

Introduction to Creative Writing Fall 2026

Kaili Mora-Duarte | Mr. K | He/Him
Office: AUSB 106
Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 4pm-5pm
Email: Kaili.Mora-Duarte@unt.edu

Course Texts

No Textbook purchase is required for this class.
Readings and handouts will be available via Canvas.

A Preface to Our Course

“For the students’ next assignment, I ask them to return to their autobiographies, choose one of the white spaces between the segments, and begin: ‘What I didn’t say here was...’

And I explain: Write about what was lurking in your mind as you wrote the first version. Write what you thought or what you remembered but dared not write. Ultimately, those white spaces in your autobiography are the material for this class, for the personal essay, and the only thing you have to convince anyone of is your humanity.” —Dr. Jill Talbot, “The Admissions Essay vs. The Permission Essay”

“There is another reason I am a liar. I hesitate to mention it. (The writer pauses for effect.) I am a liar because the world is full of nouns and sometimes I get confused, even when I am not drunk, which is most of the time. Sometimes I forget the word and people are looking at me, waiting for it. I have been known to say *Restaurant Nurse* instead of *Waitress*. I am not being funny, I’m just slow *sometimes*. I aim to get close to the meaning. I don’t expect precision, not in real life. I say sometimes *because* I don’t remember the exact times and places. I say because as if the world makes sense. Conversation is so fast. Who has the time to parse it all out while everything is in motion? It took me ten years to write sixty pages of poetry. If you want to know about my day, you should probably lower your expectations.”
—Richard Siken, “Journal, Day One”

Overview:

Creative writing is more than just crafting a story—we are creating a portal for the readers to enter into. To prepare this portal, we must learn the language of craft in each genre. In this course, we will cover three genres and in this order: poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction (CNF). We will focus on the basic elements of each, including but not limited to: plot, structure, POV, form, and theme. I will be providing craft readings and readings in each genre that we will discuss and ask questions into.

Learning Outcomes

I am here to teach you creative writing; however, I am also teaching you to answer the question: *how do you learn best?*

We will attempt to find success in the following:

1. "Develop a sense of *being* a writer, by experiencing a full writer's process, including but not limited to invention, drafting, revision, performance, editing, and production" (Wendy Bishop, *Released Into Language*, 41).
2. Answer the question: how do you learn and write best? That is, we will understand invention strategies and how to set assignments and goals for ourselves.
3. Read like a writer. That is, we will be able to analyze creative pieces to determine what the author is doing and what strategies we are employing to reach their goals.
4. Become familiar with and be able to incorporate individual strategies for strong writing: concrete details, imagery, voice, point of view, pacing, and metaphor.
5. How to read ourselves like a reader; they will be able to stand back and analyze their own piece in the same ways they would analyze the work of a published writer.
6. We will know what kinds of questions to ask about our work to enable how to set about revising—we will be able to set assignments for ourselves to improve.
7. Become acquainted with several genres and subgenres.
8. Be exposed to what experts have to say about craft and begin to learn and use the terminology of craft. They will gain the vocabulary of a writer.
9. Of course, have fun!

Grading Breakdown

Workshop 20 %

Mini Essays 20 %

Participation/Attendance 30 %

Final Portfolio and Essay 30%

I encourage you to monitor your score and review feedback posted on Canvas; However, Canvas's gradebook is not always accurate. Some grades, such as attendance or extra credit, are not incorporated until *after* the last time the class meets. If you are concerned about your grades, please set up a meeting so we can discuss them.

Please note, I cannot discuss grades over email.

Grading Breakdown & Description

Workshops & Writing Assignments | 20 % : Several times throughout the semester, you will be asked to workshop the writing of your peers. The obvious goal of workshop is to improve the writing being workshopped; but more importantly, the goal of workshop is to train participants to analyze a piece of writing to see its purpose and *how* and how well it functions to achieve that purpose. I want you to start to become the sort of writer who will eventually be able to self-diagnose the problems of her work—and be able to then figure out possible solutions.

No holdovers from earlier semesters or from high school. Poems should be sonnet length or longer. Prose should be a minimum of 750 words. Please distribute your work to class members the class day BEFORE we discuss it. Please refrain from distributing work that is sexually explicit, laced with profanity, or excessively violent. If you're not sure about a piece, use me as a sounding board first. If you miss your workshop day, plan on a 10% drop in your portfolio grade. If you do not distribute your workshop piece on the assigned day or if you miss your workshop day, plan on a significant penalty in your portfolio grade. I expect you to comment on a student's work orally and in writing, and you will be awarded preparation points for doing so.

