Syllabus—University of North Texas

Spring 2023

ENGL 3160-002 Beginning Creative Nonfiction

Class: TTH 2-3:20 PM

Gab 438

Dr. Kimberly Grey

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Student Office Hours: TTH 12:30 PM—2:00 PM (or by appointment)

Office: AUDB 206C

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“The universe is made of stories, not of atoms,” said Muriel Rukeyser. The creative nonfiction genre presents itself as a space to examine, quarrel with, and recreate a single framed story of the real world through language. This course will explore the various forms of creative nonfiction including memoir, the personal essay, literary journalism, portraits, and essays of place. We will discuss fundamental aspects of craft, learn how to effectively structure time, access memory, overcome inhibitions, incorporate research, and understand what makes personal stories universal. We will read a variety of works by authors including Joan Didion, Jamaica Kincaid, David Sedaris, David Foster Wallace, Amy Tan, and Cheryl Strayed. In-class writing exercises will be used to kick-start creativity and give expressive shape to our ideas and imaginations. Students will have the opportunity to write three essays and obtain useful and encouraging feedback from their instructor and peers in a workshop setting. We will seek to answer the questions: what is “creative” about creative nonfiction, how can memory be represented accurately or aesthetically, and what are the ethical considerations a writer must consider when exploring their own lives? This class is open to anyone who wants to be part of a warm and engaging community of storytelling.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will learn various craft techniques specific to creative nonfiction including the use of the scene, summary, reflection and various external essay shapes and modalities.
2. Students will learn to mine from their own unique lenses of the world to write thoughtful and interesting pieces that surprise them and contribute to larger conversations about the human condition.
3. Students will grow and evolve their empathy and world view by reading essays from a diverse set of authors of various backgrounds and experiences.
4. Students will grapple with the ethics of storytelling when it involves real people and real events.
5. Students will enhance their writing skills and evolve their own creative processes while building a portfolio of creative work.

PRIMARY TEXTS

*The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, edited by Lex Williford & Michael Martone

*Tell It Slant 2nd Edition*, Edited by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

*ASSIGNMENTS*

*Class Participation (30%)*

A seminar classroom is a place where many different people and ideologies converge into meaningful, illuminative discussion. In order for us to truly benefit from each other, everyone must be present with all assignments and readings completed. Every person’s voice is necessary here and I expect a high level of curiosity and investment by all. To earn all participation points for the semester, I need to hear everyone’s voice every class period at least once. Excessive absences mean the inability to contribute to the course discussions and will be reflected in your participation grade.

*Weekly Reading Responses (20%)*

Each week you will be responsible for responding to the assigned reading in a Canvas post of at least 250 words. You should respond to the piece of your choice with thoughtful and specific references to the text and to our class discussion.

*Two Essays and Two Workshops (20%)*

Students will be given weekly exercises to write to and they will develop their essays from this writing exercises. Later in the semester, you will workshop two complete pieces. Half of the 20% counts for your work and half for your participation and comments in workshops on the work of others. You will be responsible for handing out copies of your essays to the class for workshop. The essays should be between 3-6 pages double-spaced (with slight flexibility). If do not bring copies of your essay the class before your workshop to distribute as announced, you will miss your workshop and thus, your grade will be affected.

*Discussion Leading (10%)*

Each student will be responsible for choosing one text or craft essay to lead a class discussion on for 15-20 minutes in which they discuss the piece(s) and prompt the class with thoughtful questions regarding form, genre, and content. You will provide a handout (paper or projected) as a guideline for the class to follow.

*Final Project (20%)*

Students will create a multi-modal final nonfiction process that integrates some of the forms we’ve studied over the semester along with written and visual (or other creative modes) of expression. These pieces will be presented during the final weeks of the semester and guidelines will be provided. The final project can be an extension/revision of one of the essays you’ve written for workshop.

*GRADING*

Class Participation: 30%

Weekly Reading Responses: 20%

Final Project: 20%

Two Completed Essays: & Workshops 20%

Discussion Leading: 10%

A (90%—100%)

B (80%—89%)

C (70%-79%)

D (60%-69%)

F (59% and below)

### Procedures

*STUDENT OFFICE HOURS AND E-MAIL*

Feel free to stop by my student hours if you’d like to discuss any lessons or readings in further detail or need clarification about anything I assign. This time is specifically carved out for you. If my student hours don’t fit your schedule, please email me to set up an appointment. I check my e-mail once a day and will respond within 24 hours.

