

ENG 317: Creative Nonfiction Workshop
Your Story, My Story: Writing the Personal With Radical Empathy

Let yourself be gutted. Let it open you. Start here.—Sugar

Instructor: Amy Monticello
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Enrollment restrictions

Prerequisites: ENG 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, or 218

Course summary

In French, the word *essai* means “to try.” Personal essays, then, attempt to make meaning of our life experiences, and to situate those experiences within a larger cultural, historical, and humanist framework. Though our stories may happen specifically to us, in telling them we reach across the arbitrary divides between ourselves and the rest of humankind. Our stories are part of human universalism and literary tradition. And our “attempts” to tell them as such involve making important choices as writers in terms of craft. To those ends, we will study the history and craft of the personal essay, short memoir, literary journalism, and lyric essay through model and instructive texts, and we will write our own essays to converse with those models. A combination of craft analyses, short-form essays, and workshop letters will contribute to your grade in the course.

Because I believe making art is perhaps the single best way to express active, engaged citizenship in the world, I also like to build an element of experiential learning into my creative writing classes. For our course, you will complete a capstone assignment that asks you to use personal essay in the form of an advice column. The history of the advice column is long and storied, and while we may look at incarnations from Miss Manners, to Dear Abby, to Dan Savage, to Anna Pulley, we will take as official our model the advice column of Dear Sugar on The Rumpus. This is because Sugar offers something unique in the world of contemporary self-help—herself.

Steve Almond, author of *Rock and Roll Will Save Your Life* and nine other books, says of Sugar:

I happen to believe that American is dying of loneliness, that we, as a people, have bought into the false dream of convenience, and turned away from a deep engagement with our internal lives—those fountains of inconvenient feeling—and toward the frantic enticements of what our friends in the Greed Business call the Free Market.

We’re hurtling through time and space and information faster and faster, seeking that network connection. But at the same time we’re falling away from our families and our neighbors and ourselves. We ego-surf and update our status and brush up on which celebrities are ruining themselves and how. But the cure won’t stick.

And this, I think, is why Sugar has become so important to so many people. Because she’s offering something almost unheard of in our culture: radical empathy. People come to her in real pain and she ministers to them, by telling stories about her own life, the particular ways in which she’s felt thwarted and lost, and how she got found again. She is able to transmute the raw material of the self-help aisle into genuine literature.

In addition to other essays, we will read Sugar’s columns and create a Wordpress website in which to post our own columns. Each of you will write a final personal essay in response to an anonymous letter written by one of your own classmates. The goal will be to use your own experiences as a way to empathize with and advise the letter-writer, bearing in mind that your audience, as always, is bigger than that one person. How can personal essay help us to be kinder, more empathic people? How can we find similarities within our differences?

Textbooks

Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction. Martone and Williford, eds. Simon and Schuster 2007.

ISBN 978-1-4165-3174-6.

Handouts: PDFs and links available on Blackboard. Bring these to the appropriate class in hard copy or on an electronic device.

Essays

You will write two original personal essays, two short craft analyses, and one advice column this semester. You will also submit a revision of one of your personal essays, and workshop letters to your classmates at regularly scheduled intervals. Keep electronic copies of all essays and submit to me paper copies that are printed clearly.

Computer mishaps of any sort are not acceptable excuses for late or missing essays. If you keep only one electronic copy of your essay draft, you are courting disaster, and I hold you responsible for protecting your computer files and making sure that you have enough backup copies.

Keep in mind that this is a writing course, and your success depends on your writing skills as well as the quality of your thought. This goes for your own work, and critiques of your peers' work.

All assignments will be submitted for grading and workshop distribution via Blackboard. We will go over how to do this in class.

Workshops

You will all hand (upload) in your two personal essays on the same due dates, each listed in the Daily Schedule of the syllabus. I will then distribute copies of 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 (350-word min) letter to each writer that offers useful, supportive feedback for revision.

