

ENGL 2744 – Intro to Creative Writing (Poetry, Creative Non-Fiction, & Fiction) - Spring 2008
Section 12656 • Mon. & Wed., 2:30-3:45pm • PAM 1001

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Welcome to introductory creative writing. The core of this class is the craft of poetry, creative-non-fiction, and fiction; your active attendance and participation are **crucial** to the dynamic, community-building process of the writing workshop. (Translation: attendance is mandatory. Perpetual latecomers and no-shows will not be looked upon kindly. Participation is also mandatory. You will be expected to share your erudite thoughts and opinions in each and every class.) You will also be expected to write and read a great deal. We will plumb the heights and depths of contemporary American writing in a variety of fun-filled ways. Students will be required to write *and revise* at least ten pieces of writing over the course of the semester, converging in a final portfolio. (Please note: revision is absolutely critical to the writing process—if you believe your work is perfect as-is, and refuse to change it, this is not the class for you.) All of this reaches towards our primary goal: to develop your individual voice and style. This class is a journey—be prepared to forge ahead into the inner regions of yourself, and the outer regions of creative vastness. Please note: if you are not interested in facilitatively interacting with members of your peer group while keeping an open mind, this class might not be for you—a writing workshop is a community with no place for intolerance or meanness.¹

Required Texts at the Virginia Tech Bookstore

- 1) *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*, Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter (\$13.95 new, \$10.45 used)
- 2) *In The Palm of Your Hand: The Poet's Portable Workshop*, Steve Kowitz (\$13.45 new, \$10.10 used)

Required Text at Kopy Korner

(101 McDonald St. at the Corner of Progress & Main; 951-8600; open M-Th 8:30-5:30 & F 8:30-5; they accept **cash or checks only!**)

- 3) Course Reader - please bring this to class every day! (about \$25-30)

Additional Required Fee:

Each student is personally responsible for the cost of copying his or her work for workshop.

Materials:

- a portable notebook that you can use as a journal (dedicated to this class only)
- a folder for your classmates' poems
- a folder for poems of yours that have been workshopped
- a folder for your final portfolio

READINGS

- Philip Nikolayev (poetry) Wed Feb. 6, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore in the University Mall (<http://www.myspace.com/nikolayev>)
- Carolyn Krieter-Foronda (Poet Laureate of Virginia), Mon Feb. 11, 7pm, Shanks 370/380 (<http://www.carolynforonda.com/>)
- David Haynes (fiction), Thurs March 11, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore in the University Mall, (<http://www.smu.edu/smunews/matilda/haynes.asp>)
- Gyorgi Voros (poetry) Wed March 19, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore

¹ Please see the Virginia Tech “Principles of Community” for more information on this: www.vt.edu/principles.php

- Alix Ohlin (fiction), Wed March 26, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore in the University Mall, (http://www.identitytheory.com/interviews/roebuck_ohlin.php)
- Mark Doty (poetry), Thurs April 10, 7pm, Volume II Bookstore in the University Mall, (<http://markdoty.org/>)

Requirements:

1) Keep a Journal: *Write regularly*, preferably on some kind of schedule (e.g. from 10-11pm each evening). I will not collect or read your journals—these are for you and I consider them private places where you can collect material for poems. I might, on an as-needed basis, merely come around and check to make sure you are writing in them. There are many craft exercises in *What If?* and *In the Palm of Your Hand* to experiment with.

2) Write a Piece Every Week (to hand in to me); Hand in a Piece for Workshop on the Assigned Day: You should be writing at least a poem, short story, or piece of creative non-fiction a week, which you will hand in to me on MONDAYS. Some weeks I will give you a writing assignment to help you in the pursuit of the perfect piece. For weeks with specific writing assignments, you are welcome to bend or change the assignment, but not disregard it entirely. I will comment on all the work you hand in, but I will not grade it. The amount of work you put into these pieces, however, will figure heavily into your grade. Each student will have 5-6 of these pieces workshoped by a small group that I will assign you to. PLEASE NOTE: I will not accept any work via email. Pieces handed in to me MUST be printed out and delivered on paper. For workshop, we will occasionally be utilizing the “discussion board” feature of Blackboard to post files. (I’ll be discussing more details about this in class.) Sometimes you will also be responsible for making some copies of your poem/short story/essay, and bringing them to class before workshop.

