

**ENGLISH 344
BEGINNING POETRY WORKSHOP
THURSDAY 6:00-9:45, 7700 FRANCE
RICHARD ROBBINS**

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Office: AH 201F

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an intensive introduction to the writing of poetry. You'll start poems in class and at home, you'll revise and polish drafts for consideration by workshops, and you'll read and study contemporary poets as a way of learning more about the writing process. Along the way, you'll develop a vocabulary for discussing others' work and for better evaluating your own. This course meets the objectives of the BA and BFA in Creative Writing by helping students gain facility creating and revising new work in two or more creative genres and by continuing to reinforce techniques for self- and peer-editing.

TEXTS

A cheap pocket folder for organizing drafts and exercises, and the following texts:
Addonizio and Laux, *A Poet's Companion*, Norton 9780393316544

Bring the text to each class meeting, so as to be ready for selected in-class assignments.

COURSE WORK AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- *Doing the reading and responsible thinking about the reading* before it comes up for discussion in class. Doing any in- or out-of-class exercises geared toward having you profit from the reading.
- *Turning in polished poems for the days that workshops are scheduled.* This will usually mean photocopying enough for the group and passing out copies. General ground rules for your workshop poems: (1) Minimum length is 14 lines. (2) Take responsibility for the result, whether the piece began as an exercise or not.
- *Turning in your poetry folder*—which will include weekly exercises, drafts, and workshop poems—on the days indicated on the schedule.
- *Turning in a final portfolio of poems.* Instructions provided later in the term.
- *Being a constructive member of our community of writers.* Aside from following workshop etiquette (discussed later), you can make the class experience a good one by arriving before class starts, having enough copies *before class starts* on the days we circulate copies, and otherwise paying attention to details of your own work and comments toward others' work.

GRADING CRITERIA

- 50% for your *commitment* to the class (as far as I am able to judge it from your preparation, participation, and attendance). Your comments are thoughtful and detailed. You contribute to discussion out of your growing care for language and out of increasing attention to other styles and sensibilities, which may very well be foreign to your own. You don't miss class, or arrive late, or leave early.
- 25% for the *completeness* of your work. You keep to the reading and discussion schedule. You make thorough efforts of in-class and at-home exercises. You turn work in on time.
- 25% for the *level of achievement* in your most revised and polished work. For workshop and portfolio pieces, your work shows the effort and polish of someone who aims higher as a writer.

Attendance: Keep me in the loop by e-mail or other means if you have to miss class. I don't "excuse" or "not excuse" absences—if you're not here, I'll assume you have your reasons—so keeping me informed is just a simple courtesy. For this once-a-week class, missing two classes for whatever reason will probably affect your grade. Missing four will make it difficult for you to pass. (For those extreme circumstances where Life forces you to miss class beyond the threshold numbers, MSU has a mechanism for obtaining a no-fault medical or emergency withdrawal.)

- **"A" work**, as described in the **Undergraduate Bulletin**, is of "definitely superior quality." You come to class prepared, you share questions and insights with the group, you help the class in other ways to operate as something larger than the sum of its parts, you turn in superior work that reflects time, effort, and risk.
- **"B" work** represents "better-than-average" performance. You attempt all of the above, but you show some unevenness across the areas.
- **"C" work** represents "average" performance. You're minimally prepared on a regular basis. You're going through the motions. You're getting along. Maybe you need to spend more time with the text or your own writing. Maybe it's something else. We're all waiting for you.
- **"D" work** represents "below average" performance. You've been trying to fly under the radar in most or all areas. It's not working.
- **"F" work** represents "unacceptable" performance. You left your pulse at the door.

GENERAL WRITING SUGGESTIONS

- *In class, treat writing exercises as just that—exercises.* Be open-minded, and try to have some fun with them. Don't expect every exercise to lead to a finished poem, but if you sense the writing taking off, by all means run with it. *Always* feel free to depart from the "rules" of a particular exercise if you feel the direction of your writing heading toward more fertile ground. Save the exercise for your folder.
- *Outside of class, use the same approach as with in-class exercises.* Assume each required exercise requires 30 minutes of your time. As with the in-class exercises, these at-home assignments may or may not evolve into more polished poems. Save the exercises for your folder.
- *For each workshop piece* (which everyone will expect to be a more polished piece of writing), encourage in yourself the discipline to give it the time and effort needed *beforehand* to move it toward a polished draft. Take the workshop piece as far as you are able in the times you have to work with it. If you approach your work with this attitude, the quality of feedback you'll receive will be exponentially better than what you'll get by bringing in what you and everyone else knows to be "just a draft."
- If you haven't done it already, *create a writing schedule that you can hold yourself to.* Instead of writing only when inspired (waiting for lightning strikes), or setting yourself up for failure (promising yourself to write every day for eight hours), set a schedule that will get you to your desk on some regular basis—if only for short periods, if only on alternating days—and that will be modest enough so as to be impervious to due dates in other classes, light to moderate life tragedies, and (most important) the tireless, whining procrastinator within.

SCHEDULE

- 8.27 Introduction.
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
- 9.3 PC, 11-29 / At home: Do two exercises at end of chapter 1.
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
- 9.10 PC, 30-45 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
- 9.17 **No class—D2L meeting by arrangement.**
PC, 46-63 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.

Discussion and online exercise (OLE).

Mock workshop.

- 9.24 PC, 64-81 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
Workshop 1.
Folder due.
- 10.1 **No class—D2L meeting by arrangement.**
PC, 85-103 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.
Discussion and online exercise (OLE).
Workshop 2.
- 10.8 **No class—D2L meeting by arrangement.**
PC, 171-192 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.
Discussion and online exercise (OLE).
Workshop 3.
- 10.15 **No class—D2L meeting by arrangement.**
PC, 104-128 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.
Discussion and online exercise (OLE).
Workshop 4.
- 10.22 PC, 129-150 / At home: Do one exercise at the end of each chapter.
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
Workshop 5.
- 10.29 **No class—D2L meeting by arrangement.**
PC, 151-170 / At home: Do two exercise at the end of the first chapter.
Discussion and online exercise (OLE).
Workshop 6.
- 11.5 PC, 195-223
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
Workshop 7.
Folder due.
- 11.12 PC, 257-271
Discussion and In-class exercise (ICE).
Workshop 8.
- 11.19 **No class—D2L meeting by arrangement.**
Discussion and online exercise (OLE).
Workshop 9.
- 11.26 **Thanksgiving—no class.**
- 12.3 **Workshop 10**
- 12.10 Course evaluation.
Portfolio due.