

INTRODUCTION TO WRITING CREATIVE NONFICTION

English 306.01 • CRN 20256 • Spring 2026 • Ball State University

PROFESSOR: TODD MCKINNEY

The best way to contact me is via email (tdmckinney@bsu.edu). You can also stop by my office (RB250) during my office hours (Tuesday and Thursday 11-12 and by appointment). When I am in my office, you can call me at 285-8473. If the above hours do not work for you, please set up an appointment with me.

REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS

You need the following materials for this class.

1. *Writing Life Stories* (second edition) by Bill Roorbach.
2. *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg
3. Supplemental readings will be available via Canvas Modules.
4. Pens and/or pencils and some kind of journal (in a notebook, on a computer) for notes and/or daily writing exercises; and/or your laptop computer, if you have one.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Intensive study of creative nonfiction, with practice in writing and critique.

Course assignments will include drafts, workshop responses, reading responses/short quizzes, journals, and a final revision project.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To give students focused instruction and practice in the art of reading and writing creative nonfiction. By the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify basic vocabulary and literary terms associated with reading, writing, and thinking about creative nonfiction.
- Identify and evaluate the effectiveness of the various craft techniques relevant to creative nonfiction writing in both revising their own work and critiquing their peers' essays.
- Utilize those craft techniques to produce original personal essays with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Analyze a wide variety of contemporary, diverse nonfiction writing using their knowledge of vocabulary, literary terms, and craft techniques.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to diversity and inclusivity by avoiding stereotypes and misrepresentation in original work and critiques.

GRADING & ASSIGNMENTS

Your final grade will be determined by your performance in the areas described below. I will assign plus/minus grades; the grading scale for this class is as follows: 94-100 = A; 90-93 = A-; 88-90 = B+; 84-87 = B; 80-83 = B-; 78-79 = C+; 74-77 = C; 70-73 = C-; 68-69 = D+; 64-67 = D; 60-63 = D-; 59 and below equals an F.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF OUR ASSIGNMENTS

Essay Drafts with Commentaries (15%)

You will write three essay drafts this semester. With each draft, you will hand in a typed commentary that reflects on some aspect of composing the essay. If you do not hand in this commentary, or it is not

complete, you will lose two letter grades on the assignment. The drafts with the commentaries are worth 5% of your final grade, or 50 points each. Combined, that's 15%, or 150 points of your final grade.

Workshops (20%)

There will be small-group workshop sessions for each essay assignment this semester. For them, you will be required to type-up comments for your partners; if you do not, you will not receive credit. Like the drafts, each critique is worth 5%, or 50 points; combined that's 20%, or 200 points of your final grade.

Final Revision Project & Reflective Essay (30%)

At the end of the semester you will hand in a final revision project that includes a revision and a reflective essay on that revision. Because this is a process-based project, you will need to save all drafts, draft reflections, teacher comments, peer comments, notes, as well as anything else that you deem necessary—sources, drawings, etc. This project is worth 30%, or 300 points of your final grade.

Journal (20%)

Throughout the semester, you will keep a creative journal in which you can experiment with your ideas. I will collect your journal twice throughout the semester. You can complete your journal in one single document (Google Doc, Word Doc, etc.) or in longhand in a notebook. Each journal grade will count for 10%, or 100 points, of your final grade. In total, all of your journal entries will add up to 20%, or 200 points, of your final grade.

Discussion Board Posts, Reading Responses, In-class Work , etc. (15%)

To encourage everyone to keep up with their reading and to be critical readers, there will be occasional discussion board posts and/or reading responses and/or in-class work. Put together, these contributions are worth 15% total, or 150 points, of your final grade.

