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2025-2026 DPL Adult Writing Workshop SYLLABUS

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CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Workshop Description

This workshop will be a venue for DPL patrons to share their writing, improve their craft, and discuss literature and the artistic practice. Participants may submit fiction, poetry, non-fiction or memoir and as a class we will discuss the peculiarities of each genre. Submitted writing will be discussed and critiqued by the class as a group, as well as in individual written comments given both by the instructor and the members of the class. Particular attention will be given in class to the sentence-to-sentence and word-to-word choices made by participants, and the ways these choices relate to the reading experience and the meaning of the work. Short readings may be used to help inform the discussions of style and genre. Writing exercises may also be given, and surprise guests may give short lectures and take Q&A, depending on how well the instructor has estimated his friendships with other artists.

Here are some questions we may explore in class:

What is genre?

What role does form play in the different genres?

What are the limits of style?

When does style cease to be ornament and become crucial to a piece of writing?

When does style become self-indulgent?

What right do we have to judge style?

What is the difference between style and affectation?

How can style reflect the inner and outer worlds of the author?

How can style communicate? How can it fail to communicate?

Workshop Requirements

1. Attendance

Writing workshops depend on the generosity and commitment of their participants. You will be expected to attend every session unless there is a meaningful reason to be absent. In the event you are absent, you will have to notify the instructor at least 4 hours ahead of time, and your written comments on the work for that day will still be required. Failure to give advance notice or written comments may result in removal from the class to make space for those on the waiting list. Participants who are absent for the workshopping of their own work are not guaranteed a rescheduled workshop.

2. Writing Submissions

Participants will be expected to submit two pieces for workshop during the season. Writing samples should be a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 40 typed, double-spaced pages (12-pt font) per submission. Whenever possible, a writing submission should be as complete as the writer can make it before submitting.

3. Scheduling & Participant Responsibilities

The workshop will meet for two hours once a week for 14 weeks (3.5 months) with some calendar weeks skipped due to library or national holidays. The class will read and discuss two submissions per week, although bonus submission slots may open, depending on total registered participants.

Writers must distribute copies of their work the session *before* they are scheduled for discussion. If writers need assistance making copies of their work, they should contact the instructor no later than 2 days before their submission is due.

Participants are expected to be ready each week to discuss the pieces scheduled.

Written comments on submissions should be typed and should be no shorter than 1 single-spaced page (12-pt font). In addition to these summarizing comments, participants are expected to make notes in the margins of their copy of submitted work and turn these into the writer at the end of their workshop along with their written comments.

The instructor may suggest various readings but will not require them. Readings necessary to the workshop will be short and completed during workshop itself.

4. Workshop Rules

- a. Writers do not speak while their pieces are being workshopped
- b. Commenters should be honest, but courteous
- c. Commenters should engage with the work, not the writer
- d. Commenters should take every submission seriously, and assume conscious choices were made by the writer
- e. All participants will be tolerant of and take seriously submitted subject matter, even if it does not align with their personal beliefs

5. Prohibited Subjects for Submissions

When considering workshop pieces, this course draws inspiration from the Decatur Public Library Collection Development Policy which can be found here: <https://www.decaturlibrary.org/collection-development-policy>. Specifically:

"The controversial nature of certain subjects, authors, or language will not be cause for automatic inclusion or exclusion [...] Decatur Public Library does not promote all of the ideas found in its collections or the discussions those ideas may inspire, but provides the spaces and opportunities for those ideas and discussions.

The Library protects the right of the individual to access information, even when the content may be controversial or unacceptable to others [...] As such, the Library upholds the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights position statement, including the Freedom to View and Freedom to Read."

However, because it is the nature of a workshop that participants are responsible for reading *all* submissions and therefore do not have the freedom to ignore offensive material, certain subjects are prohibited:

- a. **Hate speech.** Hate speech is any form of expression through which writers intend to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred against a group or a class of persons on the basis of race, religion, skin color, sexual identity, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, or national origin. For the purposes of this class, this will include the use of slurs for the above categories regardless of the context.
- b. **Inclusion of workshop members, community members, or DPL staff.** Both past and present workshop members, DPL staff, and other members of the Decatur community are prohibited from being included in submissions. Participants writing memoir may mention themselves, but must anonymize anyone who is not a public figure (anyone who is not a politician, celebrity, etc) by significantly changing their names and any identifying characteristics.
- c. **Depictions of excessive violence or of sexual assault.** Depictions of torture, mass murder, intentional bodily harm to others or self, or sexual assault in a classroom where such material is mandatory reading can contribute to a hostile workshop environment, and may be cause for mandatory legal reporting by the instructor. Such depictions will be subject to workshop consent before submission. Please let your instructor know if such material will be included before your piece is due.

