

Introduction to Creative Writing

“One is deluded if one believes that one can actually preserve the world in words, but one is just playing games if one doesn’t try.”

– Reginald Shephard, from “Why I Write”

What We’ll Do: Go back. Read that quote again.

That’s it. That’s what we are going to do. **We’re going to try.**

How We’ll Do It: 1) Cuteness aside, we really will try—and try often. **This is a writing class, so we’ll write a lot, and you’ll hand in some of that writing every week.** To help—and because it’s fun—we will have writing prompts and in-class exercises to spark & spur on our work.

2) Writing and reading are not even two sides of the same coin—they are the face on the coin and the fact of its visibility, its impression and relief. So, **we’re also going to read widely & hungrily**, including peer work and a variety of attempts from published writers. You will be expected to think about and comment on this work—via constructive response for peers and engaged reflection on craft for assigned texts.

3) **We will be a community.** We will work to build trust so we can share and respond to writing with productive generosity. We will value bringing our whole selves to workshop and discussion. We will respect and appreciate each other as fellow learners & artists.

Our Guideposts: While we will read some Canonical™ texts, we’ll also read a lot of new work, some pretty funky work, and the work of writers who hold marginalized identities and whose work & predecessors’ work has been consequently & intentionally written out of The Canon™. We will talk about why all this work rocks. Then, **we will learn to name exactly why it rocks, what tools we can learn from it & add to our own shiny toolboxes.**

This course will not treat prose and poetry, or narrative and lyric writing, as distinct sections of a writing curriculum. Each week, we’ll read works from both murky sides of this divide, and, often as not, work that crosses this divide, or eddies comfortably mid-crossing. Genre, like form or character, is a tool of communication & art; it is useful only inasmuch as it helps to accomplish the thing. The craft lessons we’ll learn from each text are applicable to any genre, and there is extra insight to be gleaned from reading a story as poetry, a poem as story.

Similarly, **prompts and writing exercises will have options** to pursue narrative or lyric writing. You may decide which avenue(s) to follow each week, understanding that you should, over the term, write roughly equal amounts in the poetry/lyric & prose/narrative traditions.

The Nitty-Gritty: Grades will be determined according to the following breakdown—

Class (20%) You’ve got to come, and you’ve got to be prepared. This means:

- a) showing up on time to class, printed readings in hand, and with appropriate responses printed or prepared.

- b) participating in both reading discussions and workshop critique through verbal engagement, written response, active listening, and peer support. A workshop is a community of artists learning and sharing together. To be part of a community, one must invest time, thought, and engagement.

A note on tardiness & absence: Plan to arrive before class begins—anything more than 15 minutes late is considered an absence. More than two absences will result in a 10% final grade deduction. If you'd like your absence to be excused, you'll need to communicate your absence beforehand and provide documentation if appropriate.

Reading (20%) You've got to read the readings before each class, both peer work and class texts. You'll also need to respond to these texts in the following ways:

- a) For each assigned class text, you'll bring Three Typewritten Sentences of response, printed and to be handed in at the end of the class for which the text is assigned.
- b) For each peer's work that we workshop, you'll bring in two copies of your final written comments by the next workshop date—one copy to be given to your peer and one to the instructor.

Writing (20%) We will write every week, which means you will turn in writing every week. Not all of this work will be workshopped. Instead, every student will have appx. 85 minutes of workshop time, distributed across alternate workshop days. This is your time to use as you please, so long as it is for workshopping writing. When it is your workshop week, you'll send the piece you'd like to work on to the class by that week's Monday/Tuesday at 12pm midnight.

Community (10%) Engage with the NYU/C writing communities! Come to my office hours, preferably at least twice! Go to at least one talk or reading! NYU hosts talks throughout the year and literary communities across NYC host countless more. Afterwards, bring Three Type-written Sentences to our next class—things you learned, thoughts or questions provoked, etc.

The End (10%) At the end of class, a portfolio of your revised written work will be due. This can include as many pieces of your writing as you'd like, but must include, at minimum, five pages of poetry or lyric writing, and five pages of prose fiction or non-fiction narrative writing.

