

ENGL 2800-108: Intro to Creative Writing
Cornell University | Spring 2024 | T/R 10:10 - 11:25 am est | Morrill Hall 110

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Virtual Office Hours: Fridays 10am - 1 pm (by appt)



“Nothing is static; nothing is unmoving. Not ink, not thread. Everything is energy. Text is a happening... Once spoken, once touched with the eye, it is loose—an energy from a cage to which it cannot be returned. It goes on forever and will outlast its maker.”

-Natalie Diaz

“What is the difference between the story we tell of ourselves to others and the song of ourselves that we keep private and sing to nobody else?”

-Carl Phillips

“There is no poetry where there are no mistakes.”

-Joy Harjo

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, it is my hope that you leave confident in your ability to:

- i. Participate in co-creating a dynamic space of support and collaboration alongside peers and professor
- ii. Practice listening, discussing, and engaging with each other's writings, collective offerings, and questionings in thoughtful and perceptive ways
- iii. Examine and experiment with various elements of craft across poetry and fiction genres through assigned readings, writing prompts, and ongoing revision
- iv. Establish, evaluate, and reflect on writing goals as you navigate the motions of re(en)visioning your writing habits and process
- v. Create, revise, and present a portfolio of your best poetry and prose

COURSE AGREEMENT

In this course, you will use writing in two significant ways: to investigate what you think you know and get in touch with what is still unclear. Writing can be a terrifying, vulnerable act that requires equal parts risk and faith. The reading of theory and creative works that center identity and culture offers a similar kind of vulnerability. Both will require you to practice generosity and thoughtfulness about truths outside of the scope of your own personal understandings. The majority of the semester will focus exclusively on exercising this very writerly and readerly willingness in the following ways as we:

- Consider how the act of telling our own stories can offer us new ways of seeing — or testifying to — realities that we want to imagine, as well as those we cannot escape.
- Learn to get lost and, together, build a new kind of globe that reveals the exciting and hopeful connections we share as a community made of many perspectives and understandings.
- Develop our intuitive capability, building trust in ourselves and each other.
- Inhabit the life of a writer by keeping a journal, attending readings, learning how to steal the tools of other writers, and looking outside of ourselves in order to see the world.

Required Texts

- Assigned & supplemental readings, downloadable on Canvas (must be printed and brought to class)
- A course diary (aka, either a physical or electronic journal that must be brought to class every day)

All assigned readings will be accessible on our course Canvas site as pdfs. Readings will be regularly supplemented with essays, interviews, digital presentations/talks, online videos, or podcasts intimately conversant with or adjacent to what we discuss for each given week available on Canvas and the communal Google doc. It is up to you to check Canvas and the Google doc as well as email announcements on a regular basis for updates on coursework.

Content Warnings

I will do my best to give content warnings for the required and supplemental materials we engage with this semester beforehand to allow adequate time for individual preparation as needed. If there is a specific subject or trigger you would like extra warning about, please email me and I will make the proper announcements.

Canvas

You can access the semester's assigned readings on Canvas as pdfs as well as Hypothes.is, assignment prompts, and the weekly agenda breakdown. Please upload and submit all assignments as word docs via Canvas under "Assignments" and make sure to include **your name, date, and the assignment title and/or draft phase**.

Communal Google Doc

All students will be given access to a communal Google Doc which will house and populate each week's class agenda and any updates on upcoming assignments and class activities. We will be referencing this Google Doc every class as a central platform, in tandem with Canvas, for all matters course-related and as a means for you to trace and reference back to previous class discussions, resources, activities, etc.

Participation & Preparation

I believe that participation is not one-dimensional, but rather multi-faceted and at its core deeply intrinsic. Apart from participating in discussion, so long as I see that you are actively sustaining meaningful and thoughtful engagements with the texts and your peers and are open to reimagining processes of reading and writing, you receive full credit for this component.

