

ENG 305: Introduction to Nonfiction

Spring 2012, Fridays 2-4:20pm, THH 111

Instructor: Trinie Dalton, tcdalton@usc.edu

Office Hours: THH 425, Fridays 1-2pm or by appointment

Course objective: This is a generative nonfiction-writing workshop in which students develop personal nonfiction writing styles while exploring historical nonfiction sub-genres such as: the lyric essay, memoir/personal essay, science/nature writing, and journalistic forms including the biographical profile and critical review. Learn to identify the key components and compositional strategies of various nonfiction styles through close reading and practicing craft techniques inherent to the abovementioned forms. Fact-gather through interview and research, hone figurative language skills, and study standard literary and narrative techniques. Students will write and submit drafts of two essays (personal and reflective), a critical review, and a biographical profile for verbal comment and written peer critiques. To complement the workshop process we will do collaborative “lab” projects in which students learn to devise and incorporate pertinent preparatory tactics into their practice. Students will be graded on a final portfolio of their collected prose and evidence of participation in labs.

1/13 IN CLASS: Intro: Syllabus/Orientation/Get Textbook
Discuss Writing 1: Personal Essay (2000 words)
Library Session: Magazines /Discuss shortforms

AT HOME: Begin writing Essay
DUE 1/20 Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ Introduction (Scott Russell Sanders, p.xv)
2/ “The Fourth State of Matter” (Jo Ann Beard, p.1)
3/ “Getting Along With Nature” (Wendel Berry, p.17)

1/20 IN CLASS: Write: “I Am A Camera” & Craft Discussion
Read Aloud & Discuss: “Living Like Weasels” (Annie Dillard, p.148)

AT HOME: Read & write reactions to peer writing
Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ “On Noise,” “Asthma” (Seneca, PDF)
2/ “Hateful Things” (Sei Shonagon, PDF)
3/ “Pleasure Boat Studio (Ou-Yang Hsiu, PDF)

1/27 IN CLASS: Workshop _____, _____, _____, _____
Craft Discussion: Defining Elements in Nonfiction

AT HOME: Read & write reactions to peer writing
Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ “Of Books,” “Of A Monstrous Child” (Michel de Montaigne, PDF)
2/ “The Courage of Turtles” (Edward Hoagland, PDF)

2/3 IN CLASS: Workshop _____, _____, _____, _____
Craft Discussion: History of the Essay

AT HOME: Read & write reactions to peer writing
Read & write reaction to assigned reading:
1/ “Burl’s” (Bernard Cooper, p.132)
2/ “The Search for Marvin Gardens” (John McPhee, p.370)

2/10	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____, _____, _____
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "The Pain Scale" (Eula Biss, p.28) 2/ "Kissing" (Anthony Farrington, p.176)
2/17	IN CLASS:	Discuss Writing 2 & 3: Biographical Profile (1000 words) & Critical Review (300-500 words) Lab: Read a <i>New Yorker</i> profile aloud & Discuss Field Trip: Walk together to Helen Lindhurst Fine Arts Gallery
	AT HOME:	Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Shitdiggers, Mudflats, and The Worm Men of Maine" (Bill Roorbach, p.420) 2/ Selected Reviews (photocopied handout)
2/24	IN CLASS:	Field Trip: Meet at Roski MFA Gallery to visit 3001, Station, and Superhighway Discuss: Biographical Profiles and Critical Reviews
	AT HOME:	Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "The Beautiful City of Tirzah" (Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, p.190) 2/ "Repeat After Me" (David Sedaris, p.443)
3/2	IN CLASS:	Workshop Biographical Profiles _____, _____, _____, _____, _____, _____
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Death of the Moth" (Virginia Woolf, PDF) 2/ "The Crack-Up" (F. Scott Fitzgerald, PDF)
3/9	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____, _____, _____ _____, _____ Discuss Writing 3: Reflective Essay (2000 words)
	AT HOME:	Email PDF of your Critical Review to class by 3/16 Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Consider the Lobster" (David Foster Wallace, p.525) 2/ "Mother Tongue" (Amy Tan, p.514)
3/16	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	
	AT HOME:	Begin Reflective Essay Read & write reactions to peer writing (Critical Review) Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "The Glass Essay" (Anne Carson, p.97) 2/ "Use This Word in a Sentence: Experimental" (Ann Lauterbach, handout)

3/23	IN CLASS:	Roundtable Workshop: Critical Reviews
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Flight" (Barry Lopez, p.308) 2/ "Walking" (Henry David Thoreau, PDF)

3/30	IN CLASS:	Workshop Reflective Essays _____, _____, _____, _____
		Craft Discussion: Story & Plot
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Notes on a Native Son" (James Baldwin, PDF)

4/6	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____, _____, _____
		Craft Discussion: Dialogue & Diction
	AT HOME:	Read & write reactions to peer writing Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "In Praise of Shadows" (Junichiro Tanizaki, PDF)

4/13	IN CLASS:	Workshop _____, _____, _____, _____
	AT HOME:	Read & write reaction to assigned reading: 1/ "Under the Influence" (Scott Russell Sanders, PDF)

4/20	IN CLASS:	Final Portfolio Due Lab: Presentations—bring an annotated magazine and present its nonfiction contents and strategies per article
	AT HOME:	None!

