

Advanced Poetry Writing

Professor Merrill Cole
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English 485, Independent Study
Advanced Poetry Writing

Office: Simpkins 109
Hours: M, 3:30-5:30 p.m.
TTh, 1:00-2:00 p.m.

M, 5:30-? p.m.
Simpkins 308

Texts

Addonizio, Kim. *Ordinary Genius: A Guide for the Poet Within*. ISBN: 0393334163
Poems will be posted for class discussion on my website—NOT WesternOnline.

Course Objectives

This course offers student poets the opportunity to refine and develop their writing, and to explore a variety of poetic techniques, genres, and strategies. The emphasis falls on both traditional and experimental forms, including the sestina, the villanelle, and more recent avant-garde productions. Becoming a better poet means more than mastering technique: it also means developing critical awareness of ourselves and of the world around us. This seminar will explore poetic composition as the opportunity to live up to the potential of who we are and to explore who we might become.

The best writers are the best readers, for contrary to popular belief, writers must carefully study other writers in order to excel at their art. They must understand technique. We will carefully study the productions of contemporary poets, always with an eye to learning about technique. The poems will serve to increase the understanding of literary language, to widen the vocabulary, to cultivate the appreciation of diverse styles, and to inspire our own creations.

This course is also a writing workshop, where participants are expected regularly to submit writing in progress. Writers need practice—and then more practice. We will also have routine classroom and homework exercises. There will be focused writing assignments; but at other times, students will be able to write as they please. Discipline alone is the death of creativity. Freedom without discipline leads nowhere interesting. In attempting to balance the two, the course is designed to produce better poets.

Requirements

This is a **portfolio** course, meaning that each student will email me, as a Microsoft Word attachment, a final portfolio of twenty or so pages at the end of the semester. The portfolio may consist of any number of poems and may include prose poems. As a general rule, two poems should not appear on the same page.

At midterm, there will be a **mini-portfolio** assignment consisting of five pages of poetry. The mini-portfolio receives commentary, but is not graded.

Along with the portfolio, at the end of the semester, students will turn in a five-page **self-reflective essay** on how they've revised their workshop poems.

Students will also keep a **journal** with at least one entry every day.

Students will be responsible for a four-to-five page **technique analysis** of a single, published poem of the student's choice.

The **poetry readings** for this course are student-driven, meaning that usually, students will determine what poems we read in a given week. When it is your turn, you will need to send me the poems by email within 48 hours (Wednesday at 8:00 p.m.) as a Microsoft Word or .pdf attachment; whether you type, cut and paste, or scan the selection is up to you.

I expect you always to bring to class the poems assigned, whether on an electronic device, or in print. *All homework exercises and all workshop poems must be printed in enough copies for all class members, including me. All homework assignments and workshop poems must be emailed to me as Microsoft Word attachments before the beginning of class.*

After a poem is workshopped in class, email the student and me with a **100+ word critique**, formatted as a Microsoft Word attachment. Critiques need to be emailed within 48 hours (Wednesday at 8:00 p.m.). The Poetry Critique Guidelines explain what is expected and how the critiques are graded.

Everyone *must* actively participate. Lack of participation will damage and perhaps destroy your grade. This means doing the homework, completing the readings, performing class activities, and joining in workshop. Please see <http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php> for student rights & responsibilities.

Grading

Participation:		15%
Workshop:	5%	
Poetry selections:	5%	
Critiques:	5%	
Mini-Portfolio:		5%
Journal:		5%
Technique Analysis:		10%
Self-Reflective Essay:		5%
Portfolio:		60%

Missing classes, or arriving late, will affect the participation grade. *A student with more than two **unexcused** absences automatically fails the course.* I am lenient, though: if you give me a valid reason to miss, or to have missed, a session, I will probably excuse you (I may ask for documentation.). Poems are only graded in the portfolio, but you get credit for workshopping and critiquing them. Attendance at the readings of Case Writers-in-Residence is required.

Lazy students make lousy poets. You waste your time and mine if you don't work hard.

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.

Discrimination Policy

University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you, or someone you know, has been the victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at: http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php. If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at: <http://www.wiu.edu/vpas/policies/titleIX.php>.

Schedule

I am open to make changes to keep the learning situation active and dynamic.
 OG=*Ordinary Genius*. Please note that you are expected to have read the pages before you come to class. *Poetry selections are not listed below.*

- August 22: Introduction to the course. Blues.
- August 29: OG, 170-86. Addiction & metaphor exercises.
- September 5: Labor Day. No class.
- September 12: OG, 187-203. Irony & iambic pentameter exercises.
- September 19: OG, 204-13. Bag of tricks & epiphany exercises.
- September 26: OG, 217-34. Conceit & metonymy exercises.
- October 3: OG, 237-248. Metrical experiments (2) exercises.
- October 10: **Technique paper readings.**
 OG, 249-58. Sonnet exercise. Collaboration exercise.
- October 17: **Mini-Portfolio due.**
 OG, 259-72. Collaboration and email cut-up exercises.
- October 24: OG, 279-85. Ballad & blues exercises.
- October 31: OG, 287-96. Sestina & villanelle exercises.
- November 7: Imitations of metrical and free verse poets exercises.
- November 14: Free verse forms (2) exercises.

THANKSGIVING BREAK

- November 28: Anything goes workshop.
- December 5: **Journals due.**
 Portfolio workshop.

Portfolio due on Monday, December 12 at 5:30 p.m., or Wednesday, December 7 at 5:30 p.m. for comments.