ENGL3201 - Advanced Creative Writing 1
Course Outline

Course Co-ordinator: Dr Kim Cheng Boey
Room: MC 142
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Consultation hours: Thursday 10-11am, Friday 11-1pm

Semester: Semester 1 - 2008
Unit Weighting: 10
Teaching Methods: Lecture/ Seminar/ Workshop

Brief Course Description
Allows students to undertake specialization in poetry or prose. Students will be able to concentrate on developing their poetic skills or narrative and descriptive techniques in order to produce a coherent and sustained portfolio in either poetry or prose.

Contact Hours
Workshop for 2 Hours per Week for 13 Weeks
workshop/lecture/seminar

Learning Materials/Texts
ENGL 3201 course reader

Course Objectives
Upon successful completion of this course, students will have
1. furthered the understanding of the art of creative reading - the ability to identify a good text and use it as a creative model;
2. furthered the ability to analyse literary texts in a coherent way;
3. acquired a deeper knowledge of the different genres, literary tradition and forms;
4. learned more about the mechanics of a good poem or a compelling narrative;
5. been exposed to an array of voices from the local to the global and have started to develop their own voice.

Course Outline Issued and Correct as at: Week 1, Semester 1 - 2008
CTS Download Date: 28.1.2008
Course Content
This course allows students to specialize in either poetry or prose and thus gives them more opportunity to develop as fiction writers or poets. Students will be able to concentrate on developing their poetic skills or narrative and descriptive techniques in order to produce a coherent and sustained portfolio in either poetry or prose. Particular attention will be paid to:
- contemporary developments in poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction;
- comparing local and foreign voices;
- deepening knowledge of forms and traditions of each genre;
- developing a coherent collection of poetry or prose;
- the skills and techniques of major writers;
- discovering literary exemplars to inspire students.

Assessment Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essays / Written Assignments</th>
<th>* Creative Work: 3000 words or equivalent (60%)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essays / Written Assignments</td>
<td>* Short Creative Writing Exercise: 1000 words or equivalent (15%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Critical Essay: 1000 words (20%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group/tutorial participation and contribution</td>
<td>* Class participation (5%)</td>
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<td>Attendance at seminars is compulsory. Two absences are allowable in the case of illness or other emergencies, and two more absences may be recovered by completing extra work on each of the seminars missed, but further absences will be regarded as failure to complete the course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other: (please specify)</td>
<td>Students must submit all assessment items in order to complete the course.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Assumed Knowledge
ENGL2201 and ENGL2202 or equivalent.

Callaghan Campus Timetable
ENGL3201
ADVANCED CREATIVE WRITING 1
Enquiries: School of Humanities and Social Science
Semester 1 - 2008
Seminar Thursday 12:00 - 14:00 [MCLG42]
or Friday 9:00 - 11:00 [MC102]

Plagiarism
University policy prohibits students plagiarising any material under any circumstances. A student plagiarises if he or she presents the thoughts or works of another as one's own. Without limiting the generality of this definition, it may include:

- copying or paraphrasing material from any source without due acknowledgment;
- using another's ideas without due acknowledgment;
- working with others without permission and presenting the resulting work as though it was completed independently.

Plagiarism is not only related to written works, but also to material such as data, images, music, formulae, websites and computer programs.

Aiding another student to plagiarise is also a violation of the Plagiarism Policy and may invoke a penalty.

For further information on the University policy on plagiarism, please refer to the Policy on Student Academic Integrity at the following link -
The University has established a software plagiarism detection system called Turnitin. When you submit assessment items please be aware that for the purpose of assessing any assessment item the University may:

- Reproduce this assessment item and provide a copy to another member of the University; and/or
- Communicate a copy of this assessment item to a plagiarism checking service (which may then retain a copy of the item on its database for the purpose of future plagiarism checking).
- Submit the assessment item to other forms of plagiarism checking.

Written Assessment Items

Students may be required to provide written assessment items in electronic form as well as hard copy.

Extension of Time for Assessment Items, Deferred Assessment and Special Consideration for Assessment Items or Formal Written Examinations

Students are required to submit assessment items by the due date, as advised in the Course Outline, unless the Course Coordinator approves an extension of time for submission of the item. University policy is that an assessment item submitted after the due date, without an approved extension, will be penalised.

Any student:

1. who is applying for an extension of time for submission of an assessment item on the basis of medical, compassionate, hardship/trauma or unavoidable commitment; or

2. whose attendance at or performance in an assessment item or formal written examination has been or will be affected by medical, compassionate, hardship/trauma or unavoidable commitment;

must report the circumstances, with supporting documentation, to the appropriate officer following the instructions provided in the Special Circumstances Affecting Assessment Procedure - Policy 000641.

Note: different procedures apply for minor and major assessment tasks.

Please go to the Policy at [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html) for further information, particularly for information on the options available to you.

Students should be aware of the following important deadlines:

- **Requests for Special Consideration** must be lodged no later than 3 working days after the due date of submission or examination.
- **Requests for Extensions of Time on Assessment Items** must be lodged no later than the due date of the item.
- **Requests for Rescheduling Exams** must be received in the Student Hub no later than ten working days prior the first date of the examination period.

Your application may not be accepted if it is received after the deadline. Students who are unable to meet the above deadlines due to extenuating circumstances should speak to their Program Officer in the first instance.
Changing your Enrolment

The last dates to withdraw without financial or academic penalty (called the HECS Census Dates) are:

For semester 1 courses: 31 March 2008
For semester 2 courses: 31 August 2008

Students may withdraw from a course without academic penalty on or before the last day of semester. Any withdrawal from a course after the last day of semester will result in a fail grade.

Students cannot enrol in a new course after the second week of semester/trimester, except under exceptional circumstances. Any application to add a course after the second week of semester/trimester must be on the appropriate form, and should be discussed with staff in the Student Hubs.

To check or change your enrolment online, please refer to myHub - Self Service for Students

https://myhub.newcastle.edu.au

Faculty Information

The Student Hubs are a one-stop shop for the delivery of student related services and are the first point of contact for students on campus.

The four Student Hubs are located at:

Callaghan campus
• Shortland Hub: Level 3, Shortland Union Building
• Hunter Hub: Student Services Centre, Hunter side of campus

City Precinct
• City Hub & Information Common: University House, ground floor in combination with an Information Common for the City Precinct

Ourimbah campus
• Ourimbah Hub: Administration Building

Faculty website

Faculty of Education and Arts

http://www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/education-arts/

Contact details

Callaghan, City and Port Macquarie
Phone: 02 4921 5000
Email: EnquiryCentre@newcastle.edu.au

Ourimbah
Phone: 02 4348 4030
Email: EnquiryCentre@newcastle.edu.au

The Dean of Students
Resolution Precinct
Phone: 02 4921 5806
Fax: 02 4921 7151
Email: resolutionprecinct@newcastle.edu.au
Various services are offered by the University Student Support Unit:


Alteration of this Course Outline

No change to this course outline will be permitted after the end of the second week of the term except in exceptional circumstances and with Head of School approval. Students will be notified in advance of any approved changes to this outline.

Web Address for Rules Governing Undergraduate Academic Awards

Web Address for Rules Governing Postgraduate Academic Awards

Web Address for Rules Governing Professional Doctorate Awards

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR CHRONIC ILLNESS

The University is committed to providing a range of support services for students with a disability or chronic illness.

If you have a disability or chronic illness which you feel may impact on your studies, please feel free to discuss your support needs with your lecturer or course coordinator.

Disability Support may also be provided by the Student Support Service (Disability). Students must be registered to receive this type of support. To register please contact the Disability Liaison Officer on 02 4921 5766, or via email at: student-disability@newcastle.edu.au

As some forms of support can take a few weeks to implement it is extremely important that you discuss your needs with your lecturer, course coordinator or Student Support Service staff at the beginning of each semester.

