INTRODUCTION TO PROSE & POETRY

I. Course Description & Objective

In this course, we will enhance our abilities and confidence as writers through, first and foremost, writing as much and as often as possible—at home, in class, mid-commute, waiting to cross the street, etc. We will practice our craft through reading, re-reading, and having lively and thorough discussions about each other's writing, as well as that of various authors. To encourage proficiency, and to make sure we're constantly putting pen to paper, each student will keep a journal for this class. We'll begin and end each class with a brief writing exercise. We will keep toning this muscle over the semester, and we will write until it becomes a habit. My hope is that you will feel inspired to eavesdrop in cafes for dialogue inspiration, to pull out your pocket journal on the train and jot a story or poem idea, to experiment with tone and voice and form and style, and feel propelled to continue writing long after this class. This class is the perfect opportunity to find and experiment with each of these tools, and build (or begin!) your voyage as a writer.

II. Assignments & Workshop

Throughout the semester, in addition to readings, and submitting workshop material and responses, I will assign different writing exercises and assignments to be completed outside of class. In addition, each student will keep a writing journal and will be encouraged to write in it daily, or 3 times a week minimum.

- Students will workshop twice over the semester (one workshop in each genre). There will be one “free workshop” at the end of the semester where anyone can volunteer to submit any writing they’ve done over the semester that they wish to have feedback on.
  - 1 short story or excerpt of longer piece of fiction or creative non-fiction (5-15 pages)
  - 1 poem or set of poems (between 2-6 pages)
- Students will submit printed copies of work for the whole class, including me, one week before workshop date.
- Students will read and annotate each other’s work & write a 1-page feedback letter (to be printed) and brought to class on the workshop date, as well as an emailed copy to me.

III. All Readings

*Don't be scared off by the amount! Many of these readings are quite short & incredibly readable*

CRAFT – Writers on Writing

Excerpts from “Frantumaglia”, Elena Ferrante
Carmen Maria Machado, “The Personal Essay and the First Person Character”
George Saunders on “The School”
George Saunders on Writing
Richard Hugo, The Triggering Town, Chapter on “Writing off the subject”
Lydia Davis, Ten Good Writing Habits
Joan Didion, Why I Write, On Keeping a Notebook

FICTION, FLASH, SHORT STORIES
The Return, Roberto Bolano
Off, Frank Jones, Aimee Bender
Cat Person, Kristen Roupenian
Indian Camp, Ernest Hemingway
No One’s a Mystery, Elizabeth Tallent
Hello Stranger, Truman Capote
Snakebite, Saba Sams
Breathing Exercise, Raven Leilani
Like Mother Used to Make, Shirley Jackson
The Kid’s Guide to Divorce, Paris, You’re Ugly Too, Lorrie Moore
A Temporary Matter, Jhumpa Lahiri
Strawberries, Barry Yourgrau
I Lived Here Once, Jean Rhys
Husband Stitch, Carmen Maria Machado
The School, Donald Barthelme
The Birthmark, Wakefield, Nathaniel Hawthorne
To Those of You Who Missed Your Connecting Flights Out of O’Hare, Amy Hempel
A Romantic Weekend, Mary Gaitskill
Five Short Stories, Lydia Davis
Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes, J.D. Salinger
The Escort, Chuck Palahniuk
Excerpt from Samanta Schweblin’s Fever Dream
Excerpts from Adam Gopnik’s “At the Strangers’ Gate: Arrivals in New York”
Excerpt from Donna Tartt’s “The Goldfinch”

