

English 2041-40: “Creative Nonfiction” (3 credit hours – Fall 2018)

Class Meeting: Tuesday evenings, 6:30 to 9:10, in the Cody Center, Room 2214
Instructor: Carol Bell
Office: Cody Center
Phone: 307-272-1389
Email: carol.bell@nwc.edu
Office Hours: I am in my office at the Cody Center every day. Please make an appointment.

Required Text and Materials

Oates, Joyce Carol and Robert Atwan, eds. *The Best American Essays of the Century*. Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Access to a good dictionary and a grammar handbook (reliable editions of both in the Cody Center library).

A substantial notebook.

In addition, throughout the semester, you will be reading regularly and widely, searching to find models for your own work – not only for content but also for style and technique. Some of these will be class handouts, others will be references to suggested reading online or in popular publications available in the College or the county library.

Course Description and Learning Outcomes

The Northwest College Catalog describes ENGL 2041 as follows:

Focuses on the research, organization, and writing of creative nonfiction (e.g., essay, memoir, article) as well as the study of major voices in creative nonfiction. Emphasizes the development of literary writing techniques in addition to exploring key ethical issues that surround the genre.

This section of ENGL 2041 will focus on the reading, writing, and editing of creative nonfiction compositions in a workshop setting.

By the end of the course, you must show a mastery of the following learning outcomes:

- Utilize existing ideas, images, or works in original ways.
- Produce individual or collaborative forms of expression (e.g., oral, written, musical, or artistic)

- Recognize and discuss abstract and symbolic representation • Demonstrate resourcefulness in the process of problem solving.
- Develop relevant skills in the pursuit of aesthetic goals.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and conventions of creative nonfiction, including the ethical issues that surround the genre;
- Write creative nonfiction pieces in response to a particular assignment or audience;
- Implement the writing process at it pertains to the composition of creative nonfiction: sketching, drafting, revision, and final presentation in a workshop setting;
- Use appropriate research skills; and
- Observe the conventions of Standard English, showing an awareness of how grammatical and stylistic choices affect a text's meaning.^[1]

Methods of Assessment and Grade Determination

Your grade will be determined as follows:

Final Portfolio 50%

This document presents the culmination of your semester's work. Its length must be between 1315 pages, some of which may be drawn from earlier writings. You will have great flexibility in terms of deciding the form of your portfolio. For example, perhaps you will include one long essay or a memoir chapter; two shorter essays; a series of shorts; a piece of literary journalism. Also, enclose a brief preface providing a context for your work. · **Due: 5 December 2017**

Annotated Bibliography 10%

The annotated bibliography, which should be included in your final portfolio, should provide insight into your writing by describing significant influences. Please use MLA documentation. **Due: 4 December 2018**

Presentation 10%

You will give an 8-10 minute presentation to the class in which you discuss the evolution of one your entries in your portfolio and explain the influence on your writing of one the sources from your annotated bibliography.

Due 11 December 2018

Commonplace Book 10%

Due twice during the semester, this notebook is a running record you keep of this class and of your work as a writer. In it, please copy down model paragraphs or lines; ideas from our texts; comments from class; personal responses and reflections on essays or discussions about essays; your own observations. There is no requirement for the form of this commonplace book, and you're encouraged to develop a form and a method that is conducive to your own approach. However, your commonplace book must be a living document of your relationship to the work of the course. **Due 9 October 2018; 4 December 2018**

Daily Grade **10%**

The daily grade has two primary components: attendance and completion of weekly reading and writing assignments. I will assign a grade of “A” based on completing the assignment and submitting it on time, and while I will comment on these pieces, they will not receive a grade based on content.

Final Exam **10%**

The final exam is a comprehensive assessment that requires you to respond in writing to a reading in light of your own work.

Final Exam: Thursday, December 13

(Remember: These dates are subject to change.)

Course Format

Each week will be divided roughly into two areas of study. During the first part of each Tuesday session, we’ll discuss composition issues, strategies, and requirements of form. You will also have one or more reading assignments due on those days. There may be brief quizzes on those readings. These quizzes will be part of your daily grade. Quizzes cannot be made up.

