

UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE WRITING

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<http://arts.columbia.edu/writing/undergraduate>

SPRING 2023 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

All students are eligible for **seminars** and **beginning workshops**, though space is limited.

If the class is full, add your name to the SSOL waitlist and attend the first day.

Students may take only one workshop per semester and two seminars per semester.

Intermediate, advanced & senior workshops require a writing sample. Please visit our 609 Kent office or our website at <http://arts.columbia.edu/writing/undergraduate> for information on Registration Procedures.

BEGINNING WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN 1100 Beginning Fiction Workshop

The beginning workshop in fiction is designed for students who have little or no previous experience writing literary texts in fiction. Students are introduced to a range of technical and imaginative concerns through creative exercises and discussions, and eventually produce their own writing for the critical analysis of the class. The focus of the course is on the rudiments of voice, character, setting, point of view, plot, and the lyrical use of language. Students will begin to develop the critical skills that will allow them to read like writers and understand, on a technical level, how accomplished creative writing is produced. Outside readings of a wide range of fiction supplement and inform the exercises and longer written projects.

Instructors

Sec 01 Aamir Azhar
Sec 02 Alexander Kapsidelis
Sec 03 Rachel Raiola
Sec 04 Wyonia McLaurin
Sec 05 James McGowan

WRIT UN 1200 Beginning Nonfiction Workshop

The beginning workshop in nonfiction is designed for students with little or no experience in writing literary nonfiction. Students are introduced to a range of technical and imaginative concerns through exercises and discussions, and they eventually submit their own writing for the critical analysis of the class. Outside readings supplement and inform the exercises and longer written projects.

Instructors

Sec 01 Christian Kennedy
Sec 02 Sabrina Qiao

WRIT UN 1300 Beginning Poetry Workshop

The beginning poetry workshop is designed for students who have a serious interest in poetry writing but who lack a significant background in the rudiments of the craft and/or have had little or no previous

poetry workshop experience. Students will be assigned weekly writing exercises emphasizing such aspects of verse composition as the poetic line, the image, rhyme and other sound devices, verse forms, repetition, tone, irony, and others. Students will also read an extensive variety of exemplary work in verse, submit brief critical analyses of poems, and critique each other's original work.

Instructor

Sec 01 Kai-Lilly Karpman
Sec 02 Rose DeMaris

INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN 2100 Intermediate Fiction Workshop

Intermediate workshops are for students with some experience with creative writing, and whose prior work merits admission to the class (as judged by the professor). Intermediate workshops present a higher creative standard than beginning workshops, and increased expectations to produce finished work. By the end of the semester, each student will have produced at least seventy pages of original fiction. Students are additionally expected to write extensive critiques of the work of their peers.

Instructors

Sec 01 Heidi Julavits
Sec 02 Frances Cha

WRIT UN 2200 Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop

The intermediate workshop in nonfiction is designed for students with some experience in writing literary nonfiction. Intermediate workshops present a higher creative standard than beginning workshops and an expectation that students will produce finished work. Outside readings supplement and inform the exercises and longer written projects. By the end of the semester, students will have produced thirty to forty pages of original work in at least two traditions of literary nonfiction.

Instructor

Sec 01 John Vincler

WRIT UN 2300 Intermediate Poetry Workshop

Intermediate poetry workshops are for students with some prior instruction in the rudiments of poetry writing and prior poetry workshop experience. Intermediate poetry workshops pose greater challenges to students and maintain higher critical standards than beginning workshops. Students will be instructed in more complex aspects of the craft, including the poetic persona, the prose poem, the collage, open-field composition, and others. They will also be assigned more challenging verse forms such as the villanelle and also non-European verse forms such as the pantoum. They will read extensively, submit brief critical analyses, and put their instruction into regular practice by composing original work that will be critiqued by their peers. By the end of the semester each student will have assembled a substantial portfolio of finished work.

