

## **English 387: Intermediate Nonfiction Workshop**

Professor: Barbara Ashwood

Class Meeting: T/TH: 11:00-12:15, Simpkins 308

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Office Hours: T/TH 10:30-11:00 and 12:20-1:50, W by appointment

### **Course Description:**

English 387 is an intermediate level creative nonfiction workshop that focuses on various types of creative nonfiction, such as memoir, personal essays, and literary journalism. We will discuss and analyze a variety of creative nonfiction texts, but the majority of your time in this course will be spent workshopping your classmates' original works. You will need to be prepared to not only compose and edit your own pieces, but also provide detailed criticism of all texts.

### **Course Objectives:**

You will read, discuss, write, and critique, honing your ability to:

- Understand important concepts of creative nonfiction and analyze the work of writers in this genre
- Understand how elements of craft impact creative writing and be able to apply them to your own work
- Communicate your thoughts clearly
- Use workshop critiques to help you revise your work
- Better understand your identity as a writer and how to create pieces that engage a diverse audience

### **Required Texts:**

*Tell It Slant*, Brenda Miller & Suzanne Paola

*Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: I & Eye*, B. Minh Nguyen & Porter Shreve

*The Best Creative Nonfiction (Vol. 3)*, Lee Gutkind

### **Grade Distribution:**

**Exercises/Writing Assignments:** 10% (based on the number completed)

**Critiques:** 20% (based on the quality of the response and number completed)

**Manuscript 1:** 15%

**Manuscript 2:** 15%

**Portfolio:** 20%

**Participation/Reading Quizzes:** 20%

Exercises:

In this class, you will complete several creative writing exercises intended to help you explore the genre and important craft elements. Homework exercises should be typed and submitted the day they are due-- late work will not be accepted. If you are absent on a day that we do an exercise, you will not be able to make it up.

Critiques:

You are required to write a written response to each essay that is workshopped. These responses do not need to be formal, but they do need to provide thoughtful and thorough criticism of the work and be at least a half a page (doubled spaced) in length. You will print out and attach your response to your classmates' manuscript and give it to him/her the day that the essay is workshopped. You must also electronically submit your critique to [english.387.essays@gmail.com](mailto:english.387.essays@gmail.com) before class. Critiques submitted after the workshop will not be accepted, and your grade will suffer accordingly.

Manuscripts and Portfolio:

You are expected to complete two 10-12 page (approximately 3000-3600 words) pieces throughout the semester. Each piece will be workshopped, and you will turn in revised versions of them for your portfolio. Your portfolio will also include a one to two page double-spaced letter that reflects upon your growth as a writer and explains what changes you made and why you made them.

All manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. Please include the work's title(s) and your name on the first page and include page numbers for the piece. You must carefully edit all manuscripts before and after workshop: do not expect your classmates or me to correct your grammatical mistakes.

Participation/Reading Quizzes:

Participation indicates more than just speaking out in class discussion; it also reflects your dedication to the class. Good participation means coming to class on time having read the material assigned for the day, being prepared to contribute your thoughts on the texts we are discussing and workshopping, and showing respect to your classmates and to me. Active listening and questioning are important components of participation. Should there be anything hindering your ability to participate, please speak with me and we will work together to resolve the situation.

I give reading quizzes when I don't think the majority of the class is doing the readings. It is truly to your advantage to do the assigned readings.

### Workshop:

We will establish a workshop schedule for the semester. Please carefully think about the time you sign up for, as you will not be allowed to change it. If you fail to submit your work on time, you will forfeit your workshop and receive a zero.

You are required to bring each person in class a paper copy of your work the class before it is scheduled to be workshopped. You must also email me an electronic copy of your work to [english.387.essays@gmail.com](mailto:english.387.essays@gmail.com).

When your piece is being workshopped, you need to carefully listen to your classmates' feedback and avoid responding unless you are asked a question. You will have the opportunity to speak once your classmates have finished reviewing your work.

### Grade Scale:

100-95: A (4.0)	75-71: C (2.0)
94-90: A- (3.7)	70-68: C- (1.7)
89-87: B+ (3.3)	67-65: D+ (1.3)
86-82: B (3.0)	64-60: D (1.0)
81-79: B- (2.7)	59-57: D- (.7)
78-76: C+ (2.3)	56-0: F (0)

### Course Policies:

Attendance is important to the success of this class and to your development as a writer. You may be absent up to two times for any reason. Absences for university-sanctioned events **will** count towards your absence limit, so please plan accordingly. Each absence after two will result in the lowering of your final grade by a full letter grade. Five absences will result in failure for the course.

