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ENG 3061-001: Intermediate Nonfiction Writing

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Eastern Illinois University

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ENGLISH 3061, Spring 2020
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: W 2:30 to 4:00
T/TR 12:30 to 1:30 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 and workshop five essays in different creative nonfiction genres and on various topics. (Most of these will be short and quite fun.)
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.
5. Attend the Lions in Winter Literary Festival on Saturday, January 25th. If you can't attend, let me know and I can give you a short writing assignment to make up the 5 percent.

Grade Breakdown

Workshopping of Essays/Writing Portfolio: 50%
Participation: Written peer critique: 25%
Oral peer critique and discussion of essays from book: 20%
Attendance at Lions in Winter: 5%

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. 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; I will give you ample feedback on each piece and encourage you to make appointments to see me about your writing progress.

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.

Workshopping Procedure/Participation

A large part of this course will be devoted to the workshop, a popular method of critiquing creative writing. Students sign up for workshop days in class. We will aim for three students per class period. Every student will have a chance to workshop every one of their assignments.

If you are the writer:

- 1) You make a copy of your essay for all class members and email it to them at least two days before your workshop. (I will set up a class listserv or we might try posting to D2L.) **For example, if your piece is workshopped on a Tuesday, it must be mailed 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.**
- 2) 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 from your phone or asking your neighbor to borrow his/her copy.**
- 3) 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 suggestions will resonate more clearly than others for you.

If you are a critic (and everyone who is not workshopping a piece is a critic):

- 1) Read over the essay you have received. Mark sentences you like by underlining them or otherwise showing your admiration. Put question marks where you don't understand something. Write MORE after sections where you want more information.
- 2) Write a detailed 2 paragraph **typed** critique of each essay. Here are some guidelines:
 - You might begin with a 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." Or: "I like this piece, especially the dialogue. You do a great job of conveying what it feels like to be in high school."
 - Move on to more specific comments and suggestions. Example: "I'd like to hear more about the incident with the baby-sitter" or "The ending seemed a little too abrupt. Maybe you should add another paragraph to explain what you did after the incident" or "There's a lot of repetition of the word 'interesting' in paragraph three" or "You have a tendency to overuse commas."

- Be honest. False praise does not help the writer in any way and compromises your role as critic.
 - 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.
- 3) Email your 2 paragraph critique to the writer BEFORE the beginning of class. If you want to attach the essay itself with in-text comments, that's fine, but make sure you have a copy of the essay on hand for class.
- ALSO
- Email your 2 paragraph critique to **me** BEFORE the beginning of class. If you want to attach the essay itself with in-text comments, that's fine.

Participation

Participation includes making insightful and constructive written comments on the writing of your peers. Participation also includes giving oral feedback in class.

Attendance

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, finishing papers for other classes, out-of-town trips "because I'm homesick." More than three unexcused absences may lower your attendance/participation grade to an E.

Writing Center

Please visit the Writing Center if you need help with any aspect of writing, including brainstorming, organization, development, sentence structure, documentation, and grammar. The Writing Center is located at 3110 Coleman Hall and is open Mondays through Thursdays from 9am to 3pm and 6pm to 9pm, and Fridays from 9am to 1pm. Drop by to make an appointment or call (217) 581-5929.

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.

CLASS SCHEDULE

#1	T	01/14	Introduction to course/In-class writing
	TH	01/16	Read <i>Why I Write</i> (page 6 in Creative Nonfiction, aka CNF) Read handout: <i>What is Creative Nonfiction</i> Listing Exercise
#2	T	01/21	Read <i>But Tell It Slant: From Poetry to Prose and Back Again</i> (page 8 in CNF) Read <i>Researching Your Own Life</i> (45 in CNF) Read Dillard essay (xi) in <i>In Fact</i>
	TH	01/23	Bring three typed copies of lists to share with classmates Read definition handouts
#3	T	01/28	The three lists due (these count as Essay 1) In-class writing
	TH	01/30	Read <i>The Woman Who Slept With One Eye Open</i> (182 in CNF) and also <i>Writing Personal Essays</i> (38 in CNF)
#4	T	02/04	Workshops on Essay 2
	TH	02/06	Workshops on Essay 2
#5	T	02/11	Workshops on Essay 2
	TH	02/13	Workshops on Essay 2
#6	T	02/18	Read <i>The Comfortable Chair</i> (122 in CNF) and <i>What They Don't Tell You about Hurricanes</i> (223 in CNF) Also: Read <i>Being Brians</i> (163 in <i>In Fact</i>)
	TH	02/20	Bring in how-to paper (from magazines, internet, books) of your choice
#7	T	02/25	Workshops on Essay 3
	TH	02/27	Workshops on Essay 3
#8	T	03/03	Workshop on Essay 3
	TH	03/05	Workshop on Essay 3
#9	T	03/10	Read <i>In the Woods</i> (318 in <i>In Fact</i>) and <i>A Braided Heart</i> (14 in CNF)
	TH	03/12	In-class writing

SPRING BREAK

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|-----|----|-------|--|
| #10 | T | 03/24 | Workshops on Essay 4 |
| | TH | 03/26 | Workshops on Essay 4 |
| #11 | T | 03/31 | Workshops on Essay 4 |
| | TH | 04/02 | Workshops on Essay 4 |
| #12 | T | 04/07 | English Studies Conference |
| | TH | 04/09 | Read <i>An Album Quilt</i> (71 in In Fact) |
| #13 | T | 04/14 | In-class Writing |
| | TH | 04/16 | Workshop on Essay 5 |
| #14 | T | 04/21 | Workshops on Essay 5 |
| | TH | 04/23 | TBA (I may be out of town) |
| #15 | T | 04/28 | Workshops on Essay 5 |
| | TH | 04/30 | Workshops on Essay 5 |

NOTE: There is no final exam in this class

Portfolios are due on Tuesday, May 5th, by 5pm, either electronically or in my mailbox

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: 2 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, 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. **Length: 2 to 5 pages**

4. Location Essay

Tell the story of a location, possibly one that is very close to your heart that you already know well, or a new one that inspires your curiosity. Pay particular attention to your own connection to the location, however small or large that connection may be.

OR

Chose a location that you've come to know as an adult. Compare how you interact with this setting now to how you interacted with similar settings when you were a child. How has your perspective changed? **Length: 3 to 6 pages**

5. Writer's Choice

This means exactly what the title says. You have your choice of any essay topic, written in any style or format. We'll take more about this in class. **Length: 4 to 6 pages**