Introduction to Creative Writing: Prose and Poetry

Instructor: Farah Barqawi (She/her)  
Contact: fo2034@nyu.edu  
Course Number: CRWRI-UA.815.001  
Semester: Fall 2022  
Class Times: Mon/Wed 9:30 – 10:45 am  
Location: 60 Fifth Avenue, Room 161  
Office Hours: By appointment after class times

“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.”
—Joan Didion, writer and journalist

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."
--Maya Angelou, poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist

“Do what you are going to do, and I will tell about it.”
—Sharon Olds

Course Overview:  
This intro to creative writing course is a field of exploration and experimentation. We all come into this class from different backgrounds and experiences. You may have done some creative writing before, or this might be your first time. You may want to pursue more writing later or you might not want to. What is most important in this collective experience though is for you to be curious about the craft of writing, and how to begin thinking and reading more like a writer.

We will read different poetry and prose, we will write original pieces, and we will workshop and revise our work and the work of our colleagues with care and attention. We will also frequently do in class writing exercises and play literary games.

Specific Objectives  
- To identify formal qualities in works of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction.  
- To analyze how those formal choices serve or undermine the literary work.  
- To approach writing with curiosity and playfulness.  
- To discover and develop our own writing while learning from different styles we read.  
- To provide rigorous and compassionate feedback.

Structure and Rules:  
This class will be tech free. Everything will be done using paper hard copies. Please keep phones, tablets, laptops, etc. away during class. In the rare case that electronics may be used for an in-class exercise, I will let you know.

Craft Class: Typically, on Mondays.  
- We will discuss the readings due that day, and we might have some student presentations as well. Our discussion will focus on writers’ literary techniques and choices. How do these writers do what they do? How do they use structure to portray themes and
emotions? What rules do they follow or break? How can we use their techniques in our own writing?

- We will also have an in-class writing exercise or play a literary game, either at the beginning or at the end of the class.

- You will write 300 to 500 words response to the readings prior to class. Please post these responses on the designated Brightspace discussion topic max by 7 pm on the night before the class. In this response, I expect you to engage honestly with the readings. What is your opinion? What elements and literary techniques of the work moved or delighted you, and do you know why? If you hated something — tell me and tell me why!

- Most readings will be available on our course brightspace site unless noted otherwise. I strongly encourage you to read them in hard copy with a pen in hand. Jot down what you notice, make some notes in the margins. This will give you something to reference during discussion (remember, no laptops). That said, it is not required.

Workshop: Typically, on Wednesdays.

- You will be workshopped a total of two times this semester, in a total of two genres. You must choose a different genre for each workshop. In other words, if your first workshop submission is in fiction, your second workshop submission must be in either poetry or non-fiction.

- You will submit also a revision of one of the two pieces, that will be workshopped towards the end in small workshop groups.

- On the Wednesday class before your workshop day, you will bring in 13 copies of your workshop submission, for your classmates and me. The copies must be stapled, and the pages numbered. You also need to include your name and a title for the piece.

- For each workshop, you will mark up your classmates’ submissions. Underline, star, highlight. Write a note when something worked for you, and why it did. Likewise, note when something confused you or detracted from the piece.

- Prose submissions (fiction or non-fiction) must be 5-10 pages long, double spaced.

- Poetry submissions must be 2-6 pages long, double spaced. Poetry submissions can include two poems or 3 short poems.

- You will also write a 300 to 500 response letter for each submission. You will consider, how does this writer use literary techniques and structure to convey meaning? What is successful? What is less successful? Please email me by 7 pm on the day before workshop with 1 copy of your response letter and arrive with 1 copy for the writer plus the annotated copy of their text.
Grading:

**Attendance and Class Participation (20%)** Your presence—both physical and mental—in our class is essential. As a small group of writers, the trust and rapport we build as a community is integral to everyone’s growth and progress. This is a discussion-based class. Come prompt and prepared. On workshop days, you are expected to offer thoughtful comments on each of the student pieces we will be discussing that week.

