

Writing Poetry Section 01

ENGL 131

Fall 2023 4 Unit(s) 08/21/2023 to 12/06/2023 Modified 08/21/2023

Workshop in verse forms. Study of traditional and contemporary models. May be repeated twice for credit.

In his "Materia Poetica," the poet Wallace Stevens wrote, "The relation of art to life is of the first importance especially in a skeptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for what they support and give."

In English 131, *On the Prose Poem*: A favorite of the French symbolists and contemporary poets alike, the prose poem is an enigmatic, hybrid creature of recent centuries that wields the techniques of poetry but foregoes its line breaks.

Literary critic Peter Johnson has written, "Prose poets, no matter how different in sensibilities, wander on this uncertain terrain. It's a land of paradoxes and oxymorons, welcoming the sleight of word artist."

The poet James Tate went as far as to suggest that its paragraphs could trick the reader "into glimpsing a little sliver of eternity." This workshop is a brilliant way for prose writers to distill and condense their language and for poets to expand and elucidate their ideas within a fixed form.

In this workshop, writers will be exposed to surreal and eccentric prose poems: from Carolyn Forché to Charles Simic, Mark Strand, James Wright, Mathias Svalina, James Tate, Marosa di Giorgio, Sabrina Orah Mark, Ray Gonzalez, and others, the prose poem has been a form that allows the writer to explore a big story in a small space.

Come and see what makes the prose poem tick and try writing a few of your own.

The questions this course engage may include the following issues: representations of power or ideology embedded in characterizations of sex and gender, class, race, and nationality, etc.; the reader's implied relation to the text alongside authorial "intent," when that can be established; whether ethics matter in relation to the creation and reception of literature; what roles expression and emotion play in the generation and interpretation of texts; whether literary or their corresponding cinematic texts, as art objects, are independent of external relations and depend purely upon a unique system of internal relations; how realms of "fact" and "fiction" may be mediated particularly through conventions/genre demarcations (sonnet, prose poem, field poetics, etc.), among other questions.

We will explore the art of writing poetry with the aim of coming toward an understanding of knowledge production. It is a class about asking questions concerning difficult issues—both about the works themselves and how we, as a society, produce them.

Course Description and Requisites

Workshop in verse forms. Study of traditional and contemporary models. May be repeated twice for credit.

Prerequisite: ENGL 71 (or equivalent) or instructor consent.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Participation: while there may be lectures, the course will be organized as a single continuous discussion requiring everyone to voice their opinion. I allow for two excused absences before reducing 2.5% off one's overall final grade.

The quality of your class participation will be judged through the following: your effort at completing short assignments and, as necessary, sharing them; the effort you put into responding to the workshoped writing of your peers and your willingness to share your thoughts with the workshop as a whole; and the effort you bring to reading critically.

All required readings, whether online or in our books, must be brought to class.

In class, you are being asked to respond to each other and to questions raised in class: I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANY DISRESPECTFUL CONVERSATION OF ANY MANNER WHETHER IN CLASS OR ONLINE. Participation is essential to this course: we will work both in large and small groups.

Reading Like a Writer: during the semester you will pair up with a colleague to present some opening thoughts on the day's reading. Both of you must speak/present. Both of you will receive the same grade. A good discussion will include the following:

1. Introduction to the Author—Biography, Important Notes, Etc.
2. CONCISE Summary of Poem/Essay
3. Identification of the Author's Use of Prosody we are studying. This should be a close-reading that pays attention to a SPECIFIC passage of text and explicates the writing for significance of language, imagery, tone, etc. I will assign one such technique or point of emphasis; you must choose another interesting feature of the Poem/Essay.
4. A discussion of the Poem/Essay's significance, with special attention to the deeper questions the events and reflections prompt.

You must prepare a visual aid for this presentation. You may make a Powerpoint presentation. I will be evaluating these Presentations for their depth and sophistication, your abilities to engage the class, your speaking dynamics—volume, clarity, rate, etc., and your overall professionalism.

- Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practice. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

Suggestions for Process, and for Doing Well in this Course

1. Never turn in your first draft of anything. Go back over your work, asking yourself if you've been applying the techniques we have been discussing in class. This will take concentration and focus. As we progress through the semester, you will be held accountable for more and more techniques. It's a lot to keep in mind, and writers very rarely get all of them right on the first try. It's best to do several re-readings, each focused on a different concept. (If you're wondering why your scores are not improving, this is the most likely reason why.)
2. While the assignments give you some direction you should try to approach these by writing about situations and experiences that matter to you. Write about the people, observations, experiences, and things that bother you, fascinate you, anger you, etc.
3. Pay attention to what we're reading. Ask yourself the following: Which poems and essays inspire you? Who really lights your imagination on fire? If brain transplants were possible, whose (among writers) would you want to have? Try to find a few "masters," and read their work over several times. Try to discern how these writers build a poem. Then try to do it on your own. This is how writers learn.
4. Pay attention to life in general. That's what all writers do. Look for nuances, the things that nobody notices at first glance. Always work with detail—that's where the magic is. Note this in your journal/daybook
5. While I wish you to write on topics of emotional risk, there are poem which are discouraged from being turned in for workshop or assignments: relationships (of any sort) with current classmates, suicide, threats of violence, etc. If you feel unsure of your poem, please contact me.

