

***Each of you is to have your own copy of both books. Bring both of them to class with you each day unless I tell you otherwise. I will make regular assignments out of them. Read these assignments prior to the class during which they are to be discussed.***

**FOCUS:** The focus of this class is on the writing of short stories and poems. Roughly half of the term will be devoted to each genre (Weeks 1-7 Fiction, Weeks 8-15 Poetry). We will explore some of the basic theory and craft issues for each of these creative forms, and you will be assigned "finger exercises" throughout the semester, exercises which are designed to give you practice with techniques essential to each genre. The basic format for the class will be a combination of discussion, small group work, and workshops organized around your own work. Generally speaking, interesting minds and keen perceptions are prerequisites for truly creative work. No one can make your mind more interesting in fifteen weeks, but if you read carefully and write regularly, you can become a better writer, you can become a better reader of serious literature, and you can certainly make progress in that larger aim of any genuine education: self-understanding. My jobs are 1) to lay out some of the main ingredients of short stories and poems, 2) to assist you in the making of your own stories and poems, and 3) to provide you with some standards for assessing quality in both of these forms. Your job is to write and re-write until you have produced work in both genres which, in its subject matter, craft, and language, aspires to the condition of art. Evidence of such aspiration in your work this semester is a central criterion I will use in assessing your achievements.

Please Note: With respect to fiction--This is NOT a class in entertainment fiction, the kind you might read in popular magazines like *Field and Stream* or *Reader's Digest* or *Seventeen* (Playboy and *Esquire* are notable exceptions). Nor is this a class in the writing of science fiction (sorry) or fantasy literature (sorry again). And finally, this is not a class in writing stories according to the formulas, clichés, and tastes of commercial television or Hollywood films. With respect to poetry--This is not a class in writing what the popular press and greeting card companies typically offer to the public as poetry. In the case of both genres, our standard is literary fiction and poetry of high quality, the kind of stories and poems you would find in any major contemporary literary magazine. Broadly speaking, our subject matter this term is more or less the present condition of real human beings, and we want to treat this "condition" as serious writers in one way or another always do, with intelligence and artistic discipline. Admittedly, there is considerable latitude for creative approaches within such a topic and its various formal options.

**STANDARDS/EXPECTATIONS:** I have high standards for this class. I will expect you to write regularly and seriously. It is apparent to almost any sensitive reader when you have written carelessly or superficially. I expect you to make mistakes. All writers do, but generally they learn from them. You will too. But "mistakes" do not include laziness and/or a casual attitude toward the unique responsibilities of this particular class. Those responsibilities include 1) nearly perfect attendance (you have two unexcused absences; anything beyond that will seriously affect your grade), 2) the production of a thorough and balanced class portfolio, 3) exacting concern in your writing for the best words in the best order in all of your major assigned work. A fourth (4) responsibility is to share your thoughtful reactions to the stories and poems written by your classmates. Absence or tardiness or silence--none of these contributes to the basic dynamic of the workshop. I expect you to complete carefully all of the assigned work, be here all of the time, and contribute your measured opinions and responses. I assume you have signed up for this class because you value creative expression and want to improve your own creative writing ability. For the next fifteen weeks, I will treat you as a writer: That is, I will give you honest, critical responses, ones that are always intended to be useful to you in improving your writing. Most of my feedback will be oral, whether in individual conferences or during workshop sessions. I will give you praise when your work merits it, and I will give you my best critical advice when your poems and stories falls short of the standards of strong creative work. A workshop, despite its apparent emphasis on faultfinding, is in principle a positive and constructive environment, but it is no place for fragile egos. I make you this promise: I will not submit you or your
work to any form of scrutiny that my own writing has not undergone many, many times, and which it continues to undergo.

So expect criticism, and plan on revising your work. Most writers will tell you that a first draft of a poem or story is merely a beginning, and that the real work and the real creativity and discovery occur only during the many drafts that usually follow. It is impossible to do well in this class unless you submit clear evidence in your notebook at term's end of thoughtful and significant revision. **Please note:** Multiple copies of essentially the same draft DO NOT QUALIFY as "significant" revision. Revision means, for starters anyway, Re-Visioning, Re-Seeing the work you have already completed. 

Also note: You should make frequent hard copies of your stories and poems as they evolve in order to demonstrate your commitment to revision. Do not revise on the computer only and then erase all evidence of the drafting process. ***At term's end no one should offer, as an excuse for thin revision, the argument that he/she has been revising on the computer but deleting all versions but the final one.

ASSIGNMENTS: This term you will be asked to write one “finished” story of roughly 10-15 pages, four “finished” poems, and a series of assigned “finger exercises.” You will also be required to make formal responses to at least three stories and four poems in the anthology, and a final Retrospective Response on your work in this class (more on the Retrospective near the end of the term. The formal responses must be made from a writer’s point of view, stressing craft, technique, and language, not summary of narrative line and meaning (though the latter is, of course relevant in terms of the way it connects to various aspects of craft). These formal responses will be due about every two weeks, the first one due at the end of week 2. I will give you some guidelines for these formal responses at the time we take up each of the two main genres. You can learn a great deal about how to write from reading the work of accomplished writers, mostly by extending your own sense of language and subject matter and the handling of the various technical elements of the genre, which are capable of many innovative combinations and modulations. 

