

# Creative Writing Workshop

## Course Description:

This class offers you and your peers an opportunity to experiment with a variety of creative genres and hone your writing skills in the hopes of helping you produce work of publishable quality. As with many English classes, we'll do a lot of reading, examining the work of successful artists to identify what skills and techniques have made them successful writers. Ultimately, though, the heart of this class is student work and workshopping, a system by which an author receives informed, constructive feedback from a group of readers.

## INSTRUCTOR:

- Name: Dr. Michael Hancock
- Office Number: A136B
- Office hours: A: Mods 4, 6-7; B & D: 4, 6; C: 6-7  
I: 1-4 PM;  
also by appointment (Mon.-Fri.)
- Phone number: (630) 907-5981
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## Meeting Days, Time, and Room(s)

Section 1: A (Mod 4, 11-11:55), C (Mods 3-4, 10:00-11:40), A117  
Section 3: B (Mods 7-8, 2:20-4), D (Mod 7, 2:20-3:15), A119

## Text(s) / Materials:

- selections from Mary Paumier Jones and Judith Kitchen, eds., *In Brief: Short Takes on the Personal*
- selections from Richard Hugo, *The Triggering Town*
- selections from Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*
- selections from Lynda Barry, *What It Is*
- Tracy Townsend, "A Workshopper's Guide to the Creative Writing Workshop"
- various readings, as assigned

## **Essential Content:**

Workshop-oriented classes require a great deal of maturity, focus, and of course participation from all members, so be prepared to talk every day, as your ability to comment on your peers' work is your most important daily contribution to this class.

Without written work, however, there would be no workshop. Each student will produce around a dozen written works, small and larger, in the course of the semester and choose four of them to revise as part of a final portfolio grade. As this class is somewhat larger than the ideal workshop size, the whole group will review student drafts on a rotating basis. In the meantime, each of your pieces will get personal attention through our course's Moodle site. Each student will be part of a three- or four-person "mini workshop" discussion group, who will send each other drafts of work online and receive feedback from their discussion partners via the Moodle message board. Your participation in the face-to-face and online workshops will figure into your grade for this course.

There will be substantial readings assigned regularly, as in any other English course. You are expected to complete these readings and come to class ready to discuss them.

Finally, focus on providing specific, helpful feedback to your peers during workshops. The more precise your comments, the more respectful and productive a member of the class you will be.

## **SSLs and Outcomes:**

In Creative Writing Workshop (CWW), students will engage in the following learning experiences, which conform to the following Standards of Significant Learning:

- Learn to write creatively in a variety of genres and modes (I.A., III.B., III.C., IV.B., IV.D.).
- Learn to critique clearly, intelligently, and supportively the work of their peers, both orally and in written discourse (face to face and online) (I.B.-I.D., II.A.-II.B., III.A.-III.B., IV.A., IV.C.-IV.D, V.A.-V.B.).
- Learn to read creative texts as part of a transactional arrangement between artist and audience (I.A., I.C., II.A.-II.B., III.B., IV.C.-IV.D.).
- Learn to revise and reshape their creative products and their creative process (II.A., IV.A., IV.C.-IV.D).

## **Instructional Design and Approach:**

Creative Writing Workshop (CWW) addresses IMSA's Core Competencies by emphasizing students' ability to improve their competence as creators of and respondents to texts. It further privileges students' individual questions and curiosities (inquiry) by placing their creative choices at the center of their work and the work of the class as a

whole, and continually presents students with the problem of balancing artistic desire with audience expectations and needs.

### **Student Expectations:**

Students will be expected to conduct themselves with the level of decorum and reflection articulated in the “Workshopper’s Guide” document, which was composed specifically for this class. Late graded drafts (see below) will be lowered by one full letter grade for each school day they are late. Graded drafts that are more than a week late will receive a zero. Work that is not presented for workshop at the scheduled time will receive no credit. Response postings to peers’ texts online must be done by the stated deadline; responses that are made after this deadline or are incomplete will receive only partial credit. Missing responses receive no credit. Late written workshop feedback will receive no credit.

