

Introduction to Creative Writing | CRWRI-UA.815.020

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Office Hours: by appointment

Tues/Thurs: 8:00-9:15am

“Writing, regardless of the end result—whether good or bad, published or not, well reviewed or slammed—means celebrating beauty in an often ugly world.” — Mary Karr

“For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn’t any other tale to tell, it’s the only light we’ve got in all this darkness.” — James Baldwin

OVERVIEW

In this class we will read widely and write often! This is a space for curiosity, experimentation, and a celebration of the everyday magic of writing. We will be exploring a range of creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry to find the tricks and techniques writers use to find and develop meaning, create an emotional experience on the page, and make us want to keep reading. Then, we’ll take the strategies that work best and try them out for ourselves. The goal of this class is to build a mini writing community where we share ideas, find inspiration, and read each other’s work with excitement and care.

STRUCTURE

This course will be broken into two parts: Craft on Tuesdays and Workshop on Thursdays. On Tuesdays, we will discuss the assigned readings with an attention to language and elements of craft. I’ll also offer prompts based on readings and/or specific craft techniques, which will be used for your own experimental writing exercises. If time allows, we may also do some in-class writing.

On Thursdays, we will spend class workshopping one another’s writing—offering generous, constructive feedback on the pieces up for discussion. Everyone will submit to workshop three times, and we will workshop three pieces each class. Workshop submissions are due in class the week before you are up for workshop (more on the details below).

RESPONSIBILITIES

Reading Responses — *due Monday nights by 10pm*

Each Monday night by 10pm, you will send me a short response to one of the assigned readings for class on Tuesday. These responses are meant to get you thinking about the reading and prepare for in-class discussion. These are informal responses and should not be a source of stress! A response could be a bullet-pointed series of questions you have about a piece, a

paragraph on why a line or scene stood out to you, a description of why you loved or loathed a particular element of style or structure, etc. Your responses should be at least half a page long, and not longer than 1 page. You should bring a copy of your response to class, and you may read from it as part of our conversation (I might ask you to share!).

Reading and Responding to Workshop Pieces — *due in class on Thursdays*

Remember that reading each other's work is just as valuable to you as the assigned readings from established writers—reading these early drafts gives you the uncommon opportunity to see how other writers (your classmates) develop their ideas. This is also our chance to help each other learn about our pieces and develop our writing through thoughtful feedback. You are expected to read each submission at least twice, making marginal comments and line edits on your copy, which you will give to the writer after workshop.

You're also expected to write an approximately 1-page letter responding to the submission in more detail. Workshop letters should include *at least 3* strengths of the piece, and *at least 3* suggested revisions, questions, or points of confusion. We'll go over workshop etiquette and expectations in greater depth in class, but remember that your letters and marginal comments should be constructive, specific, and thoughtful. You aren't trying to make this piece into what *you* would have written—you're offering your insight as a reader and trying to help the writer achieve *their* goals. How can the piece be the most compelling, well-realized version of itself? A copy of your letters should be given to the writers on the day of their workshop, with a second copy turned in to me.

Workshop Submissions — *see schedule*

On the first day of class, we will divide into four workshop groups. Each person will be workshopped three times over the course of the semester. To encourage experimentation and breadth of work, you are required to submit writing from at least two of the genres we will cover in class (nonfiction, fiction, and poetry). For example, if you are most interested in fiction writing, two of your workshop submissions can be short stories—however, your third submission should be in an alternate genre, either poetry or nonfiction.

Poetry submissions should contain three poems. Short story and essay submissions should be 6-12 pages long and submitted in standard 12 pt Times New Roman font, double spaced, with 1-inch margins.

Except for the first round of submissions from our heroic Group 1, you will always submit by bringing 13 printed copies of your piece for workshop in class the Thursday before your critique (see schedule).

Writing Exercises — *due on select Fridays throughout the semester (see schedule)*

In addition to your 3 workshop submissions, over the course of the semester you will complete 7 short (1-3 page) writing exercises stemming from prompts I'll assign during each craft unit. These prompts are opportunities to have fun with your writing, try new things, and experiment

freely—especially in genres where you’re less comfortable. You are welcome to use these exercises as jumping-off points for your workshop submissions, but keep in mind that the workshop versions must be noticeably distinct—either revised or expanded from your original exercise. If time permits, we may do some of these exercises in class, but you should plan to complete them on your own time.

Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester, you will submit a final portfolio including **all three of your workshopped pieces, at least one of which is substantially revised** (we will talk about what constitutes a substantial revision in class). Accompanying the revision should be a **1-2 page writer’s note** describing the changes you made, the reasoning behind those alterations, and your goals for the finished draft. You will also include your **7 writing exercises** from in-class or at-home assignments over the course of the semester. This is your chance to show me breadth and writerly engagement with all three genres: **you must include at least one poetry, one fiction, and one nonfiction piece in your portfolio**. For example, if you workshopped mostly poetry and chose fiction as your alternate genre submission, there must be at least one attempt at nonfiction represented in your exercises and presented to me in your final portfolio.

GRADING

Attendance & Participation (20%)

- There is no class without you! Come to class, contribute, and engage with the material. This grade also includes meeting with me in office hours at least once this semester.

Workshop (40%)

- Submit each of your 3 pieces on the day they are due, then attend class ready to receive your peers’ thoughts and feedback on the day of your critique. This grade includes your marginal comments and 1-page written responses to your peers’ workshop submissions.

Reading Responses (10%)

- Your reading responses to assigned craft readings, submitted to me on Monday nights.

Writing Exercises (10%)

- Your writing experiments from the 7 craft prompts assigned over the course of the semester.

Portfolio (20%)

- The final collection of your work from this semester.

Extra Credit (5%)

- There will be several opportunities to receive extra credit that I will highlight during the semester (for example, attending a reading or other literary event and writing a 1-page reflection), as well as the optional 8th writing exercise due at the end of the course.

POLICIES

Plagiarism

There is a zero-tolerance plagiarism policy. Plagiarism will result in failing this course and being reported to the overseers of academic integrity.

Course Materials & Technology

You are not required to purchase any texts for this class. Each week's readings will be made available on Brightspace. However, you must bring these materials to class each week, either printed or on your computer. Laptop use is restricted to reviewing readings and notes on craft days, and is never acceptable during workshop (attention is critical, and eye contact matters!). If you require special accommodation on this front, just let me know and we'll work something out. Cell phone use is prohibited, excepting emergencies.

Office Hours

I'm looking forward to meeting with you! Email me at mal9605@nyu.edu to set up an appointment to discuss your writing, questions/suggestions, or your semester in general. Note that you are required to meet with me in office hours at least once, but I am always happy to meet more frequently.

Absence Policy and Late Work

Plan to arrive before class begins—anything more than 10 minutes late is considered an absence. You are allowed two unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence beyond that will drop your grade automatically by a third of a letter grade (A to A-, B+ to B.) For excused absences, you must communicate with me in advance. If extraordinary circumstances result in your missing class beyond your two unexcused absences, meet with me and we can try to figure out a way for you to make the work up.

I cannot accept late work. If you know, in advance, that you will be unable to turn in an assignment, please reach out to me as early as possible so that we can discuss your options.

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 Policies & Resources

In this class, we'll be sharing fiction and nonfiction work. If you submit fiction, we'll assume the speaker is fictional. If you submit nonfiction, we'll assume, broadly, that the speaker is you. I understand that writing often explores difficult or even disturbing topics. That said, I'll be alert to content that deals with abuse, violence, self-harm, or extreme mental distress. If your submissions include these themes, please send an email putting your piece in context prior to class. If you would like to talk through how to write about these topics, I am available for office hours, and if you need support in any way, please reach out and I can connect you to the NYU Wellness Center.

Counseling Services: 726 Broadway New York, NY 10003 (212) 998-4780
Wellness Center: 24-hour hotline at (212) 443-9999
Email: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

Workshop Group Sign-Ups:

Group 1: _____, _____, _____
Group 2: _____, _____, _____
Group 3: _____, _____, _____
Group 4: _____, _____, _____

SCHEDULE (Subject to change)

Week 1: Getting Started

Thurs 9/1: Intros, syllabus review, workshop sign-ups, and first writing exercise in-class

Week 2: Craft & Practice

Tues 9/6: Practice workshops and mini craft discussion (poem/prose), **Group 1** hands out workshop submissions

Thurs 9/8: Workshop **Group 1**, **Group 2** hands out submissions

Fri 9/9: Writing exercise 1 due

Week 3: Taking Shape: Form & Structure

Tues 9/13: Selected readings may include Traci Brimhall “Studies in Darkness”, Jo Ann Beard “The Fourth State of Matter”, Carmen Maria Machado “The Husband Stitch”

Thurs 9/15: Workshop **Group 2, Group 3** hands out submissions

Week 4: Taking Shape: Form & Structure cont.