In the second part of each session, we will workshop student writing. You’ll be expected to bring to each class something you’ve written in response to a prompt given out the previous Tuesday. I will make copies of each student’s work and will set the copies out in the Cody Center the Wednesday after class. You will then have a week to read and comment on the writings by the other students. We will workshop those writings the week after they were turned in. When you come to the workshop session, please be prepared to share your own work and to comment on the writing of your classmates. These assignments should be 1-3 pages in length (no more than 650 words), and you may find that they provide material for the essays you’ll choose for your final portfolio. You will receive a daily grade of “A” for completing daily writing assignments and submitting them on time. I will not accept late essays. I will write comments on these essays though I will not assign a grade because these are writing exercises designed to give you practice.

In summary, you will have three tasks each week in preparation for the next class: (1) Read the assigned essays. (2) Write and bring to class a short essay based on the writing prompts for the week. (3) Read and prepare comments on student essays for the week’s workshop session.

For the longer term, you will keep notes on your reading in your Commonplace Book, select and prepare ten entries for you annotated bibliography, and, most importantly, build your portfolio.

First Wednesday Readings at Northwest College

I also encourage you to read at the First Wednesday Readings, an open-mic forum for writers to share their work. Presenting your writing publicly gives you a great opportunity for feedback and to hear the work of other writers.

Course Policies

Papers and Assignment Format

All outside-class assignments must be typed and double-spaced. Additionally, please use a black, 12-point font, and print all outside-class assignments on white paper. I will not accept assignments that are unstapled or lack a header. The header should be in the upper left with your name, class (ENGL 2041, Creative Nonfiction), date, and number and title of writing assignment.

Late Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted when I call for them – generally at the beginning of class. **I will not accept late assignments.** If it's necessary for you to miss a class due to a college sponsored event or serious illness, let me know **before** the beginning of that class, and we will make arrangements for you to turn in the assignment.

(Please note: Computer failure and printing problems are unacceptable excuses for late work. I recommend that each time after you have worked on your paper, you print a copy you could submit should you later experience computer or printing difficulties. Also, always create a backup copy.)

Consequences of Academic Dishonesty

Northwest College does not tolerate academic dishonesty, and for additional information, it is recommended that you familiarize yourself with the “Academic Policies” section of *The Student Handbook*.

The Northwest College Student Handbook defines “plagiarism” as “the act of appropriating or sharing (without acknowledgment) the ideas, language, symbols, or written work of another and passing them off as the product of one’s own mind. In all academic areas, it is imperative that work is original or that students give explicit acknowledgments for other persons’ ideas or language.”

Any scholastic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism) will result in a grade of “0” for the assignment as well as a possible meeting with the Humanities Division Chair to determine any additional action.

Attendance

Attendance is extremely important in a writing workshop. A significant portion of the learning comes through the exchange of ideas, the surfacing of questions, and the spontaneous responses

to the material we read and discuss. You are expected to attend class and to complete all assignments.

Should you miss class due to an excused absence, you are responsible for all material covered and all assignments made. I will not be responsible for reminding you that any assignment is due.

You are responsible for providing, in a timely manner, written evidence to substantiate any college-authorized absences. If you are ill, I will require an excuse from the College Nurse or your doctor, and you will then have one week in which to make up any missed assignments. If you will be missing class due to a college-sponsored activity, you must notify me in advance and submit any assigned materials prior to your absence.

However, you may not make up any work missed due to an unexcused absence.

Northwest College's attendance policy: one clock hour of unexcused absence for each credit offered (for example, a three-credit-course equals three-clock-hours of unexcused absences allowed). After the allowed absences have been taken, the instructor has the prerogative to reduce the student's grade by one grade per absence beyond the number allowed. Students who miss class while officially representing the college are directly responsible for seeing that all assignments, written lessons, labs, quizzes, tests, and exams are made up promptly. Such authorized absences merely give the individual who missed the class an opportunity to make up the work and in no way excuse the student from work required by the instructor.

Email

If you do not use your nwc.edu email, please send an email to me so that I have the email you would like me to use. Check email frequently—I use it!

Grade Description

The following brief grade descriptions are intended to help you understand what the letter grades you will receive tell you about a piece of writing.

Students often interpret a grade of "B," for example, as an indication they have missed 15 points or a grade of "C" as an indication that they have missed 25 points. Typically, however, the grade is not based on points deducted for errors, but on an evaluation of such matters as adequate content, organization, style, documentation, coherence, audience analysis, and other elements specific to each assignment.

A (90-100):

Excellent. The work excels at fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. Moreover, it is thoroughly considered (e.g., use of characterization, scene, voice, structure, etc.), researched, stylistically sophisticated, and free of grammatical errors.

B (80-89):

Above average. The project is significantly more than competent. The work explores the basic elements of creative nonfiction and exceeds the minimal requirements for the assignment while containing few errors.

