

WRI 208 Creative Writing: Exploring Forms
Spring 2012
Sec. 010 MW 3-4:20 LY 114
Sec. 020 MW 4:30-5:50 LY 206

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CREATIVE WRITING: EXPLORING FORMS

“The slightest mark on the page could generate, in association and analysis, an eternity of writing. Of writing it which is reading it.”
--Rachel Blau DuPlessis

Welcome to Dr. Thomas’s Creative Writing class. This is an introductory course in creative writing practice, craft, and technique. You will learn how to tap into the creative process and develop the reading, writing, revision, and editing skills central to this process. This work will involve exercises to develop your powers of observation, memory, and imagination, and techniques to achieve the best language and form. Our practice will explore a range of literary genres, including memoir, poetry, fiction, and drama. Creative writing is more than “expressing yourself.” It is a **constant series of decisions about language and form**. Successful writers do not wait for inspiration; thus, practice and self-discipline are essential for success in this course.

You are part of a community of writers. We will talk together about the readings, write together to begin some of the assignments, and come together after writing to discuss the work. Reading will be done from a writer’s perspective. We will describe and analyze language and style, rather than matters of theme and context typically addressed in literature classes. What makes a “style” and how is “form” crafted? An emphasis on revision—on **re-seeing** your drafts—will drive the course, as this is crucial to success, as any professional writer will tell you. If you are open to re-seeing your work and to playing with language and form, you will develop a fresh and distinctive style that is your own, rather than recycling predictable words and outworn ideas that readers have heard before.

By the end of this course, you will have finished pieces in several genres. You will **submit at least one piece to KU’s literary magazine Shoofly**. The skills taught in this course are relevant and useful in almost any Professional Writing or English Studies field. The knowledge and experience you gain will prepare you for advanced study in the genre courses and will support your pursuit of imaginative possibilities in your writing life. As poet William Carlos Williams said, “When we name it, life exists.”

BOOKS & TOOLS

Required: *Metro: Journeys in Writing Creatively*, Hans Ostrom, Wendy Bishop and Katherine Haake

- Writing notebook dedicated to this course; favorite pens and pencils.
- Paper (recycled is fine except in Final Portfolio) for printouts shared in class workshops and handed in when projects are due.
- Activated KU e-mail and *Desire2Learn* accounts

Recommended: Usage handbooks of your choice, preferably *The Writer’s Harbrace Handbook*, *Merriam-Webster’s Pocket Dictionary*, *The Elements of Style*

REQUIREMENTS

- Complete five writing projects in memoir, poetry, fiction and drama
- Read and write all assignments before class
- Write a response to each story, poem, or play listed on syllabus
- Present one oral report on an assigned reading of your choice
- Do the *Metro* homework writing exercises on syllabus
- Do reviews, oral and written, of peers' work
- Have at least one conference with Dr. Thomas during office hours, class, or at another mutually convenient time.
- Prepare a Final Portfolio as assigned
- Submit 1-3 pieces to *Shoofly* literary magazine

POLICIES

- Attendance: I expect full attendance for each class. Participation is essential in a writing class and in all workshops. In-class work cannot be made up. Be punctual. On the third **unexcused absence, your participation grade will drop one full letter grade. Subsequent unexcused absences will result in a further-reduced participation grade.**
- Deadlines: Do the best job you can in the time you have allowed yourself, but **meet all deadlines**. Missed in-class writing, workshops and peer reviews cannot be made up for credit. If you must miss class because of unforeseen circumstances (serious illness, accident, death in family, etc.), contact me immediately. If you are going to miss a deadline because of a university-approved absence (field trip for another class, athletic competition, etc.) make arrangements with me one week prior to the absence. **Unexcused late work will not be accepted. That's one reason why we have the Dropbox.**
- Plagiarism, or the unattributed use of someone else's work, will not be tolerated and will result in an F for the poem and possibly for the course.
- Phones & Gadgets: Turn off or silence and put away cell phones, iPods and other gadgets. Take off headsets and ear buds. No texting.
- Mutual respect builds trust and constructive energy for an effective workshop. If you do not take your own and others' work seriously or deal with it respectfully, you cannot expect serious and respectful treatment from others.
- Disability/Special Needs: If you have already disclosed a disability to the Disability Services Office (215 Stratton Administration Building; 610.683.4108) and are seeking accommodations, please feel free to speak with me privately so that I may assist you. If you have an injury sustained during military service, including PTSD or TBI, you are also eligible for accommodations under the ADA and should contact the Disability Services Office.

