

Introduction to Creative Writing NYU Undergraduate Course

Instructor: Kamelya Omayma Youssef

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Class Time: MW 8-9:15 AM

Office Hours: By Appointment or Tuesday 10 AM - 1 PM, held at Lillian Vernon Creative Writer's House or as otherwise announced

Course Description:

In this course, we will collectively take on the task of exploring the breadth of imaginative output that language is capable of; and as the mind is the place where ideas are born, and the place where ideas are received, we will do the labor of exploring our own minds and understanding ourselves. This is all of course an individual journey, one that you will be embarking upon with the rest of the class, with my guidance, and all of yours as well.

Language is the vehicle, and it will take on different forms (poetry and prose, both fictional and non-fictional and the inevitable intermingling of the two). We will work together to read different works of literature, understand *how* they're working, and learn from them ways to apply those *hows* to our own work. We will also read craft essays and theory essays that help us understand the discourse of literature over time, and to learn the lessons that some experts are trying to teach us about writing. And we will also engage in the age-old practice of trusting your own gut, and inventing our own forms. Expect rigor. Expect the freedom of playdough too.

We will explore writing in our own individual forms, and we will also work with some received forms to practice, to learn how to flex using the currency that has been used throughout time and still hasn't let go. (i.e. I will invite you to write a sonnet and also to reinvent the sonnet, destroy it, if you are so inclined.) I am more a fan of reading a few important things deeply and thoughtfully instead of reading a large quantity but in a shallow way. Both have their merits, and this course will focus on spending an appropriate amount of quality time with works, instead of trying to fly through them. I will give you primary readings and suggested readings. I will also give you prompts that you are welcome to follow but if the spirit moves you to write something outside of the prompt, I welcome this endeavor with wide open arms.

In addition to learning from the words of others, we will be writing our own works and reading each other's works and responding to them in workshop. Our workshop will be driven by two things: 1) the feeling function and 2) the summary function. I will explain this on the first day, and we will get better at it throughout the semester.

I will also have office hours where you are welcome to come chat about whatever you'd like and you're especially welcome to bring in pieces to discuss with me one on one beyond the workshop. Wednesdays will be for craft lessons, discussions, and in-class writing prompts. Mondays will be for group workshops, when you will get ~fifteen sets of eyes on your work. You should bring 15 copies of the piece you want workshopped to class on Monday, so that it will be workshopped the following Monday. This gives you the weekend to think on your craft lesson and apply it to your work; it also gives everyone a few days to sit with your work; ideally, it clears your mind so that your homework is done a week in advance, and you can at least workshop without having suffered a night or more of logistical panic, as college students and human beings are wont to do.

Other threads we will discuss throughout are: the writing process, how literature works out loud, art and social justice, and anything else you find relevant as a group. You are welcome to contribute your ideas for things we should read. Ideally, you'd send these sooner than later so I can find a proper place to fit them in the syllabus readings.

Grading:

Grades in this course will be based on labor-based contract grading policy. This demystifies the grading process (hopefully) and students then can know what kind of work to put in to get the grade they want and deserve.

- Each of these criteria will be calculated using a weighted average.

You can expect this... →	A	B	C	D
If you do this ↓				
Product & Process	Submit full portfolio consisting of accepted combinations of texts in List A, B, C.	Submit partial portfolio due to one text missing or incomplete	Submit partial portfolio due to two texts missing or incomplete	Submit partial portfolio due to three texts missing or incomplete
	Each story/poem/flash in your portfolio should be accompanied with as follows: 1 st draft, final draft, other drafts as needed, 1-2 pg explanation of revisions with sources from class texts. Include MLA formatted works cited.			
Attendance	No absences; The One excused/unexcused absence	2 unexcused absences	3 unexcused absences	4 unexcused absences
	*“Personal day” in which you attend but don’t participate doesn’t count as absence. *Health situations that arise should be documented; keep me updated as soon as you know.			
Participation	Consistent meaningful and thoughtful engagement with the course texts and discussions. You are fully prepared for every workshop, as reader and writer.	Consistent engagement with texts and discussions. You are partially prepared for workshop, as reader and/or writer.	Surface-level engagement with texts and discussions. You are barely prepared for workshop, as reader and/or writer.	Little indication of genuine engagement with texts and discussions. You are not prepared for workshop, as reader and/or writer.
	This doesn’t mean taking up space in the classroom, but asking questions, offering comments, being present and an active participant in your own learning and that of others.			

