

ENG 371-A: CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOP
WRITING IN MINIATURE: FLASH ESSAYS AND OTHER BRIEF FORMS
FALL 2020

To write short nonfiction requires an alertness to detail, a quickening of the senses, a focusing of the literary lens, so to speak, until one has magnified some small aspect of what it means to be human. –Bernard Cooper

Class meets: TR 9:45-11:00 a.m. EST on Zoom

Credits: 4

Credit Hour Definition: www.suffolk.edu/syllabus

Instructor: Amy Monticello Email: amonticello@suffolk.edu

Office: 8th Floor Tremont, Rm. 8048 Office phone: 617-305-8273

Office Hours: M 2:00-3:00 p.m., and by appointment. All office hours will be held on Zoom.

Prerequisites: ENG 212

Course Modality (Online): Students not required to be on campus; instructor delivers course meetings 100% virtually. Instruction may be delivered asynchronously, synchronously, or with a combination of asynchronous and synchronous meetings.

DESCRIPTION

Catalog description: For students interested in writing autobiography and/or other forms of the personal essay. Topics can include childhood, place, sexuality, religion, work, the nature of memory. The focus will be on the writing process, with students presenting work-in-progress to the class for discussion and revision. The student should plan to read models of creative non-fiction. Normally offered annually.

Full description: In French, the word *essayer* means “to try.” Essays, then, are attempts to make meaning out of real experience, and to situate that experience within larger cultural, historical, and philosophical frameworks. Though the material for an essay may come from real life (and most often, our own lives), we aim to shape it—fragment it, juxtapose it, research it, collage it, amplify it, speculate on it, and meditate on it—in the desire to arrive at insights about the complexities and questions of lived experience. This means rendering the world in the vivid ways of all creative writing, with images, energy, tension, and pattern, while also finding and sculpting the form it takes. What characterizes the essay is its malleability—the essay is a chameleon, a shape-shifter. It transcends and transmogrifies and surprises. It responds well to experimentation of form because the form of an essay is often part of revealing the essay’s insights. This means forms of the essay are nearly limitless. Essays practically beg us to play with them!

This semester, our workshop will focus on micro forms of essaying. The essays we read and write will be no more than 1,000 words (and often much less). This might sound like the writing will be easier, but I find that the expansiveness of an essay can make short forms more

challenging. To learn the techniques of flash and micro essays, we will study work in literary journals such as *Brevity*, *Hippocampus*, *Sweet*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Hotel Amerika*, and others. From Twitter essays, to *River Teeth*'s Tiny Beautiful Things series, to flash essays that demonstrate the true range of creative nonfiction as a whole, we will use the small—the intricate, the detailed, the momentary, the urgent—to illuminate the very largeness of real life. We will follow the sharp turns of these miniature forms to the unexpected places they can deliver us.

I'm extending this course description to acknowledge that we are living through a challenging, often upsetting, and fluid situation that's affecting almost every area of our lives. While I cannot anticipate how the COVID-19 pandemic (or other elements of our contemporary moment) will affect our class or your individual lives this semester, I can promise you that I will teach first from compassion, with flexibility following close behind. I hope I can earn your trust at a time when so much feels untrustworthy and be a supportive presence in your lives and writing. I will never force you to share your personal circumstances, but I will always listen should you ever want to, and I will do whatever is in my power to help and encourage you. Writing is an affirmation of the largeness our individual lives contain, as well as the smallness of our existence within the enormity of our worlds. My wish is that you'll have opportunities to explore both this semester.

An important note: Our class will be meeting online this semester, but we will hold all class meetings synchronously unless otherwise stated on the daily schedule or announced by the instructor. All students are expected to attend the synchronous class meetings on Zoom. If you anticipate or encounter circumstances that will prevent your live attendance, you must let me know immediately.

TEXTBOOKS/REQUIRED MATERIALS

- *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Flash Nonfiction*, edited by Dinty W. Moore. E-book recommended: <https://rosemetalpress.com/books/the-rose-metal-press-field-guide-to-writing-flash-nonfiction/>. Hard copies may be purchased at the Suffolk bookstore.
- Other course readings will be available on our Blackboard course site. Please consult the site every day. Please have access to electronic versions in class.

GRADING

94-100 = A	87-89 = B+	77-79 = C+
90-93 = A-	84-86 = B	73-76 = C
	80-83 = B-	70-72 = C-
67-69 = D+	<60 = F	
64-66 = D		
60-63 = D-		

I will post grades on Blackboard. Please consider the online gradebook as a courtesy to you, subject to errors given various upgrades and shifts in the software. I reserve the right to make gradebook corrections to keep it consistent with the syllabus so that your grade reflects true performance, not software or user error. If you see something that doesn't make sense, please alert me! Thanks so much for your help.

