

# ENL 306: CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITING

## Professor's Information

**Professor Silas Hansen**

**Email:** schansen@bsu.edu

**Office Hours:** Wednesdays  
10am-1pm or by appointment

**Office:** Robert Bell 242

## Course Information

**Meeting Time:** TR 9:30-10:45

**Location:** Teachers College 112

## Required Materials

### Text Books:

- *Writing Life Stories: How to Make Memories into Memoirs, Ideas into Essays, and Life into Literature* by Bill Roorbach
- *The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, ed. by Lex Williford and Michael Martone
- *Thrown* by Kerry Howley

### Other:

- Consistent access to a computer program that saves as .doc or .docx
- A [dropbox.com](https://www.dropbox.com) or [drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com) account to back up your work

## Course Description

This class is an intensive study in the craft of writing creative nonfiction. In this course, you will read a great many published essays with a focus on identifying and evaluating the effectiveness of various craft techniques. You will then practice these craft techniques in weekly writing exercises, write and significantly revise your own essays, and read and critique your classmates' work. You will read, write, share your writing, and talk about what you've read and written in each and every class.

## Course Objectives

I expect that you will be able to do the following by the end of the semester:

- Make informed, conscious choices (and articulate your decision making process) about what to write, how to write, and when to employ specific craft techniques to make your essays more engaging.
- Provide thoughtful, constructive, and craft-based critiques of both published essays and your classmates' work.

## Assignments and Grading

Reading Responses - 10%

Writing Journal - 10%

Literary Magazine Presentation - 5%

Essay Submissions (3 @ 10% each) - 30%

Peer Review/Workshop Responses - 5%

Participation/Professionalism - 20%

Final Portfolio - 20%

## Reading Responses 10%

For each individual work of literature you are assigned, you will write a brief (200 words) response. These responses are due to the Blackboard drop box *before* the start of the class in which the essay/book/chapter will be discussed. **Late Reading Responses will earn no credit. There are no exceptions.**

For more information, please see the Reading Response Prompt on Blackboard.

## Writing Journal 10%

We will begin and/or end each class with a writing exercise, which will help you to generate material for your essays and/or experiment with or demonstrate your mastery of a specific craft technique. I will occasionally have you turn these in at the end of class, but each of them will also go into your Writing Journal. You will also occasionally finish a writing exercise or revise it outside of class.

Your Writing Journal should be a single Word document, neatly organized, that contains each and every writing exercise we do in class. On three occasions, I will collect your writing journals to ensure that they are complete and up to date. **Late Writing Journals will earn no credit. There are no exceptions.**

## Literary Magazine Presentation 5%

In small groups of approximately 3-5 students, you will choose a literary magazine from an approved list, research it, and then present your findings to your classmates. Your presentation will take place during our finals week meeting. **No credit will be given if you are not ready to present that day.**

For more information about this assignment, refer to the prompt on Blackboard.

## Essay Submissions (3 @ 10%) 30%

You will write three full-length (2000-3000 words) essays this semester, based on specific guidelines I provide. Each of these essays will be peer reviewed by at least one classmate before you turn in a final version to me. **Peer Review is mandatory.** If you cannot participate due to an unfinished essay, you will lose one full letter grade from the assignment (in addition to any penalties for late work) and will earn an unexcused absence for that day.

One of these essays will also be submitted for the entire class to workshop. One-third of the class will be workshopped for each essay submission.

**If your essay is to be workshopped, no credit will be given if it is submitted late.** Otherwise, late submissions will lose one full letter grade for each day that they are late.

For more information, refer to the prompts for each individual essay, which will be posted to Blackboard well in advance of the deadlines.

## Peer Review/Workshop 5%

You will provide a peer review critique for one classmate's first draft for each essay submission. These critiques will be handed in at the end of class for credit.

Additionally, you will write a one page, typed critique letter for each of your classmates' workshop submissions. These letters should refer to specific craft techniques the writer might employ, or employ differently, in order to improve their work.

**Late critique letters will not be accepted. If you cannot participate in Peer Review due to an unexcused absence, you will earn no credit.** If you miss Peer Review for an excused reason, it will not count against you.

