

CREATIVE WRITING: INTRODUCTION TO PROSE AND POETRY

Course: CRWRI-UA.815.025

Time: Monday/Wednesday 4:55 PM - 6:10 PM

Instructor: Lisa Gerard

Email: Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu

Class Location: BOBS 836

Office Hours: Before class, by appointment.

Office Location: Lillian Vernon Writers House (58 West 10th Street) - Office #B004

Writers serve up book-dishes with their own special seasoning blend. Some take a few extra cranks on the humor grinder, while others baste with heart-stopping suspense. There are those who garnish with sprigs of everyday life while their peers generously drizzle imagined worlds.

David Foster Wallace puts what matters quite nicely: “What the really great artists do is they’re entirely themselves. They’re entirely themselves, they’ve got their own vision, they have their own way of fracturing reality, and if it’s authentic and true, you will feel it in your nerve endings.”

What interests this reader is the hook: Why do we keep reading—and why do we stop? What is it that lights up those nerve endings? This is what we’re here to identify.

Overview

The purpose of this course is to become a better writer. The course has two parts: (1) the writing workshop, and (2) the craft of prose and poetry.

In the craft portion, we will read prose and poems *as writers*. Rather than taking the literature-class approach, we will take apart the stories and poems with the objective of identifying what we would want to use to make our own writing feel more alive. What’s working, what isn’t, and why? What makes a character feel real? What holds our attention? We will learn the rules *and* how to break them. On workshop days, we’ll be looking at the writing of our peers with these same writerly and readerly lenses, and critique their writing both supportively and constructively, noting a piece’s strengths as well as its weaknesses. In-class writing prompts and other short writing assignments will put all of this into practice and give you new ways to flex your creative muscles. By the end of the semester, your journals and writing portfolios will have hopefully led you towards a better sense of your own voice, strengths, and interests as a writer.

Course Structure

Our class meets on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. Mondays will be dedicated to lessons on craft, while Wednesdays will be our day for workshopping your writing.

Mondays (Craft of Prose & Poetry)

- You will be expected to have read all assigned stories or poems before class. Readings will either be distributed in class or posted to our class Dropbox. Please bring these

readings to class either as a hard copy or on e-reader devices.

- In your writing journal, please write at least three lines/sentences that you either liked or did not like from the assigned readings. You should be prepared to read these aloud and share your reason(s) for liking/disliking it.

- You can also expect to do in-class writing assignments to help inspire new material.

Wednesdays (Workshop)

- Students will submit work (please consult the schedule) the week before it is scheduled to be workshopped. *Please note that there is a page limit of 15 pages for prose pieces. Submissions will be shared electronically via email.

- Over the course of the semester, you will workshop one story, one poem, and a third piece of your choice (ex. fiction, poetry, cross-genre, essay).

- Students are expected to have thoroughly read, marked up, and line edited each submitted piece. (We will go over this on the first day of class.) You will also prepare a brief response letter to the writer about the submission. Two printed copies of the letter are required: one for the writer and one for your instructor.

- Each submission slated for that particular day will be discussed and critiqued, identifying both strengths and weaknesses. Three pieces will be workshopped each week.

Required Texts

Course materials will be provided in the form of handouts or pdfs, all of which will be posted to our class Dropbox.

Writers may include:

Fiction

Rumaan Alam
Leigh Bardugo
Brit Bennett
Suzanne Collins
Gillian Flynn

Lucy Foley
Katie Gutierrez
Hendricks & Pekkanen
Jamaica Kincaid
Jean Hanff Korelitz

