

University of North Florida  
Instructor: Adam Byko  
CRW 3013

Semester: X  
Pre-req: X  
Credits:

## Intro to Creative Writing

Date  
Time  
Location

*“Write naked. That means to write what you would never say. Write in blood. As if ink is so precious you can’t waste it. Write in exile, as if you are never going to get home again, and you have to call back every detail.”*

Denis Johnson

*“Try to read your own work as a stranger would read it, or even better, as an enemy would.”*

Zadie Smith

*“Tell the Truth but tell it slant,”*

Emily Dickinson

### Office Hours and Contact Information

Location  
Office hours:  
Email:

### Required Materials

*Imaginative Writing*, Burroway, fourth edition  
*Steering the Craft*, Ursula Le Guin

### Course Description

What does it mean to teach creative writing? After all ‘creativity’ is right there in the title. How can you learn something that’s inherently an internal and subjective process?

In this course, we’ll be answering that question by situating the creative process within its broader contemporary conversation. Writing, despite being a solitary act, never occurs in vacuum. We share an artistic ecosystem, where other storytellers, poets, and essayists are building off of shared influences and subverting antiquated structures. Our goal in this course will be to allow you to access this ecosystem, to find the contemporary conversations that align with your own aesthetics and to empower you to contribute to them with your own voice.

This class will be about more than just conjuring up ideas and putting pen to paper. That’s part of the process, but our main focus will be to help you discover and refine your voice in this

contemporary context. We'll be reading widely and specifically. You won't like everything you read, and that's okay! Steal what works, avoid what doesn't. The main goal is for you to find out exactly what conversation you'll be joining, which authors you want to work alongside as you pursue your artistic ambitions.

This is a genre survey course, and we will be both reading and producing works of creative nonfiction, poetry, and fiction. Across all three genres, you will be acquiring a common base of skills and vocabulary of knowledge that will help you better approach your craft.

The fact is, you are all already creative. You can all already write. But you also all have room to grow. Your voice is constantly changing, from the words you write on the page to the internal monologue in your own head. Teaching creative writing means nurturing this voice—adding accelerant to the flames that are already there.

So, let's get the gasoline out and see what happens.

### Course Plan and Objectives

Each week, we will hone our abilities as readers and writers through elective readings and imitation assignments. Through our regular Slush Pile assignments, you'll be able to follow your own instincts and develop a sense of what craft-elements suit your own personal aesthetics. In addition to our major projects in each genre, you'll be performing regular imitations of work that you admire. These aren't models for you to follow slavishly but instead opportunities for you to try on different craft choices (and hopefully find some that fit). By the end of this semester you will:

1. Become able to evaluate creative work critically
2. Be capable of communicating nuanced opinions in a group setting
3. Be capable of mindful sentence-level choices in your written work
4. Develop your voice through engagement with contemporary artists
5. Understand how to authentically revise (or "see again") a creative work
6. Understand the intertwined relationship between situation (genre, time-period, mode of publication) and a given writing product.
7. Be capable of discussing and reflecting upon your own artistic choices within their broader contemporary contexts

### **Departmental goals and objectives fulfilled by this class:**

After completing this class, students will:

- Develop creative skills
- Develop rhetorical strategies
- Develop revision strategies and editing skills

After completing this class, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate a familiarity with key American narratives
- Recognize and use various rhetorical modes, including narrative, exposition, analysis, and argument

- Exercise their imaginations in crafting their own creative works, particularly through the creative workshop format.
- Demonstrate an understanding of revision
- Practice editing skills through examining their own writing and the writing of their peers

### **Writing Requirements**

- A work of creative nonfiction (1,000-5,000 words) [Either one long-form piece or multiple flash pieces]
- A work of short fiction (1,000-5,000 words) [Either one long-form piece or multiple flash pieces]
- Poetry (5 poems)
- A final extended revision of TWO of your final works
- Line-edits and workshop commentaries for each piece reviewed in your groups.
- Imitations (500 word minimum)
- Reading Recap
- Artist Statement

### **Final Revisions and Artist Statement**

To be turned in at the place and time of our final exam. Your final revisions should show that you have taken the time to “see again” with peer and instructor comments in mind. These must be SUBSTANTIAL revisions. Editing for grammar and select word choices will not earn full credit. Even if you think your work is perfect, you must make a real effort at another draft. The worst that can happen is that you’ll have two strong pieces.

