

English 2250 Syllabus

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Office Hours: M 11 a.m.-1 p.m. (*online only!*); TR 11-11:30 a.m. W 9-10 a.m., 1-2 p.m.

Other times by appointment.

Introduction to the Course: English 2250, “Introduction to Imaginative Writing,” has usually been taught as a course that introduces you to the practices and genres of creative writing. Typically, that means you write some poetry, some fiction, and some of a third genre which used to be drama and now often is creative nonfiction. Genres have usually grounded a course like this, because imaginative writers have usually been practitioners of one (occasionally more) genre, the boundaries of which have been fairly stable.

In this class, we’re going to try to liberate the creative writing class from these strictures by encouraging all sorts of play: to explore what poet Joyelle McSweeney calls the “flexing and flexible fabric” that is language. To me, this means that you try to discover what language can do, without, at least at first, trying to meet the conventions of genre.

I hope this sounds as exciting to you as it does to me. During the first half of the semester, we’re going to examine

- *some SEEDS of writing:* We will find out the ways wordplay and soundplay infect and inflect all writing (jokes, riddles, puns, rhymes, and rhythms are woven through everything we make out of language), and also practice imitation and parody. We'll also look at the abcedarians and word etymologies as fecund sources for writers. Finally, we'll look at the ways writers appropriate from other texts as a way of getting new texts going.
- *the VOICES that writers need to be able to invoke and create:* We'll take the opportunity to enter a dialogue with other texts. We'll also consider the way that our own new texts can be inhabited by the spirits of other texts—other stories, poems, essays, television shows, advertisements, movies. We'll consider dialogue, argument, and monologue.
- *the LOCI & TOPOI of imaginative writing:* We'll consider the ways that writers, in creating characters or telling stories, seek to represent the world as they see it. We'll consider and practice developing both imaginative and "real" locations as a means of putting one's imprint and definition on the contested terrain of the world.
- *the means of creating a sense of STILLNESS & MOVEMENT in imaginative writing:* We'll practice how to create a sense of pace, of speed, swiftness, of stillness or slowness.
- *and finally, we'll develop a repertoire of SHAPES:* We'll consider a variety of forms and genres, including sentences and gestures. We'll look at fictive/narrative genres, lyric/poetic genres, as well as hybrid genres, such as prose poems, flash fiction, lyric fiction, micro-fiction, graphic novels, and what they have to tell us about the stability and flux of genre—the more persistent, conventional aspects of written forms.
- *we'll finish by looking at PUBLICATION & PERFORMANCE:* We'll consider a spectrum of types of publication, ranging from conventional literary magazines to online journals, zines and e-zines, alternative print publications like broadsides and postcards, and distros. We'll also consider publication as a kind of performance, and performance as a kind of publication.

NOTES ON THE WORK.

- You'll write new work every week. I will give you prompts and assignments, but within the frame of those prompts and assignments, you'll have maximal freedom to write what you choose. You'll do ongoing peer review for all writing in this class.
- You'll keep a notebook, separate from your assignments--see the set of notebook prompts for ideas.
- I'll confer with you twice during the semester, and look at your work in progress for more in depth feedback.
- Near the end of the course you will prepare a portfolio of your revised work, first in draft form so that I can give you feedback, and then in final form. Your revised work in this portfolio has the greatest weight in your grade, so you should take the responses your peers and I give you seriously, using it to improve and reshape your work. This portfolio is the signature assignment for this course, along with a reflective essay.
- You will write two papers for the class (see descriptions below).
- Also at the end of the class, we will create some kind of publication, to which everyone will contribute work. Details to come later.

Books: You are not required to buy any books for this course. Virtually all of the readings will be online, which you will access through links keyed to each learning module. For the first paper, I will ask you to read one of a short list of books and respond to it. For the second paper, I will ask you to do some research outside the links I've given you module to module.

Student roles and responsibilities in this course

A student in English 2250

- will read all assigned materials in order to participate knowledgeably and fully
- will write regularly (three or four times a week) in a writer's notebook
- will confer twice during the semester with the instructor
- will contact the instructor if s/he has questions about the course or about assignments
- will read and respond to the work of peers with diligence, care, and thoughtfulness, and in a timely manner (within the specified time frame)
- will use the response of instructor and peers to revise her/his work meaningfully.

Instructor roles and responsibilities in this course

You can expect that your instructor

- will post high quality course materials that will stimulate you as a writer and help you to learn more about imaginative writing
- will respond to your writing with useful and timely commentary
- will respond to your communications, such as e-mails or phone messages, in a timely manner
- will treat you and your writing thoughtfully and respectfully

"Responding to your writing with useful and timely commentary" means, usually, within a week.

"Responding to your communications in a timely manner" normally means within a day.

Treating your writing "thoughtfully and respectfully" does not mean that I will not offer criticisms of it. It does mean, though, that I believe that every student's writing deserves to be taken on its own terms. If I suggest that something about your piece of writing doesn't work well, you should understand that I mean that, from my perspective as an experienced reader and writer, I see it that way. Your writing is always yours to do with as you will. I hope that you will take my comments as coming from a great deal of experience, as well as from my sincere desire to see you reach your own goals as a writer.

Writer's Notebook: I will ask you to keep a writer's notebook or journal, and I will ask you to submit it electronically twice during the semester, so that I can give you some feedback on the kinds of writing you're doing there (as well as to make sure that you're doing it).

Consultations: I will also ask you to consult with me twice during the semester about your writing—once early in the semester and once toward the end, when you're doing the work of putting your portfolio together. These consultations can take several forms. You can schedule a time to chat; you and I can have a conversation on the phone; we can have an e-mail consultation; and, of course, you're always welcome to schedule a face-to-face meeting with me, if you prefer and if that's convenient for you.

Grading Breakdown:

13 drafts (on time)	200 pts
13 peer reviews (on time)	
	150 pts
Paper #1	100 pts
Paper #2	100 pts
Portfolio	200 pts
Participation in class publication	100 pts
Consultations (2)	50 pts
Journal checks (2) (at consultations)	100 pts
total	1000 pts

Paper #1: Read one of the books listed below. Summarize the book's major ideas. What is the most valuable advice you found in this book for you as a writer?

Wild Mind, Natalie Goldberg

On Writing, Stephen King

Writing Down the Bones, Natalie Goldberg

Bird by Bird, Anne Lamott

The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life, Julia Cameron

You can easily find these books in libraries and bookstores, as they are popular guides to the writing life.

Your paper should be about two to three pages, should cite from the text and should be documented using MLA format. You should also draw from your own experience in discussing your reading of the book you selected.

Paper #2: Investigate one of the means of publication we discussed in the module on publication: a print literary journal, an online literary journal, a zine, book publishing, or a distro. In your research, you should find out

- something about the scope of the means of publication you've investigated.
- Who does it reach and not reach?
- Who does it include and exclude in the publication process?
- What advantages does the form of publication you've investigated have, and what disadvantages, compared to what you know about other means of publication?

You should carefully explain what you found in your research, which should be as thorough as you can make it. You should cite liberally from the contents of the literary publication in order to give the reader a sense of the publication, and use MLA format to document your research and citations. Your paper should be about three or four pages long.