Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality”, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.

**Arundhati Roy, The Pandemic is a Portal**
NYU COURSE DESCRIPTION

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.

Hi everyone. That’s NYU’s description, and here’s my practical explanation: Each week we’ll read one published piece by an established writer, and a few pieces from our own class. We’ll write comments and suggestions for each at home. The next week we’ll present our comments and suggestions to each other in class. We’ll also be building a class-wide index of how-to guides, based on what we’ve learned by editing. We’ll use that to revise final portfolios of work.

THREE IMPORTANT AGREEMENTS

1. ON FLEXIBILITY: This section is fully remote. It’s also gonna be, both by design and historical circumstance, a little weird. Better for us to agree that lots of this semester is TBD.
2. ON DEDICATION: Structurally speaking, this course is designed to be simple. But I am asking for a significant amount of (basically) graduate-level maturity, commitment, and follow-through from you. In return for your dedication, I promise that I will treat you as peers and equals.
3. ON SELF-DETERMINATION: For reasons of institutional liability, I reserve the right to crank up the dial on the professorial authority if the first two agreements go south. Between you and me though, I see that as a disappointingly-cop-brained nuclear option. The pandemic gave us a great gift, in that it exposed the failures of institutions we were promised would instruct and protect us. I think what that means is, these failures have freed us from the terrible burden of looking first to leaders, authority figures, and experts to find our way, in both life and in writing. So, rather than waiting for me to deliver writing advice from on high, this semester you will be looking to yourselves, and to each other for answers on how to write. My work here will be sharpening your own sense of aesthetic judgement, helping you build systems of thinking that work for any story, and giving you experience building friendships and cooperative relationships with other writers.

I’m excited and honored to be “teaching” you. I hope you show up humble and hungry, curious about the world and confident in your ability to write it. I hope you bring messy, complicated characters. I hope you draft something genius, wake up the next day, think it’s trash, then revise it till it shines again. I hope you bring to this project all the questions you can’t quite figure out — gender, politics, war, peace, love, food, sex, drugs, family, the power of each to hurt and the power of some to liberate, the hidden pleasures of nose-picking or something like that, every question, every insecurity and every epiphany that blooms from your notes app late in the doomsscrolling hours.

I can’t wait to see what you write.  
-Will
TUESDAYS – WORKSHOP DAYS

If it is not your team’s week to submit, your homework due Tuesday is #1:

1. Preparing thoughtful comments in the margins of this week’s submitted fiction, and tracking any suggested changes in Google Docs. This keeps our homework focused on recommending suggested edits to the story, rather than commenting abstractly about the story. You will hold onto this to guide class discussions, then email it to the writer with a quick note of encouragement, and me cc’ed. We will practice this on day one.

If it is your team’s week to submit, your homework due Tuesday is #1&2:

1. Preparing aforementioned thoughtful comments for everyone else on your team.

2. Emailing us a piece of your writing in the following format:

   Fiction:
   Google Docs document (This should be a copy, not your working draft.)
   Cover page with your name, work title, and date
   5-10 pages
   12 point double-spaced font (Google Docs defaults to 11.)
   Times New Roman
   Page numbers on bottom

   Poetry:
   Word document (.docx)
   1-3 pages

   This semester you will submit fiction twice, and poetry twice.

THURSDAYS – CRAFT DAYS

On Thursdays we’ll talk about a story I assigned you the previous week. You’ll bring to class a how-to guide describing one brilliant technique you think the author is trying, with notes and advice on how to reproduce that effect for yourself and your classmates. We will discuss these, try them out, tinker with them. I’ll add thoughts when I have good ones. Keep in mind, because these how-to guides will be manuals written primarily for future you, what care and attention you invest in your thinking and writing will be, very literally, what you get out of it.

HOW WILL CLASS WORK DURING OFFICE HOURS?

You’ll come to office hours once, fairly early in the semester. Consider this mandatory. I’d like to know why you’re taking the class, how we can make sure you get what you need out of it, and to check in with you if you’re having questions or difficulties with the course. I’ll post office hours on day one.
**FINAL: REVISED PORTFOLIO**

Your final project will be a composite of your work on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and much like those two days, will be structurally simple and practically intensive. Take your four submissions, and your how-to guides, and in a single document, edit and rigorously revise them using techniques applied from your index of how-to guides.

**GRADES**

Your grade in this class will be almost entirely based on your ability to deliver on your commitments to each other, and to yourselves.

Did you meet your commitment to your classmates by turning in **two** pieces of fiction in the time you agreed with them to do so?

Did you meet your commitment to your classmates in turning in **two** poems in the time you agreed with them to do so?

Did you keep your commitment to yourself by writing **nine** how-to guides, one for each week you didn’t submit fiction or poetry?

