ENGL3201 - Advanced Creative Writing 1
Course Outline

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 the Full Term
workshop/lecture/seminar

Learning Materials/Texts
The Puncher & Wattmann Anthology of Australian Literature
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

Course Outline Issued and Correct as at: Week 1, Semester 1 - 2010

CTS Download Date: 1st March 2010
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

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<tr>
<th>Essays / Written Assignments</th>
<th>Creative Work: 3000 words or equivalent (50%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Essays / Written Assignments</td>
<td>2 Workshop presentations, 500 words each or equivalent (30%)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Critical Essay: 1000 words (20%)</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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Assumed Knowledge
ENGL2201 and ENGL2202 or equivalent.

Callaghan Campus Timetable
ENGL3201 Advanced Creative Writing 1
Enquiries: School of Humanities and Social Science
Semester 1 - 2010
Seminar Thursday 9:00 - 11:00 [MCG28C]
or Friday 9:00 - 11:00 [GP322]

Ourimbah Timetable
ENGL3201 Advanced Creative Writing 1
Enquiries: School of Humanities and Social Science
Semester 1 - 2010
Seminar Wednesday 12:00 - 14:00 [O_CS106]

IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY INFORMATION

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity, honesty, and a respect for knowledge, truth and ethical practices are fundamental to the business of the University. These principles are at the core of all academic endeavour in teaching, learning and research. Dishonest practices contravene academic values, compromise the integrity of research and devalue the quality of learning. To preserve the quality of learning for the individual and others, the University may impose severe sanctions on activities that undermine academic integrity. There are two major categories of academic dishonesty:

Academic fraud is a form of academic dishonesty that involves making a false representation to gain an unjust advantage. Without limiting the generality of this definition, it can include:

a) falsification of data;
b) using a substitute person to undertake, in full or part, an examination or other assessment item;
c) reusing one's own work, or part thereof, that has been submitted previously and counted towards
another course (without permission);

d) making contact or colluding with another person, contrary to instructions, during an examination or other assessment item;

e) bringing material or device(s) into an examination or other assessment item other than such as may be specified for that assessment item; and

f) making use of computer software or other material and device(s) during an examination or other assessment item other than such as may be specified for that assessment item.

g) contract cheating or having another writer compete for tender to produce an essay or assignment and then submitting the work as one's own.

**Plagiarism** is the presentation of the thoughts or works of another as one's own. University policy prohibits students plagiarising any material under any circumstances. Without limiting the generality of this definition, it may include:

a) copying or paraphrasing material from any source without due acknowledgment;

b) using another person's ideas without due acknowledgment;

c) collusion or working with others without permission, and presenting the resulting work as though it were completed independently.

**Turnitin** is an electronic text matching system. During 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 text matching service (which may then retain a copy of the item on its database for the purpose of future checking).
- Submit the assessment item to other forms of plagiarism checking

**RE-MARKS AND MODERATIONS**

Students can access the University's policy at: [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000769.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000769.html)

**MARKS AND GRADERS RELEASED DURING TERM**

All marks and grades released during term are indicative only until formally approved by the Head of School.

**SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES AFFECTING ASSESSMENT ITEMS**

*Extension of Time for Assessment Items, Deferred Assessment and Special Consideration for Assessment Items or Formal Written Examinations* items must be submitted by the due date in the Course Outline unless the Course Coordinator approves an extension. Unapproved late submissions will be penalised in line with the University policy specified in Late Penalty (under student) at the link above.

Requests for Extensions of Time must be lodged no later than the due date of the item. This applies to students:

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

Students must report the circumstances, with supporting documentation, as outlined in the Special Circumstances Affecting Assessment Items Procedure at: [http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000641.html)

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

Students should be aware of the following important deadlines:
Special Consideration Requests must be lodged no later than 3 working days after the due date of submission or examination.

Rescheduling Exam requests must be received no later than 10 working days prior to the first date of the examination period.

Late applications may not be accepted. Students who cannot meet the above deadlines due to extenuating circumstances should speak firstly to their Program Officer or their Program Executive if studying in Singapore.

STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR CHRONIC ILLNESS

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 contact the Disability Liaison Officer on 02 4921 5766, 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 on confidentiality and documentation visit the Student Support Service (Disability) website: www.newcastle.edu.au/services/disability.

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://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/enrolment/regdates.html

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

Studentmail and Blackboard: Refer - 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

Details about the following topics are available on your course Blackboard site (where relevant). Refer - www.blackboard.newcastle.edu.au/

- Written Assignment Presentation and Submission Details
- Online copy submission to Turnitin
- Penalties for Late Assignments
- Special Circumstances
- No Assignment Re-submission
- Re-marks & Moderations
- Return of Assignments
- Preferred Referencing Style
- Student Representatives
- Student Communication
- Essential Online Information for Students

CHANGING YOUR ENROLMENT

Students enrolled after the census dates listed in the link below are liable for the full cost of their student contribution or fees for that term.

http://www.newcastle.edu.au/study/fees/censusdates.html
Students may withdraw from a course without academic penalty on or before the last day of term. Any withdrawal from a course after the last day of term will result in a fail grade.

