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ENG 3061-001: Intermediate Nonfiction Writing

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ENGLISH 3061, Spring 2018
Intermediate Nonfiction Writing
T/TH 11:00 to 12:15
Coleman Hall 3159
Dr. Daiva Markelis/dmmarkelis@eiu.edu
Office: Coleman Hall 3375
Office Hours:
Mondays 11:00 to 12:30
Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30 to 2:00
and by appointment

Purpose of the Course

This course is designed to introduce you to nonfiction as a genre of creating writing, to give you ample practice in writing various short nonfiction pieces, and to teach you to revise these pieces effectively.

Books and Materials

Writing Creative Nonfiction. Edited by Philip Gerard and Carolyn Forché

In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction by Lee Gutkind

Requirements

1. Read the assigned material by the assigned date and participate in class discussions.
2. Write five essays on various topics. Have at least two of these essays workshopped.
3. Critique the writing of classmates in a constructive manner, both orally and in writing.
4. Submit a portfolio of creative work at the end of the semester. The portfolio should include all assignments as well as any in-class writing exercises you choose to submit.

Grade Breakdown

Writing Portfolio, including revisions of stories: 60%

Written critique of other people's stories: 20%

Effectiveness at in-class discussion: 10%

Attendance: 10%

Writing Portfolio

In creative writing courses, grading is a necessary evil. Writers develop at their own pace, and teachers may be partial to certain styles or genres. I have found through experience that a specific grade on every written piece of work sometimes discourages writers. Often they look at the grade and skip the comments. Or, if their grade is a B, they ask themselves, "Why not an A?" However, students also have the right to know what they might expect at the end of the semester, grade-wise. I'll give you the option of having your individual stories graded, with the understanding that you can rewrite pieces to include in the final portfolio. Part of your grade will be determined by how thoughtfully you incorporate the suggestions of others as well as how well you develop your own inner writing critic. Final drafts of stories included in the portfolio must be free of grammatical and mechanical errors. Please visit the Writing Center if you need help with verb tense, sentence structure, comma use, etc.

Participation

Participation includes not only actively discussing the readings, but also making insightful and constructive comments on the writing of your peers. You must submit 1-3 typed paragraphs for every piece we workshop. **You may email these to the author, or you may attach them to your**

copy of the essay after the workshop. You must also send the same typed critique to me. I must get the critique before the beginning of class. No exceptions. You may also hand me the typed critiques at the beginning of class.

Attendance

Since the format of this class is primarily workshop, participation is extremely important. In addition, many of the ideas used in your essays will be generated in class discussions or in-class writing. I do allow for excused absences if they are properly documented. These include approved university activities and illness. Unexcused absences are pretty much all others—oversleeping, finishing papers for other classes, out-of-town trips “because I’m homesick.” More than one unexcused absence will lower your attendance grade by one grade. More than two unexcused absences will lower your attendance grade by two grades. And so on.

Tardiness and Cell Phone/Computer Use

I expect you to be in class on time. Excessive tardiness may result in lower attendance grade.

No cell phone use in class other than in emergencies.

Computers to be used ONLY for class purposes—writing or reading others’ stories. No checking social media, no emailing, no Googling.

University Policies

(1) Academic integrity - Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIU's Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>) Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

(2) Students with disabilities - If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583.

(3) The Student Success Center - Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Workshopping Procedure

A large part of this course will be devoted to the workshop, a popular method of critiquing creative writing. This is how it works: You make a copy of your piece for all class members and submit it to them the class period before workshopping. **You may email the story if you like, but it must be mailed out at least two days in advance. So, if your piece is workshopped on a Tuesday, you must email essays out by Sunday evening at the latest. I realize that emergencies do arise. In such a case, email or phone me to let me know your piece will be late. Even in emergency situations, however, no essays can be mailed to the class later than 8pm on the day before we workshop—we will simply do something else in class that day and your grade for workshopping (a requirement in this course) will go down.** In class you read the first 2-3 paragraphs of your story out loud. Class members discuss strengths and weaknesses while you remain silent. At the end of discussion you respond to the critique and have the option of asking for more feedback on specific sections that the class may have overlooked. Feel free to take notes on what is said in order to help you revise. **NOTE: You MUST have a paper copy of your own piece. No reading the story from your phone. No asking your neighbor to borrow his/her copy.**

The idea of class critique makes some people nervous. You may feel uncomfortable at first. Over the course of the semester, however, you will begin to find the comments and suggestions of the class and the instructor invaluable.

Guidelines/policies for criticism:

- 1) We'll begin with a more general opinion of the work. Example: "My sense is that you're trying for a tone of ironic humor throughout the piece. I think that, for the most part, you've succeeded, though the ending seems too flippant." Or: "I like this piece, especially the dialogue, but feel that it's too long."

