

**English 4330**  
Creative Non-fiction  
Fall 2009

**Instructor: Laura Kopchick**  
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**Texts:** All readings are on electronic reserve in the library catalogue course reserves. Click on the e-item, then the article title. You must print each article out and bring it to class.

**Materials:** Reading Journal (cheap spiral notebook used only for this course)  
College-level dictionary  
Grammar Reference Guide (Highly recommended!)

**Overview:** This class centers around the writing of creative, non-fictional essays. Since better readers make better writers, we will read several contemporary essays, discuss them, then use them as inspiration for our own works. Non-fiction essays are a unique and interesting form of argumentative writing—and the trick is to seduce the reader into believing your point of view on an experience, a person, an event, or a memory. We will discuss this seduction in more detail as the semester progresses, as well as the tricks and tactics that can help you with your seduction. We will discuss language, structure, narration, and, most importantly, deal with the “So What?” factor (more on this, again, as the semester progresses). Our goal is to become better writers, yes, but also to become more confident of our writing strengths and more aware of our weaknesses. We will learn that writing is often a collaborative process, which leads me nicely into the policies of this course:

**Policies:** \*\*Since we will approach writing in a collaborative way (through group activities, workshops, and class discussions), class attendance is required. I’m here every day; so why shouldn’t you be here also? I enjoy teaching, so I see no reason why you shouldn’t enjoy learning. Attendance is, therefore, mandatory, and cutting classes will lower your final grade—not to mention what you might miss in class should I be on a roll and should I deliver a brilliant lecture. For those of you who are slow-witted and still don’t grasp the intent of my message, let me rephrase it so there is no misunderstanding: More than 3 absences (excused, unexcused, makes no difference), and I lower your grade one letter. More than 5 absences will result in a failing grade for the semester.  
\*\*I will not accept late papers or assignments unless you have made arrangements with me in advance.  
\*\*All essays must be typed and double-spaced. Use basic fonts, no larger than 12 pt. Margins should be one inch all around. Titles are mandatory and fun. Be original and inventive. Do not use plastic binders or notebooks to enclose your essays. Staples are best. Always, always keep an extra hard copy of your work.  
\*\*Plagiarism will result in immediate failure.  
\*\*Each student will have one essay workshopped by the entire class and the other two essays will receive written comments from two peers. Be prepared to bring extra copies of your essay to class on the day(s) that they’re due.

**Plagiarism:** The Student Bulletin defines plagiarism as “submitting a piece of work (for example an essay, research paper, assignment) which in part or in whole is not entirely the student’s own work without attributing those same portions to their correct sources.”

If I find evidence of plagiarism in any student paper, I will immediately fail that paper. It is often difficult to determine where the line is between being influenced by a text or person and taking words or ideas from that text or person. If you have any questions about whether or not you should give credit to a source in your work, I suggest that you always cite your source to be safe. For a more detailed explanation of plagiarism and the correct citation of sources, see *me*.

**Grades:**

Your grade will be based on the following:

75% >3 essays, 7-10 full pages each (each paper 25%). Topics will be announced in class.

25% >Reading responses (weekly, what you'll use your notebooks for, must bring to class with you always), in-class assignments, peer workshop evaluations, attendance, quizzes, and classroom participation\*.

\*Classroom participation is required and will include anything from involving yourself in discussions to raising questions or volunteering to read. It can positively influence your grade. I can not emphasize the importance of participation enough—the success of our workshops in this class depends on everyone's enthusiastic participation. Participation also includes asking questions, the willingness to help out your peers in workshop, etc.

**Grading:**

(A parenthetical insertion: I am much more concerned about your learning something in this class than I am about the final grade you earn. I have much to teach you and I'd rather not waste our limited time together "arguing" about why I gave you a certain grade and why you're sure I was horribly off the mark. I'd much rather spend office meeting time helping you with your writing. I know, however, that you have a somewhat different perspective. That's why I've included the following section in my policy statement.)