Course Diary

You will keep a course diary that you must bring to class every day. This is your self-paced archive of reading notes, passage-fragments, psychic residues, questions, uncertainties, revelations, and refractive grappling on what lies within and without the work we behold and the sights and sites they jolt within us. This notebook will be privy to three random checks over the course of the semester to aid you in keeping track of your work. Please date and title each entry, number the pages, and create a "Table of Contents" at the beginning of the notebook that lists each new entry.

Discussion Board Responses

You will have a discussion board reflection due every **Wednesday by 11:59 pm est.** Reflections should highlight and examine elements of the texts that struck you deeply. As writers, texts are our best teachers. The goal is to practice reading them like writers. This means keeping a critical eye towards what the writer is doing and how they are doing it, then trying those tools on for size in your own writing. I invite you to view these discussion board responses as calls to address and formulate your own questions as well as delve deeper into ideas related and/or tangential to the readings.

Creative Writing Experiments

Every week, you will be given creative writing experiments as prompts as we progress through our readings and supplemental texts. **I will be giving oral feedback on your individual submissions in our virtual one-on-one meetings.** Experiments will be submitted onto Canvas under "Assignments" in designated modules before class **by Monday 11:59 pm est** and will be counted as a complete/incomplete. **From these experiments, you will then choose two prose pieces and four poems that you will workshop and revise more in depth for your final portfolio.**

Artist Statements

Every weekly creative writing submission you make will include a short artist statement. Your artist statement is an invitation for you to trace-out and address the intentions, ongoing questions, obsessions, uncertainties, and aims that have informed your writing and that you would like to be further fleshed out or discussed in workshop. Artist statements must preface every weekly submission and must be a minimum of one paragraph in length.

Workshops

A creative writing workshop is a collaborative space where we, as writers, provide feedback on the work of our peers. There will be four workshop weeks culminating the work you've poured into the semester. Workshop groups will consist of three to four, self-selected students. You will provide detailed written feedback for your fellow writers. Group members will lead each other's workshop discussions. Workshop expectations and organization will be discussed before the first workshop.

Final Portfolio & Reflection

Based on your own instinct, and feedback from your peers and myself, **you will compile and submit two polished prose pieces and four poems previously submitted as drafts.** New work is only permissible at this stage if it is more developed than all previous assignments. Your final portfolio will be accompanied by a 1-2-page reflection* in which you will utilize Janet Burroway's "Five D's of Narrative" as a guiding framework to thinking about the progress and evolution you've made with regard to these pieces (as well as more broadly):

- Desire — What did you want in terms of your writing? What did you hope to get out of it, to learn, to bring?
- Danger — What was at stake for you in terms of those expectations of what you hoped to glean?
- Discovery — What did you find in your writing process and revision, and more broadly, in the collaborations and feedback during workshop sessions, in the discussions around craft?
- Decision — What did you choose for your writing as a result of what you found here in this community that got built over the course of this semester?
- Difference — What changed for you and what difference did it make in terms of your writing?

**Note: This assignment is borrowed after Professor Lyrae Van Clief-Stefanon, after Janet Burroway.*

Conferences

You are responsible for scheduling conferences with me throughout the semester--this is the only way to receive direct and thorough feedback on your writing from me. **For each draft you will prepare an agenda of questions on your writing so that I may tailor my oral feedback to spotlight your concerns.** During our meetings, we can discuss your work, writing progress, and any questions you might have about assignments, the final portfolio, materials we're engaging with more generally, and/or any other writing-related matter.

I will create electronic time slots on our Canvas course calendar for you to electronically reserve individual conference appointments and email you a Zoom link as all conferences will be virtual.

Office Hours

I will be hosting virtual office hours on **Fridays from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm est.** I will not be responding to emails over the weekend, so please make sure you send them during the week whenever possible.

