

**English 211**  
**Creative Nonfiction**  
**Mon./Wed., 10:20 to 11:30**  
**Memorial 301**  
**Spring 2010**

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**and by appointment**

As the college catalog states, English 211 is a course providing guided practice in public and personal essay writing. With that aim in mind, we will explore the genre of creative nonfiction and will prepare, in a workshop format, a range of essays. Our goals will be the following:

1. regular, scheduled writing (assigned essay drafts and revisions, responses to other students' work and assigned reading, etc.)
2. improved critical and editorial skills
3. knowledge of the work of successful nonfiction writers
4. awareness of current markets for nonfiction
5. production of publication-ready work and an actual submission by the course's end.

### **Required Texts**

- 1) B. Minh Nguyen and Porter Shreve, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: I & Eye*. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005.
- 2) Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. New York: HarperCollins, 2006 (although any edition will suffice). Paperback.
- 3) Strand, Ginger. *Inventing Niagara*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009. Paperback.
- 4) Handouts provided by instructor.

Plus cost of producing copies of one essay for entire class plus instructor at the course's end

### **Attendance and Academic Honesty**

This is a workshop-based writing course, which means that your attendance and active participation are crucial. Please arrive on time and prepared for every class session. You may be excused from one class session for legitimate academic, medical, or emergency reasons only; more than one absence, excused or unexcused, will result in an automatic lowering of your grade by one-third.

I certainly hope it goes without saying that any work you submit for this course must be your own; see the College's Academic Honesty policy in the Student Handbook on this issue. Writing for magazines and literary journals often calls for different forms of acknowledgement of sources (instead of traditional academic citations), but acknowledgement of sources remains a strict requirement. A consideration of the differences in forms of acknowledgement will be part of our work in this course.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

How long should your essays be? They should be as long as they need to be for you to say what you are trying to say. This is a vague answer, but as serious writers, you will understand (or come to understand) what this means. That said, you should get into the habit of

including an approximate word count on everything you submit for this class (because awareness of word counts is a vital part of writing professionally). You should also consider approximately 1,000 words (or 3 1/2-4 typed, double-spaced pages) as a reasonable minimum for most essays (with 1,500 words as a minimum for Essay #3).

Note that your effort to seek out, and incorporate, useful suggestions in response to drafts of your essays, along with the seriousness of your revision of these drafts, will be significant factors in my evaluation of your work. With that in mind, be sure to keep/save all drafts! Remember that English Track 3 (Writing) majors must submit formal portfolios of their work for various courses during the Spring semester of their junior year. If you are a Writing track major, then, you should get in the habit of retaining various drafts of assignments from all your writing classes.

The evaluative weight of the various assignments for this course, for grading purposes, will be as follows:

Beginning- and end-of-semester reports on magazines (5% each)	10%
Essays 1-4 (12.5% each)	50%
Final, fully revised essay, including cover letter for submission	15%
Editor's letters in response to other students' drafts (minimum 300 words each)	10%
Writer's responses to assigned reading (minimum 300 words), and occasional pop quizzes on essays of featured writers	10%
Participation:	5%
--Diligence in completing all assigned work (neatly, thoroughly, on time)	
--Attendance at at least one campus cultural event during first six weeks of the course (in connection with subsequent essay assignments)	
--Overall contribution to the class	

**A note on responses:** Your writer's responses to assigned reading must be a minimum of 300 words in length (they may be handwritten *if* your handwriting is legible!). One way to approach these responses would be to include your thoughts on the essay(s) from Nguyen and Shreve's *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction* (or handouts) you have chosen to focus on (you must respond to at least two) before and after reading the accompanying assignment on style and technique in Zinsser (on those occasions when you are assigned reading in both texts); in some cases, then, your response might be a kind of "dialogue" between the two texts used in this course (and on occasion, perhaps, between older and newer ideas about the writing of effective essays). Your editor's letters, or responses to other students' essay drafts (also a minimum of 300 words), might also draw on ideas and suggestions in Zinsser, as well as on our in-class discussions of particular issues of the craft of writing.

## Blackboard

I have set up a shell for this course on Blackboard, a virtual classroom where we can carry over discussions from class and begin new ones. I'll also post additional materials, announcements, comments, and the like here, so please check in to Blackboard at least once a day. I would also encourage you to post your own comments and start discussion threads yourself. You must enroll in Blackboard to participate ([blackboard.moravian.edu](http://blackboard.moravian.edu)). The password you'll need to enter is: Zinsser.

## Conferences and the Writing Center

While we will hold formally scheduled instructor conferences during Week 7, you are welcome--and encouraged--to schedule an individual conference or conferences with me at any time. You are also strongly urged to take advantage of the helpful feedback offered by the Writing Center tutors at any stage in your writing process. Writing Center hours will be posted during the second week of the semester.

## Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 18, Jan. 20): *What Is Creative Nonfiction?*

- Mon. Introductions (of ourselves and the course)  
Gutkind handout. *Oregonian* handout. Writing exercises  
Magazine report assignment
- Wed. *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction* (CCN): Introduction (1), Sanders (73);  
Gutkind handout. *Oregonian* handout.  
First reports on magazines from list provided by instructor (3-5 minutes; turn in written report [minimum 300 words])  
Assembling of groups

Week 2 (Jan. 25, Jan. 27): *Who Am I?: Memoir and the Personal Essay*

- Mon. Zinsser, chs. 11 and 14  
CCN: Wideman (43)  
Remaining magazine reports
- Wed. CCN: Sedaris (160), Kingston (302), Didion (340)  
Writer's response to reading due  
In-class writing

Week 3 (Feb. 1, Feb. 3): *Workshop Week*

- Mon. Essay #1 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy of essay to instructor and also post essay on Blackboard.
- Wed. Zinsser, chs. 1-3; craft discussion  
Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts  
Editor's letters due to writers and instructor

Week 4 (Feb. 8, Feb. 10): *Where Am I?: Close Observation of Place*

- Mon. Zinsser, ch. 13; CCN: Ehrlich (209)  
In-class writing
- Wed. Final Essay #1 due  
CCN: Dybek (92), McPhee (117), Vowell (130)  
Writer's response to reading due  
Discussion of issues of craft (from Zinsser, editor's letters, reading responses, etc.)

