

Introduction to Prose and Poetry

Course number: CRWRI-UA.815.019

Time: Tues/Thurs 12:30pm-1:45pm

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Course Objectives

The aim of this course is to introduce you to new ways of writing prose and poetry. Whichever your current preference, all students will submit work in both genres and the readings we do each week will encourage you to seek connections between the two. Literature at its best reads spontaneously, but such spontaneity is only achieved as a result of formal artistic strategies. We will learn to identify such strategies in what we read and to employ them fruitfully in our own work. But we will also look for times when the right thing to do is to break the rules. By the end of the course, I hope each of you will have become a more patient, more daring, more disciplined, and more passionate writer.

Course Structure

The course is divided into two classes—on Tuesdays we will have workshop, in which we read and discuss student work submitted the week before; Thursdays are devoted to craft, where we read published stories, novels and poems in order to understand how they are put together and learn lessons for our own practice.

Every workshop we will read between three and four student pieces (you must bring hard copies for everyone the Tuesday before), to which you will be expected to give considered, sensitive, constructive feedback. This should come in the form of both line-edits, as well as letter of no less than two-hundred and fifty words giving your overall impressions of the piece, ideas for where it can be developed, what you thought worked best, and suggestions for how to improve whatever currently isn't working. Keep in mind what the story or poem under discussion is aiming to achieve, not what you think it should be trying to do instead. The point of workshop is to enable the author to realize their aims, not to impose your own vision. Over the length of the course, students will submit four pieces—two stories and at least two poems (a maximum of three poems can be submitted by one student at once, as long as the total number of lines does not exceed one-hundred).

For craft, I expect every student to have read thoroughly the set texts and to bring fertile ideas to discuss. I will not ask you to write criticism of the work each week, but participation in debate is essential. In response to select readings students will complete creative writing tasks, to be workshopped subsequently.

At the end of the semester, everyone will submit to me a portfolio containing the stories and poems they workshopped (one story and one poem of which must have been revised—please also include the original); the assignments completed for select craft classes; an introduction to any one of the texts we have read in class; and a letter to yourself written after the final class.

Grading

- Attendance (20%)

Attendance is mandatory, and any absences must be excused by appropriate documentation. Please provide as far in advance as possible. An unexcused absence will result in a 2% reduction in your grade. Two unexcused absences will result in a 5% reduction. More than two will result in a 10%

decrease. Since our classes are short, it's important you arrive on time. Being late by 10 minutes or more three times equals an absence.

- Class participation (20%)
- Workshop submissions (20%)
- Workshop critiques (10%)
- Writing assignments (10%)
- Portfolio revisions (10%)
- Introduction to selected craft text (5%)
- Portfolio introductory letter (5%)

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is easy to spot and carries severe consequences. If you submit work that is not your own you can expect a failing grade and to be reported to the school's authorities. Please familiarize yourself with NYU's plagiarism policy online.

Electronics in Class

I have found electronics to be a distracting influence in creative writing classes. I expect them to be switched off/to silent when we are together. The only exception is note-taking in craft classes. When not taking notes, laptops should be shut and iPads turned face down.

Required Texts

I will provide the majority of texts to you via email the week before class. We will be reading two full novels over the semester and excerpts from three others. I will point these out in our first class so you have plenty of time to get them in advance.

Week 1

Tue: Introductions, syllabus, workshop schedule & etiquette.

Text: Raymond Queneau, *Exercises in Style*—in-class writing response & mini-workshop.

Thu: Authenticity/Illusion

Text: Franz Kafka, *Letter to his Father*

Assignment: write an equally honest letter to your own parents.

Week 2

Tue: Workshopping everyone's letters.

Thu: Escalation

Texts: George Saunders, *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain* chapter 1; Joyce Carol Oates 'Where are you going, where have you been'; Robert Frost, 'Out, Out'; Samuel Taylor Coleridge 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner'.

