



English 623: Creative (Digital) Nonfiction
Spring 2021
TR 2:10-3:30
Hamilton Smith Digital Writing Studio 336

Instructor

Dr. Melinda M. White

she/her/hers

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Office hours: T/TH 3:30-4:30, W 2-4 (virtual), and by appt.

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Course Objectives

Intermediate creative nonfiction, this course will be focused on reading and responding to engaging works of creative nonfiction in multiple media, as well as composing and workshop for your own multimodal writing. We will cover traditional nonfiction elements such as sensory details, narrative, and expressing our place in **time and space**, while also including audio, visual and interactive text to engage readers. Like an artist's paintbrush, the computer can be a creative tool in the writing process. Exploring methods, forms, and functions of works of both print and digital nonfiction will provide students with context and the foundational skills to express themselves through multimedia writing projects such as print, timeline, audio, visual, & immersive multimedia essays. Writers will become composers, telling their stories with digital media.

This digital section aims to expand on the genre & multiple forms of creative nonfiction while also encouraging you, as writers, to think outside the box and consider new forms of writing, both through the course readings and your own writing. Observe and explore the world around you and always **listen to your broccoli**.

After participation in this course you will be expected to:

- Respond thoughtfully and critically to readings in multiple forms (print & digital)
- Write with rich description, dialogue, research, and a unique voice
- Communicate ideas clearly and creatively through complex multimodal texts
- Recognize strengths and weaknesses in your own writing
- Revise your own work with instructor and peer review comments
- Comment on classmates writing in a constructive way
- Develop an awareness and control of saying something valuable with words (& more)
- Hone creative writing, critical thinking, presentation, and group-work skills
- Analyze multimodal “texts” with regards to design, movement, and interactivity

- Complete meaningful textual projects in an electronic format
- Participate in formal and informal discussion, workshop, and peer critique

Course Texts

This course relies on Open Education Resources and all readings will be provided on Canvas or the course website: <http://www.multimodalmel.com/623/>

You will need a writing journal for reader response, in-class writing, and storyboards, a UNH box or Google Drive, or a USB for storage, and (optional but strongly suggested) a Google Cardboard or other VR viewer (available for \$10 or less online). There may also be some (inexpensive) app. purchases, depending on readings in the second half of the semester.

Assignments

There will be two units, with a total of two smaller, two “medium,” and two major assignments, as well as weekly blog posts and discussion. Work must be professional and turned in on time. No excuses. I am available for help, but not on the day a project is due. It is difficult (and never a good idea) to procrastinate work that requires technology (this includes printers!). AND ALWAYS BACK UP YOUR FILES.

Unit 1: TIME

Unit 1 will be about **time and memory, description, memoir, and oral storytelling**. The first assignment will be a short descriptive (potentially lyric) piece on Winter. We will cover elements of narrative in class and our readings, including sensory detail description, dialogue, and structure. We will read multiple essays that provide strong examples of sensory description in various styles (and modes) of creative nonfiction. The next assignment will be a digital Timeline essay, and the final project an audio essay or podcast. All technology will have tutorials and time to be worked on in class. This unit will make up a total of **40% of your course grade**.

Unit 2: SPACE

The second half of the semester will center on **visuals, spaces, perspective, and how we move through the world (universe)**. Writing and expanding on description and visual text as we delve deeper into digital literature, with a look at interactive hypertext and virtual spaces. The first assignment will be writing on your own life from another’s perspective. The second, a “Humans of New York” style piece on someone else. The major assignment will be a “space-based” essay, using one of several software options and multiple modes, to create an immersive narrative. This unit will make up a total of **40% of your course grade**.