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Goals

Department of English and Comparative Literature Student Learning Goals

This course supports several of the English Department's Student Learning Goals. The Department of English and Comparative Literature seeks to foster the intellectual development of its majors by encouraging study of literature and writing—whether creative, technical, or other professional writing. The Department strives to make its majors familiar with a wide range of works of British, American, and World literature, including folk and popular forms; and with the nature of the canon and of canon-formation, including issues of culture, history, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Department of English and Comparative Literature BA Program Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. demonstrate the ability to read actively and rhetorically
2. demonstrate the ability to perform the essential steps in the writing process (prewriting, organizing, composing, revising, and editing) and demonstrate an awareness of said performance.
3. articulate an awareness of and write according to the rhetorical features of texts, such as purpose, audience, context, and rhetorical appeals
4. demonstrate the ability to integrate their ideas and those of others by explaining, analyzing, developing, and criticizing ideas effectively in several genres
5. demonstrate college-level language use, clarity, and grammatical proficiency in writing

Course Materials

- **Short** By Ziegler, Alan, Edition: 14; Publisher: NORTON; ISBN 13: 9780892554324
- **How to Write Stunning Sentences** by Schuyler, Nina; Edition: 18; Publisher: SMALL PR D; ISBN 13: 9780999431634

- A Physical Journal/Daybook
- Course Readings: on Canvas as PDFs or Links.

✓ Grading Information

Final Examination or Evaluation

The course will complete with each student turning in a final portfolio of their written work. More information will be provided nearer the time the assignment is due.

Breakdown

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A plus</i>	<i>96 to 100%</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>93 to 95%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>90 to 92%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>86 to 89 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>83 to 85%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>80 to 82%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>76 to 79%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>73 to 75%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>70 to 72%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>66 to 69%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>63 to 65%</i>
<i>D minus</i>	<i>60 to 62%</i>

Criteria

<u>8 Sketches</u>	
(from In-Class Exercises)	20%
4 Final Portfolio Revisions of your sketches	15%
<u>Workshopping with <i>Critical Friends</i></u>	
4 poems of your choice from our weekly exercises	15%
Comments/critique of your peer's work	10%
The revisions of your workshopped poetry	10%
<u>Participation</u>	
Presentations	10%
Class Participation	10%
<u>Reflection Essay</u>	
(part of your Final Portfolio)	10%

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

English 131 Writing Poetry, Fall 2023

(As the course progresses, we may get off schedule--this is natural—as such, our daily assignments may be revised as necessary with fair notice given by email or in class).

Please be sure to have completed the assigned reading **before** that day's class.

<p>WEEK ONE: Aug. 22 & 24</p>	<p>Tuesday : Course Overview, Introductions, Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Analysis and discussion of Mathias Svalina’s “Waistoid” series. <p>In-Class Exercise #1: Image and Found Language Poem Prompt.</p>
	<p>Thursday</p> <p>Read:</p> <p>Prose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Infinite and Finite Games (Canvas) <p>Short:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">o A Personal Note, pp. xxii-xxivo Introduction, pp. xxvo Walter Benjamin, pp. 76-77o Francis Ponge, pp. 90

<p>Week TWO: Aug. 29 & 31</p>	<p>Tuesday</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Short:o Louis Bertrand, pp. 23-25o Stephane Mallarme, pp. 33-35o Kate Chopin, pp. 37-38
	<p>Thursday</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Short:o Francois De La Rochefoucauld, pp. 8o William Blake, pp. 16o Joseph Jourbert, pp. 15-16o Jules Renard, pp.44-46· Canvas: The Art of the Aphorism, The New Yorker.· How to Write Stunning Sentences, Chpt. 1. <p>In-Class Exercise #2</p> <p><u>DUE:</u> In-Class Exercise #1</p>

<p>Week THREE: Sept. 5 & 7</p>	<p>Tuesday</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· How to Write Stunning Sentences, Chpt. 2· Short:<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Nathalie Sarraute, pp. 91-92o Laura Riding Jackson, pp. 92-94o Rene Char, pp. 106-107
	<p>Thursday</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Short:<ul style="list-style-type: none">o Max Frisch, pp, 109-110o Fielding Dawson, pp. 140o Vern Rutsala, pp. 147· Canvas: Andrea Rexilius, selections from <i>SisterUrn</i> <p>In-Class Exercise #3</p> <p><u>DUE:</u> In-Class Exercise #2</p>

<p>Week FOUR: Sept. 12 & 14</p>	<p>Tuesday</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Short:o Gertrude Stein, pp. 55-56· Canvas:o Gertrude Stein, Tender Buttons <i>selections</i>o Gertrude Stein, Composition as Explanation <p>In-Class Exercise #4</p>
	<p>Thursday</p> <p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Short:o Raymond Queneau, pp. 97-100· Canvas:o "Choosing Our Own Adventures," Then and Now, The Atlantic.o Twelve Blue, by Michael Joyceo A Journey Through Gender, by Jordan Ballinger, Abbey Mauch, Laurel Sira. <p><u>DUE:</u> In-Class Exercise #3</p>