In this introductory creative writing workshop we will kick open the door. We will walk into rooms of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. We will develop the tools that help our writing become vivid in the mind’s eye of the reader.

To do this, we will read widely and experiment with many different styles. Our goal is to write and, through that writing, discover the themes and aesthetics—love, spirituality, class, sound, work, nature, associative logic, family, formal verse, injustice, myth, race, place—that fire us as writers.

We will play, revise, work, read, and listen.

This is an Experiential Learning class. Each class will be divided into time for writing, discussion of the week’s readings and topics of craft, and workshopping. We will not be able to workshop everyone each week, but we will develop a rotation schedule so that all have equal opportunity.

**GOALS**

- To experiment and take risks
- To create original works of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction
- To invent and discover forms/styles for saying what you want to say, with confidence
- To critique your own work and the work of others with honesty, openness, focus, and compassion, providing constructive feedback in the workshop forum
- To contribute actively and thoughtfully in class discussions and learn to improve your ability to communicate verbally
- To gain an understanding and appreciation for different styles and subjects through a wide range of readings
- To learn to read as a writer
- To develop your ability to articulate why a piece of writing might move you (or not)
- To learn the power of revision – of taking inspiration and honing it so that it comes alive in a reader

**REQUIREMENTS**

All of the requirements below work toward fostering a deep engagement: from reading and responding to others’ writing; to engaging with literary criticism; to playing, refining, and developing your own work.
Attendance:
You must come prepared for every class. This class is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis. Since we meet only once a week, attendance is crucial: **more than one absence will result in a NC grade.** If you must unavoidably be absent, email me in advance. **Please be on time,** as a sign of respect for both yourself and your classmates.

Participation:
You must read all assigned writing and come prepared to discuss the readings. You must turn in written assignments when due. You must bring the books/papers we’re discussing each week to class. The success of this class is dependent on your participation. We will be doing most of our work in class out loud. You must participate in and contribute to all discussions and workshops.

Writing:
You will be asked to turn in a new piece of writing every week (with some exceptions). You will be asked to turn in revisions of work. There are some critical requirements, too (see below).

Reading:
Expect to read deeply. To reread things. To read aloud. There will be craft essays as well as creative work to read each week. For the creative work, you should “read as a writer”—pay close attention to what you’re reading and be alert to moments that surprise you. Use them to learn. Ask yourself *How did the writer do that?*

Required Text (weekly reading assignments & other handouts will be given in class):


Recommended Books (good to have in your poetry library for years to come):
These can be found fairly cheaply at [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) and will be on reserve in the library.


**WEEKLY REQUIREMENTS**
(more details will be given in class & on Latte)

- An original bit of writing inspired by the writer(s) you are currently reading – most often guided by assignment.
• Entries in your **commonplace book**, in which you write down questions, quotes that inspire or puzzle you, things overheard that you might want to use in a future piece of writing, responses to books you read, etc. We will use these notes for our discussions of the books assigned in class.

The commonplace book is a record of your engagement over the course of the term. **Plan on recording something each day** that sparks your interest—quotes from readings, whole poems, song lyrics, overheard conversations, Tweets, images, questions, memories.

• Prose responses to a topic of discussion (sometimes).

• Substantial written responses to your classmates’ writing for workshop.

**OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

(more details will be given in class and on Latte)

• A minimum of one private meeting with me during the semester.
• One longer story, revised.
• One longer nonfiction piece, revised.
• Four poems, revised.
• Attendance of and a written response to a public literary event on campus or elsewhere.
• A final portfolio, which will hold all of your writing from the semester, including revisions.

Please **keep** copies of everything you present or work on, as we will use them throughout the semester and you will want them for your future work.

**OTHER NOTES:**

• Please **turn off mobile phones** during class.
• When you’re in class, BE IN CLASS. Not on your personal email account, not planning dinner, not in the slight pain in your right toe. Even if you are not speaking, **attend**.
• If you must unavoidably be absent, please email me in advance. In the event of an absence, please contact a classmate to catch up on class activities and to receive any assignments.
• Brandeis seeks to welcome and include all students. If you are a student who needs **accommodations** as outlined in an accommodations letter, please talk with me and present your letter of accommodation as soon as you can. I want to support you. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting accommodations, please contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) at 781.736.3470 or access@brandeis.edu.
• Our last class will feature a short reading by each of you.

**Integrity:**

Please be sure to credit the source of any ideas borrowed from or inspired by
others. For more information, the University policy on **academic honesty** is contained in the Rights and Responsibilities handbook.

**Brandeis Four-Credit Course Expectations:**
Success in any 4-credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

**A Note on “Questionable Content” in Creative Writing**
My promise is to never expose you to explicitly sexual or explicitly violent material. By that I mean material which has no value beyond its explicit content. We will, however, encounter material that is sexual in content and material that is violent in content. Sexual or violent content may indeed still fit within the boundaries of literature, as may bigoted slurs and other content considered offensive.