Mini Essays | 20% : Throughout the semester, we will use Dr. Corey Mark's framework for our mini essays that will be answering craft based questions. I will make these questions available during our class that may ask about how we as writers approach or understand elements such as, but not limited to: the line, the pause, white-space, genre, poetry, creative nonfiction, fiction, and many more. We will discuss the way in which writers, such as Richard Hugo or Ezra Pound, approach craft based essays with the element of surprise and play.

Participation / Attendance | 30% : I will take attendance each and every class. I am always happy to have you in class—if you are running late, it is OK—come to class even when you feel like it does not matter. Complete all the reading and be ready to engage with our community in class. Come to class with questions, anxieties, critiques, insights from your responses, the things you loved, the things you hated—I want us to create an environment that leans into those curiosities and insights. Your presence is still crucial to each class, and particularly, workshop; even if you are not being workshopped, engage with our community and participate fully.

Note: Our community that is based in our classroom is sustained through our respect for each other and our learning. Please note, your attendance and participation grade will suffer if you do not participate in our activities, our conversations, workshops, and our push into curiosity. If you are ever struggling in our class, do not hesitate to reach out to me via email or in-person. My goal for each and every one of my classes is student success—I am rooting for you!

Final portfolio and Essay | 30 % : At the end of the semester (at the final, in fact), you will submit a portfolio containing several revised pieces. Revision wears different clothes in everyone's process—that may look like a complete new work, or two lines changed. I do not want our portfolios to look like a re-submission of your previous drafts; linger, ask questions, cut lines, add lines. Your portfolio will include the following: 1 poem, 1 creative nonfiction essay, 1 fiction work, 1 writing of your choice (workshopped or not) and a reflection on your writing as described below.

The Final essay: In this essay, you will reflect on your process as a writer and go back to that question: *how do you learn and write best?*

Note: I do not include a word or page count for your writings—one of the hardest elements of writing is knowing when and how to start and stop. We will be encountering and challenging ourselves with this element.

Writing Assignments:

Poetry

1. **Free Verse:** Utilize the definition below to illustrate the ways we make portals for our readers' through free verse.

"A poetry of organic rhythms, of deliberate irregularity, improvisatory delight. Free verse is a form of nonmetrical writing that takes pleasure in a various and emergent verbal music. "As regarding rhythm," [Ezra Pound](#) writes in "A Retrospect" (1918): "to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome." Free verse is often inspired by the cadence—the natural rhythm, the inner tune—of spoken language. It possesses visual form and uses the graphic line to differentiate itself from prose. "The words are more *poised* than in prose," [Louis MacNeice](#) states in *Modern Poetry* (1938); "they are not only, like the words in typical prose, contributory to the total effect, but are to be attended to, in passing, for their own sake." The dream of free verse: an originary verbal music for every poem. [Jorge Luis Borges](#) explains: "Beyond its rhythm, the typographical appearance of free verse informs the reader that what lies in store for him is not information or reasoning but emotion."-Edward Hirsh, *A Poet's Glossary*.

2. **Formal poem:** It could be a poem that you started as a prompt in class, or a new poem. Below are some ideas if you need inspiration. Please stick to the form and structure as outlined in class, or on *Poetry Foundation*.

You could write a haiku, a ghazal, a pantoum, a sonnet, a villanelle, a sestina. It should be aware of sound, form, rely on image and the concrete over abstract, and use the exact words you mean.

3. **Prose Poem.** (nonlineated poem. in paragraph format) Explore a world that has recently experienced an extinction of a crucial thing (concrete or abstract: mothers, birds, clouds, jealousy, death). Explore what this world smells, tastes, looks, feels, or sounds like. After exploring the natural world, zoom into the community and individual's lives, highlight a few relationships that are affected by this missing element.

Fiction

4. **Conversation with Subtext:** A short story that is mainly a conversation with subtext. Write a conversation between your protagonist and another character (there must be a dynamic present—they can't be talking about the weather, but maybe there is a tornado happening). Do not include any words that would be directly associated with the topic of conversation. Attempt to imply friction, subtext—without giving everything away.
5. **Linear Short Story:** The character should have a desire. Start in medias res, meaning in the middle. Without giving any backstory or context, introduce us to a character who is in a circumstance that is currently happening. Let this story unfold as you write it. A desire should arise in the character, a hope for resolution. Conflict examples: they try to open the car door but realize the keys are inside, their child won't eat dinner, they have indigestion during a job interview.
6. **Mosaic Short Story:** Tell us a story through a modular or mosaic model. There should still be a main character, setting, scene, dialogue, theme, with conflict and climax, but the way the story is told is different. Modular stories depart from linear chronological storytelling and rely on juxtaposition of image, flashback, different characters, action, dialogue, language, and idea more than on traditional plot structures to piece together a story. They repeat themselves and accumulate meaning .

