

## Introduction to Prose & Poetry

CRWRI-UA.815.018

Mon/Wed 9:30am - 10:45am

Location: BOBS 836

Instructor: Devi Sastry

email: [ds6645@nyu.edu](mailto:ds6645@nyu.edu)

Office hours by appointment

*“Anyone can cook...”*

– Chef Auguste Gusteau, *Ratatouille* (2007)

### Course Description

Perhaps you think about writing the way I used to think about cooking: the results of other people’s efforts were undeniably delectable, but the process behind it all seemed a little mystical. There are so many moving parts to food and language – how do you know which ingredients to pair with one another, and how much of each, and how long to let things simmer or bake or roast or cure, and how do you manage not to burn the fish, and still make it all look pretty on a plate? In this class, we will venture into the heart of the kitchen to take a closer look at the process. You’ll learn that in addition to whatever calling brought you to writing in the first place, a little practice (in both senses) goes a long way. As in any smoothly functioning kitchen, cooks (you) will collaborate and engage closely with one another’s work, offering and benefitting from the gift of perspective that comes from a community of artists. The objectives of this class are for you to experiment widely & wildly with ingredients & process to find what works best for you, to build confidence in your writing, and to learn by reading established writers as well as your peers, so that the next time you look in your fridge wondering what to make for dinner, you have the tools to whip up a fantastic meal.

### Course Structure

Most Mondays, we will workshop pieces submitted by four students in the class. Each student will email their workshop piece to me by 4:00pm on the Monday before their piece will be workshopped, and will bring 12 copies of their piece to class the Wednesday before their piece will be workshopped (so if for example you’re up for workshop on Monday the 26th of September, you will email your piece to me by 4:00pm on Monday the 19th of September, and will bring 12 copies of your piece to class on Wednesday the 21st of September). Students will prepare written peer critiques for each piece that is workshopped and bring two copies to class, one for the writer of the piece and one for me, to be distributed at the end of workshop. We will go over workshop etiquette and guidance regarding peer critiques during one of our initial classes.

Most Wednesdays, we will discuss assigned reading (craft essays as well as poetry & creative prose) in terms of how we can learn from the writers studied and incorporate aspects of their work into our own. At the end of each craft class, students will be given a writing prompt inspired by the assigned reading, and will each submit one short piece of writing arising from this prompt to me by the following Wednesday.

## Reading

Texts will be uploaded on Brightspace or handed out in class. NOTE: we will likely not have time to read every writer listed on this version of the syllabus. As this reading list is provisional, it will narrow a little when it comes to what will actually be assigned. All this is to say do not be overwhelmed by the literary smorgasbord before you – you won't be served more than you can stomach.

## Grading

### I. Attendance & Participation (30%)

Come to class having done the assigned reading, on time, alert & ready to engage with your peers. More than two unexcused absences will result in a 10% decrease in a student's final grade. If you arrive to class more than 10 minutes late, you will be marked tardy, and two tardies constitutes an absence. If you are unable to attend a class please let me know in advance where possible, and in case of an absence due to a medical or other emergency circumstance, please provide me with a doctor's (or other official) note.

Students are expected to participate actively in discussion. If this is something you find difficult, please meet me in office hours to discuss how we might find a way to make this easier for you.

### 2. Workshop & Peer Critiques (20%)

Each student will be workshopped four times over the course of the semester – one submission in poetry, one submission in fiction, one submission in a choice of nonfiction or a hybrid piece, and one submission in any genre of their choice. Your work will not be perfect – that's the whole point of a workshop – but it must demonstrate a level of effort and engagement with language. Similarly, you must engage respectfully with the work of your peers and provide constructive feedback.

### 3. Prompt Responses (15%)

Since one of the objectives of this class is to experiment, your prompt responses (based on the past week's reading) serve as opportunities to push your writing to unexpected places, as well as a way to demonstrate your engagement with the assigned reading. Your willingness to play and take risks with your work is vital to your growth as a writer – consider these responses as a space for trial and error. Word and page counts will vary according to the genre studied and the specific prompt of the week, but generally, prose responses should be at least 650 words. While there is no word count for poetry responses, your work should demonstrate a similar level of effort and engagement. You can choose one week of the semester to skip the prompt response: I should receive 10 prompt responses from you over the course of the semester.

#### 4. Office hours (10%)

We will meet at least two times over the course of the semester to discuss your goals, your work and your progress. You are also welcome to make additional appointments for further guidance.

#### 5. Final revised portfolio (25%)

On the last day of class, students will submit a final portfolio with three of your original workshop drafts, as well as revised versions of those drafts that ideally incorporate some of the feedback received during workshop.

### **Academic Integrity**

Any form of plagiarism is unacceptable – this will result in an automatic fail and will be reported to higher academic authorities. Your bouillabaisse will receive a scathing review and your restaurant will be shut down.

### **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  
Website: <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 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 Schedule

### Week 1

Monday, Sept 5th

No class – Labor Day.

