



CW/LT 355 – MAKING WORDS YOUR OWN
IES Abroad Dublin

DESCRIPTION:

How many times are we told to find our voice? But what does that mean? Is it something we must seek elsewhere, or is it already there, waiting within us? And if it is, how do we learn to hear it? How do we quiet the background noise and make space for it?

Focusing on the use of voice in Irish writing - from James Joyce to contemporary fiction - *Making Words Your Own* invites students to broaden their understanding of identity and Irish literature while developing their creative practice as readers and writers. Through close reading, in-depth discussion, and stimulating coursework, students will explore the inner self and its relationship to language and form.

By engaging with a diverse range of perspectives, genres, and literary styles, participants will come to see voice as a layered and powerful element of literary expression, and as something that can be consciously shaped and used in their own writing. Each week focuses on an identity-focused theme explored through different texts, encouraging students to value literature and creative writing as tools for understanding both their voice and their place in the contemporary world.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

COURSE FREQUENCY: Once per week

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: No formal prerequisites; prior experience in creative writing or literature workshops is recommended.

ADDITIONAL COST: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION: While the instructor will present key texts and critical perspectives, the course is structured around seminar-style discussion and workshop-based learning. Students will regularly share their writing in progress and engage in guided peer feedback sessions, allowing them to reflect on both their own work and that of others. This process is central to the development of voice, revision, and critical awareness. Students will receive formative feedback from both the instructor and their peers throughout the semester.

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Short Written Assignments – 50% (5 x 10% each)
- Portfolio Assignment 1 – 12.5%
- Portfolio Assignment 2 – 12.5%
- Portfolio Assignment 3 – 15%
- Class Contribution and Participation (including peer feedback and workshop engagement) – 10%

Peer Feedback and Workshop Practice

Students will participate in regular peer review sessions throughout the semester, sharing selected extracts of their work in progress and offering constructive feedback to one another. These sessions are designed to support the development of voice through dialogue, critical engagement, and revision. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on feedback received and apply it to subsequent drafts. They may be asked to circulate short extracts in advance or present them during class for discussion. Active participation in these sessions forms part of the Class Contribution and Participation grade.

Short written assignments

These assignments are designed to support the achievement of the learning outcomes outlined below. In particular, they encourage students to analyse and evaluate literary representations of the self, while developing their own creative voice, applying narrative techniques, and reflecting critically on their writing in relation to literary and cultural contexts.

Students will complete five written assignments throughout the semester, at 900 words each. These assignments are worth 10% each, for a combined total of 50%. The themes for the written assignments are as follows:

- **Short Assignment 1: *Fears and False Beliefs***

Students will write a reflective piece of creative non-fiction that explores an experience that instilled fear or a false belief about the self. In addition to conveying emotional response, students are expected to demonstrate critical reflection on how such experiences shape identity, self-perception, and narrative voice.

Students may choose the level of personal disclosure appropriate to them. Fictionalisation is always acceptable, and no student is required to write about personal experiences.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Two

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Two

- **Short Assignment 2: *Finding an Inner Voice***

Students will be tasked with writing a piece that focuses on the emergence of an inner voice. The assignment should explore a moment of self-awareness or articulation, paying particular attention to the tension between thought and expression and to the language used to give shape to interior experience.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Three

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Three

- **Short Assignment 3: *The Body Writes***

This assignment invites students to explore embodiment as a mode of expression. Students will write a short piece that foregrounds bodily sensation, physical presence, or emotional response, experimenting with rhythm, imagery, and sensory language to consider how meaning can be conveyed through the body as well as through thought.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Five

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Five

- **Short Assignment 4: *Broken Silence***

Students will write a piece that engages with silence and marginality. The assignment may focus on a voice that has been overlooked or suppressed. Students are encouraged to reflect on how power, exclusion, or social structures shape who gets to speak - and who does not.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Seven

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Seven

- **Short Assignment 5: *Saying Less***

In this final short assignment, students will experiment with restraint, omission, and implication as narrative strategies. The piece should demonstrate an ability to convey significance without explicit explanation, encouraging attentiveness to tone, structure, and what remains unsaid.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Ten

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Ten



Portfolio assignments

Students will also complete three portfolio assignments throughout the semester. The first two assignments are worth 12.5% of the overall grade and should be 1,500 words. The final portfolio assignment is worth 15% of the overall grade and should be at least 2,000 words. The topics for the portfolio assignments are as follows:

Portfolio Assignment 1: *Shush*

Students will write a personal essay that explores an early experience in which their voice was silenced, constrained, or discouraged. Each student will be assigned a specific life stage as a temporal reference point for the essay. While the writing may draw on personal experience, students are expected to move beyond narration to reflect critically on the emotional, social, or cultural structures that shaped the experience.

