

Playwriting I

Syllabus-Fall 2018

Course: TD 315, CRW 315 (unique# 25825, #34816)

Time: TTH, 11AM-12:30PM

Space: Winship. B.202

Instructor: I-Chia Chiu

E-mail: 99501041summer@gmail.com

Phone: 512-810-4134

Office hour: By appointment

“remember, you were a writer
before you ever put pen to paper.
just because you were not writing externally.
does not mean you were not writing
internally.”
— Nayyirah Waheed

OVERVIEW

This is an interrogative and generative course that approaches the creation of plays by examining the methods and practices in writing.

As Peter Brook put it, “In everyday life, ‘if’ is a fiction. In the theatre, ‘if’ is an experiment.” We, as storytellers, are the IF makers. In this course, we will continually ask ourselves the following questions: What is storytelling? What is theatre? What is playwriting? Is there a certain form in playwriting we need to follow? What if we don’t follow it?

You are invited to question the norms, generate the ifs--for your writing and for your life. We will redefine what you think about plays, unlock your imagination, and invite scrutiny and dramaturgical eyes. Through experimental writing and devising exercises, we will examine different elements of storytelling crafts such as image, character, language, motion, time, and space.

This is a course that serves as a stepping stone to a vigorous writing life. What we are seeking is not only your product but your growth in the process of writing. We want you to be confident in the generation of your voice and have fun. After all, as our friend Peter Brook said, “A play is play”.

Hope you enjoy writing, playing, and playwriting.

OBJECTIVES

1. To unleash you from the voice that tells you “I am not a good writer”.
2. To ignite your hunger for writing.
3. To unlock your imagination.
4. To cultivate your own aesthetic taste.
5. To get familiar with basic writing craft areas.
6. To apply the craft to your own writing.
7. To collaborate.
8. To invite scrutiny, to develop your lexicon in critiquing performance and writings.
9. To generate your own voice in writing.

HOW TO WORK IN THIS CLASS

1. Be curious.
(Are you hungry for more? What’s the thirst you want to quench?)
2. Be bold.
(Are you playing a safe game? How big is your comfort zone?)
3. Be an active listener.
(Are you listening? Or are you waiting to speak?)
4. Be specific.
(Where is your evidence to support your argument?)
5. Be honest with yourself.
(Don’t impress your colleagues. Don’t impress me. Impress yourself.)
6. Be generous to your colleagues.
(What is your role in this writing community? What can you do to help your colleagues shine?)
7. Do not be afraid to be wrong.
(Interrogate. Investigate.)
8. Do not come without questions.
(Prepare. Agree. Refute.)
9. Do not stop writing.
(Do not hurry. Do not rest.)

Q&A

- Who is I-Chia Chiu?

I-Chia Chiu is a storyteller. We often call her by her last name, which pronounces like

"chew". She writes plays, poems, fairy tales in English and Chinese. Her works have been developed by Stumbling Ostrich, a theatre ensemble she founded in Taiwan. She is currently working on a devised play about war and an immersive piece about memory. Her favorite Texan food is Kolache and pecan pie.

(For more: <https://ichiachiu.weebly.com/>)

- Who are you?

You are emerging writers.

You are collaborators.

You are eager to commit your time to art.

You are observers, dream weavers and metaphors builders.

REQUESTED READING MATERIALS

- **Play:** We will discuss a play every week. Please read the plays before class and prepare yourself for the discussion.

Toolkit: We will discuss the readings in the Toolkit every week. The readings in the toolkit are your great inspirations that will direct you to better understanding of writing. The readings serve as basis for in-class writing exercises and discussions.

If you have any doubts in catching up, please speak to me immediately.

- All required reading materials will be posted on Canvas's Pages. We will be reading and working on:

Scripts (required):

The Cataract by Lisa D'Amour

Life in the Middle by KJ Sanchez

Far Away by Caryl Churchill

Pool (no water) by Mark Ravenhill

Play Games by Po-Yun Hsiao

Nobody's Home by Mason Rosenthal and the Medium Theatre Company

Perpetual Motion by Paz Pardo

The Method Gun by Kirk Lynn

Ten-min Plays Collection

Play TBD. (We will decide this together.)

