

## 2520A: Write Now! Writers on Writing

Fall 2021

**Section: 001**

**Time: Monday 3:30-4:30 and Wednesday 3:30-5:30**

**Room: UCC-56**

**Instructor: Dr. Aaron Schneider**

**Email: [aschne4@uwo.ca](mailto:aschne4@uwo.ca) or OWL email**

**Office: UC 2431**

**Office Hours: Monday 9:30-11:30 in person or by Zoom**

**TA:**

**Email:**

**Office:**

**Office Hours:**

### Course Description and Objectives

Though a series of lectures by contemporary writers, *Write Now!*, explores the art, craft, and process of creative writing in a variety of genres. Course topics include inspiration, overcoming creative blocks, revision, social media, publishing, literary citizenship, and the writing life.

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have demonstrated the ability to

1. identify the fundamental elements of the craft of creative writing
2. generate ideas in a variety of genres
3. understand concepts relating to contemporary creative writing practices
4. execute a dedicated writing practice through daily journal writing and class assignments

#### Required Texts

*Creative Writing: Four Genres in Brief*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition by David Starkey, Bedford St. Martin's Press, 2017.

In addition to the textbook, links to an interview with or a blog post by each writer will be posted on OWL. These are required readings and should be completed before the class in which the writer in question speaks.

#### Assignments

Polished Draft	10%
Midterm	20%
Portfolio	30%
Final Exam	40%

#### Submitting Assignments/Due dates/late submission penalties etc.

All assignments must be submitted in hard copy in class on the day indicated on the class schedule.

Students must also submit an electronic copy through OWL for plagiarism checking. Failure to do so will result in a grade of 0% on the assignment.

If you cannot submit your assignment in class, you can drop it off in the Writing Studies drop box. This is on the wall in hall across from UC 2431. Make sure that your name, your instructor's name, and the course number are clearly visible on the first page of the assignment.

Late assignments will be penalized 5% per day.

### **Email Policy:**

I reply to email in two working days. I do not reply to email over the weekend.

### **Classroom Technology Use Policy:**

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited to, PDAs, laptops, cellphones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and distracting to other students and to the instructor and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

Note: because this course is organized around a series of visiting speakers, this is particularly important. Speakers are our guests. As such, they deserve your full attention, and they deserve to be able to speak without being interrupted by cellphones, etc. If your inappropriate use of technology impacts one of the guest speakers, you may be asked to leave the class.

### **Attendance policies**

Attendance at class is required to improve as a writer. Here is the Writing Studies attendance policy in this class:

- You may miss up to three hours (the equivalent of one week of class) of class meetings during the term without explanation. That means that the first three class hours you miss will be recorded as absences but *excused provided you don't miss any more*.
- However, if you miss a total of four to nine class hours (the equivalent of up to three full weeks of class), your final grade will be reduced by 10% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 72).
- If you miss a total of more than nine hours of class meetings (the equivalent of more than three weeks of class meetings) your final grade will be reduced by 15% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 68).

This policy will only be waived for medical or compassionate reasons. If you have non-medical evidence that would support waiving an absence of one class meeting, provide it to your instructor within one week of that absence. In the case of a medical reason, please see the Medical Accommodation Policy set out below and in the document 'Information for Students in a Writing Studies Course' on this website, and either initiate a Self-Reported Absence or apply in person to the Academic Counselling or Undergraduate office of your home Faculty. If your absence is extended and prolonged (over one week of continuous non-attendance), then you should discuss it in person with the Academic Counselling or Undergraduate office of your home Faculty. Your advisor there may then contact all of your instructors.

**Attendance also extends to tardiness.** If you are more than 20 minutes late, you will be penalized an hour of attendance. Please make every effort to be on time as late entry can disrupt the flow of discussion in our class. Early departures from class, which have not been previously arranged with the instructor, will also be counted as an absence. If you leave during the break, you will be docked an hour of attendance.

**\*Note:** a class meeting missed in order to write a test, exam, or other form of ‘make-up class’ in another course **will** count as non-attendance, and **will** attract penalties as defined above if applicable. Instructors at the University of Western Ontario **shall not require** a student to write a make-up test or similar at times which conflict with that student’s other scheduled class times. If you are asked or ‘required’ to do this, you should immediately contact an academic counselor in your Dean’s office. If you elect to miss a class in order to write such a test, that is **your** choice; your absence will not be excused.

