

Intermediate Creative Nonfiction

Syllabus

Instructor

Kevin Davis

Quarter: Spring 2024

Start – end date: March 20 – May 8

Session day/time: Wednesday, 6:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Course Code and Section: WRIT42633 24S1

Email

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Course Overview

How do we enhance our work into polished, powerful prose? In this eight-week course, we'll combine writing workshops with reading assignments that illustrate a variety of creative nonfiction techniques. We'll focus on structure, revision and adding depth to your work. While most of the course will be dedicated to doing workshops for stories in progress, we will occasionally have writing exercises in and outside of class and will write one new short essay.

Modality

Remote learning

Note to students

Students in this course are required to bring a work in progress or a section of a work in progress (5,000 words or less) to the first class. Students will be expected to post copies of their works to their classmates a week in advance of workshop sessions.

The class is designed to be interactive and discussion based. Each week we'll talk about the assigned readings, breaking down stories, analyzing them and figuring out how and why they work or don't. This is a demanding class, and it's important that you keep up with the writing assignments and develop the discipline and time commitment required. Because the class has a workshop component, your fellow students will be depending on you to share your work as scheduled for discussion.

Required texts

All readings will be posted on the Canvas web site under the blue "Files" link on the left side of the page. From there, click the Readings folder which contains all class readings.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Assignment
Before First Class		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post Your Essays/Works in Progress on Canvas in the Discussion section designated for works in progress. • Read the story “Structure” by John McPhee, posted in the Readings section.
Week 1	<p>Review of creative nonfiction. Understanding the “creative” in creative nonfiction. Building on your first and early drafts. Examining themes and big picture questions in your stories and essays. Where do you want to go from here? Assign workshop dates. Discuss Brevity essays.</p>	
Week 2	<p>Great beginnings. Getting the right start to your stories and essays. Trying new approaches and points of view. Workshop essays/works in progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “41 False Starts” and “How Introductory Paragraphs Work in Creative Nonfiction.” • Visit https://brevitymag.com/ and read a few Brevity essays to understand and study this brief essay style. Start working on your own Brevity essays. Begin to read and comment on classmates’ longer essays/works in progress.
Week 3	<p>Using research to dig deeper. Constructing and deconstructing. Focus on the framework and foundation of your pieces and experimenting with different structures. Grappling with the “So what?” question. Workshop works in progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “The Two Inmates: Research in Creative Nonfiction and the Power of ‘Outer Feeling’” and “At the Grave of Sadie Thorpe.”
Week 4	<p>Building and refining your characters – whether it’s yourself as narrator, or others in your work,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: “Going It Alone”

Week	Topic	Assignment
	we'll examine ways to make real characters come alive. Workshop essays/works in progress.	
Week 5	Curiosity. Following your passions and instincts. Voice lessons. Finding the right voice and tone and making sure it's consistent throughout your piece. Staying on key with tone. Workshop essays/works in progress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: "The Queen of Sherwin Avenue"
Week 6	Looking at the narrative arc. Does your story fulfill its promise and take readers (and yourself) from one place to another? The story as a journey. Workshop Brevity essays.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: "My Family's Slave" • https://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/the-late-alex-tizons-first-memory-and-his-last-byline-my-familys-slave/ • https://www.theatlantic.com/membership/archive/2018/03/the-story-behind-my-familys-slave/556652/ • https://www.npr.org/2017/05/24/528810319/-were-still-talking-about-my-familys-slave
Week 7	Discuss reading. Workshop Brevity essays.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: "Loneliness and Me"
Week 8	Discuss reading. Workshop Brevity essays.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: "The Crane Wife"

Accessing remote courses

Remote courses are taught through our Canvas platform. Approximately two weeks before your class begins, we will add you to your canvas site using the email address you provided at the time of registration. An invitation will then be sent to that email. Click the "Get Started" button in the email to begin the Canvas login process. For step-by-step instructions, please visit <https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts>. Once you've created your Canvas account, you can access any Graham School canvas course for which you are registered at: <https://canvas.uchicago.edu>.

Accessibility information

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class session at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

UChicago CARES Statement:

The University and its faculty are committed to creating a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students. At the University, all faculty, staff, graduate student instructors, and teaching assistants are considered “Individuals with Reporting Responsibilities” and are required to let the University’s Title IX Coordinator know about any disclosures they receive from students about experiences of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment). This includes disclosures of experiences that happened before their time at the University. This is to ensure that all students who have experienced sexual misconduct receive support, options, and information about their rights and resources. Students are not obligated to respond to this outreach, and this will not generate a report to law enforcement.

For more information, please see [this handout for students](#) as well as the [University’s Policy on Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct](#) and [Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment](#). You can also reach out directly for services and support from the [Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support](#) by emailing titleix@uchicago.edu.

If you, or another student you know, wishes to speak to a confidential resource who does not have this reporting responsibility, please contact the Sexual Assault Dean on Call through the UChicago Safe App or at 773.834-HELP.

Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zme1@uchicago.edu.