In your spoken and written comments to your peers, you should maintain a professional and constructive approach and tone. 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 all work to separate the author from the work, including ourselves from our own. Our mission is not simply to validate our own brilliance, or to defend the perfection of our work and the sublimity of our inspiration. We are building and dissecting little literary machines in order to better understand their operations and to help them function—to accomplish their apparent goals—ever more effectively. 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 and irresponsible misuses of time may detract from your workshop grade.

Essay privacy

While the papers you write for this course are your own intellectual property, they are not private. Writing pedagogy involves draft workshops; thus, you will be sharing your work with other students as well as with me. Also, I sometimes display in class work excerpted from my current or former students, though all examples will be anonymous. Be sure not to include in an essay any personal information you would be uncomfortable sharing with the entire class.

Classroom decorum

I expect everyone to show respect and open-mindedness when considering both the work of published authors and the work of your classmates. I also expect thoughtful and considerate discourse during class discussion, and will not tolerate any speech that disrupts the safety or comfort of our classroom.

A few words about email: I am always happy to correspond via email. Please keep in mind that you are emailing a Professor, not emailing your BFF. At least say hello and sign your name.

Computer access to course materials

I will distribute a substantial portion of our course materials in electronic form rather than on paper. This conserves the energy and quality of our copier in the English Department. It also saves you the cost of buying a course reader. Our Blackboard course page includes the syllabus, assignment prompts, supplemental readings, and pertinent web links. Printing is free at a variety of campus computer labs, and I expect that **ALL** readings and assignment prompts be brought to class in either printed or electronic form for discussion and analysis on the day they are due. If you are absent, consult Blackboard to see what you

missed and to catch up.

Even if you are having problems with your own computer, I still expect you to keep up with the work in our course by using a computer in one of the many computer labs on campus.

Office hours

I encourage you to come to me with specific questions about your papers at any stage of the writing process, and I will schedule special appointments if my regular hours conflict with your other commitments. Office visits are opportunities for one-on-one instruction; they are not editing sessions where I merely correct your work. Consequently, I have established the following guidelines for office hours:

Whenever you want to work with me on an essay draft, it is helpful if you bring two copies. It is hard for us to work efficiently huddled over a single copy. Any handwritten changes to your own draft should be made by you. I will not serve as your proofreader. I don't believe you will learn anything from having me merely edit your work. Do not come to my office and ask me to look over a paper "in general." If I am to help you develop as a writer, you must come to me with specific questions, and you must learn to recognize the areas in which you need help.

Asking me for help on an essay does not guarantee that you will receive a high grade. Use my advice along with your own knowledge and skill to revise and edit carefully. I will help you, but you are ultimately responsible for the quality of your essay.

Student-centered, hands-on pedagogy

I try to structure class so it is student centered rather than teacher centered. In a teacher-centered classroom, the instructor lectures or leads discussions and the students listen, take notes, and respond to questions. In a student-centered classroom, students play a more active role: they initiate discussion, work collaboratively, and may even help set course goals. The rationale for this approach is that students learn best when they are active participants. You to write and argue effectively by working at those activities, not by listening to lectures. While I enjoy talking and believe I have important things to say about writing and argument, I will rein myself in and keep the lectures brief. More often our class time will be devoted to discussions, writing exercises, small group collaboration, and writing workshops. You should come to class ready to contribute. Please talk with me early in the semester if you are uncomfortable with my student-centered pedagogy.

Writing instruction as coaching

Most of you have received writing instruction every year since you were very young, and you probably have heard identical advice from various writing instructors. Writing instruction does, at times, seem repetitive to students. It may be helpful to think of writing instruction as comparable to athletic training. Once you have learning the basics of a sport, you move from coach to coach and refine your abilities. Each coach might have distinct training exercises, but the skills essential to the sport remain the same. You work on the same skills each year and improve over time with practice and coaching. Think of me as your writing coach. I'm here to exercise and strengthen your writing muscles, not to teach you an entirely new activity. Build on the writing skills you learned in the past and focus on perfecting your performance.