Portfolio Options		
List A: 1 short story (10-20 pages) 2 flash fiction 2 poems	List B: 3 short stories (10-20 pages) 2 poems	List C: 1-2 short stories (10-20 pages) 4 poems

Assignment Descriptions

PRODUCT:

Portfolio

- For each piece you submit for your portfolio, you must submit the first and second drafts, with a 1-2 page explanation of what you changed in revision and what you learned from this revision experience. If you need help getting this going, think of it as a note to self, or as a note to fellow students. You're also welcome to submit this as a video explanation if you don't want to write it. You can cite your sources for the changes you made i.e. if Charles Baxter essay really helped you, or a particular piece influenced the changes, talk about it! One of the greatest lies told about literature and originality is that there is such a thing as a truly singularly original thought. We don't exist in a vacuum! ("There are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt." Audre Lorde)

PARTICIPATION:

Workshop Responses

- We will learn how to conduct workshop together in theory and in practice in class. Your workshop response should end up being one page for each writer. Each time someone submits a piece to workshop, you should give them an annotated printout of their piece, and also a written response with the following:
 - A one-paragraph **summary** of their piece (identifying/describing the speaker, the setting, the plot/events, the theme, the devices, etc.).
 - One paragraph or bullet points with **praise** for the piece.
 - One paragraph or bullet points with **opportunities for growth** for the piece.
 - Optional:
 - One paragraph or bullet points about how the work makes you feel at different points, and by the end. This can also be done in annotations.
 - One paragraph or pullet points with how this work inspires you and/or what it reminds you of. This can also be done in annotations.

Reading

- I recommend that you approach the readings as a reader and a writer. This might require multiple reads. Make sure you allot enough time to conduct a thorough reading. For poems, I definitely recommend reading them multiple times. For short stories, two read throughs could be enough, but if you find yourself obsessing about the piece and wanting to see more about its mechanics, definitely read it as much as is satisfying to you.
- In terms of reading poems and prose, the goal for the first read through is to allow yourself to feel the full effects of the piece. On your second read through, then start to think about the mechanics; then you should allow yourself to think like a writer, poring through the piece and deconstructing it to see how it does what it does. But in order to see how it does, you should first give yourself a chance to feel what it does first.
- In terms of craft pieces, I'm less religious. Take notes, annotate, and summarize. The goal is to summarize each paragraph or each piece as a whole to glean all of the tips and tricks of what it takes to be a writer.
- I highly encourage journaling and note-taking. Keep a notebook specifically for this class.

Attendance:

- The One: Because our class is so short and concentrated, attendance is key. You are allowed one absence, we'll call it The One. It can be excused or unexcused (doctor's note or not, if you're missing class, I'm trusting you're doing it for the right necessary reasons).
- Also, to avoid a situation that arises with absences, I am allowing you one "personal health" day; meaning, if you were not able to do the work for the class, and would otherwise not

show up, I'd rather you come to class, and say to me (or email me beforehand) that you'll be using your personal day for this session). If you are having multiple of these days, come see me during office hours so we can chat and make a strategic plan. TLDR: if you didn't do the work, you can still come, but just use your one "personal health" day pass and give me a heads up.

- Our class is so short. Don't come tardy. Arriving late three times will equal one absence.

Texts for Class

- All required texts on the class schedule will be available as PDFs on our NYU Classes page. I highly encourage that you print these out.
- From each category below, you are encouraged to buy at least one of the books; you are welcome to acquire more if you are so inclined. Annotation is highly encouraged, and is actually considered the first step of composition, so get copies you can write on comfortably.
 - o Best American Series
 - Best American Short Fiction
 - Best American Poetry
 - Best American Essays
 - Best American Experimental Poetry
 - o Daily Rituals Series
 - Daily Rituals: How Artists Work: <https://www.amazon.com/Daily-Rituals-How-Artists-Work/dp/0307273601>
 - Daily Rituals: Women at Work: <https://www.amazon.com/Daily-Rituals-Women-at-Work/dp/1524732958>
 - o Letters to a Young... Series
 - Letters to a Young Poet – Rainer Maria Rilke
 - Letters to a Young Novelist – Mario Vargas Llosa

Plagiarism

One of the greatest lies told about literature and originality is that there is such a thing as a truly singularly original thought. We don't exist in a vacuum! As Audre Lorde wrote, "There are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt."

