The Basics and the Bold:
Fundamentals of Editing Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
WRTNG-UG 1019, NYU Gallatin, Fall 2012

Class Time and location: Wed., 6:20-9:00 p.m; 1 Washington Place, Room 527
Office hours and location: Fri., 12-2 (excepting Friday, September 7th);
1 Washington Place, Room 613.
Professor: Barbara Jones, Baj4@nyu.edu

Course overview: Literary agents and book editors find that a variety of
submissions (including novels, short story collections, memoir and narrative
nonfiction) require the same kinds of editorial attention.
The purpose of this class is to learning to identify and attend to these
ubiquitous weaknesses in concept, narrative and prose by focusing on two kinds of
editing:
1) the bold—that is, identifying and troubleshooting the bigger conceptual
and structural problems, including the frequent habit of not being bold at all;
2) the basics—that is, sweating the small stuff by learning the tricks of a
fiction editor's trade and using them, from cutting to “unpacking” to making sure
characters (real and imagined) behave as believably as possible, etc.

Class structure: Each class will focus on basics and boldness in published writings
(the first half of the class) and student writings (the second half of the class).

Week by Week:

Class 1 (Sept. 5): Introduction to the course, class goals, class principles and
concepts, including “What is ‘acquiring editor’s mind’?,” “What is an editorial letter?”
and “What are we looking for when we’re reading published writings?” “What are
we looking for when we’re reading student writings?” We will also set up a
timetable for each student’s manuscript submissions to the class.

Class 2 (Sept. 12): Students will come to class prepared to discuss one story not
otherwise on this syllabus and of their own choosing from The Norton Anthology of
Short Fiction; plus two student manuscripts.

Class 3 (Sept. 19): Discussion of first half of The Virgin Suicides by Jeffrey Eugenides
and two student manuscripts.

Class 4 (Sept. 26): Discussion of the first half of The Liar’s Club by Mary Karr and of
two student manuscripts.

Class 5 (Oct. 3): Discussion of “The Things They Carried” by Tobias Wolff and “A&P”
by John Updike and of two student stories.
Class 6 (Oct. 10): Discussion of the second half of *The Virgin Suicides* and of two student manuscripts.

Class 7 (Oct. 17): Discussion of the second half of *The Liar’s Club* and of two student manuscripts.

Class 8 (Oct. 24): Discussion of “Shiloh” by Bobbie Ann Mason and “The Conversion of the Jews” by Philip Roth; student editorial letters; one student work.

Class 9 (Oct. 31): Discussion of two Flannery O’Connor stories and of two works of student writing.

Class 10 (Nov. 7): Discussion of four student revisions.

Class 11 (Nov. 14): Discussion of first third of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan and of three student revisions.

Class 12 (Nov. 21): Second third *Goon Squad* and three student revisions.

Class 13 (Nov. 28): Final third *Goon Squad* and three student revisions.

Class 14 (December 4): Discussion of two student revisions; also, a course wrap-up, including class-compiled list of basics, our top pitches, other unfinished business.

**Required texts (available at Shakespeare & Company):**

*The Virgin Suicides* by Jeffrey Eugenides;
*The Norton Anthology of Short Fiction* (Shorter Version, 7th Edition);
*The Liar’s Club* by Mary Karr;
*A Visit from the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan

15 pieces of student writing

**Optional texts:**

*The Elements of Style* by E.B. White;
*How to Read Like a Writer* by Francine Prose;
*The Buddha in the Attic* by Julie Otsuka

**Work requirements:** 1) bring in one story, novel, piece of memoir of narrative nonfiction that they have written, 2) edit (including a line edit and an editorial letter) and 3) revise their own piece of writing in response to editorial feedback from the class.

**Grading policy:** Grades are based on attendance, class participation, fulfilling all three writing/editing assignments.

**Note:** This syllabus may be adjusted to focus on troubles and goals that arise from the particular students and student writings.