ENGLISH 205: Introduction to Creative Writing
Section/Semester/Meeting time and room

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This class is an introductory level creative writing class in which primarily the principles of poetry and fiction will be addressed, with some limited discussion of creative nonfiction. Students who successfully complete this course will have a working knowledge of the literary arts and the life of the literary artist and should be better prepared to go on to advanced study in the genre of their choice.

PREREQUISITE: English 102

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES: As a result of successful participation in this course, students should be able to:

- List and discuss the major craft elements of both poetry and fiction and recognize those elements within specific texts. (CO7)
- Develop strategies for reading and interpreting contemporary poetry and literary fiction. (CO7)
- Demonstrate, through the production of both poetry and prose, an ability to implement contemporary language and ideas into creative works. (CO1)
- Demonstrate, through the revision of creative works, an awareness of the complexity of the revision process. (CO1)
- Describe, evaluate and critique student-produced texts in the workshop setting. (CO7)
- Perform or publish at least one poem or a piece of short fiction. (CO7)
* Demonstrate, through the writing of journal entries or reviews, an ability to write thoughtfully about contemporary poetry and fiction. (CO7, CO1)

CORE OBJECTIVES:

English 205 satisfies the following Core Objective:

- **CO7: Artistic Composition, Interpretation, & Expression.** Students will apply techniques of critical analysis to study and interpret works of art, dance, music and theater in the context of culture, society, and individual identity. Students may also cast their interpretation in the form of creative expression.

English 205 develops the following Core Objective:

- **CO1: Effective Composition & Communication.** Students will be able to compose written, oral, visual, and other forms of discourse for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes.
TEXTS:  
To Make It Right, Hales  
More of This World or Maybe Another, Johnson  
The Poet’s Companion, Addonizio and Laux  
The Lie That Tells a Truth, Dufresne  
Additional readings/assignments may be distributed in class

ASSIGNMENTS, DEADLINES & CREDIT BREAKDOWNS:  
(A plus-minus grading system is used in this course. Please see the grading criteria outlined at the end of this syllabus.)

1. Class participation* (15% of grade)

2. Attendance/Response to Artist’s Reading** (10% of grade)  
   Due: November 27th or immediately following event

3. Fiction exercises*** (25% of grade)

4. Poetry exercises*** (25% of grade)
   all exercises are due during the class for which they were assigned as students will be reading their work aloud; full journal due November 13th

5. Final Portfolio**** (25% of grade)  
   Due: December 4th

FINAL EXAM PERIOD:  [Date and time]

Please note that deadlines are deadlines—no late work will be accepted! You may always submit work early. Response to reading and final portfolio must be typed. Please see me early in the semester if you have any questions regarding evaluation.

All other rights and regulations concerning academic conduct as they appear in the current university catalog apply to this class. Please see course contract document which accompanies this syllabus.

*This class will be conducted as workshop/discussion which requires your verbal contributions and full participation in class activities. More than 3 absences will affect your grade.

**Visiting writers are scheduled to appear on campus and in the community this semester. You are required to attend at least one of these readings (outside of class time) and write a two page response to the event.

***All assigned exercises and “practice” writing should go into your writer’s journal—please label/identify individual exercises clearly.
****Your portfolio contains “finished” work with accompanying working drafts (2-5): one short story (5-10pp) or piece of creative nonfiction (5-10pp) or 5 poems and three revised exercises. The revised exercises are to be in each portfolio, no matter the genre. Introduce the portfolio with a short essay (1-2 pages) that analyzes your growth as a writer during the semester and addresses your reasoning for ultimately working in the genre you chose to represent your best work.

