Course Description

This is an introductory creative writing course designed for undergraduates. Throughout the semester, we'll read and discuss poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as hybrid-genre forms of writing (prose poems, lyric essays, artist books, and excerpts from graphic novels). There will also be weekly craft lectures and writing exercises. All that said, the majority of our time will be devoted to reading and critiquing students' own creative work. Over the semester, each student will have three opportunities to workshop poems and/or short stories. Our class is capped 12 participants, which will also enable us to build a strong workshop community.

Course Objectives

My hope is that you will end our semester with a stronger understanding of your creative voice and the many tools of craft and form at your disposal. You'll gain practice critiquing your classmates' work, receiving feedback, and revising your writing—all integral parts of the writing process. You’ll also read work by diverse and celebrated authors and poets, with a focus on contemporary, late 20th- to 21st-century writers, many of whom write in multiple genres. Finally, this class will help you become part of a workshopping community at NYU and guide you in taking advantage of the many literary resources at the university and in New York City at-large.

Course Structure

The first third of our class (weeks 1-4) will focus primarily on poetry, while the next third (weeks 5-8) will transition into fiction. The final part of the class (weeks 9-12) will be devoted to hybrid genre forms, including creative nonfiction. The very last week of the semester will be reserved for final presentations and other activities to be determined.

Workshops: Everyone in class will submit three times this semester. Writers will submit their work in advance of their workshop date, so peers have time to read and provide written responses in preparation for class. Though I encourage you to submit both poetry and prose over the course of the semester, the genre of your submissions are ultimately up to you. During class, workshops will last about 20-25 minutes per student, regardless of genre. The length guidelines for your submissions are below:

- Prose: 4-10 pages, double-spaced
- Poetry: 1-3 pages, or up to two poems
In terms of our workshop schedule, we will rotate through six groups of two students each. We'll choose groups on the first day of class. The due dates for each group's work are below (if you notice a little wonkiness, that's just because of idiosyncrasies in the academic calendar this fall):

- **Group 1:** 9/16, 10/7, 10/28
- **Group 2:** 9/16, 10/14, 11/4
- **Group 3:** 9/23, 10/14, 11/4
- **Group 4:** 9/23, 10/21, 11/11
- **Group 5:** 9/30, 10/21, 11/11
- **Group 6:** 9/30, 10/28, 11/18

**Final portfolios:** Workshopping will end right before Thanksgiving, at which point we'll start focusing on final portfolios. Your assignment will be to choose a story and/or set of poems we covered in class, and to write a 4-6 page paper, double-spaced, analyzing the story/poems from a craft perspective. Because enthusiasm often generates the best work, my hope is that you'll analyze a story or poem that you loved—something that spoke to you, inspired you, or helped you see possibilities in writing that you hadn't before recognized. In addition, your portfolio should contain revisions of two pieces of writing you worked on in class. Revising is one of the most important and constructive parts of writing! We'll go over some principles of revision in class to help you with this process.

**Required Texts**
I will provide you with PDFs and/or print-outs of stories and poems we'll be reading for class. However, there is one full book that you'll need to either purchase or check out from the library, which is:

*Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson

This book is available at the NYU Bookstore, through the NYU Library System, and through the New York Public Library system. Please be advised that there can be a waitlist for library check-outs. I encourage you to plan ahead to ensure you'll have the book in time for our assignments.

All texts mentioned here are subject to change and likely will, based on students’ tastes and interests. Throughout the semester, I'll also introduce new authors that I deem particularly useful to your growth.

**POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS**

**Attendance**
Attendance is expected at every class meeting, save for those that fall on religious holidays you observe (if this describes you, please email me or speak to me after class about accommodations). Otherwise, **each unexplained absence will result in a 3% grade reduction**. There are a few reasons for this policy. The first is that workshops function on the basis of exchange. Your peers review your work; in turn, you provide feedback on theirs. This model is predicated on your participation. And, of course, you'll get the most out of this experience if you are fully present. I want that for you!

Of course, if you ever have an emergency that prevents you from attending, including any medical or COVID-19-related issues, please contact me directly as soon as you're able.
Please note that attendance and participation make up 35% of your overall grade.

