Course Outline

Instructor: Carrie Snyder
Contact: ca2snyde@uwaterloo.ca
Office hours: 5:00-6:00 Wed. HH 369, or by appointment
Weekly updates and reminders will be posted on LEARN.

Course description: Aimed at encouraging students to develop their creative and critical potentials, while learning about the writing and publishing industry, the course consists of in-class exercises and workshops, seminar discussions, and opportunities to write, with units on poetry, short fiction, and creative non-fiction.

Required materials: Courseware material and A Poetry Handbook, by Mary Oliver. Lined writing paper or a notebook, and your favourite writing utensil (pen or pencil) for in-class exercises. In-class exercises will be written by hand.

Attendance and participation: Attendance is mandatory (see UW’s policy on doctor’s notes). Participation = communication! You are expected to contribute in class both verbally, during workshops, and in writing, by completing exercises and peer reviews. Weekly out-of-class notebook work will also be assessed for participation. You are expected to listen respectfully to your peers’ work and to share your ideas in positive and helpful ways. Late assignments will be accepted only if an extension has been discussed in advance of the deadline. If you have questions, issues, or concerns, no matter how big or small, please contact me by email or visit during office hours.

Mark breakdown: Attendance and in-class participation (20%); peer reviews (total of 17.5%); literary magazine assignment (2.5%); portfolio work: FIVE poems with explanatory reflection (20%), ONE story with explanatory reflection (20%), and ONE polished in-class exercise with explanatory reflection (20%). Some assignments are required to be printed out and handed in at the beginning of class. Talk to me in advance about making other arrangements, if necessary.

Grading: All written and graded assignments, with the exception of the peer reviews and the literary magazine assignment, will be assessed on the following criteria: Grammar and syntax: 25%; Style and voice: 25%; Structure and organization: 25%; Content, creativity, depth: 25%. The literary magazine assignment will be assessed on content and completion. Peer reviews will be assessed on content, organization, depth, and completion.

SATURDAY CLASS IN NOVEMBER ALERT: Please note that UW has scheduled the make-up class for Thanksgiving on Saturday, November 21. Circle this date on your calendar and keep it open. Attendance is expected.
Course curriculum

Week 1, Sept. 14: Introductions
What is creative writing? Why do you write? What are your goals for this session?
Discussion of course structure.
In-class exercises: Poems. Subject: Getting to know you.
To hand in: In-class questionnaire on your interest in creative writing.

Week 2, Sept. 21: Poetry-writing toolkit
Shaping a poem: line breaks, formal structure, rhythm, imagery, content, voice, mystery.
Today’s reading: “The Swan,” by Mary Oliver / Mary Oliver’s A Poetry Handbook
In-class exercises: Poems, poems, poems! Come prepared for a writing-heavy class.

Week 3, Sept. 28: Poetry unit continued
Today’s reading: Mary Oliver’s Handbook, continued
In-class exercises: Writing a sonnet. Line break exercise.
Due: Bring ONE original poem (ie. written by you) for line break workshop.

Week 4, Oct. 5: Workshopping the workshop
How to workshop: getting beyond “I like that.” Giving and receiving critique. An inside view of the professional editor/writer relationship.
Today’s reading: Mary Oliver’s Handbook, wrapped up
In-class exercises: Layered writing exercise. Practicing peer review: bring Courseware to class for in-class workshopping exercise.
Due on LEARN on Monday, Oct. 5, by midnight: Between 2-5 original poems for peer workshop. Note: I will read and comment too, but will not assign a mark to this material.

Oct. 12: Thanksgiving holiday, no class
Due on LEARN on Monday, Oct. 12, by midnight: Poetry peer review (5%).

Week 5, Oct. 19: Drafts and editing
What is a draft? What is a finished manuscript? What is a published manuscript? The stages of editing: structural editing, line editing, copy editing, proofreading.
Today’s reading and in-class exercises: TBA
Guest speaker! Former Globe & Mail editor, and novelist, Tasneem Jamal.
Due: Five original poems, with a brief explanatory paragraph on your themes and ideas behind the poems (20%). Due at the beginning of class; Tasneem will collect these.

Week 6, Oct. 26: Fiction: the short story
What is a short story? What can a short story do? What can’t it do? Control over POV. Grammar: why does it matter?
Today’s reading: “Traplines” by Eden Robinson, “Everything Under Your Feet” by Elisabeth De Mariaffi, “Clear Skies” by Lynn Coady, and “Manning” by Andrew Hood
In-class exercises: Critiques of stories in groups: bring Courseware to class.
**Week 7, Nov. 2: Getting started: this is how to build a story**

*What do I want to write about? Using a formal outline vs. making it up as I go. The freedom of limits: formal and informal structure.*

*Today’s reading: “Kumamuk” by Joseph Boyden*

*In-class exercises: Beginnings/endings. Place. Character. POV. Plot.*

**Week 8, Nov. 9: The details**

*Finding the plot through the details. Being specific: forcing yourself to name it. Looking for placeholder sentences in your own work and expanding these into scenes.*

*Today’s reading: “Dance of the Happy Shades” by Alice Munro and “When We Were Nearly Young” by Mavis Gallant*

*In-class exercises: Writing as an insider and as an outsider. Passive voice v. active voice. Due: One original story to be given to your workshop group for next week’s intensive. (Distribute stories to your group on LEARN; midnight deadline.)*