Blog posts & discussion, and in-class participation:

Nearly every week (total of 10), we will have a blog response and discussion (some assignments will also be shared on the blog). As a creative writing class, we will rely on thoughtful and engaging discussion, as well as sharing and workshop of writing. I want to hear what YOU think about the readings. Of course, I also expect these discussions to be respectful of others’ opinions and views. All writing will be subject to peer-review (keep

this in mind when writing extremely personal things) and revision. Revision is an inevitable part of writing, even for the most experienced writers—be prepared to write and rewrite and rethink and rewrite some more. Instructor conferences (over Zoom) will be required for drafts at least the 2 major assignments and suggested for the others. I will provide you with feedback but also help you work through what needs to be revised during this time. You are responsible for completing readings on time, composing a blog post and responding to your peers in a timely manner, and bringing something to class discussion every day. Your thoughts and opinions are a vital part of this class. I do not like to lecture and will only do so when absolutely necessary. What I want to know is what you think and what you want to create. These assignments make up **20% of your course grade**.

More detailed assignment descriptions will be provided online and when assignments are introduced. Paper and project proposal memos, in-class work, reflective memos and presentations will be counted in the final percentage for that specific assignment. Due dates and percentage breakdowns are as follows:

Unit 1: TIME (memory & reflection)	Winter	Feb. 11 th	5%
	Timeline	March 2 nd	15%
	Audio essay	March 23 rd	20%
Unit 2: SPACE (our place in the universe)	Perspective	April 1 st	5%
	Humans	April 15 th	15%
	Space essay	May 6/14 th	20%
Blog posts & discussion	Weekly reading response posts, responses & in-class discussion	Weekly (5 per unit)	20%
Total			100%

Formatting

Format non-electronic writing with the following specifications:

- 12 point font
- 1 inch margins
- Double spaced
- Black ink
- Left margin justified
- Documentation done in MLA

In addition: All files for electronic projects will be easily accessible (and instructions provided if applicable).

Course & University Policies

Covid-related policies (University-wide)

In alignment with our #unhtogether commitment to the ongoing health and safety of our community during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are several changes in classroom expectations.

All students are required to wear masks in class and campus buildings unless a medical exception is made through an accommodation process. It is your responsibility to obtain a mask before coming to class. For information on proper use of masks, acceptable mask types, and other PPE and social distancing guidelines visit <https://www.unh.edu/coronavirus>. Students wishing to request a medical accommodation should contact the Student Accessibility Services. Failure to comply with PPE and social distancing classroom protocols is a violation of the Student Rights, Rules & Responsibilities. If you refuse to comply, you will be asked to leave class immediately and you may also be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students and your associate dean.

- 1) Your instructor or TA may be wearing a face shield without a mask during instruction and only while maintaining at least a 6-foot distance from any student.
- 2) Prior to class, please wait outside the building, weather permitting, or in the hall or common area, observing social distancing and leaving plenty of room for the prior class to exit the room and building. Wipes are available near the room entrance. Obey entrance and egress signage and any additional faculty directions on entering or leaving the classroom.
- 3) Each classroom entrance is equipped with hand sanitizer and surface wipes.

Use hand sanitizer as you deem appropriate.

Wipe down your personal space prior to class and throw the used wipes away on the way out of class or take them with you.

- 4) Sit only in marked seats. Classes and laboratories were restructured to minimize or eliminate contact between individuals of less than 6 feet.
- 5) Contact tracing is mandated by the State of New Hampshire. The following practices will facilitate effective contact tracing implementation should the need arise:

Students should sit in the same seat for each class period to minimize potential contacts.

We ask students to know the names of each of the people sitting closest to them — their nearest neighbors. OR We will be filling out a seating chart as part of each class. OR A picture will be taken of where you are sitting for each class.

6) UNH has developed "Wildcat Pass," a web and mobile app to help each of us keep track of the requirements for being in compliance with necessary testing, isolation and quarantine rules that will help to keep our community healthy.

Log into your Wildcat Pass each day.

Be prepared to show your mobile device or a computer printout of your daily Wildcat Pass if asked by a university representative.

Additional English Department Policy on Faculty Exposure to Covid-19 in the Classroom:

Faculty who receive information about an infected student in their classroom, or who have themselves been exposed to infected person, may opt to immediately move their class to a remote modality for two weeks at their discretion. They should pay close attention to the pedagogical impact of such changes, and keep students fully informed, but their judgement on the safest and most effective mode of teaching is fully supported by the department.