*FORMAT*

All written work should be typed, double-spaced, in black ink, and 12 pt. Times New Roman, Garamond, or Goudy Old style font. Weekly reading responses will be turned in via Canvas. All outside sources should be documented and cited properly per MLA guidelines and papers must be edited for grammar and spelling

*LATE WORK POLICY*

All work is due at the beginning of class on the specified due date. Papers must be printed in hard copy and turned in or submitted electronically, as specified. I do not accept late work except in extraordinary circumstances. Please talk with me if those arise. Your discussion leading must be done on the day you are assigned and cannot be made up. Workshops cannot not be delayed or made up due to the tight schedule.

*ATTENDANCE POLICY*

Attendance at all classes is expected. You may miss **FOUR** class sessions without penalty, but further absences will lower your grade by three points per absence. Any more than five absences during the semester may result in failure of the class. Beyond five absences, your participation will be dropped by half since you were not in class to contribute to the conversation. Excessive lates to class can be really distracting. Please be on time. Two lates of more than 10 minutes will equal an absence. I will do my best to be flexible as needed regarding the pandemic/illness. If there is an extenuating illness or circumstance, it is your responsibility to provide proper documentation to the dean of students for academic accommodations.

You are expected to arrive in class on time to be counted present. If you must be absent, always let me know, either by telling me in class, or sending an e-mail beforehand. Only religious holidays, military service, and University-sponsored events qualify as “excused absences.” If you must miss class, you are responsible for contacting a classmate to find out what you have missed and for arriving prepared for the next class meeting. Communication is key!

**UNIVERSITY POLICIES**

WRITING CENTER

Our trained tutors help undergraduate students with structure, grammar, punctuation, citation styles and more. We'll teach you strategies and techniques to improve your writing for the long term. We offer both in-person and online appointments. Call us at 940-565-2563 or email us at [WritingCenter@unt.edu](mailto:WritingCenter@unt.edu) to schedule your appointment. Website: <https://writingcenter.unt.edu>

ADA ACCOMODATIONS

It is my commitment to foster an inclusive learning environment in this class. If you require accommodations, please notify me during the first week of classes, or as soon as possible, by sending an email or presenting a letter from Office of Disability Access. If you need more information about accommodations, please review the UNT Policy 16.001 or contact Office of Disability Access at 940-565-4323 (voice) or [online.](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access)

EMERGENCY NOTIFICATIONS & PROCEDURES

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and healthy and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence.) In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

TITLE IX

All members of the UNT community have a responsibility to uphold this mission of the university and contribute to a safe environment that enhances learning. For more information, see [the policy.](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/16-005) Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, please refer to the [appropriate resources](https://idea.unt.edu/title-ix-resources).

STUDENT ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University of North Texas promotes the integrity of learning and embraces the core values of trust and honesty. Academic integrity is based on educational principles and procedures that protect the rights of all participants in the educational process and validate the legitimacy of degrees awarded by the University. In the investigation and resolution of allegations of student academic dishonesty, the University’s actions are intended to be corrective, educationally sound, fundamentally fair, and based on reliable evidence. You are responsible for understanding the [Code of Student Conduct.](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012)

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

At UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues. Here is information about how to contact them.

Link: UIT Student Help Desk site <https://aits.unt.edu/support>  
Email: helpdesk@unt.edu  
Phone: 940-565-2324  
In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130 Walk-In Availability: 8am-9pm

For additional support, visit Canvas Technical Help <https://clear.unt.edu/services/lms-support>

*MENTAL HEALTH*

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

* [Student Health and Wellness Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and- wellness-center)
* [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing- services)
* [UNT Care Team](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care-team) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
* [UNT Psychiatric Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness- center/services/psychiatry)

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES

1. Academic Support Services
   * [Academic Resources](https://vpaa.unt.edu/resources) (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
   * [Academic Success Center (](https://success.unt.edu/asc)https://success.unt.edu/asc)
   * [UNT Libraries](https://library.unt.edu/) (https://library.unt.edu/

*ADDITIONAL STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES*

* [Registrar](https://registrar.unt.edu/) (https://registrar.unt.edu/registration)
* [Financial Aid](https://financialaid.unt.edu/) (https://financialaid.unt.edu/)
* [Student Legal Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services)
* [Career Center](https://careercenter.unt.edu/) (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center)
* [Multicultural Center](https://idea.unt.edu/multicultural-center) (https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center)
* [Pride Alliance](https://idea.unt.edu/pridealliance) (https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance)
* [UNT Food Pantry](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/food-pantry) (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

\*STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS

This classroom is a safe place for creative expression and personal freedom. I promise to do everything in my power to create an environment that is inclusive to everyone’s diverse set of needs and backgrounds. Any form of racism, sexism, classism, or ageism is a violation of classroom conduct and will not be tolerated. I promise to treat you all with the respect and humanity you deserve, and I expect that we all will work together to form a welcoming community of belonging and value.

