



## **WRT 114: Writing Culture: Introduction to Creative Nonfiction (3 credits) Spring 2016**

**Instructor: Heather Carreiro**

**Office: English 205**

**Office hours: Tues/Thurs 12:15 pm – 1:00 pm**

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**Classroom #/meeting periods: 602 / Tuesday, Thursday, Friday**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Writing 114 provides an introduction to creative nonfiction (CNF), a genre that encompasses many kinds of prose: memoirs, biography, travel writing, science writing, and literary journalism, to name a few. In this class, we'll read and reflect upon a variety of creative nonfiction texts, as well as compose our own essays. You'll have the freedom to explore a wide range of topics and experiment broadly with voice, style, form, and the use of research to enrich your writing.

Rather than present reality as a series of raw facts, creative nonfiction seeks to tell good stories while remaining faithful to the truth. To this end, creative nonfiction writers borrow techniques of fiction writing, such as description, anecdote, scene construction, characterization, and the use of dialogue. The crucial distinction between creative nonfiction and fiction is that nonfiction purports to tell the truth with very little embellishment, while fiction claims to be "made up." Creative nonfiction also draws from poetic approaches to language, including imagery, metaphor, tone, and shifts in point of view and perspective. We'll study these building blocks of creative nonfiction and use them in the composition process.

Since this is an intensive writing class, we'll often engage in writing workshops in class, including brainstorming and freewriting activities, and structured peer critiques. You will need to come to class prepared to write. All students will need a dedicated notebook for this purpose.

### **COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. Students will read and critically engage with creative nonfiction texts representing a diverse range of topics, subgenres, and perspectives.
2. Students will learn about, and put into practice, conventions and characteristics of creative nonfiction.
3. Students will compose a series of creative nonfiction texts, and take them through the processes of composing.

4. Students will explore relationships between research and creative nonfiction, and learn conventions for incorporating research into their texts.
5. Students will develop an awareness of audience, and work to construct an ethos and voice that responds to audience needs and expectations.
6. Students will experiment with voices, styles and forms.
7. Students will reflect on their writing processes.

### REQUIRED TEXTS:

- ***Tell It Slant: Creating, Refining, & Publishing Creative Nonfiction, 2E*** – Brenda Miller & Suzanne Paola (McGraw-Hill, 2012)
- ***Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction*** – ed. Judith Kitchen (WW Norton, 2005)
- ***Creating Nonfiction: A Guide and Anthology*** – ed. Becky Bradway & Doug Hesse (Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004)
- *Additional readings as assigned by the course instructor*

### MAJOR COURSE ASSIGNMENTS & GRADE REQUIREMENTS:

<b>Unit 1 Portfolio</b> (10-15pp., comprised of multiple shorter essays, & a reflective essay)	<b>15%</b>
<b>Unit 2 Creative Nonfiction essay</b> (writing about culture, 6-8pp., incl. reflective essay component)	<b>15%</b>
<b>Unit 3 Creative Nonfiction essay</b> (New lyric or personal essay, 6-8pp., incl. reflective essay component)	<b>20%</b>
<b>Unit 4 Creative Nonfiction essay</b> (literary journalism, 6-8pp., incl. reflective essay component)	<b>20%</b>
<b>Unit 5 Culminating Portfolio</b> (a substantively revised CNF essay, preface, reflective essay, showcase components, etc.)	<b>20%</b>
<b>All other informal writing and class participation</b> (incl. in-class writing exercises, notebook entries, workshop participation & peer review, research notes, critical reading responses, etc.)	<b>10%</b>

### WORKSHOPS

Writing is about community and communication. Feedback is vital for writers to improve their craft. You also need to know how your work is being perceived by an audience. A writing workshop is a supportive space where writers work together to enhance each other's work. At times, you may be asked to make your drafts available for peer critique before class so there will be time for your peers to read and comment on your work. See Ch. 15 of *Tell It Slant* on sharing your work for more information on the workshop process.