Students cannot enrol in a new course after the second week of term, except under exceptional circumstances. Any application to add a course after the second week of term must be on the appropriate form, and should be discussed with staff in the Student Hubs or with your Program Executive at PSB if you are a Singapore student.

To check or change your enrolment online go to myHub: https://myhub.newcastle.edu.au

STUDENT INFORMATION & CONTACTS

Various services are offered by the Student Support Unit: www.newcastle.edu.au/service/studentsupport/

The Student Hubs are a one-stop shop for the delivery of student related services and are the first point of contact for students studying in Australia. Student Hubs are located at:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Callaghan Campus</th>
<th>Port Macquarie students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shortland Hub: Level 3, Shortland Building</td>
<td>contact your program officer or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hunter Hub: Level 2, Student Services Centre</td>
<td><a href="mailto:EnquiryCentre@newcastle.edu.au">EnquiryCentre@newcastle.edu.au</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Precinct</td>
<td>Phone 4921 5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Hub &amp; Information Common, University House</td>
<td>Singapore students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>contact your PSB Program Executive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central Coast Campus (Ourimbah)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Hub: Opposite the Main Cafeteria</td>
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OTHER CONTACT INFORMATION

Faculty Websites
www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/business-law/
www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/education-arts/
www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/engineering/
www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/health/
www.newcastle.edu.au/faculty/science-it/

Rules Governing Undergraduate Academic Awards
www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000311.html

Rules Governing Postgraduate Academic Awards

Rules Governing Professional Doctorate Awards
www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary/000580.html

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

Ourimbah
Phone: 02 4348 4030
Email:

Dean of Students Office
The Dean of Students and Deputy Dean of Students work to ensure that all students receive fair and equitable treatment at the University. In doing this they provide information and advice and help students resolve problems of an academic nature. http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/dean-of-students/
Phone:02 4921 5806
Fax: 02 4921 7151
Email: Dean-of-Students@newcastle.edu.au

University Complaints Managers Office
The University is committed to maintaining and enhancing fair, equitable and safe work practices and promoting positive relationships with its staff and students. There is a single system to deal with all types of complaints, ranging from minor administrative matters to more serious deeply held grievances concerning unfair, unjust or unreasonable behaviour. http://www.newcastle.edu.au/service/complaints/
Phone:02 4921 5806
Fax: 02 4921 7151
Email: Complaints@newcastle.edu.au

Campus Care
The Campus Care program has been set up as a central point of enquiry for information,
This course outline will not be altered after the second week of the term except under extenuating circumstances with Head of School approval. Students will be notified in advance of the change.

**Grading guide**

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<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>49% or less</td>
<td>Fail (FF)</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>Pass (P)</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>Credit (C)</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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<tr>
<td>75% to 84%</td>
<td>Distinction (D)</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85% upwards</td>
<td>High Distinction (HD)</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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**Week 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Week Commencing</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>01/03/2010</td>
<td>The Writing Life/ Craft 1</td>
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**Week 2**

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>08/03/2010</td>
<td>Paying Attention</td>
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**Week 3**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>15/03/2010</td>
<td>Writing and Memory 1 and 2</td>
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**Week 4**

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<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22/03/2010</td>
<td>A Sense of Movement 1</td>
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**Week 5**

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<th>Week</th>
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<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>29/03/2010</td>
<td>No classes this week (Good Friday 2\textsuperscript{nd} April)</td>
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<td>* Short Creative Assignment due 30 March</td>
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**Week 6**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>12/04/2010</td>
<td>A Sense of Movement 2</td>
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**Week 7**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Week Commencing</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>19/04/2010</td>
<td>The Art of the Real</td>
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**Week 8**

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Week Commencing</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26/04/2010</td>
<td>A Sense of Place</td>
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**Week 9**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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<th>Lecture Topic</th>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>03/05/2010</td>
<td>Deep Imagery</td>
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<td>* Critical Essay due 1 May</td>
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Note:
* The first hour of the class will be devoted to a lecture and discussion on the topic/readings of the week. The second hour is for workshopping.

* Any work to be critiqued should be circulated a week before being workshopped to allow more response time.

* The golden rule to be observed in the sessions is respect, for the tutor and for fellow writing students. Respect and humility are essential in the writing life. Criticism should be constructive and directed at the text, not the author. The poem or story should be evaluated objectively, paying close attention to the craft.

* The assessment items are a Creative Writing portfolio (70%), a critical essay (30%). For the Creative Writing portfolio and short assignment, you may use the creative writing suggestions in the weekly topics below or develop your work independently. For the 1500 word critical essay, you must select one of the critical questions relating to the topics from the course.

* All work must be typed, one-and-a-half spacing.