Manuscript Guidelines

Because I want you to practice presenting your writing professionally, your drafts and essays must be presented in a regular font and must be formatted according to MLA guidelines. That means your manuscripts need to be double-spaced and justified left with one-inch margins on all four sides. Should you incorporate any outside sources, you need to cite your sources according to MLA guidelines. Also, your manuscripts need to be page-numbered (in header, page number should follow your last name in the upper right-hand corner). Title pages are not necessary, but creative titles are required. Instead, in the upper left-hand corner of the first page include this information, single-spaced:

Your Name
English 306.01
McKinney
Date

Also, I expect you to follow the general rules of Standard American English, especially grammatically. However, of course, you can employ slang and incorrect grammar and whatnot, especially if it is necessary and/or earned in the writing. If you do, let me know in your writer's commentary.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE & ENGAGEMENT

Everyone is expected to treat others with respect and dignity. As people, writers, and learners, we bring to class our varied experiences and levels of expertise and knowledge; in order to build a strong community, it is important that we respect these variations. The more we do this, the more we will learn. During discussions, comments need to be constructive, even when they conflict with another point of view.

To support a respectful and engaging academic community that encourages the free exchange of ideas and civil discourse, we will follow these ground rules:

- Respect different perspectives. Share your ideas and let others share theirs.
- Challenge ideas, not people. Disagree respectfully. No personal attacks or put-downs. Focus on exploring ideas critically and constructively.
- Listen to understand. Stay curious, ask questions to understand, and give others space to speak.
- Assume good intentions. Approach discussions with curiosity and compassion.
- Keep it private. What is shared in class stays in class. Do not share others' words or work without permission.
- Be respectful. Avoid hurtful language, stereotypes, or content that may demean others. Keep feedback constructive.

Before class begins, silence cell phones and other devices. Also, please refrain from being on your phone, doing crossword puzzles, completing other homework, and (if you have a computer) browsing the web, etc., or not actively listening to whomever has the floor.

I reserve the right to ask students to leave class at any time; if you are asked to leave, you will be marked with an unexcused absence.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance for this class is required, so it is crucial that you attend class as often as possible. This is an in-person class, and it has been designed to function best in that modality. You simply cannot be successful in the class if you are not in the class. So, you have three free absences at your disposal for those days when life floods the system. After missing three classes, I will deduct 25 points (on a 1,000 point scale) for each absence from your final grade. If you miss eight classes, a letter grade will be deducted from your final grade; if you miss nine classes or more (which is more than 20% of the class), you will fail the class. I also expect you to be on time. If you are late (more than 5 minutes) you are counted as such. Being tardy three times counts as an absence. (All of this is to help us practice being professional—being present and being on-time, which is/will be important in your professional life.)

That being said, we are all humans, we have lives, and we cannot always be present in class (physically, mentally, emotionally, etc.). So, if you miss class, it is important to communicate with me because this is a key aspect of being a respectful, active member of a community. While the course content for each day will be on Canvas, recognize that this does not accurately substitute for being in class. You will miss the opportunity to learn from those in the class, and share your own knowledge with them.

The following absences are excused per university guidelines:

- Disability accommodations
- Pregnancy, hospitalization, or medical leave
- Bereavement leave
- Religious observation
- Jury duty or court witness leave
- Military leave
- Ball State sponsored events

It is important to note that while these above absences are excused by the university, they must be supplemented with appropriate make-up work.

LATE WORK

I will accept some late work but only on one condition: you hand it in at the start of the class meeting following the original due date. For example, if you do not hand in your writing project on Friday, it is due by the start of class on Monday. Should you miss this deadline, you will not receive credit for the assignment. Also, handing in an assignment late constitutes a letter grade deduction on that assignment.

In-class assignments cannot be made up after an unexcused absence. Also, technological failures are not an excuse for not handing in your work. This is why it is so important to save your work to an online storage unit, like OneDrive.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

Since this is a creative nonfiction writing class, using generative AI tools to draft, compose, etc. your writing is **not** allowed. This is because creative nonfiction is dependent upon **your** perspective and experience. Using AI tools will constitute a breach of the student academic ethics policy.

STUDENT ACADEMIC ETHICS POLICY

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's academic integrity website Student Academic Ethics Policy (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University Student Academic Ethics Policy.

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

Using resources not authorized by the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)

- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).
- Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors (Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

COURSE ACCOMMODATIONS, ETC.

