

## **Cedar Crest College**

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Office Hours: Tues., 11:00 a.m.-noon.; Thurs., 2:30-3:30 p.m.; and by appointment

### **Nonfiction Writing: Writing for Publication Spring 2009 ENG 235 (3 credits)**

#### **Texts:**

Nguyen and Shreve, *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*.

Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed.

Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.

Handouts

Your writing

#### **Course Description:**

An exploration of approaches to nonfiction for those who are interested in writing for publication. Students will analyze published works and learn strategies for developing their own material

Private journal-keeping is an honored and honorable form of writing, but it is not the concern or work of this course. During class time, we will write, read our work aloud, consider what others have written, and talk about such matters as structure, style, and markets. Format: This class will be a workshop: your presence and your participation will determine its success.

ENG 235 fulfills the category of WRI2 and is a requirement for the writing concentration and writing minor. Prerequisite: Successful completion of English 100 (with a grade of C or higher).

**Course Learning Objectives** (these are in accordance with the objectives of the Humanities Dept.):

--To encourage the development of your writing skills and your appreciation of others' creativity and skills.

--To provide you with strategies for writing, editing, reading, and teaching nonfiction, approaches that you can use in this course and beyond.

#### **Outcomes:**

--Students will produce original work that demonstrates the mastery of various subgenres and devices of nonfiction.

--Students will demonstrate reading, editing, and analytical/critical thinking skills.

### **Course Requirements:**

--**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is required. Please note: You are allowed two absences (this includes medical and sports absences, so plan your cuts carefully). More than two (2) absences will affect your final grade; seven (7) absences will result in a grade of **F**. Excessive lateness and early departures will count as absences.

--**Readings** from textbooks and assorted handouts.

--Short discovery **exercises**, written in class or prepared ahead of time for class discussion.

--**Drafts** for workshops.

--**Informal reports** of findings re: markets and examples of types of essays.

--**Five “finished” pieces:** see syllabus for dates: Due dates are starred.

--A self-evaluation (one paragraph), to accompany the final project.

--**Two oral presentations:**

- 1) Leading a discussion: each student will lead the discussion of a selection from *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*
- 2) Reporting on a blog: each student will be responsible for presenting and evaluating a blog.

--**Active participation:** discussion of readings and other students' writing. All students must present their work to the rest of the class in the draft workshops and must take part meaningfully in peer-critiquing sessions. (On occasion, you may also present final copies and further revisions.) Failure to participate orally in commenting on others' work will result in a low class grade and the reduction of the final grade by up to a full letter grade.

**Note: There will be a penalty for late work:** If you miss a class on a day when written work—draft or final copy—is due, your paper is still due on that date. The penalty for a late final copy or a missing draft will be the loss of one full numerical credit for the assignment in question.

### **Preparing Your Work:**

--All work, including rough drafts for workshops, must be typed/word processed.

--You will need to provide copies of your work (including drafts) for others in the class.

--All work should be double-spaced. Use one-inch margins and a font size of 12 (This is a sample of size 12 font).

--Proofread. And then proofread again. Using the spell check is only the start. Read your work aloud to double-check for errors.

--Submit all work on time; late papers will affect the workshop and your final grade.

--Do not wait to print your paper until just before it is due (Something will inevitably go wrong).

--You should begin planning your final paper in mid-March.

--Keep a copy of everything that you write.

### **Revising Your Work:**

You have the option of revising and resubmitting your work (and I strongly encourage this), but please do so promptly. Do not wait until the final days (or even weeks) of the semester to produce multiple drafts. Again, plan and pace your work. Submit revisions within 1-2 weeks, if you wish me to consider them. You should be writing and revising

throughout the semester. You may submit revisions to me or--and I encourage this--represent your work to the entire group.

### **Conferences:**

You are always welcome to schedule an appointment to review your work.

### **Assessment/Grading:**

Relationship of assignments and requirements to outcomes:

--Students will demonstrate their synthesis of course content by their completion of writing assignments and by their meaningful participation in class discussions and workshops.

--Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in critical analysis in class discussions, oral reports, and written assignments.

--Students will demonstrate the ability to write clearly and effectively in a series of essays.

### **Grading:**

Grading for writing assignments is generally holistic and uses a scale of 1-4, 4 being the highest score (and the equivalent of an A).

