

English 3211.2: Introduction to Nonfiction Writing

Fall 2006, MWF 11:30-12:20, 107 Classroom Building I

Instructor: Lisa Roney

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Office Hours: M 3:30-5:00 p.m., F 10:00-11:30 a.m., and by appointment

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Please note: I make frequent use of email, and you are welcome to contact me via email. However, you cannot expect an instant answer, especially not during evenings and weekends. And email is no substitute for coming to class. I do not make up classes or accept assignments via email.

Prerequisite: CRW 3013, with a final grade of C or better

Required Texts and Expenses

The Truth of the Matter: Art and Craft in Creative Nonfiction, Dinty W. Moore

Please note that you will also be required to provide photocopies of your major manuscripts for the entire class for workshops. Please budget for this expense. We will NOT accept emailed versions, and I will NOT print out your work or copy it for you. If you fail to bring copies of your manuscript to the appropriate class for distribution, you may forfeit your right to a workshop and will receive a one-letter grade drop for that project. **You would be surprised how often this happens, so PLEASE make these dates a prominent part of your consciousness.** This policy is really not meanness on my part—our schedule is tight, and we do not have time to indulge an inattention to details like deadlines.

Course Goals and Purposes

Creative nonfiction is a category of writing that contains many sub-genres and that can be bewildering in its definition. We will write in a number of sub-genres and explore varying definitions of creative nonfiction, but I want to emphasize that this is *not* a journalism course. Journalism and literary nonfiction are overlapping categories, and many literary pieces are published in magazines and even newspapers, but we will *not* be setting out to write news articles. Our aim will be to work toward the use of our own personal experience in our writing—writing that may focus closely on us as individuals or which may turn more outward toward other people, places, and social issues.

Our methods for achieving these goals will be various, but will mainly involve:

- intense analytical reading of and conversation about published works (from your texts and handouts);
- writing exercises and discussions of the writing process;
- analysis of your stylistic choices, textual details, and their effects;
- reading aloud from short exercises in class and listening to immediate responses;

- class-wide workshops on your major manuscripts; and
- face-to-face and written comments from me.

Writing is a fabulously rewarding activity, and I hope over the course of the semester that we shall share perspectives, strategies, techniques, and insights into the process. (See more below in “A Word About Community.”)

Policies and Procedures

Attendance, participation, and timely completion of reading and writing assignments is crucial for this course. Writing is not done in a vacuum; it is *about* other people, *for* other people, and needs feedback *from* other people. It is part of a large conversation. If you only want to “write for myself,” then stick to a diary.

In other words, *come* to class, give our subjects some *thought* and be willing to *share* your thoughts, and *come prepared* because discussion-based learning cannot happen if you are not primed. I will not be feeding you answers; you must have your brain turned on so that you can find answers yourself.

Major Assignments

* Completing <i>all</i> assignments; full attendance and participation	10 points
* Writing exercises/quizzes/etc.	10
Interview/Engagement/Research Assignment	5
Profile or Literary Journalism Piece	15
Personal Essay or Memoir	20
* Two sets of workshop commentary and evaluation sheet (10/10)	20
* Final portfolio of your work	20
Total <i>potential</i> points	100

Assignments will all be explained further in assignment sheets and class presentations, but a few notes on the asterisks (*) above:

Your **participation** grade will take into account the quality, helpfulness, and seriousness of both the short writing exercises and the comments on your peers’ workshop manuscripts, as well as your level of engagement and consistent completion of work.

The **writing exercises** will be short, focused assignments, usually intended to generate ideas and/or to increase thought and understanding about a particular aspect of writing or reading. Sometimes I will give you written instructions for these, sometimes only brief in-class instructions, but you should *always* be ready to hand these in at any given class. *These will often form the core of our class discussions and so it is imperative that you do them on time; they will NOT be accepted late.* In addition, I may occasionally give a brief quiz to spark discussion and ensure that everyone is reading assigned material. In addition, I will occasionally give a **quiz** on the reading, in order to insure that everyone is primed and ready to discuss the work at hand.

