Course Title: Introduction to Creative Writing: Finding a Form
Course Code: EGL 89
Instructor: Ammi Keller

Course Summary:

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just begins
to live that day.
- Emily Dickinson

This course is designed to help new and experienced writers move past blocks and uncertainties to produce a body of work. To this end, the course will have three components:

1) A series of craft lessons using published fiction, essays and poems. This focus is designed to help students gain the technical skills to support the expression of their ideas. In order to practice, students will freewrite in class each week in whatever genre or style they wish, share their work by reading aloud in small groups for supportive peer feedback and may optionally hand in homework for written comments from the instructor.

2) A series on creativity and learning, which will include short articles and online videos emailed to students each week, which we will then discuss in class.

3) A workshop component, in which each student reads 2-10 pages (500-2500 words) aloud from a work in progress to the class. The larger group will then discuss this work with an eye towards articulating its strengths and helping the writer better serve its vision, and the instructor will offer written feedback.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.

Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
Students who attend at least 7 out of 10 classes, read aloud for workshop, do at least 1 optional homework assignment and offer supportive participation of their peers will receive credit.

- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
  - Students must attend at least 9 out of 10 classes, read work aloud for workshop and do at least 2 of the optional homework assignments to receive an A. Collaborative, consistent participation rather than the instructor’s perception of the students writing ability will determine the grade given, with each class missed subtracting 1/3 of a grade from the total (i.e., 8 classes attended = A-, 7 classes = B+, etc.)

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

**Tentative Weekly Outline:**

**Week One: Fixed vs. Growth Mindsets, Storytelling 101**
Key questions: What is the #1 block to learning? How does character relate to story? Students will meet one another and do an exercise in which they collaboratively write three novels in 45 minutes(!).
Reading:
Online: “The Effort Effect” by Marina Krakovsky, “The Common Women Poems, II. Ella, in a square apron, along Highway 80” by Judy Grahn, “War Photographer” by Carol Ann Duffy

**Week Two: The Four Stages of Learning, Using Objects to Uncover Character**
Where do we find inspiration? (Answer: objects). What is the relationship between the concrete and the inscrutable? Also, how do people learn new skills?
Optional homework 1 due
Reading:
In Short: “All-Out Effort” by Reginold Gibbons (page 32), “Enough Jam for a Lifetime” by Maxine Kumin (page 39)
Online: “Sticks” by George Saunders; “Ledge” and “Dew” by Kay Ryan

**Week Three: Grit and Voice**
Where do we find inspiration? (Answer: voices). How do we listen to, invent and transcribe people’s voices? Also, what quality most predicts success in learning?
Optional homework 2 due
Reading:
Scribners: “Girl” by Jamaica Kincaid
Online: “Me Talk Pretty One Day” by David Sedaris, and TBA

**Week Four: Problematizing the Problem and Photos/Documents**
Key questions: Where do we find inspiration? (Answer: photos and documents). What keeps us reading a work of literature? Also, once we know a writing skill is challenging for us, how do we go about mastering it?

**Optional homework 3 due**

**Reading:**
Scribners: “A Temporary Matter” by Jumpha Lahiri

**Week Five: A Slice of the Arc, plus Gratification Horizons and the Marshmallow Test**

Key questions: How do you choose how much ground to cover in a poem, essay or work of fiction? How do you figure out where it begins and ends?

**Optional homework 4 due, first week of student workshops**

**Reading:**
Online: “Sadie and Maud” by Gwendolyn Brooks, “To The Measures Fall” by Richard Powers (optional)

**Week Six: Choose Easy, Work Hard and Experimentation**

Key questions: What are the benefits to being willing to experiment? And as an artist, how do you choose where to put your energy?

**Student workshops continue**

**Reading:**
Scribners: “Jealous Husband Returns in the Form of Parrot” by Robert Olen Butler
In Short: “We Are Distracted” by Michael Shay (page 288)
Online: “alternate names for black boys” by Danez Smith, “The Young Man’s Guide to Wearing and Shopping for Women's Clothes for the First Time” by Casey Plett

**Week Seven: Cognitive Bias and Feedback and Writing History and Politics**

Key questions: Is there any information from one’s own life that’s too personal to include? How does the brain trick us into failing to see our work or hear other people’s feedback about it clearly?

**Student workshops continue**

**Reading:**
In Short: “Proofs” by Richard Rodriguez (page 48), “An End to Still Lives” by Carol Bly
Scribners: “Nineteen Fifty-five” by Alice Walker (page 616)
Online: “For Mohammed Zeid of Gaza, Age 15” by Naomi Shihab Nye

**Week Eight: Retrograde Analysis and from Personal to Universal**

Key questions: How do we use individual personal experience—our own or our fictional character’s to invoke universal topics? How do we use the feedback we’re receiving? What are concrete strategies for revision?

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Student workshops continue
Reading:
Scribners: “Brownies” by ZZ Packer (page 503)
Online: “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden

Week Nine: The Problem with Perfectionism and Using All Five Senses
Key questions: How do we bring in all five senses to make our work come alive? Does perfectionism help or hinder writers?
Student workshops continue
Reading:
In Short: “The Shock of Teapots” by Cynthia Ozick (page 68), “Mint Snowball” by Naomi Shahib Nye (page 94)
Scribners: “The Hermit’s Story” by Rick Bass (page 22)
Online: TBA

Week Ten: Moving Forward
Key questions: How can we integrate what we’ve learned in both process and skills? What is your next step?
Last week of workshops
Reading:
In Short: “Nostalgia for Everything” by Andrei Codrescu (page 198)