



ENG 401/G Course Manual or Syllabus for Summer 2005

Advanced Composition: A Course of/on Creative Nonfiction

Note: This is a long syllabus, but please make time to read the entire document very carefully. Not familiarizing yourself with the rules and expectations will make you feel frustrated and confused at the very beginning. You need to create circumstances that will help you feel comfortable so that you can stay motivated throughout the course. Staying in control will help you learn more and have a great time doing so. It's also much easier to get the grade you want if you are always prepared and up-to-date. I will be here assisting you throughout the process, but you need to do your share to make this a rewarding experience.

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HOW TO CONTACT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Please note that all times in this document are for the **Central Time Zone** in the USA.

Email is probably the fastest way for you to reach me. I respond to email messages usually immediately. However, I'd appreciate if you used email communication in case of an emergency or in situations when you need my immediate attention. My mailbox gets full very quickly. If you have a question that does not require an immediate response, here is what you do.

If you have a question about the course or about an assignment, please post your question in the Discussion Board's QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? section, and I'll get back to you within a few hours usually. I'm good at responding to these queries, but I'd say expect a maximum 24-hour turnaround. Posting your question on the DB will allow your peers to have access to the information you needed, so your posted questions will help everybody. Again, please don't send me general questions about the course via email.

Since this is a web course, there will be no face-to-face office hours. Some chat sessions using Blackboard's Virtual Classroom might be arranged depending on demand. I will make every effort to be as accessible for you as possible. I will not disappear after the first couple of days of the course and let you struggle through the course on your own. I'll be here, assisting you. At the same time, I highly appreciate resourceful students who consult their peers if they need information and/or advice before they consult their instructor.

Although I'm usually available 24/7, including weekends, I might be out town of a couple of times this semester. I'll keep you posted about when I am not going to have access to the Internet.

We will have an opportunity to sign up for one-on-one student-teacher phone conferences once or twice this term. Please do not call my home phone number without a previous arrangement.

COURSE LANGUAGE: English

TIME ZONE: Central – Please remember this when we make an appointment for a conference!

PREREQUISITES OF THE COURSE: English 100 and 300

If you have not taken these courses or their equivalents, you will not get credit for Eng 401.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR BLACKBOARD PROBLEMS

Since this is an online course and we are dealing with technology, technical problems can be expected to occur. If your login isn't working by the first day of classes, you need to contact WKU by sending an email to ReachU@wku.edu or bbhelp@atech.wku.edu or call **1-800-535-5926** or **270-745-4158**. If you are experiencing technical difficulties with Blackboard (or BB for short), please call (270)-745-7020 or email bbhelp@wku.edu.

It is also helpful to locate some computer guru friends and relatives who can help you out when you have questions. Although I consider myself more than a beginner level computer user, I am first and foremost a writing teacher and not a computer technician. I may not be able to or have the time to assist you with technical issues. It is your responsibility to find answers to your technical problems so that your participation in the course is smooth.

MYTHS ABOUT THE ONLINE COURSE

Want to find out if distance learning courses are for you? Check out the following link, fill out the questionnaire, and score yourself.

http://www.cod.edu/dept/CIL/CIL_Surv.htm

Those of you who are first-timers and a little nervous about taking an online course should keep in mind that the course is “doable.” I am going to do my very best to help you out and work with you if you are experiencing a problem, as long as you keep me informed. If you need an extension on a deadline, for example, let me know. I want all of you to complete the course and get a good grade. However, we need to talk about some myths associated with online courses.

- *Myth: Online courses are like correspondence courses.* Not really. There is a lot of interaction among students and between students and instructor in this class.
- *Myth: Online courses don't teach you anything.* Students need to take responsibility for their learning regardless of the mode of course delivery. In a web course, perhaps you need to be even more pro-active. In this particular course, whatever you put in, that's what you get out.
- *Myth: Setting aside the same amount of time for an online course as you would for a f2f class is enough to be successful.* Students occasionally indicate that they intend to set aside three hours per week to complete a web course. The reasoning behind this statement is that they would spend three hours in class in a f2f course. Now imagine that most of the info you would get in a f2f course will now reach you via reading. Depending on how fast a reader you are, three hours may not be enough to familiarize yourself with the course content, let alone to complete additional written assignments.

