

## **CRW 3311: Poetic Technique**

**Instructor:** Erin Hoover

"Let us use our words and our gazes to make the invisible visible. Let us tell the truth."  
—Claire Vaye Watkins

### **Required texts**

*Please Excuse This Poem: 100 New Poets for the Next Generation*, edited by Brett Fletcher  
Lauer & Lynn Melnick

*The Southeast Review* Writer's Regimen (information below)

### **Course objectives**

This course will introduce students to writing free-verse poems that nonetheless adhere to structural decisions about language, using craft elements such as meter, sound, figuration, and narrative. Poems generated for this class will be shared in a "workshop" setting in which fellow students and the instructor will serve as an inclusive community of readers and writers offering constructive, craft-based critiques. Our aim in workshop will be helping each poet create a revised portfolio of work that best articulates her or his unique point of view within the context of an audience. Particular attention will be paid in our readings to poets writing outside the mainstream or in alternate traditions.

By the end of this course, you will have:

- begun a regular poetry writing and reading practice;
- developed a critical vocabulary to discuss free-verse poetry (your own, as well as the poetry of contemporary writers and your peers);
- demonstrated an awareness of many of the issues now being discussed and debated among communities of practicing poets;
- and produced a portfolio of finished poems with an accompanying statement of poetics in essay form.

### **Course requirements**

Regular attendance, participation, and completing all of your work is a requirement for this course. It is your responsibility to keep track of assignments, check your FSU email and Blackboard regularly for updates, and come prepared to all class meetings.

- Regular, thoughtful responses to assigned readings
- Attentive, active, and responsible participation and citizenship in class discussions, workshops, and in-class writing exercises
- Providing copies of your own poem to the class in advance of your scheduled workshop and participating in discussions of others' poems (this requires reading and writing comments on the poems ahead of time)
- Leading one ten-minute discussion for a poem assigned in *Please Excuse This Poem*
- Midterm portfolio of drafts (and reflection) produced from Writer's Regimen exercises
- Response paper to a poetry reading
- Reflection on a "poetry date"
- Final chapbook of six revised poems with introductory statement of poetics

- Final live reading of your own work

### Coursework

The writing you do in and out of class, active participation in class discussions, workshops, and preparedness in class all factor into your final grade. All written and oral work will be graded on meaning or content and appropriateness to the assignment.

- 10% Participation
- 10% Reading responses
- 10% Midterm Writer's Regimen portfolio & reflection
- 5% Discussion leader
- 5% Poetry reading response paper
- 5% Poetry date reflection
- 5% Final live reading of one of your own poems
- 50% Final chapbook & poetics statement

## ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

### Workshop

Most of what we will be doing in this class is looking at one another's poems as a group with the aim of helping each other create a revised portfolio of work. There are two logistical parts to this:

1.) Your own poems: You will have the opportunity to workshop three of your own poems this semester—the whole class will devote a portion of our class time to your work. Students up for workshop must bring copies of their own original poem to class during the prior class, so that classmates have time to read and make written notes. This is non-negotiable. If you don't bring copies of your poem, you don't get to workshop that day, and your final chapbook grade is reduced by one full letter for each missed workshop.

2.) Others' poems: Come to workshop having read the poems and responded in some way to them, in writing. Suggested formats for your responses—such as what kinds of things you'll want to be looking for and commenting on—will be discussed at length prior to our first workshop, when we'll also create, as a group, some ground rules for workshop.

Workshop dates and dates when copies of poems are due are noted on course schedule.

### Absences and workshop

If you need to be absent on the class before your workshop, make a (responsible) buddy in the class so that your buddy can bring in copies of your poem. Do this in the first few weeks of the class, as you never know whether or when you'll need to be absent. If you are absent on the day that we plan to workshop your poem, the class will not look at your poem, though you will receive comments from me. A pattern of missed workshops will result in a reduction of your final grade for the semester.

### **In-class writing**

On some days when workshop is not scheduled, I'll provide you with a writing exercise during class. These exercises are designed to help you generate ideas for workshop poems and draft poems for your final chapbook. I suggest that you keep them all in one notebook along with other drafts.

