

English 3040-01: Advanced Writing, Creative Nonfiction
 Professor Shannon Brennan
 MWF 10:30 – 11:45a.m.
 Lentz Hall 319



Walden pond hut • title page illustration • 1882 edition

explore some of these sub-genres, reading across a broad spectrum of content and form. We'll investigate the formal issues that these works raise, and the ethical questions posed by the form of Creative Nonfiction.

Then there's the *putting words on paper* part. Over the course of this semester, we will investigate how to translate personal experience and research into effective writing. We'll practice observing the things around and within us, translating those observations into words, and transforming those words into writing that speaks to an audience.

We'll practice reading the work of others, honing in on the techniques that authors use to produce effects - aesthetic, emotional, poetic. In other words, we'll practice reading and writing for craft. We'll also reflect on craft - our own and that of others - in ways that are geared towards making the work *work* better. Finally, we'll practice revision, which means we'll consistently return to our writing, look at it anew, examine what's working (and what's not), and make changes large and small. All this is geared towards helping our writing do the things it wants to do, more beautifully and effectually.

The most successful work in this course will demonstrate your ability to:

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Office: Lentz Hall, Room 239*

*Located in a little corridor, the entrance to which is found on the lake side of Lentz Hall. If it's my office hours and I'm not there, check the tables just outside this corridor, which look onto Lake Michigan.

Office Hours:

Mondays 2:40 – 5:00p.m.

Wednesdays 2:40 – 3:40p.m.

Fridays 11:40a.m. – 1:10p.m.

...and by appointment.

Course Description and Goals

Creative Nonfiction is an unruly genre. It demands that the writer bring an artful perspective to bear on things in the world that really, truly happened. It comprises multiple different forms – from Travel Writing to Memoir; Profiles to Nature Essays. In this course, we'll

- **Meaningfully engage with and observe** the world through an ongoing process of drafting, reflecting, recollecting, and (verbal) woolgathering.
- **Engage** in the drafting process.
- **Read, study, and practice** the many forms of creative nonfiction (including “personal” and “public” subjects).
- **Study** processes and techniques that contribute to successful creative nonfiction (ranging from matters of research to matters of structure, metaphor, and syntax), and **develop techniques** for strategically using these in your writing.
- **Carefully, critically, and constructively read and analyze** the writing of others so that you may clearly communicate (1) the effects that work produces, and (2) the specific aesthetic choices that lead to these effects.
- **Carefully and critically read your own writing** so that you may recognize (1) the effects that work produces, (2) the specific aesthetic choices that lead to those effects, and (3) the ways you might make different choices to produce other (or stronger or weaker or more graceful) effects. (This also involves recognizing the relationship between the work’s intended and actual aesthetic operations.)
- **Think carefully about style** and its connection to audience and genre.
- **Revise.**
- Practice effective processes for **brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing**. These include **productively engaging with feedback**.
- **Reflect critically** and insightfully on your own writing, and your own process.

Required Materials

- Lee Gutkind, *You Can’t Make This Stuff Up*
- Lex Williford and Michael Martone, eds., *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*
- Commonplace Book: A bound notebook that you like and want to write in. Small notebooks are good because they are transportable. Cheap notebooks are good because they don’t seem to announce to the subconscious that “great things” must be written in them, so they free you up. Bring this notebook to class every day.
- Selected readings, located on eLearning
- Copies of your writing. Be prepared for 2-3 major copy-fests this semester. A week ahead of the date that your work is scheduled to be reviewed by the whole class, you’ll need to print out copies of your writing to distribute to all of the people in our workshop (including yourself and the Professor). There are, at the time of this syllabus’ composition, 11 people in the workshop (including the Professor), which means 11 copies of your 5-15 page (double-spaced) essay. Here’s the link to Carthage’s page on photocopying:
<https://www.carthage.edu/library/technology-support/printing/>
- **You are expected to have the following with you every day: Gutkind’s book, the *Touchstone* anthology, your commonplace book, and a current draft of your workshop essay(s), at whatever stage of development is appropriate.**

Writing Workload for this Class

- 10-30 pages of finished, high-quality nonfiction. (There’ll be a cover letter, too.)
- 1-3 page (300+ word) letter of response to each one of your colleagues’ stories. Usually 3/week – around 18 letters, total. Plus a practice letter or two.

