



## English 4030: Creative Nonfiction

Fall 2011

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Braithwaite 303B  
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### Required Texts:

Carolyn Forché and Phillip Gerard	<i>Writing Creative Nonfiction</i>
Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola	<i>Tell it Slant</i>
Joan Didion	<i>Slouching Towards Bethlehem</i>
Rebecca Skloot	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i>
Martin Lemelman	<i>Mendel's Daughter</i>
Sherman Alexie	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian</i>

**Articles from other sources: These will be available on electronic reserve at the library.**

### **Course Description:**

This class will be a combination of reading the various sub-genres of Creative Nonfiction [Memoir, Portrait, Essay of Place] and writing in the various sub-genres expressed in this exciting field of work. You will need to find your own creative nonfiction “voice” and speak to that truth. We will discuss the dilemma of “truth” and its place in writing/reading in the field of creative nonfiction. In addition, you will need to draw on other outside reads that have to do with crafting creative nonfiction. I will put these outside readings on electronic reserve at the library. Since this is a 4000 level course, I will treat this as a senior level seminar/capstone class. As such, we will be doing a lot of reading and writing, which will culminate in a final portfolio of your work at the end of the term.

**Writing Prompts: 10 @ 25 points each = 250 total points.** Please note that prompts are NOT busy work! Each prompt should contribute to opening doors of the creative mind and should help you “craft” as well as “create” CNF that matters. (We will discuss in class why writing

should matter and/or why we write.) Stories are the most powerful connectors of our human experience. To write fully means to be alive to all of our senses, to the people in our past and present, and to the world we inhabit. Explore each of the assigned prompts as much as possible. You may choose to write beyond the prompts and keep going. This can only help with the longer assignments where you explore the various sub-genres of CNF. Enjoy and “go with it.” [Note: prompts must be at least 3 pages full pages, double-spaced.]

**Writing Workshops:** You will be expected to bring 3 copies for peers in your workshop group. These initial first drafts must consist of ONLY the first 3-4 pages since our time will be limited. For the second workshop, feel free to bring additional pages, but make sure you mark which pages you need the most help with so that the time in class can be spent productively. Your peer group will be consistent throughout. After you have completed the second workshop, send me an electronic draft that I can comment on. (Because of the size of the class, I will not be able to comment on more than 4 pages.) The drafts that you send to me must show revision work and I must see comments about specific things you wish me to address. Draft points (10 for each draft) will be assessed when you hand in this work with the final edited paper. I need to see that there has been careful revision and editing. ***I will not count drafts that have been reviewed by someone outside of class. To get the 20 points for draft work, you must bring drafts to class and present them to your peer group.***

**Discussion Leaders: 50 points.** Part of critical reading and thinking is being able to ask questions as you read and to contemplate answers as they apply to specific questions. The objective of being a “discussion leader” is that it will push you to critically think through the readings and to generate a list of questions that you wish to bring before your peer group. You will need to have 5 primary questions. Under EACH of these 5 primary questions, you will need to come up with 4 sub-questions. (Note: Each sub-question should relate to the primary question and not be irrelevant.) The challenge here will be create questions that are not too general or obvious. I will provide models for you. These should be one page, single-spaced. Points will be based on how well you create questions that are very specific and that challenge your discussion group.

**Memoir, Portrait/Biography, Essay of Place: 100 points EACH, including drafts = 300 points.** These sub-genres of CNF will be explained and discussed in class prior to when each piece is due. We will combine writing prompts and readings for models so you will have ample background in these sub-genres before you begin. If you are already familiar with them, hopefully new insight and writing ideas will occur so you can further develop CNF, even leading to future publication.

**Final Portfolio:** This will be a combination of ALL the writing you have done all semester. Included will be your **revised and polished** work in Memoir, Portrait/Biography, and Essay of Place plus the addition of visual elements for each of these pieces. At the end of each piece in the various sub-genres, I will need a one-page, double-spaced Author’s Note stating how/what you revised and how you think this improved your writing. You will also need to include writing prompts that showcase your work. [These will already have been graded, so choose the ones that most reflect your fine work.] Think of this as something you will showcase for graduate

school or job interviews. It should be an accumulation of your best work and ideas. You will be required to give me a “physical” copy of the final portfolio, but also provide a pdf version as well. **Rubrics must be attached to each sub-genre.**