Jhumpa Lahiri
Carmen Maria Machado
Lorrie Moore
Curtis Sittenfeld
Ruth Ware

Poetry

Elizabeth Bishop
Anne Carson
Natalie Diaz
Matthea Harvey
Terrance Hayes

John Murillo
Frank O'Hara
Sharon Olds
Morgan Parker
Sylvia Plath

Matthew Rohrer
Nicole Sealey
Tracy K. Smith

Nonfiction

Megan Amram
Rich Cohen
Joan Didion
Ian Frazier

Veronica Geng
Riane Konc
David Lipsky
George Saunders

David Sedaris
Zadie Smith
Jen Spyra

Grading

40% - Workshop Submissions

- Each student will workshop one story, one poem, and a third piece of your choice (ex. fiction, poetry, cross-genre, essay). All pieces should be submitted on time. Submissions will be graded on effort, *not* talent.
 - o Submissions are to be double-spaced and in 12-point font (Times New Roman) with 1-inch margins.
 - o Prose submissions should not exceed 15 pages. Poetry submissions should consist of 3-5 poems of substance. Please contact me if you are working on a long-form poem.

30% - Participation

- All reading assignments are to be completed on time.
- Students are expected to participate in discussions on assigned readings. (I encourage you to write out some notes beforehand so you have some comments to refer to while discussing our readings.)
- Students will record three lines from the week's readings that they liked or disliked in their writing journals and be prepared to share their reasoning.
- Students will schedule a midpoint meeting to review their journaling progress.
- For each workshop submission, students are expected to write a brief response letter to the writer and come to class with two printed copies of these letters.

30% - Final Portfolio

- One copy of each original story and poem submitted for workshop
- Revised versions of the story and poem.
- Writing Journal (your notes, in-class writing assignments, etc)

Portfolio

By the final day of class, each student will submit a portfolio of writing. This will consist of the following: (1) cover page; (2) table of contents; (3) revisions of your three workshopped submissions.

Journals

On the first day of class, every student will receive a writing journal. This journal will be used for in-class writing assignments and other prompts that I might ask you to do as short take-home assignments. Students will also record the three sentences/lines they liked or disliked from the week's reading assignments. I encourage as much note-taking as possible. Are you reading something interesting in your spare time or for another class? Did you see a movie or watch a show that gave you a crafty idea? Write it down. Lorrie Moore once pointed out what she thought was the difference between the writer and the non-writer: "The non-writer thinks she'll remember it in the morning." The writer knows she won't, and she's right. If something comes to you, don't leave it for the morning.

Students will turn in their journals at the halfway point of the semester to review their progress. The journals will also be submitted along with the final portfolio for thorough review at the end of the semester.

Attendance Policy

Class will begin promptly at 4:55pm. Students are required to attend all classes. A writing workshop is a small community, and everyone's presence and participation is necessary for it to function.

Because emergencies sometimes arise and people get sick, each student is allowed one unexcused absence (with the exception of the day you are being workshopped). For every unexcused absence that follows, a half-letter will be deducted from your grade. Two late arrivals will count as an absence, so please do be on time. Absences due to medical emergencies must be excused with a note from a doctor. Please bring the note to the next class you attend. If you are aware that you are going to be absent due to a religious holiday, please let me know by email before the class.

Classroom Etiquette

It is important to be respectful, constructive, and generous when giving feedback on another student's work. An ideal workshop is open and supportive. Attacking your classmates will not make their writing or your writing better, nor will it help your grade. We will discuss in detail on our first Wednesday how to give constructive criticism. Disrespectful or inappropriate behavior in class will not be tolerated.

Office Hours

Each student is expected to meet with me after their first workshop turn as well as once during the second half of the semester, but I do encourage meetings after both workshop turns (and to discuss craft and writing in general). Please email me at Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu to set up a meeting time. My office (#B004) is on the basement level of the Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, which is located at 58 West 10th Street, between 5th & 6th Avenues.

Tech Policy

With the exception of e-readers (should you choose to use one), we will observe a strict no tech policy. Laptops will not be allowed, and cellphones should be on silent and stowed away. In-class writing assignments will be done in your journals, which I will distribute on the first day of class.

