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2023

Writing Workshop in Prose

Brenna E. Crowe
CUNY City College

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Eng. 2300 Writing Workshop in Prose

Section L, Code: 21014

Spring 2023 Semester—The City College of New York

Tuesdays & Thursdays: 9:30 a.m.-10:45 a.m.

NAC 6/329

Instructor Details

- Brenna Crowe: BCrowe@ccny.cuny.edu
- I will respond to any emails ASAP during the weekdays up until 6 p.m. and as soon as convenient on evenings and weekends.
- Office hours will be held Tuesday & Thursday 11a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (or by appointment) both on zoom or in room 6/216A in the NAC & Zoom
 - Zoom: <https://ccny.zoom.us/j/4495813162>
 - Office: NAC 6/216A

Course Description

Welcome to your prose workshop—this will be a space for you to explore, experiment, and expand the watery depths of your creative nonfiction writing talents. In this course, you will dabble in several literary-nonfiction essay genres and continue to practice your established and growing writing skills and strategies in storytelling. We also will discuss weekly readings to better understand the malleable edges and nuances of each genre—as well as to become better writers by becoming better readers.

I'll also assign weekly essays on craft so we develop a shared language. Creative nonfiction is about telling true stories with skill and imagination. It's about vivid details and engaging characters and thrilling plots, just as much as fiction, only it involves finding stories in the real world—whether it's from your personal life or tracking down a mysterious stranger to tell their story. We will discuss some storytelling strategies for each major assignment, and you will learn how to make the page come alive in the mind of your readers.

Because this is a workshop, learning from each other will be essential. You are expected to be an active participant in the classroom community. For each of the four major assignments, you will reflect on your gains and future opportunities. The course will develop your skills in writing and critical thinking, and prepare you for writing in your professional and creative life.

Course Learning Outcomes Information

By the end of this course, you should ...

CLO	Translation	Experience
1. Gather, interpret, and assess information from a variety of sources and points of view related to the production of written creative nonfiction work in a variety of genres.	Read Craft essays, as well as Model (creative nonfiction pieces) pieces to understand both the process and product of creative writing.	Mix of homework and in-class readings for each phase.
2. Produce well-reasoned written or oral arguments using evidence to support conclusions; and Evaluate evidence and arguments critically or analytically.	Read Like a Writer, assessing the choices and techniques of writers in order to improve your own craft.	Reading responses, phase 2 essay
3. Identify and apply the fundamental concepts and methods of creative nonfiction writing.	Learn the elements and techniques of each genre covered, and apply these methods to your writing	Major Assignments
4. Analyze how arts from diverse cultures of the past serve as a foundation for those of the present and describe the significance of works of art in the societies that created them.	Read classic and contemporary work to discuss the evolution of craft and the ideas on “good” writing	Readings, Discussion posts, Craft readings,
5. Articulate how meaning is created in the arts or communications and how experience is interpreted and conveyed through creative work.	Use Critical-Creative thinking to understand and describe what is successful/effective about a creative piece	Craft, Cover letters, portfolio magazine.
6. Demonstrate knowledge of the skills involved in the creative nonfiction process.	Develop your own writing process and understand what works for you; as well understand the importance of peer review, revision, and publishing.	Drafts, final drafts, peer review, open mics
7. Use appropriate technologies to conduct research and to communicate.	Engage in multimodal tools of composing that fit with our digital creative world.	The portfolio magazine, the informational interview.

Learning Format and Requirements

General

We will meet regularly in-person during our bi-weekly scheduled meeting times: **Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:30-10:45 a.m.** You will earn attendance credit by being present and active in all class discussions and workshops. In the context of COVID-19, please email me if you're feeling sick and cannot make it to class.

You'll want a dedicated writing notebook for this course (for in-class exercises, homework, workshop and reading notes, and everything else). Keep your notebook with you as you go about your days! Write down your dreams, ideas, and snippets of eavesdropped conversations.

Formal Assignments & Supportive Assignments

This course is built around four major assignments that you will develop over the course of the semester. These are: **The Lyric Essay, The Satirical Essay, The Personal Essay, and The Self Assessment & Portfolio-Magazine Project.** These assignments will be detailed in our discussions. Thorough, considerate, and timely completion of these assignments will largely determine your grade. We will also have several supportive assignments briefly described below:

Peer-review letters on first full drafts will be foundational in learning the revision process. You will write a detailed 1 page (~250 words) letter to your peers detailing at least 3 specific strengths and 3 specific opportunities—utilizing our evolving-shared language of craft. Workshopping is a skillset on its own. When we learn to edit each other's work well, it helps us understand the infinite possibilities in our own writing. You will write 6 this semester—two for each of the first 3 projects.

