



## Course Goals

- develop working definitions of *narrative* and *literary nonfiction*
- identify various nonfiction genres and discuss their defining characteristics and particular ethical and stylistic questions relevant to each
- learn how to structure, write, and rewrite truth-based stories
- become familiar with certain canonical works of nonfiction and significant nonfiction writers
- evaluate and assess self, peer, and published writing
- learn how to go beyond yourself to create texts of consequence in the wider world

## Reading/Listening

Each week, we will read both texts on craft and examples of narrative nonfiction. We will also listen to episodes of the podcast *Serial*, which is based on investigative journalism. I will hand out most of the written readings but will ask you to print them from time to time. Print, read, and annotate your texts before the class for which they're assigned. We are reading to study, learn, and analyze how these writers utilize different techniques to tell stories, which requires focused reading and annotating. (If you show up to class with a clean copy of an assigned reading, you have not done the expected work.)

### required texts

readings provided in class or posted on CourseWeb (see *Course Reading List*)

*Serial* podcast, Season 2 : <https://serialpodcast.org/>

## Projects/Portfolio

There are two major writing projects over the semester: a journalistic piece and either a personal essay or memoir. Each project will be approximately 2000 words in length. The order that you submit them is up to you. (Some of you will turn in a journalistic piece for project 1 and a personal essay/memoir for project 2, while others will do vice versa.) You will receive detailed prompts for both projects.

At the end of the term, you will submit a final portfolio that includes your working definitions of narrative and literary nonfiction, research on a specific publication venue of your choice, and highlights of the work you've done over the semester. You will receive a detailed prompt and rubric for the portfolio.

### due dates

March 4 <sup>th</sup>	project 1
April 15 <sup>th</sup>	project 2
April 27 <sup>th</sup>	final portfolio

There are many style guides out there and different publications follow different guides, including their own in-house editions. (AP and Chicago Manual of Style are both prominent in the fields we're studying.) For projects and assignments, choose a style guide that matches your intended publication.

## Assignments

Writing assignments, reading quizzes, and *Serial* notes are **due on CourseWeb by 9:00 AM on the due date**. Your three lowest assignment grades will be dropped to determine your final grade in the course.

### reading quizzes

Most Mondays, you will have a reading quiz due before class based on assigned reading.

### Serial notes

Most Wednesdays, you will submit listening notes for that week's assigned episode of *Serial* before class. I will demonstrate how to take listening notes before the first set is due.

### writing assignments

Most Fridays, you will have shorter writing assignments due before class. These will lead into the two writing projects (see *Projects/Portfolio* above).

## Presentation

Each of you will give a 5-7 minute presentation on a text that is not assigned for our class. This text can be any genre. You might present on a written nonfiction piece that relates to a reading we've done, a film documentary that uses techniques we could adapt in our own writing, or an interview with a world famous dancer that speaks to a writing struggle you're facing. The point is to begin connecting our studies of nonfiction to other texts you encounter. At the beginning of the semester, I will give a sample presentation and you will sign up for presentation dates. You will receive a detailed prompt and rubric.

## Grades

35%	assignments
25%	project 1
25%	project 2
10%	final portfolio
5%	presentation

Keep in mind that it is not uncommon for writing that earned an A in high school to be evaluated as C work (or lower) in college.

A	= superior work, above expectations, publishable
B	= meritorious work, commendable, above average
C	= adequate work, meets all expectations and criteria
D	= minimal work, does not meet requirements
F	= failure

Note that *meritorious* means commendable or praiseworthy: a B, in other words, is earned for work that is above average. An important part of our effort in this course will be to identify what makes a piece strong or, for that matter, average or weak.

## **Participation and Deadlines**

Discussion is central to the work of the course. Come to class on time, prepared to take part in conversation.

While you should try to attend every class, you are permitted three absences. Saving your three absences for emergencies is a wise idea; regardless of the reasons for missing class, each absence over the three permitted results in a 1/3 letter grade decrease in your final grade. (If you earn a B in the course but have four absences, your final grade will be a B-.) Arriving to class late multiple times or not participating (e.g., sleeping or texting) will also have a negative effect on your grade.

