

# CRW 1301: Beginning Poetry Writing

**Section:** 1651, Fall 2015

**Meeting Time/Location:** MAT 51 / Wednesday, periods 9-11

**Instructor:** Victor Florence

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**Office:** TUR 4339

**Office Hours:** Mondays, 2-3 PM

## Course Description

*And so off I went, fists thrust in the torn pockets  
Of a coat held together by no more than its name.  
O Muse, how I served you beneath the blue;  
And oh what dreams of dazzling love I dreamed!  
(Arthur Rimbaud)*

*"Today everything amazes me. The faces of people and mine along-side them."  
(from Cléo From 5 to 7)*

This poetry class (CRW 1301) is a course that emphasizes reading, writing, and criticizing poetry; as well as expanding our concept of what it *is*. Is there a single definition for poetry? No, for every explanation a poet, critic, or reader offers for this wonderful art form, another arises to challenge that definition. However, even if a hawk can fly anywhere it wants there are still steps it must take in order to take off, same with poetry. This means that not only will we be reading and writing a great deal but also exploring how poetry is defined, what poetry can do, and how to make creative/active observation a part of your daily life (or at least for this semester...more on that later). Therefore, we will be using the anthology (*The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*), individual books, and other works in different media forms (albums, films, photography, sketching, etc.), to explore what is poetry and learn from them different ways to approach writing poems.

Poetry demands a kind of attention not required by other types of writing, and in return it offers unique pleasures and rewards. This seminar/workshop operates under the assumption that one must be a skilled, critical, attentive reader of poetry in order to become a better writer of it. Our discussions will employ the types of vocabulary and methods specific to poetry. In the second half of the course, in addition to studying published poems, you'll be writing original poetry yourself and workshopping the poems of your peers.

## Statement of Objectives

The student learning outcomes for this course are as detailed in the Undergraduate Catalog at <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html#requirements>.

## Required Texts

*An Introduction to Poetry*, Kennedy & Gioia: 13<sup>th</sup> edition, ISBN: 9780205686124

*The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. J. D. McClatchy: 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2003.  
ISBN: 1400030935

*The Principles of Uncertainty*, Maira Kalman, 2007. ISBN: 9780143116462

*The Morning of the Poem*, James Schuyler. ISBN: 9780374516222

Recommended, but not required:

*The Elements of Style*, William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White: 4<sup>th</sup> edition. ISBN: 020530902X

## Assignments

### Point Breakdown

<b>Creative Writing Component</b>		<b>Subtotal: 475 points</b>
10 Poem Drafts	35 points each = 350	
Final Portfolio of 5 Revised Poems	75 points	
Daily Observation Journal	50	
<b>Analytical Writing Component</b>	<b>Total: 6000 words</b>	<b>Subtotal: 475 points</b>
5 Close Readings @ 1000 words each	5000 words	80 points each = 400
Introduction to Final Portfolio	1000-word intro	75 points
<b>Participation</b>		<b>50 points</b>
		<b>TOTAL: 1000 points</b>

## Assignment Descriptions

### **Poems (10 x 35 points each = 350 total points):**

You will write a total of seven poems. The first two will only be read by the instructor (me). Starting with Poem 3, the poems will be workshopped in class.

#### Requirements:

1. To receive credit, poems must:
  - a. be single-spaced with 1" margins
  - b. be left-justified (not center- or right-justified, although indentation and other variations in form are allowed)
  - c. be written in Times New Roman font, size 12
  - d. have a title, written in bold
  - e. have your name and the assignment number at the top right corner of the page
2. Poems must respond to the assignment given. **No end-rhyming** unless the prompt says it's OK.
3. Poems must be written in complete sentences (that is, if the line breaks were eliminated, the text would read coherently and be grammatically correct).

Workshop Procedure: Email your poem to me as a.doc or .rtf attachment by Sunday. I will read every poem and randomly select half of them to be workshopped the following week. Each student's work will be workshopped five to seven times throughout the semester.

