ENG 91: INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE NONFICTION
(TENTATIVE)

Time: Mon & Wed, 1:30-3:20, Location TBA
Office Hours: Mon & Wed, 12:30-1:30, 5:20-6:20 and by appointment

“A good essay isn’t a report of what happened. It’s a reach for the stuff beyond and beneath. Essayists begin with an objective truth and attempt to find a greater, grander truth by testing fact against subjective interpretations of experiences and ideas, memories and theories. They try to make meaning of actual life, even if an awful lot has yet to be figured out. They grapple and reflect with seriousness and humor. They philosophize and confess with intellect and emotion. They recollect and reimagine private and public history with a combination of clarity and conjecture. They venture into what happened and why with a complicated collision of documented proof and impossible-to-pin-down remembrances. And they follow the answers to the questions that arise in the course of writing about what happened wherever they go. The essay’s engine is curiosity; its territory is the open road.”

—Cheryl Strayed, Introduction to the Best American Essays 2013

DESCRIPTION

ENG 91 is an introductory course in the craft and art of creative nonfiction writing. We’ll read all kinds of examples of the form, from personal to lyrical to journalistic, on topics ranging from Monopoly to murders, mirrors, and moths. We’ll study these various forms, paying close attention to the choices the writers made. We’ll write two short assignments and some exercises on the way to coming up with a pitch for a longer quarter project of 10-15 pp., which will then be workshopped.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

1. A physical, paper journal or notebook for use in this class only.
2. You will need to print copies of your essay for everyone in the class, so please budget for this expense.
3. Course Readers will be available from CopyAmerica. Details will be given on the first day of class.

GRADING

Class Participation—45% This figure will include 1) punctuality, 2) attendance, 3) participation in class discussion, 4) completion of writing assignments and projects, 5) completion of response letters for other students, 6) participation in the blog.
Creative Work—40% This figure includes two short assignments (1-3 pp) and a larger nonfiction project (10-15 pp) that we will workshop in class. A revision of the final essay is due at the end of the quarter. Your grade depends on you completing all your creative work on time, and with real thought and energy. This work will be largely graded quantitatively, but artistic effort will also be factored in.

Reading Attendance—15% Your attendance at three readings in the creative writing program is required. The reading schedule is given below; other readings will not be counted. Plan which events you will go to in advance so that you will be able to make your three by the end of the quarter.

MISCELLANEOUS
Format for assignments:

- Stories and exercises: Double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. Make sure you staple anything more than one page.
- Workshop comments: These should be single-spaced. Bring in two copies—one for the student being workshopped and one for me.

Essay content: Because the workshop experience is based on collective trust, I recommend that you not include references to any instructors or students in your writing (unless directed by me). If you feel you must, you should discuss this with me well before you submit the piece.

Conferences: Do stop in at any time during my office hours with any concerns you have regarding class, or just to talk about writing. I also highly recommend setting up an appointment to conference with me sometime in the week following the workshopping of your story. This is not required, but I’ve found that students who come in to talk about their revision strategies consistently produce better revisions.

Laptops may be used during in-class writing exercises. Feel free to bring them to class, but don’t leave them open during general discussion.

Late Assignments. The highest grade any late assignments will receive is a C—even if you’ve just forgotten to print an exercise out for class. **Workshop critiques beyond a week late will not receive any credit, as they will not be useful for their authors.**

Note: Lecturers are available for academic advising throughout the year. Please stop by to learn more about the Creative Writing Program or to ask questions or make suggestions. For this quarter's hours and location, visit http://creativewriting.stanford.edu.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Writing Assignment 1
Write a 600- to 900-word portrait of yourself or someone you know. Use observation and physical detail to make the person come alive to the reader. In order to do this, feel free to take risks with the form; this is creative nonfiction after all.

**Writing Assignment 2**
Write about a secret, lie, or mystery related to a person or place you know well. (Some ideas: an inconsistency in family history, a person or object gone missing, a time you lied to someone or someone lied to you, an unusual custom, belief, or practice in the place where you grew up.) What about this secret interests or troubles you? Include at least one scene in the essay. Page requirement is 3-5 pp. (page limits strictly enforced).

**Questions to Consider for Reading Assignments**
How does the writer establish intimacy with the reader?
What gets you to turn the page? Are there any questions posed along the way?
When does the writer choose to use concrete details, and when does she or he use generalizations?
What are the effects of all these choices?

**Quarter-Project Essay**
This should be 10-15 pp in length. It can be in any of the various forms or styles of the essays we have studied—or it can chart its own, new, exciting course.

Your essay may be on any subject and in any style. The only stipulation is that you actively investigate experimental and/or documentary sources specifically for this essay, and include research in your project.

Experimental sources include interviews, sensory observation, travel to relevant places, personal experiments, et.

Here are some examples taken from previous Creative Nonfiction classes:

--A student who wrote about her mother’s suicide looked at police reports and letters.

--A student who wrote about the emotional life of fraternities brothers at Stanford interviewed members from different fraternities and attended parties.

--A student who wrote about his relationship with food documented the contents of his family’s refrigerators, and interviewed them about his eating habits.

--A student who wrote about a trip to South Africa looked at photos and re-listened to music from that summer.