

Introduction to Prose and Poetry | Fall '21  
T/Th: 2 PM - 3:15 PM  
CRWRI-UA.815.008  
Instructor: Jack Davis  
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“The artist is distinguished from all other responsible actors in society—the politicians, legislators, educators, and scientists—by the fact that he is his own test tube, his own laboratory, working according to very rigorous rules, however unstated these may be, and cannot allow any consideration to supersede his responsibility to reveal all that he can possibly discover concerning the mystery of the human being.”

-- James Baldwin

“it was the best of vibes, it was the worst of vibes.”

-- Phoebe Bridgers

“I’m going to put quotes on my syllabus to make my students like me.”

--Every writing instructor ever

### **About this course**

This introductory course is designed as an entry into your relationship with creative writing. The world needs good writers. The qualities of a good writer -- humility, perceptiveness, creativity, grit -- also tend to be present in those who go on to make positive change in the world. This is all to say: everyone has a place in this class.

Whether you have written ever since your childhood or haven’t written a poem in your life (as was the case when I stumbled into my first writing workshop), my hope is to create a space that is enlivening and enriching for each of you.

### **Course structure**

I have designed the course to focus on three abstract goals.

**Unlocking imagination** Best said by Stephen King in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*:

“There is a muse, but he’s not going to come fluttering down into your writing room and scatter creative fairy-dust all over your typewriter or computer. He lives in the ground. He’s a basement kind of guy. You have to descend to his level, and once you get down there you have to furnish an apartment for him to live in. You have to do all the grunt labor, in other words, while the muse sits and smokes cigars and admires his bowling trophies and pretends to ignore you. Do you think it’s fair? I think it’s fair. He may not be much to look at, that muse-guy, and he may not be much of a conversationalist, but he’s got inspiration. It’s right that you should do all the work and burn all the mid-night oil, because the guy with the cigar and the little wings has got a bag of magic.”

**Introducing craft** Craft is the technical part of writing. Good writers use a balance of craft and intuition to shape a reader's experience. In this class we'll dive into content such as form, syntax, voice, rhythm, metaphor, . . . . We'll also host other writers (hopefully!) so you can get a more diverse perspective on various writing styles and approaches.

**Building community** Writing workshops should be rejuvenating. They are spaces of bravery, vulnerability, and friendship. Writers make the best friends. Even if you don't make friends with every person in this class, it is my hope that this course points you to the rich community of writers within this school and this city.

### **Class structure**

Most classes will begin and close with some sort of written or oral exercise. On non-workshop days, we will generally read, discuss, and practice together, often with some weekly theme in mind.

On workshop days, we will read and discuss your own work. It is my hope that each of you will get workshopped four times throughout the semester. This course is also to introduce you to a writer's workshop, and get used to noticing and critiquing the subtleties of language.

### **Expectations**

I really only expect you to try. Creative writing courses are notoriously Easy A classes, not because they are easy, but because judging students based on quality in an introductory class kills innovation, creativity, and risk-taking. Rant over. Please try and you will make an A.

Other expectations:

-No electronics. It will just be us and the page. If you require an accommodation on this front, don't stress! Contact me and we can work something out.

-Attendance is mandatory, obviously. Please give a heads up if you plan to miss class, even if it's short notice. You receive two excused absences. An excused absence provides a compelling reason of absence *before* class. Extenuating circumstances will be evaluated as needed. Come to class.

-Class starts on time. Excessive tardiness is disrespectful to your peers and will impact your grade.

-Each week you will receive an experimental writing assignment in class. It is due on Sunday 11.59pm via NYU classes. No late assignments will be accepted.

### **Class texts**

The texts we will engage in this class include poems, essays, books, podcasts, and an array of visual mediums. There is a reader for this course which will be sent out: please print this out so you can mark it up.

Please also purchase these books:

*Sea Prayer, Khaled Hosseini*  
*Citizen, Claudia Rankine*  
*In the Dream House, Carmen Maria Machado*

Please check the syllabus for what text you should complete before the following class. Please thoughtfully interact with whatever is listed. Come to class prepared to discuss, preferably with written notes.

Please read!

