

CRWR 512—Nonfiction Workshop
Autumn 2017 Monday 6-8:50 p Prof. Judy Blunt
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Office Hours: T/R: 11-1 and by appointment on W/F

This semester, our nonfiction class will study the art and craft of nonfiction, both as readers and as writers. The workshop is our primary focus in this class, and to that end students will write at least 40 pages of nonfiction, at least three pieces of which will be offered for review in workshop. No more than 20 pages per workshop, please. One of the essays must be significantly revised or expanded by the end of the course. Present all work in standard format, with a title and page numbers. I require a single-side reading copy, but you can make double-sided copies for the group.

Workshop: Our workshop format is that of a community of writers working to give the most useful feedback on the fundamental issues of memory, meaning and method in writing from the first-person point of view. The focus of the workshop will be to assist in revision with an eye toward creating publishable works. Writers scheduled for workshop will provide sufficient copies of their work one week in advance. There are NO EXCEPTIONS to this rule, so plan ahead. Readers will turn in two signed copies of their written comments – one page minimum length– at the time of the workshop. The writer will keep one copy and I will keep the other, at least for the first few weeks. Constructive criticism of the story, its diction, organization, development and voice are welcome, but individuals are responsible for fully editing and proofreading work so we are not forced to sideline issues of content and style for those of grammar, syntax and spelling.

Nonfiction disclaimer: In nonfiction, writers will approach story that stems from close personal experience or observation; we ‘own’ our stories directly, and workshop discussion reflects an understanding of this. We refer to the writer as the narrator or character, depending on the role the “I” is taking. We are sensitive to difficult stories in nonfiction, but writers who address very personal events or have issues they’re still sorting out must be prepared to discuss the work objectively in class. If you have any questions or concerns about an essay topic or your ability to address it in workshop, please come to see me during office hours. Regardless, I expect your opinions regarding one another’s work to be both offered and countered respectfully. You are in this together.

Reading: In addition to your writing this semester, select four nonfiction books for a self-directed reading project. You can explore a genre, an author, a theme or a topic—but there should be a cohesive idea behind your choices and the project should speak to your own interests or goals. You’ll be asked to report early in the semester and again at the end. An annotated bibliography of the four books is due with your final portfolio.

Attendance/Participation: There is no way to make up a missed class. More than two absences and you may be asked to drop the course. Attendance—whether chronically tardy or absent—will affect your grade, as it’s a significant part of your class participation. If you know you will be absent for one or more classes, meet with me well in advance to make arrangements. The other side of participation is your contribution to class discussion. If you’re shy, preparing comments in advance will help with anxiety. Speak up. If you’re the talkative sort, say your piece and give others room to jump in. Don’t dominate. Don’t sit silently. Be part of our workshop community.

Grades: At our final class meeting, I’ll collect your portfolios, which shall include your revised essay, bibliography—and any new materials you submit to meet the page requirement. Attendance issues aside, high grades will be earned by all students who complete reading and writing assignments on time; who pull their weight in workshop with respectful, honest, well-reasoned written and spoken comments; whose contribution to classroom discussions shows thought and preparation; and who turn in a final portfolio that is complete and reflects a mastery of advanced nonfiction writing, craft and style.

Soup: I try to alternate meat and vegetarian offerings, and usually announce next week’s soup in workshop. I use organic meats and broth, or wild meat [elk, venison, bison]; I provide water and coffee. You are welcome to bring alternative beverages or food if you have allergies or dietary restrictions. There’s no pressure to eat if you’re not in the mood, or to bring food to share. No alcohol allowed. If you wish to contribute to the coffee fund, I appreciate whole beans.

Plagiarism is defined in the UM Student Conduct Code as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own. In this course it will result in a failing grade. Qualified students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please come and see me. Be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator. As the semester progresses, we, as a class, may agree to alter or amend this syllabus/schedule to suit our changing needs.