Tues 9/20: Selected readings may include Elizabeth Bishop “Sestina”, American Sonnet for My Past and Future Assassin” Terrance Hayes, Edil Hassan “Ghazal”, Jericho Brown “Duplex”, Layli Long Soldier “Obligations 2”

Thurs 9/22: Workshop **Group 3, Group 4** hands out submissions

Fri 9/23: Writing exercise 2 due

Week 5: See, Feel, Know: Image & Sensory Description

Tues 9/27: Selected readings may include Gilbert Sorrentino “The Moon in Its Flight”, Marianne Moore “A Jelly Fish”, Robert Farrar Capon “On the Onion”, Naomi Shihab Nye “The Traveling Onion”

Thurs 9/29: Workshop **Group 4, Group 1** hands out submissions

Week 6: See, Feel, Know: Image & Sensory Description cont.

Tues 10/4: Selected readings may include Lia Purpura “Autopsy Report”, George Saunders “Sticks”, Mary Oliver “The Real Prayers Are Not the Words, but the Attention that Comes First”, Sylvia Plath “Wuthering Heights”

Thurs 10/6: Workshop **Group 1, Group 2** hands out submissions

Fri 10/7: Writing exercise 3 due

Week 7: Workshop Only

Tues 10/11: NO CLASS, all classes meet according to a Monday schedule.

Thurs 10/13: Workshop **Group 2, Group 3** hands out submissions

Week 8: Who’s Talking? Points of View, Voice, and the Speaker

Tues 10/18: Selected readings may include Julio Cortazar “Axolotl”, Jim Shepard “Proto-Scorpions of the Silurian”, Diane Seuss “Bowl”, Thom Gunn “Tamer and Hawk”, Patricia Smith “Skinhead”, Marianne Boruch “A Tiny Pre-Kangaroo Slips Out Its Mother’s”, Forrest Gander “Stepping Out of the Light”

Thurs 10/20: Workshop **Group 3, Group 4** hands out submissions

Fri 10/21: Writing exercise 4 due

Week 9: Place/Setting: Where Are We?

Tues 10/25: Selected readings may include James Baldwin “Sonny’s Blues”, Mary Ruefle “The Diary”, Gwendolyn Brooks “Kitchenette Building”

Thurs 10/27: Workshop **Group 4, Group 1** hands out submissions

Week 10: Place/Setting: Where Are We? cont.

Tues 11/1: Selected readings may include Luis Alberto Urrea “Killed by the Light”, Joan Didion “The Santa Anas”, Sonja Johanson “Three Deer in Oquossoc”

Thurs 11/3: Workshop **Group 1, Group 2** hands out submissions

Fri 11/4: Writing exercise 5 due

Week 11: Research: Hiding & Seeking

Tues 11/8: Selected readings may include Leslie Jamison “The Devil’s Bait”, Sheila Heti “What Do You See When You Look at This Bridge?”, Anne Sexton “The Starry Night”, Robyn Schiff “Colt Rapid Fire Revolver”

Thurs 11/10: Workshop **Group 2, Group 3** hands out submissions

Fri 11/11: Writing exercise 6 due

Week 12: The Interpersonal: Dialogue, Character, and Audience

Tues 11/15: Selected readings may include selections from Svetlana Alexievich, Lydia Davis “The Mother”, Sheila Heti “Mermaid in the Jar”, Megan Arlett “I Ask My Grandmother What Trinidad Was Like in 1950”

Thurs 11/17: Workshop **Group 3, Group 4** hands out submissions

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Tues 11/22: NO CLASS – our class is cancelled ahead of the break

Thurs 11/24: NO CLASS – NYU official holiday

Week 14: The Interpersonal: Dialogue, Character, and Audience cont.

Tues 11/29: Selected readings may include Cheryl Strayed “Tiny Beautiful Things”, Jennifer Peepas “Alternate Endings to Hamlet”, Lorrie Moore “How to Be an Other Woman”, Jorie Graham “Poem”, Marvin Bell “To Dorothy”

Thurs 12/1: Workshop **Group 4**

Fri 12/2: Writing exercise 7 due

Week 15: Private Moments in Public Time—Writing the Personal Political

Tues 12/6: Selected readings may include Kiese Laymon selections from *Heavy*, Melissa Febos “Kettle Holes”, George Saunders “The Red Bow”, Ross Gay “A Small Needful Fact”, Alison C. Rollins “original [sin]”, Solmaz Sharif “Reaching Guantánamo”

Thurs 12/8: Final class celebration & informal read-around!

Fri 12/9: Extra credit – writing exercise 8 due

Week 16: The End

Tues 12/13: Final portfolios due