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Office hours by appointment in 208 South Hall

*First-Year Seminar*  
**English 215: Introduction to Creative Writing**

“To write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write is to write.”

– Gertrude Stein

“Just get it down on paper, and then we’ll see what to do with it.”

– Maxwell Perkins

“Nothing you write, if you hope to be any good, will ever come out as you first hoped.”

– Lillian Helman

“Read, read, read. Read everything . . . and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the masters. Read! You’ll absorb it. Then write.”

– William Faulkner

This course is designed to help you hone your skills as a writer based on the ideas of the above quotations: as Stein suggests, that the only way to learn to write is to write, whether you feel inspired or not; as Perkins evokes, that once you’ve got a draft down, careful readers can help you fashion it; as Hellman suggests, that you’ve got to write a lot to get to the good stuff; and, as Faulkner directs, that you’ve got to read in order to learn to write. So our class will proceed based on the premises of steady writing, steady discussion, steady revising, and steady reading.

This course will ask you to read, write, analyze, discuss, reflect, workshop, and experiment regularly. All students are equally responsible for productive discussions, so preparation and attendance is always required. Because this is a workshop course, active participation – in discussion and in written feedback to classmates – is essential. You should expect to spend about 8 hours per day on this course including class time and reading and writing outside of class time (i.e., plan for a 40-hour work week this block).

This writing course is also a first-year seminar. We are exploring creative writing not just for its own sake but also to practice creative thinking and to experience the artistic process. All first-year seminars aim to: encourage an understanding of the liberal arts and an appreciation for their value; foster a sense of responsibility and empowerment in the achievement of personal educational goals; enhance academic culture and foster intellectual community; and develop skills necessary for academic success. Keep these seminar objectives in mind as you reflect on your progress throughout the block.

**Classroom:** South Hall 302

**Required Texts:**

Dunghy et al., *From the Fishhouse: An Anthology of Poems that Sing, Rhyme, Resound, Syncopate, Alliterate, and Just Plain Sound Great* (F)

Martone and Williford, *Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction* (2nd ed. 2007) (S)

Readings on Moodle must be printed and brought to class (M)

**Schedule:** Our course will meet daily at 12:30 p.m., except when otherwise noted. Our schedule is subject to change; if you miss class, it is your responsibility to find out about any announcements or changes and to ensure all assignments are still turned in on time. Readings and assignments are due on the days they are listed. Unless otherwise noted, exercises are due to Moodle by noon (i.e., before class).

F 8/29

First-Year Seminar Introduction

WEEK ONE: Techniques and Strategies

M 9/1

Point of View

O'Brien, Packer (S); Moore, "Point of View Primer" (M)

Due (Moodle and in class): "Man Gets off a Bus" exercise

T 9/2

Dialogue and Monologue

Gaitskill, Kincaid (S); Marvin (5), McGrath (231) (F)

Due (Moodle and in class): Secrets Exercise

W 9/3

Difficult Material

Thon (S); Bell (M); Book (29), Rosal (27) (F)

Due (Moodle): Difficult Material exercise

Th 9/4

Finding the "Slant"

Hempel, Dickinson (M); Brock (31), Johnson (28), Turner (8), Wilson (53-55) (F)

Due (Moodle and in class): Description exercise

Due (in class): decision on which of the week's exercises you will revise

F 9/5

Conferences on revised exercises in 208 South Hall

Due (at conference): completed worksheet

**Due Sunday, 9/7 by 10 a.m. (Moodle):** Revision of one exercise with a cover note explaining how/why you revised your earlier version based on class discussion, your conference, and your re-envisioning of the piece

WEEK TWO: Inspirations and Immersions

M 9/8 **Class meets in Cole 212**

Writing what you don't know

Heller & Hamid, Groff (M)

Due (Moodle and in class): research plan

T 9/9 **Class meets at noon in Commons Circle**

Artistic Inspiration (Field Trip to Cedar Rapids Museum of Art)

Ekphrastic poems, Roberts, Roberts-inspired exercise (M); Bonair-Agard (68-70) (F)

W 9/10

Taking leaps

Haiku, writers on walking (M)

