

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry
CRWRI-UA.815 | Fall 2018 | Section 012 | Tuesday/Thursday, 12:30pm to 1:45pm
Instructor: Dan Murphy, dfm304@nyu.edu
Classroom: TBD
Office Hours: By appointment

"You should write because you love the shape of stories and sentences and the creation of different words on a page. Writing comes from reading, and reading is the finest teacher of how to write."
--Annie Proulx

THE CLASS

"Easy reading is damn hard writing."
-Nathaniel Hawthorne

Every published book, poem, short story or essay you read is the author's final draft, which it has been revised, torn up, rewritten, spit on and wrestled to the ground before being released into the wilderness. Why have the authors we love made the choices they've made? What was their intent? Is it working or not? In this class, we will venture to understand some of the choices and tricks that make up those wrestling matches and try to appropriate them in our own work, keeping always in mind the adage: *Good artists copy; great artists steal.*

In the classroom

We will write during every class session, usually at the very beginning, for varying amounts of time. You will generally be free to write about and in whatever form speaks to you—to include prose, poetry, deliberate doodling, what have you. However, I will provide an optional prompt for each session to get you started. We may read some of these prompts aloud; we may make them into paper airplanes; we may tear them up and throw them away at the end of class. You will need a devoted notebook/composition book of some kind for this class and preferably one with perforated pages that makes tearing them out clean and easy. This will be the only material you need to buy specifically for this class, as I will provide all reading materials either via email or in hardcopy.

We will also be reading aloud in class. Hooray! Hearing fiction and poetry read aloud is often the key to unlocking its voice and thereby hearing what the author is telling us. This applies both to the published work on our reading list and the work submitted for workshop. Speaking of which...

Out of class

"I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by."

--Douglas Adams

Out-of-class reading and writing assignments will not be demanding; however, completing them **meaningfully** will make up a large portion of your grade. So it behooves you to take them seriously and devote commensurate effort in engaging and responding to the texts. All submitted writing, creative or critical, should be formatted, edited and polished to a high and professional sheen. Sloppy brilliance is still sloppy.

Each week, you will prepare a one-page response to the reading assignment: pick 3-5 sentences/short passages that stood out to you—anything from transcendent to rubbish—with a few sentences why you loved it, hated it, found it trite, cliché, provocative, etc. It can simply be a beautiful image or the most penetrating and concise summation of the human condition you've ever encountered. Maybe you think it could've been written better? Show us how.

GRADING

Written assignments and workshop responses — 40%

Final portfolio — 30%

Attendance and in-class participation— 25%

Author reading — 5%

WORKSHOP

"A word after a word after a word is power."

--Margaret Atwood

"You can make anything by writing."

--C.S. Lewis

Submissions

At our first class meeting, we will set a submission schedule for the entire semester. Over the course of the term, each student will submit:

-**two (2)** short stories, each between 5 and 20 pages long*, and

-**two (2)** poetry submissions of at 2-5 total pages and consisting of 1-3 poems**

*If your work is closer to five than 20 pages the quality of its sentences will be marked more rigorously.

**If you find yourself overcome with haikus or sonnets and need more than three poems to fulfill the minimum page count (2), or conversely, find that you are writing a Homeric epic and thus are exceeding the page maximum (5), let me know ahead of time, and we'll work it out.

You will submit your work to the class in Word (.doc, .docx, etc) format via email one week prior to its date to be workshopped. Meeting this deadline is crucial to demonstrating respect both for your classmates and your work. The grading of your submitted, original work will be based on the effort demonstrated and *not* on the talent demonstrated. Likewise for evaluating the revisions in your final portfolio.

All work will be submitted in 12-point, double-spaced, Times New Roman font with page numbers and your last name appearing at the top or bottom of each page.

Notes on workshopping

"As a writer, you should not judge, you should understand."
— Ernest Hemingway

Since we are reading as writers, we will workshop with this same sentiment of Hemingway's in mind. We all have authors and genres we love—what we consider a lovely sentence, a thrilling plot twist, a provocative, touching or cutting resolution. Your job as a workshop member is, first, to attempt to understand what your classmate's intention is with the piece. The second job is to help them achieve that intention. Accomplishing these goals will often require setting aside subjective tastes, a skill, like any other, borne of practice.

We critique the writing, not the writer. It is vital that all participants enter workshop with the understanding that its purpose is to make the work stronger. This means that critiques are constructive rather than critical and that the writer listens openly rather than defensively.

Each student will prepare a written response to each submitted piece (one copy for the writer, one copy for me), as well as a copy of the piece with in-line edits, comments and questions.

CONFERENCE

You will meet with me to discuss your work at least once during the semester. You are welcome to schedule a conference after each of your submissions should you wish to.

FINAL PORTFOLIO

At the last class meeting, you will turn-in a final portfolio consisting of the significant revisions to each of the pieces you turned in this semester, as well as one additional piece inspired and expanded from one of our in-class writing exercises that you did not previously workshop in class. (You may end up workshopping something that began as an in-class writing exercise. This fifth piece is in addition to that.)

ATTENDANCE POLICY

This will be a discussion-based class, and its value will reveal primarily at our meetings. Attendance and participation make up 25% of your grade, but I think you'll find that regular attendance will inherently affect the other grading criteria.

