

**San José State University**  
**Department of English and Comparative Literature**  
**ENGLISH 240: Poetry Workshop**  
**Spring 2020**

Instructor:	Prof. Alan Soldofsky
Office Location:	FO 106
Telephone:	408-924-4432
Email:	<a href="mailto:alan.soldofsky@sjsu.edu">alan.soldofsky@sjsu.edu</a>
Office Hours:	M, W 3:00 – 4:30 PM, and Th p.m. by appointment
Class Days/Time:	M 7:00 – 9:45 PM
Classroom:	FO 104
Credit Units:	4 Credits

### **Course Description**

English 240 is an MFA-level poetry workshop in which students write, revise and complete new poems. The course will include regular discussions of poetics and the theory and craft of poetry, as well as an examination of trends in contemporary poetry in the United States and internationally. Students will also learn to how finish revisions of poems to potentially include in their thesis manuscript and to potentially to submit for publication in small magazines, literary journals, and Web sites. The course may be taken four times for credit (toward the MFA degree).

### **Thematic Focus**

#### Making a Poetry Collection: Syntax and Close Reading

Members of this MFA-level poetry writing workshop and seminar will not only produce new work but will also investigate recent collections of poems by poets who are engaged with issues of climate change, the environment, immigration and/or other social justice matters. Many of these will be first books. MFA students will create a portfolio of new poems plus contribute to a Discussion Blog on topics the class explores, based on poems and criticism we read during the semester. All students will give close attention to poetic craft and techniques of composition. MFA and MA students will participate together in weekly class workshops in which new work by class members will be read and discussed with an eye toward revision. We will read a number of published poems from

### **Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives**

#### **Course Goals:**

- Complete a portfolio consisting of (depending on length) of **eight** finished (revised) original poems.

- Explore varied modes and forms of contemporary poetry—from modern takes on traditional forms to experimental postmodern poetry.
- Workshop early drafts poems on Canvas; to receive peer comments and comment on peers’ poems throughout the semester.
- Workshop peers’ poems in class on a weekly basis, using Canvas as the space for each week’s poetry workshop worksheet.
- Investigate the art of syntax in poetry and its relationship to the making of the poetic line, reading Ellen Bryant Voigt’s book *The Art of Syntax*.
- Investigate recent collections of poems by mostly younger and contemporary poets whose work engages issues of climate change, the environment, immigration and/or other social justice matters.
- Write a 2,500 – 3,000-word analysis paper in which you analyze one of the poet’s poetry collections from the Recommended Reading list, whose work you have become interested in investigating. Your analysis should include some close reading/craft analysis of at least one poem in the collection; a discussion of signature characteristics of the poet’s work; mode and style of the poems; themes, approaches to topical subject, etc. (if appropriate).
- Give a 10-minute poetry analysis/close-reading presentation in class, discussing Ellen Bryant Voigt’s craft analysis of a poem from an assigned reading from the *The Art of Syntax*.
- Give a 10-minute poetry analysis/close reading presentation, analyzing the craft a poem by one of the poets whose collection(s) you are reading for your longer poetry book analysis paper.

## English Department Students 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.

### Learning Objectives:

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

Student Learning Objectives:	Skills/Knowledge Acquired:	Activities:
SLO 1: Students will demonstrate a high-level of ability to write and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (poetry).	1. Students will learn to apply the craft of poetry writing in free verse and traditional meters and forms.	1. Write and revised at least eight original poems. 2. Apply close-reading and knowledge of poetic craft to completing revisions of original poems.

SLO 2: Students will demonstrate high-level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (poetry).	See above.	See above.
SLO 3: Students will demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recognize trends in contemporary creative writing (poetry).</li> <li>2. Identify developments within poetry, and the development of individual authors and schools/styles of writing.</li> <li>3. To effectively analyze and apply the elements of poetic craft (diction, syntax, image, form, etc.) to make revisions of one's own poems and offer constructive criticism to peers in workshopping their poems.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give an in-class close-reading/ craft presentation discussing a poem from <i>The Art of Syntax</i>.</li> <li>2. Give a 10-minute poetry analysis/close reading presentation, analyzing the craft a poem by one of the poets whose collection(s) you are reading from the recommended reading list.</li> <li>3. Write a 2,500 – 3,000-word analysis paper in which you analyze one of the poet's poetry collections from the Recommended Reading list.</li> </ol>
SLO 4: Students will demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Close read peers' poems and essays</li> <li>2. Evaluate strengths (successes) and weaknesses (problems) in peers' poems as well as published poems by notable authors.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Workshop peers' poems weekly.</li> <li>2</li> </ol>

### Required Books

Ellen Bryant Voigt, *The Art of Syntax*, paper.

