

Homework and Daily Assignments for CRW 3211, Professor Roney

PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL HOMEWORK DAILY ASSIGNMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. THIS IS NOT A CONTRACT, BUT A SCHEMATIC IDEA OF WHERE WE'LL BE GOING.

For W 8/23

* Read Chapters 1 and 2, and the essay by Brett Lott that starts on p. 279. Please write down one comment or question about the genre of creative nonfiction even after you've read or in response to this reading. Be prepared to give this to me as a "ticket" to get into class.

* Do #2 of the Writing Prompts at the end of Chapter 2 (henceforth I will use the simpler form "2.2"). Please do your best not to use only the university newspaper, but get the Orlando or another town's newspaper. You may use online versions, but note that this makes it sometimes harder to scan for articles that interest you.

For F 8/25

* Read Chapters 3 and 5 and Gerard's essay starting on p. 151. How does Gerard's memoir about a hurricane differ from the news approach? What's the effect of the personal perspective on these issues? What is the obvious subject, and what is the "deeper" subject? What details and features of voice strike you most?

* Write your own memory of one of the hurricanes that has struck in the past couple of years. Write only a page, so make sure that you focus on some small detail(s). Without referring to his essay directly, consider your page a kind of answer or dialogue with Gerard's observations. How was your experience similar or different? How are you different from the Gerard you can see in the piece?

For M 8/28

* Our first major writing assignment will focus on a person, place, or event. Come up with a list of at least fifteen (total, not each) that you feel strongly about. Be imaginative here—you might list a place that you know well, but also a city where you've never been.

* Read Chapters 8 and 9. See the Writing Prompts at the end of each chapter, and choose one of those to do. **Please label which one it is** (8.1, 8.2, 9.1, or 9.2).

For W 8/30

* By now, you have used several methods for generating ideas—the handout from the first day, reading the newspaper with an eye toward backstage, generating lists of people, places, and events, and working a little more with a writing exercise. Now I'd like you to identify two ideas that you think you could seriously use for this the Literary Journalism/Personal Essay assignment. For each, write down the following: 1) why you are interested in it; 2) what particular interesting perspective you might bring to it; 3) what steps you would have to take to find out more about your subject.

* Read Shields. What kinds of information and sources does he use? Where or how was such knowledge gained? What kind of background understanding does each presume for its readers? Were there any references that you didn't understand? Where did each writer explain something that a reader might not understand? What do we learn about Shields

himself? What kind of person does he seem to be? Be ready to refer to specific examples in class discussion.

For F 9/1

- * Make sure to bring your calendar and familiarize yourself with your workload, as we will be signing up for workshops next class.
- * In next class, you will be practicing your interview skills on me. Please write down and bring in one question, either personal or professional, about me. Just one.
- * Read Chapter 4 and Gutkind. Gutkind has a first-person presence in this essay—note all the places where he uses the word “I.” Why might he have chosen to include himself this way when the essay is so obviously focused on someone else? What is the effect of his presence? Is the transition between himself and his subject ever awkward? What relationship does he seem to have with the veterinarian? Try to imagine how this interview process went—what challenges do you guess Gutkind faced? How do you think the vet felt when she read this? What relationship does Gutkind establish with you, the reader? How do you feel about him? Note specific details that create this “relationship.” This is a tough essay about frequently unpleasant things. Why would someone choose to write about such a thing without offering any hope or suggestion for change?

For 9/6

- * Complete your Research/Interview Report.
- * Read Jakiela (p. 105) and Panning (handout). How much time is covered in each piece? How does “real-time” scene balance with description, summary (or exposition), generalization, and other elements?
- * Write a response to Writing Prompt 4.2 (p. 40 NOT 41). If you like, you may modify this to be about the most interesting conversation you ever had with anyone. This could be with someone you know—a time when you and a friend explored the depths more than usual, or it could have been on airplane when you were sitting next to a stranger. In your description, you don’t have to use exact words, but try to capture what made this conversation unusual and capturing the character of your partner in conversation.

