

Introduction to Prose and Poetry
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Office Hours: by appointment

CRWRI-UA 815.003 MW 8:00 – 9:15

Course Objectives

Through this course, students will:

- Identify and articulate their own writerly aesthetics, preoccupations, ethics, and style.
- Develop an individualized writing practice.
- Read critically, and form evidence-based insight about creative texts.
- Participate in a workshop model, while giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Learn to identify and appreciate various genres of literature
- Identify technique and craft: POV, beginnings, endings, structure, lyricism, rhythm, imagery, character development, maintaining stakes, etc.
- Draft and edit creative work.

Assignments

Readings:

- Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (available from the bookstore)
- Handouts.

1. Workshop pieces

- You will submit three pieces to be workshopped throughout the semester:
 - 1 work of nonfiction (5-10 pages)
 - 1 work of fiction (5-10) pages
 - 1 work of poetry (3-5 poems)

It is up to you to determine the order that you would like to submit these three genres but you must submit all three throughout the semester.

2. Magpie-ing

Much of writing comes from observing the world around you as well as your own process of observation (what draws your attention, what keeps your attention, and why). To bring more awareness and organization to this process, I am asking you to curate a physical or digital collection of your inspirations and preoccupations. This could include photos, drawings, overheard snippets of conversation, movie tickets etc. I will ask you to share your collection with me at several points in the semester; thoughtful engagement will count to your participation grade.

3. Critique

For each workshop submission, the entire class must provide both margin line edits and a 300-500+ feedback letter. More information on how to provide useful critiques will be provided closer to the start of the workshop segment of the course.

4. Final Portfolio

You will submit revisions of all three of your workshop pieces. For each revision, you must include a cover letter of 250-500 words explaining the choices you made in revision, your vision for the piece, and how class critique impacted this vision. Revisions will not be graded on how much of the class critique you end up utilizing, but rather that significant improvements in the work are apparent. You must include the classmate revision letters along with your draft.

Grading

- Class participation 25%
- Critique (response letters and margin notes) 25%
- Revision (final portfolio) 20%
- Workshop pieces 30% (10% each)

Attendance Policy:

We have a limited amount of time together, so your attendance is mandatory. An effective workshop runs on the committed reading and thoughtful feedback of each class member. Under normal circumstances, I would require a letter from a physician or university administrator to excuse an absence and count each unexcused absence as a half grade deduction (i.e. B becomes B-, B- becomes C+, etc.). These are not normal circumstances. Given the pandemic's ongoing physical and mental health risks and the accompanying pressure on healthcare facilities, I will excuse an absence if you reach out to me before or after the class, provide a reasonable explanation of why you will not be able to attend, and create a plan with me to make up the missed material. I reserve the right to rescind this policy and require documentation should I feel that it is being abused.

Lateness

Being fifteen minutes late or more counts for half an absence (ex. late twice= missed class). This class is early, but it is also short. This policy is designed to make the most of our time together.

Schedule

Week 1

Monday September 5th - Labor Day, No class.

1. September 7st (W) **INTRO: Who we are, Where we are, what are we doing.**
- **Class:** Introductions, syllabus review, workshop sign up, writing exercise,
 - **Homework:**
 - o *Read:* excerpts from *Citizen, Time is a Thing the Body Moves Through, The Collected Stories of Lydia Davis* (handouts).
 - o *Write:* A brief (~500 word) response on how you would mark the difference between fiction, nonfiction, and poetry and whether this distinction is important. Your response must reference all three readings. **Email me your response by 10 p.m. Sunday 9/6.**

Week 2.

2. September 12 (M) **Defining Genre. Redefining genre.**
- **Class:** discuss reading responses. Genre mapping.
 - **Homework:**
 - o *Read:*
 - Leslie Jamison, “Devil’s Bait,”
 - Louis Menand, [“Literary Hoaxes and the Ethics of Authorship”](#)
 - excerpt from *The Lifespan of a Fact* (handouts)
 - o *Brainstorm:* class discussion on how (or whether) you define “truth” in literature and whether this distinction is important. Your response must reference both readings.
3. September 14th (W): **Defining Truth, (Potentially) Redefining Truth**
- **Class:** Discuss reading responses. Writing exercise, introduce magpie assignment.
 - **Assignments:**
 - o *Read:*
 - Joan Didion “On Keeping a Journal.”
 - Carmen Maria Machado “The Husband Stitch.”
 - Hanif Abdurraqib [“Two Poems”](#)
 - o *Begin:* Magpie-ing

Week 3.

