

## Intro to Creative Writing: Poetry & Prose

**Instructor** Markita Naomi Schulman  
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**Section #** CRWRI-UA.815.002  
**Schedule** Monday & Wednesday 12:30 PM - 1:45 PM

*“Everything we invent is the truth, do not doubt it. Poetry is as precise as geometry. The conclusion is as good as its deduction, and, at a certain point, we no longer deceive ourselves in matters of the soul.”*

- Gustave Flaubert in a letter to Louise Colet

*“It is easy to be avant-garde, but it is really difficult to tell a simple story well.”*

- Barbara Loden

### Objective

To write. And to read like writers. We will examine works of poetry and prose, fiction and nonfiction—and works that don’t quite fit in any of those categories—in order to uncover the many *whys* and *hows* of writing. We will listen to the voices of authors from different places, time periods, and social worlds, and you will begin to articulate your own voice, crafting personae on the page, entering into conversation with your classmates and the wider world.

### What to Expect

#### **In-Class Writing**

We will begin all or nearly all classes with a 10 or 15 minute in-class write. Expect to walk in, see a prompt on the board, and begin writing before anything else. Hopefully, some of what you generate in class can be the jumping-off point for your assignments.

#### **Craft Discussion (Mondays)**

Each week, we will read and discuss texts that show off various literary techniques and styles. The goal of a craft discussion is not *exactly* to strip a story, essay, or poem for parts to repurpose in your own writing, but rather to gain inspiration and expand your range. You will likely admire some of the pieces we read and dislike others. Both reactions are useful. No pressure to share my taste.

Print the readings (or buy the book) so you can take margin notes, highlight passages to discuss, etc. Bring them to class.

Every week, you will email me an informal response to the readings, including:

- 1 quote to which you reacted strongly (loved or hated)
- 1 example of a literary device or craft element employed masterfully (metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, dialogue, etc. We will review more and more of these over the course of the semester.)
- 2 or so sentences about how that week’s readings connect to each other in terms of craft and/or theme (if we read more than one piece); bonus if you

also see a connection to a previous week's reading. If we only read one piece that week, tell me about its structure, style, and salient themes.

- 1 question for discussion

Print your email and bring it to class for reference.

At some point during the semester, you will choose one reading to respond to more formally (*instead of* that week's usual informal response). Write 1-2 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) about the literary devices employed in the piece, themes that emerge, and what you have gleaned from the piece that you can apply to your own writing.

### **Writing Workshop** (Wednesdays)

Each week, three students will submit their work. The writers will receive feedback from me and the class, in writing and in an in-class workshop. At the beginning of the semester, we will establish group expectations for a constructive and comfortably uncomfortable (that is, productive) workshop environment.

#### *Writers:*

You will submit a piece of original writing, 5-15 pages in length (double-spaced, 12 pt. font), one week prior to your scheduled workshop, by emailing both a Word document and a PDF to me and the class.

5-15 pages is a big range, I know. Be reasonable. A poem with lots of line breaks, an essay that includes images or block quotes, a super-dense interior monologue, and a dialogue-heavy short story will all demand a different amount of space on the page. We can discuss expectations and exceptions in class and one-on-one, as needed.

As we will discuss in class, truth and genre can be elusive concepts. All I ask is that at least one of your submissions be "true" and at least one of them be "fiction," however you define those terms. At least one of them should experiment with and embrace poetic form and at least one of them should submit to the formal conventions of what we call "prose."

You will have the opportunity to ask questions of your classmates at the end of workshop. Come prepared to do so.

#### *Readers:*

Print a copy of the pieces being workshopped. Read the pieces ahead of time—*twice*. On the first read, let the writing wash over you; read as a *reader*. On the second read, have a pen or pencil in hand and write impressions/suggestions/craft-oriented edits in the margins; read as a *writer*. You will give your marked-up copy of each piece to its author.

You will also write a 2-3 paragraph critique for each submission, which you will email as a Word document or PDF to the author, CC-ing me. We will discuss best practices for these critiques in class.

## Special Assignments

In addition to your three workshop pieces, you will have three special writing assignments:

### *Field Notes:*

We will read several examples of evocative place writing and then take an in-class “fieldtrip” to Washington Square Park or Astor Place, where you will take notes on what you observe. You will then turn your “field notes” into a study of place. Your piece may be poetry, prose, or a combination of both. It should be 2-3 pages long (double-spaced, 12 pt. font).

### *Art Writing:*

After reading and discussing several examples of art writing (criticism, essay, woven memoir), you will write your own response to a piece or pieces of art of your choice. I will provide you with a list of current museum and gallery shows. This is a chance to take advantage of New York City! You may be as creative or experimental as you like with regards to the form, style, and genre of your response. The response should be 2-3 pages long (double-spaced, 12 pt. font); please also attach a picture of the art to which you’ve chosen to respond.

### *Reading Write-Up:*

New York City hosts many writers and writerly events. You should attend at least one reading during the semester and write a short response (1 page, double-spaced, 12 pt. font) about your experience. I will let you know about upcoming events hosted by NYU and other venues around the City.

## Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester, you will submit a writer’s portfolio that celebrates the work you have completed. Unlike other assignments, you will submit your portfolio as a PDF *and* hard copy. (You can staple it; you can stick it in an envelope; you can get fancy and bind it like a chapbook; you can get scrappy and make a zine.) Your portfolio will include:

### *Title*

Come up with a title that captures the ~vibe~ of your work or your on-the-page persona—not just “So-and-so’s Portfolio.”

### *Artist’s Note:*

Write a 1-2 page (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) artist’s note of intent and reflection. What does it mean to you to *be* a writer? How would you describe your literary aesthetic? What should readers know before they read your work and what do you hope they will take away from it? How did you grow as a writer and reader this semester? What text or texts most informed your writing? How do you feel looking back at all that you created this semester? What future goals do you have as a writer, reader, student, person? (Even if you are not a Creative Writing major, these questions apply to you.)

*Workshop Pieces:*

Include all three original submissions, and substantive revisions of two of them.

*Special Assignments:*

Include all three.

*Craft Response:*

Include the 1-2 page formal response that you wrote to a reading of your choice.

Office Hours

Please schedule a meeting with me at least once this semester to discuss your goals as a writer, reader, and human being.

Grades

**15% Participation:** This means speaking in class (without dominating the discussion) and completing the readings so you can do so meaningfully. It also means participating in in-class writes (and sharing sometimes).

**30% Workshop Submissions:** You are not being graded on the subjective quality of your writing, but on effort and willingness to push your own limits as a writer.

**15% Classmate Critiques:** Complete these and be generous with your classmates. They are also taking time to engage with your work.

**15% Special Assignments:** The field notes and art writing assignments are your big opportunities to experiment; I want to see you take risks on these assignments especially. The reading write-up should be fun; enjoy it! Complete it!

**10% Reading Responses (Formal & Informal):** Consider these a weekly check-in with me and with yourself. What are you getting from the readings? What are you seeking?

**15% Final Portfolio:** A summation of what you have accomplished (See above) and something to show off.

Policies

**Electronics:** No.

(If you need tech for accessibility reasons, let me know. I am happy to work with you and/or the Moses Center to make any necessary accommodations.)

**Plagiarism:** No.

You will receive a failing grade and be reported to the department and the Associate Dean for Students.

**Attendance:** Yes, please!

You are allowed one unexcused absence. After that, you will lose half a grade point per absence. 15 minutes late = half an absence; 30 minutes late = one absence. That said, I understand that you are a person with a life and this class is just one part of that life. If you are having trouble managing assignments, readings, time, or *et cetera*, please see me to discuss your individual needs.

## Student Wellness

In this class, you will be sharing both fiction and nonfiction writing with me and your classmates. When it comes to fiction, we assume the speaker is fictional; when it comes to nonfiction, we assume the speaker is more-or-less you. No matter what, sensitive content related to violence, self-harm, suicide, abuse, or severe mental distress will alert my attention. Please send an email putting such content in context prior to workshop. I am available to discuss the challenges of writing about these topics. Much more importantly, if you are looking for someone to talk to, for *any* reason, **I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.**

## Book-Buying

We will read lots of excerpts of lots of things this semester and all will be made available as PDFs. We will read two books in full: *Salvador* by Joan Didion and *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine. We will also refer repeatedly to *Inventory of Losses* by Judith Schallansky and *A Little Book on Form* by Robert Hass. **Please let me know if purchasing these books poses any problem for you. \$\$ should never interfere with your full participation in class.**

## The Plan

Wednesday, September 8	Hello, nice to meet and greet you! Syllabus review, workshop schedule and expectations, in-class write
Monday, September 13	<u>Writing about Writing</u> Readings: <i>Arcade</i> by Gordon Lisch (excerpts) <i>The Situation and the Story</i> by Vivian Gornick (excerpts) <i>Ongoingness</i> by Sarah Manguso (excerpts) <i>Essayism</i> by Brian Dillon (excerpts)
Wednesday, September 15	<u>Poetry 101</u> Readings: “anyone lived in a pretty how town” by E. E. Cummings <a href="#">Anyone Lived in a Pretty How Town short film</a> by George Lucas “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” by Emily Dickinson <i>A Poetry Handbook</i> by Mary Oliver (excerpts) <i>A Little Book on Form</i> by Robert Haas (excerpts) <b>Group 1 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, September 20	<u>Voice: “‘Women Writers,’ whatever that means”</u> Readings: “The Boy in Blue” from <i>An Inventory of Losses</i> by Judith Schallansky “The Only Thing I Envy Men” by Rivka Galchen “Toddler-Hunting” by Taeko Kono “Emily Dickinson” by Bianca Stone
Wednesday, September 22	Group 1 workshop <b>Group 2 workshop submission due</b>

