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CRWR 212A.50F: Introduction to Nonfiction Workshop

Kelly Renee Schirmann
University of Montana, Missoula, kelly.schirmann@umontana.edu

Introduction to Nonfiction Workshop

Welcome to Intro to Nonfiction! I'm thrilled that you're here. This accelerated course will provide a fundamental understanding of the nonfiction genre and an introduction to the creative writing workshop. For the first ~half of the course we will read a variety of nonfiction texts to enlarge our understanding of the many approaches to nonfiction. We will write regularly and generate work through various prompts. In the second ~half of the course we will focus on workshopping. Each of you will have the opportunity to share your work and receive feedback from your classmates. In workshop, we will focus on reading generously, giving and receiving critique, and providing constructive feedback for the author. By the end of this three week course, you should leave with a significant body of new work and a greater understanding of the parameters and possibilities of creative nonfiction.

Course Requirements & Expectations

As you can see from the description above, this course will mostly consist of READING and WRITING. If you've enrolled in this course, I assume you are comfortable with, and hopefully enjoy, both. My expectations for each student in this course are as follows:

- *You will complete all required readings and assignments.*
- *You will participate in class discussions and workshops via forums.*
- *You will workshop a piece of your writing.*

Grading Policy

This workshop is designed to be accessible for all levels of writers, experienced and not. If you complete all of your assignments, engage in class discussions, and participate in workshop, there is no reason that you should not finish this course with the grade you want. The grade breakdown for the course is as follows:

- Writing assignments (8 total): 40%
- Participation (attendance, forum contributions): 20%
- Workshop participation: 20%
- Final Revision: 20%

<u>Assignment Information</u>

Writing responses (40%) **:** You will complete eight (8) writing responses over the first two weeks of the course, each worth 5% of your final grade. These responses should be around 1.5~2 pages (and up to 5 pages), double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12pt font, and should be submitted via Moodle. Responses are based on a particular week's theme and readings. Response prompts can be found on the course Moodle page.

Participation (20%) **:** Your participation grade is based on a number of things, including your "attendance" (logging into Moodle and class forums daily), level of engagement in group forum discussions, demonstrated completion of readings ahead of class time, behavior, attentiveness, etc. I am looking for you to engage thoughtfully and thoroughly with assigned texts, and demonstrate this engagement through posts.

Workshop participation (20%) **:** Each student is required to workshop one (1) piece of writing during this course. This means that you will upload your piece to the appropriate Moodle Workshop forum <u>by 11:59pm on Monday, May 25th</u>. If you fail to upload your workshop assignment at this date, your final grade will be reduced by 20%.

Final revision (20%) **:** Each student will submit a final revision of a piece written during the course of the class. You will use instructor feedback, peer feedback, and skills and techniques you've learned during the course when incorporating changes and revisions to your piece. The final revision should be uploaded to Moodle no later than Monday, June 1 at 11:59pm.

<u>Late Work Policy</u>

Submissions of late work can be uploaded as long as the class is in session. However, each late submission will incur a penalty of -10% for each day that it is submitted late, with a maximum of ten days (or -100%) past the due date.

Extensions can be granted ONLY if students contact the instructor in advance of the due date and offer a reasonable explanation as to why they need additional time. Because of the condensed nature of this course, it's possible that not all extensions can be honored, and will remain available through the discretion of the instructor.

If you skip your workshop, you will receive a zero. Late workshop submissions will not be accepted—the final deadline for submission is Monday, May 25th at 11:59pm.

Final revisions cannot be accepted after Monday, June 1st at 11:59pm

Lastly, we all have commitments outside of this course. It's common to feel overwhelmed by your workload—especially if you're working, have extracurricular activities, or have taken on a unit-heavy summer schedule. Because your writing responses are such a huge part of your final grade (40% total), it's important to stay on top of your homework for the first ~half of the class. Sometimes, though, you just can't do everything. To avoid falling behind or receiving a zero on your assignments, I request that you be communicative with me about what's going on. I am more than willing to be flexible and accommodating if I understand your circumstances.

Attendance policy

Online success in CRWR 212A is dependent on your active participation and engagement throughout the course. Students are required to complete all assignments by the due date, demonstrate a close reading of assigned texts, actively participate in discussion forums, and thoughtfully complete writing assignments. Failure to participate in the aforementioned ways may result in a penalty to your overall grade or failure of the course.

Posting on discussion forums is the main way to log your attendance. Students will not be marked present for the course in a particular week if they have not posted on the discussion forum and/or submitted assignments/essays if administered in that week. Since this class is being offered in a compressed format, being marked absent for (1) week will result in automatic failure of the course. With that said, I understand that sometimes life happens and unexpected circumstances can impact your ability to stay current with class. If this happens please email me so we may discuss your options.