Because of the emphasis on the process of writing, I will not assign letter grades to individual papers. I will, however, make copious comments and use a system of numbers: **4** indicates excellent/outstanding work, **3** indicates fair work, and **2** or **1** will serve as a warning about unsatisfactory work. I will give you a warning at the midpoint of the semester if it seems as though your work merits a grade below B-. The rubric for grading is included on the last page of this handout.

Your **final grade** will depend on the quality of your written work, your progress, your attendance, and your participation in literary discussions and peer-critiquing sessions.

### **Additional Student Responsibilities:**

--**Make-Up Policies:** Because the course is conducted as a workshop, all assignments should be completed and presented on time. If you miss a class meeting on a day when work is due, you must still provide me with the work on that day and present the work in class on the first day that you return.

--The Cedar Crest **Honor Code** and the **Classroom Protocol Code**, as stated in the Customs Book, will be in effect at all times.

--**Plagiarism**, which is the appropriation of and uncredited use of another's work, in whole or in part, is a serious offense.

A reminder of the statement on plagiarism distributed to all students in WRI 100: It is dishonest to present oral or written work that is not entirely the student's own. Students must follow the requirements of the instructor regarding when and how much collaboration with other students is permitted. Any language taken from another source, whether individual words or entire paragraphs, must be placed in quotation marks and attributed to the source, following the citation format specified. Paraphrased material from an outside source must also be attributed. In addition, if the student is indebted to

another source for a specific perspective or line of argument--regardless of whether the student has directly quoted the source or not--that debt must be acknowledged.

It does not matter if the work is by an established author, a term-paper writer who sold his work to a plagiarism site for \$5.00, your best friend, or a blogger whose writing you find appealing.

**Plagiarism** is theft; it is unethical. It is a waste of your time, integrity, and money and a waste of your classmates' and my time and energy. An act of intentional plagiarism or cheating will result in a grade of **F** for the course.

**--College Policy Regarding Learning Disabilities:** Students with documented disabilities who may need academic accommodations should discuss these needs with their professors during the first two weeks of class. Students with disabilities who wish to request accommodations should contact the Learning Center.

Before you leave class on the first day, make sure that you have the phone numbers/ e-mail addresses of two of your classmates; these will be your contacts for notes and make-up work if you miss a class.

Please put your cell phone on vibrate before the start of class.

### **.Syllabus**

Reading and writing assignments must be completed by the dates specified. Everyone should read every essay—do not leave the discussion leader stranded! Bring your textbooks to every class meeting.

Please note that workshops need to be flexible; if changes seem to be appropriate, we'll revise the syllabus accordingly. Also note that workshops--our most important classroom activity--may require more time than the syllabus anticipates.

Tues., Jan.20

Introduction to the course/Getting started

On keeping a writer's notebook

Writing for an audience (and an editor)

A word about basics

The writer's responsibility

In the beginning is the list

For Thurs., Jan.22

Open-book syllabus quiz (on first 3½ pages)

Look over and become familiar with the general layouts of the textbooks.

Read in CCN: Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook," 340-

Zinsser, Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, and 11

Handout: Updike, "Central Park"

Do some browsing and report back: Bring 1-2 titles of examples of "list" articles

And another sort of list: Create a list of subjects that you would like to write about: aim for at least 10 topics (don't worry—for now—about how you'll develop them; just list subjects that you are interested in writing about)

For Tues., Jan. 27

CCN: Toth, "Cinematypes," 173

Handout: Gori, "How to Find . . ."

Read: Zinsser, Chapters 3 and 4

\*Workshop for Assignment #1 begins: Your list (1-2 pages). Bring copies for the rest of the class.

For Thurs., Jan. 29

Zinsser, Chapters 5, 6, and 7

\*Workshop continues

For Tues., Feb. 3

\*Due: Assignment #1: Final copy of "list" paper (2-3 pages)

Read: Zinsser, Chapters 8 and 9

Beginning the Memoir

CCN: Earley, "Somehow Form a Family," 17- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Grealy, "Mirrorings," 23- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

For Thurs., Feb. 5

Memoir continued

CCN: Daum, "Music Is My Bag," 145- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Skloot, "Wild in the Woods," 229-

Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Dybek, "Field Trips," 92- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Zinsser: Chapters 14 and 24

