

## INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

SPRING 2015 — 351:212:06  
M 9:50 – 12:50 MURRAY HALL 002 COLLEGE AVE

John Holliday • LSH B106A  
Office Hours: M 8:30 – 9:30

### COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

The business of this course is introducing you to the business of writing fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry. So the big goal of the course is developing your own writing, your own voice and style. But good writers are good readers. So another crucial goal of the course is honing the skill of reading as a writer. Along, then, with dealing in writing exercises, workshop, revision, and discussion about craft, we'll also spend significant time reading and analyzing published work with a writerly eye. Introduction to Creative Writing fulfills SAS CORE learning goal AHR (Arts and Humanities, learning goal r—the goal to “engage critically in the process of creative expression”) and the English Department learning goal of “the ability to write persuasively and precisely, in scholarly and, optionally, creative forms.”

### COURSE STRUCTURE

#### CRAFT

In the first half of the semester, we'll deal exclusively in the craft the writing, the how to and why, the nuts and bolts of putting together a solid story, essay, and poem. In order to sort these things out, we'll see how the pros do it, dissecting and discussing and putting the elements of craft to work ourselves.

#### WORKSHOP

In the second half of the semester, we'll workshop your own completed drafts. Workshop is the main way we'll attempt to grasp at the more elusive business of pulling the pieces of writing craft together into something that sings. The goal is to sharpen your work, of course. But it's also to sharpen our writerly acumen, our ability to understand what a piece is doing and to help it do it better.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

All required texts are posted on Sakai (in the Resources section).

### RECOMMENDED TEXTS

- Behn, Robin and Chase Twichell, eds. 2001. *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets Who Teach*. New York: Quill.
- Burroway, Janet. 2011. *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Longman.
- Garner, Brian. 2009. *Garner's Modern American Usage*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kiteley, Brian. 2008. *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books.
- . 2005. *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Writer's Digest Books.
- LaPlante, Alice. 2007. *The Making of a Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Oliver, Mary. 1994. *A Poetry Handbook*. New York: Harcourt Publishing.
- Strand, Mark and Eavan Boland, eds. 2000. *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

## ASSIGNMENTS &amp; GRADING

Course Requirement	%
Participation	30
Exercises	10
Anthology	5
Class Workshop Submission	10
Group Workshop Submission	10
Workshop Comments	25
Revision	10

Note: All work should be typed unless stated otherwise. Please use Times New Roman, 12-point font, and one-inch margins (for prose, double space; for poetry, single space). This is standard manuscript formatting. All assignment due dates are listed in the course schedule below.

**PARTICIPATION**

The success of this class turns largely on your presence and contribution to discussion. You are generally expected to attend every class. But life happens. Thus, one absence will be overlooked, no questions asked. Any further absence will be excused *only* on account of medical reasons, religious observances, or personal emergencies. For any medical reason, you must submit a note signed by a health care professional documenting the date of a medical appointment or time during which illness prevented attendance. For any religious observance, you are required to notify me of this *in advance*. Personal emergencies will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. If you anticipate missing any class, please use the University absence reporting website (<https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>) to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email will be sent to me automatically. All students begin the course with a 100% participation grade (30 points). For every unexcused absence, your participation grade will be reduced 10 points. For every 15 minutes of unexcused lateness, your participation grade will be reduced 1 point.

**EXERCISES**

Each week we'll spend time on writing exercises. We'll write and sometimes share what we've written by reading aloud. During the first half of the semester, you are required to revise and submit 4 of these exercises (at 1–2 pages each). Among these 4 exercises, you are required to work in all three genres (fiction, nonfiction, and poetry). For every class an exercise is late, its grade will be reduced 5 points (each exercise is worth 25 points).

**ANTHOLOGY**

The writers we love influence our own work one way or another. And it's important to recognize, accept, and celebrate that, I think. Plus, most of us enjoy sharing who we like. You are required to pick 3 writers who really move you, photocopy a sample of their work (1–2 pages from each, and not something we read for class), and write 150–200 words for each writer on what's so special about them and/or how they influence your own work or literary vision. Be sure to note where the samples are excerpted from and that the samples are clearly labeled. For every class your anthology is late, its grade will be reduced 20 points (the anthology is worth 100 points).

