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2021

### Creative Non-Fiction Prose Workshop

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*CUNY City College*

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Engl 23000 - Prose Workshop

Time: T/R 3:30PM - 4:45PM

Instructor: Laura Yan

Office hours: 3-3:30 PM T/R, or by appointment

### **WHAT IS CREATIVE NONFICTION (aka Prose)?**

Creative non-fiction is about telling true stories with skill and imagination. It's about vivid details and engaging characters and thrilling plots, just as much as fiction, only it involves finding stories in the real world - whether it's from your personal life or tracking down a mysterious stranger to tell their story.

In this class, we'll study three major forms of prose writing - scenic/sensory writing, personal essay/memoir, and the reported profile. We'll learn to write by reading widely and intensely, through classroom discussions, creativity and writing exercises, and honest, generous and collaborative workshops.

We'll get close and personal with the art of revision, and learn the mechanics of prose writing - including interviews, transcripts, and fact-checking. We'll learn how to write a pitch, and submit our writing to publications in the world at large.

### **COURSE OUTLINE:**

Coursework for this class will include weekly readings, in-class discussions, mini-lessons, writing assignments and revisions. We'll conduct live workshops, deliver feedback to your classmates, and learn a little about pitches, transcripts and sources.

You'll complete writing assignments (and revisions) in three main categories: food/travel (sensory writing), personal essay/memoir (looking inward to look outwards), and profile (reported storytelling).

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

1. To develop a sense of curiosity, attention, and creativity to add to your work.
2. To gain a survey of the different forms of creative non-fiction, read attentively and analyze texts for craft and technique.
3. To practice storytelling techniques, including voice, character, setting, plot, sensory details, structure and more in creative nonfiction.
4. To practice reporting and research techniques, including research, interviews, transcripts, fact checking and others.
5. To learn to edit and revise (both for yourself and others), clarify and declutter, and edit for eloquence, clarity and impact.
6. To practice generous, constructive feedback in group workshops and build a writing community.
7. To develop a pitch and learn about the publication process, submitting one piece of writing for consideration.

### **CLASS REQUIREMENTS:**

You'll need a dedicated writing notebook for this course (for in-class exercises, homework, workshop and reading notes, and everything else). Keep your notebook with you as you go about your days! Write down your dreams, ideas, and snippets of eavesdropped conversations. We'll review your notebook as part of the mid-term portfolio/office hours visit.

Please **meet your deadlines**. If there's any reason you won't be able to turn in an assignment on time, email me *before the deadline* for an exception.

You'll be graded down a letter grade for each day an assignment is late, and assignments won't be accepted after three days. Please upload all assignments in the correct Google Drive folder (and make it so that any viewer can *comment*).

Everyone will meet with me for office hours at least once during the semester, discussing your interests, ideas, progress, questions or difficulties and plans for your writing projects.

### **CLASS POLICIES:**

**Zoom etiquette:** though cameras are optional for our class, your presence is vital. Please participate as much as you can -- whether through chat, audio or video. Please do not open any other tabs or activities during our class sessions.

**Assignments:**

Please upload assignments in class's shared Google Drive folder, and label your file "Firstname, Last Name - Title."

Upload your assignments in standard format: 12-point, Times New Roman, double spaced, standard margins. Each document should include a word count and page numbers.

Late assignments will drop by a letter grade for each day they're late, and no longer be accepted three days after the deadline (except in special circumstances - again, email me BEFORE the deadline if you need an extension).

**Engagement:**

This is a class based on reading, thinking and our classroom discussions. Your participation and engagement with the class itself and our homework is a vital part of the course (and your grade).

I'd like you to give yourself a grade for engagement, based on: engagement in class discussions/meetings, effort in homework/assignments, feedback for your classmates' projects. I'll ask for your self assessment in the middle of and at the end of the semester.

Your attendance to our meetings (even virtually) is crucial. If you must miss a class because of personal circumstances, please email me and let me know before the class. Your assignments are due even if you are not in class (to be uploaded on Google Drive on the day of the deadline).

Please show up to our Zoom classes on time. Too many late sessions can reflect your participation/engagement score. If you have to miss a workshop date, please get in touch with another classmate in your group to reschedule.

**Plagiarism:** plagiarism will result in an instant F on the assignment, and potential failure for the class. This includes rewriting materials from other writers, not citing sources correctly, or self-plagiarism (using an assignment from another class). If you're not sure if something needs to be cited, please ask (or cite it anyway, to be safe).

If you're struggling with an assignment, please talk to me — turning in a crappy draft is okay if you have to, plagiarism is absolutely not.