### **Scholastic Offences, including Plagiarism**

The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines:

“Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)”

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy as above).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

### **Academic Accommodation and Consideration**

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities.

#### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence:**

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student’s final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student’s final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are not met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation. All requests for

consideration for assessments worth more than 30% of a final grade must be directed to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.

In this course, all requests for academic consideration must be directed to the Academic Counselling office of the student's Home Faculty if an SRA will not be used.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

### **Religious Accommodation:**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

### **Special Requests (Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, Aegrotat Standing):**

Please refer to the "Information for All Students in a Writing Course" for more detailed information. Briefly, remember that your instructor does not have the discretion to initiate, consider, or grant (or not) such requests; you must go directly to the Dean's office of your home faculty.

**Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness**

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwo/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

### **Support Services**

**Registrarial Services** <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

**Student Support Services** <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>

**Services provided by the USC** <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

**Academic Support and Engagement** <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

# Class Meeting Schedule

## Week 0 (September 8):

### Introduction to the class

- Intro, policies, etc.

## Week 1 (September 13 and 15):

### Speaker: Vanessa Brown

**Book:** *The Forest City Killer* (<https://ecwpress.com/products/forest-city-killer>)

### Topics:

- Strategies for overcoming writer's block
- Cliché and the importance of reading
- Promotion and crafting a public profile

### Readings:

- A Few Things You Should Know about Creative Writing (page 1)
- A Few Words about Revision (page 9)
- Chapter 1:
  - Writing Poetry (page 14)
  - Getting started writing poetry (page 72)
  - Kick-Starts: Beginning your poems (page 73)
- Read this interview with Vanessa Brown: <https://londonfuse.ca/vanessa-brown-forest-city-killer>

### Weekly Draft: Write an occasional poem

#### Suggestions:

- Write a poem for the anniversary of an official institution—a school, a company, a town or city, a club, etc.
- Write a poem for the beginning of the school year
- Write a poem for a pop-culture event, such as the release of an album, a celebrity's birthday, the premier or finale of a show. Try to have fun with the poem.

## Week 2 (September 20 and 22):

### Speaker: Sonnet L'Abbe

**\*\*Note: this will be a Zoom presentation. You do not need to attend class in person. Attendance at the Zoom event will be mandatory.\*\***

**Book:** *Sonnet's Shakespeare* (<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/564193/sonnets-shakespeare-by-sonnet-labbe/9780771073090>)

### Readings:

- Chapter 1:
  - The elements of poetry (page 18)
  - The short poem: Three models (page 19)

- Lines and stanzas (page 22)
- Meter and rhythm (page 29)
- The music of poetry (page 36)
- Poetic forms:
  - Sonnet (page 53)
  - Sestina (page 61)
  - Haiku (page 65)
  - Ghazal (page 68)
- Read this interview with Sonnet L'Abbe: <https://roommagazine.com/interview-with-sonnet-labbe/>

**Weekly Draft:** Write a formal poem—that is, a poem that follows a clear, predetermined structure. It can be as simple as a poem in rhyming couplets or as complex as a Sestina. If you pick a short form, such as a Haiku, try to write a handful of them.

Suggestions:

- Write a classic love poem (try to avoid cliché)
- Write a poem about a surprising, unpoetic subject (cheeseburgers, a night out in London, the freshman 15, etc.)
- Write a poem about a powerful emotional experience. Try to use the structure of a formal poem to process and contain the emotion.

### **Week 3 (September 27 and 29):**

**Speakers: D. A. Lockhart**

**Book: *Breaking Right*** (<https://porcupinesquill.ca/bookinfo6.php?index=361>)

**Readings:**

- Chapter 1:
  - Images, symbols, and figurative language (page 40)
  - Diction, syntax, and the language of poetry (page 48)
  - Poetic forms:
    - Prose poem (page 69)
- Read this interview with D.A. Lockhart: [http://malahatreview.ca/interviews/lockhart\\_interview.html](http://malahatreview.ca/interviews/lockhart_interview.html)

**Weekly Draft:** Write a poem that uses images, symbols and figurative language, rather than direct statements, to convey a powerful emotion. For example, instead of writing “I was depressed,” use these poetic devices to show your reader that you were depressed.

Suggestions:

- Write a poem about a basic, universal emotional experience, such as anger, sadness, happiness. Try to write a poem in which the reader will recognize themselves and their experience.
- Write a poem about an emotional experience that is unique to you. Use the above poetic devices to help the reader understand and share your unique experience.
- Write a poem that uses images, symbols and figurative language, and that pushes the boundaries of poetry—that is, write a poem that creates an experience for the reader, but that does not necessarily make literal sense.

