

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature
English 131: *Writing Poetry*
Section 1 Spring 2016

“Writers Write, Writers Read”

Instructor:	Sally Ashton, MFA
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Office Hours:	T/Th 1:30-2:30pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	Section 01: T/Th 10:30-11:45am
Classroom:	BBC 128

Course Description

This course focuses on the work of the poet and the work of the poem. The poet’s task is to observe, envision, write, and revise using appropriate poetic tools. What are they? Why choose one over the other? What are contemporary poets using today? The work of the poem is to become more than the sum of its parts, not merely well-chosen words, but art. We will review *Best American Poetry 2015* (including the cultural appropriation controversy found in that issue) for inspiration and critique. We will also visit the San Jose Museum of Art and write poems in response to exhibits on display. Let’s get to work writing, reading, and discussing poetry, poetic device, your work, and our discoveries. Regular journal keeping and workshop sessions are part of the experience.

Prerequisites: Completion of English 71 or by permission of professor.

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to: (SLO’s)

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, and/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 the 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.

Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives for *Eng 131 Writing Poetry*

During the term students will:

- Read and critique assigned poems as models of effective poetry to imitate. (SLO 1, 2, 5)
- Write and revise at least 10 finished poems during the semester. (SLO 1, 3)
- Learn to make conscious craft choices to best effect and to describe your choices. (SLO 1, 2, 3, 5)
- Discuss drafts and revisions of poems with members of your small writing group. (SLO 1, 3)
- Discuss your poems in a workshop with all class members, led by the instructor. (SLO 1, 3, 5)
- Discuss the craft of writing poems, principally lyric poetry in free-verse, but including poems in fixed forms. (SLO 1, 2, 5)
- Read about and discuss contemporary prosody, and consider your poems in this context. (SLO 1, 2, 3)
- Develop a keen attention to the precision of language that is the foundation of good poetry (SLO 1, 3)
- Develop a working poetry vocabulary (SLO 1, 3)

The goal of the course is to improve the quality of your poems by learning more about the craft of poetry and techniques of revision. You will also improve your poetry by imitating the craft and style of poems written by modern and contemporary masters. You will finish the course by completing a short manuscript of your own poems.

Required Texts/Readings

The principal texts in this class will be students' own poems in addition to readings from the textbooks you are asked to purchase:

Textbook

- *Writing Poems*, EIGHTH EDITION. Michelle Boisseau; Hadara Bar-Nadav; Robert Wallace. ISBN# 978-0-205-17605-2
- *The Best American Poetry 2015*. Guest Editor, Sherman Alexie. Series Editor, David Lehman.
- Course Reader purchased at Maple Press, 481 E. San Carlos St.
- Class hand-outs

Other equipment / material requirements required

- 1 Mead Composition Book, College Ruled. (Marble) This course ONLY
- 1 double-pocket folder: This course ONLY
- Stapler: All work stapled before class
- Regular internet access
- The ability to print multiple copies of assignments for workshop, often 20 pages.
- **\$5 student entrance fee** paid to San Jose Museum of Art, March 17, REQUIRED.

Classroom Protocol

Come to class on time. You'll be writing by hand in class, so do bring your journals, but leave laptops closed. Please don't check or send texts while in class; use common sense and decent behavior. Please do not eat in class. Neither will I.

Assignments and Grading Policy

WRITING AND WORKSHOP Each student will revise and submit the following new writing. This includes bringing copies for workshop and participating *in* workshop.

Poetry: 10 completed poems; drafts due as per Course Schedule, below. (SLO #1, 3)

- First revised group due March 15: Image poem; Descriptive-Meditative poem; Sonnet American; Ode; Fixed form poem.
- Second group due at the final will include: Ekphrastic poem; New Poem; Three poems written “In the manner of” poems from assigned reading.
- All 10 Poems will be presented in a final, revised portfolio at the end of the semester with first packet poems subject to grade improvement by revision.