For more information related to confidentiality and documentation please visit the Student Support Service (Disability) website at: www.newcastle.edu.au/services/disability

Essential Criteria in Assessment

This course contains compulsory components or assessment items that must be satisfactorily completed in order for a student to receive a pass mark or better for the course. These essential elements are described in the CTS. Refer - http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000648.html

(1) Attendance Requirements:
Attendance at seminars is compulsory. Two absences are allowable in the case of illness or other emergencies, and two more absences may be recovered by completing extra work on each of the seminars missed, but further absences will be regarded as failure to complete the course.

A class roll will be kept to record attendance. It is the responsibility of students who arrive late or leave early, thereby missing the roll call, to ensure that their attendance is recorded.
Rationale for compulsory attendance requirements: Courses taught by seminar or workshop involve a mixture of lecture material and class discussion. Even when students are not themselves contributing to the discussion, they need to be aware of the kinds of questions raised by the material being taught, and of the strengths and weaknesses of possible approaches to dealing with the issues raised.

(2) Assessment Items
Students must submit all assessment items in order to complete the course.

Rationale for compulsory submission of all assessment items: Assessment items are designed not simply to measure students’ achievements in the course but also to provide essential steps in the learning process. Each assignment engages with different skills and conceptual techniques, all of which are necessary to the development of competence in the discipline.

Online Tutorial Registration:
Students are required to enrol in the Lecture and a specific Tutorial time for this course via the Online Registration system. Refer - [http://studinfo1.newcastle.edu.au/rego/stud_choose_login.cfm](http://studinfo1.newcastle.edu.au/rego/stud_choose_login.cfm)

NB: Registrations close at the end of week 2 of semester.

Studentmail and Blackboard: Refer - [www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/](http://www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/)

This course uses Blackboard and studentmail to contact students, so you are advised to keep your email accounts within the quota to ensure you receive essential messages. To receive an expedited response to queries, post questions on the Blackboard discussion forum if there is one, or if emailing staff directly use the course code in the subject line of your email. Students are advised to check their studentmail and the course Blackboard site on a weekly basis.

Important Additional Information

Written Assignment Presentation and Submission Details

Students are required to submit assessment items by the due date. Late assignments will be subject to the penalties described below.

Hard copy submission:

- **Type your assignments:** All work must be typewritten in 11 or 12 point black font. Leave a wide margin for marker’s comments, use 1.5 or double spacing, and include page numbers.
- **Word length:** The word limit of all assessment items should be strictly followed – 10% above or below is acceptable, otherwise penalties may apply.
- **Proof read your work** because spelling, grammatical and referencing mistakes will be penalised.
- **Staple the pages** of your assignment together (do not use pins or paper clips).
- **University Assessment Item Coversheet:** All assignments must be submitted with the University coversheet available at: [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/forms/](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/forms/)
- **By arrangement with the relevant lecturer, assignments may be submitted at any Student Hub located at:**
  - Level 3, Shortland Union, Callaghan
  - Level 2, Student Services Centre, Callaghan
  - Ground Floor, University House, City
  - Opposite Café Central, Ourimbah
- **Date-stamping assignments:** All students must date-stamp their own assignments using the machine provided at each Student Hub. If mailing an assignment, this should be address to the relevant School. Mailed assignments are accepted from the date posted, confirmed by a Post Office date-stamp; they are also date-stamped upon receipt by Schools.

NB: Not all of these services may apply to the Port Macquarie Campus.
- Do not fax or email assignments: Only hard copies of assignments will be considered for assessment. Inability to physically submit a hard copy of an assignment by the deadline due to other commitments or distance from campus is an unacceptable excuse.
- Keep a copy of all assignments: It is the student’s responsibility to produce a copy of their work if the assignment goes astray after submission. Students are advised to keep updated back-ups in electronic and hard copy formats.

**Online copy submission to Turnitin**

In addition to hard copy submission, students are required to submit an electronic version of the following assignments to Turnitin via the course Blackboard website available @ [www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/](http://www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/)

* Creative Work: 3000 words or equivalent (60%)
* Short Creative Writing Exercise: 1000 words or equivalent (15%)
* Critical Essay: 1000 words (20%)

Prior to final submission, all students have the opportunity to submit one draft of their assignment to Turnitin to self-check their referencing. Assignments will not be marked until both hard copy and online versions have been submitted. Marks may be deducted for late submission of either version.

**Penalties for Late Assignments**

Assignments submitted after the due date, without an approved extension of time will be penalised by the **reduction of 5% of the possible maximum mark** for the assessment item for each day or part day that the item is late. Weekends count as one day in determining the penalty. Assessment items submitted **more than ten days** after the due date will be awarded **zero marks**.


**Special Circumstances**

Students wishing to apply for Special Circumstances or Extension of Time should apply online. Refer - ‘Special Circumstances Affecting Assessment Items - Procedure 000641’ available @ [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html)

**No Assignment Re-submission**

Students who have failed an assignment are not permitted to revise and resubmit it in this course. However, students are always welcome to contact their Tutor, Lecturer or Course Coordinator to make a consultation time to receive individual feedback on their assignments.

**Re-marks & Moderations**

A student may only request a re-mark of an assessment item before the final result - in the course to which the assessment item contributes - has been posted. If a final result in the course has been posted, the student must apply under ‘Procedures for Appeal Against a Final Result’ (Refer - [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/forms/](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/forms/)).

Students concerned at the mark given for an assessment item should first discuss the matter with the Course Coordinator. If subsequently requesting a re-mark, students should be aware that as a result of a re-mark the original mark may be increased or reduced. The case for a re-mark should be outlined in writing and submitted to the Course Coordinator, who determines whether a re-mark should be granted, taking into consideration all of the following:

1. whether the student had discussed the matter with the Course Coordinator
2. the case put forward by the student for a re-mark
3. the weighting of the assessment item and its potential impact on the student’s final mark or grade
4. the time required to undertake the re-mark
5. the number of original markers, that is,
   a) whether there was a single marker, or
   b) if there was more than one marker whether there was agreement or disagreement on the marks awarded.

A re-mark may also be initiated at the request of the Course Coordinator, the Head of School, the School Assessment Committee, the Faculty Progress and Appeals Committee or the Pro Vice-Chancellor. Re-marks may be undertaken by:

1. the original marker; or
2. an alternate internal marker; or
3. an alternate external marker (usually as a consequence of a grievance procedure).

Moderation may be applied when there is a major discrepancy (or perceived discrepancy) between:

1. the content of the course as against the content or nature of the assessment item(s)
2. the content or nature of the assessment item(s) as against those set out in the Course Outline
3. the marks given by a particular examiner and those given by another in the same course
4. the results in a particular course and the results in other courses undertaken by the same students.

For further detail on this University policy refer - ‘Re-marks and Moderations - Procedure 000769’ available @ http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000769.html

Return of Assignments

Students can collect assignments from a nominated Student Hub during office hours. Students will be informed during class which Hub to go to and the earliest date that assignments will be available for collection. Students must present their student identification card to collect their assignment.


Preferred Referencing Style

In this course, it is recommended that you use the use the MLA for referencing sources of information used in assignments. Inadequate or incorrect reference to the work of others may be viewed as plagiarism and result in reduced marks or failure.

An in-text citation names the author of the source, gives the date of publication, and for a direct quote includes a page number, in parentheses. At the end of the paper, a list of references provides publication information about the source; the list is alphabetised by authors’ last names (or by titles for works without authors). For further information on referencing and general study skills refer - ‘Infoskills’ available @ www.newcastle.edu.au/services/library/tutorials/infoskills/index.html

Student Representatives

Student Representatives are a major channel of communication between students and the School. Contact details of Student Representatives can be found on School websites.

