

Writing 3600G (Winter 2026)

Writing Fantasy

Course description and objectives

Character wants a good job, plenty of excitement, quest, possible assistance from mentors and companions.

Students in this course will work on various aspects of a full-length fantasy novel, focusing on aspects of world-building, the use and transformation of common fantasy motifs, various ways to structure the narrative and tell the story, and how to devise the most affective and climactic scenes. We will read some secondary material (including Tolkien and others on the genre), and students will also be required to read and report on a contemporary fantasy novel of their choice as we assess what makes fantasy successful. At the conclusion of the course, students will submit a portfolio of work that includes a language or myth that underpins their created world, character sketches, an outline of their novel, and an excerpt from it.

Course-level learning outcomes

- Devise a definition of "fantasy" that is inclusive and functional
- Understand structural theories of story-telling generally
- Understand the conventions of the fantasy genre specifically - motifs, movements, tales, narrative principles, structural devices, and great scenes - and understand when conventions need to be ignored
- Gain knowledge of a range of specific works in contemporary fantasy
- Prepare a marketable plan, including query letter, for a fantasy novel

Required texts

Beowulf. Any translation, any edition. Here's [a straightforward one](#), and here's [a scholarly one](#) where you can see the Old English (translation line with mouse-over if you select "translation" in the vertical "Options" tab in the middle of the screen: there's lots you can do with [this site](#)). If you like to hold a book while you read, [Roy Liuzza's translation](#) is precise (2nd edition, Broadview, 2012), and a recent facing-page translation that's quite good with solid and brief introduction and notes is Shippey (also a Tolkien expert) and Neidorf, [Beowulf: Translation and Commentary](#) (Uppsala Books, 2024). If you want to read newer takes by contemporary writers (instead of scholars), try [Seamus Heaney's translation](#) or [Maria Dahvana Headley's translation](#).

This textbook costs between \$0.00 (online options) and \$33.99 (paperback version of Shippey and Neidorf on Amazon).

J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*. Any edition. The bookstore has the Harper Collins edition in stock. **This textbook costs \$12.99 at the bookstore.**

R.F. Kuang, *Katabasis*. Harper Voyager, 2025. The bookstore has this in stock. **This textbook costs \$39.50 at the bookstore.**

Here's the [bookstore link](#).

Course Requirements and Grade Allocations

Fantastic tale construction (FT) (ungraded; due January 14)

Students will devise a brief outline of a fantastic tale. The point of the exercise is to familiarize you with some basic concepts and tools.

Critical Reading (CR) (5%; due January 21)

Students will read and summarize the salient points of one piece of academic secondary material (an article from a journal or a chapter from a book) about the fantasy genre (written summary handed in: maximum 300 words or one single-spaced page).

Language/myth/mechanics assignment (LMM) (15%; due February 4)

Students will “create” the language(s) necessary for their secondary worlds, using the linguistic principles outlined in class, create a short myth or series of myths that inform how their created world works, or explain the structure of a major feature of their world (e.g., how magic works) (maximum 1000 words).

Motif story (MS) (10%; due February 25)

Students will write a short story that fills in a piece of their story world’s background using Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (maximum 500 words). This is to be a fully self-contained story.

Character Biographies (CB) (15%; due March 11)

Students will submit three character biographies (maximum 500 words each).

Book Report (BR) (10%; due March 25)

Students will write a report on a fantasy novel (some options listed above). This will be a one-page document that is effectively a "The Top [number] Things a (Fantasy) Writer Can Learn from [title of book]." Use a numbered list, be as concise as possible while still being clear, and stop adding items when your page is full. Single-spaced page, that is!

Pitches (5%; in class, April 1)

Students will pitch their projects to the class (as if we were editors and publishers). This “presentation” will have a maximum length of two (2!) minutes.

Final Project (40%; due April 9)

The final project will consist of eight parts: 1) a query letter; 2) a language/myth document; 3) a background story; 4) three character biographies; 5) a one-page (single-spaced) synopsis of a full-length work of fantasy; 6) an explanation of how that full-length work of fantasy deploys the motifs, movements, and structures we have learned in the course; 7) a discussion of the mechanics of narration (this can be part of #5); and 8) an excerpt from the work, one “great” scene (if necessary with an introduction to contextualize the scene). The length of the final part will vary, but it should be around 1500-2000 words.

Course Policies

Assignment Format

All assignments are to be “typed,” and must have your name, course name, section number, and instructor’s name on the first page. When using sources, you will be expected to follow MLA, APA, or Chicago citation practice.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Late work **will be penalized at 5% per day unless** I have permitted an extension of the due date. You must contact me ahead of time for an extension (see also the section “Accommodation Policy” below).