POETRY
Margaret Atwood, Rat Song, They eat out
Anne Sexton, The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator, The Double Image, The Room of My Life
Elfriede Jelinek, Tonight
Sharon Olds, My Son the Man, Rite of Passage
Emily Dickinson, 591
Maya Angelou, Phenomenal Woman, Awaking in New York
Pablo Neruda, Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market
Mark Doty, A Display of Mackerel
Billy Collins, Workshop, Introduction to Poetry, Marginalia
John Berryman, Excerpts from Dream Songs
Yusef Komunyakaa, You and I Are Disappearing
Ocean Vuong, Not Even This
Four poems by Maggie Nelson
Terrance Hayes, Bob Ross Paints Your Portrait
Walt Whitman, Song of Myself
Sylvia Plath, Lady Lazarus, Daddy
Edgar Allen Poe, The Raven,
Anne Bradstreet, The Author to Her Book
Mary Oliver, At Black River
Ben Lerner, The Media
Lynn Crosbie, Carrie Leigh’s Hugh Hefner Haikus
Gwendolyn Brooks, The Pool Players. Seven at the Golden Shovel
William Carlos Williams, By the road to the contagious hospital

IV. Grading
In-class participation (attendance, contribution to class discussions): 30%
Writing: 25%
Written feedback to classmates: 25%
Final Portfolio: 20%

Absences & Late Arrivals
You are permitted 1 unexcused absence. Please send me an email if you’re going to miss class or be late. Lateness of 10+ minutes will be excused once; thereafter, it will be worth 0.5 absences.

Participation
Contributing to discussion in workshop, as well as in craft discussions, is crucial to setting a collaborative workshop environment, where we all give the attention and dedication each writer deserves.

*Tech Policy
This class will be pleasantly tech-free. All electronics must be put away at the start of class. All materials for class (workshop & craft materials, as well as writing assignments) must be printed before class, if they have not been printed out for you already. Or, unless otherwise specified.

Final Portfolio (Due December 18)
On December 18, you will turn in an emailed copy of your Final Portfolio which includes all of your workshop submissions, writing exercises and assignments, as well as one substantially revised workshopped submission.

Academic Integrity
NYU has a zero tolerance plagiarism policy for academic papers and creative pieces. All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department, and will result in a failure of this course.

Office Hours
Each student is encouraged to come to as many office hours as possible. One office hour meeting with me during the semester is mandatory.

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 register with the
Student Wellness Policy  Unless there is 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 receive 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.

V. FALL SCHEDULE

Tuesdays are dedicated to Craft, and Thursdays are dedicated to Workshop; however, we might mix it up, and often will do mini-craft lessons on workshop days. The first five classes will be dedicated to craft discussions and writing exercises, so you’ll have time to get the writing juices flowing, before workshop begins.

- Please come to class with 13 printed copies of your submission one week before your workshop date. We will begin the semester with Prose, and end with Poetry!
- Workshop Dates: 9/21, 9/28, 10/5, 10/12, 10,19, 10/22, 11/2, 11/9,
- Final Portfolio Due December 18
- Prose: 9/5-10/19
- Poetry: 9/24-12/12

WEEK ONE
T    Sep. 5  WELCOME
     Icebreaker ~ let’s get to know each other!
     Review Syllabus
     Assign writers for upcoming workshops
     Writing exercise
     Bring in excerpt from Frantumaglia for class to read aloud

TR    Sep. 7  OVERCOMING WRITING JITTERS / HOW TO BEGIN?
    Donald Barthelme’s “The School” & George Saunders on this story
    Excerpts from Elena Ferrante’s “Frantumaglia”
    Joan Didion, Why I Write, On Keeping a Notebook
    Lydia Davis, Ten Good Writing Habits
    Assignment: Come up with 3 different “gas stations” for a potential story.

WEEK TWO
T    Sep. 12  CHARACTER & VOICE/STYLE
    The Return, Roberto Bolano
    Off, Aimee Bender
    Indian Camp, Ernest Hemingway
**Snakebite**, Saba Sams

**Assignment:**

**Part I:** Create a character study or mood board for either a fictional character that already exists, or one that you come up with. Mood board can be digital (via Pinterest, Adobe, etc.) or can be physical collage. Have fun with this & get creative!

**Some questions to ask yourself:** What does this character do for fun? What’s in his/her/their starter pack? What do they wear? What are their pet peeves? What does their home look like? Where do they live? How do they feel about where they live? Do they have pets? Are they a dog person, cat person, animal person in general, or not? Who do they talk to every day?