### Recommended Reading

Susan Grimm. *Ordering the Storm: How to Put Together a Book of Poems*, paper.

Donald Justice. David Koehn and Alan Soldofsky eds. *Compendium: A Collection of Thoughts on Prosody*, paper.

*You are also required to choose one of the following poetry collections to read closely and to analyze one or more aspects of craft used in representative poems. You are also required to give a class presentation based on a close reading and craft analysis of an aspect of one of the poems in the collection you've chosen. And to write a craft analysis paper of work in this collection.*

Victoria Chang. *Barbie Chang*, paper.

Ilya Kaminsky. *Deaf Republic*, paper.

Donika Kelly. *Bestiary*. paper.\*

Li-Young, Lee. *Behind My Eyes*, paper.

Philip Levine. *New Selected Poems*, paper.

Larry Levis. *Selected Poems: Revised Edition*, paper.

David Tomas Martinez. *Post Traumatic Hood Disorder*, paper.

Naomi Shihab Nye. *The Tiny Journalist*, paper.

Craig Santos Perez. *Habitat Threshold*, paper.

David Perez, *Love in the Time of Robot Apocalypse*, paper.\*

Sharif, Solmaz. *Look*, paper.\*

Matthew Shenoda. *Somewhere Else*, paper.

Carmen Gimenez Smith. *Be Recorder*, paper.

Tracy K. Smith. *Wade in the Water*, paper.

Alan Soldofsky, [In the Buddha Factory](#), paper.

Analicia Sotelo. *Virgin: Poems*, paper.\*

Gary Soto. *Elements of San Joaquin: Poems (revised edition)*, paper.\*

Arthur Sze. *Sight Lines*, paper

Mai Der Vang. *Afterland*, paper.\*

Ocean Vuong. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*, paper.\*

Mark Yakich. *The Importance of Peeling Potatoes in Ukraine*, paper.

Javier Zamora. *Unaccompanied*, paper.\*

Matthew Zapruder. *Father's Day*, paper.

\* First poetry collection.

## ON-LINE RESOURCES:

Course Homepage on Canvas URL	Update to date course information, syllabus, class activities, worksheets, reading/writing assigned, instructor and student blogs, presentation notes and slides, etc.
Academy of American Poets URL	Large resource with thousands of poems, essays, biographies, weekly features, and poems for special occasions. <a href="http://www.poets.org">www.poets.org</a>
The Poetry Foundation URL	Publisher of <i>Poetry</i> magazine, an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in American culture. A large website containing thousands of poems, biographical essays, teaching ideas, blogs, and archived issues of Poetry. <a href="http://www.poetryfoundation.org/">http://www.poetryfoundation.org/</a>
Associated Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) URL	AWP provides community, opportunities, ideas, news, and advocacy for writers and teachers of writing. <a href="http://www.awpwriter.org">http://www.awpwriter.org</a>
Poets & Writers Online URL	Information, support, and guidance for creative <i>writers</i> . Find <i>writing</i> contests, grants for <i>writers</i> , news, small presses, and much more. <a href="http://pw.org">http://pw.org</a>

### Overview of Workshop Procedures

This class is conducted primarily as a writers' workshop, which requires active student participation. For the workshop, students will write (and revise), new poems (or essays) for other class members to read and discuss on the Canvas course site. The instructor will moderate the workshop discussion. All students are expected to actively participate as critics except when their own work is under discussion. In class we will also discuss poems published in works from the assigned and recommended readings lists, and on the weekly PLAYLISTS on Canvas.

The poems you post should be single-spaced, with a double space between stanzas. Out of respect for yourself and your classmates, please observe the courtesy of proofing your poems before post them. Please follow standard conventions for usage, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. If you deviate from conventional textual practice for aesthetic reasons, you must be able to defend your work to the instructor.

All poems submitted to the workshop must be your own original work (no translations), and written for this course exclusively. You may not hand in any poem you wrote for another course.

