

## CREATIVE WRITING: INTRODUCTION TO PROSE AND POETRY

Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.004

**Time:** Tuesday/Thursday 8am-9:15am

**Instructor:** Lisa Gerard

**Email:** Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu

**Class Location:** Bobst, Room 837

**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Office Location:** Lillian Vernon Writers House (58 West 10<sup>th</sup> 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 help you 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 look 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 and 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 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 Tuesdays and Thursdays. Tuesdays will be dedicated to lessons on craft, while Thursdays will be our day for workshopping your writing.

#### *Tuesdays (Craft of Prose & Poetry)*

- You are expected to read all assigned stories and poems before each class. Readings will be posted to our class Brightspace page. Please bring these readings to class either as a hard copy, on laptops, or on e-reader devices.

- In your writing journal, please write at least three lines/sentences that you either liked or disliked from the assigned readings. Please be prepared to read these aloud and share your thoughts.
- You can also expect to do in-class writing assignments each week to help inspire new material.

***Thursdays (Workshop)***

- Students will submit work (please consult the schedule) THE FRIDAY BEFORE it is scheduled to be workshopped (meaning, six days in advance). \*Please note that there is a page limit of 12 pages for prose pieces—and a minimum of 7 pages. Submissions will be shared electronically via email. Poetry submissions should contain at least three substantive poems.
- Over the course of the semester, you will workshop two pieces: either two prose (fiction or creative nonfiction), or one prose and one poetry.
- Students are expected to thoroughly read, mark up, and line edit each submitted piece. We will go over this in class prior to the first workshop. You will also prepare a brief response letter (one page) to the writer about the submission. Letters and edits are to be sent to both the writer and the instructor by the start of class.
- Each submission slated for that particular day will be discussed and critiqued, identifying both strengths and weaknesses. Two pieces will be workshopped each week.

**Required Texts**

All course materials will be posted to our class Brightspace page.

***Fiction***

Leigh Bardugo  
Brit Bennett  
Michael Chabon  
Suzanne Collins

Gillian Flynn  
Jamaica Kincaid  
Rebecca Makkai

Lorrie Moore  
Curtis Sittenfeld  
Brian K. Vaughan

***Poetry***

Elizabeth Bishop  
Natalie Diaz  
Matthea Harvey  
Terrance Hayes

John Murillo  
Frank O'Hara  
Sharon Olds  
Morgan Parker

Sylvia Plath  
Nicole Sealey  
Tracy K. Smith

***Nonfiction***

Megan Amram  
Rich Cohen  
Joan Didion  
David Foster Wallace

Ian Frazier  
Riane Konc  
David Lipsky  
George Saunders

David Sedaris  
Zadie Smith  
Jen Spyra

## Grading

### 40% Workshop (Submissions & Feedback)

- Each student will be workshopped twice (either two prose submissions, \*or\* one prose and one poetry submission). All pieces must 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 12 pages—7 pages *minimum*. Poetry submissions should consist of at least 3 poems of substance. Please contact me if you are working in long-form.
- For each workshop submission, students are expected to prepare substantial edits as well as write a brief response letter (one page) to the writer. Edits and letters are to be shared with **both** the writer and instructor by the start of the corresponding workshop session.

### 40% Attendance, Participation, & Office Hours

- All students are expected to be present. Please review the attendance policy below.
- All reading assignments must 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 during class.)
- 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 one office hour to review their progress.

### 20% Final Portfolio and Writing Journal

- One copy of each original workshop submission
- Revisions of each submission
- Writing Journal (your notes, in-class writing assignments, etc)

## Portfolio

Each student will submit a portfolio of writing as part of their final grade. This will consist of the following: (1) cover page; (2) your *original* two workshopped submissions; (3) *revisions* of your two 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 yours better, nor will it help your grade. We will discuss in detail 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 at least once during the semester, but I do encourage meetings after each workshop turn (and to discuss craft and writing in general). Please email me at [Lisa.Gerard@nyu.edu](mailto: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 10<sup>th</sup> Street, between 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> Avenues.

### **Tech Policy**

Cellphones should be on silent and stowed away. In-class writing assignments can be done either in your journals—which I will distribute on the first day of class—or on laptops. If you choose to use a laptop, I expect you only to consult and produce class material.

### **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.

### **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>

## **SCHEDULE**

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

Tuesday, September 5 — Introductions, Course Overview

Thursday, September 7 — Michael Chabon & Jamaica Kincaid

Tuesday, September 12 — Suzanne Collins & Lorrie Moore

Thursday, September 14 — Workshop Protocol, Sample Workshop

Tuesday, September 19 — Rebecca Makkai & Curtis Sittenfeld

Thursday, September 21 — Workshop Round 1.1

Tuesday, September 26 — Brit Bennett & Gillian Flynn

Thursday, September 28 — Workshop Round 1.2

Tuesday, October 3 — Leigh Bardugo & Brian K. Vaughan

Thursday, October 5 — Workshop Round 1.3

Tuesday, October 10 — ***LEGISLATIVE DAY – NO CLASS***

Thursday, October 12 — Workshop Round 1.4

Tuesday, October 17 — Elizabeth Bishop, Frank O’Hara, Sylvia Plath

Thursday, October 19 — Workshop Round 1.5

Tuesday, October 24 — Terrance Hayes, Sharon Olds, Tracy K. Smith

**\*Journals are due at the end of today’s class (October 24) for midterm review. They will be returned by Tuesday, October 31. Midterm grades will be entered by November 1.**

Thursday, October 26 — Workshop Round 1.6

Tuesday, October 31 — Natalie Diaz, John Murillo, Nicole Sealey

Thursday, November 2 — Workshop Round 2.1

Tuesday, November 7 — Matthea Harvey & Morgan Parker

Thursday, November 9 — Workshop Round 2.2

Tuesday, November 14 — George Saunders & Zadie Smith

Thursday, November 16 — Workshop Round 2.3

Tuesday, November 21 — Ian Frazier & David Sedaris

Thursday, November 23 — ***THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASS***

Tuesday, November 28 — Joan Didion & David Lipsky

Thursday, November 30 — Workshop Round 2.4

Tuesday, December 5 — Rich Cohen & David Foster Wallace

Thursday, December 7 — Workshop Round 2.5

Tuesday, December 12 — Megan Amram, Riane Konc, Jen Spyra

Thursday, December 14 — Workshop Round 2.6 + Final Class Celebration

**\*\*FINAL PORTFOLIOS & JOURNALS ARE DUE  
BY MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 5:00PM EST\*\***