What’s the plan?

It can be a lonely life, chained to the desk, buried under an avalanche of books. Sometimes a writer needs to escape out into the real world, to discuss their art with other writers, and not just the voices they hear in their head when they read. Sometimes they need other eyes to read over their work to see what they have missed, to pinpoint what works and what doesn’t. This Introduction to Creative Writing course will encourage the budding writer to connect with their peers, analyse the craft of writing through a wide variety of texts and multimedia sources, and discuss their work in the safe, positive environment of the workshop.

The course will be separated into two halves: Craft and Workshop. On Mondays we will discuss the craft of writing—how writers do what they do, the rules they follow and those they break, the weapons they have in their arsenal. Our discussions will consider the most important aspects of writing: voice and style, character and setting, language and structure. The reading list will not be limited to “fiction” and “poetry” because this is not a distinction I truly believe in. Nor will it be an overview of capital L Literature. Rather, I will take us on a tour of writing styles—including creative nonfiction, autobiography (vs. autobiographical fiction), prose poetry, concrete poetry, flash fiction (vs. short story), song lyrics, television and movie screenplays, and beyond—with the hope that this range of styles and voices will give you the encouragement to experiment and take your writing further.

On Wednesdays, we will workshop each other’s writing. For a workshop to be successful, it requires the full participation of every member of the class. We all have different tastes / backgrounds / influences / opinions, and therefore will read the same piece differently. All of these different impressions are vital if the writer is to fully understand what it is they have created, and how best they can go about improving it. We will start each workshop by going around the table, so that each of you has the opportunity to provide you opinion. I will ensure that everybody is heard. You are also required to provide a Feedback Letter (typed, one page max.) for each writer being workshopped, to be presented to the writer at the time of the workshop. Please make an extra copy for me.
**Expectations**

- Craft and Workshop classes are both discussion-based, and will only prove enjoyable and helpful if everybody participates, therefore 40% of your final grade is based upon your attendance and input into class discussion. Engage critically and respectfully with both the assigned texts and your classmates’ submissions. Responses should be respectful, and feedback constructive. Throughout the semester there will also be opportunities for writers to read their craft exercises and responses to literary events aloud to the class. If you are finding it difficult to speak in class, please approach me during office hours or send an e-mail.

- Good attendance and punctuality. You are allowed one unexcused absence (an excused absence requires a doctor’s note or something similarly official) for the semester. For each subsequent unexcused absence, your grade will drop one mark (A to A—, B— to C+ etc.) Arriving more than fifteen minutes after the start of class will count as an absence.

- No technology in the classroom, no exceptions. This includes laptops, tablets etc. A screen of any sort is a barrier between you and everyone else, and will only detract from your involvement in the discussion. If you want to refer to the texts we’ve read during discussion, you will need to print a copy ahead of class.

- Plagiarism won’t be tolerated. Incidents of plagiarism will be reported.

**Reading for Craft**

All texts studied during the Craft portion of the course will be available online in PDF form, so that you will not have to purchase a huge stack of books. The reading list is tentative, and subject to change. To the best of my abilities, I will react to your tastes and feedback in class and tailor the list to best suit you.

**Written Assignments:**

Over the course of the semester, each student will submit three-to-four times to workshop (depending on class size): 2 shorter pieces (5 pages max, any form) and 2 longer (15 pages max, any form). Writers should print out copies for everyone in the class and hand these out the Wednesday before they are due to be workshopped.

Each Wednesday, you will provide a Feedback Letter, typed (1 page maximum) for each writer submitting to workshop. Please print two copies—one for the writer, one for me.
Craft exercises will be assigned each Monday, and will stem from discussions of the texts studied that day. These will be in the form of writing prompts, and are intended to get the creative juices flowing. They can be of any length, but somewhere between 2-5 pages would be fine. You will not be expected to submit a craft exercise each week (though you can if you like), but you must provide a minimum of two in your final portfolio. Each week, students will be invited to read their craft exercises aloud to the class.

