

**ENGL 2100**

## **Introduction to Creative Writing**

Spring '26 / Lang 305 / Mon, Wed 12:30-1:50 pm

**Instructor:** Hector Dominguez

**Email:** [HectorDominguez@my.unt.edu](mailto:HectorDominguez@my.unt.edu)

**Office Hours:** GAB 515, Mon/Wed 12:00-12:30, or by appt.



### **REQUIRED MATERIALS**

- ◆ Notebook and writing utensil
- ◆ Writing/Notetaking device
- ◆ Course Reader (provided in class)
- ◆ UNT email account / Access to Canvas

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

- ◆ Last day to drop course without a W: Jan 29
- ◆ Last day to drop course with a W: April 10
- ◆ Spring Break: March 9-15
- ◆ Final portfolio due: May 5

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

What is creative writing? What can writing do for us? Why write creatively when AI can generate prose and poetry in a matter of seconds? Now, more than ever, creativity and writing's value to society, personal development, and self-expression is being researched and debated at great lengths. We begin the course considering these questions before studying how writers explore and articulate their experiences, thoughts, and feelings using a range of technical and expressive possibilities. As we move through the units, we'll note how poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction and their craft intersect and diverge from one another. We'll implement these elements and techniques of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction into our own writing. Once we read each other's work, we will consider more questions: How do we evaluate if a piece of writing is "good"? How can we give critical feedback constructively and compassionately? Our workshop's goal isn't solely to deliver critique but also to foster a spirit of collaboration and healthy exchange of ideas. Consider it the start of a creative writer's network. This course aims to introduce writing as a creative outlet, allowing students to experiment and build confidence writing in the different genres, providing a foundation for students to continue developing their writing skills in the semesters to come.

**What to expect:** Because of the small class environment and its workshop model, this isn't a class where students can passively sit in. Each student must participate (i.e., speak) daily, especially during workshop rounds. Participation is 20% of the final grade and if you are shy, you must find ways to chime in regularly, otherwise it will adversely affect your grade.

By enrolling, I welcome you as a student genuinely committed to growing as writer, not a student looking for easy credit hours. This means I expect you to read regularly and closely, more than in other classes. Why? Because developing your writing skills requires dedicated practice and study (writing and reading). Writers develop an eye for style, structure, voice and other elements through avid reading. Such is the life of writers: when not writing, they read! If we acknowledge this course requires time, dedication, and a little nerve, I believe it can serve as a creative outlet and writing community you can turn to for the next sixteen weeks.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This introductory course in creative writing alternates between a study of prose and fiction and a writing workshop. We will read a diverse sampling of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction, study the prominent elements of these genres, and practice each genre's basic craft techniques via writing prompts to develop and supplement our writer's toolbox. We will share and workshop our writing and apply our craft knowledge to critique the work of our peers. The course will culminate with the creation of a creative portfolio of sample writing as fiction writers. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify basic elements and techniques in the craft of literary prose and poetry.
- Discern how craft elements contribute to thematic meaning and emotional resonance.
- Practice and implement craft into their own writing via exercises and story-length work.
- Apply knowledge of craft by providing written and oral feedback in a workshop model.
- Revise their work by evaluating peer feedback and a drafting process.
- Articulate their revision process and an artistic vision of their creative work.

## POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

**Participation:** A workshop is collaborative environment where participants share ideas and voice their opinions. Effective participation involves reading and completing assigned work before class, as well as asking questions and sharing your thoughts. During workshop cycles, students are expected to comment on each story. Non-engagement and unpreparedness (i.e. coming to class without the course reader, notes, or writing utensils) will result in loss of participation points. An absence, logically, will result in a loss of participation points for that day.

**Attendance:** Attendance is taken on the first day of class. Four absences are allowed, regardless of whether excused or unexcused. “Budget” your absences in case of any unforeseen illness or emergency later in the semester. On the fifth absence, your final grade will be reduced by one letter grade. Six absences will result in automatic failure of the course. *By registering for this course, you are committing to its time slot for the next sixteen weeks. Be certain not to take up employment, schedule appointments, or other engagements that conflict with your attendance or timely arrival.* If you foresee being absent on your workshop day, inform me ASAP, to determine if an alternate date can be arranged.

**Tardiness:** Arriving five minutes late or leaving class early are counted as absences. If you must leave early, please inform me (in person or via email) before the start of class to avoid any penalty. Repeat or chronic tardiness will result in loss of participation points.