**Punctuality**

Please make every effort to come to class on time. Each student gets two “passes” to arrive up to 5 minutes late over the course of the semester. (We all live in New York, and occasionally there are circumstances that can’t be avoided, like stopped subways.) Beyond that, late arrivals will negatively impact your attendance and participation grade.

**Participation**

As mentioned above, participation is crucial to this class. I’m excited to hear your opinions and reactions to the texts we read, and your classmates will be, too. It will be a priority of mine in class to ensure that everyone has speaking opportunities and feels welcome to participate.

**Grading**

- Attendance & Participation: 35%
- Workshop Submissions & Critiques: 35%
- Craft Assignments: 10%
- Final Portfolio: 20%

*Extra Credit: 3% added to final grade*

**Extra Credit**

Engaging with the literary community at NYU and beyond is one of the best ways to discover new authors you admire, give you ideas for your own writing, and build connections with like-minded people. I encourage you to take advantage of readings in New York. To incentivize this, I'll add extra credit to your final grade if you attend a reading or literary event—either in-person or virtual—and submit a 500-word response on your experience.

**Late Work**

Late work will not be accepted, except in the case of extenuating circumstances. If you believe this describes you, please email me so that we can discuss.

**Office Hours**

You will have two in-person conferences with me over the course of the semester. These are required, but hopefully they won’t feel like an obligation. They are fun opportunities for us to connect 1-1 and discuss your writing. Other than these pre-scheduled conferences, I’ll be available throughout the semester at predetermined hours I will share with you in our first class. I’m also available to meet by appointment. Office hours will either take place at a meeting point on-campus or on Zoom.

**Electronics**

Phones and laptops are not allowed in class. They should be kept out of sight at all times, and phones should be set to silent. Should COVID-19 alter the course of our in-person semester, however, we’ll adjust this rule as needed to enable remote learning.
Plagiarism

Don't plagiarize. If you do, I'll be required to report it to the department, which will jeopardize your academic standing. You will also fail this class. So again, don't plagiarize! It's never worth the consequences.

Content Warning

Some of the work we'll be reading this semester engages with topics like racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of violence and discrimination; it's possible that your classmates will also submit work that touches on similar topics. Whenever we discuss a work of writing that might be upsetting, I'll do my best to issue a content warning. It's my intent to foster a classroom environment that feels healthy for you, and you are always invited to reach out to me with specific concerns.

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 my attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting any assignments, 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.
SCHEDULE

First Class: Welcome!
Thurs, Sep 2
Class overview and introductions
Excerpts from The Artist's Way and Mindset
Introductory writing exercises

— POETRY —

Week 1: Why We Write

Tues, Sep 7
*Note: Today is the first day of Rosh Hashanah. Please see me for accommodations if you need them.
Discussion questions: Why do we spend our time and energy writing? How does writing enhance our lives and fit into our socio-political landscape?
Readings due:
- “Why I Write,” by George Orwell
- “Why I Write,” by Joan Didion

Thurs, Sep 9
Discussion questions: How do we define poetry? What does David Orr mean by talking about poetry as though it were Belgium? How might we apply Audre Lorde’s and Edward Hirsch’s analytical frameworks to our future readings?
Readings due:
- Excerpts from “Beautiful & Pointless,” by David Orr
- “How to Read a Poem,” by Edward Hirsch
- “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” by Audre Lorde

Week 2: Poetic Forms, and Love, and Grief

Tues, Sep 14
Review workshop etiquette and guidelines for Thursday’s mock workshop.
Discussion questions: How is Hayes contemporizing classical ideas about the sonnet? How do Hayes, Diaz, and Komunyakaa shade their poems with elements of both love and grief?
Readings due:
- Excerpt from Beautiful & Pointless, by David Orr
- Selected poems from American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassins, by Terrance Hayes
- Selected poems by Natalie Diaz
- Selected poems by Yusef Komunyakaa
Assignment: Write a sonnet for/to/about someone or something that you oppose.

Thurs, Sep 16
*Note: Today is Yom Kippur. Please see me for accommodations if you need them.
Conduct our mock workshop.
Discussion questions: How do Rich and Rilke use the poetic line to contain the unruliness of feeling? What are the benefits and drawbacks of sectionalized poems?
Readings due:
- “Twenty-One Love Poems,” by Adrienne Rich
- “The Duino Elegies,” by Rainer Maria Rilke

Assignment: Choose one section from any of the above poems, and write an emulation poem.