Attendance

Much of the course material will be presented only in class and is not covered in the assigned readings; thus, class attendance is important. You are allowed 2 absences from class without penalty. After you have accumulated 2 absences, for whatever reason, any subsequent absences that are unexcused will have an impact on your overall course grade. If, for example, you miss three classes due to an illness, you will receive a grade penalty for any subsequent absences that are unexcused. Acceptable excuses for absence are specified in the Suffolk catalog. I take attendance at the beginning of the period, and if you come in late, it is your responsibility to check with me at the end of class to make sure you are marked as present. Students who are persistently late may lose attendance credit at my discretion. Students will not receive attendance credit for workshop sessions in which they accomplish little or nothing.

Final grade computation

- Essay #1: 15%
- Essay #2: 15%
- Craft Analysis #1: 15%
- Craft Analysis #2: 15%
- Advice column: 15%

-Workshop letters: 10%
-Revision: 15%

Essay #1: (1000 words min.)

Skills: In your first essay, you will focus on the fundamentals of craft—scene, description, dialogue, exposition, and reflection—in order to make meaning of a particular life experience. The subject matter and structure are up to you, but I encourage you to turn to our model texts for ideas and craft inspiration.

Essay #2: (1000 words min.)

Skills: In your second essay, you will draw upon the personal as a gateway to the cultural, historical, or political, placing your personal experiences in conversation with external issues that matter in your life and the world that surrounds you. This piece may veer into the territory of a nonfiction subgenre such as literary journalism, which may require outside research. Again, I encourage you to use our readings as models, looking for the strategies the authors employ to create a dialogue between who they are and why that matters in a larger sense.

Craft Analyses #1 and #2: (750 words min.)

Skills: Analyze and evaluate the success of an essay in terms of rhetorical choices. For the first craft analysis, you will focus on the choices the writer has made to recount, analyze, and reflect upon a personal experience. For the second craft analysis, you will focus on those choices as they pertain to the larger cultural, historical, or political issues the writer's personal experience raises.

Advice Column: (750 words minimum)

Skills: Respond to an anonymous letter with advice delivered in the form of a personal essay. Post column to class website.

Workshop letters: (350 words apiece minimum)

Skills: Prepare for class workshops by reading and annotating the scheduled essays. Come to class with a typed letter to each writer that follows the guidelines and tone provided by the instructor. Bring two copies for each workshop—one for writer, one for instructor.

Revision: (Variable length)

Skills: Submit a thorough and thoughtful revision of one of your two personal essays based on feedback received in workshop, conferences, and marginal notes from instructor.

Essay evaluation

- A The paper demonstrates excellence in meeting the goals of the assignment.
- B The paper demonstrates competence in meeting the goals of the assignment.
- C The paper is weak in some aspects but competent in others.
- D The paper indicates lack of competence in several important areas and does not respond adequately to the assignment.
- F The paper fails to meet most of the goals of the assignment.

I append pluses and minuses to letter grades when necessary. I also allow rewrites when students provide convincing arguments that they deserve the opportunity and can articulate a clear revision plan based on my comments and our lessons. If you want to rewrite, you must meet with me and state your case. This policy is not to suggest you may hand in essays in rough or incomplete form, knowing they can be resubmitted later. If I do accept a rewrite, it must be accompanied by the original graded paper.

If your essay contains an excessive number of sentence-level errors, I will return it without a grade, ask you to make an appointment at the Writing Center for peer tutoring, and you will receive a one-grade penalty on the resubmission. Essays that contain any plagiarized material will receive F's and cannot be rewritten for higher grades. Late papers will receive grade penalties as I see fit.

Suffolk University Student Support

Academic Support and Student Success

The Center for Learning and Academic Success (CLAS) is a free on-campus resource offering peer and professional tutoring in Math and English, as well as a wide range of business, science, and liberal arts courses. Students may join study groups, participate in drop in help, or make appointments with tutors to reinforce course content and encourage effective study habits. The CLAS is conveniently located inside of the Sawyer Library on the 3rd floor. Go to this office for **writing help** (tutoring) and other study and learning skill help and improvement.