### Etiquette for Student Writing Groups and Class Workshop Discussions

- When you comment on peers' work, mention what you find to be the strengths as well as offer constructive criticism of the work.
- When your poem(s) are being discussed in the class workshop, listen politely or ask permission to ask a question to clarify what a class member is explaining. Do not interrupt to defend your poem. You will have the opportunity to clarify or explain your intentions in the poem following the critical discussion. Remember, if your poem is published online or printed in a journal, you will not be present to explain the poem.
- As an author whose writing is being discussed, you will want your peers' comments to be helpful for revising your poems. Please keep this in mind when you offer your "take" on others' poems in the classroom Workshop or post comments on Canvas.
- SJSU respects students' diversity and privacy. A poetry workshop should be a safe space. What happens in the workshop is not to be discussed publicly without other participants' explicit permission. Do not submit work or make (or write) comments that will intentionally cause offense or hurt to another student (or instructor). Remember, the criticism in a workshop is not personal. It is about the work, not the author.
- If such purposely offensive or hurtful work or comments are found, the instructor will first discuss it with you, then remove the poem or comment from the Canvas Workshop Discussion. If you persist in posting knowingly and purposely offensive material that is intended to disrupt the Workshop, you will receive 0 credit for work. Poets often address sensitive issues or challenge readers' sensibilities and mores in their poems. If you have written something that you think might possibly offend someone else in the class, check with the instructor before you post it. If you post potentially offensive or hurtful material, you are encouraged to include a "trigger warning." And check with the instructor before you post the work.
- If you do not abide by these etiquette guidelines, you will receive one warning from the instructor. If you do not follow the etiquette guidelines after you have received one warning, warning the instructor may ban you from attending the class. (You would have to complete the course requirements online via Canvas, where your comments will be strictly monitored.)

### **Seminar Presentations**

Each student will give two classroom presentations during the semester. Notes, slides, and other handouts and materials for these presentations are required to be posted in Canvas the Wednesday before the presentation date. (Fulfills SLO's 3,4.)

- Review the close-reading and analysis of a poem Ellen Bryant Voigt discusses in her book *The Art of Syntax*. (Scheduled weekly according to the scheduled reading assignment and activities in Canvas.)
- Present a short close-reading and line-level analysis (annotation) of one aspect of a poem from the poet whose collection(s) you are investigating for your longer poetry collection analysis paper. Post links to sample poems from the poet's book(s) on Canvas when it's your week to present. Some or all of your close reading can be included in your analysis paper of this collection. *Examples: How does a particular poem's imagery embody its emotion? How is rhythm working to enhance or reinforce the poem's emotion? How do*

*the line lengths or line breaks add to or intensify the poem? How is a particular poem's structure or form function to best express it's subject or theme? (You may post the text of this presentation on Canvas to receive comments.)*

- Second presentation should also include a poetry writing assignment you've created for yourself (and can share), based on a craft or formal technique of interest to you that you find is characteristic or a "signature" this poet's work. (Could include approach to punctuation, type of syntax, line break, diction, imagery, figurative language, etc.).

## **Required Writing**

### **Poetry Portfolio**

By the end of the semester, you will submit a completed portfolio of at least 8 revised and completed poems, which are of publishable quality. These are poems you may wish to submit to publications (print and digital) and/or include in your thesis collection. (Fulfills SLO's 1, 2.)

### **Poetry Workshop Discussion on Canvas**

Post your praise and constructive criticism of peer's poems in the Workshop Discussion on Canvas. You are required to post a comment at least 7 times during the semester. And reply to a comment at least 4 times during the semester. A good Discussion post should be about 250 – 300 words, including some close reading/quoting from the poem(s) on which you're commenting. (Fulfills SLO's 1, 2, 4.)

### **Art of Syntax Discussion on Canvas**

Each class member is required contribute a minimum of 7 *Art of Syntax* Discussion posts on Canvas—and reply to 4 Discussion posts. The weekly Discussion Blogs will be used to extend the classroom discussion of these poems, before and after the in-person classroom meeting. Discussion posts should be about 250 – 300 words, including close reading/quoting from the poems assigned. (Fulfills SLO's 3,4.)

### **Poetry Collection Discussion on Canvas**

Each class member is required to contribute a minimum of 5 Discussion posts on Canvas—and 3 Discussion replies—responding to postings from the poetry collection poem analysis presentations. (Fulfills SLO's 3,4.)

## **1-Unit Credit Enhancement:**

### **Craft Analysis of a Poetry Collection**

Write a 2,500 – 3,000-word craft analysis paper in which you discuss a poet's work in a poetry collection you've chosen from the Recommended Reading list. You should write on a poet whose you see as a potential influence on your own poems. Your analysis should include some close reading/craft analysis of at least one poem in the collection; discussion of the signature characteristics of the poet's work; mode and style of the poems; themes, approaches to topical subject, etc. (if appropriate).

Also attach a poem which is written to respond to a poetry assignment you've created for

yourself, based on a craft or formal technique that you find characteristic of this poet's work. And write a brief (250 – 500 word) analysis of how your poem emulates a characteristic of this poet's work. (Fulfills SLO's 3,4.)

### **Credit Hour Requirements:**

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 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

**Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course has integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement:**

### **Due Dates**

You will turn in the poems in two sets: The instructor will provide you with critical comments and a grade-in-progress for the first set.