- *Myth: Online courses are too hard.* I don't think they are any harder than f2f courses, but they need a different approach. Students need to be more disciplined and more focused to be successful.
- *Myth: When you take an online course you need to work in isolation.* Absolutely not. We are trying to create a writing community here. Students work in groups. That way, they can keep one another motivated, and their grades will also be better.

If you have previous experience with online courses and can think of more myths, please let me know and I'll include them here.

ADVICE FOR ONLINE STUDENTS

If this is your first web course, please check out the following link to find out what you can expect and how to be better prepared. The link is helpful for routine online students, too.

<http://www.wku.edu/Dept/Support/AcadAffairs/CorrStudy/Tutorial/TutorialMain.htm>

For more helpful tips to succeed in an online course, please check out "**Ten Tips and Trick for the Online Student**" by Mark Evans.

(Available at <http://techlearning.com/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=20900591>. If the link doesn't work, please google it.)

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

To stay on top of things, it is crucial in online courses that you have regular, effective communication with your instructor and peers. Communication, as you know, is a two-way process and the sender of the information can never be 100% sure whether his/her words actually reach the targeted audience. Occasionally, there are students who just skim the syllabus and don't read email messages or BB postings. These students will usually get confused, fall behind, and eventually drop the course. I hope you won't be one of them. Another potential problem is that written text can easily be misunderstood or misinterpreted, since there is no body language, tone of voice, etc. to help the reader decode the message. Therefore, if something is not clear or sounds unusual, it is your responsibility to ask for clarification so that you fully understand my meaning.

Important: Please ask questions AFTER you have had a chance to read all posted information and consulted your peers, not instead. I know you want to have answers to your questions immediately, but the information you are looking for is probably included somewhere in the syllabus or other course materials. Why don't you do a "ctr F" search in the document to find the info you are looking for. That's probably the fastest way to get the info you want. I hope you will understand that I am teaching one course to twenty students and not twenty courses to twenty students.

Ways to communicate with your instructor:

- By posting questions and comments in the QUESTION? COMMENTS? forum on DB.
- By emailing in case of an emergency or if you need immediate attention.
- By talking on the phone during scheduled phone conferences.
- During occasional chat sessions.

Ways to communicate with your peers:

- By emailing your peers.
- By chatting through BB's Virtual Classroom any time. Please note that all chats are recorded and archived.
- By calling one another on the phone.
- By getting together in person if you live close by.

I recommend that group members “talk” to each other about assignments, etc. by sending email messages through BB's Communication function and NOT by posting messages in one another's personal folders. Folders need to be kept organized and manageable, and only the author of the message can delete a posting, not the “owner” of the folder.

Note: Talking on the phone is probably the most efficient way to communicate in an online course. If you call your peers or instructor, you might incur some long-distance charges. If you choose to conference with your instructor on the phone, you need to pay for the call. The English Department cannot sponsor these calls. If you live outside the U.S., a good alternative is to use BB's chat function.

TECHNOLOGY PREREQUISITES and OTHER TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

Internet Connection: Since the course is delivered electronically, it is essential that you have access to a PC with a reliable (and preferably high-speed) Internet connection on an everyday basis. Whether you live in Bowling Green or Timbuktu, being able to interact over the net is essential for all participants in this course. Even if you travel to various places during this semester, you should still be able to access the course and keep in touch with your instructor and peers, and post assignments by the deadline. (Most places have a public library or an Internet café where you can do your work while out of town.) Owning a computer—or a laptop if you travel a lot—would make your life easier, but it's not a requirement. Upgrading to DSL or cable would be a worthwhile investment, especially if you are planning to take other online courses in the future. Consider this as an investment in your education/future. You are paying for books, so why not for DSL? Life will be so much easier with a fast Internet service. It will save you the constant frustration that low-tech solutions may cause. For more information about how to prepare for a web course, please check out the following link:

<http://www.wku.edu/Dept/Support/AcadAffairs/CorrStudy/orientall/orientmain.htm>

Browsers: If you are using an older version of a browser that cannot handle advanced features of HTML, then some portions of this course may not work for you. I recommend that you use the latest version of either of these popular programs. The university uses **Internet Explorer**, **Mozilla**, and **Foxfire**. Some students use **Opera**. It doesn't matter what you use, as long as you have access.