Wednesday, Sept 7th

**Ingredients: Life & Language**

- Introductions, read-through of syllabus.
- In-class reading: essays on writing, poetry packet

Assignment:

- Prompt Response 1
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### Week 2

Monday, Sept 12th

Reading due:

**Mock workshop + Method I: Structure & Sound**

- from *A Poetry Handbook*: ‘The Stanza’
- from *The Poet’s Companion*: ‘The Music of the Line’
- Poems by Tishani Doshi, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Terrance Hayes, Solmaz Sharif, Wallace Stevens, Kei Miller, Sarojini Naidu

Wednesday, Sept 14th

Reading due:

**Method II: Description, observation, image, comparison**

- from Mary Oliver’s *A Poetry Handbook*: ‘Imagery’
- Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, William Carlos Williams, Kaveh Akbar, Sharon Olds, Tim Siebles, Gary Soto, Arun Kolatkar, Mary Jean Chan

Assignment:

- Prompt Response 2

**Group A submits workshop pieces to class**

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### Week 3

Monday, Sept 19th

**First workshop! Group A Poetry**

All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Sept 21st

Reading due:

**Presentation I: Voice, persona, tone, diction**

- from *The Poet’s Companion*: ‘Voice & Style’
- interview with Patricia Smith (Poetry Foundation)
- Poems by Tu Fu, Frank O’Hara, Patricia Smith, Rajiv Mohabir, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Lucille Clifton, Sarojini Naidu, Fiona Benson

Assignment: – Prompt Response 3  
Group B submits workshop pieces to class

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#### Week 4

Monday, Sept 26th Workshop – Group B Poetry  
All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Sept 28th Presentation II: Form  
Reading due: – from *The Poet's Companion*: 'Form'  
– Poems by Elizabeth Bishop, Tim Siebles, Raymond Antrobus, Natalie Diaz, Nicole Sealey, Agha Shahid Ali, Terrance Hayes, Safia Elhillo, Jericho Brown

Assignment: – Prompt Response 4  
Group C submits workshop pieces to class

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#### Week 5

Monday, Oct 3rd Workshop – Group C Poetry  
All students submit peer critiques

palate cleanser, time for fiction!

Wednesday, Oct 5th A three course meal: Plot, Structure, Conflict  
Reading due: – Darin Strauss: 'Notes on Narrative'  
– Anne Lamott: 'Plot' from *Bird by Bird*  
– Excerpts from/works by Sherman Alexie, Shirley Jackson, Jhumpa Lahiri, James Baldwin, Saadat Hasan Manto

Assignment: – Prompt Response 5

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#### Week 6

Monday, Oct 10th No class – Fall Break

Tuesday, Oct 11th  
(Legislative Monday)

**Collective Writing Session + Mid(ish)semester tasting!**

We'll meet to write together in real time & share some of our work with one another – a break from routine to reset as we transition to fiction.

Wednesday, Oct 12th

Reading due:

**I would like to meet the chef: Perspective & Character**

– Anne Lamott: 'Character' from *Bird by Bird*  
– Excerpts from/works by Mahasweta Devi, Carmen Maria Machado, Toni Morrison, Mariama Bâ, Maryse Condé, Chinua Achebe, Ali Smith

Assignment:

– Prompt Response 6

**Group A submits workshop pieces to class**

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**Week 7**

Monday, Oct 17th

**Workshop – Group A Fiction**

All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Oct 19th

Reading due:

**Cuisine: Setting & World**

– Anne Lamott: 'Set Design' from *Bird by Bird*  
– Excerpts from/works by Salman Rushdie, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Derrick Bell, Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Assignment:

– Prompt Response 7

**Group B submits workshop pieces to class**

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**Week 8**

Monday, Oct 24th

**Workshop – Group B Fiction**

All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Oct 26th

Reading due:

**Presentation: Voice & Style**

– Excerpts from/works by Jamaica Kincaid, Virginia Woolf, Lorrie Moore, Arundhati Roy, Junot Diaz, Vivek Shanbhag

Assignment:

– Prompt Response 8

**Group C submits workshop pieces to class**

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## Week 9

Monday, Oct 31st

Workshop – Group C Fiction

All students submit peer critiques

palate cleanser, time for nonfiction & hybrid writing!

Wednesday, Nov 2nd

Reading due:

Anton Ego's first bite: Memoir, the self & zooming out

– Excerpts from/works by Annie Ernaux, Kazim Ali, Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Rajiv Mohabir, Gaiutra Bahadur, Sara Suleri

Assignment:

– Prompt Response 9

Group A submits workshop pieces to class

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## Week 10

Monday, Nov 7th

Workshop – Group A Nonfiction or Hybrid

All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Nov 9th

Reading due:

Reality cooking show: Journal, travelogue, diary, zuihitsu

– Excerpts from/works by Sei Shonagon, Basho, Kimiko Hahn, Tina Chang, Joy Ladin, Bhanu Kapil

Assignment:

– Prompt Response 10

Group B submits workshop pieces to class

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## Week 11

Monday, Nov 14th

Workshop – Group B Nonfiction or Hybrid

All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Nov 16th

Reading due:

Fusion food: Prose poems, lyrical essays, and genre-bending

– Excerpts from/works by Maggie Nelson, Susan Sontag, Tyehimba Jess, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Fatema Mernissi, Claudia Rankine, Assia Djebar

Assignment:

– Prompt Response 11

Group C submits workshop pieces to class

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**Week 12**

Monday, Nov 21st

Workshop – Group C Nonfiction or Hybrid  
All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Nov 23rd

No class – Thanksgiving Break  
Group A & Group B submit workshop pieces to class

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**Week 13**

Monday, Nov 28th

Workshop – Group A Any genre!  
All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Nov 30th

Workshop – Group B Any genre!  
All students submit peer critiques  
Group C submits workshop pieces to class

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**Week 14**

Monday, Dec 5th

Workshop – Group C Any genre!  
All students submit peer critiques

Wednesday, Dec 7th

Reading due:

**Sending things back to the kitchen: Revision**  
– drafts of Elizabeth Bishop's *One Art*  
– various essays on revision

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**Week 15**

Monday, Dec 12th

Reading due:

**International Food Festival: Translation**  
– Excerpts from Jhumpa Lahiri, Aijaz Ahmad, Miller Oberman, Kabir  
– In class exercise: versions of Ghalib's ghazals

Wednesday, Dec 14th

**Last class! Celebratory reading!**