

English 3950: Intermediate Creative Nonfiction

Syllabus

Sarah Einstein

Email: sarahemc2@gmail.com

se116011@ohio.edu

Office: Ellis Hall 356

Office Phone: 740-593-2813

Office Hours: T–Th 1:30-3:00 (at Donkey)

Class Meets: T-TH 12:00-1:20 Ellis 214

“What I expect from writers—and from myself as a writer—is to articulate a complex view of things. To incite us to be more compassionate. To orchestrate our mourning. And to celebrate ecstasy.” --Susan Sontag

The primary goal of this class is to provide you with a supportive workshop experience within which you can experiment with different genres within creative nonfiction and build a portfolio of work, at least one piece of which should be ready for submission to literary journals, to introduce you to working writers in the genre, and to give you the opportunity to participate in the literary community.

Texts:

One book by a working writer in CNF, as chosen with the instructor.

Various essays as assigned

Course Requirements: Eight (2 pages) essays in first draft form, a craft presentation on one essay of your choice, one longer essay (3500 word minimum) that expands one of your brief pieces, and a final portfolio containing revised versions of four of your short essays and your long piece. (The short essay which you chose to expand cannot also be one of your four revised brief essays. You must have a total of five polished pieces.)

Grading:

Early Drafts of Brief Essays: 20%

Author Interview and Wikipedia Page: 20%

Workshop Participation: 30%

Final Portfolio: 30%

Early Drafts of Brief Essays: You are encouraged to experiment with form, voice, content, and other craft elements when drafting your brief essays and it's expected that some of these experiments will be less successful than others. However, these should be polished drafts that are free from spelling and grammatical errors (which is to say, grammatical mistakes, not intentional deviations from grammatical convention for the sake of art).

Author Interview and Wikipedia Page: Each of you will be assigned to read, interview, and develop a Wikipedia page for one author currently publishing in CNF. We have a long and amazing list of volunteer authors, and I hope you are as excited about this part of the class as I am! It will allow you to work with and get to know a working author

and to engage with a number of different people on issues of craft, publishing, and the writing life.

Workshop: Workshop is the heart of the creative writing classroom. It is where we come together to share our work and to offer our suggestions, as fellow writers, to one another in a constructive manner that privileges the needs of the text. You are expected to come to class with each workshop submission read, and to provide each author with at least three specific comments that either identify passages which are working particularly well or make suggestions about how a passage which is not working could be improved. Bring TWO copies of this, one to give to the author—along with any line notes you've made in her essay—and one to give to me. In class, each person will be expected to provide one thing they admire about each essay and one suggestion to make the essay stronger. A further note: creative nonfiction requires that the workshop grant each author certain courtesies not required in fiction or poetry workshop: we will believe, unless we have strong reason to suspect otherwise, that the author is speaking truthfully. We will not criticize life choices or pass judgment on personal experiences. We will focus on the writing, and not on the writer. The work that is shared in this classroom is private, and you will not share your classmates' work with anyone who is not a member of the workshop. Finally, and most importantly, this classroom is a safe place for all persons; we will *not* say prejudiced or unkind things about one another.

Final Portfolio: Your final portfolio will include four polished brief essays and one polished longer work. Portfolio grades will be determined as follows:

- A. An "A" portfolio will include at least one piece which is so well realized that it is ready for submission to literary journals. All pieces will be fairly far along in the editing process, and no pieces will be missing or still in the "rough draft" stage.
- B. A "B" portfolio will include strong work that is fairly far along in the editing process, but no pieces that are ready to be submitted to literary journals. There will be no missing pieces, and no pieces will be still in the "rough draft" stage.
- C. A "C" portfolio will contain work that is still in the early stages of drafting and/or be missing one brief essay all together. Even if a single work is well-developed, a portfolio that is otherwise underdeveloped or incomplete cannot earn a higher grade.
- D. A "D" portfolio will contain work that hasn't advanced much beyond the "rough draft" stage and/or be missing either two brief essays or not have made substantial strides toward completing the longer essay. Even if a single work is well-developed, a portfolio that is this incomplete cannot earn a higher grade.
- F. A portfolio that does not include at least two well-developed brief essays and a complete draft of the longer essay will be considered a failing portfolio. If you are in danger of failing this course, it is strongly recommended that you meet with the instructor and/or consider dropping the class.

Attendance: Attendance is particularly important in a workshop class. Missing more than four sessions of the class will result in your grade being capped at a "C" for the course. Missing more than six hours of the course will result in a failing grade for the course. There are no excused absences. Scholar athletes who know they will be

obligated to miss more than two classes during the quarter should not take this course during their travelling season.

