

# Introduction to Creative Writing — Prose & Poetry

Section 001 — Summer Session I

Instructor: Ronnie Huett (he/him/his) [rah9376@nyu.edu](mailto:rah9376@nyu.edu) (preferred)  
Time: Mon/Wed 1:30 p.m.-4:40 p.m. (323) 787-3983 (if necessary)  
Location: TBA Office Hours: by appointment

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*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.*

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## 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 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 prose<sup>1</sup>
  - 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 — you will be workshopped twice and submitting a third piece as part of your Final Portfolio, in addition to many in-class writing exercise and composing written feedback for each of your peers' submissions)
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 writer<sup>2</sup> or your level of "talent," you are welcome in this course.**

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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> As this is an introductory course, it is assumed you have little to none

## Course Basics

This course will be comprised of **several craft lectures, many in-class writing exercises, a few homework assignments, and 2 rounds of workshop.** You will submit narrative prose in one workshop round and poetry in the other. The order of those submissions is up to you — that is, you may submit poetry first and prose second, or the other way around.

Your 6-week semester will culminate in the submission of a **Final Portfolio**, which will consist of a **Critical Portfolio**, an **Artist's Manifesto**, and a **Writer's Choice Submission**. The specifics of these Final Portfolio elements can be found elsewhere in this document.

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

**Mondays** will generally consist of two craft lectures and one or more in-class writing exercises

**Wednesdays** will generally consist of four 35-minute workshops, an in-class writing exercise, and/or discussion related to assigned readings

## Required Texts

None are required for purchase.

All readings and materials necessary for this course will be provided by me and chosen based on the needs of the class.

## Submission Requirements

You will be workshopped twice over the course of the semester:

- **One prose submission** of 1500-3,000 words. Formal experimentation is encouraged, so the work may be single/double/what-have-you-spaced so long as it is between 1,500 and 3,000 words. 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 3 poems. Again, experimentation (formal and otherwise) is encouraged.

*\*Bernie Sanders voice\** I am once again asking for you to **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 submissions will be due by **11:59 p.m. on the Wednesday before your workshop** via email. This ensures that your peers will have one week 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 homework assignments. These will comprise 20% of your final grade.

Homework will be posted and submitted on our class Brightspace page.

## Final Portfolio

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

### 1. Writer's Choice Submission

A final creative writing submission of either prose or poetry, following the same rules and limits of your first two submissions. **This cannot be a revision of a previous submission** (due to the limitations of a six-week semester, we will address revision via our in-class writing exercises). This submission will not be workshopped, but you will receive written feedback from me.

### 2. Critical Portfolio

A selection of the two 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!).

The Writer's Choice Submission, Critical Portfolio, and Artist's Manifesto are each worth 10 points.

**Your Final Portfolio is due via email by 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, July 13.**

### **Workshop Model and Etiquette**

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

We will critique four submissions per workshop. Prior to the start of the semester, I will seek volunteers for our first workshop. These volunteers will submit prose or poetry by 11:59 p.m. May 25, and they will be workshopped on June 1. The rest of our workshop schedule will be determined during our first class on May 23. If I am unable to secure four volunteers prior to our first class, I may need to determine our first workshop group 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.

Writing is an iterative process in which substantial revision is the norm; our workshops will be "shared acts of imagination" in which peers collaborate with the writer on goals for such revision. While the primary role of the writer during workshop will be as a listener, they will be allowed to productively guide the discussion.

You will receive varied and sometimes contradictory responses and suggestions from your peers. Consider it all, then incorporate what most closely matches your vision for the piece.

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.

## Course Policies

### Electronics

Because I recognize that some students prefer to engage with materials electronically, devices are permitted in class with the following stipulations:

1. They are silent
2. They are used solely for relevant and appropriate purposes  
Ex. I — reading a PDF or Word document of your classmate's work  
Ex. II — typing a writing exercise rather than handwriting it
3. They are not being used for social media

If you are observed using technology inappropriately during class, I will ask for you to put it away; if technology becomes a general distraction for the class, I will ban devices for the remainder of the semester.

### Grading

<b>10 points</b>	<b>Attendance</b>  These are free points that you give away by being excessively absent or tardy.  Each unexcused absence:       -5 points Every two tardies:               -5 points  <i>Please refer to the <b>Attendance</b> section of this document for more clarification</i>
<b>10 points</b>	<b>Written feedback</b>  This grade encompasses the overall quality and generosity of the written feedback you provide to your classmates over the course of the semester.
<b>20 points</b>	<b>Miscellaneous in-class writing exercises and homework</b>
<b>30 points</b>	<b>Workshop</b>  Your Workshop grade will be comprised of the following:  15 points                               Your own submissions 15 points                               The feedback you provide to your peers during workshop
<b>30 points</b>	<b>Final Portfolio</b>  Your Final Portfolio grade will be composed thusly:  10 points                               Writer's Choice submission 10 points                               Critical Portfolio 10 points                               Artist's Manifesto

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 will meet 11 times in 6 weeks, and
- this class requires a great deal of writing, and
- this is a discussion-based class

Please note that 6 weeks is a short amount of time to accomplish the volume of writing and learning this course requires.

