

Spring 1-15-2002

## ENG 2003-001: Creative Writing: Poetry

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### Recommended Citation

Guzlowski, "ENG 2003-001: Creative Writing: Poetry" (2002). *Spring 2002*. 44.  
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GUZLOWSKI

**English 2003: Creative Writing: POETRY -- Spring 2002**  
Guzlowski

**TEXTS:**     Writing Poems, Wallace  
              The Practice of Poetry, Behn  
              Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry  
              Postmodern American Poetry, Hoover

**OFFICE:**   Coleman 3781 (320)  
              Phone: 581-6973  
              Email: jzguzlowski@eiu.edu  
              Hours: T 1100-1230am & 200-500pm, W 900am-300pm, Th 9-1200, and by appointment

**SPECIAL NEEDS:** Students with special needs who require academic accommodations should contact Disabilities Services (581-6583).

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**     Group of 20 poems 70 pts.  
  Exercises 20 pts.  
  Responses 10 pts.  
  Attendance

**GRADES:**   90-100 points = A  
              80-89 points = B  
              70-79 points = C  
              60-69 points = D  
              0-59 points = F

**PURPOSE:** This course is designed to help you to begin to reach your full potential as a poet. In conferences and workshops, you will discover what you know about writing good poems. You will also find out what you need to know to improve your work.

And what are good poems like? The answer isn't fixed in stone. Good poetry like good anything else changes over time. A good poem in 1786 was the kind of poem Wordsworth wrote, a good poem in 1850 was the kind of poem Tennyson wrote, a good poem in 1920 was the kind of poem Amy Lowell wrote. What's a good poem in the year 2001? If it's anything, it's the kind of poem you find in the best current magazines, and the best collections of contemporary poetry. What are these poems like?

Good poems avoid abstractions (for example, words like joy, victory, tragedy) and avoid allegorizations (for example, life is like a race, school is like a factory) and avoid rhymes. The poems I want you to write will be firmly based in your own experiences and perceptions. Also these poems will heavily rely on particular characters (I or she) doing particular things (washing dishes, eating bread, standing in front of a store window and wondering what happened to the girl or boy you hated in Toledo, Ohio, years ago) to convey the truths that you want to put forth. Also, while avoiding rhyme, these poems you'll write have formal aspects: stanzas, controlled line breaks, meter, musical languages. The contemporary poet--despite the common belief that free verse is totally free--works at shaping her poem.

Given these restrictions, you are free to write what you wish. You will work closely with the instructor to develop your range and skills as a writer. When you finish this course, you will be able to write poems.

You will know how to discover subjects, forms, and voices by writing. You will recognize many structural elements of poetry. You'll also be a better and more careful reader of poetry.

**WORKSHOPS:** Some of the course will take place in the classroom where we will share our writing, our problems as poets, and our solutions. In workshop we will explore works by the students in this class. During workshops, students will bring in xeroxes of finished poems which will be distributed to the class.

In class, each poet will first read his or her poem out loud. Then we'll talk about the poem, what works, what doesn't work, how to make the poem better, stronger.

It's hard to predict how many poems we'll be able to read per workshop. Poems—like poets—differ in weight, height, hair color and background. I'm guessing that we may be able to talk about 5 or 6 poems a class period.

**CONFERENCES:** Much of the course will be spent in conference. During a conference day, each student will have a fifteen minute meeting with the instructor. The student will arrive at his or her conference with a typed draft of that week's assignments.

The student will have prepared typed questions about the assignments. (These questions will count as exercises, and therefore should be saved for the portfolio.) During the conference, the student will make the first evaluation of the piece. The instructor will respond to the student's evaluation. The purpose of the conference is to help the student become an effective reader so that the student's work will improve.

**EXERCISES:** Each week I'll assign several exercises (for example, do one of the exercises in Robin Behn's book, write a sonnet, describe a setting, or write a poem about a character, etc). The exercises should be thoughtful and should show effort. The poems you will turn in will be based on these exercises.