### **Workshop Groups**

The class will be divided into Group A, Group B, and Group C. The intention is to create internal class rivalries that will manifest into life-long alliances: drama, conflict, betrayal, redemption. But actually it's just for time management. Group A and Group B will have four or five students, while Group C will have two to three. Group A and B workshops will take up the entire class, while on Group C days we will workshop for only a portion of the class. I will make every effort possible to make sure everyone is workshopped equally, and if you feel like you're being slanted on this front please don't hesitate to let me know.

### **Office Hours**

Office hours/conferences are an important part of individual feedback that I hope you find helpful. You must sign up for two conferences (30-40 min meetings) before the midpoint of the semester (10/21) and one conference after (3 total).

Additional office hours can boost a sagging participation grade, but not going to additional conferences will not hurt your grade.

### Live Readings

NYU curates an exceptional series of visiting writers every semester. You should go to everything you can/want, but you are required to attend at least **one**. You may also attend a reading outside of NYU, including spoken word events, live choreopoems, or bookstore readings. Please document your attendance in some way and upload it to NYU Classes by the end of the last day of class.

### Midterm Project

The midterm project will be announced in the third week of class and due six weeks later, **before class on October 21st**.

### Final Project

The final project will be more tailored to each student's individual interests and assigned during your third required conference (after midterm). Expect the workload of the final project to be commensurate with a standard college paper. **The final project is due before the last day of class on December 14.**

### Final Portfolio

Your final portfolio is all your written work for the semester compiled into one document. Please print it out with a cover page, stapled, and **bring to the last day of class on December 14.**

### Grading

Grading will be based on the following three questions:

Did you show up? **33%**

- **Three** office hour visits
- Attendance/participation in class
- **One** out-of-class reading attendance

Did you try? **33%**

- Serious engagement and investment in your own writing as well as your reflections on class readings and classmates' work

Did you write? **34%** because this is most important

- On-time completed assignment (weekly)
- Midterm project completed by due date
- Final project completed by due date
- Final portfolio completed by due date

**Plagiarism**

[Don't.](#)

**Health & Wellness**

Generally speaking, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, recurrent themes of violence and self-harm may prompt the instructor to check in with a student in a non-judgemental way.

There are resources that you are entitled to as a human, and made available to you as an NYU student. Please use them! A resource list, including mental health and disability services, is included at the end of this syllabus.

**Contact me at [jack.davis@nyu.edu](mailto:jack.davis@nyu.edu)** for all questions / concerns / observations. I will respond within 24 hours and probably before that. If you have a more serious concern, I would appreciate it if you would schedule an appointment to talk in person.

**Course Schedule****WEEK 1: ATTENTION**

9/2 Course Introduction  
*NOT TO LOOK AWAY*, Marie Howe  
*Dear Amy Nehzooukammyatootill*, Amy Nehzooukammyatootill

**By next class:**

**OPTIONAL** *In the Room with Marie Howe* ([Watch](#) or [Listen](#))

**WEEK 2: SHAPE**

9/7 *How to Draw a Perfect Circle*, Terrance Hayes  
*How (Not) To Speak To God*, Mary Szybist

**By next class:** *Life Drawing* by R.A. Villanueva ([Listen](#))  
Finish *Sea Prayer*, Khaled Hosseini

9/9 Book Discussion: *Sea Prayer*, Khaled Hosseini  
*The Shape of Stories*, Kurt Vonnegut

**By next class:**

Print out *x* copies for workshop. Bring to class.  
*The Art of Finding* by Linda Gregg

**WEEK 3: IMAGE**

9/14 Midterm project announced

**By next class:** Come with feedback for Group A

9/16 Workshop Group A

**By next class:** Come with feedback for Group B

**WEEK 4: TIME**

9/21 Workshop Group B

**By next class:** *Kindred (excerpt), Octavia Butler*  
Come with feedback for Group C

9/23 Poems on Time:  
*Ever, Chessy Normile*  
*Hurry, Marie Howe*  
*August, Alex Dimitrov*  
Workshop Group C

**By next class:**  
*Hip-Hop Ghazal, Patricia Smith*  
*Ghazal, After Ferguson, Yusef Komunyakaa*

**WEEK 5: FORM**

9/28 Ghazals  
*Even the Rain, Agha Shahid Ali*  
Villanelles  
                     *One Art, Elizabeth Bishop*