Students may choose the level of personal disclosure appropriate to them. Fictionalisation is always acceptable, and no student is required to write about personal experiences.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Four

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Four

Portfolio Assignment 2: *Inheritance and Influence*

This assignment invites students to reflect on the idea of inheritance in relation to voice. Students will write a reflective essay that explores how a literary or cultural tradition has shaped their own understanding of voice, and how they negotiate, revise, or resist that influence in their own writing.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Nine

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Nine

Portfolio Assignment 3: *My Voice Is Mine*

In this final portfolio assignment, students will produce a reflective piece that brings together their experiences of writing across the semester. The assignment should address the student's evolving relationship to voice, silence, and form, and may include revised material from earlier assignments alongside new work. Students are encouraged to reflect on how their understanding of self-expression has developed over time.

Assignment check-in with each student: Monday of Week Eleven

Assignment deadline: Friday of Week Twelve

Assessment Criteria

Assessment criteria are designed to reflect the learning outcomes of the course, particularly the development of voice, critical reflection, and the effective use of narrative techniques in both creative and analytical contexts.

A. Short Written Assignments (Creative / Personal Narrative)

- **Engagement with Theme:** responds thoughtfully and imaginatively to the assignment prompt
- **Development of Voice:** demonstrates a distinctive and evolving narrative voice; shows experimentation and stylistic awareness
- **Use of Language and Form:** employs language, imagery, rhythm, and structure in a purposeful and expressive way
- **Originality and Creativity:** presents ideas and experiences in an imaginative and engaging manner
- **Clarity and Coherence:** writing is well-shaped and readable, even where it experiments with form

B. Portfolio Assignments (Reflective / Analytical Writing)

- **Engagement with Theme and Context:** demonstrates a clear and thoughtful engagement with the assignment prompt and relevant literary or cultural contexts

- **Development and Reflection on Voice:** shows awareness of voice as a crafted element and reflects on its development across the semester
- **Critical Reflection:** offers insightful reflection on personal experience, literary influence, and broader social or cultural frameworks
- **Use of Language and Form:** employs structure and narrative techniques effectively to support reflection and analysis
- **Originality and Insight:** presents ideas in a thoughtful and distinctive way
- **Clarity and Coherence:** writing is well-structured, polished, and clearly articulated

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- **Analyse** how Irish authors represent different aspects of the self through close reading of fiction and non-fiction
- **Evaluate** the relationship between voice, identity, and broader social and cultural contexts
- **Develop** their own creative voice through sustained writing practice and stylistic experimentation
- **Apply** narrative techniques (e.g. voice, structure, perspective) with conscious awareness and control
- **Reflect critically** on their own writing in relation to literary influences and thematic concerns

Performance Descriptors

The following descriptors provide a general guide to how work will be evaluated:

- **Excellent (A range):** Demonstrates a highly developed and distinctive voice; engages deeply and insightfully with the assignment theme; shows strong originality, control of language and form, and sophisticated critical reflection. Writing is polished and compelling throughout.
- **Good (B range):** Demonstrates a clear and consistent voice; engages well with the assignment theme; shows evidence of originality and thoughtful reflection, with effective use of language and structure. Writing is generally clear and well developed.
- **Satisfactory (C range):** Demonstrates some awareness of voice and theme; engagement may be uneven or more descriptive than analytical; shows developing control of language and form. Writing is understandable but may lack depth or consistency.
- **Needs Improvement (D range and below):** Limited engagement with the assignment theme; voice is underdeveloped or unclear; minimal critical reflection; weaknesses in structure, clarity, or use of language.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Class attendance is mandatory. The IES Abroad Dublin Centre Attendance Policy will apply in all instances.

Week	Content	Readings & Assignments
Week 1	The Voice Beneath the Layers This class introduces voice as an inherent aspect of the self and considers the ways in which it can be constrained or silenced from an early age. Through close reading of literary texts that foreground formative influences such as family, religion, and social expectation, students will analyse how external structures shape individual development and self-expression.	• James Joyce, 'Eveline', <i>Dubliners</i>, 29-34 (6 pages). • Edna O'Brien, <i>The Country Girls: Trilogy and Epilogue</i>, 101-111 (10 pages). • Frank McCourt, <i>Angela's Ashes and Tis</i>, 11-46 (34 pages).