FORMATS & PROCEDURES

- Reading responses and *Metro* homework writing exercises may be **legibly handwritten** in your journal or typed, printed out, and placed in notebook.

- Other assignments must be typed, double-spaced in standard 12-point font with top left standard heading: your name, course title, my name, assignment title, date. Drop down a few spaces; center title.
- When projects are due, **post final draft to Dropbox. Also hand in hard copy in class as follows:** Put final version for my evaluation on top. Include evidence of prewriting, one rough draft, and peer review. This may mean photocopying or recopying from your journal. **Staple** all together. No clips or loose papers.
- Save a copy of all work. **Back up all work.** (email to self or back up on flash or hard drive)
- **Save the work I return with written comments** to include in Final Portfolio and for use in conference.

EVALUATION AND GRADING

Final Portfolio (5 projects at 8 points each)	35 points/percent
Weekly Work (5 projects at 5 points each before Final Portfolio revision)	30 points/percent
Journal (In-class writing, homework reading and writing exercises)	20 points/percent
Class Participation (Reading Report, Discussion and Peer Workshops)	15 points/percent

General Grading Criteria

1. Did you make your best effort or does the work appear hastily or carelessly done?
2. Active participation in and completion of all steps. Did you do the invention and drafting? Did you do your work in peer review?
3. Have you followed the assignment? Have you applied the lesson, whether it is “show, don’t tell,” “use concrete, not abstract words,” or “give your character an inner life”?
4. Adherence to editorial guidelines. Is your work prepared in a professional manner (see format guidelines)?
5. Grammatical and technical correctness. Sloppiness distracts a reader, weakens your work, and makes a writer appear unprofessional. More than two errors on final portfolio versions will result in a 0 for that piece. Writing Center visits may be required.
6. Was the work turned in on time?

Criteria for Effective Writing

1. Clear focus and purpose
2. Interest through tension, contrast, or surprise
3. Use of specific, particular detail and precise, well-chosen words: show, don’t tell.
4. Verbal economy and compression: every word counts.
5. Fresh metaphors and imagery; no clichés or deadwood
6. A clear, authentic voice
7. Well-crafted sentences and poetic lines
8. A sense of structure and form
9. Narrative conventions (character & plot building, point of view, setting, narrative drive)
10. Poetry conventions (imagery, metaphor, rhythm, sound play, line structure, stanza shape)
11. Drama conventions (dialogue, conflict, characters, motivation, setting)
12. Make the above conventions work for you in developing a style of your own.

General Guidelines

Work that meets the above criteria is considered at least satisfactory. All students begin at the “average” level and go up or down based on individual work. Expect to revise your work throughout the semester. I am always available to discuss your grade during office hours or at another convenient time.

A Writing is distinctive & demonstrably outstanding. Leads discussions & gives best effort in workshops.

B Writing above acceptable standards is effective & memorable. Participates actively in discussions & workshops. Writing may need polish but is grammatically correct.

C Satisfactory work demonstrates effort, but significant revision is needed for effective or memorable outcome. Participates when called upon and contributes to peer reviews, but may have missed class. Grammar and editing need more work.

D Work shows limited effort, understanding, and interest; falls below acceptable standard of class. Attendance is weak, but assignments are completed. Grammar and editing may be poor.

F Work is unsatisfactory. Student fails to prepare for class and does not complete assignments.

Final Grading: 93-100%	A
90-92%	A-
87-89%	B+
83-86%	B
80-82%	B-
77-79%	C+
70-76%	C
60-69%	D
0-59%	F

JOURNAL/NOTEBOOK

Keep a journal or notebook at least 6 x 9 inches exclusively for this class. A ring binder works well. The journal will hold homework reading responses and *Metro* writing exercises, in-class notes & writing, and “field notes” (see below). **Handwritten work is acceptable only if writing is legible.** Otherwise, type and print out work. Journal will be evaluated during the semester. Any private writing may be clipped, stapled, or removed when journals are checked. To expedite my evaluation of your journal, please organize as follows:

Make four tabbed sections:

- 1) In-class writing and notes
- 2) Homework reading responses & new words w/ definitions
- 3) Homework writing exercises
- 4) Field notes: observations, quotes, memories, images, dreams, writing ideas.

