

# ENGL 238 | Introduction to Fiction – Imagining Reality

CRN (11173)

M-F 9:45 – 11:15a | HEAV 206

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**Office Hours:** MT 12-1:30p (and by appointment)

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“I did not want to be nailed to the truth; or to be more accurate, I wanted to be able to tell the truth without ever needing to worry about the facts.” ~ Neil Gaiman, *A View from the Cheap Seats*

## Course Description

YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE LIES AHEAD—AND DOWNWARDS.

Whether we are opening the covers of a new book or logging on to a video game, humans are constantly surrounded by and interacting with alternative realities and imaginative stories. In this class, we will consider these stories' relationship to our common definitions of "truth" and "reality" in order to better analyze, discuss, and potentially understand the value and importance of fiction.

We will explore several alternative realities—from those created by short pieces of speculative fiction (fantasy, steampunk, scifi, dystopian, etc.) to novels about online role play gaming, such as *Ready Player One* and *In Real Life*; we will also consider the experience of reading itself as an alternative reality. Further, we will engage with and apply writings by authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula LeGuin, Naru Dames Sundar, and Neil Gaiman that discuss fiction's power and purpose.

Students of ENGL 238 will consider how we might define reality; whether something can be "true" without being "actual"; what sorts of effects imagination could (possibly) have on the "real" world; and why an author might write a fiction about fiction. Finally, we will also reflect on the connections between the disciplines and the ways in which the types of creative thinking encouraged by the Liberal Arts might connect with the work students may go on to do in the Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology fields.

> TAKE BOOK  
> BEGIN ADVENTURE \_

## Learning Outcomes

Students in this class will:

- Be able to define "fiction," "genre," and other key literary terms;
- Be able to discuss key aspects and functions of fiction, including fiction's relationship to nonfiction;
- Consider the role of imaginative thinking in all disciplines, as well as the effect that artistic and creative thinking can have on our world;
- Gather tools for close reading; and
- Develop and strengthen skills in time management, organization, written and verbal communication, emotional intelligence, and analytical and critical observation.

## Supplies:

- A Notebook (please bring this, and a pen, with you to class every day)
- A Habitica Account (<https://habitica.com/>)
- ENGL 238 Coursepack (CP) – Available @ CopyMat in the Chauncey Hill Mall
- Textbooks – Available @ Von’s:
  - *Ready Player One*, by Ernest Cline [ISBN: 9780307887443] (RPO)
  - *In Real Life* (graphic novel), by Cory Doctorow and Jen Wang [ISBN: 9781596436589] (IRL)

## Accessibility Statement

Everyone learns differently and I will do my best to incorporate techniques that draw on multiple learning styles. However, please let me know, as soon as possible, if you have any individual learning needs. **Remember, all students can take advantage of the excellent resources offered by the Writing Lab and on the Purdue OWL.**

Purdue Nondiscrimination Policy: [http://www.purdue.edu/purdue/ea\\_eou\\_statement.html](http://www.purdue.edu/purdue/ea_eou_statement.html)

## Attendance and Participation

You are expected to do all the reading and to come to class prepared to discuss. I highly recommend that you read with a pen or pencil in your hand; this way you can make notes in the margins or in your notebook. Because literary study depends upon discussion and debate, I cannot effectively introduce you to fiction solely by lecturing. Instead, we will need class discussions in which many people participate, offering their views, interpretations, and ideas. Preparation for discussion and participating in both large and small group work is an important part of your learning.

**Professionalism and Participation Grade:** You will start out with a 100 for your Professionalism and Participation Grade as well as with **2 free absences (excused or unexcused)**. Because you are expected to be both physically and mentally present when in class, any additional absences (including days in which a student was mentally absent from class due to excessive technology use—such as texting, tweeting, snapping, gram-ing, or facebook-ing—in a manner that is not appropriate for a learning environment) will result in your P&P Grade dropping one letter. That is, you start out with an A, and if you miss 2 or fewer classes, you still have the A. If you miss 3 classes, you get a B for P&P; if you miss 4 classes, you get a C, etc.

## Professionalism

Because effective discussion is done in a community, it is important that your interactions in class are conducted respectfully and that you participate fully in the course. **Disrespectful, belittling, or threatening speech or behavior will not be tolerated. Students who ignore this policy will be asked to leave the class and will be marked absent.**

Use of cell phones and other electronic devices should be appropriate to and for the classroom; students who persist in using technology inappropriately will see this choice reflected in their P&P grade.