Please PRINT OUT all poems to be workshopped, read each carefully (at least two times), and mark up the copies with feedback. Prepare at least TWO POSITIVE and TWO CRITICAL comments for each poem, and be prepared to share them during workshop. Bring the copies to class on the day of workshop. At the end of class, you will return the poems to the poets who wrote them.

### **Daily Observation Journal (50 points)**

I will also be requiring a physical journal to be filled daily for the duration of our class (there will be 105 entries from August 26 to December 9). This journal will be used to log daily non-confessional observations—meaning, that instead of disclosing what's going on inside, you are recording notable things outside as you go about your daily life. Each week I will give suggestions of things to pay attention to for entry ideas and every class we will share something interesting that we've noticed, as well as pulling from these entries for poem prompts. This will be graded for completion rather than content. **You cannot pass this course without completing the journal.**

The observations will be dated, in bullet points, and I ask for at least five observations in full sentences per day. The reasons behind this:

1-To make writing a daily habit. Writing and observing are skills that need to be developed and practiced in order to get better at them. Even if it's just describing what it feels like to walk in wet tennis shoes you are still working that part of your brain that's both remembering particular

things and finding ways to describe them.

2-You will begin to notice stranger things about your environment and the small things that make up your day-to-day life when you are actively observing. For example, on my way to work one morning I saw that the weird red blotch I pass by all the time is actually the word “SATAN” spray-painted on the pavement in cursive. This observation is now floating around in my head waiting to be used in a poem that will need such a piece of detail.

### **Close Reading Responses (5 @ 1,000 words each; 400 points total):**

Close Readings break down poems so as to learn how they work. Close Readings should concentrate on the decisions the poet makes in her/his work. There’s always more than one way to close-read a poem—poetry, intrinsically, is open to interpretation—but your findings are convincing only when they’re backed up by concrete evidence. Close Readings should present a concise and concentrated analysis of the poem.

As you begin thinking about the way the poem’s devices work together to produce effects on the reader, select a question, claim, or theory about the work that stands out as intriguing/thought-provoking. This issue should develop into your thesis, your Close Reading’s central argument. Don’t try to account for *everything* happening in a poem; narrow your focus down to two or three aspects (for example: violence, animal imagery, colors, diction, political allusions, disease, etc.). Ultimately, the thesis will make a claim about how the aspects of the poem you’ve chosen contribute to the poem’s effect on the reader and/or meaning. For instance, “For Robert Frost, in this poem, color disguises reality and suggests a malignancy of material or maker.” Or, “Reginald Dwayne Betts uses classical allusions and made-up words with Greek roots to talk about the Western literary tradition’s hostility to black writers, even as he claims a place within that tradition.”

Once you’ve stated your thesis, organize concrete evidence in a logical way so that your reader can understand, contextualize, and follow your argument. Generally, each body paragraph should focus on analyzing one technical aspect of the poem/poetic device. Fill in your argument with topic sentences, paraphrases, transitions, direct quotes, and summaries, as needed. There should be no more than one short paragraph’s worth of straight summary, though, and it can usually be included as part of the introduction.

#### Some devices to consider for Close Readings:

##### Tone/voice/style:

What is the effect of the speaker’s voice? Is the tone ironic, sardonic, mean, goofy, or difficult? What can the voice/tone tell us about the emotional world of the speaker?

##### Diction (word choice):

Why does the poet choose the words that he/she does? Are there words that have important connotations extending beyond their literal meanings? Does the diction reflect the speaker’s tone?

##### Images:

What kinds of images are employed and how? Which senses are activated by the poem’s imagery? Do the images work together to form a particular theme or motif, and how might

this alter our interpretation of the poem?

Metaphors/similes:

Is the poem heavily metaphorical, or are images more literal? What comparisons are being made in the poem? Do the metaphors throughout the poem share a common theme or emotional tendency?

Sound/rhythm:

Does the poet use rhyme or other sonic techniques (alliteration, consonance, assonance, off-rhyme)? Does the sound of the words mimic the event/object/feeling being described? How is the sound contributing to the overall architecture of the work?

Line length/line breaks/word order:

On the page, how does the poet choose where to break lines? Are certain words emphasized by such line breaks? Is enjambment used in the poem and to what result?

