

Bergen Community College  
Division of English  
Department Of Composition and Literature

Course Syllabus

**WRT 206: Memoir and Creative Nonfiction**

Instructor:  
Office:  
Phone:  
Office Hours:

**WRT-206: Memoir and Creative Nonfiction** is a workshop course in which students write memoir and creative non-fiction using such forms as essay, narrative, and poetry. Students read and discuss each other's work as well as that of published authors. Three credits; Prerequisite: WRT-101

**Learning Objectives**

**As a result of meeting the requirements in this course, you will be able to do the following:**

1. Recognize the special genre demands of memoir and creative nonfiction by reading and discussing the work of published authors. (PLG 1, 2) (Gen Ed Goal 1a)
2. Utilize the elements of creative writing in the genres of essay and memoir. (PLG 7) (Gen Ed Goal 1 a, b; 6 a, b)
3. Review publication conventions and apply standards of professional manuscript preparation in revising and preparing drafts of work for classroom submission or submission for publication. (PLG 4, 7) (Gen Ed Goal 1, a, b, c, d)
4. Employ critical approaches and exercise aesthetic sensibilities through interaction with others in the workshop process. (PLG 3, 6) (Gen Ed Goal 1 c, d)
5. Locate and evaluate important writer resources such as publications, markets, and continuing educational opportunities. (PLG 7) (Gen Ed Goal 4 a, b, c, d)

**Course Requirements**

**You will be required to do the following:**

1. Write and revise several works of memoir and creative nonfiction. (Meets student learning objectives 1-3)
2. Practice poetic and narrative techniques through assigned exercises, which will be reviewed during the semester by both the instructor and your peers. (Meets student learning objectives 1, 2, 4)
3. Read, interpret, and analyze the craft of professional literary and model student works. (Meets student learning objectives 1, 4)
4. Comprehend and apply various literary terms/techniques in discussion of professional and student works. (Meets student learning objectives 1, 4)
5. Present various works in workshop and participate in the discussion of other students' work. (Meets student learning objective 1, 4)

6. Participate in discussions and other class activities (visits of guest speakers, play readings, evaluation of writer resources) that support the development of quality work. (Meets student learning objectives (1,3, 4, 5))

### **Course Content**

As a student in this course, you can expect to explore your creativity by practicing the craft of writing memoir and creative nonfiction. Many of you have already done some creative writing, but whether you are a practiced writer considering writing as a career or are trying creative writing for the first time, this course will give you the opportunity to work in a friendly and supportive atmosphere. As we read and discuss the work of professional writers, we will note their techniques and see how various elements combine to create good memoir and creative nonfiction pieces. You will apply this knowledge in writing your own memoir and creative nonfiction. You will hone your critical skills and benefit from receiving “audience” reaction by participating in workshops with your fellow students. As you listen to, read and discuss the works of others, you will be exposed to the diverse voices and worlds of the other students.

### **Course Texts and Other Required Materials**

Instructor chooses material such as:

Perl, Sondra and Mimi Schwartz. Writing True: The Art and Craft of Creative Nonfiction. Houghton Mifflin Company, (2006).

Photocopied selections of poetry, personal essays and memoirs/websites; a A LiveJournal.com blog

### **Sample Grading Policy**

A student’s final grade is based on his/her dedication to the creative process and the quality of the work produced. A student’s participation and attendance are crucial components of the grade.

### **Evaluation**

Exercises	15%
Memory Piece	10%
Portrait Essay	10%
Trauma/Problem Essay	10%
Op-Ed Piece	10%
Individual Project	25%
Workshop	20%

Major assignments (memory piece, portrait essay, healing or problem-solving essay, Op-Ed piece and an individual project in memoir/creative non-fiction) must be completed and will be averaged in as a zero if missing. Exercises will comprise a smaller portion of the grade, but as a group are significant. Letter grades will not be assigned—work will be

given a check (satisfactory) or perhaps a check plus (very good) or minus (not satisfactory).

### **Individual Projects**

Students will self-select their final major assignment. Some of the choices will include memoir in narrative (or poetry), personal essay, a collection of “Short Shorts,” an article that might appear in a magazine (travel, hobby etc.) and may include research if relevant to the endeavor. These projects will be workshopped while in progress

### **BCC Attendance Policy**

All students are expected to attend punctually every scheduled meeting of each course in which they are registered. Attendance and lateness policies as well as sanctions are to be determined by the instructor for each section of the course. These will be established in writing on the individual course guide outline. Attendance will be kept by the instructor for administrative and counseling purposes.

### **Suggested Attendance Policy**

*Attendance is critical.* Excessive absence will result in grade penalty. If the class meets once a week, more than two unexcused absences will result in a half-grade penalty; four absences, a full-grade penalty. If the class meets twice a week, four unexcused absences will result in a half-grade penalty; eight absences, a full grade. Lateness also affects your grade; allow enough time to arrive on time. Two late’s = one absence.

### **BCC Policy on Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism is a form of academic dishonesty and is a punishable offense. Plagiarism is taking someone else’s words, opinions, or ideas and claiming them as one’s own. If a student commits an act of plagiarism, the instructor has the authority to assign a failing grade on the assignment or in some cases for the entire course. After two offenses, a student may be suspended from the College.

Common examples of plagiarism are submitting a work taken from a free website or using any materials—sentences, paragraphs, phrases or ideas from any source without citing and identifying the source.

