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 CRWT 2301
 Spring 2025
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CRWT 2301 Introduction to Creative Writing

“Be clear about what happens. Be ambiguous about what it means.”
 —Dr. Boswell

This course explores how writers create and make use of ambiguity. The objective of CRWT 2301 is twofold: students will develop the practice of reading like a writer and students will give voice to their own writing. Students will experiment with ambiguity in original creative nonfiction, fiction, and poetry they will share with the class. The class will read these submissions and offer constructive commentary designed to provide feedback for writers to implement in revision.

Students are required to complete course readings, creative exercises, and assigned genre writings; compose workshop feedback; and undertake a revision and metacognition project at the end of the semester. Course grading will be based on timely assignment completion, adherence to instructions, demonstration of craft, and consistent participation in workshop and class discussion. There is no final exam in the course. There is no textbook.

Course Objectives

- Develop analytical and critical thinking skills through close reading.
- Become familiar with the craft techniques of nonfiction, short fiction, and poetry.
- Discover, develop, refine the writer’s voice.
- Create a portfolio of original creative work and engage in the process of revision.
- Cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of prose and poetry.

Recommended Reading

The Making of a Story: A Norton Guide to Creative Writing, Alice LaPlante, ISBN 978-0-393-33708-2

The Poet’s Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry, Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux, ISBN 978-0393316544

A Poetry Handbook, Mary Oliver, ISBN 978-0156724005

Additional References

Perrine’s Sound and Sense (Arp and Johnson)

A Writer’s Reference (Hacker)

NTC’s Dictionary of Literary Terms (Morner and Rausch)

Grading

- Creative Nonfiction: 20%
- Short story: 20%
- Ekphrastic Poem: 20%
- Workshop Critiques: 10%
- Revision Project and Self-critique: 20%
- Participation, discussion, writing exercises: 10%

Major Assignments

All written work should be double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12 pt font, with one-inch margins. Be sure to include your name, the title, and page numbers.

Creative Nonfiction

Length: 1,500 words

- You are in charge of content and style, language and idea, art and craft; you must evince a compelling voice.
- You may sometimes want or need to cross (or blend) genres (essay, memoir, journal?). You do not have to do so.
- You will have a character or characters (who will need unique details and a sense of presence), scenes, and sometimes dialogue.
- You may have to/want to manipulate certain details. (When you saw a character, did she have on a blue sweater or a black sweatshirt? Was it Thanksgiving of 2019 or 2020 you are recalling?)
- You must set the scene well, allowing the audience to *see* it and *sense* it—to experience it.
- You must move the narrative along—don't bog it down in too many details that slow the piece, which often makes our writing cumbersome and/or dull; don't tell us *everything*—only what the piece needs. Let us imagine and enter the world you are creating through your persona.

If you are having trouble getting started, here are some suggestions from David Starkey's book *Creative Writing*:

1. Go through old (or recent) photographs.
2. Take a walk in your neighborhood or a park or around school, notebook in hand.
3. Take pictures with your phone or camera.
4. Be inspired by some essays you have read.
5. Let nature be your topic and inspiration.
6. Raid your journal or old essays for ideas.
7. Think of a house or other dwelling or a place that has been important to you.
8. Consider a topic or issue dear to your heart.
9. Expand a piece of writing you have done in the past.
10. Read again the examples of creative nonfiction from class.

FictionLength: 2,000-3,000 words

William Faulkner said the only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict. For this assignment to be successful for you, you must begin with a character and that character must be in conflict. What that conflict *is* is up to you. There must be a catalyst for that conflict to act upon that character. What is the event, motivation, epiphany, incident, etc. that drives the narrative? For example, in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants," the man and the "girl," as he calls her, are in the middle of a conflict. In "The Demon Lover," Kathleen Drover's past is catching up with her.

First, address character. Who is your main character? What is their background? What are they like? How are they living? Next, decide what the character *desires*. Along with conflict, your character must desire something. Is that desire concrete? Abstract? Both? What keeps your character from getting what they want? There will probably be other characters, and you must decide their role/purpose as well. Remember, characters are not always people. In "The Demon Lover," the house could be considered a character.

Second, after knowing about your character and what they desire and what keeps them from getting it, think about building scenes. Dialogue is fine if that is how you want to deliver your story to your audience. It is not a requirement, but it is a good tool for "showing." Also, choose a point of view and be consistent. Voice is important in any piece of writing—make sure you have one; only you can craft that. Knowing your characters well will help. Be careful of exposition: Show your audience your characters. Reveal them with what they do and say and what others do to and say about them.

