Course Overview: Writers write. A great writer may imagine worlds, teach lessons, shape morals, affirm truths, or shake seemingly immovable hearts. Before any of this, though, they write. Not in their heads. On the page. In this course we will write—a little bit every day—to develop ourselves as committed craftspersons. We will read works in prose, poetry, and beyond to learn technique and become familiar with a breadth of literary styles. Most of all, we will read to inspire ourselves and our writing.

Structure: Each class will begin with a short writing prompt, called a free write. Then we will read and analyze a text for its craft, thinking about how and why it works, and what we might emulate in our own writing. (Some of the readings will be done before class.) Finally, we will workshop each others’ work, giving specific and helpful feedback to our fellow writers so that their pieces can grow.

Learning Outcomes: You will learn how to keep going when you get stuck, and be exposed to the necessary commitment of a serious writing process. You will—hopefully!—unlearn writing for the validation of others, and instead discover what you like to make.

Coursework: You should expect to write a lot this semester—for workshops, and for submission as daily writing assignments. In workshops, you will prepare your own short works in both poetry and prose for notes from the class. Students who are workshopping their pieces are expected to turn them in on time so that their classmates can read them. Students who are giving feedback are expected to be generative, constructive, and kind. Students will give both feedback in class and submit a short letter to the writer. In daily writing assignments, you will submit 250 words from Monday through Thursday via Brightspace by 11:59 p.m. to stay on track to finish their pieces as well as inspire new ones.

Workshop: We will workshop three times this semester—once in poetry, once in prose, and once however you like. A poetry submission should be 3 to 5 poems and up to 8 pages; a prose submission may be 5 to 10 pages. You should come into this course with an idea of what you may want to write about—but also stay flexible to write what you feel as you move through the course! In the schedule below, you will see three workshop groups. Each of you will be assigned to one, and we’ll read 3-5 students’ submissions each class. Your submission is due one class before we read it. I can’t stress this enough: That’s a super short timeline for reading—you must not be late, or you will forfeit your workshop.

Grading: You’re allowed to miss the daily writing submission three times over the course of the semester, and one absence will also be dropped from your grade.
Here is a breakdown of how this course will be graded:
Attendance and Workshop (50%)
Daily Writing Submissions (25%)
Final Portfolio (25%)

Plagiarism: This is a writing class! We will learn to take inspiration from others, and study their techniques. We will not take their work. If you do, you’ll fail.

Lateness Policy: Being late happens, but this is an abbreviated course—we need all the time we can get. Being late more than twice or being very late will detrimentally affect your grade.

Accommodations: I want to make this course work for you. Let me know how I can. In addition, 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 register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980, or at 726 Broadway (2nd floor) or at: https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/student-accessibility.html.

Emotional Wellness for Creative Writers: We may read challenging, painful texts in this class—from authors on our reading list and from our classmates. Let’s be considerate with each other when dealing with anything related to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress. Do not assume that your classmates have not experienced these things. If you’re submitting a piece that deals with these topics—or anything you want to warn people about—please write a brief note at the top of the piece explaining the context of these editorial decisions. Lastly, writing can be—and for me, usually is—very vulnerable. Let’s be respectful of how hard everyone in class is working, and if you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please reach out to me and I can connect you with the NYU Wellness Center.

Selected Readings: Readings are subject to change, and students should not purchase any books. Here are the proposed readings, in no particular order:

“Deer at Providencia,” “Total Eclipse,” and “An Expedition to the Poles” by Annie Dillard
“Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid
“A Poetry Handbook” (excerpts) and selected poems by Mary Oliver
“A Man Asleep” by Georges Perec
“Recitatif” by Toni Morrison