Nonfiction

7. **Portraiture Essay:** Write a work in which you describe and reckon with someone other than the speaker—use the examples we speak about in class.

8. **Research and Collage:** One of our most encountered forms in academia—use research, the archive, and storytelling to provide a narrative in which you use scholarly work and narrative to form a work that can sing beyond one audience. Use at least 3 scholarly sources.
9. **Personal Hardship Essay:** What has been left unsaid? How do we contend and reckon with the gaps of silence and remembrance? Write a work in which suspend the speaker into adversity, hardship—and see where it leads the speaker.

COMMUNICATION EXPECTATIONS

Feedback

I strive to return all graded work promptly. For shorter assignments and discussions, I will generally post grades/feedback within seven days of the due date. For the larger projects, I aim for fourteen days, but with the rise in cheating and plagiarism, it occasionally takes longer to finish grading a set of papers. If it has been longer than the times mentioned, please feel free to ask me when to expect the grades and feedback, but not before then.

Student Hours

You can walk into my office during my hours, but I encourage you to make an appointment to ensure you get time to meet with me. Feel free to use my office hours as often as you'd like to chat with me, review an assignment, or discuss any questions/concerns you have. It's been my experience that a quick conversation is the most effective way to resolve any confusion.

Email

I will respond to all official correspondence addressed to my UNT email in person or via email within three business days. All other communication methods—Canvas Messenger, assignment comments, personal emails, physical letters, etc.—*are unreliable* ways to contact me. I cannot guarantee that I will see your message on other platforms within any specific time frame, if ever.

Please check the syllabus and related assignment sheets before emailing me, and in your email, indicate where you looked for the information you are seeking before you emailed me. So that if something is unclear, I can fix it. Additionally, when you write to me, please include the subject of your email in the subject line and write your email with appropriate salutations and grammar. For a sample email, read this article, "[How to Email Your Professor](#)." Or, for a checklist on effective email communication between yourself and instructors, see <https://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>.

It is your responsibility to check your UNT email during your 'business' hours each day to ensure you do not miss any time-sensitive information.

Public Writing

All submissions for this course, including but not limited to pre-writing, drafts, in-class assignments, and final projects, are public, i.e., any writing submitted for this course may be viewed by me or classmates. Do not submit any information that you are unwilling to share.

Please note, we are in a community of writers and there will be times that your peers or yourself will write things that are difficult and challenging—if you are ever unsure or concerned with the appropriateness of your work, come talk to me during my office hours—I am happy to speak with you! Please refrain from taking the acts of storytelling as truth by your peers—our workshop space is sacred and I honor such through maintaining our respectfulness to each other.

Mandatory Reporting

In accordance with UNT Policy, state and federal law, your instructor is a mandated reporter and must therefore report to the Title IX or Deputy Title IX Coordinator instances of sexual misconduct (e.g., sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, and sexual harassment) by or against a student enrolled at the university, about which they become aware during this course through first-hand observation, writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. Please be aware that this reporting obligation applies to information disclosed in class discussion, workshops, conferences, written assignments, journals, emails, or other course-related communications. More information can be found through the Dean of Students, including confidential resources available on campus. The University of North Texas is committed to maintaining work and educational environments free from sexual misconduct and retaliation. The University will not tolerate conduct that is inconsistent with this commitment at any of its locations, programs, or other activities. If students, faculty, or staff would like assistance or have questions, they can email TitleIX@unt.edu or visit the Dean of Students website.

Syllabus Change Policy

I have made every attempt to provide an accurate syllabus for this course. However, if presently unanticipated circumstances arise that necessitate an amendment to the syllabus, advance notice will be given in writing via email of all changes, and I will provide an updated hard copy with the changes.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance Policy ([UNT Policy 06.039](#))

Regular class attendance and participation are required. Excessive absences will affect your grade. Documented absences (e.g., religious holidays, university events) are automatically excused. Illness or

undocumented absences are unexcused unless your instructor decides otherwise. Email your instructor within 24 hours of an absence for them to consider excusing it.

You are given two free absences during the semester—at your third absence, they will begin to count against your attendance grade. Come to class and email me if it ever gets difficult to do such!

My main goal for our class is your success—keep coming to class, even when it is hard or you feel like the material has challenged you. If you are concerned or have questions concerning attendance, please meet with me during my office hours.

