

Writing Poetry

ENGL 131

Spring 2026 Section 01 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/22/2026

Contact Information

Instructor(s):	J. Michael Martinez
Office Location:	Clark Hall 408C
Telephone:	(408) 924-4425, English Office
Email:	jmichael.martinez@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	TR, Noon-1pm and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	T/R, 1:30 pm PST – 2:45 pm PST
Classroom:	Dudley Moorhead Hall 348

Course Information

Workshop in verse forms. Study of traditional and contemporary models. May be repeated twice for credit.

In his “Materia Poetica,” the poet Wallace Stevens wrote, “The relation of art to life is of the first importance especially in a skeptical age since, in the absence of a belief in God, the mind turns to its own creations and examines them, not alone from the aesthetic point of view, but for what they reveal, for what they validate and invalidate, for what they support and give.”

In English 131, our primary goal is to learn how to employ language to sculpt the art we name “Poetry.” We will turn to our creations and examine them from a variety of critical perspectives so we may become better informed artists, so you may get a taste of the vocation of “the poet.” We will read classical and contemporary poetry, essays on prosody and poetics, and, most importantly, we will write. We’ll use class workshops, peer-review, and multiple drafts and revisions to achieve that goal. The course is demanding,

and based on a certain kind of intense, exigent reading, requiring prolonged— in fact, repeated— attention to specific poems. We will see poetry as an artistic practice: as the great Paul Celan writes, “Attentiveness is the prayer of the soul.” We will be attentive and practice the process of poetry.

The questions this course engage may include the following issues: representations of power or ideology embedded in characterizations of sex and gender, class, race, and nationality, etc.; the reader’s implied relation to the text alongside authorial “intent,” when that can be established; whether ethics matter in relation to the creation and reception of literature; what roles expression and emotion play in the generation and interpretation of texts; whether literary or their corresponding cinematic texts, as art objects, are independent of external relations and depend purely upon a unique system of internal relations; how realms of “fact” and “fiction” may be mediated particularly through conventions/genre demarcations (sonnet, prose poem, field poetics, etc.), among other questions.

We will explore the art of writing poetry with the aim of coming toward an understanding of knowledge production. It is a class about asking questions concerning difficult issues—both about the works themselves and how we, as a society, produce them.

Suggestions for Process, and for Doing Well in this Course

1. Never turn in your first draft of anything. Go back over your work, asking yourself if you’ve been applying the techniques we have been discussing in class. This will take concentration and focus. As we progress through the semester, you will be held accountable for more and more techniques. It’s a lot to keep in mind, and writers very rarely get all of them right on the first try. It’s best to do several re-readings, each focused on a different concept. (If you’re wondering why your scores are not improving, this is the most likely reason why.)
2. While the assignments give you some direction you should try to approach these by writing about situations and experiences that matter to you. Write about the people, observations, experiences, and things that bother you, fascinate you, anger you, etc.
3. Pay attention to what we’re reading. Ask yourself the following: Which poems and essays inspire you? Who really lights your imagination on fire? If brain transplants were possible, whose (among writers) would you want to have? Try to find a few “masters,” and read their work over several times. Try to discern how these writers build a poem. Then try to do it on your own. This is how writers learn.

4. Pay attention to life in general. That's what all writers do. Look for nuances, the things that nobody notices at first glance. Always work with detail—that's where the magic is. Note this in your journal/daybook

5. While I wish you to write on topics of emotional risk, there are poem which are discouraged from being turned in for workshop or assignments: relationships (of any sort) with current classmates, suicide, threats of violence, etc. If you feel unsure of your poem, please contact me.



Course Description and Requisites

Workshop in verse forms. Study of traditional and contemporary models. May be repeated twice for credit.

Prerequisite: ENGL 71 (or equivalent) or instructor consent.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Course Learning Outcomes (CLO)

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

- recognize and write in a variety of poetic forms, including the sonnet, pantoum, free verse, lyric verse, prose poetry, and free verse.
- write complex poetic images
- draft multiple versions of a poem
- close read a poem deeply, far beyond its surface intention

Course Format: *In-person*

While an in-person seminar meeting will regularly, requiring a computer and internet connectivity, students can also expect various classes to also contain an asynchronous component. I will be regularly assigning small group work and asking you to meet with me on Zoom one-on-one to check in about your participation and writing. Our class will be employing Canvas throughout the course.

Course Materials and Canvas

Course materials such as syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. can be found on [Canvas Learning Management System course login website](#). You are responsible for regularly checking with the messaging system through MySJSU on [Spartan App Portal](#) (or other communication system as indicated by the instructor) to learn of any updates.



Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

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

- recognize and write in a variety of poetic forms, including the sonnet, pantoum, free verse, lyric verse, prose poetry, and free verse.

