

Creative Writing: Introduction to Prose and Poetry

Section: CRWRI-UA.815.006

Instructor: Alex Foster

Time: Monday/Wednesday 1:30–4:40

Email: af3705@nyu.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

Objectives

Keeping in mind that different works of literature can be good for different reasons, we will read broadly and write with open minds. We'll look for the successful aspects of each work we read and write, and we'll study how to cultivate those aspects while removing the things that get in the way. I hope that this class will expose you to some new favorite writers and styles, and even more importantly, I hope it will teach you to love even those writers and styles that aren't your favorite.

Class Structure

Every class will include a **craft lesson** (in which we discuss the writing process and study exemplary fiction or poetry from the past century) followed by a **workshop** (in which we discuss student work).

Craft Lessons

Each craft lesson will focus on a writing technique or aesthetic issue. I'll assign stories and poems that serve as great examples of the lesson topic, and I'll excerpt from longer works whenever possible to ensure that the readings are maximally helpful and enjoyable.

The first five minutes of every class will be a very easy reading quiz. If you do the readings for the week, you will get 100% on the quiz. I understand that life is hectic; if you can't do the readings one week, you're not going to fail the class (and I will not be mad), but the reading quiz should encourage all of us to come on time prepared for a good discussion. We owe this to one another. It will also remove much of the subjectivity from my participation grading by saving me from having to infer who has really done the readings. If you do miss some readings, in my class you will be welcome to admit it with a conscience as clean as your blank quiz, and you won't need to annoy your classmates by trying to fake your way through the discussion.

We'll also do in-class writing exercises to experiment with the techniques we're studying.

Workshop

During workshop, we discuss your writing. Over the course of the semester, every student will submit one story and three poems for workshop. Workshops will discuss craft but strive to also transcend technical concerns to examine the bigger picture—how the work creates meaning and makes us feel.

If you are being workshopped, you are responsible for posting a Google Doc of your manuscript to the class Google Drive one week in advance. Manuscripts should be double-spaced; three poems or up to twenty pages fiction, unless we agree otherwise.

Everyone else will do line edits on the manuscript and write a one-page editor letter, both of which are due by the start of class on the day of the workshop. Line edits should be done on the shared Google Doc (make sure you have Google Docs set to “Suggesting” mode—reach out to me if you have questions about this). Editor letters should be emailed to me. Your editor letters should be both positive and constructive. *What was good about the manuscript? What could be good about the manuscript in its ideal form, and what revisions would need to be made to realize that ideal?* I will pass your editor letter along to the writer, along with my own letter and a synthesis of the class’s feedback.

Summary of Recurring Assignments

Craft	- Readings
Workshop (Editor)	- Line edits added to Google Doc before class - Editor letters emailed to Alex before class
Workshop (Submitter)	- Manuscript uploaded to Google Drive by midnight one week before your workshop

Final Project

At the end of the semester, I’d like you to turn in a revision of something you submitted for workshop (either one story or three poems). My hope is that your revision will draw upon some (but probably not all) of the feedback you received. To that end, I want you also to write me a one-page memo explaining how you used (or why you chose not to use) each of the main critiques that I will have listed for you in my synthesis of the class’s feedback. In workshop, as in so much of life, categorically rejecting all critique of your work is as dangerous as blindly taking it all to heart. Sift through the critiques and figure out what is helpful to you and what isn’t—and then explain your decisions.

Attendance and Tardiness

Because this is a discussion-based class, you have to be here. Furthermore, this being a condensed summer session, what time we have together is particularly precious. If you foresee any absences, please bring them to my attention at the summer’s start. Otherwise, our standard rule will be that if you miss class, you get a zero for attendance and for the day’s reading quiz. Combined, this is effectively a 4% reduction in your final grade.

Participation

Your participation grade reflects that you contributed to the discussion each day. It’s not a measure of the quality of your contributions. Importantly, if your contributions violate classroom etiquette (which we will discuss explicitly in the first class), I’m not going to sneak a measure of this into your grade; I’ll bring it up with you in person.

Office Hours

Let's meet one-on-one at least once this semester: in the week following your first workshop. I invite you to meet with me more too. I am available for Zoom meetings or socially distant walks.

A Note on Controversial Subject Matter in Literature

Art can be offensive, but the classroom infrastructure should ameliorate the harm, not exacerbate it. When I assign potentially upsetting readings, I'll do my best to contextualize them in advance. As far as student work goes, I don't want to discourage you from writing about drugs, violence, or politics. There are, however, certain things that will necessarily trigger an administrative response: if your work indicates that you or another student is in danger, or if your work harasses or intimidate classmates. It's up to all of us to create a supportive classroom environment, and I hope you will feel comfortable coming to me if concerns arise.

Plagiarism

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the department.

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.

Grading

- 25% Attendance
- 25% Reading quizzes
- 20% Workshop critiques (timeliness and quality)
- 5% Workshop submissions (timeliness)
- 5% Participation
- 20% Final project

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Craft Assignments Due</u>	
5/24	M	Introductions	July, “The Metal Bowl”; Borges, “Library of Babel”
5/26	W	Craft Vocabulary	Oliver, <i>A Poetry Handbook</i> , “The Line” and “Some Given Forms”; Chabon, “A Model World”; Come to class with a story to tell
5/31	M	No Class – Memorial Day	
6/2	W	Clarity; Workshop	Ruffer, “Maxie”; Levin, “Poem”
Student Workshopping Begins			
6/7	M	Dialogue	Paley, “Wants”; Morrison, <i>Tar Baby</i> ; Gaddis, <i>J R</i> ; Heller, <i>Catch-22</i> (ch.1); Zucker, “Poem”
6/9	W	Escalation & Change	Barthelme, “The School”; Smith, “Song”; Frost, “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”
6/12	Sat	Character	Oates, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?”; Rankine, <i>Citizen</i>
6/14	M	Repetition	Connell, <i>Mrs. Bridge</i> ; Kocot, “Sestina for Lizzette”; Ginsberg, “Howl”; Davis, “Ph.D.”
6/16	W	Voice	Saunders, “Adams”; Keats, “On Visiting The Tomb of Burns”; Hollo, “[i shouldn’t have started . . .]”
6/21	M	Setting	Tu Fu, “Full Moon”; Buson, haikus; Issa, haikus; Lahiri, “A Temporary Matter”; optional: McCarthy, <i>Blood Meridian</i>
6/23	W	Comedy/Tragedy	Walcott, “Blues”; Stevens, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream”; Heller, <i>Catch-22</i> (ch.2)
6/28	M	Technical Language	Choose two that interest you: Calvino, “The Soft Moon”; Calvino, “Mitosis”; Ourednik, <i>Europeana</i> ; Fridlund, “Time Machine”; Pynchon, <i>V.</i> ; Wallace, “Wiggle Room”; Updike, “Problems”; Egan, “Great Rock and Roll Pauses”; etc.
6/30	W	Meta	Bishop, “One Art”; Sparrow, “Poem”; Perec, <i>La Disparition</i> ; optional: Lispector, <i>The Hour of the Star</i> ;
TBD		Finals Week/Flexible	End-of-Session Celebration and In-Class Readings