

Creative Writing

ENGL 71

Fall 2025 Section 80 Fully Online 3 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/22/2025

Letter Graded

Contact Information

Instructor: Mark Cunningham

Email: mark.cunningham@sjsu.edu

Office: FOB 214

Office Hours

In-Person: M, W 2:00-2:30

FOB 214

Online (Zoom), Tues/ Thurs 10:00 - 11:30 AM

I'm here to help you succeed, and always happy to speak with you. If you'd like to meet with me during office hours, please let me know ahead of time. And if my scheduled office hours don't work for you, please contact me and we can find a time on campus or online that works well for both of us.

Course Information

Nota Bene: This syllabus is a *human-made document*, and, like all things human, it is subject to change. All but inevitably, you'll see syllabus updates and revisions made during our first several weeks of the course.

Welcome to English 71, Creative Writing! I'm greatly looking forward to meeting and working with each of you.

I'm a writer, editor, and teacher with numerous book and magazine publications (pen-name M. Allen Cunningham). My professional and creative journey as an author has been unusual, so I bring a unique perspective to my teaching, which involves expanding how we think about our imaginative work as writers.

I've planned an invigorating semester with the hope that you'll soon find yourself approaching your writing in new and rewarding ways, this fall and beyond.

The focus of our course is Forms of Expression.

The forms available to the writer are nearly infinite, so we'll go beyond the idea of "beginning, middle, and end" and unlock our creativity by studying innovative and uniquely structured narratives, essays, poems, and works that are deliberately hard to classify. We'll also trespass beyond our own subject area of writing into the presence of other art forms and see what they can teach us in our creative work. Along the way we'll expand our ideas about some of the main principles of creative writing like voice, description, plot, character, and more.

The theme of our course is The Writing Mind

Our aim, now and always, is to wake up to the possibilities of our art form by training our attention as creative beings. In the words of Henry James, our aim is to "try to be one of those people on whom nothing is lost," to see our own surroundings as if we are travelers newly arrived in our own rooms, to break out of conventional molds and learn to write more freely, imaginatively, and creatively — as only human beings can do. This is the work of the creative writer — seeing clearly, thinking clearly, and communicating that clarity through writing that is mindful, vibratory, and alive. It's important work in any time, with incalculable ripple-effects in the larger culture. And it's certainly important in a tumultuous time like the one we're all living in right now, amid the rise of new and bewildering technologies.

So let's begin!

— Mark Cunningham

This is a synchronous online course, happening live on Zoom

ZOOM MEETINGS: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 1:30 PM - 2:45 PM

To join our 1:30 PM class meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays, please follow the Zoom link below, and enter the Meeting ID and Password. You will use this same link and password to join each of our class meetings.

***Important:** *Make sure that you use only your real name, as listed on the course roster, when joining Zoom meetings. For security reasons, I cannot admit from the Zoom waiting room anyone whose name I do not recognize on my attendance sheet.*

From PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android:

Zoom Link: <https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/88136314508?pwd=Cl5hse015BSfE67b9FprlOlGcDzR8L.1>

Meeting ID: 881 3631 4508

Password: 46054

EXPECTATIONS GOING FORWARD

Attendance at our synchronous Zoom sessions is required. You are expected to join each Zoom meeting by video & audio with your camera on, since we want to approximate the in-person class experience as much as possible.

We're going to do some in-class writing, so have **a pen and notebook** ready!

Each of our class meetings on Zoom will run for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

We will meet on all the following dates (28 occurrences)

Aug 21, 2025 01:30 PM
Aug 26, 2025 01:30 PM
Aug 28, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 4, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 9, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 11, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 16, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 18, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 23, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 25, 2025 01:30 PM
Sep 30, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 2, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 7, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 9, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 14, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 16, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 21, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 23, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 28, 2025 01:30 PM
Oct 30, 2025 01:30 PM
Nov 4, 2025 01:30 PM
Nov 6, 2025 01:30 PM
Nov 13, 2025 01:30 PM
Nov 18, 2025 01:30 PM
Nov 20, 2025 01:30 PM
Nov 25, 2025 01:30 PM
Dec 2, 2025 01:30 PM
Dec 4, 2025 01:30 PM

iPhone one-tap :

US: +16468769923,,88136314508# or +16469313860,,88136314508#

Telephone:

Dial(for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location)

US: +1 646 876 9923 or +1 646 931 3860 or +1 301 715 8592 or +1 305 224 1968 or +1 309 205 3325
or +1 312 626 6799 or +1 253 205 0468 or +1 253 215 8782 or +1 346 248 7799 or +1 360 209 5623 or

+1 386 347 5053 or +1 507 473 4847 or +1 564 217 2000 or +1 669 444 9171 or +1 669 900 6833 or +1 689 278 1000 or +1 719 359 4580

Meeting ID: 881 3631 4508

International numbers available: <https://sjsu.zoom.us/j/88136314508>

Or an H.323/SIP room system:

H.323:

162.255.37.138

Meeting ID: 881 3631 4508

Password: 460549

SIP: 88136314508@vip2.zoomcrc.com

Password: 460549

Course Description and Requisites

Examinations of works of poetry, creative nonfiction and short fiction as expression of human intellect and imagination, to comprehend the historic and global cultural contexts, and recognize issues related to writing of diverse cultural traditions. Students will also write poetry, creative nonfiction, and a short fiction.

