

Introduction to Creative Writing — Prose & Poetry

CRWI-UA 815.002

Instructor:	Ronnie Huett (he/him/his)	rah9376@nyu.edu (preferred)
Time:	Tues/Thurs 9:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m.	(323) 787-3983 (if necessary)
Location:	60 Fifth Avenue, Room 165 (Washington Square)	Office Hours: by appointment

Interviewer: [Writing is a] trade?

Kurt Vonnegut: Trade. Carpenters build houses. Storytellers use a reader's leisure time in such a way that the reader will not feel that his time has been wasted.

Course Overview

1. The goal of this course is to help you write the things you want to write.
2. A clarification: what I really mean is that I am going to try to help you write the things you want to write *better than you write those things now*.
3. Some complications of the above:
 - This course requires you to write both prose and poetry; it is possible, perhaps even likely, that you will be more enthused about one genre than the other
 - 'Craft' is neither neutral nor objective; and yet it will inform every aspect of this workshop
4. In this course, we will:
 - Identify the formal qualities of poetry and narrative prose¹
 - Analyze how the formal choices writers make *strengthen* or *undermine* their work
 - Build a vocabulary for discussing poems and prose *productively*
 - Use that vocabulary to provide rigorous and compassionate feedback that helps the author or poet *write the thing they want to write*
 - Engage seriously with our own work and that of our peers, and
 - Constantly be writing (no, but seriously — there are 10 homework assignments in addition to 3 workshop submissions and a Final Portfolio)
5. This course presumes that you intend to pursue writing in some serious way beyond this semester. Accordingly, we will begin the semester by identifying our literary goals and interests and end it by creating Artist's Manifestos which declare our aesthetic identities as writers, as well as the practical steps we will take towards realizing our literary aspirations.
6. **Whatever your literary background and regardless of your prior experience as a writer² or your level of "talent," you are welcome in this course.**

¹ This phrasing ("narrative prose") is intentional — while it is anticipated that most of the prose workshopped in this class will be fiction, creative nonfiction pieces are allowed

² As this is an introductory course, it is assumed you have little to none

Course Basics

This course will be comprised of **10 craft lessons** and **3 rounds of workshop**. You will be submitting narrative prose in the first round, poetry in the second, and your choice of prose or poetry in the third.

Your semester will culminate in the submission of a **Final Portfolio**, the specifics of which can be found elsewhere in this document.

You will also be providing written and verbal feedback on each of your peers' workshop submissions.

Required Texts

None are required for purchase.

All readings and materials necessary for this course will be provided by me. Readings will be discussed in the class following the one in which they are assigned (e.g., the readings assigned on Jan 25 will be discussed in class on Jan 27, etc.).

Submission Requirements

You will be workshopped three times over the course of the semester:

- **One prose submission** of 8-15 pages (~5,000 words max). Formal experimentation is encouraged, so the work may be single/double/what-have-you-spaced so long as it is between 8 and 15 pages and roughly 5,000 words or less. Your prose submission may be a single short story, an excerpt of a longer work, or no more than two flash fiction pieces (within the page and word count guidelines).

In order to facilitate an efficient and rigorous workshop, please, for the love of Pete, **number your pages**

- **One poetry submission** comprised of 2-5 pages of poetry (up to 3 poems total). Again, experimentation (formal and otherwise) is encouraged.

Bernie Sanders voice I am once again asking for you to **number your pages**

- **A third "writer's choice" submission** of either prose or poetry, following the same rules and limits as the first two submissions. **This cannot be a revision of a previous submission** (you will revise one piece as part of your Final Portfolio).
nUMbEr YoUr pAGeS

Important!

Each student will append short, but detailed, **Writing Notes** to the end of each submission. In these notes, you will describe your process, intentions, writing difficulties, audience concerns, etc.

In other words, you will reflect on your aesthetics and intentions as the writer of this piece, and what we should know to help you write what you are trying to write.

Also Important!

It should go without saying, but just in case: **absolutely no submissions about your classmates or featuring them as characters.**

Due Dates

With the exception of your Final Portfolio, all workshop submissions will be due by **11:59 p.m. on the Thursday before your workshop** via email, regardless of whether your workshop falls on a Tuesday or Thursday. This ensures that your peers will have at least four days to read your work twice, as well as to compose their feedback notes before your workshop.