### **Reading responses**

Prior to each class with assigned reading marked with an asterisk (\*) on the syllabus, students will complete the reading assignment and **200-word informal responses by 10:00 a.m. to the Blackboard "Journals" board** on the due date. If the assigned reading is an essay, what ideas in it did you find compelling, and did it provoke you to ask any questions? What did you think of it? If the assigned reading is a group of poems, respond to one or more of the poems. Please post your response as text directly into the form rather than attaching a document, and note that these will not be accepted via email. Reading responses cannot be turned in late or made up. Each reading response is worth 10 points, up to 100 points; responses after that are worth 5 points extra credit each. There are 13 journals total in the semester.

### **Midterm Writing Regimen portfolio & reflection (due week 9)**

During the month of February for a spring course (or October for a fall course), students are required to sign up for *The Southeast Review's* Writer's Regimen, a set of thirty daily emails containing writing exercises, prompts, and articles on the craft of writing. Instructions on how to sign up will be given in class. Each week, you will complete one or more of the prompts from the group of emails. At the beginning of March (or November), you will turn in your four best completed exercises (each written in English, in free verse, and with a minimum of 25 lines) along with a 500-600 word reflection in which you discuss your approach to the exercises. It is acceptable to use work generated from these exercises for one of your workshop poems, but it must be revised significantly.

### **Discussion leader**

Each student will serve as informal "discussion leader" for one poem within each group of poems (see syllabus for page groupings) in *Please Excuse This Poem*. For the poem you have chosen, come to class prepared with questions to encourage the class to look at various craft elements and to discuss not only the "meaning" of the poem, but choices in language that the poet has made. You will, of course, also need to be able to share your own responses to the questions you ask—they don't need to be "right," but do tell us what you think. You may wish to research the poet to get a sense of their biography and other work, as it relates to the themes you see in operation in the poem we are looking at, but this is not required. Keep in mind that this is not a presentation—so no PowerPoints or Prezis—but a discussion, in which your classmates should be doing most of the talking. Whatever you plan, you **DO** need to make sure you have enough questions and information to provoke a ten-minute discussion.

Students must be prepared to serve as discussion leader on the date they have chosen and for the poem they have chosen. Dates may only be changed or extended without penalty in the case of documented illness/family emergency and only when I have received documentation in advance. Late discussion leaders will receive a maximum of 75% credit for this assignment. A student who never leads their discussion will receive a zero.

### **Response paper to a poetry reading (due before or during week 11)**

You are required to attend at least one poetry reading during the semester (though I'll invite you to all of them, and encourage you to attend more). Readings occur every Tuesday night at the Warehouse just off campus. Take notes of your impressions of the reading, and then critically discuss the reading in an informal essay of 600-800 words. I will accept these responses at any point during the semester up until the deadline.

### **Poetry date reflection (due week 13)**

You are expected to begin working on your poetics statement (see below) ahead of the due date. During week 12, I will ask you to make an appointment with another classmate to discuss some of the key ideas you plan to include. You may even wish to draft parts of your statement ahead of time, though this is not required. At any rate, you and your classmate will meet, at a place of your choosing, and talk over your ideas about poetry. Afterwards, you will turn in a 500-600 word reflection outlining what you discussed: the ideas you shared, your classmate's responses, and vice versa. Did your discussion confirm or change what you want to write about?

### **Final chapbook & poetics statement (due at our last class)**

Students will workshop three original poems for this class, but through in-class writing exercises and the Writer's Regimen exercises, you will have the opportunity to write many more. At the end of the semester, you will compile six poems completed over the course and revise them into versions that are "final" (at least, for now). Your final chapbook must include each finished poem and its draft. Please turn in your poems and poetics statement bound with a clip or in a folder.

Requirements:

Poems must be written in English and in free verse.

Poems must be 25 lines minimum.

Revisions of your drafts must show significant (at least 50%) changes. Even if you absolutely loved the first draft, try something new—rearrange and reorder ideas, experiment with different length lines or stanzas, or add new images or metaphors.

