**English 351: Student Tips for Creating Tension**

1. Understand your characters’ desires and what obstacles get in the way of fulfilling those desires.

2. Create a combating force (an equally matched, opposing force) that works against your protagonist (that works against fulfilling his or her desire), whether it be another person or a natural force.

3. Think about what is at stake if the desire is not filled. For example, who cares if obstacles keep you from making it to class?

4. Consider the power of juxtaposition. You create tension when you place things that don’t rest easily next to each other. For example, you might have a young girl picking flowers in the summer find the body of man who has been lynched.

5. Vary the level of tension. Constant tension is boring—you get used to it you adapt.

6. Use triangles to create complex tensions. For example, the three characters in “Where Have you Been . . .” form layers of tension.

7. Write from Close-Up. Avoid summarizing important events; don’t generalize time or space. Distance kills tension. Provide enough detail to make readers feel like they are observing the situation.

8. Don’t generalize characters.

**For more tips, read the following class handout on** [**tension**](Tension.pdf)**.**