- 2-3 page analysis of a published essay, analyzing it in terms of craft. This will be accompanied by a 1-3 page imitation of the essay. 2 of these, total.
- 1-2-page notebook exercises, due weekly. Around 13, total. (These are studies in craft, and experiments in genre. They're capped at 500 words. They can and will be rough, but they should also be the result of a few passes, to work at better understanding the style element in question.)
- Commonplace Book and informal exercises. This writing's rough, and unrefined, and wild, and mostly For Your Eyes Only. You'll write in the Commonplace Book daily, and you'll be asked to reflect on it, and turn in parts, a few times this semester.

See assignment sheets for more information on each of these.

Discussion Guidelines

Productive dialogue is essential in a workshop class like this one. We're going to write together, read together, ask questions of each other, and collaborate with one another to ask difficult questions of the world.

Thoughtfully engaging with the work of your peers is the first and best strategy for learning how better to produce work that does what you want it to do. Period. And hearing from your readers about the impression your prose creates is essential to learning how to *defamiliarize* yourself from your own prose. That doesn't just help you with the specific draft that's being workshopped; it helps you to revise all of your work more strategically.

In other words, the best gains of this class come from our discussion and collaboration and careful reading. But for this to be successful, we have to create an environment in which we're dedicated to helping one another to be our best selves and to create our best work. It's impossible to hear feedback, and next to impossible to share writing or ideas that one cares about, if the atmosphere feels unserious,¹ unwelcoming, or unsafe. So, the most essential requirement of this class is that we all, on the most deep-down level, respect every person in this community through our words and our actions. Keep in mind that others may be of a different class, race, gender, religion, sexuality, or ability set than you, and make a pact with yourself to refuse to hurt others through your words or actions. Go further, in fact. Make a pact to support your colleagues' thriving.

Plagiarism

The College and I expect that all papers turned in will be **your original work**. This means that the ideas, arguments, and words that appear on the page are **yours and yours alone**. (Unless you're, like, making a clever allusion, of course.) Similarly, the phrases, sentences, and characters that appear in your colleagues' work are **theirs and theirs alone**. I can't imagine I would need to stress this, but in case I do, know that the mere *appearance* of plagiarism ruined the brilliant Nella Larsen's career: she never published after.

A paper submitted for credit for this class should not be submitted for another class, and should not *have been* submitted for another class. (You're welcome to publish the stuff you do in here, though! Of course!) Your workshop stories should not have been composed prior to **February 1, 2017**.

¹ "Unserious" doesn't mean unfunny, or unfun. This term's meant to suggest the necessity of recognizing that the work of your colleagues was made *in earnest*, and should be engaged as such. If the writing concerns a snail's desperate search for some particular leaf, then our job is to take seriously that premise, to weigh and discuss its interest and meaning and execution - not to assume the story's small just because snails are.

Plagiarism of any kind will result in a failing grade in the course, and may lead to probation and expulsion from the College. If you are unsure or have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me.

Attendance

Attendance is required. Our class meetings are rich and compact and important; any absence will put you significantly behind the rest of the class. For this reason, your final grade will fall by 1/3 of a grade for every absence after three. (An A would become an A-, an A- would become a B+, etc.) **If you miss six classes (or more), you will be unable to pass the course. If you're 15 minutes late or more, that counts as an absence for that day.**

In the case of illness or emergency, please contact me as far in advance of the class as possible so that I know you're still in tune with the class.