Form:

Is the poem one of an accepted poetic form (sonnet, ode, sestina, epic, or elegy)? How are stanzas built? How many lines in each stanza, and why?

Verb forms:

Why does the poet choose the verb tense that he/she does? Is there a shift in tense at any point during the poem? If so, what is the effect produced?

Point of view (the speaker):

Who is the speaker (remember, the speaker is not the same as the poet herself/himself)? Does the poet use the first person ("I") point of view, the second person ("you"), or the third person ("he/she"), and why?

### Checklist for a Successful Close Reading

- \*is proofread and revised
- \*dives deep into the poems' workings
- \*focuses on a specific argument laid out in a thesis
- \*does NOT simply give a summary of the work
- \*employs concrete evidence—actual quotes and paraphrases—from the poem
- \*discusses specific poetic technique
- \*chooses depth of argument over breadth
- \*provides enough context so that readers who are not intimately familiar with the poem can still follow the argument
- \*is logically organized: an introduction, a conclusion, and reasonably divided paragraphs
- \*cites quotations correctly
- \*is grammatically and syntactically correct

### Resources for Close Reading:

You'll need a dictionary. I recommend The Oxford English Dictionary, available here (but make sure you're logged on to the University's system to access UF's subscription!):

- <http://www.oed.com/>

Other resources include:

- Ch. 1 of your *To Read a Poem* textbook
- This overview of close reading, with an example, from the Purdue OWL website: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/751/01/>
- For context, you can find short biographies of many poets here:
  - <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>
  - <http://www.poets.org/>

**Final Portfolio (75 points):**

Near the end of the term, you will revise at least five poems, taking into account my feedback and the feedback of your peers, as well as your own reexamination of each poem. The portfolio will be graded as a whole based on the quality of your revisions and the scope of your improvement throughout the semester.

**Introduction to Final Portfolio (1000 words; 75 points):**

For this assignment, you will reflect on your writing processes for the poems you've written throughout the term, you will discuss your revision tactics, and you will examine your own growth as a poet. You will also look at your poems as a collected body of work and examine any themes or questions that arise from them being collected together.

**Participation (50 points):**

Because this is a discussion- and workshop-based class, you are expected to be an active participant. This does NOT mean interrupting or being otherwise disrespectful to your peers.

Class discussion:

To receive full participation points, you should speak up **at least once** during each discussion. Students are responsible for completing all assigned readings each week. Quizzes on reading and/or lectures may be given, announced or unannounced, each of which will be worth 5 points of the participation grade. Quizzes and any graded in-class activities **cannot** be made up in the case of absence.

Workshops:

To receive full participation points, you should be a vocal, but respectful, participant in workshops. Students are responsible for reading the poems to be workshopped and for writing comments on them. Be specific with your comments, written and verbal, since greater detail will help the poet in revision.

*Grading Scale*

A	4.0	93-100%	C	2.0	73-76%
A-	3.67	90-92%	C-	1.67	70-72%
B+	3.33	87-89%	D+	1.33	67-69%
B	3.0	83-86%	D	1.0	63-66%
B-	2.67	80-82%	D-	0.67	60-62%
C+	2.33	77-79%	E	0.00	0-59%

*Grading Criteria*

All larger assignments will be graded on a point scale, with letter grade equivalents. However, the poem drafts will initially be graded on a check/check-plus/check-minus scale. At the end of the semester, you will receive an overall grade for all poem drafts (out of 400 points). The overall grade is based on how well the poems respond to the prompts, how well they show an understanding of poetic concepts learned in class, overall level of effort, and improvement over the course of the semester. If you'd like to discuss your progress at any point, please feel free to email me so that we can set up a time to meet. Refer to the table on the next page for an explanation of letter grades.