**Final portfolio: Point breakdown:**

- **Memoir written narrative** 100
- **Memoir visual elements/graphic design** 25
- **Author’s Note** 25

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**150 points**

- **Portrait/Biography written narrative** 100
- **Portrait/Biography visual elements/graphic design** 25
- **Author’s Note** 25

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**150 points**

- **Essay of Place narrative** 100
- **Essay of Place visual elements/graphic design** 25
- **Author’s Note** 25

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**150 points**

**Total points for final portfolio = 450 points.**

**Course Format:**

This class will be treated as a seminar class where you, as upper division college students, provide a forum for ideas and writing. I love and appreciate all your thoughts (in fact, I learn from them as well) so do not be afraid to explore and share. Small group discussions and whole class discussions will be the primary focus. Students are responsible for all assigned reading material and also for how they bring their ideas, thoughts, critical analysis, and emotional responses to class. Participation will count heavily in the final grade.

**Course Requirements and Objectives:**

- Regular attendance and participation in class discussions
- Show a critical awareness of the tradition, aesthetics, prosody, and narrative techniques in Creative Nonfiction.
- Demonstrate creative thinking and innovation.
- Edit, proofread documents, demonstrating proficiency in grammar, syntax, common usage, and punctuation.
- Active workshop participation with peer comments.
- Final portfolio of your writing all semester that showcases your best work.

- Satisfy admission requirements for a variety of graduate or professional programs.
- Flexibility in the syllabus in case we need to make changes!

**PLEASE NOTE: I do not allow the use of electronic devices of any kind in my classroom. These include cell phones, iPods, laptop computers. Please turn off your cell phone before you enter class and please do not text underneath the table or desk. It is easy to see when someone is doing this. (Not that you would because you are advanced college students who would not even consider texting during class.☺)**

**Attendance/Tardy Policy:** Students are allowed 3 absences during the semester. I will not tolerate a pattern of tardiness. If you arrive late, this will be counted as an absence. If you must miss class for any reason, ask one of your fellow students to take notes and then give you a copy. I will not respond to an email that states the following: “Hey professor, what did I miss today?” **Students who have more than 3 absences at the end of the semester will have their final grade lowered 10 points for each absence over three.** Student athletes must provide documentation from the athletic dept. in advance for all classes that will be missed because of participation in athletic competitions. If an athletic event is scheduled when a paper is due, this must be handed in ahead of time.

**Policy on late assignment:** Because of the large number of students each term, **no late assignments will be accepted** unless there is a verifiable emergency where I have been contacted and have been made aware of the situation. With so many students, I want to make sure that I get papers back to you in a timely fashion. Late papers mean that I cannot achieve this. Thank you for your cooperation!

**Academic Integrity Policy:** Scholastic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent. You are expected to have read and understood the current issue of the student handbook (published by student services) regarding student responsibilities and rights, and the intellectual property policy, for information about procedures and about what constitutes acceptable on-campus behavior. [This statement issued from HSS, Policy #6.36, Policies and Procedures.]

**ADA Statement:** Students with medical, psychological, learning, or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids will need to contact Southern Utah University Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), Room 206F of the Sharwin Smith Center, or phone (435) 865-8022. SSD determines eligibility for and authorizes the provision of services.

**Emergency Management:** In case of emergency, the University’s Emergency Notification System (ENS) will be activated. Students are encouraged to maintain updated contact information using the link on the homepage of the *mySUU* portal. In addition, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Emergency Response Protocols posted in each classroom. Detailed information about the University’s emergency management plan can be found at <http://www.suu.edu/emergency>

## Grading Standards:

A: 93-100	D+: 67-69
A-: 90-92	D: 63-66
B+: 87-89	D-: 60-62
B: 83-86	Fail: 00-59
B-: 80-82	
C+: 77-79	
C: 73-76	
C-: 70-72	

## Assignments:

Prompts	10 @ 25 each = 250
Memoir Project	100 points
Portrait/Biography Project	100 points
Essay of Place/Place Narrative Project	100 points
Discussion Leader	50 points
Final Portfolio	450 points
Participation	50 points
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Total points for the semester	= 1100 points
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## Schedule

**Schedule Disclaimer:** Please remain flexible with this schedule! With creative writing and a lot of reads, anything can happen during the course of the semester. It may be that we spend more time on a read or on your writing than was originally planned. Allow for this and be patient with the timetable. Thank you!