For the second part of the final project, you will create your own 1,500-word poetics statement, in which you talk about how you have employed the various poetic devices we've been talking about all term to support the ideas you are communicating in your work. How do you hope a reader will interact with your work? How are your goals as a poet informed by your sense of what poetry can hope to accomplish? You must reference at least two of our course readings in your poetics statement.

### **Final live reading**

It is valuable to learn to share your written work in a public forum. At the end of the semester, we will celebrate our months of writing by reading one of our own poems out loud to our classmates. You will want to introduce the poems briefly, and then read them slowly and clearly. You will read to your classmates for 3-5 minutes.

Students must be prepared to read on the date of our reading (**last week of class**). Extensions will be given without penalty in the case of documented illness/family emergency and only when I have received documentation in advance. Late readers will receive a maximum of 75% credit. A student who does not complete their reading at all will receive a zero.

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## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Attendance**

The attendance policy for this class is strict, and attendance is taken every day. You are required to inform me ahead of time (when possible) if you need to be absent for one of the reasons below as well as relevant documentation regarding absences as soon as possible following the illness or event that led to an absence. Regardless of whether an absence is excused or unexcused, you are responsible for making up all work that is missed.

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

More than four (4) unexcused absences is grounds for failure. Two tardies of less than ten (10) minutes will equal an absence. A tardy of more than ten (10) minutes will equal an absence.

### What did I miss?

It is your responsibility to keep track of your attendance and class assignments and to be mindful of the readings and due dates on the syllabus. Ask your class buddy what you have missed if you are absent. Barring any unforeseen (and very extreme) circumstances, emails to me requesting class notes or a summary of what you have missed will not receive a response.

### **Turning in written assignments and final chapbook**

Bring a hard copy of your work to class on the date when it is due. If you will not be in class, you may email me the assignment, but it will not be graded until you turn in a hard copy. If you fail to hand in your assignment on time, your grade for that assignment will be lowered by one letter grade per day it is late. (Note, not class period late, but day. An assignment handed in on Thursday that was due Tuesday is two days late.)

All writing assignments must be typed, in 12-point Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins, and stapled. Please include a word count at the top of all assignments that aren't poems.

### **Participation and civility**

An A or even a B in participation is not automatic even with perfect attendance. You are expected to come to class and participate fully in discussions and activities and to be courteous and kind to your fellow students and to me. Bringing any assignments and reading materials needed to class in order to participate counts towards your participation grade, as do reading

quizzes, which I reserve the right to give on the assigned reading as needed. Quiz grades (if given) will be factored into your overall participation grade.

Leave your electronic devices at home or turned off and out of sight. Do not talk when others are speaking, including me. Any breach of these policies may result with your immediate dismissal from the class and a participation grade of "zero" for the day.

### **Academic Honor Policy**

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to ". . . be honest and truthful and . . . [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy>.)

### **ADA**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:

- (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and
- (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:  
 Student Disability Resource Center  
 874 Traditions Way  
 108 Student Services Building  
 Florida State University  
 Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167  
 (850) 644-9566 (voice)  
 (850) 644-8504 (TDD)  
 sdrc@admin.fsu.edu  
<http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

### **Syllabus change policy**

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

### **Reading Writing Center (RWC) & Digital Studio**

The Florida State University Reading-Writing Center and Digital Studio (FSU RWC/DS) offers writing support to all FSU students, including first-year undergraduates, students in all majors, international and other ELL students, CARE students, student athletes, and graduate students across the disciplines. Such support typically takes three forms: (1) tutoring; (2) workshops; and

(3) faculty consultations. In the tutoring context—whether in the RWC or the Digital Studio—tutors act as a practice audience for students’ ideas and writing, helping them develop their writing in many areas.

Hours are available at [fsu.mywconline.com](https://fsu.mywconline.com). Walk in to RWC locations (Williams 222-B, Johnston Ground, Strozier First Floor, & Dirac) or visit the website to make an appointment.

## SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES AND DUE DATES

Readings are listed on the date in which they are due. All readings are from the course text *Please Excuse This Poem* unless indicated. Readings for which a response is required on Bb before class are marked with an asterisk (\*).

