COURSE OBJECTIVES:

An introductory class in writing for the stage.

This semester you will learn how to create a story that has logical cohesion and compelling characters. You will learn the dramatic structure of the “well-made play,” discuss concepts of theatricality, and read various short plays by a diverse group of playwrights. However, we will also discuss and experiment with non-narrative storytelling.

To paraphrase the best known technique of Brecht’s epic theatre, the Alienation Effect: as writers you will learn to “make the familiar strange” and conversely the “strange familiar.”

You will learn techniques and exercises (pioneered by Maria Irene Fornes) that let you tap into inspiration at will and not wait for it to haphazardly or infrequently strike.

As an added bonus, you will work with actors, directors, and dramaturgs to mount your work in staged readings or workshop productions. This is made possible by San Diego’s Moxie Theatre.

Your main assignments this semester will be...

--A short monologue (1 page or two-minutes in length)
--An “impossible to stage” play (1-2 pages)
--2 short scenes. (2 to 3 pages in length)
--An issue essay
--A ten-minute play (for the bakeoff or on your own) (8-10 pages)
--A second ten-minute play (8-10 pages) OR longer one-act play.

REQUIRED READING:

More Ten-Minute Plays from the Actors Theatre of Louisville
edited by Michael Bigelow Dixon, Samuel French, Inc.

Plays: Maria Irene Fornes by Maria Irene Fornes, Paj Books

The America Plays & Other Works by Suzan-Lori Parks, Theatre Communications Group

Various plays or essays which will be posted on BLACKBOARD.

OPTIONAL READING:

100 Essays I Don’t Have Time to Write by Sarah Ruhl, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux

ASSIGNMENTS:

There will be in-class and take-home writing assignments, which will be read and discussed in class. Please have Xerox copies for each member of the class and the instructor, and be sure to keep a copy of everything you turn in.

All writing must be neatly typed and legible. Please be sure to put your name, the name of the assignment, the date, and number your pages.

Always proof your work!!! You will be required to write in standard play script format that is PERFECT, and that means no misspellings, typos, or grammatical errors. This standard of excellence is no joke and not to be taken lightly. It is demanded in the professional world. If you want your script to be taken seriously, YOU must make sure its most basic mechanics are flawless.

WARNING: This writing course has a heavy workload. So pace yourself and don’t wait to finish your assignments the night before they’re due. Give yourself ample time to REWRITE and PROOF. Write every day. Again, this is what professional writers do.

All work is expected to be turned in on time. Consistently late work drops a grade. If it is impossible to make a class, find out the assignment from your classmate.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Completion of assignments, creative content, professional presentation and growth during the semester are of great importance. The assignments are cumulative and build upon one another.
Also important is your participation and promptness. That means if you don’t ATTEND CLASS, REHEARSAL, OR PERFORMANCES, you deny yourself the opportunity to hear your classmates’ feedback. Even worse, you rob your classmates of your input. The class will be run like a professional “writers’ room.” So there will be constant, interactive discussions, not lectures.

Specifically, your grade will be based on these factors:
-- take-home assignments (40%)
-- in-class assignments (10%)
-- in-class participation, critiques (10%)
-- ten-minute plays: from concept, to actual script, to staged-reading (20%). Finding your actors and rehearsal out of class is just as important as the actual script.
-- final projects: from concept, to actual script (20%)

Because this class is so dependent on in-class assignments and participation, you are only allowed one excused absence (that’s a call or an e-mail BEFORE class, preferably at least 24 hours in advance) and one unexcused absence.

-- Two unexcused absences (i.e. no participation) lower your final grade by a half letter.
-- Three unexcused absences lower your final grade a full letter.
-- Four unexcused absences will result in a dismissal from the class.
-- Be aware, two late arrivals (15 minutes or more) equal an unexcused absence.

***A word to the wise: Just because I don’t say anything doesn’t mean these policies are lax or your class conduct isn’t being noted.***

If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, and if you consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a “B.” I do not easily or frequently give out “A” grades. This is reserved for students who accomplish all of the above and whose work is of a high quality.

CONSULTATION:
Office hours Wednesdays 1-3PM in Comm 112, e-mail: akhoo@mail.sdsu.edu. Other times to meet are the hours before and after class. If that doesn’t work, we’ll arrange something else.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT:
“If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.”

CLASS SCHEDULE:

***These assignments and dates are subject to change. Please follow instructions given in class OR check with a classmate.***

WEEK ONE 1/18/17
--Introduction
--Go over syllabus
--Study writing format
--What is a monologue? Character goals.
--Fornes in-class writing exercise

ASSIGNMENT: Go to open auditions. Read monologues. Write a monologue.

