

Introduction to Prose and Poetry | Summer '22

T/Th: 6:00 PM - 9:10 PM

CRWRI-UA.815.008

Instructor: Jack Davis

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“The artist is distinguished from all other responsible actors in society—the politicians, legislators, educators, and scientists—by the fact that he is his own test tube, his own laboratory, working according to very rigorous rules, however unstated these may be, and cannot allow any consideration to supersede his responsibility to reveal all that he can possibly discover concerning the mystery of the human being.”

-- James Baldwin

“it was the best of vibes, it was the worst of vibes.”

-- Phoebe Bridgers

“I’m going to put quotes on my syllabus to make my students like me.”

--Every writing instructor ever

About this course

This introductory course is designed as an entry into your relationship with creative writing. The world needs good writers. The qualities of a good writer -- humility, perceptiveness, creativity, grit -- also tend to be present in those who go on to make positive change in the world. This is all to say: everyone has a place in this class.

Whether you have written ever since your childhood or haven’t written a poem in your life (as was the case when I stumbled into my first writing workshop), my hope is to create a space that is enlivening and enriching for each of you.

Course structure

I have designed the course to focus on three abstract goals.

Unlocking imagination Best said by Stephen King in *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*:

“There is a muse, but he’s not going to come fluttering down into your writing room and scatter creative fairy-dust all over your typewriter or computer. He lives in the ground. He’s a basement kind of guy. You have to descend to his level, and once you get down there you have to furnish an apartment for him to live in. You have to do all the grunt labor, in other words, while the muse sits and smokes cigars and admires his bowling trophies and pretends to ignore you. Do you think it’s fair? I think it’s fair. He may not be much to look at, that muse-guy, and he may not be much of a conversationalist, but he’s got inspiration. It’s right that you should do all the work and burn all the mid-night oil, because the guy with the cigar and the little wings has got a bag of magic.”

Introducing craft Craft is the technical part of writing. Good writers use a balance of craft and intuition to shape a reader's experience. In this class we'll dive into content such as form, syntax, voice, rhythm, metaphor, We'll also host other writers (hopefully!) so you can get a more diverse perspective on various writing styles and approaches.

Building community Writing workshops should be rejuvenating. They are spaces of bravery, vulnerability, and friendship. Writers make the best friends. Even if you don't make friends with every person in this class, it is my hope that this course points you to the rich community of writers within this school and this city.

Class structure

Most classes will begin and close with some sort of written or oral exercise.

Tuesdays we will discuss a reading and practice writing together, often with some weekly theme in mind.

Thursdays we will read and discuss your own work. Given the length of the class, I expect everyone to be workshopped weekly, which is kind of insane (this never happens). This course is also to introduce you to a writer's workshop, and get used to noticing and critiquing the subtleties of language.

Expectations

I really only expect you to try. Creative writing courses are notoriously Easy A classes, not because they are easy, but because judging students based on quality in an introductory class kills innovation, creativity, and risk-taking. Rant over. Please try and you will make an A.

Other expectations:

-No electronics. It will just be us and the page. If you require an accommodation on this front, don't stress! Contact me and we can work something out.

-Attendance is mandatory, obviously. Please give a heads up if you plan to miss class, even if it's short notice. You receive one excused absence. An excused absence provides a compelling reason of absence *before* class. Extenuating circumstances will be evaluated as needed. Come to class.

-Class starts on time. Excessive tardiness is disrespectful to your peers and will impact your grade.

-Each week you will receive an experimental writing assignment in class. It is due on Sunday 11.59pm via NYU classes (except for Week 1). No late assignments will be accepted.

Class texts

The texts we will engage in this class include poems, essays, books, podcasts, and an array of visual mediums. There is a reader for this course which will be sent out: please print this out so you can mark it up.

Please purchase:

The Best of American Poetry 2021 (Edited by Tracy K. Smith)

And print out our reader.

Please check the syllabus for what text you should complete before the following class. Please thoughtfully interact with whatever is listed. Come to class prepared to discuss, preferably with written notes.

Please read!

Office Hours

Office hours/conferences are an important part of individual feedback that I hope you find helpful. You must sign up for one conference (30-ish min meetings) during the course.

Additional office hours can boost a sagging participation grade, but not going to additional conferences will not hurt your grade.

Live Readings

You must go to one event that is literary oriented and write a very short brief about its connections to our class. This can be a reading, a play, a live choreopoem. Many students wait until the last week to do this: and then they attend something online and don't pay attention, and then I get mad.

Midterm Project

The midterm project will be announced in the

Final Project

The final project will be more tailored to each student's individual interests and assigned after the midterm. Expect the workload of the final project to be commensurate with a standard college paper. **The final project is due before the last day of class on .**

Final Portfolio

Your final portfolio is all your written work for the semester compiled into one document. Please print it out with a cover page, stapled, and **bring to the last day of class on December 14.**

Grading

Grading will be based on the following three questions:

Did you show up? **33%**

- **One** office hour visit
- Attendance/participation in class
- **One** out-of-class literary attendance

Did you try? **33%**

- Serious engagement and investment in your own writing as well as your reflections on class readings and classmates' work

Did you write? **34%** because this is most important

- On-time completed assignment (weekly)
- Midterm project completed by due date
- Final project completed by due date
- Final portfolio completed by due date

Plagiarism

[Don't.](#)

Health & Wellness

Generally speaking, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, recurrent themes of violence and self-harm may prompt the instructor to check in with a student.

There are resources that you are entitled to as a human, and made available to you as an NYU student. Please use them! A resource list, including mental health and disability services, is included at the end of this syllabus.

Contact me at jack.davis@nyu.edu for all questions / concerns / observations. I will respond within 24 hours and probably before that. If you have a more serious concern, I would appreciate it if you would schedule an appointment to talk in person.

Course Schedule

T/Th 6-9pm

UNIT ONE: ATTENTION

May 24: Introductions, reading, writing

May 26: Listening exercises, practice workshop

UNIT TWO: POETRY

May 31: Then

The Illiad, Old Testament, Rumi. Bashō, Shakespeare, Whitman, Rimbaud, Wheatley, Dickenson, Rilke, Frost, Williams, Hughes, Bishop, Plath, Brooks, O'Hara, Oldes, Ginsberg, Brooks, probably more

June 2: WORKSHOP 1

June 7: Now

The Best American Poetry 2021, probably more

June 9: WORKSHOP 2

June 14: Ekphrasis

UNIT THREE: FICTION

June 16: The Shape of Stories

June 21: WORKSHOP 3

June 23: WORKSHOP 4 + Guest

MIDTERM PROJECT DUE BEFORE CLASS

UNIT FOUR NON-FICTION

June 28

Clifton, Calle, Mario Machado, Baldwin, Hooks

June 30: WORKSHOP 6

July 5: Party/Reading

FINAL PORTFOLIO DUE BEFORE CLASS

Your final portfolio should include:

3 poems

1 short story 5-10 pgs

1 essay 5-10 pgs