C (70-79):

Average. The work fulfills the minimal requirements for the assignment; however, the assignment fails to develop fully the elements of creative nonfiction, and it contains errors that detract from its effectiveness.

D (60-69):

Below average. The project fails to fulfill even the minimal requirements of the assignment. It often exhibits ineffective organization, serious mechanical errors, and fails to follow the purpose of the assignment, or to develop the topic. Evidence of careful proofreading is scanty, if nonexistent. The whole piece, in fact, often gives the impression of having been conceived and produced in haste.

F (59 and below):

Unacceptable. The work fails to meet even the minimal requirements of the assignment. In short, the ideas, organization, style, and mechanics fall far below what is acceptable writing.

Final Notes

For students with special needs: Students who qualify for specific accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should inform the instructor within the first week of class to ensure that their needs are met in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor of his/her needs and to provide necessary documentation to the Student Success Center before any classroom accommodations can be made. To contact the Director of the Student Success Center, call 754-6204 or stop by the Center located in the basement of Colter Hall.

This semester, we'll be reading and discussing materials that consider a variety of opinions, and there's a chance you may find some of this offensive. You will certainly disagree with some authors' positions, which is fine. The purpose of this course is not to ask you to adopt or espouse any particular philosophy or viewpoint; it is, instead, to ask you to read the material carefully and analytically. You're welcome -- and encouraged -- to articulate and support your own positions in class, but it is essential that you read the material and give equal consideration to other viewpoints. I encourage free, open, and energetic discussions. With that freedom and energy, I also expect each class member to respect the work and view of others. This is a class in which participants are offering newly formed work -- all writers are vulnerable in this position. Responses need to be focused on the text. Personal attacks will not be tolerated.

Please don't bring children to class.

Please do not use your cell phone during class. There might be times when we want to use phones to look something up, but unless we are working on something with phones together,

your phones should be turned off and out of sight. If phone use becomes a problem, I will ask that class members turn phones in to me during class.

You may not use tobacco products in class.

One last point: Please ask questions when you don't understand something, particularly how an assignment is to be prepared.

Weekly Schedule

(BAEC=*Best American Essays of the Century*)

Aug. 28: Introduction to creative nonfiction, the essay, and the class. Discussion of major points on the syllabus and key points from Robert Atwan's foreword to the required text as well as a discussion of reading to discover using Frost/Larkin.

Assignment for September 4:

Read Robert Atwan's foreword to *Best American Essays of the Century* (p. x-xv, up to "Acknowledgements") Read "Fiction vs. Non-Fiction" online. <https://lithub.com/the-truth-about-fiction-vs-nonfiction>

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #1, "Telling the Truth."**

Sept. 4: **Writing #1 is due.** Copies of each student's writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center by Wednesday evening.

Further discussion of the essay as a form, as well as further class expectations from the syllabus.

Discussion of reading assignment from August 28.

Writers Workshop—writing to prompts and sharing. Some points about grammar and holding yourselves accountable (it, they, etc)

Assignment for Sept. 11:

Read Annie Dillard's essay "Handed My Own Life" online (can also be found in *An American Childhood* by Annie Dillard) and Maya Angelou's essay in BAEC, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" (pp 342-357).

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #2, “Awakenings.”**

Sept. 11: **Writing #2 is due.** Copies of each student’s writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center by Wednesday.

Discussion on finding your subject and your style, as well as essays assigned Sept. 4: “Handed My Own Life” and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.”

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #1, “Telling the Truth.”**

Assignment for Sept. 18:

Read Anthony Bourdain’s “Don’t Eat Before Reading This” from the April 19, 1999 issue of the New Yorker (you can find this online), and Rick Bass’s essay “My Dinner with Denis Johnson” found on the June 25, 2018 online link for Literary Hub.

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #3, “Experiencing.”**

Sept. 18: **Writing #3 is due.** Copies of each student’s writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center by Wednesday.

Discussion of essays assigned Sept. 11 by Bourdain and Bass. Also “I Eat Dinner.”

Writers Workshop: **Discuss Writing #2, “Awakenings.”**

Assignment for Sept. 25:

Read Loren Eiseley’s “The Brown Wasp” (BAEC, p. 179) and Eudora Welty’s “A Sweet Devouring.”
Talk about Stegner’s “A Sense of Place” in class.

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #4, “Place in the Past”**

Sept. 25 **Writing #4 is due.** Copies of each student’s writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center by noon on Sept. 26.