GE Area(s): C1 Arts

Grading: Letter Graded.

Classroom Protocols

WHAT ELSE IS EXPECTED DURING THIS ONLINE COURSE?

Your Presence: Attendance at our synchronous Zoom sessions is required. **You are expected to join each Zoom meeting by video & audio with your camera on.** To ensure the best learning experience for our whole class community, we want to approximate the in-person class atmosphere as much as possible.

Your Readiness: We're going to do some in-class writing, so have **a pen and notebook** ready!

Your Best Regard for Our Class Community: Students are expected to take part in a class environment conducive to learning. Disruptions to this are behaviors that a reasonable faculty member would view as interfering with normal academic functions. Examples include, but are not limited to: persistently speaking without being recognized; interrupting other speakers; behavior that distracts the class from the subject matter or discussion; peer criticism that is non-constructive due to its pointedly personal nature; personal insults, harassing behavior, or physical threats. I expect students to engage thoughtfully with course content, and to remain respectful of their classmates' right to read, absorb, and respond independently to each text or item of visual content. Our class is a positive community environment, and in our group discussions, whole class discussions, and explorations of each text we will express ideas in the respectful manner of real dialogue and with regard to the wellbeing of our classroom community. In their in-person

and online communication with instructors, students should demonstrate consideration and professionalism. Students are held to our San Jose State University student conduct policies. These policies can be found at: <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/policies/>

Good ZOOM form: Please refrain from using the Zoom Chat to offer unsolicited commentary or engage in side-conversation. Now and then we'll make constructive, facilitated use of the Chat feature, but bear in mind that, in general, chat commentary is a distraction.

New Writing: Rather than using this course as an opportunity to polish your pre-existing work, you will be expected to create new writing in response to explorative prompts.

Your Own Voice and Creativity: Although we'll be looking to the work of others as inspirational models, the work you submit for this class must be your own. Plagiarism is an extremely serious offense with equally serious consequences. It is grounds for failure of the assignment in question. If you have questions about any aspect of plagiarism, please ask. (See also our course A.I. Policy in this syllabus.)

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php). (<https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php>)

English Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Goals

WHAT WILL STUDENTS BE UP TO IN THIS COURSE?

Our focus is: Form of Expression

Our theme is: The Writing Mind

In this class we will explore, experiment, and hone our perception as writers by generating new work in new forms. Our aim will be to wake up to the possibilities of creative writing by training our attention as expressive beings, to see our own surroundings as if we are travelers newly arrived in our own rooms, and to break out of conventional molds and learn to write more freely and imaginatively. We'll look at the vital

relationships between creative writing and other artistic disciplines, and we'll study fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, as well as hybrid works and a graphic novel. Through reading and discussion, writing experiments, analysis of published texts and student work, we'll broaden the ways we think about creative writing, some of its possible principles, and its permutations. *Note: Rather than using this course as an opportunity to polish your pre-existing work, you will be expected to create new writing in response to explorative prompts,* and will leave this course with several pieces of fresh creative writing in progress as well as a longer, more developed work.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area C1: Arts

Area C: Arts and Humanities courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. C1 Arts courses emphasize the integration of history, theory, aesthetics, and criticism.

GE Area C1 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a C1 course, students should be able to:

1. identify aesthetic qualities and processes that characterize works of the human intellect and imagination;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such works;
3. analyze the role and impact of the creative arts in culture and on the interrelationship of self and community; and
4. research and apply relevant aesthetic criteria and/or artistic conventions in effective written responses to works of art.

Writing Practice: Students will write a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

ASSIGNED BOOK (Required)

- *HERE* by Richard McGuire (ISBN 978-0-375-40650-8)

I've asked the SJSU Bookstore to order this book, but you can also find deeply discounted copies online. E-Book versions are OK too, but there's nothing like having the book in hand during class discussions.

ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES

Please bring a notebook and writing utensil to every Zoom meeting.

Course Requirements and Assignments

WHAT'S REQUIRED TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE?

Read on!

