“Take risks. Write about things that matter to you even if you aren’t sure that they matter to anyone else. Don’t be ashamed of the things that you unabashedly love in narrative. Investigate them with a loving heart.”—Kelly Link

Course Overview
In this introductory creative writing course, we will explore the creation of fiction and poetry through weekly craft classes and student workshops. Over the course of the semester, students will build practical knowledge around the conventions of writing, while exploring what makes that writing “tick,” the ephemera hidden within every piece, regardless of form or genre. Students will also gain valuable insights into the process of their own writing process, as well as experience a collaborative workshop environment.

Class Structure
Beginning 9/10, Tuesdays will be workshop days. Students in one of three groups will turn in one short story or several poems on the Thursday before their assigned workshop day. Thursdays will be craft class days, where we will critically discuss and analyze elements of fiction and poetry related to readings assigned on the previous Thursday.

Readings
Assigned Texts: Jesus’ Son (Denis Johnson), In Persuasion Nation (George Saunders), TK

POETRY

Outside of the Assigned Texts, I will upload PDFs to the class site or print out the assigned stories, depending on how closely we’re adhering to the class schedule. We will discuss these readings in the Thursday craft class one week from when the reading is assigned. Reading responses will be due every Thursday. These should be 1-2 pages, Times New Roman, double spaced. Please print this out and bring to class for me to grade. We will read multiple short pieces or poems per week, but only one response will be due—instead of summarizing what each piece/poem is about, think deeply about what you have read. Convey what you think the story is doing regarding the theme of the next craft class. Tell me what you found particularly effective or ineffective, what elements of craft you see at work across the reading.

Submissions
Each student will submit four pieces during the semester, two for fiction and two for poetry. We will split up into A, B and C groups and submit on a rotating schedule.

• Short Story Requirements: 7-10 pages, 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced. Pages must be numbered.
• **Poetry Requirements:** 2-5 pages, 12-point Times New Roman. Formal experimentation is acceptable within reason.

Students are required to submit responses to their classmates’ work (1-2 pages, 12-point Times New Roman, double spaced). Please print two copies of each response, one for the submitters and one for me.

**Submissions are to be turned in on the Thursday before their Tuesday workshop. Please print one copy for everyone in the class (including your instructor) and bring it to class on the applicable Thursday.**

**Final Portfolio**
At the end of the semester, you will submit a portfolio of the pieces you have workshoped in class, **having been meaningfully and substantially revised for edits.** You should take into consideration what your peers have suggested, but don’t feel like you have to change everything! Please, though, take care with this edit. Make sure the work is the best that it can be. Put the effort in. You will also submit a 1-page portfolio intro outlining the changes you’ve made and why.

**Office Hours (by appointment)**
Communication is key. Every student is highly encouraged to see me at least once over the course of the semester, especially to discuss workshop stories. **Socially-distanced in-person or Zoom meetings are fine!**

**Attendance**
Attendance is expected at every class. It’s incredibly hard to have a workshop and discussion-based class when people don’t attend.

• **Excused Absences:** If it’s the first class you’ve missed and you email me ahead of time, this will be an excused absence. If you have to miss class a second time, you must provide a note from a doctor or counselor explaining the absence (if it’s medical in nature. I will make rare exceptions for extraordinary personal situations). **You are required to email me your assignments even if the absence is excused.**
  o **Planned Absences.** If there’s a day you already know you have to miss (for religious holidays and celebrations, family commitments etc.) please let me know ahead of time
  o **The only excused absence that will negatively affect your grade is an absence on your workshop day without serious cause and a doctor’s note/other applicable documentation.** Missing your workshop will make this class demonstrably less valuable to you. I will take each case under individual consideration, but generally, **this will result in a 5% deduction in your overall grade.**

• **Unexcused Absences:** any absence without prior notification, and any second absence without serious cause or applicable documentation. **Each unexcused absence will result in a 5% grade reduction.**

• **Lateness:** An hour and fifteen minutes is a very short time to hold a workshop! If you are more than ten minutes late on a craft day or five minutes late on a workshop day, you will
be marked down as late. If you are marked as late three time, this will count as an unexcused absence and negatively affect your grade.

**Late Work Policy (General)**
- **Extensions:** It’s important for us to be empathetic and mutually mindful of each other’s time. If you email me ahead of time for an extension on a reading response or a critique letter, I will give you an extension of one week. **You can get extensions on two separate occasions without it affecting your grade.** After two occasions, it will count as late work.
- **Late Work:** Any work that you turn in late without giving me notice, or after having already used your allowance of extensions.

**Late Work Policy (Workshop)**
- **Late Story/Poem:** In extreme cases and if you email me ahead of time, you may be allowed to trade workshop dates with another student. **You must facilitate this with the other student.** Again, this is only to be used in extreme circumstances of medical emergency or personal crisis. **If you are late turning in a workshop with no prior communication of these circumstances, or if you’re just late because you’re late, it will result in a non-negotiable grade deduction of 5%.** Please, please don’t do this. It is extremely inconsiderate of everyone’s time and not productive for you, either.