Faculty who have students in the class without PPE, even for legitimate reasons, may opt to immediately move the class to a remote modality until the issue is resolved.

Course disruptions

Turn off all cell phones, pagers, or other noise-making items before coming to class. These devices are not to be used in a classroom setting. If your cell phone rings you will be asked to leave class. **Texting**, instant messaging, e-mail checking, and web surfing are also not allowed during class time. In order to avoid disrupting other students in class, **you will lose a discussion point** each time you are seen texting, etc. without verbal warning.

Deadlines

All due dates are listed in this syllabus. You will be reminded of due dates well in advance. Assignments are always due at the beginning of class (and will all be turned in digitally this semester). I do not accept late work. I will return your graded papers/projects within two weeks of receiving them.

Participation

Be advised that a good portion of your grade for the course is dependent upon on your attendance, participation, and compliance with work schedule. Reading and discussions are what make an interesting learning environment. Your thoughts and opinions are a large part of this course. Also, most projects will have work time and workshop during class time. That means that you must be present every day in both body and mind.

Resources

Online tutorials will be posted to the course website, but you will be expected to research and learn some software for your particular needs by finding tutorials and resources on the web. Books will also be made available to you by the instructor if applicable. You may also make appointments for individual or group conferences for any project or software concern.

Under student-use, images and/or text found on the web is available to you without copyright restrictions. Be aware, however, that this does not hold true if you want your work published outside an academic environment. Creative Commons also has resources available for fair use. **Always acknowledge your sources.**

The Connors Writing Center is now located in the library (behind the reference desk). I encourage each of you to visit at least once during the semester to obtain help or advice with anything from brainstorming topics to grammar and punctuation. Appointments are preferred and can be made by telephone or in person. (<http://www.unh.edu/writing/cwc>; 862-3272; 329 Dimond Library).

All software that we have in the lab is available on the library cluster computers. The Parker Media Lab (a MAC lab) is also located in the library. You can sign up for lab time to work on projects, receive help with projects, and check out equipment here (microphones, cameras, video cameras). (Dimond 237; 862-1747; <https://www.unh.edu/it/media-collaboration-services>).

Attendance

Attendance is required as this is a discussion and workshop-based course. Missing more than three class periods will impact your course grade. Each student is allowed to miss up to three meetings (classes or conferences) regardless of the reason; there is no distinction between excused and unexcused absences. **Each additional absence beyond the three deductibles may lower your final grade by one-third letter grade.** (For example, if you earned a B but missed five classes, your final grade will be a C+.) Missing a scheduled conference or more than 50% of a class meeting also counts as an absence. Exceptions will not be made unless extenuating circumstances can be documented for all absences. **If you are absent due to exposure or illness, you may Zoom to class that day. Let me know in advance and I will send you a link. Please do NOT attend class if you are sniffly, etc. Be safe & respectful of your classmates & our community.**

Academic Integrity

Academic Honesty is a core value at the University of New Hampshire. The [Student Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities](#) handbook defines academic honesty both inside and outside the classroom. The handbook specifically defines plagiarism in article 09.3:

"09.3 Plagiarism

The unattributed use of the ideas, evidence, or words of another person, or the conveying of the false impression that the arguments and writing in a paper are the student's own. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to the following:

1. The acquisition by purchase or otherwise of a part or the whole of a piece of work which is represented as the student's own;
2. The representation of the ideas, data, or writing of another person as the student's own work, even though some wording, methods of citation, or arrangement of evidence, ideas, or arguments have been altered;

3. Concealment of the true sources of information, ideas, or argument in any piece of work."

The penalties for plagiarism can be stiff: from an "F" for an assignment to an "F" for a course, or, in some cases, expulsion from the University. It is in your best interest to make sure you understand the UNH policy. Please take a moment to complete the UNH Plagiarism tutorial: <http://www.unh.edu/liberal-arts/plagiarism/tutorial.cfm>

