

English 211: Creative Nonfiction
Monday and Wednesday 8:55-10:05 AM, PPHAC 112

Professor: Dr. Crystal N. Fodrey

Office: Zinzendorf 307

Office Hours: M 10:30 – 11:30 AM, T 1:00 – 4:00 PM, W 10:30 – 11:30, or by appointment

E-mail: fodreyc@moravian.edu (Note: I do not respond to emails 4 PM Friday to 8 AM Monday)

Course Web Site: <https://blackboard.moravian.edu> (for downloads and announcements) and <https://classroom.google.com/c/MjA5MjU0Mzla> (for writing submissions; enter code phropl6 to join)

Telephone: 610-861-1511

Course Description

Official Description from Course Catalog:

Guided practice in public and personal essay writing. Workshop setting.

Professor's elaboration of official description:

What does a piece of creative nonfiction (CNF) do that a “traditional” academic essay or newspaper article or personal narrative might not? While we will explore many answers to that question over the next few months, I’d like to offer my preliminary answer now, as my answer guided me in the development of this course: CNF takes risks with content, form, and style. It delights readers as it informs and possibly persuades them. It refuses to deny the existence of a fallible and uncertain self behind the words, and it upholds truth and memory and the fascinating idiosyncrasies of individual experience. It journeys via paragraphs comprised of captivating sentences from the self into the world and must ultimately be written for that world, not the self alone, to consume. Editor of *Creative Nonfiction Magazine*, Lee Gutkind, says that the best CNF has the potential to “communicate ideas, germinate wisdom, and create change.” My hope for this course is that we strive toward such goals together with the writing we produce.

We begin this semester studying the craft of the CNF genre, a genre that, according to scholar Bronwyn Williams, “bring[s] together the relating of events, people, and places that are the province of journalists, historians, and biographers, with the narrative techniques and lyrical tools of novelists and poets.” Throughout the semester, you will have the opportunity to draft pieces of various lengths in various CNF sub-genres—especially memoir, place/nature writing, personal essay/cultural criticism, and immersion/literary journalism—for various audiences, purposes, and potential publication spaces. To generate ideas for your writing and engage in CNF craft exercises, you will keep an invention journal on Google Drive. To expand your understanding of what CNF is and can be, you will write and present a review of any book-length work of CNF that you choose. And you will work on improving your writing and constructively critiquing the writing of your peers through participation in group workshops and a dedication to constant revision. The semester will culminate with a portfolio of your completed, revised nonfiction prose.

Writing Intensive Learning Practices

1. Students respond in writing to all assignments.
2. Students participate in class discussions, workshops, and oral presentations.
3. Students routinely evaluate themselves in writing for each draft of an essay.
4. Students analyze and write personally situated, narrative-privileging, literarily stylized, fact-based prose in various creative nonfiction sub-genres.
5. Students practice making diverse writing choices (i.e., styles and modes of discourse).
6. Students are responsible for their own writing choices.
7. Students collaborate in drafting workshops.
8. Students edit and polish all essays before submitting final drafts.

9. Students produce a project that uses multiple forms of research.
10. Students receive feedback in numerous ways, such as margin comments, conferences, audio files, final evaluative portfolios, and traditional grading practices.

Required Texts

Biss, Eula. *Notes from No Man's Land*. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf P, 2009.

Bradbury, Becky and, Doug Hesse, eds. *Creating Nonfiction: A Guide and Anthology*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2009.

Gutkind, Lee, and Hattie Fletcher. *True Stories Well Told*. Pittsburg, PA: In Fact Books, 2014.

Root, Robert. *The Nonfictionist's Guide: On Reading and Writing Creative Nonfiction*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

Sullivan, John Jeremiah, ed. *The Best American Essays 2014*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.

Other assigned readings to be downloaded from our Blackboard course site.

