**Writing 240: Intro to Creative Nonfiction**

**CRN 21393, Fall 2016**

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Class Hours: **Mon/Weds 2:30 – 3:50 p.m.** Classroom: **MKH/118**

Office Hours: **Mon/Weds** **1:00 – 2:00 p.m.** Office: **NSH/201**

**Required Text: No required textbook; all readings posted on Moodle**

**WR240 Introduction to Creative Nonfiction** explores using creative writing techniques (plot, characterization, setting, metaphor, point of view, voice, etc.) in nonfiction essay writing, and it emphasizes the elements of the creative process: personal reflective writing, creative drafting strategies, writing workshops, and revision. \*Note: May be repeated for up to six credits.

**Recommended Prerequisite**: WR 121 English Composition

**Outcomes**:Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to: 1.) Demonstrate the skills of creative nonfiction writing (dialogue, setting, character, theme, message, reflection, research, etc.) through learning and practicing the craft of creative nonfiction writing in a workshop environment; 2.) write and speak effectively about the craft of creative nonfiction writing; 3.) interpret creative nonfiction through critical evaluation. 4.) write creative nonfiction that addresses elements of the human condition; and 5.) participate in activities that encourage personal awareness, growth, and/or creativity through creative nonfiction writing.

**What is considered creative nonfiction?** Writer and teacher David Foster Wallace lists the following forms as types of creative nonfiction: “… personal essays and memoirs, profiles, nature and travel writing, narrative essays, observational or descriptive essays, general-interest technical writing, argumentative or idea-based essays, general-interest criticism, literary journalism, and so on.”

Additionally, Wallace says, “As nonfiction, the works are connected to actual states of affairs in the world, are ‘true’ to some reliable extent. If, for example, a certain event is alleged to have occurred, it must really have occurred… At the same time, the adjective ‘creative’ signifies that some goal(s) other than sheer truthfulness motivates the writer and informs her work.”

The ‘creative’ aspect of creative nonfiction does not mean that you may embellish, exaggerate, or bend what is true; the creative aspect lies in *how* and *why* you present the truth. Ask yourself what your purpose is—to inform, persuade, entertain, amuse, ponder, or some combination of these. Wallace says, “Creative nonfiction is not expressive writing but rather communicative writing. And an axiom of communicative writing is that the reader does not automatically care about you (the writer), nor does she find you fascinating as a person, nor does she feel a deep natural interest in the same things that interest you. The reader, in fact, will feel about you, your subject, and your essay only what your written words themselves induce her to feel.” It is your job, then, as a writer of creative nonfiction, to make the work interesting to your audience; simply sharing or expressing yourself will not suffice. Writer and LBCC Instructor Alison Ruch says, “This class will ask that you plumb the depths of your memories and your thoughts for subjects and that you find ways of translating those subjects into written work that speaks to others, regardless of shared—or even remotely similar—life experience.”

**WR240 ASSIGNMENTS**

**SWA#1** (**7.5%**) – Describe a **person** you know well—a family member, friend, significant other, coworker, etc. Consider the following questions to help you get started: What is your relationship to them? What is unique about them, and how will you convey this to your audience (you may do some scene work if necessary)? How much physicality versus emotionality should you include? How should you balance showing versus telling?

**SWA#2** (**7.5%**) – Write about a **physical place** you know well, anything from the inside of a car or a room to an entire town, city, state, or country. Consider the following questions to help you get started: How/why is this place significant to you? What is unique about it, and what will your readers find interesting? What about it might be familiar to readers? What do your readers need to know about this place and what do they need to see? Try to place your readers there with details, but remember that details are not just physical descriptions.

**SWA#3** (**7.5%**) – Write a **short scene with dialogue** (a conversation), either one that you participated in yourself or one that you observed. There should be at least two people talking. Think about the following questions: Why is it important that this scene be written as a scene rather than being summarized? Should every part of the conversation be included in the scene? If not, what will you summarize and why? How does the dialogue help develop the characters?

