



*First sentences are doors to worlds. ---Ursula K. LeGuin*

**WRIT 251: Introduction to Creative Writing**

Metro State University, Spring Semester, 2024

Wednesdays, January 10 – April 24

in person: FH 301

St. Paul Campus, 6:00-8:30pm

3 Credits

Instructor: Suzanne Nielsen [suzanne.nielsen@metrostate.edu](mailto:suzanne.nielsen@metrostate.edu), St. John's Hall, Second Floor #201. (Office hours by appointment) Phone: 651.999.5950

**Course Description:** Introduction to Creative Writing is a writing workshop designed for beginning creative writers who wish to explore the craft of writing poetry, memoir and fiction. We will examine these genres closely, focusing on technical and artistic aspects of creative writing from the selected texts. At the same time students will write their own poems and prose pieces. Throughout the course of the semester writers will read aloud drafts of their work in class for feedback and revision strategies. Polished drafts are not expected initially, although the ultimate goal of the workshop will be to produce one poem and one prose piece, both of which are well on their way to completion.

**Competence Statement:** Students demonstrate they understand how to critically and creatively read poetry and prose, as well as write in the three genres. Basic terms of creative writing will also be taught and understood throughout the semester course.

**Texts:** *Art And Fear*, David Bayles and Ted Orland ISBN-13: 978-0-9614547-3-9

*What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers* (Third Edition) by Pamela Painter/Anne Bernays ISBN: 0-321-10717-9

*The Poet's Companion*, by Dorianne Laux/Kim Addonizio ISBN: 978-0-393-31654-4

**Course Requirements:** Because this is a workshop class students will submit one draft of a poem, one draft of a short story, and a piece of creative non-fiction, followed by a revision of either the poem or prose piece. Each student is responsible for completing timely all reading assignments and writing exercises listed in the syllabus. Attendance is essential to learning so any absences beyond two excused will significantly impact your final grade. Please review the policy on attendance and tardiness on page 4 of this syllabus.

Successful completion of the course requires all of the following items:

## In-class participation.

Thoughtful critiques of assigned readings and the readings of classmates' work.

Meeting all assignment date deadlines.

Your drafts of a poem, a short story, and a piece of creative non-fiction.

A revision of one of the above.

Five at-home freewrite exercises (TBA).

A two-page report on the public reading you attend (compensation: class 13).

A two- to three-page response to a full-length collection of poetry, creative non-fiction or fiction.

Please note that because this class focuses on the creative process I do not give any grades until the end of class. Your grade will be based on the effort you put into the class. That effort is demonstrated by your work during class itself and on the quality of your written assignments. I will comment briefly on all work submitted timely. Halfway through the course I will hold 10-minute conferences with each of you. If you are concerned about how you are doing grade-wise, feel free to email me. I will respond to you with more specific feedback.

#### **Attendance:**

##### University Non-Attendance and Reporting Policy and Procedure

The purpose of the Non-Attendance and Reporting Policy is to ensure Federal Title IV regulations are adhered to with respect to a student's enrollment level for the purpose of calculating and paying financial aid. While Metropolitan State University is not required to take attendance, Federal Title IV financial aid regulations require a procedure to establish that students have attended, at a minimum, one day of class for each course in which the student's enrollment status was used to determine eligibility for the Pell Grant Program. In addition, the university needs to determine a last date of attendance for those students who receive all failing grades or unofficially withdraw.

Attendance is defined based on course delivery mode. A student is "in attendance" if he or she meets the following conditions before the end of the second week of the course:

- Classroom Courses – the student is present in the classroom.
- Web-Enhanced (Reduced Seat Time Courses) – the student is present in the classroom or submits at least one academically relevant assignment.
- Online Courses –the student submits at least one academically relevant assignment
- Independent Studies – the student contacts the instructor or submits at least one academically relevant assignment.

#### **Guidelines For Workshops:**

A critiquing schedule will be set up in the beginning of the course so we don't suffer an overload one session and nothing the next. The three-submission limit for each participant (two drafts and one revision) allows us to critique an average of four pieces per session. The purpose of the workshop is to allow writers to receive feedback on works-in-progress and one revision from peers. You are responsible for coming to class willing to discuss the works of peers and assigned authors' readings; you are also responsible for providing the workshopping writers with clear, respectful comments that will support the the revision process. Your comments must be specific to the text, not just general opinions. Always note positive as well as challenging aspects of the piece. Constructive feedback will return writers to their work; vague and judgmental feedback won't.