How Not To Drown In A Glass of Water (excerpt) by Angie Cruz
Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (excerpt) by Gabrielle Zevin
They Said They Wanted Revolution (excerpt) by Neda Toloui-Semnani
“The Glass Essay” by Anne Carson
“Ghosting” by Maya Binyam
“Heaven No Hell” by Michael DeForge (excerpts)
“Sonny’s Blues” and The Amen Corner by James Baldwin
Crying in H Mart (excerpt) by Michelle Zauner
“The Ceremony” by Sam Pink
“The Cave” by Paul Tran
“Grasshopper” by e e cummings
“Museum of Stones” by Carolyn Forche
“Swan and Shadow” by John Hollander
“From the Journals of the Frog Prince” by Susan Mitchell
“I in River” by Ander Monson
“A Story that Could be True” by William Stafford
“Bread” by Margaret Atwood
Selected poems by Ocean Vuong, Saeed Jones, Ada Limon, and others

Class #1 (Thurs. 07/06) Why Write?
Read in class: “Deer at Providencia” by Annie Dillard; “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid; selections of Mary Oliver poetry
Assignment: Read excerpt from A Poetry Handbook by Mary Oliver and “Recitatif” by Toni Morrison

Class #2 (Tues. 07/11) Poetry vs Prose
Read in class: Selected poems including “Museum of Stones,” “From the Journal of the Frog Prince,” and more; “The Ceremony” by Sam Pink.
Discussion: A Poetry Handbook and “Recitatif”
Assignment: Read “An Expedition to the Poles” by Annie Dillard; Listen to podcast on “The Cave” by Paul Tran

Class #3 (Thurs. 07/13) Writing Ideas and Imagination
SMALL GROUP WORKSHOPS
Discussion: “The Cave” and “Expedition”
Assignment: Read “I in River” by Ander Monson; read workshop A submissions.

Class #4 (Tues. 07/18) Experimenting With Form
WORKSHOP A
Discussion: ‘I in River’
Read in class: “Grasshopper” by e.e. cummings; “Swan and Shadow” by John Hollander
Assignment: Read “Total Eclipse” by Annie Dillard. Read workshop B submissions.

Class #5 (Thurs. 07/20) Studying a Writer’s Prose: Annie Dillard and Authority
WORKSHOP B
Discussion: “Total Eclipse” by Annie Dillard
Assignment: Read “The Glass Essay” by Anne Carson; read workshop C submissions.

Class #6 (Tues. 07/25) Mixing Forms
WORKSHOP C
Discussion: “The Glass Essay”
Assignment: Read “A Man Asleep” by Georges Perec. Work on your third submission.

Class #7 (Thurs. 7/27) When Should You Use The Word “You?”
Discussion: Using the Second Person
Read in class: “A Story that Could be True” by William Stafford; “Bread” by Margaret Atwood
Assignment: Read How Not To Drown In A Glass of Water (excerpt) by Angie Cruz and Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (excerpt) by Gabrielle Zevin; read workshop A submissions.

Class #8 (Tues. 08/01) Contemporary Fiction
WORKSHOP GROUP A
Discussion: How Not To Drown and Tomorrow x3
Assignment: Read Crying in H Mart (excerpt) by Michelle Zauner and They Said They Wanted Revolution (excerpt) by Neda Toloui-Semnani; read workshop B submissions.

Class #9 (Thurs. 08/03) Contemporary Nonfiction
WORKSHOP GROUP B
Discussion: Crying in H Mart and Revolution
Assignment: Read selected poems from Ocean Vuong, Saeed Jones, Ada Limon, and others; read workshop C submissions.

Class #10 (Tues. 08/08) Contemporary Poetry
WORKSHOP GROUP C
Discussion: Selected poetry
Assignment: Read “Sonny’s Blues” and “The Amen Corner” by James Baldwin

Class #11 (Thurs. 8/10) Studying a Writer Across Mediums: James Baldwin and Voice
Discussion: “Sonny’s Blues” and The Amen Corner
Assignment: Read “Heaven No Hell” by Michael DeForge; “Letter of Recommendation: Ghosting” by Maya Binyam; prepare Final Portfolio

Class #12 (Tues. 8/15) Beyond Poetry and Prose
Discussion: “Heaven No Hell” and “Ghosting”
In-class readings of our work!
Due: Final Portfolio.