

Introduction to Writing Fiction & Poetry (CRWI-UA.815.004)

MW: 8AM–9:15AM

Room: TBD

Office hours: By appointment

Instructor: Parker Tarun

Email: pt1239@nyu.edu

THE COURSE

Description

It's an Intro to Creative Writing course, which means you will spend your semester writing a lot of fiction and poetry. Since it is hard to write well without reading widely, you will also read a lot. Class time is split between workshops and craft lessons. Unlike a standard English or Comp Lit class, there will be less emphasis on the content of what we read. Although we may occasionally talk about theme, we'll concentrate more on how writers "make meaning" through voice, rhythm, characterization, structure, etc.

Required Texts

I will supply almost every reading assignment via printout or virtual copy. I will be asking you to purchase two books. The first is Elena Ferrante's wonderful novel *My Brilliant Friend*. The cover is garish, but the book is first-rate. The second is Mark Strand and Eavan Boland's *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*.

Workshop

Students will submit original writing every week. We as a class will help each other to improve our craft through generous, thorough feedback. We will draw on insights from craft class to suggest how each other's pieces can be made more effective. You will submit four times over the course of the semester—twice for poetry, twice for fiction.

Craft lesson

In craft class, we will look closely at published poetry and fiction, discussing how these pieces do (or don't) work. The idea is not simply to watch the Ferrari scream past at 110 miles per hour, but to be the kind of person who can take the car apart and explain how it runs. Occasionally, we may do writing exercises to "get the creative juices flowing."

Notebook

Lorrie Moore says the difference between writers and non-writers is that the non-writer is naïve enough to believe they will remember to jot something down later. The writer knows that memory and felicity of thought are fleeting. Buy a notebook of your choice. Every week, you should write down three observations or insights. Look around. Listen. Pay attention to your unique way of being in the world.

WORKSHOP

For when you submit:

Please use a 12-point font—Times New Roman, Garamond, or Georgia. Your name must be on this document. It must have page numbers. One or two typos is forgivable (and in some cases, intentional) but if it's clear you haven't proofed the piece, your grade will be affected.

Generally speaking, poetry workshops will fall on Wednesdays, fiction workshops on Monday. Please email the class your submissions **the Saturday before poetry workshops** and **the Thursday before fiction workshops**, no later than 11:59 p.m.

For poetry, you may choose to submit one or multiple poems. Length is up to you, but be reasonable. One three-line poem will distress me; a forty-page epic will distress your classmates. Do not take advantage of this.

For fiction, you may choose to submit a few really short pieces (a la Lydia Davis) or an 8-to-20-page story. If you wish to submit a novel excerpt, please provide a brief summary for context—don't use this summary to preempt feedback—and stay within the page limit. These submissions should be double-spaced with 1" margins.

You can write about pretty much whatever you like *with one exception*: You cannot write about our class or your classmates. For additional guidelines on content, see the Student Wellness Policy on Page 4.

Before workshop:

Please write a (minimum) 300-word response for each of your classmates' pieces. Include what you think is effective and what could be improved. Be specific. You must bring **two printouts** to class, as this will help guide feedback. You will hand in one to the author and one to me.

Quick tip: Listen to your emotions while reading a piece and then ask yourself what on the page makes you feel that way. Don't resort to platitudes (e.g. "Adverbs are bad"). John Updike has a good precept for feedback: *Consider what the author is trying to do. Do not fault them for what they do not try.* Your job is to help your classmates honor *their* voices. Anything you read in this workshop is confidential and not to be discussed with friends or family.

During workshop:

When you receive feedback, please remain silent and take notes. This is hard; our first instinct is to defend. Even if you feel someone is misreading your piece, please refrain from replying. You will have a chance to discuss questions with your peers at the end.

When you give feedback, please be considerate. Allow others time to speak while not depriving of us your voice. Focus your feedback on the text, not the author of the text. Justify your feedback with specific quotations and provide suggestions.

CRAFT

Craft responses

You will be given a short writing prompt based on the week's lesson. Sometimes, you'll be asked to analyze what the lesson has to do with a reading; other times you'll be asked to write poetry or fiction based on the lesson. Please print these, as they will help with class discussion. They'll be fun, too. I will collect responses at the end of class.

GRADES

Every single person in this class is *capable* of getting an A. You will never be graded on the quality of your writing. What I'm looking for is commitment and improvement. The best guidance I can offer is to **turn assignments in on time, bring a positive attitude to class, and engage with what you read**. You will never be faulted for disliking an assigned text, but you must finish it and be prepared to discuss it.

