

Special Topics Section 01

ENGL 281

Spring 2025 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 01/23/2025 to 05/12/2025 Modified 01/28/2025

Course Information

Course Format

This course will take place *in-person and also utilize SJSU's online learning system, Canvas, for course material and course assignments.* You will need to have computer access with Internet in order to complete this course.

All material for this class including syllabus, assignments, course readings, quizzes and grades will be posted on Canvas. *You are responsible* for checking in to Canvas for messages and updates to the course.

Student Canvas Login Information:

1. Go to the Canvas Login: <https://one.sjsu.edu/>
2. Login in with your 9 digit SJSU IS and password you use for your SJSU One
3. Click LOGIN to access your Canvas Account
4. Click TA128-01, Fall 2024 course

Course Description and Requisites

Significant topic or area reflecting trends and changes in the field.½ Provides students with an opportunity to gain specialized or advanced knowledge in a small-group setting.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Theatre is a collaborative art. Therefore, participation is required. Please treat each other with respect: *Lean in. Take the opportunity to Step Up or Step Back. Ouch!* when something sensitive needs to be recognized.

Please come to class on time, prepared and ready to work.

Please silence cell phones and not take calls during class (if you are expecting an urgent call please let me know before class begins). Please put your computer notifications on "do not disturb."

Controversial Issues:

To study theatre is to study the human condition. Theatre is a space for creative exploration. As we explore, we may encounter subject matter that elicits strong feelings. Strong and uncomfortable language, difficult ideas, and graphic adult subject matter may appear in the videos we view. I will do my best to provide individual warnings on the syllabus for course materials and in presentation slides for class content that are particularly sensitive. As we evaluate these works, you will be asked to look at these materials critically, to consider what the theatremaker was trying to express, or to discuss the potential social impact of the work on their respective cultures. I reserve the right to address controversial issues as they relate to the creative process.

In our readings and discussions, we will have the opportunity to explore challenging, high-stakes issues and increase our understanding of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy. We sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening. Sometimes we will need patience or

courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. Our goal is to cultivate and inhabit an atmosphere of respect. This begins with active engagement. It involves listening, questioning, and being honest. Thus, an important aim of our classroom interactions will be for us to increase our facility with difficult conversations that arise inside issues of social justice, politics, economics, morality, religion, and other issues where reasonable people often hold diverse perspectives. This effort will ultimately deepen our understanding and allow us to make the most of being in a community with people of many backgrounds, experiences, and positions.

Attendance

Please notify me via email at eugenie.chan@sjsu.edu (or Canvas message) as soon as you know you are unable to attend a meeting. It is the responsibility of the student to get class notes from a classmate.

Course Goals

Students will explore plays that mine and challenge issues both personal and social, diverse masterworks that embrace traditional dramatic dialogue and forms, as well as those that present new ways of speaking and new structures. Students will study dramaturgy, playtexts and their historical contexts, as well as engage in writing assignments that will lead to their own individual performance writing project. Playwriting is about writing deeply and for a public. As *Death of a Salesman's* Arthur Miller once said, playwriting is the "art of a writer ... expecting to be heard."

SPECIAL TOPICS IN PLAYWRITING focuses on examining, exploring, and developing the skills, discipline, techniques and knowledge base essential for the playwriting process. Students will:

- Read, discuss, and examine a variety of playscripts, especially the short play, analyzing dramatic devices, structure, character development, form, and technique.
- Examine the sociopolitical and historical context of playscripts and playwriting, and its impact on the creation of a dramatic text and artist.
- Write in and out of class, using prompts, improvisations, and their exercises as starting points.

- Share writing and learn how to give constructive feedback.
- Write and create a 10 - Minute play.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

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

Upon successful completion of the MA English program, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an appropriate level of expertise in literary history, literary theory, and rhetoric.
2. Demonstrate high-level proficiency in literary research and in the synthesis of research
3. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the interpretation and evaluation of literary texts.
4. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to
 - a. organize and present material in a cogent fashion,
 - b. formulate and defend original arguments,
 - c. employ effectively the language of their discipline and
 - d. write under time constraints.
5. Demonstrate a reading knowledge of at least one foreign language.

Upon successful completion of the MFA in Creative Writing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a high level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Demonstrate high level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 - a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 - b) formulate and defend original arguments;

- c) employ effectively the language of their discipline;
- d) write under time constraints.

