

## **ENGL 4200: Writing Workshop, Prose Nonfiction**

**3.0 credit hours**

**Fall Semester 2015**

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**Dr. Amy Wright**

**Office: 215 Harned Hall**

**Hours: 2:30-4:00 p.m. TR & by appt.**

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**(Email is the quickest way to reach me.)**

*I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear. ~ Joan Didion*

**Catalog Description:** An opportunity to develop skills learned and projects begun in ENGL 3230 Writing Creative Nonfiction. The student is guided individually and as a member of a group through rigorous analysis and criticism of his/her work.

**Course Objectives:** Cheryl Strayed, who wrote *Wild*, selected the essays we will read in this course because they end “as if nothing would ever be the same again.” We will spend this term reading and writing funny, wise, and intense true stories toward the same end. Assignments will include writing one traditional length essay and a number of flash nonfictions (in this case, 1500 words or less). We will also discuss these prose pieces as a class with the goal of revising toward a publishable final portfolio, paying particular attention to how characters, humor, and anecdotal evidence can connect readers to universally personal events and why emotional revelation encourages readers to share stories.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:** *Rose Metal Guide to Flash Nonfiction*, Edited by Dinty W. Moore  
*Best American Essays 2013*, Edited by Cheryl Strayed

|                    |   |           |
|--------------------|---|-----------|
| GRADING STRUCTURE: | Quizzes and Participation                         | 20%       |
|                    | Diagnostic Essay (2 pages)                        | Mandatory |
|                    | Discussion & Discussion Leading Essay (3-4 pages) | 15%       |
|                    | In-class writing exercises                        | 5%        |
|                    | Essay 1 (3-4 flash essays totaling 6-7 pages)     | 20%       |
|                    | Essay 2 Character-Driven Essay (7-8 pages)        | 25%       |
|                    | Portfolio and Final Essay                         | 15%       |

**Diagnostic Essay:** The diagnostic essay is a short mandatory essay assigned at the beginning of term. You will not receive a grade on this essay, but I will collect and file it to compare with your final essay and measure your progress throughout the semester. I will also use it to find target areas to review during class discussions.

**Discussion:** Our course objective depends upon your ability to interact and communicate with the assigned essays. Therefore, you will receive credit for contributing to this conversation and effort to inquire productively together. Peer review will also fall under discussion points, so your comments and feedback on each other's essays will be included in your discussion grade.

We will work together to generate an environment of trust that helps everyone feel comfortable speaking up. Remember that any good conversation comes from mutual interest and contribution, so please assume responsibility for the success of our group dynamic.

**Discussion Leading & Discussion Leading Essay:** You and a partner will sign up for a day to formally lead the class discussion. On this day, you will be asked to hand in a three-to-four-page essay, which will be an analytical response to the missed reading. I'll expect this response to take the form of a comparison/contrast essay, focusing around a main argument that focuses your observations from juxtaposing these two texts.

**Include a minimum of five quotations** and your specific reflections on them. The originality of your ideas, along with the demonstration of thought and effort (and creativity!) in the essay as well as your presentation of them to the class will determine your grade. Your discussion leading responsibility should also include **ten questions** to prompt the conversation for the day. These questions should demonstrate critical thinking, and

should point to four or more specific passages for close reading opportunities as a group.

**Essays:** I will provide detailed essay assignments before each essay is due, but the general objective for each essay follows. The first essay will be inspired by *The Rose Metal Guide* and will take the form of a collection of three-to-four short essays from in-class essay assignments. These essays will be considered separate pieces and do not have to be linked by content or theme.

The traditional essay will be written in the style of those published in the *Best American Essays* anthology and pay particular attention to characterization. We will have in-class writing assignments to prepare you for this longer exploration of a character, and I will provide you with guidelines before the essay is due.

**Final Portfolio:** The final portfolio consists of the original drafts of your essays plus revisions of. Regardless of the scores of the original essays, your revisions will be graded based on apparent time and effort that goes into making significant changes. Please hold onto the workshop copy that I return to you with my comments, as you will turn in this copy as your original. You may make a copy of it, if you want to save these comments for your own reference.

