



# Independent Learning

*ENGLISH 350*

*INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING*

## **Syllabus Preview**

Instructor: Nancy Pagh  
Credits: 5 Quarter Credits  
Lessons: 8 Assignments  
Exams: No Exam  
Format: Self-paced independent learning with instructor guidance  
Note: WWU English majors/minors may apply up to 10 credits earned through distance learning to their major/minor course of study.

The following pages are an excerpt from the full course syllabus. Western Washington University reserves the right to cancel courses and change instructors, course requirements and textbooks at any time. Check with the Independent Learning office regarding course availability.

## **Independent Learning**

WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY  
516 High Street MS 5293  
Bellingham, Washington 98225-5996

Phone: (360) 650-3650  
Fax: (360) 650-6858  
E-mail: [ilearn@wwu.edu](mailto:ilearn@wwu.edu)  
<http://www.ExtendedEd.wwu.edu/ilearn>

## *ENGLISH 350*

### *INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING*

#### **COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS:**

English 350 is an introduction to the art and craft of creative writing. Addressing the concerns of first-time creative writers as well as pre-service teachers preparing to teach creative writing, the course provides an introduction to writing poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, while grounding students in the elements of craft common to all creative writing.

We begin with poetry. Poetry permits an economy of size that allows one to focus on detail and imagery—the building blocks of all creative writing. Poetry, which may be written as fiction or nonfiction, also makes it easy to experiment with narrative voice and point of view—experience that will help us as we move to nonfiction and, finally, fiction.

This course does not require any prior experience in creative writing, nor does it require that you write publishable material. Rather, the course requires that you try, that you learn by doing, engaging in the work of creating literary art—texts that “instruct and delight.” This work includes both the thrill of experimentation and the hard task of revising. The revising will occur in two stages: in the first, you strengthen your rough drafts by attending to specific elements of craft covered in our texts. In the second, you choose one of three genres we study and, based on my comments and suggestions, create a final portfolio of more polished work. In this way you will have tried your hand at three genres and will have had the opportunity to significantly revise your work in at least one.

#### **TEXTBOOKS:**

Kowitz, Steve. *In the Palm of Your Hand: The Poet’s Portable Workshop*. Gardiner, Maine: Tillbury House, 1995.

Kitchen, Judith, and Mary Paumier Jones. *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996.

Thomas, James; Denise Thomas, and Tom Hazuka. *Flash Fiction: Very Short Stories*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992.

**Textbook Ordering:** The textbooks are available at the WWU Bookstore. You may order with your VISA or MasterCard from the AS Bookstore website ([www.bookstore.wvu.edu](http://www.bookstore.wvu.edu)) or you can call the store at (360) 650-3655 to place an order if you prefer to mail a check. Students whose materials are paid for by an agency should call the bookstore to place an order. Please do not mail a check without first verifying prices and shipping charges with the bookstore. Orders

placed on-line will be shipped out in 1-2 business days, and orders held for receipt of a check will be shipped as soon as the check is received. Orders are sent via UPS ground unless rush or other service is requested.

You may use the green book order form to order by mail, or if you are shopping for your books in person, visit the customer service counter in the Textbook Department, and staff will help you find your books. Correspondence books are not kept on the open shelves. Please be sure to mention that you are a correspondence student when calling or visiting the store for assistance.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

### **Writing Journal**

Part of the work of learning to write creatively is learning to engage the world as a creative person, looking for inspiration and insight wherever and whenever it may come. Brainstorming happens at one's desk, but it also happens when driving, taking care of children, or waiting in line. Indeed, it is sometimes said that artists are not necessarily more creative than the rest of us: they simply work harder at recognizing originality when it strikes them. Part of this work is having a place to record insights and ideas—your writing journal. A spiral notebook works fine. Some writers like notebooks large enough to write drafts in; others like something smaller that can be carried in a pocket. As part of the first four assignments, I'll ask you to photocopy one page of your writing journal and to submit it with the assignment. The writing journal is a pass/fail component of the course. The writing journal need not be typed; all other writing for the course must be typed.

### **Reading Assignments**

In reading assignments you respond to specific prompts or questions. These responses will take two forms: some prompts ask you to provide a personal response describing your own engagement with the reading, other prompts ask you to attend to and comment on specific elements of craft manifest in the writing. Reading assignments must be typed; they may be double- or single-spaced.

### **Creative Writing Assignments**

There are six creative writing assignments prior to the revision of your final portfolio, which comprises assignments seven and eight. All creative writing must be typed and double-spaced.