Grade	Essays	Poems
A	An “A” paper responds to the assignment prompt in full. It presents an original, specific, and clearly worded argument supported by sufficient evidence from authoritative sources. Writing style is engaging, clear, and concise, and the paper employs a logical organization. It is free from mechanical or formatting errors and cites sources using the proper citation format.	An “A” poem responds to the assignment prompt in full. It uses vivid and carefully considered language and follows an original and cohesive vision. It employs poetic techniques discussed in class to a constructive purpose. Its sentences make complete grammatical sense and it is free from mechanical or formatting errors.
B	A “B” paper responds to the assignment prompt. It presents an original argument, but ideas may need further development or clearer articulation. The argument is supported by evidence. Writing style is generally clear and organization is logical, but there is room for improvement. There are very few mechanical errors and sources are cited properly.	A “B” poem responds to the assignment prompt. It presents a unique vision, but ideas may need further development. It uses poetic techniques but could be doing more to bring craft and drama to the poem. Language used is effective but may need some refining. There are very few mechanical errors.
C	A “C” paper may not fully respond to the prompt. Argument is overly broad or in need of clarification and development. Some evidence is used to support the argument, but claims are not sufficiently defended. Writing style lacks clarity and organization is problematic. Several mechanical errors or incorrect citations.	A “C” poem may not fully respond to the prompt. Vision is disjointed or overly clichéd. Poetic techniques are not used to their fullest potential. Language seems hastily chosen or unoriginal. There are several mechanical errors.
D	A “D” paper does not fully respond to the assignment prompt. Argument is underdeveloped or nonexistent. Little or no evidence is used to support claims. Writing style and organization are unclear. Many mechanical errors or incorrect citations.	A “D” poem does not fully respond to the assignment prompt. Poem seems hastily written with little overall vision to hold it together, unoriginal word choices, and many mechanical errors. Poetic techniques are missing or misused.
E	An “E” paper fails to respond to the assignment prompt ( <u>including papers that do not meet the minimum word requirement</u> ). Papers that are late or plagiarized will also receive an “E.”	An “E” poem fails to respond to the assignment prompt. Poems that are late or plagiarized will also receive an “E.” <i>Man, what happened?</i>

# Course Policies and Procedures

## *Attendance and Tardiness*

You are allowed two unexcused absences. A third absence will lower your grade by an entire letter. If you accumulate four unexcused absences, you will fail the course.

An absence will count as excused only if the student is participating in a university-sponsored event (athletics, theater, music, field trip, religious holidays) and provides documentation from an appropriate authority. Absences related to university-sponsored events must be discussed with me **PRIOR** to the date that will be missed. If you are ill and under orders to stay inside, please provide a doctor's note.

I take roll at the beginning of class. If you enter class after roll has been called, you are late. Every two instances of tardiness will count as one absence. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will be marked as absent for the day. Tardiness will also lower your participation grade.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are absent, it is still your responsibility to make yourself aware of all due dates and to submit the next week's assignments on time.

## *Classroom Etiquette*

No phones or laptops may be used in class unless we are discussing a reading that has been made available online through PDF format. Keep all electronic (or other) distractions on silent mode or in your bag. If I notice you using a cell phone or laptop during class without permission, you will have the choice to either sing, *a cappella*, for the class for one minute straight (I'll keep time) or take an absence. You can only sing once, all other subsequent times you are caught you will be marked absent.

## *Submission Requirements*

Assignments must be submitted by the correct time on the day assigned and in the specified format. Late assignments will be docked by one-half the earned letter grade for each day they are late. Minor assignments such as homework will not be accepted late.

Mode of Submission: All Close Reading Responses, poems, and the final Portfolio will be submitted to me BOTH as paper copies and via Canvas. Poems being submitted for workshop will be e-mailed to the class listserv before class begins on the day they are due. Final drafts should be polished and presented in a professional manner. All papers and poems must be in 12-point Times New Roman font. Poems should be single-spaced and include your name, the date, and the assignment number. Essays must be double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Please use correct MLA formatting and citation style for critical writing.

## *Paper Maintenance Responsibilities*

Students are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work submitted in this course and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over. Should the need arise for a

resubmission of papers or a review of graded papers, it is the student's responsibility to have and to make available this material.

### *Conferences*

I encourage you to make an appointment with me if you have questions about your progress in the course, work we are doing, or if you have any other concerns. Conferences on assignments will almost certainly improve the quality of your final draft.