## **GENERAL COURSE POLICIES**

### **Special Needs and Accommodations**

Syracuse University welcomes people with disabilities and, in compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act, does not discriminate on the basis of disability. Students who require special consideration due to a learning or physical disability or other situation should make an appointment to see me right away.

### **Use of Student Academic Work**

It is understood that registration for and continued enrollment in this course constitutes permission by the student for the instructor to use for educational purposes any student work produced in the course, in compliance with the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). After the completion of the course, any further use of student work will meet one of the following conditions: (1) the work will be rendered anonymous through the removal of all personal identification of the student(s); or (2) written permission from the student(s).

### **Academic Integrity**

Syracuse University sets high standards for academic integrity. Syracuse University students are expected to exhibit honesty in all academic endeavors. Cheating in any form is not tolerated, nor is assisting another person to cheat. The submission of any work by a student is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions in it are the student's own, except when properly credited to another.

Those standards are supported and enforced by your instructor, SU faculty and Project Advance administrators. The presumptive sanction for a first offense is course failure (SU grade of F), accompanied by the transcript notation "Violation of the Academic Integrity Policy." Students should review the Office of Academic Integrity online resource "Twenty Questions and Answers About the Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy" and confer with your instructor(s) about course-specific citation methods, permitted collaboration (if any), and rules for examinations. The policy also governs the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. Additional guidance for students can be found in the Office of Academic Integrity resource: "What does academic integrity mean?"

For a more detailed description of the guidelines for adhering to academic integrity in the College of Arts and Sciences, go to:

<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

If you will miss a class on a day when a formal paper is due, you must still post your paper to Turnitin by the posted deadline.

**Late papers will lose 5% per day late**, so a 95% paper will automatically be dropped to 90% if late by one day. Weekend days are counted as regular class days, so a paper that is due on Friday but handed in on Monday will lose 15%. After 10 days, later papers will not be accepted and a zero will be given for the assignment.

## **UNIT I: Introduction: What Is Creative Nonfiction? / Flash Nonfiction Writing (4 Weeks)**

### **Week 1: Introduction to creative nonfiction / genre and craft January 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Focus:**

- Elements of creative nonfiction – What makes nonfiction writing literary?
- “Flash” nonfiction – purpose and examples
- Scene vs. exposition
- Sensory details

#### **Readings:**

- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 13: The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form (163-170)
- “Not Every Sentence Can Be Great But Every Sentence Must be Good” by Cynthia Newberry Martin in *Brevity*
- “Book War” by Wang Ping (*Short Takes*, 166-168)

#### **Writing Prompts:**

- What’s in a name?
- What do you like to read? What makes a story great?
- 202-Word Scene

#### **Exercises:**

- Adding sensory details / being specific
- Identifying scene vs. exposition in your own writing

### **Weeks 2-3: Finding your material / writing workshop February 1<sup>st</sup> to February 12<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Focus:**

- Developing the first person narrator / trust with the reader
- Framing your work
- Ethics and truth-telling
- Cueing / “Perhapsing”
- Showing vs. telling / seeing vs. doing
- Using dialogue
- Developing character

#### **Readings:**

- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 13: The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form (170-180)
- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 12: The Particular Challenges of Creative Nonfiction
- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 1: The Body of Memory
- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 3: Writing the Physical World
- “Coming to Your Senses” by Janet Fitch (PDF)
- Student selections from *Short Takes*

#### **Writing Prompts:**

- 101-Word Scene
- Childhood memory – *Tell it Slant* prompts Chapter 1

- Writing about place (*Tell it Slant* prompts Chapter 3, #6-8)
- Character sketch (*Tell it Slant* Chapter 13, #4)
- Student discussion leading of flash pieces from *Short Takes*

**Exercises:**

- Sense journals
- Eavesdropping
- 202 to 101 Words

**Week 4: Cultivating a voice and writing for an audience / revision work  
February 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>**

**Focus:**

- Writing workshop skills
- Revision vs. editing
- Use of detail

**Readings:**

- "Workshop is not for you" by Jeremiah Chamberlain (Glimmer Train)
- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 14: The Writing Process and Revision
- "Morris Sees a Furrier" by Erin Entrada Kelly (online – fiction)

**Writing Prompts:**

- Desire in nonfiction / revision prompt

**Exercises:**

- Group writing workshop (on paper)
- Adding details

**Unit 1 Assignments:** writing portfolio of flash non-fiction, approximately 10-15 pp.; separate reflective essay (2-3 pp.)