If illness or disability impacts your ability to attend class on a regular basis, please meet with me to discuss ways to accommodate this. It is possible that we can arrange a way for you to participate in workshop remotely, using technologies such as Skype. Any absence which you have not pre-arranged with me, or which cannot be accommodated, counts toward the attendance policy.

Classroom Accessibility: Please let me know as soon as possible if you need an accommodation in order to work successfully in this class. This classroom strives for full accessibility, and it is not necessary for you to have an official accommodation letter from Disability Services in order to request changes to the classroom that will better serve your needs as a student. Both able bodied students and students with disabilities are encouraged to suggest any improvements to the learning environment. We're all in this together!

Safe Zone Statement: I am part of the SafeZone community network of trained Ohio University faculty/staff/students who are available to listen and support you. As a SafeZone Ally, I can help you connect with resources on campus to address problems you face that interfere with your academic success, particularly issues of sexual violence, hateful acts, or concerns faced by individuals due to sexual orientation/gender identity. My goal is to help you be successful and to maintain a safe and equitable campus.

Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism is defined by the Ohio University Student Handbook as a Code A offense (10); this means:

[a] student found to have violated any of the following regulations will be subject to a maximum sanction of expulsion, or any sanction not less than a reprimand Plagiarism involves the presentation of some other person's work as if it were the work of the presenter. A faculty member has the authority to grant a failing grade. . . as well as referring the case to the director of judiciaries.

Any student who has chosen to plagiarize will receive an F for the course and will be referred to judiciaries. Also, you will break my heart.

Late Work: Due to the nature of workshop, no late creative work will be accepted. Each person may drop one of the short essays from her/his final grade if she chooses, and so missing a single brief essay assignment will not negatively impact your grade. If you must be absent for a workshop, you can however turn in a copy of your comments on each essay to me, and provide a copy to each person whose work was being workshopped, for full credit provided that you do so by the next class meeting which you attend.

The Vagaries of Life...

Such is life that we cannot always predict things with perfect accuracy. The schedule of work is subject to change as necessary to meet the primary course goals, account for inclement weather or other unforeseen events, and to accommodate learning needs of the classroom community which have not yet been identified.

<p>August 25: Welcome! An introduction to the workshop. Homework: Read Sonya Huber's "Shadow Syllabus," Sonja Livingston's "A Thousand Mary Doyles" B.J. Hollars "On the Occurrence of March 20, 1981 and on the Occurrences of Every Night After," and Karen McElmurry's "Consider the Houses." Write a two page exploration of your own writing. What kind of writer do you want to be? What kind of work do you want to publish? What successes have you already had? What goals do you have for your writing? What are your fears? Bring one printed copy to class on Thursday. This is for my eyes only, so be as open as you are comfortable being. It will help me shape the rest of the class.</p>	<p>August 27: Craft issues in short creative nonfiction, in class writing exercise. Homework: Read Steven Church's "Lag Time," Joe Bonomo's "Cathy or Katy," Jill Talbot's "Stranded," David Lazar's "Being a Boy-Man," read or listen to David Oliu's "Zelda Revisited," and Mari Naomi's "The Song in my Head." Choose any one of the brief essays (except the Huber) which we have read and use something you found in it—an idea, a craft element, an image, a voice—to inspire a brief essay of your own. Write two pages and 10 copies of it to class on Tuesday for workshop.</p>
<p>Sept. 2 Read before class: https://www.creativenonfiction.org/online-reading/expanding-essay-canon-one-decade-time by Ned Stuckey-French</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write two pages on your understanding of what an essay is and how it functions. Submit to the instructor by Thursday at noon via email.</p>	<p>Sept. 4 Individual Conferences: No Class</p>
<p>Sept. 9 Read Before Class: Excerpts from SafeKeeping by Abigail Thomas (available on Bb)</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write two pages that contain at least three short, sub-headed sections</p>	<p>Sept. 11 Excerpts from SafeKeeping by Abigail Thomas (available on Bb)</p> <p>Bring ten copies of your two page essay in segments to class to hand out for workshop.</p>