I shall consider the following general and specific questions when I grade your papers:

Generally, does the paper make **easy** sense to me? Can I trace the rational development of ideas leading to a logical end? Have you supported these ideas with **specific detail** and/or sound reasons? Is the prose written by a human being or is it textbook prose composed by a committee of brain-dead psychologists? (i.e. is there a human voice? Have you made the private public?) Where is your personal commitment? Is it an interesting read? Is the essay marred by grammatical blunders so horrible I'll want to run for a red pen? Does the essay take into account the "so-what?" factor?

**TENTATIVE (and rather skeletal) SCHEDULE:****Section I : The Personal Essay and the Personal Profile Essay**

- T 8/25 Chaos and confusion; discussion of the course and the syllabus  
HW: Read “My Body, My Weapon, My Shame” and “Notes on My Mother”
- TH 8/27 Continuation of introduction and probably more confusion; in class discussion of essays, focus on narrative voice  
HW: Read “Demonology” and “A Plague of Tics”
- T 9/1 Discussion, focus on use of humor to engage  
HW: Read “Werner” and “Jessica, the Hound, and the Casket Trade”
- TH 9/3 Discussion, focus on narrative voice (in-your-face vs. poetic, etc.) and character development  
HW: “Evening with A Gifted Child,” “Umbilicus,” and “Waiting for Katarina Witt.”
- T 9/8 Discussion of essays. Essay assignment #1 handed out
- TH 9/10 Finish discussion, brainstorm essay topics.  
HW: Essay #1 first draft due next class. Workshoppers bring copies for entire class.
- T 9/15 **Essay #1 first draft due.** Discuss workshop policies. In-class reading of essay.  
HW: Type up peer evaluations of 2 essays. Bring to next class.
- TH 9/17 Workshop
- T 9/22 Workshop  
HW: Read sections 1-5 of “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again” (This is LONGISH. Give yourself time)

**Section II: The Public Spectacle Essay and the Group Portrait Essay**

- TH 9/24 Discussion, focus on sense of purpose in defining group experience  
HW: Finish reading “A Supposedly Fun Thing”
- T 9/29 Discussion, focus on implication of self in argument. **Final draft of essay #1 due for grading**  
HW: Read “Meet the Shaggs” and “The Right Stuff”
- TH 10/1 Discussion  
HW: “Naked,” “Springtime in the Masochist Café,” and “Shakers”
- T 10/6 Discussion  
HW: “Talking Aids to Death” and “My Habit”
- TH 10/8 Discussion  
HW: “Trucking Through the Aids Belt” (LONGISH essay. Give yourself time.
- T 10/13 Discussion, essay assignment #2 handed out  
HW: “The Unwanted”
- TH 10/15 Discussion of Possible Essay topics  
HW: Essay #2 first draft due next class. Workshoppers bring copies for entire class.
- T 10/20 **Essay #2 first draft due.** In class reading and discussion of “Six Days, Some Remembering”  
HW: Type up peer evaluations of 2 essays. Bring to next class.
- TH 10/22 Workshop
- T 10/27 Workshop
- TH 10/29 Workshop  
HW: Read “No Wonder They Call Me a Bitch” and “How to Get Out of A Locked Trunk”

**Section III: The Experiment Essay and the Interview Essay**

- T 11/3 **Final draft of essay #2 due for grading,** discussion  
HW: Read “Shooting Dad” and “On Dumpster Diving”
- TH 11/5 Discussion,  
HW: Read on-line interview, TBA
- T 11/10 Discussion, essay assignment #3 handed out  
HW: Read on-line interview, TBA
- TH 11/12 Discussion  
HW: Essay #3 first draft due next class. Workshoppers bring copies for entire class
- T 11/17 **Essay #3 first draft due**  
HW: Type up peer evaluations of 2 essays. Bring to next class
- TH 11/19 Workshop
- T 11/24 Workshop
- TH 11/26 No Class—Thanksgiving!
- T 12/1 Workshop
- TH 12/3 Last Day of Class, In class reading and eating! **Final draft of essay #3 due for grading**