Plagiarism is anathema in any course, but especially in a creative writing course. Any work you turn in should be the product of your own imagination and effort. I expect workshop drafts, grading drafts, written feedback, and other written assignments to be original work composed entirely by you. Do not copy from other sources, published or unpublished, or present others’ work, partial or whole, as your own. Students suspected of academic dishonesty will be referred for formal discipline, with possible sanctions including but not limited to loss of credit for an assignment and academic suspension. See the *Student/Parent Handbook* for IMSA’s academic behavior code: <https://www.imsa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-2019-Student-Parent-Handbook-1.pdf>

### **Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes:**

Grades will be based on IMSA’s broad grading standards:

- A (90-100%) = Exceeds course requirements
- B (80-89%) = Meets course requirements
- C (70-79%) = Credit awarded, needs improvement
- D (<70%) = Does not meet course requirements

See “A Workshopper’s Guide to the Creative Writing Workshop” for broad guidelines for assessment of creative work.

Quarter and semester grades will be calculated according to the following category and term weights:

Quarter Grades:

Online workshop participation (online, small group): 15%  
Oral workshop participation (in class, whole group, weekly): 15%  
Written workshop feedback & other homework writing (weekly): 15%  
Graded drafts grades: 55%

Semester Grade:

Q3: 40%  
Q4: 40%  
Final Portfolio: 20%

For course grades, A=93% or above; A-=92-90; B+=89-87; B=86-83; B-=82-80; C+=79-77; C=76-73; C-=72-70; D=69 or lower. **It is the policy of the English Department not to round up quarter or semester grades.**

### **Sequence of Topics and Activities**

*This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class or via Moodle.*

#### **Weeks 1-2: The Creative Writer**

Week 1 (Jan. 14-18): Intro. to course; short writing exercises; discuss “Workshopper’s Guide”; “55 Fiction” assigned

Week 2 (Jan. 21-25): Workshop #1; **“55 Fiction” draft due**; selections from Lamott, *Bird by Bird*; First major assignment: Short Story 1 assigned (workshop draft due end of next week)

#### **Weeks 3-5: The Short Story (Part One)**

Week 3 (Jan. 28-Feb. 1): Workshop #2; **Short Story 1 Workshop Draft due**; Hemingway, “Hills Like White Elephants”; discuss plot, character, and dialogue from the perspective of the author

Week 4 (Feb. 4-8): Workshop #3; Atwood, “Happy Endings”

Week 5 (Feb. 11-14): Workshop #4; Spontaneous Writing Minstrelsy activity; **First Graded Draft due** (2/14: C-Shortened)

#### **Weeks 6-8: The Poem (Part One – Form)**

Week 6 (Feb. 19-22): Workshop #5; selections from Richard Hugo's *The Triggering Town*; Major Assignment: Poems 1 & 2 assigned (workshop drafts due next week)

Week 7 (Feb. 25-Mar. 1): **Poems 1 & 2 Workshop Drafts due**; Workshop #6

Week 8 (Mar. 4-8): Workshop #7; readings TBA (COTH)

**Weeks 9-11: Monologues and One-Act Plays**

Week 9 (Mar. 11-15): **Second Graded Draft due**; Workshop #8; **3rd Qtr. Ends**; Monologue assigned; selected monologues (“Siobhan,” “Mrs. Sorken,” and “The Janitor”)

**Spring Break: March 18-22**

Week 10 (March 25-29): Workshop #9; **Monologue Workshop Drafts Due**; One-Act Plays assigned (due Week 11); readings TBA

Week 11 (Apr. 1-5): Workshop #10; **One-Act Workshop Drafts due**

**Weeks 12-13 (Apr. 8-18): The Return of the Poem (free verse and prose poems)**

- read selections of contemporary poetry (TBA)
- learning how NOT to write “at a high degree of personal association”
- more readings from Hugo’s *Triggering Town*
- Major Assignment: Poems 3 & 4 assigned (1 prose poem; 1 free verse)
- Poetry workshops; begin revising

**Weeks 14-16 (Apr. 23-May 10): The Personal Essay**

- What is the personal essay? What is creative nonfiction? The concept of “earning your exposition”: read selections from *The Art of the Personal Essay*)
- Major Assignment: Personal Essay
- Workshop personal essays; begin revising

**Weeks 17-18 (May 13-24): “Choose Your Own Adventure”**

- Students choose a genre to continue working in—fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama.

**Last day of classes (May 24; D-Shortened):** turn in your final portfolio, containing no fewer than four revised works from this semester's workshop. At least one of these must be a prose piece (fiction, nonfiction, or drama) and at least one must be a poem – the rest can be whatever mix you like.