For F 9/8

- * Read Iyer. Take a look at the opening pages of Baldwin, McPhee, and Sanders, too, just to see how they approach place differently. What differences do you notice in terms of how much personal information they contain, what organizational strategy or juxtapositions they use, and how they balance description of places and the people in them. Do you see any similarities? Try to linger especially on ways in which these writers give these places personalities.
- * Do Writing Prompt 4.1 on Characterization Through Dialogue (p. 40 NOT 41). Modify it, however, to concentrate as much on the surrounding scene and what it can add to the meaning of the conversation you are hearing. Remember to include details of the place. In fact, you might want to think about how you could make your observations ultimately “say something” about the place or milieu as much as the individuals that are there. If this stumps you, take a look at Jim Jarmusch’s film *Coffee and Cigarettes* or *Night on Earth*.

For M 9/11

* Read handout excerpt from *In Cold Blood*. There are many categories of people that we write about: the famous, the infamous (as in *In Cold Blood*), the little known (like the vet in Gutkind), those we encounter briefly (as in Jakiela and Martin), and those we know well, our family and friends. What do you think are the various considerations about what we “should” and “shouldn’t” write about people in these various groups?

* Are there situations you can think of when you shouldn’t write honestly about family members or others you are close to?

* What are the ethical/legal issues involved with writing about a stranger who is not famous, or in writing about anyone in an unflattering way?

* Are there “greater purposes” that make this okay or even desirable? What might those be? What reasons would be good enough and what reasons would be not quite good enough? Think a good bit about your own personal compass in regard to these issues, as you will need to know how you feel about them.

For W 9/13 and F 9/15

Work on your research and drafting of your Literary Journalism/Personal Essay assignment.

For M 9/18

* Read Chapter 6 and Kidder. In some ways, the personal process of discovery-through-writing described in Chapter 6 is easier when you write using the first-person point of view. In using it, you are placing yourself right in the action of discovery and owning up to your role, your failures, and your successes. Why does Kidder decide that this style is not for him? What benefits has he gained from working without his immediate presence in his writing? How is his personality and perspective conveyed nonetheless? How do you choose which way to go? Try thinking about the choices you have made with your current piece. Try writing a paragraph of it in another point of view (in second or third person if you have used first).

For 9/20 through 10/11

Read and comment on workshop manuscripts. After your manuscript has been critiqued, fill out your Workshop Comments Evaluation and turn it in.

For F 10/13

* Read Chapter 7.

* Do Writing Prompt 7.3.

* Make sure to turn in any stray Workshop Comments Evaluation sheets.

For M 10/16

* Read Drummond and Beard. Both of these women write about fear of a potential rape. How do their approaches differ? Which one do you find most affecting? Why? If the surface subject is similar in both, how does the “deeper idea” differ? What is the personality of each woman like? As always, note specifics.

* “Crack open” either Writing Prompt 7.3 or the childhood fear one we did in class. This is used generally to mean identifying something to pursue in more detail, or to open up a scene from a minor phrase. However, what I want you to do here has more to do with the

term “essay,” which both Moore and Lott have noted originally meant “to try” or “attempt” something. I want you to be digressive and exploratory here. Just try it. What I’m asking you to do here may be a stretch. That’s okay. Stretch. Explore. Dig around in your memory. What you find may be covered in mud and a little hard to distinguish. It may be fragmented. Anyway, what I want you to do is to **take that memory or early fear and try to write about it along the theme of what that moment has to do with your desire to be a writer—a page or two.**

For W 10/18

* Read Williams. Note that Williams’ memoir about breast cancer in her family turns at the end to a kind of manifesto. How does she indicate that the piece of writing is turning into something different? How do the two halves of the piece support each other? What would each be like without the other? How has Williams used her emotions to appeal to ours? What are the benefits and dangers of that approach?

* Write your own manifesto. See Writing Prompt 9.2, but in this case make sure to tie your manifesto to some aspect of your own experience.