Daily Reading: Selections chosen from our texts, visiting authors, and selected outside material are required not only for your success in this class, but your success as a writer. Journal responses are required. (SLO 1, 2, 5)

Journal: You are required to keep a well-organized journal/notebook in which you will do assigned creative writing activities inside and outside class. You will also record your responses to the assigned readings here. You are urged to write down quotes from your readings that you may want to share with your classmates. You can also use your journal to develop drafts of new material or simply to react to what is working in your imagination as you respond to ideas and work presented by others in the course. Your notebook is due at the midterm and at the end of the semester. **You will be graded on the quality and quantity of your entries.** (SLO 1,2,3,5)

2 Literary Event Response Papers: You must attend two literary events this semester on or off campus. Write a 2 page paper that focuses on your personal response to the event: What did you like and why? What did you learn? What surprised you and why? What did you find interesting and why? What questions did it raise? What did the writer discuss in the Q/A? Would you attend a similar event again? Why or why not? Etc. At the top left of your paper list the title of the event, and the day, time and location. (SLO 3, 5)

Required attendance San Jose Museum of Art: This studio event will be held during normal class hours.

For information about literary events see:

- www.litart.org (Center for Literary Arts at SJSU)
- <http://www.pcsj.org/calendar.html> (Poetry Center San Jose)
- <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/events> (English Department Events listed)
- Poetryflash.org Bay Area, Northern and Southern California listings and compendium

Assignment Format

All assignments handed in (except the journal/notebook) should be **typed 12 pt. font and include page numbers**. Prose is double-spaced; Poetry is single spaced. Use double space between stanzas. Multi-page assignments must be **stapled**. Your name, my name, the assignment title, and the date *single-spaced* should be included at the top Left of the first page(MLA format).

*****Workshop Procedures: Workshop attendance is required for participating in this class** whether your work is under consideration or not. The class will be divided into groups of approximately six students each. These will serve as your workshop groups, (V),W, X, Y, & Z.***

- Poems must be distributed, **hard copy**, to all participants on assigned dates including Me and You (typically 6 copies total). No Exceptions; No email.
- Workshop dates cannot be changed.
- I have **zero tolerance** for *late arrival* to Workshop and **zero tolerance** for missing Workshop Days.

Grading:

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered during the workshops.

Grade distribution:

Group I (5 poems) due March 15.	40%
Group II/Final Portfolio (5 poems plus revisions from Group I) due May 23.	40%
Journal, Literary event papers, general participation as outlined including meeting due dates.	20%

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT GRADING STATEMENT: In English Department courses, instructors comment on and grade the quality of writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. *All* your writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official 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.

Creative writing, though subject to the instructor's individual subjectivity, can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective use of grammar, syntax, rhythm; also meter, rhyme, and other elements of poetic style and form. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

A: Creative writing that receives an “A” is likely to:

- Fulfill all assignment requirements
- Demonstrate complex, unique and/or insightful approach
- Function well as a whole
- Demonstrate engaging voice
- Incorporate strong word choices
- Incorporate, where appropriate, striking imagery
- Lack clichéd or over-used language
- Incorporate unusual/unique associations that fit the tone of the piece
- Lack spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

B: Creative writing that receives a “B” is likely to:

- Fulfill the assignment requirements
- Demonstrate insightful approach
- Function generally well as a whole
- Demonstrate a generally engaging voice
- Incorporate some strong word choices
- Use some concrete imagery

Mostly lack clichéd or over-used language
Mostly lack spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

C: Creative writing that receives a “C” is likely to:

Meet the assignment requirements
Be derivative of other works
Not completely function as a whole (some parts may be underdeveloped)
Incorporate some strong, and some weaker, word choices
Lack concrete imagery
Include clichéd or over-used language
Have some spelling and punctuation errors, typos, etc.

D: Creative writing that receives a “D” is likely to:

Not fulfill the assignment requirements
Not function as a whole
Be a cursory response that demonstrates lack of motivation and/or poor understanding of the assignment

F: No response.

(Note: Graded assignments will be based on this criteria, which will be discussed in class. All assignments, graded and non-graded, will receive written feedback from instructor based on this criteria, as applicable.)

**A minimum of one meeting in my office, scheduled by YOU, is required during the semester before the last full week of classes.