Refer - ‘Information for Student Representatives on Committees’ available @ http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/committees/student_reps/index.html

Student Communication

Students should discuss any course related matters with their Tutor, Lecturer, or Course Coordinator in the first instance and then the relevant Discipline or Program Convenor. If this proves unsatisfactory, they should then contact the Head of School if required. Contact details can be found on the School website.

Essential Online Information for Students
Information on Class and Exam Timetables, Tutorial Online Registration, Learning Support, Campus Maps, Careers information, Counselling, the Health Service and a range of free Student Support Services is available @ [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/currentstudents/index.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/currentstudents/index.html)

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>49% or less</td>
<td><strong>Fail (FF)</strong></td>
<td>An unacceptable effort, including non-completion. The student has not understood the basic principles of the subject matter and/or has been unable to express their understanding in a comprehensible way. Deficient in terms of answering the question, research, referencing and correct presentation (spelling, grammar etc). May include extensive plagiarism.</td>
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<tr>
<td>50% to 64%</td>
<td><strong>Pass (P)</strong></td>
<td>The work demonstrates a reasonable attempt to answer the question, shows some grasp of the basic principles of the subject matter and a basic knowledge of the required readings, is comprehensible, accurate and adequately referenced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>65% to 74%</td>
<td><strong>Credit (C)</strong></td>
<td>The work demonstrates a clear understanding of the question, a capacity to integrate research into the discussion, and a critical appreciation of a range of different theoretical perspectives. A deficiency in any of the above may be compensated by evidence of independent thought. The work is coherent and accurate.</td>
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<td>75% to 84%</td>
<td><strong>Distinction (D)</strong></td>
<td>Evidence of substantial additional reading and/or research, and evidence of the ability to generalise from the theoretical content to develop an argument in an informed and original manner. The work is well organised, clearly expressed and shows a capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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<td>85% upwards</td>
<td><strong>High Distinction (HD)</strong></td>
<td>All of the above, plus a thorough understanding of the subject matter based on substantial additional reading and/or research. The work shows a high level of independent thought, presents informed and insightful discussion of the topic, particularly the theoretical issues involved, and demonstrates a well-developed capacity for critical analysis.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Week beginning</th>
<th>Lecture Topic &amp; Assessment at a Glance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>February 18</td>
<td>The Writing Life/ Craft 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>February 25</td>
<td>Paying Attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>March 3</td>
<td>Writing and Memory 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>March 10</td>
<td>Writing and Memory 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>A Sense of Movement 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>March 24 (Easter Holiday)</td>
<td>A Sense of Movement 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>The Art of the Real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td>A Sense of Place</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>April 28</td>
<td>Deep Imagery</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>May 5</td>
<td>What Are We Talking About</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>May 12</td>
<td>Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>May 19</td>
<td>Writing as Rewriting 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>Revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>June 2</td>
<td><strong>Final creative work/essay due June 6th.</strong></td>
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Mid-Semester Recess: Friday 14 April to Friday 25 April 2008
Week 1 – The Writing Life/ Craft

Why write? Can writing change the world, stop wars and famine, make a difference in any way? Auden says in his elegy to Yeats that “Poetry makes nothing happen.” Yet at the end of the poem he urges the poet: “In the deserts of the heart/ Let the healing fountain start./ In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise.” Every serious writer has thought long and hard about the question, especially in the post-Holocaust age. The issue of literature’s relevance became especially urgent in the wake of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, when the arts and humanities, all the human beauty celebrated in literature seemed demolished, and language underwent a crisis, because it had been turned into an instrument of propaganda and torture. The critic Theodor Adorno declares that after Auschwitz, poetry is impossible.

Adorno has been proven wrong of course. The arts have continued to flourish, in spite of the crisis of faith in language. Paul Celan, a survivor of the concentration camp, found in poetry a means of witnessing, a possible salvation from human atrocity. Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi wrote novels about their harrowing experiences in the death camps. Poets writing in concealment in the Communist regimes, like Miroslav Holub and Wislawa Szymborska, invented an oblique poetry that gives their lyric voice freedom of expression and at the same time allows them to secrete a critique of the regime.

Writing, it would seem, is essential, to human civilisation, and indeed it is part of the definition of what it means to be human, alive. There is a need to record what we see and experience, and to share these records of who we are, what we have seen and lived through. William Carlos Williams says:

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

Creative
1. Write an *ars poetica* poem, like Archibald Macleish’s “Ars Poetica,” or any of the poems about writing in the reader.

2. Write an essay about your experiences of reading and writing. How are the two linked? Who are the authors who have mattered to you most? Attempt a personal essay combining narrative with reflections, as in Raymond Carver’s “Fires.”

3. Is there a poem or a story which has come like a revelation to you, altering the way you look at things, and in some way leading you to the place where you are now in life? Is there a necessary poem or story you come back to again and again, as a believer would to a holy book? Trace the memory of the first encounter with the writer or the text, and explore the possible readings of it, and why it has travelled with you so long, so far.

4. Start a notebook/journal recording the thoughts about reading and writing that float into your mind, the images and ideas that could later mature into full poems or stories.

Critical
1. Write an essay about what you think poetry is. Think about the role of the poet and the function of poetry. Use at least three poems.

2. Read Carver’s essay “Fires.” What is his writing belief? Can you see it at work in his short stories? Discuss with reference to at least one of his short stories.

3. Read the two Hemingway stories in the reader. How would you describe his style? Draw on the interview with Hemingway or any statements he has made about writing.
Week 2 – Paying Attention

Writing is about paying attention, listening, being ready for the images and sounds as they reveal themselves. Oscar Wilde declares: “The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” In a way, the poetry renews the world, performing the sacraments of making new, of alerting us to the colours, to the sounds, smells, sensations around and in us. The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke proclaims “Praising is what matters!” He sees poetry as a continual act of praise, of celebrating the mystery of the visible and invisible worlds. When a poem or a prose piece records a moment of seeing, registering the way a leaf travels to the ground, the way the sunlight behaves in a particular place, the way the mountains come and go in the blue haze, it is uttering things into existence, bringing forth what would otherwise pass unnoticed. The Zen poets, after years of arduous practice, master the art of seeing, of capturing what is happening in the present moment. By perceiving the unique quality of the present moment, the poets experience a moment of enlightenment, when the transitory and the eternal, the earthly and the spiritual are reconciled.

A single petal
Of the cherry blossom fell:
Mountain silence.
  Kenneth Tanemura

Just by being,
I’m here –
In snowfall.
  Kobayashi Issa

Such a moon –
Even the thief
pauses to sing.
  Buson

On a withered bough
A crow alone is perching,
Autumn evening now.
  Basho

These are haikus, a seventeen syllable form which demands strict discipline – the moment of perception is spontaneous and original, and has to be compressed into three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, an approximate of the length of a human breath. It is an instant, an experienced rendered without commentary, so that the reader feels it as if he were experiencing it himself.

When asked by his disciple about the way to enlightenment, a Zen Master says: “The Way is your daily life.” There are art objects, poems to be found all around us. There is poetry in the things we do daily: waking, washing, eating, walking, sleeping etc. Richard Jones “White Towels” turns laundry into a poem:

I have been studying the difference
Between solitude and loneliness,
Telling the story of my life
To the clean white towels taken warm from the dryer.
I carry them through the house
As though they were my children
Asleep in my arms.

And here is Raymond Carver celebrating the wonder of an everyday event in “Happiness”:

So early it’s still almost dark out.
I’m near the window with coffee,
and the usual early morning stuff
that passes for thought.
When I see the boy and his friend
walking up the road
to deliver the newspaper.
They wear caps and sweaters,
and one boy has a bag over his shoulder.
They are so happy
they aren’t saying anything, these boys.
I think if they could, they would take
each other’s arm.
It’s early in the morning,
and they are doing this thing together.
They come on, slowly.
The sky is taking on light,
though the moon still hangs pale over the water.
Such beauty that for a minute
death and ambition, even love,
doesn’t enter into this.
Happiness. It comes on
unexpectedly. And goes beyond, really,
any early morning talk about it.