Week 2	Articulating the Self This session focuses on moments of awakening in which individuals become aware of, and begin to articulate, an inner voice that has been obscured or suppressed. Through selected readings, students will explore how Irish writers use storytelling to examine identity, self-awareness, and belonging.	- James Joyce, <i>A portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>, 258-268 (11 pages). - Kate O'Brien, <i>The Land of Spices</i>, 194- 216 (22 pages). - Anne Enright, <i>The Gathering</i>, 1-12 (12 pages). Short assignment #1 due
Week 3	Inner Voices, Outer Worlds This class examines how characters articulate inner experience in relation to both internal consciousness and the external world. Students will analyze narrative techniques such as free indirect discourse, interior monologue, and stream of consciousness, and explore how internal thought interacts with social reality.	- James Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i>, 45-57 (12 pages). - Mary Lavin, 'In the Middle of Fields', <i>In the Middle of Fields</i>, 9-27 (18 pages). - Dorothy Nelson, <i>In Night's City</i>, 59-71 (12 pages). Short assignment #2 due
Week 4	Gendered Expectations of Writing This session examines how voice is shaped by gender roles and how women and men have traditionally been expected to write in terms of style, genre, and subject matter. Students will critically reflect on how such gendered frameworks have influenced literary production and how Irish writers have challenged, subverted, or reworked these expectations.	- George Egerton, 'A Keynote to Keynotes', 58-60 (3 pages). - Anne Enright, 'Call Yourself George': Gender Representation in the Irish Literary Landscape', 73-87 (14 pages). - Sally Rooney, 'Misreading <i>Ulysses</i>', <i>The Paris Review</i>, 7 December 2022. Portfolio assignment #1 due
Week 5	Embodied Writing Building on previous discussions, this class focuses on embodied modes of writing, with particular attention to how women writers have used the body as a site of expression in opposition to patriarchal narratives. Through engagement with feminist essays and literary texts, discussion will centre on how visceral self-expression can be represented, interpreted, and accommodated within creative writing.	- Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', <i>Signs</i>, Vol.1, No. 4, 1976, 875-93 (18 pages). - Excerpts from 'Molly Bloom's Soliloquy', James Joyce, <i>Ulysses</i> (12 pages). - Eimear McBride, <i>A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing</i>, 11-18 (17 pages).

		Short assignment #3 due
Week 6	The Personal is Political This class explores the resurgence of the personal essay in Ireland and examines how individual narratives are situated within broader social and political contexts. Students will reflect on writing as a space for reclaiming voice – particularly women’s voices – and consider the tensions between personal testimony as empowerment and as marketable subject matter.	• Emilie Pine, <i>Notes to Self</i>, 89-105 (16 pages). • Sinéad Gleeson, <i>Constellations: Reflections from Life</i>, 1-18 (18 pages). • Emma Dabiri, <i>Don’t Touch My Hair</i>, 43-64 (21 pages).
Week 7	Interrupted Silences This class examines how dominant literary traditions have historically reflected structures of power, while also considering literature as a space of inclusion and resistance. Students will analyse texts that move marginal or background figures into central narrative positions, exploring how literature enables previously silenced perspectives to articulate their truths.	• Mary Morrissy, <i>The Rising of Bella</i>, 40-58 (18 pages). • Nuala O’Connor, <i>Nora: A Love Story of Nora Barnacle and James Joyce</i>, 1-11 (11 pages). • Doireann Ní Ghríofa, <i>A Ghost in the Throat</i>, 3-25 (22 pages). Short assignment #4 due
Week 8	On the Shoulders of Giants Is it possible to “make it new”? This class examines how Irish women writers have engaged with the legacy of canonical authors, particularly James Joyce, and how they have transformed that inheritance into something distinctively their own. Moving beyond competitive models of influence, the session explores literary inheritance as dialogue, revision, and creative conversation.	• Emilie Pine, <i>Ruth & Pen</i>, 14-28 (14 pages). • Sally Rooney, <i>Intermezzo</i>, 274-287 (20 pages). • Donal Ryan, ‘Eveline’ in <i>Dubliners 100</i>, 39-46 (8 pages).
Week 9	Freeing the Voice This class introduces students to a wide range of expressive possibilities in contemporary writing. Through engagement with diverse literary styles, students will explore experimental practices alongside forms influenced by interdisciplinary and cross-artistic approaches.	• Anna Burns, <i>Milkman</i>, 1-10 (10 pages). • Sara Baume, <i>A Line Made by Walking</i>, 1-18 (18 pages). • Mike McCormack, <i>Solar Bones</i>, 7-13 (8 pages). Portfolio assignment #2 due
Week 10	Writing the Contemporary This session explores how Irish writers engage – sometimes subtly, sometimes explicitly – with contemporary social, cultural, and political	• June Caldwell, ‘Somat’, <i>Room Little Darker</i>, 81-92 (11 pages).

