

CRWR 212: Introduction to Creative Non-Fiction

Autumn 2016

MWF 12-12:50, Liberal Arts 335

Instructor: Lisbet Portman

Inst. Mailbox: LA 133

Inst. Office & Hours: Corbin 254, Mon. 11-12, Tues. 2:30-4:30, and by appointment.

Email: lisbet.portman@umontana.edu

The term “Creative Nonfiction” is used to describe a vast spectrum of written forms, all of which maintain a dedication to “truth” that distinguishes the practice from that of fiction or poetry. The habit of writing good nonfiction tends to involve interrogating one’s context and individual memory as well as cultivating a rigorous practice of writing and reading that swings between blissful and soul-taxing.

The best creative nonfiction pairs intellectual curiosity with individual voice. Through narrative, it delivers a unique perspective on the world. It embraces the power of storytelling and shows the lived world to be more complicated, confounding, heartening, or humorous than we previously suspected.

Our goal in this class is to help each other become better writers and readers by analyzing a diverse clutch of interesting modern creative nonfiction as well as producing and revising original work.

Lunch hour on Monday, Wednesday and Friday will be fun and burn a bit as we grapple with the craft of the modern essay, examine our individual habits as writers and readers, discuss how different writers have handled the fallibility of memory, complicate how fiction and nonfiction are commonly distinguished, how the origins of the nonfiction genre compare and contribute to the circumstances within which we write today, etc...

...and ultimately apply what we learn of the craft to the stories we choose to tell.

Readings

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts* (2016)

All other readings will either be handed to you in class or made available online. You must bring a hard copy of every reading to class on the day that it is up for discussion, which means you should locate and befriend your chosen printer ASAP.

Portfolio

Your working folder should contain every writing assignment that you complete, including your response letters with my comments, response letters that you have received from peers, in-class

writing and hard copies of your own work with my written comments. Your final grade will be based on an edited version of this bulk: the Final Portfolio.

Course Requirements

All of the writing that you turn in must be printed and stapled in Times New Roman font, double-sided & double-spaced with 1" margins.

Bring any assigned reading, a pen and paper to every single class.

Homework assignments will vary, but must be completed before class begins.

For each essay that we read, you will write a short response (approx. 200 words or ½ p. double-spaced) in which you examine some aspect of the piece that you would like to discuss further with the group. Sometimes you will be asked to write to a specific prompt. These responses are due during class.

For each of your peers' workshop pieces, you will type a 1-3 page response outlining what you saw to be the piece's strengths and weaknesses. Responses will be due during class on the day of discussion (no exceptions)—you need to print 1 copy for the writer, and 1 copy for me. I encourage you to make edits and offer comments on your copy of the piece (this will help you write your responses), which you may give to the writer after the workshop.

You will hand in one workshop piece this semester. You are responsible for bringing copies for me and your peers to the class period *before* your assigned workshop date. If you do not meet this deadline, your story will not be workshopped and you will not be able to continue with the class (seeing as your Final Portfolio depends largely on this workshop and your subsequent revisions).

Learning Outcomes

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing, and writing nonfiction
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to creative nonfiction
- Practice the art of writing and revising nonfiction works
- Learn to critique the quality of your own work, and that of your fellow writers

Grading Criteria

- Final Portfolio: 50%
- Attendance, Quality & Quantity of Participation, Effort, Improvement: 25%
- Letters of Response: 25%

Etiquette

Once again, our goal is to help each other become better writers. *Every single piece of writing* will benefit from deep analysis, question and revision. Creative nonfiction is difficult to write and can be intensely personal. Keep this in mind when offering feedback to your classmates both in discussion and in your response letters for workshop. Handsome critique is possible when we pay close attention to the text at hand and instead of asking whether or not we like it (boring), consider what the piece is attempting to accomplish, why this seems to be the case, and offering specific ways that it might be improved.

So have a snack and walk your best editor self (considerate, rigorous, calm, hawk-eyed) into class. Leave your writer-self (emotional, involved, drooling?) rambling through some portion of the beautiful woods just outside of town.

Attendance

Come to class.

If you have to miss a class it's up to you to get caught up. If you know ahead of time that you will be absent, come talk to me and plan on completing the assignment for the day it is due.

Plagiarism

You know it when you smell it. Questions? See the UM Student Conduct Code and come talk to me. Repercussions for plagiarism include failing an assignment, failing a course, and even expulsion.

Disabilities

Come talk to me either after class or in office hours if you will be needing accommodations. Please bring a letter from your DSS coordinator to this meeting.

This syllabus is subject to change