Week 3: Poetry as Protest + Workshops start!

Tues, Sep 21
WORKSHOP GROUP 1
Discussion questions: How might we define a protest poem? A political poem? How do this week’s readings help contextualize Lorde’s idea that “poetry is not a luxury?”
Readings due:
- Selected poems from Deaf Nation by Ilya Kaminsky
- Selected poems by Danez Smith
- Selected poems by Reginald Dwayne Betts
- “Power,” by Audre Lorde
Assignment: If you were to use a roster of characters in your next poems, who would those characters be? How would they relate to each other?

Thurs, Sep 23
WORKSHOP GROUP 2
Discussion questions: Why might a poet want to reinvigorate certain elements of language that are often considered “unpoetic” (e.g. bureaucratic language)? What strategies can a poet use to jolt readers awake? On a formal level, why might poets rely on constraint or organizational schemes?
Readings due:
- “WHEREAS,” by Layli Long Soldier
- “Howl,” by Allen Ginsberg
- To view online: Images of the annotated draft of “Howl” (link will also be emailed)
Assignment: Brainstorm a list of five constraints you might use in a future poem. This could be a linguistic constraint, a thematic constraint, a formal constraint—or something else entirely.

Week 4: The Self & The Other

Tues, Sep 28
WORKSHOP GROUP 3
Discussion questions: What is the poetic “I”? How do we situate that “I” in poetic contexts?
Readings due:
- Selected poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Ada Limón, Jericho Brown, C.K. Williams, Dan Chiasson, Suji Kwock Kim, Tracy K. Smith

Thurs, Sep 30
WORKSHOP GROUP 4
Discussion questions: In what ways is poetry a social form? What can we say to, for, and about others in poetry that might not find a voice in prose?
Readings due:
- Selected poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Ada Limón, Jericho Brown, C.K. Williams, Dan Chiasson, Suji Kwock Kim, Tracy K. Smith, Jorie Graham

— FICTION —
Week 5: Fiction Fundamentals

Tues, Oct 5
WORKSHOP GROUP 5
Discussion questions: When might a writer choose fiction over poetry, or vice versa? Is this a useful distinction?
Readings due:
  - “In Defense of Fiction,” Zadie Smith

Thurs, Oct 7
WORKSHOP GROUP 6
Discussion questions: How does Packer leverage the fiction fundamentals we covered on Tuesday, especially plot and structure?
Readings due:
  - "Brownies," ZZ Packer
Assignment: Write up two outlines: one of the plot of “Brownies,” and another of the story's timeline. Compare them.

Weeks 6: Voice & Character

Tues, Oct 12
No class!

Thurs, Oct 14
WORKSHOP GROUP 1
Discussion questions: How do Zhang and Moshfegh get us inside their characters’ heads? Where can we distinguish narrative voice from character voice?
Readings due:
  - “We Love You, Crispina,” by Jenny Zhang
  - “Dancing in the Moonlight,” by Ottessa Moshfegh
Assignment: Write a back-and-forth text or email exchange between two characters, paying attention to what the style of these messages conveys.

Week 7: Perspective & Dialogue

Tues, Oct 19
WORKSHOP GROUP 2
Discussion questions: How do Danticat and Wolff use the circumstances of their story to justify shifts in perspective? How does your perspective on these characters evolve throughout the story?
Readings due:
  - “Without Inspection,” by Edwidge Danticat
  - “Bullet in the Brain,” by Tobias Wolff
Assignment: Write a scene in which the thoughts of your character diverge from their physical situation.

Thurs, Oct 21
WORKSHOP GROUP 3
Discussion questions: What work does dialogue do inside the Smith and Paley stories? How does dialogue reveal character, conflict, time and place?
Readings due:
  - Excerpt from NW, by Zadie Smith
Assignment: Listen to conversation around you. Record 5 lines of dialogue that strike you as interesting. Ask yourself why they captivate you. Save them, and see if you can include them in a future story.

Week 8: Time, Place, Description

Tues, Oct 26
WORKSHOP GROUP 4
Discussion questions: What exactly do we mean when we call language “beautiful?” How do Nabokov and Schulz balance rich sentence-level description with larger concerns, like plot?
Readings due:
- “Spring in Fialta,” by Viktor Nabokov
- “August,” by Bruno Schulz
Assignment: Choose a place, a date (month, day, and year), and a time of day. Now describe that place at that time, using sensory details.

