

San José State University
Humanities and the Arts/English Department
English 178, The Literature of Creative Nonfiction, Fall 2016

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Office Hours:	T/TH 1:30-2:45
Class Days/Time:	T/TH 10:30-11:45
Classroom:	BBC 120

Description: Reading/Writing Creative Nonfiction

Creative nonfiction is a booming field. The term includes a wide range of prose: memoir, travel writing, biography, science writing, nature writing, personal and lyrical essays, feature writing. In this class we will focus on that range. The goals of this course are to help you read and appreciate creative nonfiction; to improve your own writing of creative nonfiction; and to discuss your own and others' prose.

Learning Outcomes

In the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will demonstrate the ability to:

1. **read** closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, and/or rhetoric;
2. **show familiarity** with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American and World Literature;
3. **write** clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style

appropriately to the content, the context, and the nature of the subject;

4. ***develop and carry out research projects***, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively;

5. ***articulate*** the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Required Reading/Texts

Joan Didion, *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*

Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Miriam Pawel, *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez: A biography*

John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well, 30th Anniversary Edition*

PDFs sent to students

Course Requirements and Assignments

A. Reading and participation, 40%: This grade is determined by quizzes on the reading; class discussion of the readings; participation in Ideas Workshops; comments on peers' writing before in-class workshops (to be turned in); comments during in-class writing workshops.

B. Writing and revising four nonfiction essays, 4-8 pp. each in final drafts, 60% .
While this class focuses on reading nonfiction, it's also concerned with the practice of writing nonfiction. Based on the models read in class, each of you will write four pieces of nonfiction: a. place. b. travel c. memoir d. biography. Each writing assignment will involve first Ideas workshops, where the class will consider ideas that students bring to class; and then writing and workshopping the piece.

Grading Information and determination of grades

a. Participation. Full participation in a class means reading each assigned text carefully; contributing to discussions on these works; participating fully and thoughtfully in each workshop

b. Each student's writing is graded on clarity, originality, specificity.

A and A-: A superior piece of writing. The idea is focused, the language sharp, and the writing free of grammatical errors. The piece has originality and style, is elegant, thoughtful and persuasive.

B+ and B: A good piece of writing, solid and clear. But it may lack the innovation and sharpness of the top category. The central idea is clear but could be supported with additional details. There may be minor spelling, typographic, and/or grammatical errors. But it is interesting enough to hold a reader's attention.

B- and C+: This response may be broad. Examples may be general rather than specific. Personal voice is lacking. There may be grammatical errors. The central idea may not be fresh. The writing may be wordy and vague.

C and below: These pieces are without a sharp focus. Examples are general. There may be serious grammatical errors.

b. Late essays receive lower grades, 1/3 grade per day assignment is late.

Determination of final grade will depend on completion of work noted under "Course Requirements and Assignments"—ie, reading group projects, notebook, quizzes and final. Failure to complete any of the assignments will result in a 0 earned for that part of the course, thus significantly lowering the final grade.

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined by the SJSU Catalog (Grades-Letter Grading).

Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A+/A/A- = excellent; B+/B/B- = above average; C+/C/C- = average; D+/D/D- = below average; F = failure. *Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.*

University Policies

University-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs' [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>

English 178 / Reading Creative Nonfiction, Fall, 2016

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	August 25	Intro. Gerard, "What is Creative Nonfiction Anyhow?" (PDF)
2	August 30	Gerard, "Finding an Original Subject" (PDF) and Didion, <i>Slouching Toward Bethlehem</i> , "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream"
2	September 1	Zinsser, Chapter 11. Didion, "John Wayne: A Love Song" and "Where the Kissing Never Stops"
3	September 6	Zinsser, Chapter 20. Didion, "Comrade Laski," "California Dreaming," "Marrying Absurd"
3	September 8	Zinsser, Chapter 21. Film: "Berkeley in the Sixties"
4	September 13	Didion, "Slouching Towards Bethlehem"
4	September 15	Zinsser, Chapter 22. Ideas Workshop: Writing about place, California. Come to class with a list of three topics.
5	September 20	Zinsser, Chapter 23. Ideas Workshop: Writing about place, California. Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook"
5	September 22	Zinsser, Chapters 1-5. Didion, "On Self Respect," "I Can't Get That Monster..." "On Morality," "On Going Home."
6	September 27	Didion, complete.
6	September 29	Working Workshop I: Writing about place, California (each student will have read his/her group's essays before class)
7	October 4	Zinsser, Chapters 6 and 7. Thompson, Part I, Chapters 1-6. Group 1 report: style
7	October 6	Thompson, Part I, Chapters 7-12. Group 2 report: audience
8	October 11	Thompson, Part II, Chapters 1-6. Group 3 report: words
8	October 13	Zinsser, Chapters 8 and 9. Thompson, Complete.
9	October 18	Zinsser, Chapter 13. Ideas Workshop: Travel writing. Come to class with a list of three topics.
9	October 20	Steinbeck, <i>Travels with Charley</i> , 3-65. Lopate, "Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself Into a Character" (PDF)
10	October 25	Steinbeck, <i>Travels with Charley</i> , 66-142.
10	October 27	Writing Workshop II: Travel writing (each student will have read his/her group's essays before class).

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
11	November 1	Steinbeck, <i>Travels with Charley</i> , complete. Zinsser, Chapter 14.
11	November 3	Zinsser, Chapter 10. Ideas workshop:Memoir. Bring to class three ideas for writing an essay about your own experience.
12	November 8	Fadiman, PDF; Sedaris, "Us and Them" http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/2004/jun/sedaris/usandthem.html Sedaris, "Letting go" http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/05/letting-go
12	November 10	MFK Fisher (PDF)
13	November 15	Writing Workshop III, Memoir (each student will have read his/her group's essay before class)
13	November 17	Moore, "Twelve Years and Counting: Writing Biography" (PDF). Pawel, <i>The Crusades of Cesar Chavez</i> , Part I.
14	November 22	Pawel, <i>The Crusades of Cesar Chavez</i> , Part II.
14	Thanksgiving	
15	November 29	Pawel, <i>The Crusades of Cesar Chavez</i> , Part III.
15	December 1	Pawel, <i>The Crusades of Cesar Chavez</i> , Part IV.
16	December 6	Pawel, <i>The Crusades of Cesar Chavez</i> , Part V.
16	December 8	Ideas workshop, biographical essay.
Final Exam	December 15	9:45-12:00. Writing Workshop IV, biography. Also readings of best essay, revised.