**By next class:** Finish *In the Dream House*

9/30 Book discussion: *In the Dream House, Carmen Maria Machado*

                      
**By next class:** *We Feel Now A Largeness Coming On, Tracy K. Smith*  
*jasper texas 1998, Lucille Clifton*

**WEEK 6: BODY**

10/5 Craft Talk with Gabrielle Calvocoressi ([Watch](#))

*Song, Bridget Pegeen Kelly*

**By next class:** *Some Thoughts on Mercy, Ross Gay*

Come with feedback for Group A/B (will indicate)

10/7 *The Physical Traits That Define Men and Women In Literature* ([Access here](#))

*The Poetry of the In-Between, Sharon Olds* ([Watch](#))

Workshop Group A/B

**By next class:** Come with feedback for Group B/C (will indicate)

**WEEK 7: CITIZENSHIP**

10/12 Legislative Day - Classes meet according to Monday schedule

10/14 Workshop Group B/C

**By next class:**

Finish *Citizen, Claudia Rankine*

*How Can I Say This So We Can Stay in This Car Together?, Claudia Rankine* ([Listen](#))

Print out *x* copies for workshop. Bring to class.

**WEEK 8: PROTEST**

10/19 Book Discussion: *Citizen, Claudia Rankine*

*Against Poetry, Kaveh Akbar*

**By next class:** Finish midterm project

**MIDTERM PROJECT DUE BEFORE CLASS**

10/21 Free space to work in additional workshops, discussions, poems

**By next class:** Print out *x* copies for workshop. Bring to class.



**WEEK 9: MEMORY**

10/26 \_\_\_\_\_ *A Letter to My Mother That She Will Never Read, Ocean Vuong*

**By next class:** Feedback for Group A

10/28 Workshop Group A

**By next class:** Feedback for Group B

**WEEK 10: MASK**

11/2 \_\_\_\_\_ Workshop Group B

**By next class:** *Girl, Alexander Chee*  
Feedback for Group C  
Print x copies for Week 12 workshops

11/4 \_\_\_\_\_ *Altered After Too Many Years Under the Mask, CA Conrad*  
*I Am Not Batman, Marco Ramirez*  
Workshop Group C

**By next class:**

**WEEK 11: EXPERIMENT**

11/9 Experimental writing day

11/11 Conversations with Other Poets

**WEEK 12: FREESPACE**

11/16

This week we will workshop anyone whose workshop we may have missed or has the desire to be workshopped an additional week

11/18

**By next class:** *excerpts, Voyage of the Sable Venus, Robin Coste Lewis*  
*Ekphrasis, Art on Art by Phyllis E. Roker* ([Watch here](#))  
Feedback for Week 12 workshop: all groups

**WEEK 13: EKPHRASIS**

**11/23** Ekphrasis at \_\_\_\_\_ Museum (TBA, COVID-pending)

**11/25** No classes - Native American Remembrance

**WEEK 14: HOME**

**11/30** Workshop Group A/B  
*kitchenette building, Gwendolyn Brooks*

**12/2** Workshop Group B/C  
*a poem where no one is deported, José Guadalupe Olivarez*

**By next class:** Finish and submit final projects!

**WEEK 15: “UNTITLED”**

**12/7** **FINAL PROJECTS DUE BEFORE CLASS**  
Group A/B: Final Project Presentations

**12/9** Group B/C: Final Project Presentations

**WEEK 16: BEGINNING**

**12/14** **FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE IN CLASS**  
Class reflections. Possibly food.

Feedback on final project + portfolio will be sent to you via email.  
Final grades posted and feedback given by Winter Break Recess (1/23)

Resources! (I will continue to add more)

- [Counseling Services at SHC](#)
- [The Mindfulness Project](#)
- [Office of Public Safety](#)
- [Sexual Assault Prevention and Response](#)
- [Student Health Center](#)
- [Student Health Insurance](#)
- [Student Dental Plan/Stu-Dent](#)
- [Wellness Exchange](#)
- [Global Inclusion and Diversity](#)
- [LGBTQ Center](#)
- [Accessibility Services](#)
- [Other resources](#)