\*Workshop for Assignment #2 (memoir) begins

For Tues., Feb. 10

\*Workshop continues

For Thurs., Feb. 12

\*Workshop continues, if necessary

\*\*Final copy due from anyone who has already presented in workshop

Profiles/Observational Writing

Zinsser, Chapter 12

Also read: "The Traveler" (handout) and "Soup" (handout)

Tues., Feb. 17

\*Due: Topic and market for profile

CNN: Lowry, "Secret Ceremonies . . .," 48-

Orlean, "Meet the Shaggs," 52- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Zinsser, Chapter 13

Thurs., Feb. 19

\*Workshop for draft of Assignment #3 (profile) begins

Bring grammar questions (and handbook) to class

Tues., Feb. 24:

\* Workshop continues

Thurs., Feb. 26

\*Due: Assignment #3: Final copy of profile

Another basic form/method: Comparison and contrast

White, "Education" (handout)

Going undercover:

CCN: Graham, "Invisible Man," 314- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Tues., Mar. 2 and Thurs., Mar. 4

Blogs Are Us

Mar. 10 and Mar.12 Spring Break

Tues., Mar. 17

Look at the letters to the editor in your local paper and in national papers. Be prepared to tell the rest of the class what you found. Have you noticed any trends, clustering of subjects, etc.?

Zinsser, Chapter 10

The argument in miniature: the letter of persuasion/complaint/commendation

Thurs., Mar. 19

\*Workshop for Assignment #4 (letter to editor or company)

Tues., Mar. 24

\*Workshop continued

Thurs., Mar. 26 No class meeting Work on assignments for Mar. 31

Tues., Mar. 31

\*Final copy of Assignment #4 is due

Op-ed writing

Look at op-ed columns in you local paper or in a national paper. What are some of the topics you found?

Handout: Shipley, "And Now a Word from Op-Ed"

Handout: Ferrick, "The Basic Formula of Column Writing"

Thurs., Apr. 2

Reflective Writing/Observational Writing II

CCN: Atwood, "The Female Body," 288- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Early, "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss American Pageant," 290-

Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Tues. Apr. 7

Science and Nature Writing

Zinsser, Chapter 15

CCN: Ackerman, "The Psychopharmacology of Chocolate," 242- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Gould, "A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse," 253- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Hogan, "The Bats," 220- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Thurs., Apr. 9 No class meeting

Tues., Apr. 14

Writing About the Arts

Zinsser, Chapter 18

CCN: Updike, "Fast Art," 185 Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Handout: Lane, Film review

\*Topic for final project

Thurs., Apr. 16

Humor

Zinsser, Chapter 19

CCN: Vowell, "What He Said There," 130- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Sedaris, "The Drama Bug," 160- Discussion leader: \_\_\_\_\_

From this point on, you may present your draft of Assignment #5

Tues., Apr. 21

Sports Writing

Zinsser, Chapter 17

Handout: Halberstam, "The Fitness-Goers"

\*Workshop for final project

Thurs., Apr. 23

CCN: McPhee, "The Search for Marvin Gardens," 117

Zinsser, Chapters 20 and 21

\*Workshop for final project

Tues., Apr. 28

CCN: Ehrenreich, "Getting Ready," 345-

Zinsser, Chapters 22, 23, 25

\*Workshop for final project

Thurs., Apr. 30

\*Final project, including self-evaluation, due

Presentations

Last words

## Leading a Discussion:

Begin with a clear and concise introduction of title, author, date, and original place of publication.

If biographical details about your author seem important, present them concisely. Give a brief summary. Then present and direct our attention to significant points about the work. Consider the category, structure, delivery of content, tone, use of literary devices. What makes this a useful model for us?

Have several questions prepared for everyone to discuss.

If you use outside sources, you must acknowledge those sources in your presentation: incorporate them directly and explicitly into your comments (“As \_\_\_\_\_ explains in her essay titled ‘ \_\_\_\_\_,’ . . .”).

## Writing Assignments:

### General Instructions

For each assignment, include the title(s) and specifications of the publication(s) you are “writing for.” In addition to Internet sources, you will find the following reference book helpful: *The Writer’s Market* (available in the Reference section of Cressman Library)

“Draft” and “workshop copy” here do not mean a sketchy set of notes; the workshop draft should be close to a final paper--your best effort to that point.