Everyone in the class will have an individual conference with me during the week of February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Missing your conference or coming unprepared qualifies as an absence. You will sign up for conference times a week or two before conference week.

Work that is turned in late will not receive full credit. I will deduct 25% for an assignment that is turned in within 24 hours past the due time and 50% for an assignment that is over 24 hours late. I will not accept work a week past the due date. For projects, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours that a project is late.

Not having an assignment completed is not a reason to miss class! Doing so will result in a double penalty – a poor grade on the assignment and an absence.

If an emergency arises, contact me as soon as possible.

## **Submitting Assignments**

Submit a digital copy of every assignment to CourseWeb by 9:00 AM on the due date. Detailed instructions specific to each assignment (such as how many hardcopies to bring to class) will be posted on CourseWeb a week or more before the due date.

## **Academic Integrity**

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. Students will fail the course for incidences of plagiarism.

<http://www.as.pitt.edu/fac/policies/academic-integrity>

You may not submit a paper or project—or versions of a paper or project—to fulfill the requirements of more than one course without permission from both instructors.

## **CourseWeb (Blackboard)**

Announcements, assignment descriptions, and readings will all be posted on our class CourseWeb site. This is also where you will digitally submit all work.

<http://courseweb.pitt.edu>

Log in using your university computer account username and password. CourseWeb automatically uses your Pitt email account.

If you use another email account as well (e.g., Yahoo, AOL, Gmail, etc.), be sure to check your Pitt account at least once a day, since I will occasionally send email announcements to the class via CourseWeb. Use your Pitt email account when contacting me.

Tutorials are available under “Help” in the menu. If you have trouble logging on, call the help desk at (412) 624-HELP.

### **Technology in the Classroom**

You may bring your tablets, smart phones, laptops, etc. into class so long as you use them productively. (Note: you are NOT required to have this stuff.) If you’re on Facebook or texting and I find out, you’re banned to paper and pencil.

### **Resources**

#### your instructor

Do not hesitate to email me, attend office hours, or make an appointment to see me outside of these times to discuss your work in the course. In the past, I’ve had several students who made it a point to speak with me individually once every week or two, and their work in the course often became markedly stronger.

#### your peers

Creating working relationships with other students in the course can help you both in and out of class. In the past, I’ve had students who met on their own time to swap drafts and feedback, and the extra effort showed in their work. Your peers are also a good resource to find out what you missed in a class that you were not able to attend.

#### The Writing Center

Located in 317-B Student Center, 4024 O’Hara St., the Writing Center is an excellent resource for working on your writing with an experienced consultant. Although you should not expect consultants to correct your papers for you, they can assist you in learning to organize, edit, and revise your essays. Consultants can work with you on a one-time basis, or they can work with you throughout the term. In some cases, I may suggest that you visit the Writing Center for help on a particular problem; otherwise, you can decide on your own to seek assistance. Their services are free, but you should call ahead (412-624-6556) or make an appointment online at [www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/](http://www.english.pitt.edu/writingcenter/)

#### other services

Pitt offers a number of services to help students who are struggling either academically or personally. If you are a student with a disability for which you will be seeking accommodations, contact Disability Resources and Services in 216 William Pitt Union or at 412-648-7890. Pitt also offers free counseling at the Counseling Center, located in 334 William Pitt Union (412-648-7930), for students who are experiencing personal or emotional difficulties.