## Assignments/Exams

Reading Quizzes and Classwork	15%
Professionalism and Participation	10%
Weekly Mini-Essay (2-3pgs, TNR, double spaced)	50% (10% ea.)
<b><i>*You will begin drafting in class, but mini-essays should be polished after class before being turned in; see assignment sheet for more information*</i></b>	

**Week One Prompt:** Close Reading of a passage not covered in class

**Week Two Prompt:** Discuss one of the stories read in Week One in light of one of the authors' theories on fiction read this week

**Week Three Prompt:** Visual close reading of a page or panel not covered in class

**Week Four Prompt:** Make a mini-argument about the relationships between—or purposes of—fiction, reality, and alternative reality based on the first part of *Ready Player One*

**Week Five Prompt:** Think about your future major and/or what you are most interested in studying while at Purdue and write a mini-essay exploring the connections between what you want to do and the things we have learned in this class

*Ready Player One* Activities

10%

**\*Full prompts are on Blackboard under the “Discussions” Tab; please respond to the applicable thread before 11:59pm Sunday night\***

**Week One:** Play “Endless, Nameless” and at least one other text-based adventure game on the Text Adventures Website (<http://textadventures.co.uk/games/tag/rpg>) for a minimum of 30 minutes; blog about your experiences on Blackboard (be sure to answer the discussion board post questions when crafting your response)

**Week Two:** Begin reading *Ready Player One*; think about how Wade has constructed his avatar and answer the questions posted on Blackboard

**Week Three:** Continue reading *Ready Player One*; write at least two discussion questions about RPO (citing a specific passage or passages from the text that you would like to point us to) and post them to Blackboard

Final Exam

15%

### Grading Standards

<i>A to A-</i>	High quality work. A-level work meets all the qualities listed for a B, but also demonstrates that you took extra steps to be original or creative in your thinking and/or style. Work is refined and thinking well-developed
<i>B+ to B-</i>	You did what the assignment asked of you and clearly put in thought and effort. Work in this range needs little revision, is complete in content, shows mental effort, and is well organized.
<i>C+ to C-</i>	You met the minimum requirements of the assignment. Work in this range needs polish and development, but it contains all the basic content.
<i>D+ to D</i>	Low-quality work. D-level work may not have met the requirements of the assignment, and tends to need significant revision in style, content, and organization.
<i>F</i>	This is reserved for those who do not complete the assignment. If you feel you put in your best effort and still received an F, please come see me in office hours.

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D	60-69
F	<59

### Course Calendar

**Week One (Fiction, aka. the other F-word)**

**M (7/10): Introductions + What is Fiction? (Definitions, Questions, etc.)**

**T (7/11): What is Fiction (cont.) & Intro to Close Reading**

HW (due today): Plot (CP 3) + Tone and Style (CP 8-9) + Feldman, “My Life in Fiction” (CP 85-86)

**W (7/12): Point of View & Close Reading**

HW: POV (CP 4-6) & Sarah Rees Brennan, “Faint Heart” (CP 15-29)

**TH (7/13): Close Reading Practice**

HW: **\*Introduction Survey Due\***; bring Notebook, Coursepack, & any notes about “Faint Heart” to class and be ready to begin drafting your mini-essay in class

**F (7/14): The True, the Actual, and the Fictional – Or, Why Tell “Lies”?**

HW: Mini-Essay 1 Due, READ: M.T. Anderson, “The Oracle Engine” (CP 31-50)

**\*Do RPO Activity 1 over the weekend\***

## Week Two (Authors)

### M (7/17): Genre, Argument, and Monsters

HW: READ: Carrie Ryan, "After the Cure" (CP 53-66)

### T (7/18): From the Writers Themselves

HW: READ: either Neil Gaiman (CP 117-122), Ursula Le Guin (CP 105-115), or J.R.R. Tolkien (CP 87-103) depending on your group

### W (7/19): Fiction Writers (cont.)

HW: Come prepared to help your group teach your reading to the rest of the class

### TH (7/20): Genre Fiction and Fiction Writers (cont.)

HW: READ: *Lightspeed* Pieces (CP 123-130) & Bring Coursepack & notebook

### F (7/21): Where am I?: On Setting

HW: Finish Mini-Essay, READ: Setting (CP 7) & Jeffrey Ford, "The Annals of Eelin-Ok" (CP 69-81)

**\*Begin reading RPO and do Activity 2 over the weekend\***

## Week Three (IRL)

### M (7/24): Intro to Visual Rhetoric and Reading "Comics"

HW: READ: Scott McCloud, "From *The Vocabulary of Comics*" (CP 131-138)

### T (7/25): Graphic Narratives, part I

HW: Theme & Symbol (CP 10-13) & *In Real Life* (pp.1-87), please do **not** read the Intro

### W (7/26): Reading and "Real Life"

HW: *IRL* (p. 88-end) & Intro

### TH (7/27): Gaming and Reading

HW: Bring *IRL* & Notebook & be ready to draft Mini-essay

### F (7/28): Worlds within Worlds – RPG and READ(ing)

HW: Finish Mini-Essay and Make Sure you have read through p. 99 of *RPO*

**\*Do RPO Activity 3 over the weekend\***

## Week Four (RPO)

### M (7/31): Intro to the World of *Ready Player One*

HW: *Ready Player One* (through p. 133)

### T (8/1): HW: Finish Level One of *RPO* (ends p. 166)

### W (8/2): HW: READ *RPO* (through p. 207)

### TH (8/3): HW: Bring *RPO* & Notebook & be ready to draft Mini-essay

### F (8/4): HW: Finish Mini-Essay, Finish Level Two (ends p. 266)

## Week Five (RPO)

### M (8/7): HW: READ *RPO* (through p. 312)

### T (8/8): HW: READ *RPO* (through p. 342)

### W (8/9): Wrap-up *RPO* and Review for Final

HW: finish *RPO*

### TH (8/10): HW: Bring *RPO* & Notebook & be ready to draft final Mini-essay

### F (8/11): Final Exam in class



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