

CRWT 3308: Nonfiction Workshop

Fall 2022

Instructional mode: in-person

Meeting time: Tuesdays, 4:00 – 6:45 p.m., GR (Green) 4.208

Instructor: Jonathan Malesic, Ph.D.

Email: jonathan.malesic@utdallas.edu

Office hours (**Location TBA**): Tuesdays, 3:00 – 3:50, or by appointment.

Course Pre-requisites, Co-requisites, and/or Other Restrictions

CRWT 2301 is the prerequisite for this class. CRWT 3308 may be repeated, with a maximum of 9 credit hours.

Course Description

We will engage in the study and practice of nonfiction writing in a workshop setting.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

The chief goal is to write more enlightening and beautiful essays than you did before taking this class. Smaller outcomes that will lead to that one include:

- Appreciate the range of things writers can do in the essay form and recognize what you can learn from the best practitioners of the genre.
- Set an intellectual and aesthetic goal for an essay and seek the best balance between attention to self and attention to world, and between narrative and discourse to accomplish it.
- Revise your goals for an essay in the middle of writing it.
- Build skills in nonfiction storytelling, research, reporting, recollecting, analysis, and argument.
- Appreciate the value of a literary community to the writing life.

Required reading

Required texts

Jack Hart, *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*. University of Chicago Press, 2011. (Or 2nd edition, 2021)

All other reading will be posted on eLearning or distributed in class.

Textbooks and some other bookstore materials can be ordered online or purchased at the [UT Dallas Bookstore](#).

Suggested reading

As a budding writer of creative nonfiction, you should get into the habit of reading in the genre, whether in magazines like *The New Yorker*, literary magazines (there are so many, including *Reunion*, *The Southwest Review*, and *Carve*, all of which are edited locally), or books in the genre. I will periodically suggest additional reading throughout the course.

As a UTD student, you can get a free digital subscription to the *New York Times*, which, in addition to being a great source of news and information, is also an important venue for creative nonfiction and narrative journalism. To claim your subscription, go to <https://library.utdallas.edu/news/new-york-times-digital-newspaper/>.

Assignments and grading

You will attain the course goals is by reading and analyzing the reading assignments, doing short writing exercises, talking with each other about writing, and writing and revising three essays.

Every writer must read widely. For this class, **reading assignments** will include a guidebook on nonfiction narrative, exemplary published essays, criticism, and each other's works in progress. We may not directly discuss everything you read; that does not diminish the importance of reading it. Everything is geared toward helping you "read like a writer" and write better essays. If you want to get better, you'll read and learn from it.

Nonfiction writers gather facts, questions, and ideas for their essays through observing the world and **taking notes**. Every day this semester, take at least one note in a paper notebook dedicated to this task or in a notes file on your phone. Every day! (OK, you can take one day off a week.) The note does not have to be profound or significant. In fact, you likely won't be able to judge its significance until later. The point is to build a discipline of observing the world, asking questions about it, and looking for answers. Be ready to talk about your notes in class.

This class is a literary community. Everybody brings something to it. Our class meetings are when that community gets together and talks about writing, with the aim of understanding our genre and helping each other improve. Active, constructive **class participation** is not optional. I will lecture a little. Otherwise, we will hold a conversation. Activity that harms the community is forbidden. In some cases, it is grounds for dismissal from class meetings. We don't have to agree with each other, but we do have to respect each other.

Attendance is expected. You may have a very good reason to miss a class, but there's no making up what you miss. If you miss your workshop date, even for a very good reason, you will not be able to make it up, because there won't be time.

You will **write three essays** of various lengths. The first one will be short, just 150 words, and will not be workshopped. The second will be medium length, 1,000 – 1,200 words, and you will build it up through exercises and informal workshop sessions in class. The third will be longer, 2,000 – 3,000 words, and you will workshop it through formal critique groups in class. I will also give formal feedback on the third essay before you turn in the final version. Critique group instructions will be posted on eLearning later in the semester.

Your submissions for workshops and grading must be on time, cleanly edited, and double-spaced, with page numbers.

In writing personal essays, people often share experiences that are difficult for them to share or for others to read. It is imperative that we leave each other the space to say what they need to say. Please confine your comments on others' work to writing issues – how the author is telling their story – and not judge the author themselves. And please do not discuss what people are writing beyond the class. Someone may write something in a draft that they would not publish.

To see nonfiction writing techniques in action, every week you will read published essays. (See the schedule on p. 4.) I will expect you to read them carefully, with an eye not only to the

narrative and intellectual content of the essays but also to the techniques the authors use in them. We will spend much of our time together in class discussing them. So come to class with observations, reactions, and questions about the essays.

Most weeks you will also complete a short **writing exercise** on eLearning that will give you practice with whatever technique we're working on for the week. These will be due the night before the class devoted to that technique. Most of the time, you will work with the exercises in class; they might be the basis for discussion, or you might revise them in class after we discuss the reading and the technique for the week. If you put forward a decent effort on these exercises, you'll get full credit. If not, you'll get less than full credit.

Grade breakdown

Participation	30%
Essay 1: 150 words	10%
Essay 2: 1,000-1,200 words	20%
Essay 3: 2,000-3,000 words	30%
Writing exercises	10%

Grading scale

90-92	A-	93-96	A	97-100	A+
80-82	B-	83-86	B	87-89	B+
70-72	C-	73-76	C	77-79	C+
60-62	D-	63-66	D	67-69	D+
		0-59	F		

Weekly workflow

1. Take notes (daily): gather ideas.
2. Read essays & other assignments: see techniques in action.
3. Do writing exercise (due Monday): develop ideas from notes, try out techniques.
4. Class (Tuesday): share notes, discuss essays, learn about and practice techniques.
5. Apply what you've learned: build on ideas, exercises, class discussion, techniques, and revision.