### Week 1

Tuesday: Class introduction

Thursday: **DUE: Make a Bb "test post"**

Audience: who are you writing for?

Reading: "On Pandering" (Bb)

Reading: "The Triggering Town" (Bb)

### Week 2

Tuesday: The writing class / images

\*Reading: "The Writing Class" (Bb)

Reading: "Images" (Bb)

Thursday: **DUE: Deadline to sign up for the Writer's Regimen**

Simile and metaphor

Reading: "Simile and Metaphor" (Bb)

### Week 3

Tuesday: **DUE: Sign up for Discussion Leader poems**

The music of the line

Reading: "The Music of the Line" (Bb)

Thursday: **DUE: Group A brings poems for workshop**

Voice & style / setting our workshop ground rules

Reading: "Voice & Style" (Bb)

\*Reading: *PETP*, pp. 3-11

### Week 4

Tuesday: **DUE: Group B brings poems for workshop**

Group A workshop

\*Reading: *PETP*, pp. 12-23

Thursday: **DUE: Group C brings poems for workshop**

Group B workshop

Reading: *PETP*, pp. 24-33

### Week 5

Tuesday: Group C workshop

Reading: *PETP*, pp. 34-50

Thursday: **DUE: Group D brings poems for workshop**

Poetry & subject matter

Reading: *PETP*, pp. 51-63

\*Reading: "A Mystifying Silence: Big and Black" (Bb)



## Week 6

- Tuesday: **DUE: Group A brings poems for workshop**  
Group D workshop  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 64-75
- Thursday: **DUE: Group B brings poems for workshop**  
Group A workshop  
\*Reading: *PETP*, pp. 76-84

## Week 7

- Tuesday: Group B workshop  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 85-94
- Thursday: **DUE: Group C brings poems for workshop**  
Poetry and "truth"  
\*Reading: "Based on a True Story. Or Not."  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 95-104

## Week 8

- Tuesday: **DUE: Group D brings poems for workshop**  
Group C workshop  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 105-116
- Thursday: **DUE: Group A brings poems for workshop**  
Group D workshop  
\*Reading: *PETP*, pp. 117-125

## Week 9

- Tuesday: **DUE: Midterm Writing Regimen portfolio & reflection**  
Group A workshop  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 126-135
- Thursday: Poetic identity/identities and the self  
\*Reading: "The Body of the Poem: On Transgender Poetry" (Bb)  
Reading: selection from *Troubling the Line* (Bb)

NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK

## Week 10

- Tuesday: **DUE: Group B brings poems for workshop**  
"Accessible" vs. "difficult" poetry  
\*Reading: "On Poetry & Accessibility" (Bb)  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 136-144
- Thursday: **DUE: Group C brings poems for workshop**  
Group B workshop  
Reading: *PETP*, pp. 145-156

## Week 11

- Tuesday: **DUE: Group D brings poems for workshop**

- Group C workshop  
 \*Reading: *PETP*, pp. 157-166  
 Thursday: **DUE: Last date to turn in response paper to a poetry reading**  
 Group D workshop  
 Reading: *PETP*, pp. 167-177
- Week 12  
 Tuesday: NO CLASS: Use this time for your poetry date  
 Thursday: NO CLASS: Use this time for your poetry date
- Week 13  
 Tuesday: Poetry contradictions  
 \*Reading: selection from *The Art of Recklessness* (Bb)  
 Reading: *PETP*, pp. 178-191  
 Thursday: **DUE: Poetry date reflection**  
 Personal poetry / revision  
 \*Reading: "The Idea of Courage" (Bb)  
 Reading: "The Energy of Revision"
- Week 14  
 Tuesday: Publication panel  
 Reading: Writing & Publishing FAQ (link on Bb)  
 \*\*See journal prompt under Assignments tab  
 Thursday: **DUE: Bring revisions of chapbook poems to class to share with a peer**  
 Portfolio peer review  
 Reading: *PETP*, pp. 192-203
- Week 15  
 Tuesday: Final live readings  
 Thursday: **DUE: Final chapbook and poetics statement**  
 Final live readings / Final class reflection