Week 3

Tue: Group A workshop

Thu: Polyphony

Texts: T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*; Seamus Heaney, 'Whatever You Say, Say Nothing'; Robert Hayden 'Middle Passage'; José Saramago, excerpt from *Death with Interruptions*; Mikhail Bakhtin, excerpt from *The Dialogic Imagination*.

Week 4

Tue: Group B workshop

Thu: Monologue

Texts: Thomas Bernhard, *Woodcutters*; T.S. Eliot 'The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock'; H.D. 'Eurydice'; Elizabeth Bishop, 'Crusoe in England'.

Week 5

Tue: Group C workshop.

Thu: Revision

Texts: Raymond Carver, 'Beginners'/'What We Talk About When We Talk About Love'; Maggie Smith, 'How to Revise Poems Without Losing the Initial Spark'; Elizabeth Bishop 'One Art' – 16 drafts.

Week 6

Tue: Group A workshop

Thu: Ending Things

Texts: James Joyce, 'The Dead'; Alice Munro, 'A Bear Came over the Mountain'; Roald Dahl, 'The Great Switcheroo'; Philip Larkin 'Church Going'; Thylia Moss 'The Undertaker's Daughter Feels Neglect', 'The Undertaker's Daughter Makes Bread'.

Week 7

Tue: Group B workshop

Thu: Style

Texts: Vladimir Nabokov, excerpt from *Pnin*; Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Windhover', 'No Worst There is None'; Frank O'Hara, 'The Day the Lady Died', 'Having a Coke with You'; Susan Sontag 'On Style'.

Week 8

Tue: Group C workshop

Text: Paul Seghal, 'The Case Against the Trauma Plot'

Thu: Transgression

Texts: J.G. Ballard *Crash*; Philip Roth, excerpt from *Sabbath's Theater*; Elena Ferrante, excerpt from *The Days of Abandonment*.

Week 9

Tue: Group A workshop

Thu: Other Languages

Texts: Umberto Eco, excerpt from *Mouse or Rat*; Lydia Davis, excerpt from *Essays Two*; poems and stories bilingual students have brought, with their own translation; Samuel Beckett, excerpts in English and French.

Week 10

Tue: Group B workshop.

Thu: Conceit and High Concept

Texts: Franz Kafka, 'Metamorphosis'; J.G. Ballard, 'The Intensive Care Unit'; John Donne, 'The Flea'; Emily Dickinson, 'One need not be a Chamber – to be haunted'; William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 130'.

Week 11

Tue: Group C workshop

Thu: Poetry of Place and Thing

Texts: Hannah Sullivan, excerpts from *Three Poems*; Francis Ponge, 'The Match', 'The Frog'; Alice Oswald, excerpt from *Dart*; W.H. Auden, 'In Praise of Limestone'; A.R. Ammons, 'A Poem is a Walk'; Seamus Heaney, 'A Sense of Place'.

Week 12

Tue: Group A workshop

Thu: Poetic Form

Texts: W.H. Auden, 'Lullaby'; W.B. Yeats, 'Among Schoolchildren'; Dante Alighieri, excerpts from *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*; George Herbert, 'Easter Wings', 'The Altar'; Frank Bidart, 'Pre-existing Forms'.

Week 13

Tue: Group B workshop.

Thu: "Unliterary" Prose

Texts: Jorge Luis Borges, 'Llön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote'; excerpts from Jonson's Dictionary; Lydia Davis, flash fictions; household appliance instructions; aphorisms (Kafka, La Rochefoucauld, Wilde, Cioran, Nietzsche).

Week 14

Tue: Group C workshop

Thu: What's the Point of Writing?

Texts: George Orwell, 'Why I Write'; Lorrie Moore, 'How to be a Writer'; V.S. Naipaul, 'On Being a Writer' and discussion on publishing, getting an agent and other nitty gritty details of being a writer. Assignment: write a letter to yourself justifying why you write. This will form the introduction to your portfolio. When you are despairing (inevitable in the writing life) you can reread this letter.