## Week 4 (October 4 and 6):

\*\*\*Polished Draft due in class on Wednesday, October 6\*\*\*

**Speakers:** Zalika Reid-Benta and Ashley Li

**Book:** *Frying Plantain* (<https://houseofanansi.com/products/frying-plantain>)

### Readings:

- Chapter 2:
  - Writing the Short-Short Story (page 102)
  - The elements of fiction (page 104)
  - The short-short story: Three models (page 105) (read all three stories)
  - Structure and design (page 114)
- Getting started writing the short-short story (page 149)
- Kick-Starts: Beginning your story (page 150)
- Read this interview with Zalika Reid-Benta: <http://prismmagazine.ca/2019/11/28/frying-plantain-an-interview-with-zalika-reid-benta/>

**Weekly Draft:** Write a short-short story that is focused on a single event. This is in some ways the simplest kind of story to write, but it is deceptively simple. It takes real craft to make something resonant and powerful out of a single event. Focus on what happens, who is involved, and why it is meaningful.

Suggestions:

- Write a story about a character who makes a surprising or disturbing discovery.
- Write a story about a character attending an important event (a wedding, a funeral, a graduation).
- Write a story in which a character's everyday routine is suddenly and dramatically altered.

## Week 5 (October 11 and 13):

**Speaker:** No speaker this week

### Readings:

- Chapter 2:
  - Creating characters (page 122)
  - Writing dialogue (page 130)
  - Setting the scene (page 135)
  - Deciding on point of view, developing tone and style (page 140)

**Weekly Draft:** Write a short-short story about two people meeting. They could know each other; they could not. They might speak; they might not. It's up to you.

Suggestions:

- Write a story about two old friends who see each other after many years but don't talk to each other.
- Write a story about two people who don't like each other meeting and talking.
- Write a story in which two characters who would not normally interact are forced to engage with each other.

## Week 6 (October 18 and 20):

**Speaker: Paul Vermeersch**

**Book:** *Shared Universe: New and Selected Poems, 1995-2020* (<https://ecwpress.com/products/shared-universe>)

### Readings:

- Chapter 3:
  - Writing Creative Nonfiction (page 181)
  - The elements of creative nonfiction (page 185)
  - Short creative nonfiction: Three models (186) (read all three pieces)
  - Organizing creative nonfiction (page 196)
  - Getting started writing short creative nonfiction (page 222)
  - Kick-Starts: Beginning your creative nonfiction (page 222)
- Read this interview with Paul Vermeersch: <http://open-book.ca/Columnists/An-Interview-with-Paul-Vermeersch>

**Weekly Draft:** Write about a time when you were uncomfortable. Explore why you were uncomfortable, what this experience said about you, what you learned from it, and, most importantly, why it is significant for other people—what your reader can learn from and take away from it.

#### Suggestions:

- Write a short creative nonfiction piece about trying something new, something that were unsure of.
- Write a short creative nonfiction piece about a time when you were the odd person out, when you did not fit in or belong.
- Write a short creative nonfiction piece about discovering something that changed your perspective in an important way and that made familiar things new, different, strange, etc.

## Week 7 (October 25 and 27):

**\*\*Midterm Test on Wednesday, October 27\*\***

**No Speaker this week**

### Readings:

- No Readings this week. If you have the time, read a few of the poems, stories, personal essays and plays in your textbook.

**Weekly Draft:** Write a handful of 1 sentence stories. Have some fun with this, try to be clever, witty, shocking, surprising. On the one hand, try to see how much you can pack into one sentence. On the other hand, try to see how little you need to make a story.

#### Suggestions:

- No suggestions this week because they would be longer than most of the stories you are going to write.

**\*\*Fall Reading Break\*\***

## Week 8 (November 8 and 10):



**Speaker: Farzana Doctor**

**Book: *Seven*** ([https://www.dundurn.com/books\\_/t22117/a9781459746398-seven](https://www.dundurn.com/books_/t22117/a9781459746398-seven))

**Readings:**

- Chapter 3
  - Telling the truth (page 201)
  - Creative nonfiction as narrative (page 206)
  - The poetry of creative nonfiction (page 211)
  - Writing yourself into creative nonfiction (page 215)
  - Ethics and edicts (page 218)
- Read this interview with Farzana Doctor: <https://junctionreads.ca/2020/11/18/to-reflect-the-fullness-of-life-an-interview-with-farzana-doctor/>

**Weekly Draft:** Write a short creative nonfiction piece about a time when you were not completely in the right. Try to explore and grapple with your own culpability, and, also, try to explore the situation and how you looked to the other people involved in the situation. Don't be afraid of writing about a situation that is ethically complex, that has a lot of grey in it. It is this kind of complexity and wrestling with it that makes a lot of creative nonfiction interesting.