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 Materials

Required Texts/Readings

Textbook

There is no textbook for this class. All readings and plays will be available on Canvas in specific modules. We will look at four full-length plays and other shorter work this semester to look at how professional playwrights tackle many of the concepts we will be exploring.

Other technology requirements / equipment / material

You will need to have computer access with Internet in order to complete this course.

Library Liaison

Throughout the semester you will be required to do research for the play you are developing. I highly recommend contacting our Library Liaison, Peggy Cabrera, to help you find appropriate materials.

e-mail: (peggy.cabrera@sjsu.edu (<mailto:peggy.cabrera@sjsu.edu>))

Course Requirements and Assignments

Participation, Preparation 10%

Preparation means:

- Completing reading and in-class and out-of-class writing exercises, both assessed and non-assessed.

Participating means:

- Contributing to class discussions

- Listening to feedback and critiques of your own work
- Giving feedback and critiquing fellow work.
- Volunteering to have your work read
- Volunteering to serve as an actor for another writer.

This course will use as its foundation Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process for critiques. There will be short writing assignments that I will ask you to bring in to share.

Short Writing Assignments (SWA) 15%

Over the course of the semester you will be asked to bring in short writing assignments, like character biographies, monologues, design sketches, etc. You will be given ample time for each short assignment. These assignments are intended to help you develop your final play; many will be developed from our opening writing prompts or journal entries.

Writing Journal 25%

You are required to have a dedicated writing journal/notebook. We begin each session with a writing prompt to be done in your journal. Your journal will also be where you can react to various articles, podcasts assigned throughout the quarter. There will be *weekly writing prompts* that must be included in your journal. Prompts are designed to get you writing, you should spend a *minimum* of 15 minutes on *each prompt* (keep writing if the ideas are flowing). Write without self-editing. These are *rough*, not polished. You will upload sections your notebook to Canvas. These can be handwritten.

First Draft of 10-Minute Play 20%

You will write a 10-minute play this semester. You will be required to turn in two drafts. Throughout the semester you will explore ways to develop this play.

Each writer’s journey is different and your play can alter over the course of the quarter. Writing is re-writing.

FINAL DRAFT (FINAL PROJECT) 30%

Your final draft must demonstrate dramaturgical growth from your First Draft.

✓ Grading Information

| <i>Grade</i> | <i>Points</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| <i>A plus</i> | <i>960 to 1000</i> | <i>96 to 100%</i> |
| <i>A</i> | <i>930 to 959</i> | <i>93 to 95%</i> |

| <i>Grade</i> | <i>Points</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <i>A minus</i> | <i>900 to 929</i> | <i>90 to 92%</i> |
| <i>B plus</i> | <i>860 to 899</i> | <i>86 to 89 %</i> |
| <i>B</i> | <i>830 to 859</i> | <i>83 to 85%</i> |
| <i>B minus</i> | <i>800 to 829</i> | <i>80 to 82%</i> |
| <i>C plus</i> | <i>760 to 799</i> | <i>76 to 79%</i> |
| <i>C</i> | <i>730 to 759</i> | <i>73 to 75%</i> |
| <i>C minus</i> | <i>700 to 729</i> | <i>70 to 72%</i> |
| <i>D plus</i> | <i>660 to 699</i> | <i>66 to 69%</i> |
| <i>D</i> | <i>630 to 659</i> | <i>63 to 65%</i> |
| <i>D minus</i> | <i>600 to 629</i> | <i>60 to 62%</i> |

Breakdown

Participation/Preparation 10%

Short writing assignments 15%

Journal 25%

First Draft of 10-minute play 20%

Final 10-minute play (Final Project) 30%

University Policies

Per [University Policy 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

ENGL 281 / SPECIAL TOPICS IN PLAYWRITING, Course Schedule

Course schedule is subject to change with fair notice. Eugenie will notify you both in-class and on Canvas.