Feedback Note Requirements

We will read each submission at least twice: first as a reader, then again as a writer. During your first read, resist the urge to mark up the text. Instead, read it for enjoyment and general reaction.

At the end of the piece you will encounter brief **Writing Notes** from the author. Use these notes to inform your second reading of the piece and focus your annotations and feedback on these concerns as much as possible.

Your feedback might identify sentences or moments that you find particularly beautiful or confusing, etc. When making such observations, think about *why* you find the line beautiful or confusing, and include that in the comment.

Be as specific as possible, starting with something illuminating, beautiful, or interesting about the piece. Grammatical edits are appreciated, but try to focus on broader craft concepts that might make a large or profound impact on the piece as a whole. Identify threads in the piece that the author might pull tighter — an idea that isn't fully developed, or that you feel could be made less vague or better articulated, more detailed. You might also note parts of the piece that could be cut, and why.

Finally, you might end your note with a question or provocation for the author — something that might cause them to view their work in a new light. Then, sign your name.

You will provide the author with a hard or soft copy of your note and marked-up manuscript during or after their workshop (you must have these with you during the workshop).

Feedback need not be long — a paragraph or two is sufficient. Prioritize thoughtfulness over length.

Miscellaneous in-class writing exercises and homework

You will complete in-class writing exercises and 10 homework assignments. These will comprise 15% of your final grade.

Homework is typically submitted to me via email; check the **Course Calendar** for due dates and specifics.

Final Portfolio

You will submit a Final Portfolio to me at the end of the semester. This portfolio will consist of the following four elements:

1. Revision Portfolio

One *substantially* revised piece chosen from your workshop submissions over the course of the semester. Questions or concerns as to whether you have revised your piece 'enough'? Reach out to me and we'll figure it out together (office hours are a great time to do this!)

2. Critical Portfolio

A selection of the three best critiques you have provided to your peers over the course of the semester, in your opinion. For each critique, you will write a short (~150 words) reflection explaining what you are proud of about it and/or what you would change knowing what you have learned by the end of the semester. This part of the Final Portfolio will be graded on the quality of your written feedback itself in addition to your reflections on it.

3. Artist's Manifesto (500+ words)

Revisit your Writer's Statement of Purpose from the beginning of the semester and reflect on your growth since then. Create an Artist's Manifesto that addresses each of the following questions:

- Do you still agree with your initial Writer’s Statement of Purpose? Why or why not? Revise your Statement of Purpose if it no longer fits you.
- In what ways have your writing and your writing practice changed over the course of the semester?
- What are your goals as a writer and what actionable steps will you take to realize them, and by when?

Note: writing goals may pertain to your craft (“*I want to develop a stronger and more consistent writing voice*”), your educational aspirations (“*I will obtain the creative writing minor at NYU and then apply for an MFA*”), and/or a potential career as a prose writer or poet (“*I will get published in a literary journal and here is my plan for doing so*”).

You may have other writing goals in mind that I haven’t anticipated; if in doubt, please seek clarification from me (office hours are a great time to do this!).

4. Submission Receipt

 writ·ing
/ˈrɪdiŋ/
noun

1. A lottery you have to work for.

“All these years of writing finally paid off! Pretentious Literature magazine is going to publish my short story — they’re paying me with a subscription to Pretentious Literature magazine!”

Recall that **this course presumes you will be pursuing writing in some serious way** beyond this semester. The Submission Receipt element of your Final Portfolio incorporates this presumption into your grade.

Simply provide me with a receipt, screenshot, etc., documenting that you have submitted any piece of prose or poetry for consideration by an outside entity. You may apply for publication by a literary journal or website, enter a writing contest, etc. The parameters of this requirement are broad.

The Submission Receipt amounts to free points in exchange for taking a chance on yourself. This requirement may result in your first rejection as a writer; perhaps it will earn your first acceptance.

I will be hyping you up regardless.

The Revision Portfolio, Critical Portfolio, and Artist’s Manifesto are each worth 10 points. The Submission Receipt is worth 5 points.

Your Final Portfolio is due via email by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, May 10.

Workshop Model and Etiquette

“Adapt what is useful, reject what is useless, and add what is specifically your own.” — Bruce Lee

We will critique two submissions per workshop. Prior to the start of the semester, I will seek two volunteers for our first prose workshop and two others for our first poetry workshop. The rest of our workshop schedule will be determined by lottery.

