

# English 229, Introduction to Creative Writing

## Class Philosophy

It's important that you know this.

Our class may not be as structured as some of your other classes are. We do indeed have a structure—institutional aims, fundamental requirements, a general schedule, etc.—but the *specifics* are to some extent flexible throughout the term, based on class interests and needs.

You might say that this course itself models the creative process in important ways: it allows for some degree of randomness, free-association, unstructured ferment, shifts in direction, PLAY, and the seizing of accidents. But, just as with your writing, we work toward shaping what we generate, often even *as* we generate it, and our aim is always a polished, identifiable product. In the case of a university course, that product is a successful overall learning experience in the form of concrete, assessable materials. Just like your finished writings, however, that product will ideally be one that retains the freshness of discovery.

**So: expect a flexible structure, occasional shifts in direction, “soft” kinds of learning, and what may look like, on occasion, aimlessness. I assure you, it will never ultimately be aimless.** And what looks like aimlessness may in fact be some of the most vital learning you will ever do in school. An idea that emerges in discussion, say, on a given day, and that seems inconsequential or random at the moment, may occur to you weeks, months, even years later when it suddenly clicks. Some learning takes place, you could say, in our bodies, or in our unconscious minds, where it has to gestate before finally surfacing with great clarity and relevance.

**This approach allows me to take what you hand in and shape our next activity accordingly.** It means that I won't always know exactly what our next activity will be in advance, nor how long it will necessarily take for me to get there.

I call these moments “Being In Hiatus.” Google “hiatus.” It means pause, break, interval, interruption, suspension, intermission, interlude, gap, lacuna, lull, rest, respite, breathing space, time out. It means incubation; we're in the oven; I'm *cooking up* the next activity and assignment based on what you've given me.

When we are in hiatus, it means that you should wait patiently for what is coming; it may be a surprise both to you and me.

Major due dates on our schedule are firm; how we get there—what exactly we do from class session to session—is flexible.

If you find any of this dubious, consider how a child learns to speak. No one lectures a child on how to speak; no one gives exams and grades (I hope) in teaching their kid to talk. But somehow

a child learns what words are, and how they work in sequences. They learn that, in English, verbs come *after* and adjectives come *before* nouns; that verbs change according to number and time; that tone is a huge element of what one “means” when anyone talks. They learn, in other words, the whole vastly complex project of human speech, and all without grades! Without points! Without penalties! It comes through play, delight, fearlessness, humor, practice, modeling, curiosity, desire, social interaction, and intuitive, even physical engagement.

## Digging Class

Somewhat related to the discussion above: curiosity. This is a **KEY** word for this class.

One of the **WORST** things you can do is tell me that **SOMETHING BORED YOU**. All coursework will require active thinking and engagement. If you are energetically reflecting, imagining, questioning, and struggling when you read course materials or complete course work, **YOU WILL NEVER BE BORED**. Admissions of boredom are embarrassing, because they reveal that you yourself are a boring person who is too unimaginative or passive to make things interesting.

If you do not **UNDERSTAND** something, do not become frustrated, angry, or defeated. **REJOICE!** :D You are in exactly the right place to begin learning. When confused or otherwise stumped, ask questions. Be willing to be dumb. Dig. Explore. **LOOK THINGS UP**. Engage others. Contact your instructor. And, yes, even **RE-READ** assignments!

Class participation does not simply mean perfect attendance. Becoming better writer requires critical thinking, dialogue, and practice. This is a workshop course, which requires your active input and involvement.