Th 9/11

Reading Aloud

Listen to a sampling of poems (and read along) (F – CD)

Due (Moodle): a piece inspired by Tuesday's art immersion *or* a haiku

Due (in class): questions about recitations

**F 9/12 Class meets at 9:00 a.m.**

Due (in class): Poetry recitations

Due (to Moodle) by 5:00 p.m.: sample piece from the week with reflection

WEEK THREE: Workshop

M 9/15

Practice Workshop of "Student X" (M)

Due (in class): Workshop Drafts (18 copies, stapled)

T 9/16

Workshop A

**W 9/17 Class meets at 9:00 and 1:00**

Workshop B & Workshop C

**Th 9/18 Class meets at 9:00 and 1:00**

Workshop D

Due by 1:00 p.m. (Moodle): Copies of your written end notes from workshop (all 17 in one document)

**F 9/19 Class meets at 9:00 a.m.**

Revision

Carver (2 stories), Hugo (M)

Conferences (group A)

WEEK FOUR: Re-visioning

M 9/22

Panel of writers: Laura Farmer, Shena McAuliffe, Jen Rouse

Farmer, McAuliffe, Rouse (M)

Due (in class): questions for our visitors

Conferences (group B)

T 9/23

Conferences (groups C and D)

**W 9/24 Class meets at 9:00 a.m.**

Class Reading

Due (in class): revision of workshop piece and cover letter

## **Assignments and Grading:**

**Grading:** My grading of your work this term is not meant to pass judgment on your innate talent or promise as a writer. I will emphasize how you reflect on what you've learned: implementing the technical subjects we explore, contributing to class discussion and helping others to improve, evaluating your work and working on revisions, exhibiting a willingness to experiment, and working toward the course objectives of the first-year seminar. Cover notes/letters and reflections I ask you to write will help me understand your process and your product and therefore will guide me in grading your work. *Note 1: You should NEVER turn in a first draft in this course; all of your assignments should represent the best and most polished work you could produce given the time allowed. Note 2: ALL assignments must be turned in to pass the class; even ungraded exercises are included in this policy. Note 3: NO late work will be accepted. Note 4: There are no make up reading quizzes; if you are absent you receive a 0 for that day's quiz.*

### **Distribution:**

Participation: 13%

Workshop (discussion and endnotes): 10%

Reading quizzes: 5%

Poetry recitation: 7%

Week One revised exercise: 20%

Week Two reflection: 15%

Revised workshop piece: 25%

Revision cover letter: 5%

**Exercises:** You will be completing short written exercises almost nightly. Written instructions can be found on Moodle or may be handed out in class. These exercises must be uploaded to Moodle by noon on the days they are due. Most days I will ask you also to bring paper copies of your assignments to class. Be sure you are uploading every assignment and paying attention to when paper copies are necessary for class. *Make sure your name is on every document you upload to Moodle.* Although these daily exercises will not each be graded, they should represent your best work for that day; do not turn in first drafts. Revisions of exercises will be graded and should represent a re-visioning (not just a little bit of editing) of your original versions. I will provide more guidelines.

**Workshop piece:** You will submit a piece of your choice to the class for workshop; fiction should be roughly 6-7 pages, double-spaced, and poetry should be roughly 3-4 pages. Other than these guidelines, you have a lot of freedom. You may choose to develop one of your exercises into a longer piece or you may choose to work on something completely different. Most of you will have written creatively before. For this term, however, I want you only to turn in work you write *during this term*. Do not turn in "old" work. Let's truly use this block to generate as much new work as possible.

You will be commenting on your classmates' workshop pieces, including writing substantial end notes. After we discuss your classmates' work, you will turn back to them their drafts with marginal comments as well as typed end notes. You will turn in additional copies of the end notes to me for credit. Handouts on the workshop process (included at the end of this syllabus) provide more guidelines; please ask if you have questions, as this aspect of your participation will count substantially in your grade. Even if you miss class on a workshop day, you are responsible for giving comments to your classmates whose work was discussed that day.