With that said, it is a given that we are influenced by other writers. There is a long tradition of showing how others have influenced you within your work. Ways to do this include but are not limited to: include a byline that says *after [so and so]* or *after Lydia Davis's The Cow* or *with a line from Li Young Li*; include a footnote at the end; mention the other writer(s) and/or their piece(s) with your own artfulness. This is how to not plagiarize.

With that said, if you do plagiarize, you will put me in an unfortunate situation in which I will swiftly follow NYU's Plagiarism procedures as outlined on NYU's Academic Integrity policy. The protocol for plagiarism is as follows, and I reserve the right to skip over any step: 1) Warning 2) Disciplinary Probation 3) Suspension 4) Dismissal. This is especially critical within creative writing because it is a field that welcomes shared influence and that also has established protocol for crediting, and anything beyond that protocol is an offensive violation and exploitation of work that people chose to share with the world. Their contributions should be honored, and within this stipulation, your work is protected too.

Understanding NYU's Harassment Policy

Harassment among students and faculty will not be tolerated. If you or anyone you know is experiencing harassment, speak up. Let me know, and we will follow procedures in accordance with NYU's policies concerning the protection of student rights. If you have any questions about this, check out the following website or speak to me. A brief and useful overview of NYU's harassment policy is available online at: <http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/equal-opportunity/harassment-and-discrimination.html>.

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 themselves, we always 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 the instructor's attention and concern. 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.

Ways To Get Involved With The NYU Creative Writing Program

- **CWP Website:** Visit the Creative Writing Program website: www.cwp.fas.nyu.edu
- **Listserv:** As an enrolled student, you are automatically enrolled in the Creative Writing Undergraduate Listserv. This will send events and opportunities straight to your inbox. If you are not receiving listserv emails, subscribe by sending an email titled "Join UG Listserv" to creative.writing@nyu.edu.
- **Minor in Creative Writing:** Yes, you can minor in CW! Visit the CWP website for the (CAS) Minor Declaration Form and an in-depth description of the requirements.
- **Intermediate & Advanced Workshops; Master Classes; Summer Programs:** If you want to pursue further creative writing classes, consider the following: Intermediate Workshops for after you finish this introductory one; you can apply to attend a Master Class, you can apply for Intensive Summer Programs: Writers in Florence/New York/Paris. There are also so many local opportunities to develop your writing just by being in New York.
- **Undergraduate Literary Journal:** *West 10th* is our student-edited literary journal for undergraduates, released annually in April. A call for submissions for the 2018-2019 issue will go out during the Fall '18 semester, and editorial applications for the 2018-19 issue will be requested in the Spring '18 semester. For more information about the journal, please visit: <https://as.nyu.edu/cwp/undergraduate/west-10th.html>.
- **Undergraduate Awards & Prizes:** Each year, the Creative Writing Program administers undergraduate writing awards, prizes, and scholarship funds. Students should check out the "Awards" page on the CW website.
- **Special Events for Undergraduates:** The Creative Writing Program hosts several events during the year for undergraduates, including an end-of-semester student reading each term and a *West 10th* reading and reception each April.

SCHEDULE:

Week 1	Jan 27	Jan 29
Prep	First Day	Overview
Product	Syllabus, Goals, Free Write, Poem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Team Building * 1st Poetry Craft Class: Poetry as a Container of Feeling * Reading: Poetry is Not a Luxury – Audre Lorde, Paul Celan, Lucille Clifton, Jamaal May
Week 2	Feb 3	Feb 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Artist Routines & Poems U Luv * Reading: Sharon Olds, Mohja Kahf, Hayan Charara <p>Workshop group A: Bring poems to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 2nd Poetry Craft Class: Poem as Obsession (and Scanning) * Reading: Podcast episode of VS., Charles Baxter – Dysfunctional Narrator, Safia Elhillou, Rainer Maria Rilke, Andrea Abi-Karam
Week 3	Feb 10	Feb 12
	<p>TBD: Workshop Day 1 OR Poetic Form</p> <p>Poetic Form</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Reading: The Ode, Carl Phillips; American Sonnets; Berrigan Sonnet; Vs. Episode; Villanelle; Pantoum <p>Workshop group B: Bring poems to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 3rd Poetry Craft Class: Poem as a telescopic tool * Reading: Mohja Kahf, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, Paul Valery, Charles Baudelaire, Pablo Neruda * Maybe Bonus Session: Poem as an alchemical tool * Reading: Nate Marshall, Hala Alyan, Aracelis Girmay
Week 4	Feb 17	Feb 19
	No Class, President's Day	On Revision
Week 5	Feb 24	Feb 26
	<p>Workshop Day 2</p> <p>Workshop group A: Bring poems to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 4th Poetry Craft Class: Poem as a long silent scream * Reading: Projective Verse, Etel Adnan, Aime Cesaire, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha
Week 6	Mar 2	Mar 4
	<p>Workshop</p> <p>Bonus Session: Poem as sound object</p> <p>Allen Ginsberg, Fred Moten, Tracie Morris</p> <p>Workshop group B: Bring poems to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 5th Poetry Craft Class: Poem as a visual object * Reading: William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, Apollinaire, e. e. cummings, Phillip B. Williams * Bonus Reading: On Erasure Poems – Phillip Metres, Sappho
Week 7	Mar 9	Mar 11
	<p>Workshop</p> <p>+ Visual Poem Activity: Bring scraps of newspapers</p> <p><i>No workshop when we return.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * 6th Poetry Craft Class: The Prose Poem / The Flash Fiction * Reading: Marwa Helal, Lydia Davis, Jorge Luis Borges, Hanif Willis Aburraqib, Roxane Gay

Week 8	Mar 16	Mar 18
	<i>No classes, Spring Recess</i>	
Week 9	Mar 23	Mar 25
	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #1: Introducing the Short Story as Magic Trick * Julio Cortazar – Axolotl * In-Class Prompt</p>	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #2: What is a short story? * Reading: The Lunatic’s Eclipse – Randa Jarrar, Distance of The Moon – Italo Calvino, What The Moon Brings - HP Lovecraft, The Nature and Aim of Fiction – Flannery O’Connor</p>
Week 10	Mar 30	Apr 1
	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #3: Dialogue/Structure * Reading: ZZ Packer “Brownies”, Clarice Lispector – The Hen, Lorrie Moore – People like that are the only people here, Nam Le – Love and Honour and Pity and Compassion and Sacrifice...</p> <p>Workshop group A: Bring short stories to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #4: Speculative Past, Present, & Future * Reading: Ursula LeGuin Chapter from Steering the Craft * In-class activity: “The Thing From The Future”</p>
Week 11	Apr 6	Apr 8
	<p>Workshop Workshop group B: Bring short stories to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #5: “I Want to Speak In My Own Voice” (On Voice in Short Fiction) * Reading: Miranda July, Tommy Orange, Glenn Shaheen, Junot Diaz, Ursula LeGuin Craft Reading</p>
Week 12	Apr 13	Apr 15
	<p>Workshop Workshop group A: Bring short stories to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #6: Short Story as a Conceptual Prism Reading: Ursula LeGuin - The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas, Randa Jarrar - Testimony of Malik, Prisoner #287690, George Saunders - Jon</p>
Week 13	Apr 20	Apr 22
	<p>Workshop Workshop group B: Bring short stories to be workshopped next Monday.</p>	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #7: Be of Your Time: Best Debut Short Stories * Reading: Ava Tomasula y Garcia – Videoteca Fin del Mundo, Cristina Fries – New Years in La Calera, Zombie Horror – Drew McCutchen</p>
Week 14	Apr 27	Apr 29
	<p>Workshop <i>No workshop next Monday. Session on revision instead.</i></p>	<p>* Fiction Craft Class #8: Experimentation as Form * Reading: Excerpts from Salvador Plascencia: The People of Paper, Interview with George Saunders</p>
Week 15	May 4	May 6

	* On Revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion, Activity, and Resource Sharing - Bring your portfolio drafts. 	* On Publishing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussion, Activity and Resource Sharing - Bring your portfolio drafts.
Week 16	May 11	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Portfolios Due - End of Class Celebration 	