PLEASE ALSO NOTE: Reading assignments, assigned writing, and weekly deadlines will be announced during class sessions, but do peruse the tentative course calendar below. Also it’s important to note that creative writing workshops function as a community of literary artists whose needs and interests contribute to the pace at which work will be assigned and concerns addressed. But in general, once we’ve established a vocabulary of literary terms and techniques by reading and studying our texts, we’ll be writing and sharing numerous exercises in the genres and discussing work by writers noted for their excellence of craft. Toward the end of the term, students will work in small groups, workshopping their final projects for portfolios, which showcase their best work and accomplishment. Students will read from their portfolios during the final class periods and during final exam period. Until that time, approximately half of our sessions will be discussion-based, half will be more workshop focused. Again, our primary objectives are to prepare for advanced study in creative writing and to introduce and examine the life of a literary artist.

Tentative Course Calendar:

Week 1: Course Intro; Community Intro (students express identity – what are our potential stories?); Question for Discussion: What is the role of the artist in society? Specifically, what does the literary artist contribute to contemporary culture? Assignment: read pp. 1-56 in The Lie That Tells a Truth by John Dufresne

Week 2: Discuss reading assignment, paying attention to the tone of the text— who is John Dufresne? How can we tell? What are his concerns about craft and literary interpretation? Assignment: complete “First Memory” and “Lost Love” exercises from this text, with a critical eye toward mining personal experience. Students read aloud from their work, offer constructive oral criticisms. Assignment: read remaining chapters in Dufresne text from the section titled The Process.

Week 3: Discuss reading assignment above, paying particular attention to the notion of literary process—specifically the need for revision. Ginsberg: First Thought, Best Thought. Dufresne: First Thought, Worst Thought. Students continue sharing their exercises by reading aloud to the full community and offering constructive critical responses to those who read. Assignment: read pp.
119-196 in Dufresne text. Complete the following exercises: “Observations” of setting, people, conversations; and “The Stranger” — both of these exercises ask for critical engagement with the world around us, require analytical and interpretive observations.

**Week 4:** Discuss reading assignment above; attention paid to critical plot development and the expression of character; Exercises assigned for reading aloud in classroom community: “Story from Photo (analysis and interpretation); “Opening Scenes” (getting started, hooking reader); “Song to Story” (borrowing of a plot from another’s work). Assignment: finish Dufresne text.

**Week 5:** Complete discussion of Dufresne text; revisit question of who he is, what his personal aesthetics are. Write a 2 page annotation of this text. Complete the following exercises to be read aloud: “My Hometown; “Home Furnishings as Character”; “POV” (2 parts). These exercises ask writer to revisit known events and people but with fresh eyes — requires analytical interpretation of known material.

**Week 6:** Read and write an annotation (2 pages) of Johnson’s collection of stories, *More of This World or Maybe Another*. Ideas to consider for class discussion: Johnson’s stories are set in a place many don’t know (Louisiana) about people many have never met (working class) in a time many can’t remember (pre-Katrina New Orleans). What must she do in her work to make this place and these people resonate with readers? How does she draw us in? What are we to carry away from this world? Assignment: write a short-short story. See p. 262 in Dufresne text.

**Week 7:** Students share short-shorts. Assignment for discussion: read the first full section, *Subjects for Writing*, in *Poet’s Companion* (7 short chapters). Students will ultimately choose and complete one exercise from each chapter. This expectation may be completed over the next couple of weeks, but do come prepared to read aloud those exercises you are working on.

**Week 8:** Share exercises from *Poet’s Companion*; introduce elements of poetic craft (metrics, rhyme, traditional forms, scansion, enjambment, etc.). Students will practice scansion in class using a traditional and a contemporary sonnet. Assignment: write a sonnet; include scansion and note rhyme scheme.

**Week 9:** Assignment for discussion: read the section in *Poet’s Companion* entitled *The Poet’s Craft* (10 short chapters). Topics for discussion include imagery, metaphor, voice, form, grammar and revision. Students will continue to share written work aloud. Assignment: write a villanelle or a sestina — note formal patterns.
**Week 10:** Complete a 2 page annotation of *Poet’s Companion*—what did you learn? How do the authors approach the complexities of writing poetry? Students continue readings. Assignment: read and write a 2 page annotation of Hales’ *To Make It Right*.