## Participation/Professionalism 20%

You are expected to attend each and every class (unless excused—see “Attendance Policy”), show up on time and stay until the end, fully engage in productive conversations about the texts we study, and treat your classmates and their ideas and writing with respect. As this class relies heavily on your participation, it is *impossible* to earn an A for this portion of your grade if you do not speak in class.

Please come talk to me early in the semester if you have any concerns or questions about how to earn this portion of your grade.



## Final Portfolio 20%

Your Final Portfolio for this class consists of two parts:

1. **A personal reflection (800-1000 words)** that articulates your goals, strengths, and weaknesses as a writer of creative nonfiction, as well as the specific choices you had to make when writing and revising your essays this semester.
2. **A significantly revised version of *one* of the essays you submitted this semester;** it does not have to be the one you submitted for workshop.

The Final Portfolio is due in hard copy on the date of our final—the same day that you will present on your chosen literary magazine. Late submissions will lose one full letter grade for each day that they are late.

## Important Notes

### Formatting

Unless otherwise noted in the prompt, all assignments should be typed in size 12, Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and include one-inch margins on all sides. Your name and the word count should appear in the top left corner of the first page (and no other pages). Include page numbers and staple (not fold or paperclip) the pages together if you are turning in more than one single sheet of paper.

### Proofreading/Typos

Although many of the things you turn in this semester will be “drafts,” I expect that you will carefully proofread your work before submitting it to me. This means that you need to fix typos and unintentional grammatical errors and make sure that your formatting is correct (indent new paragraphs and lines of dialogue, for example). If you turn in consistently sloppy work, it will have a dramatic impact on your grade for the assignment.

### Assignment Submissions

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the due date and in the method specified (e.g., Blackboard drop box or printed copies), unless otherwise noted. If it is turned in after class begins, it is late. If you must miss class on the day an assignment is due, you must email it to me or submit it to the appropriate drop box before the beginning of class in order to receive credit. **An absence—even if excused—does not mean that you can turn work in late.**

**A note on grades:** If you ever have any questions about the grade you earned on an assignment, please come talk to me in office hours—*do not bring up your grade in class under any circumstances*. If you would like to meet to talk about your grade, please carefully read and consider my feedback for a full 24 hours before we meet to ensure that we have a productive conversation.

**Please note that I do not give extra credit.** The only way to earn an A in ENL 306 is by turning in excellent work and being a productive and engaged member of the class.

## Course Policies

### Attendance

You are expected to attend each and every class. I will excuse a *reasonable* number of absences for contagious or debilitating illnesses, official representation of the university, or the serious illness or death of a loved one. “Reasonable number” means that you are still able to actively contribute to the class; if a medical or family situation makes this impossible, I will refer you to your academic advisor and/or other resources on campus to discuss your options.

In order to receive an excused absence, you must notify me of the circumstances via email *before* the start of the class you’re going to miss and provide me with any necessary documentation.

If you miss class for any other reason, or if you do not contact me (I do not retroactively excuse absences without very good reasons), it will count as an unexcused absence. You are allowed two such absences before they affect your final grade. **Each additional unexcused absence, beginning with the third, will lower your final grade for the course by one full letter grade.** Therefore it is impossible to pass the course if you accumulate six or more unexcused absences.

Three instances of tardiness (whether five minutes or forty minutes) will be equal to one unexcused absence. There are no exceptions.

### Electronic Devices

While laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices can sometimes be useful in the classroom, I have found that they are, 9 times out of 10, disruptive or distracting in a class like this. Please leave them off and put away during class time. You may, however, use your laptop to complete in-class writing.

**Note: If you need to use an electronic device during class due to a documented disability, please let me know; I am happy to make an exception under those circumstances.**

If you have family responsibilities that require you to be available by phone, please leave it on silent/vibrate and answer it in the hallway.

### Email/Office Hours/Appointments

I am available to meet with you during my regularly scheduled office hours—for Spring 2015, they are on Wednesdays from 10:00 am until 1:00pm in Robert Bell 242. That means that, if you stop by during that time—unless I am meeting with another student—I will be available. **If I need to reschedule office hours for any reason, I will send an email to the class and post a notice on Blackboard.**

If you are unable to come to office hours, I am happy to make an appointment to meet with you at another time. Simply send me an email with (1) a brief overview of what you’d like to discuss and (2) 3-5 times when you are available (“Between 2 and 3 on Tuesday,” not “Sometime next week”). **If you make an appointment, I expect that you will show up, or email me as soon as possible to let me know that you are no longer able to meet at that time.**

I am also happy to answer questions via email, though I ask that you make an effort to check the syllabus or the assignment prompt before sending one, as it will give you an immediate response and give me more time to plan for class and grade work in a timely manner. Questions like “What is the assignment for Tuesday?” or “How long does this essay need to be?” will be easily answered this way.