Carver has taken something very routine, a scene that he has probably seen day after day, and turned it into a significant moment of peace and happiness. The language is simple, plain, and intimate. There are no colourful metaphors, just a quiet description reflecting the beauty of the moment. The poem then dismisses its own effort to approximate the sense of happiness in an everyday event.

Even when nothing much seems to be happening, the poet can make a poem happen. Linda Gregg has a poem called “Nothing Happening”:

Nothing happened in the city unless
you count the youth on a horse pushing
eleven cows across an intersection from
the field of rubble and plastic bags
to somewhere else. Or the two children
under a table set up in their doorway
with fruit on top for sale. Or me
not keeping house for any man I love
or throwing water in the hot terrace.

The poem is a short list of images, random and nothing unusual on their own. But together they resonate, bring out the mood, the emotional state of the speaker. We get the feeling that the poem is writing itself, all the images cohering as Gregg looks out from the centre of herself.

Writing is about waiting, listening. It is about being attentive to words, letting ourselves be led from the poem we set out consciously to write to the poem waiting for us at the end. Auden says that when he asks an aspiring poet why he wants to write poetry and if “the young man answers because I have important things to say, then he's not a poet. But if he answers I like hanging around words listening to what they say, then maybe he's going to be a poet.” It entails a trust, an abandonment to the magic of the moment, of language. A. E. Housman remarks: “Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act...”

Creative
1. Read the haikus of Basho, Issa, Buson etc. Read more if you can. Now empty your mind. Go for a walk and sit very quietly, as in meditation. Take deep breaths. Do you see anything? An image perhaps printing itself on you mind, a whiff of thought or memory? Note it down in haiku form or an approximation. Discipline yourself to do about three a day.
2. Take a walk alone, in the bush, the suburb or the city. Keep your eyes and mind open. What do you see, hear, feel? Is there somebody on the street doing something striking, like reading Proust at a bus-stop? Do you hear anything or silence in the bush? Has the legion of lawnmowers started in the suburb? Walk, pause, watch, listen. Be there, when the poem appears.

3. Attempt a “seeing” log, compiling a list of things experienced and seen everyday but seen now in a new light, without clichés. Model it on the Annie Dillard excerpts if you like.

4. Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” and Tobias Wolff’s “Say Yes” are rooted in the everyday; they are stories spun out of what we observe everyday. Attempt a scene/ story between a man and a woman, working the tension into it, building up a sense of conflict and confrontation.

**Critical**
1. Pick at least five haikus and examine how they preserve the freshness of the moment, the moment of wonder and mystery. Have you written any poem which revolves around a single moment, of wonder and mystery like these here? How has your poem tried to evoke this moment? Do you think you have succeeded?

2. How would you describe Annie Dillard’s vision or aesthetics? How do the excerpts demonstrate her poetics?

3. Compare Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” and Tobias Wolff’s “Say Yes” and explore how the two stories turn a quotidian event and human situation into a compelling story.

**Week 3 - Memory and Writing 1**

T.S Eliot’s much-quoted lines from “The Four Quartets” run: “We shall not cease from exploration/ And the end of all our exploration / Will be to arrive at the beginning/ And know the place for the first time.” We all go back to the beginnings to find out who we are. There are poems still wanting to be unearthed in our childhood, the toils of growing up, all the stumbling and fumbling. Let you poetry make the journey back to these hidden and hiding places, where we may find a clue to where we are going and who we have become.

We write from all our lived experiences, and memory is a powerful source of inspiration, a high archival library of lived experiences, thoughts and sensations. But it is impossible to remember things as they happened. We have to fill in the gaps, add a bit of colour, improvise, to bring out the shape of the memory and story. And sometimes emotional truth is more important than factual truth.

There are enough materials in childhood to feed the writer for the rest of his life. We return to the beginning or beginnings constantly for reference, for the first memories, the first smell, taste, sound, image, love. Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* begins in childhood and comes back to it continually. The French title *A la recherche du temps perdu* suggests something more questing than the English “remembrance.” It suggests a research, an inquiry into the past, probing it for meanings, for connections to the present. Wordsworth says: “The child is father of the man,” implying if we want to find out who we are, we have to go all the way back to the child we once were.

**Creative**
1. Look at yourself in the mirror. Then dig up the photos of yourself. It could be snapshots of you as a baby, a child, or a young adult. Attempt a self-portrait and ponder what has led you to what you see in the mirror now. Where are the beginnings, the shaping years? Think about the passing of time. What has changed? What has remained constant?

2. Write about your first experience with death. Use a trigger, something that prompts the memory and reflection of death. Describe the dead person, the face in the coffin. What did that experience change you?

3. Write about your first experience of birth.
4. Write about your best friend in childhood. Think about the meaning of friendship. Describe the friend, and give plenty of visual details not just of the physical traits, but the behaviour and family background. Don’t forget to provide vivid scenes and episodes of you two together, any event that put the friendship to the test.

5. Think of a place where you lived as a child. Map it out. Recall the streets, the names, the topography, the neighbourhood, the inhabitants, the sense of community. Now cast your mind back to two or three memorable events that happened here, or what made living there so special. Introduce the characters, their names and living features as you would characters in fiction. Weave the selected memories together into a coherent piece about the place.

6. First memories are hard to retrieve. But they are there, if we listen and watch patiently. In Learning to Eat Soup,” Edward Hoagland writes:

   My first overtly sexual memory is one of me on my knees in the hallway outside our fifth-grade classroom cleaning the floor, and Lucy Smith in a white blouse and black shirt standing above me, watching me.

   My first memory is of being on train which derailed in a rainstorm in Dakota one night when I was two — and of hearing, as we rode in a hay wagon toward the distant weak light of a little station, that a boy my age had just choked to death from breathing mud. But maybe my first real memory emerged when my father was dying. I was thirty-five and I dreamed so incredibly vividly of being dandled and rocked and hugged by him, being only a few months old, giggling helplessly and happily.

Write about your first memory or memories, incorporating reflections on the nature of memory.

7. Write an essay or poem about memory and food. Describe the meals, the memory of eating it, the person who cooked it. Use Mark Strand’s “Pot Roast” or Albert Goldbarth’s essay as a model.

Critical
1. Read Elizabeth Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room.” What is the poem about? How does Bishop convey the feelings of the child and her awakening consciousness?

2. Read William Matthews’ “A Happy Childhood.” What is being remembered? What does the poem tell us about time, memory and childhood?

3. Read Albert Goldbarth’s “Parade March from “That Creaturely World.”” What is the essay about? What does it say about childhood and memory?

Week 4 – Memory and Writing 2

William Wordsworth says that poems are “emotions recollected in tranquillity.” For him poetry captures “the spots of time,” the moments when life seems coherent and meaningful. Writing is about redeeming, salvaging otherwise forgotten moments from time, giving an order and shape to our lives. The act of recall is not simply nostalgia; it is an attempt to revisit the past in order to give it a meaning, place it in a meaningful relationship to the present.

But memory is anything but coherent and sequential. It comes in flashes and often comes unbidden. In fiction flashbacks are the most common and important way of restructuring story time. These are moments when the past suddenly intrudes, interrupts the ongoing present, plunging the protagonist in another time and place. They are especially vital in stories rooted in memories, stories haunted by the past, like Alice Munro’s story “Miles City, Montana.” The frequent use of flashbacks challenges the reader to make the connections between events, pick out the irony of the drama, and amplifies the mood and theme of the narrative.

Creative
1. Write about a memory from childhood, a moment with a friend, your parents, a moment which has been so deeply etched in your mind.
2. Now let’s try some free or automatic writing. Let all random images of the past surface. Record them as they arrive. Arrange them in a list. Can you see a poem there, a certain shape and meaning perhaps?