Recommended and Referenced Websites

Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies (scholarly journal— <http://www.assayjournal.com/>)

Brevity (literary journal—<http://www.creativenonfiction.org/brevity/>)

Center for Digital Storytelling (<http://www.storycenter.org/index1.html>)

Creative Nonfiction (literary journal— <http://www.creativenonfiction.org/>)

New Pages—<http://www.newpages.com/> site indexing and reviewing small literary journals, writing contests, and conferences.

Other recommended texts and websites will be added to Blackboard throughout the semester.

Course Evaluation, Assignments, and Grades

It is within the instructor's purview to apply qualitative judgment in determining grades for any assignments and for the final course grade. Grades will consider the following aspects of writing, in the context of a particular assignment: purpose, audience, content, organization, development of ideas, style, ethos, document design, mechanics/readability, and maturity of thought.

The following table lists all assignments and their point values. Required assignments that carry no point values (i.e., drafts) must be completed in order for you to receive full credit for the unit and the course.

Assignment	Points
Short Essay #1 – Memoir emphasis	5
Short Essay #2 – Place/nature emphasis	5
Short Essay #3 – Personal essay/ cultural critique emphasis	5
Short Essay #4 – Immersion/literary journalism emphasis	5
Invention Journal (ongoing)	15
Workshop Response Letters (ongoing)	10
Review of CNF Book	7.5
Presentation of Book Review	2.5
Participation	10
Final Portfolio (includes):	35
Introductory Essay/Cover Letter	Required
Expanded Essay #1 (Braided/Segmented)	Required

Expanded Essay #2 (if expanded essay #1 is less than 16-20 pages)	Required
Revised Short Essay #1	Required
Revised Short Essay #2 (to submit for publication)	Required
Total Points Possible	100

To earn an A in this course, you must accumulate at least 93.5 points; for an A-, 89.5 points; for a B+, 86.5 points; for a B, 83.5 points; for a B-, 79.5 points; for a C+, 76.5 points; for a C, 73.5 points; for a C-, 69.5 points; for a D+, 66.5 points; for a D, 63.5 points; and for a D-, 59.5 points. Please turn in all assignments, even if you believe they are poorly done. The difference between an F grade and 0 is that F carries points toward the final points and is assigned for something turned in, while a 0 carries no points and is assigned when no assignment is submitted.

In this course you will practice writing in multiple sub-genres of CNF, each with multiple drafts. Invention journal entries, workshop response letters, and the book review and presentation are meant to provide additional outlets for response, brainstorming, drafting, and delivery of ideas related to the topic of the course.

- **Flash Essays #1-#4**, each worth 5 points (5%) of your grade, give you approximately 1000 words to practice the craft of four different sub-genres of CNF—including, but not limited to memoir (#1), place/nature (#2), personal essay/cultural critique (#3), and immersion/literary journalism (#4). These will be completed in the first half of the semester as we work toward a greater understanding of the expansiveness of the CNF genre.
- The **Invention Journal**, worth 15 points (15%) of your grade, will help you develop your understanding of CNF craft conventions through homework assignments focusing on craft analyses of published CNF works, craft exercises asking you to practice certain stylistic elements of CNF, research activities, brainstorming/idea generation activities, and drafting. Each assigned entry in this journal is pass/fail, and you get out of it what you put into it. The invention journal will be kept as one file on Google Drive and shared only with Dr. Fodrey, who will check it and comment on it periodically throughout the semester. **Note:** You should always keep the journal up to date because I will not tell you when I will be checking your journal for credit.
- **Workshop Response Letters**, worth a total of 10 points (10%) of your grade, are written throughout the semester to peers on their workshop days. This ongoing assignment asks you to reflect critically and contentiously about your peers' work so that your peers receive substantive feedback in writing and verbally during full class workshops. Students in the class will be divided into four groups, and each of those groups will be responsible for turning in completed drafts on specific days and writing response letters to either their group members (first half of semester) or members of other assigned groups (second half of semester). More information about this assignment will be forthcoming in class.
- The **CNF Book Review and Presentation**, worth 7.5 points (7.5%) and 2.5 points (2.5%) respectively, ask you to apply your knowledge of CNF craft and critique in order to write and present a thoughtful review of a book-length work of CNF. The book you choose is entirely up to you, but I will provide links to lists of more "canonical," influential works of CNF on Blackboard to help you make that choice. Students will present during Week 10 of the semester (after spring break), and written book reviews are due the day of your scheduled presentation.
- The **Final Portfolio**, worth 35 points (35%) of your grade, will be comprised of a variety of expanded, re-written, re-envisioned, and revised versions of the short essays completed during the first half of the semester. One of these works will be a braided essay, which we will work on at length during the second half of the semester. Other pieces may include a graphic or multimodal nonfiction piece, a short essay expanded into a blog concept . . . the sky is the limit. However, the portfolio must include the following:

- An introductory/cover letter in which you provide context for what you have included in the portfolio.
- A braided essay, which will likely come from a concept or concepts with which you worked for one or more of the short essays.
- If your braided essay is under 16-20 pages, you will need to expand another one of your short essays to at least 10 pages in length and include this as well.
- Two revised short essays—not necessarily expanded, just improved—with at least one revised to the point where you feel comfortable submitting it for possible publication in an undergraduate literary journal (or elsewhere).

The individual point break-down of the final portfolio will depend on what you include and how you have assessed your work in the cover letter.

- **Participation:** 10 points (10%) of your total grade count for participation. Participation has many aspects. Participation includes contributing to discussions, asking questions, taking notes, writing when asked to write, listening, respecting your peers and me, responding thoughtfully to your peers' writing, and anything else that shows you are actively engaged in the course. Expect to have written homework due for every class. **It is due whether or not you are in class.**
 - Anytime you use your phone for non-class-related reasons or sleep, it will result in **.5 point** deduction from your participation grade.
 - **Anytime you fail to turn in work on its due date**
 - You will lose **1 point** for not having formal writing (drafts, book review, and all major assignments listed in table) and
 - **.5 points** for not having informal writing (invention journal entries and workshop response letters) when I ask you to bring them to class for discussion.
 - In accordance with the attendance policy listed below, excessive absences will be deducted from your participation grade until you run out of participation points.
 - In the event you lose all 10 participation points, you will start losing additional points from your final grade. It is possible to fail the course due to missing work, late work, and absences.

Course Policies

Academic Honesty

All Moravian students are responsible for upholding the academic honesty policy detailed in the [Student Handbook](#), which I highly suggest that you read. You must do your own writing for all the assignments in this course and have a full understanding of all terms and concepts you have used. If I question whether the work you have submitted is your own, I may test you on its content. Additionally, the use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly and consistently documented using styles common to published creative nonfiction.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Creative Nonfiction is a course that includes engaged discussion, in-class writing, large and small group workshops, and conferences. Therefore, students should not be late and should not miss class. Any in-class work missed as a result of tardiness or unexcused absence cannot be made up. Students enrolled in this course cannot miss more than a week of classes—two class meetings—without penalty. For each class meeting missed thereafter, your final course grade will be reduced by 2%.

All holidays or special events observed by organized religions will be honored for those students who show affiliation with that particular religion. A dean's note or other official Moravian College document justifies absences for Moravian functions but must be presented to me *before* the scheduled event. Doctor's

appointments, job interviews, and other important appointments do not count as excused absences. If you have a legitimate conflict or an extreme emergency, discuss the situation with me.

Submitting your Work

- In-class and out-of-class writing will be assigned throughout the course. Students not in class when writing is assigned are still responsible for completion of the assignment when due.
- It is your responsibility to submit your work to Google Drive by the published assignment deadline.
- It is your responsibility to submit the correct version of your assignment.
- Students are required to keep additional, saved copies of all drafts and major assignments until after the end of the semester. This means you should have another version of the work in addition to what is on Google Drive.
- Rough drafts must be turned in prior to final drafts. Drafts should show significant changes in purpose, audience, organization, or evidence.
- Final copies should be typed and follow the appropriate style guidelines for the assignment.