Grading

Your final grade will be **determined not only by quantity** (meeting all course requirements), **but also by the quality of your PROCESS--i.e., the work produced, evidence of thoughtful tending to your writing, judicious and critical revision, and active, useful contribution to class workshop/peer critique.**

To earn an A, you **must**:

- Complete all weekly assignments and readings before class
- Submit Final Portfolio & Reflection
- Show up on time and not miss more than **two** classes (see “Attendance Policy”)
- Participate regularly in class by leading and actively engaging with and thoughtfully responding to your peers in discussion and workshop
- Demonstrate a serious approach to revision that prioritizes creative honesty
- Attend **two** mandatory conferences to discuss your work

You will get some version of a B if you:

- Show up consistently and on time
- Complete all required assignments: Hypothesis Responses, Creative Writing Drafts, Peer Reviews, In-Class Writing
- Participate actively and respectfully in class
- Offer your peers thoughtful, detailed feedback
- Attend **two** mandatory conferences to discuss your work

Your grade will fall below a B if you are:

- Excessively absent or tardy
- Missing assignments
- Disrespectful to your peers or me
- Unwilling to participate, or extremely resistant to feedback and growth

Late Work

If you anticipate a late submission, I kindly ask that you email me **at least twelve hours** in advance of the deadline; if you do not notify me at all, you will risk facing a substantial point reduction overall toward your final grade. However, I understand that sometimes circumstances are beyond our control, and I am willing to give extensions for final assignments if you request them.

I will not accept work **a week after its original deadline** unless we have spoken and made this arrangement; this is made in large part to prevent an overload of work on you as a writer and on me as a grader. In the case that you find yourself missing multiple assignments or are consistently late on

assignment submissions, I will likely ask for us to meet so we can discuss and agree upon steps that will be most conducive to your success in class.

Attendance Policy

You may be absent from **any two classes** no questions asked and without it affecting your grade. If you can, notify me in advance via email should you feel unable to join class. You are responsible for consulting with your classmates, not me, about the content of any class you miss. Should you be absent for longer periods of time, please schedule a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we may discuss your needs and find alternative methods for you to continue the class.

Communication Policies

As we grow our thinking, we'll be holding ourselves (and each other) accountable through the semester. As we do so, I expect each of us to avoid microaggressions (i.e., indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination) including: refusing to acknowledge when someone is speaking, commenting on someone's name preference, not using someone's pronouns, or in some other way undermining their identities and perspectives. Every one of us has the right to an academic experience untainted by inappropriate comments or outbursts, offensive language, dismissiveness, or harassing behavior. Anyone who undermines this learning environment will be asked to leave the classroom.

University Policies & Regulations

This instructor respects and upholds University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically disabled, visually and/or hearing-disabled student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to the attention of the instructor.

As an employee of Cornell University, I am a mandated reporter, meaning if you were to disclose an instance of sexual assault or harassment to me, I am required to report it to the university. If you wish to discuss these issues with someone who is allowed to keep your disclosure confidential, you can call the RAINN hotline at 1-800-656-4673. You can also reach out to Cornell Health CAPS services, who are not mandatory reporters.

Public Domain

Anything discussed, written for, and shared amongst us in class is open to public use for all students of this class as fodder or inspiration for individual writing. If you are especially drawn to an observation or idea made by a fellow peer, and you would like to develop around or rework that point in an assignment, feel free to do so; I only ask that you appropriately reference that person in writing to practice proper citation habits.

Academic Integrity

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work. Often plagiarism occurs unintentionally due to uninformed citation practices; if you have any questions as to what constitutes plagiarism, please consult university-wide policy in the *Essential Guide to Academic Integrity at Cornell University*:

<https://theuniversityfaculty.cornell.edu/dean/academic-integrity/code-of-academic-integrity/>.

Disability Accommodations

In compliance with the Cornell University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Student Disability Services to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

Student Well-Being

If you are in the thick of overwhelm and feel it is seriously affecting you, please let me know as soon as you can so that we can come up with a plan together to address both your needs and how to meet the requirements of this course. Communicating with me will help put you in the best possible position to succeed in this class.

