

CRWR 588: Nonfiction III
Fall 2013, Natalie Kusz
Mondays, 5:30-10 p.m., SIRT I 317

Office: RVPT Ste. 425, 2nd cubicle on the rt.
Phone: 359-4955
Office Hours: by appointment is best

MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLEHILLS: GREAT ESSAYS, SMALL SUBJECTS

Nothing will sustain you more potently than the power to recognize in
your humdrum routine, as perhaps it may be thought, the true poetry of
life. -- Sir William Osler (1849-1919) Canadian Physician

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- To examine ways in which nonfiction writers extract the profound from the mundane.
- To practice identifying similarly provocative “trivia” in our own world.
- To engage in minute examination of nonfiction-specific writing methods.
- To develop skill in reading literature with writers’, as opposed to critics’ or entertainment-seekers’, eyes.

TEXTS:

- Peterson, Linda H, ed. *The Norton Reader, 13th Ed.* New York: Norton, 2012.
ISBN: 978-0-393-91218-0
- Photocopied readings posted on Canvas course website, under “Files” tab in left sidebar.

GRADING:

Grades will reflect absolute attention to deadlines, completion of all required coursework, the quality of your oral and written assignments, and the value and professionalism of your critical observations. Because the course is quite short, there is no room for class tardiness or absence. Our course website is ALLEGEDLY set up so that it calculates your grades automatically, as follows:

Technique Journals/Oral Intros, one point each if posted on Canvas on time:	40%
Major Essays, each 100 points possible, points entered by me:	40%
Quality of Oral Participation (2 percentage points subtracted for each absence, 2 points possible per week, entered by me):	20%

METHODOLOGY:

The bulk of our class time will involve discussion and dissection of the reading assignments, with periodic in-class writing practice.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- Oral introduction:
Each of you will be responsible for introducing part of one class period’s reading. This introduction should take the form of a 10- to 15-minute craft lecture, using minute textual analysis to reveal the intricacies of some point of craft; think of it as an oral technique journal. Use handouts or visual aids if you wish, but concentrate specifically on the authors’ methods. We will schedule these introductions on the first day of class, and there will be at least two introducers per week. You may divide your week’s material any way you wish – with each person taking specific essays/authors, each person introducing a relevant writing technique, etc. – or you may combine efforts to give cooperative, team-based intros. The day of your oral intro, you’ll post lecture notes instead of a technique journal on Canvas – BEFORE 5 P.M.

- Weekly technique journal:
For each week's reading, you will post, BEFORE 5 P.M., a 200-word analysis of some point of craft in the work(s) at hand. The emphasis here is on *how* an author accomplishes what he or she does. For instance, one might note that Lillian Hellman is particularly gifted in the use of the flash-forward; a technique journal entry on this subject would dissect passages of Hellman's work, discussing *how* her various flashes forward function, *when* she employs this technique, and *why* it serves the essay well at these points. Journal entries should be excruciatingly specific, and it is appropriate to include a discussion of how you plan to "steal" the points of craft for your own work.
- Two middle-of-term writing projects (see schedule for due dates):
At two times during the term, you will submit one of two specific projects pertaining to the study of nonfiction. You may choose which paper to hand in on which due date, so long as both get done. Details of the projects are as follows:
 1. Two-part analysis/emulation paper:
Here, you will demonstrate your grasp of nonfiction prose techniques, first by identifying them in another author's work, and then by emulating them. The two parts of the paper are as follows:

Part I: Technique analysis of a single author, 750 to 1500 words.
Choose an author from our reading list and do an exquisitely-detailed analysis of that author's form and style. Demonstrate both your own knowledge of nonfiction techniques, and the author's specific versions or uses of those techniques.
Sample questions you might address: What prose techniques distinguish this author from other nonfiction authors? Are there specific sentencings "quirks" he/she tends to manifest? In what ways do voice, tone, diction, sentence and paragraph rhythms, authorial distance, temporal considerations (i.e. where on a time line the author is writing in relation to the events portrayed), etc., influence the way the work is formed? In short, how would you identify a work by this author if it had no byline attached?

