

Instructor: Cris Beam

Writers In New York Creative NF Workshop, Summer 2023

Course Description:

The best literary nonfiction borrows several things from fiction: strong character development, well-developed, nuanced scenes, and a tangible narrative arc. But it also often bears the hallmarks of good journalism: thorough research, live reporting and a writer's quizzical, intelligent stance. This class meets directly at the intersection of fiction's energy and journalism's integrity—the place where literary nonfiction is born.

In this class, students will not only learn the components of a good story, but what makes an idea compelling to a diverse audience to begin with. We'll look at and write two forms of nonfiction: memoir, and the personal essay. We'll read masters in these styles as well as some newer voices—writers like Joan Didion, Jamaica Kincaid, bell hooks, and Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, to look at elements like tone and approach, argument and appeal. Each form is distinct, but we'll build on the skills we establish as the class moves along. The memoir, for instance, will be a short assignment, and based entirely on your lived experience. The personal essay can incorporate pieces of your life and belief systems, but must also integrate reporting and outside research.

Emphasis in this course will be on revision, and we will workshop both of the assignments so students can learn effective editing strategies for their own writing by working closely with their peers. Readings will be somewhat extensive and come from one compiled reader, available as PDFs.

Required Tools and Texts:

- Course Reader, available as PDFs, on Brightspace, under Content

Course requirements:

- Attendance & participation
- Close readings of required texts
- Writing Exercises
- One memoir (1200- 1800 words)
- One personal essay (1500-2500 words)

Format

Papers are to be typed, double-spaced, and stapled. When you are up for workshop, you must submit your paper to NYU Brightspace, in the Discussions Folder, on or before the deadline we

determine in class. You must staple all drafts (with my comments) to the final papers. Please do not submit written work that you do not want others to see.

Late and Missed Assignments

Although drafts will not be graded, they still must be turned in on time. If you submit a draft late, I cannot promise to read it in time for my comments to be useful to you. If you do not turn in a draft, you are still responsible for turning in a final version of the paper, the grade of which will be lowered by one letter. Late final papers will adversely affect the grade as well.

Remember that late or missed exercises or drafts often take their toll on the quality of final papers.

Attendance

This only meets twice per week, so your attendance is vital. Aside from religious observances, you are permitted only one absence without adversely affecting your grade.

Grading

The final grade for the semester will be determined as follows:

Exercises	5%
Class participation	20%
Memoir	50%
Personal Essay	50%

Students will receive one grade for the entire program, which will be a reflection of their performance in both their workshop and craft classes, as well as their attendance at the evening events.

You must complete all of your work in order to pass the class.

Week One

Class One

Introduction

What is Literary Nonfiction?

In-class Exercise

Reading for next week: Lucy Sante, Alison Smith and Oscar Hijuelos

Optional Assignment: Sante writing exercise

Class Two

Discuss Alison Smith and Oscar Hijuelos

Sante Exercises

Emotional truth versus literal truth

Writing Children: Kid logic

The physical world—using all five senses

Assignment: Prep for Workshop and read *The Button Man*

Week Two

Class Three

Workshop Group A

Class Four

Workshop Group B

Reading for next week: Rodriguez, Didion and Ghansah

Week Three

Class Five

MEMOIRS DUE

Discuss the Personal Essay: What is It?

Discuss Rodriguez and Didion and Ghansah

Place as Focus

Incorporating research

Reading for Next Class: McKibben, hooks and Kincaid

Class Six

Discuss McKibben, hooks and Kincaid

Idea as Focus

Style, voice persuasion

Week Four

Class Seven

Workshop Group B

Class Eight

Workshop group Workshop Group A

Final Personal Essays to be submitted via email after class is complete