Final Note: Unlearning & Relearning

Literary scholar and cultural theorist Lauren Berlant once said: “Because learning and unlearning happen at the same time, there ought to be a lot of grace...Unlearning means you have to experience a complexity about moving through the world that you didn’t have before” (from “[Pleasure Won: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant](#)”). Over the course of the semester, I invite you to reflect on modes of thinking, writing, existing you invoke not only the page, but in your daily navigations of and through the world. We do not (un)learn linearly or chronologically—much less absolutely—but it is my hope that we co-create and hold space for each of us to tend to our personal trajectories throughout this course.

Creative Writing Workshop Guide

As we read through our fellow writers' work, we will be thoughtful and generous. We will notice and "steal" the things that they are doing well. We will suggest alternatives in moments when they are not doing as well. We will develop an educated understanding of what we like and what we don't and find new ways to communicate this with nuance and care. We will learn to recognize in our own writing what we see in the work of others. We will use the workshop experience to diligently press our own compositions into something more honest each week.

Writers are constantly developing themselves by engaging a regular, focused, and intentional writing and revision schedule. Though I will continue assigning weekly prompts, you are regularly expected to spend the rest of the semester attending to your revision practice. Continue studying the models I have provided and use them as guides for how to edit your own work and finalize pieces for your portfolios.

Critical Response Process: Guidelines

Step 1 (Participants Offer Statements of Meaning)

For the Writer: Begin by reading aloud your artist statement. After you've done so, start your timing device (15 min) and read aloud your workshop pieces.

For the Participant: After the artist statement and poem are read aloud, use your feedback to offer statements of meaning about what was stimulating, surprising, evocative, memorable, challenging, confusing, compelling, and/or unique.

Step 2 (Writer Poses Questions)

For the Writer: As dialogue unfolds, pose your craft-based questions to the group. You hold the agency to stop discussion and move on to another question once you feel like you've garnered sufficient feedback, or else follow up with additional questions in pursuit of a more satisfactory response.

For the Participant: Take time to respond thoughtfully to the writer's questions, referencing the writing directly. As you discuss, take notes on your copies of the poems, writing down anything that is important regarding the artist's aims, desires, intentions as well as any ideas or insights that shed new light on, clarify, or complicate a particular moment.

Step 3 (Moving Forward)

For the Writer: Upon concluding, thank your workshop participants and identify one or more task points for revision. Make sure to schedule a virtual post-workshop conference with me via email so that we can reflect on your workshop experience and address any lingering concerns and/or questions you might have about your draft.

Note: This Critical Response Process is subject to modification by each writer being workshopped and as such can be negotiated over the duration of workshop based on each writer's needs. You can choose to abridge or skip steps to maximize your workshop experience.

Responsibilities of the Reader

- Download from Canvas and print works by writers who are being workshopped.
- Read once for basic understanding, twice with a keener eye for what the writer is doing, and a third time to write your thoughtful reactions in the margins.
- Annotate your fellow writers' work clearly and succinctly with **at least**: three notes on compelling aspects of the writing *and* three notes on areas for revision. Your comments should be completed BEFORE the class workshop begins, easy for the writer to follow, and also help you to share and expand on your reactions during the workshop. Hand the annotated submission to the writer at the end of each workshop.
- Be respectful and generous with your feedback so that you may receive the same care from your peers. (If you are feeling stuck, think about what you might want someone to notice and help you with in your own work.)
- Don't forget to transcribe your feedback on Canvas via the Peer Review function for each member of your workshop group.

Responsibilities of the Writer

- Curate a writing submission you'd like the class to discuss. This submission may contain, either, two poems of any length, or a short prose piece (fiction or creative nonfiction) of up to ten pages.
- Upload your submission to Canvas as directed on the syllabus calendar. No exceptions.
- Choose pieces to submit by asking yourself the following questions:
 - *How attached am I to this work?* We will be workshopping with a careful but critical eye. If you don't feel ready to hear criticism about your piece yet but are looking for ways to develop it, it may be best to just show it to me.
 - *How developed is this work?* Be sure that there is something substantial for your peers to work with—no first drafts. Make an effort to give us a piece of writing that will pique our interest, as we help you think through ways to hone it into something even stronger.
 - *What do I like about it? What needs to change?* Imagine someone asking you why the work you are submitting is important to you. If you already have a sense of how to answer these questions, great! If not, review your submission and try answering these questions before clicking submit.
- Be sure to have a copy of your own writing submission with you on the day of your workshop, so that you can read from it and note any ideas that spring up in class.