<p>Sept. 16: Read before class: http://www.hobartpulp.com/web_features/whipping-post and http://therumpus.net/2012/09/what-i-learned-in-hOMEMaking/ by Jill Talbot.</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write a two page essay in the second person.</p> <p>Order and begin reading the latest book by your chosen author.</p>	<p>Sept. 18: Before class, read: http://www.readthebestwriting.com/buckethead-b-j-hollars/ and http://bendinggenre.com/2013/12/09/the-dead-clowns-knot-b-j-hollars/ by BJ Hollars.</p> <p>Bring ten copies of a two page essay written in second person to class to distribute for workshop.</p>
<p>Sept. 23 Before class, read: http://www.stilljournal.net/karen-mcelmurray-saved-cnfn.php and http://herkind.org/links/global-woman/outside by Karen McElmurray.</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write a two page essay with something or someone creepy in it.</p>	<p>Sept. 25 Before class, read: http://therumpus.net/2013/05/on-loitering/ and http://therumpus.net/2013/01/field-trip-to-the-earthquake-lab-2010/ by Steven Church.</p> <p>Post your weekly essay on BB.</p>
<p>Sept. 29 Before class, read: https://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0701/fraser/essay.html and http://www.salon.com/2000/01/07/vegetarian/ by Laura Fraser.</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write a two page essay in which food plays an important role.</p>	<p>Oct. 2 Before class, read: http://www.terrain.org/essays/28/fallon.htm and http://www.katiefallon.com/?p=107 by Katie Fallon.</p> <p>Post your weekly essay on BB.</p>
<p>Oct. 7 Before class, read: http://blog.longreads.com/2014/09/11/how-to-spell-the-rebel-yell/ and http://superstitionreview.asu.edu/issue3/nonfiction/el-enapassarello by Elena Passarello, and this review of her book <i>Let Me Clear My Throat</i> http://thediagram.com/12_4/rev_passarello.html .</p> <p>Prepare three questions to ask Prof. Passarello in class on Thursday.</p>	<p>Oct. 9 Elena Passarello visit to classroom.</p>
<p>Oct. 14 Before class, read: http://www.salon.com/2013/03/04/when_i_parented_my_father_partner/ and http://www.thenervousbreakdown.com/amonticello/2013/05/the-faces-we-carry/ by Amy Monticello.</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write a two page essay in which something or someone is lost.</p>	<p>Oct. 16 Before class, read: http://www.thenervousbreakdown.com/wortiz/2013/05/mix-tape/ and http://www.vollbrooklyn.com/2014/03/26/girlfriend/ by Wendy Oritz.</p> <p>Upload your weekly essay to BB.</p> <p>Send your proposed interview questions to</p>

<p>This week: Finish the book by your chosen author, begin forming questions for author interview.</p>	<p>Sarah via email.</p>
<p>Oct. 21 Before class, read: http://fullgrownpeople.com/2014/06/19/unfinished/ and http://sweetlit.com/6.3/proseAldrich.php by Marcia Aldrich.</p> <p>Weekly Prompt: Write a two page essay inspired by a piece of art, a song, or a film.</p> <p><i>Begin work on your longer essay</i></p>	<p>Oct. 23 Before class, play: http://graphics.latimes.com/how-to-be-a-writer/ Come to class prepared to talk about the work of writing that is not, actually, writing.</p> <p>Upload your weekly essay to BB.</p>
<p>Oct. 28 Individual Conferences at Donkey: Bring revised interview questions and research for Wikipedia project.</p>	<p>Oct. 30 Individual Conferences at Donkey: Bring revised interview questions research for Wikipedia project.</p>
<p>Nov. 4 Wikipedia workshop. Class will meet in computer lab TBD.</p>	<p>Nov. 6 Wikipedia workshop. Class will meet in computer lab TBD.</p>
<p>Nov. 11 No class: UPLOAD YOUR LONGER ESSAY TO BB by 5pm.</p>	<p>Nov. 13 Group One: Longer Essay Workshop</p>
<p>Nov. 18 Group Two: Longer Essay Workshop</p>	<p>Nov. 20 Group Three: Longer Essay Workshop</p>
<p>Nov. 25 Before class, read: http://www.100wordstory.org/3944/dinty-moore-writing-essays-with-brevity/ and http://bendinggenre.com/2014/04/21/what-therefore-dinty-has-joined-together-sarah-einstein/ and http://www.triquarterly.org/craft-essays/%E2%80%9Cmy-name-ned-and-i%E2%80%99m-addict%E2%80%9D-facebook-and-personal-essay .</p> <p>Write a two page essay on where you hope to go next as a writer and what you hope to write.</p>	<p>Nov. 27 Before class, read the submission guidelines to one journal of your choosing, along with several issues of that journal. Bring ten copies of a “cheat sheet” on how and what to submit to that journal to share with your classmates.</p> <p>Upload your weekly essay to BB.</p>
<p>Dec. 2 Final class hootenanny! Or, perhaps hootenanny is too strong a word. But in any event, the final meeting of the class and we will endeavor to make it</p>	<p>Dec. 4 Final Portfolio Due</p>

celebratory.	
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