



English 501.06 Introduction to Creative Nonfiction
Nature, nouns, & art
TR 8:10-9:30am
Hamilton Smith 240

Instructor

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she/her/hers

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Office hours: T/TH 2:00-3:30, W 2-4 online, and by appt.

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Course Objectives

Introduction to creative nonfiction explores types of creative nonfiction such as nature writing, the profile, the memoir, and the personal essay. Extensive reading of contemporary authors to study the sources and techniques used in creative nonfiction. Regular papers, conferences, and workshops. In this section we will focus on nature writing, a researched “noun” essay, and ekphrastic writing. This will include weekly free writes and written responses to course readings, class discussion, three major essays, and one final revision/remediation of one of those essays into a multimodal work. Observe and explore the world around you and always listen to your broccoli!

After participation in this course you will be expected to:

- Recognize and critique nonfiction elements of style
- Write with rich description, dialogue, research, and a unique voice
- Communicate ideas clearly through your own voice and style
- 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
- Recognize that creative nonfiction encompasses a variety of things (including visuals)
- Develop an awareness and control of saying something valuable with words (& more)
- Hone creative writing, critical thinking, presentation, and group-work skills
- Analyze texts, including multimodal “texts,” with regards to significance, form, and style
- 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 the syllabus and course website: <http://multimodalmel.com/501/pages/501.06.html>

You will need a **writing journal specific to this class** for reader responses and free write assignments. These will be collected throughout the semester for assessment.

Assignments

The course includes weekly writing and reading response exercises, in-class discussions, workshop, and a minimum of three conferences with your instructor. Course readings are not optional, and lively class discussion will keep us from having things like pop-quizzes. Full assignment descriptions will be posted on Canvas when they are assigned.

Work must be professional, **original**, and turned in on time. As in a workplace, if you are going to miss a deadline, talk to me in advance. I am always available for help and questions, but not on the day a project is due.

The most important thing you can get out of this course is to explore your own creative ideas and voice. I have no tolerance for AI in creative writing and want to know your ideas and get to know your words. **Trust your voice**, every one of you has something important to say to the world. 😊

Nature Essay: The first unit of the semester we will be immersed in nature. Hopefully with time to write outside. We will be focused on sensory details and description, as well as our connection to nature and its significance in our lives. The variety of readings will provide a breadth of examples for your own nature writing essay.

Noun Essay: The second unit of the semester will be about nouns—people, places, and things that are meaningful to us! This unit essay will incorporate more research on a noun, as well as your personal connection to the person, place, or object you choose to write about.

Art Narrative: The third major writing assignment will be an art narrative. We will cover elements of narrative in class and our readings, including sensory detail description, dialogue, and structure. We will then visit the campus art gallery and you will choose a work of art to write on, connecting it to something in your life.

Final revision/remediation project: The final unit will explore revision and remediation. You will be choosing one of your three previous essays to complete a major revision and remediation (translating it into a new medium). We will be exploring some multimodal texts and platform options for you to choose from—video, hypertext, etc. You want to find a medium that fits the message and significance you were conveying in print, or that changes that significance in a meaningful way. This essay will be presented the last week of class. There will be technical assistance provided! This final assignment includes a reflective essay.

Reader response & free write journal

Throughout the semester we will have written responses to the course readings (in-class) and free write assignments that lead to ideas for each unit essay. These will be handwritten (exceptions for accommodations) with photos of your writing submitted to Canvas on the day and will also be collected at the end of each unit. These assignments make up 20% of your final grade.

Class discussion, reader response, in-class assignments, workshop, and instructor

conferences: Since this is a creative writing class, we will be relying heavily on engaging and thoughtful discussions. 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. Each unit will have in-class group sharing and activities and peer review workshops. 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 will be required for drafts of at least three of the major assignments. I will provide you with feedback but also help you work through what needs to be revised during this time. Peer reviews and conferences count toward your total unit essay grades.

More detailed assignment descriptions will be provided online and when assignments are introduced.

Due dates and percentage breakdowns are as follows:

Reader response journal		Ongoing	10%
Free-write exercises		Ongoing	10%
Unit 1: The Nature of Writing (& writing about nature)	Nature essay	Oct. 1 st	20%
Unit 2: Nouns (people, places, & things we hold dear)	Noun essay	Oct. 22 nd	20%
Unit 3: Ekphrastic writing (Writing about art, music, &)	Ekphrastic essay	Nov. 12 th	20%
Unit 4: Final essay revision/ remediation (Listen to your multimodal broccoli)	Revision/remediation/ reflection	Dec. 8 th / Dec. 11 th	20%
Total			100%

Formatting

Format typed 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 final digital projects will be easily accessible (and instructions provided if applicable).

Course & University Policies**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 unit point each time you are seen texting, etc. without verbal warning.

Netiquette Guidelines (from UNH Academic Technologies)

Netiquette is the socially and professionally acceptable way to communicate on the Internet. We are all expected to abide by these guidelines of “netiquette” when using online communication tools with your classmates and instructor. Guidelines can be found through the [Faculty Resource Hub](#) and at this [Academic Technology resource](#). More general guidance can be found [here](#).