Tardiness is disruptive to the classroom environment and prevents you from fully participating and assimilating the information discussed in class. Excessive tardiness will result in an absence.

Academic Dishonesty is a serious academic offense that can result in referral to the Committee on Academic Misconduct and failure for the course. Please refer to Western Illinois University's Academic Integrity Policy for more information (<http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>).

Your work must be completed and submitted on time. All assignments should be turned in during the class period when they are due. **Late work will not be accepted, and you will receive a zero for the assignment.** All writing assignments must be typed and double spaced with one-inch margins and a reasonable font (like Times New Roman 12 point).

You are expected to be respectful to your classmates and me. If you are disruptive and/or rude, you will be asked to leave class and will receive an absence for the day. You are also expected to exercise civility in your written critiques and provide constructive criticism of the work.

Cell phones are to be turned off and ignored for the entire class period. If I catch you texting during class, you will be marked absent for that day.

### **Resources:**

Me. Take advantage of my office hours. I am here to help!

The Writing Center. The University Writing Center offers students at any academic level collaborative, one-on-one consultation on writing projects from any discipline at any point in the writing process. For more information, visit the University Writing Center website (<http://www.wiu.edu/uwc>).

Disability Support Services. “In accordance with university values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, [disability@wiu.edu](mailto:disability@wiu.edu) or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.”

Title IX Coordinator. “University values, Title IX, and other federal and state laws prohibit sex discrimination, including sexual assault/misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking. If you or someone you know has been a victim of any of these offenses, we encourage you to report this to the Title IX Coordinator at 309-298-1977 or anonymously online at [http://www.wiu.edu/equal\\_opportunity\\_and\\_access/request\\_form/index.php](http://www.wiu.edu/equal_opportunity_and_access/request_form/index.php). If you disclose an incident to a faculty member, the faculty member must notify the Title IX Coordinator. The complete Title IX policy is available at <http://www.wiu.edu/vpas.policies/titleIX.php>.”

Leslie F. Malpass Library:

<http://www.wiu.edu/library>

Information regarding student rights and responsibilities:

<http://www.wiu.edu/provost/students.php>

And lastly, all assignments, texts, and due dates are subject to change.

## CALENDAR

All assigned readings and homework for the day should be completed by the beginning of class.

Assignments, texts, and due dates are subject to change.

### **(8-23) Day 1: Introductions/ What is Creative Nonfiction?**

- Introduction to course, texts, and syllabus

### **(8-25) Day 2: Forms of Creative Nonfiction: Memoir/Personal Essay**

- *Tell It Slant*: “Introduction” (xiii-xvi) and “The Tradition of the Personal Essay” (89-104)
- *I & Eye*: “Introduction” (1-8), Tony Earley, “Somehow Form a Family” (17-23), Meghan Daum, “Music Is My Bag” (145-152), Richard McCann “The Resurrectionist” (223-229)
- Open registration ends on 8/26

### **(8-30) Day 3: Forms of Creative Nonfiction: Memoir/Personal Essay**

- *I & Eye*: Terry Tempest Williams, “The Clan of One-Breasted Woman” (236-241), Maxine Hong Kingston, “No Name Woman” (302-309), Alice Walker “Becoming What We’re Called” (311-313)

### **(9-1) Day 4: Experimenting With Structure: The Lyric Essay**

- *Tell It Slant*: “Playing with Form: The Lyric Essay and Mixed Media” (107-123)
- *I & Eye*: Judith Ortiz Cofer, “Silent Dancing” (83-89), Margaret Atwood, “The Female Body” (288-290), Charles Simic “The Necessity of Poetry” (166-173)
- *The Best Creative Nonfiction*: Brenda Miller, “Table of Figures” (41-48)
- Last day of restricted schedule change is 9/2