Center for Learning and Academic Success (CLAS)
2nd Level of Sawyer Library, 73 Tremont St. Tel. 617.573.8235
clas@suffolk.edu

The Early Alert Project

This class participates in Suffolk's Early Alert Project. Around week 6, I will notify the Center for Learning and Academic Success (CLAS), if you have struggled with writing or language skills, excessive absences, incomplete work, or difficulty with the course content. This warning is not an official grade, yet it indicates concerns about your progress that need to be addressed immediately. If you receive an Early Alert, please visit me during my office hours so we may talk about strategies for how you can be successful in this class.

Counseling Resources and Physical/Emotional Health

As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, health issues, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating, lack of motivation, or feeling ill. These concerns or other stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. Suffolk University services are available to assist you in addressing these and other concerns you may be experiencing. You can learn more about the broad range of medical services and confidential mental health services available on campus at the following website: www.suffolk.edu/health

Office of Health, Wellness, and Counseling Center
Stahl Building, 73 Tremont St, 5th Floor. Tel. 617.573.8260

Students with Disabilities

If you anticipate issues with the format or requirements of this course, please meet with me—I would like to discuss ways to ensure your full participation in my classroom. If you determine that you need formal, disability-related accommodations, it is very important that you register with the Office of Disability Services (located at 73 Tremont Street, 7th floor; 617.994.6820) and notify me of your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. We can then plan how best to implement your accommodations.

Office of Disability Services
Stahl Building, 73 Tremont St, 7th Floor. Tel. 617.994.6820
disabilityservices@suffolk.edu

Academic Honesty Policy for All Undergraduate Students

Please refer to the student handbook link below for academic honesty. I will review this in class as well as distribute a handout detailing what you should keep in mind as you write your papers, take your exams, and work on collaborative projects with peers. If you have any questions on what to cite or not in your essays or other work, please check with me first.
<http://www.suffolk.edu/studenthandbook/19863.php>

Statement on Technology Services

Suffolk University provides a variety of resources to support course technology:

- University Help Desk (Mon-Fri, 8:30am – 8pm): 617.557.2000 or helpdesk@suffolk.edu
- For Blackboard and Collaborate assistance, please contact the 24-hour support line at 866.886.4861.
- Step-by-step Blackboard tutorials are accessible within every Blackboard course via the Bb Tutorials menu
- **On Demand Knowledge Base** provides information on all other technologies that are used in courses, including teaching, learning, research and productivity tools

State for International Students

International Students Services Office (ISSO), a part of the Center for International Programs and Services, provides comprehensive support to international students regarding immigration status and DHS regulatory responsibilities. If you are an international student in F-1 or J-1 status, you are responsible to maintain full-time enrollment (minimum of 12 units) every semester, else your immigration status is at risk. For more information, go to <http://www.suffolk.edu/isso>, call 617.573.8154, email isso@suffolk.edu or visit ISSO on the 6th floor of 73 Tremont.

Credit Hour Compliance and Expected Student Work

Also, this course follows the Federal Government's Credit Hour definition for a four-credit course. Expect to do two hours of work outside of class per one hour of classroom instruction. For more info on this engagement requirement see: <http://ifap.ed.gov/dpclatters/attachments/GEN1106.pdf>

Final Note

It is my hope to make this class as challenging and enjoyable as possible. If you have any questions or concerns about the course, or this syllabus, please contact me by phone, e-mail, or in person during my office hours.

Daily Schedule: (Note: Subject to change at instructor's discretion. Readings and assignments are due on the date listed.)

Key: *TA*= *Touchstone Anthology*
HO = Handout or link (available on Blackboard)

Week 1

W Sept 3: First day of class!
Reading Due: None
In class: Course introduction, syllabus, workshop schedule; Dear Sugar

Week 2

M Sept 8 Reading Due: *TA*: Jo Ann Beard's "The Fourth State of Matter"
HO: Dear Sugar #98 "Monsters and Ghosts"
HO: Michael Steinberg's "Finding the Inner Story..."