3. Write about a place you once lived in, as Ted Kooser does in “Small Rooms in Time.” Switch between past and present, contrasting the place with other places you have lived in.

4. Write a story or personal essay using a journey structure/motif/theme as in Alice Munro’s “Miles City, Montana.” Make it both a real journey and a journey back in time. Use time-shifts to break up the narrative flow.

5. Imagine your protagonist is on a journey escaping from the past. Don’t mention that he or she is running away. Useful flashbacks to reveal piecemeal what happened. Weave the flashbacks with descriptions of the ongoing journey.

6. Create a portrait of a family member using photographs. Or write about a photograph that has always intrigued you. Who is the person in the picture? When was it taken? What other memories does it trigger? Go beyond the frame of the picture. Speculate about what could have happened that the picture does not tell.

**Critical**

1. “Miles City, Montana” is a road trip that not only moves between places but between different points in time. Examine the shifts in time and place and how they relate to the story.

2. In *Day by Day*, Robert Lowell says that his aim is “to give my simple autobiography a plot.” Access whether Lowell has achieved this in his poetry, given the fragmentariness and discontinuities of real life and the narrative limits of the poetic mode.

3. Examine the nature of memory and time in “Small Rooms in Time.”

**Week 5 – A Sense of Movement**

A compelling work moves us; we travel with it, drawn by the movement of the prose or the poem. A good piece of writing is alive; it breathes, it has a body, it dances, writhes in pain or ecstasy or meditatively still. We journey from the first line or paragraph to the last and in the course of it make discoveries about the characters, about the story or poem, and about ourselves.

So what creates this sense of movement? A complex of different but connected things: diction or choice of words, rhythm, cadence, pacing, imagery, syntax etc. It is also the vision, the way you see the work, the themes propelling it forward. You have to listen to your work, get the pulse right and make it move, find the rhythm for it.

Rhythm is the way your sentences and paragraphs breathe. It is the pace, the cadence and movement of the words. In poetry, the cadence is an integral part of the meaning of the poem. A clipped, fast cadence may reflect excitement while a slow ponderous rhythm usually implies melancholy. In good prose, the rhythm is effectively harnessed to the mood and meaning of the work.

The rhythm of a work allows it to speak to us intimately, get close to and beneath our skin. Often a good poem or story feels as if it were addressing you alone, the solitary reader. It touches us, reaches that deep place in us because of its music, its breath, cadence, the way it sings. We learned about meter and measure, the basic breath units of poetry in earlier courses. How a poem sounds depends on its rhythm, its cadence, the number of stresses, the line length, whether the line runs on to the next (enjambment) or if it stops at the line (end-stopped), whether it has many pauses in the middle of the line (caesura), whether there are long and short words, complex or short sentences (syntax). This is applicable to prose too, how slow or fast we want it, whether we use long sentences, long words, complex syntax, punctuations etc.

**Critical**

1. Examine closely the narrative pace and prose rhythm in Tim O’Brien’s “The Things They Carried.” How do they reinforce the theme and how are they created?

2. Discuss the prose rhythm in Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” and how it relates to the theme.
3. Explore how the sense of movement in Philip Larkin’s “Church Going” and “The Whitsun Weddings” relate to the theme/s.

**Creative**

1. Write about a character on a journey. He or she may be lost, struggling and panicky or at peace in the landscape, contemplative and in reverie. Use the prose rhythm to reflect the movement and the inner thoughts of the character.

2. Write about a character who is trapped in his or her environment. It could be a bored housewife or an inmate of an institution. Use the prose rhythm to convey the feelings of the character.

3. Write a journey or travel poem. It could be a train, bus or plane trip. Describe the shifting landscape and weave reflections about the journey, about life into it.

**Week 6 - A Sense of Movement 2**

Literature is awash with journeys, characters going on a quest for something, embarking on a journey of transformation, of homecoming. From Cervantes’ Don Quixote to Jack Kerouac’s On the Road, we have characters going on a journey and having encounters that change them irrevocably. It’s the most effective trick, putting your protagonist on a journey so that he/she is tested, reveals his/her weaknesses/ strengths, and come into some kind of self-knowledge.

In poetry too, the journey poem is a marvellous vehicle for self-discovery. Poetry abounds with journeys; from The Odyssey, Basho, Li Po, Wordsworth, to Baudelaire and Rimbaud, poetry records movement between places. There are poems about exile and migration, about the joy of wandering and walking, about the search for solitude and identity. Often the journey is not only about physical travel, but also about an interior movement, a quest for understanding and self-transcendence.

It is useful at this juncture to look at the archetypal journey pattern outlined by Joseph Campbell in Hero With a Thousand Faces. Campbell observes that this pattern is central to all myths and legends with a hero and quest motif. The first stage is separation and departure, when the hero receives the call to adventure and leaves home, crossing the threshold into the unknown. The second stage is the descent in which the hero experiences the trials and pains of the journey, meet enemies and finds friends, overcomes obstacles and shows his mettle in contests of will and courage. In the process the hero attains knowledge of supernatural realms and also comes to know himself better. Lastly is return and resurrection, when the hero comes home to where he starts from, to his family and himself. Here the knowledge gained on the journey is consolidated and shared and the old self is integrated in a new vision. Your journey may conform to part of, if not all, of the structural pattern. The mythic framework gives it an interior sense, that your journey is not just outward movement, but something more profound happens at the same time, a sea-change of perception, a spiritual awakening. The encounter with other cultures and places may also provoke a self-questioning, an interrogation of the value system one grew up with, a deeper recognition of the nature of the self as it meets the other.

The journey is more than just the outward itinerary. It is a trite metaphor – that life is a journey, but that does not lessen the metaphorical truth. We travel through the days, the years and arrive at something like the final destination, which in a way resembles the beginning. For some people the journey is real and metaphorical at the same time. These are the displaced persons: travellers who are not at home in their place of origin; people expelled from their homeland; voluntary exiles who reject all that their country represent, migrants; expatriates, and a new breed of people who have more than one home, who shuttle between places. For all these people life is a perpetual journey, and sometimes they feel more at home between places than in any fixed place.

**Creative**

1. Write a poem about journey, a train ride, a country hike, a mountaineering expedition, being lost in a strange city or the bush. Describe the external journey but at the same time allude to what is happening within you. Make it as much a physical journey as a journey of self-discovery.

2. Write a poem about crossing borders, moving from one country to another. Now turn it into a metaphorical journey about the transition from one phase of your life to another.
3. What is the most memorable journey you have ever had? Was it on a train, a bus, a boat, or on foot? Recall the vivid details, the places, the landscape, the weather, the people, the individual characters, the smells, sounds, your own sensations. And don’t forget the moving, the journey itself; sometimes the getting there is more important than the destination.

4. Have you been to a place where you were compelled to face uncomfortable truths about yourself and your origins?

5. Begin with a moment of return, coming home from a long trip or stay somewhere. Describe the feeling of homecoming. Then cast your mind back to when you left and why and the journey you underwent.

**Critical**

1. How does the journey structure in Tobias Wolff’s “The Rich Brother” reflect the themes in the story?

2. How does the use of place relate to the character portrayal in Tobias Wolff’s “The Missing Person”?

3. How does the journey structure/motif in Gretel Ehrlich’s “The Future of Ice” reveal her ideas and attitude towards nature and religion?

4. What is Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Moose” about? Relate the theme closely to the journey motif.

5. Examine Elizabeth Bishop’s ideas of travel and identity in “Questions of Travel.”

**Week 7 – The Art of the Real**

Art is a way of making us look at things with new eyes. Its trick is to defamiliarize, translate ordinary objects and experiences into something that has a special power to dazzle us, or make us ponder and wonder. Oscar Wilde says that “The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” Look at the still-lifes of Cézanne, the sunflowers and portraits of ordinary people by Van Gogh, the photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson, and again the stories of Chekhov, they are all drawn from very real life.

