

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class offers you and your peers an opportunity to experiment with a variety of creative genres and hone your writing skills in the hopes of helping you produce work of publishable quality. As with many English classes, we'll do a lot of reading, examining the work of successful artists to identify what skills and techniques have made them successful writers. Ultimately, though, the heart of this class is student work and workshopping, a system by which an author receives informed, constructive feedback from a group of readers.

OUTCOMES AND SSLS

In this course, students will engage in the following learning experiences, which conform to the listed Standards of Significant Learning (SSLS):

- Learn to write creatively in a variety of genres and modes (IA, IIB., IIIC., IVB., IVD)
- Learn to critique clearly, intelligently, and supportively the work of their peers, both orally and in written discourse (face to face and online) (IB., IC., ID., IIA., IIB., IIIA., IIIB., IVA., IVC, IVD, VA, VB)
- Learn to read creative texts as part of a transactional arrangement between artist and audience (IA., IC., IIA., IIB., IIIB., IVC, IVD)
- Learn to revise and reshape their creative products and their creative process (IIA., IVA, IVC, IVD)

INSTRUCTOR

Dr. Eric Rettberg
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CLASS MEETINGS

A Mod 6, C Double Mod 5/6 (section 4)
B Double Mod 1/2, D Mod 1 (section 2)

USUAL OFFICE HOURS

A: 9-10 a.m., 3:15-3:45 p.m.
B: 1-2 p.m.
I: 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.
C: 9-11 a.m., 2:15-3:30 p.m.
D: 9-10 a.m., 1:20-2:15 p.m.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

Creative Writing Workshop (CWW) addresses IMSA's Core Competencies by emphasizing students' ability to improve their competence as creators of and respondents to texts. It further privileges students' individual questions and curiosities (inquiry) by placing their creative choices at the center of their work and the work of the class as a whole, and continually presents students with the problem of balancing artistic desire with audience expectation and need.

ESSENTIAL CONTENT

Workshop-oriented classes require a great deal of maturity, focus, and of course participation from all members, so be prepared to talk every day, as your ability to comment on your peers' work is your most important daily contribution to this class.

Without written work, however, there would be no workshop. Each student will produce around a dozen written works, small and larger, in the course of the semester and choose four of them to revise as part of a final portfolio grade. As this class is somewhat larger than the ideal workshop size, the whole group will review student drafts on a rotating basis. In the meantime, each of your pieces will get personal attention through our course's Moodle site. Each student will be part of a three- or four-person "mini workshop" discussion group, who will send each other drafts of work electronically and receive feedback from their discussion partners and me via the Moodle message board. Your participation in the face-to-face and electronic workshops will figure into your grade for this course.

There will be substantial readings assigned regularly, as in any other English course. You are expected to complete these readings and come to class ready to discuss them.

Finally, focus on providing specific, helpful feedback to your peers during workshops. The more precise your comments, the more respectful and productive a member of the class you will be.

MATERIALS

- Various electronic texts from Moodle
- Pen and paper
- Laptop and charger, which should be brought every day

GRADING BREAKDOWN

QUARTER GRADES

15%	Workshop participation (online, small group)
20%	Participation (oral, in class)
15%	Weekly written workshop feedback
50%	Graded drafts

SEMESTER GRADE

80%	Quarter 3 + Quarter 4
20%	Final Portfolio

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Students will be expected to conduct themselves with the level of decorum and reflection articulated in the “Workshopper’s Guide” document posted on Moodle, which was composed specifically for this class. Late graded work will be accepted at the rate of a half-letter grade penalty per day of lateness. Work that is not presented for workshop at the scheduled time will receive no credit. Response postings to peers’ texts online must be done by the stated deadline; responses that are made after this deadline (all or in part) or are incomplete will receive only half credit. Missing responses receive no credit.

GRADING

I grade assignments using letter grades rather than points. Generally, A is the highest grade awarded in the class. To translate letter grades into numbers, assume that A = 95, A- = 92, B+ = 88, B = 85, and so on. Using those translated numbers, the English department calculates final grades that roughly signify the following:

- A (90-100): Exceeds course requirements
- B (80-89): Meets course requirements
- C (70-79): Credit awarded but needs improvement
- D (69 or below): Does not meet course requirements; no Academy credit awarded.

Your semester grade will be calculated based on the accumulation of grades in the categories for the entire semester.

Instructors in the English department do not round quarter or semester grades.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Writing classrooms depend on trust between students, peers, and teachers. It is always better to contact me about the difficulties you’re having with an assignment than to plagiarize. I trust my students, but that trust is matched by the seriousness with which I take academic honesty. Instances of academic dishonesty will be forwarded to Ms. Berger.

ATTENDANCE

Whether or not you are present in class, you are responsible for class activities, presentations, and assignments. Please refer to the student handbook for the full attendance/tardy policy.