Please note that it may take me up to 24 hours on weekdays and up to 48 hours on weekends/school holidays to respond to emails.

### Academic Honesty

Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation or permission, or claiming someone else’s work as your own. Instances of plagiarism are taken seriously at Ball State and may result in the failure of the assignment, failure of the course, or suspension or expulsion from the university.

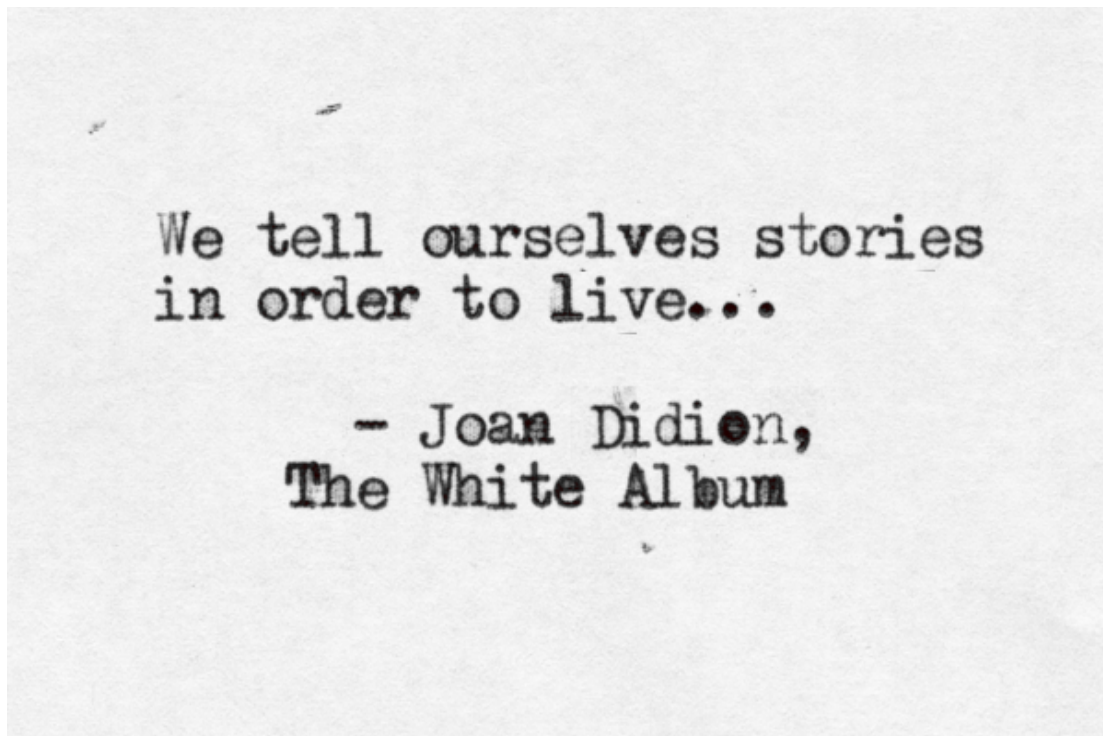


## Campus Resources

**Disability Services:** If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file with that office before any accommodations can be made. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or [dsd@bsu.edu](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu).

**Counseling Center:** Students often write about difficult and/or traumatic experiences in creative nonfiction—the death of a close family member or friend, struggles with health conditions, etc.—and sometimes reading and writing about these subjects can bring difficult emotions to the surface. If this happens, I *strongly encourage* you to take advantage of the Ball State Counseling Center, which provides *free and confidential* counseling to students. You can find out more by visiting [bsu.edu/campuslife/counselingcenter](http://bsu.edu/campuslife/counselingcenter) or by calling 765-285-1736.