**Electronics and Distractions:** Cell phones must be away from view. Headphones or AirPods may not be worn during class. Laptops and tablets may be used to write or access notes. *Do not work on assignments from other classes!* Students that fail to abide by this policy will be asked to leave class, be marked absent, and/or lose participation points.

**Late Work/Make-up Work/Extensions:** Late work is not accepted, and make-up work cannot be assigned. Due to tight scheduling, workshop pieces and final portfolios must be submitted promptly. Extensions may be granted under emergencies, but please communicate those ASAP.

**Respect and Courtesy:** Be mindful of disruptive behavior (side chatter, flippant comments, raising unrelated concerns). Many aspects of fiction are subjective so students must be respectful toward their peers' opinions and work. It is okay to disagree, but we must be courteous. On workshop days, please respect the time set aside for writers' work by giving them your full attention.

**Communication:** Check Canvas and your student email daily. When emailing me, include "ENGL 3140" in your subject line so I can prioritize it. For privacy concerns, I'll only respond to UNT email accounts. As a professional courtesy, please include proper greetings and signoffs in your emails.

**Office Hours:** Time is set aside each week to meet with students. Feel free to schedule appointments to discuss your work at any point in the semester. If my office hours don't work for you, please reach out so we can set up an alternate time. I encourage you to schedule a meeting after your workshop.

**Course Content:** Texts/student work may engage with sensitive topics and traumatic experiences. Class content does not indicate a specific position of the school, department, or instructor. Reach out if you find any content to be triggering or have difficulties engaging with the work. **Note to Writers:** If your readers may be triggered by the content in your work (e.g., abuse, violence, racial violence, bigotry, etc..), please provide a trigger warning at the start of your work.

**Plagiarism:** Submitting someone else's work with the intention of being passed off as your own, is considered plagiarism and grounds for automatic failure. Often the line between inspiration and our creative work can be thin and blurry but as a general rule of thumb: creative work must be of your own creation and not directly copy already established works. Fan fiction is not allowed.

**ChatGPT and AI tool usage:** This course does not specialize in, or critique creative work written in collaboration with artificial intelligence. Any work written entirely by or with the assistance of AI falls outside the learning objectives of this course. *All work produced for this course (writing prompts, discussion board responses, feedback letters, story outlines, and creative work) must be written without any assistance from AI tools.* Do not use AI to proofread, edit, or revise your work as that can change the sentence structures, verbiage, and any other variation that is inherently your voice and style. By doing so, you put yourself in danger of having your work flagged as "AI-generated." AI

usage in a creative writing course is in direct opposition to this course's objectives. Plagiarism and work authored, assisted, or edited by AI will not be considered of your own creation and subsequently be given a failing grade and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

**Syllabus Changes:** I reserve the right to alter the syllabus at any point in the semester. Due dates, readings, and other aspects of this course may be subject to change.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

**Assigned Readings:** Check Course Schedule on Canvas for each day's readings. Depending on the day's readings, discussion questions may be provided for you to consider. Read and annotate texts before class and bring your course reader and/or textbooks to facilitate class discussion.

**Reading Quizzes:** To ensure you are completing assigned readings, pop quizzes will be assigned randomly at the start of class on non-workshop days.

**Group Discussions:** In groups of four or five, you will discuss readings, question responses, or craft elements introduced in class. Subsequently, each group will share their insights with the class.

**Creative Prompts/Craft Responses:** Creative exercises practice the craft terms discussed in class to develop your writing skills and story ideas. Craft response questions are an avenue for articulating and sharing your views on writing and fiction. I recommend you use your word processor of choice to draft these prompts and then copy and paste them to Canvas—otherwise you may find yourself losing your work in case of any internet/browser issues. Full credit is given to writing when it fully meets each prompt's requirements.

**Poetry Workshop Submission:** Submit two poems for a flash round workshop (~10 mins). The poems must contain basic elements discussed in class. Poems should avoid rhyming patterns and instead focus on imagery, language, and theme.

*Directions:* Upload workshop piece as a .doc Word file (*not pdf, Google pages, or file link!*) before 11:00 pm on February 3. Once I receive your work, I will schedule the workshop days and provide printed copies a week in advance for students to provide to read.

