



ENGL214: Creative Nonfiction Workshop

Spring 2020 :: Section 001
Instructor—Dave Frame
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Office: Colson 242
Office Hours
TR 12:30-1:30 PM

G16 Woodburn :: MWF 10:30 – 11:20 a.m.

Required Materials

Class Materials

Two one-subject notebooks

Pens (One blue/black, one green/red)

Readings

1. *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process* by John McPhee (ISBN-10: 0374537976)
2. *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine (ISBN-10: 1555976905)
3. Online Readings: You will need to print out online readings to make marginal comments and have them available during class discussions. You will also be required to print out and distribute your own writing. All this will likely total more than 500 pages. Assuming ten cents per page, you're looking at \$50-60 in printing costs. (Note: This still comes in well below a STEM textbook, so I'm hoping you'll take it in stride).

Introduction

Welcome to English 214: Nonfiction. This writing workshop will help students to recognize, understand, and apply the conventions and elements of craft specific to the expanding field of creative nonfiction. We'll look at different forms from literary journalism, to essay, to memoir. We'll touch on questions of memory, identity, place, subject vs. object, and truth.

During the semester, you will find yourself on both ends of the writer-reader relationship, and in the liminal space between them. You will read deeply and critically. You will write to be read. And you will respond as a reader to other writers in the class, with an eye toward understanding and improving their connection with an audience.

The class will also survey contemporary CNF. You will learn terminology, philosophy, and theories of writing that will assist you in thinking critically about the creative process. You will then use those tools to articulate your own ideas, create your own works, and provide constructive criticism for others.

You will also be encouraged to think reflectively about your own work. In doing this, I hope you'll build a vocabulary for articulating and understanding your own voice and place in literary history.

Grading

Throughout the semester you will complete several types of assignments including in-class writing exercises, quizzes, reader responses, peer critique letters, and your own creative writing. You will also be graded on participation in class discussions and workshops. Finally, you will be expected to submit a final portfolio with a reflective essay on your work. Grades will break down as follows:

Participation/In-Class Writing Exercises (10%): This course requires significant in-class writing and active participation in discussions. Participation grades will be affected by such behavior as failure to bring the necessary materials (e.g., notebook, pen, and reading materials), failure to follow along in the text being discussed, failure to share thoughts during discussion (i.e., remaining silent for two or more consecutive class periods) and unauthorized use of technology (e.g., texting, using social media, taking selfies). You will also be required to keep a dedicated notebook for in-class writing exercises which I will periodically collect to verify your engagement with exercises.

Reader Responses/Quizzes (10%): For each reading assignment, you will be asked to produce a single, robust (100+ words) paragraph of reader response to the texts assigned. These responses should:

1. include a general statement regarding your personal reaction to the texts
2. address issues of craft and thematic content
3. quote, paraphrase, or summarize examples to support claims when possible
4. use relevant terminology from the class, and
5. compare and contrast the given readings with each other or previous readings from the course.

Peer responses will be submitted to discussion boards in Google Classroom. If peer responses begin to show a lack of consideration or effort, I reserve the right to assign quizzes to be completed at the beginning of class instead. Quizzes will include content- and theme-based questions and receive a pass/fail based on what your performance suggests re: whether you have closely read the text.

Flash Nonfiction (15%): During the semester, you will be asked to complete a flash piece (2-4 pages) demonstrating consideration of conventions, craft, and audience. It may be on any subject/topic so long as it is nonfiction. It should make use craft elements like metaphor and image to maximize content within the constraints.

Peer Critique Letters/Memos (20%): For each peer submission, you will be asked to write a letter or memo to the writer offering support and constructive criticism. Each letter/memo should be at least a half page, single-spaced. Your critique should be thoughtful and offer suggestions when pointing out problems. Your main goal should be to help the writer create a more effective work. Abusive or inflammatory language will necessitate a discussion with me during office hours.

Workshop Submission (20%): After the first few weeks, part of each class will be spent in workshops, sharing and critiquing student work. Each student will be required to turn in at least one workshop submission of 10-20 double-spaced pages.