Course Requirements:

- Engagement! (20% of your final grade)
- Writing Experiments and Film Response! (20% of your final grade)
- Written Peer Feedback! (20% of your final grade)
- Take a Field Trip to a Museum or Concert & Compose a Thing Portrait! (20% of your final grade)
- Create a Final Portfolio! (20% of final grade)

ENGAGEMENT: *Engagement is crucial to the learning we will do. Lack of engagement will impact your grade. You should attend all Zoom meetings and arrive on time, not only because you're responsible for material we'll discuss in class, but because active engagement is essential for the maximum benefit of all class members.* You will fulfill the Engagement requirement by attending Zoom meetings on time; completing reading assignments on time; by participating in class discussions on both of our class platforms (Zoom & Canvas); and by demonstrating thoughtful engagement with your classmates' work through peer feedback on Canvas.

WRITING EXPERIMENTS: Most weeks you will undertake at least one creative writing experiment. Experiments will usually consist of 250-500 words of original work inspired by one of our readings. Your writing will sometimes begin during our Zoom sessions, and you'll sometimes be provided a starter prompt, to which you may or may not choose to respond specifically. **All writing assignments for ENGL 71 must be typed in 12-pt. font, double-spaced, and uploaded to Canvas.**

WRITTEN PEER FEEDBACK: For each Writing Experiment you turn in, you'll receive peer feedback from 2 classmates and provide feedback to 2 others (feedback partners will be assigned). Your feedback should demonstrate thoughtful engagement through the inclusion of sentence-level suggestions as well as a short message to the writer. I will provide further guidelines.

FILM RESPONSE: You will independently view your selection of one film from the following list of options. You'll then complete a 250-500 word response as a creative practitioner, reflecting on how the film's ideas about process and/or form advanced or changed your approach to your creative writing. Your Film Response can be uploaded any time thereafter to Canvas, with both responses uploaded no later than our last week of classes.

Film Options:

1. TBA
2. TBA
3. TBA

INDEPENDENT FIELD TRIP: MUSEUM VISIT, or CONCERT ATTENDANCE, and THING PORTRAIT (due as part of your Final Portfolio) Our inquiry into form will include an independent visit to *your choice of one of* the following museums and/or performances:

- Virtual or in-person visit to the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

<http://searchcollection.asianart.org/>

- Virtual or in-person visit to the Palace of the Legion of Honor and/or the De Young Museum of San Francisco

<https://www.famsf.org/>

- Virtual visit to the Kunsthistorisches Museum of Vienna

<https://www.khm.at/en/visit/collections/>

- Virtual visit to the *Meet Vermeer* Project (Google)

<https://artsandculture.google.com/project/vermeer>

- Virtual concert attendance: Leonard Bernstein conducts Tchaikovsky's 5th Symphony

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2JBT0HC98I>

- Virtual concert attendance: National Orchestra of France performs Mozart's *Requiem*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dp2SJN4UiE4>

- Virtual attendance: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

(Alvin Ailey is offering rotating, limited-time videos of their dance performances on their website:

<https://www.alvinailey.org/performances-tickets/ailey-all-access> and on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/AileyOrganization/featured>)

THING PORTRAIT: Your independent field trip is your opportunity to find inspiration in a piece of art and apply this actively in your own creative writing. The artwork you select can be painterly, sculptural, musical, videographic, dance-centered, etc. After prolonged study of the artwork, you will write a 250-500 word Thing Portrait. (Instructor will provide further guidelines.)

FINAL PORTFOLIO: From your collection of Writing Experiments, you will select one experiment to further develop into a 1,000-1,500 word work of creative writing in which you apply the ideas and approaches to form that we've explored in this course. This and your Thing Portrait together will make up your Final Portfolio. (Instructor will provide further guidelines).

Course Policies:

LATE POLICY

All assignments have specific due dates, and it's your responsibility to track these. Late work will not be accepted. If at any point you have concerns about your progress in this course, please communicate with me. I'm here to help you succeed.

PLAGIARISM & "A.I." POLICY

Plagiarism: All work you submit for this course will be your own. Any work that is intentionally plagiarized will receive a failing grade. Because plagiarism is an extremely serious academic offense, this is a zero-tolerance policy. Plagiarism means using someone else's exact words (in a direct quote) or their ideas (in a paraphrase) as your own without proper citation. Or, as SJSU's Academic Integrity Policy puts it, plagiarism is "the act of representing the work of another as one's own without giving appropriate credit, regardless of how that work was obtained, and submitting it to fulfill academic requirements." It is also unacceptable to recycle your own work from other courses. See the SJSU Academic Integrity Policy here: <https://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/docs/SJSU-Academic-Integrity-Policy-F15-7.pdf>

"A.I.": Because the text generated by A.I. algorithms is never wholly original but relies on phrases harvested without credit from pre-existing texts on the Internet (a kind of *plagiarism by patchwork*), you are not allowed to use ChatGPT *or any other* generative "artificial intelligence" (AI) and/or Large Language Model tools at any stage of your work process for ENGL 71, including preliminary stages. Doing so is a violation of SJSU's Academic Integrity Policy, will be considered plagiarism, and will be subject to the zero-tolerance policy outlined in the prior paragraph. Please note that using Grammarly is likely to put you at risk of violating this A.I. policy. In this course you will hone your perceptive, expressive, and imaginative skills – none of which a robot can do for you!