Class participation figures significantly in your course grade. I therefore ask that you make sure that you bring not only your body and your books, but also your mind and spirit to class with you. In other words, don't merely come to class; ***be present.***

Assignments: Due Dates

All assignments should be submitted on the **due date** in the format (hard copy or Microsoft Word Document) **that is specifically indicated by the assignment**. Late work will only be accepted if an extension has been requested and granted at least 24 hours prior to the class meeting at which the paper is due. If you neglect to show your work on the day that it is due (**or, in some cases, to present it in your feedback meeting**), you will not receive credit for this work. Plan accordingly. If you expect that you will not be able to meet a deadline, do not disappear into the night. Rather, consult me as far in advance as possible to discuss the situation.

Writing Resources

The Brainard Writing Center offers writing workshop services **free of charge** for Carthage students. You can make an appointment with a Writing Fellow on their website, <https://www.carthage.edu/writing-center/appointments/>. Of course, I will also be available during office hours, or by appointment, to discuss any issues regarding the class materials, your progress, or your writing assignments, and I strongly encourage you to come to office hours if you have any questions at all about the class or your work.

Tutoring Resources

The College offers **free tutoring** to all Carthage students. You can find an academic coach to help you develop better time management skills and more effective study habits. You can also book a peer tutor for more course-directed assistance. You don't need to be in dire straits to use these resources – though you can! You can also come here to help your good strategies to become even more effective. (Even Usain Bolt has a coach.) Here's their website: <https://www.carthage.edu/tutoring/>. Here's how you can request a coach: <https://www.carthage.edu/tutoring/academic-coaching/request-a-coach/>. Here's how you can request a tutor: <https://www.carthage.edu/tutoring/request/>.

Counseling Resources

Carthage counseling services are terrific, and **free** to Carthage Students. Their website is <https://www.carthage.edu/campus-life/health-counseling/counseling-services>, and their phone

number is (262) 551-5777. They are open M-F 8:30a – 5:00p. They can help with issues ranging from writer’s block to general malaise to transitioning to college.

Resources for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and would like to discuss special academic accommodations, please contact me and register with the Diane Schowalter at the Center for Student Success. Her number is (262) 551-5802. Here’s a link to more information: <https://www.carthage.edu/student-success/students-with-disabilities/>.

Class participation

Class participation involves (1) your active contributions to group work and class discussion, (2) your focus and attentiveness in class, (3) your conscientious, active, and respectful engagement with the work and ideas of others (this includes listening as much as responding), (4) your punctuality and attendance, (5) your participation in conferences and visits to office hours, (6) your preparation for class as reflected in your facility with assigned reading (especially your colleagues’ work) – and your preparation to pose informed questions about the reading.

Grade Distribution:

Feedback Letters to Classmates	25%
Weekly Notebook Exercises	15%
Commonplace Book and In-Class Writing	15%
Final Portfolio	15%
Participation	10%
Timely Completion of Workshop Drafts	5%
Essay Imitation and Analysis #1	5%
Essay Imitation and Analysis #2	5%
Craft/Revision Meetings (+ completion of revision)	5%

Major Due Dates:

Every two weeks or so, you’ll receive a complete scheduling breakdown of the fortnight (give or take) to follow, including the readings that will be discussed those weeks. The list below offers the major due dates for class projects so that you can plan your schedule.

Every Day.....Commonplace Book
Every Wednesday.....Notebook Exercise

Weeks 5-7 (Feb. 25 – March 17) & 12-13 (April 16-April 27) (Sun, Tues, Thurs)...Feedback Letters
Weeks 4-6 (Feb. 24-March 10) & 11-12 (April 7 – April 28)Submit Essay #1 / #2

My essays are due on _____ and _____.

Week 9.....First Essay Revision Draft
Weeks 3 (Friday, Feb. 17) & 10 (Friday, April 7)Essay Imitation & Analysis 1 & 2
Weeks 2, 5, 7, 9 & 12 (Fridays: 2/10, 3/3, 3/17, 3/31, 4/21).....Commonplace Book Reflection

Meetings:

Week 6.....Craft meeting
Week 9-10.....First Essay Revision Meeting

Week 14.....Craft/Revision meeting

These 30-minute meetings will be scheduled with Prof. B. and will take place in LH 239.