OR

Organize chronologically: Include all of the above week by week. **Before journal check, insert tabs/sticky note for each reading response & Metro writing exercise.**

HOMEWORK: Reading Responses

Answer Discussion Questions, if assigned. If there are no assigned questions, write a **substantive paragraph** of critical response to the reading and list any questions you have. As an alternative, write a creative response.

- Critical response: Discuss a technique of language, structure, voice, tone, detail, imagery, form, characterization, setting, etc., in relation to your response. Follow D2L handouts, Writers Reading Fiction for prose or Unpacking a Poem. Examples:

“I liked how the poem’s imagery of snow and pines created a cold starkness suggesting the father’s death.”

“I liked this story because the character of the boy reminded me of my experience...”

“This poem confused me because I didn’t get how the watermelon metaphor related to the green apples.”

“I didn’t like this story because the narrative structure was weakened by omission of the breakup scene.”

- Creative response: Write your own piece inspired by the reading. Include a working note about the part, element or technique that prompted your piece.
- **Oral Reading Report:** Sign up on the master schedule for an author/title and presentation day.

1) Read the piece you have chosen two or three times. Make notes on your reaction and questions.

2) Research author’s style and background. **Do not focus primarily on biography** in your report. Refer to the author’s biography only as it is relevant to our understanding of the particular work.

3) Unpack an element of style or structure in the work. Choose element from “Writers Reading Fiction” or “Unpacking a Poem” depending on whether the piece is prose or poetry. **Do not focus on a summary.**

4) End your oral report in class with a question for the class to consider.

HOMEWORK: Writing Exercises

On most days, a writing exercise in *Metro* is assigned. Do the exercise in your journal by handwriting legibly or typing and attaching to your journal. The exercises have been chosen to prime the pump for the main writing assignments, to mine your experience and imagination, and to do regular writing practice. Always ask in class or email me if you have questions about these assignments. They will not always be reviewed in class, but will be read when I evaluate your journal.

WRITING WORKSHOPS

Except for the unit on drama, peer reviews will be done in small groups. You will read your work aloud and listen to other students’ responses. They will ask questions about the work, which you should not necessarily answer but should think about. You will also receive some written feedback. **You will be**

asked to bring enough copies of your work for the group. With time and practice, you will grow comfortable with the workshop as a vital part of your creative process that lets you see your work from a reader's perspective.

Guidelines for Peer Review

All work is considered “in-process” and unfinished until published. Pay critical attention to the piece, not to the person who wrote it. Do not simply say a piece is “good” or “bad.” Your job is neither to heap praise nor to rewrite a piece. **Your job is to engage deeply as a reader, to make specific comments about what is well achieved and to raise questions about what may not be clear or fully achieved.** I will provide a list of questions for each assignment. Begin by asking: What works in this piece, and why? What needs more work, and why?

LITERARY EVENTS:

- Thursday *Shoofly* Readings featuring student writers and open mic: 1/26, 3/8, and *Shoofly* 2012 book launch 4/19 held in SUB 250, 7-9 p.m. (attend or participate for extra credit)
- Film Screening of *LEBANON, PA* and discussion with writer/director Ben Hickernell, 6 p.m. Wed., 2/22, SUB Alumni Auditorium
- Master Class with writer Jason Schossler, author of *Mud Cakes* (Bona Fide Press, 2011): Wed., 2/29
- Reading by Jason Schossler: 7:30 p.m. Wed., 2/29, SUB Alumni Auditorium. Book signing to follow.

COURSE CALENDAR SPRING 2012

Dates reflect when reading or work is due; Readings and journal writing exercises in *Metro* (designated below as "M." **Print assignments, handouts, and additional readings from D2L.** Calendar subject to change.

Week 1

- 1/23 Introductions to course and each other. Review syllabus and D2L. Reading report signup.
- 1/25 Bring **Project 1 Memory Vignette** assignment and Handout: **Writers Reading Fiction** (print from D2L).
- Thurs., 1/26: Attend/participate, *Shoofly* reading & open mic, SUB 250, 7-9 p.m. Refreshments served.