**Academic Integrity:** The relationship between a teacher of writing and a student of writing is one of trust. You trust me to help you achieve our course goals and to grade based on the objectives laid out in this syllabus and I trust you to hand in work that is your own, and is well-sourced when it includes the ideas or writing of another. Plagiarism is defined as “the act of passing off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another.” **Because plagiarism is a breach of this trust, you will not only fail the plagiarized assignment but also the course** as I cannot thereafter assign any grades to work I cannot trust to be yours.

Plagiarism includes a wide range of behavior. Loosely defined, it means representing others’ words, thoughts, or deeds as your own. It includes copying all or part of a paper someone else wrote; downloading ready-made papers from the web; and quoting or paraphrasing without appropriate citations. While the following may not be familiar to you as plagiarizing, they are clearly examples of academic fraud: talking with your roommate about an idea that both of you write about, thereby completing only one real assignment; writing a paper based on someone else’s paper because you haven’t read the text or are short on time; stringing together arguments from secondary sources without making your own argument; and turning in work you’ve completed for a different class.

You will be using MLA Style to cite any research you include. **Err on the side of caution and cite all sources you paraphrase or quote.** If you have questions at any point about your citations, the Writing Lab exists to provide you with Academic Support. They are available on a walk-in, appointment and email basis. Be sure to allow enough time to incorporate their feedback before an assignment is due. Hours are online at: <http://www.apsu.edu/academic-support-center>

**Attendance and Participation:** Your success in this course will be measured against the goals set out for this course; therefore, the importance of being in class to participate cannot be overestimated. **Perfect attendance and contribution to class discussions will earn extra credit.** I do not decide between excused and unexcused absences. Only university-excused absences accompanied with appropriate documentation are excused. The work itself is never excused, so you will be responsible for the assignments/discussion missed. **If you miss more than five classes for any reason, you will be in danger of failing the course. If you miss more than three classes, your grade will suffer by one or more letter grades.**

**Makeup Assignments:** To make up for a missed discussion, write and turn in a two-page, double-spaced, typed response to the assigned reading **within one week from the missed day.** Responses should be given to me in hard copy, but you may email me an electronic one at the cost of one letter grade. **A maximum of three** make-up responses is allowed. The quality of your response—its organization, clarity, and evidence of thought determine its grade. The goal of the response is to evidence critical thinking, so I expect it to be a formal presentation of observations you might bring up in discussion, **including at least three quotations from the**

**text.** Email me if you need help formulating questions to investigate.

**Late Assignments:** Late essay assignments are penalized one letter grade starting ten minutes from the beginning of the class period in which the essay is assigned. Because university-excused absences are known in advance, I expect any missed essay assignments to be handed in ahead of time if possible (in hard copy) or on time via email if not. Quiz-replacing responses are due within one week of the missed quiz, unless prevented by extenuating circumstances discussed with me. There will be a cutoff date three weeks before the end of the semester when I will accept no more makeup quiz responses, so please plan accordingly.

**Special Needs:** Any student who has a disability that may affect his or her academic performance is encouraged to make an appointment with me to discuss this matter, and to contact Disability Services; telephone 221-6230; voice 221-6278.

**Policy on Minors or Children in Classroom:** Minors (any non-student under the age of 18) accompanying staff, faculty, students, or visitors on campus are not permitted in the classroom.

**Academic / Classroom Misconduct:** Students are expected to conduct themselves appropriately at all times. Academic and classroom misconduct will not be tolerated. Students must read the “Code of Conduct” in the *Student Handbook* for an understanding of what will be expected of them within the academic setting.

**Midterm Grades:** A midterm grade is available upon request. Please make an appointment with me to discuss your progress at the midpoint in the term if you would like me to go over this grade with you.

**Final Note:** Turn your cell phones or other electronic devices off BEFORE entering class NOT AFTER we are interrupted. Do not use your phones or other devices to send text messages AT ANY TIME. If I catch you using **any** such devices **at any time** during class, you will receive an F on the day’s assignment and may be asked to withdraw from the course.