Ekphrastic PoemLength: 20 lines

Content—what you want to write—is up to you and could be inspired by something you have read about in this class, an idea or conviction important to you, thoughts you have about certain cultural trends, or things you want your audience to understand better or experience better, but the form must be ekphrasis.

Workshop Critiques

These are important written components of the course, and it is your responsibility to consider your classmates' work carefully. The purpose of your comments is to provide constructive and supportive feedback. Dig deep, be specific, detailed, and thoughtful. As always, be respectful and kind. The goal is to help the author. (You'll have an opportunity for self-reflection at the end of the semester.)

- Find and respond to both of the following:
 - 1) a passage that is meaningful/important to *you*
 - 2) a passage you think is important to the *author*
- Ask the author three questions, which you do not answer
- What is not said in the piece and needs to be
- What is the center of gravity of this piece

- What word choices/language/literary devices are significant and what do they contribute to the piece (mood, tension, pacing, etc.)
- Identify metaphor or simile
- Discuss meter, rhythm, repetition, or form
- Notice imagery

Be sure to include the title of the piece and the author's name, your name, and the date. Bring paper copies of your critiques to class to share with the writer, along with paper copies of the pieces being workshopped.

If you 1) fail to post your work in Teams on the day it is due OR 2) skip class when you are scheduled to present, you will automatically lose ten (10) points from your CNF, Short Story, or Poem grade. To repeat, you lose a letter grade on each major assignment by failing to share your work or through nonattendance.

Not posting your work *on time* means the class can't be expected to read and critique your late work. Even if you submit your work to me in eLearning on time, your grade will be affected if you fail to also post in Teams or fail to show up in workshop. **Due to scheduling constraints, missed workshops can't be made up.**

Confidentiality, trust, and mutual respect are necessary for a successful workshop experience. You should write honestly and freely. However, if you feel your work contains elements that your classmates might find disturbing please include a brief explanation (1-3 sentences). Likewise, if you read material you find troubling, please know you are supported. All work should be free of typos and grammatically correct (unless incorrect grammar is an intentional element in the work, in which case you'll need to provide an explanation of your reasoning). Please be sensitive to the views and experiences of your classmates. To be creative we must cultivate trust; it is essential. Privacy is a serious matter, and I trust you to behave accordingly, with utmost respect for your colleagues' work and private information they share.

Revision Project

One workshopped **creative nonfiction piece or short story** and a 1,000-word reflection on your revision process.

Attendance

Three (3) unexcused absences are permitted in this class. These three absences are yours to use with no questions asked. I encourage you to save your three unexcused absences for sick days or a flat tire—and if you are using one of your free absences you don't need to email me to explain why. Don't skip class if your work is scheduled to be workshopped on the day. Missing more than three classes is an automatic F in the course. If you are ten minutes late to class, you will be marked late. If you do not arrive within the first fifteen minutes of class, you are absent. Leaving early will be considered an absence.

Technology

If you use technology for any purpose other than CRWT 2301 you will be marked absent. Repeated instances of digital distraction will result in a subtraction of **five (5) points** from your course grade. At the beginning of class, put away your phone or tablet and close your laptop. No phones should be visible during class time. Please don't wear headphones.

Resources

A spiral notebook or journal for in-class writing and homework exercises.

Important Course Policies

We have no textbook in this course. The course readings I've provided should be treated like a textbook, and you should always have your assigned reading with you when you attend class. Sitting through class without the texts means you aren't participating. When failure to prepare becomes a pattern, it becomes a problem.

Bring hard copies of the assigned essays, stories, poems. If you do not have hard copies of the course readings, I will deduct **one (1) point** from your final course grade, per class. You should also bring copies of the work being workshopped on the day and your critiques.

Late work is not accepted. If you submit an assignment late, you automatically receive a zero (0). Why? CRWT 2301 is a workshop-based course and having sufficient time to read and reflect is essential. Your classmates need time to read your work, so please respect *their* time and submit *your* work on time. Remember that their grade depends on you turning in your work on time, and vice versa. You are expected to arrive in class having completed the assigned reading and writing so that you can contribute to the class conversation.

All assignments are due on the date listed on the assignment schedule or announced in class or in eLearning. If you have been granted an excused absence by providing documentation from a doctor, counselor, or medical professional, no worries, you're allowed to make-up missed assignments by a date to be determined.

Grading

A+ 97-100, A 93-96, A- 90-92

B+ 87-89, B 83-86, B- 80-82

C+ 70-79, C 73-76, C- 70-72

D+ 67-69, D 63-66, D- 60-62

F 59 and under

Plagiarism, Academic Integrity, and AI Use

Students are expected to maintain a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Plagiarism is a very serious breach of the University's academic code. Students suspected of plagiarism, or any other act of scholastic dishonesty, are subject to disciplinary proceedings.

