

English 211: Creative Nonfiction Writing
Spring 2013

Dr. Joel Wingard
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Course description and objectives

This course will explore “the essay” as a genre as well as provide focused study of the developing field of *creative nonfiction*. Through guided practice in a workshop setting, students will work on producing a number of complete creative nonfiction works. Course goals will be the following:

- 1. improved critical awareness of the work of successful nonfiction writers;**
- 2. improved critical and editorial skills;**
- 3. awareness of current markets for nonfiction and work toward a publication-ready essay and actual submission by semester’s end.**

These goals will be achieved through your effort and engagement in these approaches:

- 1. regular, scheduled reading (from the books assigned below as well as your own writing and the writing of a small group of your classmates);**
- 2. regular, scheduled writing (assigned essay drafts and revisions, reflective analysis of your own writing and writing process) and a writer’s notebook (including responses to other students’ work and to published essays; notes on readings; notes toward writing).**

Writing-intensive

ENGL 211 is one of the English Department’s designated Writing-Intensive courses. As such, it satisfies one half of the Department’s WI requirements for majors.¹ The College’s criteria for WI courses are these:

- at least 25 pages of writing is required of and produced by the student
- at least 50% of the course grade must derive from writing assignments
- a deliberate approach to writing as a process²
- the provision of models of the disciplinary genres you are expected to practice and produce yourself.³

¹ All English majors must take ENGL225, which also carries WI designation. The major requirement of a second WI course may be satisfied by this course, ENGL212, or ENGL215.

² Understood as requiring time, multiple drafts, intervention and help from other readers (in turn understood as classmates, your instructor, and Writing Center tutors, all of whom will take your writing seriously and respond critically with the intention of improving your (and others’) writing).

³ i.e., most if not all of the assigned readings.

Required texts

Root, Robert L. Jr., and Michael Steinberg, eds., *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*, 6th ed. New York: Longman, 2012.
Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*, 30th Anniversary ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.⁴

Assignments and evaluation

Grades are important, but more so from student and institutional perspectives. While you will receive grades in this course, I encourage you to consider your work more as *writers* than as students. To that end, much of this course will be about practice, habits and discipline. Action produces motivation or “inspiration” more often than the other way around, and writers write as their action.

You will **keep a writer’s notebook** all semester in what should become a habit throughout your writing courses and your writing career. Here, you will collect in- and out-of-class writing of various kinds: responses to the work of other writers, both students and professionals; notes or other rough “brainstorming” writing toward essay ideas or on observations or from interviews or research. Please devote one notebook to this class alone and always bring it to class. I will check it randomly but not grade it until the end of the semester.⁵

You will **develop 4 essays** from germinal ideas in your notebook to revised “finished” products. As a culminating project, you will **revise 1** of these to **submit somewhere for publication**. This revision will involve your study of publication markets for creative nonfiction.

For grades, the weight of assignments will be as follows:

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| 1. Essays 1-4 | 15% each, 60% altogether |
| 2. Essay 5 w/ query/cover letter | 20% |
| 3. Writer’s notebook (including attendance) | 20% |

To emphasize that, in the long run, your writing *process* is as important as your written products, **for each essay, I will grade your process at 60% and your final product at 40%.**

You will also be required to do much reading – *about* writing for publication in general and creative nonfiction in particular, *examples* of creative nonfiction, and a group of your classmates’ essays-in-process. Reading assignments and a rough schedule for workshops and essay due dates are listed below, pp. 5-6.

Attendance

As a student in a workshop-based course, your attendance and active participation are crucial. Please arrive on time and prepared for every class meeting. Once groups are organized, please sit adjacent to your partners. Have any assigned reading or writing ready to be looked at again⁶. You may be excused from up to three class meetings for legitimate academic, medical, or emergency reasons only; **more than three unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your grade by 1/3 per absence. Missing more than two workshops, excused or unexcused, will result in a lowering of your grade by 1/3 per absence.**

⁴ although almost any edition of this book will do

⁵ As an alternative to paper and pen(cil)), you may use a laptop or thinkpad for this purpose, as long you save files to send me for reading.

⁶ Laptops or notebooks are permitted, even encouraged.