Workshop #1: 15%

Students will write two flash essays in the style of *River Teeth's* Beautiful Things column. Essays should be between 200-250 words each.

Workshop #2: 20%

Students will write one flash essay in the style of *Brevity* magazine, which limits essays to 750 words or less.

Revision Portfolio: 20%

Students will revise one of their flash essays from throughout the semester, submit one new essay in any of the forms we've studied, and submit a 1-2 page letter to me that details what they've learned about writing flash essays this semester and how micro forms of nonfiction offer something unique, even if they use similar techniques as longer personal essays.

Workshop Letters: 20%

Students will compose workshop letters for each student in each of our two workshop periods, excluding their own work. These letters must follow a specific format outlined by the instructor. Informal feedback may also be delivered in small groups on Blackboard.

Discussion Leading: 15%

Each student will sign up to lead the discussion of the day's readings sometime during the semester (excluding workshop days). The discussion leader should prepare at least 20 minutes of material, which should use a variety of forms: discussion questions, Blackboard posts, in-class writing activities, a Powerpoint or Prezi on craft, etc. Options will be outlined in the full assignment prompt.

Professionalism and Participation: 10%

There are many ways to demonstrate engagement with our class materials, and I will work to give a wide variety of opportunities to participate for students of all learning styles and personalities. At its most basic, good participation means coming to class regularly and on time, having read the material assigned for the day, active listening, completing in-class writing and other activities when assigned, and respectful, observant, challenging engagement with both published work and the work of our peers. I expect every student to contribute to our class

dialogue, whether by speaking up during discussion and small group work, posting questions and responses on Blackboard, developing creative communities with your classmates on Blackboard and Zoom, or even slipping me a question or comment via email to address in class (anonymously, if you prefer). If anything hinders your ability to participate, please speak with me and we'll work something out.

Assignment/Activity	Engagement Estimated	Engagement Hours
Course Readings/Texts	300 pages x 5 min/page	60
Essay Drafts	15 hours each x 2	30
Workshop Letters	1 hour each x 30	30
Revision and Final Portfolio	17 hours	17
Discussion Leader Prep	5 hours	5
Class Attendance	3 hours X 15 weeks	45

Total: 185 engagement hours

COURSE GOALS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

<p>Course GOALS Upon successful completion of this course, students will:</p>	<p>Learning OBJECTIVES Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:</p>	<p>ASSESSMENTS How the student will be assessed on these learning objectives:</p>
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<p>.... Understand the craft techniques used in creative nonfiction</p>	<p>Students will be able to employ the craft techniques of creative nonfiction to produce original and meaningful work.</p> <p>Students will be able to recognize the risks taken in a particular piece of writing, and identify them as a matter of authorial decision.</p> <p>Students will be to analyze the craft of published essays.</p>	<p>Essays</p> <p>Portfolio</p> <p>Workshop letters</p> <p>Discussion Leading</p>
<p>....Understand the essay as a malleable form.</p>	<p>Students will be able to recognize the essay as a form with many different kinds of structures.</p> <p>Students will be able to craft essays whose form arises from the content.</p> <p>Students will be able to evaluate the success of an essay.</p>	<p>Essays</p> <p>Portfolio</p> <p>Discussion Leading</p> <p>Workshop letters</p>

<p>.... Understand the creative writing classroom as part of a community.</p>	<p>Students will be able to provide substantial, meaningful, craft-based feedback on peers' work.</p> <p>Students will be able to share writing exercises in small groups.</p> <p>Students will find opportunities for participation in the Boston literary community.</p>	<p>Workshop participation</p> <p>Workshop letters</p> <p>Event attendance</p> <p>Discussion Leading</p>
<p>... Understand the process and importance of revision as an ongoing part of a writer's life.</p>	<p>Students will be able to evaluate and respond to critical feedback from peers and instructor.</p> <p>Students will be able to revise their essays at both the macro-structural level and the sentence level.</p>	<p>Revision</p> <p>Workshop letters</p> <p>Event attendance</p>

University-Wide Policies and Academic Resources

Suffolk University has developed important academic and campus life policies that apply to all students. Some of these policies explain logistics such as credit hour requirements, filing academic grievances, and religious holidays, while others are about larger aspects of campus life, such as academic integrity and sexual misconduct.