**Creative assignments (30%):** The pieces you’ll hand in for workshop and the take home assignments. They must meet the length requirements and be printed and on time when your group submits.

**Workshop Critiques (20%):** Letters and annotated texts will be given to the workshopped writers in print on Wednesdays.

**Readings Responses (15%):** Due on Brightspace on the night before craft class at 7 pm.

**Final Portfolio (15%):** Due on last day of classes. Your final portfolio will consist of all the material you’ve written over the semester. This includes:

1. Your two **originally submitted pieces**;
2. A revised version of each piece. The revised versions will take into account my comments and the comments of your peers.
3. A **third submission**. The third piece can be in any genre (poetry, fiction, or non-fiction). It may build on an in-class writing exercise or be something entirely new.
4. All take home writing assignments.

Your final portfolio must be bound together in some way: binder, folder, paper clips, shoelace, what have you.

**Attention!**

- Late assignments: -5% for each day late, except in cases of emergency
- No-email no-show absences: -5% of overall course grade
- More than three instances of lateness (5 min) will count as an unexcused absence. If you are 20 minutes late to class, it counts as an absence.
- Extra credit: attend a reading and write a 350- to 500-word response (+5%)

**Office Hours:** I would like each person to meet with me during office hours at least once during the semester. Send me an email at fo2034@nyu.edu to secure an appointment time.

**On integrity and plagiarism:** In this class, as across NYU, you are expected to do your own honest, original work. There is a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism will be reported directly to the department. University policy on academic integrity is available here: [http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity)
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
For workshop pieces, unless we see explicit evidence that the narrator of a work is the writer themself, we will assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, that seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt my attention. Please send me an email putting such work in context before submitting.

If you ever need someone to talk to at any point, please feel comfortable reaching out to me. I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center and/or other resources.

NYU’s 24/7 Wellness Exchange hotline: 212 443-9999.
COURSE MATERIALS

Most of the material will be in your course reading packet uploaded on Brightspace, these texts include but not limited to:

Non-fiction
*Why I write*, George Orwell
*Why I write*, Joan Didion
*Poetry is Not a Luxury*, Audre Lorde
*Notes for Young Writers*, Annie Dillard
Selected excerpts from *Bird by Bird*, Ann Lamott
Selected excerpts from *A Poetry Handbook*, Mary Oliver
Selected excerpts from *Heavy*, Kiese Laymon
Selected excerpts from *Bluets*, Maggie Nelson
Selected excerpts from *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*, Ocean Vuong
Selected excerpts from *Room 304 Or How I Hid from My Dear Father for 35 Years*, Amr Ezzat
Selected excerpts from *Fierce Attachments*, Vivian Gornick
Selected excerpts from *In the Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado
Selected essays from *Telling True Stories*, Edited by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call
Selected essays from *The Autobiography of Language*, Mirene Arsanios
*The Love Of My Life*, Cheryl Strayed
*How to Write Iranian-America, or The Last Essay*, Porochista Khakpour
*When Your Greatest Romance Is a Friendship*, Victor Lodato
*Modern Love: Reimagining Masculinity*, Ocean Young

Short Fiction
*Girl*, Jamaica Kincaid
*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, Raymond Carver
*I Don’t Like Your Tone*, Muhammed El-Hajj
*Lust*, Susan Minot
*A Temporary Matter*, Jhumpa Lahiri
*Living Like Weasels*, Annie Dillard
*Five Stories*, Lydia Davis
*Oats*, Rashad Hosein
*And of Clay are we Created*, Isabel Allende, translated by Margaret Seyers Peden
*The Life, Loves, and Adventures of Zelwa the Halfie*, Randa Jarrar
*How to Be an Other Woman*, Loorie Moore
*The Paper Menagerie*, Ken Liu
Excerpt from *My Brilliant Friend*, Elena Ferrante
Selected excerpts from *If An Egyptian Cannot Speak English*, Noor Naga