**Formatting:** Include proper first page headers. Document should be double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins, and include last name/page number on upper right corner of every page (see formatting template). Excessive typos, grammatical mistakes, poor story development, or improper formatting will result in point deductions.

**Prose Workshop Submission:** Submit a short story or creative nonfiction essay for a full workshop (20-25 mins). The piece must employ consistent use of craft in its genre (Novel excerpts are not allowed.) Workshop submissions receive full credit only if all specified criteria are met.

*Follow the directions and formatting requirements for the poetry submission.* Prose Workshop submission due on March 23 at 11:00 p.m.

**Workshop Letters/Active Peer:** As a peer you're expected to provide written critique for your classmates' stories and be present in class to participate in the story's discussion. Partial credit is

given for workshop letter submissions and non-attendance, or vice versa. Refer to “Feedback Guide” for detailed instructions. The workshop letter submission procedure is as follows: Hard copies of the workshop pieces will be distributed a week in advance. On the day of workshop, you must print two copies for each feedback letter (one for the writer, the other for the instructor). Hand over your marked copy of the story to its respective writer. Minimum 350-word critical response. Laptops and tablets are not allowed in this workshop model.

**Final Portfolio:** The course culminates with a final portfolio consisting of the following:

- 1) an unrevised copy of your two workshop poems,
- 2) a required revision of the two workshop poems,
- 3) a unrevised copy of the prose workshop piece,
- 4) a required revision of the prose workshop piece,
- 5) a 700-word holistic assessment (not line-by-line account) of the
  - a. your revision process for the poems and the prose piece,
  - b. consideration of peer feedback, or
  - c. a future vision for the work,

*Submit as a single file by 11:59 p.m. on May 5. Check rubric on Canvas for further details.*

**Literary Event:** Literary citizenship entails finding a local hub for writers. By attending one of their events, you'll not only support other fellow writers, but it might even engage and stimulate your own creative process. *Directions:* Seek out events in the local writing community. These may be school-related, but I encourage you to look for local open mics, poetry readings, writer talks, or events that connect with writing or storytelling. Cafés, bookstores, and libraries are good starting points. Check with me before attending the event (sorry, no online events). Write and submit a short response (350-500 words) connecting the event with our class topics, craft talk, or your own writing.

**\*Extra credit opportunity** (+25 pts): you may attend an (1) additional event.

**Grade Distribution:**

- 4% Literary Event Response
- 4% Discussion Board Posts
- 5% Reading Quizzes
- 10% - Creative writing prompts
- 10% - Poetry workshop submission
- 10% - Prose workshop submission
- 15% - Final Portfolio
- 20% - Daily Participation
- 22% - Peer feedback letters (11% poetry + 11% prose)

**Grading Scale:**

100 - 90	89.9-80	79.9-70	69.9-60	59.9 and below
A	B	C	D	F

\*Final grades cannot be bumped, unless they lie within .1% of the next letter grade. Consider completing the extra credit assignment to avoid such scenarios.

**FEEDBACK GUIDE**

Read peers' workshop pieces carefully before writing feedback. Workshopping involves discovering your own process of critiquing others' work. The method that works for me: 1) Read from start to finish with pen in hand, noting where you become lost, need context, admire the language, have questions, etc.; 2) Reread via a close reading, targeting pivotal moments; 3) Type letter of critique after the last step. We all digest work differently, so find a method that works for you, while giving your best feedback.

Feedback must be typed before the workshop begins. Length requirement is 350 words for each workshop piece. Letters need to be printed (2 copies) and handed to the writer and instructor before the end of class. *Providing a letter does not excuse peers from participating (i.e., speaking) during the workshop.*

**FEEDBACK TIPS:**

Some of you may be unfamiliar with critiquing creative writing and may be more familiar with analyzing/critiquing through a literature lens which isn't entirely adequate for our purposes. The following tips may help you critique your peers' workshop pieces.