Workshop discussion will be primarily peer-led and informed by the concerns identified by the writer in their **Writing Note** at the end of their submission.

Your final grade in this course will consist of however many points you earn from the above elements, expressed as a percentage (e.g., 95/100 = 95%).

A note regarding “participation”

Workshop is a collaborative environment in which all members respectfully contribute to each other’s creative growth. That being said, I will not be grading your “participation” in the sense that the people who talk the most get the most points. If anything, recognizing when it is time to listen and giving others the space to express *their* ideas in addition to your own is an important, foundational workshop skill.

I may occasionally request your input because I believe it will benefit the class or your own development as a serious writer; you are generally encouraged to participate to the degree that you are comfortable. If I have concerns about your verbal participation in class, I will reach out to you privately. Should you have concerns, you are encouraged to reach out to me outside of class as well (office hours are a great time to do this!).

Attendance

Consider the following:

- this class begins at 9:30 in the morning, and
- this class ends at 10:45 in the morning

From the above it can be deduced that this class is one hour and fifteen minutes in duration (feel free to double-check; I used a calculator).

Please note that one hour and fifteen minutes is a short amount of time in which to productively workshop multiple pieces and engage seriously with craft.

Consequently:

- it’s actually for real important that we start class on time

If choosing, of your own free will and volition, to enroll in a class that requires you to be present, ready to go, at 9:30 in the morning, Eastern Standard time, every Tuesday and Thursday, later proves less enjoyable than you anticipated — welp! That’s on you.

Let the record show that you have been so advised.

The Add/Drop period ends on Feb. 6. You will be permitted one free absence after this date. Each unexcused absence beyond that will count as a 2.5% deduction from your total grade (meaning one unexcused absence is a loss of a quarter of your attendance grade).

For the purposes of this course, “tardy” is hereby defined as being fifteen minutes late to class; every two tardies will be counted as one absence.

Important caveats to the above:

- New York is a hard place to live. If you’re having difficulty getting to class due to disability or other reasons related to accessibility, please let me know and we’ll figure it out
- Likewise, if you need to miss class because of urgent, emergency, employment, dependent care, or *gestures vaguely* reasons, please email me as soon as you’re aware (ideally, well before class)

The purpose of this class is to enable the free expression of your written creativity, not to punish you for having responsibilities or hardships.

Plagiarism

Don't do it. You will be caught, and the consequences will be ruinous. Also, consider that this is an introductory creative writing course — *the entire point* is to get better at producing your own words. Enrolling in this class only to submit someone else's work would be kind of an odd, sad, poseur-y move. Don't be an odd, sad, poseur. **Be an odd, sad writer.**

Refer to NYU's plagiarism policy via the University's Academic Integrity page for more information:

<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html>

Important Resources

Understanding NYU's Harassment Policy

Harassment among students and faculty will not be tolerated. If you or anyone you know is experiencing harassment, please speak up. Let me know, and we will follow procedures in accordance with the University's policies concerning the protection of student rights. If you have any questions about this, reach out to me and/or refer to the brief overview of NYU's harassment policy online at:

<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/equal-opportunity/harassment-and-discrimination.html>

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, and/or is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should 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

(212) 998-4114

Voice/TTY Fax: (212) 995-4114

<http://www.nyu.edu/csd>

Student Wellness Policy

Your wellness is more important writing. It is also more important than this course. As indicated elsewhere in this document, unless there is explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker or protagonist of a work is the writer themselves, we will assume that the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault or severe mental distress will likely prompt my attention. Please send an email putting this work into context before submitting a piece, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you ever feel the need to speak to someone about these issues, please reach out to me or the NYU Wellness Center (whichever you feel most safe and comfortable with):

Counseling Services:
726 Broadway
New York, NY 1003
(212) 99804780

Wellness Center:
(212) 443-9999
email: wellness.exchange@nyu.edu

COURSE CALENDAR

extremely tentative!