For example, both T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, at one point, supported Hitler’s government. This does not decrease the value of the poems of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as historical and artistic markers, nor does it depreciate their ability to capture the human condition in other subjects. We must reckon with the values of our predecessors.

Your half of the promise is that you come into my classroom with an open heart, no matter how much the poems we are discussing might challenge you, and to make sure that writing you bring to class earns the right to push boundaries for reasons beyond mere shock value.

We are not here to bolster our current values, or be affirmed in our life choices. We are here to learn, which is often a terrifying and life-changing experience. If you should find a particular piece offensive, let me know. We will discuss your discomfort and possibly establish a substitute assignment for you.
WEEK BY WEEK: Readings, Milestones, Assignments

Each week, I will post assignments on Latte. That is where you should expect to find the most up-to-date information. What follows here is an outline – our own discussions will guide how closely we adhere or how far we stray from it as we get to know each other.

In addition to the pages/chapters assigned from our textbook, I will be passing out readings in class and/or as pdfs on LATTE. Sometimes, your reading will be light – consider that an opportunity to take your time and read it twice. Savor it. Fast isn’t the point. Deep is.

Week 1: September 9
Poetry: The Quest for Startlement

Bring to class a piece of writing that, to you, is utterly breathtaking for its power or beauty or humor or…. This can be poetry or prose. It should not be more than 300 words.

ALSO: Bring to class something that has personal meaning for you. It can be a spoon, a necklace, an inhaler, a love letter. Anything. This is not about who brings in the “coolest” thing... be sincere in your choice.

9/14/19: The bookstore has said that, by this date, our text should arrive from backorder. This is the only book required for the course, and I want you all to have a PRINT copy (not an e-version). This allows you to scribble in the margins, mull in the tub, and read without the distraction of multitasking. Many studies show the benefits of non-screen reading in terms of depth of attention.

Week 2: September 16
Poetry: What’s Your Line?

Have read for discussion:

- Ch. 1, “Getting Started” in Bell. Do the exercises!
- “What is a Poem?” essay by Mark Yakich
- “Some Thoughts on the Integrity of the Single Line in Poetry” (pdf)
- Lineation sampler

Wednesday, SEPTEMBER 18: Grace Talusan reading, 5:30 pm

Week 3: September 23
Poetry: Sound, Sounding, Singing

Have read for discussion:

- Ch. 11, “Workshops” in Bell
- “Gold in the Ore: The Sounds of English” (pdf)
- Sound sampler

**Week 4:** October 3 – NOTE: This is a Thursday (Brandeis Monday).
Poetry: The Thing's the Thing

Have read for discussion:
- Ch. 2 “Training the Eye” in Bell. Do the exercises!
- “Imagery” Mary Oliver (pdf)
- Object/detail sampler

**Week 5:** October 7
Fiction: Who?

Have read for discussion:
- Ch. 5 “Characterization” in Bell. Do the exercises!
- “The Sources of Fiction” Minot (pdf)
- other readings tbd

DUE: Four revised poems. Your revisions should be substantial, not just surface fussing. At least one must shift from one form to another, one must open with what ended the first draft, one must integrate a second voice not in the original draft.

**Week 6:** Oct 15 - NOTE: This is a Tuesday (Brandeis Monday).
Fiction: Where?

Have read for discussion:
- Ch 7. “Setting” in Bell. Do the exercises!
- Eudora Welty, “Place in Fiction”
- other readings tbd

*Tuesday, OCTOBER 22: Toi Dericotte reading, 5:30 pm.*

**Week 7:** October 28
Fiction: What

Have read for discussion:
- Ch 8. “Plotting and Shaping” in Bell. Do the exercises.
- other readings tbd

**Week 8:** November 4
Fiction: Perspective

Have read for discussion:
- 6 “Point of View” in Bell Bell. Do the exercises.
- other readings tbd
**Week 9: November 11**  
Creative Nonfiction: Truthiness

Have read for discussion:
- “Memoirs,” from *Good Prose* (pdf)

DUE: Your revised 7-10 page story. The revision must be substantial. At least one of the following must be different: point of view, setting, main character, opening/ending scene.

**Week 10: November 18**  
Creative Nonfiction: Braid Essay

Have read for discussion:
- “Braid Essay” (pdf)
- “A Braided Heart” (pdf)

**Week 11: November 25**  
Creative Nonfiction: Characters

Have read for discussion:
- “Characters” in *Good Prose* (pdf)
- “On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character” (pdf)

**Week 12: December 2**  
Creative Nonfiction: Revision!

Have read for discussion:
- readings tbd

**Week 13: December 9**

DUE: Final Portfolios. This portfolio is a record of who you are as a writer, now. Of what you think, create, and are inspired by. You can submit these electronically. Your portfolio should hold:
- all of your final-final revisions, your prose responses to questions posed in class AND your initial creative drafts.
- the poems, paragraphs, and sentences you copied into your commonplace book as significant/inspiring/breathtaking to you
- your writeup of a "live literary event" (two are listed on this very syllabus)
- a 2-page reflection on what changed for you as a writer this semester and what you hope to carry forward into your creative life.