Class Schedule (Note: all readings subject to change & will be provided by instructor in PDF):

- W Sept 9 – **Syllabus & Class Guidelines**
This sounds boring but instead it will be fun! We'll talk! We'll do some writing! There might be doughnuts! Show up to find out!
- M Sept 13 – **Why do we make words? – Voice & The Impulse to Write**
Readings: Terry Tempest Williams (from "When Women Were Birds") & Layli Long Soldier (from "Whereas")
- W Sept 15 – **Look at this stuff! Isn't it neat?! – Objects & Images**
Readings: Gertrude Stein (from "Tender Buttons"), Maggie Nelson (from "Bluets"), Ross Gay, Sharon Olds (from "Odes")

- M Sept 20 – **Workshop** – 12 min workshops, Students 1-6 (numbers assigned in Class #1)
- W Sept 22 – **Workshop** – 12 min workshops, Students 7-12
- M Sept 27 – **Write Where You Are, Write What You Know – Place & Memory**
Readings: Mary Oliver, Selections from “Black Nature”’s Anthology ed. Camille Dungy, Ada Limón, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Annie Proulx (from “Close Range”), Joan Didion (from “Slouching Towards Bethlehem”)
- W Sept 29 – **Workshop** – 15 min workshops, Students 1-5
- M Oct 4 – **The Self – Interiority & (First) Person(al) Narrative**
Readings: F. Scott Fitzgerald (“The Crack-Up”), Arisa White (from “Who’s Your Daddy”), Don Mee Choi, Sylvia Plath, Morgan Parker, Terri Campion (“Thanksgiving, 1974”), Roxane Gay, Etheridge Knight
- W Oct 6 – **Workshop** – 15 min workshops, Students 6-10
- T (!! Oct 12 – **The Not-Self – Character & Persona**
Readings: Patricia Smith, Claudia Rankine, Robert Lynn Wood, H.D., Kristen Iskandrian (“Good with Boys”), William Faulkner
- W Oct 13 – **Workshop** – 15 min workshops, Students 11-3
- M Oct 18 – **Write Where You Are(n’t), What You Do(n’t) Know - Invented Place/Memory**
Readings: N. K. Jemisin, James Tate, Ken Chen, Vievee Francis (“Say it, Say it Any Way You Can”), Tarfia Faizullah (“100 Bells” and “Against Explanation”)
- W Oct 20 – **Workshop** – 25 min workshops, Students 4-6
- M Oct 25 – **Constraint & Conceit #1 – Some Work with Forms**
Readings: EE Cummings, Jericho Brown (from “The Tradition”), Terrence Hayes, Selections from “The Making of a Poem” ed. Mark Strand & Eavan Boland, Clarice Lispector, Joy Harjo (from “She Had Some Horses”)
- W Oct 27 – **Workshop** – 25 min workshops, Students 7-9
- M Nov 1 – **Constraint & Conceit #2 – Some (More! Funky!) Work with Forms**
Readings: Carmen Maria Machado (from “Her Body and Other Parties”), Angbeen Saleem (“poem mad lib for the apocalypse”), A. Van Jordan (from “M-A-C-N-O-L-I-A”), Layli Long Soldier (from “Whereas,”) Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (from “Dictee”), Lori Jakiela
- W Nov 3 – **Workshop** – 25 min workshops, Students 1-3

- M Nov 8 – **Words are a social construct!! – Language(s) as (a) Malleable Tool(s)**
Readings: Jos Charles (from “feeld”), Mark Leidner, EE Cummings, Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah (“The Era”), D. A. Powell (from “Tea”), Marwa Helal (from “Invasive Species”), Etel Adnan
- W Nov 10 – **Workshop** – 25 min workshops, Students 10-12
- M Nov 15 – **Remix – Speaking Back, Re-Writing, and Source Material**
Readings: Carmen Maria Machado (from “Her Body and Other Parties), Hannah Sanghee Park (from “The Same-Different), Robin Coste Lewis (from “Voyage of the Sable Venus)
- W Nov 17 – **Workshop** – 5 min speed-workshops, all
- M Nov 22 – **Returning to Self & Approaching Identity**
Readings: Sherman Alexie (“What You Pawn I Will Redeem”), Danez Smith (from “Don’t Call Us Dead”), Cristina Henríquez (“Everything is Far from Here”), Tope Folarin (“Can a Black Novelist Write Autofiction?”), Kevin Young (from “Jelly Roll”)
- W Nov 24 – **Workshop** – 15 min workshops, Students 4-8
- M Nov 29 – **What comes next? – Vision & Re-vision**
Readings: torrin a. greathouse, Ada Limón, Elizabeth Bishop, Allen Ginsberg, Gary Soto
- W Dec 1 – **Workshop** – 15 min workshops, Students 9-12
- M Dec 6 – **Re-vision Workshop** – 12 min workshops, Students 1-6
- W Dec 8 – **Re-vision Workshop** – 12 min workshops, Students 7-12
- M Dec 13 – **End of Class Celebration & Reading!!** – Maybe more doughnuts?!

Class Policies:

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 Web site: <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 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. 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.

Submission Policy

All responses, exercises, workshop submissions must be turned in on the assigned deadline, either by email, NYU classes, or in class—as per the syllabus. It is your responsibility to have printed or photocopied responses, Typewritten Sentences, and copies of your workshop piece(s).

Plagiarism

There is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy for both academic papers and creative pieces. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department, without exception.