

ENGL210: INTRO TO CREATIVE WRITING

Fall 2013 Syllabus

MWF 9:00-9:50 AM

RM# Wheatley W01-0037

Instructor: Lewis Feuer

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REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Burroway, Janet. *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft (3rd Edition)*
- eReserve texts, links, and handouts, distributed or mentioned weekly.
- A notebook, brought to class every day.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This course is an introduction to the art and practice of creative writing. Beginning the creative writing process will embolden students to flex and educate their imagination. Creative writing is an art. It is founded in the imagination and then imbued with the rigor of process, the pain and joy of expression, and the power to communicate with an audience.

However, writing successful poems and stories is not immediate. Shaping language, finding an evocative order of words, giving voice to a character, striking the right sound, or illuminating discord, requires a consistent practice of one's art. This practice (like this course) encompasses more than just writing.

What does a writer do when they sit down to write? Or, before they write? Or, after? Like the sculptor studying the broken visual planes of Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No.2* students will study the movement of a sentence, the logic of a line break, and the structure of a story by reading published examples of poetry and fiction, as well as the work of their peers (and maybe something from Duchamp, or Lewitt, or Hesse). While developing their ability to read as writers students will generate a vocabulary for discussing creative writing—a vocabulary they may then use to assess constructively their own work and that of their classmates.

COURSE METHODS

In this class students will write—a lot. Students will be encouraged and expected to take risks and experiment through in-class writing exercises as well as assignments outside of class. These

exercises will generate new material that students will then develop and refine through workshop and the revision process. The results of this process will become the final portfolio.

Students will also read and respond to examples of published fiction and poetry, and learn to engage with these works as writers. How is the story or poem *constructed*? How does the author use language to develop meaning? Can students learn anything about their own writing by answering those questions? As the class shifts towards workshop students will write regular responses to the work of their classmates as well as self-assessments of their own work and writing process. During this time students will also schedule individual conferences with me to discuss questions, concerns, and the progress of their work. What will be unique about this course is the strong and supportive community of fellow writers. Participation each and every class will be not only an expectation, but also how this community will be sustained and energized throughout the semester.

EVALUATION

Students in this course will not be graded on “talent.” Individual poems and stories will not be graded, nor will weekly writing assignments. Instead, weekly assignments will receive brief comments on how a student addressed/responded to the assignment, and suggestions towards further development and revision.

A **Final Portfolio** will be worth **35%** of the overall grade. The final portfolio is a collection of the student’s best work as well as early drafts of final work, and a self-assessment. The accumulation of this material should demonstrate not only the results of revision, but also (and most importantly) the student’s artistic development throughout the semester. The best way to develop and compile a final portfolio is to complete, on time, all the weekly assignments. This course requires a consistent high level of work throughout the semester, and the best portfolios will demonstrate that effort.

To be included in the student’s final portfolio:

- cover sheet
- 10 pages of completed writing (the most recent/polished draft)
- 2 previous drafts of each piece included in the 10 pages
- final self-assessment of the student’s work presented in the portfolio, and on their development as a creative writer throughout the semester

Participation will also be worth **35%** of the student’s overall grade. This is not a lecture-based course, and so its success depends on the informed participation of the students. Each student must come to class with the textbook and/or additional readings, as well as their **notebook**. All in class writing should be done in this notebook. The notebook should also be used outside of class for sketching ideas, collecting bits of language or bytes of syntax, and it should be the space in which each student’s own work first takes shape. I will ask occasionally to see that work is going into the notebook. As a general rule there should be **at least** one page for each day of class.

To achieve a strong participation grade come to class prepared (assignments completed, reading done with notes or selected passages to discuss), actively contribute to discussion and workshop—this involves listening to peers as well as speaking—and diligently participate in all in-class writing exercises. 2 sets of workshop letters, which students will write for each member of their workshop group, will also be included in the participation grade.

In this class it is absolutely necessary that each and every student feel that artistic risk taking is not only encouraged, but also respected. Mature conduct is expected at all times. Eye rolling and sighing in disagreement, interrupting classmates, insults (even when you are “just kidding”), dismissive tone or body language, and interjections off of topic are obviously inappropriate and such behavior will affect adversely a student’s participation grade.

Papers will be worth **30%** of the final grade. During the semester students will be required to write 3 short papers: 1 in response to an element of craft (500-750 words), and 1 in response to a literary reading attended by the student (250-750 words), and a mid-term self-assessment (500 words), to be completed prior to the student’s individual conference.

INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCE

Each student will be required to schedule one individual conference with me during the semester. The intent of this conference is to give the student an opportunity to discuss questions, concerns, goals, and the progress of their work. Missing this conference will affect adversely a student’s participation grade. Additional conferences may be scheduled anytime during office hours, or if another time outside of office hours works for both the student and myself.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Coming to class is the first step towards sustaining the strong community of writers that this class seeks to foster. It is also the first step students must take in order to develop and demonstrate respect for their own work, the work of their peers, and for the collective work which is integral to the course.

