

**USC Dornsife  
College  
Department of  
English**

**English 172g: The Art of Poetry (32606)**  
**Units: 4/Fall 2024**  
**Lecture: M/W 8:30-9:45 am in THH 102\*\*;**  
**after Oct 21<sup>st</sup>, lecture will be on Zoom**

**Professor Chris Freeman (THH 410; Office  
hours 10-11:30 am M/W and by appointment;**  
**cefreema@usc.edu)**

**Discussion sections: Monday 11 and 12: Mithcell  
Jacobs (mbjacobs@usc.edu); Monday 1 and 2:  
Lucas Iberico Lozada (ibericol@usc.edu);  
Wednesday 11 and 12: Leah Tieger  
(tieger@usc.edu)**

“Memory is each human being’s poet-in-residence.”—Stanley Kunitz

“One doesn’t *study* poets. You read them and think, ‘That’s marvelous!  
How’s it done? Could I do it?’ and that’s how you learn.”—Philip Larkin

“I want the poem to ask something and, at its best moments, I want the  
question to remain unanswered. I want it to be clear that answering the  
question is the reader’s part in an implicit author-reader pact.”—Mary  
Oliver

“You cannot play for safety and make art.”—Lucille Clifton

“There’s an intimacy in poetry that can make one feel as though there is  
just one listener out there, and the voice of the poem is speaking directly to  
that listener. That kind of intimacy that makes you feel as if you are  
inhabiting the experience of someone else.”—Natasha Trethewey

**ABOUT THE COURSE**

“The Art of Poetry” will explore the craft of poetry, the work of poetry, the  
beauty of poetry, and the complexity of poetry. We will read about the  
mechanics and the uses of poetry, and we will write our own poems—when  
we get inside the forms, we understand them differently. This course will  
use a recent anthology of poetry as the fundamental textbook; it will provide  
us the foundational material we need to explore further and deeper the work  
of individual poets, focusing especially on the American poets Mary Oliver  
(1935-2019) and Reginald Dwayne Betts (b. 1980) as well as on a new  
anthology of environmental/nature poems called *You Are Here*, edited by  
current US Poet Laureate Ada Limon.

***Students will be expected to attend lecture and section every week and to participate actively in both.*** We will be, in effect, a large poetry community. In section, you'll work on poetry closely with your TA; that work will draw from and contribute to our discussions in lecture, and lecture will be as much of a full discussion as possible. We care about your reactions and responses to the poetry we will be reading and discussing: this is the material of our course.

***\*\*NOTE: Before the end of October, lecture will shift to Zoom. More details to come on that in September. Sections will be in person all semester long.***

Your work will include reading, thinking about, and discussing poetry and its challenges and rewards; you will also write a few essays and a few poems, some of which you'll share with lecture and/or section. Active engagement and participation are the keys to your success in this class.

This General Education course will help you understand and appreciate poetry and will remind you of the pleasures inherent in the art of poetry. We will do all we can to make this class a conversation about poetry, reading, and writing. Our job is to get you more interested in what poetry is and what it does; your job, in the words of the contemporary American writer Mary Oliver, is "to pay attention, this is our endless and proper work." I will ask for your engagement; you need to read our material, to think about it, and to come to lecture prepared to discuss it, to read it out loud, and to try to interpret it. We don't "read into" poetry; we read out from it.

In your discussion sections, your instructors will elaborate on lecture material, and they will also pursue some of their own passions about poetry. Essentially, the sections are "advanced" poetry and will function as a sort of workshop, while the lecture is "introduction and intermediate" poetry; the simultaneity of these experiences should keep you challenged and inspired from day one. Poetry is beautiful; it can be disturbing and challenging; it is almost always instructive. This course will help you understand it more fully and with more depth and, maybe, passion

***To reiterate: You are expected to attend and to engage with the lectures and the discussion sections fully; this is not a drop-in class.***

**Hot Seat:** This structure will facilitate the atmosphere of a seminar, instead of a large lecture course. At every lecture beginning week three, one section will be designated at that day's HOT SEAT. Everyone in the hot seat is on the spot: you are expected to volunteer to read out loud, to make comments, and to ask questions; everyone else may also participate, but they get recognized AFTER the hot seat students have their turn/say. **Your TA will take roll of the hot seat section; if you miss TWICE, you forfeit all credit for your lecture participation.**

**A NOTE ON CONDUCT/PROFESSIONALISM:** You are expected to attend lecture and section. Respect and attend to people's responses to the poems and contribute your own. ***Lean in; engage; respond; be a good participant. Also, we will foster a nurturing, inquisitive, positive community in this space. We expect intergrity from you in your preparation and engagement; CHAT GPT or other forms of cheating will not be tolerated.***

**ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES/GRADING (all written work goes to your TA)**

Short response paper/introduce yourself (750 words; week three): 10%

Essay One (1000-1200 words; due week six or seven): 25%

Essay Two (1200-1500 words; due week twelve or thirteen): 25%

**Final exam** (due Wednesday, December 11<sup>th</sup> by 10am PT to your section leader): 25%

**Participation and Attendance:** 15% (5% lecture; 10% section: **if you miss TWO 'hot seat' days, you forfeit lecture percentage; if you miss more than two section meetings, you forfeit that percentage)**

**Poetry Event (optional):** We will recommend events during the semester, some of which will be online; you will attend and write a response of 500 words and submit it to your TA within ONE WEEK of the event; completion of this activity will exempt you from part of your final exam assignment. Must be turned in before Thanksgiving break.

