

Creative Writing: Introduction to Fiction & Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.008

Instructor: Cara Cushing

Schedule: Tues/Thurs 4:55–6:10 p.m.

Location: TBD

Email: cc7300@nyu.edu (checked frequently)

Phone: 707.613.0315 (text if needed)

Office hours: by appointment

Course Overview/Objectives

“Workshop’s greatest pedagogical value is in its ability to help writers clarify their own aesthetics (often referred to as ‘finding their voice’). . . You clarify your aesthetics by talking and writing about how you believe fiction should work and what you believe fiction should do. . .”

— Matthew Salesses, *Craft in the Real World*

This course aims to make you a better writer and reader of prose and poetry. You will learn to engage generously and analytically with your own work, your peers’ work, and works by established authors.

Craft classes are not the same as traditional literature classes. We are not interested in figuring out *what an author means* so much as *how an author managed to create meaning*.

Nor are we necessarily interested in using our workshop time to establish a set of *rules* for writing. Instead, we’ll study craft techniques that are used successfully in the writing we admire, so that we may borrow these techniques as needed, and make them our own.

In this course, you will inevitably be exposed to writing that you dislike (though it’s my hope that you enjoy most of it!). That’s okay—in fact, in my experience as a student of craft, learning to generously analyze and critique *writing I dislike* has perhaps been the *most* useful in teaching me to challenge my own biases, clarify my literary tastes, and understand *what kind of art I want to make, and how I might go about making it*.

Class Format

This course will consist of **12 craft lessons** and **3 rounds of workshops**. The semester is roughly divided as follows:

Sept. 1–Oct. 6: Fiction | Oct. 11–Nov. 8: Poetry

During which:

- On Tuesdays, we will workshop 3 student submissions (approximately 20 minutes per student). You will write fiction for the first round, poetry for the second.
- On Thursdays, we will have craft discussions centered around the readings assigned in the previous class. Please bring pen and paper for in-class writing exercises.

Nov. 10–Dec. 8: Open Workshops

During which:

- We will workshop 2 student submissions a class on Tuesdays *and* Thursdays (approx 35 minutes per student).
- You may submit poetry, fiction, nonfiction or works in hybrid/experimental genres (with my approval).

Written Assignments

You will turn in the following written assignments throughout the semester. See the course calendar for deadlines. **Refer to this as a general guide: more detailed information about writing assignments will be provided in class.**

- **Creative writing submissions:**
 - One fiction submission (7–20 pages, 12 pt double-spaced; I strongly encourage you to attempt a complete short story, but you may also submit a novel excerpt or up to 3 pieces of flash fiction)
 - One poetry submission (approx. 3 pages of poetry; can be one long poem or multiple short poems)
 - One final submission in the genre of your choosing:
 - Poetry (approx. 3 pages of poetry)
 - Fiction or nonfiction prose (10–20 pages)
 - Experimental genre/graphic story/play (please notify me if you wish to submit something outside of the usual prose/poetry format and we will discuss requirements)
- **Feedback notes:** A letter (approx. 400 words or more) for each of your classmates' workshop submissions. You will write 33 feedback notes throughout the semester.
 - You may choose to either bring 2 printed copies of these notes to class (one for me and one for your classmate), or you may email your classmate *on the day of class* and CC me.
- **Line edits/marginalia:** Substantive line edits of your classmates' workshop submissions.
 - You will either bring your marked-up, printed copy to class on the day of workshop and submit it to me (I will then distribute it to the student); or you may use Google docs to submit comments and share the file with me and your classmate *on the day of class*.
- **Craft analysis (reading responses):** You will be required to choose one of our fiction readings and one of our poetry readings on which to write a 1000–1500 word craft analysis (2 responses total). I will provide more info about this assignment in class.
- **Final portfolio:** At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio of your workshop submissions.
 - One of these pieces will need to have been substantially revised.
 - You must include a note with the revised piece. In the note, explain how you chose to incorporate workshop feedback while you were revising the piece. I

don't expect you to make all the changes that were suggested to you in workshop, but I do want you to be able to thoughtfully describe your writing process and defend your aesthetic choices.