Instructor

Sec 01 Emily Luan

ADVANCED WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN 3100 Advanced Fiction Workshop

Building on the work of the Intermediate Workshop, Advanced Workshops are reserved for the most accomplished creative writing students. A significant body of writing must be produced and revised. Particular attention will be paid to the components of fiction: voice, perspective, characterization, and form. Students will be expected to finish several short stories, executing a total artistic vision on a piece of writing. The critical focus of the class will include an examination of endings and formal wholeness, sustaining narrative arcs, compelling a reader's interest for the duration of the text, and generating a sense of urgency and drama in the work.

Instructors

Sec 01 Marie Myung-OK Lee
Sec 02 Halle Butler

SENIOR WORKSHOPS

WRIT UN 3101 Senior Fiction Workshop

Seniors who are majors in creative writing are given priority for this course. Enrollment is limited, and is by permission of the professor. The senior workshop offers students the opportunity to work exclusively with classmates who are at the same high level of accomplishment in the major. Students in the senior workshops will produce and revise a new and substantial body of work. In-class critiques and conferences with the professor will be tailored to needs of each student.

Instructor

Sec 01 Benjamin Marcus

WRIT UN 3201 Senior Nonfiction Workshop

Seniors who are majors in creative writing are given priority for this course. Enrollment is limited, and is by permission of the professor. The senior workshop offers students the opportunity to work exclusively with classmates who are at the same high level of accomplishment in the major. Students in the senior workshops will produce and revise a new and substantial body of work. In-class critiques and conferences with the professor will be tailored to needs of each student.

Instructor

Sec 01 Phillip Lopate

WRIT UN 3301 Senior Poetry Workshop

Seniors who are majors in creative writing are given priority for this course. Enrollment is limited, and is by permission of the professor. The senior workshop offers students the opportunity to work exclusively with classmates who are at the same high level of accomplishment in the major. Students in the senior workshops will produce and revise a new and substantial body of work. In-class critiques and conferences with the professor will be tailored to needs of each student.

Instructor

Sec 01 Alexander Dimitrov

SEMINARS

WRIT UN 2110 Approaches to the Short Story

The modern short story has gone through many transformations, and the innovations of its practitioners have often pointed the way for prose fiction as a whole. The short story has been seized upon and refreshed by diverse cultures and aesthetic affiliations, so that perhaps the only stable definition of the form remains the famous one advanced by Poe, one of its early masters, as a work of fiction that can be read in one sitting. Still, common elements of the form have emerged over the last century and this course will study them, including Point of View, Plot, Character, Setting and Theme. John Hawkes once famously called these last four elements the "enemies of the novel," and many short story writers have seen them as hindrances as well. Hawkes later recanted, though some writers would still agree with his earlier assessment, and this course will examine the successful strategies of great writers across the spectrum of short story practice, from traditional approaches to more radical solutions, keeping in mind how one period's revolution - Hemingway, for example - becomes a later era's mainstream or "common-sense" storytelling mode. By reading the work of major writers from a writer's perspective, we will examine the myriad techniques employed for what is finally a common goal: to make readers feel. Short writing exercises will help us explore the exhilarating subtleties of these elements and how the effects created by their manipulation or even outright absence power our most compelling fictions.

Instructor

Naomi Bernstein

WRIT UN 2211 Traditions in Nonfiction

The seminar provides exposure to the varieties of nonfiction with readings in its principal genres: reportage, criticism and commentary, biography and history, and memoir and the personal essay. A highly plastic medium, nonfiction allows authors to portray real events and experiences through narrative, analysis, polemic or any combination thereof. Free to invent everything but the facts, great practitioners of nonfiction are faithful to reality while writing with a voice and a vision distinctively their own. To show how nonfiction is conceived and constructed, class discussions will emphasize the relationship of content to form and style, techniques for creating plot and character under the factual constraints imposed by nonfiction, the defining characteristics of each authors voice, the authors subjectivity and presence, the role of imagination and emotion, the uses of humor, and the importance of speculation and attitude. Written assignments will be opportunities to experiment in several nonfiction genres and styles.