Attendance and Participation (30%)

You have to show up. You are allowed one unexcused absence (this may not fall on your workshop day). With additional unexcused absences, your final grade will drop half a letter grade (A goes to A-). Arriving late three times will count as an unexcused absence (seven minutes is late). If I notice that you are not participating in class, I will broach the topic with you before it affects your grade. Some people are more comfortable speaking than others, but your peers deserve the opportunity to hear your feedback. You will be required to meet with me at least once this semester for Office Hours.

Submissions (20%)

Submit your original work to your peers *on time*. Make sure to follow the guidelines in "For when you submit..."

Feedback (15%)

Please hand in copies of all your feedback letters—to me and your classmates. I want to make sure everyone is getting feedback from everyone.

Craft responses (15%)

Please hand in every craft response. The prompts will usually allow a lot of freedom, but if they do include, say, a word count, make sure to meet it.

Portfolio (20%)

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a portfolio. This portfolio will include revisions of your poetry and fiction as well as a reflective essay on your writing journey. I will provide more detail mid-term.

OFFICE HOURS

During the semester, you must meet with me at least once for office hours. You are allowed to schedule additional meetings if you like. We can meet at 58 W 10th St. (the graduate creative writing offices) or Bobst, or simply speak by phone. In this session, we'll discuss what you're working on, what you're reading, and your goals for writing. This allows us to go into greater detail about your work than class time permits. You are guaranteed thirty minutes per appointment.

POLICIES

Respect: A creative writing class is one of more the visceral spaces on campus. In this setting, personal disclosures and strong opinions are common. Whether or not you agree with what is said, you will always treat your classmates with respect.

Technology: No laptops or phones, please. “Dumb” e-readers are allowed. Anything with Instagram functionality is not sufficiently dumb.

Food: is permitted. But nothing too smelly, loud, or distracting.

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 my attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work that may be interpreted as such. If you 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.

Difficult subjects: Little addendum to the above. There is no better medium for exploring difficult material than the written word. We will occasionally read texts that explore sensitive subject matter. I will do my best to provide trigger warnings.

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
Website: <http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Plagiarism: Please don't do this. You'll receive a zero on the assignment. I also have to refer you to the college for disciplinary action. Plus, there's no possible gain, since you're not being graded on the quality of your work (though I'm sure you will all produce high-quality work). If the workload or the anxiety of influence seems to be forcing your hand on this issue, please come talk to me.

Calendar:

We will be reading many poets and fiction writers, with occasional critical assists. Each week's craft selections pertain to the listed theme, but your interests can, and should, guide discussion. The texts are to be read by their posted dates—e.g. you are expected to show up on September 9th, having already read Eileen Myles' “An American Poem,” etc.

Sept. 4 **Intros, Syllabus, Housekeeping**
Welcome!

Poetry 1
The Atoms of Poetry

- M** **9** **How You Speak: Voice, Tone, Persona**
- “The German Army, Russia, 1943” by Ai
 - “An American Poem” by Eileen Myles
 - “The Summer Day” by Mary Oliver
 - Excerpt from *IRL* by Tommy Pico
 - “Here, Bullet” by Brian Turner
 - “This Is Just to Say” by William Carlos Williams
 - “The Second Coming” by W.B. Yeats

Assists: “Voice and Style” by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux.

W **11** **Poetry Workshop: Group A**

- M** **16** **“Shopping for Images”: Image and Metaphor**
- “A Supermarket in California” by Allen Ginsberg
 - “New York Poem” by Terrance Hayes
 - “Untitled While Listening to Drake” by Morgan Parker
 - Selected poems by Basho
 - “In the Station of the Metro” by Ezra Pound
 - “Snow” by David Berman
 - “Feared Drowned” by Sharon Olds

Assists: “Images,” “Simile and Metaphor” by Addonizio and Laux.

W **18** **Poetry Workshop: Group B**

- M** **23** **Building Blocks: Sound, Rhyme, Repetition**
- “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot
 - “We Real Cool” by Gwendolyn Brooks
 - “Rigamortus” by Kendrick Lamar
 - Excerpt from *Whereas* by Layli Long Soldier
 - “Vowels” by Christian Bok
 - “Crustacean Island” by Kay Ryan

Assists: “The Stanza at a Glance” by Strand and Boland. “Presto Manifesto!” by A.E. Stallings. “Rapping, deconstructed” by Vox Media.

W **25** **Poetry Workshop: Group C**

- M** **30** **Move Your Feet: Meter, Rhythm, Blank Verse**
- “Because I could not stop for Death” by Emily Dickinson
 - “This Be the Verse” by Philip Larkin
 - Excerpt from *Paradise Lost* by John Milton
 - “Mending Wall” by Robert Frost
 - “Alexander Hamilton” by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

Assists: “Meter at a Glance,” “Blank Verse at a Glance” by Strand and Boland. “Meter, Rhyme, and Form” by Addonizio and Laux (p. 138-142)

Fiction 1
The Atoms of Fiction

- October** **2** **Great Expectations: Leads, Suspense, Subversion**
- “A Temporary Matter” by Jhumpa Lahiri
 - “Brownies” by Z.Z. Packer
 - “The Prairie Wife” by Curtis Sittenfeld
- *Please read in this order.