“There are significant moments in everyone’s day that can make literature. That’s what you ought to write about,” advises Raymond Carver. Around and within us can be found a vast array of materials for art. E.L. Doctorow reveals:

With *Ragtime*, I was desperate to write something. I was facing the wall of my study in new Rochelle and so I started to write about the wall...Then I wrote about the house that was attached to the wall. It was built in 1906, you see, so I thought about the era and what Broadview Avenue looked like then: trolley cars ran along the avenue down at the bottom of the hill; people wore white clothes in summer to stay cool. Teddy Roosevelt was President. One thing led to another and that’s the way the book began, through desperation to those few images.

One thing leading to another, image begetting images and story generating stories. This is an organic vision of writing, that the story will find its own form, theme, and voice if you give yourself entirely to it.

There are stories and poems out on the streets, stories about buildings, places, and characters floating around, ready to go into a story, waiting to lead you to unexpected places.

**Creative**

1. Take a walk through the city. List the sights, the things happening on the streets. Cut up the list. Try to arrange the objects, things into a poem.

2. Gather a list of objects: a souvenir, a childhood keepsake, any favourite thing and write about it. Keep it concrete.
3. Write a story concentrating on the relationship between two characters, as in Tobias Wolff’s “The Night in Questions” and Richard Bausch’s “Aren’t You Happy for Me.” Build up the dialogue, the dramatic tension slowly, and use telling details to reveal the relationship. Remember mundane details can be vital.

**Critical**

1. Tobias Wolff’s “The Night in Questions” and Richard Bausch’s “Aren’t You Happy for Me” are about everyday situations. The setting, the dramatic development, the theme are compelling real-life scenarios.

2. William Carlos William’s famous dictum is “No ideas but in things.” Discuss with close reference to his poems.

**Week 8 – A Sense of Place**

A poem or a story does not appear out of nowhere. You find it in a particular time and place. It is always situated, taking place in a place, even if the final poem is erased of the spatial references. The Irish have a poetic tradition called the *dinnseanchas*, poems commemorating the meanings of places. Many writers believe in the spirit of place and seek to evoke that in prose and poetry.

In a sense what we are is shaped by the places we have been in, the places we grow up in, travel through, long for. Many of Wordsworth’s poems retrace the places visited in youth and early manhood, places that have yielded vital insights and have brought him to the place he is at the time of writing. Seamus Heaney’s poems are tied to the place of origins, Mossbawn in County Derry where he was born, and other places in Ireland which have come to mean something to him in his quest to understand the nature of the poetic creation and the violence in Northern Ireland.

The poetry of place is as much about mapping the landscape, getting it’s the spirit of place right, as it is about charting the self, the thoughts and feelings the place evokes. Les Murray’s poems are often located in specific places, and evoke particular moments in the poet’s life. “Evening at Bunyah” traces a moment of homecoming, to the place of his childhood and to his father. It commutes between the past and present, recreating the land as it was and as it is, rediscovering the father he lost and the one who lives in his mind.

Place is also vital in fiction or creative nonfiction. Placing the story is a vital step in shaping the story. By imparting a sense of place to your narrative, you give it a sense of reality. The story becomes anchored, takes hold and shape. The characters have a landscape to move in, a backdrop against which their outlines can be traced. Getting the place right also means conjuring the right atmosphere in which the characters can breathe, a mood and tone which hold the story together.

You can afford to carve the location elaborately in a novel. In the short story, you have to map the location with a few deft touches. Sometimes place becomes a character in its own right. In *Wuthering Heights*, the windswept moors are not just a backdrop; they are a haunting presence in all the scenes. The same happens in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, where the Congo jungle is at the heart of the story, and E.M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, where the Marabar Caves mock the human drama. In Tim O’Brien’s war story “The Things They Carried,” Vietnam is not just a place; it is the theme, the subject, a major presence. O’Brien’s story enumerates the physical equipment the soldiers carry, the weapons, the helmets and a vast array of things which add up to an enormous burden, but nothing compared to the emotional weight the men carry; the fear of death, the loss, grief and longing. In addition to the diseases, lice and ringworm, they also “carried the land itself – Vietnam, the place, the soil – a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the sky. The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity.” Place is not a mere background, but becomes an antagonist, the enemy, the unconscious, the past, the present, haunting the very deepest reaches of the characters’ minds. The characters are trapped in a place which is not only geographic but mental and psychic, a place which ironically gives them a sense of identity, a sense of who they are.

Just as places lend credibility to characters, characters make places come alive. In Virginia Woolfe’s *Mrs Dalloway*, London becomes alive through Mrs Dalloway’s senses, and Mrs Dalloway becomes real through her interaction with the surroundings. In the opening pages, she sallies forth to buy flowers for a party:

> For having lived in Westminster – how many years now? over twenty, - one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For
Heaven knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can’t be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people’s eyes, in the swing, tramp, and cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jungle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

Virginia Woolf is viewing everything through the eyes of Mrs Dalloway. Westminster is coloured by her vision; her responses to the sounds, sights and smells and the ensuing reflections and memories.

Critical

1. Discuss the use of place in Helen Garner’s “Postcards from Surfers” or Tim O’Brien’s “On the Rainy River” and how it relates to the themes.

2. Robert Drewe’s “The Bodysurfers” uses the quintessential Australian landscape, the beach, to underscore the theme of crisis and anxiety. Examine how he does this.

3. Discuss the relationship between place and identity in Seamus Heaney’s poems OR Discuss the sense of place in Heaney’s poetry with close reference to the essay “A Sense of Place” and his poems.

Creative

1. Now visualise a character on a train, or a long-distance bus. Describe the sensations of motion, the views outside, and the other ravellers. Work a story into the journey, give the character a past, as in Alice Munro’s story. Relate it to the journey, weave it into the landscape, the movement, moving back and forth between past and present.

2. Write a story about a holiday on the beach. Use the details of location as a trigger for memories, so that your character is caught in the present drama but also haunted by an unresolved past.

3. Write a place poem or a sequence of place poems set in a particular place.

4. Write a journey or travel poem.

Week 9 – Deep Imagery

Often what stays in our minds after reading a powerful poem or story is the image, resounding, sinking through to touch something deep within us. Ezra Pound defines an image as “an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” John Ciardi states: “Imagery is best defined as the total sensory suggestion of poetry.” The image carries with it a cluster of associations and meanings, and often says much more than mere statement or telling. It seems to come from deep within the writer’s unconscious, and turns the work into an experience for both writer and reader, rather than something to be thought about and analysed.

In poetry as well as prose, the image can be the cohesive and central force of the work. It can make the poem or story say more than you set out to say, more it so much more powerfully suggestive.

Creative

1. Write a story centred on an image or metaphor, as in Kevin Brockmeier’s “Space” or Tim O’Brien’s “On the Rainy River.” Build the relationships and the narrative around it.

2. Write a poem or a series of poems using a key central image. Keep it concrete.

3. Write a poem using space or astronomy imagery, as in the Adrienne Rich’s “Planetarium.”

Critical
1. Explore the imagey in either Kevin Brockmeier’s “Space” or Tim O’Brien’s “On the Rainy River” and how it relates to the themes.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy* that “the lyric poet’s images are nothing but the poet himself, and only different objectifications of himself, which is why, as the moving centre of that world, he is able to say "I": this self is not that of the waking, empirically real man, however, but rather the sole, truly existing and eternal self that dwells at the base of being, through whose depictions the lyric genius sees right through to the very basis of being.” Discuss with reference to one poet.