## Course Reading List

- Bucak, Ayse Papatya. "I Cannot Explain My Fear" (*Brevity*, 2008)
- Bucak, Ayse Papatya. "I Cannot Explain My Heart" (*Hot Metal Bridge*, 2015)
- Didion, Joan. "Goodbye to All That" (*The Saturday Evening Post*, 1967)
- Dillard, Annie. "Living Like Weasels" (*excerpted from Teaching a Stone to Talk*, 1982)
- Harvey, Yona. "Blood Work" (*excerpted from Writing Away the Stigma*, 2014)
- Heathcott, Joseph. "Skin flaneur" (*100 Word Story*)
- Koenig, Sarah. *Serial* podcast, season 2 (WBEZ Chicago, 2015-16)
- Junod, Tom. "Can You Say... Hero?" (*Esquire*, 1998)
- Laskas, Jeanne Marie. "Game Brain" (*GQ*, 2009)
- Laymon, Kiese. "Da Art of Storytelling (A Prequel)" (*Oxford American*, 2015)
- Meyer, Michael. *In Manchuria* excerpt (2015)
- McCready, James. "I Was Furniture" (*100 Word Story*)
- Orwell, George. "Shooting an Elephant" (*New Writing*, 1936)
- Rocheleau, Deborah. "Nostalgia" (*100 Word Story*)
- Talese, Gay. "Mr. Bad News" (*Esquire*, 1966)
- Trachtenberg, Peter. *Another Insane Devotion* excerpt (2012)
- Wallace, David Foster. "Consider the Lobster" (*Gourmet Magazine*, 2004)
- Wilkinson, Rachel. "The Doctors Whose Patients Are Already Dead" (*The Atlantic*, 2015)
- Wilkinson, Rachel. "Roach Parts" (*Green Briar Review*, 2014)
- Woolf, Virginia. "The Death of the Moth" (*The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, 1942)
- Yager, Sarah. "Prison Born" (*The Atlantic*, 2015)

**draft schedule (subject to change based on class needs)**

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
	<b>1/6</b>  first day of class  literary nonfiction overview	<b>1/8</b> read: Laymon’s “Da Art of Storytelling’ (A Prequel)”  in class: Heathcott’s “Skin flaneur”  <b>due: reading quiz 1</b>
<b>1/11</b> read: Junod’s “Can You Say...Hero?”  sample presentation <b>due: reading quiz 2</b>	<b>1/13</b> listen: <i>Serial</i> episode 1   <b>due: Serial notes</b>	<b>1/15</b> in class: sample student work #1   <b>due: initial ideas</b>
<b>1/18</b>  MLK holiday (no class)	<b>1/20</b> listen: <i>Serial</i> episode 2   <b>due: Serial notes</b>	<b>1/22</b> in class: craft reading   <b>due: ideas, refined</b>
<b>1/25</b> read: Didion’s “Goodbye to All That”  presentations 1 & 2 <b>due: reading quiz 3</b>	<b>1/27</b> listen: <i>Serial</i> episode 3   <b>due: Serial notes</b>	<b>1/29</b> in class: McCready’s “I Was Furniture”   <b>due: one idea, refined</b>
<b>2/1</b> read: Yager’s “Prison Born”  presentations 3 & 4 <b>due: reading quiz 4</b>	<b>2/3</b> listen: <i>Serial</i> episode 4   <b>due: Serial notes</b>	<b>2/5</b> in class: sample student work #2   <b>due: refined idea/ draft beginnings</b>
<b>2/8</b> read: Talese’s “Mr. Bad News”  presentation 5 <b>due: reading quiz 5</b>	<b>2/10</b> listen: <i>Serial</i> episode 5   <b>due: Serial notes</b>	<b>2/12</b> intro to Wilkinson  in class: craft reading  <b>due: draft beginnings</b>
<b>2/15</b> read: Wilkinson’s “The Doctors Whose Patients Are Already Dead”  presentation 6 <b>due: reading quiz 6 &amp; conference sign-up</b>	<b>2/17</b> read: Wilkinson’s “Roach Parts”  in class: Rocheleau’s “Nostalgia” <b>due: reading quiz 7</b>	<b>2/19</b> Rachel Wilkinson visit   <b>due: application of Wilkinson to own work</b>
<b>2/22</b> read: Wallace’s “Consider the Lobster”  presentation 7 & 8 <b>due: reading quiz 8</b>	<b>2/24</b> listen: <i>Serial</i> episode 6  student conferences (no class) <b>due: Serial notes</b> <b>*project 1 draft due before conf.</b>	<b>2/26</b>  student conferences (no class)  <b>*project 1 draft due before conf.</b>

