

Eng 309: Creative Nonfiction
Pace University
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Truth and Discovery

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“I don’t write out of what I know; I write out of what I wonder. Poetry and art are not about answers to me; they are about questions.”

— Lucille Clifton

“Whether you succeed or not is irrelevant, there is no such thing. Making your unknown known is the important thing.”

— Georgia O’Keefe

Course description:

Welcome, writers! In this class, we will explore the art and craft of the personal narrative, a form that uses the writer’s life experiences and memory to craft a story that is about both self and the world. We will write – a lot – in and out of class, and co-create a supportive, inspiring, and productive writing community. Our study of craft and storytelling will inform our work. We will read a range of essays and memoir excerpts that will guide our short writing experiments and our more sustained projects. We will explore hybridity and form as well as the gray areas between truth and fiction. We will engage deeply with the living world through the body and senses, enriching our writing life and evoking play and discovery in our writing process. A big part of our class will involve sharing new work with classmates in a compassionate, author-centric workshop setting. This is an advanced workshop, so reading and writing outside of class is expected, as is sharing your work and offering constructive input on your classmates’ work. Our ultimate goal will be to develop our individual writing voice and style. Throughout, we will call upon the spirit of curiosity and play as we learn and grow together. I am excited to have you on board!

Reading List:

Some are essays, some are books we will read excerpts from. **No need to purchase anything.** I will provide scans for everything. This is an ongoing list which is likely to change in response to the needs of our class. Refer to our page on Classes and follow my emails to stay up to date on week-by-week reading expectations.

'Boys of my Youth' by Jo Ann Beard
'World of Wonders' by Aimee Nezhukumatathil
'Living like Weasels' by Annie Dillard
'Dear Memory' by Victoria Chang
'Mother Tongue' by Amy Tan
'Priestdaddy' by Patricia Lockwood
'In the Heart of the Heart of the Country' by William Gass
'I remember' by Joe Brainard
'The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers' by Bhanu Kapil
'The Book of Delights' by Ross Gay
'Braiding Sweetgrass' by Robin Wall Kimmerer
'Meaty' by Samantha Irby

Do you have favorite creative nonfiction writers whose work you admire and would like to learn from? Add to this list and read as independent study during the course of the semester.

Logistics:

Reading: All readings will be available on Classes a week before they are to be discussed. Read and annotate everything thoroughly, at least twice, and come prepared for in-depth discussion on craft, techniques, and themes.

Writing: We will be writing to a generative prompt in almost every class. Some of these will be inspired by the reading we do. Please come prepared to write, with your chosen materials (notebook or laptop) in every class. Frequently, I will ask you to write by hand, so please **always** have a notebook and pen/pencil on you. You should make a **dedicated notebook/journal for this class** – I suggest a cheap Composition notebook, the kind that you can find at a dollar store or supermarket.

Workshop: I will explain our workshop process in detail during class, but in a nutshell, the workshop involves getting and giving support and critical feedback on peer writing. Each of you will be workshoping 2 pieces of writing with classmates. I will ask you to sign-up in advance for time-slots where your work will be workshoped.

Communication: You are responsible for regularly monitoring both your email (for announcements) and our Classes page (for materials, assignments, and deadlines). I am available via email at kjoshi@pace.edu if you have questions in the coming weeks. I usually take 2-3 days to respond. As an adjunct who juggles multiple jobs to make ends meet, I have

several commitments + energy limitations. If your query is urgent, please mark 'Urgent' in the subject line and I will get back to you soonest.

Statement on Accessibility:

Your success in this class is important to me. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and course requirements. I am committed to making all course materials as accessible as possible, and to working with students if any of these materials are inaccessible. We will all need some accommodations in this class, because we all learn differently. You may self-identify and register with the Office of Disability Services housed in the Counseling Center on the New York City campus. You may also see me after class or during office hours if you would like to talk about accommodations/disability (**I live with disability myself, and am happy to chat!**) or would like to submit your academic accommodation letter to me if you have registered for accommodations. Any conversations we have about accommodations are **confidential**. I also want to note that it is somewhat **problematic to only recognize documented accommodations**. Therefore, please let me know if you have a non-documented accommodation request and I will strive to ensure that the class is **accessible and inclusive** for every student.