GOOD teacher/BAD teacher: Attendance and Classroom Policies

Meet with Me! I’m hanging out in my office hours just for YOU! Try and come in throughout the semester to discuss your prose and poetry. An appointment is recommended even during office hours so you don’t have to wait around. Take advantage of some one-on-one time.

Late Work. Late work receives a reduction of 1 grade per class session it is late. **If** the paper is turned in after the class period on the assigned due date, the essay will be graded down half a letter grade. **If** you are sick or have to miss class for any other reason on the day something is due, arrange to have a classmate turn it in if you do not want a grade reduction. **For** extenuating circumstances, I must be contacted *before* the due date to consider an extension.

No Work by Email. No work in my mailbox. No exceptions. I do not accept work by email or in my campus mailbox. If you need to miss a class session, ask a classmate to turn in your classwork and to collect handouts and assignments for you. Otherwise, turn in the paper as “late” next class session.

Your Responsibility If You’re Absent. If you miss class, contact a classmate to get notes, assignments, etc. It is your responsibility to figure out what’s going on and to show up prepared the next class session. Please do not ask me to do extra things for you if you choose not to come to class.

Always bring your journal and required texts to class. These are required for participation. If you’re not prepared to contribute to the class, be prepared to be asked to leave for the day.

Be Fully Present No electronic devices are to be on/used/visible during class.

Infractions will result in being dismissed from class.

Academic policies

You are responsible for reading the SJSU academic policies available online:
<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/comp/policyforsyllabi.html>

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, or if you need to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible, or see me during office hours. Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the [Disability Resource Center](http://www.drc.sjsu.edu/) (DRC) at <http://www.drc.sjsu.edu/> to establish a record of their disability.

Important Note for Spring 2016 Classes:

The California Faculty Association is in the midst of a difficult contract dispute with management over salary issues. Higher pay for faculty is crucial to attracting and keeping better professors and improving the quality of your education.

It is possible that the faculty union will picket, hold rallies, or perform other job actions during this semester, up to and including a strike. If the faculty are forced into any of these activities, we will try to keep you apprised and to minimize any disruption to your education.

Students showing support for the faculty will be a very helpful factor in getting a quick settlement that benefits everybody.

For more current information you can visit the California Faculty Association website at <http://www.calfac.org/>

Writing Poetry Seminar English 131, Spring 2016, Course Schedule

The schedule is subject to change with advance notice in class and follow-up email.
Check it.

Abbreviations used in Schedule:

“WP”: *Writing Poems*; “BAP” *Best American Poetry 2015*; “CR”: course reader

BRING assigned texts and Journal to EVERY class.

Week	Date	Homework Readings, Assignments DUE this date	Topics and Considerations
1	Th 1/28 2016	Purchase all materials: Texts; Required Journal; Pocket Folder	Introduction to the course Review Syllabus Questionnaire Bios
2	Tu 2/2	Bring \$\$ for Course Booklet AND all required materials. Read: WP Ch. 1(entire chapters are to be read unless otherwise noted) Journal: In class	Review Texts Journal instructions “Starting Out” In class writing
2	Th 2/4	Read: CR “Image” pg.	Image Workshop ?
	Sun 2/7	LITERARY EVENT: Ekphrastic Poetry Reading: Sally Ashton, Persis Karim, Parthenia Hicks, Jennifer Swanton Brown	2-4pm San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles 520 So. First Street, San Jose, CA sjquiltmuseum.org
3	Tu 2/9	DUE: IMAGE poem Read: WP Ch. 2 Journal: Daily Image	“What is Verse?” Small Groups Poem Handout
	Th 2/11	Read: CR “Descriptive Meditative” & poem handout (2/7) Journal: Daily Image (continue until notified)	Structure and <i>surprise</i> : “Descriptive Meditative” Handouts