PROVISIONAL COURSE SCHEDULE
ENGL 2800-108: Intro to Creative Writing, T/R 10:10-11:25 am est

Week 1 (**Tuesday, Jan. 23 & Thursday, Jan. 25**): Syllabus & Orientation

[Poetry Unit Begins] Week 2 (**Tuesday, Jan. 30 & Thursday, Feb. 1**): Writing From & Through Lineage

Week 3 (**Tuesday, Feb. 6 & Thursday, Feb. 8**): The Image as Living Arch(I/eye)ve

Week 4 (**Tuesday, Feb. 13 & Thursday, Feb. 15**): Lyric & Narrative In Relation

Week 5 (**Tuesday, Feb. 20 & Thursday, Feb. 22**): Invention = Disruption

[Prose Unit Begins] Week 6 (**Thursday, Feb. 29**): Personal Narrative (Lyric Essay)

*NO CLASS on Tuesday, Feb. 27 due to February Break (**Saturday, Feb. 24 - Tuesday, Feb. 27** (Instruction Resumes on Wednesday!))

Week 7 (**Tuesday, March 5 & Thursday, March 7**): Narrative Shape & Pattern (Blended Nonfiction Essay Forms)

Week 8 (**Tuesday, March 12 & Thursday, March 14**): Exploring Character (Fictional Short Stories)

Week 9 (**Tuesday, March 19 & Thursday, March 21**): Conjuring the Stakes in Prose

Week 10 (**Tuesday, March 26 & Thursday, March 28**): TBD

Week 11 (NO CLASSES!): Spring Break: **Saturday, March 30 - Sunday, April 7** (Instruction Resumes on Monday!)

Week 12 (**Tuesday, April 9 & Thursday, April 11**): Workshops & Revision

Week 13 (**Tuesday, April 16 & Thursday, April 18**): Workshops & Revision

Week 14 (**Tuesday, April 23 & Thursday, April 25**): Workshops & Revision

Week 15 (**Tuesday, April 30 & Thursday, May 2**): Workshops & Revision

Week 16: Last Day of Class! (**Tuesday, May 7**)

Resources

COVID Information & Response Updates: <https://covid.cornell.edu/updates/>

Cornell COVID Tracking Dashboard: <https://covid.cornell.edu/testing/dashboard/>

Caring Community @ Cornell: <http://caringcommunity.cornell.edu/get-help/>

Mental Health Services: <https://health.cornell.edu/services/mental-health-care>

& <https://knight.as.cornell.edu/resources-student-mental-wellbeing-health>

Cornell Writing Center: <https://knight.as.cornell.edu/wc>

The Learning Strategies Center: <http://lsc.cornell.edu/>

Anabel's Grocery: <https://anabelsgrocery.org/>

Office for Academic Diversity Initiatives:

<https://oadi.cornell.edu/resources%20and%20services/oadi-resources.html>

Title IX Office (gender discrimination and sexual harassment concerns):

<https://titleix.cornell.edu/>

Office of Diversity and Inclusion (bias reporting and incident response concerns):

<https://diversity.cornell.edu/policies-and-other-initiatives/bias-reporting-cornell>

For Students with Families and Children:

<http://studentswithfamilies.cornell.edu/resource-directory/>

Cornell Libraries: <https://www.library.cornell.edu/undergraduate>

Cornell Library Citation Management: <https://www.library.cornell.edu/research/citation>

Veterans Support and Advocacy:

<https://dos.cornell.edu/student-veterans-advocate-office/useful-links-forms>