

**Introduction to Creative Writing: Vision and Revision
(Poetry and Fiction)**

ENG 223

Winter 2015

Twice weekly, 90 minutes

Inez Tan

Office Location:

Office Hours:

(2 hours a week and by appointment)

“How do I know what I think until I see what I say?” –E.M. Forster, on writing

“Any discipline can help your writing: logic, mathematics, theology, and of course and particularly, drawing. Anything that helps you to see, anything that makes you look. The writer should never be ashamed of staring. There is nothing that doesn’t require his attention.” –Flannery O’Connor

Course Description for English 223:

In this class, we will be reading and crafting poetry and fiction, paying special attention to how form and technique contribute to meaning. We’ll consider questions such as: What makes a poem or story interesting? How do we develop an early vision into a finished work, through the process of revision? And how do the choices we make as writers shape what the reader experiences? Through studying poems and short stories that employ particular elements of craft in service of the whole, we will acquire techniques for our own writing: metaphor, lineation, point of view, dialogue, and more. Since all writing is a gradual process of thinking and discovery, greater emphasis will be placed on the revision of your work. This course is taught by an MFA in fiction.

Learning Goals for English 223:

- To *explore* the craft of both poetry and fiction, creating new work and developing it over time through the process of revision
- To acquire strategies of “reading like a writer,” in order to *analyze* and *critique* published stories and poems
- To develop these strategies in *workshop* by giving and receiving constructive feedback for works-in-progress
- To *reflect* on your own writing process

Required Texts:

- Course packet. Available at Dollar Bill Copying, 611 Church Street. Please bring this to **every** class, as we’ll be referring to it often.
- Michael Martone, et. al., eds. *The Scribner Anthology of Contemporary Short Fiction: 50 North American Stories Since 1970. 2nd edition.* New York: Touchstone Books, 2007.

Grading Standards:

I will provide written feedback on the writing you bring to workshop, as well the writing you include in your final poetry and fiction portfolios. While I will naturally take into account your writing’s merits, I will evaluate your work primarily on the basis of:

1. **Revisions:** your process of developing an early vision into a finished piece, taking into account peer and instructor feedback.
2. **Craft:** your ability to employ craft elements we covered together in class.
3. **Originality and risk-taking:** your willingness to try new things.

Response to Reading Attended:

As a member of the Ann Arbor writing community, you are expected to attend at least *one* writing event this semester. This can be a reading or a Q&A session with a writer.

After the event, please email me a brief (200-300 words) response with the following information about your experience: date, location, name of reader, genre of work, subject matter (just a general idea is fine), anything that you liked and why, any ideas the reading may have given you for your own writing. Note: Sometimes readings aren't everything you hoped they would be. If you learned something you don't want to do, that's okay too, but no trash-talk, please. These are not meant to be busy work, but to expose you to different work and hopefully inspire you to learn more about yourself as a writer.

Please write and send these responses to me as soon as you can after attending the readings. The longer you wait, the less you will remember making it harder to reflect meaningfully. Your response is due no later than **Monday, 4/6** via email.

Here are some of the events you can attend:

- The Webster Series features the work of MFA second-year poets and fiction writers. These readings take place on certain Fridays from 7-8PM in the auditorium of the Museum of Art (UMMA). Look out for posters of the schedule, or check the English Department's event calendar: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/events/default.asp>
- The Zell Visiting Writer Series showcases renowned published writers. Generally on Thursdays, roundtable discussions take place at 2:00 p.m. in the Hopwood Room (1st floor Angell), followed by Hopwood Tea (all students welcome). Hour-long readings are held at 5:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the Museum of Art (UMMA). Look out for posters of the schedule, or check the English Department's event calendar: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/english/events/default.asp>
- Local readings also take place periodically at Literati Bookstore and Nicola's Books. Check online for their schedules.

Grading Breakdown:

- Participation: 30%
 - Attendance
 - Participation in class discussions and small group activities
 - In-class writing exercises and first drafts
- Poetry Portfolio: 30%
 - Due Monday, 2/23 in class
- Fiction Portfolio: 30%
 - Due Wednesday, 4/22 in my mailbox before noon
- Reading Response: 10%
 - Due anytime before Monday, 4/6 via email to inezxtan@umich.edu

A Note on Participation:

This is a discussion and workshop-oriented class. The more you put into the class, the more you will get out of it, and the more successful the class will be for everyone. I value your time and attention, and I expect the same in return.