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. 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 each unit 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 dealing with an unexpected, extenuating circumstance that will keep you out of class or affect your performance for more than a day or two, reach out to the Dean of Students (dean.students@unh.edu) to request a letter be sent to all your faculty.

Academic Integrity

From [UNH's policy on Academic Integrity](#): All members of UNH share responsibility for promoting and protecting the highest standards of integrity in scholarship and professional practice. The value of honesty and the expectation of conduct that goes with it are intended to reinforce a learning environment where students and faculty can pursue independent work without unnecessary restraints. At the same time, the University recognizes its responsibility to encourage and inculcate values and standards of conduct that will guide its students throughout their careers.

This means that each member will adhere to the principles and rules of the University and pursue academic work in a straightforward and truthful manner, free from deception or fraud. Students are expected to complete independent, original work for each academic activity unless otherwise specified by the faculty member. Students should seek clarification when in doubt. Any attempts to deviate from these principles will be construed as acts of academic dishonesty subject to disciplinary action.

Artificial Intelligence: Unless otherwise specified, the use of Automated Writing Tools, including chatGPT and similar artificial intelligence (AI) tools, is strictly prohibited in this course, even when properly attributed. The use of automated writing tools is considered plagiarism (as defined by UNH's [Academic Integrity Policy](#)) and will be handled in accordance with existing policy.

Plagiarism: Use or submission of intellectual property, ideas, evidence produced by another person, including computer generated text or work outsourced to third-parties, in whole or in part as one's own in any academic assessment without providing proper citation or attribution. In some cases, reusing one's own previous work without acknowledging or citing the original work can constitute self-plagiarism.

Please review [UNH's plagiarism tutorial](#).

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, you find you are experiencing emotional or mental

health issues, please contact the University's ([PACS](#)) (3rd floor, Smith Hall; 603-862-2090/TTY: 7-1-1) which provides counseling appointments and other mental health services. If urgent, students may call PACS M-F, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., and schedule an Urgent Same-Day Appointment.

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: The Nature of Writing (& writing about nature)

Tuesday, September 1st

Introduction to each other and course

Free write practice: biography

Read: Syllabus, [“What is Creative Nonfiction?”](#) by Lee Gutkind & [excerpt from Bird by Bird](#) by Anne Lamott, come with an example of creative nonfiction for discussion

Thursday, September 3rd

Continue introductions, class schedule

Reader response & discussion practice: defining creative nonfiction & the nature of writing (& broccoli)

Read: [“Going to the Woods: A Few Words about Nature Writing”](#) by Amber Lee & [“A Brief Guide to Writing the Nature Essay”](#) by Dinty Moore, [“Yosemite Glaciers”](#) by John Muir, & [Braiding Sweetgrass](#), [“Skywoman Falling”](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer

Tuesday, September 8th

Reader response & discussion #1: Nature writing, description & sensory details

Introduction to Nature writing assignment

Read: [“When I am among the trees” by Mary Oliver](#), [Treeline by Jordan Manley](#), [Hermann Hesse on “What Trees Teach us about Being Human” by Maria Popova](#), & [“The Tree Beyond Imagining” by Reg Saner](#)

Thursday, September 10th

Scavenger hunt/writing outside

Free write #1: Plants

Share descriptive paragraphs

Read: [“The Pond in Winter” by Henry David Thoreau](#), [“Winter” by Larry Sill](#), [“Snow” by John Haines](#), [“Good Use for Bad Weather” by Donald Hall](#), & [“Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost](#)

Tuesday, September 15th

Reader response & discussion #2: Sensory details & seasons

Descriptive words from images/videos

Read: [“January” by Verlyn Klinkenborg](#)

Thursday, September 17th

Free write #2: Seasons

Share descriptive paragraphs

[“The Summer Day” by Mary Oliver](#) (reading(s) from documentary)

Team odes to a season

Sign up for conferences for next week!

Read: [“Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver](#) ([bonus video](#) from her documentary), [“Living like Weasels” by Annie Dillard](#), [“Mute Dancers: How to Watch a Hummingbird” by Diane Ackerman](#). Bring an animal poem to class Tuesday

Full Documentary: [Mary Oliver: Saved by the Beauty of the World](#)

Tuesday, September 22nd

Reader response & discussion #3: creatures and presence

Share poems, creature drawings

Read: [“A Family History Told in Horses” by Rachael King](#), bring a photo of an animal to class Thursday

Thursday, September 24th

Individual conferences this week!

Free write #3: Creatures

Drafting & the process of revision

Rough draft for Tuesday

Read: [“Feminism \(n.\)”](#) by Roxanne Gay, [“In Praise of the Humble Comma”](#) by Pico Iyer, [“Enough Jam for a Lifetime”](#) by Maxine Kumin

Tuesday, September 29th

Workshop nature essays/revisions

Essays due Thursday!

Read: [“Odd Objects: In Praise of the Wunderkammer”](#) by Karen Babine, [“Afternoon Tea”](#) by Emily Hiestand, [“Spoon”](#) & [“Collar”](#) by Dinah Lenney

Unit 2: Nouns: people, places, and things (we hold dear)

Thursday, October 1st

Nature essay due!