**DUE MONDAY FEBRUARY 21st AT 10pm – POST ON TURNITIN**

## UNIT II: Writing About Culture (4 Weeks)

### Week 5: Writing About Place and Culture

February 22<sup>nd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>

#### Focus:

- Defining culture
- Our place as an observer / participant
- Point of view
- Vertical vs. horizontal trajectory

#### Readings:

- "Vietnam Four Ways" by Anne Panning (*Brevity*)
- "Anne Panning: The 'Thingy-ness' of Essays" – Interview by Rebecca Meacham online at *Talking Writing*
- "Running Xian" by John Calderazzo (handout)

#### Writing Prompts:

- On my way to...(writing about a journey)
- \_\_\_\_\_ four ways

#### Exercises:

- What cultures / subcultures am I part of?
- Insider vs. outsider
- Potential topics for CNF

### Week 6: Writing About Culture and Identity: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class, and Subcultures

February 29<sup>th</sup> to March 4<sup>th</sup> (No class on March 4<sup>th</sup>)

#### Focus:

- Your "lens" as reader/writer
- Connection of form and meaning
- Linear vs. non-linear narrative
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#### Readings:

- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 7: Writing the Larger World
- "June: Circle K Recipes" by Karen Tei Yamashita (*Creating Nonfiction*, 779-784)
- Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita (*Creating Nonfiction*, 785)

#### Writing Prompts:

- Every day object (*Tell it Slant* prompt #6, p 70)
- Area of expertise (*Tell it Slant* prompt #3, p 69)

#### Exercises:

- Non-linear narrative
- Same scene, different narrators

**Week 7: Using Research**  
**March 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>**

**Focus:**

- Incorporating research into CNF
- Identifying reliable sources

**Readings:**

- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 8: Using Research to Expand Your Perspective
- "A Place Called Midland" by Susan Orlean (*Creating Nonfiction*, 615-622)

**Writing Prompts:**

- Dialoging with sources

**Exercises:**

- Library research

**Week 8: In-class workshops**  
**March 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Focus:**

- Writing the researched essay
- Revision and editing
- Humor in researched non-fiction

**Readings:**

- Excerpt from *Pyongyang* [graphic memori] by Guy Deslisle (*Creating Nonfiction*, 272-282)

**Writing Prompts:**

- First impressions of a place

**Exercises:**

- Peer review workshop
- Self-revision worksheet
- Self-editing checklist

**Unit 2 Assignments:** sustained essay (6-8 pp.) that engages with an aspect of culture that you are either part of or witness to; writing portfolio that showcases two drafts of Unit 2 essay; separate reflective essay (2 pp.)

**DUE MONDAY MARCH 21<sup>st</sup> at 10pm – POST ON TURNITIN**

## UNIT III: Personal Essay / Lyric Essay / Graphic Essay (5 Weeks)

### Week 9: What is the Personal Essay? / Researching the self

March 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup>

#### Focus:

- Writing about yourself
- What to do about gaps in memory
- Writing about the family

#### Readings:

- "Shunned" by ----- (*In Fact*, p -----)
- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 2: Writing the Family

#### Writing Prompts:

- *Tell it Slant* prompts Chapter 2, #5-7

#### Exercises:

- Different voices (family members telling same story)
- Family interviews

### Week 10: The Self as Social Actor

April 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>

#### Focus:

- The self as agent / developing your character
- Mixed media and different forms