**Part II:** Write 1 page in this character’s distinct voice (using 1st person).

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**TR Sep. 14**

**TO PLOT OR NOT TO PLOT**

Breathing Exercise, Raven Leilani
No One’s a Mystery, Elizabeth Tallent
The Escort, Chuck Palahniuk
Paris, Lorrie Moore

**Assignment:** Write an outline of a thorough plot for a short story using Freytag’s pyramid.

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**WEEK THREE**

**T Sep 19**

**DIALOGUE, GESTURE & COMMUNICATION (TEXTS, EMAILS)**

Cat Person, Kristen Roupenian
*A Temporary Matter*, Jhumpa Lahiri
Hello Stranger, Truman Capote
The Kid’s Guide to Divorce, Lorrie Moore

**Assignment:** Listen to a conversation in a public place and re-write it as dialogue. OR Write 2 pages in the interview-style of Capote’s “Hello Stranger”

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**TR Sep 21**

**WORKSHOP**

Review *Workshop Guidelines* (in preparation for first workshop!)
Workshop #1 ___________ & ___________

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**WEEK FOUR**

**T Sep 26**

**SETTING / PLACE & DISPLACEMENT**

Excerpt from Adam Gopnik’s memoir “At a Strangers’ Gate: Arrivals in New York”
Like Mother Used to Make, Shirley Jackson
Excerpt from Samanta Schweblin’s “Fever Dream”
Excerpt from Donna Tartt’s “The Goldfinch” (Las Vegas chapter)

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**TR Sep 28**

**WORKSHOP**

Mini craft lesson on **HUMOR & THE UNEXPECTED**
Frank Jones, Aimee Bender
Strawberries, Barry Yourgrau
Workshop #2: ______________ & ______________

WEEK FIVE
T   Oct. 3 FLASH & REVERSALS
    Five Short Stories, Lydia Davis
    Horror Story, Carmen Maria Machado
    I Lived Here Once, Jean Rhys
    To Those of You Who Missed Your Connecting Flights Out of O'Hare, Amy Hempel

TR  Oct. 5 WORKSHOP
    Mini craft lesson on TENSES
    Workshop #3: ______________ & ______________

WEEK SIX
T   Oct. 10 NO CLASS (Legislative Monday)

TR  Oct. 12 MINI CRAFT LESSON ON POV (1st, 2nd, 3rd person)
    A Romantic Weekend, Mary Gaitskill
    The Personal Essay and the First Person Character, Carmen Maria Machado

Workshop #4: ______________ & ______________

WEEK SEVEN
T   Oct. 17 ENDINGS
    Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes, J.D. Salinger
    The Husband Stitch, Carmen Maria Machado
    Wakefield, Nathaniel Hawthorne
    Assignment: Pick one of your favorite endings, and one of your least favorite endings, of a short story or novel. Write a paragraph about why you like or don't like it.

TR  Oct. 19
    Workshop #5: ______________ & ______________

WEEK EIGHT – POETRY
T   Oct. 24 SUBJECT / OBJECT
    Chapter “Writing the Subject” from “The Triggering Town”
    Billy Collins, Introduction to Poetry
    Sylvia Plath, Lady Lazarus
    Ode to a Large Tuna in the Market, Pablo Neruda
    Mark Doty, A Display of Mackerel
    Yusef Komunyakaa, You and I Are Disappearing
    Assignment: Write two different poems about the same subject.

