

SYLLABUS, SUMMER 2017

**WRITERS IN NEW YORK: CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOP
CRWRI-UA 835-001 (2828)**

Professor: Saïd Sayrafiezadeh
Office Hours: By appointment only.

Schedule: Week 1: Monday, May 22 & Wednesday, May 24 (2:30pm-5:00pm)
Week 2: Wednesday, May 31 & Friday, June 2 (2:30pm-5:00pm)
Week 3: Monday, June 5 & Wednesday, June 7 (2:30pm-5:00pm)
Week 4: Monday, June 12 & Wednesday, June 14 (2:30pm-5:00pm)

Location: TK

Course Description

This creative nonfiction workshop will be a combination of writing, reading and analysis. It will be conducted seminar style, with in-class discussion as its primary component. One of the essential questions of the course will be to ask—but maybe not answer—what exactly constitutes *creative* nonfiction? Using examples from contemporary memoir, personal essays, newspaper articles, films, songs (and anything else that may have a useful narrative), we'll examine how writers shape raw material, how they choose to end a *true* story, how they employ dialogue, how they create drama, how tone and voice can enhance or distract from a story, how the difference between exaggeration and creative license is handled—or mishandled. We'll also focus on traditional storytelling elements like character development, arc, pace, climax—never mind that we're writing *nonfiction*. Our discoveries will be infused into our own work, by way of three original prose pieces written over the course of the term, based on assigned parameters. The emphasis here is on *original*, i.e., these pieces will be created expressly for our class; they won't be cobbled together using previous stories, journal entries, poems, screenplays, letters, etc. (The emphasis is also on *prose*.) Together we will examine our classmates' strengths and weaknesses, and point the way forward to revision(s). Our class discussions will include fundamental writerly concerns regarding process, discipline and distraction, as well as how to be published, how and why to find an agent, how to deal with an editor. There will be some in-class analysis of various art forms, including poetry, screenwriting, film, and anything else that might help us learn how to tell stories—even if our own stories are being drawn from real life.

Course Reader

The course reader includes short stories, personal essays and memoir excerpts. Course reader is not needed for the first class, but bring it for the rest of the semester.

It can be purchased at:
Unique Copy Center
252 Greene St.
212-420-9198
Price TK

Reading Schedule

(Class 1, Monday, May 22) No assigned reading.

(Class 2, Wednesday, May 24) *Looking for Johnny* by A.M. Homes. 'Get Home Safe,' *My Rapist Said* by Alisson Wood. *A Lesson in Injustice* by Prajwal Parajuly. *The Cost of Getting Kicked in the Face* by Brock Clarke. *The Life of a Project*.

(Class 3, Wednesday, May 31) *Half a Life* (excerpt) by Darin Strauss. *How Memoirists Mold the Truth* by André Aciman.

(Class 4, Friday, June 2) *A Million Little Pieces* (excerpt) by James Frey. *Omission* by John McPhee.

(Class 5, Monday, June 5) *The Hospital Suite* by John Porcellino. *That Crafty Feeling* by Zadie Smith.

(Class 6, Wednesday, June 7) *The Scream* by Elizabeth Frankenger. *The Numbers* by Bryan Charles. *The Silent Beauties of West 19th Street* by Carolyn Murnick. *When You Write a Memoir, Readers Think They Know You Better Than They Do* by Dani Shapiro.

(Class 7, Monday, June 12) *Notes From a Bystander* (draft and published version) by Saïd Sayrafiezadeh. *A Simple Way to Create Suspense* by Lee Child.

(Class 8, Wednesday, June 14) *The Empathy Exams* by Leslie Jamison. *Syd Field, Who Wrote the Book on Writing Screenplays, Dies at 77* by William Yardley.

Grading: Workshop instructors are responsible for assigning final grades with input from craft instructors. Class participation and attendance will count for **50%** of your grade, this includes speaking aloud, coming to class on time with the necessary supplies (see below) and avoiding the use of cellphones. Timely completion of your stories, adherence to the narrative parameters that I assign, and *polished writing that appears to have been carefully considered*, will count for **50%**.

The evaluation of your work will be based on:

- 1) *Class participation.* This is a seminar class, so consistent participation is required.
- 2) *Attendance:* Come on time for class, come back from break on time, and stay for the duration of class. College policy is that students are expected to attend all class sessions for courses in which they are enrolled. Since this course meets twice a week for only four weeks, more than one absence will lower your grade. Absences in excess of two weeks require withdrawal from the course.
- 3) *Course reader:* You're required to read and discuss the short works provided in your course reader. (Plus some additional odds and ends that I'll occasionally distribute in class.) Bring your course reader to every class with notes written down, prepared to discuss. Having the course reader counts as part of your class participation portion of the grade.

- 4) *Outside assignments*: There will be a few non-writing assignments to be completed outside of the classroom.
- 5) *Writing*: This is the crux of the workshop. You will be required to write three pieces over the course of the term. Two of these pieces will be workshopped in class. The third and final piece will be due at the end of the semester. When it's your turn to be workshopped, you will email your submissions to your classmates (and professor) by the due date (TBD) at 11:59 PM.
- 6) *Late work*: Late work will lower your grade.
- 7) *Formatting*: 12 pt. Times or Helvetica. Double spaced. Page numbers.
- 8) *Edits*: You'll be giving your classmates' their manuscripts with your comments and edits at the end of their workshop. You'll also compose a one-page letter for your classmates of your overall thoughts, suggestions, impressions, compliments.
- 9) *Workshop etiquette*: Please be thoughtful, constructive, considerate and engaged in class discussion. Treat your peers' and their work with respect and rigor.
- 10) *Final assignment*: Your third and final writing assignment will be due by the end of the semester. This will not be workshopped in class.
- 11) *Paper*: We'll only be handling paper in class. Every assignment you do should be printed out or handwritten and brought to class.
- 12) *Electronics*: No cellphones. No laptops. No tablets. Turn everything off before coming into the classroom. Use of electronics will lower your grade.
- 13) *Plagiarism*: NYU takes plagiarism very seriously. I'm required to report any case of suspected plagiarism.
- 14) *Disclaimer*: The literature we read for class may occasionally describe in graphic and unapologetic detail misogyny, racism, homophobia, sexual abuse, drug abuse, xenophobia, violence, etc. If you feel that you'd rather not read about certain subjects, please consider whether this is the right class for you.

This syllabus may be modified as deemed appropriate. Any changes will be announced in class.