For F 10/20

* Read Sedaris. Identify places in the Sedaris piece where you laugh. Trace, if you can, ways in which Sedaris seduces us into caring about his high school experiences, a time that is usually written about in a dull, trite way. How does he balance between the familiar (“oh, I remember how that used to be in h.s.”) and the unfamiliar (“he’s a pretty strange guy, and fascinating because of it”).

* Write about something eccentric you have done that you haven’t really talked about doing. For instance, last year before the last hurricane, I went outside and talked to the big trees in my yard, telling them to hang in there and good luck. Show what is unique about you. For possible variations, see Writing Prompts 6.1 and 9.1. Let yourself be funny if it seems right, but be careful: humor on the page is very difficult. Don’t force it.

For M 10/23

* Read Earley. As he describes it, what do you think “went wrong” in Earley’s childhood home? What is the tone and pace of this piece? How would you characterize Tony? How does his organizational strategy compare with Williams’s and Sedaris’s?

* Do **ONE** of the following:

1. Visual representations, such as maps and diagrams, often allow numerous ideas to float to the surface. Try drawing a roadmap of your life with major events, changes, and phases represented in the terrain. Try drawing an actual map of an important neighborhood in which you lived or worked. Or try a chart with a list of emotions on the left axis and the years of your life across the bottom (two-year increments are fine, or five, or ten, depending on how old you are); plot your emotional states, then choose the most interesting time periods and do sub-charts of months. These are all ways that help you identify times and events that brought about change.
2. Make a long, long list of topics on which you are an expert (not in a professional sense, but loosely defined). Let your list include off-the-wall things (belly button lint) as well as serious ones (taking care of dysfunctional adults). How and why have you become an expert in these things? Which do you care most about? Choose five and write five very quick potential openings.
3. Make an iterative statement about a time in your life: “We would always go to the beach on Sundays.” Then start writing about a particular time that stands out, where something different happened or where you had cause to remember.

For W 10/25

* Read Dobie. Earlier in the semester, we discussed issues involved with writing unflattering things about other people. When is it appropriate to do so about oneself? How would Dobie be described in a newspaper article about today's generation? How about in a psychology case study? What is the value of her piece when we already have others that describe her type? We're just guessing, but what do you imagine motivated her to write this?

* Although Moore in our textbook notes repeatedly that no one is perfect and that flaws are more interesting and "real" than depicting ourselves in dishonestly flattering ways, that can be hard. Nonetheless it can be a very rewarding part of the kind of discovery described in Chapter 6. This will NOT be collected, but try writing down a few "bad" or "disturbing" aspects of yourself that you would like to explore in writing someday. What might you learn from doing so? What might you teach someone else?

For Friday 10/27

1. Read Foer and Nye.

* What's the effect of Foer's experiment with typographic symbols in this piece? Why does it work here when so often that kind of thing comes off as silly or clunky?

* Describe the unusual structure of Nye's piece? How does it relate to her content or to the personality that she creates on the page?

2. Choose **ONE** of the following:

* Write about something you really loved, or a time when you felt whole and complete in an activity all for itself (not the later reward or someone else's approval). This could be as simple as learning to make a grilled cheese sandwich. Be specific about the details, sensations, and any distractions. While you concentrate and focus, also be aware of the whole world that was around you, too.

* Write about a time you had magical powers. Or write about dreams or wishes for magical powers. Give those powers to yourself and write about what you would do.

For 10/30 through 11/22

Read and comment on workshop manuscripts. After your manuscript has been critiqued, fill out your Workshop Comments Evaluation and turn it in.

For M 11/27

* Read Chapter 10. Make a list that describes how you revise. What tips do you have for others about how to do it?

* Make sure to bring in any stray Workshop Comments Evaluation sheets.

For W 11/29

* Revision Plan is due. Spend some time organizing your plans for revision, and then starting the work.

For 12/1

Work on your portfolio.