Instructor

Rebecca Sara Levey

WRIT UN 2311 Traditions in Poetry

“For those, in dark, who find their own way by the light of others’ eyes.” —Lucie Brock-Broido

The avenues of poetic tradition open to today’s poets are more numerous, more invigorating, and perhaps even more baffling than ever before. The routes we chose for our writing lead to destinations of our own making, and we take them at our own risk—necessarily so, as the pursuit of poetry asks each of us to light a pilgrim’s candle and follow it into the moors and lowlands, through wastes and prairies, crossing waters as we go. Go after the marshlights, the will-o-wisps who call to you in a voice you’ve longed for your whole life. These routes have been forged by those who came before you, but for that reason, none of them can hope to keep you on it entirely. You must take your steps away, brick by brick, heading confidently into the hinterland of your own distinct achievement.

For the purpose of this class, we will walk these roads together, examining the works of classic and contemporary exemplars of the craft. By companioning poets from a large spread of time, we will be able to more diversely immerse ourselves in what a poetic “tradition” truly means. We will read works by Edmund Spenser, Dante, and Goethe, the Romantics—especially Keats—Dickinson, who is mother to us all, Modernists, and the great sweep of contemporary poetry that is too vast to individuate.

While it is the imperative of this class to equip you with the knowledge necessary to advance in the field of poetry, this task shall be done in a Columbian manner. Consider this class an initiation, of sorts, into the vocabulary which distinguishes the writers who work under our flag, each of us bound by this language that must be passed on, and therefore changed, to you who inherit it. As I have learned the words, I have changed them, and I give them now to you so that you may pave your own way into your own ways, inspired with the first breath that brought you here, which may excite and—hopefully—frighten you. You must be troubled. This is essential.

Instructor

Ryan Cook

WRIT UN 3011 Translation Seminar

This course will explore broad-ranging questions pertaining to the historical, cultural, and political significance of translation while analyzing the various challenges confronted by the arts foremost practitioners. We will read and discuss texts by writers and theorists such as Benjamin, Derrida, Borges, Steiner, Dryden, Nabokov, Schleiermacher, Goethe, Spivak, Jakobson, and Venuti. As readers and practitioners of translation, we will train our ears to detect the visibility of invisibility of the translators craft; through short writing experiments, we will discover how to identify and capture the nuances that traverse literary styles, historical periods and cultures. The course will culminate in a final project that may either be a critical analysis or an original translation accompanied by a translators note of introduction.

Instructor

Bonnie Chau

WRIT UN 3023 Hauntings: Ghosts, Presences & Residues in the Literary Imagination

“I believe—I know that ghosts have wandered the earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad!”

—Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*

In this course we’ll expand our understanding of how writing is often the site of lingering, numinous, immaterial presences. We’ll begin with the tradition of the ghost story— a literary device beloved by writers for centuries across many genres. Beyond the consideration of the supernatural, we’ll also investigate more abstract capacities in which texts—and writers (and sometimes editors!)—are inevitably possessed by an other, a presence that lingers persistently, making itself known whether we welcome it or not. Memory and trauma are their own kinds of ghosts. Similarly, we’ll discover how traces of works by writers we admire, our teachers, even a specific text or image, can manifest as spectral forms inhabiting our work. We’ll address the complexities of those vestiges in terms of appropriation and originality— what Harold Bloom calls “the anxiety of influence.” Students will process and explore these ideas in both creative and analytical writings throughout the semester.

Course Books (available at Book Culture):

Eileen Myles, Afterglow
Diana Khoi Nguyen, Ghost Of
Lucie Brock Broido, Trouble in Mind
Mary Ruefle, A Little White Shadow
Max Porter, Grief is the Thing With Feathers
All other readings will be posted on Courseworks as PDFs.

