Read Like A Writer, Revise Like A Reader

Creative Writing: Intro to Fiction & Poetry, CRWRI-UA 815
Summer Session I: May 28 to July 6, 2019 (12 classes over 6 weeks)
Tuesdays and Thursdays 1.30–4.10 PM
Instructor: Maxwell Addington
mma584@nyu.edu
Office hours by appointment.
Classroom location to be determined.

“We come together in order to change what we know and how we know it.”
—Jesse Ball

This course assumes you are new to creative writing, so new you may have never written a story or poem before. Through a blend of Workshop and Craft, I hope to equip you with techniques for approaching other people’s writing as well as your own pages. For Craft we will read published work and break the writing down to better understand the subtle and seemingly effortless techniques the writer has employed, while in Workshop we will do the same, only with your work, in an effort to clarify your voice through revision. Our ultimate aim is get you reading others’ work with the technical eye of a writer, and revising your own work with the easily confused and deterred eye of a reader.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Craft Readings
We will begin each session by dissecting published fiction and poetry in an attempt to demystify successful writing by looking at it in terms of its mechanics. There will be discussion of content as well, but what we pay attention to differs from that of a standard university literature class. As writers, we want to pull the machine apart and understand how a story or poem’s component parts work together so that we may borrow techniques for our own writing. In the first class we will discuss how to see a piece of writing through this technical lens.

The works we will read and dissect for Craft are available free online from The New Yorker, Poetry Magazine and Poetry Foundation. I will provide an email with links to the readings and distribute paper handouts of any material that isn't available online. Note that many works include audio of the writer reading aloud. I encourage you to listen to the audio when available. This is especially helpful for poems with unconventional formatting. In our last week each student will bring a poem of their choice to share with the class. Part of your grade asks that you email me the night before class a minimum of five sentences/lines that were favourites of yours while reading (you may also indicate sentences you disliked).
Workshop & The Writing You Will Do
In workshop we will apply the same technical lens from Craft, only now we are using it to understand and improve each other’s work. Each student will workshop three main submissions (in any order): one fiction (5–15 pages), one poetry (1–3 poems spread over 2–5 pages), and a third of your choice (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, hybrid lyric essay, or whatever as long as it is creative writing and you have cleared it with me). You will distribute 15 printed copies of your submission during the preceding class. This means if your workshop is on Thursday, hand out your stuff Tuesday. If your workshop is Tuesday, hand it out Thursday.

You are expected to read the other students’ pieces once without making edits, and then read a second time with a pen or pencil in hand, making line edits and noting what draws you in and what takes you out. You will also write a feedback letter for each student submission, summarized your impression of what you liked and what could be improved. We will go over how to do all this in the first week. To allow every student three workshops, we will have about thirty minutes to go over each submission.

In addition, we will engage in some in-class writing exercises, to be included in your final portfolio. These exercises can make people panic, but you may be delighted with the results and find yourself with the starting point for something you can develop and submit to workshop.

Grading
15% Participation (includes attendance, engagement, effort, and at least one office hours visit)
15% Fiction Submission (5–15 pages, approx. 1250–4000 words)
15% Poetry Submission (1–3 poems spread over 2–5 pages)
15% Third Submission (genre/form of your choice)
10% Favourite Sentences/Lines (emailed the night before class for each Craft reading)
15% Written Critiques of Students’ Work (to be emailed to me before class)
15% Final Portfolio (Includes revised version of three submissions plus typed copies of in-class writing exercises. I will be looking for evidence that you have incorporated feedback into your revisions.)
5% Extra credit: In our last week I’ll ask you to bring in a poem you admire and want to share with the class. I’d like you to read it aloud, but I do not expect memorization.

SOME RULES & ETIQUETTE

Attendance
In order to minimize the potential for chaos, it’s best if everyone attends every class, on time. In terms of absences, please look at our schedule and notify me now of any dates you are unable to attend. Excessive lateness and lack of attendance will negatively impact your participation grade.
Formatting Your Work
The standard is 12-point font, double-spaced (this averages 250–300 words a page for prose). Make sure to title your submissions and include your name. I will distribute a template in the first class that will cover indentation, space breaks, etc.

Distributing Your Work
On the class before your workshop date, you will bring 15 printed copies of your story/poem(s) and distribute them to the rest of us. Please staple or paper clip.

Materials
To bring to every class:
1) a copy of the syllabus 2) annotated stories/poems up for Workshop 3) printed feedback letters 4) a couple pens 5) a fresh notebook for notes and in-class writing exercises 6) copies of your submission if you are up for Workshop in the following class 7) a copy of our Craft readings for the week, which can either be printed out (encouraged) or read off a laptop—not a phone—that is not connected to the internet 8) your list of favourite/most disliked sentences from the Craft readings 9) Coffee, tea, water, snacks

Electronics
Out of respect for your colleagues, kindly set phones to do not disturb and put them out of sight. I would like you to take written notes rather than typed, but you may use a laptop or e-reader in order to read the Craft assignments. However, please turn your WiFi off.

Plagiarism
Any instances of plagiarism, i.e. attempting to pass off another’s work as your own, necessitates that I refer you to the higher academic authority, which could result in disciplinary measures. Since this is a creative writing course, we will discuss the difference between acceptable imitation of another writer’s techniques and outright plagiarism.

Speaking In Class
I would like to get everyone talking about the readings and submissions, so I may call on you to offer an opinion. Please notify me in advance if you have trouble speaking in front of others.