Consequently: you have to be here, and you have to be on time.

The Add/Drop period ends on May 26 (the day after our 2<sup>nd</sup> class session). Each unexcused absence beyond that date will count as a 5% deduction from your total 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.

## **Anticipated Remote Contingencies**

- If you need to miss a craft class due to illness, relevant materials will be shared on our class Brightspace page. You may also arrange to meet with me via zoom for office hours to discuss the material covered during the lesson. Please email me if you will be out of class
- If a class needs to be offered entirely online, we will meet synchronously at the standard class time using Zoom. Additional instructions about class meetings or work will be emailed to you in the event of a shift to online instruction
- If you need to miss a workshop class due to illness or quarantine, you may join our workshop via zoom (assuming that you are well enough to do so). Please email me ahead of time to facilitate this
- If you are unable to participate in a workshop in which your piece is due to be discussed, we will do our best to reschedule your workshop for a later date (e.g., on one of our craft days); otherwise students will email you their written critiques directly

If a workshop needs to be offered entirely online, we will meet at the standard class time using Zoom. Additional instructions about class meetings or work will be emailed to you in the event of a shift to online instruction

## 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, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](mailto:wellness.exchange@nyu.edu)

## Extremely Tentative Class Calendar

<b>May 23</b> Mon.	<p><b>Craft I. What Even Is a ‘Story’?</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Narrative Basics</i></span></p> <p><b>Craft II. One Thing After Another</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Story Shapes &amp; Plot</i></span></p> <p>Introductions, class overview &amp; syllabus review, workshop sign-up</p> <p><b>In Class:</b> Compose a Writer’s Statement of Purpose</p>
<b>May 25</b> Weds.	<p><b>Craft III. Tell All the Truth but Tell it Slant</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Intro to Poetry</i></span></p> <p><b>Craft IV: tHaT wOuLD nEVeR hAPpEn</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Creative Nonfiction and Believability</i></span></p> <p><b>GROUP A</b> (4 students) — <b>submit pieces for workshop by 11:59 p.m.</b></p> <p><b>Homework:</b> Story Shape Exercise (<i>due 11:59 p.m. 5/27</i>)</p>
<b>June 1</b> Weds.	<p><b>GROUP A</b> — <b>workshopped in class</b> (35 mins/each)</p> <p><b>GROUP B</b> (4 students) — <b>submit pieces for workshop by 11:59 p.m.</b></p>
<b>June 6</b> Mon.	<p><b>Craft V. Pity the Readers</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Voice, Tone, &amp; Style</i></span></p> <p><b>Craft VI. The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Metaphor &amp; Poetry</i></span></p>
<b>June 8</b> Weds.	<p><b>GROUP B</b> — <b>workshopped in class</b> (35 mins/each)</p> <p><b>GROUP C</b> (4 students) — <b>submit pieces for workshop by 11:59 p.m.</b></p>
<b>June 13</b> Weds.	<p><b>GROUP C</b> — <b>workshopped in class</b></p> <p><b>GROUP A</b> (4 students) — <b>submit pieces for workshop by 11:59 p.m.</b></p>
<b>June 15</b> Mon.	<p><b>Craft VII. Make Your Reader Feel Dumb, then Smart</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Sound &amp; Structure</i></span></p> <p><b>Craft VIII. Just Who Do You Think [They] Are?!</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Characterization</i></span></p>
<b>June 22</b> Weds.	<p><b>GROUP A</b> — <b>workshopped in class</b> (35 mins/each)</p> <p><b>GROUP B</b> (4 students) — <b>submit pieces for workshop by 11:59 p.m.</b></p>
<b>June 27</b> Mon.	<p><b>Craft IX. He Was As Tall As a 6’3” Tree</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Description &amp; POV</i></span></p> <p><b>Craft X. WYA?</b> <span style="float: right;"><i>Place &amp; Time</i></span></p>
<b>June 29</b> Weds.	<p><b>GROUP B</b> — <b>workshopped in class</b> (35 mins/each)</p> <p><b>GROUP C</b> (4 students) — <b>submit pieces for workshop by 11:59 p.m.</b></p>
<b>July 6</b> Weds.	<p><b>GROUP C</b> — <b>workshopped in class</b> (35 mins/each)</p> <p>Last day of class! Reflect and appreciate our time together; discuss how to pursue writing as a career</p>



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