W Sept 10: Reading Due: *TA*: Cheryl Strayed's "The Love of My Life and David Sedaris' "Repeat After Me"
HO: excerpt from Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola's *Tell It Slant*, "The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form"

Week 3

M Sept 15: Reading Due: *TA*: Eula Biss' "The Pain Scale"
HO: Dear Sugar #81 "A Bit of Sully in Your Sweet"
HO: Vivian Gornick's "The Situation and the Story"

W Sept 17: Reading Due: *TA*: Brenda Miller's "The Date" and Lee Martin's "Sorry"
HO: Phillip Lopate's "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character"

Week 4

M Sept 22: **DUE: CRAFT ANALYSIS #1**
Reading Due: *HO*: Bernard Cooper's "Picking Plums"
HO: Leslie Jamison's "How to Write a Personal Essay"
TA: Ted Kooser's "Small Rooms in Time"

W Sept 24: Reading Due: *TA*: Erin McGraw's "Bad Eyes" and Lucy Grealy's "Mirrorings"
HO: Dear Sugar #78 "The Obliterated Place"
HO: Christy Wampole's "The Essayification of Everything"

Week 5

M Sept 29: **DUE: ESSAY #1**
Reading Due: *HO*: Joe Oestreich's "Writing in the Major Key"
In class: Guest speaker Norah Dooley from MassMouth

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30: MASSMOUTH STORY SLAM AT THE MODERN THEATER!

W Oct 1: Reading Due: *HO*: Leslie Jamison's "The Empathy Exams"
HO: Dear Sugar #91 "A Big Life"
HO: Jennifer Niesslein's "Like? Whatever: Likability and the Nonfiction Writer"

Week 6

M Oct 6: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

W Oct 8: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

Week 7

M Oct 13: COLUMBUS DAY

W Oct 15: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

Week 8

M Oct 20: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

W Oct 22: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

Week 9

M Oct 27: Reading due: *TA*: Floyd Skloot's "A Measure of Acceptance"
HO: Laura Bogart's "I Choose to be Fat"
HO: Dear Sugar #71 "The Ghost Ship That Didn't Carry Us"

W Oct 29: Reading Due: *TA*: David Foster Wallace's "Consider the Lobster" and Jamaica Kincaid's "A Small Place"
HO: Sonya Huber's "Stone Houses: A Poem About Fiction Within Nonfiction"

Week 10

M Nov 3: Reading Due: *HO*: Gerald Callahan's "Chimera"
TA: E.J. Levy's "Mastering the Art of French Cooking"
HO: Dear Sugar #67 "The Black Arc of It"

W Nov 5: **DUE: CRAFT ANALYSIS #2**
Reading Due: *TA*: Lia Purpura's "Autopsy Report" and Lauren Slater's "Black Swans"
HO: Dear Sugar #42 "No is Golden"

Week 11

M Nov 10: Reading Due: *TA*: Kelly Grey Carlisle's "Physical Evidence" and Sue William Silverman's "The Pat Boone Fan Club"

W Nov 12: **DUE: ESSAY #2**
Reading Due: *HO*: Allie Brosh's "Adventures in Depression" (Parts 1&2)
HO: Dear Sugar #39 "The Baby Bird"

Week 12

M Nov 17: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

W Nov 19: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

Week 13

M Nov 24: Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

W Nov 26: NO CLASS--Thanksgiving

Week 14

M Dec 1: **DUE: ANONYMOUS LETTER IN SEARCH OF ADVICE**
Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

W Dec 3: In class: Course evaluations
Workshop:
Workshop:
Workshop:

FINAL EXAM: You will hand in your personal essay revision (in hard copy) before or during our final exam, scheduled for Wednesday, December 10 at 5:40-7:30 pm in my office. All advice columns must also be sent to me via email by this time.

ENG 371 Essay #1: Writing From Memory

FORMAT: 1000 words min., double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins. Your name, instructor's name, class, and date should appear in the upper left corner of the first page. Pages must be numbered and stapled. Essay must have a title.