**Week 10 – What Are We Talking About**

Theme is not to be mistaken for moral. We don’t want didactic stories, stories that point out a moral and direct us to certain conclusions. Stories should challenge us into rethinking, make us see differently. Theme is often something that emerges at the end of the writing, though it may be there in the beginning, hidden and undefined. Experience may be sometimes irreducible to linguistic logic. But stories often tell us what we know already, in different ways. Raymond Carver notes: “While short stories often tell us things we don’t know anything about -- and this is good of course -- they should also, and maybe more importantly, tell us what everybody knows but what nobody is talking about. At least, not publicly." Often the themes transcend the immediate context of the story. For instance, a war story like *Going After Cacciato* is not just about war; it is also about the imagination, writing, and finds a sympathetic chord in readers who are not interested in war writing. Tim O’Brien says:

> I'm talking about stories that transcend the particulars of the story-a story that, say, reaches out beyond Vietnam and into the hearts of all of us. Updike's work, for example, reaches out beyond the suburbs and touches all of us in the center of our thoughts, in those quiet places in our hearts that we visit at night sometimes before we go to sleep.

Updike’s stories are located in a specific cultural, political and geographical context, but they touch on deeper issues that concern us, the complexity of human living.

Look back on the stories you have written. Are there themes which recur? Why have you consciously or unconsciously reworked them? Are there connected themes, underlying or sub-themes that the major theme points to?

**Critical**

1. Read Alice Munro’s “Miles City, Montana” and examine how the theme is conveyed. You should explore the narrative structure, the use of location, voice, imagery, anything that is essential to the realisation of the theme.

2. Write a sequence of short poems centred on a particular object or idea. Maybe a group of souvenirs, photographs etc.

**Creative**

1. Think of a theme that interests you. Love, friendship, loneliness etc. Pick an opening scene, a café, a bus stop where you will locate the theme. Let your mind circle around it for the ideas or images. There may be a face, a scene that you could start with. Now start sketching the opening scene with the theme as background.

2. Chekhov’s “About Love” and Carver’s are stories which contain stories told by a small group of friends. Write a story with four characters getting together for a reunion or on a camping trip. Visualise your characters and go for the telling feature. What is it that draw the characters to each other?

1. Look back on the stories you have written. Are there themes which recur? Why have you consciously or unconsciously reworked them? Are there connected themes, underlying or sub-themes that the major theme points to?
2. Think of a theme that interests you. Love, friendship, loneliness etc. Pick an opening scene, a café, a bus stop where you will locate the theme. Let your mind circle around it for the ideas or images. There may be a face, a scene that you could start with. Now start sketching the opening scene with the theme as background.

3. Read Chekhov’s “About Love” and Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” again. Now write your own version about what love is.

Week 11 – Voice

Voice and style sound abstract but they are really made up of tangible elements. When we talk about Picasso’s style in blue period, we are not just talking about the colour dominating this phase. There are also the obsessions, his vision, the different medium, the different focus, the different brushstrokes, and an array of other things. Style is made up of all the composite things and transcends them to become something almost intangible. When we say there is a new voice on the writing scene, we refer to someone with something distinct to say and saying it in a distinct way. Miles Davis was a new voice on the jazz scene, his sound and philosophy of jazz broke new ground and redefined what jazz was.

Narrative Voice

The voice in which a story is told is the story voice. It can be spoken, informal, colloquial, naïve, as in Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*; disillusioned, bitter and pained as in Graham Greene’s *The End of the Affair*; gregarious, witty, ironic as in some of A.S. Byatt’s short stories; or it can be distant, objective, understated as in Hemingway and Carver; it also can be epic, sublime and tragic as in Cormac McCarthy’s *Border Trilogy*.

Voice is also related to the chosen point of view. If it has multiple points of view as in Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, then the voice may be fragmented, incoherent and schizophrenic. If the narrative is in the first-person, the writer is speaking through the character and has to find a voice that fits the character. The writer may have to take into consideration the dialect, the character’s age and personality to get the right voice. Salinger’s Holden Caulfield and Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* have distinct voices, which reflect the society they live in and their own character.

Narrative voice is an integral part of the story. It is spun from various elements: the genre, the point of view, diction, syntax, rhythm, choice of detail etc. If it is a tragic work, the voice is predominantly grave; if a humorous work, then the voice is playful, irreverent, parodic, hilarious. The voice also depends on the theme, the subject-matter. If the genre is war, and the theme is loss and disillusionment, then the voice may be mourning, angry, bitter and if it involves confronting the absurdities of war, then a dark humour, an ironic tone may be required, as in Tim O’Brien’s “The Things They Carried.”

They carried USO stationery and pencils and pens. They carried Sterno, safety pins, trip flares, signal flares, spoons of wire, razor blades, chewing tobacco, liberated joss sticks and statuettes of Buddha, candles, grease pencils, The Stars and Stripes, fingernail clippers, Psy Ops leaflets, bush hats, bolos, and much more. Twice a week, when the resupply choppers came in, they carried hot chow in green mermite cans and large canvas bags filled with iced beer and soda pop. They carried plastic water containers, each filled with a two-gallon capacity. Mitchell Sanders carried a set of starched tiger fatigues for special occasions. Henry Dobbins carried Black Flag insecticide. Dave Jensen carried empty sandbags that could be filled at night for added protection. Lee Strunk carried tanning lotion, Some things they carried in common. Taking turns, they carried the big PRC 77 scrambler radio, which weighed 30 pounds with its battery. They shared the weight of memory. They took up what others could no longer bear. Often they carried each other, the wounded or weak. They carried infections. They carried chess sets, basketballs, Vietnamese-English dictionaries, insignia of rank, Bronze Stars and Purple Hearts, plastic cards imprinted with the Code of Conduct. They carried diseases, among them malaria and dysentery. They carried lice and ringworm and leeches and paddy algae and various rots and molds. They carried the land itself- Vietnam, the place, the soil – a powdery orange-red dust that covered their boots and fatigues and faces. They carried the
The whole atmosphere, they carried it, the humidity, the monsoons, the stink of fungus and decay, all of it, they carried gravity. They moved like mules.

This passage resumes the tally of the things the soldiers carried. Earlier, there is an exhaustive inventory of the weaponry and now the list is of more varied objects. Repetition, the flat syntax, and the accumulation of nouns add to the weight. There is hardly any adjective or adverb. Even the abstract nouns are given an unfamiliar weight. The march of the sentences imitates the plodding march of the men, the repeating syntax and the sentences piling up into one extremely long paragraph, again conveying the effect of weight, of burden.

All these result in a weary deadpan, detached voice. This matter-of-fact voice contrasts ironically with the grave and urgent theme, the horror and pity of war. Its distant tone heightens the sense of pain, suffering and loss. In *The Art of Fiction* John Gardner observes how a dispassionate voice can actually heighten the emotional tone of the work:

> In great fiction we are moved by what happens, not by the whimpering or bawling of the writer’s presentation of what happens. That is, in great fiction, we are moved by characters and events, not by the emotion of the person who happens to be telling the story. Sometimes, as in the fiction of Tolstoy or Chekhov — and one might mention many others — the narrative voice is deliberately kept calm and dispassionate, so that the emotion arising from the fictional events comes through almost wholly untinged by presentation; but restraint of that kind is not an aesthetic necessity. A flamboyant style like that of Faulkner at his best can be equally successful. The trick is simple that the style must work in the service of the material, not in advertisement of the writer.

**Poetic Voice**

You can identity a poet, in the same way that you can say – “That is Billie Holiday” or “That is Frank Sinatra.” A poet’s voice is the distinct way in which his works sound. It is his signature, his stamp of originality. It is related to style, which is the way the writer puts his words and sentences together on the page. The factors influencing style are the theme, the preoccupations of the writer, the diction or word choice, the syntax or sentence structure, the imagery, the point of view, the poetic forms the poet inclines towards. But voice can also refer to the immediate context of the poem. If the poem is a dramatic monologue spoken from the point of view of a child, then it may have a child’s innocent and naïve voice. If the persona is a disillusioned politician, then it may be cynical, bitter, ironic, cold.