Suggestions:

- Write a short creative nonfiction piece about a disagreement you had where you were in the wrong.
- Write a short creative nonfiction piece about a time when you hurt someone else.
- Write a short creative nonfiction piece about a misunderstanding.

## **Week 9 (November 15 and 17):**

**Speaker: Leah Bobet**

**Book: *An Inheritance of Ashes*** (<https://bookshop.org/books/an-inheritance-of-ashes/9780544813229>)

**Readings:**

- Chapter 4
  - Writing the Ten-Minute Play (page 247)
  - The elements of play writing (page 252)
  - The ten-minute play: Three models (page 253) (read all three plays)
  - Structuring the ten-minute play (page 274)
  - Getting started writing the ten-minute play (page 308)
  - Kick-starts: Beginning your play (page 309)
- Playscript Format: A Model (page 311)
- Read this interview with Leah Bobet: <https://www.blackgate.com/2016/12/04/wordsmiths-an-interview-with-leah-bobet/>

**Weekly Draft:** Write a short play in which two characters are arguing. They can resolve the argument or not. It's up to you. Try to make the argument as realistic as possible. Try to make the characters talk like and respond like real people. Note: this is a deceptively difficult thing to do, and you should expect to find it challenging. Don't worry if your draft seems a bit stilted and awkward in places.

Suggestions:

- Write a short play about a couple having an argument. It can be an argument about a minor thing, such as cleaning the house, or a major thing, such as the future of their relationship.
- Write a short play about two characters arguing about an accident. They can argue about what happened, who is at fault, etc.
- Write a short play about two characters arguing about who is at fault for something that happened a long time ago. They could be a couple who divorced a decade ago, siblings who hurt each other during childhood, friends who fell out over something, etc.

## Week 10 (November 22 and 24):

**Speaker: Silmy Abdullah**

**Book: *Home of the Floating Lily*** (<https://www.dundurn.com/books/t22117/a9781459748170-home-of-the-floating-lily>)

### Readings:

- Chapter 4
  - Creating believable characters (page 280)
  - Writing convincing dialogue (page 285)
  - Crafting a theme (page 294)
  - Onstage: The elements of production (page 298)
- Read this interview with Silmy Abdullah: <https://tokmagazine.ca/in-conversation-with-silmy-abdullah/>

**Weekly Draft:** Write a short play that is grounded in character. Try to teach the audience as much as possible about the characters in the play in the short time that you have. Try to do this without resorting to characters simply telling the audience about themselves.

Suggestions:

- Write a short play in which two people have dinner.
- Write a short play in which two people share a car ride.
- Write a short play in which the characters sit in a waiting room (this is a classic scenario that you can find in several quite famous plays).

## Week 11 (November 29 and December 1):

**Speaker: Sydney Brooman**

**Book: *The Pump*** (<https://invisiblepublishing.com/product/the-pump/>)

### Readings:

- A Few Words about Getting Your Work Published and Produced (page 346)
- A Few Words about Hybrid Creative Writing (page 356)
- Read this interview with Sydney Brooman: <https://news.westernu.ca/2021/08/short-fiction-collection-the-pump-penned-at-western/?fbclid=IwARIZW91-y92TCIRafAUctJoKvAu1Zj5jRvYW5wked1pZUcSRTja8433j8bk>

**Weekly Draft:** Instead of writing something new this week, focus on revising the four pieces that you will submit for the Creative Writing Portfolio.

## Week 12 (December 6 and 8):

**\*\*\*Creative Writing Portfolio due in class on Wednesday, December 8 \*\*\***

**Speaker: Fawn Parker**

**Book: *Dumb-Show* (<https://49thshelf.com/Books/D/Dumb-Show>)**

**Readings:**

- A Few Words of Farewell (page364)
- Read this interview with Fawn Parker: <https://www.eventmagazine.ca/2020/09/the-working-writer-hannah-macready-interviews-journey-prize-longlisted-author-fawn-parker/>