Note: You must hand in new work! Please don’t recycle old poems or stories or essays from high school or past classes. You may, however, hand in a substantial revision as your piece for the week. If you choose to hand in a revision, please make copies of the original as well, and attach it to the revised version. Keep in mind that you need to have written and revised FOUR new pieces by the end of the course for your final portfolio (with *at least* one piece in each genre). In addition, I WILL NOT ACCEPT WORK THAT IS MORE THAN A WEEK LATE. Any assignment that comes in more than a week after its original deadline will be handed back unread, and you will receive a zero for that particular assignment.

3) Do All Assigned Class Reading: When I assign you writing to read for class, read it closely and come prepared with opinions and questions. Read as carefully as you can. Read twice. Read each text assigned, trying to figure out how the writer crafted the work. Think of this writer as your teacher, and the text as their argument about what makes good writing. What can you learn from them? It can help if you scrawl notes on stories/poems/essays, much as you would with a workshop piece. I will be asking for volunteers each week to lead discussion on particular pieces. If you agree to be in charge of a piece, please be prepared to: read the poem aloud, or read a paragraph-long selection from the short story or essay, give a narrative synopsis, relate the work to the theme of the class (‘imagery,’ ‘emotion,’ etc.), and prepare at least one question for the class about the work.

4) Critical Writing: In addition to reading the assigned pieces for each class, and handing in the aforementioned creative writing pieces each week, you will be required to do **four** very short pieces of critical writing over the course of the semester:

- a. attending *at least* one reading outside of class and writing a 1-2 page response for it (due as they occur)
- b. write two short responses to Katie Fallon and Robin Allnut’s work (our in-class visiting writers—more on this in class)
- c. writing a two-page “close reading” paper on a poem of your choice from class (due 2/27)
- d. writing a two-page “compare and contrast” paper on two prose pieces from class (either fiction or creative non-fiction) (due 4/9)

MORE ON CRITICAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

- a. **Readings:** There are a few visiting authors coming to campus this semester (and also to our class), and I have included the schedule on the first page of this syllabus. There is also a link to the schedule on the “Announcements” page on Blackboard. I will also keep you informed of any other upcoming readings that I hear about. If you attend extra readings and write responses for them, I will give you extra credit. *A 1-2 page response for each reading you attend should be turned in to class no later than one week after the reading. Please include the writer’s name, date, and time of reading, as well as titles of some of the poems or stories read, or the title of the book the author read from.* If you can’t make it to a reading due to unavoidable work or family commitments, or other evening classes, please see me so we can devise alternative assignments for you. Please see the sheet in your Course Reader (the last page of the “Essentials” section) for more information on how to write up a reading.
 - b. **Close Reading Paper (poetry):** Your paper should include the poem’s title and author at the top. Write about your opinions of the poem, what you noticed about craft, your visceral reactions, what you thought of the poet’s subject material, and some of your favorite or least favorite lines from the work. Find what is striking, unique or particular to the poem you’ve just read (language, stylistic devices, poetic obsessions, etc.). For further ideas, consult the page in the Course Reader entitled “How to Read a Poem,” and also the assignment sheet (which will be available on Blackboard).
 - c. **Compare-and-Contrast Paper (prose):** Select two pieces of prose to compare and contrast. Your paper may compare two texts that seem to deal with a similar theme in a similar way, a similar theme in very different ways, or have stylistic (but not thematic) similarities. (I will be explaining this assignment in more detail later on in the semester. The assignment sheet will also be available on Blackboard.)
- 5) **Conferences:** *I would like to meet with you at least once during the semester.* I will pass around a sign-up sheet when the time arrives for the first conference (usually a bit before the mid-term mark of the semester), which is required. Other than this conference, it is up to you to come see me on your own during my office hours or by making an appointment with me. (I’d love to see you more often than once, of course, so see my Office Hours information at the top of the syllabus if you have any other questions or concerns or just want to chat.) Take advantage of the fact that I’m available as a reader for any of your work that we don’t get to in class.
- 6) **Workshop:** We will discuss the mechanisms of workshop in more detail in class. Copies handed around for workshop must be typed, *and have your name on them.* Poems should be single-spaced, and prose should be double-spaced. When you get copies of other students’ work, you are expected to take time to read it and comment on it carefully (for more information on this, see the “Workshop Guidelines” sheet in the “Essentials” section of the Course Reader). I will be collecting copies of commented-on work at random intervals. Please Note: if you are absent on a day where you are due to be workshopped, we will skip you and move on to the next student. There will be no make-up workshop. If you are absent on a day when pieces are handed around, it is YOUR RESPONSIBILITY to obtain the pieces you are missing from your classmate.
- 7) **Final Portfolio:** At the end of the semester you’ll submit a portfolio (folder) of at least *four* pieces of creative writing (revised) along with all the original versions of everything you’ve written over the course of the semester that has my comments on it. This is your semester’s volume of finished work, so make it look pretty. I will give you more details on this later in the semester. **Most importantly, please hang on to the drafts of your pieces that I’ve commented on over the course of the semester, as you will be required to include these in your portfolio.**