- Note your emotional reactions. What feels "hot" or engaging to you? Where are you moved? Where do you feel most immersed? When you finish the piece, what stands out the most? An image? A line of dialogue? Character gesture? Identify 1-3 places where you feel moved, note them in the letter, and explain why they are working for you.
- Engage the work in terms of craft. Identify craft choices discussed in class that are working in the piece, or alternatively, offer suggestions on how a different craft choice could help a section become more effective in the piece.
- Note what isn't working yet. Identify at least 2 places that need improvement and try articulating why they're not working. Ask probing questions, e.g., What associations does this image bring to mind? How is my reading impacted by the use of white space on the page? Why does this line strike my ear differently than others around it? What effect does this have on me as a reader? Try to capture your experience of the writer's craft choice. *It is important here to think of yourself as a writer in the role of a reader. Our jobs are not to delineate meaning for the writer, or to reduce*

*their work down to symbols or analysis. It is not our job to tell the writer how to develop a section, but merely to act as an engaged audience, noting what it is like to read their work.*

- Some of you may be novice writers and feel inexperienced critiquing the work of others. But even the most inexperienced writer can be instrumental in providing feedback—we are all readers, we have all read, listened to, watched fiction, and more importantly, we are all human beings with the ability to be moved, irritated, confused, delighted, stunned, etc. Your emotional and intellectual responses as people are valuable—share them with your peers!

## WORKSHOP PROCEDURES

We will work with a slightly altered version of the traditional workshop model.

- Workshop begins with the writer reading a short passage (less than 2 minutes) they are proud of, or they feel is significant in the piece. No explanation is needed afterward.
- The writer will then remain silent and take notes for the duration of the critique.
- Critique begins with peers voicing their praise: the things you liked about the piece (e.g., lines, language, characters, craft, images, etc.).
- After positive feedback, we will shift to a constructive critique. Important questions to keep in mind: How can we help the writer improve the piece? What elements are helping, needing, or hindering the piece? Where do we need more information? While reading, where did we get confused? It's important that we use a craft-based critical lens here and employ the language and terminology discussed in class.
- The workshop is led by peers—students must participate in both stages of critique. As the instructor, think of me as a mediator, steering the conversation in different directions but not as the discussion leader, nor the source of answers. All peers should thoroughly read each piece, so they are confident in delivering feedback. Students may refer to their letters while speaking but a more organic conversation between readers is preferred. If you agree with others' feedback, chime in, and mention it so the writer spots readerly patterns. Similarly, if you disagree, mention the reasons. Remember fiction is subjective and we're here to give our honest take. Workshop is not a debate, nor competition; it is a roundtable discussion to help the writer improve their work.
- Once all feedback is shared, the writer will have the opportunity to ask questions. The writer should not defend their writing—no one likes hearing a five-minute monologue about what readers didn't "get"! Instead, try articulating your vision of the piece and bounce ideas off your peers on how to best implement it.

The workshop is not a place to be hurtful nor a platform for students to "flex" their knowledge or literary muscle: Feedback needs to be constructive. We're all young writers here and the goal of a workshop is not only to make us better writers, but also guide us to finding our voices.

### A Word to Writers Being Workshopped:

By sharing our work, we expose our fledgling work to critique, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable for the sake of growing as writers. Be proud of yourself for taking this step in your development.

Writers need to be open to constructive criticism—Peer feedback is important because fresh eyes to our work are something we as writers cannot provide for ourselves.

Not all feedback is created equal; part of developing as a writer is learning to identify which feedback is useful for you. Something that strikes you as wrong or misses your intent may in fact open you up to new ways of viewing your work, or different ideas for your stories. For this reason, I encourage students to get to know each other and use the course to network with other creative writers and voice their differing aesthetic choices and viewpoints.

Take notes while your piece is being discussed. If feedback is confusing, note it as a clarifying question at the end of the workshop. Your notes will make the revision process easier.

Look beyond feedback that offers only validation. Likewise, don't linger on criticism. Not to belabor the point, but: DO NOT defend or justify your work to your peers or gag them from providing honest feedback. Instead, think of how in future revisions you can better implement your vision and overcome the issues they've pointed out.

## UNT POLICIES:

**ADA Accommodations Statement:** UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at [disability.unt.edu](http://disability.unt.edu).

**Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences:** According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

The decision of the instructor will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity, which is responsible for maintaining student conduct records. The incident may result in an official disciplinary record for the student(s).