For workshop presentations, provide copies for the rest of the class. Along with your final copy, submit all workshop copies.

For any outside sources, use MLA format.

You are welcome to (further) revise and resubmit #'s 1-4 after I have evaluated and holistically scored them. You may present revisions to the class or simply submit them to me (I recommend the former). Revisions must show significant improvement in order to merit a change in grade.

Note: In addition to meeting all other criteria, papers must demonstrate a mastery of grammar; editors of publications will not consider careless work, and this course will make the same editorial demands as any standard publication.

### Assignment #1: The “List” (1-2 pages)

The workshop will begin on Jan. 27. Bring copies for the rest of the class. The final copy is due on Feb. 3.

Choose one:

- 1) Things to do while waiting for \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank)
- 2) Things to do at \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_ Ways to \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_ Reasons to \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_ Things Every \_\_\_\_\_ Should Know



- 6) \_\_\_ Steps to Guarantee Success in \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) \_\_\_ How to . . . (enumerate and describe the steps of the process)
- 8) A place at a moment of transition or at an uncharacteristic time. The “edge” here is the unusual or unexpected juxtaposition or detail.
- 9) Classify the subcategories of a topic: break down a topic into categories. (There are \_\_\_ categories of \_\_\_\_\_.)

Remember that all writing must have a point: convey an attitude. Try to create a mood.

Think of the examples provided in class. Your list may be expository/informative or more explicitly literary. It may be humorous (we can be serious without being solemn).

Form: provide a telling title; if necessary, a brief introduction; and a descriptive series. Your list may or may not be numbered.

Make sure that the items in your list are parallel in form (for example, use full sentences throughout, verbal [-ing] phrases throughout, second person/direct address [“Count the trees”; “Make your reservation early] throughout, etc.

For #'s 7 and 8, use chronological order (arrange according to the sequence of steps), or imitate Mike Gori’s model (arrange in order of simplest to most complex). Many “how to” articles and guides use second person (you); the sentences here provide examples. Using second person/direct address will help you avoid passive (wordy and unemphatic) sentences. The point is to keep your reader’s interest. Remember to provide helpful tips along the way. Your readers want to learn how to do/achieve something, and they are looking to your article for guidance.

What not to use:

Example of passive verb form: The brushes must be cleaned with turpentine.

What to use:

Example of active verb form: Clean the brushes with turpentine.

Your topic will help to determine your form, although you will still need to make organizational decisions along the way: What is the clearest, most effective order? What striking juxtapositions can I create? What is the best way to open/conclude?

(Some of these prompts are from Florence Grossman’s *Getting from Here to There*)

### **Assignment #2 Memoir Writing** (750-1,000 words/3-4 pages\*)

The draft of your memoir, or autobiographical essay, is due on Feb. 5. Bring copies for the rest of the class. The final copy is due on Feb. 12.

\* Your essays may go over 1,000 words; 750 is the minimum word-count.

Possible subjects:

--a special place where you spent a great deal of time when you were young

--dance/music/art lessons

- a sport that you excelled at (or didn't excel at)
- a visit to an unusual place
- a routine event or visit transformed by an insight
- a recurring dream
- any "first"
- any memorably difficult situation
- an occasion when something turned out differently than you expected
- an incident that challenged your basic values or beliefs
- a challenge that you met successfully
- a time when you felt like an outsider

Note: See also CCN, Appendix I, "Writing Prompts," 355-

Memoir/Autobiographical writing is *nonfiction*\* that incorporates storytelling devices: dialogue, conflict, attention to point-of-view. Readers want to find an engaging story, with a satisfying resolution.

\*Nonfiction is nevertheless truthful to *fact*: that is, if your childhood music teacher is still living, you may not kill her off, even if doing so would make for a more dramatic conclusion.

Some of these suggestions are from *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*.

### **Assignment #3 The Profile** (750-1000 words/3-4 pages)

Topic and market are due Feb. 17. The draft is due Feb. 19.

The final copy of your profile of a person, place, or event is due on Feb.26.

Why do people like to read profiles? To learn, to be entertained, to be moved. An effective profile goes beyond the obvious.

Person: Write a profile of someone on Cedar Crest's campus or some other person you know (not a relative) who has an interesting job, hobby, or background.