Confidentiality & mandatory reporting

Because you may be sharing some very personal information with me in your essays or in conferences, please be aware of the following: in some circumstances in which you mention crimes/harm committed against you/by you or even secondhand in your writing or in a conference, I will have to share what you revealed. For example, **as a faculty member, I am required to report any disclosure of sexual harassment, sexual assault, unwanted sexual contact, domestic violence, relationship abuse, dating violence, and stalking to UNH police and university administrators.** Consider carefully what you share with me, and if you do not want this information reported, seek the assistance of the non-mandatory reporters available at Health Services and SHARPP (Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program). Note that SHARPP is available to you 24 hours a day should you seek advice or just want to talk (Crisis Line: 862-7233).

Services

Student Accessibility Services (SAS). If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with SAS in developing a plan to address your academic needs. I will be unable to make any accommodations without a letter from SAS (201 Smith Hall; 2-2607). I cannot provide retroactive accommodations.

Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS). Your academic success in this course is very important to me. If during the semester, emotional or mental health issues are affecting that success, please contact Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS) (3rd floor, Smith Hall; 862-2090), which provides counseling appointments and other mental health services.

Additional Services. Military & Veterans Services (862-0643; 3rd floor of Thompson Hall). Center for Academic Resources (2nd floor, Smith Hall; 2-3698). IT Help via Phone (2-4242). IT Help in Person: Academic Technology Support Center (ATSC) (Dimond Library, Level 3).

And...

I am dedicated to your learning, but you must be dedicated as well. Come to class prepared, complete your assignments, participate in class discussions and group work, be respectful to your peers and their ideas and you will succeed academically.

Discriminatory behavior based on race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation or age will

not be tolerated. I am committed to your success and hope this class helps you to become a better writer, thinker and academic.

I will be available in class, during office hours, and by appointment to answer any questions that you may have. If you are having any problems, please talk to me before due dates, etc. Please feel free to e-mail me or to call me to arrange an appointment. E-mail is usually the best way to contact me. As a general rule, please allow me at least **24 hours** to acknowledge and/or respond to your queries.

The following schedule is tentative and subject to changes depending on class dynamics and instructor mood. ☺

Schedule

Unit 1: TIME

Tuesday, February 2nd

Introduction to each other and course

Read: Syllabus, excerpt from *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, post to the blog with an excerpt from your favorite creative nonfiction for discussion

Thursday, February 4th

Continue introductions, class schedule

Reading discussion: Observation (& broccoli), favorite readings

Intro. to Winter short

Read: “The Pond in Winter” by HD Thoreau, “Winter” by Larry Sill, “Good Use for Bad Weather” by Donald Hall, & “Snow” by Jon Haines

Dress warm for Tuesday!

Tuesday, February 9th

Reading discussion: descriptive writing & sensory details

Writing outside

Share writing outside exercise, discuss details

Watch: *Treeline*, directed by Jordan Manley, & read “Poems about Trees” by K. Silem Mohammad, (& “Hermann Hesse on What Trees Teach Us About Belonging and Life”), blog post

Thursday, February 11th

Winter short due

Reading discussion: form/style. film, deconstruction & generated texts

Make a valentine: generated poems & letters

Introduce Timeline

Read: “Of Memoir & Memory” by Robert Atwan & excerpt from *Becoming* by Michelle Obama

Tuesday, February 16th

Reading discussion: memoir & memory

In-class work on essays

Read: Excerpt from *The Art of Memoir* by Mary Karr & excerpt from *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* by Jeanette Winterson, blog post

Thursday, February 18th

Reading discussion: reconstructing memory

In-class work on essays

Read & watch: “Adventures in Depression” by Allie Brosh & excerpt from *How to Ruin Everything* by George Watsky (& Ted Talk: Lucky)

Tuesday, February 23rd

Reading discussion: multimodal memoir

In-class work on essays

Rough draft for Thursday

Optional conferences

Read & watch: “My Father, Out to Sea” by Jaed Coffin & Ted Talk, blog post

Thursday, February 25th

Reading discussion: the medium for the message

Workshop rough draft/revisions

Publishing timelines to blog

Listen: Podcast: “Bars, Blood, & Boxing in Southeast Alaska”

Tuesday, March 2nd

Timeline due (post to blog)

Sound & voices

Introduction to audio essays & technology

Listen & read: *War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles & “The ‘War of the Worlds’ Radio Broadcast was a Magnificent Fluke” by A. Brad Schwartz

Thursday, March 4th

Reading discussion: memoir, identity & voice

Interview activity/practice audacity

Listen: The Moth Playlist: “Stranger than Fiction”

Tuesday, March 9th

Reading discussion: meaningful... & funny?