TR  Oct. 26 WORKSHOP
    Workshop, Billy Collins
    591, Emily Dickinson
    Workshop #6: ______________ & ______________
WEEK NINE
T Oct. 31 SOUND & RHYME
   Maya Angelou, Phenomenal Woman (Recording)
   Sylvia Plath, Daddy (Recording)
   Walt Whitman, Song of Myself (Recording)
   Terrance Hayes, Bob Ross Paints Your Portrait
   Edgar Allen Poe, The Raven or Annabel Lee

TR Nov. 2
   Workshop #7: ______________ & ______________

WEEK TEN
T Nov. 7 VOICE & STYLE
   Not Even This, Ocean Vuong
   Rat Song, Margaret Atwood
   The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator, Anne Sexton

TR Nov. 9 WORKSHOP
   Workshop #8: ______________ & ______________

WEEK ELEVEN
T Nov. 14 IMAGERY
   At Black River, Mary Oliver
   Tonight, Elfriede Jelinek
   The Double Image, Anne Sexton
   Little Exercise, Elizabeth Bishop

TR Nov. 16 WORKSHOP
   Workshop #9: ______________ & ______________

WEEK TWELVE
T Nov. 21 WORKSHOP
   Workshop #10: ______________ & ______________

TR Nov. 23 NO CLASS

WEEK THIRTEEN
T Nov. 28 FORMS
   Four Poems by Maggie Nelson
   The Media, Ben Lerner
   Carrie Leigh's Hugh Hefner Haikus, Lynn Crosbie
   Assignment: Write a poem in couplets.

TR Nov. 30 WORKSHOP
   Workshop #11: ______________ & ______________

WEEK FOURTEEN
Rite of Passage, Sharon Olds
They Eat Out, Margaret Atwood
The Pool Players. Seven at the Golden Shovel, Gwendolyn Brooks
By the road to the contagious hospital, William Carlos Williams

Workshop #12: ______________ & ______________

WEEK FIFTEEN

Free Workshop

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Last Class

Class Reading!

Final Portfolio due December 18

WORKSHOP ETIQUETTE (print this out separately to hand out in class?)
Workshop can be a sensitive environment, and the act of sharing creative work is inherently vulnerable. Therefore, our goal with workshop is to be helpful and thoughtful. There's no room for unnecessary critique or blatant statements of taste. When giving critique, think always of trying to make the story the best version of itself.

“If I have a story that is a mess, full of places I can't live with, instead of thinking, you know, “And you call yourself a professional writer? Just look at the mess you've made!” I try to think, “Ah, you have skillfully revised yourself into a place where the key to getting the story to its higher ground lies in this little handful of messy places. Good for you! And look, there are only, like, six of them. And they are messy because—well, because they have the potential to be really beautiful, but they don't know how yet, the poor things.” — George Saunders

Dear Readers,

Before Workshop

• Read each piece twice (once for fun, a second time for clarity).
• Annotate and takes notes as you read.
• Write a 1-page min. double-spaced “feedback letter” to the writer (what’s working, what’s not) and email me a copy of this letter before class. Bring a printed copy of this letter with you to class as a guide & to give the writer after workshop.

During Workshop

• First, let’s talk about what the piece is about / give some summary!
• Next, let’s talk about what’s working! Give specific examples within the text (moments or characters or lines or concepts you responded to.
• Questions to ask yourself: What is this work trying to achieve? How is it doing this? How could it develop to better achieve its goals?
• Heartbeats: what gave you pause in the story? What stayed with you afterwards?
• Even if something isn’t the typical kind of writing you gravitate towards, try and view this writing as if you did.
• Speak to the story/poem and not to the writer (ex: the story/poem did this instead of you did this).
• Separate the author from the character/narrator of a story and the speaker of a poem (exist under the assumption that all material is fictional unless otherwise specified.)

Dear Writers,

Before Workshop

• Bring in 13 printed copies of your submission for the class one week before your workshop date. For prose: 5 – 15 pages. For poetry: 2 poems minimum, 2-4 pages.
• Working Title, Double-spaced, & Page Numbers, please.

During Workshop

• Please wait until after the workshop to comment. While this isn’t mandatory, it’s often the best way to fully be able to absorb the experience of your readers. It’s so valuable and rare to be able to listen to people talk about and react to your work—take advantage of this!
• Once we’ve finished workshopping, you may ask follow-up questions. Remember: even if you feel readers have missed something crucial, this almost always tells you some key information. However, remember that not all critique and suggestions may be for you. Sometimes you must sift through and pick out the critiques that are most useful to you.