We will also **workshop** in class revised drafts before submission. You will read part of your work outloud to the class and give notes to your peers on strengths/opportunities.

You will be expected to write and post quick **reading responses** to BB to at least 10 of our course readings. All readings will be hyperlinked in the syllabus and BB discussion forums. For each post, generally you should share from the reading *a quote* you find meaningful and share *why*, anything you learned. I'll also ask everyone to *define a new word* that you didn't know before, because some of our readings do have complex diction.

The **informational interview** will be an opportunity for you to reach out to a professional writer, ask them questions about their career & writing philosophies, and write a reflection telling the story of your conversation.

You are also expected to attend at least **1 literary reading**—either on campus or elsewhere and submit a reflection as part of your grade. The reflection should be 1-2 pages standard format.

You should describe, summarize, and share some takeaways from the event. I will announce/remind opportunities for readings in-class.

Grading

Formal Assignments:

- ❖ Lyric Essay 10%
- ❖ The Satirical Essay 15%
- ❖ Personal Essay 15%
- ❖ The Self-Assessment & Portfolio Magazine Project 15%

Supportive assignments/expectations:

- ❖ 6 Peer Review Letters & Workshops 10%
- ❖ 10 Reading Responses 10%*
- ❖ Participation (Attendance, participation, class discussions)—10%

Asynchronous:

- ❖ Informational Interview 10%
- ❖ Literary Event Reflection(s)—5%

*Each discussion post (quick response to reading) will earn 1% toward your final grade. There will be more opportunities to post than required, so you have flexibility with which readings you respond to—though you are still expected to read all the readings carefully, take notes, and come to class ready to share your thoughts.

A Note on Writing Workshops:

Creative writing workshops work best when you think of them as a cycle of generosity. It's a gift—an act of kindness—to take the time to read a peer's essay and tell them how to improve it. The comments you each receive and give will help revise your essays for the final portfolio. At the same time, reading your peers' essays and figuring out how they can improve is also a way to improve your own writing. Another is comparing your advice to what everyone else says in the workshop. So, the bravery it takes to submit a draft for a workshop—and the bravery it takes to explain your critiques and suggestions in class—are themselves generous gifts to everyone in the course.

Workshops require mutual consideration and respect. Hand in your assignments on time, so everyone has a chance to read them. Be supportive of your classmates in class. Offering a sensitive, constructive critique can be difficult or uncomfortable, but receiving one is always useful to an author and helps enormously in doing revisions. At the same time, it is important that the author knows what others see as their strengths, so they can build on those. For all critiques of a fellow student's work, therefore, I will ask you to answer two basic questions: 1) what are 3 basic strengths? and 2) what are 3 basic opportunities? It also helps to share your connections with other works.

Online Technology and Software Requirements

You will need to regularly access

- Blackboard (CCNY's online teaching support system where you'll access and submit materials)
- A printer for sharing work during our in-class workshops.
- CUNY Academic Commons (where you'll create a digital portfolio)
- Word-processing software of your choice: Microsoft Office, Office365 (available for free to CCNY students), Google Docs, etc. No matter what you use, please save all documents as .doc or docx files and please no links, PDFs, or Pages files.
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I strongly recommend you make an effort to organize our course documents and your work. Create a designated "Writing Workshop in Prose, Spring 2023" folder on your computer and be strategic in how you use subfolders and title documents. You will need to return to assignments at the end of the semester, so the more organized the better. Computers, as you know, are susceptible to crashing and freezing. Save your work frequently and back up your files (in multiple places!).

Course Policies

Respect: All students are expected, first and foremost, to treat each other with respect and dignity. **Hateful speech or ill treatment of others will be met with zero tolerance.** This is a class about sharing ideas and expressing yourself, and it is our collective duty to make sure we do this safely and respectfully.

Attendance: To be part of the conversation, you need to show up to class on time and prepared to engage in the discussion and workshops. Show up for class and make your required posts every week. Be active, have something to say, and you will do well. **If a student misses more than three classes, the final grade will be dropped by one half letter** (from 90 to 85, for example). **If you miss 5, your final grade will be dropped one full letter. If you miss six, you will not be able to pass the course.** Consistent lateness, early departure, or meandering cell phone use will impact your grade. If you can't participate, let me know ahead of time, except only in cases of serious emergency.

Participation: I care deeply about students being present and engaged in class, and I'll do my best to make class meetings meaningful and useful. I ask that you come to class on time and prepared with all relevant readings or texts. I understand that everyone has different approaches to participation, so I welcome you to engage in class in a way that best fits you (by quietly but actively listening, writing in the chat for online classes, taking notes, asking questions, and/or offering comments). Everyone is required, however, to collaborate with peers during group work.

