

**Mississippi Valley State University**  
**College of Arts and Sciences**  
**Department of English and Foreign Languages**  
**EN 353-E01 (Poetry Writing II: Microfiction)**

**Instructor:** Deb Payne Purnell, M.A., M.F.A.  
**Office:** TED 163  
**Phone:** 662-254-3449  
**Office Hours:** Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:00-4:00 pm & Tuesdays & Thursdays, 3:00-4:00 pm  
**Classroom:** TED 108  
**Required text:** Lamott, Anne, [Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life](#)  
**Class Code:** mwdvypb

**Welcome to EN 353-E01: Micro Fiction**

This course is open to all students interested in writing fiction, in particularly micro fiction. What is microfiction? Scholars think of microfiction as being a one-part story and one-part poem. Without a doubt, microfiction is a fictional work of extreme brevity that still offers character and plot development. Microfiction is a member of the family of flash fictions, which are all 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 use the standard 100-word format, but don't be surprised if we suddenly drop to 50 words or less.

Microfiction authors include Amy Hempel, Ernest Hemingway, Steve Almond, Stephen Graham Jones, and Lydia Davis among many others. Here is a quick example from author Gayle Towell:

"Eclipse"

He told me small objects would float if tossed in the air during a lunar eclipse. I knew he was wrong, but I filled a hundred water balloons so we could juggle them in the dark and pretend they were made to hover by some magic. And when they actually did as the moon turned blood red, he revealed himself to be a magician and popped them all with his fingertips, making it rain.

"My skin is armor," I told him. "Paper thin, but it can repel arrows."

"Run fast," he said. "I'm going to see if that's true." (99 words)

For this online class, we will begin by reviewing the fundamentals of the writing process itself and the basic concepts behind the fiction. The course will proceed through readings in the text and writing various short stories. Yes, reading is an important and necessary component of writing fiction.

**Class requirements**

You are responsible for all readings and writing assignments. We will be utilizing Google Classroom. You must join my class by going to [www.classroom.google.com](http://www.classroom.google.com) and enter the following code: mwdvypb. 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 the due date; 10 points deducted for inaccurate MLA formatting**
2. **Micro Fiction (40%)**
3. **Midterm (15%)**
4. **Final Exam (15%)**

### **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 353-E01 Course Outline: Micro Fiction**

- Week 1 Review "The Mechanics of Fiction: A Writer's Boot Camp," pp. 177-187; Read Microfiction by Famous Authors; **Assignment 1:** 1-page analysis on "With One Wheel Gone Wrong" and "Her Number"? What are your initial thoughts? Take notice of the grammar, mechanics, and syntax of each story. How difficult do you think it is to write short fiction with such clarity? Discuss your own writing style. Do you write poetry, drama, screenplays or novels? How many drafts do you write of your story before you think it's finished? **Assignment 1 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 8/24**
- Week 2 Read "Working with the Elements of Fiction," pp. 45- 71, "Grace" and "Witness." by Joyce Carol Oates; **Assignment 2:** 1-page analysis of "Grace" and "Witness." Discuss your initial thoughts the short story. Include information about the characters, POV, setting, tone, plot, and theme. What do you like best in each work? Is the dialogue effective? How does the setting influence the characters? **Assignment 2 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 8/31**
- Week 3 **Micro Fiction 1:** In 50 words, write about "It's scary what a smile can hide." In 25 words, write about falling out of love. Be sure to use MLA basic formatting and to title your work. **Microfiction 1 (90 minutes) due by 11:59 on 9/7**
- Week 4 Read Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott, Introduction, pp. xi-xxxi; **Assignment 3:** 1-page analysis of Lamott's introduction. Discuss your initial thoughts on the introduction. What are Lamott's main points? Can you relate to what the author is saying? **Assignment 3 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 9/14**
- Week 5 Read Bird by Bird, pp. 3-20; **Assignment 4:** 1-page analysis of pp. 3-20. Discuss your initial thoughts. What are the main points? How does the section relate to your dreams of being a writer? **Assignment 4 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 p.m. on 9/21**

- Week 6                    **Micro Fiction 2:** In 50 words, write about taking back control. In 100 words, write about a teenager's decision to steal food from Wal-Mart. **Microfiction 2 (90 minutes) due by 11:59 p.m. on 9/28**
- Week 7                    **Midterm;** Read Bird by Bird, pp. 21-32; **Assignment 5:** 2-page analysis of pp. 21-32. Discuss your initial thoughts. What do you think about your first drafts and perfectionist habits? What can you change about your writing? How do you feel about your writing style thus far? **Midterm (60 minutes) due by 11:59 p.m. on 10/4**
- Week 8                    **Micro Fiction 3:** In 50 words, write about the stolen marriage; In 25 words, write about a difficult telephone conversation. **Microfiction 4 (90 minutes) due by 11:59 p.m. on 10/12**
- Week 9                    Read Bird by Bird, pp. 44-63; **Assignment 6:** 1-page analysis of pp. 44-63. Discuss your initial thoughts building good characters and great plots? What books have you read with great characters and plot? **Assignment 6 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 10/19**
- Week 10                    Read Bird by Bird, pp. 64-73; **Assignment 7:** 1-page analysis of pp. 64-73. Discuss your initial thoughts on writing dialogue. Are you good at writing convincing dialogue? Provide an example from a book or movie of good dialogue? Tell me why you like about the dialogue. **Assignment 7 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 10/26**
- Week 11                    **Micro Fiction 4:** In 100 words or less, write about how they couldn't explain the laughter in the empty house; in 6 words, write about something that vanished into thin air. **Microfiction 4 (90 minutes) due by 11:59 on 11/2**
- Week 12                    Read Bird by Bird, pp. 80-92; **Assignment 8:** 1-page analysis of pp. 80-92. Discuss your initial thoughts on the chapters. Discuss your own false starts with the flash fiction assignments and how you've overcome your hesitation? **Assignment 8 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 11/9**
- Week 13                    Read Bird by Bird, pp. 97-109; **Assignment 9:** 1-page analysis of pp. 97-109. Discuss your initial thoughts. Where do you find your best dialogue and story ideas? **Assignment 9 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 on 11/16**

Nov. 19-23

Fall Break

Week 14

Read Bird by Bird, pp. 162-171, **Assignment 10**: 1-page analysis of pp. 162-171. How do you feel about having someone to read your drafts? How have you handled the criticism in this class? What do you consider your best microfiction from this semester? **Assignment 10 (60 minutes) due by 11:59 p.m. 11/30**

Week 15

**Final Exam Week; Micro Fiction 5**: In 100 words or less, write a story that takes place in 24 hours in one room, in 6 words, write the woman at the car dealership, in 50 words, write about the body on the fire escape, and in 25 words, write about a murder at an empty zoo. **Microfiction 5 (120 minutes) due by 11:59 p.m. on 12/6**