

English 3150
Beginning Poetry Workshop
Fall 2025

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Office Hours: **Thurs. 2:00-3:30**
& by appointment

Course Description

While inspiration is primary in writing poetry, poets can't succeed without technique. This class will consider how poems are made rather than simply received, and how the process of making poems can be learned through practicing the methods honed by accomplished poets of the past and present. We'll study poetry as readers and as writers. Reading provides essential instruction; without reading, you cannot develop as a poet. Of course, you also need to write your own poems, and so I'll give you assignments that focus on critical aspects of poetic craft. These two approaches will feed each other; your analytical abilities will benefit from insights gleaned during the act of writing, while your facility with craft and your sense of poetic possibilities will grow through encountering work written by strong and influential poets. Finally, as a member of a workshop you will be expected to participate actively in our discussions of course readings and peer writings.

Required Texts

How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry, Edward Hirsch

School of Instructions, Ishion Hutchinson

The Sounds of Poetry, Robert Pinsky

Recommended: *Rules for the Dance*, Mary Oliver

A note on difficult subject matter: Poetry can trouble and console as it provides, in the words of poet Adam Zagajewski, both “forms for our inner life” and “a sober eye directed toward the historical world.” This semester, we will occasionally consider—both in course readings and student writings—work that deals with painful subjects that could prove triggering to some readers. Poetry often illuminates human suffering and trauma, and if you're concerned that such work could cause you emotional or physical duress, please exercise awareness and self-care as you encounter class readings. You are expected to read all the work assigned this semester. That said, we will attend to how the best poetry that shoulders these subjects seeks not to sensationalize or exacerbate trauma, but rather to find the language, empathy, and imagination necessary to give form to those difficult experiences and histories.

Participation

Because of the discussion-centered nature of this class, regular participation is important. More than two absences may harm your grade. You will also be expected to participate in two conferences with me over the semester. Finally, you will need to attend one of the Rilke Prize events in October. If you cannot make either, please contact me to arrange an alternate assignment.

Canvas

Though in-class discussion will be central in this course, we will also rely on Canvas for distributing and providing written comments on your poems. Check our course on Canvas and your linked email account regularly.

Workshop Procedures

You will be expected to participate in workshop by putting your own work forward for discussion and by commenting on your peers' poems. These conversations will take place in class. I would like you to prepare comments on your peers' poems before workshop. You will then share written responses. I will also provide detailed written comments. You'll also have the opportunity to discuss your work with me in conferences.

Evaluation

Your grade will be based on:

1. Creative work (50%):
 - Six original poems;
 - A final portfolio, including at least 3 substantial revisions
2. Participation (35%):
 - Active participation in discussing your classmates' poems
 - Written responses to your peer's poems
 - Active participation in discussion of readings
 - Attendance at one Rilke event
 - Two conferences
3. Critical work (15%)
 - Final essay (5 pages)

A note on grading creative work: I will not give letter grades for the poem drafts you submit, but I will offer detailed responses that I expect you to consider carefully during the revision process. My goal is to emphasize the ways in which a draft works, the questions and possibilities it raises, and the strategies for development it can use during revision. This approach stresses the process of writing poems. If you engage the assignments with seriousness and put considered effort into your drafts and revisions, you will readily succeed in the class. If you do not submit a poem for an assignment you will fail that assignment.

I will give a letter grade to your final portfolio, and to determine that grade I will weigh the first drafts submitted for each of the assignments and the revisions you've produced in response to my comments. Your revisions should significantly develop the poems in response to the questions and suggestions offered in those comments.

Generative AI Policy

Given that this is a creative writing course, my assumption is that you are here because you want to create poems that embody your particular perspective, understanding, and style. AI is imitative, not creative. Therefore, the use of GenAI tools is not permissible in this course. No matter the approach, any attempt to represent GenAI output as a student's own work will be considered fabrication, cheating, and/or academic dishonesty as determined on a case-by-case basis.