**Pass-No Pass:** you must maintain C-level work or above to achieve "Pass"  
Grading: A: 93-100; A-: 92-89; B+: 88-86; B: 85-83; B-: 82-79; C+: 78-73, etc.

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**TEXTS**

\*The anthology: *Poetry: A Writers' Guide and Anthology* (second edition; Bloomsbury, 2023), Edited by Amorak Huey & W. Todd Kaneko; USC Bookstore or order for yourself; paperback or ebook version

\*Mary Oliver, *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*. (Penguin, 2017); USC Bookstore or order for yourself; order ebook or hard copy

\*On Audible.com, "Wild and Precious: Mary Oliver" by Sophia Bush

\*Reginald Dwayne Betts, *Felon* (Norton, 2016): USC Bookstore or order for yourself; ebook or hard copy

\*Ada Limon, editor, *You Are Here* (Milkweed Editions, 2024)

\*Poetry packet for section (TA will provide this for you)

A note on how we will use these books: for the first 8-10 weeks, we will generally be using the anthology text on MONDAYS and the Mary Oliver on Wednesdays; in section, you'll be using the anthology to help you work with Oliver and other poets. The anthology readings are outlined in the schedule below; the final section of the book is a collection of poems, all of which are

referenced within the text of the book. **When you are doing your prep for class, you should read the entire section and note which poems are referenced; then, you should read (at least twice) each referenced poem for our discussion.** In terms of Oliver's *Devotions*, it is a collected poems volume, arranged from most recent to oldest. We will therefore work with it in reverse. Using Post-It notes or something similar, use the table of contents to mark where each individual book begins and read for section and Wednesday lecture based on the schedule below. This is easier than it sounds, but please familiarize yourselves with both of those texts early on. The anthology by Limon will be used throughout the term. We will finish with a case study on *Felon* by Reginald Dwayne Betts.

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### **SCHEDULE (subject to revision as pacing of the course necessitates)**

Week One: (8/26 & 28): Monday: introduction to course and structure; understanding how to use the books and the format of lecture/section; a couple of warm up poems...

Wed: Maya Angelou and Amanda Gorman (inauguration poems, on Brightspace)

Week Two: (9/4): Monday: Labor Day; no class; Wed: Huey, chapter 1, sections 1-4; Oliver: read *New Yorker* essay on Mary Oliver (Brightspace); from *No Voyage* in *Devotions*, read "No Voyage," "Beyond the Snowbelt," and "Swimming Lesson"; from *River Styx*: "Going to Walden" and "Night Flight"; **discuss "introduce yourself" essay in section**

Week Three (9/9 & 11): Monday: Ada Limon, "Introduction" in *You Are Here*; Huey, chapter 2, sections 5, 6, and 7 ABC (Ambiguity; Beginnings; Clarity; Concision; Contradiction); Wednesday: Oliver, From *Twelve Moons*: "Entering the Kingdom"; "Beaver Moon—The Suicide of a Friend"; from *You Are Here*: Donika Kelly, "When the Facts of Your Gaze.." and Ruth Awad, "Reasons to Live"; **get to know you essay due to your TA this week or next**

Week Four (9/16 & 9/18): Monday: Hot Seat begins this week; Huey: 2.7 DE (Defamiliarization; Diction; Doorways; Endings; Explorations); Limon: Jose Olivares, "You Must Be Present"; Wed: HOT SEAT.; Oliver, from *Three Rivers*: "At Blackwater Pond"; from *American Primitive*: "Humpbacks" and "In Blackwater Woods"; from *Dream Work*: "Wild Geese"; "The Journey"; **listen to first part of "Wild and Precious"**

Week Five (9/23 & 25): M: HOT SEAT; Huey: 2.7 GI (Gaze; Image; Inventory); from Limon: Jericho Brown, "Aerial View"; W: HOT SEAT: Mary Oliver, from *Dream Work* continued: "1945-1985: The Anniversary" and "The Sunflowers"; **discuss ESSAY ONE prompts in section**

Week Six (9/30 & 10/2): M: HOT SEAT; Huey: 2.7 LM (Language; Lines; Lyric; Metaphor; Mood; Movement; Music); Mary Oliver, from *House of*

*Light*: “The Summer Day”; “Singapore”; “The Swan”; Wednesday: from *New & Selected Poems*: “The Sun”; “When Death Comes”; “Picking Blueberries”; next part of “Wild and Precious” and selections from Limon: Victoria Chang, “A Woman with a Bird”; Matthew Zapruder, “It Was Summer...”; Aimee Nezhukumatathil, “Heliophilia” and Alberto Rios, “Twenty Minutes in the Backyard”; next part of “Wild and Precious”

