

ENG 306: CREATIVE NONFICTION WRITING

Summer 2018, Session II: Online

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As this is an online course, I do not have regularly scheduled office hours this semester. That said, **I am happy to schedule an appointment with you**, if you'd like to meet either via Skype or in person in my office in Robert Bell 2104.

I will also be easily available via email throughout the course. **During the week (Monday through Friday), you can expect an answer within 24 hours (likely sooner); on weekends/holidays, this may be closer to 48 hours.** If you do not hear back from me within this time, please send a follow-up email.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The word essay comes from the French verb “essayer”—to try. This class will focus on personal essays, which are our attempts to understand something: how a significant event in childhood impacted us, how we came around to a particular way of thinking, or what a series of seemingly unconnected events might mean when put into context. We will focus on the questions—what the questions mean, how to ask better ones, and the various ways we might attempt to answer them—rather than the answers themselves.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Recognize, explain the importance of, and utilize the craft techniques relevant to creative nonfiction writing in both published essays and work produced by their classmates.
2. Examine work produced by a diverse range of both canonical and contemporary essayists in order to understand the types of questions and ideas about life experiences, identities, and beliefs that make for compelling personal essays.
3. Articulate their decision-making process in writing and revising work, using the correct vocabulary of the genre.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

You have one required text for this course, which you are welcome to purchase or rent from the retailer of your choice (or borrow from your local library, if it's available!): *Writing Life Stories: Turning Memories into Memoirs, Ideas into Essays, and Life into Literature* by Bill Roorbach.

All other readings and course materials will be posted to our course Canvas site, which you can access by signing in with your Ball State credentials at bsu.instructure.com.

You will also need:

- Regular access to the internet and a supported browser (Canvas recommends either [Chrome](#) or [Firefox](#), which are both free; Safari and Internet Explorer are not supported by Canvas and you will likely have trouble accessing materials if you use them).
- A computer program that allows you to create and view Word documents (.doc or .docx) and PDFs. If you don't have Word, [Libre Office](#) is an open source alternative, or you can use [Google Drive](#), which is also free.
- A way to back up all of your work. I recommend using [Box Sync](#) (you can access your free Box account through BSU by going to bsu.box.com) so that you can access your work from any computer. [Google Drive](#) and [Dropbox](#) are good alternatives that have a similar feature. If you aren't sure how to do this, let me know and I will send you a tutorial for your chosen service.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Reading and Lecture Responses **20%**

You will write a brief response to each of the assigned readings (chapters from the textbook and example essays posted to Canvas) and lecture videos/presentations. Each response will ask you to briefly summarize the material and then to answer specific questions about it to ensure that you understand key concepts.

You will earn full credit (10 points) for complete, on-time responses. **Late responses will earn half credit (5 points) within 48 hours of the deadline.** Responses that are missing or incomplete more than 48 hours after the deadline will earn no credit.

I will drop the two lowest grades. All others will be averaged to determine 20% of your final grade.

Discussion Board Posts and Responses **20%**

You will need to regularly post to discussion boards (a total of 6) and then respond to your classmates' posts. Some of these discussion boards will ask you to respond to specific questions about the reading, while others will ask you to complete a writing exercise and post it for feedback.

Each discussion board will include specific directions about (1) what must be included in your post, (2) any length requirements, (3) whose work you should respond to (you will respond to 2-3 classmates' posts each time), and (4) what to include in your responses to your classmates' posts.

Each discussion board post and response will earn a grade based on the rubric on Canvas. Late discussion board posts and responses will lose **10% of their value if one day**

late, 50% of their value if two days late, and will be marked as 0 if turned in more than two days late. These discussion board posts and responses will be averaged to determine 20% of your final grade.

If you post to a discussion board more than 24 hours after a deadline, your classmates will not be required to respond to you, though I will still grade it.

Essay Draft **5%**

You will respond to a detailed prompt that will ask you to utilize specific craft techniques in order to write a complete essay of approximately 1500-2500 words (roughly 5-10 properly formatted pages). You will post a complete draft of this essay to the drop box by the deadline.

This will be graded as complete/incomplete (with full-credit granted only for on-time, complete, and correct drafts). No credit will be earned for late and/or incomplete drafts. **Essay drafts are due by 11:59PM on Friday, July 12.**

This will count for 5% of your final grade.

Peer Review Responses **10%**

You will respond to your assigned peer review partners' essays (3-4 students per group) by the deadline. This feedback is meant to help your peer review partners revise their essays before turning them in to me for a grade. **Responses are due by 11:59PM on Tuesday, July 16.**

Peer Review Responses will be graded based on the rubric on Canvas and will determine 10% of your grade for the class.