Scripts (supplementary):

Fiction by Steven Dietz

Intro to Being Here by Drew Paryzer

Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov

Indecent by Paula Vogel

The Golden Dragon by Roland Schimmelpfennig

In the Red and Brown Water by Tarell McCraney

Weekly Toolkit Reading:

- **Note:** PDF excerpts or details of the page number are available on Canvas. Suggested reading will be uploaded on Canvas as well. I encourage you to savor it when you have time. They're yummy and healthy.

1. Theatre Toolkit:

"Plays vs. Novels" by Kirk Lynn

"36 Assumptions about Playwriting" by Jose Rivera

"Theatre and its Double" by Anton Artaud

2. Image Toolkit:

The Natural History of Senses by Diane Ackerman

3. Character Toolkit:

The Actor and the Target by Declan Donnellan

4. Motion Toolkit:

A Director Prepares by Anne Bogart

5. Language Toolkit:

Soul Mountain by Gao Xingjian

6. Time Toolkit:

Einstein's Dream by Alan Lightman

7. Space Toolkit:

"Visit to a Small Planet" by Elinor Fuchs

8. Meta-World Toolkit:

If on a Winter's Night a Traveler by Italo Calvino

GRADING

Biweekly Response 21%

Top/End of Semester Reflection Worksheet 4 %

In-class Participation 30%

-This include all the mini exercises:

1. Image

2. Character and Status
3. Language
4. Motion
5. Time and space
6. Audience Experience

Play discussion 15%

Ten-page play 20 %

Play Presentation 10%

GRADING BREAKDOWN

95-100: A | 90-94: A- | 85-94: B | 80-84: B- | 75-79: C | 70-74: C- | 65-69: D | 64+below: F

ASSIGNMENT

- We need you to submit your pages in time so we will have time to create constructive feedback. Late submissions will result in a -1 point deduction. Absent submissions (over 72 hours late) will result in a -5 point deduction.
- Please bring laptops on the days we review our works.

1. Biweekly Response: 21 % (3% per response)

Over the course of the semester, you will submit 7 responses to me via Canvas. Please submit your reflection by no later than 5PM on Friday. The response is no less than 100 words, no more than 200. The response is a brief reflection to the previous Tuesday and Thursday class. It will include:

- 1) at least one of your observation / take-away from the class
- 2) at least one question you're pondering on.

You can apply your notes for this assignment.

Give examples. Be specific. Be sincere.

Treat this assignment not only as an opportunity to open a dialogue between you and me but also to invite scrutiny and self-reflexivity to your writing life.

2. Top/End of Semester Worksheet: 4% (2% per worksheet)

In the first week of the class, you will write "Top of Semester Reflection Worksheet" instead of a weekly response (DUE 8/31, 5PM). Submit this worksheet

through Canvas. You will talk about your relationship with writing and your goals for this course in the worksheet.

In the end of the class, you will send to me “End of Semester Reflection Worksheet” instead of a weekly response (DUE 12/7, 9 AM).

3. MINI EXERCISE (5% per exercise) (30%)

We will have exercises every week.

Please submit your work no later than 9 AM on the day we share our work. On the days we share work, you will need to bring laptop so we can read together.

1. Image
2. Character
3. Language
4. Motion
5. Time and Space
6. Audience Experience

4. Play discussion (15%)

We will discuss and analyze the plays in class. Please prepare yourself by reading the scripts and bring the hardcopy or the PDF of the script to the classroom.

5. Play Presentation- An Inspiring Play (10%)

After the submission of the first draft of your 10 page play, I will give each of you a list of plays that I think suits your aesthetic taste and will nourish your writing in the process of finishing your second draft. You can choose one of these plays and read it. (Or feel free to find another play that suits your needs!)

You will have a 10 minute presentation about a play that inspires you.

Your response will include:

- who this playwright is
- what the work is about
- how this work influences your perception and practice to writing.

6. TEN-PAGE PLAY (20%)

You will turn in a ten-page play at the end of the semester.

You will bring 5-15 pages for the first draft peer review and workshop (due 10/22), then the 10 pages for the second draft (due in different weeks).