Final Portfolio (25%): On the last day of the semester, you will be expected to turn in a revised portfolio of your creative work from the semester, incorporating, reflecting on, or responding to feedback from myself and your peers. This will include:

1. a reflective cover letter/memo discussing your process for writing and revision as well as any major insights from the course/readings
2. all minor creative writing assignments with revisions
3. your workshop submission with revisions

Absence Policy

This course is based largely on a workshop and class discussion format. As such, absences will be detrimental to your understanding of the material. Also, your absence in workshops will deprive classmates of well-deserved feedback and support. In order to create accountability, I'm limiting absences to three (3) over the course of the semester. Each absence after your third will result in a full letter-grade reduction to your final grade.

If you are struggling with an assignment, if you are unexpectedly ill, or if you have some other personal emergency, contact me immediately (before class) and we may be able to negotiate a makeup work. Special arrangements like this require a formal, written request that includes an explanation of the circumstances, documentation (if relevant), and a detailed plan for completing any work due that class period.

Late Work. Late work is unacceptable. In-class exercises, reader responses, and quizzes not completed as the result of an absence will receive a grade of zero (0). If you know in advance that you will miss class or a deadline, contact me ASAP to discuss the possibility of makeup work. Only emailed requests made before the beginning of a given class period will be considered. No request is guaranteed to be granted.

Extended Absences. If you know in advance that you will need to miss more than three consecutive class meetings, you should take the course in another term. It is much better for you as a writer and as a student to take the course during a semester when your schedule allows you to be present to do your best work. If you are a **military service person** with possible drill events or deployments, please speak to me about a plan for successfully completing all required coursework.

Social Justice

THE DEPARTMENTAL STATEMENT ON SOCIAL JUSTICE:

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

MY PERSONAL STATEMENT ON SOCIAL JUSTICE:

My teaching philosophy is based on a strong concern for inclusion and accessibility. If you have a disability, religious objection, or economic burden that requires accommodation, or if you are having difficulty understanding course content, accessing class resources, or using class materials, please feel free to reach out for assistance.

At some points in the semester, you can be sure class discussions and student writing will touch on social or political issues about which we expect to encounter differences of values and opinions. While disagreements are entirely appropriate in an academic setting, students should show the utmost respect for others in discussion. Any attempt to belittle, mock, or shout down other students for their identities or beliefs will necessitate a conversation with me and serious violations such as harassment or hate speech may result in removal from the class.

This is a class about craft. Discussion should be grounded in critical analysis of the text before us. That may include discussing political or historical context, and we will often discuss personal reactions to a story, but any such digression must ultimately serve the course goals. As facilitator, I reserve the right to redirect conversations that depart from the content of the class.

Academic Integrity

You are responsible for the integrity of your work. This means that all of your work for this course must be your own and must be created specifically for this course. Failing to maintain the integrity of your work will have serious consequences. I may be required to report cases to the Office of Student Conduct. I may request that you resubmit an assignment, or I may give you a zero. I will request an office conference to discuss any potential outcomes. You should never:

1. Submit work that was completed or submitted during another course.
2. Pay another person to complete an assignment on your behalf.
3. Submit another student's work as your own.
4. Share quiz answers or reading responses with other students.
5. Ask other students (including from previous semesters) to share quiz answers or reading responses.

Violating any policy explicitly outlined above will result in expulsion from the class.

Sensitive Material

Some readings over the course of the semester will feature profanity, drug use, violence, and a spectrum of sexual thoughts or behavior. They may discuss or allude to (though never graphically depict) sexual violence. I will do my best to warn you if we are likely to encounter problematic material in a particular piece of writing, so that you can be emotionally prepared. However, in most cases, you will not be exempt from reading the material or participating in class discussion. If you have serious concerns about your ability to handle some material, if you've experienced some trauma or are suffering from PTSD, let me know and we can discuss accommodations and/or university services that can help. You will never be asked to share details or specify a trauma.

NOTE: If you aren't comfortable speaking with me directly, you can confidentially contact the Office of Equity Assurance about sending a *traumatic incident letter* that will direct me in how to accommodate you.

In your own writing, please be mindful of how this type of material may affect classmates. Inclusion of sensitive topics should necessitate serious reflection about significance and motive. If your primary intention is to shock or arouse your readers' sensibilities or emotions, please reconsider. If you are unsure about a piece of writing, by all means write it, but please consider talking to me about it before you release it to your peers. Though it won't be required, you may consider (especially for sexuality or violence) making some small note at the top of the manuscript to prepare peers who may have experienced trauma which may make the content difficult.

