

**San José State University**  
**Department of English and Comparative Literature**  
**English 240: Poetry Workshop**  
**Fall 2020**

“Prose Poetry and Short Forms”

*We consider something as perfect not when you can't add anything more to it, but when you can't take anything else away~ Yvon Chounard, founder, Patagonia*

<b>Instructor:</b>	Sally Ashton, MFA
<b>Office Location:</b>	Zoom Room
<b>Telephone:</b>	Please use email ONLY to contact me.
<b>Email:</b>	sally.ashton@sjsu.edu
<b>Office Hours:</b>	By appointment
<b>Class Days/Time:</b>	M 4-6:45 pm
<b>Classroom:</b>	Online Zoom Room
<b>Credits:</b>	4 Credits

**Course Description**

English 240 is an MFA-level poetry workshop in which students write, revise and complete new poems. The course will include regular discussions of poetics and the theory and craft of poetry, as well as an examination of trends in contemporary poetry in the United States and internationally. Students will also learn to finish revisions of work to potentially include in their thesis manuscript and/or submit for publication in small magazines, literary journals, and Web sites. The course may be taken four times for credit (toward the MFA degree).

**Course Theme:**

In this graduate level workshop we'll consider short forms including flash fiction and brief essay/memoir through the lens of the Prose Poem, including its historical development, structures, and the challenges of genre classification, fluidity, and hybridity. Poets and prose writers alike are welcome to read, consider, write, and workshop in their genres through this popular form. Discover how writing short forms—using the constraint of wordcount—sharpens your writing and editing skills; contributes to your understanding of genre, Voice, and narrative and poetic structures; and opens up new projects and publication possibilities. Students will read across a wide spectrum of writers, historically and globally, with a focus on contemporary American writers.

## English Department's Student Learning Goals

This course supports several of the English Department's Student Learning Goals. The Department of English and Comparative Literature seeks to foster the intellectual development of its majors by encouraging study of literature and writing—whether creative, technical, or other professional writing. The Department strives to make its majors familiar with a wide range of works of British, American, and World literature, including folk and popular forms; and with the nature of the canon and of canon-formation, including issues of culture, history, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

### Learning Objectives:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

Student Learning Objectives	Skills/Knowledge Acquired:	Activities:
SLO 1: Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to write and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (poetry).	1. Students will learn to recognize and use craft elements, formal structures, and genre contrasts in writing prose poems, flash fiction, and/or brief essay.	1. Write and revise at least eight original pieces including four prose poems and at least one short form in the secondary genre in a final Portfolio. 2. Apply close-reading and knowledge of craft to analyzing reading and completing revisions of original work.
SLO 2: Students will demonstrate a high-level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration.	See above.	See above.
SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.	1. Recognize trends in contemporary creative writing (poetry). 2. Identify developments within poetry, and the development of individual authors and schools/styles of writing. 3. To effectively analyze and apply the elements of poetic craft (diction, syntax, image, form, etc.) to make revisions of one's own poems and offer constructive criticism to peers in workshopping their poems.	1. Give a 10-minute analysis/close reading presentation, analyzing the craft a short form author chosen from our selected reading with supporting documentation and class discussion. 2. Apply cross-genre critique to sample writings. 3. Create an Anthology including a 1000-1500 word Introduction and Analysis to a Short Form Anthology you create.
SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.	1. Close read peers' work 2. Evaluate strengths (successes) and weaknesses (problems) in peers' poems as well as in published poems by notable authors. 3. Learn to apply insights to their own writing.	1. Workshop peers' poems weekly. 2. Incorporate feedback in revisions. 3. Analyze the work of short form authors with attention to craft, genre differentiation, and hybridity. 4. Anthology(see above)

### Required Texts/Readings:

- *Cast-Iron Aeroplane That Can Actually Fly* ed. Peter Johnson
- *Great American Prose Poets*, ed. David Lehman
- *Short*, ed. Alan Ziegler
- Canvas Postings as Assigned

### Recommended Reading:

- *Structure and Surprise* by Michael Theune, for a deeper understanding of poetic structure
- *Art of Syntax*, by Ellen Bryant Voigt, for a deeper understanding of just that, plus a lexicon of useful terms.
- [\*Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction\*](#) , for a better understanding of genre possibilities
- [\*Flash Fiction Online\*](#) for a better understanding of genre possibilities

### Course Requirements and Assignments

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica.

1. Eight new pieces written in the short-short form including 4 prose poems; half due at mid-term, complete packet of 8 as Final.
2. Each week students will provide written comments to their classmates' work. [SLO #4]
3. Each week students will provide a written response to the assigned reading. [SLO #4}
4. Students will engage and participate in meaningful class discussions. [SLO #4]
5. Students will give a presentation on a published short piece of their choice. [SLO #3]
6. In place of a final exam, students will turn in a final, revised portfolio of 8 pieces of new work. [SLO #5] (See Final Portfolio below)
7. Students will create a Micro Anthology of top-10 pieces selected from the *Cast-Iron Aeroplane* text. [SLO #3, #4, #5] (See 1-Unit Enhancement below)

### **This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:**

Throughout the semester you will read extensively and respond weekly as specified, culminating in the production of a Micro Anthology created from your top-ten favorite prose poems selected from *A Cast-Iron Aeroplane* that includes a reflective general introduction (1000+ words) to your ordered choices describing the editorial basis for your selections as well as a reflection of how Short Forms might inform your ongoing writing project. Include an individual analysis of the top 5 pieces, (250-500 words each), and any comments supporting your inclusion of #6-10 as desired.

**Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments.**

**Grading Information:**

Grades will be based on the quality and quantity of writing you do as well as the quality and constructiveness of the criticism offered for workshop.

Final grades will be the product of the following factors:

60% Final Portfolio of Revised Work (see grading guidelines below)

10% Workshop: Presence, Verbal Participation, and Canvas Discussions

10% Reading Responses

10% Presentation—Craft analysis and close reading presentation, including presentation slides, notes, handouts, etc. Also comments on Canvas Discussion

10% Micro Anthology (One-unit enhancement)

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT GRADING *STATEMENT*: In English Department courses, instructors comment on and grade the quality of writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. *All* your writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog (“The Grading System: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

**Creative writing** can be evaluated according to general standards used to determine how well a piece of writing works. These include: 1) Textual and/or technical competence and eloquence. 2) Imaginative risk. 3) Energy and freshness of language. 4) Effective use of metaphor and other forms of figurative language. 5) Clarity and precision of detail. 6) Capacity for mixed feelings and uncertainty. 7) Effective use of grammar, syntax, rhythm; also meter, rhyme, and other elements of poetic style and form. 8) Naturalness and believability. 9) Appropriateness of style to subject. 10) Compelling audience interest.

(Note: All graded assignments will receive written feedback from instructor based on this criteria, as applicable.)

**WORKSHOP: Your Work**: All work submitted to the workshop must be your own original writing (no translations), and written for this course exclusively. You may not hand in any work written for another course. Pieces submitted for workshop should be complete and polished, and submitted on time per our schedule.

**Peer Review**: Your Canvas commentary on student submissions will first address comments and analysis of what is working well and (b) suggestions for improvement. A portion of your final grade will be determined by the quality/quantity of your peer

commentaries. A good Discussion post should be about 250 words, including some close reading/quoting from the poem(s) on which you're commenting.

Review [Workshop Protocol](#) on Canvas for our process and your responsibilities.

**READING RESPONSES:** You will complete a series of short (250+ word) writing assignments in response to our weekly reading selections that rate and analyze your critical choices. These will allow you to evaluate issues of craft, style, and genre especially as they relate to your own writing. They will be graded chiefly on quantity (the fact you've done the assignment), but as with all assignments should follow departmental guidelines. You will **choose 10** of 15 to complete, other than from your presentation and those specifically required (2).

**PRESENTATION:** Each student will give a 10 minute presentation—live or video—and lead the subsequent discussion on a single author you've chosen from our scheduled readings sign-up list. You will analyze the presented piece and one other, discussing the writer, signature characteristics of the work (structure, mode, style, and genre-based characteristics, ie, what classifies the writing as prose poetry, flash fiction, or brief nonfiction, or cross-genre possibilities), and how this piece engages you as a writer.

Notes, slides, handouts or materials for these presentations are required to be posted in Canvas the Friday before the presentation date.

**FINAL PORTFOLIO:** Serves as our semester Final. Complete 8 original and revised short form pieces, each 150 min – 500 max words, including, but not limited to, 4 pieces written *as* prose poems. The remaining 4 pieces may be written as flash fiction and/or brief nonfiction, but should include 1 piece from your secondary (or primary if not poetry) genre. Any of these 8 pieces may be derived from an in-class writing exercises if appropriate. One piece should be “in the style of” a chosen writer.

## Course Protocol

### Workshop Etiquette

Workshop is a place for respectful and constructive criticism. Spoken and written commentary must always be directed at the work, not the writer. Personal attacks and offensive or inappropriate language will not be tolerated. Students who cannot follow these guidelines will be dismissed from the course. See the [Workshop Protocol](#) guidelines on Canvas.

**Late Work:** As a writer, you must become very disciplined about setting your own deadlines and sticking to them. Turning in your work on-time is essential for meaningful review and response. **Late work will not be accepted.** If you need to change your workshop or presentation date, it is on you to find a classmate willing to swap. It is also your responsibility to notify the professor as soon as possible.

**Absences** If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than one class, please contact me as soon as possible. In the extremely rare case of an absence, the student will be assigned a published short for which they must compose a

brief 500-word analysis of the author's handling of an element of craft. The assignment will be due on the class meeting following the absence.

### **University Policies**

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' Syllabus Information web page at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>.

### **Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act**

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, Presidential Directive 97-03 requires that students with disabilities requesting accommodations must register with the [Disability Resource Center](http://www.drc.sjsu.edu/) (DRC) at <http://www.drc.sjsu.edu/> to establish a record of their disability.

## ENGL 240 / MFA Poetry Workshop, Fall 2020, Course Schedule

The Poetry Workshop meets online via ZOOM every Monday of the Fall 2020 semester, starting on Monday, August 24. The last class is Monday, December 7. Class will not be held on September 7 (Labor Day). In lieu of a final exam, you will submit the Final Revision on the day of the University final.

*Note: This schedule is subject to change. Announcements will be made in class and online.*

*Detailed Schedule located on Canvas.*

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</b>
1	8/24	Welcome & Introduction
4-8	9/14-10/21	First Round of Workshop, Presentations, & Readings
9	Packet #1 Due	Presentations & Readings
10-16	10/28-12/09	Second Round of Workshop Presentations, & Readings
16-Last class	12/09	Micro Anthology Due
Final	<b>12/16</b>	Final Packet Due