**Note:** Assignments listed on each particular date are due the next class period.

### Week One:

**Tues., August 23: In class:** Review syllabus. Share ideas about CNF and the problem of perceptual reality. **Assignment:** *Tell it Slant*: Introduction and Chapter One. Read also "Why I Write" and "But Tell it Slant," in *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, page 6-13. Prompt 1: Exercise on page 7 from "Why I Write," and any of the prompts listed on pages 12-16 in *Tell It Slant*.

**Thurs., August 25: In class:** Share prompts and discuss readings. **Assignment:** *Tell It Slant*, Chapter Two + “Researching Your Own Life,” in *Writing Creative Nonfiction*. Prompt 2: Choose any prompt on pages 22-24 from *Tell It Slant*.

#### **Week Two:**

**Tues., Aug. 30:** Share prompts, discuss readings. **Assignment:** *Tell It Slant*: Chap. Four + “The Woman Who Slept With One Eye Open,” by Judith Ortiz Cofer on page 182 in *Writing Creative Nonfiction*. Discussion leaders on Cofer. Prompt 3: Choose any prompt on page 45-6 in *Tell It Slant*.

**Thurs., Sept. 1: In class:** Share prompts+ Discussion leaders on the reading. **Assignment:** Chap. 8 in *Tell It Slant* + “Taking Yourself Out of the Story,” in *Writing CNF*. Be prepared to debate ethical considerations on writing CNF + discuss “narrative stance.”

#### **Week Three:**

**Tues., Sept. 6: In class:** Debate on CNF ethics and the problem of truth. (No. 1, page 90 in *Tell It Slant*.) Discussion on “narrative stance” + position of the “I” or Upright Pronoun. In class writing. “I” and “Tone.” **Assignment:** Chap. 9 in *Tell It Slant* + “Portrait of My Body,” by Philip Lopate on page 214 in *Writing CNF*. **Discussion leaders on Lopate’s story.** Prompt 4: page 104, #7 in *Tell It Slant*.

**Thurs., Sept. 8: Sept. 3: In class:** Discussion leaders. Share prompts. **Assignment:** *Absolutely True Diary*...to page 118. Bring 3 questions, typed, that you wish to bring before your peer group for discussion. 15 participation points (5 for each question.)

#### **Week Four:**

**Tues., Sept. 13: In class:** Discuss the reading, share insight and ideas. **Assignment:** Finish *Absolutely True Diary*...Create a visual using Alexie’s book for a model. Visual 1: A visual that relates to you—how you see yourself or a visual that represents an event in your life. Visual 2: Create a visual of someone in your family, such as Alexie’s representation of his parents, his sister, and his grandmother. 20 participation points. [10 for each visual.]

**Thurs., Sept. 15: In class:** Share visuals. Discuss book as effective Memoir. Tentative: Braithwaite Art Gallery, impact of visuals. **Assignment:** *Tell It Slant*, Chap. 12. Prompt 5: Choose any prompt on page 147-150.

#### **Week Five:**

**Tues., Sept. 20: In class:** Share prompts. **Assignment:** Reserve article from *Writing True*, “A Lighter Touch—or Other Ways to Tell a Story,” page 129-141. Prepare a first draft of your Memoir. **Bring 3 copies.**

**Thurs., Sept. 22: In class: Workshop on draft 1** + discuss the power of a dynamic opening/hook + visual incorporation ideas from “A Lighter Touch. **Assignment: Revise draft 1. Send me an electronic copy of the revised draft.**

**Week Six:**

**Tues., Sept. 27: In class: Workshop on draft 2. Assignment: *Writing True: 80-84*.** Ereserve. Check where you see yourself having the most problems. Bring for discussion. Continue working on Memoir drafts.

**Thurs., Sept. 29: In class: Discussion on WT, 80-84. Workshop on two student papers. Assignment: Prepare Memoir project + visual incorporations. Spiral bind, clear plastic cover front, colored plastic cover back. All drafts + rubric must be included.**

**Week Seven:**

**Tues., Oct. 4: In class: Due: Memoir Project. Reading. Assignment: Biography/Portrait: *Writing CNF: “As Time Goes By,” 67-84. Prompt 6:*** Journal response to chapter. Emotional + critical response, using examples from the reading to support your ideas. 3-4 pages, double-spaced.

