

English 3150-003 — Beginning Poetry
Auditorium 212
Spring 2026

Instructor: Brad Murff
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 Office: Gab 515
 Office Hours: Monday 3:30-4:30pm

Course Description:

Welcome to English 3150, Beginning Poetry! Buddhists have a principle of Beginner's Mind, where each day one awakens afresh with a new, untrained outlook. This is also a wonderful way to think of writing a poem. Each new poem offers a path to personal and artistic discovery. Together we will read and study works of great poets as we develop our own skills as creative writers. Ours is a workshop-based course, and many of you have taken workshops before. For those of you who have not, don't fret! We will work together to make our workshops a positive experience for everyone.

Required Textbook:

The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms, edited by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland.

* Bring this textbook to class everyday. Most of the poems we will read are in the book. It is an anthology of different poetic forms with a rich selection of poetry.

Tools:

You must bring a notebook and either a pen or pencil to class each day for in-class writing and note taking. You must also bring the class textbook.

Workshop:

You are expected to provide written and in-class feedback on your peers' poems. I insist on two things: that we both honest and kind when discussing each others work. Workshop is a place where we come to fix stuff. It is best if you bring poems on which you are actively working.

Canvas:

Our primary avenue of providing feedback on student poems will be in class. We will, however, use Canvas to distribute and provide written feedback on each other's work. At least 48 hours prior to your assigned workshop date you will turn in your poem for workshop under the appropriate discussion thread. Prior to class you should also post

a response to your peers' poems. These written responses should be 100-200 words in length.

Office Visits:

You are required to have two office visits with me during the semester. The first will be early in the semester and the second toward the middle or end. I like to have the first visit early so that we can get to know each other and I can learn what your hopes are for the course. Setting expectations is a great way to make sure you have a positive experience and gain as much from the course as possible. These visits are twenty to thirty minutes in length and will be held in GAB 515.

Participation:

You are expected to provide generous and thoughtful feedback on your peers' work, show up and leave on time, and pay attention in class. When we hand in a poem for workshop, we are sharing our souls with one another. Please honor yourself and your peers by carefully reading, thinking about, and providing feedback on student work.

Attendance:

Students may miss up to six classes without penalty. If a student misses more than six classes, they will fail the course. There is no need to email me prior to class if you plan to be absent. The six classes are not free days; they are sick days. This policy is in place for various reasons; one of which is to teach the student the importance of arriving and leaving on time and always showing up for work if at all possible. Employers disdain employees who come and go as they please. If you are consistently tardy or more than ten minutes late for any particular class, you may be counted absent.

Grades:

Six poems: 50% of your grade

Participation: 20% of your grade

Office visits = 10% of your grade

Final Essay: 10% of your grade

Final Portfolio: 10% of your grade

*A note on grades: I do not grade the poems you submit in any traditional sense. What I am looking for is for you to passionately inhabit the page. As such, each poem is graded on completion. There is no rubric and no set standard.

Technology:

We will not use computers and cell phones in class. To help each other with our work, we must be fully present. Students who repetitively use laptops, tablets, and cell phones without prior authorization may be asked to leave the class and be counted absent for the day. If you have a disability that requires you to have technology in the classroom, please reach out to the Department of Accessibility Access regarding accommodations.

Student Poems:

Several of the poems will be “assignment” poems meaning we will be writing poems that make use of specific forms found in our textbook. These assignments will mirror the readings for that week. I will give more details on this in class. Don’t worry. The assignments are guideposts, not straight jackets. Poetry is about asserting a pattern and then deviating from that pattern.

Final Essay:

A final essay of at least five pages will be turned in with the final portfolio. We will discuss specifics as the due date approaches.

Final Portfolio:

This shall include all of your creative work, including at least three substantial revisions of poems workshopped in class, and your final essay.

Readings:

Most days there will be poems assigned for students to read before class. I will announce these poems in class and on Canvas prior to the day they will be discussed. The majority of the poems are in our textbook. Most others can be found on the Poetry Foundation website or by performing a quick online search. I will also from time to time provide essays and poems for discussion via pdf.

Changes to Syllabus:

At anytime during the semester, I may make alterations to this syllabus and its policies. It is rare that I need to do this, and I use a reasonableness standard when making changes. I do, however, need to let you know of this policy here. A syllabus is a contract. By remaining in the course you agree to adhere to the policies and conditions in this document. Please let me know if you have questions.

Schedule:Week One

M: Class Introduction

W: Readings and Intro to Form

Week Two

M: MLK day, No Class

W: Readings

Week Three

M: Readings: Sonnet

W: Workshop Poem 1 and Readings

Week Four

M: Workshop and Readings

W: Workshop and Readings

Week Five

M: Readings: Sestina/Villanelle/Pantoum

W: Workshop Poem 2 and Readings

Week Six

M: Workshop Poem 2 and Readings

W: Workshop Poem 2 and Readings

Week Seven

M: Readings: Blank verse/Heroic Couplet

W: Workshop Poem 3 and Readings

Week Eight

M: Workshop Poem 3 and Readings

W: Workshop Poem 3 and Readings

Week Nine

M: Readings: Ode/Ballad

W: Workshop Poem 4 and Readings

Week Ten

M: Workshop Poem 4 and Readings

W: Workshop Poem 4 and Readings

Week Eleven

M: Readings: Elegy/Pastoral

W: Workshop Poem 5 and Readings

Week Twelve

M: Workshop Poem 5 and Readings

W: Workshop Poem 5 and Readings

Week Thirteen

M: Readings: Dramatic/Narrative

W: Workshop Poem 6 and Readings

Week Fourteen

M: Workshop Poem 6 and Readings

W: Workshop Poem 6 and Readings

Week Fifteen

M: TBA

W: TBA