

Introduction to Fiction and Poetry (CRWRI-UA.815.013)

Schedule: Tuesday/Thursday 8:00 - 9:15 a.m.

Instructor: Hannah Redder (hr1198@nyu.edu)

Office hours: By appointment

Objective: The purpose of this class is twofold: to analyze and to create. Learning to read critically is arguably one of the most important things you will learn during your college career, whether it be a newspaper article or a short story; therefore, half of our classes will focus exclusively on the analysis and critique of short fiction and poetry. You will examine the words written by some of the world's best writers and learn to ask questions that reveal, or attempt to reveal, why and how they move us. You will then apply what you've learned there to the second and, in my opinion, far more critical task set before you, which is writing, perhaps for the first time, your own fiction and poetry.

Class: Each Tuesday class will be devoted to discussing the writing process as it's outlined in Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* and Mary Oliver's *A Poetry Handbook* as well as that day's assigned short stories or poems. On Thursdays we will discuss student work, spending 15-20 minutes on each piece depending on the number of students being workshopped that day.

Readings:

Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*

Various handouts, packets

Grading:

Attendance (20%): I understand that this is a (very) early morning class and will try my best to be accommodating; that being said, workshops -- at least successful ones -- require the establishment of rapport between writers, and you can't build rapport if you don't show up. Barring medical or family emergencies, more than three absences in a semester will be considered an issue.

Participation (20%): Participation is the second way you show up for your classmates, both by way of engaging in class discussion on Tuesdays and providing thoughtful, thorough feedback in workshop. You cannot be expected to receive the same otherwise.

Writing assignments/submissions (15%): Each student will be workshopped three times over the course of the semester. Students being workshopped will be expected to bring copies of their submission for the class the week prior to their workshop. Barring some kind of emergency, emailed submissions will not be permitted. All work will be typed. Stories should be between 4 and 10 pages, double-spaced, and poems can be of any length, single-spaced. Short writing assignments (no more than a page) might be assigned throughout the semester. I will expect these printed out and handed in to me on the due date.

Final portfolio (15%): Writing is not only writing, but rewriting. Therefore, each student will hand in a revised portfolio of their workshopped pieces along with copies of

their reading responses, commentaries, and any other assignments handed in during the semester. Students will email their portfolios to me by 5 p.m. on the last day of class.

Two commentaries (15%): In this class, you will be asked to write two commentaries—one for a piece of fiction, the other for a poem—of three to five pages. You may choose pieces we’ve covered in class but will be encouraged to rather go out and employ independently the skills we’ve practiced during the preceding weeks. Find something that moves you and ask why.

Reading responses (10%): Students will be required to bring a 3-4 paragraph reading response to every Tuesday class period. These responses should not be a summary of what you have read but rather a critical analysis of the techniques the authors use and their effects.

Event review (5%): During the course of the semester, you are expected to attend at least one literary reading and write a page-long review/write-up about your experience. I will provide a heads-up on upcoming readings, but you are responsible to research these on your own.

Submission Policy:

All responses, exercises, workshop submissions must be turned in on the assigned deadline, in class. It is your responsibility to have photocopies of your workshop piece available in the session preceding your workshop. Email submissions are highly discouraged and will only be accepted in the event of an excused absence.

Plagiarism:

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.

Syllabus:

Week 1: Introductions

September 3	Introductions, expectations
September 5	Introduction to workshop

Week 2: Fiction

September 10	Bird by Bird: “Shitty First Drafts”, “Perfectionism” Handouts: “How to Become a Writer” (Moore) (Group B brings submissions)
September 12	Workshop Group A

Week 3

September 17	Bird by Bird: “Short Assignments,” “Polaroids” Handouts: “The Things They Carried” (O’Brian) (Group C brings submissions)
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September 19 **One-inch picture frame due**
Workshop Group B

Week 4

September 24 Bird by Bird: “Looking Around”, “Index Cards”
Handouts: “The Mark on the Wall” (Woolf), “Symbols and Signs”
(Nabokov)
(Group D brings submissions)

September 26 Workshop Group C

Week 5

October 1 Bird by Bird: “Plot”, “Plot Treatment”
Handouts: “The Lottery” (Jackson); “What We Talk About When We
Talk About Love” (Carver)
(Group A brings submissions)

October 3 Workshop Group D

Week 6

October 8 Bird by Bird: “Character”
Handouts: “Good Country People” (O’Connor), “Everyday Use” (Walker)
(Group B brings submissions)

October 10 Workshop Group A

Week 7

October 15 Bird by Bird: “Set Design”
Handouts: “Challenger Deep” (Keegan), “The Yellow Wallpaper”
(Perkins Gilman)
(Group C brings submissions)

Fiction commentary due

October 17 Workshop Group B

Week 8

October 22 Bird by Bird: “Dialogue”
Handouts: “Hills Like White Elephants” (Hemingway), “For Esme --
With Love and Squalor” (Salinger)
(Group D brings submissions)

October 24 Workshop Group C

Week 9: Poetry

October 29 Introduction to poetry
(Group A brings submissions)

November 31 Workshop Group D

Week 10

- November 5 A Poetry Handbook: pp. 1-34
“Song of Myself” (Whitman), “Somewhere I Have Never Traveled”
(Cummings), “Dance Russe” (William)
(Group B brings submissions)
- November 7 Workshop Group A

Week 11

- November 12 A Poetry Handbook: pp. 35-57
Handouts: “Persimmons” and “From Blossoms” (Lee), “You Who Never
Arrived” (Rilke)
(Group C brings submissions)
- November 14 Workshop Group B

Week 12

- November 19 A Poetry Handbook: pp. 58-75
Handouts: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Eliot), “Howl”
(Ginsberg)
(Group D brings submissions)
- November 21 Workshop Workshop Group C

Week 13

- November 26 A Poetry Handbook: pp. 76-91
Handouts: “Marginalia” (Collins), “How to Like it” (Dobyns), “What the
Living Do” (Howe)
- November 28 Thanksgiving Break -- No Class

Week 14

- December 3 A Poetry Handbook: pp. 92-111
Handouts: “A Miracle for Breakfast” (Bishop), “The Book of Yolek”
(Hecht), “In Arabic” (Ali)
Poetry commentary due
- December 5 Workshop Group D

Week 15

- December 10 Bird by Bird “The Last Class”
- December 12 **Final portfolios due**
Student readings