Introduction to Poetry

Fall 2025 | University of North Texas

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***Please note: Your decision to remain in this course constitutes your acceptance of this syllabus. Read it. It is subject to change.***

Required Course Texts:

* *Dream Work* by Mary Oliver. Published by Grove Press. ISBN - 13: 978-0-87113-069-3 (Please contact me if you need a copy)
* *The Poetry Handbook* by Mary Oliver.
* A printed *Reading Packet*, which I will provide.
* A notebook for your own poetry.

A Few Quotes to Preface the Course



“You have to let the madman out. The madman has got to be allowed to go wild. Then you can get the architect in and design the structure. After that, you can have the engineer come in

and put it together. And then you let the janitor in to clean it up. The problem is, most people

let the janitor in before they let the madman out.” —John R. Trimble

“If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know it is poetry. —Emily Dickinson

“"A poem is a small machine made of words." - William Carlos Williams

“Come forth into the light of things, Let Nature be your teacher.”  
― William Wordsworth

“If you will stay close to nature, to its simplicity, to the small things hardly noticeable, those things can unexpectedly become great and immeasurable.” -Rainer Maria Rilke "Letters to a Young Poet"

"The mirror that nature holds is deep and floating and ethereal and faithful—A clean bright mirror, a magical wondrous mirror, it will show you all you can conceive of, all you wish to behold." - Walt Whitman "The Poet in Nature

“It's possible to understand the world from studying a leaf. You can comprehend the laws of aerodynamics, mathematics, poetry and biology through the complex beauty of such a perfect structure. It's also possible to travel the whole globe and learn nothing.” ― Joy Harjo, The Woman Who Fell From the Sky: Poems

Learning Outcomes



The student will:

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).

1. Know how to read like a writer. That is, they will be able to analyze creative pieces to determine what the author is doing and what strategies they are employing to reach their goals.
2. Know how to write like a reader. That is, 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. They will know what kinds of questions to ask about their work to enable them to begin revising.
3. Become familiar with and be able to incorporate individual strategies for strong writing: concrete details, imagery, voice, point of view, pacing, metaphor, etc.

1. Be exposed to the canon of what has been and is currently being done. Become acquainted with several subgenres. Be exposed to what experts have to say about craft and begin to learn and use the terminology of craft. Develop the vocabulary of a writer.

Grading Breakdown points out of 800



Workshop 180 points

Writing Assignments 160 points

Thoughtful Participation 100 points

Reading Series 30 points

Poetry Vocabulary Test 30 Points

Final Portfolio and Essay 320 points

\*Extra Credit option (additional poem 20 points)

Course Requirements



1. **Workshops** (90 points) 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 understand what its purpose is and how well it functions to achieve that purpose. I want you to become the sort of writer who will eventually be able to self-diagnose the problems of their 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. Please distribute your work to class members the class day BEFORE we discuss it. Please refrain from turning in work that is intensely vulgar, graphic, or profane. If you’re not sure about a piece, use me as a sounding board first. 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 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.

2. **Writing Assignments** (160 points) Plan on 8 of these, all of which should be typed. To receive full credit, they must be turned in on Canvas before the class starts on the day they are due. If you turn them in within a week, expect a 5% penalty. If they are later than this, expect a 10% penalty. If you turn in fewer than six of these, expect to fail the course.

3. **Thoughtful Participation** (100 points) I will pass around a reading record daily. Complete all the reading and be ready to engage with your peers and me in class. Come to class with questions, anxieties, critiques, insights from your responses, the things you loved, the things you hated—all of it. As far as workshopping goes, even if you are not being workshopped, your presence is still crucial, and you’ll be amazed at the things you can learn by actively participating in a discussion of someone else’s work. Believe it or not, as different as our writing styles will turn out to be, we all make the same mistakes/have the same problems/need to hear the same things once in a while. You will also be asked to present on certain readings throughout the semesters, and will be given points based on your level of participation and thoughtfulness of the presentation; I will give more instructions on this in the future.

Note: I strongly advise you to make a friend in the class from whom you can get notes and hand-outs, should you happen to be absent. I will not conduct a private tutorial with you, either by email or during office hours, in order to replicate what you missed by not attending class. Please do not ask me to do so. However, *after you have thoughtfully considered your friend’s notes, feel free to ask me specific questions should you need clarification.*

4. **Attend a Reading Series** (30 points)You may attend a reading hosted by UNT, American Literary Review, or one hosted locally in the Denton area. Attend one reading and complete a write­up of at least 250 words focusing on techniques (with examples) you admire (or didn't admire) in the writer, or other things you learned.

5. **Final portfolio and essay** (300 points) At the end of the semester you will submit a portfolio containing several substantively revised pieces. You will include at least 6 revised poems. Highlight the revisions and changes you have made in these pieces.

*Final essay* (150 points) (3-5 pages, Double spaced). In this essay you will discuss your governing aesthetic, quote from and analyze at least 2-4 texts we’ve studied this semester, comment on your writing process and, and analyze some of your highlighted revisions. In short, you’ll demonstrate what you have learned. MLA formatted.