**Writing Center:** From the Writing Center — “The Writing Center is a community of Ball State students who value writing. Come and collaborate with one of our trained peer tutors on any project for any major. The Writing Center is a comfortable, supportive environment for writers from all communities and backgrounds. The Writing Center is located in Robert Bell 291 and offers both face-to-face and online appointments. To make an appointment, go to [ballstate.mywconline.com](http://ballstate.mywconline.com).”





## Daily Schedule

**Note:** TS (*Touchstone Anthology*), B (Blackboard)

**Tuesday, January 6**

Syllabus, introductions, course overview, basics of creative nonfiction

**Thursday, January 8**

Meghan Daum - "Haterade" (B), Sherman Alexie - "Superman and Me" (B), and Ch. 1 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Tuesday, January 13**

Lee Martin - "Sorry" (TS), Ryan Van Meter - "If You Knew Then What I Know Now" (TS), and Ch. 2 of *Writing Life Stories*, [take syllabus quiz on Blackboard](#)

**Thursday, January 15**

Sue William Silverman - "The Pat Boone Fan Club" (TS) and Ch. 5 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Tuesday, January 20**

JoAnn Beard - "The Fourth State of Matter" (TS), Hope Edelman - "Bruce Springsteen and the Story of Us" (B), and Ch. 3 of *Writing Life Stories*, [Writing Journals due to Blackboard](#)

**Thursday, January 22**

**Peer Review:** submit your draft to the Blackboard drop box *and* bring a printed copy to class

**Tuesday, January 27**

Roxane Gay - "What We Hunger For" (B) and Ch. 4 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Thursday, January 29**

James Baldwin - "Notes of a Native Son" (B), [Essay #1 due in class](#)

**Tuesday, February 3**

Cheryl Strayed - "The Love of My Life" (TS), Kiese Laymon - "How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America" (B), and Ch. 6 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Thursday, February 5**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday, February 10**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday, February 12**

Eula Biss - "No-Man's Land" (B), and Mimi Schwartz - "Research and Creative Nonfiction" (B)

**Tuesday, February 17**

David Foster Wallace - "Consider the Lobster" (TS) and Ch. 7 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Thursday, February 19**

Maureen Stanton - "Laundry" (B) and Lia Purpura - "Autopsy Report" (TS)

**Tuesday, February 24**

Bill Roorbach - "Shitdiggers, Mudflats, and the Worm Men of Maine" (TS), Eula Biss - "The Pain Scale" (TS)

**Thursday, February 26**

**Research/Writing Day (meet in the library)**

**Tuesday, March 3 & Thursday, March 5: No Class - Spring Break**

**Tuesday, March 10**

Kerry Howley - *Thrown*, **Writing Journals due to Blackboard**

**Thursday, March 12**

**Peer Review:** submit your draft to the Blackboard drop box *and* bring a printed copy to class

**Tuesday, March 17**

Joan Didion - "The White Album" (B), Anne Panning - "Untranslatable" (B), **Essay #2 due in class**

*In Print Festival: March 17*

**Thursday, March 19**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday, March 24**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday, March 26**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday, March 31**

Michael Martone - "Contributor's Note" (B), David Shields and Matthew Vollmer - Introduction to *Fakes* (B), and Brenda Miller - "Table of Figures" (B)

**Thursday, April 2**

Sarah Einstein - "Self-Portrait in Apologies" (B) and Ch. 10 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Tuesday, April 7**

Dinty W Moore - "Son of Mr. Green Jeans" (TS) and Ch. 9 of *Writing Life Stories*

**Thursday, April 9**

**Online Peer Review via Blackboard:** Submit your essay to the Blackboard discussion board by 9:30am; submit your Peer Review to the drop box by 11:59pm

**Tuesday, April 14**

Anne Carson - "The Glass Essay" (TS), Ch. 8 of *Writing Life Stories*, **Writing Journals due to Blackboard**

**Thursday, April 16**

TBD, **Essay #3 due in class**

**Tuesday, April 21**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Thursday, April 23**

**Workshop:** \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Finals Week Meeting: Friday, May 1 @ 9:45-11:15am**

**Final Portfolios Due, Literary Magazine Presentations**

**\*\* Note:** If I need to make any changes this schedule, I will make an announcement in class, send a follow-up email, and upload an updated schedule to Blackboard.