Use of AI, Grammarly, Copilot, Google Translate, etc., are banned in this course—this includes using AI to brainstorm, generate ideas, condense texts, or write. All work submitted must be your own original work, unassisted.

You can find detailed information in the Student Code of Conduct or by visiting <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

Class Recordings

Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Accessibility

If accommodation would be advantageous to you, please visit the AccessAbility Resource Center website <https://accessability.utdallas.edu> at the beginning of the semester and request accommodation in CRWT 2301. Our classroom is an accepting, safe space for learning. Contact ARC with any questions or concerns and feel encouraged to reach out with me to discuss any hindrance you might encounter to your success.

Communication

I answer emails Monday-Friday, 8:30AM-6:00PM. Please allow me 24 hours to respond. I don't check email over the weekend or after 6:00PM. If the answer to your email is clearly stated in the syllabus, I'll respond asking you to check your syllabus.

Assignment Schedule

Note: The descriptions and due dates in this syllabus are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. You may also be responsible for completing assignments not listed—such as in-class writing or homework exercises. Readings and out-of-class writing exercises should be completed prior to class. Always bring your writing journal to class.

Week 1

Tuesday:

Welcome to CRWT. Please sign and return your syllabus contract in class.

Reading:

“Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid (eLearning)

“Meander,” Mary Paumier Jones (eLearning)

Writing:

In your CRWT 2301 journal write a letter that you think your parent (or grandparent) would write. This letter should contain a set of rules by which to grow up and go out in the world, rules to navigate life, and rules to live by. Ideally your letter will reveal the hierarchy of values held by the letter writer. What is important to them? What do they want you to know? (Bring your journal to class.)

Thursday:

Reading:

“The Death of the Moth,” Virginia Woolf (eLearning)

“Transfiguration,” Annie Dillard (eLearning)

“What is Ambiguous Writing,” handout (eLearning)

“Ambiguity Versus Clarity,” handout (eLearning)

Writing:

In your journal, begin brainstorming about your CNF piece by selecting one or more ideas from Starkey's list (see page two of this syllabus). Be prepared to discuss your selection(s).

Week 2

Tuesday:

Reading:

Seven Types of Ambiguity pages 1-7, William Empson (eLearning)

“Me Talk Pretty One Day,” David Sedaris (eLearning)

“Artist Memoir,” Pablo Neruda

Writing: Identify three questions you have while reading. Record these in your journal and include quotations, when relevant.

Thursday:

Sign up for workshop in Teams.

Reading:

Alice LaPlante handout (eLearning>Handouts)

“A Sea Worry,” Maxine Hong Kingston (eLearning)

“The Marginal World,” Rachel Carson (eLearning)

“Eat, Pray, Love” excerpt, Elizabeth Gilbert (eLearning)

Writing:**CNF due midnight, Saturday, February 1**

Before you begin to write, I advise you refer to:

- Basic Elements of Craft (eLearning>Handouts)
- Literary Terms (eLearning>Handouts)

Week 3Tuesday:

Workshop A

Read Group A's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group A due by the beginning of class today

Thursday:

Workshop B

Read Group B's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group B due by the beginning of class today

Week 4Tuesday:

Workshop C

Read Group C's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group C due by the beginning of class today

Thursday:

Workshop D

Read Group D's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group D due by the beginning of class today

Week 5Tuesday:***Reading:***

"The Demon Lover," Elizabeth Bowen (eLearning)

The Making of a Story, "Defining the Short Story," pages 152-166 (eLearning > Course Readings)

Writing:

Complete Exercise 1, page 165, *The Making of a Story*

Thursday:***Reading:***

"The Daemon Lover," Shirley Jackson (eLearning)

The Making of a Story, "Dialogue," pages 341-354 (eLearning)

Writing:

Identify three questions you have while reading. Record these in your journal and include quotations, when relevant.

Week 6Tuesday:**Reading:**

“Hills Like White Elephants,” Ernest Hemingway (eLearning)

The Making of a Story, “Show and Tell,” pages 204-222 (eLearning)**Writing:**

In your journal write in a different place, one that is not school, not home. Starbucks; a shopping center; a park, etc. What visual elements do you notice? What do you overhear that catches your attention or imagination? An overheard conversation? A one-sided phone conversation? Music? Birdsong?