### *Extensions on Poems*

**Each student may take one “free pass” during the semester.** This means that you can turn in one POEM late, no questions asked, as long as you get it to me within one week. Please contact me via email **BEFORE** the assignment is due to request your free pass.

### *Grade Appeals*

In 1000- and 2000-level courses, students may appeal a final grade by filling out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant. Grade appeals may result in a higher, unchanged, or lower final grade.

### *Statement of Composition (C) Credit*

This course can satisfy the UF General Education requirement for Composition. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggened.html>

### *Statement of Writing (formerly Gordon Rule) Requirement*

This course can satisfy the UF requirement for Writing. For more information, see:

<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/advisinggordon.html>

### *Statement of Student Disability Services*

The Disability Resource Center in the Dean of Students Office provides students and faculty with information and support regarding accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom. For more information, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

### *Statement on Harassment*

UF provides an educational and working environment for its students, faculty, and staff that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment. For more about UF policies regarding harassment, see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/studentguide/studentconductcode.php#s4041>

### *Statement on Academic Honesty*

All students are required to abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see:  
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>

### *Statement on Grades and Grading Policies*

For information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points, see:  
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

### *Statement on Grade Point Equivalencies*

UF has recently instituted minus grades. As a result, letter grades now have different grade point equivalencies. For more information, see:  
<http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/catalog/policies/regulationgrades.html>

### *Resources for Students*

The Reading and Writing Center  
Teaching Center Mezzanine, SW  
Broward Hall  
(352) 392-6420  
<http://www.at.ufl.edu/rwcenter>

The Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

The Counseling and Wellness Center  
3190 Radio Road  
(352) 392-1575  
<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/>

Research and Documentation Online (Diana Hacker  
& Barbara Fister)  
<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/index.htm>

## Schedule

\*In addition to what's listed below, we'll be reading a number of poems from *The Vintage Book of Contemporary American Poetry*, so be sure to bring that book to class. The same goes for any book we will be focusing on in class. We may also read some online poems in class, in which case I will either bring copies or email everyone a URL where they can be found and printed beforehand.

\*This schedule is subject to change. Unless otherwise indicated, assignments and readings are **DUE THE DAY THEY ARE LISTED** on the syllabus, not the following week.

### *Week 1: August 26*

Introduction to Poetry Writing; Kalman, May-August (3-67)

### *Week 2: September 2*

*An Introduction to Poetry (IP)* Ch. 1 "Reading A Poem" & Ch. 2 "Listening To A Voice;"  
Kalman, September-November (69-171)

### *Week 3: September 9*

*IP* Ch. 3 "Words" & Ch. 4 "Saying and Suggesting;" Kalman, December-February (173-247)

### **Close Reading 1 Due**

### *Week 4: September 16*

*IP* Ch. 5 "Imagery;" Kalman, March-Finale (249-end)

### *Week 5: September 23*

*IP* Ch. 6 "Figures of Speech"

### *Week 6: September 30*

### **Close Reading 2 Due**

*IP* Ch. 6 "Symbols and Allusions;" Schuyler

### **Poem 1 Due**

### *Week 7: October 7*

*IP* Ch. 7 "The Sound of Poems;" Schuyler

### **Poem 2 Due**

### *Week 8: October 14*

*IP* Ch. 8 “Meter and Rhyme;” Schuyler

**Poem 3 Due**

*Week 9: October 21*

*IP* Ch. 9 “Forms and Types of Poetry”

Workshop of Poem 3

**Poem 4 Due; Close Reading 3 Due**

*Week 10: October 28*

*IP* Ch. 10 “Versions of the Same”

Workshop of Poem 4

**Poem 5 Due**

*Week 11: November 4*

Workshop of Poem 5

**Poem 6 Due**

*Week 12: November 11*

*NO CLASS: HOLIDAY*

**Close Reading 4 Due by Friday (11/13)**

*Week 13: November 18*

Workshop of Poem 6

**Poem 7 Due**

*Week 14: November 25*

*NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING*

*Week 15: December 2*

Workshop of Poem 7

**Daily Journals Due; Close Reading 5 Due**

*Week 16: December 9*

**Poetry Portfolio Due (Revisions + Introduction)**