

INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

ENG 215
Law Hall 321
9:30–11:00 am/1:30–3:00 pm
Block 8
April/May 2024

Dr. Adam Abraham
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Hours by appointment via Zoom
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“Who ever anywhere will read these written words? Signs on a white field.”
—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

“By telling you anything at all I’m at least believing in you, I believe you’re there, I believe you into being. Because I’m telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are.”

—Margaret Atwood,
The Handmaid's Tale

“The true wellspring of civilization isn't writing; it is editing.”
—Nathan Heller

“Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth.”

—Pablo Picasso



Beginning course in creative writing and an introductory course to the English major. Students will explore a myriad of writing techniques and approaches to writing in a variety of genres. Students will write, share work, and offer critiques. The course also includes the study of published authors as models for student writing, as literary-historical context for artistic creation, and for the study of creative theory. Students will learn to analyze texts from a writer’s perspective, which they will apply to their own writing and to the study of literature in the major.

REQUIRED READING:

Didion, Joan. *Slouching towards Bethlehem*. 1968. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Freeman, John, ed. *The Penguin Book of the Modern American Short Story*. 2021. New York: Penguin Books, 2022.

Please use these editions so that we are all on the same page. New and/or used copies are available at the college bookstore. All other readings will be made available online.

Each student will also be required to purchase a Roaring Spring one-subject notebook (available at the college bookstore) for in-class writing exercises.

ASSESSMENT:

- I. Attendance: 10 points
- II. Participation: 10 points
- III. Poem: 10 points
- IV. Personal essay: 10 points
- V. Short story: 10 points
- VI. Workshop: 10 points
- VII. Unannounced quizzes: 10 points
- VIII. Final submission: 30 points

TOTAL = 100 points

EXPECTATIONS:*Attendance*

Marshall Brickman once told a reporter that 80 percent of success is showing up. In this course, attendance will count for 10 percent of your final grade. But attendance means more than just showing up. You must be fully *present*: awake, alert, attentive, engaged. Each student is allowed to miss up to four class meetings (morning or afternoon). There is no need to tell me your reasons: it's four for free, no questions asked. If, however, you miss five classes (21 percent of the course), you will earn zero points for attendance. If you miss more, then you are at risk of receiving a failing grade. Any student who misses ten classes will fail automatically.

Participation

We learn by articulating ideas and refining those ideas in conversation with others. Try to be a lively participant in each class discussion. Raise points, ask questions. Listen carefully and respectfully to what others are saying. It is okay to disagree with one another: disagreement does not mean disrespect. This course is designed to workshop creative writing, and this works most successfully when every single member of the course participates during every meeting.

Electronic Devices

Because paying attention is one of the goals of this course, I ask that all phones and electronic devices are turned off and placed out of sight. Students texting in class will be marked absent for that class meeting. If there is a genuine life crisis, please pretend that it is 1977 and that you have to go outside to use a payphone *before* texting or making that urgent call.

Quizzes

In order to assess that you are reading the assigned material and listening in class, there will be four unannounced quizzes over the block. These will be rather easy if you have completed the assignments. I will drop the lowest score. Because the element of surprise is essential, you will *not* be able make up these quizzes under any circumstances.

Free Expression

You have a first-amendment right to express yourself, in speech and in writing, as you see fit. Other students may disagree with your sentiments, and that is *their* right. Please abide by two rules in the assignments that you submit during the block: (1) do not break any laws (including copyright infringement); (2) do not write about any people in this course (faculty or student, pseudonymously or otherwise). That said, your work in this course is always public. Please do not submit any writing that you would not want other students in class to read. We may discuss topics such as gender, race, religion, sexuality, violence. You may want to include a content warning with any of your submissions that might prove to be unsettling or traumatic for others.

In-Class Writing

Writing requires practice. To that end, there will be frequent in-class writing exercises. You will be asked to write these with a pen or pencil, in your Roaring Spring one-subject notebook (or its paper equivalent). *Do not* write these assignments in electronic form. From time to time, I may collect the pages. They will not be evaluated, scored, or annotated in any fashion.

Major Assignments

There are three major assignments: poem, personal essay, short story. For each, you are welcome to generate the assignment however you choose: paper or electronic drafting or some combination. *Follow all instructions*. Submitted work must be typewritten; double space everything. The three assignments will be scored holistically: you will get 10 points each for work that meets the requirements. Any feedback that you receive (from the instructor or fellow students) should inform your final submission.

Late Work

The block schedule moves quickly. To succeed, you should complete all readings and write all assignments by the designated dates. Do not fall behind. Any assignment submitted late will lose 10 percent and lose the benefit of instructor and student feedback. Note that any work submitted after 8 May will receive a score of zero.

Workshop

An essential part of a creative-writing course is the workshop. We will practice this method early in the block and then hold formal workshops during Week 4. Each short story will be assigned a Workshop Leader (another member of the course), who will introduce the story and author, ask the author to read a passage, and then discuss areas of strength and elements to improve. Finally, the Workshop Leader will ask a few questions of the class and invite the author to respond. All students are required to read *all* submitted stories, write brief reviews, and discuss the stories during the workshop sessions.