#### Readings:

- "A Measure of Acceptance" by Floyd Skloot (*Creative Nonfiction*, Volume 19 Diversity Dialogues, 79-91)
- *Tell it Slant* Chapter 10: Playing with Form – The Lyric Essay and Mixed Media

#### Writing Prompts:

- Family photo essay
- *Tell it Slant* prompts, Chapter 10

#### Exercises:

- Essay expansion ideas

### Weeks 11-12: The Lyric Essay / The Graphic Essay

April 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>

#### Focus:

- Writing the personal essay
- Use of imagery through language in lyric essays
- Use of imagery in graphic essays

#### Readings:

- *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi [graphic memoir]



<b>Writing Prompts:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell the same scene in two forms (graphic essay, radio essay, personal essay, lyric essay, etc)</li></ul>
<b>Exercises:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Essay expansion ideas</li></ul>






**Unit 3 Assignments:** Select one piece of flash non-fiction from your Unit 1 portfolio and develop the piece into a personal, lyric essay, or graphic essay OR choose a topic from your list of potential CNF topics, and compose an essay from scratch (6-8 pp.); separate reflective essay (2 pp.)

**DUE MONDAY APRIL 18th AT 10pm – POST ON TURNITIN**

## UNIT IV: Literary Journalism (3 Weeks)

### Week 13: Research and Inquiry: What is Literary Journalism? April 18<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Focus:**

- What is literary journalism?
- Using dialogue in the researched essay
- Finding topics for literary journalism

**Readings:**

- Excerpt from *Candyfreak* by Steve Almond (*Creating Nonfiction*, 157-168)
- Interview with Steve Almond (*Creating Nonfiction*, 169)
- "Literary Journalism" (*Creating Nonfiction*, 26-32)

**Writing Prompts:**

- Finding your obsessions
- Describe a candy bar

**Exercises:**

- Annotating the Almond essay - structure, flow, research
- Making a research "hit list"

### Week 14: Readings in Literary Journalism April 25<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> (No class April 29<sup>th</sup>)

**Focus:**

- Literary journalism that raises social awareness
- Objectivity and subjectivity as a writer
- Ethics in literary journalism

**Readings:**

- "Marion Prison" by Laurence Gonzales (*Creating Nonfiction*, 403-427)

**Writing Prompts:**

- Secret places and taboo subjects
- School and local news

**Exercises:**

- Selection of topics for specific audience and purpose

### Weeks 15-16: Developing the Researched Essay / In-class workshops May 4<sup>th</sup> to May 20<sup>th</sup> (No class May 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**Focus:**

- Citation in creative nonfiction
- Developing and writing literary journalism
- Beginnings and endings in literary journalism

**Readings:**

- None

<b>Writing Prompts:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>
<b>Exercises:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Peer review</li><li>• Developing the opening scene</li></ul>






**Unit 4 Assignments:** researched personal essay or a piece of literary journalism, 6-7 pp.; separate reflective essay (2 pp.)

**DUE MONDAY MAY 23<sup>rd</sup> at 10pm – POST ON TURNITIN**

## UNIT V: Revision and Reflection (2 Weeks)

**Weeks 17-18: Final Portfolio: Comprehensive revision of a creative nonfiction piece and student readings**  
**May 23<sup>rd</sup> to June 3<sup>rd</sup>**

<b>Focus:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Revision</li><li>• Choosing your best work</li><li>• Pitching publications</li><li>• Sharing your work publicly</li></ul>
<b>Readings:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>
<b>Writing Prompts:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>
<b>Exercises:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Public reading</li><li>• How to revise for specific publication guidelines</li><li>• Submitting a finished essay for publication</li></ul>










**Unit 5 Assignments:** comprehensive revision of a selected piece of writing from the semester; final showcase portfolio; separate reflective essay

**DUE MONDAY JUNE 6<sup>th</sup> at 10pm – POST ON TURNITIN**