### **The Writer's Memo**

You will include a brief ( $\frac{1}{2}$  page, more or less) memo with nearly all of your creative writing. The writing memo serves to give me a window to the thinking you bring to your writing. Instructions for writing the memo are the same for almost all the writing you will do for this class: **Describe the process of writing this piece, the difficulties and joys you encountered, and your sense of what the writing does and does not achieve.** You may also use the memo to ask me questions about your writing or the elements of craft you are practicing. The writer's memo must be typed; it may be single- or double-spaced.

## **Final Portfolio**

You will choose drafts from your assignments to revise for a final portfolio of 10-15 pages of typed, double-spaced writing. Revisions to the portfolio comprise two assignments: in Assignment Seven you select the material you want included in your final portfolio and revise it with respect to your intentions and the sequence of advice provided in the assignment. Assignment Seven includes a memo you write to me, spelling out your intentions for the portfolio and the specific features you want me to attend to in reading your work. In Assignment Eight you revise and polish the portfolio in light of my response to Assignment Seven.

## **CALENDAR:**

You may take up to nine months to complete this course. However, many students wish to complete Independent Learning courses within a single quarter and in some instances—such as those mandated by financial aid—this must be done. To assist students planning to complete the course within a ten-week quarter, I've provided an optional brief outline of what could be done each week to meet such a schedule.

Week One: Complete and submit Assignment One  
Week Two: Begin Assignment Two  
Week Three: Complete and submit Assignment Two  
Week Four: Complete and submit Assignment Three  
Week Five: Complete and submit Assignment Four  
Week Six: Complete and submit Assignment Five  
Week Seven: Complete and submit Assignment Six  
Week Eight: Complete and submit Assignment Seven  
Week Nine: Begin Assignment Eight after receiving my response to Assignment Seven  
Week Ten: Complete and submit Assignment Eight

It is best to wait for my response to one assignment before submitting another. However, I am sometimes away and students are sometimes in a hurry. Consequently, you may submit up to two assignments at a time. Be aware, though, that you cannot begin Assignment Eight, your final revisions, until receiving my comments on Assignment Seven. Please plan accordingly.

## **GRADING:**

Your grade for the course will be determined by your performance on the assignments and your final portfolio. Every assignment will be worth ten points, for a total of 80 possible points. A grade of 55 is required to pass the course. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

72 – 80 pts. = A  
64 – 71 pts. = B  
56 – 63 pts. = C  
48 – 55 pts. = D  
< 48 pts. = F

All assignments are graded 1-10 according to the rubric below:

10 – The reading and writing assignments demonstrate an advanced understanding of the craft of creative writing.

- Uses original and insightful examples and details; observations note features that beginning creative writers rarely recognize; commentary extends a step or two further than is required of the assignment
- Demonstrates a full understanding of concepts taught in the lesson
- Responses are specific
- All terms are used correctly

7 – The reading and writing assignments demonstrate a developing understanding of the craft of creative writing.

- Uses “safe” and obvious details and examples that stay close to the surface of the texts
- Demonstrates a partial understanding of concepts taught in the lesson
- Responses are general but adequate
- Terms are used in a cursory but correct manner

1 – The assignment demonstrates an emerging understanding of the craft of creative writing.

- Does not use examples
- Does not demonstrate an adequate understanding of concepts taught in the lesson
- Responses are sketchy, general, and incomplete
- Terms are used incorrectly

## **ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR:**

Nancy Pagh was born and raised in Anacortes, Washington. Much of her childhood was spent boating with her family in the San Juans and Canadian Gulf Islands. After college, she worked in the Publications Unit of the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration in Seattle before traveling to New Hampshire for graduate school. She earned Master’s degrees in literature and in creative writing then attended the University of British Columbia for a Ph.D. Her first book, *At Home Afloat* (2001), is a study of the language women use at sea. Her first collection of poems, *No Sweeter Fat*, won the Autumn House Press book award in 2006. Her second poetry collection, *After*, won the 2008 Floating Bridge Press chapbook award. Nancy’s creative writing appears in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Fourth River*, *Rattle*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Crab Creek Review*, *The Bellingham Review*, *Pontoon*, *Rock Salt Plum*, *Oprah* magazine, and other journals. An enthusiastic performer, she has been a featured poet at the Skagit River Poetry Festival and the Gist Street Masters Series in Pittsburgh, and she was the 2008 D. H. Lawrence Fellow at the Taos Summer Writer’s Conference. Nancy has taught at universities in Washington State and New York, and has led writing workshops with the Whidbey Island Writers Association conference and the Field’s End program on Bainbridge Island. She lives in Bellingham and teaches in the English and Canadian-American Studies programs at WWU. Courses she offers at Western include Introduction to Creative Writing, Introduction to Writing Poetry, Introduction to Writing Creative Nonfiction, Writing in Context, and a wide variety of literature courses. Some of her favorite thematic courses include Food Literature, Literature of the Wild, Victorian Women’s Travel Writing, and the Pacific Northwest Historical Novel.