

# English 477: Advanced Nonfiction Writing And English 377: Nonfiction Writing

## Syllabus

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### Syllabus—

*Welcome!* This is a combined seminar for students just entering the nonfiction sequence and for students who have a bit more experience. We will work toward refining our understanding of contemporary nonfiction, its place in contemporary letters, and we will work toward developing our skills and insights as authors.

We will spend the majority of our time reading the published work of contemporary authors as well as the work-in-progress of our classmates. We will attempt, through a frequent use of an in-class workshop, to articulate our trials as authors and our needs as readers.

*It is important to note that we begin with the assumption that all of us who gather here are active and experienced writers. This class could demand considerable amounts of your time and energy. I will do my best, as we all should, to make the expenditure of that time and energy rewarding.*

### MANUSCRIPT:

You are asked to spend this semester generating, presenting, and revising a manuscript of no less than 40 standard typewritten pages (12 point Times New Roman font, standard margin and spacings, etc.). Any number of essays or chapters can fill the page requirement.

### BINDING:

You are required to submit two copies of your final manuscript. One of them I will mark and return. The other copy will become part of the English department's permanent Writing Program Library. The work for the library should be bound with a clear plastic cover and a plastic spiral-bind.

### DRAFTS

You should plan on presenting your work-in-progress to the class. We will discuss some work as a class in general; other work we may discuss in small groups or pairs. All work, however, will be distributed to the class for critique. This workshop is a "critical reading" workshop; in other words,

every draft will undergo a reading that attempts to make sense of the parts as well as the whole and goes well beyond responses based only on taste or emotion.

***We will assume the drafts presented to class are not first drafts, but instead have undergone substantial revision already.***

### **CONFERENCES:**

You are *required* to sign up for a faculty/student conference *within the week following your workshop time* to discuss your work and the class reaction.

### **GRADING:**

Essays and/or chapters presented to class workshop will not be graded. The final manuscript will receive a collective grade determined by the quality of the manuscript. The final grade for the class will be 75% for your final manuscript and 25% for matters such as attendance, class participation, effort and general class leadership. These in-class considerations can raise or lower your grade as much as one full letter. I will be happy to discuss grades in progress during office hours. Because this class is essentially a workshop, what goes on in class depends on your willingness and ability to participate. *Your presence is required every time we meet.*

**The expectations for depth, for research, for stylistic grace and original insight are significantly greater for students in 477; thus, students in 477 are asked to engage in at least one major project to be discussed early in the semester in a conference.**

**TEXTS:**      *Best American Essays 2013*  
                  *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2013*  
                  *Best American Travel Writing 2013*  
                  *Good Prose*

Plus: National Book Award books.  
*The Flamethrowers*  
*Hitler's Furies*

### **SCHEDULE:**

The readings will be assigned each week. We will not have the time to cover every essay in all of the texts; however, *you are expected to read well beyond the discussion assignments.* The books are for inspiration and mentoring as well as for class discussion.

I have assigned workshop days for each of you, alphabetically, starting with 477. You are free to trade workshop days with other students, as long as you let me know in advance.

**MON/WED/FRI Spring 2014 English 477/377 W. Scott Olsen**

**Jan.**

8 Introductions  
10 Good Prose, Best American Travel

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13 Good Prose, Best American Essays  
15 Good Prose, Best American Science and Nature  
17 Good Prose, Ascent

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20 (MLK Day Events, classes held), Good Prose, Best American Travel  
22 Good Prose, Best American Essays  
24 Good Prose, Best American Science and Nature

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27 Workshop: Burtman, Peterson, Taylor  
29 Workshop: Cruz, Estenson, Farmer  
31 Workshop: Flack, Fondell, Lindquist

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**Feb.**

3 Workshop: Morgan, Nelson, Reff  
5 Workshop: Robinson, Schindler, Schneider  
7 Workshop: Wavra, Widseth. Craft Summary

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10 Best American Travel  
12 Best American Essays  
14 Best American Science and Nature

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17 Classics (handouts)  
19 Classics (handouts)  
21 Classics (handouts)

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Midsemester break Feb 22 – March 2

**March**

3 Workshop: Burtman, Peterson, Taylor  
5 Workshop: Cruz, Estenson, Farmer  
7 Workshop: Flack, Fondell, Lindquist

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10 Workshop: Morgan, Nelson, Reff  
12 Workshop: Robinson, Schindler, Schneider  
14 Workshop: Wavra, Widseth. Craft Summary

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17 National Book Awards: Kushner

19 National Book Awards: Kushner  
21 National Book Awards: Kushner

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24 National Book Awards: Lower  
26 National Book Awards: Lower  
27 (Thursday) National Book Awards Evening Event  
28 National Book Awards Master Class (Community Time)

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31 Conferences

## **April**

2 Conferences  
4 Conferences

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7 Workshop: Burtman, Peterson, Taylor  
9 (Celebration of Student Scholarship – no class)  
11 Workshop: Cruz, Estenson, Farmer

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14 Workshop: Flack, Fondell, Lindquist  
16 Workshop: Morgan, Nelson, Reff

Easter break April 17-21

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23 Workshop: Robinson, Schindler, Schneider  
25 Workshop: Wavra, Widseth. Craft Summary

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28 Open

Final exams April 30 – May 2

Final Portfolio Due at or before the beginning of our scheduled final exam time.