

**Mississippi Valley State University**  
**College of Arts and Sciences**  
**Department of English and Foreign Languages**  
**EN 253-6 (Poetry Writing I: Flash Fiction)**

**Instructor:** Deb Payne Purnell, M.A., M.F.A.  
**Office:** TED 163  
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**Office Hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:00-4:00 pm & Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:00-4:00 pm  
**Classroom:** TED 108  
**Google Classroom:** class code: 0h500w9  
**Required text:** Burroway, Janet, Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition & Silver Sparrow by Tayara Jones

**Welcome to EN 253 Poetry Writing I: Flash Fiction**

First, this is a no-cellphone zone! No texting, Instagramming, Facebooking, etc., in class. This course is open to all students interested in writing fiction, in particularly short prose/poetry. This course is for beginners, those who want to write but have not learned the discipline of fiction writing. EN 253 is a workshop-type class, thus it will be hard work and will mean confronting yourself head-on to succeed as a novelist or poet. If you cannot stand confrontation, frustration, anger or self-discipline or if this is low on your list of priorities for the next few months, this is not the class for you.

So, what is Flash Fiction? Some scholars think of flash fiction as being one-part story and one-part poem. Without a doubt, flash fiction is a fictional work of extreme brevity that still offers character and plot development. There are many varieties of flash fiction and all are defined by **word count**. The various types include the six-word story, the 280-character story (also known as "twitterature"), the minisaga (50 words), microfiction (100 words); sudden fiction (750 words), flash fiction (1,000 words) and others. For this class, we will start at 1000 words, but don't be surprised if we suddenly drop to 50 words or less.

We will begin by reviewing the fundamentals of the writing process itself and the basic concepts behind fiction. The course will proceed through readings in the text and various short stories. Yes, reading is an important and necessary component of writing fiction. We will have frequent class discussion and writing exercises, both in class and out in the form of journaling. Journaling will be used throughout the course. This non-structured writing will become the focus of class discussion, as well as a basic tool you will use for the rest of your writing career.

**Class requirements:**

Attendance is expected. The absence of any member is felt in a workshop and the contributions of all members are vital. If you take it upon yourself to miss class, you can expect your grade to suffer. Three tardy arrivals constitute one (1) absence. You are tardy if you enter class after your name has been passed during the roll call. It is then your responsibility to inform me immediately after the class has concluded that you were indeed present, otherwise this error on your part will remain an unexcused absence. If you miss as much as two-thirds of a class by arriving late and/or leaving early, you will be marked absent. Absences

are counted from the first day of class until the end of the semester. Only officially excused absences do not incur attendance penalties.

You are responsible for all readings and writing assignments, participation in class, and a notebook/journal. The workload is rigorous. You should understand that the course proceeds in increments and therefore you should be prepared to do all the work as assigned. Late work will be accepted, but penalized.

All final drafts of class assignments must be typed; this includes anything handed in for grading or for peer review. You may disabuse yourself of the fantasy that there are editors who do not care about sloppy handwriting, incorrect spelling and punctuation.

### Grading:

Grading in a workshop course is neither pleasant nor easy, but according to the MVSU Department of Student Records, it must be done, and in case you were wondering, I am not a soft touch. The final grade will consider not only the quality of your written work, but the intensity of your effort as exemplified by your class work, your journal, and your participation.

The final grade will be determined according to the following:

1. **Assignments (30%)—10 points deducted for each day after due date; 10 points deducted for inaccurate formatting**
2. **Participation (15%)—Closely tied to class discussion & peer workshop**
3. **Attendance (15%)—5 points deducted for each unexcused absence over two**
4. **Flash Fiction (40%)—7 poetry or short prose**

While I consider the journal to be the backbone of the course, it will not be graded. Trust me, the work you put it to journaling will reflect in your assignments and in the final project. Simply, what you get out of this semester will be directly proportional to what you put into the journal. Journaling is an important habit for all writers. The writing of fiction involves opening up the senses, engaging the imagination, accessing to dreams, making lists of ideas, creating characters, recording images. Your journal is a place for you to record these things, and more. Several times a week you should write in the journal/notebook outside of the prompts; doing so will prove extremely useful. Write, write, write—search your past, dream about the future, tell stories, examine your feelings, attitudes, and values, write about what you love and hate, what you read and watch, and what you think. You may vent about the class. You may free-write. You may do just about anything here except using the journal for classroom notes or in other courses. The journal is a “writer’s journal,” so use it as such.

### Journal Rules:

- Be very strict in the form the journal takes. Use a standard 8.5x11 composition notebook, either lined or unlined, or purchase a fancy, but an inexpensive 5x7 journal. Do not use a heavy three-ring binder or a spiral notebook.
- **Date** and **number** the entries and begin each entry on a new page. Do not write on the back of entries. Doodling is fine but make it your practice to write on one side of the paper only.

- The more you use the journal throughout the term, the more beneficial it will be to you. If it works as it can, it will institute the habit of daily writing, which is the minimal expectation you should have for yourself if you wish to improve as a writer.
- Bring the journal and textbook to each class.