Late peer review responses will lose **10% of their value if 24 hours late, 50% of their value if 48 hours late**, and will be marked as **0% if turned in more than two days late**.

Essay Revision & Reflection **25%**

You will significantly revise your essay based on your partners' feedback and turn it in to me for a grade, accompanied by a reflection that responds to specific questions (in the assignment prompt) about your goals, the decisions you made, and your identity as a writer. **Essay revisions and reflections are due by 12PM (NOON) on Sunday, July 21.**

The essay revision itself will be worth 80% of your grade for the assignment, while the reflection will be worth 20%. They will both be graded based on the rubric on Canvas.

Late submissions of the essay revision and reflection will lose **10% of their value per day they are late**. As final grades are due on Wednesday, July 24, **I must have it by 12PM (NOON) on Tuesday, July 23. If your work is not turned in by then, it will be marked as a 0.**

Final Exam

20%

You will take a final exam during the last week of class. **The exam will be available for 72 hours, from 12:00AM on Wednesday, July 17 until 11:59PM on Friday, July 19 and you must complete it within this time**, unless you make other arrangements with me in advance.

The exam will ask you to (1) identify and explain the importance of a few key CNF writers we have talked about, (2) define and explain the purpose and/or give an example of the craft techniques we have studied, and (3) talk at more length about a single essay we've read this semester (your choice). I will provide a study guide in advance of the exam and most of the questions on the final exam will be similar to questions asked on the weekly quizzes.

Unless you have an accommodation that allows for extra time on exams, you will have two hours to complete it after you begin.

Grading scale:

≥ 95% = A	80-82.9% = B-	67-69.9% = D+
90-94.9% = A-	77-79.9% = C+	63-66.9% = D
87-89.9% = B+	73-76.9% = C	60-62.9% = D-
83-86.9% = B	70-72.9% = C-	< 60% = F

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance/Deadlines/Communication/etc.: Although we do not meet at a set time and I won't take "attendance" on a daily basis as I would in an in-person class, it is important that you log in to our course website and check your BSU email on a regular basis—ideally each and every weekday, especially if something is due. I will often make important announcements via email—the sort of thing I would typically say in class.

Note that this is NOT a self-paced course. While you can work ahead on some assignments (and I encourage you to do so to avoid any unforeseen circumstances), others must be completed within a specific time frame—and, in a five-week course, I'm unable to make the exceptions I might be able to make in a traditional semester. It will be difficult—if not impossible—for you to catch up if you fall more than a few days behind. While I will gladly work with you (within reason!) if you have documentation of an extenuating circumstance, make sure you keep this in mind.

In short, I expect that you will:

- Check your BSU email and the course website daily (or as close to daily as possible) during the week (Monday through Friday).
- Contact me ASAP—ideally before—if extenuating circumstances prevent you from turning in assignments (even small ones) on time or accessing the course website for more than a day or two during the week.

- Keep track of deadlines and work ahead (if possible) if you know that you are going to be away from your computer when an assignment is due.

Professionalism and Respect: It's important that everyone feels comfortable sharing their work and ideas with each other. It's okay to disagree and have a respectful discussion about the course material, but these conversations should be (1) based on craft—i.e., focused on the writing, rather than the writer's (or a character's) identity, values, beliefs, etc. and (2) respectful—i.e., phrase your disagreements as intellectual conversations, not personal attacks. I will not tolerate personal attacks of any kind and/or conduct that violates Ball State's [anti-harassment](#) or [sexual harassment](#) policies.

I also expect you to act in a professional manner. This means taking responsibility for your own success in the class, treating both your classmates and me with respect in all course communication (including discussion board posts, emails, peer review responses, etc.), and approaching the course material with maturity and an open mind.

Late Work: I am willing to accept late work under certain circumstances and for partial credit. See "Assignments and Grading" and/or the assignment prompt for more information about whether or not individual assignments can be turned in after the deadline for partial credit and how much credit you can earn for late assignments. My policy about each assignment varies depending on several factors, including whether or not your classmates need your work to complete theirs. If you have any questions about my late work policy, or my rationale for why I will/won't accept an assignment late, please feel free to contact me.

I do not make exceptions to my late work policy except under documented extraordinary circumstances (for which you contact me as soon as possible). Extraordinary circumstances are things like hospitalization, debilitating illness, or the death or illness of a loved one; they do not include technology failure, minor illnesses, going on vacation, forgetting, etc.