**SWA#4** (**7.5%**) – Write an **emotional (or emotionally-charged) moment** in your life or one you witnessed in someone else’s life. Don’t just focus on the ‘show don’t tell’ edict; try instead to both show and tell. This moment may be happy or harsh, painful or pleasant, or something that’s more complicated than a single adjective can describe. Sometimes the first thing that comes to mind when you think of this assignment is significant—there’s a reason why you thought of this first. And don’t be afraid to be personal.

**Essays 1** & **2** (**20%** & **25%**) – The only criteria for your two major essays is that they be creative nonfiction and that they fit the assigned page count. You may choose to expand upon one of your SWA writing exercises and turn it into an essay, or you may choose to do something entirely different. I just ask that you keep it creative, keep it nonfiction, and keep it within the word counts. Also, please double-space, carefully proofread, and include a title. Both essays will be workshopped/peer reviewed.

Word count: between 1,200 and 2,500 words (between roughly 4 and 9 double-spaced pages])

**Personal Journals** (**15%**) – Throughout the term, you will keep a written journal (an actual journal or an electronic one) in which you will write with some regularity. You may use your journal for whatever you’d like, from reflecting on your day or your feelings, to writing childhood memories, to sketching out scenes, to listing ideas for essays, to trying out different approaches to introductions to your essay ideas. It’s not a requirement, but I strongly suggest you try to write in it at least once per day, even if it’s only a few sentences or ideas.

**Reflective Essay** (**5%**) – At the end of the term, you will write a brief summary of your work this term. Where were you as a writer when the term started versus where you are at the end? In what areas were you successful this term? In what areas did you struggle? What areas will you continue to work on? What do you like about your writing this term? \*Keep in mind that this is not a reflection of the course or a critique of my teaching.

The remaining **5%** will be based on **class participation** and **peer review**.

**COURSE POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS**

**Attendance & Lateness:**

**Attendance** – Consistent attendance is crucial to your success in this course. Class participation is an integral part of the structure of this class; therefore, your attendance and involvement are necessary.

**Lateness** – Lateness is distracting and inconsiderate. Please make every effort to arrive on time.

**Participation & Preparation:** Class participation is an important part of this course. I expect students to have completed their readings and any necessary assignments prior to class, and to be prepared to participate in classroom discussions about the work. I also expect students to be prepared for peer review workshops (see calendar). NOTE: Though this is a ‘creative’ class, this does not mean that

**Class participation counts for 5% of the final grade.**

**Late Assignments:** Assignments are due at the start of class on the date specified in the class calendar. Students who foresee a problem turning in an assignment on time should contact me immediately. With the exception of excused absences, any work not turned in by the following class will not be accepted.

**Revision:** Revision is a necessary aspect of writing. No writers ever write perfect first drafts. I will allow an opportunity to resubmit one assignment demonstrating significant revisions. Please note, however, that the assignment can only be revised and resubmitted if the original grade was a C or lower.

**Plagiarism:** **All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented.**

**Class Cancellation:** If for any reason I need to cancel class, I will notify you via email and post a cancellation notice outside the classroom.

**Disability Accommodations:** If you need support or assistance because of a disability, please see me to make any necessary accommodations. You may also contact the **Center for Accessibility Resources (CFAR)** at **(541) 917-4789**.

**LBCC Learning/Writing Center**: From initial ideas to final drafts, the LBCC Writing Center can help you take your writing to the next level. Please feel free to drop in during regular hours to work one-on-one with one of the supportive Writing Assistants. In addition to your draft, please bring your assignment and any questions you have. You may also submit your writing online at lbcc.writingcenteronline.net where you will receive a personalized response within 1-2 business days. For more information, visit us online at <http://www.linbenton.edu/go/learning-center/writing-help>.

**Zero Tolerance Policy:** Racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination and bias are hurtful and unacceptable. There is no tolerance for words, speech, behavior, actions, or clothing/possessions that insult, diminish, demean, or belittle any individual or group of persons based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference, ability, economic class, national origin, language, or age. Academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of discourse DO NOT protect racism or other acts of harassment and hate. Violations of this Zero Tolerance Policy may result in removal from the classroom, and actions governed by the student code of conduct will be taken.