WEEK TWO 1/25/17
--Go over monologues.
--What is impossible to stage?

ASSIGNMENT: Read impossible to stage plays. Write an “impossible to stage play” (1-2 pages)(short scene #1, 10% of grade)
--Collect $20 for theater tickets for Moxie, Or $12 for On-Campus show

WEEK THREE 2/1/17
--Go over monologues OR “impossible to stage play.”
--In-class writing exercise, eavesdropping dialogue.

ASSIGNMENT: Read “The Zoo Story.” Read “Lynette at 3 A.M.”

WEEK FOUR 2/8/17
--Go over “impossible to stage play”
--Discuss ten-minute play readings.
--Scene structure, with a third element.
--If you haven’t presented, turn in your monologues or your impossible to stage plays.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a short two-person scene with a third element or third character. (short scene #2, 10% of grade)

***WEEK FIVE - SATURDAY 2/11/17 at 8PM or SUNDAY 2/12/17 at 2PM***
Moxie Theatre trip to see “Blue Door.” Tickets are $15 if 15 or more students go. Otherwise $20.
--OR Saturday 2/18/17 show on campus at 7:30PM
--(No class 2/15/17)

WEEK SIX 2/22/17
***GUEST SPEAKER TBA***
--Go over 2 person scene with a third element.
--Pre-reading discussion of “Mud” by Maria Irene Fornes.

ASSIGNMENT: Read “Mud.” Bring in a paragraph of found text.

WEEK SEVEN 3/1/17
--Go over 2 person scene with a third element.
--Begin planning Moxie event and Experimental Theatre plays. Assign producers.
--**In-class writing exercise using found text.**

ASSIGNMENT: Write 2, one-page essays on an issue. (issue essays, 10% of grade)

WEEK EIGHT 3/8/17
--Go over issue essays.
--**In-class writing exercise: the Craig Lucas issue play.**

ASSIGNMENT: Read “Imperceptible Mutabilities” by Parks. Begin writing your larger one-act play, pages 1-5. (completed script worth 20% of grade)

*** WEEK NINE 3/15/17 – NO CLASS ***
TO ACCOUNT FOR OUR 48-HOUR NON-STOP CLASS

WEEK TEN 3/22/17
--Present pages of your larger play.
--Discuss “Imperceptible Mutabilities.”
--Talk about Moxie Theatre and SDSU Experimental Theater staged readings of new ten-minute plays (entire process is 20% of your grade).
ASSIGNMENT: Keep writing your one-act play, pages 6-10 or more.

***WEEK ELEVEN  3/29/17 – NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK***

WEEK TWELVE  4/5/17
--Present pages of your larger play. Group 1, Final Project.
--Meet your dramaturgs. What is a dramaturg?
--Prepare for Moxie event this weekend. Students get writing prompt Saturday morning 4/8.

ASSIGNMENT: WEEKEND TEN-MINUTE PLAY BAKE-OFF 4/8 and 4/9
--Rehearsal of ten-minute plays with playwright, director, dramaturg, and professional actors.

WEEK THIRTEEN  ***No class 4/12/17***
***Class moved to Saturday & Sunday 4/8 and 4/9***

ASSIGNMENT: Students with performances at the SDSU Experimental Theatre rehearse outside of class.

WEEK FOURTEEN  4/19/17
***GUES SPEAKER TBA***
--Public performance of ten-minute plays at SDSU Experimental Theatre.
--Discuss public performances of ten-minute plays.

ASSIGNMENT: Resume writing or re-writing your longer, one-act play. 10 pages minimum – 30 pages maximum.

WEEK FIFTEEN 4/26/17
--Discuss public performances of ten-minute plays.
--Present pages of your larger play. (Group 2, Final Project)  
(Again this is the final project that accounts for 20% of semester grade.)

ASSIGNMENT: Rewrite longer, one-act play or write more, 30 pages max.

WEEK SIXTEEN - LAST WEEK OF CLASS   5/3/17
--Present pages of your larger play. (Group 3, Final Project)
PLAYWRITING / SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE

--Final Draft 8, 9, or 10:
The industry standard. Buy it online. You won’t regret it.

--software on the internet

SOURCES FOR NEW, INTERESTING PLAYS

--“American Theatre Magazine”

--Plays published by Theatre Communications Group

--Some plays published by Samuel French

--SDSU’s main library, media collection, has DVD’s and scripts you can look at.

--Interesting essays:

100 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write: On Umbrellas and Sword Fights, Parades and Dogs, Fire Alarms, Children, and Theater by Sarah Ruhl, Faber & Faber