4/27	IN CLASS:	LAST DAY// Portfolios Returned, Class Reading
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Class Structure & Requirements

—Classes will alternate between workshops, literary craft discussions, and collaborative, interactive breakout sessions and activities. At home you'll be required to 1/ write nonfiction, to 2/ read assigned nonfiction, to 3/write short weekly critical reactions, and to 4/ research and/or coordinate labs. I will direct in-depth workshops of your individual stories, guide craft discussions, and initiate lab sessions during which we might do in-class writing exercises, look at nonfiction periodicals, and/or explore modes and venues for contemporary nonfiction. This syllabus refers you to what is happening in class that day (*In Class*) as well as the homework due following week (*At Home*).

—On a weekly basis, beyond the generation of your own work and peer reactions, you should submit to me a one-page commentary on literature assigned. This is a personal reaction, so format is flexible. It can be a compare/contrast, an examination of one aspect of the story you are particularly drawn to, a note about how the readings inform your work. You can discuss style, craft, subject matter...this is also a great time to ask questions. Goals here are to 1/ hone your critical mind and writing, to 2/ create a private dialogue between student and instructor, and to 3/ prepare you not only to discuss assigned stories in class but also to ideally apply their notable concepts in peer workshop. (Also, bear in mind that at the end of the semester these commentaries will be collected into a portfolio to influence your final grade.)

—Final Portfolio should include: 1/ your nonfiction + any revisions, 2/ your assigned reading commentaries that I handed back to you (with my marks), 3/ notes from peers about your workshop submissions, 4/ lab session research and/or project evidence. Portfolio design is optional; have fun with it!

Preparing for a peer's nonfiction workshop:

Please prepare detailed notes about the prose your peer submits to workshop, to bring to class as reference during workshop. Be very specific with your suggestions, and give examples with quotes when possible. Bring a copy of these notes to give to your peer after their workshop. While these notes will not be submitted to me, they will be turned in with your peer's final portfolio—Therefore, I will see them and these notes contribute to your participation grade. Save everything, including these notes, to compile portfolios.

Your nonfiction submission:

1/ Submit enough copies of your piece for everyone in class (12) the week **previous** to your workshop. After your workshop, we will return to you all copies of your text marked up with editorial, along with our notes.

2/ Your commentary on assigned reading is due, but you get a one-week extension. Therefore, it is due not the week you submit prose, but the week after your workshop.

—A note on what to submit to workshop:

You can submit whatever you want, as long as it is sincere and it exemplifies your capability. Don't be afraid to submit something that is imperfect (that's what we're here for!), but do try to get as far as you can on the prose before submitting it. Word-count is attached to each assignment. (500 words=approx. 1-2 pages, essays at 2000 words each will be approx. 4-6 pages maximum.)

3/ All submissions should be double-spaced, with a serif book font and 1-inch margins.

Assigned Texts & Further Reading:

—The required text for this course is **Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction, edited by Williford and Martone**. It is available in the USC Bookstore; please purchase it today. Readings not in textbook will be distributed via emailed PDF the week pertaining to the assignment.

—Recommended further reading:

The Art of the Personal Essay, edited by Phillip Lopate

The Writer's Workshop: Craft Essays from Tin House

The Next American Essay, edited by John D'Agata

Cultural Resistance Reader (Verso)

American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau, edited by Bill McKibben

Class Conduct & Grading Policy

1/ Grades are based on the quality of your scheduled submitted nonfiction & written homework critiques (50%), your final portfolio (25%), class participation (10%), and library sessions (15%). My primary concerns are that we dialogue openly, engage in focused conversation, that your attendance is good, and that your writing and authorial identity are strengthened during our semester together. A lackadaisical presence in class will lower your grade as will multiple absences (**FIRM RULE: 3 absences = 1 letter grade drop**). Notify me of impending absences. Please submit work on time; late or missing assignments can disturb the rhythm of a small class. Compiled written work will be assessed for final grading based on your **PORTFOLIO** that is due **April 20th**, though you will be graded along the way as well and will be notified at midterm of your progress. On **April 27th**, I'll return your final portfolio with final class grades. The last class will also be a class reading and CELEBRATION of your INDUSTRY!

A=Amazing; turns in all assignments on time and quality of written work is stellar.

B=Good; turns in all or most assignments, makes most deadlines, and quality of written work is absolutely passable.

C=Needs improvement; misses too many classes, deadlines, and is not generally with it. Doing the bare minimum to pass.

D=Not passing.

2/ Be on time. Chronic tardiness is considered a class disruption and will lower your grade (**3 tardies = 1 absence**). However, if occasionally late, it's better to come in quietly to join class than to skip.

3/ CELL PHONES OFF por favor **ZERO TOLERANCE**

Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30am-5pm, M-F. 213-740-0776.

Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the student guidebook, contains Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.

Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Nice to meet you; I sincerely look forward to our class. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.