

## Introduction to Writing Fiction and Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.005

M/W 2:00 PM – 3:15 PM, Spring 2020

Location: TBD

Instructor: Alex Smith

Email: [ars1010@nyu.edu](mailto:ars1010@nyu.edu)

Office hours: by appointment

**Course Overview:** In this class we will think about how writing is ‘working.’ What are all the parts of a given piece doing, and how were they made? We will analyze our own experience when reading a text, and then think about how to create writing that will produce such an experience for a reader. We will discover tricks and techniques used by writers, and talk about how to deploy them in our own work.

**Class Structure/Assignments:** On **Mondays** we will discuss the assigned readings and consider them from a craft perspective. Our goal is to learn something about the decisions the author made which led to the piece in its finalized form. Why did the author choose to do *x* or *y*, and how can our understanding of *x* or *y* inform our own writing, when we are faced with similar decisions?

This investigation entails thinking about how a reader experiences a text, and there is no better reader to consult than oneself: throughout this semester we will pay attention to what we like and dislike when reading a text—which words and sentences appeal to us for whatever reason, and which don’t—so that when we come to the moment of writing we are armed with a greater ability to use that same sense to generate things that are delightful (and to avoid things that make us cringe). **Assignment due Monday:** You will be asked to bring five sentences or lines from the reading that you liked or disliked, and be prepared to talk about why. We will go around the table and read these aloud as part of our discussion. A phrase you dislike can teach you just as much as a phrase you like, as long as you rigorously interrogate yourself in either case!

On **Wednesdays** we will workshop your own stories and poems. Over the course of the semester, everyone will submit twice for fiction and twice for poetry. When it’s your turn to submit your writing for workshop (one week in advance of your actual workshop date), you will be required to print out individual copies for the entire class and hand them out. **Assignment due Wednesday:** For each workshop, you will prepare written feedback in the form of a critique letter addressed to the person being workshopped that day (approximately one page, double-spaced). You will print out two copies, one for the person being workshopped, and one for me. These letters should seek, in a non-evaluative way, to increase the writer’s awareness of what is working effectively and what is not. Try to figure out what the writer is attempting to do (as opposed to what *you* would attempt to do) and think about how to help them do it better. It is a chance for you to submit your sensibilities as a tool for the writer’s consideration, and you should be as thoughtful as you hope peers will be when discussing your work.

**Workshop:** For poetry, please submit up to five pages of poems (one longer poem or several shorter poems), and for fiction, please submit between five and twelve pages of prose (a short story, or several flash pieces). Submissions should be in Times New Roman font, 12 pt, double-spaced, with page numbers and your name on every page.

**Grading:** If you do the work and participate fully, there is no reason you should not receive an A. You will not be graded on the quality of your writing, but for the timely completion of all assignments and readings, thoughtful engagement with the texts (both readings and workshop pieces), and contribution to discussions. You will also hand in a final portfolio at the end of the semester, which should reflect the revisions you will incorporate to your pieces after they have been workshopped.

Participation (attendance and discussion):	40%
Writing (workshop submissions, responses):	40%
Revised portfolio:	20%

**Attendance:** Consistent attendance and participation are crucial elements of the course. One unexcused absence will be permitted without any repercussion. After one unexcused absence, your grade will drop by a half letter (i.e. from an A to an A-) for each subsequent absence. Excessive tardiness (arriving more than 10 minutes after the start of class) will count as half an absence; two instances of tardiness will be documented as one unexcused absence. If you are late by more than 30 minutes it will count as a full unexcused absence.

## SCHEDULE

Week 1	Monday, 1/27 Introduction and logistics, workshop sign up
	Wednesday, 1/29 Reading: selected poems from Philip Larkin, Marianne Moore, W.B. Yeats Group A distributes poems.
Week 2	Monday, 2/3 Reading: Terrance Hayes, Wallace Stevens
	Wednesday, 2/5 Workshop Group A. Group B distributes poems.
Week 3	Monday, 2/10 Reading: Frank Bidart, Carolyn Forché, Kenneth Koch
	Wednesday, 2/12 Workshop Group B. Group C distributes poems.
Week 4	Monday 2/17. <b>Presidents' Day. No class.</b>

Wednesday, 2/19  
Workshop Group C. Group A distributes poems.

Week 5 Monday, 2/24  
Reading: Elizabeth Bishop, Seamus Heaney

Wednesday, 2/26  
Workshop Group A. Group B distributes poems.

Week 6 Monday, 3/2  
Reading: Gerard Manley Hopkins, Sylvia Plath

Wednesday, 3/4  
Workshop Group B. Group C distributes poems.

Week 7 Monday, 3/9  
Reading: Gwendolyn Brooks, Emily Dickinson, Paul Muldoon

Wednesday, 3/11  
Workshop Group C.

Week 8 Monday 3/16. **Spring Break. No class.**

Wednesday, 3/18. **No class.**

Week 9 Monday, 3/23  
Reading: stories by Amy Hempel, George Saunders

Wednesday, 3/25  
Group A distributes stories.

Week 10 Monday, 3/30  
Reading: Alice Munro

Wednesday, 4/1  
Workshop Group A. Group B distributes stories.

Week 11 Monday, 4/6  
Reading: selections from works by James Joyce

Wednesday, 4/8  
Workshop Group B. Group C distributes stories.

Week 12 Monday, 4/13  
Reading: Michael Chabon, Lorrie Moore

Wednesday, 4/15  
Workshop Group C. Group A distributes stories.

Week 13 Monday, 4/20  
Reading: Jhumpa Lahiri, John Updike

Wednesday, 4/22  
Workshop Group A. Group B distributes stories.

Week 14 Monday, 4/27  
Reading: Jamaica Kincaid, David Foster Wallace

Wednesday, 4/29  
Workshop Group B. Group C distributes stories.

Week 15 Monday, 5/4  
Reading: Donald Barthelme, Jenny Zhang

Wednesday, 5/6  
Workshop Group C.

Week 16 Monday, 5/11  
Reflections and celebration

Wednesday, 5/13  
Final portfolio due by 5 PM

**Office Hours:** Students are encouraged to meet with me at least twice during the semester (preferably after your first workshop) to discuss the progress of your work and any questions you might have.

## **POLICIES**

**Plagiarism:** Zero-tolerance. Plagiarism of any kind will be reported to the university.

**Technology:** No laptops, phones, or tablets in class.

**Food:** You are welcome to bring food items and beverages to class, as long as they are not too loud or distracting. Please do not make a mess.

**Respect:** It is very important, especially in the environment of writing, that you treat everyone's thoughts, opinions, and work with respect, whether you agree or disagree (*especially* if you disagree) with whatever is being said.

**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.

**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.

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New York, NY  
10003-6675  
Telephone: 212-998-4980  
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114  
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