

# Writing *Creative* Nonfiction

Summer 2010

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**PROSPECTUS / OBJECTIVES:** Welcome to Writing 323, where we learn to write true stories in creative ways. Nonfiction used to refer to news articles and feature stories, but in the past twenty years or so, creative nonfiction, a blend of facts and creative writing techniques, has become a major genre in the creative arts.

As with fiction writing, creative nonfiction talent can't be taught. But technique can be—just as craft can be sharpened through guided practice, and scope can be broadened through wider exposure to good writers. We'll use the learn-by-doing technique, and no previous creative writing experience is necessary—willingness to listen, write, rewrite, rewrite again, and try new approaches are the only requirements. Commitment to improvement and willingness to work will take you far---talent is not the issue; grades are based on what you actually DO. Since we're traveling for this course, the final project will focus on travel writing.

Miller, Brenda and Suzanne Paola. *Tell It Slant: Writing and Shaping Creative Nonfiction* McGraw-Hill, 2004.  
**ISBN: 0-07-251278-4. IF YOU ORDER ONLINE, BE ABSOLUTELY SURE TO GET THIS EDITION—use the ISBN # when you search.**  
Plus CNF readings TBA

**CRUCIAL EMAIL and ECLASS:** You will receive important announcements and some reading assignments by email. All students are required to check their PLNU e-mail daily; twice daily is even better.

## COURSE PLAN

Students are required (1) to complete all or most of the reading and assignments for the course by the end of Spring term and (2) to attend 3 or 4 discussion and planning meetings during Spring term, plus conferences by arrangement with the professor. Reading assignments and exercises will be due at the end of January, February, March, and April in the spring term and students will complete a final CNF with cover letter and mailing materials by the end of the Summer I term.

## EVALUATION

50% Readings and exercises  
25% Travel journal, meeting attendance, and class participation  
25% Final CNF and mailing

**Reading Schedule: WHAT TO TURN IN WHEN A CHAPTER ASSIGNMENT IS DUE:**  
**Think of each assignment as a three-part, stapled package that looks like this:**

1. On Top: The final draft of the item. This clean draft follows all of the writing mechanics and format guidelines below and in the "HOW TO SEND" article.
2. Below the Top Draft: At least one MARKED draft of the item. A marked draft is a printout that has ink or pencil corrections/notes on it. It may be that you usually do all your corrections on the computer; if so, try this marked draft method anyway while you're in this class. Trust me, writing on a typed draft provides a new dimension to editing.
3. Rough notes or brainstorming notes, either written or typed.

**Writing Mechanics:** All work turned in should be prepared as if each piece were being submitted to those picky souls who publish creative nonfiction. You will receive a “How to Send Creative Nonfiction” handout that models the professional format you’ll use to send out your work. Use that format for every assignment in this class, beginning with the first one.

**ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

Order the book online immediately (or buy it in a bookstore) and read the following:

**READING Over Christmas Break:** Order the text online (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Abe, etc. etc.) or get it at a used bookstore ASAP. Read Part 1 (CH 1&2), plus these pieces from the PART IV “anthology” section: Berry, “An Entrance to the Woods” and Didion, “Goodbye to All That” ALSO read “Kevin Heath, “Yardwork,” and Robin Dodds “Vino with Pino” which I’ve attached

**WRITING Over Christmas Break:** Do one or two of the “Try It” exercises in chapter 1 and/or 2.

If you don’t get the book on time, write 2 pages or so on a conflict you’ve had with a person, place, or thing. Be descriptive and use dialogue.

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**READING FOR JANUARY:** Part 2, CH 3-6 plus these pieces from the PART IV “anthology” section:

- Dillard “Total Eclipse”
- Hemly, “Reading notes to my mother”
- LaMott, “Why I don’t meditate”

**WRITING for January:** Two “Try it” exercises. Don’t make them both from the same chapter. Each exercise should be 2-3 pages, double spaced, following the “How to Send” format.

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**READING FOR February:** Part 2 Ch 7&8 plus these pieces from the PART IV “anthology” section:

- Kingston, “No Name Woman”
- Sanders, “Buckeye”
- White, E.B. “Afternoon of an American Boy”

**WRITING for February:** Two “Try it” exercises. Don’t make them both from the same chapter. One “Family Story With a Point.”

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**READING FOR March** Part 3, CH 9-10 plus 3 new Anthology readings of your choice

**WRITING for March:** Two “Try it” exercises. Don’t make them both from the same chapter. One Prose poem.

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**READING FOR APRIL** Part 3, CH 11, 12, Epilogue plus Readings TBA

**WRITING for APRIL:** One CNF piece, 1000-2500 words.

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**FINAL WRITING due June 21:**

A CNF travel oriented piece from the tour, 1000-2500 words, with cover letter and mailing apparatus.