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible. The Office of Disability Services coordinates services for students with disabilities;

documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or dsd@bsu.edu.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's Statement on Freedom of Expression, the resources on Ball State's Freedom of Expression webpage, and Ball State's Beneficence Pledge.

TITLE IX

Ball State University is committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment—including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, please know that you are not alone. The University offers support services and resources. For more information or to report an incident, please visit bsu.edu/titleix or contact the Title IX Coordinator at 765-285-1545 or at titleix@bsu.edu

As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter under the Title IX policy and required to report any information I receive about possible sexual harassment. This includes information shared in class discussions, assignments, or private conversations.

What happens after I report? The Title IX Coordinator will email the person who experienced sexual harassment (complainant) and invite them to schedule a meeting. If the complainant chooses to meet with the Title IX Coordinator,

- Title IX Coordinator will offer supportive measures (e.g., counseling, extensions on deadlines, course-related adjustments, changes to work or class schedules, and/or referrals to campus offices), review the policy, and discuss options to move forward.
- If a complaint is filed by the complainant or the University, an investigation will begin following University policy.

UNIVERSITY GRADE APPEAL POLICY

If you believe you received a final course grade that does not reflect your performance due to fairness or a procedural issue, you have the right to file an appeal within 5 school days after final grades are posted by the Office of the Registrar. Review the [University Grade Appeal Policy and Process](#).

THE WRITING CENTER

All writers improve with practice and feedback, so as a student in this course, you are encouraged to use the Writing Center (in Robert Bell 295 during weekdays, Bracken Library First Floor West in the

evenings, or online during any of our regularly scheduled hours) to get additional feedback on your writing.

The Writing Center offers free planning, feedback, and accountability sessions (in person and online) to all students composing essays, reports, reflections, research projects, web content, lesson plans, slideshows, poster presentations, resumes, and other digital or print texts. To schedule a free appointment to discuss your writing, go to bsu.edu/writingcenter. Online and in-person appointments are available; however, plan ahead because appointments book quickly!

THE SPEAKING CENTER

The [Speaking Center](#) is a free resource available to all members of the BSU community wanting to improve their public speaking abilities. We offer personalized coaching designed to help you become a more confident and effective speaker. Our trained coaches provide constructive feedback and support throughout the entire speech preparation process, whether you are in the early stages of brainstorming ideas and organizing your thoughts, or you need to practice your delivery and refine your message.

The Center is in the David Letterman Communication and Media Building, room 302. To schedule an appointment, please access us through your Navigate app or use this [direct link](#) to sign up for a time. Appointments are available both in person and on Zoom. Appointments are available in person, on Zoom, and in virtual reality (VR) for those interested in practicing in an immersive speaking environment.

THE LIBRARY

The libraries on campus are wonderful learning resources available to you. But they are not the only ones you have access to; with the help of the librarians, you can also borrow materials from other university libraries, like IU and Purdue, etc.

COMPUTER LABS

Labs are located across the campus. You can find all kinds of great software on these computers, and they provide access to software like Microsoft Word, printers, the internet, and your email account. The tech store also offers software packages.

NON-ACADEMIC RESOURCES

The University provides health care, psychological counseling, legal aid, career counseling, and affirmative action and sexual harassment counseling through various offices on campus. Please take advantage of these services if you are in need.

The Ball State University Counseling Center offers free and confidential services to all students. The Counseling Center is in Lucina Hall, Room 320. To schedule an appointment, you can contact them at 765-285-1736. Ball State now also offers a 24/7 Crisis Line, which can be reached at 765-285-HOPE (4673). The Crisis Line is a mental health resource for those who are struggling with any mental health concerns, including thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide.

The Ball State Counseling Center sees students for a variety of reasons, some of which include homesickness, relationship concerns, anxiety, and depression. At your first appointment, you will work with a therapist to create a plan that will connect you with resources that best fit your needs. They assist students with getting connected to therapy at the Center as well as connecting students to self-help resources, other on-campus resources, and community-based resources. All Ball State students also have access to several on-demand, self-help resources through a variety of different platforms. All these resources can be found on their website: <https://www.bsu.edu/campuslife/counseling-center>.

*This syllabus is subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.