

# Creative Writing: Introduction to Poetry & Prose

Fall 2022 || CRWRI-UA.815.014 || Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:45 AM

**Instructor:** Stephanie Newman

**Email:** [sln256@nyu.edu](mailto:sln256@nyu.edu)

**Classroom:** 194 Mercer, Room 303

**Office Hours:** Thursdays 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM, or by appointment

## Course Description

This is an introductory creative writing course designed for undergraduates. Throughout the semester, we'll read and discuss poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as hybrid-genre forms of writing (prose poems, lyric essays, artist books, and excerpts from graphic novels). There will also be weekly craft lectures and writing exercises. All that said, the majority of our time will be devoted to reading and critiquing students' own creative work. Over the semester, each student will have three opportunities to workshop poems and/or short stories. Our class is capped at 12 participants, which will also enable us to build a strong workshop community.

## Course Objectives

My hope is that you will end our semester with a stronger understanding of your creative voice and the many tools of craft and form at your disposal. You'll gain practice critiquing your classmates' work, receiving feedback, and revising your writing—all integral parts of the writing process. You'll also read work by diverse and celebrated authors and poets, with a focus on contemporary, late 20th- to 21st-century writers, many of whom write in multiple genres. Finally, this class will help you become part of a workshopping community at NYU and guide you in taking advantage of the many literary resources at the university and in New York City at-large.

## Course Structure

The first third of our class (weeks 1-4) will focus primarily on poetry, while the next third (weeks 5-8) will transition into fiction. The final part of the class (weeks 9-12) will be devoted to hybrid genre forms, including creative nonfiction. The very last week of the semester will be reserved for final presentations and other activities to be determined.

**Workshops:** Everyone in class **will submit three times** this semester. Writers will submit their work in advance of their workshop date, so peers have time to read and provide written responses in preparation for class. Though I encourage you to submit both poetry and prose over the course of the semester, the genre of your submissions are ultimately up to you. During class, workshops will last about 20-25 minutes per student, regardless of genre. The length guidelines for your submissions are below:

- **Prose: 4-10 pages, double-spaced**
- **Poetry: 1-3 pages**

In terms of our workshop schedule, we will rotate through six groups of two students each. We'll choose groups on the first day of class. The **due dates** for each group's work are below (if you notice a little wonkiness, that's just because of idiosyncrasies in the academic calendar this fall):

Group 1: 9/15, 10/13, 11/10

Group 3: 9/29, 10/27, 11/29

Group 2: 9/22, 10/20, 11/17

Group 4: 10/6, 11/3, 12/1

**Final portfolios:** Instead of a final exam or paper, we will complete final portfolios. Your portfolio will contain revisions of each piece you workshopped in class (a total of three pieces of creative writing, revised). Revising is one of the most important and constructive parts of writing! We'll go over some principles of revision in class to help you with this process.

## Required Texts

I will provide you with PDFs and/or print-outs of stories and poems we'll be reading for class. However, there is one full book that you'll need to either purchase or check out from the library, which is:

*Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson

This book is available at the NYU Bookstore, through the NYU Library System, and through the New York Public Library system. Please be advised that there can be a waitlist for library check-outs. I encourage you to plan ahead to ensure you'll have the book in time for our assignments.

All texts mentioned here are subject to change and likely will, based on students' tastes and interests. Throughout the semester, I'll also introduce new authors that I deem particularly useful to your growth.

## POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS

### Attendance

Attendance is expected at every class meeting, save for those that fall on religious holidays you observe (if this describes you, please email me or speak to me after class about accommodations). Otherwise, **each unexplained absence will result in a 3% grade reduction.** There are a few reasons for this policy. The first is that workshops function on the basis of exchange. Your peers review your work; in turn, you provide feedback on theirs. This model is predicated on your participation. And, of course, you'll get the most out of this experience if you are fully present. I want that for you!

Of course, if you ever have an emergency that prevents you from attending, including any medical or COVID-19-related issues, please contact me directly as soon as you're able.

Please note that attendance and participation make up 35% of your overall grade.

## **Punctuality**

Please make every effort to come to class on time. Each student gets two “passes” to arrive up to 5 minutes late over the course of the semester. (We all live in New York, and occasionally there are circumstances that can’t be avoided, like stopped subways.) Beyond that, late arrivals will negatively impact your attendance and participation grade.

## **Participation**

As mentioned above, participation is crucial to this class. I’m excited to hear your opinions and reactions to the texts we read, and your classmates will be, too. It will be a priority of mine in class to ensure that everyone has speaking opportunities and feels welcome to participate.