Academic Honesty

The Moravian College policy on academic honesty is quoted in the paragraphs below. In addition to complying with College policies, however, students in a writing course such as this must be ethical about their own and others' writing. Although creative writers do have license in using literal or factual truth, the writing you do in this course must be accurate and all sources must be attributed, if not necessarily formally cited, as academic writing is. There is another dimension to this in creative nonfiction particularly, which we will study in the first week's assignment.⁷

Moravian College expects its students to perform their academic work honestly and fairly. A Moravian student, moreover, should neither hinder nor unfairly assist the efforts of other students to complete their work successfully. This policy of academic integrity is the foundation on which learning at Moravian is built.

The College's expectations and the consequences of failure to meet these expectations are outlined below. If at any point in your academic work at Moravian you are uncertain about your responsibility as a scholar or about the propriety of a particular action, consult your instructor.

All work that you submit or present as part of course assignments or requirements must be your original work unless otherwise expressly permitted by the instructor. This includes any work presented, be it in written, oral, or electronic form or in any other technical or artistic medium. When you use the specific thoughts, ideas, writings, or expressions of another person, you must accompany each instance of use with some form of attribution to the source. Direct quotes from any source (including the Internet) must be placed in quotation marks (or otherwise marked appropriately) and accompanied by proper citation, following the preferred bibliographic conventions of your department or instructor. It is the instructor's responsibility to make clear to all students in his or her class the preferred or required citation style for student work. Student ignorance of bibliographic convention and citation procedures is not a valid excuse for having committed plagiarism. When you use the specific thoughts, ideas, writing, or expressions of another person, you must accompany each instance of use with some form of attribution to the source⁸.

You may not collaborate during an in-class examination, test, or quiz. You may not work with others on out-of-class assignments, exams, or projects unless expressly allowed or instructed to do so by the course instructor. If you have any reservations about your role in working on any out-of-class assignments, you must consult with your course instructor.⁹

You may not use writing or research that is obtained from a "paper service" or that is purchased from any person or entity, unless you fully disclose such activity to the instructor and are given express permission.

You may not use writing or research obtained from any other student previously or currently enrolled at Moravian or elsewhere or from the files of any student organization, such as fraternity or sorority files, unless you are expressly permitted to do so by the instructor.

⁷ In preparation for creating an English Major Portfolio in your senior capstone seminar, please save both digital and hard copies of your work for this class, including drafts with peer and instructor comments.

⁸ These last two points are seriously in question if not now false regarding plagiarism. Discussion of the use of the words and ideas of others and of academic and other citation requirements will be an important issue in this course.

⁹ Although no students in your class or in the Writing Center should ever be allowed to write your paper for you, in this course they are *required* to read your work and to offer suggestions for improving it. Such collaboration is a natural part of a community of writers.

You must keep all notes, drafts, and materials used in preparing assignments until a final course grade is given. In the case of work in electronic form, you may be asked to maintain all intermediate drafts and notes electronically or in hard copy until final grades are given. All these materials must be available for inspection by the instructor at any time.

Statement on disabilities:

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Ms. Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street, at 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Office of Learning Services. Students are also encouraged, yet not required, to inform course faculty of those situations that can affect academic performance. Resources may be available to aid students who are experiencing academic difficulty. It is important to contact the office as soon as possible to enhance the likelihood that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. Any student who wishes to disclose a disability and request accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for this course first MUST meet with either Mrs. Laurie Roth in the Office of Learning Services (for learning disabilities and/or ADD/ADHD) or Dr. Ronald Kline in the Counseling Center (for all other disabilities).

The Writing Center

The Writing Center, on the second floor of Zinzendorf Hall, is there to support the efforts of all writers at Moravian College. The tutors there are students who are good, experienced writers and who are professionally trained to help you improve your writing. They will go over an essay draft with you and guide your understanding of how you might improve that draft. You could also drop by to pick up some of the free handouts on virtually every part of writing: getting started, writing a thesis, developing paragraphs, eliminating wordiness, using commas, and the like. The Writing Center is generally open Monday-Thursday afternoons and Sunday evenings after the third week of the semester. The Writing Center is in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392.¹⁰

¹⁰ My office is in the same building as the Writing Center, so the same applies to conferences or impromptu meetings there. Except that my office number is 610-861-1511.

