

# Advanced Poetry Writing

Professor Merrill Cole  
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English 485, Section 001  
Spring Semester 2010

Office: Simpkins 115  
Hours: TTh, 1:00-2:00; W, 3:00-5:00

T, 3:30-4:45 p.m.  
Simpkins 27

## Texts

Caplan, David. *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form*.

Hartman, Charles. *Free Verse: An Essay on Prosody*.  
*Poems will be posted for class on WesternOnline.*

## Course Objectives

This course offers poets the opportunity to refine and develop their compositional finesse and to explore a variety of poetic techniques, genres, and strategies. Becoming a better poet means more than mastering technique, though we will spend a good deal of time practicing poetic form, both traditional and experimental: it also means developing critical awareness of ourselves and of the world around us. This seminar will explore poetic composition as the opportunity to live up to the potential of who we are and to explore who we might become.

The best writers are the best readers, for contrary to popular belief, writers must carefully study other writers in order to excel at their art. They must understand technique. We will carefully study the productions of contemporary poets, always with an eye to learning about technique. The poems will serve to increase the understanding of literary language, to widen the vocabulary, to cultivate the appreciation of diverse styles, and to inspire our own creations.

This course is also a writing workshop, where participants are expected regularly to submit writing in progress. Writers need practice—and then more practice. We will also have routine classroom and homework exercises.

There will be focused writing assignments; but at other times, students will be able to write as they please. Discipline alone is the death of creativity. Freedom without discipline leads nowhere interesting. In attempting to balance the two, the course is designed to produce better poets.

## Requirements

This is a portfolio course, meaning that each student will present a final portfolio of twenty pages, or a little more, at the end of the course. The portfolio may consist of any number of poems, including prose poems. At midterm, there will be a mini-portfolio assignment consisting of five pages of poetry. The mini-portfolio is only graded as to whether the student submits it.

Students will be responsible for a four-to-five page analysis of one poem's technique. The poetry readings for this course will be student-driven, meaning that usually, students will be responsible for determining what poems we read during a given week. When it is your turn, you will need to send me the poems by email as attachment; whether you type or scan is up to you.

Everyone *must* actively participate. Lack of participation will damage your grade. This means doing the homework, completing the readings, performing class activities, and joining in class discussion, particularly when we review someone else's writing. It also means submitting writing to the class *on a regular basis*.

You will need to photocopy your own writing for all of us. Always bring enough copies of your typed poems *and your homework* to class, unless I direct you otherwise. Please see <<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/student/>> for student rights and student responsibilities.

## Grading

Participation:		30%
Homework:	15%	
Class Participation:	15%	
Technique Analysis:		10%
Portfolio:		60%

Missing classes, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade.

## Visiting My Office

Please take the opportunity to meet with me during my office hours, or by appointment, to talk about the readings, or your writing. *I very much appreciate any kind of feedback about the course.*

# Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I will make academic accommodations for any student who notifies me of the need. For me to provide the proper accommodation(s), you must provide me documentation from Disability Support Services. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to my attention, as I am not legally permitted to ask. Students who require special assistance in emergency evacuations (i.e., fire, tornado, etc.) should tell me the most appropriate procedures to follow. Please contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512.

## Schedule (Assignments are due the following week.)

### Week 1: January 19 & 21

Introduction to the Course. Handout & Discussion. Workshop.  
Quatrain Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "Introduction."  
Poems online: Bob Perelman.

### Week 2: January 26 & 28

Workshop. Discussion.  
Sestina Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "The Age of the Sestina."  
Poems online: Thom Gunn.

### Week 3: February 2 & 4

Workshop. Discussion.  
Ghazal Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "In that Thicket of Bitter Roots."  
Poems online: student selection.

### Week 4: February 9 & 11

Workshop. Discussion.  
Sonnet Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "When A Form Comes Out of the Closet."  
Poems online: student selection.

### Week 5: February 16 & 18

Workshop. Discussion.  
Heroic Couplet Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "Why Not the Heroic Couplet?"  
Poems online: student selection.

### Week 6: February 23 & 25

Workshop. Discussion.  
Ballad Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "On the Contemporary Ballad."  
Poems online: student selection.

### Week 7: March 2 & 4

Workshop. Discussion.  
Imitation Assignment; *Questions of Possibility*, "Prosody after the Prosody Wars."  
Poems online: student selection.

Week 8: March 9 & 11

Workshop. Discussion.

Concrete Poem Assignment; *Free Verse*, "The Prehistory of Free Verse" & "Some Definitions."

Poems online: student selection.

*Mini-Portfolio due March 11.***Spring Break**Week 9: March 23 & 25

Workshop. Discussion.

*Free Verse*, "Accentualism, Isochrony, and the Musical Fallacy."

Poems online: student selection.

Week 10: March 30 (No Class April 1)

Workshop. Discussion.

Prose Poem Assignment. *Free Verse*, "Free Verse and Prose."

Poems online: student selection.

Week 11: April 6 & 8

Workshop. Discussion.

Blues Assignment; *Free Verse*, "Counterpoint."

Poems online: student selection.

Week 12: April 13 & 15

Workshop. Discussion.

Imitation Assignment; *Free Verse*, "The Discovery of Form" & "The Discovery of Meter."

Poems online: student selection.

Week 13: April 20 & 22

Workshop. Discussion.

*Free Verse*, "Free Verse and Poetry."

Poems online: student selection.

*Technique analysis due April 20.*Week 14: April 27 & 29

Workshop. Discussion.

*Free Verse*, "Some Contemporaries."

Poems online: student selection.

Week 15: May 4 & 6

Intensive workshop.

Final Exam Week*Portfolios due in my office on Monday, May 10 by 5:00 p.m.*