Instructor

Samantha Zighelboim

WRIT UN 3028 Lost and Found in the Anthropocene

We are living through a time of unprecedented change. This change is characterized by “solastalgia,” a word that describes a response to environmental loss in our daily lives which encompasses both pain and solace. In this course we will think seriously about the imperative to notice, pay attention, and remember that which is changing or disappearing. How might we work through and with loss, and how might we harness attention and awareness to envision different futures and new creative approaches? Students will consider the ways writers and other artists are working with losing and finding in a posthuman world across different forms, genres, and cultures. Will take an imaginative and interdisciplinary attitude to these questions, studying literary work alongside visual art, anthropology, psychology, literary theory, and science. We will consider extinction, elegy, landscape, geological temporalities, fragments, trash, and ghosts. In his call to arms, *The Great Derangement*, author Amitav Ghosh writes that climate change resists so many of the literary and artistic forms we currently possess. As such, he calls for an embrace of hybrid genres. Through reflections, critical essays, and their own creative work, students will think seriously about hybridity and the imaginative challenge of being alive in the world today.

Instructor

Madeleine Watts

WRIT UN 3031 Around the Fire: Intro to Audio Storytelling

It’s one thing to tell a story with the pen. It’s another to transfix your audience with your voice. In this class, we will explore principles of audio narrative. Oral storytellers arguably understand suspense, humor and showmanship in ways only a live performer can. Even if you are a diehard writer of visually-consumed text, you may find, once the class is over, that you have learned techniques that can translate across borders: your written work may benefit. Alternatively, you may discover that audio is the medium for you.

We will consider sound from the ground up – from folkloric oral traditions, to raw, naturally captured sound stories, to seemingly straightforward radio news segments, to highly polished narrative podcasts. While this class involves a fair amount of reading, much of what we will be studying and discussing is audio material. Some is as lo-fi as can be, and some is operatic in scope, benefitting from large production budgets and teams of artists. At the same time that we study these works, each student will also complete small audio production exercises of their own; as a final project, students will be expected to produce a trailer, or “sizzle” for a hypothetical multi-episode show.

This class is meant for beginners to the audio tradition. There are some tech requirements: a recording device (most phones will suffice), workable set of headphones, and computer. You’ll also need to download the free audio editing software Audacity.

Instructor

Mallika Rao

WRIT UN 3032 It's Complicated: Writing as Relationship

In this cross-genre class, we'll explore writing process as relationship, one that reflects how we relate to both ourselves and the world. How do we bring the public back to the private space of the writing desk? How do our social, cultural, and political realities and histories influence our writing process? How is our relationship with our audience informed by our relationship with language? How can we be at play in structures of grammar and narrative without assimilating to what seems otherwise unrelatable? Seeing the sentence as a set of relationships, one tied to our human relations, we will write and revise with the hope of fostering an enduring relationship with the page. Coursework will include in-class writing exercises and 3 short (3-6 page) pieces.

Instructor

Nina Sharma

WRIT UN 3111 Exercises in Style

Instructor

Christine Smallwood

WRIT UN 3127 Time Moves Both Ways

What is time travel, really? We can use a machine or walk through a secret door. Take a pill or fall asleep and wake up in the future. But when we talk about magic machines and slipstreams and Rip Van Winkle, we are also talking about memory, chronology, and narrative. In this seminar, we will approach time travel as a way of understanding "the Fourth Dimension" in fiction. Readings will range from the speculative to the strange, to the realism of timelines, flashbacks, and shifts in perspective. Coursework will include short, bi-weekly writing assignments, a completed short story, and a timeinflected adaptation.