	realities. Through discussion of selected texts, students will examine how literature offers critical perspectives on the present through narrative form and voice.	• Fiona Scarlett, <i>Boys Don't Cry</i>, 29-41 (12 pages). • Lisa McNerney, <i>Glorious Heresies</i>, 1-12 (12 pages). Short assignment #5 due
Week 11	Silences That Speak While the course focuses on the search for voice, this class examines how meaning can also be communicated through omission, restraint, and implication. Students will analyse how writers convey emotional and psychological depth without explicit articulation, learning to trust the reader and avoid over-explanation in their own writing.	• James Joyce, 'Clay', <i>Dubliners</i>, 95-102 (8 pages). • D'hoker, Elke. 'The Irish Short Story and the Aesthetics of Silences', 87-108 (21 pages). • Claire Keegan, <i>Small Things Like These</i>, 1-15 (15 pages).
Week 12	My Voice, My Choice The concluding session centres on reflection and discussion of how voice and selfhood are articulated through writing. Students will consider how sustained writing practice over the course of the semester has shaped their understanding of voice and contributed to their development as writers.	• Naoise Dolan, <i>Exciting Times</i>, 1-10 (10 pages). • Catriona Lally, <i>Eggshells</i>, 225-243 (18 pages). • Paul Murray, <i>The Bee Sting</i>, 1-17 (17 pages). Portfolio assignment #3 due

Required Readings

- Baume, Sara. *A Line Made by Walking*. London: Penguin Books, 2017.
- Burns, Anna. *Milkman*. London: Faber & Faber, 2018.
- Caldwell, June. *Room Little Darker*. London: Head of Zeus, 2018.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, Vol.1, No. 4, 1976.
- Costello, Mary. *The River Capture*. Edinburgh: Canon Gate, 2019.
- D'hoker, Elke. 'The Irish Short Story and the Aesthetics of Silences', in M. Teresa Caneda-Cabrera, José Carregal-Romero, eds., *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Dolan, Naoise. *Exciting Times*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021
- Egerton, George. 'A Keynote to Keynotes', in John Gawsworthy, ed., *Ten Contemporaries: Notes Towards their Definitive Bibliography*. London: Ernest Benn, 1932.
- Anne Enright, 'Call Yourself George': Gender Representation in the Irish Literary Landscape', in Anne Enright, *No Authority Writings from the Laureateship*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2019.
- Enright, Anne, *The Gathering*. London: Vintage Books, 2008.
- Gleeson, Sinéad. *Constellations: Reflections from Life*. London: Picador, 2019.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.
- Joyce, James. *Dubliners*. 1914. London: Penguin Classics, 2000.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. New York: Vintage Books, 1986.
- Keegan, Claire. *Small Things Like These*. London: Faber & Faber, 2022.
- Lally, Catriona. *Eggshells*. London: HarperCollins, 2018.
- Lavin, Mary. *In the Middle of the Fields*. New York: Macmillan: 1969.
- McBride, Eimear. *A Girl Is a Half-Formed Thing*. London: Faber & Faber, 2014.
- McNerney, Lisa. *Glorious Heresies*. London: John Murray, 2015.
- McCormack, Mike. *Solar Bones*. Dublin: Tramp Press, 2016.

- McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes and Tis*. New York: Scribner, 2013.
- Morrissey, Mary. *The Rising of Bella Casey*. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2013.
- Murray, Paul, *The Bee Sting*. London: Penguin Books, 2024.
- Ní Ghríofa, Doireann. *A Ghost in the Throat*. Dublin: Tramp Press, 2020.
- Nelson, Dorothy, *In Night's City*. Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1982.
- O'Brien, Edna. *The Country Girls: Trilogy and Epilogue*, New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986.
- O'Brien, Kate. *The Land of Spices*. London: Virago, 1988.
- O'Connor, Nuala. *Nora A Love Story of Nora Barnacle and James Joyce*. Dublin: New Island Books, 2022.
- Pine, Emilie. *Notes to Self*. UK: Penguin Books, 2019.
- Pine, Emily. *Ruth & Pen*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2022.
- Scarlett, Fiona. *Boys Don't Cry*, London: Faber & Faber, 2022.
- Ryan, Donal 'Eveline' in Thomas Morris, ed., *Dubliners 100*. Dublin: Tramp Press, 2014.
- Rooney, Sally. *Intermezzo*. London: Faber & Faber, 2025.

Instructor Biography

Dr Annalisa Mastronardi is a journalist with Storyful. She holds a PhD in Irish literature from Dublin City University. Her monograph, *James Joyce's Legacies in Contemporary Irish Women's Writing* (Routledge), was published in 2025. Her work has appeared in *The Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *Writing.ie*, and *Headstuff*. In addition to being a published writer of short stories and creative non-fiction, Annalisa has extensive experience in teaching literature and language. She worked as an English literature tutor at Dublin City University for three years and as an Italian language teacher at the Italian Language and Culture Academy for two years.