**Responsibilities of the Writer:**

Make copies of each workshopped piece and hand out to each student in class. Think of a few questions in particular that you might want feedback on. Write those down and attach them to the back of your draft/revision. Remember when submitting your work try to separate yourself from it; it is not you that are being dissected, but a piece of written art, which stands by itself. Hard as it seems, once you have written a piece and sent it out in the world, it belongs to the general world of art.

**Responsibilities of the Reader:**

Listen to work carefully. You will have your own copy of each written work critiqued, so take advantage of this and use the draft given to you to mark strengths and challenges throughout the piece in the margins as it is being read. Answer any questions the writer has asked on the last page of the draft. Write down three things that worked well and why. What can be clearer in the draft? Where are there places that the draft could expand/condense for clarity? When reading and critiquing others' work, always ask this question: How can I be most useful to this writer? Here are some elements of good writing to consider when giving feedback:

**Characters:** Strong and vivid, use sensory details.

**Plot:** However subtle. You should be able to state what the story is about.

**Dialogue:** Does it work? Does it seem stilted? Does it help the flow of the story?

**Pacing:** Does the poem or story move at an interesting rhythm? Is the piece too long or too short?

**Voice:** Are you writing in a voice that is your own?

**Tense/Point of View:** Would another point of view or tense work better for this piece?

**Details:** Pay close attention to specifics; they are so often what make a piece compelling and real for the reader.

**Metaphor/Simile:** If used, does the piece make good use of these literary devices or are they cliched and stilted?

**Chronology:** Would a different time frame or structure work better?

**Beginnings and Endings:** Do they work, too long? Too short? Nonexistent?

**Gut reaction to the piece:** Despite problems, does the piece work on some level? Where?

**Draft Guidelines**

**Poems:** May be free verse or a specific format. Must not exceed one page.

**Short Stories:** Must not exceed five, double-spaced pages. Try to keep the time frame small.

**Memoirs:** Must not exceed five, double-spaced pages. May not contain people who have never existed. Factual events referred to must be verifiably true. This is a snippet of truth as you see/saw it to be.

**Final Portfolios** are due the 14<sup>th</sup> week of class. Again, I will have an assignment sheet for the due dates/presentations of these. They will include your drafts of one poem, one short piece of creative non-fiction, and one short fictional story. They will also include one revision of your choice (of the above), five freewrite exercises, one report of a public reading, (2 pgs), one book review (2-3 pgs), an over-all self evaluation of your experience with this course (2-3 pages), and a total of 10 critiques you have sent to workshopped writers. Make sure to label each piece of work in your portfolio.

The correct order should be:

1. Self evaluation

2. Draft of poem
3. Draft of creative non-fiction
4. Draft of short fiction
5. Revision of one genre
6. Book review
7. Public reading report
8. Five freewrites
9. 10 student critiques

**The use of GAI is prohibited.** In this course, every element of class assignments and assessments must be fully prepared by the student. The use of GAI tools for any part of your work will be treated as plagiarism. If you have questions, please contact me.

**Grading** will be based upon the preparation for and participation in discussions and critique sessions, presentation of all work according to agreed-upon schedules and standards, and development of each individual's writing. Attendance is required. Because the class has a workshop element, a major portion of your grade is determined by class participation. Poor attendance will reduce your grade.

**Grading Philosophy:**

An A grade will be reserved for those students who consistently present thoughtful comments and well-crafted work.

An A grade reflects superior achievement. The A range is 100-91 points.

B grades reflect above-average work. Bs are 90-83 points.

C grades reflect adequate work. Cs are 82-76 points.

D grades reflect partially adequate work. Ds are 75-69 points.

An F grade reflects a failure to meet the basic requirements of the course.