Workshop may be new to many of you. I intend to guide you through that process as much as possible, though some of your best learning will probably come from simply getting your feet wet. I expect you to come well-prepared and willing to engage in open and thoughtful classroom conversation.

As writers, we will strive to cultivate a lively interest in a variety of subjects and points of view, including one another's. I value the social virtue of intellectual generosity: a will to engage honestly, critically, and in good faith with the work of your colleagues and the pieces of the world brought into focus by them. Workshop often involves frank, sometimes hard conversations around artistic choices and personal beliefs. It is not a place for any speech or action that creates a hostile, offensive, or intimidating environment based on gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation. Instead, let's make this a welcoming and inclusive space for all.

Office Hours:

- I look forward to meeting with you individually during office hours. We'll meet for at least one required conference, during which we'll discuss your goals for your writing and this class. I also encourage you to come to my office hours throughout the term.
- If your schedule conflicts with my weekly office hours, please let me know so that we can arrange to meet at another time.

Daily Course Schedule

Please note that the daily course schedule is subject to change as the semester progresses; I will add and possibly subtract readings according to class needs. (In the event of a change, I will post an updated version of the syllabus on CTools.)

Readings are in the course packet, unless indicated otherwise. **Please bring the course packet to every class, as we will refer to it often.**

Wednesday, 1/7 – Welcome! (Class #1)

Read, in class:

- Syllabus
- Blueberry poem revisions

POETRY

Monday, 1/12 – Place I: Triggering Towns (Class #2)

Read:

- Excerpt from “The Triggering Town” by Richard Hugo (from page 4, “A poem can be said to have two subjects...” to page 6, “You owe reality nothing and the truth about your feelings everything.”)
- “North Haven” by Elizabeth Bishop
- “To Myself” by Franz Wright
- “At Burt Lake” by Tom Andrews
- “A Primer” by Bob Hicok

Write:

- Write 10 lines describing either a physical location you are currently in, or a place you know very well. Describe what can be seen, heard, smelled, touched, and tasted. Don't attempt to "say" anything or to produce a poem at this point. Just focus on evoking the place as clearly and vividly as you can. Print and bring two copies to class.

Wednesday, 1/14 – Place II: Going Places (Class #3)

Read:

- "Shitty First Drafts" by Anne Lamott
- "Reading a Poem: Twenty Strategies" by Mark Yakich

Write:

- Using the 10 lines you wrote for last class as a "trigger," write a poem of 15-25 lines, keeping the place you started with in the poem but allowing yourself to discover other subjects. Print and bring one copy to class, along with the copy of the 10 lines you started with. (Poem 1: Place)

Monday, 1/19 – Martin Luther King Day, NO CLASS

Wednesday, 1/21 – Animals and Sound (Class #4)

Read:

- "Tarantulas on the Lifebuoy" by Thomas Lux
- "Why Some Girls Love Horses" by Paisley Rekdal
- "Difference" by Mark Doty
- "To Beg For Food in A Contemptible Way" by James Tate

Write:

- First, choose an animal. Next, describe it as much as you can: what it looks, sounds, feels, smells, and tastes like. You may wish to do a little research. Next, using the four animal poems you've read as a model, use the descriptions you've written as a "trigger" to write about something else, keeping the animal you started with in the poem. Print and bring one copy to class. (Poem 2: Animals)

Monday, 1/26 – Conferences (Class #5)

Mandatory conferences to be held in my office (Tisch 3029) this week.

Write:

- Write a poem in which you use at least *four* of the sound devices we discussed in class. (Challenge yourself to use as many as you can!) Bring in one printed copy for me during our conferences: one 15-minute timeslot either on Monday 1/26, or Wednesday 1/28 (TBA). (Poem 3: Sound)

Wednesday, 1/28 – Simile and Metaphor (Class #6)

Read:

- "Heroic Simile" by Robert Hass
- "Celestial Music" by Louise Glück
- "Lady Lazarus" by Sylvia Plath

- “Nobody Fails At Meditation” by Michael Bazzett

Write:

- Write at least five similes and metaphors. Print and bring these for discussion in class.