Late-Assignments: Assignments are to be handed in on time, as detailed in the class schedule. I cannot emphasize this enough: handing in something is better than not handing anything at all. We have a lot to get through, and want to give ourselves enough space to dig into what matters to us, so staying on task is important. An extension may be granted in urgent circumstances, so

please reach out if you find yourself in a situation where you may need more time. You will be held accountable to the new deadline you request. **A late assignment without a request for an extension will drop one half letter grade for each day it is late. After one week the assignment will receive an automatic zero.**

Language: Students are expected to take an active role in developing their writing and language. I recognize that students come from different educational, linguistic, and racial backgrounds and that it takes several years, not a semester, to develop English academic language uses, especially if English is a student's additional (and not first) language. As your instructor, I am committed to adopting approaches deemed most effective by the fields of Second Language Writing and Composition and Rhetoric: I will provide ongoing feedback on your writing to highlight potential areas to revise/develop (including language uses), and I will refrain from penalizing you for your language.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is unacceptable. There are no exceptions. Evidence of plagiarism will be discovered and may result in failure, or even expulsion. Don't do it! For a more detailed description of the guidelines for adhering to academic integrity, see CCNY's Policy on Academic Integrity on the college website:
<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-resources/academic-integrity-policy/> As part of this course, we will discuss responsible source use practices.

Don't Go Quietly: Any matters of accessibility or difficulties pertaining to electronic devices or facilities may be discussed with me directly and will be dealt with in confidence. Links to school-wide policies and helpful resources can be found below. Any other questions, concerns, ideas? Don't keep them to yourself. I'm here to help!

Other Pertinent Information

The Writing Center: The CCNY Writing Center provides a supportive learning environment where students can have one-on-one tutoring sessions with experienced writing consultants. The Writing Center is available for virtual meetings. Students can schedule an appointment through the online booking system. This is a free resource available to all students and recommended for all writing assigned in this and other classes. Visit their website for more info <http://www.cuny.cuny.edu/writing/> and to book an appointment.

Special Needs and Accommodations: There are several Student Support Services available for CCNY students. Check this website for more information: <https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/sssp>. If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact CCNY's AccessAbility Center (Student Disability Services), <https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/accessability> or call (212) 650-5913 for an appointment to discuss your 5 needs and the process for requesting accommodations. I am committed to accessibility; please do not hesitate to reach out to me so that we can determine ways to make this course accessible to you.

Counseling Center: As a student in the CCNY community, part of your tuition goes to free mental-health counseling services. If you find yourself overwhelmed, emotional fraught, or in the need for someone to talk to, please do not hesitate to reach out to the counseling center: <https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/counseling>

Food Bank: Students who find themselves experiencing difficulties obtaining food every day or who lack a stable and safe place to live are urged to come to Benny's pantry for assistance

(<https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/bennysfoodpantry>). Benny's pantry is located on the ground floor of the North Academic Center (NAC) and is open to anyone within the CUNY community in need of support. The pantry is open from 10am to 6pm and is self-serve. Additional emergency support for financial, health and housing needs are also available through Benny's.

CCNY Quick Links and Other Resources

- IT Service Desk (where you can get your CCNY username, set up your email and password, and get access to CUNY Portal, CUNYFirst, and Blackboard): go to <https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/it/help>, email, servicedesk@ccny.cuny.edu, or call 212-650-7878.
- The City College of New York website: <http://www.cuny.cuny.edu/>
- CUNYFirst: https://home.cunyfirst.cuny.edu/oam/Portal_Login1.html
- Blackboard:
<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/cis/core-functions/cuny-blackboard/>
- CCNY Writing Center: <http://www.cuny.cuny.edu/writing/>
- CCNY Library: <http://ccny.cuny.edu/library>
- CCNY online databases: <http://library.ccny.cuny.edu/az.php>
- List of computer labs (including those with printers) at CCNY:
<https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/it/hours>
- Free access to *New York Times* for CCNY students:
<https://myaccount.nytimes.com/verification/edupass>
- Free software for CCNY students (including Word):
https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/it/software_stu

Phase 1 Calendar

The Lyric Essay

During Phase 1, you will be introduced to a variety of texts, genres, ideas, and poetic strategies in support of writing a 4+ page lyric essay. Our primary focus will be on description, voice, setting, rhythm, prosody etc.

Note: you should have access to all readings & all assignments every class (in print or on your laptop/phone). This is because we'll likely reference previous assignments/readings.