**FALL 2016 COURSE CALENDAR**

Wk 1

**9/26 (M)** – Introductions/Course Requirements/Expectations/Assignments Format

Assignments: Log on to Moodle and review the course materials

Watch “What is Creative About Creative Nonfiction?” (short video)

Read Borich’s “What is Creative Nonfiction? An Introduction”

**9/28 (W) –** Discussion: What is creative nonfiction? / Writing about people

Assignments: Read Moore’s “How to Bring Your Voice to Life…”

Read Sedaris’s “Remembering My Childhood…”

Read Goffman’s Prologue to *On the Run*

Purchase, find, or set up your Personal Journal and begin writing in it

(for more information, see ‘Assignments’ above)

➤Begin **SWA#1** (**due 10/5**)

Wk 2

**10/3 (M) –** Discussion: Writing about people

Assignments: ➤Complete **SWA#1** (**due 10/5**)

Read Steiner’s “Skeleton Leaves”

Read Dubus’ “Digging”

**10/5 (W) – SWA#1 DUE** / Writing about people

Discussion: Narrative approaches/Subject matter/Writing about place

Assignments: Read Korchnak’s “A Demolition”

Read Dillard’s “The Chase”

Read Allison’s “Place”

Watch Susan Orlean’s “How to Find Subjects for Creative

Nonfiction” video (linked on Moodle)

Wk 3

**10/10 (M)** – Discussion: Writing about place

Assignments: Read Stielstra’s “Stop Reading and Listen”

➤Begin **SWA#2** (**due 10/17**)

**10/12 (W) –** Discussion: Writing about place

Assignments: ➤Complete **SWA#2** (**due 10/17**)

Read Elliott’s “Where I Slept”

Wk 4

**10/17 (M) – SWA#2 DUE /** Writing dialogue

Assignments: Read handouts on dialogue

Read Walker’s “Dragon Slayers”

**10/19 (W) –** Discussion: Writing dialogue

Assignments: Read Key’s “The Wishbone”

➤Begin **SWA#3 (due 10/26)**

Wk 5

**10/24 (M) –** Discussion: Writing dialogue

Assignments: ➤Continue **SWA#3 (due 10/26)**

**10/26 (W) – SWA#3 DUE**

Writing emotional/significant moments

Assignments: Read Hughes’ “Salvation”

Read Fennelly’s “I Survived the Blizzard of ‘79”

➤Begin **SWA#4 (due 11/2)**

Wk 6

**10/31 (M)** – Writing emotional/significant moments

Assignments: ➤Complete **SWA#4 (due 11/2)**

**11/2 (W) – SWA#4 DUE**

Assignments: Read “Lies, Truth and Memory: The Memoir Debacle”

Wk 7

**11/7 (M) –** Discussion: Writing the personal essay

Assignments: ➤Begin **Essay#1 (due for peer review 11/14)**

**11/9 (W) –** Personal essay

Assignments: ➤Continue **Essay#1 (due for peer review 11/14)**

Wk 8

**11/14 (M) – Essay #1 peer review (\*bring 2 copies of your essay draft to class)**

Assignments: ➤Revise **Essay#1 (final due 11/16)**

Read Harrison’s “The Forest of Memory”

**11/16 (W) – Essay #1 final due**

Assignments: ➤Begin **Essay#2 (due for peer review 11/22)**

Read “The Art of the Sentence”

Wk 9

**11/21 (M) –** Personal essay

Assignments: ➤Continue **Essay#2 (due for peer review 11/22)**

**11/22 (W) – Essay #2 peer review (\*bring 2 copies of your essay draft to class)**

Assignments: ➤Revise **Essay#2 (final due 11/30)**

Wk 10

**11/28 (M) –** Personal essay

Assignments:➤Revise **Essay#2 (final due 11/30)**

➤Prepare **Reflective essay (due 11/30)**

**11/30 (W) – Final class meeting/All final work due**:

Journals, final copies of Essay 2, any rewrites of previous assignments

**\*NOTE**: If you’d like to receive written feedback on your final work, please let me know, and we’ll make the necessary arrangements.