Week 5 (Feb. 15, Feb. 17): *Workshop Week*

- Mon. Essay #2 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy of essay to instructor and also post essay on Blackboard .
- Wed. Zinsser, chs. 4-7; craft discussion  
Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts  
Editor's letters due to writers and instructor

Week 6 (Feb. 22, Feb. 24): *What Do I Know/What Have I Learned?: The Research-Based Essay*

Mon. Zinsser, ch. 12; Strand, *Inventing Niagara* (1-8)

*Grave Matters* (handout)

In-class writing

Wed. Final Essay #2 due

Strand, *Inventing Niagara* (45-75)

Writer's response to reading due

Proposed topics for Essay #3 due

Week 7 (Mar. 1 no class, Mar. 3): *Conferences and Research Session in Reeves Library*

Mon.-Fri.: Conferences with instructor; required for this conference: research plan (in writing), plus rough preliminary outline for Essay #3

Wed. Required research session in Reeves Library

*Spring Break*

Week 8 (Mar. 15, Mar. 17): *Workshop Week*

Mon. Essay #3 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy of essay to instructor and also post essay on Blackboard

Wed. Zinsser, chs. 8-9; craft discussion

Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts

Editor's letters due to writers and instructor

Week 9 (Mar. 22, Mar. 24): *Tastes, Standards, Values: The Arts of Criticism and Critique*

Mon. Zinsser ch. 18; CCN: Gilb, (152), Williams (236).

"Led Zeppelin's Return" (handout)

Writer's response to reading due

In-class writing

Wed. Final Essay #3 due

Criticism/critique essay drafts discussed in small groups

Week 10 (Mar. 29, Mar. 31): *Beyond the Boundaries of the Traditional Essay*

Mon. CCN: Earley (17), Cofer (83), Toth (173), Atwood (288)

Writer's response to reading due

Editor's letters due to writers and instructor

Wed. Nontraditional essay drafts discussed in small groups

Week 11 (No class April 5. Class on April 7): *Choosing Essay #4*

Wed. Editor's letters due to writers and instructor

Zinsser, chs. 20-22; recap of reading from Weeks 9 and 10

Discussion of issues of craft (from Zinsser, editor's letters, reading responses, etc.)

Featured writers turn in hardcopy of criticism/critique or nontraditional essay to instructor and also post criticism/critique or essay on Blackboard.

Week 12 (Apr. 12, Apr. 14): *Final Essays*

- Mon. Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts
- Wed. Final Essay #4 (criticism/critique or nontraditional) due, along with (a) written explanation/justification for choice of which essay to revise and submit for a grade and (b) draft(s) of essay that was *not* chosen.  
Bring Essays 1, 2, and 3--for in-class writing in preparation for choosing which essay to revise/expand as final essay.

Week 13 (Apr. 19, Apr. 21): *Expanding, Refining, Submitting: The Final Essay*

- Mon. Zinsser, chs. 23-24  
Pairs or small groups to discuss final essay drafts
- Wed. Final revised essay due, with copies to be distributed to all class members  
Discussion of cover/query letters and submitting work to magazines  
Assignment for final magazine report

Week 14 (Apr. 26, Apr. 28): *Wrapping Up*

- Mon. Final magazine reports and cover/query letters
- Wed. Course evaluations

Final Exams Week: Required participation in either full-class reading.

## Notes on Workshop Format

We will have both small-group and full-class workshop sessions. Here is how workshop weeks (when drafts of assigned essays are due) will work.

On Mondays, when drafts are due, students will meet in groups of 3-4, read their drafts, and get immediate feedback. At the end of the class session, each student will exchange his or her draft with another student, who will prepare an editor's letter in response to that draft for Wednesday.

On Wednesday, one writer from each of the small groups will be a featured writer, which means that he/she will have his/her work presented during a full-class workshop session that day. (Students will sign up for their scheduled times as featured writers at the beginning of the course). Featured writers' drafts will be presented and discussed, primarily, by the writers of editor's letters for these students; small group members will be encouraged to contribute to the presentation/discussion as well, and the instructor will also have read and prepared notes on the featured essays.

Thus, you will receive in-class feedback plus one written response from your small group for each of the first five essay drafts you write; you will also receive more detailed feedback from your instructor for one of those essays. **Note, then, that you should always bring *two copies of your essay draft during the first day of workshop weeks--one for yourself (on which you should take notes during the small-group discussion), and one for the group member who is to respond to your draft. In addition, during the week when you are a featured writer, you must bring an additional copy for the instructor and post your essay on Blackboard.***

Your responsibility on workshop weeks, then, is as follows:

**Monday:** Come to class with two copies of your assigned essay draft (one for your small group members, one for yourself). If you have signed up to be a featured writer for the week, bring an additional copy for the instructor and post your essay on Blackboard. Read and respond to drafts within your group; exchange your draft with one other group member.

**Wednesday:** Come to class with a written response (editor's letter) to the draft you took home on Wednesday. If you responded to the work of a featured writer, lead the full-class presentation/ discussion of the essay you took home.