4. September 19th (M): **Inspiration, Aesthetics, and Influence**
- **Class:** discuss reading, Handouts from: [Sheila Heti](#), Peter Handke *The Weight of the World*. Writing prompt.
 - **Assignments:**
 - o *Read*
 - Zadie Smith “In Defense of Fiction” (handout)
 - Zadie Smith [“Crazy they Call Me”](#)
 - *American Dirt* criticism.
5. September 21th (W) **Writing About Others**
- **Class:** discuss reading, opportunity to share writing, watch [Patricia Smith](#) perform “Skinhead” on DefJam’s YouTube. in-class writing: write from a perspective that is not your own **Group 1 turns in first workshop piece.**
 - **Assignments:**

- *Read:*
 - Group 1 submission.
 - Write: response letters.

Week 4

6. September 26st (M) **First Workshop: Group 1**

- **Class:** Workshop Group 1 Submissions.
- **Assignments:**
 - *Read:*
 - From *The Situation and the Story* (handout)
 - From *To Show and to Tell* (handout)
 - *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* p. 1- 50,
 - Listen: : <https://onbeing.org/programs/ocean-vuong-a-life-worthy-of-our-breath/>
 - *Brainstorm:* for in-class writing assignment constructing yourself as a character.

- 7. September 28th (W) **“Let Me Begin Again,” Openings and Writing about the Self**
 - **Class:** in-class writing assignment: constructing yourself as a character, discuss reading, characterization of the self. Craft lesson on openings (handouts from *Jazz* by Toni Morrison, *Heavy* by Kiese Laymon, “[After Suicide \[A hole is nothing\]](#),” Matt Rasmussen. Review workshop etiquette **Group 1 first workshop submissions due.**
 - **Assignments:**
 - *Read:* workshop submission.
 - *Write:* response letter.
- 8.

Week 5

8. October 3 (M) **First Workshop Group 2**

- Class: Workshop group 2.
- **Assignments:**
 - Read:
 - *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* 50-125
 - “The Power of Metaphors,” Jonathan Collins”
 - “[When my Brother was an Aztec](#)” by Natalie Diaz (handout)
 - Select: four-6 metaphors/ similes from Vuong that you find particularly effective (and/or that have stuck with you from other readings). Mark them in your copy of the book or write them down in a notebook. You will be asked to share these with the class.

9. October 5 (W) **Metaphors**

- **Class:** metaphor exercise. craft talk on metaphors, discuss reading. writing prompt. **Group 3 first submission due.**
- **Assignments:**
 - *Read:*
 - workshop submission.

- *Write:*
 - response letter.

Week 6 *Fall break, class meets on Tuesday*

10. October 11 (T): **First Workshop Group 3**

- **Class:** workshop group 3.

Assignments

- *Read*
 - *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* 125-200
 - Nikky Finney "[Liberty Street Seafood](#)"
 - Gwendolyn Brooks "[We Real Cool.](#)"

11. October 12 (W) **Lyricism, Rhythm, and Musicality.**

- **Class:** craft lesson rhythm, discussion: how does imagery differ in poetry and prose? How do the writers employ imagery similarly and differently to accomplish their aims? What purpose does a line break serve? How (or is) this different from a paragraph or chapter break? Line break exercise. **Group 4 first submission due.**
- **Assignments:**
 - *Read:* workshop submission.
 - *Write:* response letter.

Week 7

13. Oct 17th (M) **First Workshop Group 4**

- **Class:** Workshop Group 4
- **Assignments:**
 - *Finish:* *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*
 - "Peonies" Zadie Smith
 - "[Trouble](#)" Matthew Dickman.

14. Oct 19^h (W) **Imagery, repetition, grounding.**

- **Class:** discuss readings, image exercise, excerpts from *Luster* **Group 1 hands in second submission.**
- **Assignments:**
 - *Read:* workshop submission.
 - *Write:* response letter.