We also provide many resources that support academic success and quality of life, such as our Center for Learning and Academic Success, Disability Services, Counseling, Health, and Wellness, Technology Services, and International Student Services. Lastly, Suffolk University has a student handbook that acts as a guide through your rights and responsibilities. These policies, the student handbook, and information regarding student resources (including contact info) can be found by following this link: <https://www.suffolk.edu/syllabus>.

To learn more, explore these webpages:

www.suffolk.edu/student-life

www.suffolk.edu/academics/advising-student-services

www.suffolk.edu/student-life/health-wellness

www.suffolk.edu/student-life/student-services/student-affairs/suffolk-cares

Please don't hesitate to contact me for help in navigating these resources. To learn how to best use your syllabus, please follow this link: www.suffolk.edu/academics/72770.php

Course Policies

ATTENDANCE

Per university policy, I take attendance daily. You may have good reasons for missing class on occasion. Perhaps you are sick or chronically sleep-deprived. Perhaps you fall in love. Perhaps Boston sees a glorious fall day that absolutely must be spent outdoors. **You may have 4 “good reasons” for free.** Please notify me of any necessary absences beforehand if possible.

After 4 absences, every additional absence will detract 1/3 of a letter grade from your Participation & Professionalism grade. If you must be absent for a week or more, please contact the Dean of Students Office at (617-573-8239)/studentaffairs@suffolk.edu

We may run into technical difficulties this semester using Zoom, Blackboard, and other digital tools—in fact, let's go ahead and assume we will. In the event of a technical problem with Zoom:

1. Leave the class meeting and log back in.
2. If that is not possible, check your Suffolk email for a link to a new meeting that I will create so that we can resume class (this may take several minutes, so keep checking).
3. If that link also does not work or Zoom becomes inaccessible, check your Suffolk email for a Blackboard announcement for how our course syllabus will be adjusted to make up for the missed class time and how to prepare for our next class meeting.

We can make arrangements in the event of serious personal or family crises. The most important thing is to reach out to me—or to someone—if anything is going on. Also reach out if you just get behind and feel overwhelmed, ashamed, and unsure of how you'll get it all done. We can help with that too.

In college courses, each day builds on the last. So much happens in class—discussions, writing activities, the opportunity to ask questions and get feedback—that you can't fully make up for on your own. Showing up is the most important thing.

CONTINGENCY PLAN

If Suffolk cancels classes, like during severe weather or other reasons, I will send instructions via Blackboard, including any revised due dates for assignment.

We will not meet on scheduled holidays, which are listed in the Daily Schedule. However, you are expected to continue your work on current assignments and prepare as indicated in the schedule for our next meeting.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Our ability to learn together depends on our ability to trust one another and feel comfortable in our classroom and digital environments. All students are responsible for taking an active role in their own learning experience, but also in the learning experience of others. Because the contribution of ideas from each student is critical to the success of our class, we will not allow behavior that may silence voices. Unacceptable behavior includes interrupting others, mocking or shallowly dismissing others' ideas/efforts/identities, carrying on conversations separate from class discussion, or deliberately making comments that could be perceived as racially, sexually, culturally, socioeconomically, or in any other way abusive.

However, learning challenges what we thought we knew and will occasionally be uncomfortable, requiring us to reconsider our assumptions, perceptions, and language. We will work together to show kindness and patience during the learning process, cheering each other on as we grow, change, and find our roles and voices.

I have no doubt our course texts will raise complicated issues about which they are many viewpoints—some of which could be upsetting. Whenever possible, I will provide trigger warnings in the daily schedule about material that could activate stressful responses, and I invite you to let me know if there are subjects about which you'd like advanced notice. We will show one another patience and kindness as we work together to become better thinkers, better writers, and better people.

DIGITAL ETIQUETTE

The world has been made anew this semester due to COVID-19, and so, too, has Suffolk University evolved. This semester, we will be meeting via Zoom and Blackboard, which opens up new avenues for discussion of class conduct. Here are the major do's and don't's of our online workshop. We will work to come up with more on our own:

1. Students are prohibited from making their own recording of lectures and classes, unless the recording is an approved disability accommodation in accordance with University policy. Do not screenshot, either. Basically, respect everyone's privacy. All the time.