## **Grading**

Attendance & Participation: 35%

Workshop Submissions & Critiques: 35%

Craft Assignments: 10%

Final Portfolio: 20%

*\*Extra Credit: 3% added to final grade*

## **Extra Credit**

Engaging with the literary community at NYU and beyond is one of the best ways to discover new authors you admire, give you ideas for your own writing, and build connections with like-minded people. I encourage you to take advantage of readings in New York. To incentivize this, I’ll add extra credit to your final grade if you attend a reading or literary event—either in-person or virtual—**and** submit a 500-word response on your experience.

## **Late Work**

Late work will not be accepted, except in the case of extenuating circumstances. If you believe this describes you, please email me so that we can discuss.

## **Office Hours**

You will have two in-person conferences with me over the course of the semester. These are required, but hopefully they won’t feel like an obligation. They are fun opportunities for us to connect 1-1 and discuss your writing. Other than these pre-scheduled conferences, I’ll be available throughout the semester at predetermined hours I will share with you in our first class. I’m also available to meet by appointment. Office hours will either take place at a meeting point on-campus or on Zoom.

## **Electronics**

Phones and laptops are not allowed in class. They should be kept out of sight at all times, and phones should be set to silent. Should COVID-19 alter the course of our in-person semester, however, we’ll adjust this rule as needed to enable remote learning.

## **Plagiarism**

Don't plagiarize. If you do, I'll be required to report it to the department, which will jeopardize your academic standing. You will also fail this class. So again, don't plagiarize! It's never worth the consequences.

## **Content Warning**

Some of the work we'll be reading this semester engages with topics like racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of violence and discrimination; it's possible that your classmates will also submit work that touches on similar topics. Whenever we discuss a work of writing that might be upsetting, I'll do my best to issue a content warning. It's my intent to foster a classroom environment that feels healthy for you, and you are *always* invited to reach out to me with specific concerns.

## **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

Web site: <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 my attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting any assignments, 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.

# SCHEDULE

## First Class: Welcome!

### Thurs, Sep 1

Class overview and introductions

Excerpts from *The Artist's Way* and *Mindset*

Introductory writing exercises

## — POETRY —

### Week 1: Why We Write

#### Tues, Sep 6

Discussion questions: Why do we spend our time and energy writing? How does writing enhance our lives and fit into our socio-political landscape?

**Readings due:**

- “Why I Write,” by George Orwell
- “Why I Write,” by Joan Didion

#### Thurs, Sep 8

Discussion questions: How do we define poetry? What does David Orr mean by talking about poetry as though it were Belgium? How might we apply Audre Lorde’s and David Orr’s analytical frameworks to our future readings?

**Readings due:**

- Excerpts from *Beautiful & Pointless*, by David Orr
- “Poetry Is Not a Luxury,” by Audre Lorde

### Week 2: Poetic Forms, and Love, and Grief

#### Tues, Sep 13

Review workshop etiquette.

Discussion questions: How is Hayes contemporizing classical ideas about the sonnet? How do Hayes and Diaz shade their poems with elements of both love and grief?

**Readings due:**

- Excerpt from *Beautiful & Pointless*, by David Orr
- Selected poems from *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin*, by Terrance Hayes
- “It Was the Animals” and “My Brother at 3 AM,” by Natalie Diaz

**Assignment:** Write a sonnet for/to/about someone or something that you oppose.

#### Thurs, Sep 15

Discussion questions: How do Rich and Rilke use the poetic line to contain the unruliness of feeling? What are the benefits and drawbacks of sectionalized poems?

**Readings due:**

- “Twenty-One Love Poems,” by Adrienne Rich
- “The Duino Elegies,” by Rainer Maria Rilke (please focus on the first and second elegies)

**Assignment:** Choose one section from any of the above poems, and write an emulation poem.

## Week 3: Poetry as Protest + Workshops start!

**Tues, Sep 20**

Discussion questions: How might we define a protest poem? A political poem? How do this week's readings help contextualize Lorde's idea that "poetry is not a luxury?"

**Readings due:**

- Selected poems from *Deaf Republic* by Ilya Kaminsky
- "Dinosaurs in the Hood" and "not an elegy for Mike Brown," by Danez Smith
- "Shahid Reads His Own Palm" and "When I Think of Tamir Rice While Driving," by Reginald Dwayne Betts
- "Howl," by Allen Ginsberg
- To view online: Images of the [annotated draft of "Howl"](#) (link will also be emailed)

**Thurs, Sep 22**

WORKSHOP GROUP 1

## Week 4: Sense of Wonder

**Tues, Sep 27**

*\*Note: Today is Rosh Hashanah. Contact me if you need accommodations.*

Discussion questions: What is the poetic "I"? How do we situate that "I" in poetic contexts? What alternatives do we have for bringing the self into a poem? What can we say to, for, and about others in poetry that might not find a voice in prose?

