

ENWR 212-01: Introduction to Poetry Writing Fall 2010

Instructor: Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett
Class information: CA 108, MW 11:30am-12:45pm
Blackboard site: <https://bb9prod.montclair.edu>

E-mail: somerswilles@mail.montclair.edu
Office: Dickson Hall 316
Office hours: M 2:45-5:30 and by appt

COURSE POLICY STATEMENT

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the craft of writing poetry in a workshop environment. Through reading and writing exercises, you will learn the basics of prosody and practice foundations of poetic craft such as image, metaphor, abstract versus concrete diction, using precise language, and voice. We will also discuss and practice different approaches toward form, line, stanza, and revision. Because good writers are first good readers, our writing exercises will be paired with literary selections that we will read and discuss from a writer's perspective.

Required Texts and Materials (available at MSU bookstore)

Writing Poems, Seventh Edition, Michelle Boisseau, Robert Wallace, and Randall Mann

Poetry: A Pocket Anthology, Sixth Edition, R.S. Gwynn

A hardbound composition book (not a spiral-bound notebook) used solely for this class

Grading

35% Final portfolio of revised poems

35% Writing journal and exercises

15% Prosody exam

15% Attendance and Participation

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is defined by the university as “any attempt by a student to submit as his/her own work that which has not been completed by him/her or to give improper aid to another student in the completion of an assignment, i.e., plagiarism” (please view the entire policy at www.montclair.edu/deanstudents/regulations1.html). This can include “double-dipping,” or using one piece of writing to satisfy the requirements of more than one course. Since our focus in this course is literary production, **work you turn in for this class is to be new, original writing created specifically for this workshop** (except in the case of revision exercises). Please ask if you have any questions about this policy.

The Logistics of Responding to Peer Writing

When we begin workshopping, you will be expected to turn in copies of your poems for each member of the class, write commentary on your peers' hard copies, and return your written commentary to them in workshop. Commentary in the neighborhood of 2-5 sentences is appropriate. If you are absent on a day that poems are handed out, you should pick them up from the box outside my office (Dickson Hall 316) before our next class meeting.

Workshop Etiquette

The purpose of our workshops is not to “fix” stories and poems but rather to help the author discover his or her piece of writing through process. In this regard, our comments in workshop should aim toward the neutral, descriptive, and interrogative—in the words of Janet Burroway, not *What I like* but *What this piece is like*. Only then can we critique whether or not the writing is successful in what it wants to achieve and offer constructive criticism to guide the piece in that direction.

As guides, our goal should be to find a balance in the tenor of our comments; too much praise can be just as poisonous as too much criticism. Finding this balance is the most difficult part of a workshop, but it also can be the most rewarding.

As authors, it is our responsibility to not just to listen to but to *hear* how our readers describe our writing in a non-defensive way. This openness is part of the writing process, and entertaining the suggestions of others—even as they may seem to counter our own senses—may be the thing that gives the writing flight.

In order to encourage this openness, we will for the most part follow the gag rule in workshop: While a piece of writing is being discussed in class, the author should remain silent. Of course, in all things you are expected to behave with maturity and respect for others. If you exhibit behavior that is threatening or that disrupts the learning experience, disciplinary action will be sought according to university policy.

Deadlines, Attendance, and Participation

Attendance and participation are required in this course, and both will affect your grade. Missing **more than three classes** constitutes missing a significant part of the course and will affect your final grade.

Workshop drafts, as all assignments, **are due at class time on the date posted** (not that afternoon or evening). Because assignment deadlines are posted with ample advance notice, extensions for assignments will not be granted. If you miss a due date for a piece of writing to be workshopped, you will receive no credit for your participation that week and you may, at the discretion of the instructor, miss your turn at workshop. **Please do not e-mail your writing to the instructor or the entire class after it is due.** This not only creates headaches for each of your class members, it is disrespectful and taxes your classmates' time and resources.

If you are absent on a day when an assignment is due, you are still responsible for meeting that deadline. If non-workshop assignments are due (i.e., a paper or review) and you must be absent, you may e-mail it to the instructor. You are also responsible for picking up any handouts and in-class writing exercises that you missed before our next class meets. Handouts are available in a box outside my office (Dickson Hall 316); I suggest you get information from a few classmates whom you can contact if you are absent so you can keep up-to-date on writing exercises.

E-mail and BlackBoard

We will, on occasion, communicate via e-mail during the semester. For this reason, students are required to have a working e-mail address that they check regularly. For the most part, this communication will announce campus activities related to our course topic. However, in the event that last-minute changes to our class schedule have to be made, these changes will be communicated via e-mail. All class assignments will be posted on BlackBoard should you ever need another copy.

Final Portfolios

Please save all drafts of your writing for this class, and take care not to lose your writing journal. They will determine the vast majority of your grade and you will be asked to include them in your final portfolio.

Information for Students with Disabilities

Both the university and I are committed to keeping this classroom and course material accessible. If you have a learning or physical disability, please inform me at the beginning of the course either after class or in office hours. In the case where a class assignment is not accessible, an alternative assignment requiring the exercise of equal skill and knowledge can be arranged.

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Abbreviation Key: WP=*Writing Poems*, Seventh Ed., Boisseau *et al*
PA=*Poetry: A Pocket Anthology*, Sixth Edition, R.S. Gwynn
BB=Reading posted on Blackboard

SYLLABUS (subject to change)

You must bring texts to class on the days we discuss them.