- Poems Set 1 Due: March 16 (a minimum of 4 completed poems).
- Poems Set 2 Due: May 15: (At least 8 completed poems, including any Set 1 revisions, and a second set of 4.
- Craft analysis of a poetry collection paper—draft: April 27.
- Craft analysis of a poetry collection paper—final draft: May 11.

### **Grades**

- **60%** -- Final poetry portfolio.
- **10%** -- Participation in the workshop; in class and on Canvas.
- **10%** -- *Syntax* seminar presentations including presentation slides, notes, handouts, etc.; also comments on Canvas Discussion.
- **10%** -- Craft analysis close reading presentation, including presentation slides, notes, handouts, etc.; also comments on Canvas Discussion.
- **10%** -- Craft analysis of poetry collection paper. (One-unit enhancement.)
- **10%** -- Extra Credit presentations or writing projects (TBD).

**A NOTE ON GRADES:** In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs (stanzas).

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.

*University policy requires Graduate Students to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA to remain in good standing in their degree program.*

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, stanzas, or poetic form. Grades issued will represent a full range of student performance and will adhere to the following SJSU academic standards of assessment. Academic Integrity:

"Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's Integrity Policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the Office of Judicial

Affairs." The policy on academic integrity can be found at:

[http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/index.html](http://sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html)

## University Policies

### Academic integrity

**Avoiding Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of somebody else's words or ideas and is considered an instance of academic dishonesty that instructors must report. Repeated instances of plagiarism will result in a student's expulsion from the University. You commit plagiarism by:

1. Buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper or creative work;
2. Hiring someone to write a paper or creative work;
3. Building on someone's ideas without providing a citation;
4. Or copying from another source or using a source too closely when paraphrasing.

In other words, submit only your own work. To learn how to cite sources accurately and forthrightly, consult your handbook.

The instructor reserves the right to revise the requirements and to notify students of such revision in a timely manner, e.g., "subject to change, announced at least one class meeting in advance. Students should know that the University's [Academic Integrity Policy is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial\\_affairs/Academic\\_Integrity\\_Policy\\_S07-2.pdf](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf). Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University and the University's integrity policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work. Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. The website for [Student Conduct and Ethical Development is available at http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial\\_affairs/index.html](http://www.sa.sjsu.edu/judicial_affairs/index.html).

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person's ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified. If you

would like to include in your assignment any material you have submitted, or plan to submit for another class, please note that SJSU's Academic Policy F06-1 requires approval of instructors.

### **More University Policies**

The link below contains university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as additional information on academic integrity, accommodations, etc.

<http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>

## Course Calendar

We will conduct an on-going poetry workshop in class until the end of the semester. Poems to be workshopped should be uploaded our Canvas course Workshop Discussion We will workshop students' poems (one poem at a time) mostly in alphabetical order—except when students have been very active submitting work. Please upload poems as Word files (.doc format or .docx) to Canvas in the appropriate week's Workshop Discussion. Seminar readings presentations and poem analysis presentations will be assigned by the instructor for the first part of the semester.

<b>Week 1</b> <b>Jan. 27:</b>	Orientation; introductions. Course syllabus review. Screening Film on Larry Levis: <i>A Late Style of Fire</i>
<b>Week 2</b> <b>Feb. 3:</b>	INTRODUCTORY POETRY WORKSHOP: (Open to anyone who posts) Poetry Collection: <i>Elements of San Joaquin</i> , Gary Soto. The poetry of Fresno/Central Valley. Larry Levis, Philip Levine. (Soldofsky)
<b>Week 3</b> <b>Feb. 10:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: (Begin alpha order workshop) <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 3 – 21. Poetry Collection Presentation/Discussion: More on Levine, Levis, Soto.
<b>Week 4</b> <b>Feb. 17:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 23 – 42. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: <i>Afterland</i> , Mai Der Vang.
<b>Week 5</b> <b>Feb. 24:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 43 – 52. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>Week 6</b> <b>March 2:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 53 – 61. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>Week 7</b> <b>March 9:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 63 – 77. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>Week 8</b> <b>March 16:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 79 – 91. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>Week 9</b> <b>March 23:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 92 – 97. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>March 30 – April 3:</b>	Spring Break
<b>Week 10</b> <b>April 6</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 99 – 109. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA

<b>Week 11</b> <b>April 13:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 110 – 120 Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>Week 12</b> <b>April 20</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. <i>Art of Syntax</i> Discussion: pp. 121 – 127. 127 – 144. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA
<b>Week 13</b> <b>April 27:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. Craft/Analysis Paper Draft Workshop. Donald Justice prosody analysis exercise (handout)
<b>Week 14</b> <b>May 4:</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Continues. Craft/Analysis Paper Draft Workshop.
<b>Week 15</b> <b>May 11</b>	POETRY WORKSHOP: Concludes. Poem close reading presentation/discussion: TBA