Poetry
*Wild Geese*, Mary Oliver
*One Art*, Elizabeth Bishop
*Rita and the Gun*, Mahmoud Darwish
*Anodyne*, Yusef Komunyakaa
The Deck, Yusef Komunyakaa
Bad Temple, Sara Farag Elkamel
Love, Tina Chang
If You Knew, Ellen Bass
The Garden, Aria Aber
Kissing in Vietnamese, Ocean Vuong
Someday I'll Love Ocean Vuong, Ocean Vuong
The Clot, Iman Mirsal
The Curse of Small Creatures, Iman Mirsal
Love Poem with Forgetting, Dana Alsamsam
Maternity, Anna Swir
Wedding-Ring, Denise Levertov
Fifth Grade Autobiography, Rita Dove
Barbie Doll, Marge Piercy
Elena, Pat Mora
Mirror, Sylvia Plath
Daystar, Rita Dove
To a Daughter Leaving Home, Linda Pastan
Singapore, Mary Oliver
I worried, Mary Oliver
Postcard from Kashmir, Agha Shahd Ali
We Are American Now, We Live in the Tundra, Marilyn Chin
Save Us From, Roo Borson
I Go Back to May 1937, Sharon Olds

Note on content:
Please note that some readings could be subject to change/replacement according to class development, and a more detailed reading assignment over the weeks will be provided later.
COURSE PLAN

Week 1

Monday, January 23rd  
**Welcome!**  
Introductions, syllabus review, workshop schedule, in-class writing exercise and on keeping a notebook

Wednesday, January 25th  
**Why Do We Write?**  
“Why I write,” George Orwell; “Why I write,” Joan Didion; “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” Audre Lorde

Week 2

Monday, January 30th  
Craft of Poetry: stanzas, lines, and rhymes  
Selected excerpts from “A Poetry Handbook,” Mary Oliver; “Theme for English B,” Langston Hughes; “Harlem,” Langston Hughes; “Do not go gentle into that good night,” Dylan Thomas; “We Real Cool,” Gwendolyn Brooks; “[The falling flower],” Babette Deutsch; “What Were They Like?,” Denise Levertov

Wednesday, February 1st  
Craft of Poetry: forms  
“Shall I Compare Thee to a Summers’ Day?,” William Shakespeare; “Sonnet,” Billy Collins; One Art, Elizabeth Bishop; Mad Girl’s Love Song, Sylvia Plath; sestina for a black girl who does not know how to braid hair, Raych Jackson.

Week 3

Monday, February 6th  
Craft of Fiction  
“Happy Endings,” Margaret Atwood  
“And of Clay Are We Created,” Isabel Allende;  
“What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” Raymond Carver

Wednesday, February 8th  
Craft of Nonfiction  
“The Memoir Time Machine,” Julie Metz  
“Against Catharsis: Writing is Not Therapy,” T Kira Madden  
“On Breakups,” Hanif Abdurraqib; Some comic strips from Fun Home & “Are You My Mother?,” Alison Bechdel; When Your Greatest Romance Is a Friendship,” Victor Lodato, Modern Love  
+ In class reading: “I Remember,” Joe Brainard; excerpt from “The Weight of the World,” Peter Handke

Group 1 workshop submission due
Week 4

Monday, February 13th

*I-They-You: Point of View*

Wednesday, February 15th

*Group 1 Workshop*

*Group 2 workshop submission due*

Week 5

Monday, February 20th

*No Class! President’s day! (Might reschedule)*

Wednesday, February 22th

*Group 2 Workshop*

*Group 3 workshop submission due*

Week 6

Monday, February 27th

*How?: Style, Voice, and Tone*
“On Style,” Emily Hiestand; “On Voice,” Susan Orlean; Selected excerpts from *Heavy*, Kiese Laymon; Selected poems TBD

