

**CREATIVE WRITING – INTRODUCTION TO FICTION & POETRY
(CWRI-UA.815.002)**

Instructor: Spencer Gaffney

Email: sg5142@nyu.edu

Monday/Wednesday: 12:30-1:45 PM

Location: TBA

Office Hours by Appointment

(Welcome!)

Course Overview

This class is designed to help improve your writing – to get you excited about writing, to have you reading like a writer, and to learn to engage productively with your fellow writers. Everything we do will be in service of that goal.

Each class meeting will have two sections: a craft discussion and a workshop.

- The craft discussion is where we will be talking about the work of noteworthy fiction writers and poets – typically one or two short stories per class meeting, and several poems from one author or on a single theme. Unlike literature classes you may have taken before, the goal here is to read like a writer, with an eye towards mining these stories and poems for tricks you can apply to your own work. You'll come to class each week having read and thought deeply about these works – there will be specific things I'll be asking you to pay attention to with each work, but expect to at least have a favorite line or two to share, and an explanation for why you think it works well.
- The workshop is the heart of this course, and where you'll have the opportunity to share your own work and offer feedback to your fellow writers. We will discuss the structure and the approach for the workshop more when we're in class together, but a good workshop will provide the encouragement and support necessary to get folks excited about submitting their work, along with the feedback and critique that will help them improve upon their writing.

What's Expected of You

- Writing
 - Students will be submitting four times over the course of the semester – twice during our fiction section (one story or excerpt, 8-15 pages), and twice during our poetry section (one to three poems each submission).
 - Students will also submit a revision to me at the end of the semester – two of their works (either fiction, poetry, or a combination) that they've

meaningfully revised based on feedback from the workshop. We will discuss what this looks like in greater detail in class.

- Feedback
 - Written feedback – you’re required to submit, to both the writer and to me, written feedback for each submission (typically two of these per class, since we’ll normally have two students being workshoped each session). 250 words minimum for each short story, and 100 words for each poem (though you’re of course welcome to add more if you have more thoughts!).
 - Verbal feedback – as I’ll discuss in the section on grading, being part of a workshop means being an active participant in class. I’ll do my best to make sure everyone has an opportunity to get involved, but I need you to be prepared and excited to contribute to the conversation as well.

- Reading
 - Prior to each class you’ll be reading the selection for our craft discussion as well as the work that your fellow students have submitted ahead of their workshop. **IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT YOU DO ALL THE READING.** There is no greater sin in workshop than not reading the work of your peers. I’ll know, they’ll know, and you’ll know, and it will suck. Please don’t make it suck. Do the reading.

- Office Hours
 - At least once per semester, you will come to office hours. These discussions work best following your workshop submission – if your schedule allows, try to meet with me in the week following one of your submissions. I’m generally flexible with regard to time and place for discussions, so email me to set up a time. You are always welcome to meet with me more frequently, and I welcome more in-depth conversations on your work.

How You’ll Be Graded

This is not a course that grades you on the quality of your writing. If you do the necessary reading, are an active participant of the class, and submit your materials as required, you will get an A. More granularly, here’s how the grading breaks down:

Participation: 50%

- You write feedback for your fellow writers, as required
- You contribute (positively!) to the workshop conversation
- You have thoughts and ideas regarding the craft readings
- You show up (see below for more specifics regarding attendance policy)

Writing: 40%

- You write the stories and poems for workshop, within the parameters of submission – note that this includes, crucially, submitting on time so as to give your fellow writers the time and headspace necessary to think critically and thoughtfully about your work.

Revising: 10%

- You submit your two revised pieces to me at the end of the semester
- You have made meaningful, thoughtful revisions to the work that show you are engaging with the workshop's feedback (to be discussed further later in the semester)

Rules, Regulations, and Preferences

A Brief But Important Note on Plagiarism:

Don't do it. Come on. You'll get caught, I'll have to fail you and report you to the university, and it ruins the whole point of the course. Just...don't, ok?

Laptops:

I understand the convenience of laptops, but also their seductive power. Laptops are fine during the craft portion of the class but should not be used during the workshop. That means you should print out the necessary materials for the workshops. (If you need to use electronic materials for some reason, of course, just let me know and we will accommodate.)

Attendance:

You need to show up. After more than one unexcused absence, your grade will drop by a half letter (i.e. from a B to a B-) for each subsequent absence. Being late by more than 15 minutes will count towards half of an unexcused absence; being late by more than 30 minutes will be a full unexcused absence. Of course, things happen – if you need to miss class, contact me with reasonable advanced notice and we will work something out.

A few additional notes:

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.

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 we see 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.

Provisional Reading Schedule (Subject to Change, but Broadly Indicative)

The idea here is to focus granularly on one author or idea for each of our class meetings, in order to figure out what we want to take from their work and use in our own.

Part One of Class – Fiction

Week 1

M – No reading ahead of class – general housekeeping, setting up schedule

W – Reading: Curtis Sittenfeld, “Show Don’t Tell”

Week 2

M – Raymond Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”

W – Nathan Englander, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank”

Week 3

M - Carmen Maria Machado, “The Husband Stitch”

W – Tobias Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain”

Week 4

M - Ken Liu, “The Paper Menagerie”

W – Adam Johnson, “Nirvana”

Week 5

M - Donald Barthelme, “The School”; George Saunders on Barthelme

W – Ron Carlson, “What We Wanted to Do”

Week 6

M - Grace Paley, “Wants,” “A Conversation With My Father”

W – George Saunders, “Tenth of December”

Week 7

M - Junot Diaz, “Monstro”

W – Zadie Smith, “Lazy River”

Part Two: Poetry

Week 8

M - Billy Collins, "Litany," "Picnic, Lightning"

W - W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death"

Week 9

M - Robert Frost, "Directive," "The Hill Wife"

W - Louise Gluck, "The Wild Iris," "Earthly Love"

Week 10

M - Elizabeth Bishop, "The Fish," "One Art"

W - John Milton, "Sonnet 19," Monica Youn, "Blackacre"

Week 11

M - Yusef Komunyakaa, "Facing It," "Envy"

W - Dorothy Parker, "A Certain Lady," "Resume"

Week 12

M - Ocean Vuong, "Essay on Craft," "Some Day I'll Love Ocean Vuong"

W - Gerard Manley Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," "Margaret are You Grieving?"

Week 13

M - Sharon Olds, "Ode to the Hyman," "Ode to the Clitoris"

W - Tracy K. Smith, "Duende," "Sci-Fi"

Week 14 – Alternate Forms

M - Kendrick Lamar, "Sing About Me/I'm Dying of Thirst," Andre 3000, "A Life in the Day of Andre Benjamin"

W - Daniel Clowes, "Ice Haven"