Did you respect the time and effort your classmates poured into their work with helpful edits on **every** one of their submitted pieces?

Did you come to office hours at least **once** to talk through why you are here, what you want to get out of this class, and how it’s going for you?

Did you submit a portfolio of **four** workshopped stories, revised with your guide?

If you can answer yes to all these questions, you get full marks.

**Your points:** [All 18 points above + number of edits submitted on time, or with extension]

**Your final grade:** [Your points*100]/[18+Total number of editable submissions].

I use these standard percentage conversions: A=94-100 A-=90-93 B+=87-89 B=84-86 B-=80-83 C+=77-79 C=74-76 C-=70-73 D+=67-69 D=65-66 F=below 65
ATTENDANCE

The common thread here is to communicate changes early, and set expectations right.

To miss one non-submission class: email us all 24 hours in advance to get an excused absence and a 7 day extension. No excuses wanted or needed.

To miss a second non-submission class: email us all 24 hours in advance to get an excused absence and a 7 day extension. You must check in with me by email or in office hours before returning to class.

To miss one class when you’re submitting writing: …I gotta be honest here, please don’t. You’ll irrevocably lose one point for submission, and one point for your portfolio grade.

Any absences after or outside of this framework are a single point deduction.

LATE WORK

Without informing us, we can only assume late work is bad time management and communication. Real bummer for everyone. By informing us, we’ll know late work is a sign that you care, and maybe you got sick or overwhelmed. Totally human and understandable. If you need an extension, email me, and include anyone to whom you owe the work, to communicate to us a plan for delivering it. I technically have veto power on this stuff, but as long as you’re straight-up with us, expect a yes.

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.

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
PLAGIARISM

Don’t even think about it. Yes I have to report it. See “useless nuclear-option cop energy” above, and NYU’s Academic Integrity Guide below:

https://liberalstudies.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/liberalstudies/academics/academic-integrity-guide.html

SYLLABUS & READING LIST

Week 1
Tues 1/25:
Intros & Syllabus, Assign teams,
How to run your own workshop
Write for next week: Team A

Thurs 1/28:
How to write a how-to guide.
Read for next week: https://munyori.org-fiction/happy-birthday-president-of-africa-by-noviolet-bulawayo/

Week 2
Tues 2/2
Workshop Team A
Write for next week: Team B

Thurs 2/4
Read for next week: https://lithub.com/zimmer-land/

Week 3
Tues 2/9
Workshop Team B
Write for next week: Team C

Thurs 2/11
Read for next week: https://www.unm.edu/~gmartin/535/Sticks.htm

Week 4
Tues 2/16
Workshop Team C
Write for next week: Team A

Thurs 2/18
Read for next week: https://www.amazon.com/Delias-Elevator-Short-Elena-Ferrante-ebook/dp/B017MF6l0Q

Week 5
Tues 2/23
Workshop Team A
Write for next week: Team B

Thurs 2/25
Read for next week: https://www.haveyoureadnevada.club/ (First 6 Chapters)
Week 6
Tues 3/2
Workshop Team B
Write for next week: Team C
Thurs 3/4
Discussing last week’s author
Review how-to guides.

Week 7
Tues 3/9
Workshop Team C
Write for next week: Team A
Thurs 3/11
Read for next week: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/mar/22/story-yan-lianke-england-clan

Week 8
SPRING BREAK—NO CLASS

Week 9
Tues 3/23
Workshop Team A
Write for next week: Team B
Thurs 3/25
Read for next week: https://therumpus.net/2018/06/rumpus-original-poetry-three-poems-by-eve-l-ewing/

Week 10
Tues 3/30
Workshop Team B
Write for Next Week: Team C
Thurs 4/1
Read for next week:

Week 11
Tues 4/6
Workshop Team C
Write for Next Week: Team A
Thurs 4/8
Read for next week: https://www.newyorker.com/books/poems/kaveh-akbar-the-palace

Week 12
Tues 4/13
Workshop Team A
Write for Next Week: Team B
Thurs 4/15
Read for next week: https://www.lambdaliterary.org/2017/03/a-poem-by-joshua-jennifer-espinoza/

Week 13

Tues 4/20
Workshop Team B
Write For Next Week: Team C

Thurs 4/22
Read for next week:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/118558/the-burning-girl

Week 14

Tues 4/27
Workshop Team C
Write For Next Week: All Teams Revise Portfolios

Thurs 4/29
Read for next week:
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/56769/aubade-with-burning-city

Week 15

Tues 5/4:
Student run: Compiling and publishing our index of how-to guides.

Thurs 5/6:
Student run: Final portfolio working session. Sendoff!

Week 16

Tues 5/11
Portfolios due by midnight. Study well!