Instructor

Hilary Leichter

WRIT UN 3128 How to Write Funny

"Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die."
--Mel Brooks

"Comedy has to be based on truth. You take the truth and you put a little curlicue at the End."
--Sid Caesar

"Analyzing humor is like dissecting a frog. Few people are interested and the frog dies of it."
--E.B. White

"What is comedy? Comedy is the art of making people laugh without making them puke."
--Steve Martin

"Patty Marx is the best teacher at Columbia University."
--Patty Marx

One of the above quotations is false. Find out which one in this humor-writing workshop, where you will read, listen to, and watch comedic samples from well-known and lesser-known humorists. How could you not have fun in a class where we watch and critique the sketches of Monty Python, Nichols and May, Mr. Show, Mitchell & Webb, Key and Peele, French and Saunders, Derrick Comedy, Beyond the Fringe, Dave Chappelle, Bob and Ray, Mel Brooks, Amy Schumer, and SNL, to name just a few?

The crux of our time, though, will be devoted to writing. Students will be expected to complete weekly writing assignments; additionally, there will be in-class assignments geared to strategies for crafting surprise (the kind that results in a laugh as opposed to, say, a heart attack or divorce). Toward this end, we will study the use of irony, irreverence, hyperbole, misdirection, subtext, wordplay, formulas such as the rule of three and paraprosookians (look it up), and repetition, and repetition.

Instructor

Patty Marx

WRIT UN 3131 Creating New Worlds in Writing and in VR

Creating New Worlds in Writing and in VR is a generative, exploratory fiction seminar where we will read, analyze, and experiment with the process of building new worlds. We will ask, What are the narrative possibilities that unfold within these environments? What are the conventions of sci-fi and fantasy and how can they be used to critique and scrutinize our lives on earth, particularly, experiences of violence, environmental degradation, and racial, sexual, and gender-based oppression? We will use VR technology to help us model our own invented spaces. We will examine how to incorporate traditional literary elements, such as character and dialogue, into these dynamic environments.

Instructor

Joss Lake

WRIT UN 3225 Life Stories

In this seminar, we will target nonfiction that tells stories about lives: profiles, memoirs, and biographies. We will examine how the practice of this kind of nonfiction, and ideas about it, have evolved over the past 150 years. Along the way, we will ask questions about these nonfiction forms: How do reporters, memoirists, biographers, and critics make sense of their subjects? How do they create work as rich as the best novels and short stories? Can criticism explicate the inner life of a human subject? What roles do voice, point-of-view, character, dialogue, and plot—the traditional elements of fiction—play? Along the way, we'll engage in issues of identity and race, memory and self, real persons and invented characters and we'll get glimpses of such key publications as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *The New York Review of Books*. Some writers we will consider: Frederick Douglass, Louisa May Alcott, Walt Whitman, Henry Adams, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross, James Agee, John Hersey, Edmund Wilson, Gore Vidal, Gay Talese, James Baldwin, Vladimir Nabokov, Janet Malcolm, Robert Caro, Joyce Carol Oates, Toni Morrison, Joan Didion, and Henry Louis Gates Jr. The course regularly welcomes guest speakers.

Instructor

Mark Rozzo

WRIT UN 3226 Nonfiction-ish

This cross-genre craft seminar aims to uncover daring and unusual approaches to literature informed by nonfiction (and nonfiction-adjacent) practices. In this course we will closely read and analyze a diverse set of works, including Svetlana Alexievich's oral history of women and war, Lydia Davis's "found" microfictions, Theresa Hak Cha's genre-exploding "auto-ethnography," Alejandro Zambra's unabashedly literary narratives, Sigrid Nunez's memoir "of" Susan Sontag, Emmanuel Carrère's "nonfiction novel," John Keene's bold counternarratives, W. G. Sebald's saturnine essay-portraits, Saidiya Hartman's melding of history and literary imagination, Annie Ernaux's collective autobiography, Sheila Heti's alphabetized diary, Ben Mauk's oral history about Xinjiang detention camps, and Edward St. Aubyn's autobiographical novel about the British aristocracy and childhood trauma, among other texts. We will also examine Sharon Mashihi's one-woman autofiction podcasts about Iranian Jewish American family. What we learn in this course we will apply to our own work, which will consist of two creative writing responses and a creative final project. Students will also learn to keep a daily writing journal.