Monday, 2/2 – Lineation (Class #7)

Poetry Workshop Group 1 turns in poems.

Read, paying close attention to their lineation (where the line and stanza breaks fall, where the lines are long or short, how the lines are positioned on the page):

- “Strawberrying” by May Swenson
- “Alone with Everybody” by Charles Bukowski
- “Marriage” by Lawrence Raab
- “Provenance” by Mary Ruefle
- “Falling: The Code” by Li-Young Lee

Write:

- Write a poem that contains a long (spanning at least ten lines) simile or metaphor. Print and bring one copy to class. (Poem 4: Simile and Metaphor)

Wednesday, 2/4 – Poetry Workshop, Group 1 (Class #4)

Poetry Workshop Group 2 turns in poems.

Read and write comments on the poems submitted by Group 1:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Write:

- Lineation exercise: “Ave Maria” (on CTools). Lineate this *without* referring to the published poem. There is no ‘right’ answer here; there are many possible choices. Print and bring one copy to class.

Monday, 2/9 – (Class #9)

Poetry Workshop Group 3 turns in poems.

Read and write comments on the poems submitted by Group 2:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Write:

- Lination exercise: “Clouds” (on CTools). Lineate this *without* referring to the published poem. There is no ‘right’ answer here; there are many possible choices. Print and bring one copy to class.

Wednesday, 2/11 – (Class #10)

Poetry Workshop Group 4 turns in poems.

Read and write comments on the poems submitted by Group 3:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Write:

- TBA

Monday, 2/16 – (Class #11)

Read and write comments on the poems submitted by Group 4:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Write:

- TBA

INTERLUDE

Wednesday, 2/18 – Interlude I: Elegy for a Dead World (Class #12)

Work on your poetry portfolio!

Play: Elegy for a Dead World. (Exact assignment TBA.)

Read:

- TBA

Monday, 2/23 – Interlude I: Elegy for a Dead World (Class #13)

DUE: Turn in your poetry portfolio in class.

Play: Elegy for a Dead World. (Exact assignment TBA.)

Read:

- TBA

FICTION

Wednesday, 2/25 – Introducing the Short Story (Class #14)

Read:

- “The Nature and Aim of Fiction” by Flannery O’Connor
- “No One’s A Mystery” by Elizabeth Tallent

Write:

- TBA

BREAK: FEBRUARY 28-MARCH 8

Monday, 3/9 – People I: Main Characters (Class #15)

Read, paying close attention to how the writers describe their main characters:

- “A Temporary Matter” by Jhumpa Lahiri (Scribner)
- “Cry Cry Cry” by Sherman Alexie

Write:

- Describe how five different original characters (in one paragraph each) would perform *one* of the following actions: taking off their shoes, making a sandwich, opening a door, standing in line, or burying a body. Print and bring two copies to class. (Fiction Exercise 1: Portraying Characters In Action)

Wednesday, 3/11 – People II: Ensemble Casts (Class #16)

Read:

- “Brownies” by ZZ Packer (Scribner)
- “Proto-Scorpions of the Silurian” by Jim Shepard

Write:

- Write a scene, or part of a scene (800-1,000 words) where at least four characters are doing something together. Make each character distinct, drawing on the techniques we’ve seen Lahiri, Alexie, Packer, and Shepard employ. Also write a short reflection (200-400 words) explaining your reasoning behind the techniques you used. Print and bring one copy to class. (Fiction Exercise 2: Ensemble Cast + Reflection)

Monday, 3/16 – Orientation + Plot and Structure, with guest lecturer Lauren Prastien (Class #17)

Read:

- “Orientation” by Daniel Orozco
- “The TV” by Ben Loory (given out in class)
- “A Primer for the Punctuation of Heart Disease” by Jonathan Safran Foer (given out in class)

Write:

- In Orozco’s “Orientation,” an employee introduces a new hire to an office. Write the beginning of an orientation to a place, job, procedure, subculture, or something else of your choosing (500-1,000 words). Describe physical features or characters with as much sensory detail as possible. You may wish to closely imitate craft features of Orozco’s story: the first-person narrator, directions such as *those are*, *that is*, or *such and such is over there*. Print and bring one copy to class. (Fiction Exercise 3: Orientation)

Wednesday, 3/18 – Time and Chronology (Class #18)

Read:

- “Bullet in the Brain” by Tobias Wolff
- “How to Talk to Your Mother” by Lorrie Moore

Write:

- After completing the reading, choose ONE of the following two options and write 2-3 pages double-spaced:
 - Create a new character, or reuse one you’ve written from a previous exercise. As with Anders in “Bullet in the Brain,” he or she has just been shot in the head. Write at least three memories that pass before your character’s eyes.
 - OR: Create a new character, or reuse one you’ve written from a previous exercise. In the style of “How to Talk to Your Mother,” write at least ten years of your character’s life. You may proceed forwards or backwards in time.

