OBJECTIVE

We will be studying creative writing using a two-prong approach. Craft lessons will examine the components and techniques of writing fiction and poetry. What makes successful fiction and poetry? What constitutes success? Since this is an introductory class, we will be attempting to cover a survey of the creative writing landscape rather than going in depth. You will be putting craft lessons into practice in your own writing and participating in workshops where you will submit your own work and edit and critique the work of your fellow classmates.

Writing is about two things when reduced its essential components: writing and reading. Good writers write and rewrite and read and re-read. This class is different than a literature class for a number of reasons, primarily because you are a writer and the texts we approach, both assigned as well as the ones you and your classmates create, will be our guides to becoming better writers.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Each class will be a combination of craft lesson and workshop. Tuesday craft lessons will concern fiction and Thursday lessons poetry.

REQUIRED TEXTS


My intent is that these two textbooks will prove useful to your writing long after the class is finished. I will supply most reading assignments through NYU Classes or by printout to be handed out during class. We will not be reading entire novels, although I encourage that behavior. Because of our limited time, and mindful as I am of your out of class workload, I will attempt to select works of a length that allow you to spend most of your time in this class on actual writing, yours and your classmates’.

Readings will include fiction from Donald Barthelme, Ernest Hemingway, Hannah Tinti, Toni Morrison, Alice Munro, James Thurber, Joan Didion, Joseph Heller, Kurt Vonnegut, poetry from Louise Gluck, Gwendolyn Brooks, Brian Turner, E.E. Cummings, John Berryman, and essays from George Saunders, Francine Prose, Michael Chabon, Stanley Fish, James Wood, Joan Didion and more.
ORIGINAL WORK

All the work you submit should be original work written specifically for this class – not a piece of recycled writing. If you have an existing piece you would like to revise in place of one of your submissions, you must get my approval first.

ATTENDANCE

Only one unexcused absence will be permitted. Each subsequent unexcused absence will result in a grade decrease: A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, and so on.

This is an 0800 class, and it may surprise you to learn that we will start at 0800. When I was an undergraduate, any morning class would have been unthinkable. Be that as it may, attendance is mandatory. Not arriving on time is arriving late: 0801 is late. More than two instances of lateness will count as an unexcused absence. 0815 is very late—being very late more than once will count as an unexcused absence.

Given the crumbling transportation infrastructure in New York City and the vicissitudes of life, there may be times when you have an acceptable excuse for being late or absent. If you find yourself in this situation, please do me the courtesy of sending me an email to alert me that you are running late or will be absent.

GRADING

Your grade is contingent on doing the readings and assignments, participating in class discussion, submitting your own work for workshop and critical responses to the submissions of your classmates—all in a timely fashion.

- Class Participation: 30%. While some people feel more comfortable speaking in class than others, it is important that everyone contributes to the discussion. For workshops, each person will be required to provide verbal feedback before we plunge into general discussion. When we discuss published work, I may ask one or two students to read their written responses. If talking off the cuff unnerves you, I encourage you to use this opportunity to share your ideas with the class. If you are finding it difficult to speak in class, please come see me during office hours or send me an e-mail.
- Writing Assignments: 50%. This includes workshop submissions, critiques, and written responses to the reading assignments. I will be looking for evidence of your attention and effort. Have you tried to engage with the material? Are you taking creative risks, pushing yourself into unknown territory? Are your critiques thoughtful and considerate?
- Revised Portfolio: 20%. On the last day of class, you will submit revisions of one of your stories and two of your poems, along with a critical reading response (1-2 pages) to one of the reading assignments. Revisions will not be graded on how much of the class critique you end up utilizing, but rather that significant improvements in the work are apparent.

Part of the problem in assigning a grade based on an evaluation of writing is that your work will likely be a moving target rather than a final draft. Also, I’m not comfortable with the level of subjectivity involved in that kind of assessment. Perhaps you have an ear for the work of Krapotkin and generate work that evokes the same talent of this completely fictitious author. However, if I am allergic to the work of Krapotkin, I may not assign your work the value it
deserves. For these reasons, your grade will not be a measure of the quality of your writing (although I am sure that it will very good).

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The school’s policy on academic integrity can be found online at http://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html. Academic integrity is a broad umbrella. In the context of this class, honesty and plagiarism are the most relevant concepts.

HONESTY

Dishonesty will not be tolerated, e.g., giving dishonest reasons for being late or absent is a violation of academic integrity.

PLAGIARISM

There is absolutely no reason to submit work that is not your own. Not only is plagiarism very easy to spot; the benefit is minimal, and the consequences are brutal. So—don’t do it. If for some reason you cannot complete an assignment by its deadline, let me know ahead of time (at least 24 hours’ notice, please), and we will work something out. That is a far, far superior solution than submitting work that is not your own. There is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy for both academic papers and creative pieces. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department, without exception. As for work just plain written by somebody else, don’t even think about it! This is obviously unacceptable and will be reported to the University and the appropriate disciplinary actions will be taken.

TECHNOLOGY

This is a low-tech class. All reading will be available in hardcopy, either in the books you purchase or handouts or the pieces posted to NYU Classes. Therefore not only are cell phones, laptops, and all other electronic devices not allowed (unless otherwise instructed), they won’t be needed. Make sure to print copies of the assigned reading and workshop pieces that we will be discussing.