8) **Attendance:** You will be allowed one absence during the semester before your grade begins to drop. Beyond that, each absence will drop your grade by a half-letter (e.g. an A will drop to an A-, an A- to a B+, etc.). If you miss a class for any reason, you still must:

- a) do the readings and assignments for the missed day
- b) deliver your comments on workshopped poems to the author at the next class meeting
- c) deliver any written work due to me at the next class meeting

More than any other kind of class, a workshop demands attendance. Your voice adds immeasurably to the group, while your absence is a loss. If you have any sort of emergency (medical, family), or religious observance, that forces you to miss a class, PLEASE absolutely come see me, call me, or email me about it—I'm tough, but not inflexible.

Regarding lateness: two latenesses count as one absence.

Regarding excessive absences: FIVE absences lead to automatic failure of the class.

9) **Grades:**

- 30% CLASS PARTICIPATION (oral and written response to workshop pieces, discussion and analysis of assigned texts, attendance in class). In a workshop it is vital that everyone involved participate and contribute their efforts, so please don't hide in the corner! If your insights are grounded in the text and thoughtfully presented, you can't go wrong. I will be looking at both the level of your participation, and the quality of your comments.
- 20% CRITICAL WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (worth 5% each).
- 50% FINAL PORTFOLIO (creative writing and revisions). This grade will not be drawn from the "greatness" of your writing, but from the amount of work you've put into your pieces over the course of the semester—has your work improved and changed? I will be looking for sincere attempts to utilize craft concepts introduced in class, as well as the willingness to experiment with new forms, subjects, and voices, your quality of revision, and your overall investment in your work. Were you open to suggestions about your work from both me and the class? Did your work change considerably from the first draft form? The point of this class is to make everyone a better writer. On that end, grades become an annoying marker. Sweat counts. Love counts. If you care about your writing, and dedicate time to it, it will show.
- *Please note*—any of the following will get you a failing grade: more than five unexcused absences, failure to hand in two or more critical writing assignments, failure to hand in four or more creative assignments. Also, with the grade breakdowns above, any missing creative piece means 4 POINTS are subtracted from your final grade.

SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS:

- Come to class
- Participate in Discussion & Workshops (verbally and via written comments)
- Write One Creative Piece Per Week, as assigned (keep a journal & hand in your final portfolio)
- Write Four Critical Pieces (& go to two readings)
- Have one conference with me

SOME LAST NOTES

- Grammar: Grammar and Mechanics should be correct in imaginative writing as they are in formal reports and essays. If you know you have trouble, see me, or get help at the Writing Center on the third floor of Shanks (http://www.composition.english.vt.edu/wc/WC_Home.html).
- Plagiarism: The Virginia Tech Honor System Constitution sets forth the vital principle that "Every student has the right to live in an academic environment that is free from the injustices caused by any form of intellectual dishonesty." Therefore, the Virginia Tech Honor Code will be upheld in this course for all work submitted. See the Honor System website at www.honorsystem.vt.edu.
- Disability Statement: Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a disability. Students should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), 150 Henderson Hall, 231-3788 (V), 231-1740 (TTY); Susan P. Angle, spangle@vt.edu, www.ssd.vt.edu. "Students with disabilities are responsible for self-identification....To be eligible for services, documentation of the disability from a qualified professional must be presented to SSD upon request."
- Illness: to excuse an absence due to illness, I will need a note from Schiffert Health Center or a doctor.

Basic Calendar, ENGL 2744, Spring 2008 (Subject to Change)

Please note: all readings in the Course Reader (CR) are required; the additional readings in Kowitz are recommended—you will find them extremely helpful.

Week 1 – Introduction to CW

M 1/14 – First class meeting

(HW: Skim “Essentials” and “Catching Words” in CR; start writing in your journal)

W 1/16 – Introduction & CATCHING WORDS

(HW: “Memory” in CR; also read p.8-20 “I couldn’t stop watching” & p.30-35 “Shards of Memory” in Kowitz. Please try “A Process for Recovering Fugitive Memories” on p.33, and then write either “Poem 7: Shards of Memory” OR “Poem 8: A List Poem.” Comment on Mock Workshop poem.)

Week 1 – Introduction to Workshop

M 1/21 – NO CLASS – MLK Day

W 1/23 – MEMORY • Mock Workshop • **Poem 7 or 8 due**

(HW: “Image & Sense” in CR; look over p.129-136 “Deranging the Senses” & p.38-47 “Awful Poems” in Kowitz. Comment on Workshop poems. Write Kitchen Poem.)

Week 3 - Poetry

M 1/28 – IMAGE & SENSE • All-Class Workshop • **Kitchen Poem Due**

W 1/30 – NO CLASS IN CLASS – class trip to the Perspective Gallery

(HW: “Simile” & “Metaphor” in CR. Look over p.64-78 “Figure and Image” and p.79-87 “The Controlling Metaphor” in Kowitz. Write Image exercise/poem.)

Week 4 - Poetry

M 2/4 – SIMILE & METAPHOR • **Image/Ekphrasis Poem Due**

(HW: Comment on Workshop poems.)

W 2/6 – All-Class Workshop

(HW: Read Carolyn Foronda’s work on Blackboard and write a one-paragraph response with two questions for her. Write a “Simile/Metaphor” poem using the exercise on Blackboard.)

Week 5 - Poetry

M 2/11 – Visit from Poet Laureate of VA, CAROLYN FORONDA • **Simile/Metaphor Poem Due**

(HW: Read “Narrative” and “Lyric” in CR. Write response to Foronda reading. Look over p.94-100 “Family Secrets” and p.234-243 “Poetry and the Awakened Life in Kowitz.)

W 2/13 – NARRATIVE/LYRIC • **Foronda Response Due**

(HW: Read “Sound” in CR. Look over p.56-63 “After-Glow” in Kowitz. Comment on Workshop poems. Use Poem 18, 19 or 20 in Kowitz to write a Narrative Poem.)

Week 6 - Poetry

M 2/18 – SOUND • Small Group Workshop (Metaphor Poems) • **Narrative Poem Due**

(HW: Read “Persona” in CR and read p.48-54 “The Art of Revision” in Kowitz. Also, Look over p.88-93 “Myth, Legend, and Pop Icon” in Kowitz.)

W 2/20 – PERSONA & REVISION

(HW: Read “Prose Poems” in CR. Look over p.21-29 “Little Poems in Prose” in Kowitz. Comment on Workshop poems. Revise one of your poems.)