<p>Jan. 25 <i>Tues.</i></p>	<p>Craft I. What Even Is a ‘Story’? <i>Narrative Basics</i></p> <p><i>“The world is a hellish place, and bad writing is destroying the quality of our suffering.”</i> — Tom Waits</p> <p>In Class: compose list of rules for writing (group exercise); analyze Popular Mechanics and <i>Another Mystery</i> by Carver. Also: introductions, syllabus, course overview.</p> <p>Homework: Writer’s Statement of Purpose (<i>due 1/31/22</i>)</p> <p>Required Readings: Redefining Craft Terms – Salesses; Workshop – Collins; Plot; <i>Reading Poetry</i> (excerpts) – Meyer; <i>Poetry Terms</i> glossary sheet</p>
<p>Jan. 27 <i>Thurs.</i></p>	<p>Craft II. One Thing After Another <i>Story Shapes & Plot</i></p> <p><i>“Get your character in trouble in the first sentence and out of trouble in the last sentence.”</i> — Barthe DeClements</p> <p>In Class: analyze story shapes of various texts</p> <p>Homework: Story Shape Exercise (<i>due 2/3/22</i>)</p> <p>Readings: <i>Word Choice, Word Order, and Tone</i> (excerpt) – Meyer; Rivers (excerpt); <i>Folks Are Right, My Nose Was Wide Open</i> – Keene</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Writers A & B submit prose <i>via email by 11:59 p.m.</i></p>
<p>Feb. 1 <i>Tues.</i></p>	<p>A & B prose workshopped</p> <p>Readings: Don’t Write What You Know – Johnson; Audience, Theme, and Purpose – Salesses; <i>Figures of Speech</i> (excerpt) – Meyer; Coming Down Again; <i>Returning After Our War</i> (excerpts) – Balaban</p>
<p>Feb. 3 <i>Thurs.</i></p>	<p>Craft III. tHaT wOuLD nEVeR hAPpEn <i>Research & Believability</i></p> <p><i>“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.”</i> — Zora Neale Hurston</p> <p>Homework: Eavesdropping Exercise (<i>due 2/7/22</i>)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">C & D submit prose</p>
<p>Feb. 8 <i>Tues.</i></p>	<p>C & D prose workshopped</p> <p>Readings: <i>Symbol, Allegory, and Irony; Character</i> (excerpts) – Meyer; <i>The Weary Bluesman</i> – Hughes; East of Eden (excerpt) – Steinbeck</p>
<p>Feb. 10 <i>Thurs.</i></p>	<p>Craft IV. Just Who Do You Think [They] Are?! <i>Characterization</i></p> <p><i>“By the end, you should be inside your character, actually operating from within somebody else, and knowing him pretty well, as that person knows himself or herself. You’re sort of a predator, an invader of people.”</i> — William Trevor</p> <p>Homework: Characterization Exercise (<i>due 2/13/22</i>)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">E & F submit prose</p>

Feb. 15 <i>Tues.</i>	E & F prose workshopped Readings: Association of Small Bombs (excerpt) – Mahajan; Freshwater (excerpt) – Emezi; Flatland (excerpt) – Abbott; <i>Images, Point of View</i> (excerpts) – Meyer; Car Crash While Hitchhiking; <i>A Poem About Baseballs</i> – Johnson
Feb. 17 <i>Thurs.</i>	Craft V. He Was As Tall As a 6’3” Tree <i>Description & POV</i> <i>“The question is not what you look at, but what you see.”</i> — Henry David Thoreau Homework: POV Exercise (<i>due 2/22/22</i>) <p style="text-align: right;">G & H submit prose</p>
Feb. 22 <i>Tues.</i>	G & H prose workshopped Readings: <i>Pale Fire</i> (excerpts) – Nabokov; Incarnations of Burned Children – Wallace; Emergency – Johnson; <i>Sounds; Patterns of Rhythm</i> (excerpt) – Meyer
Feb. 24 <i>Thurs.</i>	Craft VI. Taping Waves to the Ocean <i>Form & Structure</i> <i>“All writing is that structure of revelation. There’s something you want to find out. If you know everything up front in the beginning, you really don’t need to read further if there’s nothing else to find out.”</i> — Walter Mosley <i>“When you write what you know, you stay in control. One of the first things I encourage my writing students to do is lose control – say what they want to say, break structure.”</i> — Natalie Goldberg Homework: Structure Exercise (<i>due 2/28/22</i>) <p style="text-align: right;">I & J submit prose</p>
Mar. 1 <i>Tues.</i>	I & J prose workshopped Readings: How to Write with Style – Vonnegut; Mission of the Volga Dead Manuscript; The (Diblos) Notebook; <i>Casual Wear</i> – Merrill
Mar. 3 <i>Thurs.</i>	Craft VII. Pity the Readers <i>Voice, Tone, & Style</i> <i>“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that’s creativity.”</i> — Charlie Mingus <i>“The writing style which is most natural for you is bound to echo the speech you heard when a child.”</i> — Kurt Vonnegut Homework: Voice and Tone Exercise (<i>due 3/9/22</i>) <p style="text-align: right;">K & L submit prose</p>
Mar. 8 <i>Tues.</i>	K & L prose workshopped Readings: To The Quick; Shock of The Old – Tulathimutte; <i>Poetry in Action</i> – New York Times Handouts: Those Words That Echo... – Kincaid
Mar. 10 <i>Thurs.</i>	Craft VIII. If It Bores You, It’s Because It’s Boring <i>Reimagining & Revision</i> <i>“My method is one of continuous revision.”</i> — Joyce Carol Oates <i>“I’ll be brief. Most books contain too many words.”</i> — Tony Tulathimutte <i>“Try to leave out the part that readers tend to skip.”</i> — Elmore Leonard Homework: Revision Exercise (<i>due 3/21/22</i>)