**Readings due:**

- "At the Fishhouses," by Elizabeth Bishop
- "Lull," by Jorie Graham
- "Dark," by Jericho Brown
- "Fugue," by Suji Kwock Kim
- "Don't You Wonder, Sometimes?" by Tracy K. Smith
- "Bianca Burning," by C.K. Williams

**Thurs, Sep 29**

WORKSHOP GROUP 2

## — FICTION —

## Weeks 5 & 6: Plot

**Tues, Oct 4**

Discussion questions: What do we expect from the short story form? How does Packer craft a plot that keeps us wanting to read? How does plot work in tandem with other elements of fiction (character, setting, etc.)?

**Readings due:**

- "Brownies," ZZ Packer

**Assignment:** Write up two outlines: one of the plot of "Brownies," and another of the story's structure (the order in which Packer gives us information). Compare them.

**Thurs, Oct 6**

WORKSHOP GROUP 3

**Tues, Oct 11**

No class!

**Thurs, Oct 13**

WORKSHOP GROUP 4

## **Week 7: Character**

**Tues, Oct 18**

Discussion questions: How do Cline and Moshfegh develop character? Which details about the characters stay with you after reading? Why do you think that is?

**Readings due:**

- "Marion," by Emma Cline
- "Dancing in the Moonlight," by Ottessa Moshfegh

**Assignment:** Create a character. Describe everything about this person you can think of: not only how they look, but how they sound, where they work, how they move through the world.

**Thurs, Oct 20**

WORKSHOP GROUP 1

## **Week 8: Language & Description**

**Tues, Oct 25**

Discussion questions: What exactly do we mean when we call prose "beautiful?" How do Nabokov and Freudenberger balance rich sentence-level description with macro concerns, like plot and structure?

**Readings due:**

- "Spring in Fialta," by Viktor Nabokov
- "Lucky Girls," by Nell Freudenberger

**Assignment:** Choose a place, a date (month, day, and year), and a time of day. Now describe that place at that time, using sensory details.

**Thurs, Oct 27**

WORKSHOP GROUP 2

## **Week 9: Voice**

**Tues, Nov 1**

Discussion questions: How do Freudenberger and Zhang establish a sense of place in their stories? How does each story's setting inform the chain of events and the emotional development of the protagonists?

**Readings due:**

- "We Love You, Crispina," by Jenny Zhang

**Assignment:** Choose an age and a major milestone. Now go back to the assignment from last Tuesday, and rewrite from the perspective of a narrator at that age, going through that milestone.

**Thurs, Nov 3**

WORKSHOP GROUP 3

— HYBRID FORMS —

**Week 10: The Lyric Essay**

**Tues, Nov 8**

Discussion questions: What is creative nonfiction? What do you think makes Beard's essay "lyrical?" How does Rankine blur the lines between poetry and essay/memoir?

**Readings due:**

- "The Fourth State of Matter," Jo Ann Beard
- Excerpt from *Citizen*, by Claudia Rankine

**Thurs, Nov 10**

WORKSHOP GROUP 4

**Weeks 11 & 12: Collective Histories**

**Tues, Nov 15**

Discussion questions: How does Alexievich's writing complicate our definitions of nonfiction? Why might she have chosen a collective, lyrical form for her subject matter? How do we view Alexievich's work in context of our earlier lessons on protest poems and dialogue?

**Readings due:**

- Selections from *Voices from Chernobyl*, by Svetlana Alexievich

**Thurs, Nov 17**

WORKSHOP GROUP 1

**Tues, Nov 22**

WORKSHOP GROUP 2

**Thurs, Nov 25**

Thanksgiving, no class!

**Week 13: Novels-in-Verse**

**Tues, Nov 29**

Introduce final portfolios.

Discussion questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of writing a narrative in verse form? How does Carson render character and plot using poetry? How do the individual pieces of *Autobiography of Red* work together to inform the novel at-large?

**Readings due:**

- *Autobiography of Red* by Anne Carson

**Thurs, Dec 1**

WORKSHOP GROUP 3



## **Week 14: The Art of Revision**

**Tues, Dec 6**

Discussion questions: Why revise? What is Boswell's strategy for generative revision, and how do you see his recommendations as potentially useful for your portfolio?

**Readings due:** "After the Workshop: Transitional Drafts," by Robert Boswell

**Thurs, Dec 8**

WORKSHOP GROUP 4

## **Week 15: Final Projects & Celebration**

**Tues, Dec 13**

Final portfolio due

Celebration!