Workshop participants who violate the above guidelines will forfeit the workshop for the submitted piece and may forfeit their spot in the class.

6. Privacy

The Decatur Public Library Privacy policy can be found here: <https://www.decaturlibrary.org/privacy-policy> . The Decatur Public Library will treat all submitted work and comments in accordance with our privacy policy, but cannot ensure that other workshop participants will do so. Any dispute regarding submitted work or comments will be between workshop participants and does not involve the Decatur Public Library. Please be considerate of your fellow workshopppers and treat the work we share in class as confidential to our group.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: 11/18	How a workshop works, introductions, short reading. Writing exercise: Setting as Other Things.
Week 2: 11/25	Minimal Style: Paragraphs from Ernest Hemingway's <i>In Our Time</i> , Tao Lin's <i>Shoplifting from American Apparel</i> , Gayle Jones' <i>Corregidora</i> , and Joan Didion's <i>Play it As it Lays</i> . Poems from Robert Frost and Elizabeth Bishop. Practice workshop and writing exercises.
Week 3: 12/2	Caricature: Paragraphs from Stacey Richter's <i>My Date with Satan</i> and Stanley Crawford's <i>Petroleum Man</i> . Poems TBD. Workshop 1.
Week 4: 12/19	Lyric Style: Paragraphs from Wright Morris' <i>Fire Sermon</i> , Cormac McCarthy's <i>Blood Meridian</i> , and Thomas DeQuincey's <i>Confessions of an Opium Eater</i> . Poems from Paul Muldoon, Christopher Marlowe, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Workshop 2.
Week 5: 12/16	Grotesque & Burlesque: Paragraphs from Flannery O'Connor's <i>Wise Blood</i> , P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves & Wooster stories, Lydia Millet's <i>Omnivores</i> , and T.C. Boyle's <i>World's End</i> . Poems TBD. Workshop 3.
Week 6: 12/30	Mythic Style: Paragraphs from Aimee Bender's <i>Girl in the Flammable Skirt</i> , Toni Morrison's <i>Sula</i> , and Gabriel Garcia-Marquez's <i>A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings</i> . Poems from Alice Notley and Louise Gluck. Workshop 4.
Week 7: 1/6	Maximal Style: Paragraph selections from Marcel Proust's <i>In Search of Lost Time</i> , Eleanor Catton's <i>The Luminaries</i> , <i>Praiseworthy</i> by Alexis Wright, and David Foster Wallace's <i>Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way</i> . Poems from T.S. Eliot and John Milton. Workshop 5.
Week 8: 1/13	Disjunctive Style: Paragraph selections from Gertrude Stein's <i>Tender Buttons</i> , Ben Marcus' <i>The Age of Wire and String</i> , and Garielle Lutz's <i>Stories in the Worst Way</i> . Poems from Rick Reed and Louis Zukofsky (A-15 or other Materialists). Workshop 6.
Week 9: 1/20	Experiments: Paragraphs from Lydia Davis' <i>Almost No Memory</i> , Brian Evenson's <i>Dark Property</i> , and Toby Olson's <i>The Woman Who Escaped from Shame</i> . Poems from Albert Goldbarth and John Ashbery. Essays by John D'Agata and Albert Goldbarth. Workshop 7.
Week 10: 1/27	Selections from Flannery O'Connor's <i>Mystery and Manners</i> . Writing exercise: Metaphors in Typography. Workshop 8.
Week 11: 2/3	Selections from Donald Barthelme's <i>Not Knowing</i> . Writing exercise: Unwriting. Workshop 9.
Week 12: 2/10	Selections from Italo Calvino's <i>Six Memos for the Next Millennium</i> . Writing exercise: Expansion. Workshop 10.
Week 13: 2/17	Selections from <i>How Fiction Works</i> by James Wood. Writing exercise: TBD. Workshop 11.
Week 14: 2/24	Closing thoughts. Selections from <i>The World within the Word</i> by William H. Gass. Workshop 12.