Final Submission

At the end of the block, each student will submit revised versions of *two* of the major assignments (poem, personal essay, short story). The final submission, unlike the earlier ones, will be evaluated and scored. Scores will be based on the quality of the work, the level of completeness, a demonstration of craft topics taught over the block, responsiveness to instructor and student criticism, professionalism (copy that looks read to publish, with a lack of obvious errors), and a substantial cover letter.

Learning Needs

You are welcome to schedule a one-on-one meeting (via Zoom) to discuss anything related to the course. If you require accommodation for a diagnosed disability, please notify me privately at the beginning of the block.

Academic Integrity

It is the assumption that the work you present in this course will be your own. If you incorporate someone else's words or ideas, you must cite that person, text, or source. If you do not know how to cite sources, read chapter 14 of *The Chicago Manual of Style* or ask me for guidance.

SCHEDULE:

Reading assignments must be completed by the start of the class period mentioned. Items marked with an infinity sign (∞) will be found on the website adamabraham.info.

15–21 April

WEEK 1

Poetry

 Mon. 9:30 Getting to Know You

 Tue. 9:30 • SCREEN “How to Read a Poem” lectures ∞
 • Poems, part 1 (The Ballad) ∞
 1:30 Writing Exercises

 Wed. 9:30 • Poems, part 2 (Dramatic Monologue) ∞
 1:30 Writing Exercises

 Thu. 9:30 • Poems, part 3 (The Sonnet) ∞
 1:30 Drafting in Class
 • Bring poem-in-progress

 Fri. 9:30 Poetry Celebration
 1:30 Poetry Celebration (continued)

 ... **POEM DUE** Friday 19 April by 9:00 am

22–28 April

WEEK 2

Nonfiction

 Mon. 9:30 • *Slouching towards Bethlehem*, pp. 3–83
 1:30 Writing Exercises

 Tue. 9:30 • *Slouching towards Bethlehem*, pp. 131–156, 225–238
 1:30 Writing Exercises

 Wed. 9:30 • A Bouquet of Essays, part 1 and part 2 ∞
 1:30 Drafting in Class
 • Bring essay-in-progress

Thu. NO CLASS (Conferences)

 ... **PERSONAL ESSAY DUE** at your scheduled conference

Fri. NO CLASS (Conferences)

 ... **PERSONAL ESSAY DUE** at your scheduled conference

29 April–5 May

WEEK 3

Fiction

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- Mon. 9:30 Narrative and Narrators
 • Seven Classic Short Stories ∞
 1:30 Writing Exercises
- Tue. 9:30 Time in Fiction
 • Paley, Kincaid, Singer, Dybek, Cisneros, Wolff, Lahiri
 in *The Penguin Book of the Modern American Short Story*
 1:30 Writing Exercises
- Wed. 9:30 Character and Dialogue
 • Everett, Liu, Muñoz
 in *The Penguin Book of the Modern American Short Story*
 1:30 Writing Exercises
- Thu. 9:30 Drafting in Class
 • Bring story-in-progress
- Fri. NO CLASS
 • Write short stories
- ... **SHORT STORY DUE** Friday 3 May by 4:30 pm

6–8 May

WEEK 4

Workshop

-
- Mon. 9:30 Workshop I
 • Read all short stories in Group I
 • Bring handwritten student responses
 1:30 Workshop I (continued as needed)
- Tue. 9:30 Workshop II
 • Read all short stories in Group II
 • Bring handwritten student responses
 1:30 Workshop II (continued as needed)
- ... **FINAL SUBMISSION DUE**
 Wednesday 8 May by 4:30 pm

COLLEGE BOILERPLATE:

Academic Honesty

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is their work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

AI Policy

The beta release of Dall-E-Mini in July 2022 and ChatGPT in November 2022 are among many tools using artificial intelligence. There is a good possibility that using tools like these are going to become an important skill for careers in the not distant future (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jan/07/chatgpt-bot-excel-ai-chatbot-tech>). In the meantime though, it's going to take a while for society to figure out when using these tools is/isn't acceptable.

- Work created by AI tools may not be considered original work and, instead, considered automated plagiarism. It is derived from previously created texts from other sources that the models were trained on, yet doesn't cite sources.
- AI models have built-in biases (ie, they are trained on limited underlying sources; they reproduce, rather than challenge, errors in the sources).
- AI tools have limitations (ie, they lack critical thinking to evaluate and reflect on criteria; they lack abductive reasoning to make judgments with incomplete information at hand; they make up or use inaccurate information and may "hallucinate" sources that do not exist).

Disability Statement

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Disability Services and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <https://www.cornellcollege.edu/student-success-center/disabilities/index.shtml>.

Masking Policy

The Safe Repopulation Task Force reviewed and significantly revised COVID-19 campus protocols. All mitigation strategies ceased as of May 15, 2023. No mask requirements are in place at this time. However, as a mask-friendly campus, mask-wearing remains accepted in all situations without question. A contagious illness monitoring group will replace the Safe Repopulation Task Force and will meet when needed.