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 poetics* poem, like John Tranter’s “The Alphabet Murders:23” or “Fine Arts” or Geoff Page’s “The Poem That You Haven’t Seen” or Fay Zwicky’s “Letting Go” or Bruce Beaver’s “Anima XIII” or Peter Porter’s “The Sadness of the Creatures” or Henry Kendall’s “Prefatory Sonnets” or Marcella Polain’s “Writer’s Subject” or Aileen Kelly’s “They Flee From Me” or any of the poems about writing in the anthology or 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. Rosemary Dobson’s “Folding the Sheets” turns laundry into a poem:

You and I will fold the sheets
Advancing towards each other
From Burma, from Lapland,

From India where the sheets have been washed in the river
And pounded upon stones:
Together we will match the corners.

From China where women on either side of the river
Have washed their pale cloth in the White Stone Shallows
‘Under the shining moon’.

We meet as though in the formal steps of a dance
To fold the sheets together, put them to air
In wind, in sun over bushes, or by the fire.

We stretch and pull from one side and then the other –
Your turn. Now mine.
We fold them and put them away until they are needed.

A wish for all people when they lie down in bed –
Smooth linen, cool cotton, the fragrance and stir of herbs
And the faint but perceptible scent of sweet clear water.

And here is Alison Croggon celebrating the wonder of an everyday event, such as grocery shopping, in “The Elwood Organic Fruit and Vegetable Shop”:

I will go walking in Elwood with my mind as smooth as a marrow
winking at the unruffled sky throwing its light down for free
letting the gardens exude their well-groomed scents and thinking
everything good
to the Elwood Organic Fruit and Vegetable Shop:
for the counter is democratically in the centre and everyone smiles
for people go on with the civil business of buying and selling under the
handwritten notices
for bawling children are solaced with grapes and handled to leave no bruises
for the mangoes are soft yellow thighs and the strawberries are klaxons of
sweetness
for the mignonette purses its frilly lips and snowpeas pout their
discreet bellies and the melons hug their quirky shapes under their
marvellous rinds
for onions ringing their coppery globes and o the silver shallots
and the hairy trumpets of leeks
for the cabbages folding crisp linens and the broccoli
blooming in purple tulles and the dense green skirts of lettuces
for peaches like breasts of angels and passionfruits hard and
dark and bursting with seed in your palm
for the dull gold flesh of pontiacs and knotty umbers of yams
and new potatoes like the heels of babies
for the tubs of sweet william and heart-lifting freesias and orchids
damp and beautiful as clitoral kisses
for poignant basil and maiden-haired fennel and prim blue-lipped
rosemary and o! irrepressible mint!
how they nestle up the vegetables, promising them the fragrance of
their ardour!
the marriages which await them! the lips that moisten to meet
them! glorious speech of the earth!

Even when nothing much seems to be happening, the poet can make a poem happen. Evan Jones has
a poem called “Generations”:

I go to see my parents,
we chew the rag a bit;
I turn the telly on
and sit and look at it.

Not much gets said:
there doesn’t seem much point.
but still they like to have
me hanging round the joint.

I go to see my son,
I’m like a Santa Claus:
he couldn’t like me more;
mad about him, of course.

Still years before he learns
to judge, condemn, dismiss.
I stand against the light
and bleed for both of us.

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 your 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.

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 huge 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 a 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 Jill Hellyer’s “Living With Aunts” or Elizabeth Bishop’s “In the Waiting Room.” What are these poems about? How do the poets convey the feelings of the child and their awakening consciousness?

2. Read James McAuley’s “Because.” 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?

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.” Assess 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 4 – A Sense of Movement 1

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 to, 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 Dorothy Hewett’s “The Runner” and/or Jordie Albiston’s “The Fall” 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 5 - 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 use of place relate to the character portrayal in Tobias Wolff’s “The Missing Person”?

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

3. What is Les Murray’s “On the North Coast Line” about? Relate the theme closely to the journey motif.

1. Examine Emma Jones’ ideas of travel and identity in “Winnowing.”

Week 6 – 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 7 – 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, Moosbawn 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 fatigue 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 over head 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 any of the poems in the anthology concerned with a sense of place: Coral Hull’s “Liverpool”, or Philip Hodgkin’s “The Land Itself”, Francis Webb’s “Morgan’s Country”, Kenneth Slessor’s “South Country”, David Campbell’s “At Windy Gap”, Judith Wright’s “At Cooloolah” or “For A Pastoral Family” or Gig Ryan’s “The Cross/The Bay.” You may want to refer to Seamus Heaney’s 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 travellers. 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 8 – 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 imagery 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 9 – 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 subthemes that the major theme points to?

Critical
1. Read David Vann’s “A Legend of Good Men” 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.

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?
3. 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?

4. 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.

5. 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 10 – 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, spools 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 mermitic 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
sky. 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 voices in Ania Walwicz’s “Australia” or Les Murray’s “It Allows a Portrait in Line-Scan at Fifteen”? How do they relate to the themes? How do they achieve these voices?

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

**Week 11 – 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” or the two versions of “So Much Water So Close to Home”. 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 12 – 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 he 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 re-visioning, 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.