

## ENWR 312-01: Writing Poetry: Form & Technique Fall 2010

Instructor: Dr. Susan B.A. Somers-Willett  
Class information: UN 3013, W 5:30-8  
Blackboard site: <https://bb9prod.montclair.edu>

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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 craft of writing poetry in a workshop environment. With the understanding that poetic form is different from formalist verse, we will explore writing poetry through a variety of traditions as well as learn some basics of prosody. Forms and traditions we will practice include the sonnet, the litany, the ballad, the blues lyric, free verse and organic form, ekphrasis, writing in a persona, performance poetry, and hip-hop. We'll also discuss specific aspects of poetic craft such as diction, metaphor, stanza, and the line. After revising your writing, you will create a final portfolio with an artist's statement reflecting on your process as a writer and the strengths and weaknesses of your writing. Your attendance and participation are crucial to your success in this class. **Prerequisites: ENWR 200 and departmental approval.**

**Satisfies: 2 (Writing), 3 and TE 3b (Poetry)**

#### Required Texts (available at the MSU Bookstore)

*An Exaltation of Forms*, Eds. Annie Finch and Katherine Varnes  
*Writing Poems*, Seventh Edition, Michelle Boisseau, Robert Wallace, and Randall Mann

#### Grading Policy

60% Final portfolio with an artist's statement/self-evaluation  
25% Weekly in-class critiques (written and oral) and on-time assignments  
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 be 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 <http://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.

#### In-Class Workshop Etiquette

The purpose of our workshops is not to "fix" poems but rather to help the author discover his or her poem 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 poem in that direction.

As members of a workshop, 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 process of the poem, and entertaining the suggestions of others—even as they may seem to counter our own senses—may be just 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. There are exceptions to this rule, however, which we will inevitably discover together. As poet Dean Young says, “Poems are birds, not birdcages,” and if they have strong enough wings they deserve to stretch them.

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 and Distribution of Poems**

These 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.

Please pay special attention to when poems are due, for you should not expect that your classmates (or instructor) can and will be available to pick up poems outside of class. If you miss a due date for a poem, 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 poem 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. Please also make sure you have made enough copies to distribute to everyone in class. Showing up with one copy of your work does not constitute meeting the deadline.

**If you are absent on a day when an assignment is due, you are still responsible for meeting that deadline.** You can accomplish this by having a classmate distribute copies of your poem for you. 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 or poems that you missed before our next class meets. These will be available in a box outside my office located at Dickson Hall 316.

Remember that you should craft your responses to poems before each class meets, not during or after workshop. In the neighborhood of 2-5 sentences is appropriate. In your comments, remember to balance praise with criticism. Most important will be your suggestions on how the poem can move forward in revision and become more successful.

**Attendance and Participation**

Attendance and participation are required in this course, and both will affect your grade. Missing **more than two classes** constitutes missing a significant part of the course and will affect your final grade. Should you miss class, you are responsible for meeting all assignment deadlines, contacting a member of class in order to keep up with readings and assignments, and notifying the instructor in advance of your absence if possible.

**Final Portfolios**

**Please save all drafts of your writing** for this class. 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 rare case where a class assignment is not accessible, an alternative assignment requiring the exercise of equal skill and knowledge can be arranged.

## Grading Policies

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The purpose of having a full range of grades (A through F) is to represent true levels of academic achievement. Although I'm sure everyone would like to make As or Bs on their class assignments, chances are that not everyone will receive them.

When receiving graded assignments, it may help to keep in mind these descriptions of different levels of student achievement:

- F – Represents failure (or no credit) and means that work was either completed at a level not worthy of credit, or not completed at all.
- D – Achievement worthy of credit, but which does not meet assignment/course requirements fully.
- C – Achievement that meets the assignment/course requirements in every respect and shows adequate understanding and application of the course material.
- B – Achievement *significantly above* the level necessary to meet assignment/course requirements. Such work demonstrates good application of instructional material and makes some successful and original connections beyond it.
- A – achievement that is *outstanding and unique* relative to the assignment/course requirements. Such work demonstrates clear and accurate independent thought and goes well beyond the application of instructional material to make new scholarly or creative connections and understandings. The student's voice is polished and clearly original.