We'll then move on to more specific comments. Example: "There's a lot of repetition of the word 'interesting' in paragraph three." Or: "You have a tendency to overuse commas."

- 2) Be honest. False praise does not help the writer in any way and compromises your role as critic.
- 3) Criticism should not be mean-spirited or vengeful. And it goes without saying that sexist, racist, homophobic or otherwise inappropriate comments will not be tolerated.
- 4) When it comes to taking criticism, be open-minded, but remember that what you revise—what you leave in, add, leave out—is ultimately your decision. Some remarks will resonate more clearly than others for you.

CLASS SCHEDULE

#1	T	01/09	Introduction to course
	TH	01/11	Listing
#2	T	01/16	Read Dillard essay (xi) in Gutkind, the introduction in Gerard/Forche and also Dinty Moore (122) in Gerard/Forche
	TH	01/18	Bring three typed copies of lists to share with classmates
#3	T	01/23	Assignment 1 (the three lists) due/In-class writing
	TH	01/25	Read Gutkind, xix, in Gutkind and Ortiz Cofer (8) and Lopate (38) in G/F
#4	T	01/30	Workshops
	TH	02/01	Workshops
#5	T	02/06	Workshops
	TH	02/08	Workshops
#6	T	02/13	Workshops
	TH	02/15	Essay 2 due/Read handouts
#7	T	02/20	Workshops
	TH	02/22	Workshops

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| #8 | T | 02/27 | Workshops |
| | TH | 03/01 | Workshops |
| #9 | T | 03/06 | Workshops |
| | TH | 03/08 | Essay 3 due |
| | | | Read In the Woods (318) in Gutkind, and The Shadow Knows (256) |

SPRING BREAK

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|-----|----|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| #10 | T | 03/20 | Workshops |
| | TH | 03/22 | Workshops |
| #11 | T | 03/27 | Workshops |
| | TH | 03/29 | Workshops |
| #12 | T | 04/03 | Read Miller, 14, in Gerard/Forche and Robson, 226, in Gutkind |
| | TH | 04/05 | Essay 4 due |
| #13 | T | 04/10 | Workshops |
| | TH | 04/12 | Workshops |
| #14 | T | 04/17 | Workshops |
| | TH | 04/19 | Workshops |
| #15 | T | 04/24 | Essay 5 due |
| | TH | 04/26 | Publishing Your Work |

NOTE: I may make minor changes to this syllabus in order to suit the needs of the class. Changes will always be announced in advance.

FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE on Tuesday, May 1st at four

NO FINAL EXAM in this class

English 3601 Assignments

1. List Essays

Lists allow a writer to brainstorm ideas, develop themes, and work on voice. They can be very short—3 lines or so—or quite long—several pages. They can be funny, informative, or poetic. Here are examples of a few list headings: What I Saw on My Way to School Today, My Greatest Achievements in Life So Far, Most Overrated Musicians (Actors, Athletes, Movies), The Biggest Jerks in the Animal Kingdom, Top Ten Signs Your Coworker is a Computer Hacker, Effective Ways to Annoy Your Siblings, Things You Don't Want to Hear at a Tattoo Parlor, and Signs Your Amish Teen is in Trouble.

Length: 3 lists

2. Definition Essay

Pick an abstract word that is important to you—Justice, Desire, Dating, Work, Faith—and copy out a dictionary definition, adding a few more attributes that you think people would agree on. Then skip a line and write a highly personalized definition of the word. Ground your definition in something concrete. (Taken from *Writing True* by Perl and Schwartz)

Length: 1 to 3 pages

3. Expertise/How-to Essay

We are all good at something, whether it's playing poker, writing poetry, getting out of traffic tickets, coaching Little-League baseball, or getting free stuff on the web. Writing about what we're good at, if done in an entertaining, informative, and even self-deprecating way, doesn't come across as bragging. (Not that there's anything wrong with a little self-promotion now and then.) For this assignment, I'd like you to write about something you're an expert in (or at least can do quite well.) Your essay can be in the form of a reflection: when did you first engage in or realize you were good at this activity? Another option would be to write a "how-to" paper explaining to someone else how to do what you're so good at. Think broadly. No recipes, please.

Length: 3-4 pages

4. Profile essay

A profile essay focuses on the description of a person. It should be factual but also literary, providing an interesting experience for the reader. First of all, you'll need to find a person to observe and interview. No family members or boyfriends/girlfriends please. Interview questions should be open-ended—we'll talk about effective questions and methods in class. Secondly, you'll need to decide what tone you want to convey and the structure you want to use. No Question and Answer formats.

Length: 4-5 pages

5. Your choice essay

Means exactly what it says