**Respect & Privacy:** this class is a place for learning, curiosity, and community. I'd like it to be a safe environment -- please do not discuss any of your classmates' work with anyone outside of this class. Please DM on Zoom, email or talk to me privately if you ever feel uncomfortable because of a classmate, a comment made during class, or anything.

**READINGS:**

You'll get weekly readings emailed after class or shared in Google Drive. Please take notes on your readings and join the discussion online.

**GRADE BREAKDOWN:**

25% - writing assignments

20% - homework

15% - workshop / feedback

15% - revisions + transcripts

25% - engagement, participation & attendance

**CALENDAR:**

(Note: readings are assigned to be finished *BEFORE* the upcoming class.)

Course schedule, readings and assignments can change throughout the semester. **Please check this live syllabus for up to date calendar/assignments.**

Week 1

**Thursday 8/26**

Introductions. What is CNF?

HW: Sign up for class Slack, join Google Drive, and begin Lynda Barry diary.

Week 2

*"Always be a poet, even in prose."*

--Charles Baudelaire

**Tuesday 8/31**

Syllabus review. What's in sensory details?

HW: *reading*: two by Jonathan Gold. Write a letter of introduction (less than 500 words) in the third-person, writing about yourself as if you were a fictional character.

**Thursday 9/2**

Reading discussion. Freewriting, sensory details & what's in a scene?  
Reading: Accidental Cook.

Week 3

**Tuesday 9/7 NO CLASS**

**Thursday 9/9**

**LYNDA BARRY DIARIES DUE.**

Telling Details. Reading discussion.

HW: TBD.

Week 4

**Tuesday 9/14**

Let's talk about scenes! What's in a workshop?

Reading: Ryan Knighton Safari piece.

**Thursday 9/16 (NO CLASS)**

Week 5:

**Tuesday 9/21**

**NF Assignment 1 Due.**

NF Workshop 1

**HW:** written workshop feedback. Reading.

**Thursday 9/23**

Workshop 2

**HW:** feedback.

Week 6:

**Tuesday 9/28**

Workshop 3

**HW:** feedback.

**Thursday 9/30**

Workshop 4

HW: reading: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/12/learning/dropping-the-reader-into-a-scene.html>

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Week 7

*“When your story is ready for rewrite, cut it to the bone. Get rid of every ounce of excess fat. This is going to hurt; revising a story down to the bare essentials is always a little like murdering children, but it must be done.”*

— Stephen King

### **Tuesday 10/5**

Style/revising/rules of writing. Reading discussion.

HW: reading: [The Physics of Forbidden Love](#).

### **Thursday 10/7**

Deconstructing the personal essay. Revision assignment 1 due on SATURDAY, 10/9..

Week 8

### **Tuesday 10/12**

Personal essay/memoirs. How to tell a story / the shape of a story.

Reading: “The Refugee Camp She Once Called Home.”

### **Thursday 10/14**

Ideas workshop. Looking outwards - connecting to big ideas.

HW: readings. Writing exercise.

Week 9

### **Tuesday 10/19**

NF Assignment 2 Due. Workshop group 1.

HW: readings. Writing exercise.

### **Thursday 10/21**

Workshop group 1..

HW: readings/feedback. Writing exercise.

## Week 10

*"Half my life is an act of revision."*

--John Irving

### **Tuesday 10/26**

Workshop group 2.

HW: readings. Editing exercise.

### **Thursday 10/28**

**Workshop group 3.**

HW: readings. Workshop feedback/start revisions.

## Week 11

### **Tuesday 11/2**

Revisions: let's talk structure.

HW: Revision worksheet. Revisions Due 11/9. readings, essay ideas.

### **Thursday 11/4**

What's reported non-fiction? Let's practice listening.

HW: readings. Writing exercise.

## Week 12

### **Tuesday 11/9**

Let's talk about interviews. How to dig in.

HW: readings. Make a reporting plan.

### **Thursday 11/11**

Editorial boardroom.

Workshop assignment 3, group 1.

HW: readings.

## Week 13

### **Tuesday 11/16**

Workshop assignment 3, group 1.

HW: readings.



**Thursday 11/18**

Workshop assignment 3, group 2.

Week 14

**Tuesday 11/23**

Workshop assignment 3, group 3.

**Thursday 11/25 (no class) Happy Thanksgiving!**

Week 15

**Tuesday 11/30**

Guest lecture? // Let's talk about pitching.

**Thursday 12/2**

Write your pitch/where to publish. Assignment 3 revision due.

Week 16

**Tuesday 12/7**

Literary salon.

**Thursday 12/9 (Last Day of Class)**

Literary Salon/celebration. .

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