

Writing 4880F/English 4871F (Fall 2024)
Seminar in Creative Writing**Course description and objectives**

This isn't a theory course. Some background in literary theory might help, but this course is neither a replacement for a theory course nor a course that requires any prior knowledge of theory. Think of it as a series of creative writing assignments with different kind of constraints, much like constraints of form in composing a villanelle or a sonnet. We will read passages from over 2000 years of theoretical work, ranging from such thinkers as Aristotle and Longinus to Gerard Genette, from classical considerations of rhetoric to discussions of what constitutes the fantastic. The graded work of the course will be four creative exercises in different genres based on our critical readings, and the objective is to become better writers by having more tools at our disposal.

Required texts

None. Everything that I'd like you to read will be available on the course website, and we won't be reading all that much. We will, in addition to considering theoretical approaches, read some shorter works (poetry and prose) that model the effects we are trying to achieve.

Learning outcomes

We'll talk more about learning outcomes for individual modules, but this course can be reduced to two:

1. Students will become, if not better writers, at least better equipped to consider their options as writers.
2. Students will improve as members of a writing community.

Recommended texts

Should you have time and wish to read some works that will help you with two of the modules in the course, you might read Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* and William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* or *As I Lay Dying*. Let me stress that this is entirely optional.

Course requirements and grade allocations

The course will be divided into modules. Each module will have the same basic structure: in the first week, we will introduce and discuss some aspect of literary theory and/or a short work. For the second week, we will read about the module's topic, discuss it in depth, consider relevant creative work in the module's contexts, and then explore draft ideas. In the third week, we will have peer review sessions for the draft creative responses to our readings. Final creative responses will be due the following week. In the four modules, students must write at least one work of poetry and at least one work of prose, though experimentation with genre is encouraged. The initial expectation for the creative responses is that they will be between 500 and 1200 words each, but assignments outside that range can be negotiated (especially for poetic responses).

Module 1 (25%; due September 26)

Our first module will take as a starting point the definition of literature. From there, we'll consider defamiliarization or estrangement, language as material, and détournement.

Module 2 (25%; due October 24)

Our second module will consider other ways of making strange. Todorov's definition of the fantastic, his notion of hesitation, will be combined with Freud on the uncanny.

Module 3 (25%; due November 14)

Our third module will consider the sublime (largely through Longinus' discussion) and some literary examples of the sublime.

Module 4 (25%; due December 5)

Our fourth module will be about narratology, mainly about focalisation and different kinds of discourse. We will experiment with different narrators and different styles of narration.

Course Policies

Assignment Format

All assignments are to be "typed," and must have your name, course name, section number, and instructor's name on the first page. When using sources (unlikely, but not impossible!), you will be expected to follow MLA, APA, or Chicago citation practice.

Submitting Assignments

Assignments are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Late work **will be penalized at 2.5% per day unless** I have permitted an extension of the due date. You must contact me ahead of time for an extension (see also the section "Accommodation Policy" below).

Attendance/Participation

This is a senior-level seminar course. I expect you to be "present" and participating, but the only penalties revolve around missing peer review. *Peer review is an important part of the course. Students who do not participate in the peer review or who fail to bring drafts for peer review will receive a 10% deduction on their assignments (5% for each component). That could be 10% on the each of the four modules.*

Student Conduct

This ought to go without saying, but please remember that *the use of any language that works against the values of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will not be tolerated.*