- write complex poetic images
- draft multiple versions of a poem
- close read a poem deeply, far beyond its surface intention

Course Materials

Texts/Readings (All available on CANVAS)

- A Physical Journal/Daybook
- Poetry Course Readings: on Canvas as PDFs or Links.

There will also be handouts in class All required readings, whether online or in our books, must be brought to class.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Participation: while there may be lectures, the course will be organized as a single continuous discussion requiring everyone to voice their opinion.

The quality of your class participation will be judged through the following: your effort at completing short assignments and, as necessary, sharing them; the effort you put into responding to the workshopped writing of your peers and your willingness to share your thoughts with the workshop as a whole; and the effort you bring to reading critically.

All required readings, whether online or in our books, must be brought to class.

In class, you are being asked to respond to each other and to questions raised in class: I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANY DISRESPECTFUL CONVERSATION OF ANY MANNER WHETHER IN CLASS OR ONLINE. Participation is essential to this course: we will work both in large and small groups.

Your class participation will be assessed as follows:

A: Regular, helpful questions and comments that demonstrate full preparation for class meetings. Active, positive participation in all classroom discussions and activities. Conformity to all course policies as stated in this syllabus.

B: Occasional, pertinent questions and responses; good listening. Conformity to all course policies as stated in this syllabus.

C: Infrequent, tangential questions or comments; attentive. Conformity to all course policies as stated in this syllabus.

D: Inconsistent conformity to policies stated in this syllabus; disengaged from discussion; not prepared for class.

F: Regularly absent, physically or mentally; failure to contribute meaningfully to the classroom's learning community; repeated violations of classroom policies.

Students are STRONGLY ENCOURAGED to review the course calendar in light of their other commitments. The instructor will determine on a case-by-case basis whether or not an out-of-class commitment merits special consideration.

Regarding AI: There is a place for AI, but not in this class. Our Class is designed to develop students' abilities to think and write critically about literary texts. To that end, the use of any artificial intelligence tools, including but not limited to ChatGPT and Grammarly, is expressly forbidden. All graded student work is submitted to Turnitin, which flags AI above 20%. Any student work that is flagged with an AI score above 20% will be considered a violation of SJSU's academic code and result in a minimum penalty of zero for the assignment in question.

Reading Like a Writer: during the semester you will pair up with a colleague to present some opening thoughts on the day's reading. Both of you must speak/present. Both of you will receive the same grade. A good discussion will include the following:

1. Introduction to the Author—Biography, Important Notes, Etc.
2. CONCISE Summary of Poem/Essay
3. Identification of the Author's Use of Prosody we are studying. This should be a close-reading that pays attention to a SPECIFIC passage of text and explicates the writing for significance of language, imagery, tone, etc. I will assign one such technique or point of emphasis; you must choose another interesting feature of the Poem/Essay.
4. A discussion of the Poem/Essay's significance, with special attention to the deeper questions the events and reflections prompt.

You must prepare a visual aid for this presentation. You may make a Powerpoint presentation. I will be evaluating these Presentations for their depth and sophistication, your abilities to engage the class, your speaking dynamics—volume, clarity, rate, etc., and your overall professionalism.

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally three hours per unit per week) for instruction, preparation/studying, or course related activities, including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

✓ Grading Information

Grading Information

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>A plus</i>	<i>96 to 100%</i>
<i>A</i>	<i>93 to 95%</i>
<i>A minus</i>	<i>90 to 92%</i>
<i>B plus</i>	<i>86 to 89 %</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>83 to 85%</i>
<i>B minus</i>	<i>80 to 82%</i>
<i>C plus</i>	<i>76 to 79%</i>
<i>C</i>	<i>73 to 75%</i>
<i>C minus</i>	<i>70 to 72%</i>
<i>D plus</i>	<i>66 to 69%</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>63 to 65%</i>

<i>D minus</i>	60 to 62%
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- 8 Sketches 20%
 - (from In-Class Exercises)
- 4 Final Portfolio Revisions of your sketches 15%
- Workshopping with *Critical Friends*
 - 4 poems of your choice from our weekly exercises 15%
 - Comments/critique of your peer's work 10%
- The revisions of your workshopped poetry 10%
- Participation 20%
- Reflection Essay (part of your Final Portfolio) 10%

Total 100%

Grades given conform to the English Department and university grading policy. The Department of English is committed to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure.

Department of English and Comparative Literature Student Learning Goals

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

the nature of the canon and of canon-formation, including issues of culture, history, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Department of English and Comparative Literature BA Program Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9](#), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on [Syllabus Information web page](#) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>). Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.



University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](#) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](#) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.



Course Schedule

English 131 Writing Poetry, Spring 2025

(As the course progresses, we may get off schedule--this is natural—as such, our daily assignments may be revised as necessary with fair notice given by email or in class).

Please be sure to have completed the assigned reading **before** that day's zoom class.