Two responses (as with the craft exercises these can be of any length, somewhere around the 2-5 pages mark) to literary events you have attended over the course of the semester. Your responses should seek to consider / exercise some of the ideas and techniques we’ve discussed during the course. Responses can take any form (review, essay, personal account, short story or poem, etc). “Literary event” is here given a liberal definition: it could be an official event—a reading, a panel discussion, a performance etc—or it could be something more innocuous that has sparked your creative interests—a mother reading to her child in the park, for example, or a series of intriguing statements gratified in your neighbourhood. As long as you are reacting to something literary that’s in non-book form, I would consider it a literary event.

**Final portfolio**

Due the last week of class. This should contain:

- 2 craft exercises
- 2 responses to literary events
- 2 of your workshop submissions, revised and pushed to a new level.

**Submission Policy**

All responses, exercises, workshop submissions must be turned in on the assigned deadlines. It is your responsibility to print copies of your submissions and hand them out the Wednesday before you are workshopped. Email submissions are only acceptable in instances of excused absence.

**Office Hours (location and time TBA)**

I would encourage you to meet with me at least twice during the semester. Please arrive with questions prepared (and a copy of any writing you want to talk about). Things we could discuss: texts / authors we have read in class, literary techniques or styles you would like to explore
further, suggestions for further reading, concerns about the class in general, questions about publishing, writing as a career etc.

**Grading**

40% attendance and participation in class discussion
15% Feedback Letters
10% Responses to Literary Events
10% Craft Exercises
25% Final Portfolio

**Week 1**

Monday 1/23
Introduction to Course, Objectives and Desired Outcomes

Texts: *How to Become a Writer*, Lorrie Moore, and *That Crafty Feeling* by Zadie Smith.

Wednesday 1/25
Workshop

**Week 2**

Monday 1/30

Craft: Writing from experience, Biography

Texts: Excerpts from *On Writing*, Stephen King, and *Lit*, Mary Carr.
Week 3

Monday 2/6

Craft: (Auto)Biography in fiction

Texts: Excerpts from *A Death in the Family: My Struggle Book 1*, Karl Ove Knausgård, and *But Beautiful*, Geoff Dyer

Wednesday 2/8

workshop

Week 4

Monday 2/13

Craft: Prose Poetry: Language vs Structure

Texts: Excerpts from *Dreams and Stones*, Magdalena Tulli and something.

Wednesday 2/15

workshop

Week 5

Monday 2/20 President’s Day (class reschedule TBA)

Craft: Narrative Poetry
Wednesday 2/22
Workshop

Week 6
Monday 2/27
Craft: Poetry

Wednesday 3/1
Workshop

Week 7
Monday 3/6
Craft: Concrete Poetry
Selection from *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, ed Emmett Williams.

Wednesday 3/8
Workshop

Spring break

Week 8
Monday 3/20
Craft: Song Lyrics
Text: something from *On Celestial Music*, Rick Moody, various songs by Bob Dylan, Nick Drake, Andre 3000. Students will be encouraged to add their own favourites, compiling a class playlist.

Wednesday 3/22
Workshop

Week 9
Monday 3/27
Craft: Fragmented writing

Wednesday 3/29
Workshop

Week 10
Monday 4/3
Craft: Flash Fiction
Texts: Lydia Davis, Richard Brautigan, etc.

Wednesday 4/5
Workshop
Week 11
Monday 4/10
Craft: Less is more, Short stories

Wednesday 4/12
workshop

Week 12
Monday 4/17
Craft: Character and Setting

Wednesday 4/19
Workshop

Week 13
Monday 4/24
Craft: Dialogue
Texts: *Edgemont Drive*, E.L. Doctorow, something from *Great Days*, Donald Barthelme, and something else.
Wednesday 4/26
Workshop

Week 14

Monday 5/1
Craft: Dialogue: Screenplays
Sources: Black Mirror, Breaking Bad etc.

Wednesday 5/3
Final class. Final Project Due