**Week 9, Nov. 16: Dialogue**

*Writing speech like you know what you’re talking about.*

*Today’s reading: “Trap Lines” by Thomas King and “Repeat After Me” by David Sedaris*

*In-class exercises: Dialogue. Final hour and a half: Small group intensive story workshops. Due: Short story peer reviews (10%). Hand in during class or file on LEARN.*

**Week 10, SATURDAY, Nov. 21: Creative non-fiction**

*Listening to each other’s stories. Listening to our own stories.*

*Today’s reading: “Sound and Vision” by Aleksandar Hemon*

*In-class exercises: Exploring the difference between telling your own story (memoir) and telling someone else’s story (biography/personal essay). NOTE: Prepare a story about yourself that you’re willing to share out loud with the class.*

**Week 11, Nov. 23: Whose story is this?**

*What is creative non-fiction? Examples. Practical issues related to writing about real life. Boundaries? What’s true / what’s real? Who do our stories belong to?*

*Today’s reading: “The Carver Chronicles” by D.T. Max*

*In-class exercises: Simple sentences v. compound sentences. A layered exercises that uses different verb tenses.*

*Due: bring work from your final portfolio for in-class workshopping session (2.5%)*

**Week 12, Nov. 30: Literary magazines & final reflections**

*What gets published and why? What is contemporary Canadian literature? Where can we find it? Do we like it? Why or why not? What are your writing goals going forward?*

*Guest speaker! Pamela Mulloy, editor of The New Quarterly.*

*Due: Three pages of your choice from a current Canadian literary magazine to share with the class, plus a short (250 words) written reflection on why you made this choice, to be handed in (2.5%). Print and bring to class to hand in.*

*In-class exercise: Poetry slam! Prepare a short reading to present.*

**Final portfolio due one week from today!**
Notes on assignments and important due dates:

**Notebook work:** Each week you will be assigned out-of-class writing work on a topic or angle related to what we’re discussing in class. We will begin most classes by sharing our topical notebook work out loud—you have been warned! If you are not comfortable sharing personal reflections, you may create fictional personas instead. You are encouraged to use your notebook to develop your individual writing practice: collect ideas, observations, snippets of overheard dialogue, descriptive passages, character studies, etc. Your notebook work contributes to your overall participation mark.

Week 3: **Bring to class ONE original poem written by you** for our line break workshop. These will not be handed in, but are necessary for participation in the workshop.

Week 4: **File on LEARN by midnight, to your workshopping group: between 2-5 original poems for peer review.** Note: I will read and comment too, but will not assign a mark to this material. This is your opportunity to seek critique in order to revise your poems.

Week of Thanksgiving (no class): **File on LEARN on Monday, Oct. 12, by midnight: Poetry peer review (5%).**

Week 5: **Portfolio work due for poetry unit.** Please hand in five poems, plus an explanatory paragraph (250-500 words). The explanatory paragraph is your opportunity to reflect on the writing and editing experience: please note helpful advice given, frustrations or difficulties, and what you hoped to achieve. This assignment is worth 20% of your final mark. Due at the beginning of class; printed, hard copies only.

Week 8: **File on LEARN by midnight, to your workshopping group: SIX copies of an original short story,** written by you (1500 words or less), in preparation for next week’s short story intensive workshop. Your story should be one you plan to use for your final portfolio. You will not be graded directly on this short story draft: it is part of the larger process of preparing your final portfolio. I will be offering notes and comments, too.

Week 9: **Short story peer reviews due.** We will break up into small groups for the final hour and a half of today’s class, and each group will spend roughly 15 minutes discussing each story. In preparation for today’s class, you will write editorial notes on your peers’ stories. Formal peer reviews will be handed in at the end of class to the instructor, or submitted via Dropbox on LEARN (12.5%), due before class begins this evening.

Week 10 (SATURDAY): **Please come to class prepared to share a childhood story about yourself.** You don’t need to plan this out elaborately in advance. This is a story you will tell orally. Do not write it down. If you are not comfortable sharing a personal story, please invent a fictional anecdote in the first-person.
Week 11: **Due: Bring to class work intended for final portfolio** for a last-gasp workshopping session. You will be working in pairs. Specifically identify for your partner what kind of feedback you’re seeking—what issues are you struggling with?

Week 12: **Literary magazine assignment due.** Bring to class three pages of your choice from a current Canadian literary magazine to share with the class, plus a short written reflection (250 words) on your choice, to be handed in. Print this exercise! (2.5%) **Also this week: Prepare a short reading for tonight’s class.** Any genre welcome, as long as your reading has been written by you.

**Final portfolio due: December, 7.** Hard copies only, delivered to my mailbox by 5:30PM or in person during office hours, 5:30-6:30PM. One short story (1500 words max), plus explanatory paragraph (250-500 words), and one polished in-class exercise of your choice (poems, short story, or creative non-fiction, of a length of between 1000-1500 words), plus explanatory paragraph (250-500 words). Again, the explanatory paragraph is your opportunity to reflect on the writing and editing experience. This assignment is worth 40% of your final mark, and breaks down as 20% for the finished short story, and 20% for the finished in-class exercise. Please speak to me at least a week in advance if you require an extension. Last-minute extensions will not be granted.