

Crafting Creative Nonfiction

HON 400-1

MWF 4:15-6:45 p.m.

Classroom: WRI C323

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Hours: W 2:00-4:00 pm or by appointment

“Writers write to influence their readers, their preachers, their auditors, but always, at bottom, to be more themselves.”- H. L. Menken

What?

This seminar will better acquaint you with the world of creative nonfiction and help you produce a finished piece that is suitable for publication, framing, or just being complete.

First we'll cover what creative nonfiction is (and isn't) and run through some of its genres. Then we'll read and analyze some examples of creative nonfiction and work on a few exercises as you develop and hone your own writing style. You will develop three ideas for pieces; two of these you'll save for the future, but one of them will become your Big Project, the major piece that you'll write, workshop, and revise. Along the way, we'll be reading about writing and critiquing a few relevant examples of good creative nonfiction.

Do?

1. Attend class and actively listen

Class attendance is **mandatory**. Students are expected to **arrive** in class, on time and **coherent**, ready to **listen** and **talk** about writing. You won't eat, read (even course materials), text message, or talk on your cell phones during the class. Be respectful to others and to yourself.

2. Do the readings

Readings are **due at the start** of the class for which they are assigned. If you're not **intellectually curious** enough to do the readings, save everyone's time by dropping the class right now. Sure, you've got a lot to do and little time to do it in, but so does everyone.

3. Participate in discussion

This is why reading is important: we will each gain valuable insights from each other, and if you don't know the material, you can't contribute. This is unacceptable selfishness.

4. Complete the small assignments

These are short exercises due at the beginning of class that will help you translate some of our ideas into practical writing.

5. Guide a discussion

The best way to learn is to teach, so part of your grade will depend on a **discussion** you will lead—you'll orchestrate a focused critique of a single piece of creative non-fiction.

6. Your Big Project

This is it: the most lasting physical and psychological reminder you'll have of this course. Long after the summer of 2008 has faded into dust, you'll have this piece to remember our class and your 2008 self. It will be somewhere between ten and thirty pages, and will lie within any genre of creative nonfiction.

The course components are weighted as follows:

Participation:	100
Discussion	100
Small assignments:	100
Big project:	<u>200</u>
Total:	500

Cheating of any kind is very serious, and will be punished by an **automatic failing grade** for the course and, if appropriate, **referred to the college** for further action.

Read?

1. Sondra Perl and Mimi Schwartz: *Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction*

Small?

There are no exams in the course. Instead, to test your comprehension and focus your energies, we will have a series of small assignments: two per week, for a total of ten. Each is worth ten points, and is due at the start of the next class; we will spend time reading and discussing each other's assignments.

Every assignment will begin with your being handed a prompt, which will include instructions on how to proceed and details on the suggested length of your written work.

Discuss?

In the interest of promoting a cooperative learning experience (and sharing the load of leading discussion), your professor is assigning everyone a simple task: lead the discussion on an assigned reading. To do this, you should do the reading, taking copious notes, and think of points to stimulate interest. You may also want to learn more about the author and his/her other work, or related work by other authors. You will be graded on how well you have prepared and on how well the class responds to your prompts. You will turn in your notes for evaluation as part of your grade.

Big?

You'll develop this from an idea to the finished product in a month. It can be any kind of creative nonfiction, and the length is deliberately flexible. It should be well-researched and the result of honest, reflective writing.

This project is more personal than a research paper, though it need not have any elements of autobiography; even if you are not “in” your piece as a character or narrator, it will be written in your personal *style*.

The Big Project is due in stages: your initial idea is assignment 2.1; a very rough 1st draft, assignment 2.2; a more detailed draft, assignment 4.2; this draft will be read aloud and workshopped, and the final draft is due on the last day of class

How to format your Big Project

1. It must be **10 to 30** pages long,
2. in a readable **12 point** font,
3. **double**-spaced,
4. with standard margins,
5. a **title page** with a title, your name, and the date,
6. and a list of works cited, with footnotes if applicable.

If you are doing a multi-media project, obviously some of these criteria will apply differently. Talk to your instructor for clarification.

Outline?

Discussion assignment readings are italicized

Week 1 What is creative nonfiction?

June 9 What will class be like? Who is the professor? Who are you? How will you be graded? Let’s assign discussions! Small assignments and the Big Project.

Exercise 1.1: Definitions plus

June 11 History, memoir, autobiography, and biography

Reading: Ch 1

June 13 Reflective and lyric essays; travel writing and topical writing

Reading: Stafford (353-64)

Exercise 1.2: Genre shopping

Week 2 Starting from scratch

June 16 Ideas

Reading: Ch 2, *Doyle (227-234), Callahan (219-227)*

Exercise 2.1: Three ideas

June 18 Getting started

Reading: Hampl (327-338), 20 ways (80-4)

June 20 Your first draft

Reading: Ch3, *Wieneke (255-62) Walker (210-7)*

Exercise 2.2: A sketchy first draft

Week 3 Telling a story

June 23 Voice
Reading: Ch 5 *Liu (234-7)*, *Tayebi (250-5)*

June 25 Place
Reading: Ch 4, *Legler (289-98)*, *Whitehead (298-302)*
Exercise 3.1: Place in 4 parts (S&P, 16)

June 27 Narrative structure
Reading: Harvey (338-40). *Earley (191-200)*, *Sedaris (208-10)*
Exercise 3.2: Playing with your draft's narrative structure

Week 4 Descriptive Details

Jun 30 Thick description
Reading: Ch 6, *Toth (280-3)*, *Simic (271-4)*
Exercise 4.1: Walking and taking notes

July 2 Details and research
Reading: Ch 8, Ch 9, *Fadiman (304-9)*, *Orlean (314-325)*
Exercise 4.2: Add strengthening details to your draft

July 4 NO CLASS! Celebrate America's independence!

Week 5 Revising and Finishing

July 7 Complete reading of penultimate drafts
Reading: Ch 7
Exercise 5.1: Out of time

July 9 Revising
Reading: Miller (340-53)
Exercise 5.2: The kindest cut

July 11 Turning in and reading of final drafts; what to do tomorrow
Reading: Ch 10

Remember your discussion.

Reading: _____ Date: _____

“Good writing is a kind of skating which carries off the performer where he would not go.”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

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