

Nonfiction Writing Workshop

ENGL 242

Fall 2025 Section 01 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/25/2025

Contact Information

Class Time: Wednesday 4:00pm-7:00pm in FOB 104

Instructor: Dr. Brook McClurg

Email: brook.mcclurg@sjsu.edu

Office: FOB114

Office Hours: 2-4pm Wednesday, 12:45-1:45 Friday, in person and by appointment on Zoom

Course Description and Requisites

Nonfiction writing as preparation for thesis. Study and critique of canonical and contemporary nonfiction. Intensive workshop experience. May be repeatable for credit for up to 12 units.

Letter Graded

* Classroom Protocols

Classroom decorum and workshop etiquette:

Writing Creative Nonfiction can be a vulnerable exercise, even more so when having works-in-progress workshopped. Everything we discuss in class will be handled with the utmost respect and care. You will likely read work that deals with sensitive and/or controversial topics. We will handle these works as carefully as we would like our own work to be treated. We will all work together to create an atmosphere that is welcoming and inclusive for all.

Late Work

This type of course requires all of us to turn our work in on time. When you do not, it creates an unnecessary burden on your peers who are all likely dealing with their own schedule constraints. You should do your best to turn all things in on time. Late work loses 10% per 24-hour period that it is late. For obvious reasons, you must be in class to get participation points.

There is no extra credit for course.

Academic integrity

Your commitment as a student to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University. The Academic Integrity Policy F15-7 requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. **For this class, this includes absolutely no use of any AI or generative text apps or programs, unless discussed with me; your personal and original writing is fundamental to the work in this course.** Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Visit the Student Conduct and Ethical Development website for more information.

Title IX Disclosure and Mandatory Reporter Status

In this course, the topic of sex (including sexual misconduct/sexual violence) may emerge either purposefully or inadvertently in readings, films, class discussions or other class materials. We recognize that such topics may be particularly upsetting for some; we encourage all students to seek the support they need. While making personal connections with the topics studied in any course can be a meaningful and important endeavor, please be aware of the following policy regarding confidentiality and disclosures of incidents of sexual misconduct/sexual violence.

As your instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help maintain a safe learning environment on our campus. In the event that you choose to write, speak or otherwise disclose information about having experienced sexual misconduct/sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking and specify that this violence occurred while you or the perpetrator were a SJSU student, federal and state laws require that I, in my capacity as a “responsible employee,” must notify SJSU’s Title IX and Gender Equity Officer. The Title IX and Gender Equity Officer will contact you to inform you of your rights and options and connect you with support resources, including possibilities for holding accountable the person who harmed you. Please be advised that you will not be forced to share information and your level of involvement will be your choice.

In Nonfiction workshops, we take for granted that the things being written about are true, which can possibly trigger the need for your professor to report to the above office in ways that fictional writings might not require. There are other craft elements, too, at your disposal, such as the use of second or third person POV, aliases, and many more. These are useful tools that communicate clearly that this work is not about you (the author), and that you are not in any such distress. I say all of this in the spirit of meeting three concurrent allegiances: 1) I would like to connect anyone in distress with the resources that they need; 2) I am required by the school to do so if I learn of it; AND 3) I would also like this workshop to be a safe space for you to write about the subjects you’d like—both the easy and the complicated—without the need for further follow up that a student might not desire. Please see me if you would like further clarification.

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English

reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System").

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance:

- A = excellent;
- B = above average;
- C = average;
- D = below average;
- F = failure.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or - (minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the MFA in Creative Writing, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a high level of ability to propose and complete a publishable, full-length work of literature in a primary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
2. Demonstrate high level of proficiency to write works of literature in a secondary genre concentration (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, or scriptwriting).
3. Demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge of literary history, literary theory, and craft and theory of creative writing.
4. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills in the evaluation and interpretation of literary texts.
5. Demonstrate a command of written academic English, including the abilities to:
 - a) organize and present material in a cogent fashion;
 - b) formulate and defend original arguments;
 - c) employ effectively the language of their discipline;
 - d) write under time constraints.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>).

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>).

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Materials

Course books can be found at the campus bookstore. (<https://sjsu.bncollege.com/course-material-listing-page?bypassCustomerAdoptions=true>).