Late Work

Final drafts of major assignments will not be accepted without penalty unless students make arrangements for an extension before the due date. Final drafts of major assignments that are turned in late will incur a 10% penalty per 24-hour period. Workshop drafts submitted late will cause you to incur a 10% penalty per 24-hour period off the final draft as well. Please note that I do not grant extensions for workshop drafts for ANY reason because failing to submit a workshop draft on time throws off the class schedule for everyone. Invention journal entries not completed by the assigned dates will not be accepted.

Workshops

We improve as writers by responding to input from readers. To that end your essay drafts will go through extensive peer review via writing workshops. You are expected to take the input from your classmates **seriously** and respond to their feedback when you revise. You are likewise expected to take your job as a reviewer seriously. Critique others' work as you wish to be critiqued, both in the workshop response letters and in person. Treat each other with respect. Each of us has areas to improve in our writing.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Ms. Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Academic and Disability Support in the lower level of Monocacy Hall, or by calling 610-861-1401. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic and Disability Support Office.

Writing Support

The Writing Center is a free resource for Moravian students. At the Writing Center, a trained peer tutor will work individually with you on your writing, at any point in the process from brainstorming to editing. The Writing Center is located on the second floor of Zinzendorf Hall, 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.

English Major Portfolio

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

Information contained in the course syllabus may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Unit 1 Daily Schedule

Be aware that a daily schedule is occasionally subject to change due to time constraints, unexpected disruptions, or needs of the class. Therefore, pay attention to announcements of any changes in assignments or due dates. These changes will be announced in class and on Blackboard. The most up to date homework will ALWAYS be posted in the Announcement section of our Blackboard page. Also note that **whatever is listed for a specific day is DUE that day**.

Key to Symbols:

CN = *Creating Nonfiction*

NG = *The Nonfictionist's Guide*

BAE = *Best American Essays 2014*

TSWT = *True Stories Well Told*

B = the reading can be found in the "Content" section of Blackboard

IJ = Invention Journal (to be explained in detail in the "Announcement" section of Blackboard)

WEEK 1

Introduce genre of creative nonfiction; analyze the conventions of flash essays; write and share introductory flash nonfiction; introduce subgenre of memoir

M 1-19 **Read** syllabus (in class); Talbot, "All or Nothing, Self-Portrait at Twenty-Seven" (in-class)
Listen to interview with Lee Gutkind on his definition of creative nonfiction (in class)
Draft introductory "self-portrait" flash essays (in-class)

W 1-21 **Enroll** in English 211 course shell on Blackboard (go to <http://blackboard.moravian.edu>, sign in, find course listing in Spring 2015 folder, click "enroll") **and enroll** in English 211 Google Classroom page (sign in to Moravian Google account, go to <https://classroom.google.com>, click on "student," click on + in upper right corner to add class, use code **phropl6** to enroll)
Read Root, "The Nature of Nonfiction" (NG Chapter 1); Bartkevicius, "The Landscape of Creative Nonfiction" (B); Stuckey-French, "Our Queer Little Hybrid Thing" ([click here](#)); Bradway and Hesse, "Defining Creative Nonfiction" and "The Plentiful Permutations of Creative Nonfiction" (CN Chapters 1 and 2)
Write IJ entry #1: What expectations did you have for a class on "creative nonfiction" prior to reading these introductory texts? If those expectations changed, how did they change? What aspects of writing creative nonfiction seem the most exciting and engaging to you? Which aspects of it are you least excited about or possibly even worried about? Make reference to ideas discussed in at least three of the readings, and follow the Google Drive posting directions on Blackboard (and repeated on our Google Classroom site).