On the day of workshop, you will need to bring laptop so we can read together.

For writers: Come up with one to three questions. You will cast us. We will read your play. We will discuss your play.

For readers: Please read your colleagues' work before class so we can give strong feedback. Each of you will become an expert of a certain craft area during the workshop. You will make critique based on the craft you are assigned to.

After the first draft, there will be some time for you to rewrite. Revision is crucial and please do remember to apply your notes there. At the end of the semester, you will come up with your own rubric to assess your work. I will grade you based on your rubric.

EXTRA POINTS (5%)

PERFORMANCE RESPONSE

You can write a **250-300 word response** of a performance you see this semester. There is a template of the response on Canvas. You will need to apply what you learn about the crafts to your analysis. Feel free to use it. Please turn it in through CANVAS for no later than two weeks after the day you see the show.

COURSE POLICY

RULES FOR THE ROOM

1. No food. Beverage okay. Water encouraged.
2. Please bring your laptop for workshop. For play and reading discussion, you can choose to bring hard copies or laptop.
3. No cell phone while the class is in session.
Please make sure your cell phone is silenced.

ATTENDANCE / PUNCTUALITY

Be punctual.

If you're late, you will miss the opportunity to attend awesome warm-up activities and my inspiring opening speech. We don't want to see you late. We need your presence.

Please be ON TIME. Not at 11:05 AM but at 11 AM. THREE lateness equal ONE absence. You will be allowed up to two excused absences. Every unexcused absence after that will result in lowering your final grade by half a letter (e.g. from a B to a B-). Absences are excused in the case of severe illness, unavoidable personal emergencies,

and religious holidays cleared in advance.

(If you are sick or have an emergency, please take good care of yourself and communicate this with me. Bring me an official document afterwards. If you foresee something coming up, please let me know too.)

COURSE CONTENT

The material created in this course may cover a range of experiences and identities. Some of the materials in this course may be emotionally challenging. Please talk with me if you have any concerns. We can discuss what works best for you, so that I can do my best to support your engagement with these topics and plays.

PERFORMANCE ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENTS

It is the policy of the Department of Theatre and Dance that our majors attend department season productions and that this attendance is a part of the coursework for our majors' classes. Information on how majors may obtain discounted admission is available on the Department of Theatre and Dance wiki under the "Student Resources" tab. (<https://wikis.utexas.edu/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=51841138>).

- *A Plan and Not Quite Enough Time*, 9/29-30 at the B. Iden Payne Theatre
- *Metawan*, 10/10-21 at the Oscar G. Brockett Theatre
- *Merchant of Venice*, 11/14-12/2 at the Oscar G. Brockett Theatre

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Thursday, 8/30— Introduction

READ: Theatre Toolkit: "Plays vs. Novels" by Kirk Lynn

IN CLASS: Course overview.

Top of Semester Reflection.

Reading discussion.

- Bring your laptop, or a device to read the syllabus in class.
Prepare to share your relationship with theatre, writing, and playwriting.
- You will ask: Where am I now? What do I want to get from this course?
- We will also explore the following questions: What is theatre? What is playwriting?
How is a play different from film, novel, and poem?

Friday, 8/31 5PM

DUE: Top of Semester Reflection due by 5PM.

Week 2

Tuesday, 9/4 –Image

READ:

- Image Toolkit: *The Natural History of Senses* by Diane Ackerman
- Play #1 *The Cataract* by Lisa D'Amour

IN CLASS: Image exercise.

Reading discussion.

ASSIGNMENT: Image exercise (prompt provided in class).

- Prepare for class by reading the material in the toolkit. We will investigate and share the fun facts you learned in *The Natural History of Senses*.
- Prepare the discussion by reading the play. Ask yourself the following questions: What images stick out to you? What is the texture, the color, the palette of the play?

Thursday, 9/6—Image

DUE: Image exercise due by 9 AM on Thursday

IN CLASS: Sharing image exercise

- You will be exploring: What is my image of obsession?