Week 2

- 1/30 Read: Baker, "My Children Explain the Big Issues," M 334-35
Journal writing exercise: #6 Lost Childhood Places, M 58-60; Handout: **Show vs. Tell**
- 2/1 Draft due: **Memory Vignette** (double-space, include standard heading, & title piece.)
Read/complete worksheet: Prose Masters Style Study: Hemingway & Woolf
In-class exercise: Sound and smell writing

Week 3

- 2/6 Bring 4 copies of revised draft, **Memory Vignette**, for peer review
Journal writing exercise: # 2 Narrative Anxiety Cure-All, M 48-51
Read (no writing required) #17, Responding, Evaluating, Grading Alternate Style, M 39-43.
- 2/8 Bring final draft, **Memory Vignette**, for editing and poem carving.
Read/complete worksheet: Prose Masters Style Study: Stein & Faulkner

Week 4

- 2/13 **Memory Vignette due**: follow Format & Procedures above, p. 2-3. Bring **Project 2 Tender Buttons Poem**. Handout: **Unpacking a Poem**
Read: Schossler, "Potholes"
Journal writing exercise: #29 Listing & Memory, M 111-13 (Make 2 lists & poem prompted by 1 listed item)
- 2/15 Develop Tender Buttons Poem (blind sense, memory chain).
Handout: **Imagery and Metaphor**
Read: Plath, "Metaphors," M 293
Journal writing exercise: #20 Working with Metaphor, M 97-98

Week 5

- 2/20 Bring 4 copies of revised draft, **Tender Buttons Poem**, for peer review.
Read: Turner, "Here, Bullet." Handout: **Line Breaks** exercise
Journal writing exercise: #16 Poetry Phobia Cure-All, M 273-5 (Do 1 prompt; play w/ sentence & line in your poem)

- 2/22 ***Tender Buttons Poem due.*** Bring ***Project 3 Word Wide Web Poem.***
Computer writing exercises: #13 “Blowing Up” Your Poems: Large-Font Revision, M 189 (include printout in journal).
➤ Attend Film Screening of *LEBANON*, *PA* and discussion with writer/director Ben Hickernell, SUB Alumni Auditorium, 6 p.m.

Week 6

- 2/27 Word Wide Web Poem invention (word chain)
Read: Nasrin, “Character,” M 18 (exercise below counts as written response to reading)
Journal writing exercise: Begin #9 Eight Steps for Inhabiting and Transforming a Poem, M 18-19 (do any five steps)
- 2/29 Master class with Jason Schossler, author of *Mudcakes*. Bring question about his poem “Potholes” or his writing life. See <http://jasonschossler.com/>
➤ Attend Jason Schossler’s Reading & Book Signing, 7:30 SUB Alumni Auditorium. Refreshments served.

Week 7

- 3/5 Bring 4 copies of revised draft, ***Word Wide Poem***, for peer review.
Read/write journal responses: Handal, “Even” and Tretheway, “Flounder”
Journal writing exercise: #14 The Perfect Grammar of Form: Finding Your Own Ideal Form, M 82-85. Try two different forms for your poem.
- 3/7 ***Word Wide Web Poem due.*** Bring ***Project 4 Narrative Scene.*** Additional reading:
Narrative Structure: Forms
Read/write journal response: Kincaid, “Girl”
Journal writing exercise: #27, Drama=Conflict=Power, M 106 (map story ideas *after* reading Project 4 assignment)
➤ Thurs., 3/8: Attend/participate, *Shoofly* reading and open mic, SUB 250, 7-9 p.m. Refreshments served.

Week 8

3/12 & 14 Spring Break

Week 9

Dr. Thomas reading poems in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, this week.
Work independently on Project 4 as follows:

- 3/19 Draft ***Character Sketch*** after doing Character Witness exercise below.
Study handout: ***Inner Lives*** and enhance your sketch with this exercise.
Read/write journal response: Milenski, “Lost Keys”
Journal writing exercise: #6 Character Witness: 20 Questions, M 129-33
- 3/21 Draft ***Narrative Scene.*** Study handout: ***Fiction Techniques & Devices.*** Include a flashback, interior monologue, or stream of consciousness in your story.
Read/write journal response: Ch’iung-ch’iung, “A Lover’s Ear”
Journal writing exercise: Time, M 118-129: Read all; write only #4 Telling Time: Duration, M 124-128.