• THE SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT ANY TIME DEPENDING ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE COURSE. CHANGES WILL BE COMMUNICATED TO YOU.

Weekly Schedule

**WEEK ONE**

Tuesday January 17: Introductions, Syllabus Overview, What is CNF?

Thursday January 19 “The Particular Challenges of Creative Nonfiction” (pg. 12)

Writing Exercises

**WEEK TWO: MEMOIR & The Voice of Innocence**

Tuesday January 24: “Visitor” by Michael C. Cox (pg. 141)

“Here and There” by Tiffany Hitesman (link)

“The Body of Memory” (pg. 3 in Tell it Slant)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thursday January 26: “Somehow Form a Family,” by Tony Early (pg. 167)

“Fluency,” by Jamila Osman (link)

Writing Exercises

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK THREE: MEMOIR & The Voice of Experience**

Tuesday January 31: “The Unwanted Child” by Mary Clearman Blew (pg. 46)

“Notes of a Native Son” by James Baldwin (link)

“Writing the Family” (pg. 17 in Tell it Slant)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thursday February 2:” The Love of my Life” by Cheryl Strayed (pg. 500)

“Return to Sender” by Mark Doty (pg. 152)

Writing Exercises

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK FOUR: PERSONAL ESSAY & Research**

Tuesday February 7: “The Murder of Crows” by Jordan K. Thomas (Link)

“Frankenstein Abroad” by Molly McCully Brown (Link)

“The Tradition of the Personal Essay” (pg. 89 in Tell it Slant)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thursday February 9: “The Pain Scale” by Eula Biss (pg. 28)

“Celibate Passion” by Kathleen Norris (pg. 396)

“Using Research to Expand Your Perspective” (pg. 71 in TIS)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK FIVE: THE INNER and OUTER**

Tuesday February 14: NO CLASS

Thursday February 16: “Black Swans” by Lauren Slater (pg. 484)

“Standing by” by David Sedaris (Link)  
 “Anniversary Disease” by Diane Suess (link)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK SIX: LITERARY JOURNALISM**

Tuesday February 21: “Boys Least Likely To” by Colin Rafferty (Link)

“Leap” by Brian Doyle (pg. 165)

“Writing the Larger World (pg. 63 in Tell it Slant)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thursday February 23: “Autopsy Report” by Lia Purpura (pg. 405)

“Consider the Lobster” by David Foster Wallace (pg. 525)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK SEVEN: PORTRAITS of people & place**

Tuesday February 28: “Portrait of My Body” by Phillip Lopate (pg. 299)

“Mother Tongue” by Amy Tan (pg. 514)

Writing Exercises

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Thursday March 2: “A Small Place” by Jamaica Kincaid (pg. 257)

“Goodbye to All That” by Joan Didion (Link)

“Sharing Your Work: The Writing Group & Workshop” (pg. 109 TIS)

DISCUSSION LEADERS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**WEEK EIGHT: ROUND ONE WORKSHOPPING BEGINS**

Tuesday March 7: Workshop

Thursday March 9: NO CLASS

**WEEK NINE**

March 13-17

SPRING BREAK—NO CLASSES

**WEEK TEN**

Tuesday March 21: Workshop

Thursday March 23: Workshop

**WEEK ELEVEN**

Tuesday March 28: Workshop

Thursday March 30: Workshop

**WEEK TWELVE:**

Tuesday April 4: Workshop

**ROUND TWO WORKSHOP BEGINS**

Thursday April 6: Workshop

**WEEK THIRTEEN:**

Tuesday April 11: Workshop

Thursday April 13: Workshop

**WEEK FOURTEEN**

Tuesday April 18: Workshop

Thursday April 20: Workshop

**WEEK FIFTEEN**

Tuesday April 25: Revision Exercises & Lecture

Discussion on “The Writing Process and Revision in TIS (pg. 181)

Thursday April 27: Final Presentations

**WEEK SIXTEEN**

Tuesday May 2: Final Presentations

Thursday May 4: Final Presentations/ Class Celebration