Reading Assignments/Required Texts

Assigned readings are listed in the course calendar section of this syllabus. You are not required to purchase any texts—I will provide PDFs and/or hand-outs of all readings.

The readings listed here are subject to change depending on time limits, the interest of the class, etc. If changes are made, I will announce this in class and send a follow-up email.

Absence & Late Arrivals

You are permitted **2 unexcused absences** a semester. Subsequent unexcused absences will result in a half-letter reduction of your grade.

It's important to show up when you're scheduled to be workshopped. Don't miss this class unless it's an actual emergency. It's disrespectful to your classmates and disruptive to the course. If you anticipate a genuine need to be absent from your scheduled workshop, notify me as early as possible.

Lateness of 15+ minutes will be excused once; thereafter it will be worth 0.5 absences. Reach out to me if you're having trouble making it to class.

Electronics Policy

In the interest of saving paper, all students are provisionally allowed to bring their craft readings, line edits etc. to class in electronic form. I will ban electronic devices for the class if they become a distraction. Cell phones **must** be silenced and put away at all times.

Grading

Your grade will be weighted as follows:

- 40% — **Workshop participation and substantive feedback.** Each student will submit a piece for workshop 3 times, which means (assuming 12 students in the class), you will be graded on your participation in 33 workshops (not including your own). You can earn 3 points for each workshop, with the score weighted using the below rubric.
 - 1 point for your substantive written feedback note
 - 1 point for your substantive margin notes and line edits
 - 1 point for your thoughtful in-class participation

Active participation is essential to a functional writing workshop; that being said, please contact me if you feel uncomfortable speaking up in class for any reason, and we will work together to find a solution. You

will be graded on the quality (thoughtfulness/care) of your contributions to discussion – not on how much you talk.

- 40% — **Creative work and final portfolio.**
 - Creative writing (workshop submissions) = 25 points each (3 total)
 - Revised portfolio (submitted during finals week) = 25 points
- 20% — **Craft discussions and reading responses.**
 - Thoughtful participation in craft discussions = 5 points each (12 total)
 - Reading responses = 20 points each (2 total)

Office Hours

I am available to schedule flexible office hours throughout the semester—either in person, over the phone or via Zoom. You are not required to schedule office hours with me. However, I've personally found that it's helpful to meet with an instructor after I've been workshopped in order to process the feedback that I've received. I encourage you to meet with me if you feel this would be helpful.

I am also happy to meet to discuss aspects of creative writing that we won't have time to cover in class, for example: finding writing-related internships, pursuing a writing MFA, submitting to literary journals and contests, or crafting an artist's statement.

Plagiarism/Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is not allowed, nor should there be any reason to feel you have to plagiarize to get by in this class. If you are struggling with the writing assignments, please reach out to me. See NYU's academic integrity policy for information about the consequences of plagiarism:

<https://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity.html>

NYU 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: 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>

NYU 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.

Course Calendar

(provisional; subject to change)

Sept. 1 Thurs	<p>Introduction & Syllabus Review; Workshop groups assigned Readings: 'Violets', Bud Smith; 'Misery', Anton Chekhov; 'Redefining Craft Terms', Salesses</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Homework: Write a feedback letter on 'Violets' due in class 9/6</p>
Sept. 6 Tues	<p>Mock workshop Craft: Story arcs & character arcs</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Read for Thursday: 'Drinking Coffee Elsewhere', ZZ Packer; 'A Manual for Cleaning Women', Lucia Berlin</p>
Sept. 8 Thurs	<p>Craft: Expectations & reversals</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Homework: Writers ABC submit prose by 10 pm. 9/8 Feedback notes on ABC prose due 9/13</p>
Workshop Round 1: Fiction	
Sept. 13 Tues	<p>ABC workshop</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Read for Thursday: 'The Latehomecomers', Mavis Gallant; 'Car Crash While Hitchhiking', Denis Johnson</p>
Sept. 15 Thurs	<p>Craft: Setting & time</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Homework: DEF submit prose by 10 pm. 9/15 Feedback on DEF prose due 9/20</p>
Sept. 20 Tues	<p>DEF workshop</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Read for Thursday: 'Two Catholic Tales', Roberto Bolaño; 'Everything I Know About My Family on My Mother's Side', Nathan Englander</p>
Sept. 22 Thurs	<p>Craft: Structural constraints</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Homework: GHI submit prose by 10 pm. 9/22 Feedback on GHI prose due 9/27</p>
Sept. 27 Tues	<p>GHI workshop</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Read for Thursday: 'Escapes', Joy Williams; 'The Stone Boy', Gina Berriault</p>
Sept. 29 Thurs	<p>Craft: Voice & perspective</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Homework: JKL submit prose by 10pm. 9/29 Feedback on JKL prose due 10/4</p>