Academic Honesty: Academic honesty is taken seriously at Ball State, and in this course. It is absolutely unacceptable to use someone else's words or ideas without proper citation and permission, or to claim someone else's work as your own. Instances of plagiarism and academic dishonesty may result in failure of the assignment, failure of the course, or suspension or expulsion from the university. As the rules for citation are a bit different in creative writing than in other disciplines (i.e., we don't necessarily use MLA citations or include a works cited page for an essay), we will discuss this as it comes up. I also urge you to come talk to me if you ever have any questions about academic honesty in relation to a specific project you're working on—I am always happy to help you find an answer.

Accessibility and Accommodation: Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file

with that office before accommodations can be made. Contact them at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

I've found that many students are unaware that they might qualify for services. **Disability Services is a great resource for students facing a variety of situations, including both long- and short-term physical and mental illnesses and both physical and intellectual disabilities.** If you are struggling in your classes for any of these reasons, I urge you to contact them. While I am also happy to discuss your individual learning needs and help however I can, there is a limit to how much I am able to do without the support and resources offered by Disability Services.

I make every effort to provide course materials in multiple formats (e.g., if there is a lecture video, there will also be a plain-text transcript and/or captions to accompany it) for your convenience. If there is something else I can do to make the course material more accessible for you, please let me know. I will do everything I can to make that happen.

Notes on Content: I do not place limits on what you can/cannot write about in this class. That said, I want you to be aware of a few things:

1. **As a BSU faculty member, I am a mandated reporter.** That means that I am legally required to report any sexual or gender-based violence (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment) involving a student to BSU's Title IX office, even if the event took place off-campus or before the student was enrolled at BSU.

What this means: I am happy to talk to you about any issues that are affecting your performance in my class (whether absences, late work, difficulty reading certain essays, etc.), but I do want you to be aware that, while I would never share that information with anyone other than the Title IX office, I am not legally allowed to keep it strictly between us.

If you would like to access confidential assistance with any of these situations, I urge you to contact the Office of Victim Services, which can connect you to resources on campus/in the Muncie community. Contacting Victim Services does not trigger any formal criminal and/or student conduct investigations unless you choose to take those steps.

2. Some of your classmates may be struggling with a lot of different things and may therefore find it difficult to read certain subject matter in your essays and/or the essays I assign. That *does not* mean you shouldn't write about it. I simply ask that, **if you plan to write about things that could be difficult for others to read—suicide or suicidal thoughts, self-harm, abuse, sexual assault, etc.—please let me know in advance** so that I can give anyone who has asked for one a

heads up about the content. You are also always welcome—though not at all required—to provide a content warning on your essays for workshop.

3. **If you'd like a content warning about any particular subjects that might arise in the essays we read, please let me know.** I'm happy to give you one when I know in advance and/or to talk about ways to ensure your full participation in the course while also prioritizing your health.

Privacy: It is absolutely imperative that you respect the privacy of your classmates by not sharing their work—or talking about their work—with anyone outside of this class. While you may feel comfortable sharing your writing with your friends, roommate, family members, etc., your classmates might not feel the same way, particularly as we are writing nonfiction. Even if you don't think a classmate could possibly care if you share it, even if you are only saying nice things, even if you are sharing it with someone who has no connection to this class, it's still a violation of their privacy. You can't know who might know your classmate—your roommate might be their third cousin, or your mom might have gone to high school with their mom—and what might get back to someone they know and possibly cause damage. Regardless of whether or not it causes damage, the writer is still the only one who can decide when and with whom they want to share their work.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: JUNE 17-JUNE 23

Monday, June 17: Introductions

- Watch introduction video
- Read the syllabus
 - ⇒ Take the syllabus quiz
- ⇒ Post to Discussion Board #1—introductions

Tuesday, June 18: Basics of CNF

- Watch Lecture #1
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response: (1) briefly summarize (< 100 words) what the lecture video was about, (2) list three of the most important takeaways from the lecture video, and (3) ask any questions this lecture video raises for you about CNF as a genre, about writing essays, or about this material in particular
- Read Ch. 1 (“Getting Started”) of Writing Life Stories
 - ⇒ Complete reading response: (1) briefly summarize (< 100 words) what the chapter was about, (2) list three of the most important takeaways from the chapter, and (3) ask any questions this chapter raises for you about CNF as a genre, about writing essays, or about this chapter in particular
- Read “This Is East Tennessee Punk Rock” by Megan Kerns
 - ⇒ Complete reading response: (1) briefly summarize (< 100 words) what the essay is about, (2) identify a single passage from the text that stuck out to you in some way (anything from one sentence to a full paragraph), and (3) ask any questions this essay raises for you about CNF as a genre, about writing essays, or about this essay in particular