Best American Essays 2024

By morris, wesley

Edition : 24

Publisher : HARP PUB
ISBN 13 : 9780063351554

Love Is a Burning Thing

By nina st. pierre
Edition : 24
Publisher : PENG CC
ISBN 13 : 9780593473832

Reality Hunger: A Manifesto

By shields, david
Edition : 10
Publisher : PENG RAND
ISBN 13 : 9780307387974

Family Trouble: Memoirists on the Hazards and Rewards of Revealing Family

By castro, joy
Edition : 13
Publisher : LONGLEAF
ISBN 13 : 9780803246928

Assorted readings will be provided on Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Course Overview

This workshop will focus on the reading and writing of Creative Nonfiction. Envisioned as the first in a four-semester sequence, this class will attempt to build a broad and well-informed introduction to the genre, while also introducing some of its thornier theoretical concerns. In short--no experience is necessary, but even CNF devotees should feel challenged in a productive way.

We will explore several modes and sub-genres, including but not limited to, Memoir, Essay, the Prose Lyric, Reportage and Hybrid texts. We will balance our reading of literary works with craft and critical essays, while using formal experimentation and structural play to help shape and reshape your works in progress. We will also interrogate the generic borders of Creative Nonfiction, considering the ethical implications--to facts, to those we write about, amongst others--that complicate our writing practices. This class will contain both discussion and workshop.

Note: You should feel free to write in any sub-genre of Creative Nonfiction that you would like (Memoir, the Prose Lyric, Reportage, Hybrid text, to name a few). Also, if you do plan to submit parts of a longer book-length work, where possible, I request that you begin at the beginning (as currently envisioned) and let us move forward in your later submissions.

Workshop

You will workshop twice this semester, turning in pieces that range in length from 1,500-5,000 words (increasing in length as we progress). Though none of your works are expected to be "publication ready," they should show some signs of editorial polish. The more complete and revised the piece is when you turn in for workshop, the more applicable the responses of your peers will be to your final vision.

Peer Feedback (workshop notes)

Your reading responses and peer feedback will be graded based on the quality of the input, the insightfulness of the critique and criticism, as well as the ability to present these in a manner that feels supportive to those receiving them. (We will spend time in class discussing best practices for how to do this, as needed.) Traditional practice is an annotated copy of the work itself and a 1-page letter directly addressed to them. This should include both things that you feel are working well, and things that can be improved. As students of the written word, I expect you all to approach this rhetorically. What evidence will you use to convince the author that your critique has merit? (In short, stay close to the page.) Written responses will only be required for our full and normal workshops (not the flash workshop).

Attendance at readings

You will attend two readings this semester as a portion of your grade. They can be campus readings or anywhere out in the community.

Presentation Assignment

You will give a presentation to the class on a literary topic of your choosing. The subject matter should be some area of concern to you, and hopefully intersect with either our class subject--Nonfiction, in all its varied forms--or literature more broadly.

Final exam and evaluation (Revision of earlier work)

In lieu of a final exam, you will turn in a revised piece, ready for publication. Since this class is largely about exploring different shapes for your work, you will be expected to drastically re-imagine the piece, not just do line level edits. This may include writing in a different mode, change of POV, or other structural changes. **You will turn these in with Track Changes on in Word and submit a reflection about changes you made.** Your final turn in should be a substantial revision. You will also send it out for publication consideration.

	Project Name	SLO	Word Count	% of grade
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Workshop of Creative Works (2 @ 15% ea)	1,2,3,4,5	2.5k-3k	30%
Workshop Response Notes	1,2,3,4,5	250	15%
Literary Presentation	1,2,3,4,5	250-750	20%
Attend (2) public readings	4	N/A	3%
Submit for publication (send proof)	1,2,3,4,5	N/A	2%
Substantial Revision of Earlier work	1,2,3,4,5	N/A	15%
Participation	1,2,3,4,5	N/A	15%
Totals			100%

Note: All works should be:

- In **12 pt. font**, preferably TNR, or a similar, easily readable text.
- Double-spaced** (unless it is an important craft element for it not to be so).
- Each page should be **numbered** to aid in our analysis of it(!).
- Have **your name** somewhere on the first page (a traditional heading works great).
- Any work short of the minimum word count will lose points.
- Late Assignments lose 10% per day for every day they are late. (If it's due at 11am, it is late and loses 10% at 11:01, and loses 20% by 11:01 the following day, etc.)

✓ Grading Information

Grade	Range
A+	96%-100%

A	93%-95%
A-	90%-92%
B+	87%-89%
B	83%-86%
B-	80%-82%
C+	77%-79%
C	73%-76%
C-	70%-72%
D+	67%-69%
D	63%-66%
D-	60%-62%
F	<59%