**WORKSHOP SUBMISSIONS**

We will have one round of workshop with the entire class and one round with small groups. Between the two rounds, you are required to submit 6–10 pages of fiction or nonfiction (which must be one single story/essay) and 5–7 pages of poetry and/or prose poetry. In the first few weeks of class, we will create a schedule for workshop. ***Your workshop pieces are due in class one week before the date you are***

***scheduled for workshop.*** You must post a PDF of your submission to our Sakai site (on the Workshop page) and bring enough paper copies of your submission to class for the class (22 copies) or your small group (8 copies). If you do not meet this deadline *and* these requirements, you will forfeit your workshop slot and your submission's grade will be reduced 20 points. For every additional class your submission is late, its grade will be reduced an additional 20 points (each submission is worth 100 points).

#### WORKSHOP COMMENTS

You are expected to make constructive line edits and marginal notes in others' workshop pieces and are required to type one constructive comment of 200–250 words (roughly  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of a page) for each class workshop submission. You should address a submission's strengths and give suggestions for improvement. Typed comments are due on the day the pieces are scheduled for workshop. You must bring *two* copies of your typed comments (one for the writer and one for me). For every class a comment is late, its grade will be reduced  $\frac{1}{2}$  point (each comment is worth 1 point).

#### REVISION

Using some of the feedback you received in workshop, you are required to revise one of your workshop submissions (either the 6–10-pages of fiction/nonfiction or the 5–7 pages of poetry/prose poetry). Along with this revision, you must submit the original submission I marked and a 2-page commentary in which you discuss your revision and your literary vision. For every *day* your revision/commentary is late, its grade will be reduced 20 points (the revision and commentary are each worth 50 points).

#### GRADING SYSTEM

Grades for all assignments will be calculated in terms of raw %. All assignments completed in good faith<sup>1</sup> and submitted on time will receive full credit for the requirement. Any assignment not submitted or not completed in good faith will receive 0%. Final grades for the course will be calculated as follows (Rutgers does not recognize minuses):

%	90	85	80	75	70	65	60	0
letter	A	B+	B	C+	C	D+	D	F

#### GRADE DISPUTES

It is my job to make every effort to grade as accurately and fairly as possible, and I take that job seriously. But should you believe I've made an error in recording or assessing any of your assignments or participation, please let me know as soon as possible. If you believe there is an error in recording, speak with me in person (during office hours or before or after class). If you believe there is an error in assessment, speak with me in person (during office hours or by appointment) *and* submit a signed letter detailing why you believe reassessment should be considered. All disputes submitted in a timely manner will receive a response within two weeks. ***No disputes will be considered after Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>.***

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<sup>1</sup> The notion *completed in good faith* is a measure of effort. While it doesn't have a strict definition, there are clear cases of what does and doesn't count as completed in good faith. For instance, assignment submissions that meet the assignment criteria (genre, page length, subject matter), lack egregious typos, have coherent syntax and diction, and don't repeat a single line for pages on end in the supposed name of being "avant-garde" have clearly been completed in good faith. On the other hand, assignment submissions that fall far short of the assignment criteria, contain egregious typos (such that it's clear the writer didn't proofread one bit), have incoherent syntax and diction (where this doesn't mean things that may, on first blush, seem incoherent, but on closer inspection are obviously deliberate and labored over, like, say, some late Samuel Beckett), or repeat a single line for pages on end in the name of whatever, have clearly not been completed in good faith. As you move away from these extreme ends of the good faith spectrum and toward the middle, there is a degree of murkiness. Whether partial credit will be given for such cases will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to comply with the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy. Any violations of this Policy will be confronted and reported. For more information on the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy, visit [academicintegrity.rutgers.edu](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu).

### RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

If you are unable to meet the deadlines of any course requirements due to religious observances, you are required to notify me of this *in advance*. If you are unable to meet the deadlines of any course requirements due to medical reasons, you must give me a note signed by a health care professional documenting the date of a medical appointment or time during which illness prevented the completion of course requirements. If you are unable to meet the deadlines of any of the course requirements due to personal reasons, speak to me as soon as possible (some form of documentation will be required). *No requests for accommodation of any kind will be considered after the last day of class.*

### SPECIAL NEEDS & SITUATIONS

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation (<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus' disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with me and discuss the accommodations with me as early as possible. To begin this process, complete the Registration form on the ODS web site (<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>).