Week Seven (10/7 & 10/9): **M: TA Craft Talk: Lucas**; Wednesday: Huey: 2.7 NO (Narrative; Observation and Interpretation; Originality); Mary Oliver: from *White Pine*: “May”; “Yes! No!”; “Morning Glories”; from *West Wind*: “Am I Not Among the Early Risers?”; title poem from *Why I Wake Early*; from *Thirst*: “Doesn’t Every Poet Write a Poem about Unrequited Love” and “Thirst”; **Essay One due to your TA this week or next (1000-1200 words)**

Week Eight (10/14 & 16): Mon: **TA Craft Talk: Mitchell**; Wed: Huey: 2.7 PQ (Point of View; Precision; Punctuation; Questioning); Wed: HOT SEAT; Oliver, “Evidence”; “Three Things to Remember” from *A Thousand Mornings*; more from Limon (TBA); next part of “Wild and Precious”

Week Nine (10/21 & 23): Mon: **TA Craft Talk: Leah**

**\*\*From here until the end of the semester, lecture will be on Zoom**

Wednesday, 10/23: HOT SEAT: Huey: 2.7 R (Repetition; Rhythm); Limon, TBD; excerpts from *Blue Horses*: “Drifting”

Week Ten (10/28 & 30): M: HOT SEAT; Huey: 2.7 S (Showing and Telling; Speaker; Structure; Surprise; Syntax); W: HOT SEAT; finish “Wild and Precious”; Oliver, from *Felicity*: “The Pond” and “I Have Just Said”; wrap up Oliver; **essay prompts in section this week or next**

Week Eleven (11/4 & 11/6): M: HOT SEAT; Huey, 2.7 T (Titles); Limon: Camille T. Dungy, “Remembering a Honeymoon Hike”

NO CLASS 11/6 or 11/11 (Veterans’ Day)

Week Twelve (11/13): W: Hot Seat; Huey, 2.7 V & W (Value; Voice; Weight); wrap up *Poetry* anthology; begin Betts (*New Yorker* piece on Brightspace) and 1-17 in *Felon*; **Essay due (1200-1500 words) this week or next**

Week Thirteen (11/18 & 20): M: HOT SEAT; continue in Betts, up to p. 30; **final exam prompts given this week**; W: HOT SEAT; continue in Betts, 31-56; **poetry/live event response due to your TA this week**

Week Fourteen (11/25): TBD/Thanksgiving

Week Fifteen (12/2 & 4): M: HOT SEAT; wrap Betts and anthology; sharing poems from students both days; poetry event response due this week or before; W: HOT SEAT: continue sharing poems; wrap up; online evaluations  
**FINAL EXAM due by Wednesday, Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> by 10am PT to your TA**

### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems Academic Conduct**

#### *Academic Integrity*

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

**A NOTE ON AI: DO NOT USE IT.** This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. **Therefore, using AI-generated text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.**

*Intellectual Property Statement: Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies*  
USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

*Statement on University Academic and Support Systems*

**Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

**Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:**

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

**Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or

emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.



[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

### **COVID Safety**

**Students are expected to comply with all aspects of USC's COVID-19 policy. Failure to do so may result in removal from the class and referral to Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards.**

## **Definition of Excellence in Teaching USC Department of English**

All writing is creative, and all civic engagement requires a sophisticated understanding of discourse and interpretation. The USC Department of English is committed to the power of the story, the word, and the image. We analyze and organize complex ideas, evaluate qualitative information, anticipate how real audiences respond to language, and study behaviors of complex characters leading uncertain lives with competing values. We develop critical abilities for a successful life, but our stories tell us why life is worth living.

Excellence in teaching is an active engagement with these commitments, perspectives, and values. A student with a major in **English** should graduate with an appreciation for (1) the relations between representation and the human soul, and (2) the relations between words and ideas. Teachers will encourage this appreciation through their knowledge and conveyance of the subject, the appropriateness of instructional materials, and the quality of their students' responses. We expect our students to:

- understand the major representations in English discourse from earliest beginnings to the current moment; all literatures exist in conversation with earlier literatures;
- organize and interpret evidence;
- feel the experiences of others, both by engaging in literatures and by their own efforts to create new literatures;
- understand how periods, cultural intentions, and literary genres differ;
- grasp the skills and theories of interpretation, and the history of our own discipline;
- see how interpretive interests shift with time and place;
- attend to linguistic details of semantics, phrasing, and structure;
- assume there are reasonable alternative understandings of a text;
- adjudicate differences through reasoned arguments that honestly engage counter-arguments.

Our students will have lives in very different arenas, but all calling for skills in discourse, empathy, civil argument, and civic engagement. We cannot and should not say what those careers will be; we train students for jobs that have not yet been invented.

English Department students with an interdisciplinary major in **Narrative Studies** should expect instruction that inculcates an appreciation for all of the above, and coordinates with definitions of teaching excellence in USC's corresponding departments.

The Department of English adheres to the modalities of instruction published in the "USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching."

Approved September 18, 2018