DESCRIPTION: Your first essay will recount and reflect on the significance of life experience with attention to how *what* happens (the situation) is a means of understanding something bigger (the story). To the best of your memory, you will use the techniques of scene, description, exposition, dialogue, and voice to tell a narrative from your own life. In addition to the storytelling, you must also use the expository techniques of reflection and analysis to make meaning of the narrative for your reader. Consider the significance of this experience to your understanding of yourself and your place in the world. Do not merely state the plot of happened. Tell the reader how what happened helped you uncover something new and meaningful. Situate this narrative within a broader understanding of who you are, where you come from, and what matters to you. I always suggest using our readings and craft articles as models. How do the essays we've read find a balance between scene and exposition? How do they characterize their narrators and other people populating the prose? How do they arrive at meaning through reflection, both implicit and explicit? How do they compel us to think about our own experiences?

You might also consider the limits of memory: where there are gaps, how might you use speculation or interrogation to help you cope with the absence of a memory, or a distortion?

Due Date: September 29th, followed by class workshops

EVALUATION:

An “A” paper demonstrates excellence in meeting the goals of the assignment, contains little or no mechanical errors, and is thoughtfully organized, titled, and formatted.

A “B” paper demonstrates competence in meeting the goals of the assignment, but could contain some mechanical errors, or areas in need of some further development/analysis, or some formatting/organizational issues.

A “C” paper demonstrates weak analysis in need of further examination or development, and likely contains recurring mechanical errors, and/or organizational/formatting issues.

A “D” paper indicates a lack of competence in several key areas, does not adequately satisfy the assignment goals, and likely contains recurring mechanical, organizational, and formatting errors.

An “F” paper fails to satisfy most of the goals of the assignment.

ENG 371: Essay #2: Moving from Personal to Cultural Narrative

Format: 1000 words min, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt font; pages numbered; your name, instructor’s name, course, and date in upper left-hand corner; stapled. Essay must have a title.

Description: You will apply the same creative and expository techniques (scene, exposition, reflection, description, dialogue, voice, character, etc.) used in your first personal essay, but this time, you must choose an experience that acts as a gateway to cultural critique. Using the self as a lens through which to examine a larger cultural, historical, or political issue or trend, craft an essay that makes appropriate and dynamic transitions between personal experience and cultural analysis.

Consider the ways in which David Foster Wallace comments on being an omnivore through his experiences at the Maine Lobster Festival. Or how Gerald Callahan explores the limits of memory through his wife’s suicide. Familiarize yourself with how the writers in our second unit create a conversation between the personal and the cultural. What structural moves do they make? How do they use memory to trigger analysis, and vice versa? How do your personal experiences represent larger observable patterns in society? You may bring in outside research for this essay, though it is not required.

Due Date: November 12th, followed by a class workshop

Evaluation:

An "A" paper thoughtfully facilitates a dialogue between two or more sources, which illuminates an issue of technology and communication for a particular audience, contains little or no mechanical errors, and is properly formatted and creatively titled.

A "B" paper demonstrates competence in putting two or more sources into conversation, but may need further development. The paper may contain a few small mechanical errors.

A "C" paper demonstrates weak synthesis of source material, and likely contains recurring mechanical errors/organization issues/formatting issues.

A "D" paper indicates a lack of competence in source material synthesis, and likely contains a number of recurring mechanical errors/organization issues/formatting issues.

An "F" paper fails to meet most of the above criteria.

ENG 371 Craft Essays #1 and #2

Format: 750 words each, min., double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt font; pages numbered; titled; your name, my name, course, and date in upper left-hand corner; stapled.

Description:

Craft Analysis #1: Choose one of readings from first few weeks of class (Beard, Strayed, Biss, Miller, Martin, Sedaris, or read ahead if you like) and compose a brief craft analysis that describes, examines, and critically evaluates the writer's most important rhetorical choices. Consider how the writer uses scene and exposition, creates a narrative voice, characterizes those who populate the essay (including the narrator), and makes meaning out of the experiences recounted in the essay. What larger significance about the self or the situation does the writer reveal? Look at specific passages in the text and analyze their language in a close reading. Think about what techniques this essay uses that are instructive to new writers of personal essay. You must use at least one of our craft articles in your essay to help you support or complicate your claims. **Craft Analysis #1 Due September 22.**