Your final assignment for the end of the block will be a substantial revision of your workshop piece (length and spacing as is appropriate for your piece) as well as a thorough cover letter. The cover letter

should include a discussion of: your revision process; which issues or topics we covered this block that you feel you are doing well with and which you still need to work on (referring to specific lessons and readings is encouraged); how your workshop revision responds to the class workshop; what you are most proud of in this piece; what your future plans would be for the piece; and how your workshop piece has developed from the “initiating or triggering subject” to the “generated subject” (Hugo 4). (If you can’t identify your “generated subject,” that’s a good sign that you need to revisit your workshop piece with Hugo’s advice in mind; leave yourself time to do so.) Be specific (3 pages, double-spaced).

**Other assignments:** I will provide guidelines for other assignments as the block progresses.

Please remember that with all assignments, it is your responsibility to ask questions when you have them and to seek counsel from me in office hours, with tutors at the writing studio, and/or with our class mentor.

**Course Policies:** Read these carefully; you will be held responsible for all policies. Do not email me questions that can be answered by the syllabus.

**Writing in class, writing at home:** We will be doing some writing in class. You should have plenty of paper on which to write – and sometimes turn in and share with others (so don’t use notebook pages that can’t be separated). Devices of any kind – laptops, tablets, kindles, etc. – are not permitted in class unless you have a documented learning disability that requires you to use one. (If so, see me by day three of the block to discuss accommodations.)

Most of the writing you do for this class will be works-in-progress – even after rounds of revision. This does not mean, however, that the work you turn in should be unpolished. Hastily-written work that is riddled with errors or that does not thoughtfully address the assignment will not receive credit.

**Sharing your work:** Sometimes nothing is more terrifying than showing your work to others. A lot of you may be anxious about sharing your work this block, but remember you will be sharing your work with people who are focused on furthering the work, not tearing it apart. I assure you that one of my responsibilities as your professor will be to moderate a workshop that is always constructive, not destructive. I also assure you that all writers (creative and otherwise) have to go through this process – whether in a classroom, a writing group, or an editor’s office. Honing your skills at both offering and receiving feedback will be an important asset to you if you continue on in the writing life – and will also serve you well in the rest of your future college courses.

**Attendance, Participation, and Class Etiquette:** This class requires faithful attendance, attention, and participation from all of its members. The more you contribute and listen to one another, the more you will learn. Make sure your cell phones are turned off, that you refrain from talking with others around you, and that you eliminate any other distractions that may detract from the class atmosphere. Please speak with me during office hours if you are having any trouble participating in class or preparing for discussion.

If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes from a classmate, to make up assigned work, and to turn in anything that was due that day. Being late to class or not being prepared and engaged may all constitute absences; students falling asleep in class will be asked to leave.

You are allowed one “free” absence, for any reason, during the block. Missing two classes will result in a lowered participation grade, regardless of class performance. Missing more than two classes will result in failure of the course. If an illness causes you to fall behind, be in touch with me so we can determine whether you will be able to catch up or whether you will need to take a health withdrawal. Fifteen-day Drops will only be granted according to College policy, which specifies the student has completed all assignments and made a good-faith effort to pass the course. Educate yourself about policies such as health withdrawals and 15-day drops so that you can make the best decision should an emergency arise.

**Keeping in touch:** Although our class meets every day, I also hope to get to know each of you outside of class – and there will be times when we need to communicate via email and in one-on-one conferences. Email is considered an official mode of communication at Cornell; you are expected to read your Cornell email at least once a day and to be attentive to any email you receive about our course. If you are having any problems with the course, I strongly encourage you to come talk to me.

You will have two required conferences with me this block, though you are certainly invited to schedule additional meetings. You are also encouraged to meet with your mentor, Laurel Fraser. Not responding to emails or missing scheduled appointments (with me or our class mentor) will affect your grade. You are also expected to read my written feedback on your work carefully and to apply the feedback to subsequent assignments; it is your responsibility to see me with any questions about the feedback.

**Additional Resources:** Please feel free to be in touch with any of the following people throughout the block – they are here for you!