Academic integrity violations can include copying a passage from a source verbatim, but they can also include improper or misleading citations. Please note that all source material must be acknowledged, even if the material is paraphrased. Be careful to always acknowledge the work of other writers and take the time to work out your thoughts and arguments without copying the work of others. (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/06-049>)

**Emergency Notification and Procedures:** UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

**Sexual Assault Prevention:** UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at [SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648

**Retention of Student Records:** Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Day	Topic	Reading Due (read before class)	Assignments
1	Monday 1/12	Syllabus & Introductions	Syllabus	
	Wednesday 1/14	Why write? What is creative writing? What is creativity's function? The Reading-Writing Relationship	Williams, "Why I Write"; Stafford, "A Way of Writing"; Zagajewski, "Young Poets, Please Read Everything" and "Self-Portrait"	
2	Mon 1/19	Labor Day/ No Classes		
	Wed 1/21	What is a Poem? Clarity, Ambiguity, and Narrative	Scheer, "An Essay on Poetry"; Zapruder, "Understanding Poetry..."; Machado, "Memory from Childhood"; Hales, "Power"	Prompt #1
3	Mon 1/26	Memory & Experience; Sound and Language	Hugo, "Writing off the Subject"; Carver, "After-Glow"; Brooks, "Cynthia in the Snow"; Laux, "The Tooth Fairy"; Tretheway, "History Lesson"	Prompt #2
	Wed 1/28	Imagery, Metaphor & Simile	Hazelton, "Learning about Figurative Language"; Laux, "Girl in the Doorway"; Ginsberg, "Homework"; Simic, "Fork"; Young, "Belief in Magic"	Prompt #3

4	Mon 2/2	Speaker, Voice, Syntax,	Brooks, "We Real Cool"; De la Paz, "In Defense of Small Towns"; Limon, "The Contract Says..."; Koertge, "I Went to the Movies...";	Poem workshop submission due on Tues 2/3 at 11 p.m.
	Wed 2/4	Form and Line	Gioia, "13 Ways to Think about the Poetic Line"; Simic, "Essay on the Prose Poem"; Sharif, "Reaching Guantanamo"; Marshall, "Granddaddy was the neighborhood"	
5	Mon 2/9	Poetry Workshop #1	6 Student Poems	
	Wed 2/11	Poetry Workshop #2	6 Student Poems	
6	Mon 2/16	Poetry Workshop #3	6 Student Poems	
	Wed 2/18	Poetry Workshop #4	4 Student Poems	
7	Mon 2/23	Character & Plot	Lamott, "Character" and "Plot"; Munoz, "Anyone Can Do It"	Prompt #4
	Wed 2/25	Tension & Stakes	Saunders, "Sticks"; Harris, "The Mine"; Gogol; "The Nose"	
8	Mon 3/2	Perspective & Point of View	Gardner, "POV"; Eggers, "After I Was Thrown..."; Jan Kochai, "Playing Metal Gear Solid V..."	Prompt #5
	Wed 3/4	Setting	Boyle, "After the Plague"; Dybek, "We Didn't"	Prompt #6
	March 9-15	Spring Break – No Class		
9	Mon 3/16	Shape & Structure	Chekhov, "The Darling"; Vaye Watkins, "The Last Thing We Need"	Prompt #7
	Wednesday 3/18	Persona Flash/Paragraph	Lopate, "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character"; Christman, " <a href="#">The Sloth</a> "; Vodicka, " <a href="#">Girl/Thing</a> "; Grauke, " <a href="#">Again</a> "	Prompt #8
10	Monday 3/23	The Self	Lopate, "Reflection and Retrospection"; Spechler "Men: A Travelogue";	Prompt #9 Prose Submission Due

			Cooper, "Burl's"; Arundel "The Things I've Lost"	on March 24 at 11 p.m.
	Wednesday 3/25	Research/Personal	Biss, "Time and Distance Overcome"; Bradley, "Fear"	Prompt #10
11	Monday 3/30	Borrowed Form	Walker, " <a href="#">Fish</a> "; Adams, " <a href="#">Drug Facts</a> "	
	Wednesday 4/1	Prose Workshop 1	3 Student Essays/Stories	
12	Monday 4/6	Prose Workshop 2	3 Student Essays/Stories	
	Wednesday 4/8	Prose Workshop 3	3 Student Essays/Stories	
13	Monday 4/13	Prose Workshop 4	3 Student Essays/Stories	
	Wednesday 4/15	Prose Workshop 5	3 Student Essays/Stories	
14	Monday 4/20	Prose Workshop 6	3 Student Essays/Stories	
	Wednesday 4/22	Prose Workshop 7	3 Student Essays/Stories	
15	Monday 4/27	Revision	Smiley, "What Stories Teach Their Writers"	
	Wednesday 4/29	Portfolio Review		
16	May 4-8	Finals Week – No Class		Final Portfolio due May 5, 11:59 pm