Craft Analysis #2: Once again, you will consider the rhetorical choices of one of our class readings (Skloot, Levy, Purpura, Slater, Callahan, Bogart, Wallace, Kinkaid, or read ahead if you like). But this time, you will focus your craft analysis on how the writer uses personal experience in order to launch a cultural commentary. What issues or ideas does the personal experience

reveal or become representative of? How does the writer transition between the personal and the analytical? To what trends in society does the writer seem to be responding? You must use at least one of our craft articles in your essay to help you support or complicate your claims. **Craft Analysis #2 Due November 5.**

ENG 371: Advice Column Essay: Radical Empathy Through Personal Experience

Format: 750 words min., double-spaced, Times New Roman 12-pt font; your name and my name, date.

Description: As the first page of our syllabus says, I believe art is a humanitarian act. In her memoir *The Chronology of Water*, Lidia Yuknavitch writes, “I’d say art is with you. All around you. I’d say when there doesn’t seem to be anyone else, there is art. I’d say you can love art how you wish to be loved. And I’d say art is a lifeline to the rest of us—we are out here. You are not alone. There is nothing about you that scares us. There is nothing unlovable about you, either.”

All semester, we have been reading the advice columns of Dear Sugar on The Rumpus. There are other examples of the advice column, historical and contemporary, posted on Blackboard, but I became interested in Sugar because of the way she uses the personal essay in order to dispense advice. Her work is a testament to the artistic notion that when we create, we never do so in isolation.

Your final personal essay, then, will be written in response to one of your classmates’ anonymous letters in search of advice. No topic is off-limits. You will not know who wrote the letters. Only I will know who wrote the letters, and I won’t tell (so don’t ask). I will merely collect them and dispense them back to you in a random order (please inform me IMMEDIATELY if you get your own letter by accident). Your job will be to use your own experiences to respond to the letter writer’s question or problem. Maintaining a standard of nonjudgment and open-heartedness, you will muster all of your empathetic strength to compose your response. Use your own life experiences and the craft of personal essay to help you enter the subject matter of the letter. Channel Sugar and reach for empathy.

You are welcome to bring in outside resources—quotes from other writers, professional organizations, websites, news articles, etc.—to help you advise your letter writer. We'll talk about these options in class.

Due Wednesday December 10 by 7:40 PM in a Word document emailed directly to me! I will then upload them on our class website. Be sure to include the letter that prompted your essay at the top of your essay *in italics*. I'll show you how.

ENG 371—Workshop Letters

Format: 350 words per letter. Times New Roman. Double-spaced. Your name and the writer's name in upper left-hand corner with date and class.

Description: Write one letter for each workshop with the exception of your own (28 total for each of you). ***This assignment differs in the submission format! Bring two hard copies of each letter on the appropriate workshop day (one to give to the writer, and one for me).*** Together, these letters account for 10% of your overall grade, but your final grade in the class may suffer if you do not maintain a professional and constructive tone, reliably follow the workshop schedule, or give respectable effort to analyzing and critiquing the work of your peers. Compose a thoughtful, analytical critique using the steps below. Cite and quote specific details from the essays as evidence. Use page or paragraph numbers.

1. Describe the goals and methods of the essay. Suspend judgment. Focus on the writer's techniques, rather than addressing content in your own way. Spend a healthy paragraph defining what the essay is trying to accomplish, and what materials and approaches the author uses in the attempt to accomplish those goals. Describe the apparent thesis and discuss how clear and focused or unclear and scattered it may be. Do not simply like/dislike or agree/disagree.
2. Describe what works well. Emphasize the most effective techniques, the sharpest moments of insight, the things the writer should not lose in revision, the things that point to even more sophisticated possibilities in revision.
3. Describe what doesn't work so well. Identify any points of confusion, digression into things irrelevant to the thesis, logical fallacy, unclear language, underdeveloped ideas, scenes, or reflections, or reliance on conventional wisdom or prior judgment and conviction.
4. Offer suggestions for revision in terms of "if/then" statements. When you recommend a change, explain its rhetorical effects.