WEEK 2

Form workshop groups; introduce and draft short essay #1—memoir emphasis

M 1-26 **Read** Blew, "The Art of Memoir" (B); Hampl, "Memory and Imagination" (B); Yagoda, "Memoir Nation-Universe" (B); Sundberg, "It Will Look Like a Sunset" (<https://www.guernicamag.com/features/it-will-look-like-a-sunset/>)
Write IJ entry #2—TBA on Blackboard

- W 1-28** **Read** Bradway and Hesse, “Form” and “Description” (CN Chapters 3 and 4); Root, “Not the Design of the Author” (NG Chapter 2); Key, “The Wishbone” (TSWT 63-75); Mazza, “A Girl Among Trombonists” (CN 577-90); Derricotte, “Beds” (TSWT 175-94)
Write IJ entry #3—TBA on Blackboard

WEEK 3

Draft, workshop, and revise essay #1—memoir emphasis

- M 2-2** **Read** Bradway and Hesse, “Dialogue” (CN Chapter 5); Eggers, from *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (CN 342-67); Thompson, from *Blankets* (CN 699-723);
Write IJ entry #4—TBA on Blackboard

- W 2-4** **Read** Bradway and Hesse, “Style” and “Revision” (CN Chapters 6 and 7)
Write short essay #1 draft; bring three copies for small group workshop

WEEK 4

Introduce and draft short essay #2—place/nature emphasis

- M 2-9** **Read** Root, “Place” (NG Chapter 10); Barnes, “On Place” (B) and “The Ashes of August” (CN 188-205); Hemingway, from *A Moveable Feast* ([click here](#)); Hall, “Without a Map” (TSWT 201-24); Martone, “Manufacturing Place” (CN 571-76)
Write IJ entry #5—TBA on Blackboard

- W 2-11** **Read** Root, “The Experimental Art” (NG Chapter 3); Borich, from *Body Geographic* (B); Gornick, “A Letter from Greenwich Village” (BAE 49-65); Kennedy, “End of the Line” (TSWT 53-62)
Write revised short essay #1 due to Google Drive; IJ entry #6—TBA on Blackboard

WEEK 5

Workshop and revise short essay #2—place/nature emphasis; introduce short essay #3—personal essay/cultural critique

- M 2-16** **Read** Phillips, “Charging Lions” (TSWT 37-52) **or** Dillard, “Total Eclipse” (CN 283-94)
Write short essay #2 draft; bring three copies for small group workshop

- W 2-18** **Read** Lopate, “Introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay*” (B); Bascom, “Picturing the Personal Essay: A Visual Guide” ([click here](#)); Lin, “Between Art and Architecture” (CN 499-508); Gay, from *Bad Feminist* (B); Klosterman, “Nostalgia on Repeat” (<http://grantland.com/features/nostalgia-repeat/>)
Write IJ entry #7—TBA on Blackboard

WEEK 6

Draft and workshop short essay #3—personal essay/cultural critique

- M 2-23** **Read** Bradway and Hesse, “Written Sources” (CN Chapter 8); Steinberg, “Finding the Inner Story in Memoir and Personal Essays” (B); Didion, “Goodbye to All That” (B); Biss, *Notes from No Man’s Land* (1-71)
Write revised short essay #2 due to Google Drive; IJ entry #8—TBA on Blackboard

- W 2-25** **Read** Lopate, “The Essay, Exploration or Argument” (B); “Biss, *Notes from No Man’s Land* (73-223)
Write IJ entry #9—TBA on Blackboard

WEEK 7

Introduce and research short essay #4—immersion

M 3-2 **Read** Lopate, “On the Ethics of Writing about Others” (B)
Write short essay #3 draft; bring three copies for small group workshop

W 3-4 **Read** Bradway and Hesse, “Interviewing” (CN Chapter 9); Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, “Writing Self, Writing Cultures” (B); Hemley, “Immersion Journalism” (B); Orlean, “The American Man at Age Ten” (B); Martinez, “Inherit the Earth” and “The Things They Carried” (CN 567-70)
Write IJ entry #10—TBA on Blackboard

WEEK 8

M 3-9 & W 9-11: Class Cancelled for Spring Break.