3	Tu 2/16	DUE: Descriptive meditative poem Read: WP Ch. 3 and CR Sonnet/scansion	Scansion, meter, form Handout: maybe Sherman alexie? Journal: Lines in iambic pentameter
	Th 2/18	Read Handout Poems and WP Appendix I, pg 219 Journal: Lines in iambic pentameter	Workshop strategies
	Tu 2/23	DUE: Sonnet American	WORKSHOP
	Th 2/25	Read: CR “The Ode” and WP Ch. 7 Journal: Lines with Metaphor	“The Ode” (could be blank verse) and Metaphor.
	Tu 3/1	DUE: Ode poem Journal: Lines with Metaphor	WORKSHOP
	Th 3/2	Read: WP Ch. 5 Journal: Rhyming couplets (heroic!)	The sound (and look) of sense; Formal poems/formal choices. Repeat or count something.
	Tu 3/8	DUE: Formal poem Journal: Rhyming quatrains (WP pg. 55)	WORKSHOP
	Tu 3/8	Literary Event: Christina Garcia, Lurie Chair, Fiction	7pm:
	Th 3/10	DUE: Journal I Reading: WP ch. 6	Subjects for poetry Handouts for 3/15
	Tu 3/15	DUE: POETRY PACKET, first set: (Image poem, Descriptive-Meditative, Sonnet American, Ode, Formal) Signed Field Trip Form CR “Ekphrastic Poetry” and handout	“Ekphrastic poetry;” writing in response to art. Video: “Ways of Seeing”
	Th 3/17	REQUIRED: museum Meet in Museum Lobby \$5	San Museum of Art (I hope) 10:15-Noon.
	Tu 3/22	DUE: Ekphrastic poem Read: WP Ch. 10 Journal:	WORKSHOP “Finding the Poem”
	Th 3/24	DUE: FIRST Literary Event Paper Read: WP Ch. 8 and BAP “Foreword” and “Introduction” BRING: Best American Poetry(BAP)	Voice and <i>Best American Poetry</i> Assign online readings

	3/28-4/1	Spring break	Enjoy! Keep up with assignments due 4/5.
	Tu 4/5	DUE: Online Readings New Poem Journal: Online Reading Response	QUIZ: Vocabulary WORKSHOP
	Wed 4/6	LITERARY EVENT: Andre Dubus, Fiction (4/6 <i>House of Sand and Fog</i> screening [Oscar-nominated film based on Dubus novel] NOT for event credit but extra credit-only.	7pm Reading Film time tba
	Th 4/7	Read: BAP pg. 1-25 Journal: Top 5	BAP poems In the manner of
	4/7	LITERARY EVENT: Andre Dubus in conversation with Prof. Miller	1:30pm
	Tu 4/12	DUE: Poem in the manner of #1 Journal: On writing this poem	WORKSHOP
	Wed 4/13	LITERARY EVENT: Steinbeck Fellows Reading	7pm
	Th 4/14	Read: BAP pg. 26-50 Journal: Top 5	BAP poems
	Tu 4/19	DUE: Poem in the manner of #2 Journal: On writing this poem	WORKSHOP
	Th 4/21	Read: BAP pg. 51-75 Journal: Top 5	BAP Poems
	Tu 4/26	DUE: Poem in the manner of #3 Journal: On writing this poem	WORKSHOP
	Th 4/28	DUE: Poems for Review packet (3 in order of importance of critique) Read: WP ch. 11	Devising, revising, and large workshop
	Th 4/28	Read and critique Group W's poems Journal: feedback	LARGE WORKSHOP- Group W
	Tu 5/3	Read and critique Group X's poems Journal: feedback	LARGE WORKSHOP- Group X
	Th 5/5	LITERARY EVENT: SJSU LEGACY OF POETRY DAY: Juan Felipe Herrera, US Poet Laureate, with local laureates.	TBA (or LARGE WORKSHOP Group V)?
	Mond	LITERARY EVENT: Paul Douglass & Julia	7 pm reading & conversation

	ay 5/9	Markus	
	Tu 5/10	Read and critique Group Y's poems Journal: feedback	LARGE WORKSHOP- Group Y
	Th 5/12	LAST DAY OF CLASS Read and critique Group Z's poems Journal: feedback DUE: Journal #2; Literary Event Paper #2; Top 5 BAP Self-critique Paper	LARGE WORKSHOP- Group Z
	Friday May 20	FINAL 9:45 a.m. –NOON. DUE: Final poetry packet	Final Exam period: Meet in classroom ?? Poetry Reading TBA