| WK | DATE | TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS | WHAT'S DUE |
|----|------|---|--|
| 2 | 1/28 | <p>Introductions: to Special Topics, each other, and playwriting (https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1jT7Ziilh22Psw7-haxDW-RaZILWiF76/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=117537766056535132952&rtopof=true&sd=true)</p> <p>PLAYWRITING JOURNAL</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>VIEW: Fences dir. Denzel Washington (https://csu-sjsu.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01CAL.S_SJO/tu4ck5/alma991013977062002919)</p> <p>HOMEWORK: See Canvas (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1603676/assignments/7213782).</p> <p>READING: Fences by August Wilson (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XBB0efyVoW9caEGlOevl8F3hhu-100Jm/view?usp=sharing).</p> <p>EF's Visit to a Small Planet (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1rMiYhmLxP0s1KTuoZW4hYIXVY9eblGQR/view?usp=sharing).</p> | |
| 3 | 2/4 | <p>Character: The Essence of Everything</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING: Character Brainstorm</p> <p>DISCUSSION: <i>Fences</i> & Journal Prompt #1 HOMEWORK: See Canvas (https://sjsu.instructure.com/courses/1603676/assignments/7213782).</p> <p>READING: <i>Death of a Salesman</i> by Arthur Miller</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Fences</i> • Journal #1 |

| WK | DATE | TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS | WHAT'S DUE |
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| 4 | 2/11 | <p>Aristotelian Structure: A Conversation about the Master Plays</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING: Monologue</p> <p>DISCUSSION: <i>Fences</i> and <i>Death of a Salesman</i> in conversation</p> <p>HW: Finish Monologue</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Death of a Salesman</i> |
| 5 | 2/18 | <p>New Structures: The Testimony, a monologue play</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: Share Monologues</p> <p>HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>9 Parts of Desire</i> by Heather Raffo</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWA #1 Monologue |
| 6 | 2/25 | <p>New Structures: The Non-Linear Play</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING: Essential Action/Reaction DISCUSSION: To bear witness: <i>9 Parts of Desire</i> HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>How I Learned to Drive</i> by Paula Vogel</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>9 Parts of Desire</i> |
| 7 | 3/4 | <p>Old Stories Made New: Transcultural Adaptation & Myth:</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: Non-linearity & trauma</p> <p>VIEW: <i>Oedipus the King</i> adapted by Julie Taymor HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>Oedipus El Rey</i> by Luis Alfaro; <i>Oedipus Rex</i> by Sophocles</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal #2 • Finish <i>How I Learned to Drive</i> |

| WK | DATE | TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS | WHAT'S DUE |
|----|------|--|---|
| 8 | 3/11 | <p>New Structures: Pushing Boundaries: Challenging the Gaze</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: A conversation between ages <i>Oedipus El Rey</i> and <i>Oedipus Rex</i></p> <p>HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>Caught</i> by Christopher Chen</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Oedipus El Rey</i> and <i>Oedipus Rex</i> |
| 9 | 3/18 | <p>Comedy: Satire</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: Meta-commentary</p> <p>HOMEWORK: . See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>Eureka Day</i> by Jonathan Spector</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Caught</i> |
| 10 | 3/25 | <p>New Structures: In Your Face</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: Contemporary Commentary: Audience HOMEWORK: . See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven</i> by Young Jean Lee</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Eureka Day</i> |

| WK | DATE | TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS | WHAT'S DUE |
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| 11 | 4/1 | <p>New Structures: the Variety Show</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: Satire x2 HOMEWORK: . See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>The Lily's Revenge</i> by Taylor Mac</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play Proposal • Finish <i>Songs of the Dragons</i> |
| 12 | 4/8 | <p>New Structures: Drag as Narrative</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: The Epic Drag Variety Show, kind of HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>A Map of Virtue</i> by Erin Courtney</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journal #3 • Finish <i>The Lily's Revenge</i> |
| 13 | 4/15 | <p>New Structures: the Political Play</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: The Mystery Play: Structure as Poetry</p> <p>HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>Top Girls</i> by Caryl Churchill</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>A Map of Virtue</i> |
| 14 | 4/22 | <p>New Structures: the Audience as Character</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: History and Modernity</p> <p>HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> <p>READING: <i>Fairview</i> by Jackie Sibblies Drury</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Top Girls</i> |

| WK | DATE | TOPICS, READINGS, ASSIGNMENTS | WHAT'S DUE |
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| 15 | 4/29 | <p>New Structures: Revisiting the Gaze</p> <p>IN-CLASS WRITING</p> <p>DISCUSSION: Interactive Theater</p> <p>HOMEWORK: See Canvas</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finish <i>Fairview</i> |
| 16 | 5/6 | <p>Writing day in class</p> <p>Journal Entry #4</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Draft Ten-Minute Play |
| 17 | 5/19 Mon 3:15 –5:15 pm | <p>FINAL EXAM DAY: Share work. Present Excerpts</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FINAL DRAFT |