One-hundred points are possible for the course:

- 10 points - the off-campus public reading
- 15 points - the report on the outside book
- 10 points - the poem you will submit for workshop
- 10 points - the five pages of non-fiction you will submit
- 10 points - the five pages of fiction you will submit
- 10 points - revision of one piece presented for workshop
- 10 points - for all collected freewrite exercises
- 10 points - 10 critiques
- 15 points - for in-class participation – not including attendance

**Usability, disability and design:** I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if an accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design. I am always happy to consider creative solutions as long as they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity. You are also welcome to contact the Center for Accessibility Resources to begin this conversation or to establish accommodations for this or other courses. I welcome feedback that will assist me in improving the usability and experience for all students. The Center for Accessibility Resources is

located in New Main, room L223. Phone number is 651-793-1549 and email is [Accessibility.Resources@metrostate.edu](mailto:Accessibility.Resources@metrostate.edu).

**Academic Honesty:** Students should review the Student Handbook sections concerning academic honesty. A student suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to University administrators. If found guilty of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism), the student will fail the course and may be suspended from the University.

Refer to Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures,  
<http://www.metrostate.edu/student/university-info/university-info/center-for-faculty-development/teaching-and-learning-resources/teaching-resources/academic-integrity-policy-and-procedures>

### Class Schedule

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Agenda</b>	<b>Assignment Due</b>
<b>Class One 1 - 10</b>	Introductions to class, syllabus and each other. Set up writing/ critiquing schedule. Introduction to poetry, journals.	In-class writing exercise.
<b>Class Two 1 - 17</b>	Focus on poetry (image & metaphor) In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussions and critiques of student poems.	Addonizio, pp. 11-81 Bayles/Orland, pp. 1-8
<b>Class Three 1 - 24</b>	Focus on poetry (developing voice) In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussions and critiques of student poems.	Addonizio, pp. 85-194 Bayles/Orland, pp. 9-22
<b>Class Four 1 - 31</b>	Focus on poetry (major/minor surgery) In-class writing exercise, Readings, discussions and critiques of student poems.	Addonizio, pp. 195-223 Bayles/Orland, pp. 23-36
<b>Class Five 2 - 7</b>	Focus on poetry (musical matters) In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussions and critiques of student poems.	Bayles/Orland, pp. 37-47 Turn in draft of poem.
<b>Class Six 2 - 14</b>	Introduction to memoir (senses) In-class writing exercise. Student critiques. Discussion of readings.	Bayles/Orland, pp. 49-62
<b>Class Seven 2- 21</b>	<b>INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES</b>	

<b>Class Eight</b> <b>2 – 28</b>	Focus on memoir. In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussions and critiques of student memoirs.	Handout: TBA Bayles/Orland, pp. 65-77; 79-92
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### **3/6 SPRING BREAK**

<b>Class Nine</b> <b>3 – 13</b>	focus on memoir (revision) In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussions and critiques of student memoirs.	Handout: TBA outside book reading response Turn in draft of memoir Bayles/Orland, pp. 93-112
<b>Class Ten</b> <b>3 – 20</b>	Introduction to short story (fiction) In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussion of structuring a short story. Student critiques.	Bayles/Orland, pp. 113-118 Bernays/Painter, pp. 1-30
<b>Class Eleven</b> <b>3 – 27</b>	Focus on short story. In-class writing exercise. Readings, discussion/critiques of student writings.	Bernays/Painter, pp. 31-54
<b>Class Twelve</b> <b>4 – 3</b>	Focus of short story. In-class writing exercise. Student discussion and critiques	Bernays/Painter, pp. 55-72
<b>Class Thirteen</b> <b>4-10</b>	NO CLASS: ATTEND READING	
<b>Class Fourteen</b> <b>4 – 17</b>	Portfolios Due Bernays/Painter, pp. 197-222 First half of presentations	
<b>Class Fifteen</b> <b>4 – 24</b>	Last Class! Potluck meal and final reading. Revision Strategies Second half presentations. Return portfolios/final grades.	

**“The purpose of art is to make life more interesting than art.”**

**--Anonymous**

**Required Text Reading:** Choose one of the following books listed below, or select a book of choice (approved by instructor), read the book and write a 2 - 3 page critical, analytical and personal response paper.