**Grading**
- **Class Participation:** 40%. We’ve all been in that class where nobody talks. It’s the literal worst. We’ve also been in the class where one person talks over everyone else. It’s the second-worst. The point of fiction and poetry is communication and analysis, so please, share your thoughts, and be mindful of your feedback! This applies to workshop and to craft classes equally. However, **if you find it difficult or intimidating to speak in class**, please shoot me an email or meet with me during office hours. As a former shy guy, I am more than open to making accommodations.
- **Writing Assignments:** 40%.
  - 2 Fiction Submissions
  - 2 Poetry Submissions
  - Critique Letters and Reading Responses (graded on check plus, check and check minus scale)
  - **Note:** You are being graded largely on the effort and care you show your work, not how “good” it is. “Good” is completely subjective, while hard work is almost always evident. I would rather you take creative risks and invest wholeheartedly in your piece than try to turn in something very safe and polished.
- **Final Portfolio:** 20%.
  - All stories and poems, substantially edited
  - 1-2 page intro

**Plagiarism**
Morality of plagiarism aside, it’s extremely difficult to get away with plagiarism in the internet age. It’s doubly difficult to get away with plagiarism in a creative writing class. Seriously, I will be able to tell. Plagiarized work will receive an automatic zero and will be reported to the department. Read NYU’s Academic Integrity Guide here: [https://liberalstudies.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/liberalstudies/academics/academic-integrity-guide.html](https://liberalstudies.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/liberalstudies/academics/academic-integrity-guide.html)
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
Unless we see explicit evidence that the speaker of a workshop piece is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

Workshop Etiquette
• **Practice constructive criticism.** This is the most important one. No one creates well in an antagonistic environment. It also doesn’t help when people avoid asking questions or giving honest feedback about a classmate’s work, perceiving these views as inherently antagonistic. Giving constructive and thoughtful feedback is the best way to help develop you and your classmates’ craft. The worst is to not engage, or to engage harmfully. **I will have zero tolerance for antagonism, rudeness, disrespect or disregard in this class. Period.**

• **Edit and suggest, don’t rewrite.** Everyone has different tastes. Focus more on word choice, structure, clarity, plotting and so on, rather than suggesting wholesale plot or language overhauls.

• **Give what you want to get.** Inevitably, you will workshop some pieces that you don’t connect with. Taking extra care with those, looking deeply into them and analyzing what could be changed, can help your writing more than editing pieces you feel are closer to “done.” **You are expected to read workshop submissions twice before you edit them in order to give the most thoughtful feedback to your classmates.**

• **Not taking it personally: difficult, but important!** Every draft has imperfections. We’ll be going over this more in our editing class—even the most acclaimed poets and fiction writers are edited repeatedly and often still have some “mistakes” in their published work! **The imperfections in your drafts are not imperfections in you as a writer/person.** In reality, very few writers get from first to final draft on natural talent alone. The writers who can take criticism, edit and work hard are the ones who succeed.

Critique Letter Guidelines
• **Start with the positive.** Tell the author when the story is working and why (keeping structure and literary elements in mind, more than what you liked and didn’t like personally).

• **Move into suggestions and questions.** Especially important: when was something unclear, and why? Was it the language? The plot? Did you ever “fall out” of the story? Again, don’t be judgmental, but don’t be afraid of constructive criticism. This information helps the author immensely in future edits.

• **Example ideas if you don’t know what to say:**
  
  - Are the characters believable? Do they act with consistency and have strong individual voices?
  - Can you “see” the setting? If not, why do you think that is? Has it been described too little or too much? Are characters moving through it in inconsistent ways?
  - In the case of poems, how are they using the structure to enhance communication of images/ideas? Are those images and ideas clear? Are they impactful?

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**Provisional Syllabus (Subject to Change)**

**Week 1**

**Tues 1/25**
In Class: Review syllabus, icebreakers, Mock Workshop
Video: Christine Schutt on Nightwork, Saunders False Starts.
Assignments: Read “Ten Rules for Writing Fiction” (Zadie Smith); “Losing It” (Roxanne Gay)

**Thurs 1/28**
Fiction Structure
In-Class Reading: “Let it Snow” (David Sedaris)
Writing exercise
Reading Assignment: “On Poetry,” Ai Weiwei, and “Writing Poetry” (Kinereth Gensler)
Writing Assignment: Group A Fiction

**Week 2**

**Tues 2/2**
Poetic Structure
In-Class Reading: Shakespearean sonnets, “On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous” (Ocean Vong), tbd
Writing Exercise
Writing Assignment: Group A workshop responses