SPRING BREAK	
Mar. 22 <i>Tues.</i>	<p>Craft IX. Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant <i>Introduction to Poetry</i></p> <p><i>“Poetry is not difficult. If you possess one of the five senses, poetry is in it. If you can compose a text message, tweet or Facebook status, you can write poetry. If you can rap a song, you can rhyme poetry. If you can memorise a prayer, you can recite poetry. If you struggle to make sense of formatted text, poetry is your call.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">— Gloria D. Gonsalves</p> <p>Homework: Poetry Exercise (<i>due 3/24/22</i>)</p> <p>Readings: <i>American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin</i> (excerpt) – Hayes; <i>Good Bones</i> – Smith; <i>Poetic Forms</i> (excerpt) – Meyer</p>
Mar. 24 <i>Thurs.</i>	<p>Craft X. As If the Top of Your Head Were Taken Off <i>Form & Structure II</i></p> <p><i>“I’ve been getting bored with metaphors anyways. I’ve decided that I don’t like them because one thing is never another thing, and it’s a lie to say something is anything but itself; it’s ontologically and physically impossible, in fact, not even apple and apple can be each other.”</i> — T Fleischman (Clutch)</p> <p><i>“Poetry might be defined as the clear expression of mixed feelings.”</i> — W.H. Auden</p> <p>Homework: Imitation Exercise (<i>due 3/28/22</i>)</p> <p>Readings: <i>Open Form</i> (excerpt) – Meyer</p> <p>Handouts: <i>Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam</i>; <i>The Wasteland</i> – Eliot</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Writers CDEF submit poetry <i>C & D workshopped Tues. 3/29</i> <i>E & F workshopped Thurs. 3/31</i></p>
Mar. 29 <i>Tues.</i>	C & D poems workshopped
Mar. 31 <i>Thurs.</i>	E & F poems workshopped ABGH submit poetry
Apr. 5 <i>Tues.</i>	A & B poems workshopped
Apr. 7 <i>Thurs.</i>	G & H poems workshopped IJKL submit poetry.
Apr. 12 <i>Tues.</i>	I & J poems workshopped
Apr. 14 <i>Thurs.</i>	K & L poems workshopped. Submissions in next round are “writer’s choice” <i>(cannot be revision of previous submission)</i> ABCD submit poetry or prose
Apr. 19 <i>Tues.</i>	A & B workshopped

Apr. 21 <i>Thurs.</i>	C & D workshopped	EFGH submit poetry or prose
Apr. 26 <i>Tues.</i>	E & F workshopped	
Apr. 28 <i>Thurs.</i>	G & H workshopped	IJKL submit poetry or prose
May 3 <i>Tues.</i>	I & J workshopped	
May 5 <i>Thurs.</i>	K & L workshopped	LAST CLASS!
FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE TUESDAY, MAY 10		



“The closest thing I have to a method to offer is this: go forth and do what you please.”
— George Saunders