Academic Integrity and "No AI" policy:

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an honest, truthful, and responsible manner. You are more than encouraged to discuss writing, reading, and homework with other students, but the work that you submit should be your own, in your own words. Plagiarism in my class will result in a failing grade.

Moreover, the use of generative AI tools like chatGPT is (obviously) not permitted for this course, and will also result in a failing grade. Students must rely on their own originality and creativity to complete creative writing tasks and engage with course material.

Books on craft and the writer's life:

These are excellent (and fun to read) resources on writing and the writing life. Occasionally, I will share excerpts and quotes from these during class. I encourage you to seek them out to explore on your own. I will also try to provide PDF copies of some of them on Classes.

'Bird by Bird' by Anne Lamott

'What it is' by Lynda Barry

'Writing alone and with others' by Pat Schneider
'Writing with power' by Peter Elbow
'Writing down the bones' by Natalie Goldberg
'My trade is mystery' by Carl Phillips
'Meander, spiral, explode' by Jane Alison
'The art of memoir' by Mary Karr

Important Dates:

First day of class meeting: 21st Jan
Last day of class meeting: 24th April

Final portfolio due online: 9th May

Round 1 Workshop Dates: approx 20th Feb to 5th March [5 class days: 3 students each day]

Round 2 Workshop Dates: approx 9th April to 2nd May [5 class days: 3 students each day]

Notes on grading:

I follow a labor-based grading philosophy, which means you will be graded for the sum of your labor and effort in this class. Most of the writing we will do during class will be experimental. The prompts are designed to jump-start and inspire you to write towards truth and discovery. I will not be assigning grades for these in-class writing experiments, but I will be making note of whether you complete them with sincerity (and upload them on Classes). I also expect you to turn in your drafts on time. Please do your best to respect the due dates so that our class schedule is not disrupted. Learning to work with discipline is an essential life skill. Also remember that freewriting drafts do not have to be perfect, just done. If you ever need an extension, please let me know via email.

You will be assigned a final grade at the end of the semester as follows:

Workshop participation and feedback on classmates' work: 30% of final grade

Final portfolio: 70% of final grade

- 2 polished essays/memoirs: substantial and project-based
- 1-2 page reflection on your process, practice, workshopping, and growth as a writer

Your final portfolio grade will be reduced if:

you are not participating in an engaged, present, sincere, and thoughtful manner in class; if you do not come prepared to class with all your materials (having done the readings and made careful notes); if you are not trying new things in your writing; if you are not thoughtful and respectful during workshop; if your assignments are often turned in late; or if you do not display

sincere effort in revising your portfolio. In sum, effort is key, and you will be rewarded for the sincerity of your effort and the sum of your intellectual and creative labor towards this class. Your final grade is also heavily dependent on your attendance and participation (see below).

Attendance and participation:

The success of any writing class depends on our ability to form a supportive, productive writing community, which is not possible without your attendance, active participation and presence*. I am a stickler for full attendance in this course and will weigh your effort and willingness very heavily in final grading. The whole course grade will be reduced 1/3rd (i.e., A- to B+ and so on) for each class missed after 4 unexcused absences. Communication is key – do keep me in the loop about any emergencies or medical absences. I am happy to be of assistance to you. Please also notify the Dean for Students in case of extended medical absence and follow university procedure. Moreover, please make sure to come to class on time. Frequent tardiness will also lower your attendance and participation grade.

Active participation and presence*:

I expect you to come to class prepared for our discussions, activities and writing; having all your materials well-organized and available for class; listening actively and openly, and responding thoughtfully and respectfully; staying present—showing up for every class and not multitasking on digital devices; trying out new class activities; being an engaged and helpful member of workshop and other group activities. If you love to talk in class, great! If you're shy or private, there are other ways of participating and helping to make this class work for everyone. You can choose to respond via writing on discussion boards, share your thoughts in writing, and (most importantly) contribute through engaged listening and your full presence.