

Intro to Creative Writing: Syllabus

CRWRI-UA.815, Section 007

Spring Semester 2018

Ts & TRs: 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

Instructor: Phillip West

Email: paw338@nyu.edu

Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

“A man must have thought much over scenery before he begins fully to enjoy it. It is no youngling enthusiasm on hilltops that can possess itself of the last essence of beauty. Probably most people’s heads are growing bare before they can see all in a landscape that they have the capability of seeing; and, even then, it will be only for one little moment of consummation before the faculties are again on the decline, and they that look out of the windows begin to be darkened and restrained in sight. Thus the study of nature should be carried forward thoroughly and with system. Every gratification should be rolled long under the tongue, and we should be always eager to analyse and compare, in order that we may be able to give some plausible reason for our admirations. True, it is difficult to put even approximately into words the kind of feelings thus called into play. There is a dangerous vice inherent in any such intellectual refining upon vague sensation. The analysis of such satisfactions lends itself very readily to literary affectations; and we can all think of instances where it has shown itself apt to exercise a morbid influence, even upon an author’s choice of language and the turn of his sentences. And yet there is much that makes the attempt attractive; for any expression, however imperfect, once given to a cherished feeling, seems a sort of legitimation of the pleasure we take in it. A common sentiment is one of those great goods that make life palatable and ever new. The knowledge that another has felt as we have felt, and seen things, even if they are little things, not much otherwise than we have seen them, will continue to the end to be one of life’s choicest pleasures.” —

Robert Louis Stevenson, Roads, 1911

Aims:

- 1) To discover what we like in/about good writing (read)
- 2) To analyze why we like it (craft)
- 3) To try our hand at writing it (workshop)

In order to accomplish these objectives we will: read much and widely across the three prominent forms of creative writing and beyond; discuss the nuts and bolts of what we consider “good” writing; and take what we have learned and apply it to our own writing.

Reading:

To be purchased:

- *The Elements of Style*, Strunk and White
- *This Craft of Verse*, Jorge Luis Borges
- *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Mark Twain
- *Lovecraft Country*, Matt Ruff

To be distributed via handout or electronically:

- *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman
- *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Edgar Allan Poe
- *The Dead*, James Joyce
- *Key Gardens*, Virginia Woolf
- *A Rose for Emily*, William Faulkner
- *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Jorge Luis Borges
- *The Balloon*, Donald Barthelme
- *Gazebo*, Raymond Carver
- *Girl*, Jamaica Kincaid
- *Tenth of December*, George Saunders
- *The Depressed Person*, David Foster Wallace
- Many, many poems—a veritable slew—from Rumi to Kendrick Lamar; from Dickinson to Dickman; from Milton to memes

Structure:

Tuesdays are dedicated to discussions of the previous week's readings, and craft lectures.

Students are expected to read each work *twice* before arriving to class. Students are expected to have ready, at the beginning of each class, either a reading response (300-500 words), a writing exercise, or both, depending on the assignment.

Thursdays are reserved for workshop (aka discussion of student work).

Each student will be workshopped no less than two (2) times during the semester. All students (including workshopped students) are expected to provide 2 copies of written feedback (min 250 words / piece), as well as one (1) annotated copy of each work being discussed that day to be given to the author. Workshopped students will need to submit their pieces by the Thursday prior to being workshopped. Workshopped students may forgo the reading response and/or writing exercise due on the Tuesday prior to turning in their piece for workshop.

Strategies/etiquette for verbal and written feedback to workshoppees will be discussed prior to our first workshop, as well as general in-class behavior.

Assignments:

All out-of-class written assignments must be 100% legible, and logged chronologically in a neat, sleeved folder, which the student should bring to each class. The student's name, and the date the assignment is due, should be in the upper-right-hand corner of the first page of every assignment. If there are multiple pages to one assignment, please staple them in the upper-left-hand corner. These folders will be collected at random intervals during the semester, and will be assessed for effort/participation. Students should be prepared to hand in an updated folder at any time throughout the semester.

Grades:

Attendance.....	10% (all or nothing)
Participation.....	10%
Written assignments**	35%
Midterm.....	20%
Final Portfolio**	25%

**Writing will not be assessed on “quality”, which is subjective and squirrely, but rather on how much apparent ambition/thought/effort/revision went into the work

The Midterm will consist of an in-class quiz on the craft of writing, as well as a 5-6 page, double-spaced, creative or persuasive essay.

The Final Portfolio will be a curated, heavily revised collection of pieces written and/or workshopped during the semester—three (3) poems and one (1) short story or novel chapter—and should not exceed 25 pages, double spaced.

Attendance: All students are afforded two (2) unexcused, unannounced absences during the semester (except for days they are scheduled to be workshopped), with no repercussions. After that, each unexcused absence will result in the loss of a 1/3 letter grade (A+ → A, B → B-, etc.). Absences for illness, family emergencies, religious observance, or civic duty, will be excused with ample (48 hrs) notice. Two (2) instances of tardiness (10+ minutes late) will result in one (1) unexcused absence. Unexcused absences on days you are scheduled to be workshopped will result in a full letter deduction to your final grade (A → B, B+ → C+, etc.).

Late work: All written assignments must be submitted on time and in an updated folder to receive full credit. For each day an assignment is late, or a folder missing, a full letter grade will be deducted for those assignments.

Plagiarism: Any and all plagiarism will result in an F- for the course, and the notification of the appropriate academic authorities.

Technology: Cellphones are allowed for the purposes of the class: to look up vocabulary words, to quickly search something relevant to class discussion, etc. Tablets, laptops, desktops, and the use of cellphones for purposes other than this class, are not permitted.

Office hours: I don't require that students meet with me during the semester, however it is strongly encouraged.