Week 8

15. Oct 24th (M) **Second Workshop Group 1**

- **Class:** workshop group 1 second submission.
- **Assignment:**
 - *Read:*
 - Excerpt from *David Mamet, Three Uses of the Knife: On the Nature and Purpose of Drama.*
 - Shirley Jackson "The Lottery."
 - Li-Young Lee "[Persimmons](#)"

16. Oct 26 (W) Plot, **Scene, Stakes, and Narrative**

-**Class:** craft talk, small group exercise, narrative mapping, John McPhee drawings.

Group 2 turns in second submission.

-**Assignments:**

- *Read:* workshop submission.
- *Write:* response letter.

Week 9

17. Oct 31st (M) **Second Workshop Group 2**

- **Class:** workshop group 2.
- **Assignments:**
 - *Read:*
 - Joan Didion, from *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (handout)
 - David Foster Wallace, [“Tennis, Trigonometry, Tornadoes.”](#)

18. Nov 2 (W) **Evoking Place**

- Class: reading discussion, craft lesson on place, writing exercise. **Group 3 turns in second submission.**
- Assignments:
 - *Read:*
 - workshop submission.
 - *Write:*
 - response letter.

Week 10

19. Nov 7 (M) **Second Workshop Group 3**

- **Class:** Workshop group 3
- **Assignments:**
 - *Read:*
 - From *Intimations* (handout).
 - “People” from *Aspects of the Novel*
 - *Brainstorm:*
 - In class writing assignment: write for 25 minutes on someone you notice on a regular basis, but do not know (ex bus driver, neighbor, shopkeeper)..

20. Nov 9 (W) **Characterization**

- **-Class:** craft talk on character. Characterization exercise **Group 4 turns in second workshop piece.**

Assignments:

- *Read:*
 - workshop submission.
- *Write:*
 - response letter.

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Week 11

21. Nov 14 (M) **Second Workshop Group 4**

- **Class:** workshop.
- **Assignments:**
 - o Johnathan Franzen, [Farther Away](#).

22. Nov 16 (W) **Pacing**

- **Class:** Craft lesson pacing. Discuss how the pacing of “Farther Away” does or does not contribute to the characterization of the narrator and the central argument(s). writing exercise. **Group 1 turns in final workshop piece.**
 - o *Read:*
 - workshop submission.
 - o *Write:*
 - response letter.

Week 12

23. Nov 21 (M) **Final Workshop Group 1.**

Class: workshop group, 1 **Group 2 turns in final workshop piece via email Tuesday at midnight.**

- o *Read:* workshop submission.
- o *Write:* response letter.

Nov 23 Thanksgiving break (no class)

Week 13

24. Nov 28th (M) **Final Workshop Group 2**

- **Class:** workshop group 2.
- **Assignments**
 - o *Read:*
 - James Joyce, “The Dead”
 - Watch 10-min video of [“The Dead”](#) ending.

25. Nov 30th (W) **Endings**

- **Class:** craft lesson on endings. End exercise. **Group 3 turns in final submission.**
 - o *Read:* workshop submission.
 - o *Write:* response letter.

Week 15

26. Dec 5 (M) **Final Workshop Group 3**

- **Class:** workshop group 3.
- **Assignments:**
 - o Raymond Carver, “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love”

- Raymond Carver [“Beginners”](#) (“What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” without Gordon Lish’s edits.)
- Kiese Laymon on revision.

27. Dec 7 (W) **Writing is Rewriting**

- **Class:** discuss revisions, outline portfolio expectations, small groups. **Group 4 turns in final submission.**
 - *Read:* workshop submission.
 - *Write:* response letter.

Week 16

28. Dec 12th (M) Final Workshop Group 4

- **Class:** workshop group 4.
- **Assignments:**
 - “How to Become a Writer” by Lorrie Moore
 - From Anne Lamott’s *Bird by Bird*

29. Dec 14th (W) Class: **Where from here?**

- **Class:** literary journals, publication, pitching, sanity.
- **Assignments:**
 - Revised portfolio due electronically by Dec 22.