- Laurel Fraser, student mentor for our course: [lfraser16@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:lfraser16@cornellcollege.edu)
- Shawn Doyle, first-year writing consultant: [sdoyle@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:sdoyle@cornellcollege.edu)
- Ian Ely-Cate, coordinator of academic support and advising: [ielycate@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:ielycate@cornellcollege.edu)
- Jen Rouse, consulting librarian for the humanities: [jrouse@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:jrouse@cornellcollege.edu)
- Your academic advisor

**Learning Disabilities:** Cornell College is committed to providing equal educational opportunities to all students. If you have a documented learning disability and will need any accommodation in this course, you must request the accommodation(s) from me as early as possible and no later than the end of week one. Additional information about the policies and procedures for accommodation of learning disabilities is available at: [http://cornellcollege.edu/academic\\_affairs/disabilities/](http://cornellcollege.edu/academic_affairs/disabilities/). Please remember that Ian Ely-Cate, Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising, is also available to assist you.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the act of taking the work of another and presenting it as one’s own, without acknowledgement of the original source. This course assumes utmost academic honesty; plagiarism will not be tolerated. Acts of plagiarism will be reported to the College. If you have any questions about your use of others’ work this term, see me about citation guidelines and proper use of sources. Our librarians and writing consultants are also wonderful resources for questions about the use of sources.

## Guidelines for Workshop

*Here are some questions to ask yourself as you prepare to discuss your fellow writers' work:*

- What are the strengths of this piece?
- Has the writer done what s/he set out to do? Can you see any gaps between what the writer thought s/he was doing and the way the work has turned out?
- What is this piece about? Can you identify a conflict? How does the writer try to maintain tension? Do ambiguities serve a purpose or do they merely confuse or frustrate the reader? If there are any digressions, do they strengthen the principle narrative or theme? Or do they unbalance the work overall?
- Does the structure of the work serve its purpose? If not, what other ways could its elements be arranged?
- Is the writer being so explicit that the piece becomes didactic or moralistic?
- Does the work contain unintentional lapses of grammar, logic, point of view, diction, or narrative distance?
- Does the work successfully suspend your disbelief? Are there elements that seem unjustified or unmotivated?
- Is the language carefully chosen? Are the details crisp? Do they carry significance?
- Are there elements of the work that seem clichéd or predictable, stereotypical or “obligatory”? Are there elements that are unexpected? Do these delight or mislead you as a reader?
- are there any technical aspects of writing we’ve discussed in class that the author should pay more attention to?
- Is the work effective for its intended audience (even if not for you, or only for you)? Will your suggestions benefit the work as a whole or are they mainly a reflection of your personal leanings as a reader?
- In addition to writing comments in the margins of the work, you should include an End Note that is about 200 words written in full sentences (not note form). Please sign your responses. While you will not be able to address all of the above questions in your end note, use these questions as a guideline and focus on what seems most important for the piece. Of course include any other suggestions you have and/or compliments you’d like to pay the author.
- Remember you will turn in all of the end notes you’ve written (17 total) to me as a significant portion of your workshop grade; take your time with these and think about what you can learn from them as a writer.

*Here are some things to tell yourself when it's your turn for a critique:*

- While it's normal to feel anxious, even defensive, about your work, try to check your ego at the door. The point of the workshop is to size up the work, not you. Our class is a community of writers whose aim is to help one another improve.
- Be prepared to listen, not argue. Be prepared to be misunderstood. Part of the point of the workshop is to run your draft by a group of more-careful-than-average readers. If they don't get it, then maybe it's too subtle, or maybe it's not really there yet.
- On the other hand, they could be completely wrong. Take everything with a grain of salt.
- On the other hand, if you are not willing to listen to earnest advice, you may never improve your craft.
- Bring a copy of your work so that you can follow along with the discussion. Take notes during workshop: your memory may fail when you go back to revise. After the workshop, read the written comments on your manuscripts carefully. Sometimes the group gets focused on one aspect during a discussion, and there may be completely different types of feedback written down.
- You won't be able to incorporate *all* of the feedback! Your challenge is to sort through what your readers have said, rethink your piece, and decide what to do to achieve your vision. This is a tough process. You'll be meeting with me a few days after your workshop to discuss how it's going.
- If you make drastic cuts, save the deleted material in another file – it's not uncommon for writers to change their minds (or even to use something deleted from one piece in a future piece).
- Ultimately, it's your work, and only you can decide what to do with it.