

The Art of Personal Essay COURSE SYLLABUS

Credit hours: 3/Contact hours: 45

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General Description

Focuses on the critical reading and practical applications of the personal essay as a literary form. Student will produce critical and creative work examining the art of the personal essay. See course schedule pp. 2-3 for specific details.

Prerequisites/Co-Requisites:

Introduction to Creative Writing

Required Texts and Materials

Moore, Dinty W. *Crafting the Personal Essay: A Guide for Writing and Publishing Creative Nonfiction*. F+W Media, 2010.

Williford, Lex, and Michael Martone. *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: Work from 1970 to the Present*. Simon & Schuster, 2007.

The Touchstone Anthology provides stellar examples of creative nonfiction chosen for innovations in style, form and content. *Crafting the Personal Essay* provides insightful and practical strategies, exercises, and discussions for producing and refining personal essays.

Course Objectives

- 1) To examine styles and strategies for turning life experience into literature.
- 2) To practice and apply craft techniques for writing personal essay.
- 3) To identify in published work elements of personal essay craft and style.
- 4) To produce exercises and essays for the student's portfolio.
- 5) To develop workshopping skills with an experienced facilitator.

Course Guidelines

Attendance: Attendance matters. Missing an excessive number of classes places students at risk of failure. It is the students' responsibility to learn what they will miss or have missed in their absence. As emergency situations arise, students have the obligation to contact their instructor within 48 hours. Course grade and/or tuition appeals stemming from a lack of attendance, repeated tardiness, and/or failure to comply with withdrawal deadlines are not disputable.

Inclement weather or emergency closure: In the event that the campus is officially closed during regular class days, instructions will be posted on D2L.

Grading Distribution and Criteria

8 writing assignments @ 50 points ea.	400 points*
Workshops 3 @ 50 points ea.	150 points
Portfolio (3 best / revised pieces)	300 points
<u>Discussions 15 weeks @ 10 points ea.</u>	<u>150 points</u>

Total 1000 pts

Grades are assigned on average: 90% or above=A, 80-89%=B, 70-79%=C, 60-69%=D and below 60%=F.

Essay format: All assignments must be in Manuscript format and posted to D2L using the Dropbox. The student is responsible for making class copies of their work when it is their turn for workshop.

Workshop: Most creative writing courses have an element of workshop, which means time in which we discuss and critique a student work. As such, I have rules. ☺

- 1) **What happens in workshop stays in workshop.** Personal essay projects are personal in their very nature, so we must agree that any sensitive information confronted in an essay needs to stay in the workshop.
- 2) **Focus on the work.** Because these essays can run the gamut of emotions, and writers are affected by criticism because they are sharing their inner selves, it is important to focus critique on the work, not on the writer. For example, avoid “What Joe said...” Instead, try, “the narrator says or implies...”
- 3) **The writer on the chopping block is silent.** Yep. It hurts. Your job when your piece is being workshopped is to introduce it, provide contextual information (not a complete retelling of personal backstory), and then step back into a passive observer role.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to always do your own work. *Academic dishonesty* is defined as the unauthorized use of assistance with intent to deceive a faculty member or another person assigned to evaluate work submitted to meet course and program requirements. *Plagiarism* is the unauthorized use of someone else’s materials (book, article, graphics, etc.) without citing the source or using that work as one’s own without proper documentation. In other words, it’s cheating, and the grade earned is zero.

Course Schedule*

► *Note: Unit essays and final portfolio must be turned in to D2L Dropbox*

Week 1 **Course Introduction and in-class writing**
 “Why I Write” by Terry Tempest Williams
Read: “The Date” by Brenda Miller (*Touchstone*)
Read: Chapter 1-2 (Moore)
Discuss (in class): Craft techniques used by Miller
Write (assignment): “Gesture” p. 18 or “The Full Weight” p. 22

Week 2-3 **Memoir and Metaphor**

Read: Chapters 3-4 (Moore)

Read: “The Fourth State of Matter” by Jo Ann Beard (*Touchstone*)

Discuss (in class): Metaphor in personal essay and Beard’s essay

<http://www.essaydaily.org/2013/09/jill-christman-on-jo-ann-beard.html>

Write: “What’s a metaphor?” Moore pp. 44-45

Week 4-5 Mental Rabbits or the Imp of the Mind

Read: Chapters 5 and 7 (Moore)

Read: “Living Like Weasels” by Annie Dillard (*Touchstone*)

Workshop: Metaphor or Rabbit essays

Write: “I’m going to get that rabbit” Moore pp. 76-77

Week 6-7 Lyric and Braided essays

Read: Chapter 8 (Moore)

Read: “A Braided Heart” by Brenda Miller

Discuss: Braided essays

Write: 3 disparate items (see in-class assignment sheet)

Week 8-9 Conflict

Read: Chapter 9 (Moore)

Read: “Physical Evidence” by Kelly Grey Carlisle (*Touchstone*)

Workshop: Braided essays

Write: On the pleasure of... (Moore pp. 106-107)

Week 10-11 Who Am I?

Read: Chapter 12 (Moore)

Read: “High Tide in Tucson” by Barbara Kingsolver (*Touchstone*)

Discuss: “Until I learned to be in love with my life again” (Kingsolver)

Write: Plain vanilla (pp. 140-141) or Myriad Self (pp. 147-148)

Week 12-13 Humor

Read: Chapter 14 (Moore)

Read: “Repeat After Me” by David Sedaris (*Touchstone*)

Discuss: The stupidest things

Write: Grab bag pp. 163-165

Week 14-15 Curiosity

Read: Chapter 16 (Moore)

Read: Class choice from *Touchstone*

Workshop: Student’s choice

Write: One week pp. 182-183 (Moore)

FINAL: Portfolio of top 3 personal essays (300 points)

*Course schedule subject to change based on the needs of the class/instructor