**Thurs., Oct. 6: In class:** Share responses. Evita film clips. Discuss applications to Portrait. **Assignment: *Writing CNF: 85-96. Prompt 7:*** Writing to photographs, #1, page 96.

**Week Eight: Midterm [Handout on Final Project.] ☺**

**Tues., Oct. 11: In class:** Photographs! Writing from photos. In class writing. Impact of Visuals. Graphic novel, *Stictches*. **Assignment: *Mendel’s Daughter*** by Martin Lemelman. Read the entire graphic novel. Discussion leaders.

**Thurs., Oct. 13: In class: Discussion leaders.** Share responses to the reading. **Assignment: *The Immortal Life...to Chapter 13, page 93. Prompt 8:*** Write a journal response, 3-4 pages, using supportive examples from the text.

**Week Nine:**

**Tues., Oct. 18: No class. Fall Break.**

**Thurs., Oct. 20: In class:** Share journals. **Assignment: *Immortal Life...to Chap. 22.*** Bring 3 questions for consideration that you wish to bring before your peers. 15 participation points. [5 points each.]

**Week Ten:**

**Tues., Oct. 25: In class:** Discussion on *Immortal Life...* **Assignment:** *Immortal Life...* to Chapter 30. Discussion leaders.

**Thurs., Oct. 27: In class:** Discuss the book. **Assignment: Finish book.** Prompt 9: Write an “emotional reaction” to the book + implications for informing your own writing. What tools/techniques can you model? How can this writing serve as a model for your own writing overall?

#### **Week Eleven:**

**Tues., Nov. 1: In class:** Put the book to rest. Implications for Portrait/Biography. Discuss the interview. Tentative: Film, Pier Rats. **Assignment:** “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream,” in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, page 3-28. Read also the opening poem by Yeats.

**Thurs., Nov. 3: In class:** Discuss reading + poem. **Assignment:** Write draft 1 of Portrait/Biography. **Bring 3 copies.**

#### **Week Twelve:**

**Tues., Nov. 8: In class:** Workshop on Draft 1. **Assignment:** Revise draft 1. **Bring 3 copies. Send me an electronic copy of the revised draft.**

**Thurs., Nov. 10: In class:** Workshop on draft 2. **Assignment: Revise and polish. Incorporate visuals: photographs, collage, “Alexie’ish” visuals, other.**

#### **Week Thirteen:**

**Tues., Nov. 15:** Workshop on two student papers. **Assignment: Put together your Portrait/Biography Project. All drafts + rubric must be included**

**Thurs., Nov. 17: In class: Due: Portrait/Biography Project. Reading. Assignment: *Tell It Slant*, Chap. 3. Prompt 10: Choose any prompt on page 35-38. Read also: Ereserve: “Moments of Being: An Antarctic Quintet,” from *Writing True*. Highlight key lines that jump out at you in a sensory way—lines that take your breath away. Bring “Moments of Being” to class. Discussion leaders if some of you still have to do this.**

#### **Week Fourteen:**

**Tues., Nov. 22: In class:** Discuss “Moments of Being” and share prompts. **Assignment:** Read “Slouching Towards Bethlehem,” in the book of the same name by Joan Didion, page 83-128. Be prepared to discuss. [Discussion leaders if there are those that still need to do this.]

**Thurs., Nov. 24: No class. Thanksgiving break. 😊**

**Week Fifteen:**

**Tues., Nov. 29:** Discuss Didion's piece. Film: Summer of Love. **Assignment:** Draft 1 of Essay of Place, or Place Narrative. Bring 3 copies.

**Thurs., Dec 1:** Workshop on draft 1. **Assignment:** Revise Draft 1. Send me an electronic copy of the *revised* draft.

**Week Sixteen:**

**Tues., Dec. 6: In class:** Workshop on draft 2. **Assignment:** Revise & polish draft. Incorporate visuals as needed.

**Thurs., Dec. 8: In class:** Discuss final project. Workshop two student papers on Essay of Place. **Assignment: Revise, edit. Prepare final portfolio. Make a pdf of the final portfolio.**

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**Dec. 13: Final Projects due by 5:00.** I will be in my office so you can drop them by. If for some reason I am not in, there will be a box by my office door where you can put your final projects. [pdf versions will be due the same day.]

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Thank you for all your hard work, your writing, your efforts, and a wonderful semester with all of you!



**Merry Christmas!**