Knowing how to use dialogue, portraits, plot, description, point of view, characterization, language, and imagery is crucial to all story telling. Developing these skills and a writer’s unique voice is the central focus of our fiction writing courses in the Creative Writing Program.

To nurture a student’s voice and skill, our workshops emphasize the strengths of each story or exercise and how it might be developed rather than whether the work appeals to a readers’ personal taste. This constructive critique approach cultivates writers’ talents and teaches them how to help one another recognize where their writing is working best.

Because it can be much more difficult to create a unique voice in genre writing such as science fiction, mystery-detective, or fantasy, we encourage students to avoid them. Not only is a solid knowledge of genre conventions necessary for success, but avoiding cliché, stereotype, and imitation is harder when the conventions themselves hang so heavily on the writing as they do in genre writing. It takes a strong voice and great skill to navigate genre writing with originality and depth. Although marvelous writers such as Margaret Atwood, Thomas Pynchon, John Le Carre, J.K. Rowling and Anne Rice often inspire students to try their hands, doing so at the beginning stages of writing usually makes creating effective writing that much more daunting.

We do encourage students to experiment: to write in traditional, modernist, surrealist, post-modern modes or combinations that take their fancy. Students are welcome to use their writing to explore the murky edges of reality – and beyond – as well as playing with the authorial posture. Fresh material is within everyone’s reach: no two people have the same experience of family, of nature, of culture, of surfing, partying, or death. You don’t have to write about yourself or your personal life. Stories are often based on a news story or “something I heard.” Subject and style will be as diverse as the multiplicity of backgrounds, ethnicities, ages, inclinations, imaginations, and experiences in any workshop. All a story – or the nubbin of one – has to do is “come to you.” Begin writing it and you’re on your way. Whether you eventually want to write a coming of age story, a vampire novel, or an action-adventure movie, the work you do in the CSUCI Creative Writing workshops will build the necessary techniques.

Our creative writing emphasis is committed to helping students develop and polish enough work in a style that best expresses their vision in order to graduate with a portfolio of either polished stories or the beginning of a longer manuscript.