(Please note that different classes at SJSU might implement different AI policies, and it is your responsibility to abide by the expectations of each course.)

ATTENDANCE & TARDINESS POLICY

As noted in the Engagement requirement above: you should attend all class meetings and arrive on time, not only because you're responsible for material we'll discuss in class, but because active engagement is essential for the maximum benefit of all class members. Lack of engagement, consistent tardiness, and consistent early departures will impact your grade. (Please note: Class rosters are often full and include waiting lists. Instructors are permitted to drop students who fail to attend the first scheduled class meeting and who fail to inform the instructor of the reason for the absence.)

ACCESSIBLE EDUCATION AT SAN JOSE STATE UNIVERSITY

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with AEC to establish a record of their disability. The Accessible Education Center (AEC) proudly presents its vision of redefining ability at San Jose State University by providing comprehensive services in support of the educational development and success of students with disabilities. Learn more: <https://www.sjsu.edu/aec/index.php>

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance,

counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

WEEK 1: KEEPING TIME

Thurs 8/21 Introductions, Questions, reading & discussion

WEEK 2: KEEPING TIME, contd.

Tues 8/26 Syllabus overview; reading & discussion

HW: Read assigned text (TBA) for discussion in next class meeting

Thurs 8/28 Discussion of assigned text; additional texts; Prompt for Writing Experiment #1

HW: Read assigned text (TBA) for discussion in next class meeting

WEEK 3: FINDING FORM

Tues 9/2 **NO CLASS: Please attend the campus event Jumpstarting Digital Literacy during our class meeting time:** <https://new.express.adobe.com/webpage/NP8QoZ6fCwxSn>

Thurs 9/4 ***Due in Canvas: Writing Experiment #1***; Class discussion of assigned text; additional texts

WEEK 4: FINDING FORM, contd.

Tues 9/9 Making It Strange; Prompt for Writing Experiment #2

Thurs 9/11 Page As Stage

WEEK 5: FINDING FORM, contd. / SEEING SCHOOL

Tues 9/16 ***Due in Canvas: Writing Experiment #2, and Peer Feedback on WE#1***; Page As Stage, contd.

Thurs 9/18 Seeing to the Edge; Prompt for Writing Experiment #3

WEEK 6: SAYING & MAKING

Tues 9/23 Communication, Expression, Style

Thurs 9/25 ***Due in Canvas: Writing Experiment #3, and Peer Feedback on WE#2***; Communication, Expression, Style, contd.; Prompt for Writing Experiment #4

WEEK 7: SEEING & BEING

Tues 9/30 Perception and Perspective

Thurs 10/2 ***Due in Canvas: Writing Experiment #4, and Peer Feedback on WE#3***

WEEK 8: PEOPLE & PLOTS

Tues 10/7 Character

Thurs 10/9 Character, contd.; Prompt for Writing Experiment #5

WEEK 9: PEOPLE & PLOTS, contd.

Tues 10/14 Plot

Thurs 10/16 ***Due in Canvas:*** *Writing Experiment #5, and Peer Feedback on WE#4*; Plot, contd; Prompt for Writing Experiment #6

HW: Read assigned text (TBA) for discussion in next class meeting

WEEK 10: A FULLY REALIZED WORK

Tues 10/21 Discussion of assigned text

HW: Read assigned text (TBA) for discussion in next class meeting

Thurs 10/23 ***Due in Canvas:*** *Writing Experiment #6, and Peer Feedback on WE#5*; Discussion of assigned text

WEEK 11: A PLACE IN TIME

Tues 10/28 Group Discussions: Richard McGuire's *HERE*

Thurs 10/30 Group Discussions: Richard McGuire's *HERE*

WEEK 12: FURTHER THOUGHTS ON TIME / SENTENCE-MAKING

Tues 11/4 On Time

Thurs 11/6 Sentence Work

WEEK 13: EDITING

Tues 11/11 **NO CLASS: Veterans Day**

Thurs 11/13 Editing for Writers

WEEK 14: WORKSHOPS

Tues 11/18 Workshop 1 & 2

Thurs 11/20 Workshop 3 & 4

WEEK 15: WORKSHOPS

Tues 11/25 Workshop 5 & 6

Thurs 11/27 **NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Holiday**

WEEK 16: WORKSHOPS

Tues 12/2 Workshop 7 & 8

Thurs 12/4 (last class meeting) Workshop 9 & 10

WEEK 17: FINAL PORTFOLIO (due MON 12/15)