

English 212
Introduction to Creative Writing
Mon./Wed., 10:20-11:30
Fall 2009

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Office Hours: Mon., 1-2:30; Tues., 10:30-11:30;
Wed., 2-3:30; and by appointment.

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 for Hard Times*. New York: Penguin Books, 2005.

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; you will also devote your entire attention to what's happening in the class--no matter how good you are at multi-tasking, I require that all cell phones be *turned off*

(not merely silenced) in my classes.

Also note that 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

Journal entries (in response to assigned reading) must be sent to me by email or posted on Blackboard (we will determine which in class) by 10 PM on the nights before class sessions for which the readings are assigned. Each journal entry should be a minimum of 350 words long (please include word count at the entry's end), and should include a brief summary of what you consider the most important points of that day's reading, along with your application of the reading's important ideas to a published poem of your choice (during the poetry unit) or to one of the assigned short stories in Burroway (for the fiction unit). In addition, you will be required to submit a journal entry in response to your required attendance at at least one of the Moravian College Theatre Company's fall productions (Oct. 7 deadline for *Betty's Summer Vacation*; Nov. 18 deadline for *The Fountain of Fair Fortune*). See the Schedule (below) for assigned readings and dates.

I will look over these journal entries quickly prior to our class discussions. On these discussion days, several students will be randomly selected to present their summaries and applications, as a group. In addition, you will be required to turn in hard copies of your completed and refined journals at two points during the semester: Wed., Oct. 7 (poetry) and Mon., Dec. 7 (fiction).

Note that in addition to these more formal journal assignments, you are advised to have a notebook (with you at all times!) for recording ideas, completing in- and out-of-class writing exercises, etc.

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 the four poem drafts you write during the first portion of the course, 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 class member for one poem and one story. You will also receive focused feedback on one of your short stories during a required visit to the Writing Center (and failure to schedule this visit will negatively affect your participation grade). Finally, you are always welcome to schedule an individual conference with me, to spend more concentrated time on one of your poems or stories or any other work that you request.

Please do not over-use email to contact me with questions about the course or about your own work; ask important questions about the course during class time so that everyone can benefit from such questions and answers, and schedule a time or times to meet with me to discuss your work in person.

Evaluation

You will receive comments and a cumulative grade on a portfolio of your work submitted to me at two points in the semester: week 7 (30% of final grade) and week 15 (35% 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)

Portfolio II (35% of final grade): All drafts to be included.

- Introduction/Self-evaluation
- Two complete stories, including one submitted as your “final story” (revised as fully as possible; minimum eight pages)
- Editor’s Letter (written response—minimum one page—to one story by another student)

Journals

Poetry Unit: 7 total entries, submitted on time, then compiled, refined and turned in as hard copies on Wed., Oct. 7 (**15%**)

Fiction Unit: 7 total entries, submitted on time, then compiled, refined, and turned in as hard copies on Mon., Dec. 7 (**15%**)

Participation in class discussions, small-group and full-class workshop sessions, and class reading; required visit to the Writing Center (**5%**)

Schedule

Week 1 (8/31, 9/2)

- Mon. Introductions; going over syllabus.
- Wed. Discussion and modeling of workshop method; in-class writing and writing exercises for coming week; use of Keillor text; etc.

Week 2 (9/7—no class, 9/9):

- Wed. Oliver, first three chapters (through “Imitation”) plus selected poems; modeling of journal entry plus discussion; assembling of groups and scheduling of reading discussions, featured writers, etc.

Week 3 (9/14, 9/16): Journal entries due by 10 PM Sun. 9/13 (3) and Tues. 9/15 (2)

- Mon. Three group-led discussions of the following in Oliver:
 - “Sound” and “More Devices of Sound”
 - “The Line”
 - “Some Given Forms”
- In-class writing

Wed. Two group-led discussions of the following:
Wallace handout
“Verse That Is Free” (in Oliver)
In-class writing

Week 4 (9/21, 9/23): Journal entries due by 10 PM Sun. 9/20 (2)

Mon. Two group-led discussions of the following in Oliver:
“Diction, Tone Voice”
“Imagery”
In-class writing

Wed. 2 draft poems due; small group workshops; featured writers must bring copies of one chosen poem for entire class plus instructor.

Week 5 (9/28, 9/30)

Mon. Full-class workshop: discussion of featured writers’ poems; Editor’s Letters (written by writers who are NOT featured today) 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.

Week 6 (10/5, 10/7)

Mon. Full-class workshop: discussion of featured writers’ poems; Editor’s Letters (written by writers who are NOT featured today) due to writers.

Wed. Reading: “Revision,” “Workshops and Solitude,” and “Conclusion” in Oliver; workshop catch-up; **complete Poetry Journal due** (including entry on MCTC production of *Betty’s Summer Vacation*, if selected).

Week 7 (10/12—no class, 10/14)

Wed. **Portfolio I due.** Reading: 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?”; modeling of journal entry plus discussion; in-class writing; assembling of groups and scheduling of featured workshop writers, etc.

Week 8 (10/19, 10/21)*: Journal entries due by 10 PM, Sun., 10/18 (2)

Mon. Group-led discussions of Burroway chs. 3 and 4, plus Baxter, “Gryphon” and Wolff, “Bullet in the Brain”

Wed. Small group workshops: one complete story draft; seven featured writers to share work for next week.

***All students must schedule at least one Writing Center appointment, for work on one or more short stories, during Weeks 8-13.**

Week 9 (10/26, 10/28)

Mon. Full-class discussion of 7 featured writers’ stories; 7 Editor’s Letters due.

Wed. Full-class workshop, cont’d.

Week 10 (11/2, 11/4): Journal entries due by 10 PM, Sun., 11/1 (2)

Mon. Group-led discussions of Burroway chs. 7 and 8, plus Atwood, “Happy Endings,” O’Connor, “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” Orozco, “Orientation” and Jen, “Who’s Irish?”

Wed. Small group workshops: revised first story plus initial draft of second due; seven featured writers to share work for next week.

Week 11 (11/9, 11/11)

Mon. Full-class discussion of 7 featured writers' stories; 7 Editor's Letters due.

Wed. Full-class workshop, cont'd.

Week 12 (11/16, 11/18): Journal entries due by 10 PM, Sun., 11/15 (2 on chs. 5 & 6) and by 10 PM, Tues., 11/17 (1 on ch. 10)

Mon. Group-led discussions of Burroway chs. 5 and 6, plus Shepard, "Love and Hydrogen" and Cheever, "The Swimmer"

Wed. Group-led discussion of Burroway ch. 10, plus Alexie, "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona"; journal entry on MCTC production of *The Fountain of Fair Fortune* due (if chosen).

Week 13 (11/23, 11/25—no class)

Mon. Small group workshops: complete final story (minimum 8 pages/2400 words); seven featured writers to share work for next week.

Week 14 (11/30, 12/2)

Mon. Full-class discussion of 7 featured writers' stories; 7 Editor's Letters due.

Wed. Full-class workshop, cont'd.

Week 15 (12/7, 12/9)

Mon. **Complete Fiction Journal due;** Burroway ch. 11 plus Carver stories (handout).

Wed. **Portfolio II due;** course evaluations.