Students are allowed no more than 3 unexcused absences. Unexcused means a student did not notify me in advance of class. So: notify me. This class depends on everyone being present, and prepared to contribute. I expect that no student will miss more than 6 classes during the semester excused or unexcused. More than 6 absences will affect a student’s grade. Please let me know if this is a concern, or if a student has an outside circumstance that impacts attendance. If a student is planning to miss class, I should be informed ahead of time, and the student must turn in their assignment prior to class. If the absence is unexcused the student has 24 hours to email me their assignment.

Also, **no cell phones, email, Facebook, etc.** during class. If I notice a student using any of these, I will mark down their participation grade. If a student has a particular circumstance that requires them to keep their phone on, I should be notified before class.

STYLE REQUIREMENTS

All written assignments must be done in 12-point font Times New Roman. Poetry should be single-spaced (unless the form suggests something else); however, **all fiction and all papers** should be double-spaced and stapled. All assignments must be turned in on time and meet these requirements in order to be considered for grading. For graded assignments, 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for each day the assignment is late. So, if an assignment merits an “A,” but is handed in three days late, the student would receive a “B.”

All work should be free of excessive typos, misspellings, and grammatical errors. Most word programs highlight these errors. So, if the document on the computer screen is riddled with red and green underlines or fluorescent highlights, do something about it! If a student is making grammatical errors for effect, she should know what she is doing and be able to explain why she is doing it.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you have a disability that may affect your performance in this class, know that UMass Boston has resources that can help you succeed in your coursework. Contact the Ross Center for Disabilities (Campus Center UL211); they will provide documentation that you then bring to your instructor: <http://www.umb.edu/academics/vpass/disability/>

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

Plagiarism is defined as the attempt to use or pass off as one's own the ideas or writings of another. This includes copying from a friend, downloading material from the internet and pretending it's yours, or using passages either reproduced word-for-word or paraphrased from someone else's work without giving credit to the author. If a student is confused about the correct way to use sources, please see me for clarification and assistance. Because plagiarism involves stealing someone else's ideas, it's considered a very serious matter in academic life. *Anyone who commits plagiarism risks failing this course.*

All students are accountable to the definitions and regulations concerning Academic Honesty contained in the University of Massachusetts Boston “Code of Standard Conduct.” For more details, see: http://www.umb.edu/life_on_campus/policies/code/

***Please note that this syllabus is subject to change and that students are responsible for being aware of any changes.

WEEK TO WEEK SCHEDULE
(Subject to change with advance notice)

note:

All chapters are from the Burroway Text

All other texts/materials will be distributed in class or made available on the class Wiki.

All weekly assignments will be posted on the class Wiki.

WEEK 1 9/3 Introduction, Chapter 1; Didion, "Why I Write"; Brouwer, "Meadow" and "Teacher"

WEEK 2 9/9 Fiction, Chapter 9; Berlin, *My Jockey*; Chopin, *The story of an hour*

WEEK 3 9/16 Poetry, Chapter 10; Edmundson "Poetry Slam..."; Millay, "Sonnet XLII 'What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why'"; Whitman, "Song of Myself" #51; Hartigan, "Cockatiel"

WEEK 4 9/23 Image and Setting, Chapters 2 & 5; selections from Williams' "Spring & All"; Creely, "Edges"; Plath, "You're"

WEEK 5 9/30 Image and Setting, cont'd; C.D. Wright, "The Treatment"

WEEK 6 10/7 Voice and Character, Chapters 3 & 4; O'Hara "Why I'm Not a Painter," Bowman, "I Want to Be Your Shoebox"

WEEK 7 10/15 (Columbus Day 10/14) Voice and Character, cont'd; Cramer, "I hear the dinner plates gossip"; Wolff, *Bullet in the Brain*; John Berryman, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpimsgfNj7c>

WEEK 8 10/21 Conferences (self-assessment DUE)

WEEK 9 10/28 Story and Dialogue, Chapter 6; Hemingway, *Sea Change*; James Tate, "The Swing"; Trisha Brown, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MpGsEOR9db0>

WEEK 10 11/4 Story and Dialogue, cont'd; Schwartz, "Six Words"; Justice, "Sestina: Here in Katmandu"; Bishop, "Sestina"; (craft paper DUE)

WEEK 11 11/12 (Veterans Day 11/11) Workshop (1st workshop letters DUE)

WEEK 12 11/18 Development and Revision, Chapter 7; Lewitt, "Sentences on Conceptual art"

WEEK 13 11/25 (Thanksgiving 11/28-9) Workshop (2nd workshop letters DUE)

WEEK 14 12/2 TBD

WEEK 15 12/9 TBD: Reading paper DUE

Final portfolios due week of 12/16