

Intermediate Poetry Writing

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English 385, Section 001
Fall Semester 2011

Office: Simpkins 109
Hours: TTh, 3:30-4:30; W, 2:00-4:00

TTh, 2:00-3:15 p.m.
Simpkins 214

Texts

Behn, Robin and Chase Twichell, eds. *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach*. Harper. ISBN: 9780062730244

Hollander, John. *Rhyme's Reason: A Guide to English Verse*. Third Edition. ISBN: 0300088329

Poems will be posted for class discussion on my website.

Course Objectives

This course offers poets the opportunity to refine and develop their skills 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. Becoming a better poet 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. We will carefully study the productions of a wide variety of published 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. As a general rule, two poems should not appear on the same page of the portfolio.

As the midterm assignment, each student will be responsible for a three-page analysis of the importance of a particular published poet to her or his own works. These reflective, personal essays will be read aloud in class, as well as turned in for a grade.

I have deliberately not asked you to purchase a poetry anthology, for I cannot tell in advance which poems will be most useful for you. I give myself greater flexibility and save you money by posting readings on my website, which *I expect you always to print and to bring to class*. I welcome student suggestions, but reserve the right to make the ultimate decision on what we read as a class.

Everyone *must* actively participate. Lack of participation will damage and perhaps destroy 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:		40%
Homework:	20%	
Class Participation:	20%	
Reflective Essay:		10%
Portfolio:		50%

Missing classes, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade. A student with more than two unexcused absences will automatically fail the course. I am lenient, though: if you give me a solid reason to miss a session, I will probably excuse you.

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 (or Lack Thereof)

I have decided to treat this course as an improvisation, meaning that we sacrifice predictability for a more dynamic and active learning situation. I want to tailor the poetry readings, the in-class exercises, and the homework assignments according to what appears most helpful for you at any given time. This is not a class in which you can get everything done in advance, but it is one that gives you multiple opportunities to help shape what happens.

Almost every session, though, will involve workshop, meaning that we will read and discuss individual students' poems as a group. This means that you should, as often as possible, have a poem ready, in multiple copies, to distribute to me and to the other students in the classroom.

A few due dates are set in stone:

Midterm Reflective Essay:	October 11.
Final Portfolio:	December 8.