Adding sound effects, music

In-class work on drafts

Listen: Podcast, *Storycorps* or *This I Believe(s)* of your choice, blog post

Thursday, March 11th

Reading discussion: audio & emotion

Sign up for conferences

Read: excerpts from *And Here's the Kicker*, "How to Write Better using Humor" by Leigh Anne Jasheway & "7 Ways to Become a Master Humor Writer When You Don't Think You Have a Funnybone" by Sarah Cy

Tuesday, March 16th

Conferences

Reading discussion: Humor & voice

Work on audio essays

Read & listen: Excerpt from *Wow, No Thank You*: "We Almost Got a Fucking Dog" by Samantha Irby & "The Loft's Wordplay: Samantha Irby reads 'Ghost'"

Thursday, March 18th

Workshop audio essays/revision

Read: interview with Samantha Irby (TBA) & blog: "Bitches Gotta Eat"

Unit 2: SPACE

Tuesday, March 23rd

Audio essay due

Presentations

Reading discussion:

Read: "You're so brave for wearing clothes and not hating yourself by Lindy West" & "Hollywood Summer" by Samantha Irby, blog post

Thursday, March 25th

(Presentations cont.)

Reading discussion: perspective & adaptation

Watch *Shrill* in class

Read: "To Scratch, Claw, or Grope Clumsily or Frantically" by Roxane Gay & "A Few Words about Breasts" by Nora Ephron, & Un/Tied Shoes by Evie Ruddy & Tracey Lebedovich (& My Body?)

Tuesday, March 30th

In-class perspective exercise

Share exercise, discuss narrative/characterization

Watch: opening to *Stranger than Fiction* & excerpt from *Sherlock Holmes*, blog post

Thursday, April 1st

Perspective short due

Introduce Humans

Visual rhetoric and interviews

Read: *Humans of New York* TBA

Tuesday, April 6th

Reading discussion:

In-class work on essays

Rough draft for Thursday

Read: [Humans of New York](#) of your choice, blog post

Thursday, April 8th

Workshop rough draft/revisions

Introduction of final project

Bring images/text for platform tutorials next Thursday!

Play: [Way to Go](#) & other fun things for “break” TBA

Tuesday, April 13th (no class! classes follow Friday schedule)

Thursday, April 15th

Humans essay due (post to blog)

Final projects: Space, the final frontier!

Platform options and introductions

Read: [“What is Immersive Storytelling? The Frontier of Virtual Reality”](#) & [hypertext & VR TBA](#)

Topic proposals due (via email)

Tuesday, April 20th

Reading discussion: interactivity & nonlinear narrative

In-class work on projects

Read & Watch: Ted Talk: [“How Virtual Reality Can Create the Ultimate Empathy Machine”](#) by Chris Milk, [Clouds Over Sidra](#), & [Bashir’s Dream](#), blog post

Thursday, April 22nd

Reading discussion: the elegance of e-lit

In-class work on projects

Read: [Immersive narratives TBA](#)

Tuesday, April 27th

Reading discussion: reflection/the past & future of storytelling

Work on projects

Sign up for workshop & conferences

Thursday, April 29th

Work on projects/ posting drafts

Workshop & conferences

Tuesday, May 4th

Work on project revisions

Workshop & conferences

Thursday, May 6th
Presentations & discussion

Tuesday, May 11th
Last day of class!
Presentations & discussion
Blog recap!

Space essay final revisions due by Friday, May 14th