*Final exam:* Attendance is mandatory: put our final on your calendars. You will turn in your final portfolio assignment, you will bring food (if you can), you will read 2 minutes of poetry you wrote for this class, and you will bring around 20 printed copies of one of your poems for a class anthology, and it will be a lovely time.

6. **Send a Poem out to be Published** (20 points) Turn in a paragraph about why you chose to submit to Turn in a paragraph about why you chose to submit to this journal, and what the process what like, with a screenshot of the confirmation that you submitted. Some journals you can research and submit to. Here are some literary journals from local Texas Universities: Hothouse, Apricity, The Eckleburg Project, Harbinger, and even the UNT writing contests. You can also find nonuniversity or collegiate magazines. Try to find one that publishes poetry similar to yours.

7. **Extra Credit** (20 points) Write one additional poem due at the end of the semester. Acceptable form and structaut are written below.

8. **Poetry Vocabulary Test** (30 points) The only test I’ll ever give. It will test you on the terms we have been using and studying all semester.

Poem Assignments (20 points each)

1. **Haiku** (3-10 of these). Go into nature and observe and feel. Then write a few haikus. They should be 90% concrete. What do I mean by concrete? A poem that shows rather than tells, that favors words that appeal to the senses, words that can be seen, smelled, touched, heard, or tasted. Cross out abstractions like patriotism, friendship, loyalty, hatred, love. They should include a shift or a volta. What is a volta? The same thing as a turn in a sonnet, which usually comes in line nine of a Petrarchan sonnet or line thirteen of a Shakespearean sonnet. A volta signals a shift, an answer, a reversal, a resolution.
2. **Scansion Worksheet** I will provide this with instructions
3. **Sonnet** Write a 14 line poem that follows the Petrarchan or Shakespearean structure. The *Petrarchan sonnet*, divides the 14 lines into two sections: an eight-line stanza (octave) rhyming ABBAABBA, and a six-line stanza (sestet) rhyming CDCDCD or CDECDE. John Milton’s [“When I Consider How My Light Is Spent”](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poem.html?id=174016) is a good example.

The *English (or Shakespearean) sonnet* condenses the 14 lines into one stanza of three [quatrains](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learning/glossary-term.html?term=Quatrain) and a concluding couplet, with a rhyme scheme of ABABCDCDEFEFGG

Your sonnet should be full of images. Aim for two surprises each line (surprises could be am image, a unique word choice, a strong sound, a metaphor or figurative language, or enjambment). Your sonnets should include a volta in the last couplet, a shift or turn.

1. **Surrealist Prose Poem** A prose (non-lineated or no lines) composition that, while not broken into verse lines, demonstrates other traits such as symbols, metaphors, and other figures of speech common to poetry" (Poetry Foundation "Prose Poem"). See "Swerve" by Brenda Miller, or "Metals Metals" by Russel Edson as an example. Often times prose poems have a surrealist quality.
2. **Strict Form Poem** You may write a sestina, pantoum, ghazal, or villanelle. But you must stick to the rules and use modern language. Most poem forms, their descriptions and rules can be found at [Poetry Foundation's website](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms?letter=P)or in our Reading Packet.
3. **Ode** Write an ode in second person and identify the object or thing in the title: Read a number of odes before trying your hand and be sure to find a way to implicate the speaker. You might especially look at examples by Sharon Odes’ “Odes to a Tampon,” or Pablo Neruda’s “Ode to the Large Tuna in the Market,” or and Kenneth Koch’s poems from *New Addresses.*
4. **Homage to Mary Oliver** Find a poem from *Dream Works* that you admire both for its form and overall effect on the reader. Study this poem in great detail, breaking it down into its constituent parts, trying to account for such things as voice, form, diction, metaphor, tone, rhyme, meter, stanza shape, etc. Now, write a detailed prompt (no less than five sentences) explaining the constraints you’ve set. Now write your imitation poem. Turn in three items: a photocopy of the original poem, your prompt, and your own poem that owes something to the original but at the same time stands on its own two feet.
5. **Poem of Your Choice** Write and turn in whatever kind of poem you would like. Shoot for a minimum of 20 lines and maximum of 100.
6. **Extra Credit poem (Optional)** At the end of the semester you can make up 20 points by writing 1 additional poem. See some prompt options below

**Sonic Poem** Write a poem for it's quality of sound. Be aware of and utilize alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme (do not fall victim to the clunky ones) and internal rhyme and meter.  You should read your poem out loud multiple times in the writing process. Content, meaning, and form are low priority in this poem--I will be grading by listening and looking for sonic quality. See Benjamin Blackhurst's "Ode to O" for example, or any of A E Stalling's poems, or [Robert Pinsky's "Shirt".  (Links to an external site.)](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47696/shirt)

**Self-Portrait Poem** (15-30 lines) This is a poem that acts as a self portrait. Sum yourself up in a poem. You may search the Poetry Foundation database to find a multitude of self portrait poems as an example.

**Ekphrastic Poem:** Write a poem that is in response to a piece of art. This poem should acknowledge the art piece, make poignant observations about it and descriptions of it, and then build off and respond to it in some way. For examples see W. H Auden’s “Musee du Beaux Arts,” or “Ode to a Grecian Urn” by John Keats.