Monday, September 27	<u>Place: Field Notes</u> Readings: <i>Running in the Family</i> by Michael Ondaatje (excerpts) <i>The Colossus of New York</i> by Colson Whitehead (excerpts) <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i> by Annie Dillard (excerpts) “Fieldtrip” to Washington Square Park or Astor Place (TBD)
Wednesday, September 29	Group 2 workshop <b>Group 3 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, October 4	<u>Place: The Outsider’s Gaze</u> Readings: <i>Salvador</i> by Joan Didion “The Colonel” by Carolyn Forché <b>*Special* field notes assignment due</b>
Wednesday, October 6	Group 3 workshop <b>Group 4 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, October 11 <i>No class</i>	
Tuesday, October 12	<u>Place: These United States</u> Readings: “An American Poem” by Eileen Myles “I, Too” by Langston Hughes “dear white america” by Danez Smith <i>Citizen</i> by Claudia Rankine
Wednesday, October 13	Group 4 workshop <b>Group 1 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, October 18	<u>Scene-Setting &amp; Imaginative Histories</u> Readings: “Prologue” from <i>Underworld</i> by Don DeLillo
Wednesday, October 20	Group 1 workshop <b>Group 2 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, October 25	<u>Speculation &amp; Memory</u> Readings: “No Name Woman” from <i>The Woman Warrior</i> by Maxine Hong Kingston “Questions We Asked for the Girls Turned to Limbs” by Chloe N. Clark
Wednesday,	Group 2 workshop

October 27	<b>Group 3 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, November 1	<u>Free Verse Poetry: Society, Obscenity &amp; the Self</u> Readings: “Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg
Wednesday, November 3	Group 3 workshop <b>Group 4 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, November 8	<u>Avant-Garde Poetry, the Literary <i>Enfant Terrible</i>, &amp; Writing Against the Colonial Canon</u> Readings: Selected poems by Roberto Bolaño Selected poems by Elias Petropoulos Selections from <i>Antipoems: How to Look Better &amp; Feel Great</i> by Nicanor Parra Selected poems by members of the Hungry Generation (Kolkata, India; 1960s)
Wednesday, November 10	Group 4 workshop <b>Group 1 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, November 15	<u>What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Love?</u> Readings: “The Love Songs of Sappho” from <i>An Inventory of Losses</i> by Judith Schalansky Selected poems and fragments by Sappho “Untitled (One Day, This Kid...)” by David Wojnarowicz “summer, somewhere” by Danez Smith “The Cinnamon Peeler” from <i>Running in the Family</i> by Michael Ondaatje Selected poems by Pablo Neruda “Mad Girl’s Love Song” and “You’re” by Sylvia Plath <i>all about love</i> by bell hooks [Supplemental text]
Wednesday, November 17	Group 1 workshop <b>Group 2 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, November 22	<u>Art Writing: To Each, Their Own</u> Readings: <i>Funny Weather</i> by Olivia Laing (excerpts) <i>White Girls</i> by Hilton Als (excerpts) <i>97,196 Words</i> by Emmanuel Carrère (excerpts) “How I Spent My Summer Vacation” by Philip Leider <i>The White Dress</i> by Nathalie Léger (excerpts)

Wednesday, November 24	Group 2 workshop  <b>Group 3 workshop submission due</b>
Thursday & Friday, November 25 & 26 <i>Thanksgiving Recess</i>	
Monday, November 29	<u>"Tell A Dream, Lose A Reader," Allegory &amp; Surrealism</u> Readings: "House Taken Over" by Julio Cortázar Selected poems and stories by Jorge Luis Borges "The Daughters of the Moon" by Italo Calvino "The Autumn of the Patriarch" by Gabriel García Márquez [Supplemental text] <b>*Special* art writing assignment due</b>
Wednesday, December 1	Group 3 workshop  <b>Group 4 workshop submission due</b>
Monday, December 6	<u>The Body, Illness, Death, Sex, Elegy</u> Readings: "The Pain Scale" by Eula Biss <i>AIDS &amp; Its Metaphors</i> by Susan Sontag (excerpts) Selected poems by Danez Smith <i>To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life</i> by Hervé Guibert (excerpts) Selected poems from <i>Love Alone: 18 Elegies for Rog</i> by Paul Monette "In Time of Plague" by John McIntyre; and referenced poems, including "My Death" by Tim Dlugos, "Lament" by Thom Gunn, and "Self-Help" by Charles Bernstein
Wednesday, December 8	Group 4 workshop
Monday, December 13	<u>Writers &amp; Solitude</u> Readings: "Stranger in the Village" by James Baldwin "Guericke's Unicorn" from <i>An Inventory of Losses</i> by Judith Schalansky "A Room of One's Own" by Virginia Woolf [Supplemental text]
Tuesday, December 14 <i>Final class</i>	<u>Fancy &amp; Frivolity</u> Readings: <i>The Decameron</i> by Giovanni Boccaccio (excerpts) <i>The Pillow Book</i> by Sei Shōnagon (excerpts) In-class group writing exercise re: <i>small pleasures</i>

Friday, December 17  
**Final portfolio due**