Oct. 4 Tues	JKL workshop Read for Thursday: 'A Place I'd Go' and 'Poker', Kathryn Scanlan; 'Lot', Bryan Washington
Oct. 6 Thurs	Pacing & compression Read for Tuesday: Read first, and then watch linked videos of Ilya Kaminsky: 'We Lived Happily During the War'; Danez Smith: 'Dogs'; Steven Jesse Bernstein: 'Face', 'Party Balloon'; Sylvia Plath: 'Fever 103' Homework: Select a fiction piece for a craft analysis. Submit by 10/20
Workshop Round 2: Poetry	
Oct. 11 Tues	Craft: Forms, sound, lyricism Homework: ABC submit poems by 10pm 10/13 Feedback on ABC poems due 10/18
Oct. 13 Thurs	<i>No class</i>
Oct. 18 Tues	ABC workshop Read for Thursday: 'Death Fugue', Paul Celan; 'Fire Left by Travelers', Frank Stanford; 'Song In My Heart', Diane Seuss; 'At Night Birds Hammered my Unborn', Ishion Hutchinson
Oct. 20 Thurs	Craft: Image & metaphor Fiction craft analysis papers due by 10pm 10/20 Homework: DEF submit poems by 10pm 10/20 Feedback on DEF poems due 10/25
Oct. 25 Tues	DEF workshop Read for Thursday: 'The Glass Essay', Anne Carson; 'Winter Stars', 'Sensationalism', Larry Levis
Oct. 27 Thurs	Craft: Narrative possibilities Homework: GHI submit poems by 10pm 10/27 Feedback on GHI poems due 11/1
Nov. 1 Tues	GHI workshop Read for Thursday: 'Personal Effects', Solmaz Sharif; 'What the Living Do', Marie Howe; 'The Lost Pilot', James Tate; 'Another Elegy', Jericho Brown
Nov. 3 Thurs	Craft: Elegy Homework: JKL submit poems by 10pm 11/3 Feedback on JKL poems due 11/8

Nov. 8 Tues	JKL workshop Read for Thursday: 'Her Kind', Naomi Jackson; 'New York: Sentimental Journeys', Joan Didion Homework: Select a poem for a craft analysis paper. Submit by 11/29
Nov. 10 Thurs	Craft: Narrative nonfiction Homework: AB submit by 10 pm. 11/10; CD by 10 pm. 11/12 Feedback for AB due in class 11/15; CD due in class 11/18
Workshop Round 3: Submit in the genre of your choice	
Nov. 15 Tues	AB workshop
Nov. 18 Thurs	CD workshop Readings: TBD writing on revision
Nov. 22 Tues	Craft: Revision Homework: EF submit by 10pm 11/22, GH submit by 10pm 11/25 Feedback for EF due 11/29; GH due 12/1
Nov. 24 Thurs	<i>No class</i>
Nov. 29 Tues	EF workshop Poetry craft analysis papers due by 10pm 10/29
Dec. 1 Thurs	GH workshop Homework: IJ submit by 10pm 12/1; KL submit by 10pm 12/3 Feedback for IJ due 12/6; KL due 12/8
Dec. 6 Tues	IJ workshop
Dec. 8 Thurs	KL workshop
Dec. 13 Tues	Last class Portfolios due