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week	Date	
1	8/20	Introductions
		<p>-Syllabus/Structure of this course.</p> <p>-CNF timeline/origins ICR: "A Taxonomy of Nonfiction" by Babine</p> <p>-Opening writing exercise</p> <p>(Key: AHR: At home reading/ICR: In class reading; BAE: <i>Best American Essays</i>; FT -<i>Family Trouble</i>)</p>
2	8/27	Flash
		<p>-Discussion: Rules for workshop: Standard or other?; A primer on shapes and forms: Flash, Braids, Hermit Crabs/False Documents, Narrative Shapes</p> <p>-Reading: <i>On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character</i> (Canvas); FT - <i>Mapping Hope</i> (p. 1)</p> <p>-Writing exercise.</p> <p>Note: Writers for 9/03 workshop turn in by midnight 8/27!</p>
3	9/03	Memoir
		<p>-Discussion: Telling Stories: Narrative memoir (tools of)</p> <p>-AHR: <i>Love is a Burning Thing</i> by St. Pierre (1-83); <i>Chewing Band-Aids</i> (p. 17)</p> <p>-ICR: FT - <i>Done With Grief: The Memoirists Illusion</i> (169)</p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p>
4	9/10	

		<p>-Discussion: Your Truth, Their Truth, and The Truth: generic implications and complications.</p> <p>-AHR: <i>Love is a Burning Thing by St. Pierre (84-165)</i>; FT: <i>Memory Lessons (p.50)</i></p> <p>-ICR: Laymon and response, Westover, etc.</p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p> <p>NOTE: 9/16 is last day to Drop</p>
5	9/17	
		<p>-AHR: <i>Love is a Burning Thing by St. Pierre (166-223)</i>; FT: <i>What the Little Old Ladies Feel p. (71), Truths We could Live With (p. 73)</i></p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p>
6	9/24	
		<p>AHR: <i>Love is a Burning Thing by St. Pierre (224-End)</i>; FT: <i>Bad Asian Daughter (p. 197) & Your Mother Should Know (p. 201)</i></p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p>
7	10/01	The Essay
		<p>-Discussion: To Essai – Montaignian or Baconian? Knowing or toward a spirit of Not Knowing?</p> <p>-BAE- <i>Jenisha from Kentucky (p.1)</i>; <i>Reframing Vemeer (p.27)</i>; FT: <i>At It's Center (38)</i></p> <p>-Workshop (x2) -Presentation (x2)</p>
8	10/08	

		<p>-Discussion: On the Braided Essay (and other lyric variations)</p> <p>Reading: <i>BAE- As They Like It: Learning to Follow My Child's Lead</i> (p. 189)</p> <p>-Workshop (x2) -Presentation (x2)</p>
9	10/15	Workshops Round #2
		<p>Discussion: Collection of Essays as Memoir</p> <p>Reading: <i>BAE- If Then</i> (p. 119) and <i>An Upset Place</i> (p. 226)</p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p>
10	10/22	On Ethics in CNF
		<p>-Discussion: Writerly problems/Writerly solutions: quotes, memory, disclaimers</p> <p>-Reading: <i>BAE- As Big as You Make it Out To Be</i> (p. 274); FT: <i>The True Story</i> (125), <i>The Things We Don't Talk About</i> (146), <i>The Part I can't Tell you</i> (58)</p> <p>-ICR: "Woven" by Yuknavitch;</p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p>
11	10/29	
		<p>-Discussion: TBD</p> <p>-Reading: <i>BAE- Storm Damage</i> (p.311) FT: <i>Writing the Black Family Home</i> (78) and <i>The Deeper End of the Quarry</i> (p. 88)</p> <p>-Workshop (x3) -Presentation (x1)</p>

12	11/05	
		<p>Discussion: The Book-Length Essay and the Book-Length Lyric</p> <p><i>Reality Hunger</i> by David Shields pp. 1-100</p> <p>Reading: <i>BAE - Love Is A Washing Line</i> (p. 302)</p> <p>Discussion: Lyrics and Fragments, white space.</p> <p>-Workshop (x2) -Presentation (x2)</p>
13	11/12	
		<p>Discussion: De-centering the self: Reportage, Narrative Journalism, True Crime</p> <p><i>Reality Hunger</i> pp. 101-end; <i>The Falling Man</i> by Junod</p> <p>-ICR: class Reading: "What Happens There" by J. D'Agata. Lifespan of a Fact (excerpt).</p> <p>-Shtick Lit or The Year I Did a Thing So That I Could Write About How I Did a Thing (from Thoreau to Ross Gay)</p> <p>-Workshop (x2) -Presentation (x2)</p>
14	11/19	
		<p>-On getting your work published: Submission tools: query letters, bios, and contests.</p> <p>-Workshop (x2) -Presentation (x2)</p>
15	11/26	
		-No class: Enjoy your break!

16	12/03	
		<p>-Class Reading and Submission Party (public or private, as the class decides)</p> <p>Final revision assignment due: 12/15 by 5:15pm (Tentatively. Will defer to official SJSU final exam time.)</p>