In creative writing, presenting another’s work, words, or experiences as your own is unacceptable!

### **RESOURCES FOR WRITING:**

**Writing Center** Supervisor: John Findura

L-125F

201-447-7136 [www.bergen.edu/pages/7195.asp](http://www.bergen.edu/pages/7195.asp)

Professional, peer and faculty tutors will guide students in all aspects of writing.

**English Language Resource Center:**

Ender Hall 126/201-612-5292 [www.bergen.edu/pages/2182.asp](http://www.bergen.edu/pages/2182.asp)

Supervisor: Marilyn Pongracz

Provides help to students whose native language is not English: tutoring, computer programs, books, tapes, conversation groups and specialized workshops.

Mon. 9:30AM-6PM; Tues. 9:30AM-7:30PM; Wed. 9:30AM-7:30PM; Fri. 9:30AM-3:00PM; Sat. 10AM-2PM.

**Tutoring Center** L-125/201-447-7489

Manager: Khairia Fazal [kfazal@bergen.edu](mailto:kfazal@bergen.edu)

Peer, professional tutors and faculty provide free individual and group tutoring.

Online tutoring through Smarthinking <http://www.bergen.edu/pages/2196.asp>

Walk-in hours: Mon. through Thursday: 9AM-8PM; Fri. and Sat. 10AM-3PM

## **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students who require accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) can request these services from the Office of Specialized Services. To learn more about how to apply for services, please visit them at <http://www.bergen.edu/oss>.

### **Sample Course Guide**

Week I (Sept. 7/9): Introduction to Course/name exercise

Assignment: Read Chapter 1: “Why Creative Non-fiction?”(1-19) Set up your LiveJournal blog at [www.livejournal.com](http://www.livejournal.com)

WEEK II (Sept. 14/16): David Sedaris “Let It Snow” (208)

Discussion of Workshopping (Value and Protocol) and exercise: “I Remember” (from prompts).

Assignment: “Twenty Ways to Talk about Creative Nonfiction” (80-81) and Chapter 6 “Workshopping a Draft” 85-105. Read Tony Earley’s “Somehow Form a Family” 191-200. Edit your memory piece (minimum 500 words) and enter it into your blog to share in workshop.

WEEK III (Sept. 21/23): Workshop/ Discussion of assignment readings/workshop of memory pieces (poetry/narrative).

Assignment: Read Chapter 2 “The Power of the Notebook” (20); and Chapter 3 “Ten Ways to a Draft” (33). Read Portrait 263, Charles Simac “Dinner at Uncle Boris” (271-275); Alice Steinbach “The Miss Dennis School of Writing” (275-280; Susan Allen Toth “Going to the Movies” 280-283).

WEEK IV 9 (Sept. 28/30): Discuss Readings; Workshop; In-class Exercise “Portrait” (Pieces from Threads)

Assignment: Read Chapter 4 “Taking Shape” (46). Complete your portrait (500 word minimum) and put it into your blog for workshop.

- WEEK V (October 5/7): Workshop on Portraits  
Assignment: Read Chapter 5: Finding Voice (64+)  
Read: Alice Walker's "Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self" (210)  
Angela Balcita "Dumpling" (Handout from The Fourth Genre)
- WEEK VI(Oct. 12/14): Discussion of Finding Voice, Writing and Healing, and Louise DeSalvo  
Readings: Hand-out "Unbroken" (Labyrinth) ; Excerpts from The Color of Water, Girl Interrupted  
Assignment: Work on piece on Healing/Working out a Problem (750 word minimum).
- WEEK VII (Oct. 19/21): Analyze Op-Ed Pieces; Workshop  
Assignment: Read "The Craft of Revision" (106) Write Op-Ed piece
- WEEK VIII (Oct. 26/28): Discuss Revision; Workshop  
Assignment: Complete revisions on your work. Prepare: Folder I due Week IX.  
Read "The Role of Research" 143; Read Short Shorts 363-374
- WEEK IX (Nov. 2/4): Folder I due; Discuss "Short Shorts"; Discuss Research and Defining the Individual Project  
Assignment: Create a proposal of the individual project
- WEEK X (Nov. 9/11): Workshop Project Proposals  
Assignment: Work on Individual Projects/ Read "The Ethics of Creative Nonfiction" 163
- WEEK XI (Nov. 16/18): Discussion of Ethics and Markets (where to publish);Workshop  
Assignment: Continue work on project. Find a market for a completed work, prepare it for submission and after class review, send it). Markets may include Labyrinth, The Torch and journals and magazines.
- WEEK XII (Nov. 23/25): Review of Submissions; Workshop projects.  
Assignment: Work on individual project. Read Chapter 8 "A Lighter Touch—Or Other Ways to Tell a Story" (129). Mail Submission
- WEEK XIII (Nov. 30/Dec. 2): Workshop of Individual Projects.  
Assignment: Edit individual projects to hand in.
- WEEK XIV (Dec. 7/9): Workshop of Individual.  
Assignment: Individual Projects (Folder II)
- WEEK XV(Dec. 14/16): Workshop; Project Folder II due

WEEK XVI (Dec. 21): Finish Workshop of Projects; Individual Conferences

The course schedule may be altered to adjust for guest speakers, class needs, unexpected class cancellations etc.