You will include an artistic statement with your revisions, describing your personal aesthetics in light of the readings and discussions of our class. You should list at least three writers who you see yourself working in conversation with, and, *specifically* address what aesthetic values you share at a craft level. Generalizations (ie: both JK Rowling and I like to write about wizards!) will not earn full credit. This must be a meaningful effort to describe your artistic values and aspirations.

### **Reading Attendance**

During the course of this semester, you are required to attend at least one reading. This can be a visiting author, the MFA program’s monthly Parcels series, or any outside literary event if you discuss it with me first. I will arrange one reading at a coffee shop toward the end of the semester (exact date, time and location TBA) in the event that procrastination leaves you in a desperate situation. But please note, to receive credit for our new semi-annual “Last Minute Literary Reading Extravaganza” you will be required to participate as a reader. If you want to avoid this particular scenario, I recommend planning accordingly.

### **Slush Pile Discussion and Imitations**

On Slush Pile days, you will select one of three pieces to read based solely upon their first paragraphs. Each Slush Pile will be dedicated to a different craft element, and you will be

expected to engage in a workshop level discussion with your peers on the subject when you return to class. I will sit in with each group at various points to evaluate your discussion.

In addition, for every two Slush Piles, you'll be required to complete an imitation exercise (500 word minimum) focused on replicating an element of craft you admire. These will be graded based upon completion, but I expect you to make an honest effort. Your larger genre projects are allowed to be expanded versions of one of your imitations, so consider this an opportunity to get a headstart on your major assignments.

## Policies

### **Attendance/Workshop**

Come to class. Every day will involve some form of small-group discussion, and your absence will rob your peers of a useful voice and perspective. This course is designed to help you all grow as a community of writers. Losing even one member weakens our ability to foster an environment where we can trust and understand one another.

Come on time. In the event that you're late, enter quietly and respectfully. Use common sense. Don't expect everything to come to a halt to catch you up to speed. Any egregious disruption of our class-time will be treated the same as an absence.

***You get three unexcused absences per semester.*** I'd obviously prefer you come to every class, but I also understand that you have lives outside of the classroom that might dictate otherwise. Still, try to consider this class as a sunk-cost opportunity. You've already invested in adding it to your course-load, why not get the most out of the experience?

***Each unexcused absence after three will result in a full letter grade deduction.*** Plan your schedule accordingly, and procure a doctor's note in the event of a medical necessity. If you believe you've got extenuating circumstances, we can have a discussion. But understand that exceptions will be rare. Just come to class.

***ANY UNEXCUSED WORKSHOP ABSENCE WILL COUNT DOUBLE.*** A successful workshop is completely dependent on your ability to treat your peers with respect. Casually skipping out on the experience is not an option. If you absolutely have to miss a workshop, email both me and your affected group your critiques and commentaries BEFORE class starts. If you foresee a problem with our schedule, let me know as far in advance as possible.

**Participation** is crucial to a successful class. It's a human quirk that we learn better in groups than on our own. Basically, when we're all engaged, we can't help but teach each other. You all have distinct life experiences and perspectives, and each one adds value to our classroom environment. We do worse without your voice! I will do my best to create an engaging, supportive community, but this won't work without your help. Involve yourself in discussions, participate freely in your small groups.

I expect you to be an active participant in our classroom community, and I'll hold each of you to a high standard accordingly. Expect to have to work to earn full credit in this area. You will receive your final grade at the end of the year, but I will provide quarterly updates of where your grade would be if the class ended on that particular day. If you see a grade you don't like, change it! The end result will be entirely in your hands.

**Cell Phones** aren't going anywhere. I get it. Try to use classic human-conversation rules when in my classroom (ie: eyes on speaker, listen to each person attentively, don't ignore all discussion around you in favor of a side-conversation on your phone, etc). Cell phone use happens, but if I feel like you are disengaged from discussion, I will mark you as absent as a consequence. This also goes for **laptop use** in the classroom. Laptops are useful tools and can be remarkably helpful in a writing class. But again, if you are coasting on social media to the point of distraction, you will be marked absent to more accurately represent your mental state in my attendance sheet. You will receive a warning before I take this step, but let's try not to let it get that far.