WEEK 1: Intro

W 9/8 Class intro and discussion of policies

WEEK 2: Starting Out: Imagery

M 9/13 WP Chapter 1: Starting Out (1-14)
PA The Language of Poetry (11-18), Pound "In a Station at the Metro" (212), Fennelly
"Asked for a Happy Memory" (428), Hass "Meditation at Lagunitas" (357)
Image & the senses exercise

HW: Write a bad poem in your journal. Be prepared to share in class tomorrow.

W 9/15 Abstract vs. Concrete diction: Examples from Snodgrass's *De/Compositions*
Diction exercises

HW: One exercise from "Questions and Suggestions"(Q&S) section of WP Chapter 1 (14-16)

WEEK 3: Content

M 9/20 WP Chapter 6: Subject Matter (113-128)
Handout: "The Rules" of poetry writing

HW: One Q&S exercise from WP Chapter 6 (128-130)

W 9/22 WP Chapter 10: Finding the Poem (207-223)
Assignment 1: Imitation Poem

WEEK 4: Metaphor

M 9/27 **Assignment 1 due: Imitation poem**
WP Chapter 7: Metaphor (136-152), Harrison "Rowing" (154-5), Snider "School
Dance" (156-8)
PA Figurative Language (18-22), Levertov "The Ache of Marriage" (289), Plath
"Metaphors" (329)

W 9/29 PA Crapsey "Amaze," "Languor After Pain," and "Trapped" (201-2)
Image exercises: Haiku and cinquain
HW: One Q&S exercise from WP Chapter 7 (152-3)

WEEK 5: Odes

M 10/4 PA Pope, "Ode on Solitude" (95)
BB Odes by Neruda
Discussion of Odes and group exercise
Assignment 2: Ode

W 10/6 **Assignment 2 due: Ode (x4 copies)**
In-class peer review
Workshop assignments made

10/7-10/10 **Dodge Poetry Festival, NJ Performing Arts Center, Newark**
FYI <http://www.dodgepoetry.org/>

WEEK 6: Voice

M 10/11 WP Chapter 8: Tale, Teller, and Tone (160-174) and Kelly "Song" (228-30)
PA Plath "Daddy" (326-8), Ai "Child Beater" (382-3)
Handout: Jess "Mistress Stella Speaks"
HW: One Q&S exercise from WP Chapter 8 (174-5)

W 10/13 Outdoor Field Trip: Wear walking shoes and outdoor attire
Assignment 3: Persona Poem
HW: Bring in a piece of prose with some poetic potential (1-2 paragraphs) to next class for an exercise

Th 10/14 **Vona Groarke reading, Irish Poetry series**
FYI Cohen Lounge, Dickson Hall, 1pm

WEEK 7: Line and Stanza

M 10/18 **Assignment 3 due: Persona Poem**
WP Chapter 2: Verse (25-37)
PA Williams "Red Wheelbarrow" (210-11), Dugan "Love Song" (284-5), Alexie "The Exaggeration of Despair" (480-1), Forché "The Colonel" (390)
Found poetry exercise & group discussion
Assignment 4: Line and Stanza variations
HW: One Q&S exercise from WP Chapter 2 (37-38)

W 10/20 **Workshop 1 students: Poems due (x20 copies)**
PA Writing About Poetry (45-55)
BB Burroway, *Invitation to the Reader*
Model Workshop
HW: Make notes on workshop 1 poems

WEEK 8: Workshop 1

M 10/25 Workshop

W 10/27 Workshop

Th 10/28 **Michael Langley reading, Irish Poetry series**
FYI Cohen Lounge, Dickson Hall, 1pm

WEEK 9: Prosody

M 11/1 **Assignment 4 due: Line and Stanza**
 PA: Introduction (1-11, 27-41 only)
 Discuss examples from *For Better for Verse*: <http://prosody.lib.virginia.edu>
HW: Prosody take-home quiz

W 11/3 **Workshop 2 students: Poems due (x20 copies)**
 Discuss take-home quiz
HW: Make notes on workshop 2 poems

WEEK 10: Workshop 2

M 11/8 Workshop

W 11/10 Workshop

WEEK 11: Received Forms

M 11/15 PA Shakespeare “Sonnet 130” (70), Millay “What Lips” (232), Bishop “Sestina” and
 “One Art” (256-7), Cortez “Tu Negrito” (389-90)
 Final Portfolio assigned
HW: In your journal, try your hand at writing in a received form. See PA (431-436) for full list of received forms and examples.

W 11/17 Review for prosody exam

WEEK 12: Exam

M 11/22 **Workshop 3 students: Poems due (x20 copies)**
Prosody Exam

W 11/24 NO CLASS
HW: Make notes on workshop 3 poems; start preparing final portfolio

11/25-11/28 Thanksgiving Break

WEEK 13: Workshop 3

M 11/29 Workshop

W 12/1 Workshop
HW: Prepare draft of final portfolio for peer review & bring to class

WEEK 14: Revision

M 12/6 Discuss approaches for revision
 In-class peer review: final portfolios

W 12/8 **Portfolios and Journals due**

WEEK 15: Course Wrap-Up

M 12/13 **Course wrap-up**