

**English 211: Creative Nonfiction**  
**Spring 2014. Memorial 301. Tue./Thur. 10:20-11:30**

**Mark Harris**

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**Office Hours: Thurs., 12:15 to 1:15 and by appointment**

**Course Description**

This workshop-based course introduces you the genre of creative nonfiction in its many forms – including the personal essay, literary journalism, and memoir. It also offers instruction on how to analyze the work of successful practitioners and to write your own.

In this course, you will:

- Read the works of successful nonfiction writers
- Study the craft and techniques of the genre
- Work to improve your critical and editorial skills
- Write short works of creative nonfiction

**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) Handouts provided by instructor.

**Attendance and Academic Honesty**

Your attendance and active participation are crucial, for both the success of this course and for your final grade. You may be excused from one class session for a legitimate academic, medical, or emergency reason; more than two absences will result in an automatic lowering of your grade.

Any work you submit for this course must be your own. The College's Academic Honesty policy in the Student Handbook is very clear on this issue, and will be enforced: "All work that students submit or present as part of course assignments or requirements must be their own original work."

If you need special accommodation to participate in this course and/or access the classroom, please contact Learning Support Services and/or Disability Support Services.

**Assignments and Evaluation**

You will write four major works for this course. They will account for the majority of your final grade. The papers should be roughly between 1,000 to 1,500 words in length (about 3.5 to 5 pages, double-spaced). Please include a word count on any piece of writing you produce for this course. Include all previous drafts, peer responses, and revisions when you submit your final paper.

Papers must be handed in at the beginning of class on the date they are due. I will accept only

hardcopies – not digital submissions -- of your papers. Please DO NOT email me your work.

In order to help ensure that you come to class ready to engage in a lively and informed discussion, I am asking that you prepare a writer's response to the assigned texts. Responses should be at least 300 words in length. I will provide you with a prompt, either in class or via Blackboard. Due dates are noted in the syllabus.

Your response paper is due at the beginning of class. On the right hand corner of your paper, please write your name, the date the assignment is due, the title of the work you're writing about, and a word count. You will also write three editor's letters, whose due dates are noted in the syllabus. Letters must be handed in at the beginning of that day's class.

In assigning a grade to your work, I will consider the following: a) the strength of your argument and the effectiveness with which you communicate it, b) elements of style and grammar, and c) the extent to which you consider and incorporate useful comments from your workshop peers and from my edits to your early drafts. Work turned in late will be given a lower grade.

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

Essays 1-4	50%
Final, fully revised essay, including cover letter for submission	15%
Editor's letters in response to other students' drafts (minimum 300 words each)	15%
Writer's responses to assigned reading (minimum 300 words),	15%
Participation:	5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diligence in completing all assigned work (neatly, thoroughly, on time)</li> <li>• Attendance at one campus cultural event during the first eight weeks of the course (in connection with an essay assignment)</li> <li>• Active, vocal contribution to the class</li> </ul>	

### **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: McPhee.

### **Conferences and the Writing Center**

We will hold formally scheduled conferences during week 7. However, you are welcome -- and encouraged -- to schedule an individual conference or conferences with me at any time. I also strongly urge you to take advantage of the helpful feedback offered by the Writing Center tutors at any stage in your writing process. The Writing Center is located 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. Writing Center hours will be posted during the second week of the semester.

**Schedule of Readings**  
(subject to change)

Week 1 (Jan. 14, Jan. 16): *What Is Creative Nonfiction?*

- Tue. Introductions (of ourselves and the course)  
Gutkind handout. *Oregonian* handout. *Morning Call* handout.
- Thur. *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction* (CCN): Introduction (1),  
Gutkind and *Oregonian* handouts. *Morning Call* handout.  
Writer's response to reading due

Week 2 (Jan. 21, Jan. 23): *Who Am I?: Memoir and the Personal Essay*

- Tue. Zinsser, chs. 11 and 14  
CCN: Wideman (43); Sedaris (160); Sanders (73)  
Writer's response to reading due
- Thur. CCN: Kingston (302); Didion (340); Raban (140)  
Writer's response to reading due

Week 3 (Jan. 28, Jan. 30): *Workshop Week*

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

Week 4 (Feb. 4, Feb. 6) *Where Am I?: Close Observation of Place*

- Tue. Zinsser, ch. 13; CCN: Ehrlich (209); Lee (95)  
Writer's response to reading due
- Thur. Final Essay #1 due  
CCN: Dybek (92), McPhee (117), Vowell (130)  
Writer's response to reading due

Week 5 (Feb. 11, Feb. 13) *Workshop Week*

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

Week 6 (Feb. 18, Feb. 20): *What Do I Know?: The Research-Based Essay*

- Tue. Zinsser, ch. 12. CCN: Gawande (245); Ehrenreich (345)  
*Grave Matters* (handout)  
Writer's response to reading due
- Thur. Final Essay #2 due  
CCN: Ackerman (242), Gould (253)  
Writer's response to reading due

Week 7 (Feb. 25, Feb. 27): *Conferences*

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

*Spring Break: March 3 – March 7*

Week 8 (Mar. 11, Mar. 13): *Workshop Week*

- Tue. Essay #3 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy of essay to instructor and also post essay on Blackboard
- Thur. Zinsser, chs. 8-9; craft discussion  
Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts  
Editor's letters due to writers and instructor

Week 9 (Mar. 18, Mar. 20): *Tastes, Standards, Values: The Arts of Criticism and Critique*

- Tue. Zinsser ch. 18; CCN: Gilb, (152); Williams (236); “Led Zeppelin’s Return” (handout);  
Writer’s response to readings due
- Thur. CCN: Orleans (52); Reviews (handout)  
Writer’s response to reading due

Week 10 (Mar. 25, Mar. 27): *Beyond the Boundaries of the Traditional Essay*

- Tue. CCN: Earley (17), Cofer (83),  
Writer’s response to reading due
- Thur. CCN: Toth (173), Atwood (288).  
Zinsser, chs. 23-24

Week 11 (Apr. 1, Apr. 3): *Workshop Week*

- Tue. Essay #4 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy of essay to instructor and also post essay on Blackboard
- Thur. Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts.  
Editor’s letters due to writers and instructor  
Zinsser, chs. 20-22;

Week 12 (Apr. 8, Apr. 10) Final Essay *Expanding, Refining, Submitting: The Final Essay*

- Tue. Bring Essays 1, 2, and 3 for in-class writing in preparation for choosing which essay to revise/expand as final essay.
- Thur. Final Essay #4 due  
Discussion of query letters and submitting work to publishers

Week 13 (Apr. 15, Apr. 17): *Workshop Week*

- Tue. Essay #4 drafts discussed in small groups. Featured writers turn in hardcopy of essay to instructor and also post essay on Blackboard;
- Thur. Full-class discussion of featured writers' drafts.  
Editor’s letters due to writers and instructor

Week 14 (Apr. 22, Apr. 24): *Final Essays*

- Tue. Presentations of publishing venues and query letters
- Thur. Final Essay #4 due  
Course evaluations

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 Tuesdays, 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 Thursday.

On Thursday, 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:

Tuesday: 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.

Thursday: 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.