

# ENG 263: An Introduction to the Poem

\*\*\*\*\* J-Term 2025 \*\*\*\*\*

*“Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind .....Not only do words infect, egotize, narcotocize, and paralyze, but they enter into and colour the minutest cells of the brain.”*

— [Rudyard Kipling](#)

*“Rhythm creates a pattern of yearning and expectation, of recurrence and difference. It is related to the pulse, the heartbeat, the way we breathe. It takes us into ourselves; it takes us out of ourselves. It differentiates us; it unites us to the cosmos.”*

—[Edward Hirsch](#)

*“Poems can dignify small moments in our lives, turning them in to ceremonies of awareness.”*

— [David Mason](#)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will expose you to the study of poetry as it has been practiced for thousands of years — a sophisticated form of entertainment that teaches you about yourself, other people, the world in which you live, and the virtual realms of mind and spirit. You will practice reading, writing about, discussing, commenting on, and reciting poetry from a wide range of time periods and national and cultural traditions to gain both a sense of its sounds, senses, emotionality, storytelling, artfulness, and effects. This course aims to strengthen your capacity for intellectual inquiry, aesthetic pleasure, argumentation, expressivity, imagination, self-love, and empathy.

\*This class fulfills the GE requirements for [Humanities \(A3\)](#) and [Write Effectively \(B1\)](#).

## COURSE CONTENT

We will pursue three broad areas of interest this term:

**Dynamism of Reader/Text:** Where is the life of a poem? Is it hidden in the inscriptions on an ancient tablet or the black marks on a printed page or the lights illuminating text on a screen? Poetry could be said fully to exist only in the eyes, ears, and body of its individual readers and listeners. And yet, there would not be *readers* and *listeners* if not for the invitations of individual *poems*, in any medium. These invitations, and the interactions they produce, have a magical potency that we will study with the attentiveness and passion that they deserve.

**Generic Depth:** Poetry (from the Greek *poiesis* – ποιήσις – or, “making”) is a form of art that uses the qualities of language to evoke complex meanings and effects. Poetry engages body and mind to precipitate pleasure and insight. We will study the linguistic qualities that make poetry the dense artform that it is, from figurative language (the evocation of non-literal communication) to rhythmic (the arrangement of language as both a visual and oral medium according to duration and periodic stress) to rhetoric (designing language to persuade, impress, or move readers/listeners). Our engagement with poetry in this course will open you up to new insights about language, art, and the wider world.

**Historical Breadth:** An ancient form of human artmaking, poetry predates literacy and thus spans long time. The earliest poetry was recited or sung as a way of remembering oral history, genealogy,

and law. In Africa, poetry has a history dating back to prehistorical times with the creation of hunting poetry, and panegyric and elegiac court poetry were developed extensively throughout the history of the empires of the Nile, Niger, and Volta river valleys. The first evidence of written poetry is the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, recorded on stone tablets in Mesopotamia (what is today parts of Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq) more than 4000 years ago. And the tradition continues into our contemporary moment. The entanglement of the oral and written mediums in poetry has defined poetry for thousands of years. On the one hand, there is Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which began as oral poems and survived as written artifacts passed across time since at least the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. More recently, Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for having created "new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition" in 2016. In this course, we will study English-language poetry from its beginnings in Middle English through to the 20<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Non-Synchronous Participation (15%)
- 2) Discussion Forums (15%)
- 3) Journal Entries (15%)
- 4) Poetry Workshops (15%)
- 5) Reading Quizzes (20%)
- 6) Active Reading Assignment (10%)
- 7) Close Reading Assignment (10%)

## REQUIRED TEXTS

All material for this course will be available online through our Brightspace site free of charge, except for a series of poetry workshops published by Norton Press, which cost \$10 total.

## COURSE RHYTHM

We will hold asynchronous "class" on weekdays beginning January 2 and ending January 17, leaving the weekends for relaxation and recreation or makeup work. Each day you will complete a series of assignments, from reading and writing to oral recitation and reading quizzes. Assignments will generally be due before midnight each day, giving you wide berth to complete assignments along your own timeframe within the given day.