2. Class meetings Zoom MAY be recorded. These recordings will not be shared outside our class. The instructor reserves the right to pause a recording should the class be discussing sensitive information.
3. Conversations among students on Blackboard may be informal, gleeful, funny, and even irreverent, but must still follow the class conduct rules listed in the previous section.
4. Consider enabling your video on Zoom. It is not required, but leaving your video off does not mean you can walk away from class. I just may call on you to give a contribution!
5. Please mute yourself on Zoom to cut down on background noises. You may ask a question or make a comment by using the “raise hands” function.
6. You may ask questions or type comments in the chat box, as well. Unless I can’t keep up with it!
7. Please keep your phones silent as you would in a normal class. Additionally, please shut off audible notifications for social media and email.
8. Please refrain from scrolling other tabs on your browser during class. We can tell. Your curious eyes give you away!
9. Do consider your background. What do you want us to see behind you? Fun backgrounds are fine so long as they don’t actually obscure your head.
10. Do consider the lighting on your face. Unless you’re going for that Shadowy Figure distinction, you probably want some light on your face.

EMAIL

Please check your email at least twice a day. I am always happy to correspond via email, and do my absolute best to respond to student emails within 24 hours. I do have many students, however, so please be sure to sign your name. Take email as an opportunity to work on your rhetorical skills. Be convincing!

WORKSHOPS

You will all upload essays on the same due dates, each listed in the Daily Schedule of the syllabus. I will then electronically distribute your peers’ essays to be read and annotated in compliance with the workshop schedule we agree to as a class. It is your responsibility to be sure you have copies of the correct essays read and annotated for each workshop. You will also prepare a short (400-word min) letter to each writer that offers observant and supportive feedback. I recommend writing these as we go so you don’t have to write them all at the end of each workshop period.

In your spoken and written comments to your peers, remember that our purpose is to inspire growth in other writers, not to hinder or insult them, and certainly not to condemn other people’s work and words as a way to nurture our own egos and arrogance. Hollow praise and dismissive critiques are equally useless. We will separate the author from the work, including ourselves from our own. Our mission is not simply to validate our own brilliance or defend the perfection of our work and sublimity of our inspiration. We are building and studying little literary

machines in order to better understand their operations and to help them function—to accomplish their apparent goals—ever more effectively. It is also important we all maintain an appropriate emotional distance, both in giving feedback and in receiving it. Don't take it personally. Don't make it personal. Poor citizenship may detract from your workshop letters or participation & professionalism grades.

TALK TO ME!

I don't expect anyone in this class to make it through on their own, including me. The best successes I've seen are things people accomplished together. Work with me, write to me, talk with me, even if you don't feel like you're struggling or in need of help. It's amazing what can happen when we're just kicking ideas around. If you have any questions or concerns about the course, this syllabus, our assignments, or any of the ideas or texts we work with, please e-mail me or drop in during office hours. I'd love to see you!

DAILY SCHEDULE

Except for things labeled "in class," all assignments and readings are due by class time on the dates listed. I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule as needed in the event of extenuating circumstances, by mutual agreement, and/or to better ensure student learning.

All course dates and times are set for the EDT/EST time zone. The course week begins on a Sunday, and the day ends at 11:59 PM (EDT/EST).

Key: RMP = *Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction* BB= Blackboard

TH Sept. 3: Course Introduction

Reading: None

In class: Syllabus, defining micro forms, discussion leader schedule

T Sept. 8: How Small is Small?

Reading: RMP Preface and Introduction, Essay #1 assignment prompt (BB), and Harmony Hazard's "Stream" (BB)

In class: Reading discussion, Tiny Truths activity (#cnftweet), Beautiful Things activity

TH Sept. 10: On Miniatures

Reading: RMP "On Miniatures," Ira Sukrungruang's "After the Hysterectomy" (BB), and Leanne Ogasawara's "The Perfumed Winds of May" (BB) (CN: surgery and infertility.)

In class: Reading discussion, crafting narratives in flash

Discussion Leader:

T Sept. 15: The Turn

Reading: RMP "Writing Into the Flash," Stephanie Cox's "False Spring" (BB) and Shuly Xochitl Cawood's "Katy Perry is Crooning and Won't Stop Just Because I Did" (BB), a (CN: grief and

divorce.)

In class: Reading discussion, finding “the turn” in flash nonfiction, workshop guidelines

Discussion Leader: Sara Ann

TH Sept. 17: Compression

Reading: RMP “On Carnival Lights, Compression, and Mice,” Sejal Shah’s “Things People Said: An Essay in Seven Steps” (BB), and Donna Steiner’s “How Do They Find Me” (BB) (CN: racism and grief.)