WEEK 9

Draft and workshop

M 3-16 **Read** Tower, “The Old Man at Burning Man” (BAE 165-85); Almond, from *Candyfreak* (CN 157-70); Didion, “Marrying Absurd” (B); Wallace, either “A Supposedly Fun Thing I Will Never Do Again” (B) or “Consider the Lobster” (CN 755-73)
Write IJ entry #11—TBA on Blackboard

W 3-18 **Class Cancelled but work still due**
Write short essay #4 draft—due by class time to Google Drive and shared with workshop group members; see Blackboard for workshop response letter assignment—to be completed in Google Drive

WEEK 10

Presentations of book reviews; researching for and drafting of braided/expanded essay(s)

M 3-23 **Read** CNF book chosen for review
Write Review and presentation (students who signed up for today); revised short essay #4 due to Google Drive (for students who do not present today)

W 3-25 **Read** CNF book chosen for review
Write Review and presentation (students who signed up for today); revised short essay #4 due to Google Drive (for students who do not present today)

WEEK 11

Studies of form; researching for and drafting of braided/expanded essay(s)

M 3-30 **Read** Root, “College, Montage, Mosaic, Vignette, Episode, Segment” and “This is What the Spaces Say” (NG Chapters 5 and 6); Early, “I Only Like It Better When the Pain Comes” (CN 320-41); Lunden, “The Butterfly Effect” (TSWT 15-36); Gordon, “On Enmity” (BAE 41-48); Jamison, “The Devil’s Bait” (BAE 83-99)
Write IJ entry #11—TBA on Blackboard

W 4-1 **Read** Huber, “The Digital Essay: An Introduction” (B); digital essay from *DIAGRAM* (TBA); examples of CNF blogs (TBA); Sacco, from *Palestine* (CN 656-65); Monson, “Solipsism” (B); Lish, “Self-Interview” (TSWT 101-06); Walker, “How to Make a Slave” (BAE 186-90)
Write IJ entry #12—TBA on Blackboard (workshop group #1 exempt); workshop group #1 submit completed drafts of extended essay for workshop

WEEK 12

Full class workshops

- M 4-6** **Read** Workshop group #1 essays
 Write workshop response letters (members of group #3 only); workshop group #2 submit completed drafts of extended essay for workshop
- W 4-8** **Read** Workshop group #2 essays
 Write workshop response letters (members of group #1 only); workshop group #3 submit completed drafts of extended essay for workshop

WEEK 13

Full class workshops

- M 4-13** **Read** Workshop group #3 essays
 Write workshop response letters (member of group #2 only); workshop group #1 submit completed drafts of extended essay for workshop
- W 4-15** **Read** Workshop group #1 essays
 Write workshop response letters (members of group #3 only); workshop group #2 submit completed drafts of extended essay for workshop

WEEK 14

Full class workshops

- M 4-20** **Read** Workshop group #2 essays
 Write workshop response letters (members of group #1 only); workshop group #3 submit completed drafts of extended essay for workshop
- W 4-22** **Read** Workshop group #3 essays
 Write workshop response letters (members of group #2 only)

WEEK 15

Completing Portfolio

- M 4-27** **Read** Root, “Truth” (NG Chapter 11)
 Watch *Black Mirror* “The Entire History of You” (Netflix—Optional)
 Write Portfolio introduction/cover letter draft. Bring three copies to class for review
- W 4-29** **Final Portfolio Due** to Google Drive (or other agreed-upon, shared digital space) by class time
 End of Semester Celebration—breakfast party, course evaluations, reading of excerpts from our completed work. Final Portfolio will be counted 1 day late if you do not show up for class.