**Late Work** will receive a full letter grade deduction for each day past due. Again please contact me in the event of extenuating circumstances.

### **Grading**

10% Participation

10% Imitation

25% Workshop commentaries/line-edits

30% Writing Projects First Drafts (10% for each genre)

25% Final (10% for each substantial revision, 5% for your artist statement)

A	94-100	B	80-83	D+	67-69
A-	90-93	C+	77-79	D	64-66
B+	87-89	C	74-76	D-	60-63
B	84-86	C-	70-73	F	59 & below

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarizing creative work is a weird choice. I don't like it! But in the event that you do, please understand that you'll receive a zero, the same as you would in any of your other classes. Do not try to pass off the work of another's as your own. Also, do not try to pass off an assignment you've written for a previous class as new, original work. You're being graded holistically on your growth and revisions, so there is profoundly little upside to even trying to pull this off. Please don't.

### **Syllabus Statement: Students with Disabilities**

**Requests for Accommodations:** is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. If you have a disability and need accommodations in the course, **you must contact me within the first two weeks of the semester** to discuss necessary accommodations. You must be registered with

Student Disabilities Services, Student Resources Center, Room 132 (phone: 407 823 2371; TDDD only phone: 407 823 2116) before requesting accommodations from me. The procedural stuff is important and necessary for me to take appropriate actions, so please stay on top of it.

**Eligibility:** The Director will meet with the student and review the process and procedures for consideration of eligibility.

**FERPA:** Once eligibility is determined, the student must sign a release of Information form (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act – FERPA) in order for the University to release the Accommodation Plan to the student’s professors. This form must be signed annually in order for accommodations to continue. If the FERPA form expires, the student will need to sign a new form before the Accommodation Plan is sent out to the student’s professors. Therefore, it is recommended that the student contact the Office of Student Disability Services as early in the semester as possible in order to ensure continuity of their accommodations.

**Reasonable Academic Accommodations:** If it is determined that the student does qualify for accommodations, a plan will be developed that addresses the student’s individual needs. This Accommodation Plan, which specifies what academic adjustments have been granted to the student by the University, will be sent to the student’s professors.

In the event that a student does not qualify for services under Section 504 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, other support services open to all University students will be discussed with the student.

## SCHEDULE

Date	Topic discussed in class	To read and do before coming to class	Deadlines
<b>PART 1: CREATIVE NONFICTION</b>			
<b>WEEK 1</b>			
Tuesday	Introduction  Creative Writing as Community		
Thursday	Narrative of Memory  Small Group Discussions/ Generative Craft Workshops	<b>Slush Pile Assignment 1:</b> “How to Ignite” by Julia Koets OR “Documents” by Charles D’ambrosia OR “Notes of a Native Son” by James Baldwin	<i>Thursday, Jan 8th 11:59pm Drop/Swap Deadline</i>

WEEK 2			
Tuesday	Discussion of reading. In-class reading/discussion of Le Guin chapter 1.	Read Burroway Chapter 6	
Thursday	Small group craft workshops -- “What makes a writer’s voice distinct?”	<i>Writing in Your Own Voice</i> Slush Pile Assignment: “Tickets to the Fair” by David Foster Wallace OR “Damned Yankee” by Gary Smith OR ”Total Eclipse” by Annie Dillard	
WEEK 3			
Tuesday	Discussion of reading. In-class reading/discussion of Le Guin chapter 3.	Read Burroway Chapter 3 and “When the Other Dancer is the Self”	
Thursday	Small group craft workshops -- “Transitions and movement”	<i>The Personal and the Objective</i> Slush Pile assignment “Manifesto a Velo” by Valeria Luiselli OR “Men Explain Things to Me” by Rebecca Solnit OR <i>Bluets</i> [Excerpt] by Maggie Nelson	<b>Imitation 1 due by 11:59pm, Thursday</b>
WEEK 4			
Tuesday	Discussion of readings, collaborative generative exercise	Read chapter 2 of Burroway. Read chapter 2 of Le Guin	

