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**Dept. of Literature and Languages**  
**Office Online**  
**Office Hours MWF 9:00-10:00**  
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## **Syllabus**

**Week 1**                    **Introduction to Class.** Discussion of poetry; what distinguishes poetry and prose. Discussion of poetic form, external and internal.

Preliminary discussion of blank verse, and practice.

**Week 2**                    **FORMAL VERSE**  
1) Bring your own blank verse poem(s)  
2) Pick a Poem..  
3) Bring a BRIEF, formal analysis of one poem from one of these two issues – a poem that you consider successful. The poem need not be in blank verse – but it must be pentameter. Blank verse preferred if the opportunity allows, but not required.

**Week 3**                    1) Bring your own sonnet  
2) Pick a sonnet you admire from one of the above journals, or another current journal paper-journals are also okay, if you can get hold of them), and  
3) analyze how your poet used selected formal elements. 1-2 pages typed.

**In Class Discussion:** discuss effects (and goals)of rhyme and off-rhyme, with examples. Discuss Sound and Sense.

**Week 4**                    1) Bring in your own rhyming, metered poem (any line length, but still regular). Tetrameter, Trimeter, etc. If your poems are very short, then bring several.  
2) Pick a rhyming, even line-length poem you admire from roughly the 100 years. Then  
3) Go through at least 12 lines, analyzing **on a line by line basis** how form reinforces or determines content: consider rhyme, caesuras, light and heavy accents, multi-syllabic vs. mono-syllabic words, etc.

- Week 5**
- 1) Bring in your own rhymed, metered poem with lines of different, but repeating, line length structures. I.e. Ballads often do this; poems may use a chorus of a different line length, or make the last line of the stanza shorter (i.e. Keats Belle Dame is 8/8/8/shorter).
  - 2) Analyze (1/2 –to 1 page) how this form effects the content of your poem: how they work together or conflict, and why, etc. Avoid vague generalizations in favor of the specific.
- Week 6**
- 1) Bring in your own rhymed, metered poem with different, ostensibly random line lengths.
  - 2) bring in ½-1 page analysis explaining why one line must be shorter than another – that is, relate line length to content. Mere Convenience is NOT an acceptable reason.
- Week 7**
- 1) Bring in a poem of yours in an unusual form. It must be an identifiable form, but it may be trimeter, 14ers, a “shaped” poem, an unusual rhyme pattern or stanza – your choice.
  - 2) Briefly explain (half page) how the content of your poem works with your chosen form.
- Week 8**
- 1) Pick two poems you have written this semester and revise them. Revision may include formal alteration, content alteration, or both.
  - 2) bring in a half page explaining the principles behind your revision. Then give the old and new version of two lines, and explain why you think them better.
- Week 9**
- FREE VERSE**
- 1) Pick one poem you wrote in the first half of this course and it so as to remove it’s formal structure. You may alter content as needed in the process.
  - 2) Explain the effect you were going for in positive terms – i.e. don’t just say why the external form was confining or wrong, but what sound/style/effect to wanted to achieve, this time. Then, briefly, say where you think it falls short, or (if it doesn’t) what problems you met along the way.
- Week 10**
- 1) Turn to any convenient copy of Eliot’s Wasteland (you can find it online if you do not have one). Then examine the sections, looking for evidence of dominant meters in this “free” poem. In any particular section you may find clear dominant meter, no dominant meter, or more than one. Come to at least ½ page of conclusions (but no more than a page) based on internal evidence in the final poem.
  - 2) Write a free verse poem with a formal under-pinning that you deliberately diverge from for effect.

In class discussion of the influence of meter on “free” verse, historically and/or currently.

**Week 11**

T.S. Eliot thought that all poetry must have a “musical pattern.”

1) Write a free verse poem, focusing on the achievement of some “musical “pattern.” On a separate page identify the effect you were trying to achieve, and the means you used.

2) Pick any free verse poem published in the last 20-30 yrs in English that you like, and discuss it’s musical pattern

**In Class Discussion of various “Musical Patterns” in free verse.**

**Week 12**

1) Write a “prose-poem”: a poem that is based on conversational English, and involving at least some very long lines (note: Eliot attacked prose-poems – but nevertheless tried writing a few).

2) Find a successful “prose-poem” and analyze how you think it achieves it’s effect.

(Possible on-line source for those who need one: *The Prose-Poem: An International Journal*).

**Week 13**

1) Write a free verse poem that makes frequent use of alliteration and/or assonance. You may, if you chose, have other unifying principles.

2) Briefly analyze how these sound effects help to shape the reader’s understanding of the poem’s content.

**Week 14**

**No Class, alas.**

**Week 15**

**Break the Rules** in some way. Write a poem that issues a challenge in both form and content.

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### **Course Description**

**Welcome to Creative Writing 315.** This semester's genre is Poetry. Put like that however, poetry sounds like One Thing, whereas in fact poetry today is myriad and hydra-headed: a slippery and complex creature. So the only truly safe way to define poetry today is by negatives: poetry is “not-fiction,” “not non-fiction,” (a double negative!), not-drama, etc. As a genre, poetry today is composed of different “schools,” each with its own aesthetic imperative. At its base however, poetry is a *concentrated* way of writing; a way of manipulating sound and sense to achieve intense effects not easily obtained in more diffuse forms.