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WEEK ONE: January 22	First Day of Class: Course Overview, Introductions, Objectives In-Class Exercise #1: Image and Found Language Poem Prompt.
Week TWO: Jan 27	Read: (Canvas) · Prose: · Infinite and Finite Games (Canvas) · Poetic Sensibility: What is it and Why We Need it in 21 st Century..." · Poetry: <i>Canvas:</i> · Arthur Sze, "First Snow", · Carl Philips, "Luna Moth," · Mary Oliver "At Black River" · Selah Saterstrom "Eraser" In-Class Exercise #2: "Living Object" Poem Prompt <u>DUE:</u> In-Class Exercise #1 -

Jan. 29	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Poetry: <i>Canvas</i>: · John Keats "Ode to a Nightingale" · Francis Ponge "Rain" (PDF) · C.K. Williams Packet (PDF) <p>In-Class Exercise #3: "The Hidden World of Things" Poem Prompt</p>
<p>WEEK THREE:</p> <p>Feb. 3</p>	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Rilke Selections · Brigit Pegeen Kelly, selections from SONG <p>In-Class Exercise #4: "The Poet Contemplates" Poem Prompt</p> <p><u>DUE:</u> In-Class Exercise #2</p>
February 5	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Helene Cixous, selections from THREE STEPS ON THE LADDER OF WRITING
<p>WEEK FOUR:</p> <p>Feb. 10</p>	<p>Writing Exercises</p> <p><u>DUE:</u> In-Class Exercise #3</p>
Feb. 12	Writing exercises

WEEK FIVE: Read:

Feb. 17

- **Poetry:** *Canvas*.
- Gerard Manley Hopkins "The Windhover," "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" (Link)
- Lewis Carroll "Jabberwocky,"
- Eric Baus, "The Forest Formed Gills" (Link),
- Saul Williams "DNA/Coded Language" and "Sha-Clack-Clack" (Canvas)

DUE: In-Class Exercise #4

Feb. 19

Read:

- **Poetry:** *Canvas*.
- Brian Teare "Genius Loci" (Link),
- Richard Siken, "The Torn Up Road" (Link),
- Paul Celan "Flower" and "Vinegrowers" (Links),
- Craig Santos Perez "ginen the micronesian kingfisher [i sihek]" (Link),
- Rita Dove "Parsley" (Link)

Group Presentation Dates Assigned

WEEK SIX:	Read:
Feb. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Book: <i>Diwata</i> by Barbara Jane Reyes <p>Group “Jan” PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>
Feb. 26	<p>Read:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prose: <i>Canvas</i> “A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE PROSE POEM” (Link) Poetry: <i>Canvas</i>: Zachary Schomberg “The Fire Cycle” (Link) <p>Group “February” PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>
WEEK SEVEN:	Read: <i>Canvas</i>
Mar. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Book: <i>Destruction Myth</i> by Mathias Svalina

Mar. 5	<p>Read: <i>Canvas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Book: <i>One Hundred Dreams</i> by Mathias Svalina <p>Group "March" PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>
WEEK EIGHT: Mar. 10	<p>Read: <i>Canvas</i></p> <p>Vincent Toro, selections <i>Tertulia</i></p>
Mar. 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Poetry: <i>Canvas</i>: · Julia Alvarez "Bilingual Sestina" (Link), · Sandra Lim "Pantoum"(Link), · Evie Shockley "Pantoum: landing, 1976" (Link), · Aimee Nezhukumatathil "Red Ghazal" (Link), · Yusef Komunyakaa "Ghazal, After Ferguson"(Link), <p>Group "April" PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>

WEEK NINE: Mar. 17	<p>Read: <i>Canvas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Book: Black Peculiar by Khadijah Queen <p>Group “May” PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>
Mar. 19	<p>Read: <i>Canvas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Book: selections, Andrea Rexilius <p>Group “June” PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>
WEEK TEN: Mar. 24	<p>Read: <i>Canvas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Book: selections, Andrea Rexilius <p>Group “July” PRESENTERS:</p> <p>§</p> <p>§</p>
Mar. 26	Workshop Ethics

WEEK ELEVEN: Mar. 31	SPRING RECESS
Apr. 2	SPRING RECESS
WEEK TWELVE: Apr. 7	Workshop Group One
Apr. 9	Workshop Group Two
WEEK THIRTEEN: Apr. 14	
Apr. 16	Workshop Group One
WEEK FOURTEEN: Apr. 21	Workshop Group Two
Apr. 23	Workshop Group One
WEEK FIFTEEN: Apr. 28	Workshop Group Two Discuss Final Portfolio and Contents.
Apr. 30	Workshop Group One
Last Week: May 5	Last General Workshop
May 7 Last Day	POETRY READING

Final Manuscript is DUE, by end of day, of the day OUR FINAL IS SCHEDULED