Week 3

Tuesday, 9/11-Character

READ:

- Character Toolkit: *The Actor and the Target* by Declan Donnellan
- Play #2 *Life in the Middle* by KJ Sanchez

IN CLASS: Character exercise

Reading Discussion

ASSIGNMENT: Character exercise

- Prepare for class by reading the material in the toolkit. We will investigate the following questions: What are the ways to approach a character?
- Prepare the discussion by reading the play. Ask yourself the following questions: Who are the characters in the play? How does the playwright present these characters?

Thursday, 9/13 — Character

DUE: Character exercise due by 9 AM on Tuesday

READ: Character toolkit: "Tips for doc plays and interviews" by KJ Sanchez

IN CLASS: Sharing character exercise

- Prepare to discuss your interview process. What is my discovery? What's my role in the interview?

Friday, 9/14

DUE: Biweekly Response #1 by 5PM.

Week 4

Tuesday, 9/18 –Motion

READ:

- Motion Toolkit: *A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart (The Violence Chapter)
- Play #3 *Far Away* by Caryl Churchill

IN CLASS: Motion exercise

Reading discussion.

ASSIGNMENT: Motion exercise: Five-Line Play

- Prepare for class by reading the toolkit. We will investigate the following questions: What are the examples of violence? How do we create disruption?
- Prepare the discussion by reading the play. Ask yourself the following questions: What happens in the play? What do you suspect happens?

Thursday, 9/20 —Motion

IN CLASS: Far Away Motion Exercise

Motion Exercise Sharing

- Prepare the discussion by reviewing the play. Ask yourself the following questions: How does the energy move in Act I? Act II? Act III?

Week 5

Tuesday, 9/25—Motion

IN CLASS: Motion Exercise Sharing

Thursday, 9/27-Motion

IN CLASS: Motion Exercise Sharing

Friday, 9/28

DUE: Biweekly Response #2 by 5PM

Week 6

Tuesday, 10/2 –Language

READ: READ:

- (Optional) Language Toolkit: *Soul Mountain* by Gao Xingjiang
- Play #4 *Pool (no water)* by Mark Ravenhill

ASSIGNMENT: Language Exercise

- (Optional) Prepare for class by reading the material in the toolkit. We will investigate the following questions: What kind of linguistic feature stick out to you? What is Gao's use of POV in the story?
- Prepare the discussion by reading the play. Ask yourself the following questions: What are the linguistic styles of this play? How does it affect the motion of the play?

Thursday, 10/4—Language

DUE: Language exercise due by 9 AM.

IN CLASS: Sharing language exercise

- You will ask: What kind of linguistic styles fascinates me?

Week 7

Tuesday, 10/9—Time and Space

READ:

- Time Toolkit: *Einstein's Dream* by Alan Lightman
- Space Toolkit: *Visit to a Small Planet* by Elinor Fuchs
- *Play Games* by Po-Yun Hsiao

IN CLASS: Time Exercise

Reading Discussion

ASSIGNMENT: Time and Space Exercise

- Prepare for class by reading the material in the toolkit. We will use these toolkits as prompts for our writing exercise.
- Prepare the class by reading the play and we will investigate the following questions: How does time move in the play? What are the major time shifts? Also think about the character. How does time affect their relationship?

Thursday, 10/11 --- —BIG COLLABORATION DAY

DUE: Time exercise due by 9 AM.

READ: Meta-World Toolkit: *If on a Winter's Night a Traveler* by Italo Calvino

IN CLASS: Collaboration Exercise

Audience Exercise (Rewrite your time and space exercise)

ASSIGNMENT: Audience Exercise (DUE: 10/18)

- Be ready to answer questions about time, character, language, time, space, and image.

- Prepare for class by reading the material. We will investigate the following questions: What are the effects when you break the fourth wall? What is Calvino's skills and techniques to shorten the speaker's distance from the readers?

Friday, 10/12

DUE: Biweekly Response #3 by 5PM

Week 8

Tuesday, 10/16—AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE

READ: (NOTE: We will divide the class into three groups and assign you the script.)

Play #6 *Nobody's Home* by Mason Rosenthal / *Perpetual Motion* by Paz Pardo/ *The Method Gun* by Kirk Lynn

IN CLASS: Play discussion

Devising Exercise

- Prepare the class by reading the play and we will investigate the following questions: How do the performers interact with the audience?