Wednesday, June 19: Memory

- Watch Lecture #2
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response
- Read Ch. 2 (“Memory”)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- Read “If You Knew Then What I Know Now” by Ryan Van Meter
 - ⇒ Complete reading response

Thursday, June 20: Scene, Summary, and Exposition

- Watch Lecture #3
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response
- Read Ch. 3 (“Scene-Making”)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response

- Read “Girl” by Alexander Chee
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**: in addition to the typical reading response for essays, also identify a single passage that you think could be labeled as (1) scene AND (2) summary/narrative summary (i.e., two passages total, one of each)
 - ⇒ **Respond to posts on DB #1**

Friday, June 21

- ⇒ **Post to DB #2: writing exercise**

WEEK 2: JUNE 24-JUNE 30

Monday, June 24: Exploration and Discovery

- Read Ch. 4 (“Big Ideas”)
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**
- Read “Some Thoughts on Mercy” by Ross Gay
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**
- ⇒ **Respond to posts on DB #2**

Tuesday, June 25: Characterization

- Watch Lecture #5
 - ⇒ **Complete lecture response**
- Read Ch. 5 (“Characters and Character”)
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**
- Read “The Mercy Kill” by Joe Oestreich
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**
- ⇒ **Post to DB #3**

Wednesday, June 26: Voice

- Read Ch. 6 (“Stage Presence”)
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**
- Read “Notes of a Native Son” by James Baldwin
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**

Thursday, June 27: Putting it all together

- Read “Self-Portrait in Apologies” by Sarah Einstein
 - ⇒ **Complete reading response**

Friday, June 28

- ⇒ **Post to DB #4**
- ⇒ **Respond to posts on DB #3**

WEEK 3: JULY 1-JULY 7

Monday, July 1: Research

- Watch Lecture #7
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response
- Read Ch. 7 (“Finding the Facts”)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- Read “No-Man’s Land” by Eula Biss
 - ⇒ Complete reading response

Tuesday, July 2: Metaphor and Meaning

- Read Ch. 8 (“Metaphor and Meaning”)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
 - Read “Pork Life: An Autobiography in Seven Meals” by Todd Kliman
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- ⇒ Respond to posts on DB #4

Wednesday, July 3: Saying it right

- Read Ch. 9 (“Saying It Right”)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
 - Read “Goodbye to All That” by Joan Didion
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- ⇒ Post to DB #5

Thursday, July 4: INDEPENDENCE DAY—NOTHING DUE. UNIVERSITY OFFICES CLOSED

Friday, July 5: NOTHING DUE

WEEK 4: JULY 8-JULY 14

Monday, July 8: Structure

- Watch Lecture #10
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response
 - Read Ch. 10 (“Building a Building”)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
 - Read “I’m Just Getting to the Disturbing Part” by Steven Church
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- ⇒ Respond to posts on DB #5

** July 9 is the last day to withdraw from the course.

Tuesday, July 9: Writing about popular culture

- Watch Lecture #11

- ⇒ Complete lecture response
- Read “Defiance, Ohio is the Name of a Band” by Hanif Abdurraqib
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- Read TBD essay (I’ll post this by Friday, July 5)
 - ⇒ Complete reading response

Wednesday, July 10: Fraudulent Artifacts & Hermit Crab Essays

- Watch Lecture #12
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response
- Read “Table of Figures” by Brenda Miller
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- Read “The White Space” by Jennifer De Leon
 - ⇒ Complete reading response
- ⇒ Post to DB #6—discussion/analysis

Thursday, July 11: Workshopping

- Watch Lecture #13: Workshop
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response

Friday, July 12

- ⇒ Submit COMPLETE draft of essay to drop box labeled “Draft of Essay for Peer Review”

WEEK 5: JULY 15-JULY 21

Monday, July 15: NOTHING DUE

Tuesday, July 16

- ⇒ Submit peer review responses for partners’ essays

Wednesday, July 17: Revision

- Watch Lecture #12
 - ⇒ Complete lecture response
- Read “The Writing Process and Revision” (excerpt from Tell It Slant) by Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola
 - ⇒ Complete reading response

Thursday, July 18: NOTHING DUE

Friday, July 19

- ⇒ Last day to complete final exam

Submit a significantly revised version of essay AND your reflection to the drop box by 12PM (NOON) ON SUNDAY, JULY 21.