**RESPONSES:** During the course of the semester, you will write 5 responses to works in the Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry or Postmodern American Poetry. Each response should deal with the poems of a particular poet in the last 700 pages of the book of the Modern Poetry book or any of the poets in the Postmodern book. The purpose of the responses is two-fold. First, they will familiarize you with the kinds of poems currently being written. Second, they will teach you to view literature from the perspective of a writer.

What will you be writing in these responses? Basically, in each response, I want you to read at least 5 poems by a poet the way a poet would read them. You will not write about what the poem means. That is a reader's question. You will approach the poems as a poet. You will ask and answer questions like: What does the poet do to make the poem sound personal? Why does the poet begin the poems the way she does? How does she describe a landscape? Is her use of dialogue effective? How would you change the poem? You will ask and answer questions like: Why does she put stanza breaks where she does? How does she use specific details? How does she create a sense of a character?

I realize that these questions may be difficult for you to formulate and answer at first, but by trying to answer such questions you will become a better poet.

These responses should each be at least 200 words long. They should be typed. One response will be due for each of the first five units of the semester. Late responses will not be accepted.

**FOLDER: DO NOT THROW OUT ANY WORK YOU DO FOR THIS CLASS.**

Instead, save all work and collect it in some kind of folder. The material in it should be dated and labeled. Do this immediately following each assignment or you may get seriously confused. This folder will be turned in at the end of the semester and will help me in assigning a final course grade.

**GRADING:** Grades will be assigned on the basis of quality of finished work and completeness of folder. I do not grade individual exercises, but you will be graded on whether or not you do the exercises and whether the exercises show effort. If you miss exercises, the exercise grade will go down. If you don't show effort (for example, writing a 2 line sonnet, or a one stanza sestina), the exercise grade will go down. The responses will be graded on whether or not you do them. If you follow the instructions for the responses, you'll get credit for each one; if you don't follow the instructions, you will not get credit.

The twenty poems you write will be graded on the basis of their quality. Four factors I consider in assigning this grade are: **Personalness, particularity, form, and music.** I will see your poems repeatedly during the semester, and will make suggestions for improving them. The poems may be revised during the course of the semester and again at the end of the semester. If you revise, your final grade for the poems will be based solely on the revisions. If you don't revise, your grade will be based on the unrevised works.

Although I will not formally grade each exercise or assignment until the end of the semester, I recognize your need to have some sense of your grade in this class. At mid-term, therefore, I will give you an informal assessment of your grade if you request it.

**RULES ABOUT LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND ABSENCES:** There are no late assignments. Those who do not bring their exercises or assignments to conferences will be invited to drop the course. Attendance at workshops and conferences is crucial.

Much of the learning that goes on in my writing course takes place in a workshop or conference situation. During the workshops, the students either work on their own writings or work with the writings of their peers, in both cases, according to guidelines I set. During the conferences, I respond to your writings and your questions about your writings. In order to get the full value of the course, the student should attend both workshops and conferences, and the student should be fully prepared. If the student does not have all of the assignments (exercises, Xerox copies of poems, etc.) completed for a particular day, the student will be counted absent for that day. To encourage active attendance, I will adhere to the following:

If a student has 3 absences, the final grade drops 1 letter. 4 absences, 2 letters. 5 or more absences, 4 letters.

If a student is absent from part of a class, workshop, or conference, the absence will count as a full absence.

**PLAGIARISM:** Any teacher at Eastern who discovers an act of plagiarism--"The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary)--has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course. I am a teacher who takes this seriously. Any act of plagiarism will result in an F for the class, and I will notify the Judicial Board about the plagiarism.

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**SYLLABUS:** Each of the following units is 2 weeks long.

- Unit 1: Sources of Creativity: Where do poems come from? Ch 9 WP
- Unit 2: Particularity in Poetry, Ch 5 WP
- Unit 3: Character in Poetry, Ch 6 WP
- Unit 4: Metaphor, Ch 7 WP
- Unit 5: Form in Poetry, Ch 1 WP
- Unit 6: Line breaks, rhyme, meter, stanza, Ch 2, 3, 4 WP
- Unit 7: Revision Workshop
- Unit 8: Revision Workshop