Thursday 10/18— Devising Workshop: #1

DUE: Audience Exercise due in class.

IN CLASS: Exercise Presentation

Friday, 10/19

DUE: Biweekly Response #4 by 5PM

Week 9-Workshop #1

Tuesday, 10/23— Devising Workshop: #2

DUE: Ten-min Play Pages (for everyone) at 9AM.

READ: Play #7 Ten Page Play Collection

IN CLASS: Exercise Presentation

Thursday, 10/25— Workshop #1-Group 1

READ: Group 1's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop

Week 10

Tuesday, 10/30 —Workshop #1-Group 2

READ: Group 3's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop.

Thursday, 11/1— Workshop #1-Group 3

READ: Group 4's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop

Play discussion

Friday, 11/2

DUE: Biweekly Response #5 by 5PM.

- Your focus in the response: what did you learn from your colleagues? What do you want to steal from them? How does it change your perception to writing?

Week 11

Tuesday, 11/6 —Workshop #1Group 4

READ: Group 2's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop

Play Discussion

Thursday, 11/8—Revision Workshop

READ: Motion Toolkit: *A Director Prepares* by Anne Bogart (The Embarrassment Chapter)

IN CLASS: Reading discussion

Play Development Exercise

Week 13

Tuesday 11/13 –Workshop #2-Group 1

DUE: Group 3's pages due by 9AM on Tuesday.

READ: Group 2's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop.

Thursday 11/15 –Workshop #2-Group 2

DUE: Group 4's pages due by 9AM on Tuesday.

READ: Group 3's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop

Friday, 11/16

DUE: Biweekly Response #6 by 5PM.

Week 13

Tuesday, 11/20 –Workshop #2-Group 3

READ: Group 4's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop.

Thursday, 11/22—NO CLASS (Thanksgiving holiday)

Week 14

Tuesday, 11/27 —Workshop #2-Group 4

READ: Group 4's pages

IN CLASS: Workshop.

Thursday, 11/29 –Presentation #1

DUE: Presentation-a play that inspires you

READ: Play #8

IN CLASS: Presentation-a play that inspires you.

Friday, 11/30

DUE: Biweekly Response #7 by 5PM.

- Your focus in the response: What did you learn from your colleagues in the workshop? What do you want to steal from them? How does it change your perception to writing?

Week 15

Tuesday, 12/4 Presentation #2

DUE: Presentation-a play that inspires you

READ: Play #8

IN CLASS: Presentation-a play that inspires you.

Thursday, 12/6 Final Reflection

IN CLASS: Reflection.

Celebration!

Friday, 12/7

DUE: End of Semester Reflection due by 5PM.

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN POLICIES

Religious Holy Days

According to UT Austin policy, you must notify your instructor at least 14 days prior to a pending absence for the observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, a presentation or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, we will give you an opportunity to complete work wither in advance of your absence or within a reasonable time after the absence.

This instructor will make an exception for religious holy days that fall less than 14 days after the first day of class.

Regarding Scholastic Dishonesty

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. For more information on scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial services Web site at <http://www.utexas.edu/depts/dos/sjs/>.

ACADAEMIC ACCOMODATIONS

Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodation should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259 (voice) or 471-4641 (TTY) to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.

Please let me know if you have any reservations about this class, including, but not limited to, learning differences and hidden or sensory disabilities. I want to make the course as inclusive and safe as possible, and I need your help and communication to stay informed.

If you need accommodation for any facet of this course, make an appointment with me during the first two weeks of class. I will ask for your accommodation letter from the Services for Students with Disabilities.

University Electronic Mail Notification Policy

All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. It is

recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html>. In this course Canvas and e-mail will be used as a means of communication with students. You will be responsible for checking your e-mail regularly for class work and announcements.

Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here: Student Emergency Services <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/> and Student Counseling http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_sexualviolence.html

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting unusually, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you might require assistance during a possible, future evacuation, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.
- Do not re-enter a building unless authorized by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office.

This syllabus is guaranteed to change.