**Week 11:** Discuss the Hales text; ideas to be addressed include how Hales addresses historical and personal shame. As a direct descendant of those who participated in the Mountain Meadow Massacre, is she courageous in her work or has she betrayed her ancestors? How do writers approach the notion of shame? Hales also writes several ekphrastic poems (those that take as subject a famous artwork.) What are the ethics behind doing such work? Assignment: write a poem that scares you, that brings forth a sense of shame (no one will see this!). Also write an ekphrasis; visit a museum or gallery; become inspired by other artists.

**Week 12:** Discuss further any material not yet addressed fully or of which there are still questions and concerns. Finish the readings from exercises; everyone will have read at least 2 exercises aloud by this week and will have received constructive critical feedback. If time, more exercises will be read aloud. Students meet their small group workshop members.

**Week 13:** Students move into small groups, determined by final project genre. These groups will workshop the material of the final portfolios for all class periods until further notice.

**Week 14:** Small group workshops.

**Week 15:** Final small group workshops.

**Week 16:** Final Exam Period—all students will read a very short section (a page or so for fiction writers, a single poem for poets) from their final portfolios. This is an opportunity to “publish” your best work, and your audience will be a truly supportive one. Congratulations—you have been introduced to the life and work of the literary artist!
**Contract** for Course Enrollment and Additional University Policy Statements: turn this into your instructor no later than the third week of the term.

**Academic Dishonesty**: “Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student’s enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the University of Nevada, Reno General Catalog.”

**Disability Services**: “Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building, Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.”

**Audio and Video Recording**: “Surreptitious or covert video-taping of class or unauthorized audio recording of class is prohibited by law and by Board of Regents policy. This class may be videotaped or audio recorded only with the written permission of the instructor. In order to accommodate students with disabilities, some students may be given permission to record class lectures and discussions. Therefore, students should understand that their comments during class may be recorded.”

**Academic Success Services**: “Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (775) 784-4422, Tutoring Center (775) 784-6801, and University Writing Center (775) 784-6030. These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.”

**Online Course Evaluations**: “Your chance to evaluate this English course will appear two weeks before the last day of classes in the form of a new course on your WebCampus home page. This new course contains only the evaluation survey. These online course evaluations are extremely important to your instructor and to the Department of English, so please take a few minutes to complete your course evaluation when it becomes available. The evaluation is completely anonymous and your comments can never be connected with your name. Instructors cannot see the evaluation course on WebCampus and will not have access to the contents of these evaluations until after final grades have been posted.”

I have read and understand the information above, and I agree to the conditions of this class as outlined in the course Policy Sheet.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**
GRADING CRITERIA* for FINAL PROJECTS
And other assignments**

A WORK: shows evidence of creative thinking, awareness of craft and the principles of the genre. These portfolios combine sophisticated thinking and vision with writing that is clear, intelligent and engaging. These portfolios may not be flawless, but they demonstrate a command of the genre, and often delight or entertain the reader, teaching her something.

B WORK: shows evidence of clear thinking, a solid awareness of craft and effective expression. These portfolios demonstrate deep thinking about the material as well as clean and thoughtful writing, but they do not demonstrate the level of skill of an A portfolio. These portfolios exhibit a command of technique, which makes for a good reading experience.

C WORK: demonstrates competent written expression, with some flaws in craft and command of the genre. The level of writing is adequate for the course level but does not invite thoughtful response from the reader; it tends to have a general quality. Problems often exist with the level of expression and syntax. Occasional grammar errors may exist.

*Please note that there are no criteria for D and F projects. Everyone who completes the work, meets the project expectations, and does his/her best to make literary art is considered competent.

**EXERCISES and ANNOTATIONS: basic guidelines above apply, but these assignments are not considered “polished” works. If all expectations of an assignment are met (length, evidence of engagement, adherence to specifics, etc.), students will earn full credit, be evaluated as excellent.