Wednesday, March 1st

*Group 3 workshop*

*Group 4 workshop submission due*

Week 7

Monday, March 6th

*Who?: Character and Personification*
“Character,” Anne Lamott from Bird by Bird; “A Temporary Matter,” Jhumpa Lahiri; Selected poems TBD
In class exercise: Character Sheet

Wednesday, March 8th

*Group 4 workshop*

*Group 1 workshop submission due*

Midterm survey due
**Week 8**

Monday, March 13th  
*Spring Break!*

Wednesday, March 15th  
*Spring Break!*

**Week 9**

Monday, March 20th  
(Class held on Zoom)  
*Where? When?: Time, Place, and Details*  

Wednesday, March 22nd  
*Group 1 workshop*  
*Group 2 workshop submission due*

**Week 10**

Monday, March 27th  
*Rhythm, Tempo, and Movement*  
“Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid;  
“Mary When You Follow Her,” Carmen Maria Machado  
Selected poems TBD

Wednesday, March 29th  
*Group 2 workshop*  
*Group 3 workshop submission due*

**Week 11**

Monday, April 3rd  
*How Many Drafts Can One Do?*  
On Editing and Revising!  
“Shitty First Drafts,” Anne Lamott from Bird by Bird;  
“Revising One Sentence,” Lydia Davis  
In Class:  
“Beginners,” Edited, The New Yorker;  
“One Art: The Writing of Loss in Elizabeth Bishop’s Poetry”

Wednesday, April 5th  
*Group 3 workshop*  
*Group 4 workshop submission due*
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<th>Week 12</th>
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<td>Monday, April 10th</td>
<td><strong>On Curiosity and Research</strong>&lt;br&gt;Introduction to common tools for writers&lt;br&gt;Please bring your laptops to class today</td>
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<td>Wednesday, April 12th</td>
<td><strong>Group 4 workshop</strong>&lt;br&gt;Writing Assignment due</td>
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<td>Monday, April 17th</td>
<td><strong>TBD</strong></td>
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<td>Wednesday, April 19th</td>
<td><strong>Writing Assignment Discussion</strong>&lt;br&gt;All groups revision due</td>
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<td>Monday, April 24th</td>
<td><strong>TBD</strong></td>
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<td>Wednesday, April 26th</td>
<td><strong>Revision workshop for all groups</strong></td>
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<td>Monday, May 1st</td>
<td><strong>TBD</strong></td>
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<td>Wednesday, May 3rd</td>
<td><strong>Special Class</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, May 8th</td>
<td><strong>Last Class!</strong>&lt;br&gt;Final Portfolio due</td>
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Workshop Etiquette

1. Class Submissions:
   There will be 4 groups of students, 3 persons each, rotating over the weeks
   ● If you are being workshoped, you will bring in 13 copies of your submission on the class period before.
   ● You must choose a different genre for each workshop. In other words, if your first workshop submission is fiction, your second workshop submission must be either poetry or nonfiction.
   ● Prose submissions (fiction or non-fiction) must be 5-8 pages long, double spaced.
   ● Poetry submissions must be 2-6 pages long, double spaced. Poetry submissions can include one or two poems.

2. Critiques:
   For each workshop, you will mark up your classmates’ submissions. You will also write a critique of each submission (at least 2 paragraphs). You will consider, how does this writer use literary techniques and structure to convey meaning? What is successful? What is less successful? Please 1. email me one copy of your critique before class and 2. arrive to class with one copy of your critique, for the writer.
   ● When writing critiques, remember we are ALL here to learn
   ● Include comments on what was effective and what was less effective, citing specific quotes, page numbers, etc. when possible.
   ● There is a way to provide constructive criticism while remaining kind and respectful. Use language such as “the writer did X, which was/was not effective because Y” rather than “I liked X” or “I didn’t like X”