

a fiction writer's playbook

As the townspeople grapple with their problems, mild and dire, Olive is brought to a deeper understanding of herself and her life—sometimes painfully, but always with ruthless honesty. Olive Kitteridge offers profound insights into the human condition—its conflicts, its strategies and joys, and the endurance it requires.
— from Olive Kitteridge (the back cover)

A writer's project: the fiction playbook

Over the next few weeks, we will be reading some pretty great fiction, including Elizabeth Strout's Pulitzer Prize winning novel entitled *Olive Kitteridge*, Jennifer Egan's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, short fiction selections from Burroway's *Writing Fiction*, the *Micro Fiction* anthology edited by Jerome Stern and other work. This work is produced by skilled and accomplished writers of fiction. We can learn from them and that's what we will do. This project asks that you put together a kind of playbook or set of effective “moves” that you can employ as a writer of fiction. The idea is that you will read these works carefully with an eye toward craft, notice what works in the fiction, and then distill a few specific lessons that you might apply toward your own work. Your playbook will include **ten moves or strategies—at least three from Strout, at least three from Egan, at least two from Stern's collection, and two of your choice from other work in or out of our course.**



Elizabeth Strout

What each “play” should include

Each of the seven to ten moves you document in your playbook should include the following elements.

1 a name for the move

Come up with a good name for each of the moves you have documented in your playbook. It should be somewhat descriptive, but also creative and memorable. The name should be such that you can easily recall it later when you are working on your own narrative craft.

2 quoted passage from the work itself

Provide a quote from fictional text that demonstrates the effect you are documenting in your playbook. This should be a solid example of the technique. Try to isolate just the right amount of the text to illustrate the move.

3 why you like the passage you quoted

Explain in a fair amount of detail (about a paragraph or so) why you were drawn to the passage. What do you like about? How does it affect you as a reader?

4 how it works

This is the most important part. Explain in detail how this fiction writing “move” you are capturing works. Start with how it is working in the writer's piece, but then try to distill the lesson, making it more conceptual such that it is a lesson easily applied to your own work. You might use some of your developing fiction writer's vocabulary here to assist you in your explanation. Burroway may be of some help here.



Jennifer Egan

wait, wait, there's more 

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Turning in your playbook

Your playbook will be submitted in installments, about one play a week as assigned on the course schedule. We will be using our "Scribbler" site to facilitate this, which will be really nice because it will make sharing these fiction writing "moves" with the class quite easy so we can all benefit from the lessons to be learned in them.

How this project will be assessed

Each work of your playbook is a "contract term," so it is essential that you complete them all on time and in keeping with the requirements above. To earn credit for each play, all four parts must be clearly present, labeled, and fully-developed, and the play must be posted before by the due date. Refer to the course schedule and the grading contract for more information.

Due date

Consult the course schedule for a complete list of due dates.