ENG 4762-001: Creative Writing: Poetry

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**English 4762**: Creative Writing: POETRY – Sp 04
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**TEXTS:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breen, Nancy</td>
<td>2004 Poet’s Market</td>
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<td>Bugeja, M.</td>
<td>The Art and Craft of Poetry</td>
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<td>ramazani, jahan and others</td>
<td>The Norton Anthology of Modern and contemporary poetry, volumes 1 &amp; 2</td>
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**OFFICE:** Coleman 3781  
Phone: 581-6973, email cffzg@eiu.edu  
Hours: T 1100-200, W 9-200, Th 8-930

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

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

- A chapbook of 15 poems 60 pts.  
- Class participation 20 pts.  
- Journal 20 pts.  
- Attendance

**GRADES:**

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

**PURPOSE:** In this course you will be treated as a writer, not as a student. In Eng 2003 you were the latter and were given assignments and exercises in the craft of poetry; in 4762 you are now the former, a writer; and what you are doing in this class is learning how to be a better writer. In workshops and conferences, you’ll discover what you know about writing good poems, and you’ll learn how to make those good poems better. (If you haven’t taken a creative writing course, you shouldn’t be here.)

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 2003? 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?
You can say a lot of things about contemporary poetry but to keep this pretty much to the basics, I think the following are some truths about contemporary poems: They 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. These poems are firmly based in the poet’s own experiences and perceptions. Also these poems 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 boy or girl you hated years ago in Toledo, Ohio) to convey the truths that you want to put forth. Also, while avoiding exact rhyme, these contemporary poems 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. Contemporary poets I like are Ai, Philip Levine, Billy Collins, Rodney Jones, Charles Fishman, Carolyn Forche, and lots of others.

Given these contemporary guidelines, you’re free to write what you want. You will write about what you choose and in a style you want to write in.

As a writer, however, you will face far tougher demands than ever before: finding your subject, focusing, shaping, and revising and revising and revising. Your guide in these dark, confusing, and deep waters is the class itself. In workshops, you will hear what we say about your work. Listen closely. Keep an open mind. Maintain your perspective. Some of the suggestions and comments will be useful, some won’t be. But they should all getting you thinking about your poems, and how to make them better, strong. What you do with the suggestions and comments you get in the workshops is finally up to you, but no poem will ever be considered finished in here, only “abandoned,” to be picked up later and reconsidered and revised some more.

Finally, I want to see you sending your poems to little magazines. Poet’s Market should help. Send out 2 poems every other week.

WORKSHOPS: Most of the course will take place in a workshop situation where we will share our writing, our problems as poets, and our solutions. In workshop we will explore works by the writers in this class. We will talk about what the students accomplish in their writing and about how we can help each other improve our work.

We’ll have class workshops on Tuesdays where everyone meets. We’ll have small hour-long group workshops where small groups meet. These will be on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and Thursdays. We’ll start them the first week. There will be no class on Thursdays.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURE: You are responsible for making copies of your poems for the class. The copies—with your name, poem title, and some kind of indication of which draft it is—are due at each workshop.

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: A couple of times during the semester we will be having conferences, one on one. You’ll bring your poems, your revisions, and we’ll talk about them.

JOURNAL: We learn about poetry by writing it and by reading it and by writing about it. I want you to be reading contemporary poems. Not that old stuff by Keats and Yeats and Elinor Wylie. But the new stuff by Ai and Carolyn Forche and Rita Dove and Rodney Jones, living poets. Poets you can call up and ask the time of day of. You’ll find some of these poets in Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry. But remember, only living poets.

I want you to keep a log of the poems you read. At least 3 a week. And I want you to write responses to these poems: How do you as a poet react to the works of these sister and brother poets? Don’t explicate. Don’t explain what the poem means. Rather, talk about what works in the poem, what could be better, what you can learn from the poet, and what the poet can learn from you. What would you change in the poem? What should never be changed?

SELF-EVALUATION: I want you to do a couple of self-evaluations during the course of the semester, one at the start of the semester and one at the end. At the start of the semester, sit down and write about 800 words about what you feel are your strengths and weaknesses as a poet. What are the things you do well as a poet, what are the things you want to do better? What are the subjects you move toward? What are the subjects you can’t write about? At the end of the semester, I want you to do the same thing. Include these in your journal.

GRADING: Grades will be assigned on the basis of quality of finished work and completeness of folder. In the folder, you will include your journal, your self-evaluations and your finished 15 poems with all of the revisions you did of these fifteen poems.

I don’t grade individual poems. Instead, your poems will be continually revised, and the degree to which you revise them, often at the risk of the original poem, will influence your grade. Like the Olympic diver, your “score” will be influenced by the degree of difficulty you impose on yourself. Your grade will be based on the risks you take and the effort you show in your revision and the quality of the finished poems you include in your folder. I suggest trying forms, varying your style, and going after what should scare you the most, yourself.

I will discuss your grade during the conferences if you wish or any other reasonable time, but try to put your writing first. If you do so, the good grade will follow.

FOLDER: DO NOT THROW OUT ANY WORK YOU DO FOR THIS CLASS. PUT IT IN YOUR FOLDER.
GUZLOWSKI

RULES: There are no late assignments. Those who do not bring their poems to the workshops should 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. 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 misses class or a workshop or if the student does not bring his/her poems to the workshop, the student will be counted absent for that day. To encourage active attendance, I will adhere to the following:

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

If a student has an unexcused absence from part of a class, workshop, or conference, the absence will count as a full absence.

PARTICIPATION: One learns about writing poems by talking about writing poems and talking to each other about our poems. To encourage you to talk during the workshops, I will give a grade at the end of the term for participation.

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 does this.