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# ENG 2001-001: Creative Writing: Nonfiction

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**ENGLISH 2001-001, SPRING 2007****Creative Writing: Nonfiction****T/TH 9:30—10:45****Coleman Hall 3159****Dr. Daiva Markelis/581-5614/348-9230/dmmarkelis@eiu.edu****Office: Coleman Hall 3375****Office Hours: T 2:00 to 3:30, TH 11:00 to 12:30, and by appointment****Purpose of the Course**

This course is designed to introduce you to nonfiction as a genre of creating writing. You will craft various nonfiction pieces such as personal narratives and profiles. Several short in-class writing exercises will be required, though the major part of this course will be devoted to the workshop. In workshops students make copies of their essays for every class member; the class then discusses the works in a supportive atmosphere, offering suggestions for revision. Students will get the chance to workshop two creative nonfiction essays. Final grades will be based on a portfolio of essays and other writings, and on participation in classroom discussions.

**Books and Materials**

On Writing Well. William Zinsser

Writing Creative Nonfiction. Edited by Philip Gerard and Carolyn Forché

**Requirements**

1. Read the assigned material by the assigned date and participate in class discussions and occasional in-class writing exercises.
2. Critique the writing of classmates in a constructive manner. Have at least two of your essays workshopped by the class.
3. Submit a portfolio of creative work at the end of the semester. The portfolio should be at least thirty typed pages (double-spaced) and should include all assignments as well as any in-class writing exercises you choose to submit.

**Grade Breakdown**

Writing: 80%

Attendance/Participation/Written Peer Critique: 20%

**Writing Portfolio**

In creative writing courses, grading is a necessary evil. 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 forgo the comments. Or, if their grade is a B+, they ask themselves, "Heck, why not an A-?" Portfolios, where one grade is given at the end for your entire creative output, work to your advantage. You can rewrite as many times as you like. You can include things you've written in the middle of the night, out-of-the-blue, spur-of-the-moment.

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 must also be free of grammatical and mechanical errors. Please visit the Writing Center if you need help with verb tense, sentence structure, comma use, etc.

### **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 every member of the class. You read your essay out loud. Class members have a few minutes to write down comments, questions, and suggestions for revision. Class members discuss strengths and weaknesses. (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: If your piece is longer than four double-spaced pages, you need to hand it out to your peers the class session BEFORE it is read. You then read only one or two pages out loud during class.**

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.

### **Attendance/Participation**

Many of the ideas used in your essays will be generated in class discussions or in-class writing, which is why it is very important that you come to each class session. I realize, however, that emergencies do occur. Excused absences are those outlined in the student catalogue: "illness, emergency, or university activity." Documentation is required for all excused absences. Unexcused absences are pretty much all others—oversleeping, hangovers, finishing papers for other classes, out-of-town trips "because I'm homesick." More than three unexcused absences will lower your attendance/participation grade to an E.

Since the format of this class is primarily workshop, participation is extremely important. If you have great attendance but rarely speak up in class, it will be difficult to get an A or B for this part of the class requirement.

**PLEASE TURN OFF ALL CELL PHONES BEFORE COMING TO CLASS**

## CLASS SCHEDULE

- #1 T 01/09 Introduction to course  
TH 01/11 Read Zinsser, "Simplicity" and "The Sound of Your Voice"
- #2 T 01/16 Bring three typed copies of mini essay to share with classmates  
TH 01/18 Moore, "The Comfortable Chair" (122) and Slater, "One Nation" (164)
- #3 T 01/23 Zinsser, "Bits and Pieces"  
TH 01/25 Lopate, "Writing Personal Essays" (38)  
Zinsser, "Writing About Yourself: The Memoir"
- #4 T 01/30 Workshops  
TH 02/01 Workshops
- #5 T 02/06 Workshops  
TH 02/08 **First essay due**
- #6 T 02/13 Lopate, "Portrait of My Body" (214)  
TH 02/15 Workshops
- #7 T 02/20 Workshops  
TH 02/22 Workshops
- #8 T 02/27 Workshops  
TH 03/01 **Second essay due**  
Zinsser, "Writing About People" and Dillard, "Flying in the Middle of Art" (357)
- #9 T 03/06 Conferences  
TH 03/08 Conferences

## SPRING BREAK

- #10 T 03/20 Workshops  
TH 03/22 Workshops
- #11 T 03/27 Workshops  
TH 03/29 Workshops  
**Third essay due**
- #12 T 04/03 Lowry, (97) and Lowry, (256)  
TH 04/05 Workshops

#13	T	04/10	Workshops
	TH	04/12	Workshops
#14	T	04/17	Workshops
	TH	04/19	Workshops
#15	T	04/24	Workshops
	TH	04/26	Colbert, "Getting Published" (130)
			<b>Portfolios due</b>

**NOTES:**

There is no final exam in this class.

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