### OFFICE HOURS & THE LITERARY COMMUNITY

Stop by. For questions or concerns, of course. But also if you just want to talk shop. And if my hours don't work for you, let me know. We'll work something out. A big part of this class is welcoming you to the literary community. So: welcome! You've arrived. And know that the literary community extends well beyond our classroom and my office hours. I encourage you go out and explore. Thumb through some lit mags at Barnes & Noble. Attend the Writers at Rutgers Reading Series or the Writers at Newark Reading Series. Check out literary events in the area. And tell us if you know of something going on.

### ON TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

At some point, if you continue to write and read about the business of writing, you'll encounter the question of whether writing can be taught (or you could now just do a quick internet search and see the slew of results). I think the answer is, in one sense, obviously yes. But I also think the question is a little unclear or confused. What can be taught are matters of craft: lyrical devices, character development, narrative pacing, descriptive techniques, and so on. Insofar as these things can be noted, analyzed, applied, and practiced, they can be taught. This seems little different than teaching the technical machinery of any art. And between writerly-minded reading and writing exercises, we'll be engaged in learning the matters of craft all semester long.

But what's clearly trickier is how to put all these technical elements together to create something emotionally powerful or aesthetically glorious. Making great art is not a mechanical affair (or at least not wholly so). It takes something more, something seemingly inspired, something beyond a mere grasp of craft. Can this be taught? Umm, probably not, if "teaching" means someone can simply show you how to write the next great American novel. But we can still try to put our fingers on how the stories and essays and poems we love make us emotionally riveted and aesthetically moved, how they drop our jaws and

send our heads spinning. And we can submit our best attempts at doing the same to others with writerly sense, using their feedback to shape and refine and hone. And so we will.

But also, whatever inspired magic is involved in writing great stuff, only those who work, only those who write, day in, day out, have even a chance at producing such stuff. As Mary Heaton Vorse said, “The art of writing is the art of applying the seat of the pants to the seat of the chair.” And at least for me, at times it seems that art calls for chains and some kind of industrial padlock. The trenches in which writerly wars are fought are so, so far from inspiration and creative magic (or whatever). The literary community you’re now part of by being part of this class can, if anything, help you navigate these trenches.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

NOTE: THE DAY READINGS ARE LISTED IS THE DAY THEY WILL BE DISCUSSED.  
 REQUIRED READINGS ARE IN BLACK. OPTIONAL READINGS ARE IN GRAY.

THE WRITING LIFE	
M 1/26	<p>FICTION                      Lorrie Moore, “How to Become a Writer”</p> <p>NONFICTION                      Joan Didion, “On Keeping a Notebook”                      Anne Lamot, “Shitty First Drafts” &amp; “Jealousy”</p> <p>POETRY                      Billy Collins, “Intro to Poetry”</p>

SOUND	
M 2/2	<p>FICTION                      James Joyce, excerpt from <i>Ulysses</i>                      Lydia Davis, “Mown Lawn” &amp; “Right and Wrong”                      Djuna Barnes, excerpt from <i>Nightwood</i>                      Gaddis &amp; Pynchon quotes</p> <p>Pure Sound</p> <p>NONFICTION                      Mary Oliver, “More Devices of Sound”                      Robert Pinsky, “Accent and Duration”</p> <p>POETRY                      Gertrude Stein, “Cezanne”                      Lisa Jarnot, “They Loved the Sea”                      The Villanelle &amp; Theodore Roethke, “The Waking”                      Thomas Campion, “Now Winter Nights Enlarge”                      Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover”</p> <p>FICTION                      George Saunders, “My Chivalric Fiasco”                      Wells Tower, “Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned”</p> <p>Voice</p> <p>POETRY                      Ron Padgett “Voice”                      Joe Wenderoth, from <i>Letters to Wendy’s</i>                      Marie Howe, “Reading Ovid”</p>
M 2/9	<p><b>DUE: Exercise 1</b></p> <p>FICTION                      Raymond Queneau, <i>Exercises in Style</i></p> <p>POETRY                      The Sonnet &amp; Shakespeare, “Sonnet 47”                      K. Silem Mohammad, “The the the the the the the the the the Death (Hey Hey)”</p> <p>Style</p>