Thursday:**Reading:**

“Sonny’s Blues,” James Baldwin (eLearning)

The Making of a Story, “POV,” pages 258-280 (eLearning)**Writing:**

Set a timer fifteen minutes. In your journal write about leaving. (Where? When? I leave it up to you.)

Week 7Tuesday:**Reading:**

“Axolotl,” Julio Cortázar (eLearning)

The Making of a Story, “Characters” pages 418-434 (eLearning)**Writing:**

Write a flash fiction piece (a short short story) in which you *connect* and *layer* **one set** of the following objects:

- A splinter and Saturn.
 - A paper crane and beach glass.
 - A checkerboard and a shoelace.
 - Wax and a saltshaker.
- **Due 3/6 by 11:30 AM**
 - 500-1,200 words
 - MLA style
 - Grading: 20 points
 - Turn in this assignment in eLearning > Assignments

Thursday:**Reading:**

“The Book of Sand,” Jorge Louis Borges (eLearning)

The Making of a Story, “Plot” pages 375-385 (eLearning)**Writing:****Short Story due midnight, Saturday, March 8**

Week 8

Tuesday:

Workshop A

Read Group A's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group A due by the beginning of class today

Thursday:

Workshop B

Read Group B's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group B due by the beginning of class today

Week 9: *Spring Break and Midterm Point*

Week 10

Tuesday:

Workshop C

Read Group C's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group C due by the beginning of class today

Thursday:

Workshop D

Read Group D's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group D due by the beginning of class today

Week 11

Tuesday: Introduction to Poetry

Reading:

Sound and Sense, Chapter 1 (you do not have to complete the exercises) (eLearning>Handouts)

"I, Human," essay by Margaret Renkl (eLearning>Handouts)

Poetry Terminology (eLearning>Handouts)

Writing:

How do you feel about writing? I want you to feel confident about writing, to enjoy the process, and to learn new things about writing. With that in mind, I'd like you to share a *mentor text*. Pick a favorite book from any genre, sky's the limit. In your journal, make notes about this text. (You'll need these notes for a later assignment.)

⇒ What do you love about this book? (Be as specific as possible.)

⇒ Does it evoke memories? Does it seem like it's speaking only to you?

Thursday: Erasure Poetry

Reading:

"A Little White Shadow," Mary Ruefle (eLearning)

Erasure Poetry handout (eLearning)

Figurative Language (eLearning>Handouts>Power Point)

Week 12Tuesday: Ekphrastic Poetry**Reading:**

Keats, HD, Auden (all in one PDF in eLearning)

Writing:

Choose one piece of visual artwork for your ekphrastic poem (due 4/12). Here's a good place to start: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection>

Thursday**Reading:**

"The Starry Night," Anne Sexton, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42565/the-starry-night>

"On Seeing Larry Rivers' 'Washington Crossing the Delaware' at the Museum of Modern Art," Frank O'Hara,

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?volume=87&issue=6&page=27>

"The Disquieting Muses," Sylvia Plath, <https://allpoetry.com/The-Disquieting-Muses>

Writing:

Spend time observing your chosen artwork. In your journal, describe the visual elements. Capture mood, colors, shapes, and any specific details that stand out to you. Use vivid and evocative language to convey the essence of the art. As you write, consider the story behind the image, the characters involved, or the broader concepts the artwork might represent.

Week 13Tuesday: Nature Poetry**Reading:**

Nature Poems (8 in total eLearning)

Writing:

Take a walk in nature and observe and record what your senses encounter. Take good notes! In your journal, craft a poem (10-20 lines) that contains seven types of imagery (visual, sound, smell, taste, touch, internal (hunger, thirst), kinesthetic (movement in the body)).

Thursday: Metaphor & Simile**Reading:**

Reading as a Poet in Workshop handout (eLearning)

"Elliptical," Harryette Mullin (eLearning)

"The Human Figure in a Dress," Mary Jo Bang (eLearning)

"Coherence in Consequence," Claudine Rankine (eLearning)

Ekphrastic poem due midnight, Saturday, April 12**Week 14**Tuesday:

Workshop A

Read Group A's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group A due by the beginning of class today

Thursday:

Workshop B

Read Group B's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group B due by the beginning of class today

Week 15

Tuesday:

Workshop C

Read Group ACs workshop submissions

Critiques for Group C due by the beginning of class today

Thursday:

Workshop D

Read Group D's workshop submissions

Critiques for Group D due by the beginning of class today

Week 16

Tuesday:

Reading:

The Making of a Story, "Revising," pages 542-553 (eLearning)

Thursday:

Course wrap-up

Writing:

Revision Project (CNF or Short Story plus essay) due by midnight, Monday, May 12