Through the discipline of routine daily work, you will be sure to thrive in this course, finding a healthy balance for your studies as well as establishing an ongoing conversation with me through commentaries on your work. If you are unable to "attend" class (meaning, complete assigned work on a given date) due to illness or a university-sanctioned event, please notify me as soon as possible via email. In the case of an extension, you can use the weekend to catch up with coursework.

## UNIT 1: THE POEM AS LIFE

Find links to all readings and assignments in separate modules by date under UNIT 1 in Brightspace.

Week 1	Reading Assignment	Learning Objective	Deliverables
	<p>(1) Read the “Overview” and all modules under the “Table of contents” on the horizontal tab <i>Brightspace&gt;Content</i></p> <p>(2) Introduce yourself to your classmates and professor in a format of your choice: written, audio, or audio/video</p> <p>(3) Read “Message in a Bottle” by Edward Hirsch</p>	<p>(1) Become familiar with course in all its particulars.</p> <p>(2) Become familiar with your classmates and professor.</p> <p>Meditate on the genre of poetry and how readers bring it to life across time, place, and circumstance.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Syllabus Reading Quiz #1</b></p> <p>(2) <b>Discussion Forum</b> Introductions: Compose a thread and respond to a minimum of one classmate. (Written or video format)</p> <p>(3) <b>Discussion Forum</b> - Compose a thread and respond to a minimum of one classmate. (Written or video format)</p>
	<p>(1) Read pages 15 – 34 of “Origins and Definitions” from Scott Brewster’s book entitled <i>Lyric</i></p> <p>(2) Read “How to Annotate a Poem” and “Analyzing Poetry” and then annotate one of the following two poems: Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro” OR Wallace Stevens’s “The Snow Man”</p>	<p>Learn about the genre of <i>lyric</i> poetry.</p> <p>Familiarize yourself with annotation and analysis and practice applying these skills to your best capacity.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Reading Quiz #2</b></p> <p>(2) <b>Journal</b></p>
	<p>(1) Read pages xxiii through xxvi from Helen Vendler, “About Poets and Poetry” as well as pages 3 through 14 from Chapter 1, “The Poem as Life.”</p> <p>(2) Norton Poetry Workshop: <i>Meter and Rhythm</i></p>	<p>Meditate on the relation of poetry to life.</p> <p>Conceptualize the relation between poetry and time/timing through artistic structures built</p>	<p>(1) <b>Discussion Forum</b> - Compose a thread and respond to a minimum of one classmate. (Written or video format)</p> <p>(2) Complete <b>Norton Poetry</b></p>

			with the natural sounds of language.	<b>Workshop: Meter and Rhythm</b>
		(1) Read pages 16-25 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 1, “The Poem as Life”  (2) Norton Poetry Workshop: <i>Poetic Form</i>	Expose yourself to a group of poems from the 16 <sup>th</sup> century through to the 20 <sup>th</sup> century.  Conceptualize poetic form. Apply what you learn.	(1) Complete <b>Norton Poetry Workshop: Poetic Form</b>  (2) <b>Journal</b>

## UNIT 2: POEMS AS PLEASURE AND PLAY

Find links to all readings and assignments in separate modules by date under UNIT 2 in Brightspace.