Assists: Selections from *Art of Fiction* by John Gardner (p.55-57).

- M** **7** **Fiction Workshop: Group A**

- W** **9** **Desperate Characters: Motivation and Frustration**
- “Some Other, Better Otto” by Deborah Eisenberg
 - “Franny” by J.D. Salinger

Assists: “Character Motivation” by Aimee Bender. “The Motivational Continuum” by Michael Kardos (short).

- M** **14** *NO CLASS (Fall Break)*

- T (Legis.)** **15** **Fiction Workshop: Group B**

- W** **16** **How You Speak, Redux: Prose Styles**
- “Story,” “Men,” “Letter to a Funeral Parlor” by Lydia Davis
 - “What’s Wrong with You? What’s Wrong with Me?” by J.M. Holmes
 - “Packed Dirt, Churchgoing, a Dying Cat, a Traded Car” by John Updike
 - “The Soul Is Not a Smithy” by David Foster Wallace

Assists: “Vocabulary” and “The Sentence” by John Gardner. “Sentences” by Francine Prose.

M **21** **Fiction Workshop: Group C**

W **23** **The Eye, The I: Narration, Point of View, and Reliability**

- “Bam Bam (1-2)” by Marlon James
- “The Dead” by James Joyce
- “The Way We Live Now” by Susan Sontag

Assists: “Narrating” by James Wood.

Poetry 2
...In Motion

M **28** **Fixing on Forms: Villanelle, Sestina, Sonnet**

- “Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” by Dylan Thomas
 - “One Art” by Elizabeth Bishop
 - “The Mortician in San Francisco” by Randall Mann
 - “Sestina: Like” by A.E. Stallings
 - “Ozymandias” by P.B. Shelly
 - “Heat” by Denis Johnson
- *Please read in this order.

Assists: “Verse Forms: Overview,” “The Villanelle,” “The Sestina,” “The Sonnet,” by Strand and Boland.

W **30** **Poetry Workshop: Group A**

November **4** **Thematic Modes in Poetry: Elegy, Ballad, Ode**

- “In Memory of W.B. Yeats” by W.H. Auden
- “Facing It” by Yusef Komunyaaka
- “Peter and John” by Elinor Wylie
- “Sadie and Maud” by Gwendolyn Brooks
- “Perhaps The World Ends Here” by Joy Harjo
- “Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market” by Pablo Neruda

Assists: “Shaping Forms: Overview,” “The Elegy at a Glance,” “The Stanza at a Glance,” “The Ballad at a Glance,” “The Ode at a Glance” by Strand and Boland.

W **6** **Poetry Workshop: Group B**

M **11** **Feeling Free: Open Forms and Experimentation**

- “Theme for English B” by Langston Hughes
- “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath
- Excerpt from *Bluets* by Maggie Nelson
- Excerpt from *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine

- W** **13** **Poetry Workshop: Group C**
- Fiction 2**
...In Motion
- M** **18** **Fiction Workshop: Group A**
- W** **20** **World-Building**
- “Especially Heinous” by Carmen Maria Machado
 - “Standard Loneliness Package” by Charles Yu
- Assists: “Engineering Impossible Architectures” by Karen Russell.
- M** **25** **Fiction Workshop: Group B**
- W** **27** *NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)*
- December** **2** **Tension, Time, and Structure**
- “End of the Line” by Jonathan Franzen
 - “You’re Ugly, Too” by Lorrie Moore
- Assists: “That Crafty Feeling” by Zadie Smith.
- W** **4** **Fiction Workshop: Group C**
- M** **9** **Doing It All: Fiction Master-Class**
- *My Brilliant Friend* by Elena Ferrante (p. 1–136)
- W** **11** **Wrap Up**
- “Workshop” by Billy Collins
 - “How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore
- W** **18** **Portfolio Due**
- Please drop off your portfolio by 5 p.m. at 58 W 10th St. The people inside are very friendly. There is a mailbox in the basement with my name on it.

A Note on Workload

This course is reading-intensive, but, I think, totally manageable. On poetry craft days, you’ll have 5-6 poems to read. On fiction craft days, you’ll have 2-3 stories. The critical assists are shorter. Both genre’s “voice” lessons have slightly more reading, because it’s important that you see variety in poetic and prose styles. If you are having trouble, please reach out to me. I want you to push yourself, but I’d also like this to be a fun time of self-discovery! I’m really looking forward to working with you all.