You are responsible for carefully critiquing the work of other students during our major workshops and for giving back to that person the manuscript s/he handed out with comments written on the manuscript and with an end (or overall) comment, preferably typed. When your manuscript has been discussed, you will be given a **Workshop Commentary Evaluation** sheet, which you are required to fill out in order to receive credit for your own workshop comments.

The **final portfolio** will consist of *revisions* of one of your major assignments and an analysis of your semester's work. In addition, you may add any uncollected or revised exercises from the semester, though they should all be refined if you choose to include them. If you feel that your grade may be borderline, you may also discuss with me revising both major manuscripts, but you may only do so with my permission.

Final Grade Scale and Basic Math

A = 93-100, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, C- = 70-72, D+ = 67-69, D = 63-66, D- = 60-62, F = 0-59

Please be responsible for keeping up with your grades. To see where you stand, you can add up the number of points you have so far received, then calculate it with a simple fractional formula, like so:

$$\frac{\text{number of points you have}}{\text{number of points possible}} = \frac{x}{100}$$

Then you multiply the number of points you have by 100 and then divide by the number of possible points so far. For example, if you have received 4/6 on homework so far, 5/5 on the Interview/Research Assignment, 6/10 on the first set of critiques, and 13/15 on your Literary Journalism piece, then you would have 28/36 so far. So, multiply 28 x 100 = 2800 ÷ 36 = approximately 78, so you would be carrying a C+ at that point.

Technicalities

* Not only will repeated **absence** negatively affect your participation grade, but at a certain point it will mean failure. **After only two unexcused absences, you can expect your final grade to start falling by a plus/minus per absence.** If you have *university-sanctioned* absences, then please let me know immediately and provide the necessary documentation. **If you miss eight or nine classes, you will almost certainly fail the course.** Also, please note that **if you sleep or otherwise fail to attend to the discussion at hand, I will ask you to leave and you will be counted absent for the day.** Repeated tardiness may also affect your attendance grade.

* I will accept **late work** under certain circumstances, but a) *never* short exercises, the point of which has been to focus class discussion; b) *only* when the reasons are of the same caliber as the ones used for university-excused absences; and c) *only* when you maintain contact with me about what the problem is rather than waiting weeks to inform me of what is going on.

* **Format.** Your assignments should be typed in 12-point Times Roman or equivalent font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins (1.5 at bottom okay). Your name, course number, and the date should appear in the upper right-hand corner of page 1, with subsequent pages numbered. **Please do not forget to number pages!!! Please staple or**

paper-clip securely; loose sheets are devilishly easy for me to lose. Always keep a backup copy of your work. When it is your turn for a workshop, you will be required to bring copies for the entire class.

* Please be careful with typographical, spelling, and grammar errors on major assignments. Although you may not mean it this way, sloppiness is disrespectful of yourself, your work, and your readers. While I don't mind errors in short exercises, you will never receive an "A" or even a "B" on a major assignment that contains such errors.

A Word About "Community"

In English 3211, I hope for us to fully enjoy the rare privilege of working within a supportive community of fellow writers. This entails a tricky balance because at the same time that we need to be able to talk about *any* topic and to feel free to use the broadest possible range of language, we also should never abandon discretion or respect for self and others. A couple of specific thoughts:

* A word or a topic used in an essay or story appropriately may be inappropriate if used in a general class context, and we need to be sensitive to the difference. For instance, an essay might contain sexual content that is not gratuitous, and we may discuss it in class, but that does not mean that suggestive remarks to fellow students are okay.

* There are no right and wrong answers or simple ways to conclude an argument about writing. We must be careful to avoid contentiousness. Learn when to let go of a point.

* Creative writing is an inevitably personal activity, and some of the content of our course will therefore be about who we are as individuals. It is virtually impossible to substantively discuss a piece of writing without evaluating the consciousness behind it. However, both with our sympathies and our criticisms, we should try to focus on the *writerly* qualities of the work at hand. This means that you should think about whether x or y quality serves the intended effect of the work, rather than whether you *like* it or *relate to* it or like the sensibility of the author, though you are certainly encouraged to raise the issue of what that sensibility is.