Week 10

- 3/26 Drafts due: **Character Sketch & Narrative Scene**. Bring one copy of each for discussion in class. Bring your questions about assignments. Oral report on “Lost Keys.”
- 3/28 **Character Sketch & Narrative Scene peer review**: Bring four copies of revised drafts for peer review and editing. Oral report on “A Lover’s Ear.”
Journal writing exercise: #9, Turning the Lens: Framing Narrative Perspective, M 137-9
Write scene from a different point of view; choose best version for today’s peer review.

Week 11

- 4/2 **Character Sketch & Narrative Scene** due. Bring **Project 5 Dramatic Dialogue**
Read/write journal response: Carver, “Popular Mechanics” fiction and drama, Project 5 File
- 4/4 Handout: **Developing a Dramatic Scene**: Project 5 File. Sign up for peer review.
Read/write journal response: McNally, “Andre’s Mother”
Journal writing exercise: Write a dialogue about an unresolved conflict that affects you or someone you know. Use the past as a tactic, obstacle, and character builder.

Week 12

- 4/9 **Scenario & Plot Points due** for peer review. Bring 4 copies.
Read/write journal response: Ives, “Sure Thing”
Discuss Final Portfolio guidelines.
- 4/11 Drama peer reviews begin: Live reading with selected peers in roles and rest of class reviewing; your scene is due in hard copy and Dropbox on your appointed review day)

Week 13

- 4/16 Drama peer reviews continue.
- 4/18 Drama peer reviews continue.
➤ Thursday, 4/19: Attend *Shoofly* 2012 launch, SUB 250, 7-9 p.m. Refreshments served.

Week 14

- 4/23 Drama peer reviews conclude (Otherwise, in-class conferences).
- 4/25 **Journals Due**. Conferences.

Week 15

- 4/30 Conferences Revision exercises:
#11 Directed Revision & Editing: Variations on Arbitrary Revision, M 185-86
#8 Old Faithfuls: Some Enduring Approaches to Revision, M 181-182
#12 Writing Between the Lines: Revising as “Adding To” Not “Taking Away,” M187-189
- 5/1 **Final Portfolios Due** (no late portfolios accepted) / Final Reading
Pick up Portfolios in my office, LY 256, during exam period
3:00 class: Friday, May 11, 11-1 4:30 class: Friday, May 11, 2-4

ORAL READING REPORTS

Read piece two or three times.

- 1) Research author's style and background. Report only on *relevant* biography.
- 2) Unpack an element of style or structure in the story, poem, or play. Choose element from "Writers Reading Fiction" or "Unpacking a Poem."
- 3) Present your report in class. Bring a question for class discussion.

1/30

1. _____ Baker, "My Children Explain the Big Issues," M 334-5, (focus on "Feminism" and "Fate")
2. _____ Baker, "My Children Explain the Big Issues," M 334-5, (focus on "Existentialism" and "East and West")

2/1

3. _____ Ernest Hemingway, from *The Sun Also Rises*
4. _____ Virginia Woolf, from *The Waves*

2/8

5. _____ Gertrude Stein, from *Three Lives*
6. _____ William Faulkner, from "Barn Burning"

2/13

7. _____ Jason Schossler, "Potholes" (imagery)
8. _____ Jason Schossler, "Potholes" (metaphor)

2/15

9. _____ Plath, "Metaphors," M 293 (voice and form)
10. _____ Plath, "Metaphors," M 293 (metaphor)

2/20

11. _____ Turner, "Here, Bullet" (line breaks)

2/27

12. _____ Nasrin, "Character," M 18

3/5

13. _____ Tretheway, "Flounder"

14. _____ Handal, "Even"

3/7

15. _____ Kincaid, "Girl"

3/26

16. _____ Milenski, "Lost Keys" (narrative structure/use of time)

17. _____ Milenski, "Lost Keys" (character development)

3/28

18. _____ Ch'iung-ch'iung, "A Lover's Ear" (point of view)

19. _____ Ch'iung-ch'iung, "A Lover's Ear" (setting)

4/2

20. _____ Carver, "Popular Mechanics" (fiction)

21. _____ Carver, "Popular Mechanics" (drama)

4/4

22. _____ McNally, "Andre's Mother" (dramatic structure: inciting incident, conflict/crisis/resolution)

23. _____ McNally, "Andre's Mother" (characters & dialogue: tactics & obstacles)

4/9

24. _____ Ives, "Sure Thing" (dramatic structure and devices)

25. _____ Ives, "Sure Thing" (characters & dialogue: tactics & obstacles)