Please remember that a “C” is not a bad grade, merely an average one; that Bs represent good, above-average work; and As represent excellent work that achieves the very best in undergraduate thinking and writing. Also remember that in paper-writing assignments, length is independent of quality; a long paper does not necessarily indicate a good paper.

I will occasionally retain copies of student writing to serve as samples in future semesters or for a teaching portfolio. Please be assured that if I choose your paper as a sample, I will remove any identifying information from it and use it for instructional or administrative purposes only. If you prefer that your writing not be used for this purpose, please let me know.

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**Abbreviation Key:** WP=*Writing Poems*, Seventh Ed., Boisseau *et al*  
EF=*An Exaltation of Forms*, Finch and Varnes  
BB=Reading posted on Blackboard

### SYLLABUS (subject to change)

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

#### WEEK 1: Introduction

W 9/8 Class intro and discussion of policies  
In-class reading and discussion: Gioia/Kennedy, "What is poetry?"; Pound, "In a Metro"; Gernes, "Yellow Balloon"; Somers-Willett, "Self-Portrait as I-10"; Graham, "Self-Portrait as the Moment between Them"  
Poem 1 assigned: Self-Portraits

#### WEEK 2: Prosody and Sonnets

W 9/15 **Poem 1 due: Self-Portrait (bring copies for all class members)**  
Read: WP Diction, Syntax, Pruning (5-12) and Ch. 3 Making the Line I (44-60 only);  
EF "The Sonnet" (297-307); sonnet handout (BB)

#### WEEK 3: Metaphor

W 9/22 **Poem 2 due: Sonnet**  
Workshop: Self-Portraits  
Read: WP Ch. 7 Metaphor (136-59)

#### WEEK 4: Lists and Litanies

W 9/29 **Poem 3 due: Metaphor**  
Workshop: Sonnets  
Read: EF "The List Poem" (359-65) and "A Wand Made of Words: The Litany Poem" (242-246); Szmborska, "Vietnam," (BB); Somers-Willett, "What's Left" and "Women of Troy" (BB); Notter, "Jubilate" (BB), Collins, "Litany" (BB)

#### WEEK 5: Stanza and the Line

W 10/6 **Poem 4 due: List or Litany**  
Lineation exercise and discussion of stanza forms  
Workshop: Metaphor  
Read: WP Ch. 4 Making the Line II (69-88)

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

**WEEK 6: Repetition and Musicality: Villanelles**

W 10/13      **Poem 5 due: Line and Stanza**  
 Workshop: Lists and Litanies  
 Read: WP Ch. 5 Sound and Sense (89-102 only); EF Kumin, "Gymnastics: The Villanelle" (314-321); Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle" (BB)

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

**WEEK 7: Radical Revision**

W 10/20      **Poem 6 due: Villanelle**  
 Workshop: Line and Stanza  
 Read WP Ch. 11 Devising and Revising (231-249 only)

**WEEK 8: Free Verse and Organic Form**

W 10/27      **Poem 7 due: Radical Revision**  
 Workshop: Villanelle  
 Read: EF "Free Verse" (73-80) and "Organic Form" (325-33)

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

**WEEK 9: Persona and Ekphrasis**

W 11/3      **Poem 8 due: Free Verse/Organic Form**  
 Workshop: Radical Revision  
 Read: WP Persona (165-68); Bishop, "The Fish" (BB); Yellin, "Nighthawks" (BB); Trethewey, "Vignette"; Komunyakaa, "Facing It"; Rilke, "Archaic Torso of Apollo"  
 Lecture on ekphrasis, photos assigned

**WEEK 10: Workshop**

W 11/10      **Poem 9 due: Ekphrastic Poem**  
 Workshop: Free verse/ Organic form

**WEEK 11: Conferences**

W 11/17      **Individual conferences as scheduled**

**WEEK 12**

W 11/24      **No Class—Thanksgiving Break**

**WEEK 13: Workshop**

W 12/1      Workshop: Ekphrastic Poem

**WEEK 14: Closing Session**

M 12/8      **Portfolios due; Course wrap-up**