Introduction to noun exploration assignment

Reader response & discussion #4: our connection to things

Free write #4: Objects

Read: [“My Mother in Two Photographs...”](#) by Aleida Rodríguez & [“My Father, Out to Sea”](#) Jaed Coffin, [“Becoming You”](#) by Joshua Rothman (library), [“Someone I Love”](#) by Naomi Shihab Nye, Humans of NY TBA

Tuesday, October 6th

Reader response & discussion #5: Profiles & characterization

Brainstorming noun essays

Read: Humans of NY TBA & [“The Art of an Effective Interview”](#) with Brandon Stanton (HoNY)

Thursday, October 8th

Free write #5: People

Interviews

Playing with perspective

Read: [“Writing about Place in Personal Nonfiction”](#) by Georgia Kreiger, [“The Ashes of August”](#) by Kim Barnes & [“Writing the Travel Essay”](#) & [“History”](#) by Dinty Moore, & [“The Shock of Teapots”](#) by Cynthia Ozick

Tuesday, October 13th

No class. Classes follow a Wednesday schedule!

Thursday, October 15th

Reader response & discussion #6: Place & travel

Free write #6: Place

Drafting & revision

Individual conferences this week!

Work on noun essays

Read: [“Taroko Gorge”](#) by Nick Montfort

Tuesday, October 20th

Workshop noun essays/revision

Read: [“The Starry Night”](#) by Anne Sexton & [“Vincent”](#) by Don McLean, excerpts from [Leap](#) by Terry Tempest Williams and [Still Life with Oysters and Lemon](#) by Mark Doty, [“Dead Christ”](#) by Brian Bouldrey, [“Ekphrasis”](#) and one ekphrastic poem from poets.org (bring with you Thursday)

Unit 3: Ekphrastic writing (Writing about art, music, &)

Thursday, October 22nd

Noun essay due!

Art Department Visit!

Reader response & discussion #7: art & ekphrastic writing

Free write #7: art

Introduction to ekphrastic essay

Read: [“Ekphrasis: Writing about Music”](#) by N.L. Holmes, [“Being James Brown”](#) Jonathan Lethem (library), [“Taylor Swift does not Exist”](#) by Sam Kriss, & [“Some Notes on Attunement”](#) by Zadie Smith ([“Sing it Loud”](#) by Jenny O’Connell?)

Tuesday, October 27th

Reader response & discussion #8: our connection to music

Bring a song for Thursday

Read: [“Suspended”](#) by Joy Harjo & [“Music is My Bag”](#) by Meghan Daum

Thursday, October 29th

Free write #8: music

class playlist

Read/watch: [“Pearl Harbor”](#) by Anthony Lane, [“Seeing Hamilton”](#) by Tim Sniffen, [“Oscar Rant part II: Barbie”](#) by Leah Williams

Tuesday, November 3rd

Reader response & discussion #9: performances that move us

Read/watch: [“A Critical Essay on the Art of Performance as Guided by Work on Improvisation”](#) by Gunnar de Jong & performances/performance readings TBA

Thursday, November 5th

Individual conferences this week!

Free write #9: performance

Drafting & revision

Ekphrastic essays in process check-in, preparing for workshop

Rough draft for Tuesday

Tuesday, November 10th

Workshop ekphrastic drafts/revision

Bring a printed copy of one of your essays for Thursday's class

Read: "The Medium is the Message" by Marshall McLuhan, (["Understanding Marshall McLuhan's Concept"](#) video), & ["Introduction: The Double Logic of Remediation"](#) by Jay David Bolter

Unit 4: Final revision/remediation/reflection (Listen to your (multimodal) broccoli)

Thursday, November 12th

Ekphrastic essays due!

Collage/remediation

"The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe, *Clueless*, *10 Things I Hate about You*

Introduction to Final Revision/Remediation & multimodal examples/technology

Read: multimodal/remediation examples: ["RedRidinghood"](#) by Donna Leishman, ["You're so Brave for Wearing Clothes & Not Hating Yourself"](#) by Lindy West & Pool party scene from *Shrill*, ["My Body, A Wunderkammer"](#) by Shelley Jackson & ["All Girls Must be Everything"](#) by Tina Fey & scene from *Mean Girls*

Tuesday, November 17th

Reader response & discussion #10: media & remediation

Proposals submitted for revision/remediation

Media/platform options/brainstorming topics

Topic proposals due (via email)

Thursday, November 19th

Free write #10: Brainstorming/planning for projects

Twine/ThingLink/MyMaps tutorial

In-class work on projects

Tuesday, November 24th

Reflective memos

Work on projects

Sign up for workshop & conferences

Happy Thanksgiving!

Tuesday, December 1st

Individual conferences this week!

Work on projects/ posting drafts

Thursday, December 3rd

Workshop revision/remediations

Tuesday, December 8th

Final revision/remediation essay presentations!

Presentations & discussion/workshop

Thursday, December 10th

Last day of class!

Presentations & discussion/workshop

Final project revisions & reflections due by Friday, December 11th!