## **Course Schedule (Subject to change)**

**Readings are to be discussed ON THE DAY LISTED. Be prepared by reading them before class.**

### **Week 1 Introduction**

M Aug. 24 Introduction and syllabus.

W. Aug. 26 Excerpt from “How I Became a Famous Writer” by Harrison Scott Key

F Aug. 28 **Diagnostic Essay Due. In-class workshop of Diagnostic Essays.**

### **Week 2 Mysterious, Ambitious, and Intimate: The Flash Nonfiction Form**

M Aug. 31 On Miniatures and Writing into the Flash from *Rose Metal Guide (RMG)* p. 1-14

W Sept. 2 On Carnival Lights, Compression, and Mice (*RMG*) p. 15-21

F Sept. 4 Writing in Place p. 22-32 (*RMG*)

### **Week 3 “No Ideas But in Things”: The Power of Image and Detail**

M Sept. 7 Labor Day—No Class

W Sept. 9 Friendship, Intuition and Trust and Memory Triggers and Tropes p. 28-36 (*RMG*)

F Sept. 11 Paper Clips...The Ant in the Water Droplet (*RMG*) p. 37-49

### **Week 4 Speaking to the Reader: On Finding Your Voice**

M Sept. 14 The Wound of the Photograph (*RMG*) p. 50-56

W Sept. 16 Crafting Voice (*RMG*) p. 57-69

F Sept. 18 Of Artifacts and MRIs (*RMG*) p. 142-150

### **Week 5 Words, Wonderful Words**

M Sept. 21 The Sounds and Sense of Sentences (*RMG*) p. 76-85

W Sept. 23 Word Hoards (*RMG*) p. 86-92  
F Sept. 25 The Question of Where We Begin (*RMG*) p. 131-141

**Week 6 Thoughts on Point-of-view**

M Sept. 28 Bye-Bye, I (*RMG*) p. 93-99  
W Sept. 30 Dinah Lenney (*RMG*) p. 100-104  
F Oct. 2 Weaving Past, Present and Future (*RMG*) 105-112

**Week 7 Settling on Structure**

M Oct. 5 The Art of Digression (*RMG*) p. 118-125  
W Oct. 7 Harrison Scott Key, “The Man with No Pants” <http://www.harrisonscottkey.com/read-some-work/>  
F Oct. 9 Building A Frame (*RMG*) p. 126-133

**Week 8**

M Oct. 12 No Class. Fall Break  
W Oct. 14 **Group of 6-7 pages of 2-4 flash essays due with copies for class. In-class reading.**  
F Oct. 16 **Workshop**

**Week 9 Workshop**

M Oct. 19 **Workshop**  
W Oct. 21 **Workshop**  
F Oct. 23 **Workshop**

**Week 10 Workshop / Engaging Readers**

M Oct. 26 **Workshop**  
W Oct. 28 Introduction and “His Last Game” *Best American Essays (BAE)* p. xv-xvii, and 202-204  
F Oct. 30 “Keeper of the Flame” (*BAE*) p. 56-65

**Week 12 Handling Intense Emotion**

M Nov. 2 “Triage” (*BAE*) p. 123-131  
W Nov. 4 “The Highway of Lost Girls” (*BAE*) p. 38-55  
F Nov. 6 “I’m Jumping Off the Bridge” (*BAE*) p. 106-112

**Week 13 Relating to your Characters**

M Nov. 9 “The Girls In My Town” (*BAE*) p. 171-187 **Seven-eight page essay due with copies for class.**  
F Nov. 11 Veteran’s Day—No class  
W Nov. 13 **Workshop**

**Week 14 Workshop**

M Nov. 16 **Workshop**  
W Nov. 18 **Workshop**  
F Nov. 20 **Workshop**

**Week 15 Workshop**

M Nov. 23 **Workshop**  
W Nov. 25 No classes—Thanksgiving holiday  
F Nov. 27 No classes—Thanksgiving holiday

**Week 16**

M Nov. 30 Channel B (*BAE*) p. 250-253  
W Dec. 2 **Last Day of Classes. Portfolio and Final Essay Due.**