Excused Absences

Absences for the following reasons are considered excusable by the university based on [UNT policy 6.039](#), but you must obtain a note from the [Dean of Students](#) (or other appropriate university offices) to verify your absence(s): (1) religious holy day, including travel for that purpose; (2) participation in an official university function; (3) active military service, including travel for that purpose; (4) pregnancy and parenting under Title IX; and (6) when the University is officially closed. Please inform me of any planned absences with at least 10 days' notice to minimize any potential negative impact on your grades.

No other absences are eligible to be excused. Unless the absence is an illness or an extenuating circumstance that *exceeds* five consecutive days, you may request documentation from the Dean of Students' office for an excuse. Examples include, but are not limited to: (1) temporary disability or injury; (2) extended medical absence or hospitalization; (3) illness of a dependent family member; or (4) major illness or death of a loved one.

If you miss a class:

You are responsible for finding out what you missed. *Before* the next time our class meets, review the Canvas page and ask a classmate for notes on what you missed, or make an appointment to meet with me during office hours, or if needed, email me to ensure you are on track and prepared for the next class.

If you miss an assignment:

Email and make an office hour visit with me to discuss how to navigate our class. I will give you time to turn in your missed assignments if you are missing due to an excused absence. If you miss an assignment throughout our semester, do not let it wait and accept the zero; come talk to me and let us see how we can keep moving forward. I am rooting for you.

LATE WORK

This course requires extensive reading and regular writing. To keep up with the course, you must complete all assignments by the date and time stated on [Canvas](#). If you do not contact me concerning missing work, I will deduct 10 points per day it is late.

Note that unreadable documents, e.g., inaccessible, unopenable, partially complete, incorrect files, etc., will be considered as a non-submission and thus late if the deadline has passed. It is your responsibility to plan on submitting with ample time to check the submission quality and viewability of your submission on Canvas. Additionally, showing “last edited date” metadata does not qualify to remove the penalization based on any technological ‘catastrophe’ that impeded your submission.

Extensions

I will occasionally grant extensions for assignments if you request the extension at **least 24 hours before the deadline**. All requests must be sent via email and include 1) the specific assignment information in the subject and body, and 2) let me know the day and time you will turn in the assignment instead. No extensions will be granted for inherently collaborative assignments (peer review, in-class activities, etc.) in which your peers depend on your timely submission to progress in their work.

UNT POLICIES

Academic Integrity Standards

According to [UNT Policy 06.003](#), Academic Integrity standards are violated when students engage in academic dishonesty behaviors, including, but not limited to, cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty and my decision on academic sanctions will be reported to the [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

Plagiarism can include copying a passage from a source verbatim without citing it, but it can also include improper or misleading citations. Please note that all source material must be acknowledged, even if the material is paraphrased or sourced from generative AI technologies. Be careful always to acknowledge the work of other writers and take the time to work out the distinction between your original thoughts and arguments and those of others.

Additionally, the use of any generative AI writing tools is prohibited in this class. Assignments for the course have been designed to help you develop as a thinker, reader, and writer without using these technologies. You will generate ideas, read, revise, and write independently or when appropriate in consultation with peers, UNT Writing Center tutors, and me. *Any* use of generative AI in your work for this class violates our syllabus and thus will be treated as an instance of cheating. Ignorance of the generative AI tools in your chosen digital writing technologies, whatever they may be, is not

sufficient to excuse the violation. If you are unsure about a digital writing tool (even automatically integrated ones), don't use it for this class.

Acceptable Student Behavior

According to UNT policy 07.012, student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be notified verbally or in writing and may be directed to leave the classroom. Additionally, the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct.

For additional information, refer to the Dean of Students website.

ADA Accommodations

According to UNT policy 16.001, UNT will make reasonable academic accommodations for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA). Then, the ODA will provide them with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty members detailing the students' accommodation needs. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss such letters during their designated office hours. Students may request reasonable accommodation at any time; however, ODA notices of reasonable 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 and meet with all faculty members prior to accommodation implementation every semester.

For additional information, refer to the Office of Disability Access website.

Emergency Notification & Procedures

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly provide 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.

For additional information, refer to the Eagle Alert website.

UNT RESOURCES

Technical Assistance:

Information Technology Help Desk | University of North Texas

Email: helpdesk@unt.edu

Phone: 940-565-2324

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130

Writing Assistance:

Writing Center | University of North Texas

Email: WritingCenter@unt.edu

Phone: 940-565-2563

In Person: Sage Hall, Room 150