Discussion on essays of place, as well as essays assigned Sept. 18.

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #3, “Experiencing.”**

Assignment for Oct. 2:

Read Tom Wolfe “Putting Daddy On” (BAEC, p. 280).

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #5, “Family Influence.”**

Oct 2: **Writing #5 is due.** Copies of each student’s writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center by Wednesday at noon.

Discussion of the essayist’s voice, as well as essay assigned Sept. 25, Wolfe’s “Putting Daddy On.”

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #4 “Place in the Past.”**

Assignment for Oct. 9:

Read: Maxine Hong Kinston’s “No Name Woman” (BAEC, p. 383)

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #6, “Secrets.”**

Oct. 9: **Writing #6 and Commonplace Books Due.** Copies of each student’s writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center.

Discussion of importance of reading for writing. Discussion of the memoir, as well as a discussion of essay assigned Oct. 2, Kinston’s “No Name Woman.”

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #5 “Family Influence.”**

Assignment for October 16:

Read E.B. White’s “Once More to the Lake” and excerpt from Teresa Jordan’s *Riding the White Horse Home*.

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class This is **Writing #7, “Memory.”**

Oct. 16: **Writing #7 due.** Copies of each student's writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center as usual.

Discussion of memory and memoir in essays, as well as class readings.

Writers Workshop: **Writing #6 "Secrets."**

Assignment for October 23:

Read Rebecca Solnit's "Men Explain Things to Me" at link

<https://www.guernicamag.com/rebecca-solnit-men-explain-things-to-me/> and John Updike's "The Disposable Rocket", (BAEC, p 549).

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class.
This is **Writing #8, "Gender and Identity."**

Oct. 23: **Writing #8 due.** Copies of each student's writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center on Wednesday.

Discuss essays that take a controversial stance and their audience, as well as reading assignment from Oct. 16.

Also, introduce Neltje and her book *North of Crazy*. Assign excerpt from the book to discuss on Oct. 30.

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #7 "Memory."**

Assignment for October 30:

Attend Neltje's reading at the Cody Library on Oct 24 and come prepared to discuss her writing and the experience of her reading. Also read Ariel Levy's Essay "Thanksgiving in Mongolia" from the New Yorker: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/11/18/thanksgiving-in-mongolia>

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class.
This is **Writing #9, "Limits."**

Oct. 30: Writing #9 due. Copies of each student's writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center on Wednesday.

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #8 "Gender and Identity."** Editing workshop with Lynn Pitet.

Assignment for November 6: Read Kelly Maria Korducki's essay "Jane Austen's Practical Concerns about Marriage are Still Relevant" from Lithub, 5/22/18.

file:///H:/Creative%20NonFiction/Jane%20Austen's%20Practical%20Concerns%20About%20Marriage%20Are%20Still%20Relevant%20_%20%20Literar.pdf

and John McPhee, "The Search for Marvin Gardens," (BAEC, p. 361).

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #10, "Responding and Voice."**

Nov. 6: Writing #10 due. Copies of each student's writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center and in the box outside my office on Wednesday.

Discussion of the response essay, addressing reading assignment from Oct. 31, "Jane Austen" and "The Search for Marvin Gardens." Discussion about voice.

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #9, "Limits."**

Assignment for Nov. 13:

Read Wendell Berry essay to be shared in class, as well as Atul Gawande's "Courage" from *Being Mortal*. Also discuss Teresa Jordan's *A Year of Living Virtuously* and letters as persuasive voice (think MLK).

Write a brief essay (no more than 650 words) drawn from prompts handed out in class. This is **Writing #11 "Persuasion."**

Nov. 13: Writing #11 is due. Copies of each student's writing will be available for pickup at the Cody Center on Wednesday.

Discussion of publishing, as well as discussion of reading assignment from Nov. 6, "Courage" and Berry.

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #10 "Responding."**

Assignment for Nov. 27:

Read about dreams and other inspirations.

Begin assembling your portfolio.

Nov. 20: Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 27: Discussion of commonplace books and reading influences on student essays.

Writers Workshop: Discuss **Writing #11 “Persuasion.”**

Assignment for Dec. 4:

Read Michael Herr’s “Illumination Rounds” in BAEC p 327.

Complete portfolio.

Dec. 5: Portfolios and portfolio presentations due.

Dec. 11: Wrap up discussion.

Dec. 13 (Thursday): Final Exam, 5:30 to 7:20.