Assignment Schedule

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| Week I M 1/14 - F 1/18 | Introductions Forming writing groups What is creative nonfiction and how might it be written? <i>Zinsser</i> : chapters 1-7 and 11 <i>Fourth Genre</i> : Introduction: “Creative Nonfiction: The Fourth Genre” (pp. xxiii-xxxvii); Part 1: “Writing Creative Nonfiction” (pp. 1-2), Part 2: “Talking About Creative Nonfiction” (pp. 241-42) Essays from Part 1 by Beard (pp. 3-7); Part 2 by Bartkevicius (pp. 243-49) and Gornick (pp. 261-63) |
| Week II W 1/23 - F 1/25 | The personal essay <i>Zinsser</i> : chapters 14 and 24 <i>Fourth Genre</i> : Essays from Part 2 by Blew (pp. 250-53), Hampl (pp. 264-73), Steinberg (pp. 333-36) and Winograd (pp. 342-43); from Part 1 by Hampl (pp. 91-94), Gornick (pp. 87-90) and Winograd (pp. 237-39) |
| Week III M 1/28 - F 2/1 | Workshopping the personal essay |
| Week IV M 2/4 - F 2/8 | Publishing venues for creative nonfiction <i>Writers Market</i> and “M’TPCNF” (handouts) Looking around you and writing <i>Zinsser</i> : Chapter 13 <i>Fourth Genre</i> : Essays from Part 2 by Klaus (pp. 296-307) and Miller (pp. 308-14); from Part 1 by Montgomery-Fate (pp. 147-50), Sanders (pp. 188-93) and Schwartz (pp. 194-201) Essay #1 due ¹¹ |
| Week V M 2/11 - F 2/15 | Workshopping the ‘place’ essay |
| Week VI M 2/18 - F 2/22 | Reporting and writing <i>Zinsser</i> : chapters 8, 9, and 12 <i>Fourth Genre</i> : Essays by Caudron (pp. 35-45), Lord (pp. 115-17), and McPhee (pp. 128-36) Essay #2 due |

¹¹ For each essay, you must submit a final draft in both print and digital formats, and all drafts, critiques, Writer’s Notebook entries, and exploratory writing. Details for each submission will follow sequentially.

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| Week VII M 2/25 - F 3/1 | Writer's Notebook check Planning for creative reportage essay; Conferences ¹² <i>Zinsser</i> : Chapter 10 <i>Fourth Genre</i> : Essay by Morano (pp. 151-61) |
| Spring break Sa 3/2 - Su 3/10 | |
| Week VIII M 3/11- F 3/15 | Workshopping the creative reportage essay Critiquing your own writing, Part I <i>Zinsser</i> : chapters 20-21 |
| Week IX M 3/18 - F 3/22 | Essay #3 due Bending/Breaking the rules <i>Fourth Genre</i> : Essays from Part 2 by Root (pp. 318-29); from Part 1 by Braner (pp. 29-30), Ortiz Cofer (pp. 54-60), and Marquart (pp. 118-19); from Part 3 by Pope (pp. 447-52 and 453-60); from Part 2 by Huber (pp. 276-77); from Part 1 by Biss/Bresland (pp. 8-11 and at http://www.requiredjournal.com/index.php?/form/eula-biss-and-john-bresland/), Bresland (pp. 31-34 and at http://www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v4n1/gallery/bresland/intro.htm); and Wingard at http://www.rhetorman.com . |
| Week X M 3/25 - R 3/28 | Workshopping the experimental essay |
| Week XI T 4/2 - F 4/5 | Essay #4 due |
| Week XII M 4/8 - F 4/12 | Critiquing your own writing, Part II <i>Zinsser</i> : chapters 22-23 Submitting work for publication |
| Week XIII M 4/15 - F 4/19 | Workshopping a publishable piece of creative nonfiction and writing cover/query letters |
| Week XIV M 4/22 - F 4/26 | Essay #5 and cover/query letter due Course evaluations |
| Finals Week M 4/29 – F 5/3 | In lieu of a final exam, Writer's Notebooks will be due for submission. |

¹² Conferences will run Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday this week and will be held in my office in Zinzendorf Hall unless other arrangements are made.