Key: * discussion post/reading response ■ writing for workshop

Wk	Date	H.w. Due Before Class	In-Class Topics/Goals
1	Thurs. 1/26	* Introduce Yourself to the class in designated BB discussion following the prompt. Please also include a piece of writing or quote you find interesting or important.	Introductions Syllabus Review Course Overview Craft
2	Tues. 1/31	* Read and write a response to: "What's Missing Here? A Fragmentary, Lyric Essay About Fragmentary, Lyric Essays" by Julie Marie Wade Read: "The Creative Process" by James Baldwin	Intro. to Lyric Essays Craft discussion Object Prompt
	Thurs. 2/2	* Read & submit a response to: "The Mark on the Wall" by Virginia Woolf Read: "The Lyric Essay" by Deborah Tall and John D'Agata	Woolf Discussion Home prompt Sketch
3	Tues. 2/7	■ Write messy draft of your lyric essay from in-class exercises and post to BB Read: "An Oral History (with hiccups)" by Lydia Davis Read: "On Breathing Life into Cliches" by Toni Morrison	Intro. to Workshops/peer review letters Craft Discussion Informational Interviews
	Thurs. 2/9	* Read and submit a response: part I of Claudia Rankine's Citizen (first piece in section II recommended) Read: "so you want to be a writer?" by Charles Bukowski Revise your evolving draft based on peer comments	Rankine Discussion Community Prompt Audience
4	Tues. 2/14	■ Write a first full draft of your lyrical essay Review: 50 Pieces of Stephen King's Greatest Writing Advice Read: "The Tent" by Margaret Atwood	Peer Review Letters (submit after class) Revision
	Thurs. 2/16	■ Write a revised full draft your essay and be ready to share by practicing reading an excerpt out loud. Read: "25 Essential Notes on Craft" by Matthew Salesses	In-Class Open Mic/Group workshop

	Fri. 2/17	<u>Revise & polish</u> the final draft of your lyrical essay. Then, write a .5-1 page cover letter that shares 1-2 things you learned and still want to keep practicing at the beginning of your document. <u>Submit on BB.</u>	No class, of course.
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Phase 2 Calendar:

The Satirical Essay

During Phase 2, you will craft a 4+pages of satirical essay(s) that satirizes the frivolity o quotidian interactions or a powerful institution of your choosing. You will develop a specific voice, style, and tone. You will continue to develop the storytelling strategies you practiced in phase 1. Key: * discussion post/reading response ■ writing for workshop

Wk	Day	HW Due Before Class	In-Class Discussion
5	Tues. 2/21	*** No Class , classes follow a Monday Schedule*** Watch: “The Shapes of Stories” lecture by Kurt Vonnegut	
	Thurs. 2/23	* Read and respond to: “Four Institutional Monologues” by George Saunders Read: “The Statue of Liberty was Built to Welcome Immigrants—That Welcome Must not End” by Dave Eggers	Phase 1 Reflection Intro. to Satirical Essay Brainstorm
6	Tues. 3/1	■ Write a 1-page brainstorming for your essay—provide details about a social issue, injustice, or observation that you find to be important and explain why & what is at stake. Who has the power? (use this explore what you want to write about if you’re unsure) Read: “Adorable, Taxable You” by S.J. Perelman, p. 234	Sketching Arcs Strategies for humor Horatian vs. Juvenalian satire
	Thurs. 3/2	* Read & write a response to: “A Better Place” by David Sedaris Read: Brief History of Attacks on Satirists by Roger Kreuz Sketch an Arc for the story you’ll tell about the subject you are satirizing & post to BB	Sketching Arcs Craft Discussion Prompt Sharing Arcs
7	Tues. 3/7	■ Write a messy draft of your satirical essay Read: “How to Write About Africa” by Binyavanga Wainaina	Workshop Conducting interviews
	Thurs. 3/9	Read: “If Fathers Could Breastfeed” by Namrata Poddar Revise your evolving draft based on free-writes/peer comments	Workshop drafts More on interviews
8	Tues. 3/14	■ Write a <u>full</u> draft of your Satirical essay. Please also upload it to the BB Discussion Forum. Read: “National Jail Contractors” by Ryan M. Moser	Workshop of drafts Peer-review letters
	Thurs. 3/16	Revise your essay based on peer comments and prepare to read your work outloud. Read: “PEN vs. Sword” by Ayad Akhtar, Andrey Kurkov, Patrice Nganang, Salman Rushdie, Yiyun Li	Open Mic/Group Workshop
	Fri. 3/17	Revise & polish the final draft of your satirical essay and Submit on BB.	No class, of course

Phase 3 Calendar

The Personal Essay/Memoir

During Phase 3, you will utilize the skills we've been developing to tell a story inspired by your life.