You will get **ONE (1)** no-questions-asked absence for the semester. After that, absences for which you cannot provide a valid reason beyond your control (read: medical reason, family/personal emergency) will result in the deduction of a half-letter from your final grade. As the first part of this policy is extremely generous, the second part will be strictly enforced.

Three instances of excessive lateness—more than five minutes—will be considered an unexcused absence.

READINGS

You will be required to attend **one (1)** author reading during the semester. This can be one of the NYU Creative Writing Program's Reading Series events, the graduate student-run Emerging Writers Series at KGB Bar, or a reading elsewhere, so long as it features fiction or poetry authors reading their own work. You will submit a one-page response discussing your experience. Did you enjoy it? Was the reading good but the writing bad? Vice-versa? Keep in mind readings may feature one or multiple authors, some may include a Q & A (ie: more to write about in your response) or free food and beverage afterwards (something to do while thinking about your response).

BONUS: If you accumulate an unexcused absence beyond the forgiven one discussed above, attending a **second** reading and submitting a **second** response **beyond the required one** will make up for the absence and absolve the half-letter grade deduction. You may avail yourself of this policy **once**.

*****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.

TECHNOLOGY POLICY

No laptops or tablets. You should print out and bring hardcopies of assigned reading with you to each class session. Notes will be taken by hand. As well, cellphones will be silenced/place in Do Not Disturb mode, and really will not have any reason to be out. If you have a compelling need for an exception to the technology policy, I'm happy to talk about it.

READING LIST

"Read, read, read. Read everything--trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it's good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out of the window."
--William Faulkner

WEEK 1 - Introduction, syllabus review. What is workshopping and why?

- Donald Barthelme, "School"
- Jack Gilbert, "Poetry Is a Kind of Lying"

WEEK 2 – Why am I writing?

- George Orwell, "Why I Write"

WEEK 3 – What's this piece about anyway?

- Paola Peroni, "Protection"
- Frank O'Hara – "Having a Coke With You"
- Jack Gilbert, "Remembering My Wife"

WEEK 3 – Who am I writing for?

- Lucia Berlin, "A Manual For Cleaning Women," "Point of View"

The Sonnet

- William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 130"
- John Keats, "To Mrs. Reynolds's Cat"
- Terrance Hayes, "American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin"
- Mary Jo Salter, "Half a Double Sonnet"

WEEK 4 – Quickly now

- Jamaica Kincaid, "Girl"
- Julio Cortazar, "Don't You Blame Anyone"
- Joyce Carol Oates, "The Boy"
- Margaret Atwood, "Happy Endings"
- Bernard Malamud, "The Model"
- John Curry, "Patience"
- Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro"
- (Haikus)

WEEK 5 – Children

- ZZ Packer, “Brownies,”
- Adrian Matejka, “Those Minor Regrets,” “How to Choose the Next City,” “If You’re Tired, Then Go Take a Nap,” “Intergalactic Blacks”

WEEK 6 – The reader is the story?

- Lorrie Moore, “How to Be an Other Woman,”
- Junot Diaz, “Hot to Date a Brown Girl (Black Girl, White Girl or Halfie)”

Odes

- Pablo Neruda, “Ode to My Socks”
- Sharon Olds, “Ode to the Penis,”

WEEK 7 – Do I need a hero?

- Alice Munro, “Differently,” “The Bear Came Over the Mountain”

Poetry as story

- Rita Dove, “Shakespeare Say”

WEEK 8 – False Documents

- Jennifer Egan, “Forty-Minute Lunch: Kitty Jackson Opens Up About Love, Fame, and Nixon!”
- George Saunders, “I Can Speak!™”
- Adrian Matejka, “Cannibalism,” “The Manly Art of Self-Defense,” “Mouth Fighting,” “Cooking Lessons,”

WEEK 9 – Can we move this thing along, please?

- Annie Proulx, “Tits-Up In A Ditch,” “The Half-Skinned Steer”
- Rita Dove, “Adolescence I,” “Adolescence II,” “Adolescence III”

WEEK 10 – Now where did I put my pathos?

- Jim Shepard, “Boys Town”
- Yaehuda Amichai, “We Did It,” “What Did I Learn in the Wars”

WEEK 11 – Here’s the story’s title

- Denis Johnson, “Car Crash While Hitchhiking”
- Diana Adams, “Hawk;”

WEEK 12 – Family

- Jhumpa Lahiri, “The Third and Final Continent,” “A Temporary Matter”
- Sharon Olds, “First Thanksgiving”

WEEK 13 – It’s in the details/Voice, Internality, Confession

- David Foster Wallace, “Forever Overhead,” “Brief Interviews With Hideous Men [p. 17 – 34],” “The Depressed Person,” “Signifying Nothing”
- Denis Johnson, “Heat”

WEEK 14 – Every story is death

Ernest Hemingway, “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”

-Dylan Thomas, “Do not go gentle into that good night”

-Jack Gilbert, “Michiko Dead”

WEEK 15 – Generational

-Claire Vaye Watkins, “The Past Perfect, The Past Continuous, The Simple Past”

-William Butler Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium”