

English 212
Introduction to Creative Writing
Wed., 6:30-9:30
Fall 2006

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Goals

English 212, Introduction to Creative Writing, will focus on theory and practice in the writing of two imaginative genres: poetry and short fiction. Our focus on poetry, during the first part of this course, will have one primary goal: a close attention to, and heightened awareness of, the power of language; such awareness is crucial to good writing of any kind--but it is invaluable to the writing of imaginative works. Here is the first of innumerable instructor's biases about writing that you will encounter in this class: **No good writing can happen without this passionate concern for language.**

Instructor's bias number two: **Good writers read (and further: bad writers claim they don't need to, or that they "just don't like to")**. For the theory component of this course, then, plan on not only writing, but *reading*. We will read about the painstaking craft of writing poetry and fiction, as well as accomplished poems and short stories, which will serve as models and as inspiration.

Number three: **Besides reading, good writers write *all the time***. They record their thoughts on the things they've read; they jot down random expressions, overheard conversations, ridiculous remarks at the grocery store or the gym; they clip newspaper and magazine articles that make them laugh or make them cry; they hear, suddenly and for no apparent reason, words that sound like music in their heads--and they race for the nearest scrap of paper to get those words down before they disappear just as suddenly. All this is building toward another important aspect of this course (one that combines both theory and practice): you will keep a thorough journal that should be with you all the time.

Finally, the most crucial practice components of all: writing, then rewriting, then reading your work to others and hearing others read their own, then rewriting some more, then rewriting some more. In short, this will be a workshop course, demanding (1) the sharing of your own work; (2) your careful reading of, and constructive responding to, the work of others; and (3) **the ongoing act of revising that no good writer can avoid** (instructor's bias number four--and a lesson I continue to learn myself).

Required Texts

Garrison Keillor, *Good Poems*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Mary Oliver, *A Poetry Handbook*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1994.

Janet Burroway, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, 7th ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Plus photocopying (or printing of multiple copies) of your own work for small groups and full-class workshops as needed.

Attendance and Academic Honesty

We will meet once a week for fourteen weeks; that isn't much time when you consider all we have to do. If you are serious about writing, you will show up on time, every time. More than one absence (excused or unexcused) will jeopardize your final grade.

I certainly hope it goes without saying that any work you submit for this course must be your own; see the College's Academic Honesty policy in the Student Handbook.

The Journal

It should be wild, free-wheeling and *long*. Because I may sometimes need to take your journal with me for a few days to look over your entries, I'd recommend a loose-leaf binder or folder, so that you can continue to keep journal pages when the notebook itself is out of your hands for a time. You shouldn't need minimum requirements, but if you want them here you go:

Poetry Unit

Min. 1 ½ pages per chapter for five chapters in Oliver + Wallace handout (including notes on poems included in Oliver and/or handouts distributed in class) = 9

Min. 2 pages for chpt. assigned to your group for discussion
= 2

In-class writings = ?

Fiction Unit

Min. 1 page per chapter for 3 chapters in Burroway = 3

Min. 2 pages for chpt. assigned to your group for discussion
= 2

Min. 1 page per short story for 4 short stories in Burroway = 4

Min. 1 page on revision, in response to Burroway ch. 11 = 1

In-class writings = ?

Total 21 pages + in-class writings

I will look over these journals quickly on evenings when you are working on drafts of your own work in small groups. What this means is that (a) if you want me to read something closely, you should mark it accordingly and I'll take it with me to read outside of class, and (b) if there's something you do *not* want me to read, you should fold the page over, mark it accordingly, and tell me how long this particular entry is and, in a general sense, what it's about. Note that I'll expect you to be keeping the journal consistently throughout the course (not writing tons of entries late in the semester), and I'll be checking it regularly. You should have about one-third of your entries written by week 4, two-thirds by week 10, and all by week 14.

Small Groups, Full-Class Workshops, Writing Center, Individual Conferences

We will negotiate the formation of small groups in class, but my assumption is that you will work with one group during the first portion of the course (poetry) and another during the second (fiction). For every poem draft that you write for this class (a total of six), you will receive feedback from a small group of your peers. In addition, you will receive full-class workshop feedback for one poem and one short story, as well as more detailed feedback from one group member for one poem and one story, plus focused Writing Center feedback. Finally, you will have an individual conference with me during Weeks 5-6 and, if you wish, again during Weeks 14-15.