Because poetry is one of the oldest forms of writing, it is never just self-expression: every line you craft is freighted with historical meaning. Are your lines traditional or “experimental?” Are they end-stopped or open-ended; do your lines fulfill or violate expectation, etc etc. Whether you know it or not, every decision you make when you write a poem will be read in the context of convention. You may conform to a convention or modify it; you may challenge it or flagrantly violate it – but the one thing you cannot do is to be *ignorant* of it; this just comes off as muddled.

To prevent that, we will spend this semester practicing poetic *form*. Poetic form may be (roughly speaking) external or internal, and you will experience both this semester. Here some more **definitions** are in order.

**External form** is “traditional” form: in English, that usually means meter and/or rhyme. Line length (defined by syllable and accent, not visual “length”) fits a pattern: either all the lines are the same length, or a pattern of varied line length is established and repeated.

**Internal form** is also known as “free” verse, or “experimental” verse, and was first expounded in the early twentieth century by poets like Eliot and Pound and Auden. The term free verse (or “vers libre” in French) was first used in English by Eliot and Pound. Free does *not* however mean “random”: in fact, properly done, free verse is anything but “free.” In Free verse, the decision when to end a line has to be remade every time – and there has to be a reason, every time.

When I write free verse for instance, it always exists in the context of all those centuries of pentameter (the dominant “literary” line). In the background I hear the reverberating echoes of insistent pentameter – and I break them, or I create a heavier pause by starting a

line where no pentameter poet would create one, etc etc.

By no means does this mean you should do the same. But always, when you write verse, you should have a reason for ending a line with that word – that sound – and starting with the next one.

In short, External form gives you a set pattern to fulfill or violate in myriad and subtle ways, whereas Internal form in other words requires constant justification.

Ultimately, I am not invested in what choices you make – as long as you make those choices deliberately and with knowledge. Think of this course instead as an apprenticeship. A poet should know his/her craft. And as Yeats says, “nor is there singing school, but studying/Monuments of its own magnificence.” Literature classes “study” by reading and analyzing works of art. Some of that will occur in this class, too. But the biggest part of this class is practice: learn from the various “Makers” (to use an old English word for it) how it can be done – and then take your own way.

### **Course Objectives**

To practice a form it is first necessary to learn it. Some of you will be new at this; you have never heard of feet and line length, and are very iffy on “accent” in general. Others of you may already be comfortable with words like “sonnets” and “tetrameter,” free vs blank verse. Do not worry though if all this is new to you.

First, I will explain this via “lectures.”

Because however poetry is an aural experience and should be heard, I will also attach a few taped lectures for you to listen to, especially in the first weeks.

Finally – to make sure you understand – I will periodically ask you to pick a published poem and practice analyzing it. Basically, you cannot practice what you've never learned in the first place.

Students will therefore read, discuss, listen, practice – and share. Because sharing too is part and parcel of a creative writing class.

### **Objectives, Elaborated**

**1) Expect to write a poem, or its equivalent, every week,** and to present it online. Your work should be a response to the assignment for that week. Expect also to revise poems periodically.

**2) Expect** to respond, clearly and analytically, to the poems submitted by your classmates. This can be *hard*. It is not enough just say how you feel: you have to be able to say why; which word, which line, etc etc. Push yourself.

**3) In addition, expect** to write an analysis roughly every 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> week. Sometimes you will analyze your own poem (explaining and justifying your decisions). Sometimes you will do the same with published poems by others

**4) Finally, expect to revise** at least some of your poems, taking into account the responses of others, and explaining how you have done so.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

Students will be able to analyze external form, be it sonnet or ballad, blank verse or free verse. Students will be able to identify rhyme schemes, and to analyze caesuras, endstopped lines and enjambment.

Students will be able to write poems in a variety of external forms, using the techniques identified above.

Students will be able to relate form and content, showing how content dictates form, or form alters content.

### **Grades**

Grades will be weighted as follows:

<b>Poems, First Drafts.</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Revisions</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Participation</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Explication:</b>	<b>15%</b>

### **Grades, Elaborated**

**First Drafts:** poems will not be rated qualitatively. They will however be rated on the following criteria:

- 1) Poems must be presented to the class (and to me) in a timely fashion
- 2) Poems **must fit the assignment**. This is very important. If we are focusing on pentameter, the poem must be written in pentameter. Make sure you understand the form assigned, and follow it – you will have chance to mess it with later. It is not easy to follow the requirements of a particular form if you are not used to it; it will take work.

**Revisions** cannot be slap-dash: you will be required to explain what changes you made, and why. Be prepared to explain **how** the changes you made achieve the effect you are aiming for.

**Participation** means much more than turning in poems in a timely fashion, and making

them available to the class – missing poems will detract from your Poetry grade (first drafts). To earn participation points you must provide a detailed, analytical response to at least half the class each week. This means saying what works and does not work, and why. What do you think they were trying to achieve? (this is very useful, if it turns out they were trying to do something else). Where was the form/meter rhyme awkward or ineffective and why; what else could they have done, etc etc.

Finally, Explications explain **what** poets seem to be aiming at, **how** they succeeded or failed to succeed, **and what methods** they used along the way. Explanations analyze the process of creation. Here the less vague you are, the better: be crisp, detailed and insightful.

### **Academic Dishonesty Statement**

Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate *plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty (including collusion and selling academic products)*. *Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise.*

Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1,2,3]).

### **Courtesy Statement:**

"All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment." (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct).

### **Americans w/Disabilities Act Statement:**

Americans w/Disabilities Act Statement: Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must go through the Academic Support Committee. For more information, please contact the Director of Disability Resources & Services, Halladay Student Services Bldg., Room 303D, (903) 886-5835.