

English 212
Introduction to Creative Writing
Mon./Wed., 2:20-3:30
Fall 2007

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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 and Elizabeth Stuckey-French, *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 twice a week (sometimes only once a week) for fifteen 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 two absences (excused or unexcused) will automatically lower

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

Min. 1 page in response to Sam Hamill reading on Oct. 4 = 1

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 22 pages + in-class writings

I will look over these journals quickly on days 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 5, two-thirds by week 10, and all by week 14; your entry on revision should be included with Portfolio III.

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 (two or three) 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, during weeks 8-13 of the semester, you will have an individual conference with me; here we will spend concentrated time on one of your stories and any other work that you request.

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 13 (40% of final grade), and week 16 (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 9/12, 9/19, and 9/26; 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 10/17, 10/31, and 11/14; 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 9-14 as assigned)
 - Required final journal entry on revision, in response to *Burroway* ch. 11 and Carver stories (included with this portfolio and considered as part of portfolio grade)
- Participation (including participation in Class Reading)

Schedule

Week 1 (8/27, 8/29)

- Mon. Introductions; going over syllabus; discussion and modeling of workshop method; writing exercises for coming week; etc.
- Wed. *Oliver*, first four chapters (through "Imitation"); modeling of notes and discussion, including selected poems; use of Keillor text
Assembling of groups and scheduling of *Oliver* chapter discussions, featured writers, etc.

Week 2 (9/3—no class, 9/5)

- Wed. Three group-led discussions of the following in *Oliver*:
 - (1) "Sound" and "More Devices of Sound"
 - (2) "The Line"
 - (3) "Some Given Forms"

Reading and discussion of poems; in class-writing
Wallace (handout)
Reading and discussion of exercise poems

Week 3 (9/10, 9/12)

Mon. Three group-led discussions of the following in Oliver:

(4) "Verse That Is Free"

(5) "Diction, Tone, Voice"

(6) "Imagery"

Reading and discussion of poems; in class-writing

Reading and discussion of exercise poems, cont'd.

Wed. 2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem for entire class plus instructor (turn in journals during this time).

Week 4 (9/17, 9/19)

Mon. Oliver, "Revision"; full-class workshop: discussion of featured writers' poems; Editor's Letters due to writers.

Wed. 2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem for entire class plus instructor (turn in journals during this time).

Week 5 (9/24, 9/26)

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

Wed. 2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem for entire class plus instructor (turn in journals during this time).

Week 6 (10/1, 10/3)*

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

Wed. Oliver: "Workshops and Solitude" and "Conclusion"

*Required attendance at reading by poet Sam Hamill on Thursday, Oct. 4 at 4 PM.

Portfolio I (including journal response to Sam Hamill reading) due by noon on Friday, 10/5.

Week 7 (10/8—no class, 10/10)

Wed. Burroway, chs. 1-2, plus Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts," O'Brien, "The Things They Carried," and Oates, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"; in-class exercises

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

Week 8 (10/15, 10/17)

Mon. Group-led discussion of Burroway ch. 7, plus Atwood, "Happy Endings" and O'Connor, "Everything That Rises Must Converge"; in-class writing

Wed. Draft story #1 due; small group workshops: writers 1-7 featured (turn in journals).

Week 9 (10/22, 10/24)*

Mon. Editor's Letters prepared by writers 8-14; discussion of stories by writers 1-7.

Wed. Group-led discussion of Burroway chs. 3 and 4, plus Baxter, "Gryphon" and Wolff, "Bullet in the Brain"

*This week: Writers 8-14—conferences with instructor; Writers 15-21—Writing Center.

Week 10 (10/29, 10/31)

Mon. Group-led discussion of Burroway ch. 8, plus Orozco, “Orientation” and Jen, “Who’s Irish?”; in-class writing

Wed. Revised story #1 due; small group workshops: writers 15-21 featured (turn in journals).

Week 11 (11/5, 11/7)*

Mon. Editor’s Letters prepared by writers 1-7; discussion of stories by writers 15-21.

Wed. Group-led discussions of Burroway chs. 5 and 6, plus Shepard, “Love and Hydrogen” and Cheever, “The Swimmer”

*This week: Writers 1-7--conferences with instructor; Writers 8-14--Writing Center.

Week 12 (11/12, 11/14)*

Mon. Group-led discussion of Burroway ch. 10, plus Alexie, “This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona”; in-class writing

Wed. Draft story #2 due; small group workshops: writers 8-14 featured (turn in journals).

*This week and week 13: Writers 15-21--conferences with instructor; Writers 1-7--Writing Center.

Week 13 (11/19, 11/21—no class)

Mon. Editor’s Letters prepared by writers 15-21; discussion of stories by writers 8-14.

Portfolio II due by noon on Tuesday, 11/20.

Week 14 (11/26, 11/28)

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

Wed. Revised story #2: copies for entire class plus instructor.

Week 15 (12/3, 12/5)

Mon. Full-class workshop

Wed. Full-class workshop

Week 16 (12/10)

Mon. Plan for class reading; course evaluations

Portfolio III due during this final class.

Finals Week: Class reading (during scheduled final exam period).