Place: Your subject might be as far away as a community in another country that you visited or as close as a restaurant in the Lehigh Valley.

Event: Again, an unusual choice or a slightly different angle on a standard event is the key.

Form: Your organization may be chronological, spatial, or topical (or a combination). This assignment may involve an interview and/or research. If you use any secondary sources, you must acknowledge them.

### **Assignment #4 The Persuasive Letter** (250 words)

Workshops will be on Oct. 19 and 24; final copy is due on Mar. 31.

Write a persuasive letter (250 words): a letter of commendation or complaint to a company (about a product or service) or to the editor of a newspaper. Your letter should demonstrate the strategies (and good manners) of effective persuasive writing.

If your letter is addressed to a company, research and provide the address.

If you are writing a letter to an editor, you must determine (and indicate) which paper:  
Take a stand on an issue of national or global interest: The New York Times  
Take a stand on an issue of local or national interest: The Morning Call, The Express Times, or your hometown's local paper  
Support or oppose some course of action on campus or some issue of recent interest on campus: The Crestiad

Before you write your letter, look at newspapers, which are available in the library and TCC.

**Assignment #5 Final Project The Op-Ed Piece/Creative Nonfiction Essay (3-5 pages)**

Your final project is due at the beginning of class on April 30. It should include: your early draft, with workshop copies, your final copy of 750-1,000 words minimum; and your self-evaluation of your performance in the course.

Your topic is due on April 14. The workshop will begin on April 21. If you have something prepared earlier, you may present it.

Write an essay on a subject you care about. Your essay should interweave two or three of the following: personal narrative, reflection, description, argumentation, information.

Models: almost everything in our collections. See also "Lives" (The New York Times Magazine); "My Turn" (Newsweek); the "Review" section of The Chronicle of Higher Education; and the op-ed pages of The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and your local paper.

You are writing for a general audience, rather than for other specialists in your field. You can assume that your readers are educated and fairly intelligent, but you should explain any specialized terms.

Your paper should demonstrate your mastery of the strategies covered this semester. You may draw from general concepts for other courses, but the final project should be a new treatment. You must acknowledge any outside sources: follow MLA format (6th ed.). The object is to produce clear, concise prose that is informative and interesting.

**Your paper is due at the start of class (you will present your finished product, as if at a mock conference). Late papers will receive a grade of F. This is a reasonable position, given the amount of lead-time you have for this essay. Deadlines in the worlds of both publishing and academia are serious.**

**Writing Rubric:**

#### 4 Superior/Outstanding

Work which uses an assignment as the occasion for a piece of writing compelling enough to engage readers on its own terms. It presents an insight or viewpoint with enough fullness and support to command readers' respect, if not their assent. The treatment of content is fresh, not hackneyed; the organization is coherent and effective; and the language is clear and vivid, not clichéd. Superior work uses sophisticated sentence structure, and needs little or no additional editing in terms of basic details of grammar, punctuation, and format. Finally, the appropriateness of the tone and the material for the chosen publication will be taken into consideration.

#### 3 Good/Satisfactory

Work which meets all of an assignment's expectations with competence. The work may lack the fresh thought or compelling development of 4-work\*, but it demonstrates, nevertheless, its author's ability to respond intelligently to an assignment's demands, to structure and focus writing clearly, and to choose words accurately and effectively.

\*In contrast to 4-work, 3-work may--despite its original thought--require a final editing that takes care of weaknesses in basics that detract from the content.

#### 2 Fair

2-work shows evidence of attempting to meet the assignment's bare specifications, but lacks sharp focus, the full and purposeful development, or the stylistic awareness necessary for a higher grade. 2-work is clearly inadequate in at least one way. Although 2-work may demonstrate competence in one or more facets, one or two pervasive weaknesses will outweigh its strengths. Weaknesses may include failure to engage meaningfully an important aspect of the writing task or to maintain a focus; skimpy or illogical development; repeated significant errors in grammar or idiom.

#### 1 Poor

Work which does not respond acceptably to an assignment, 1-work may misunderstand or disregard the assignment's intent, lack any pattern or organization, or make enough errors in Standard English to make it difficult for a reader to follow the author's thought.

#### F Failure

The following will merit a grade of F: Failure to submit an assignment, incomplete work, work that disregards the assignment's intent, and, of course, plagiarism.