Evaluation

You will receive comments and a cumulative grade on a portfolio of your work submitted

to me at three points in the semester: week 6 (30% of final grade), week 12 (40% of final grade), and following week 15 (30% of final grade). While I will evaluate your work for originality and craft (skill with language and form), it is important to realize that in determining your final grade, I will place equal (or even greater) emphasis on your level of commitment to writing itself; this will be gauged by your class participation, the seriousness of your responses to fellow writers in the class, and the time and attention you have put into revising and improving your own work. Note the following requirements:

Portfolio I (30% of final grade): All drafts to be included.

- Introduction/Self-evaluation
- Four poems, two of which are significantly revised (that is, reworked at least twice)
- Editor's Letter (written response--minimum one page--to one poem by another student)
- Journal (checked on 9/6, 9/13, and 9/20 considered as part of portfolio grade)
- Participation (including group-led discussion of assigned chapter in Oliver)

Portfolio II (40% of final grade): All drafts to be included.

- Introduction/Self-evaluation
- Two poems, each significantly revised (If you include a poem or poems from Portfolio I, these must be considerably revised *again*.)
- Short Story #1 (min. 5 pages), revised at least twice
- Journal (checked on 10/18 and 11/1; considered as part of portfolio grade)
- Participation (including group-led discussion of assigned chapter in Burroway)

Portfolio III (30% of final grade): All drafts to be included.

- Introduction/Self-evaluation
- Story #2, revised at least once
- Editor's Letter (written response--minimum one and a half page--to one story by another student, prepared during weeks 9-11 as assigned)
- Journal (checked on 11/29; considered as part of portfolio grade)
- Participation (including participation in Class Reading)

Schedule

Week 1 (8/30)

Introductions; going over syllabus; model group critique (poetry); writing exercises for coming week; etc.
 Oliver, first four chapters (through "Imitation"); modeling of notes and discussion, including selected poems; use of Keillor text
 Assembling of groups and assigning of Oliver chapter discussions, featured writers, etc.

Week 2 (9/6)

Complete reading of first four chapters in Oliver
 Group-led discussions on the following in Oliver: (1) "Sound" and "More Devices of Sound," (2) "The Line," (3) "Some Given Forms," (4) "Verse That Is Free," (5) "Diction, Tone, Voice," (6) "Imagery"

2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem (turn in journals during this time)

Week 3 (9/13)

Wallace (handout)

Full-class workshop: discussion of featured writers' poems; Editor's Letters due to writers

2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem (turn in journals during this time)

Week 4 (9/20)

Oliver, "Revision"

Full-class workshop: discussion of featured writers' poems; Editor's Letters due to writers

2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem (turn in journals during this time)

Week 5 (9/27)*

Oliver: "Workshops and Solitude" and "Conclusion"

Full-class workshop: discussion of featured writers' poems; Editor's Letters due to writers

*Individual conferences with instructor this week and next.

****Required attendance at Dodge Poetry Festival on Friday, 9/29; details in class.**

Week 6 (10/4)*

Portfolio I due. No regular class.

Note that one Writing Center visit will be required (for work on one of your two short story drafts) during the following weeks of the course's fiction unit; you must sign up for this session and report the date you've selected to me by Wed., Oct. 25.

Week 7 (10/11)

Burroway, chs. 1-3 plus Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts, Bloom, "Silver Water," O'Brien, "The Things They Carried"

In-class exercises

Assembling of groups and scheduling of featured workshop writers, etc.

Week 8 (10/18)

Group-led discussions of Burroway ch. 4, plus Baxter, "Gryphon" and Burroway ch. 5, plus Hemingway, "Hills Like White Elephants"

Draft story #1 due; small group workshops: half of class as featured writers (turn in journals).

Week 9 (10/25)

Editor's Letters prepared by featured writers; discussion of featured writers' stories

Group-led discussion of Burroway ch. 6, plus Morgan, "Dark Corner" and Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"

Week 10 (11/1)

Group-led discussions of Burroway chs. 7 and 8, plus Orozco, "Orientation," Alvarez, "Snow," and Jen, "Who's Irish?"

Revised story #1 due; small group workshops: other half of class as featured writers (turn in journals).

Week 11 (11/8)

Editor's Letters prepared by featured writers; discussion of featured writers' stories

Group-led discussion of Burroway ch. 10, plus Alexie, "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona"

Week 12 (11/15)

Burroway, ch. 11 plus Carver stories (handout).

Portfolio II due.

Week 13 (Thanksgiving recess; no classes.)

Week 14 (11/29)*

Draft story #2 due; small group workshops (turn in journals).

*Optional conferences with instructor this week and next.

Week 15 (12/6)*

Wed. Full-class discussion of all final stories

Plan for class reading

Course evaluations

Portfolio III due by 6:30 PM on Monday, 12/11.

Finals Week: Class reading (to be scheduled).