**Homage Poem** (20-­30 lines). Find a contemporary poem we’ve read in class that you admire both for its form and overall effect on the reader. Study this poem in great detail, breaking it down into its constituent parts, trying to account for such things as voice, form, diction, metaphor, tone, rhyme, meter, stanza shape, etc. If you’re feeling ambitious, memorize it. If you’re feeling lazy, read it one more time. Put yourself on assignment by writing up a detailed prompt (no less than five sentences) explaining the constraints you’ve set. Write the best poem of your life. Turn in three items: a photocopy of the original poem, your prompt, and your own poem that owes something to the original but at the same time stands on its own two feet.

**Ars Poetica** A poem that explains the “art of poetry,” or a meditation on poetry using the form and techniques of a poem.

**Any poem structure** we have already written in the semester.

### Office Hours | 11:30-12:20 Tuesday | GAB 515 (Cubicle the back right corner of the room

Office Hours are the most underused resource available to college students. Come to me with specific questions about your work at any stage of the writing process. Run your ideas by me, use me as a sounding board, ask me about a hitch in your draft you can’t see your way around. I’ll gladly schedule special appointments if my regular hours conflict with your other commitments. Office visits are opportunities for one-on-one instruction.

### Instructor Responsibilities and Feedback

My responsibility as your instructor is to challenge you, to help you understand the course material, and to help you grow and learn as a student. I will provide clear instructions for projects and assignments, answer your questions, and identify additional resources as necessary. I will also provide feedback on your written work. You can expect me to have **feedback and grades returned to you within two weeks of the submission date** for each assignment. If you’d like more feedback, please come to my office hours.

If you complete the assignments, you will pass the class. Most of this class is based on participation and completion. **For the poetry assignments (worth 20 points), I will almost never grade below a 15. Think of a 20 as ready to publish, 19 as darn close, 18 as could be more intentional, 17 as confusing and unintentional use of language/literary tools, 16 as somewhat missing the mark of the prompt, 15 or below–does not match the prompt.**

## Classroom Policies

### Attendance

**You are allowed 4 “free” unexcused absences in this course.** It is not necessary to email your instructor every time you miss class (see illness clause on previous page). In addition to not attending class altogether, the following actions may result in a student being counted as officially absent:

* Coming to class unprepared (didn’t read, won’t participate in discussions)
* Excessive cell phone use or the use of headphones during class
* Distracting or disruptive behavior or outbursts

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### Lateness to Class

Most students, at some point or another, meet with unforeseen circumstances that make them late for class. However, repeated late arrivals are disruptive. **You will lose participation points if lateness seems to be a persistent problem.** Nevertheless, you are always better off showing up to class, even if you are extremely late. It is much easier to update you on what you missed directly after class. (Note: This policy does not apply to students with ODA accommodations for lateness.)

Electronic Devices

**No phone or headphone use during class. Phones should be out of sight for the duration of class. While some computer use is permitted, you are expected to be accessing course materials only during class.** We can think of this policy as important for participation in the course and as a general exercise in focusing our attention and showing respect for the classroom space. If I see you using your phone during class, I can mark you as absent. If you have an issue that requires you to have your phone out during class, please inform me

### Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will automatically docked 5% of its grade. If any digital paper submission errors occur using Canvas, the student is expected to *email the instructor with the assignment attached before the due date* to avoid late grade penalties.

### Academic Integrity Standards and Consequences

**You are here to improve your own voice as a writer, so do not use writing assistance software. I will automatically fail any work that has been written or assisted by AI. If a student uses it twice, I will report them to the Academic Integrity office will result is academic penalties like admonition to expulsion from the University. T**urn off Grammarly, ChatGPT, and any software that offers suggestions to your writing beyond adding a comma. If you are too tempted to use these softwares, please buy a notebook and turn everything in by hand.

According to UNT Policy 06.003, [Student Academic Integrity](https://vpaa.unt.edu/fs/resources/academic/integrity)

“academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to:

* Cheating--submitting work that is not your own (This includes using ChatGPT)
* Fabrication--pretending you are writing about a real interview when you really made it up
* Facilitating academic dishonesty--helping someone else cheat
* Forgery--pretending your work is someone else's
* Plagiarism--using someone else's published work without citing it correctly
* Sabotage--setting someone else up to fail”

A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University. I am obligated to report any academic dishonesty.

## Acceptable Student Behavior

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 directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the [Code of Student Conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct)

The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc.

The [Dean of Students Office](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct)  enforces the [Code of Student Conduct.](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012)

The Code explains:

* What conduct is prohibited
* The process the DOS uses to review reports of alleged misconduct by students
* The sanctions that can be assigned

When students may have violated the Code, they meet with a representative from the Dean of Students Office to discuss the alleged misconduct in an educational process.

### University Policies for Students

**Emergency Notification & 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.

**ADA/ODA Accommodations**

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. Students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must **discuss expectations with each instructor prior to implementation in the classroom**. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu

**Survivor Advocacy**

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit 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. UNT’s Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim’s compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565-2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.