Extra Credit Policy

You may obtain extra credit by completing **two** of the following assignments:

- Attend a reading and write a one-page response (Discuss your impressions and what you learned that you can apply to your own writing. Submit the response within one week of the event. I encourage you to attend events that are part of the Creative Writing Program's public reading series. You can find more information [here](#).)
- Write a book review of at least two double-spaced pages (standard formatting applies) on a novel, short story collection, or collection of poetry.
- Go to a museum and write a poem or short story inspired by a work of art. You must include the museum ticket and a photo of the artwork along with the writing assignment.

Plagiarism

Don't do it. You will receive a zero on the assignment and will be referred to the college for disciplinary action. NYU's policy on academic integrity can be reviewed [here](#).

Student Wellness

If you submit a piece of creative work that exhibits potential dangers—such as depression, suicide, or explicit harm to oneself or others—expect that I will email you to check in. However, you can preemptively send me an email explaining that this is simply creative work and not reflective of your state of mind.

If you think your mental health and well-being is affecting your classroom performance, please let me know. Also remember that the NYU Wellness Exchange Hotline can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at (212) 443-9999.

SCHEDULE

Note: Readings and assignments are subject to change. You will be notified in advance should there be any adjustments.

Wednesday, September 7 – Introductions, Course Overview

Monday, September 12 – Gillian Flynn, Greer Hendricks-Sarah Pekkanen ***or*** Lucy Foley, & Ruth Ware

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, September 14 – Workshop Protocol, Sample Workshop

***Homework due:** Writing Prompts

Monday, September 19 – Leigh Bardugo, Suzanne Collins, & Carmen Maria Machado

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, September 21 – Workshop Round 1.1

Monday, September 26 – Jhumpa Lahiri, Lorrie Moore, & Curtis Sittenfeld

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, September 28 – Workshop Round 1.2

Monday, October 3 – Brit Bennett, Katie Gutierrez, & Jamaica Kincaid

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, October 5 – Workshop Round 1.3

Monday, October 10 **NO CLASS – Fall Recess**

Tuesday, October 11 (Legislative Day) – Rumaan Alam & Jean Hanff Korelitz

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, October 12 – Workshop Round 1.4

Monday, October 17 – Elizabeth Bishop, Frank O’Hara, & Sylvia Plath

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, October 19 – Workshop Round 2.1

Monday, October 24 – Anne Carson, Terrance Hayes, Sharon Olds, & Tracy K. Smith

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, October 26 – Workshop Round 2.2

Monday, October 31 – Natalie Diaz, John Murillo, & Nicole Sealey

***Homework due:**

Wednesday, November 2 – Workshop Round 2.3

Monday, November 7 – Matthea Harvey, Morgan Parker, Matthew Rohrer
***Homework due:**

Wednesday, November 9 – Workshop Round 2.4

Monday, November 14 – Zadie Smith & George Saunders
***Homework due:**

Wednesday, November 16 – Workshop Round 3.1

Monday, November 21 – Ian Frazier & Veronica Geng
***Homework due:**

Wednesday, November 23 **NO CLASS – *Thanksgiving Break***

Monday, November 28 – David Lipsky & Joan Didion
***Homework due:**

Wednesday, November 30 – Workshop Round 3.2

Monday, December 5 – Rich Cohen & David Sedaris
***Homework due:**

Wednesday, December 7 – Workshop Round 3.3

Monday, December 12 – Megan Amram, Riane Konc, & Jen Spyra
***Homework due:**

Wednesday, December 14 – Workshop Round 3.4 + Final Class Celebration
***Homework:** Work on your Final Portfolios (due Friday, December 16 at 5:00pm EST!)

****FINAL PORTFOLIOS ARE DUE BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16, 5:00PM EST****
Final portfolios will be turned in directly to me, either in my office (58 West 10th Street, Office #B004) or to my mailbox in the Writers House. These will be graded and placed in my mailbox for you to pick up by **Wednesday, December 21 at 10:00am EST**.