Eating in Class
I will probably snack, so feel free to do the same. Please email me if you have food allergies the rest of us should know about.
Contacting Me
Email mma584@nyu.edu. I will do my best to reply promptly, but please try to limit panicked emails the night before or day of class.

Office Hours
I will hold office hours by appointment at the Lilian Vernon Creative Writing House, 58 W 10 Street. If it is a sunny day, I may hold office hours in Washington Square Park or the Stumptown café patio. Every student is required to book at least one office hours session as part of the participation grade. Most students do this after they have been workshopped (to further discuss Workshop feedback), but we can also meet to discuss what you are intending to submit, or to discuss something you have read.

SOME THOUGHTS TO GUIDE
HOW WE INTERACT

Clarification
Please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. We all know things others do not; we all do not know things others do. I will admit when I haven’t read something, or when I haven’t heard of a writer, or do not understand a word one of you uses. This is how we all strengthen our understanding and learn to see each other eye to eye.

Discussion
A classroom needs to be a safe space. We are exchanging ideas. We are not looking to hunt down what is morally good and what is morally bad in each other’s work. We will have instinctive value-judgement reactions to content, but we are attempting to understand what the piece is going for, and how it could get there. We want to support each other, to lift each other up. We are not looking for single perfect answers. Of course you will disagree with things people say. There will be times when you can’t possibly understand how someone sitting in the same classroom looking at the same words could come up with an interpretation so far from your own. But even if you fundamentally disagree, take a moment to try to understand where the person is coming from. And assume they mean well.

Criticism & Letting Go
If a majority of people in class highlights a point in your poem or story that detracts from the quality of the rest of the piece, then it is worth addressing whether that detraction is in service of the work. Sometimes you may feel a reflexive need to reject these comments. This is because writing is a particularly vulnerable endeavour. However, we need to understand that criticism of our work is not a reflection of self-worth. Though our work is created in our most vulnerable moment, that is not ‘you’ on the page. Even if the work is autobiographical, you are not your work, your work is a thing you have made. Though writing can bring us close to our deepest fears
and traumas and dreams and delusions, as heavy as it all can seem, remember that we are essentially learning the same things we were taught in kindergarten: how to read and write. I encourage all of you to cherish your work and make it as good as you possibly can right up to the point of submission, and then let it go. However much effort you have put into it, assume it is terrible, and you can be delighted when we start talking about how it isn’t. Even then it may be obvious to you that some people did not like your work. Please keep in mind that the most celebrated writers at the top of their game are also subject to such criticism, and we cannot be everything to everyone all the time. It is difficult enough to be something to someone just once, but we are all capable of achieving this small feat.

PLEASE NOTE

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

Student Wellness Policy
Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themself, 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, 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.
NYU will be closed Thursday July 4 (Independence Day). Saturday July 6 is our make-up class for missing that day. Plan accordingly.

WEEK 1

Tues May 28
Class introductions. Reviewing the syllabus. Discussion of how to read like a writer, proofreading marks and formatting template. In-class writing exercise. Assigning workshop dates.
**Readings:** Elif Batuman ‘Construct Worlds’ / Jamaica Kincaid ‘Girl’ / Anna Scotti ‘Then Fall Again’ / Haiku(s) by Matsuo Bashô

Thurs May 30
**Workshop:**

**Readings:** Hye-young Pyun ‘Caring For Plants’ / Frank O’Hara ‘Poem’ / Tu Fu ‘Full Moon’

WEEK 2

Tues June 4
**Workshop:**

**Readings:** Haruki Murakami ‘Cream’ / William Carlos Williams ‘This Is Just To Say’

Thurs June 6
**Workshop:**

**Readings:** David Foster Wallace ‘Good People’ / Ernest Hemingway ‘Hills Like White Elephants’ / William Carlos Williams ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’ / Elizabeth Bishop ‘One Art’

WEEK 3

Tues June 11
**Workshop:**

**Readings:** Alice Munro ‘The Bear Came Over the Mountain’ / John Keats ‘On Visiting the Tomb of Burns’

Thurs June 13
**Workshop:**
Readings: Don DeLillo ‘The Itch’ / Noelle Kocot ‘Sestina for Lizzette’ / Anne Boyer ‘At Least Two Types of People’

WEEK 4
Tues June 18
Workshop: __________________ ________________ ________________

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Readings: Kristen Roupenian ‘Cat Person’ / Robert Frost ‘Home Burial’

Thurs June 20
Workshop: __________________ ________________ ________________

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Readings: Zadie Smith ‘Now More Than Ever’ / Marianne Moore ‘The Fish’ / Elizabeth Bishop ‘The Fish’ (Two different poems, same name.)

WEEK 5
Tues June 22
Workshop: __________________ ________________ ________________

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Readings: David Sedaris ‘Now We Are Five’ / Layli Long Soldier ‘from WHEREAS’

Thurs June 27
Workshop: __________________ ________________ ________________

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Readings: Jhumpa Lahiri ‘A Temporary Matter’ / Aram Saroyam ‘Film Noir’ / Sharon Olds ‘No Makeup’

WEEK 6
Tues July 2
Workshop: __________________ ________________ ________________

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Readings: Simon Rich ‘The Sellout’ Parts 1 + 2 (a serialized novella) / Poems selected by the students.

Saturday July 6
In-class final portfolio editing session. Come with your revisions made, your work printed, and we will do final edits on each other’s portfolios.

Readings: Simon Rich ‘The Sellout’ Part 3 + 4 / Poems selected by the students.

Sunday July 7
PDFs of the doubly revised final portfolios due by email at 3.00 PM.