Week 7 – Poetry/Creative Non-Fiction

M 2/25 – PROSE POEMS • Small Group Workshop (Narrative Poems) • **Poem Revision Due**

(HW: Read “Creative Non-Fiction Short Shorts” in CR and on Blackboard. Also read Burroway’s “Fact & Truth” in CR.)

W 2/27 – Intro to CNF • CNF SHORT SHORTS • **Poetry Close Reading Paper Due**

(HW: Katie Fallon’s essay, “Lost.” Write a one-paragraph response with 2 questions for Katie. Write CNF Short-Short based on a piece of your choice from *Brevity* and bring 5 copies to class.)

Week 8 – Spring Break

M 3/3 – NO CLASS – spring break

W 3/5 – NO CLASS – spring break

Week 9 - Creative Non-Fiction

M 3/10 – KATIE FALLON (CNF class visit) • **CNF Short Shorts due AND Fallon Response due**
(HW: Memoir/Family in CR—Karr, Eggers, Sedaris. Comment on Workshop pieces.)

W 3/12 – MEMOIR/FAMILY • Small Group Workshop (CNF Short Shorts)
(HW: Obsessions in CR—Almond, movie pieces. Write Movie or Obsession piece and bring 5 copies to class.)

Week 10 - Creative Non-Fiction

M 3/17 – OBSESSIONS • **Movie or Obsession Piece Due**
(HW: Read Voice & Tone in CR—Foer, Gabriele, Moore. Comment on Workshop pieces.)

W 3/19 – VOICE & TONE • Small Group Workshop (Movie/Obsession piece)
(HW: Fiction! Read Character in CR—Charters, Erdrich, O'Connor. Write How-to Piece and bring 5 copies to class. Bring *What If* to class!)

Week 11 – Fiction

M 3/24 – CHARACTER • **How-to Piece Due** (*what if p. 46-47*)
(HW: Comment on Workshop pieces.)

W 3/26 – Small Group Workshop (How-to pieces)
(HW: Character Sketch - take your character to the supermarket. Read Robin's story on Blackboard. Write a one-paragraph response with 2 questions for Robin.)

Week 12 - Fiction

M 3/31 – ROBIN ALLNUTT (fiction writer, class visit) • **Character Sketch Due**
(HW: Read Dialogue & Conflict in CR—Carver, Hemingway, Hempel)

W 4/2 – DIALOGUE & CONFLICT (*in-class dialogue sheet, and get 2 volunteers for what if*)
(HW: Read Voice & Detail in CR—O'Brien and Johnson. Read p.99-100 in *What If*. Write Scene Exercise & bring 5 copies to class.)

Week 13 - Fiction

M 4/7 – VOICE & DETAIL (*play What If with class volunteers*) • **Scene Exercise Due**
(HW: Comment on Workshop pieces.)

W 4/9 – Small Group Workshop (Scene Exercises) • **Fiction or CNF Compare & Contrast Paper Due**
(HW: Read Kids in CR – Packer, Diaz. Begin work on your Short Story.)

Week 14 - Fiction

M 4/14 – KIDS • REVISION
(HW: Read Form in CR – Julavits, Dybek. Comment on Workshop pieces. Keep working on your short story.)

W 4/16 – NO CLASS – memorial

Week 15 - Fiction

M 4/21 – FORM • Small Group Workshops (Short Stories) – **Short Story Due (bring 5 copies for workshop)**
(HW: Read Metaphor in CR – Chaon, Baxter. Work on Final Portfolio.)

W 4/23 – METAPHOR • Small Group Workshops (Short Stories)
(HW: Read Unreliable Narrator in CR – Richmond. Work on Final Portfolio.)

Week 16 - Fiction

M 4/28 – UNRELIABLE NARRATOR • Course Wrap-up
(HW: Work on Final Portfolio.)

W 4/30 – End of Class Reading - **Final Portfolios Due**