Thurs, Oct 28
WORKSHOP GROUP 5
Discussion questions: How do Freudenberger and Cline establish a sense of place in their stories? How does each story’s setting inform the chain of events and the emotional development of the protagonists?
Readings due:
- “Lucky Girls,” by Nell Freudenberger
- “Marion,” by Emma Cline
Assignment: Choose an age and a major milestone. Now go back to the assignment from Tuesday, and rewrite from the perspective of a narrator at that age, going through that milestone.

— HYBRID FORMS —

Week 9: The Lyric Essay

Tues, Nov 2
WORKSHOP GROUP 6
Discussion questions: What is creative nonfiction? What do you think makes Beard’s essay “lyrical?”
Readings due:
- “The Fourth State of Matter,” Jo Ann Beard

Thurs, Nov 4
WORKSHOP GROUP 1
Discussion questions: How do Rankine and Nelson blur the lines between poetry and essay/memoir? What can a fragmented form achieve that unbroken prose cannot—if anything?
Readings due:
- Excerpt from Citizen, by Claudia Rankine
- Excerpt from The Argonauts, by Maggie Nelson

Week 10: Prose Poems & Novels-in-Verse

Tues, Nov 9
WORKSHOP GROUP 2
Discussion questions: How does a prose poem differ from a poem in verse, or from a work of fiction? Are these distinctions useful, or misleading?

Readings due:
- Selections from The Penguin Anthology of the ProsePoem

Assignment: Go back to one of the poems you wrote earlier in the semester. Try reconfiguring it into a prose poem. What is gained by the transition? What is lost?

Thurs, Nov 11
WORKSHOP GROUP 3

Discussion questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing a narrative in verse form? How does Carson render character and plot using poetry?

Readings due:
- First half: Autobiography of Red by Anne Carson

Assignment: Go back to one of the prose assignments from earlier this semester. Can you break the sentences down into verse? Again, what is gained, and what is lost in this transition?

Week 11: Novels-in-Verse (cont.), and Collective Histories

Tues, Nov 16
WORKSHOP GROUP 4

Discussion questions: How do the individual pieces of Autobiography of Red work together to inform the novel at-large? What role do the appendices and introduction play?

Readings due:
- Second half: Autobiography of Red by Anne Carson

Thurs, Nov 18
WORKSHOP GROUP 5

Discussion questions: How does Alexievich’s writing complicate our definitions of nonfiction? Why might she have chosen a collective, lyrical form for her subject matter? How do we view Alexievich’s work in context of our earlier lessons on protest poems and dialogue?

Readings due:
- Selections from Voices from Chernobyl by Svetlana Alexievich

Week 12: Graphic Art as Literature

Tues, Nov 23
WORKSHOP GROUP 6

Discussion questions: How do poetic and fictional conventions emerge in Herriman’s comics? What makes a comic “literary,” and literature “comic?” How does each form make space for sociopolitical issues to emerge?

Readings due:
- Selections from Krazy Kat & Ignatz Mouse comics by George Herriman
- Selected poems from Ignatz by Monica Youn
- “The Gender Fluidity of Krazy Kat,” by Gabriella Bellot

Thurs, Nov 25
Thanksgiving, no class!

Week 13: Artists’ Books & The Art of Revision
Tues, Nov 30
Introduce final portfolios.
Discussion questions: How might the form of the book object itself inform our reading experiences? As writers, how can materials become part of the experience we want to create for our readers?
Readings due:
- Excerpt from “A Century of Artist Books,” by Johanna Drucker
- Selections from Emily Dickinson’s fascicles

Thurs, Dec 2
Discussion questions: Why revise? What is Boswell’s strategy for generative revision, and how do you see his recommendations as potentially useful for your portfolio?
Readings due:
- “Revision,” by John Boswell

Week 14: Beyond the Classroom

Tues, Dec 7
Class speaker or field trip TBD

Thurs, Dec 9
Class speaker or field trip TBD

Week 15: Final Projects & Celebration

Tues, Dec 14
Final portfolio due
Celebration!