I share with you this quote from Joshua Bennett's article "Why So Many MIT Students Are Writing Poetry," published in *The Atlantic*:

In a moment marked by widespread institutional investment in the promise of artificial intelligence, we should be asking more about not only what AI can and cannot do but what drives the desire for its proliferation: what hope, what sense of longing, boredom, or emptiness. A large language model is a prediction machine. Crucially, it does not think or dream. It establishes the likeliest sequence of words based on its training data and relays it back to you. A well-crafted poem performs a nearly opposite function. It is made from original, dynamic language choices, and it lives and dies on its ability to surprise. It is a means of preserving the particular.

Special Needs

If you need any special accommodations, please let me know.

The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

FALL 2025 BEGINNING POETRY COURSE CALENDAR

WEEK 1

Tuesday, August 19

Introduction to course

Thursday, August 21

Read: Definition of Image in *How to Read a Poem*, Edward Hirsch, pp. 286-287; “Imagery” & “Image-Making,” Mary Oliver; Assignment 1 Poem Packet

WEEK 2

Tuesday, August 26

Read: Selection from “Image” by Ellen Bryant Voigt; “Nuts and Bolts,” Richard Hugo

Due: Poem 1

Thursday, August 28

Workshop: Poem 1

WEEK 3

Tuesday, September 2

Read: Assignment 2 Poem Packet

Workshop: Poem 1

Thursday, September 4

Workshop: Poem 1

WEEK 4

Tuesday, September 9

Workshop: Poem 1

Thursday, September 11

Read: “Breath,” “Patterns,” “More About Patterns,” Mary Oliver; “Accent and Duration,” “Syntax and Line,” “Technical Terms and Vocal Realities,” from *The Sounds of Poetry*, Pinsky; passages from *Rhyme’s Reason*, John Hollander; Assignment 3 Poem packet

Due: Poem 2

WEEK 5

Tuesday, September 14

Workshop: Poem 2

Thursday, September 16

Workshop: Poem 2

WEEK 6

Tuesday, September 23

Workshop: Poem 2

Thursday, September 25

Read: “A Made Thing,” Hirsch; “Design: Line Length,” “Design: Traditional Forms,” Mary Oliver; “Like and Unlike Sounds,” “Blank Verse and Free Verse,” Pinsky;

Assignment 4 Poem Packet

Workshop: Poem 2

WEEK 7

Tuesday, September 30

Workshop: Poem 2

Due: Poem 3

Thursday, October 2

Read: “A Message in a Bottle,” pp. 3-30 Hirsch; “Disruption, Hesitation and Silence,” Glück; Assignment 4 Poem Packet

Workshop: Poem 3

WEEK 8

Tuesday, October 7

Read: *School of Instructions*, Ishion Hutchinson

Workshop: Poem 3

Wednesday, October 8

RILKE PRIZE Q&A

Thursday, October 9

Workshop: Poem 3

Due: Poem 4

RILKE PRIZE READING

WEEK 9

Conferences

Tuesday, October 14

Workshop: Poem 4

Thursday, October 16

Workshop: Poem 4

WEEK 10

Tuesday, October 21

Read: “Soul in Action,” pp. 244-258; “A Shadowy Exultation” pp. 236-242; selections from “Five Acts,” (pp. 116-117, 122-123, 127-128, 130-131, 135-136, 140-141) Hirsch; Assignment 5 Poem Packet

Workshop: Poem 4

Thursday, October 23

Workshop: Poem 4

WEEK 11

Tuesday, October 28

Workshop: Poems 4

Due: Poem 5

Thursday, October 30

Workshop: Poem 5

WEEK 12

Tuesday, November 4

Read: Assignment 6 Poem Packet

Workshop: Poem 5

Thursday, November 6

Workshop: Poem 5

WEEK 13

Tuesday, November 11

Workshop: Poem 5

Due: Poem 6

Thursday, November 13

Workshop: Poem 6

WEEK 14

Tuesday, November 18

Workshop: Poem 6

Thursday, November 20

Read: Selection from *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke

Workshop: Poem 6

WEEK 15

Thanksgiving

WEEK 16

Conferences

Tuesday, December 2

Workshop: Poem 6

Thursday, December 5

Workshop: Poem 6

WEEK 17 (Final Exam Week)

Thursday, December 11

You will be expected to hand in a portfolio including a final essay, all poems written for the course, and at least three revised poems.