

University of Montana

## ScholarWorks at University of Montana

---

Syllabi

Course Syllabi

---

Spring 2-1-2017

### CRWR 212A.01: Introduction to Nonfiction Workshop

Claire Voris

University of Montana, Missoula, [claire.voris@umontana.edu](mailto:claire.voris@umontana.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

#### Recommended Citation

Voris, Claire, "CRWR 212A.01: Introduction to Nonfiction Workshop" (2017). *Syllabi*. 4781.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/4781>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Course Syllabi at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@mso.umt.edu](mailto:scholarworks@mso.umt.edu).

## Introduction to Nonfiction Workshop T-Th 12:30-2:00

### Instructor Information

- \* Instructor: Claire Voris
- \* Mailbox: LA 133
- \* Office: COR 254
- \* Office Hours: T-Th 11-12:30
- \* Email: [claire.voris@umontana.edu](mailto:claire.voris@umontana.edu)
- \* Website: <https://moodle.umt.edu>

The honest nonfiction writer is a restrained illusionist.  
-Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd, *Good Prose*

### Course Description

There are true stories, and there are truth stories. Creative nonfiction is a genre that explores the space between these two data-points in the same way that poetry and fiction do, but with slightly higher stakes. The best creative nonfiction makes us feel connected to characters, narratives, and landscapes that we would otherwise be unable to inhabit. It also has the ability to critically distance and surprise us when fresh lenses are applied to subjects considered too boring, tired and overdone to be interesting. The best advice I have for writers interested in the genre is to take risks, and, rather than avoid the potential messiness, to pursue complication with vigor.

In CRWR 212 we will investigate craft recommendations, but rather than regurgitate formulas, I hope that you will formulate your own opinions about what does and does not “work.” This course is made up of three units: narrative, memoir, and essay. We will read, analyze, and discuss a variety of nonfiction, investigating the anatomy of these pieces in order to understand the genre better. Each student will produce three nonfiction pieces and two of the three will be workshopped by the class. A revision of one of your drafts and a final reflection will be due at the end of the semester.

We will spend time practicing what a quality workshop looks like, but most of the rules are self-explanatory. Workshop comments should be directed towards pieces, never towards authors. Critical reading requires you to acknowledge not only what’s on the page, but additionally, what the author’s intentions are. As readers, your job will be to suggest elegant solutions that allow what the author has already produced to resonate. These notes will be exchanged via workshop letters from reader to writer, and will be due in class on the day of the discussion.

### Creative Writing Learning Outcomes

- Acquire foundational skills in reading, discussing, and writing nonfiction
- Demonstrate an understanding of the terminology and concepts that apply to creative nonfiction
- Practice the art of writing and revising nonfiction works
- Learn to critique the quality of your own work, and that of your fellow writers

### Course Texts

*Good Prose* by Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd  
*In Fact* edited by Lee Gutkind

### Other Requirements

- Working folder
- Notebook for in-class writing

## **Major Projects**

Expect to write three different projects, one of which will be revised, and a final reflection. In addition, short assignments and workshop letters will play an important role in your final grade. I will give you a detailed assignment sheet as we begin each of these major assignments.

1. Narrative Nonfiction
2. Memoir
3. Essay
4. One Revision and Final Reflection

When it is your time to workshop, I'll ask you to bring enough draft copies to share with the class. I will respond to these projects with written comments focused on suggestions for revision, but I will also mark them using a check system to help you know where you stand on a specific project.

## **Community Statement**

In order to get the best from each other we must commit ourselves to building a safe community based on mutual respect. Your roles as readers and listeners infer incredible privilege and responsibility, and how we respond to the written work and oral contributions of our peers should reflect this at all times. Discrimination or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated in our classroom community.

## **General Class Expectations**

- \* All reading and writing assignments will be completed by the assigned date
- \* **All typed homework must use Times New Roman 12 pt. font, 1-inch margins, and double-spacing**
- \* Staple loose pages of papers prior to turning them in
- \* Attend class
- \* Actively, vocally, and appropriately participate in class discussions

## **Grading**

I encourage you to talk with me at any time to better understand my comments or to discuss your overall progress and success in the class.

- \* Class Participation, Homework, and Workshop Letters 40%
- \* Major Projects 30%
- \* Final Revision and Reflection 30%

## **Grading Policy**

Students enrolled in Creative Writing are graded by the traditional letter grade A, B, C, D, F or are given NC for no credit. The NC grade does not affect grade point average. It is reserved for students who have worked unusually hard, attended class regularly and completed all assignments but whose skills are not at a passing level at the end of the semester.

## **Attendance**

More than two unexcused absences from a TR class will compromise your participation grade. Five or more unexcused absences from a TR class will result in a failing grade. Four or more late arrivals to class will count as an absence.

I reserve the right to adjust the policy. Make sure you talk with me in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class. If you must miss class, *you are responsible* for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class.

## **Participation**

Participation includes coming to class prepared and on time, taking part in class discussions, asking questions, contributing your knowledge and insights in whatever form is appropriate. It also includes doing the required reading and writing for each class.

## **Late Work**

Your work needs to be typed, printed, and in class with you to be considered "on time."

- \* Unless we've chatted and come to an agreement, late or handwritten homework does not receive credit.
- \* Emailed assignments will be considered only with special permission.
- \* Late formal essays are disrespectful to everyone involved. Please email me in advance if you run into unforeseen hurdles.

## **Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities will receive appropriate accommodations in this course. Please speak with me privately after class or in my office. Please be prepared to provide a letter from your DSS Coordinator.

## **The Check System**

To give you a sense of the check system I'll be using, please refer to the following descriptors.

- \* *Check*: A project with a check generally meets the goal of the assignment in terms of purpose, genre, and writing situation without need for extensive revision. Written comments will elaborate on strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for focused revision.
- \* *Check minus*: A project with a check minus meets the basic requirements, but would benefit from significant revision. Written comments will elaborate on strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for revision.
- \* *Unsatisfactory*: A project with a U does not meet basic standards, and requires extensive development and attention. An unsatisfactory submission may be incomplete or inappropriate to the assignment. Such a submission may receive a request to rewrite within a week in order to receive teacher comments.

## **Plagiarism Policy**

According to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code, plagiarism is "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own." Our class policy: Please don't.

*The Student Conduct Code can be found here: [http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student\\_conduct.php](http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php)*