Instructor

James Yeh

WRIT UN 3227 True Crime

The explosion of true crime programming in the past few years—from podcasts to documentaries to online communities sleuthing cold cases—would make you think that poring over real-life atrocities is a recent phenomenon. But in fact, our obsession with death, destruction, duplicity, and antisocial behavior is as old as humanity itself.

In this class, we will trace the origins of true crime in nonfiction literature in the United States from Puritanism to the present. We will see how the genre has developed and how its preoccupations reflect the zeitgeist. We will consider how race, gender, class, and other identities shape narratives around victims and victors, guilt and innocence. We will think broadly about what, exactly, crime is, not limiting ourselves to the obvious. We will also look at corruption, fraud, systemic discrimination.

Once (and sometimes still) considered a trash genre, we will read elevated works that turn that notion on its head. We will host guest speakers from the multifaceted perspectives true crime writing touches: victims, law enforcement, journalists, and convicts themselves. Since recent true crime reporting is such an expansive field that we can only begin to scratch the surface of in this class, students will present and analyze true crime artifacts to the class.

The centerpiece of the semester will be students reporting and writing on a real crime themselves. It is all too easy to critique the work of others at a comfortable distance when one has not entered the thorny fray oneself. Students will craft their own true crime writing project, interrogate their own motivations and interest, and present their findings to the class.

The subject matter of this class is disturbing in nature, and we will be looking at all manner of crimes from violent to white collar to sexual to social. Consider this a blanket trigger warning for each and every class. We will cultivate a safe space to think and feel through the crimes we examine and share ways to take care of ourselves. I am here as a resource and to help students navigate university resources as appropriate.

Instructor

Elizabeth Greenwood

WRIT UN 3315 Poetic Meter and Form

This course will investigate the uses of rhythmic order and disorder in English-language poetry, with a particular emphasis on formal elements in free verse. Through a close analysis of poems, we will examine the possibilities of qualitative meter, and students will write original creative work within (and in response to) various formal traditions. Analytical texts and poetic manifestos will accompany our reading of exemplary poems. Each week, we will study interesting examples of metrical writing, and I will ask you to write in response to those examples. Our topics will include stress meter, syllable-stress meter, double and triple meter, rising and falling rhythms, promotion, demotion, inversion, elision, and foot scansion. Our study will include a great range of pre-modern and modern writers, from Keats to W.D. Snodgrass, Shakespeare to Denise Levertov, Blake to James Dickey, Whitman to Louise Gluck etc. As writers, we will always be thinking about how the formal choices of a poem are appropriate or inappropriate for the poem's content. We will also read prose by poets describing their metrical craft.

Instructor

Joseph Fasano

WRIT UN 3320 Provocation in 20th Century Poetics

This is a class about poetry and revolt. In a century of wars, unchecked proliferation of industrial and market systems in the continued legacy of settler-colonialism and the consolidation of state powers, does language still conduct with revolutionary possibilities? In this class, we will read manifestos, philosophical treatises, political tracts, literary polemics, poems, scores, and so on, as we consider poetry's long-standing commitment to visionary practices that seek to liberate consciousness from the many and various structures of oppression. The term "poetry" is not limited to itself but becomes, in our readings, an open invitation to all adjacent experiments with and in the language arts. As such, we will look at the emergence of the international avant-gardes as well as a few student movements that populate and complicate the explorations of radical politics in the twentieth-century. In addition to our readings, students will be asked to produce creative responses for class discussion. Final projects will be provocations of their own design.

Required Texts:

Friedrich Nietzsche: *On the Genealogy of Morality*
Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto*
Aimé Césaire: *Notebook of A Return to the Native Land*
Hilda Hilst: *The Obscene Madame D*
Marguerite Duras: *Hiroshima Mon Amour*
Guy Debord: *Society of the Spectacle*

Instructor

Lynn Xu