**Creative**

1. Reread a poet you like. It could be any poet from the anthology or elsewhere. Imitate the style, the voice, by taking one of the poems you like and writing something similar.

2. Adopt the persona of one of these: a farmer, a man who comes home from work to find his wife has left with his child and the furniture, a woman waiting for her lover to return, a disillusioned soldier, a conceited politician, a rock star, a lonely child. Take time to find the voice and speak imaginatively from the person’s perspective.

3. Read Hemingway and Carver and examine their minimalist style. Then read Carol Shields and John Updike and examine the maximalist style. Select a story you have written or a sketch for a story and write it first in the minimalist style and then write another version in the maximalist mode.

4. Write a dramatic monologue from the point of view of one of these: a migrant, a drunk, a homeless person, a 10 year old boy, a professor of classical languages, and an uneducated housewife, a priest. Pay close attention to the language, the thoughts etc. Use the syntax and grammar to make the voice more compelling. You may dispense with punctuations, use halting sentences and write ungrammatically if the character portrayal requires it.
5. Write about an event from the point of view of three characters. The occasion may be the death of a mutual friend or relative. Give the three characters different voices and perspectives.

6. Listen to a song, a Miles Davis jazz track, a Chet Baker or Joni Mitchell song, or a German lieder, Debussy or anything. Now write a poem following the mood and emotional theme of the music. Is it about falling in or out of love, death and grief, or a burst of joyousness, exultation? Have you used long or short lines, enjambment or many pauses, heavy or light words?

**Critical**

1. Analyse the Carver’s style and voice using “A Small, Good Thing” and “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” or any of his other stories.

2. Discuss the narrative voice in Stuart Dybek’s “We Didn’t” and how it reinforces the themes.

3. How would you describe the voice in Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”? How does this relate to the theme? How does Ginsberg achieve this voice?

4. Pick any poet you admire. What is his/her voice? What makes this voice?

**Week 12 – Writing as Rewriting**

Anton Chekhov gave some advice about revising a story: first, he said, throw out the first three pages. As a young writer I figured that if anybody knew about short stories, it was Chekhov, so I tried taking his advice. I really hoped he was wrong, but of course he was right. It depends on the length of the story, naturally; if it’s very short, you can only throw out the first three paragraphs. But there are few first drafts to which Chekhov’s Razor doesn’t apply. Starting a story, we all tend to circle around, explain a lot of stuff, set things up that don’t need to be set up. Then we find our way and get going, and the story begins ... very often just about on page. — Ursula LeGuin

Kerouac may have reeled off *On the Road* in three weeks on a continuous typewriter scroll, and Faulkner may have sped through a story in a single nightshift, but in reality most writers labour for years on the work. Drafts and furious revisions, that is the test of a writer. Hemingway reveals that he rewrote the ending of *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times.

**Creative**

1. Is there any story you have written that could be expanded or reworked into something fuller? Or perhaps it could be revised structurally, cut up into something non-linear?

2. Is there any poem that you feel isn’t quite complete? Perhaps it could be more realised in a traditional format, or perhaps it is a sonnet or villanelle that is stifled by its form and could possibly be rewritten in free form?

**Critical**

1. Compare “The Bath” with “A Small Good Thing.” What are the differences? Why did Carver rewrite “The Bath” into “A Small Good Thing”? What makes the latter a more complete story?

2. Examine the drafts of Elizabeth Bishop’s “One Art” and comment on the drafting, revision, writing process.

**Week 13 – Revision**

Revision is an intensive process. Horace, when he wrote the *Ars Poetica*, recommended that poets keep their poems home for ten years. When Pope wrote "An Essay on Criticism" seventeen hundred years after Horace, he cut the waiting time in half, suggesting that poets keep their poems...
for five years before publication. Hemingway is known to have done thirty drafts for a story. Gaps have to be filled in, but more often Ursula LeGuin’s update of Chekhov is right. The wastepaper basket, as another writer remarks, is the writer’s best friend. We generally write a lot more than necessary to get to the point where we are in a better position to see better. In another context, the jazz trumpeter Miles Davis says: “I always listen for what I can leave out.” The goal of revision is get the chords right and not have a superfluous note in the composition.

When we write, the writer comes to the fore and the critic takes a back seat. But when it comes to revision, it is time to let the critic take over the controls. This transition is not easy and sometimes you have to keep the two balanced, reading and writing. You may also have to leave the work for a while, read around, and come back to it with senses refreshed. You are then likely to see and hear better. Carver reveals: “Maybe I revise because it gradually takes me into the heart of what the story is about. I have to keep trying to see if I can find that out. It’s a process more than a fixed position.”

**Checklist**

Revision or rewriting entails a mobile vision – you should step back from your work and scan it as a whole and at the same time be able to zoom in to scrutinise the parts. Let the reader-critic in you take over and test-read it to check the coherence and ensure that every word counts. Flannery O’Connor says: “A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is.”

Here is a checklist for revision:

* What is the story about? What is the central defining moment of the story? Is it a moment of conflict, confrontation, knowledge? Do the sequences, the parts add and lead up to this? Is there enough causality, motivation, suspense to move the story and the reader forward?
* Has the central moment and scene been well sustained, explored and linked to the resolution? Is the resolution too forced or unsatisfactory?
* Are there irrelevant scenes?
* Have you repeated anything that doesn’t need recapitulation?
* Is there enough description? Or is there so much of it that the narrative is too ponderously slow?
* Is the writing too laboured, too self-conscious?
* Have you observed the golden rule-show and not tell? Inevitably there is summarizing, straightforward telling but this should be kept to a minimum and be done in an interesting way.
* Is there anything that is vague or general?
* Scan the sentences, the paragraphs. Are they too flat, overlong, clumsy or monotonous?
* Is there any passage that is overwritten or over-embellished? Samuel Johnson counsels: “Read over your compositions and, when you meet a passage that you think is particularly fine, strike it out.”
* Have you glossed over or hurried through a scene which could be important?
* Go over all the fundamentals – plot, structure, character development, location, point of view, and test if they have been well worked.
* Check the choice of words. Check the sentences, then the paragraphs. Do they flow?
* Get rid of clichés, unnecessary adjectives and adverbs.
* Tighten up the dialogue. Get rid of unnecessary speech markers like “he says,” if it is clear who is talking.
* Check the punctuations. Refer to the MLA Handbook for writers if you are unsure about punctuations like semi-colons.

For the poets, you may have to go through twenty or more drafts, shaping, shape and meaning of the poem. Robert Lowell was always revising, even the published poems. Elizabeth Bishop was
also a furious revisionist, churning out draft recasting, chiselling and hammering. It is about revisioning, learning to see the real after draft on the way to the real poem.

**Checklist**
Is the shape of the poem right? Is the form, the way it looks on the page right to you?
Is it in the right voice?
Is there too much telling?
Is there too little imagery? Too many images?
Is there a sustained metaphor that becomes boring, makes the poem too predictable?
Does the imagery relate to the theme?
Are the rhythms right? What about the music?
Are the lines too long, too short? Are the line breaks in the right place?
Look for clichés, stale verbs and adjectives?
Are there adverbs you can replace with vivid verbs?
Is it too predictable, too sentimental, too clichéd?
Is there a sense of movement towards knowledge, sense of quest?
Have you allowed for a sense of mystery, the unknown or have you explained it all away?
Is there more to be explored?
Do the lines flow, the stanzas connect, the images link?
You may have to leave the poem for a while. Read around, read more poetry. Take notes in your journal. You may stumble for an image, the solving line or shape. When you come back to it with renewed vision, you may discover the real poem revealed.