

# Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.015

TR 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

**Instructor:** Matthew T. Williams

**Email:** [mtw358@nyu.edu](mailto:mtw358@nyu.edu)

**Location:** TBA

**Office Hours:** By Appointment

*“Most of what you put on the page in that first draft is garbage, but there’ll be a little nugget to pardon it.” ~ D.A. Powell*

*“Everything has a lot to do with poetry  
everything has a lot to do with prose.”  
~ Gertrude Stein*

*“Don’t be afraid of surprising oneself.”  
~Yusef Komunyakaa*

## Course Description

With focus on fiction and poetry, this course is designed to guide students in building a fundamental set of tools for transmuting interior and exterior experience into art through the act of writing. In the service of this goal, students will read and discuss a number of literary and theoretical texts to assist them in thinking critically about their own developing writing practice. Students will also be asked to produce their own creative work and to familiarize themselves with the workshop model as a generative, critical, and safe environment for them to experiment, take risks, and above all, improve the quality of their writing.

## Required Texts

All required reading material will be provided.

## Class Structure

To ensure that each student gets the full benefit of our readings as well as generous critical feedback from their fellow writers, there are some logistical intricacies to be aware of:

The **class will be split into 2-3 workshop groups**, depending on the number of students enrolled.

- Each week one group will be workshopped.
- Each workshop group will be workshopped by all their classmates not just those in their group.

**Mondays**, students in the group that will be workshopped that week will turn in their poems to me via email *no later than 2pm*.

**Tuesdays**, All students will turn in reading responses for the assigned readings to me via email, discuss those readings in class, and receive an email from me containing the poems or short stories (turned in the preceding Monday as above) they will be responsible for reading and annotating, so that they can print them out on campus. Students who aren't being workshopped should also turn in their poems via email by the end of the day.

**Thursdays**, will be workshop days. Students will bring in *two copies of their annotations*—a packet for me and one for each writer, respectively—and give each piece being workshopped a thoughtful, respectful, and critical in-class response.

## **Coursework**

**Reading Responses** help students collect and organize their thoughts about the week's assigned reading. Responses should be approximately 250-500 words. These limits are flexible as long the student's response demonstrates that they have engaged deeply with the material. This might be as simple as a personal reflection on how the reading affects your reading or writing practice, or as complex as applying reading concepts to work we're reading. Regardless, *only thoughtful, considered responses will receive full credit.*

**Annotations** assist students in thinking their way through any given poem or narrative and act as guides for authors of those pieces to revise them. These have no strict requirements as to the amount of annotation that need be done, but they should be of quality and demonstrate deep engagement with the piece. Additionally, students must annotate every student's work being workshopped that week. *Only complete packets of annotations will receive full credit.*

**Craft Discussion** gives students an opportunity to, in collaboration, clarify and analyze assigned readings. The student's role in class discussion is to discuss. Guidance and facilitation will be provided, but there will be no lectures. So, it is incredibly important that every student comes prepared to speak on the readings. This doesn't mean students must speak on every single topic that arises at length, but students should aim to add something to discussion at least once during each class. Students who are less-comfortable engaging in discussion are encouraged to bring written statements as a means of generating or adding to discussion. *Only students who engage regularly in discussion will receive full credit.*

**Workshop** is the crux of this course. Submissions to workshop should consist of one poem (*up to three pages*) or one short story (*1500-3500 words*), depending upon which genre the class is focusing on. If your submission falls outside these limits, you're welcome to make a compelling argument via email as to why your piece necessitates breaking the guidelines. Also, please note that, unless there is explicit information in the piece that demonstrates otherwise, the people and events of any given piece will be treated as fictional. (More on this in Student Wellness section under Class Policies)

Moreover, as with Craft Discussions, it is vital that every student comes prepared with their annotations and ready to speak on each piece being workshopped (excluding their own of course). In workshop itself,

students should strive to give both praise and suggestions for improvement. When it comes to suggesting improvements (and even praising), it cannot be stressed enough that we all must be as respectful and considerate as possible. (In our course, we'll discuss some ways of ensuring our criticism isn't cutting.)

A **Final Portfolio** provides students the chance to revisit and revise their work, to take what they've learned through the semester and apply it. Final Portfolios should consist of at least three creative pieces they've written during the semester. Students may submit either one poem and two short stories or vice versa. Please note that these pieces should show development from their previous iterations. It may be best to submit work that has gone through the most revision, rather than the most polished pieces. *Only Final Portfolios demonstrating a concerted effort at revision will receive full credit.*

### **Grading**

Reading Responses & Annotations	30%
Craft Discussion/Workshop Participation	40%
Final Portfolio	30%

### **Office Hours**

Students are expected to attend office hours *at least once* during the semester. However, students are encouraged to come early and often.

### **Class Policies**

**Attendance & Punctuality** are especially important to our course, because the class is designed around discussion, and it is impossible to recreate the educational benefits of challenging and being challenged regarding the concepts (and interpretations of those concepts) we will come across in our readings and apply to our criticism. That being said, students will be allowed *one excused absence; all other absences will be considered unexcused*, unless the student provides a legitimate reason via email for their absence the week prior to the date they will be absent, the student is experiencing an emergency, or is ill and can provide a doctor's note upon returning to class. An unexcused absence will result in the student's grade being reduced by one third (i.e., A to an A-, B- to a C+). Note: Students who are late to class more than twice will be counted as having an absence.