### **(9-6) Day 5: Forms of Creative Nonfiction: Literary Journalism**

- *I & Eye*: Beverly Lowry, “Secret Ceremonies of Love and Death” (48-51), Tom Wolfe, “Yeager” from *The Right Stuff* (59-67), “Getting Ready” from *Nickel and Dime* (345-349), Lawrence Otis Graham, “Invisible Man” (314-323)
- *The Best Creative Nonfiction*: Wesley Yang, “The Face of Seung-Hui Cho” (99-120)

- *Tell It Slant*: “Using Research to Expand Your Perspective” (71-84)

### **(9-8) Day 6: Basics of Good Writing/ Establishing Self as Character**

- *Tell It Slant*: “The Basics of Good Writing in Any Form” (163-177)
- *I & Eye*: Phillip Lopate, “On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character” (69-73), Lee Gutkind “The Creative Nonfiction Police” (349-354)
- *The Best Creative Nonfiction*: Sean Rowe, “The Insider’s Guide to Jailhouse Cuisine: Dining In” (1-10), Emily Rapp, “Okahandja Lessons” (49-62), open.salon.com, “I Can’t Answer” (195-199)

### **(9-13) Day 7: Basics of Good Writing: Sensory Description and Setting**

- *Tell It Slant*: “The Body of Memory” (3-14), “‘Taking Place’: Writing the Physical World” (25-35)
- *I & Eye*: Thomas Lynch “The Undertaking” (102-108), Naomi Shihab Nye “Thank You in Arabic” (108-116), Floyd Skoot, “Wild in the Woods: Confessions of a Demented Man” (229-236)
- *The Best Creative Nonfiction*: Scott Black, “The Rope Swing, the Swastika, the Oldest Whale I Know” (29-39), Laura Bramon Good, “First Year” (65-78), Marie Mutsuki Mockett, “Letter from a Japanese Crematorium” (79-94)
- Assignment: Choose one exercise from pages 12-16 of *Tell It Slant* and bring your written response to class.

### **(9-15) Day 8: Dialogue**

- *I & Eye*: Dorothy Allison, Two or Three Things I Know For Sure (283-287), David Sedaris, “The Drama Bug” (160-166), Stuart Dybek, “Field Trips” (92-95)
- Assignment: Exercise #2 (*Tell It Slant*, 177)

### **(9-20) Day 9: Challenges of Creative Nonfiction: Writing about Family**

- *Tell It Slant*: “The Particular Challenges of Creative Nonfiction” (145-162) and “Writing the Family” (17-22)
- *I & Eye*: Bernard Cooper, “Picking Plums” (11-17), Chang-Rae Lee, “Coming Home Again” (95-102)
- *The Best Creative Nonfiction*: Julianna Baggott, “Literary Murder” (11-20)

- Assignment: Choose one exercise on pages 23-24 of *Tell It Slant* and bring your written response to class

**(9-22) Day 10: Challenges of Creative Nonfiction: Moving Past Yourself**

- *Tell It Slant*: “Gathering the Threads of History” (55-60) and “Writing the Larger World” (63-68)
- *Tell It Slant*: “The Writing Process and Revision” (181-192) and “The Writing Group” (193-204)
- *The Best Creative Nonfiction*: Tim Bascom, “Community College” (177-184), Gregory Orr, “Return to Hayneville” (217-235)

**(9-27) Day 11: Workshop**

**(9-29) Day 12: Workshop**

**(10-4) Day 13: Workshop**

**(10-6) Day 14: Workshop**

**(10-11) Day 15: Workshop**

**(10-13) Day 16: Workshop**

**(10-18) Day 17: Workshop**

**(10-20) Day 18: Workshop**

**(10-25) Day 19: Optional Conferences**

**(10-27) Day 20: Optional Conferences**

**Last day to drop course and/or withdraw from the university: 10/30**

**(11-1) Day 21: In-Class Exercise**

**(11-3) Day 22: Workshop**

**(11-8) Day 23: Workshop**

**(11-10) Day 24: Workshop**

**(11-15) Day 25: Workshop**

**(11-17) Day 26: Workshop**

**(11-22) Day 27: Thanksgiving Break**

**(11-24) Day 28: Thanksgiving Break**

**(11-29) Day 29: Workshop**

**(12-1) Day 30: Workshop**

**(12-6) Day 31: Workshop**

**(12-8) Day 32: Workshop**

- *Tell It Slant*: “Publishing Your Creative Nonfiction” (205-216)

Your portfolio is due during the final exam period.