**Course Outcomes:**

After this course, students will be able to:

1. Implement key terms in the fiction writing process such as plot, characterization, setting (time & place), description, treatment, loglines, point-of-view, etc.
2. Write significant dialogue
3. Write in active voice
4. Understand the importance of journaling and active reading for fiction writers
5. Write a complete 10-page short story or 10-minute play

**Teaching and Learning Strategies:**

- Lecturing & class discussion
- Computer lab writing
- Journaling & journal prompts
- In-class writing assignments
- Group work & peer review (workshop)

**Academic Integrity Statement:**

Academic integrity is a commitment to the values of honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, respect, and responsibility in academia. Academic integrity is violated by any dishonest act that is committed in an academic context. Honesty and integrity are essential values of the Mississippi Valley State University's mission to pursue truth and knowledge. Academic excellence can be reached only with the cooperation and support of students. Students are expected therefore to accept responsibility for maintaining honesty and integrity in all acts inside and outside the classroom, studio or laboratory.

For a detailed description of sanctions and appeal procedures, consult Student Handbook pg.59. [https://www.mvsu.edu/sites/default/files/student\\_handbook\\_](https://www.mvsu.edu/sites/default/files/student_handbook_)

**Disabilities Statement:**

Mississippi Valley State University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for students with a documented disability. If you feel you are eligible to receive accommodations for a covered disability (medical, physical, psychiatric, learning, vision, hearing, etc.) and would like to request it for this course, you must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) program administered by University College. It is recommended that you visit the Disabilities Office located in the EMAP Computer Lab in the Technical Education (IT) Building to register for the program at the beginning of each semester. Please contact Mr. Billy Benson, Jr. via phone or email at 662-254-3005 or [billy.benson@mvsu.edu](mailto:billy.benson@mvsu.edu) for more information or to schedule an appointment.

**EN 253-06 Course Outline: Flash Fiction****Google class code: 0h500w9**

- August 21 Class discussion “The Mechanics of Fiction: A Writer’s Boot Camp,” pp. 177-187; Summary versus analysis
- August 23 Working with the Elements of Fiction, pp.45- 71
- August 28 **Quiz 1**, copies of “Where are You” by Joyce Carol Oates
- August 30 **Assignment 1 due:** 1-page analysis of “Where are You,” discuss your initial thoughts about the elements of the story including setting, characters, POV, dialogue, plot. Provide an analysis of the characters. How do the characters interact? Whose POV is it?
- September 4 **Flash Fiction 1 due** (bring 2 copies): 1000 words or less, write about breaking up with a high school boyfriend or girlfriend; peer review & workshop.
- September 6 **Flash Fiction 2 due** (bring two copies): In 750 words or less, write about starting over again; peer review & workshop
- September 11 Imaginative Literature, pp.15-24, class discussion & in-class writing
- September 13 **Flash Fiction 3 due** (bring two copies): In 1000 words or less, write about “the railway tracks seemed unused until we noticed,” peer review & workshop
- September 18 Imaginative Literature “Girl,” “American History Looks for Light—a prayer for the survival of Barack Obama,” and “French Fries,” class discussion
- September 20 **Flash Fiction 4** (bring two copies): In 100 words or less, write about a thunderstorm that changed everything, peer review & workshop
- September 25 Imaginative Literature, pp. 47-61, class discussion
- September 27 **Flash Fiction 5:** In 50 words or less, write a story that uses this line, “The cat had it coming,” peer review & workshop
- October 2 **Midterm (Quiz 2)**
- October 4 Imaginative Literature “Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self,” “Guns for Teachers,” “Ode to American English,” and “High Hard Ones,” class discussion

October 9	<b>Flash Fiction 6</b> (bring 2 copies): In 100 words or less, write about the stranger in the emergency room; peer review & workshop
October 11	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 1-48
October 16	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 49-108
October 18	<b>Assignment 2 due:</b> 2-page analysis the first 100 pages of <u>Silver Sparrow</u> . Discuss your initial thoughts about the setting, characters, POV, dialogue, plot, etc. Class discussion
October 23	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 109-159
October 25	<b>Flash Fiction 7 due</b> (bring 2 copies): In 1000 or less, write about a girlfriend telling a wife that her husband is cheating on them (or boyfriend telling a husband); peer review & workshop
October 30	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 163-193
November 1	<b>Assignment 3 due:</b> 2-page analysis of the main characters in <u>Silver Sparrow</u> . Discuss your initial thoughts about the sisters. Class discussion about characterization and dialogue
November 6	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 194-242
November 8	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 242-271
November 13	<b>Assignment 4 due:</b> 2-page critical analysis on Silver Sparrow. What are your thoughts thus far? What do you think of the author's storytelling techniques?
November 15	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 272-307
November 19-23	Fall Break
November 27	<u>Silver Sparrow</u> , pp. 308-340
November 29	<b>Assignment 5 due:</b> 2-page critical analysis on <u>Silver Sparrow</u> . Discuss your final thoughts about the setting, characters, POV, dialogue, plot, etc.; class discussion
December 4	<b>Final Exam</b> (rewrite of every flash fiction)