Minimalism & Maximalism	FICTION
	Ann Beattie, "Find and Replace"
	David Foster Wallace, "Death is Not the End"
	NONFICTION
	Daniel Orozco, "Shakers"
	POETRY
Steve Scafid, "To Whoever Set My Truck on Fire"	
Cole Swensen, "A Garden as Between"	
Robert Creeley, "When I Think"	

DESCRIPTION	
M 2/16	<b>DUE: Exercise 2</b>
Diction & Detail	FICTION
	William Gass, "Order of Insects"
	NONFICTION
	Mary Oliver, "At Herring Cove"
	POETRY
	Stephen Dunn, "Decorum"
Eleni Sikelianos, "A Radiant Countess of What's It"	
Adrienne Rich, "Ghost of a Chance"	
Mood & Metaphor	FICTION
	David Foster Wallace, excerpt from <i>Infinite Jest</i>
	NONFICTION
	Zadie Smith, "Ten Notes on Oscar Weekend"
	Joan Didion, "At the Dam"
	POETRY
Sharon Olds, "Topography"	
Billy Collins, "Litany"	
Charles Simic, "My Beloved" & "Evening Chess"	

CHARACTER	
M 2/23	<b>DUE: Exercise 3</b>
Pulling from the Personal	NONFICTION
	Glen David Gold, "Your Own Personal Satan"
	POETRY
	Julie Sheehan, "Hate Poem"
	William Carlos Williams, "Danse Russe"
Eileen Myles, "December 9 <sup>th</sup> "	

Quirks & Kinds	FICTION Karen Russell, “Dougbert Shackleton’s Rules for Antarctic Tailgating” George Saunders, “Sticks”
	NONFICTION Rebecca McClanahan, “Considering the Lilies”
	POETRY Elizabeth Willis, “The Witch” Franz Wright, “Panhandler”
M 3/2	<b>DUE: Exercise 4</b>
Dialogue	FICTION J.D. Salinger, “Just Before the War with the Eskimos”
	NONFICTION Thomas Bernhard, “The Grillparzer Prize”
	POETRY Robert Hass, “Forty Something”

STORY	
Plot	FICTION Margaret Atwood, “Happy Endings” Rick Moody, “Boys” Raymond Carver, “Cathedral”
	NONFICTION Brian Doyle, “Leap”
	POETRY Marie Howe, “Marriage” Paul Violi, “Index”
M 3/9 Show & Tell	FICTION Amy Hempel, “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried” Stephan Dixon, “The Saddest Story”
	POETRY Russell Edson, “The Fall” Allen Ginsberg, “First Party at Ken Kesey’s with Hell’s Angels”
	FICTION Kelly Link, “Travels with the Snow Queen”
Reinventing Tradition	POETRY William Carlos Williams, “This is Just to Say” Kenneth Koch, “Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams”

*spring break*

BREAKING THE "RULES"	
M 3/23	<p><b>DUE: Anthology</b></p> <p>FICTION</p> <p>Donald Barthelme, "Sentence"</p> <p>John Barth, "Lost in the Funhouse"</p> <p>NONFICTION</p> <p>Dave Eggers, <i>A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius</i> "Acknowledgments"</p> <p>POETRY</p> <p>Steve McCaffery, "The Dangers of Poetry" &amp; "Digital Poetics"</p> <p>Sharon Mesmer, "I Never Knew an Orgy Could Be So Much Work"</p> <p>Kenneth Goldsmith, "from <i>Day</i>"</p> <p>Ron Padgett, "Nothing in That Drawer"</p>

CLASS WORKSHOP	
M 3/23	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> </ol>
M 3/30	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>
M 4/6	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>
M 4/13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>
M 4/20	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>

GROUP WORKSHOP	
M 4/27	<p>GROUP 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol> <p>GROUP 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol> <p>GROUP 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> <li>4.</li> <li>5.</li> </ol>
M 5/4	<p>GROUP 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> <li>3.</li> </ol> <p>GROUP 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> </ol> <p>GROUP 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.</li> <li>2.</li> </ol>

GO FORTH INTO THE WORLD & WRITE	
M 5/4	<b>DUE: Revision</b>