Student Conduct

This ought to go without saying, but please remember that *the use of any language that works against the values of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will not be tolerated.*

Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism

The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

“Scholastic Offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, which can be found here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement currently Western and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.”

“In this course, the use of AI (such as automatic translation tools, grammar checkers, ChatGPT) is prohibited, unless there has been discussion with and agreement by the instructor before beginning an assignment. If AI use is suspected, the instructor will ask for research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and/or other materials used in preparing assignments. Students are expected to retain these materials until after final grades have been entered. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, students may be asked to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against them.”

Prerequisites/Antirequisites

Antirequisite(s): Writing 3900F/G if taken in 2020-21, 2021-22, or 2022-23; Writing 4880F/G if taken in 2018-19 or 2019-20.

Prerequisite(s): At least 65% in one of Writing 2101F/G, Writing 2111F/G, Writing 2130F/G or Writing 2131F/G; or at least 65% in one of Writing 1000F/G, Writing 1030F/G, or Writing 1031F/G; or at least 65% in each of MediaCom 1020E (or both of MediaCom 1021F/G and MediaCom 1022F/G) and

MediaCom 1025F/G; or permission of the Department (consult the Undergraduate Program Director, Writing).

Academic Accommodation

University policy on academic considerations is described [here](#). This policy requires that all requests for academic considerations must be accompanied by a self-attestation.

Please note that any academic considerations granted in this course will be determined by the instructor, in consultation with the academic advisors in your Faculty of Registration, in accordance with information presented in this course outline.

For procedures on how to submit Academic Consideration requests through the Student Absence Portal, please see the information posted on the Office of the Registrar's webpage:
https://registrar.uwo.ca/academics/academic_considerations/index.html

All requests for Academic Consideration must be made within 48 hours after the assessment date or submission deadline.

All academic consideration requests must include supporting documentation, which may include a Student Medical Certificate. Recognizing that formal documentation may not be available in some extenuating circumstances, the policy allows students to make **one** Academic Consideration request **without supporting documentation** in this course. However, the following assessments are excluded from this, and therefore always require formal supporting documentation:

In this course, because not all elements of the quizzes (only five of six quizzes get counted) are required in the calculation of the final course grade, the instructor reserves the right to deny academic consideration for missed quizzes.

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519-661-3030 (during class hours) or 519-433-2023 after class hours and on weekends.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays and should give reasonable notice in writing (email), prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance.

Statement on Gender-based Sexual Violence

Western University [is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence](#) (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website: <https://www.uwo.ca/health/studentsupport/survivorsupport/get-help.html>. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Other Student Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Academic Support and Engagement <https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/>

Intellectual Property and Copyright

All instructor-written materials (e.g., PowerPoints, lecture notes, oral lectures) for this course are created solely for students' personal use within the course and remain the instructor's intellectual property. Further reproduction, fixation, distribution, transmission, dissemination, communication, or any other uses without securing the consent of the copyright owner (the course instructor) may be an infringement of copyright. You may not distribute, email, or otherwise communicate these materials to any other person. These limitations extend to recording, photographing, or sharing lectures (online or in-person) and lecture material without permission. Posting the instructor's content from this course to online course sharing sites like OneClass or Course Hero without permission is both an infringement of intellectual property law and a violation of academic integrity guidelines. The instructor will pass these cases on to the Western University Ombudsperson or their Department Chair as appropriate.

Schedule

Week 1 (January 7): Introductions/first lines/basic tale construction

Week 2 (January 14): Language creation/world building/myth (FT due)

Week 3 (January 21): Defining fantasy/*Beowulf*, 1-2199 (CR due)

Week 4 (January 28): *Beowulf*, 2200-3182/motifs and movements (LMM peer review)

Week 5 (February 4): *The Hobbit*, ch. I-IX (LMM due)

Week 6 (February 11): *The Hobbit*, ch. X-XIX

Winter Reading Week (Feb 14-Feb 22)

Week 7 (February 25): *Sellic Spell/Undermajordomo Minor* (MS due)

Week 8 (March 4): *Katabasis*, ch. 1-9 (CB peer review)

Week 9 (March 11): *Katabasis*, ch. 10-17 (CB due)

Week 10 (March 18): *Katabasis*, ch. 18-26/query letters

Week 11 (March 25): *Katabasis*, ch. 27-35/book reports (BR due; GS peer review)

Week 12 (April 1): Pitches

Week 13 (April 8): Final project submission