**Thurs 2/4**
Group A Workshop
Reading Assignment: Selection from *In Persuasion Nation* (George Saunders)
Writing Assignment: Reading response; Group B Fiction
Week 3  
**Tues 2/9**  
Setting and World-Building in Fiction  
Discuss reading  
Writing exercise  
Writing Assignment: Group B Workshop responses

**Thurs 2/11**  
Group B Workshop  
Reading Assignment: Selections from *Jesus’ Son* (Denis Johnson)  
Writing Assignment: Reading response; Group C Fiction

Week 4  
**Tues 2/16**  
Character  
Discussion of reading  
Writing Exercise  
Reading Assignment: Group C Fiction  
Writing Assignment: Group C Fiction Responses

**Thurs 2/18**  
Group C Fiction Workshop  
Reading Assignment: “Howl” (Allen Ginsberg), “Some San Francisco Poems: Sections 5-10,” (George Oppen), **TBD**  
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group A Poetry

Week 5  
**Tues 2/23**  
Place and Time in Poetry  
Discuss readings  
Writing Exercise  
Reading Assignment: Group A Poetry  
Writing Assignment: Group A workshop response

**Thurs 2/25**  
Group A Poetry Workshop  
Reading Assignment: “Two Men Arrive in a Village” (Zadie Smith), How to be an Other Woman (Lorrie Moore), “Another Manhattan” (Donald Antrim)  
Writing Assignment: Reading response; Group B Poetry

Week 6  
**Tues 3/2**  
Voice, POV and Tense
Discuss readings
Writing Exercise
Reading Assignment: Group B Poetry
Writing Assignment: Group B Poetry responses

Thurs 3/4
Group B Poetry Workshop
Reading Assignment: “Unholy Elixir” (Kate Tempest), assorted Dannez Smith [MORE TBD]
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group C Poetry

Week 7
Tues 3/9
Poetry in Performance
Discuss Readings
Writing Exercise
Reading Assignment: Group C poetry
Writing Assignment: Group C Poetry responses

Thurs 3/11
Group C Poetry Workshop
Reading Assignment: “The American Male at Age Ten” (Susan Orleans), “Zooey” (J.D. Salinger)
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group A Fiction

Week 8
SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

Week 9
Tues 3/23
Dialogue
Discuss Reading
Writing Exercise
Reading Assignment: Group A Fiction
Writing Assignment: Group A Fiction responses

Thurs 3/25
Group A Workshop
Reading Assignment: Priestdaddy excerpt and selected poetry (Patricia Lockwood), “Sonny’s Blues” and selected poetry (James Baldwin)
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group B Fiction

Week 10
Tues 3/30
Transference (Poets who Write Prose)
Discuss Reading
Writing Exercise
Reading Assignment: Group B Fiction
Writing Assignment: Group B Fiction responses

Thurs 4/1
Group B Fiction Workshop
Reading Assignment: House of Leaves excerpt (Mark Z. Danielewski), “Up To Half The Apocalypse” (Lucy Corin), selected Jericho Brown poetry
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group C Fiction

Week 11
Tues 4/6
Page-Bending and Eclectic Formatting
Discuss reading
Writing Exercise
Reading Assignment: Group C Fiction
Writing Assignment: Group C Fiction responses

Thurs 4/8
Group C Fiction workshop
Reading Assignment: selected poems of Sylvia Plath, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (Gilman), Never To Dream of Spiders (Audre Lorde)
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group A Poetry

Week 12
Tues 4/13
Writing Madness
Discuss Reading
Writing Exercises
Reading Assignment: Group A Poetry
Writing Assignment: Group A Poetry responses

Thurs 4/15
Group A Poetry Workshop
Reading Assignment: Selection from Letters to Wendy’s (Joe Wenderoth), Come on Silver (Ann Glaviano)
Writing Assignment: Reading responses; Group B Poetry

Week 13
Tues 4/20
The New Epistolary
Discuss Reading
Writing Exercise:
Reading Assignment: Group B Poetry
Writing Assignment: Group B Poetry responses
**Thurs 4/22**
Group B Workshop
Reading Assignment: “The Hortlak” (Kelly Link), tbd Christine Schutt, CA Conrad’s somatic poetry exercises.
Writing Assignment: Somatic poetry; Group C poetry

**Week 14**
**Tues 4/27**
~Big Mood~
Discuss reading and upcoming edits
Writing Exercise
Assigned:
Reading Assignment: Group C Poetry
Writing Assignment: Group C Poetry Responses

**Thurs 4/29**
Group C Poetry Workshop
Reading Assignment: “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” (Raymond Chandler), selections from TBD
Writing Assignment: N/A

**Week 15**

**Tues 5/4**
The Importance of Editing
Discuss Reading
In-Class Reading (red-line edits)
**Final Portfolio Due Next Class**

**Thurs 5/6**
Last Class Party!
Class Reading