Print and bring two copies to class. (Fiction Exercise 4: Time) **(NOTE: We skipped this one.)**

Monday, 3/23 – Point of View (Class #19)

Read:

- “X’s and O’s” by Jennifer Egan
- Reread “How to Talk to Your Mother” by Lorrie Moore
- “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen

Write:

- None – we’ll do a writing activity in class.

Wednesday, 3/25 – Dialogue (Class #20)

Read:

- “Dialogue” by Alice LaPlante
- “The Swim Team” by Miranda July
- “Car Crash While Hitchhiking” by Denis Johnson (Scribner)

Write:

- Write 2-3 pages double-spaced primarily or entirely composed of dialogue, where one character wants something that the other one doesn’t/the other ones don’t. (Fiction Exercise 5: Dialogue)

Monday, 3/30 – Revision + Q&A with guest lecturer Kirstin Valdez Quade (Class #21)

Read:

- “Revision: Line Editing” (course packet, pg 69-72)
- “Ordinary Sins” by Kirstin Valdez Quade (given out in class)

Write:

- After you’ve read “Revision: Line Editing,” return to one of the five fiction exercises we’ve done so far. Revise it, with the aim of turning it into a complete story: expand it, rewrite sections, make line edits. Print and bring one copy (2-3 pages double-spaced), along with the original exercise that you started from. (Fiction Exercise 6: Revision of Previous Exercise)
- Come to class with at least one question about revision.

Wednesday, 4/1 – Litany (Class #22)

Read:

- “Boys” by Rick Moody (Scribner)
- “Xmas, Jamaica Plain” by Melanie Rae Thon (Scribner)
- “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid (Scribner)

Write:

- Each of these stories is built on a repeated litany: “Boys...” “I’m...” or a series of instructions. Write a complete story or the beginning of a story constructed from a litany of your own (2-4 pages double-spaced). Print and bring one copy to class. (Fiction Exercise 7: Litany)

Monday, 4/6 – Subtext + TURN IN FOR WORKSHOP (Class #23)

Everyone: Print and bring five copies of your story for workshop. (If you’re in the group of three, print and bring four copies.)

This is also the day that your response (200-300 words) to a writing event is due. More details in the syllabus.

Read:

- “The Afterlife” by Amy Hempel

Wednesday, 4/8 – NO CLASS, BUT WORK DUE BY 4:00 (Class #24)

We won’t meet for class (and there will not be office hours today), but by 4:00 p.m., please:

Read:

- “The Things They Carried” by Tim O’Brien (Scribner)

Write:

- Choose a character from the story you turned in to workshop. Write a paragraph describing, with as much sensory detail as possible, what this character would normally carry. Next,

write a paragraph describing something this character *wouldn't* normally carry. Think of this as part of the revision process – you might not include it in your story, but it will help you to know this character better. Email your exercise to me. (Fiction Exercise 8: A Character Carrying)

Monday, 4/13 – Fiction Workshop, First Two of Your Group (Class #25)

Read, annotate, and write letters for the stories submitted by:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

Wednesday, 4/15 – Fiction Workshop, Second Two of Your Group (Class #26)

Read, annotate, and write letters for the stories submitted by:

- 3) _____
- 4) _____

Monday, 4/20 – What We've Covered This Semester (Class #27)

Read:

- Reread “Revision: Line Editing” (course packet, pg 69-72)

Write:

- None – work on your fiction portfolio!

In-class PowerPoint review of what we've covered this semester.

Office Hours on Tuesday, 4/21 – Office hours will be held from 3:30-5:30 in Tisch 3029.

Wednesday, 4/22 – DUE: Fiction Portfolio in my mailbox by noon