Part II: Emulation piece. 600 to 800 words.
Write a short essay in which you copy, exactly, your chosen author's style. Don't plagiarize the author's phrasings or content, but do make your prose style indistinguishable from this person's.
 2. "Your choice" essay, 1500 to 3000 words:
Because this course includes both writers of nonfiction and writers in other genres, it is assumed that not everyone will feel competent to write a creative essay, so you have two choices of form. For this paper you may, indeed, write a creative piece in which you practice the subject of our study: making something large out of a seemingly-insignificant subject. Alternatively, you may write a standard, graduate-level craft paper in which you examine nonfiction techniques, authors, or conventions (see description of a craft essay, below). In this case, follow MLA style.
- Final craft paper, 3000 to 5000 words:
A "craft essay" differs from a "critical essay" in that it treats literature from a perspective of "How does this work?" as opposed to one of "What does this mean?" (This distinction illustrates, essentially, the differences between the ways in which writers and scholars read.) For your craft paper, you may examine a specific point of the nonfiction writer's craft, using examples from multiple authors, or you may study the work of one nonfiction author and the specific technical characteristics of his or her work. Use MLA style.

SCHEDULE:

Sept. 30: Introduction, Scheduling, Writing

Oct. 7: MINOR EVENTS

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

Henry David Thoreau, "The Battle of the Ants," Norton 759.

Annie Dillard, "Sight into Insight," Norton 1109.

Naomi Shihab Nye, "Someone I Love," photocopy.

Loren Eiseley, "The Angry Winter," photocopy.

Oct. 14: FOOD

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

MFK Fisher, "Young Hunger," Norton 206.

Malcolm Gladwell, "Java Man," Norton 248.

Calvin Trillin, "The Magic Bagel," photocopy.

Maxine Kumin, "Enough Jam for a Lifetime," photocopy.

Oct. 21: OBJECTS

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

Rebecca Solnit, "Locked Horns," Norton 453.

Garrison Keillor, "Postcards," Norton 448.

Scott Russell Sanders, "Buckeye," photocopy.

J.B. Priestly, "The Toy Farm," photocopy.

ESSAY ONE DUE.

Oct. 28: IDIOSYNCRACIES

Stanley Elkin, "Pieces of Soap," photocopy.

Paul Rudnick, "Good Enough to Eat," photocopy.

L. Rust Hills, "How to Eat an Ice Cream Cone," photocopy.

Marcia Aldruch, "Hair," photocopy.

Nov. 4: PLACES

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

Sandy Frazier, "Take the F," Norton 154.

Joyce Carol Oates, "They All Just Went Away," photocopy.

Wallace Stegner, "The Town Dump," photocopy.

George Orwell, "The Moon Under Water," photocopy.

Nov. 11: No class; Veterans Day.

Nov. 18: EVERYDAY LIFE

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

Richard Selzer, "Car Sickness," photocopy.

Verlyn Klinkenborg, "January," photocopy.

Art Homer, "Falling," photocopy.

Donald Hall, "Good Use for Bad Weather," photocopy.

ESSAY TWO DUE.

Nov. 25: MINOR CHARACTERS

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

Judith Ortiz Cofer, "More Room," Norton 116.

Peter Balakian, "The Old Country," photocopy.

Max Beerbohm, "Something Defeasible," photocopy.
Lynne Sharon Schwartz, "The Page Turner," photocopy.

Dec. 2:

HUMAN SITUATIONS & STATES OF BEING

INTRODUCERS: 1. _____ 2. _____

Amy Cunningham, "Why Women Smile," Norton 189.

Anne Fadiman, "Night Owl," Norton 62.

Mike Rose, "Blue Collar Brilliance," Norton 393.

Paul Theroux, "Being a Man," Norton 176.

Dec. 9:

FINAL ESSAYS POSTED ON CANVAS NO LATER THAN NOON.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

No person shall, on the basis of age, race, religion, color, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin or disability, be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of Eastern Washington University.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION STATEMENT

Eastern Washington University adheres to affirmative action policies to promote diversity and equal opportunity for all faculty and students.

ADA STATEMENT

Eastern Washington University is committed to providing support for students with disabilities. If you are a student with physical, learning, emotional, or psychological disabilities needing an accommodation, you are encouraged to stop by Disability Support Services (DSS), TAW 124 and speak with Kevin Hills, the Manager DSS or call 509-359-6871.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Any question of Academic Integrity will be handled as stated in the EWU Academic Integrity Policy. This policy is on the EWU web site. Violations will result in a course grade of X.X.