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with the University's policies on academic honesty. Work turned in by you under your name should be written by you, and unless indicated otherwise it should be new work, not work recycled from high school or another course.

Please note that presenting work from another college course (or other source) as new work in my course constitutes cheating and is grounds for an F in my course and possibly in the other course as well!

Disability Accommodations

The University of Central Florida encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities. If you anticipate needing any kind of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.

Schedule of Classes

Please note: this syllabus is subject to change and elaboration. You are responsible for knowing about any such changes. **“R:” indicates reading DUE on that day; “W:” indicates writing DUE.** Note that only major writing assignments appear here; there will be additional short assignments.

- M 8/21** Course introduction. Creative nonfiction: what is it? what are the subgenres? In-class writing (Exercise 1.3).
- W 8/23** Subject matter and approaches. R: Chapters 1 and 2 and Lott (p. 279). W: Exercise 1.2. (22pp)
- F 8/25** Writing about events and issues with a personal voice. Detail and description. R: Gerard (151) and Chapter 3 and 5. (26pp)
- M 8/28** Literary Journalism/Personal Essay assigned. R: Chapters 8 and 9. (19pp)
- W 8/30** Varieties of research. R: Shields (p. 243) (9pp)
- F 9/1** Writing about others: interviewing. R: Chapter 4 and Gutkind (p. 167). (19pp) Sign up for workshops.
- M 9/4** LABOR DAY—No class.
- W 9/6** Writing about other people: family, friends, encounters. R: Chapter Panning (handout) and Jakiela (p. 105). (4pp) W: Research/Interview Report.
- F 9/8** Writing about place: R: Iyer (p. 189). (11pp)
- M 9/11** Writers’ responsibilities. R: Handout excerpt from *In Cold Blood*. Watch first bit of film *Capote*.
- W 9/13** Watch middle of *Capote*.
- F 9/15** Watch end of *Capote* and discuss.
- M 9/18** How much “me” in my piece about someone or something else? R: Kidder (p. 276) and Chapter 6. (12pp)
- W 9/20** Workshop.
- F 9/22** Workshop.
- M 9/25** Workshop.

W 9/27	Workshop.
F 9/29	Workshop.
M 10/2	Workshop.
W 10/4	Workshop.
F 10/6	Workshop.
M 10/9	Workshop.
W 10/11	Workshop.
F 10/13	<i>Withdrawal deadline.</i> Last day to turn in Workshop Comments Evaluations. Memoir assigned. R: Chapter 7. (9pp)
M 10/16	Nuances in the sub-genres and voice. R: Drummond (p. 103) and Beard (p. 127). (7pp) Sign up for memoir workshops.
W 10/18	Who cares about your life? Making others care about the personal and the mundane. Pathos and other strategies. R: Williams (p. 257). (6pp)
F 10/20	Humor. R: Sedaris (p. 229). (7pp)
M 10/23	Connecting to larger issues. R: Earley (p.143). (8pp)
W 10/25	Taking chances in your writing. R: Dobie (handout).
F 10/27	Style and experimentation. R: Foer (handout) and Kincaid (p. 200). (10pp)
M 10/30	Workshop.
W 11/1	Workshop.
F 11/3	Workshop.
M 11/6	Workshop.
W 11/8	Workshop.
F 11/10	VETERANS DAY—No class.
M 11/13	Workshop.

W 11/15	Workshop.
F 11/17	Workshop.
M 11/20	Workshop.
W 11/22	Workshop.
F 11/24	DAY AFTER THANKSGIVING—No class.
M 11/27	Revision. R: Chapter 10. Last day to turn in Workshop Comments Evaluations. Revision Plan assigned.
W 11/29	More on revision. W: Revision Plan.
F 12/1	Course conclusion and evaluation.

Final portfolios due between last class and final exam period. NO LATER THAN FINAL EXAM PERIOD.