**NOTE:** We will begin workshopping your stories by the beginning of Week 4. Because the composition of a short story is complex and time-consuming, that means you must all start work on your stories immediately and have them essentially completed by Week 4. A good typed working draft of your story will be due at the end of week 3.

PORTFOLIO: At term’s end, you will submit all of the assigned work (see above and below) to me in a sturdy 8 1/2 x 11 notebook. Buy this notebook now and use it as a storage site and organizational strategy throughout the term. In this notebook you will also submit all drafts of your story and poems, and the final versions typed to the standards of publication. You should buy some dividers and organize your portfolio carefully before submitting it. You should throw nothing away; keep all of your notes, drafts, etc. for possible inclusion in the portfolio. These portfolios are due no later than Friday of the last week of regularly scheduled classes. This is an ABSOLUTE deadline, so plan on meeting it. No Exceptions.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURE: In a week or so I will outline a process for reading and responding to the student manuscripts to be discussed in class. Once we begin the workshopping, you must follow the procedures precisely and ON TIME if the workshop is to be truly helpful. As you read each story or poem prior to the workshop in which it is to be discussed, take good, specific, complete notes. Use these notes to guide your oral responses in the workshop. Your comments should be precise and focused. Students who have not properly prepared for the workshop typically are either silent or they make vague and superficial observations about the story or poem. I will be keeping track of the quality and frequency of your participation and will factor the overall quality of your comments into your final grade. We will sometimes fall behind our workshop schedule and not get to targeted work on the assigned day, so stay flexible but always remain caught up. You can learn a great deal about good writing by studying the stories and poems of your colleagues with the same kind of "writerly eye" you use in your formal written responses to work in the anthology.

CONFERENCES: One-on-one conferences with a writer/teacher are an especially productive way for students to get feedback on their writing, either before their work is scheduled for workshopping or soon after it has been discussed. For reasons I have never fully understood, some students don’t like to share their work in conference. Therefore, you will not be required to schedule such a conference. Nevertheless, I encourage you to schedule at least one personal extended conference with me, of about 30 minutes’ duration and preferably during my office hours. Schedule this conference in advance so I know you are coming, and give me in advance a draft or part of a draft and some indication of the kind of help you need. If you have class or work conflicts with my posted hours, then you should work with me to find an available time. 

**NOTE:** Those who choose not to schedule one of these conferences will diminish their chances for an A in the class. The more often we can meet individually to talk about your work, the better, so please feel free to drop by for additional unscheduled discussions during my office hours to talk about your work. You can also e-mail questions and parts of drafts to me. I would also urge you to find several others in the class of like minds, etc., and form your own small writing group so that you can test your work on them before bringing it to the workshop. I also plan to establish an electronic class site to enable me to pass on information to you as I see fit. I view this site as an additional opportunity for
each of you to meet the responsibility to participate I listed above. You should regard this electronic site as an extra chance to make contributions to the class by raising questions and encouraging ongoing thinking and helpful dialogue.

**EVALUATION:** I strongly dislike assigning grades in a class explicitly devoted to creative expression. I see little value in it and suspect that it can sometimes do more harm than good. But since I have to assign a grade, here's how I intend to do it.

Your course grade will, assuming you have taken the class seriously, derive from a **full and honest assessment** (mine as well as yours) of how well you have handled all assignments outlined in this syllabus, how well you have met all of the expectations herein described, and what kind of overall contributions you have made to the class. Writers who satisfy all requirements and who stretch their talents and imagination and make solid contributions will be eligible for As and Bs. Writers who do not and/or who hand in incomplete or careless portfolios will **not** be eligible for As and Bs. **PLEASE NOTE:** There will be **no grades along the way, only a term grade.** If anyone is uncomfortable with this arrangement, let me know and I will do my best to estimate a grade for you for the work you have completed. Once again, I'll remind you that most of my evaluative feedback will be **oral.** I will make few written comments on your exercises and drafts, though I will read them and will be happy to talk with you about them in conference.

**A FEW LAST COMMENTS:** 1) I realize the Ten Commandments-like tone of this syllabus and the amount of work it outlines may be a bit daunting. But beyond all the structure and the details is a class that I know can be not only pleasant but deeply satisfying for those who are serious about developing their creativity. But it will also require a great deal of work, and I want to make that clear to you on this our first day together. 2) I tend to regard a syllabus as a contract between teacher and student. If you remain in the class, I assume you are tacitly agreeing to abide by the terms of the syllabus. You should keep this syllabus in your portfolio and reread it several times during the semester, and one final time at term’s end. If at any time questions occur to you about this document, please let me know ASAP. 3) All in all, I am a pretty reasonable teacher and--I hope--human being, and I will work with you if you are experiencing problems, either with the class or in your personal life. I can only do that if you communicate these problems to me early on, not after the fact and after you have dug yourself too deep of a hole to climb out. I will try to help whenever I can, and at the very least I won’t bite! So let me know if you are struggling, and together we will look for solutions.

**FINAL NOTE:** MTU’s Affirmative Action Officer has asked that all faculty include the following statement on each course syllabus:

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students, (2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office (3310).