DISABILITY DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 (address below):

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd

STUDENT WELLNESS POLICY

Unless there is explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will
likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

CRAFT LESSONS
Craft lessons will look at our reading material and address what works (or doesn’t) in these pieces and why. We will also do writing exercises to practice techniques and develop inspiration.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE
Each workshop we will consider the submissions of three students. You will be split into five groups. Fiction submissions should be between 8-12 pages double-spaced with size 12 font, Times New Roman. (Approximately 250 words per page.) Poetry submissions should be 3 poems at a time. Make sure to include a header or footer with your name and page numbers.

SUBMISSIONS
Over the course of the semester, everyone will workshop two poems and two stories and one piece in a genre/form of the student’s choosing. The sequence of the types of pieces is a matter of choice for the student. Pieces for workshop will be distributed by email to me and every student in the class, poetry on the Saturday before workshop and fiction on the Thursday in advance.

RESPONSES
On the day of the workshop, you must prepare written feedback for each writer (minimum of 300 words, typed). Print two copies of each response, one for the writer and one for me.

You must also prepare line edits on each submission. Read the piece once straight through. Then read it a second time, marking up the copy with a pen or pencil. Mark the manuscript where you have questions or particularly enjoyed something in the work. Identify the three images or sections you remembered the most. This is a good test to see where the writing is strongest. We will be discussing these moments in class. These copies will be given to the author at the end of class, to help them revise.

Your feedback should follow the following pattern: 1) what you notice about the piece; 2) where, how, and why these elements serve the piece; and 3) where, how, and why, these elements undermine the work or could be made stronger.

In drafting your feedback for fiction consider the following:
- What is the plot? Is it clear what is happening? Were you ever confused?
- How is the structure unfolding (organization of the plot/how it is being told)? Is anything missing?
- Who are the different characters in the story? What is their role?
- What point of view is this being told from? How is that affecting the story, and your reading experience?
- What are people saying? How does the dialogue add to the story?
- Think about the style of the narration-the "voice" of the piece. Is it consistent? What is it adding to the story?
• How is the setting used? Does it add/subtract anything to the characters or story?
• Why do you think this story is being told? What is it all about?
• A good approach is to write down 2-3 of the BIGGEST questions you have, to help the author determine the major weak spots, then try to come up with some suggestions of how they might approach solving the issues you’ve pointed out. In other words—don’t just tell a writer what’s wrong with their manuscript. Come up with a way to fix it.

I will distribute guidance concerning feedback for poetry at the beginning of the class.

WORKSHOP ETIQUETTE & BEST PRACTICES

Our workshops will be based on trust, support and respect. Consider The Golden Rule. We will discuss our classmates work with the same respectful tones that we would want our own work considered.

Submissions to workshop are rarely finished products and should be treated as works in progress. Our workshop will assess the submissions based on aesthetic criteria derived from our study of the craft.

SCHEDULE
(Please note that the schedule may change depending on our class discussions and other factors. You should read the assigned reading before the date where the readings are listed.)

WEEK ONE INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

January 28
First class. Introduction. Assign workshop groups. You should read Donald Barthelme’s “The School” and James Thurber’s “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” before coming to the first class and be prepared to discuss. We will also be discussing the following questions: What defines success in a work of creative writing? What are the components of that success?

January 30

WEEK TWO STRUCTURE

February 4
Reading: TBD
Workshop A #1

February 6
Reading: TBD
Workshop B

WEEK THREE SENTENCES/WORDS
February 11
Reading: TBD
Workshop C

February 13
Reading: TBD
Workshop D

WEEK FOUR PLOT/CONFLICT

February 18
Reading: TBD
Workshop E

February 20
Reading: TBD
Workshop A #2

WEEK FIVE CHARACTER

February 25
Reading: TBD
Workshop B

February 27
Reading: TBD
Workshop C

WEEK SIX POV

March 3
Reading: TBD
Workshop D

March 5
Reading: TBD
Workshop E

WEEK SEVEN VOICE

March 10
Reading: TBD
Workshop A #3

March 12
Reading: TBD
Workshop B

March 17 Spring Recess (no classes scheduled)
March 19 Spring Recess (no classes scheduled)

WEEK EIGHT OPENINGS/LEADS

March 24
Reading: TBD
Workshop C

March 26
Reading: TBD
Workshop D

WEEK NINE SETTING

March 31
Reading: TBD
Workshop E

April 2
Reading: TBD
Workshop A #4

WEEK TEN SYMBOL AND MOTIF

April 7
Reading: TBD
Workshop B

April 9
Reading: TBD
Workshop C

WEEK ELEVEN INSPIRATION

April 14
Reading: TBD
Workshop D

April 16
Reading: TBD
Workshop E
WEEK TWELVE *HUMOR*

April 21  
Reading: TBD  
Workshop A

April 23  
Reading: TBD  
Workshop B

WEEK THIRTEEN *IMAGE/METAPHOR*

April 28  
Reading: TBD  
Workshop C

April 30  
Reading: TBD  
Workshop D

WEEK FOURTEEN *SUBVERSION*

May 5  
Reading: TBD  
Workshop E

May 7 Last class. Final portfolios due.