LAPTOPS

We will use laptops regularly in this class, and you will need to use your laptop to access and annotate electronic texts. In general, I permit laptop use in class—but if I notice a pattern of distraction, I will ask you to forego your laptop in favor of printed copies of texts. If I ask you to bring printed copies of texts, you must have a printed copy of each text each day.

TECHNOLOGY EXCUSES

You live on a campus inundated with computers, and there are countless free ways to back up your work automatically—use Google Drive, Dropbox, or the like. Unless a technology problem is a system-wide failure, IMSA’s fault, or my fault, please don’t share it with me as an excuse. If you plan ahead and have good backup plans, you won’t lose access to up-to-date copies of your work.

TOPICS AND ACTIVITIES

WEEKS 1-2: THE CREATIVE WRITER

- Read selections from Lamott’s *Bird by Bird* and Townsend’s “Workshopper’s Guide”
- Begin short writing assignments
- “55 Fiction” Assigned
- First Major Assignment: Short Story 1 Assigned

WEEKS 3-5: THE SHORT STORY

- Spontaneous Writing Minstrelsy Activity
- Read short stories from packet 1
- Discuss plot, character, and dialogue from the perspective of the author
- Short Story 1 collected and workshopped. Revisions begun.

WEEKS 6-8: THE POEM (I - FIXED FORMS)

- Read selections from Richard Hugo’s *The Triggering Town*
- Major Assignment: Poems 1 & 2 Assigned (form poetry prompts)
- Poetry workshops; begin revising

WEEKS 9-11: ONE-ACTS AND MONOLOGUES

- Read selected one-act plays and monologues
- Major Assignments: One-Act and Monologue
- Workshop one-act and monologue; begin revising

WEEKS 12-13: THE POEM (II - FREE VERSE AND PROSE POEMS)

- Read selections of contemporary poetry
- Major assignment: Poems 3 & 4 assigned
- Poetry workshops; begin revising

WEEKS 14-16: THE PERSONAL ESSAY

- What is the personal essay? What is creative nonfiction?
- Major assignment: personal essay
- Workshop personal essays; begin revising

WEEKS 17-18: CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

- Students choose a genre to continue working in: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, or drama.

FINALS WEEK

- Final portfolio submitted, containing no fewer than 4 revised works. At least one of these must be a prose piece (fiction, nonfiction, or theatrical) and at least one must be a poem.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME

RESPECT: I assume that my students have ideas to contribute to our discussions and to the world. Even when students have difficulties in class, I believe in their capacity to improve their thinking, writing, and communication. I will strive to take your ideas seriously and to fully acknowledge you as a person with a complex life.

HELP AND GUIDANCE: I want you to succeed in my class, and I have chosen this profession because I want to work with you inside and outside of class to make that happen. If you are confused by an assignment or are struggling with something we are doing in class, stop by my office so we can talk about it. If you are having trouble understanding something, contact me early and often. Plan ahead so if you need help, you have time to get it.

AVAILABILITY: I will respond to clear, self-contained questions direct to my IMSA email within 24 hours during the working week. I will make myself available during office hours.

ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR IDEAS: As a teacher, I am interested in helping you understand my ideas and the ideas of authors. I'm even more interested, however, in helping you hone and communicate your own ideas. If you're having trouble connecting the content of the course with the things that interest and concern you most, please come see me during office hours so I can help you find the connections.

USEFUL FEEDBACK: I will spend a lot of time crafting comments and feedback on your assignments. It is important to me that you do your best to understand that feedback and produce work that responds to it. If you have trouble understanding my comments on your work, please see me during office hours.

HIGH STANDARDS: I believe that writing and literature are serious, important stuff that will be crucial to your life, education, and career whether you end up being a biologist, a mathematician, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, or a novelist. Grades in my class are not "given," and points in my class are not "lost" from some arbitrary beginning point. Instead, grades in my class are earned through hard work and the difficult process of completing excellent assignments and projects.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU

CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE AND SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION: At the scheduled start time of class, you should be in your seat and ready for a conversation. Come prepared with questions and observations about the text, and be willing to share those questions and observations in small groups and in the large-group conversation.

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH CLASSMATES' IDEAS: Discussions of literature—and contemporary ways of thinking about literature—can involve challenging, contentious topics. Even when you disagree with your classmates, it is absolutely crucial to the success of our conversations that you treat them with respect. I will treat you like adults, and I expect you to treat your classmates like adults engaged in a respectful conversation.

HONESTY: I assume that you will tell me the truth and that your work represents your own effort. Please match my respect with your honesty.

COMMITMENT TO PROCESS: You will probably enjoy many of the texts we read in this class, but there are some you may not enjoy. Even if you realize a certain text is not your cup of tea, work through it and try to find what's interesting about it, even if it's hard. Similarly, commit to improving your writing, whether you believe you are a strong writer or a weak one. All of us, including me, still have lots to learn when it comes to writing.

WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP: I love nothing more than helping students improve their work. I can only do so, however, if students seek out my help. Taking advantage of my help—and, as importantly—the help of tutors at the writing center—will help you become a stronger writer, thinker, and communicator.