Thursday	Model CNF workshop	Read “Thanksgiving in Mongolia” by Ariel Levy	<b>Creative Nonfiction workshop piece due by 11:59pm Sunday</b>
<b>WEEK 5</b>			
Tuesday	Large Group Workshop	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
Wed. Feb 5	Small Group Workshops	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
<b>WEEK 6</b>			
Tuesday	Small Group Workshops	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
<b>PART 2: POETRY</b>			
Thursday	Small group craft workshops “How to subvert expectations.”  In-class reading and discussion of Le Guin chapter 6	<i>Irony and Poetry</i> Slush Pile Assignment: “Guidelines for the Treatment of Sacred Objects” by Heid Erdrich OR “Daddy” by Sylvia Plath OR “Satan Says” by Sharon Olds	
<b>WEEK 7</b>			
Tuesday	Discussion of readings. Blackout poetry activity.	Read Burroway chapter 10 and “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg	
Thursday	Small group craft workshops “What is the value of the break?”  Lineation activity.	<i>Form and Function</i> Slush Pile assignment: “For Brothers of the Dragon” by Terrance Hayes OR “My God It’s Full of Stars” by Tracy K. Smith OR	<b>Imitation 2 due by 11:59pm Thursday</b>



		“Cartographies of Silence” by Adrienne Rich	
<b>WEEK 8</b>			
Tuesday	Model poetry workshop	Read “Another Reason Why I Don’t Keep a Gun in the House,” by Billy Collins, “Harlem” by Ralph Ellison, and “The Double Image” by Anne Sexton	<b>Poetry Workshop Submissions due by 11:59pm Tuesday</b>
Thursday	Large Group Workshop	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
<b>WEEK 9</b>			
Tuesday	Small Group Workshops	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
Thursday	Small Group Workshops	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
<b>PART 3: FICTION</b>			
<b>WEEK 10</b>			
Tuesday	Small group craft workshop: “How to draw multi-dimensional characters.”	<i>The Inner Lives of Characters</i> Slush Pile assignment “Bullet in the Brain,” by Tobias Wolff OR “A Day” by William Trevor OR “The Weirdos” by Ottessa Moshfegh	
Thursday	Discuss reading. In-class reading and discussion of Le Guin chapter 7.	Read Burroway Chapter 4	
<b>Week 11</b>			
Tuesday	Small group craft workshops: “Concrete action and its relationship to	<i>Harmonizing Internal and External Conflict</i> Slush Pile assignment: “Car Crash While Hitchhiking” by Denis Johnson	

	abstract emotions.”  In-class reading and discussion Le Guin chapter 4.	OR “Brownies” by Z.Z. Packer OR “Blowing Up On the Spot” by Kevin Wilson	
Thursday	Small group craft workshops: “What is the value of place beyond imagery?”	<i>Setting and Theme</i> Slush Pile assignment: “Proving Up” by Karen Russell OR “A Temporary Matter” by Jhumpa Lahiri OR “Hero Sustains Major Damage” by Charles Yu	<b>Imitation 3 due by Sunday 11:59pm</b>
<b>WEEK 12</b>			
Tuesday	Discuss reading, in-class reading and discussion of Le Guin chapter 9	Read Burroway Chapter 6	
Thursday	In-class craft workshop: “Subverting Formal Structure”	<i>Breaking the Rules: Experiments in Form</i> Slush Pile Assignment: “Great Rock and Roll Pauses” by Jennifer Egan OR “17776” by Jon Bois OR “Pierre Menard Author of Quixote” by Jorge Luis Borges	
<b>WEEK 13</b>			
Tuesday	Small group craft workshop: “Subverting narrative structure: risks and Benefits.”  Model fiction workshop of	<i>Breaking the Rules: Defying Narrative</i> Slush Pile Assignment “is your blood as red as this” by Helen Oyeyemi OR “Lull” by Kelly Link/ OR	<b>Fiction Workshop Submissions Due Tuesday by 11:59pm</b>

	“Creative Writing” by Etgar Keret.	“Brad Carrigan American” by George Saunders	
Thursday	Large Group Workshop	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
<b>WEEK 14</b>			
Tuesday	Small Group Workshops	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
Thursday	Small Group Workshops	Read assigned workshop pieces	Workshop line-edits/commentaries due by start of class
<b>WEEK 15</b>			
Tuesday	Discussion of reading, In-class reading and discussion of Anne Lamotte’s “Shitty First Drafts”	Read Burroway Chapter 7	
Thursday	<b>Conferences</b>		
<b>FINAL EXAM PERIOD</b>			