Schedule of Work

| Weeks | Topics and Assignments |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 1 January 13–17 *January 13 is the first day of classes *January 17 is the last day to register for classes, add new courses, etc. | Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Introductions▪ Review of Syllabus Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What is CNF? Friday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Elements of Craft (Terminology)▪ Read <i>The White Album</i> (Didion) |
| Week 2 January 20–24 *January 20 is Martin Luther King, Jr. Day—University Closed | Monday: Martin Luther King Jr. Day—University Closed—Class Cancelled Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Discuss <i>The White Album</i> (Didion)▪ Read <i>Draft No. 4</i> (McPhee) Chapter One: Progression Friday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Discuss <i>Draft No. 4</i> (McPhee) Chapter One: Progression▪ Prewriting Strategies▪ Discuss Workshop Schedule and Format▪ Read <i>The Fourth State of Matter</i> (Beard) |

Week 3
January 27–31

Monday:
▪ Discuss *The Fourth State of Matter* (Beard)

Wednesday:
▪ Memory: What We Remember and How
▪ Crafting from Memory

Friday:
▪ Workshop
▪ Read *What's Inside you, Brother* (Touré)

Week 4
February 3–7

Monday:
▪ Discuss *What's Inside you, Brother* (Touré)

Wednesday:
▪ Subject vs. Object
▪ Identity

Friday:
▪ Workshop
▪ Read *Getting Down to What is Really Real* (Sullivan)

Week 5
February 10–14

Monday:
▪ Discuss *Getting Down to What is Really Real* (Sullivan)

Wednesday:
▪ Representation & the Portrayal of Others

Friday:
▪ Workshop
▪ Read *This is My Heart* (Stielstra)

Week 6
February 17–21

Monday:
▪ Discuss *This is My Heart* (Stielstra)

Wednesday:
▪ Narrative Control
▪ Playing with Form

Friday:
▪ Workshop
▪ Read *Draft No. 4* (McPhee) Chapter Two: Structure (to page 34)

Week 7
February 24–28

Monday:
▪ Discuss *Draft No. 4* (McPhee) Chapter Two: Structure

Wednesday:
▪ Narrative Shape

Friday:
▪ Workshop
▪ Flash Nonfiction piece due
▪ Read *Devil's Bait* (Jamison)

Week 8
March 2–March 6

Monday:
▪ Discuss *Devil's Bait* (Jamison)

Wednesday:
▪ Belief and Positionality

*Mid-semester reports due by noon March 6

Week 9
March 9–13

Week 10
March 16–20
SPRING RECESS
NO CLASSES

Week 11
March 23–27

Week 12
March 30–April 3

Week 13
April 6–10

*April 10 University Closed

Week 14
April 13–17

*April 17 is the last day to withdraw from the university, or from classes

Friday:

- Workshop
- Read *Our Own Kind* (Pancake)

Monday:

- Discuss *Our Own Kind* (Pancake)

Wednesday:

- Place: Geography and Cultural Influence

Friday:

- Workshop
- Read *Citizen* (Rankine)

Monday:

- Discuss *Citizen* (Rankine)

Wednesday:

- Lyricism and Prose Poetry

Friday:

- Workshop
- Read *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* (Flynn) excerpts

Monday:

- Discuss *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* (Flynn) excerpts

Wednesday:

- Memoir & Writing the Self

Friday:

- Workshop
- Read *Consider the Lobster* (Wallace)

Monday:

- Discuss *Consider the Lobster* (Wallace)

Wednesday:

- Playing with Conventions
- Travel & Writing the Other
- Read *Draft No. 4* (McPhee) Chapter Five: Frame of Reference

Friday:

Spring Holiday (No Class)

Monday:

- Discuss *Draft No. 4* (McPhee) Chapter Five: Frame of Reference

Wednesday:

- Editing and Revising

Friday:

- Workshop
- Read *Draft No. 4* (McPhee) Chapter Seven: Draft No. 4

Week 15
April 20–24

Monday:

- Discuss *Draft No. 4* (McPhee) Chapter Seven: Draft No. 4

Wednesday:

- Intro to Final Portfolio/Reflection

Friday:

- Workshop

Week 16
April 27–May 1

*May 1 is the last day of
classes

Monday:

- A Guide to Better Reflection

Wednesday:

- Compiling Materials

Friday:

- Submit Final Portfolio

NOTE: Readings and discussion topics are tentative and subject to change based on our progress. If I perceive that students are struggling with understanding certain skills/concepts, we may spend extra time in those areas or assign different readings to drive things home.