Additionally, students are expected to:
- Log on at least three times a week – on different days in order to complete weekly assignments, assessments, discussions and/or other weekly deliverables;
- Participate in the threaded discussions – this means that, in addition to posting a response to the thread topic presented, students are expected to respond to each other and comment and questions from the instructor and/or other students

If you have questions or concerns about the course attendance policy, please contact me sooner rather than later so there are no surprises.

On communication

If you haven't learned this already, being communicative with your instructors is crucial to success at the university level. Many of you have a lot going on outside of

class, and juggling coursework with your extracurricular activities can be a challenge. If you start to fall behind, have questions, need clarification, or have something come up, please reach out to me. I can be flexible and accommodating if I know what's going on.

<u>On workshopping</u>

Workshopping is the cornerstone of intermediate and upper division creative writing courses. The workshop affords us, as writers, the opportunity to share our work with a group of engaged, interested, and intelligent peers who can speak with some authority to some of the techniques used in our essays and let us know what is working, and what could clarification. It goes without saying that sharing our work – especially in nonfiction, when what we say can be assumed to be some version of the truth – can be unnerving to say the least, and maybe even terrifying. To that end, I'd like you to consider the crucial balance between kindness and criticism; while we need to know where the holes in our logic are, we mostly (at this point at least) need to be told what it is we are doing right.

So, here's my request. When responding to the workshop pieces of your peers, please include answers to these two overarching questions:

- <u>What do you admire?</u> What lines, themes, ideas, structure, dialogue, moments, descriptions, etc are working; what does the author do especially well?
- <u>What is a suggestion for improvement?</u> Be as specific as possible here. Is there a moment where some clarification is called for, or where you wanted more detail?

Lastly, I want to be tender about the way we offer prescriptive advice, i.e., "I think you should turn this into a piece about x." While prescriptive advice is almost always given with good intentions, it can also cast a shadow of doubt on the piece as a whole – something we all know is difficult enough to fight back to begin with! The real skill of a writing workshop is to learn to identify what the piece itself seems to want, and be able to offer suggestions of how to get it there – even if they don't coincide with our own preferences or abilities.

<u>Course Schedule</u>

Please note: the syllabus is subject to change based on a number of factors. Make sure to check the course Moodle page and Live Syllabus for the most up-to-date schedule.

WEEK 1

<u>Monday, 5/11</u>
Review: Moodle Tutorial, Syllabus, Course schedule

Read: "Kurt Vonnegut's Greatest Writing Advice" compiled by Emily Temple; "Trying to Write Down Life Before it's Too Late" by Chelsea Hodson
Write: Response 1
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Tuesday, 5/12
Read: "Breaking Clean" by Judy Blunt
Write: Response 2
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Wednesday, 5/13
Read: "1989" by Alexander Chee
Write: Response 3
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Thursday, 5/14
Read: "On Joy" by Hanif Abdurraqib
Write: Response 4
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm
Friday, 5/15
Read: No reading due.
Write: No writing due.
** Responses 1-4 will be accepted until 11:59pm tonight **

WEEK 2

Monday, 5/18
Read: "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream" by Joan Didion
Write: Response 5
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Tuesday, 5/19
Read: from "Into Thin Air" (excerpt) by Jon Krakauer
Write: Response 6
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Wednesday, 5/20
Read: "Tracking the Elusive Western Shoe Tree" by Bryan DiSalvatore
Write: Response 7
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Thursday, 5/21

Read: "Total Eclipse" by Annie Dillard
Write: Response 8
Respond: Submit a minimum of 2 comments or responses to today's forum by 11:59pm

Friday, 5/22
Catch-up Day: No Reading or writing due.
Revisit your essays and think about what you will revise for your workshop.
** Responses 5-8 will be accepted until 11:59pm tonight **

WORKSHOP WEEK

Week 3
Monday, 5/25
Review: CRWR 212A Workshop guidelines
Read: "Draft No. 4" by John McPhee
Respond: Submit a minimum of 1 thoughtful comment or response to the course forum
Write: Upload your revised workshop submission by 11:59pm

Tuesday, 5/26
Read: Workshop submissions, at your own pace
Respond: Submit feedback for submissions, at your own pace

Wednesday, 5/27
Read: Workshop submissions, at your own pace
Respond: Submit feedback for submissions, at your own pace

Thursday, 5/28
Read: Finish reading all workshop submissions by 11:59pm
Respond: Submit feedback for workshop submissions by 11:59pm

Friday, 5/29
Read: No reading due
**Write: ** FINAL REVISION due by 11:59pm **
Instructions: Revise one essay that you've completed this semester (your workshopped essay or something else) using instructor and peer feedback, learned techniques, and class discussions to inform your edits. Upload to Moodle by 11:59pm.