Schedule of topics, assignments, and meetings

Complete all reading and writing assignments before class on the date on the schedule. Topics and assignments may change; the most accurate and up-to-date schedule will be on eLearning.

Date	Topic	Reading due before class	In-class activity
Aug. 23	The essay	In-class reading: Michel de Montaigne, "To the Reader," "Of Age" Annie Dillard, "Living Like Weasels"	
Aug. 30	Start small	Jack Hart, <i>Storycraft</i> , intro – ch. 1 William Dameron, "After 264 Haircuts, a Marriage Ends" various authors, tiny love stories	
Sept. 6	Voice / Style / Tone	Hart, ch. 4 Lydia Kiesling, "The Return of My Garbage Self" Heather Havrilesky, "Marriage Requires Amnesia" Kate Harding, "Have We Forgotten How to Read Critically?" Recommended: Havrilesky on Longform podcast Essay 1 due.	
Sept. 13	Showing and telling	Hart, ch. 3 Dan Barry, "Meet Mago, Former Heavyweight" Jane Hu, "Why the Filet-O-Fish Is My Gold Standard for Fast Food"	
Sept. 20	Narrative 1: scenes	Hart, ch. 5-6 Kiese Laymon, "Terrors"	
Sept. 27	Narrative 2: structure	Hart, ch. 2 David Grann, "The Squid Hunter"	
Oct. 4		Critique groups for Essay 2	
Oct. 11	Individual conferences via Teams (required) in place of class meeting. Essay 2 due.		
Oct. 18	Getting information	Hart, ch. 10 Kathryn Schulz, "When Things Go Missing" additional essay TBA	
Oct. 25	Leading with ideas	Apoorva Tadepalli, "Treat Yourself" Elisa Gabbert, "Magnificent Desolation" Jessa Crispin, "Marrying Him Was Political. Sponsoring His Visa Is for Love."	
Nov. 1	Writing about culture	Hanif Abdurraqib, "The Delicious Misery of the Sad Banger" Zadie Smith, "Some Notes on Attunement"	
Nov. 8	Revision	John McPhee, "Omission"	
Nov. 15		Critique groups for Essay 3	
Nov. 22	No class meeting, Thanksgiving holiday.		
Nov. 29		Critique groups for revision of Essay 3	
Dec. 6	The writing life	Kristin Dombek, "A Hollywood Screenwriter" Roxane Gay, "How to Be a Contemporary Writer"	Reading event
Dec. 13	No class meeting, exam week. Essay 3 due.		

COVID-19 Guidelines and Resources

The information contained in the following link lists the University's COVID-19 resources for students and instructors of record.

Please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies>.

Class Participation

Regular class participation is expected regardless of course modality. Students who fail to participate in class regularly are inviting scholastic difficulty. A portion of the grade for this course is directly tied to your participation in this class. It also includes engaging in group or other activities during class that solicit your feedback on homework assignments, readings, or materials covered in the lectures (and/or labs). Class participation is documented by faculty. Successful participation is defined as consistently adhering to University requirements, as presented in this syllabus. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Class Recordings

Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

The instructor may record meetings of this course. Any recordings will be available to all students registered for this class as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the Office of Student AccessAbility has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. If the instructor or a UTD school/department/office plans any other uses for the recordings, consent of the students identifiable in the recordings is required prior to such use unless an exception is allowed by law. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Class Materials

The Instructor may provide class materials that will be made available to all students registered for this class as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. These materials may be downloaded during the course, however, these materials are for registered students' use only.

Classroom materials may not be reproduced or shared with those not in class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student AccessAbility accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Technical Requirements

In addition to a confident level of computer and Internet literacy, certain minimum technical requirements must be met to enable a successful learning experience. Please review the important technical requirements on the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage.

Course Access and Navigation

This course can be accessed using your UT Dallas NetID account on the [eLearning](#) website.

Please see the course access and navigation section of the [Getting Started with eLearning](#) webpage for more information.

To become familiar with the eLearning tool, please see the [Student eLearning Tutorials](#) webpage.

UT Dallas provides eLearning technical support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The [eLearning Support Center](#) includes a toll-free telephone number for immediate assistance (1-866-588-3192), email request service, and an online chat service.

Communication

This course utilizes online tools for interaction and communication. Some external communication tools such as regular email and a web conferencing tool may also be used during the semester. For more details, please visit the [Student eLearning Tutorials](#) webpage for video demonstrations on eLearning tools.

Student emails and discussion board messages will be answered within 3 working days under normal circumstances.

Distance Learning Student Resources

Online students have access to resources including the McDermott Library, Academic Advising, The Office of Student AccessAbility, and many others. Please see the [eLearning Current Students](#) webpage for more information.

Server Unavailability or Other Technical Difficulties

The University is committed to providing a reliable learning management system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty which prevents students from completing a time sensitive assessment activity, the instructor will provide an appropriate accommodation based on the situation. Students should immediately report any problems to the instructor and also contact the online [eLearning Help Desk](#). The instructor and the eLearning Help Desk will work with the student to resolve any issues at the earliest possible time.

Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

Academic Support Resources

The information contained in the following link lists the University’s academic support resources for all students.

Please go to [Academic Support Resources](#) webpage for these policies.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University’s policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.

Please go to [UT Dallas Syllabus Policies](#) webpage for these policies.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.