In class: Reading discussion, compressing time and character, workshop schedule

Discussion Leader: Isabel

T Sept. 22: “Thingyness”: On Objects in Flash Essays

Reading: RMP “Paperclips, Sausage, Candy Cigarettes, Silk” and “Memory Triggers and Tropes,” Ronni Lundy’s “Sun Gold Solitaire” (BB), Heidi Czerwiec’s “Mosque/Musk” (BB), and Workshop Letters assignment prompt (BB)

In class: Reading discussion, objects as metaphors, conduits, and lenses

Discussion Leader: Carina

TH Sept. 24: Crafting Voice in Flash Nonfiction

Reading: RMP “Crafting Voice” and “Communal and Personal Voices,” Beth Bich Nguyen’s “Unsilencing the Writing Workshop” (BB) (CN: 9/11 imagery, bullying, animal cruelty)

In class: Reading discussion, experiments in voice construction, writing workshop guidelines

Discussion Leader: Hannah

T Sept. 29: Playing with Point of View

Due: Workshop Essays #1

Reading: RMP “Bye-Bye, I, and Hello, You,” A. Papatya Bucak’s “An Address to My Fellow Faculty Who Have Asked Me to Speak About My Work,” (BB), Natalie Lima’s “Snowbound” (BB), and Sian Griffiths’ “Correction” (BB)

In class: Reading discussion and POV writing activities

Discussion Leader: Lauren

TH Oct. 1: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

T Oct. 6: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

TH Oct. 8: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

T Oct. 13: Workshop
Reading: Peers' essays
In class: Workshop

TH Oct. 15: Workshop
Reading: Peers' essays
In class: Workshop

T Oct 20: Workshop
Reading: Peers' essays and and Essay #2 assignment prompt (BB)
In class: Workshop

TH Oct. 22: Final Workshop AND The Sonic Effect in Flash
Reading due: Peer's essay + RMP "The Sounds and Sense of Sentences," Rita Cirese's "Sounds" (BB), and Jaquira Diaz's "Beach City" (BB)
In class: Reading discussion, creating soundscape, workshop schedule
Discussion Leader: Emily

T Oct. 27: The Shape of Flash

DUE: Workshop letters

Reading: RMP "Over the River and Through the Woods, to Almanac We Go," Marcia Aldrich's "A Short Book on Grief" (BB), Matthew Gavin Frank's "A Brief Atmospheric Future" (BB), and Amanda Miska's "Stalking My Ex-Boyfriend's Girlfriend on Facebook" (BB) (CN: loss)
In class: Reading discussion, emergent forms
Discussion Leader: Karlecia

TH Oct. 29: Artful Digression

Reading: RMP "The Art of Digression," Thao Thai's "Counting Bats" (BB) and J.D. Schraffenberger's "Dropping Babies" (BB)
In class: Reading discussion, the movement of ideas in flash
Discussion Leader: Tess

T Nov. 3 : Location

Reading: RMP "Location, Location, Location," and "The Question of Where We Begin"; Roxane Gay's "There Are Distances Between Us" (BB) and Danielle Geller's "Blood; Quantum" (BB)
In class: Reading discussion, how we locate the reader in our essays
Discussion Leader: Julia

TH Nov. 5: Making Full Use of Time

DUE: Workshop Essay #2

Reading: RMP “Weaving Past, Present, and Future in Flash Nonfiction,” Abby Mims’ “Constellations” (BB), Amy Monticello’s “Shame” (BB) (I know, I’m sorry.), and the Revision Portfolio assignment prompt (BB)

In class: Reading discussion, traversing time

Discussion leader: John

T Nov. 10: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

TH Nov. 12: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

T Nov. 17: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

TH Nov. 19: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

T Nov. 24: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

TH Nov. 26: **NO CLASS: University Closed for Thanksgiving!**

T Dec. 1: Workshop

Reading: Peers’ essays

In class: Workshop

TH Dec. 3: Final Workshop and Perspectives on Revision

Reading: Peer’s essay; Silas Hansen’s “On Asking the Hard Questions” (BB) and Jill Talbot’s “Zooming In [Draft by Draft]” (BB)

In class: Reading discussion, revision strategies

Discussion leader: Kelsey

T Dec. 8: An Essay’s DNA

DUE: Workshop Letters

Reading: Joe Bonomo’s “Locating an Essay’s DNA” (BB)

In class: Reading discussion, literary journals that publish flash nonfiction

Discussion leader: Sarah W.

TH. Dec. 10: Last Day of Class

Reading: None

In class: Course evaluations

Revision Portfolio due during final exam time: December 17th by 4:30 p.m.!