#### **SELECTED READING LIST**

**(extremely limited: If you have a title that does not appear on here, ask me about it as a potential book for review)**

**Poetry:**

Selected Poems 1965-1975, by Margaret Atwood.  
All of the Above, by Dorothy Barresi.  
You Won't Remember This, by Michael Dennis Browne.  
In The Western Night Collected Poems 1965-90, by Frank Bidart.  
The Complete Poems 1927-1979, by Elizabeth Bishop.  
The Other Man Was Me, by Rafael Campo.  
Autobiography of Red, by Anne Carson.  
Men in the Off Hours, by Anne Carson.  
But I Won't Go Out In A Boat, by Sharon Chmielarz.  
The Terrible Stories, by Lucille Clifton.  
Good Woman: poems and a memoir 1969-1980, by Lucille Clifton.  
Emily Dickinson, any book.  
Allen Ginsberg, any book.  
Louise Gluck, any book.  
Otherwise, by Jane Kenyon.  
Selected Later Poems of Marie Luise Kaschnitz.  
Li-Young Lee, any book.  
Elegy, by Larry Levis.  
The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke.  
I'll See You Thursday, by Myra Shapiro.  
Tug, by G. E. Patterson.  
The Way It Is, by William Stafford.  
Some Ether, by Nick Flynn.  
Any book by Donald Hall.  
Any book by Mary Oliver.  
Any book by Sharon Olds.  
Any book by Rita Dove.  
Any book by Maya Angelou.  
Any book by Naomi Shihab Nye.  
Any book by Denise Levertov.  
Any book by Philip Levine.  
Any book by John Ashbery.

**Short Fiction:**

Walking, by Henry David Thoreau.  
Circe's Mountain, by Marie Luise Kaschnitz.  
The Joy Luck Club, by Amy Tan.  
The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros.  
Two or Three Things I Know for Sure, by Dorothy Allison.  
Vinegar Hill, by A. Manette Ansay.  
The Invention of Solitude, by Paul Auster.  
First Light, by Charles Baxter.  
Ellen Foster, by Kaye Gibbons.  
All American Dream Dolls, by David Haynes.  
The Escape Artist, by Judith Katz.  
The Metamorphosis and other stories, by Franz Kafka.  
Shadow Baby, by Alison McGhee.  
Geek Love, by Katherine Dunn.  
The End of Fiction, by Victor Thorn.  
Any book by Rebecca Wells.  
Any collection of Flannery O'Connor short stories.  
Any book by Ellen Gilchrist.

Any book by Raymond Carver.

Any book by george Singleton.

**Creative Non-Fiction:**

Codeine Diary, by Tom Andrews

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Maya Angelou

Boys of My Youth, by Joann Beard

My Lesbian Husband, by Barrie Jean Borich

Here and Nowhere Else, by Jane Brox

Manhattan, When I Was Young, by Mary Cantwell

Black Ice, by Lorene Cary

Life and Death in Shanghai, by Nien Cheng

Any book by Gretel Ehrlich (but check with instructor)

Telling, by Patricia Weaver Francisco

Autobiography of a Face, by Lucy Grealy

I Could Tell You Stories, by Patricia Hampl

Virgin Time, by Patricia Hampl

A Moveable Feast, by Ernest Hemingway

Cherry, by Mary Karr

The Liar's Club, by Mary Karr

Girl, Interrupted, by Susanna Kaysen

My Brother, by Jamaica Kincaid

The Woman Warrior, by Maxine Hong Kingston

Track Conditions, by Michael Klein

Road Song, by Natalie Kusz

Poker Face, by Katherine (Katy) Lederer

Russian Journal, by Andrea Lee

Angela's Ashes, by Frank McCourt

Crabcakes, by James Alan McPherson

This Room Lit by Roses, by Carole Maso

The Bishop's Daughter, by Honor Moore

No Heroes, by Chris Offutt

Iron & Silk, by Mark Salzman

Lucky, by Alice Sebold

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, by Gertrude Stein

My Own Country, by Abraham Verghese

The Tennis Partner, by Abraham Verghese

Refuge, by Terry Tempest Williams

In Pharaoh's Army, by Tobias Wolff

This Boy's Life, by Tobias Wolff

The Latehomecomer, by Kao Kalia Yang

**Information about other Students Success resources that are available to students:**

- The Center for Academic Excellence,

<http://www.metrostate.edu/student/learning-resources/learning-resources/center-for-academic-excellence>

- Veterans and Military Student Services,

<http://www.metrostate.edu/student/student-services-support/student-services/veterans-and-military-student-services>

- Student Services, <http://www.metrostate.edu/student/student-services-support/student-services>

- Counseling Services, <http://www.metrostate.edu/student/student-services-support/student-services/counseling-services>

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