Key: * discussion post/reading response ■ writing for workshop

WK	DATE	HW DUE BEFORE CLASS	IN-CLASS TOPICS/GOALS
9	Tues. 3/21	* Read and respond to: "Annie Dillard and The Writing Life" by Alexander Chee (you should have found and scheduled and interview date by now with the writer you will chat with)	Phase 2 Reflections Intro. To Personal Essay Brainstorm
	Thurs. 3/23	* Read and respond to: excerpt from Zora Neale Hurston's "Dust Tracks on a Road" Sketch an arc for your personal essay from one of the class exercises	Craft in Memoir Dialogue Prompt
10	Tues. 3/28	■ Write a messy draft of your personal essay and upload to BB discussion Forum. Read : "That Crafty Feeling" by Zadie Smith	Informational Interviews Share Sketches Point of View
	Thur. 3/30	* Read and write a response to: "Once More to the Lake" by E.B. White	White Discussion Structure
11	Tues. 4/4	■ Write your first full draft of the Personal Essay. Please also upload it to the BB discussion forum to be workshopped over Spring Break. Read : "Dear Hume" by Hunter S. Thompson	Submit peer review responses to 2 peers & respond to the reading.
	Thurs. 4/6	Spring Recess from April 5th to April 13th *No Class, of Course* Spring Recess Until 4/13	
	Tues. 4/11 & Thurs. 4/13	Remember to Submit Peer Review Letters & Read the Roxane Gay reading.	
12	Tues. 4/18	Submit peer-review letters to BB. * Read and respond to: "Black in Middle America"	Discussion on Revision

		by Roxane Gay	
Thurs. 4/20		Revise your full draft based on peer comments, and prepare to read some of your work to the class.	Open Mic/Group Workshop
Fri. 4/21		Revise your Personal Essay draft based on critique you received during peer review. write & paste your cover letter at the beginning of your document. Submit on BB.	No class, of course.

Phase 4 Calendar

Self-Assessment Essay & Portfolio Magazine

During our final phase, you will substantially revise your major assignments, articulate and analyze your learning process and knowledge gained. You will practice formal reflection writing and editing, and prepare with a group a literary magazine of your collective best works.

Note: you should have access to all readings & all assignments every class (in print or on your laptop/phone). This is because we'll likely refer back to previous assignments/readings.

Key: * discussion post/reading response

WK	DATE	HW DUE BEFORE CLASS	IN-CLASS TOPICS/GOALS
13	Tues. 4/25	Sign-Up for CUNY Academic Commons Read: Excerpt from “Heartbreaking work of Staggering Genius” by Dave Eggers (full text if you’re interested) Compile your cover letters for a messy draft of your self-assessment. Review the course goals, and make a list of your experiences in the class that helped you meet or almost meet the goals you haven’t mentioned in previous cover letters.	Intro. Self Assessment Lit. magazine groups Creating Sites
	Thur. 4/27	Read: How to Submit Your Writing to Literary Magazines Revise your self-assessment essay to add flow between the cover letters and address each course goal. * Write a reflection on your thoughts/knowledge about literary publishing.	Intro. to literary publishing Finding Themes and Organizing Design & revision
13	Tues. 5/2	■ Post messy-interview draft (make sure you capture writing philosophy and career trajectory) Read: “Why You Should Aim for 100 Rejections a Year” by Kim Liao	Self-Assessment Lit. magazine Design & revision Submitting Cover letters
	Thur. 5/4	Complete revisions for your final “portfolio” version of your Phase 3 essay & post portfolio link to BB. Read: “A Survivor’s Guide to the Long, Slow, and Infuriating Process of Revision” by Peter Ho Davies	Lit. magazine groups More on design revision
14	Tues. 5/9	Complete revisions for your final “portfolio” version of your Phase 1 essay	Lit. magazine groups More on design/revision Share Interviews

	Thur. 5/11	Complete revisions for your final “portfolio” version of your Phase <u>2</u> essay. * Read & write a response to “Why I Write” by Joan Didion	Lit. magazine groups Design/revision Share Interviews
15	Tues. 5/16	Polish the full draft of your literary magazine—with your self-assessment and post to BB. * Read & write a response to “Why I write” by George Orwell	Share Interviews Course Evaluations In-Class Final Goodbyes
	Fri. 5/19	Submit on BB your self-assessment the URL to your Magazine Portfolio and (which should include your Self-Assessment and revised essays and any other notes or comments) Last Chance to Submit any revisions or late assignments.	No class, of course