**Plagiarism** is antithetical to creative writing. Do not do it. All work must be the student's own.

**Late Work** cannot be accepted, especially creative work. It wouldn't be fair to other students who must read and respond in a limited amount of time. *If there is an assignment you're struggling to complete, please contact me before it's due; I cannot accommodate students who simply allow a deadline to pass by.*

**Student Wellness** is far more important than writing. As said above, 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 my attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting a piece, 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.

**Counseling Services:**  
726 Broadway  
New York, NY 10003  
(212) 998-4780

**Wellness Center:**  
24-Hour Hotline: (212) 443-9999  
Email: [wellness.exchange@nyu.edu](mailto:wellness.exchange@nyu.edu)

**Extra Credit** will be available to students throughout the semester: Living in NYC is an opportunity to participate in, arguably, the single most vibrant literary community in the anglophone world. Students who come to readings (TBA) and write a reflection on the experience will earn *an extra point on their Final Portfolio for each reflection (limited to five)*.

**Technology** won't be needed for our purposes. Do not use smartphones, laptops, or any other device that connects to the internet in class. And please be sure to silence your phones when entering class.

### **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>

### **Class Schedule**

#### **Week 1: Class Overview**

9/3 Tuesday

Meet & Greet, Class/Syllabus Overview

9/5 Thursday

“How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore

Workshop Etiquette Handout

“Having a Coke with You” by Frank O’Hara

Annotation/Workshop Practice (in class)

## **Week 2: Image**

9/10 Tuesday

“Imagery” from *Introduction to Poetry* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia

“A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste” by Ezra Pound

“The Hug” by Thom Gunn

“Facing It” by Yusef Komunyakaa

“The Garden by the Moonlight” by Amy Lowell

“Before Completion” by Arthur Sze

9/12 Thursday

Workshop

## **Week 3: Sound & Rhyme**

9/17 Tuesday

“Poetry and the Art of Sound” by Marilyn L. Taylor

“Blue Light Lounge Sutra for the Performance Poets at Harold Park Hotel”  
by Yusef Komunyakaa

“Tale of a Tub” by Sylvia Plath

“Down in the River” by Joshua McKinney

“American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin” by Terrance Hayes

9/19 Thursday

Workshop

#### **Week 4: Rhythm & Meter**

9/24 Tuesday

“The Pursuit of Form” by Robert Pinsky

“Rhythm and Meter” from *Poetic Designs* by Stephen Adams

“The Figured Wheel” by Robert Pinsky

“Long Gone” & “Sam Smiley” by Sterling A. Brown

“The Moose” by Elizabeth Bishop

9/26 Thursday

Workshop

#### **Week 5: Speaker**

10/1 Tuesday

“Listening to a Voice” from *Introduction to Poetry* by X.J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia

“The War of Vaslav Nijinsky” by Frank Bidart

“White Lies” & “Flounder” by Natasha Trethewey

“Prayer” by Marie Howe

“Expired Meat” by Tim Kahl

“North to Taos” by Arthur Sze

10/3 Thursday

Workshop

#### **Week 6: Semantics**

10/8 Tuesday

“Flowing Uphill” by Andrew Joron

“Cracks in the Oracle Bone” by Brenda Hillman

“Changes; or, Reveries at a Window Overlooking a Country Road, with Two Women Talking Blues in the Kitchen” by Yusef Komunyakaa

“Gathering” by Natasha Trethewey

“California Poppy” by D.A. Powell

“Dazzled” by Arthur Sze

10/10 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 7: Special Topic**

10/15 Tuesday

“Theory and Play of the Duende” by Federico Garca Lorca

“summer somewhere” by Danez Smith

“Odyssey of Big Boy” by Sterling A. Brown

“I Don’t Have A Pill For That” by Deborah Landau

“A New National Anthem” by Aida Limon

10/17 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 8: Point of View**

10/22 Tuesday

“Point of View’s Points of View” by Mario Ortiz-Robles

*Play It As It Lays* by Joan Didion

10/24 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 9: Setting**

10/ 29 Tuesday

“Voice as Place and Place as Voice: A Craft Essay” by Phillippe Dierderich

*Play It As It Lays* by Joan Didion

10/31 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 10: Characters & Characterization**

11/5 Tuesday

“The Creation of Character” & “Building a Character” from *The Foundations of Screenwriting*  
by Syd Field

*Black Water* by Joyce Carol Oates

11/7 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 11: Plot & Conflict**

11/12 Tuesday

“Shape of Stories” by Kurt Vonnegut ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOGru\\_4z1Vc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOGru_4z1Vc))

*Black Water* by Joyce Carol Oates

11/14 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 12: Symbol & Motif**

11/19 Tuesday

“Frye’s Principles of Literary Symbolism” by Thomas Willard  
(Note: Only read the “Central Principles” section)

“*Crise de vers*” by Stephane Mallarmé

*The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon

11/21 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 13: NO CLASS**

11/26 Tuesday

Fall Break

11/28 Thursday

Fall Break

**Week 14: Theme**

12/3 Tuesday

“Parable and Theme: Kafka and American Fiction” by Shimon Sandbank

*Selected Letters* by John Keats

“Before the Law” by Franz Kafka

*The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon

12/5 Thursday

Workshop

**Week 15: Revision & Class Reading**

12/10 Tuesday

Snacks & Portfolio Revision

12/12 Thursday

Party & Class Reading