Week 2	Reading Assignment	Learning Objective	Deliverables
	(1) Read pages 26-62 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 2, “The Poem as Arranged Life”	Consider the differences between organic life and the arranged life expressed through poems by meditating on temporality.	(1) <b>Reading Quiz #3</b>  (2) <b>Discussion Forum:</b> audio file: favorite poem from Chapters 1 or 2; brief explanation of why this is so.
	(1) Read pages 62-70 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 2, “The Poem as Arranged Life”  (2) Read pages 71-92 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 3, “Poems as Pleasure”	Study poetic structure by analyzing arrangement of parts.  Learn how patterns, and at root, rhythm, creates pleasure for readers and listeners of poetic artworks.	(1) <b>Journal</b>  (2) <b>Discussion Forum</b> - Compose a thread and respond to a minimum of one classmate. (Written or video format)
	(1) Poetry Workshop: <i>Poetic Syntax</i> .  (2) Read pages 92-102 of Helen Vendler, Chapter 3, “Poems as Pleasure”	Study how syntax can be used to create effects in poems.  Analyze rhythm in poems.	(1) Complete <b>Norton Poetry Workshop: Poetic Syntax</b>  (2) <b>Journal</b>
	(1) Read pages 141-154 of Helen Vendler’s Chapter 5, “The Play of Language”  (2) Read pages 154-163 of Helen Vendler’s Chapter 5, “The Play of Language”  (3) Poetry Workshop: <i>Rhyme and Sound</i> .	Learn about the raw material of language out of which poets create their experiments, from roots to words to sound units to word order.  Analyze sound effects in poems.	(1) <b>Reading Quiz #4</b>  (2) <b>Journal</b>  (3) Complete <b>Norton Poetry Workshop: Rhyme and Sound</b>

	<p>(1) Poetry Workshop: <i>Reading a Poem: Kubla Khan</i></p> <p>(2) Choose a poem either from among those listed in the Collection entitled <i>Winter Poems</i> OR <i>Poems of Anxiety or Uncertainty</i></p>	<p>Analyze Coleridge's poem.</p> <p>Analyze, interpret, annotate a chosen poem. Cite ways of analyzing from at least three of Vendler's chapters; if you cite more examples, you may receive extra credit.</p>	<p>(1) Complete <b>Norton Poetry Workshop: <i>Reading a Poem: Kubla Khan</i></b></p> <p>(2) <b>Active Reading Assignment</b> (Video recitation performance optional) *Due Monday at 11am</p>
--	--	--	--

### UNIT 3: CONSTRUCTING A SELF

Find links to all readings and assignments in separate modules by date under UNIT 3 in Brightspace.

Week 3	Reading Assignment	Learning Objective	Deliverables
	<p>(1) Read pages 164-180 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 6, "Constructing a Self"</p> <p>(2) Read pages 180-193 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 6, "Constructing a Self"</p> <p>(3) Norton Poetry Workshop: <i>Reading a Poem: "Hope" is the thing with feathers</i></p>	<p>Learn about how poets provoke personality into speech in their poems.</p> <p>Study how poets construct personality into speech in their poems.</p> <p>Analyze Dickinson's poem.</p>	<p>(2) <b>Reading Quiz #5</b></p> <p>(2) <b>Journal</b> - Answer the first four questions on page 180 of Vendler's chapter.</p> <p>(3) Complete <b>Norton Poetry Workshop: <i>Reading a Poem: "Hope" is the thing with feathers</i></b></p>
	<p>(1) Read pages 271-287 from Helen Vendler, Chapter 10, "Writing about Poems"</p> <p>(2) Choose any poem we have read during the term in Hirsch, Vendler, or on Poetryfoundation.org (you may choose the poem you wrote about for Active Reading, but you do not have to choose this poem).</p>	<p>Learning and studying how to write about poems.</p> <p>Prepare to write an essay about a poem in which you persuade your readers to value the poem based on what you take to be its most remarkable and meaningful characteristics.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Reading Quiz #5</b></p> <p>(2) <b>Journal</b> - Identify a minimum of 5 characteristics that you will write about, citing where you studied them (in Hirsch or Vendler) as well as the textual evidence that you will use from the poem to demonstrate how these characteristics work.</p>
	<p>Close Reading Assignment Prep</p>	<p>Prepare to write your Close Reading essay.</p>	<p>(1) <b>Journal</b> – Draft an introduction for your essay that includes the introduction of your poet/poem as well as a thesis statement.</p>

		Close Reading Assignment	Culminating work of the term	(1) <b>Close Reading Assignment</b> Due by 2pm (Video recitation performance optional)
--	--	--------------------------	------------------------------	--

**\*Subject to Change of Notice:** Any changes to material, assignments, or deadlines on the syllabus will be announced via Brightspace.