Internet Explorer available at
<<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/default.msp>> or

Netscape Communicator available at <<http://channels.netscape.com/ns/browsers/download.jsp>>

Mozilla available at <<http://www.mozilla.org/>>

Firefox available at <<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/>>

Plug-ins, Players, and Viewers: I have prepared some multimedia/video files to help your learning. To view these files, you will need to download some special software, if you don't already have it on your computer. I think it's useful to have these **free** downloadable applications for your general web browsing convenience, not only for the sake of this course. If you cannot or don't want to download these applications, you will not lose significant information from the uploaded core content of the course, but you will need to read more.

Here is what I recommend that you download:

Tegrity:

Tegrity is the name of the program that I use to create multimedia files. To view these files, you need Internet Explorer, Mozilla, etc. and Microsoft Virtual Machine. Here is what you need to do before viewing. If your browser is set up to use the Sun Java Virtual Machine please go to step 1. If you need to update your Microsoft Virtual Machine please go to step 7.

- 1) From Internet Explorer menu bar, select "Tools" and then "Internet Options"
- 2) From the "Internet Options" window, select the "Advanced" tab.
- 3) Scroll down the list of installed components and locate the "Sun Java" component.
- 4) Uncheck the "Sun Java" component.
- 5) Continue to scroll down through the list and locate the "Microsoft VM" component.
- 6) Make sure that the "JIT Compiler" is selected.
- 7) If you are missing the Microsoft Java VM component you can download it from Microsoft. If you fail to get it from the Microsoft Web site please download it from here. When finished downloading the file, double click to activate the auto installer application.
- 8) When finished, close your Internet Explorer browser and launch it again.

The following website, although currently (i. e. June 2005) under construction, will also be helpful to you. Just copy and paste it into your browser: <<http://www.wku.edu/tsonline/tech.htm>>

Once you have completed the instructions above, you can learn more about Tegrity and explore its features if you view the following Tegrity files:

<<http://tegrity.wku.edu/tegrity/Tegrity/Demo/class/default.htm>>

<<http://www.tegrity.com>>

Adobe Acrobat Reader available at <<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>>

It is free, and freely distributable, software that lets you view and print Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files.

Apple QuickTime player available at <<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/>>
It is for viewing video in Apple's QuickTime format. Works with over 30 audio, video and image formats.

Microsoft PowerPoint Viewer 97 available at
<<http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=7C404E8E-5513-46C4-AA4F-058A84A37DF1&displaylang=EN>>
It is for viewing and printing PowerPoint presentations. Download this if you do not already have PowerPoint installed on your computer.

Macromedia Shockwave and Flash available at
<<http://sdc.shockwave.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi?>>
It is for viewing interactive content in various Macromedia formats.

Real Player available at <<http://www.real.com/player/index.html?src=downloadr>>
It is for streaming audio and video content.

Blackboard: As you know, we will use Blackboard as our virtual environment (accessible at <<http://ecourses.wku.edu>>). Please bookmark this page. You need to be a comfortable BB user by the time the course starts. Although Blackboard is not difficult to use, you need to spend some time to familiarize yourself with the program. Please do this as soon as possible. If you can view Tegrity files, you will find the following links helpful. Just copy and paste the link into your browser.

Logging into BB: <<http://tegrity.wku.edu/tegrity/Blackboard/Students/LoginBB/class/>>

BB Help: <<http://tegrity.wku.edu/tegrity/Blackboard/Students/BbHelp/class/>>

Additionally, BB's main page gives you information about login names, passwords, help, and support. You will find information posted to the following BB links:

- Announcements
- Course information
- Staff information
- Course documents
- Assignments
- Communication: Discussion Board, Email, Virtual Classroom, Roster
- External links

We will use the DISCUSSION BOARD's (DB for short) interactive function for posting and responding to assignments.

You can find out more about the DB by viewing the following Tegrity file:
<<http://tegrity.wku.edu/tegrity/Blackboard/Students/DiscussionBoard/class/>>

We will NOT use the DROP BOX at all in this course due to my previous negative experience with accessing, downloading, and uploading long assignments. I have created a "folder" (or forum) on

the Discussion Board for every student in the course. You can use this “personal folder” (or forum) under your name to save assignments and other school-related work. I expect you to check BB’s Announcements and the DB at least once a day for new postings and information. If you have questions and comments about the course, please post them under the QUESTIONS? COMMENTS? forum on the DB. I encourage you to answer your peers’ questions if you know the answer. This will work towards your participation grade.

Computer Skills: You should be familiar with keyboarding, operating systems, and word processing. You should know how to save your work, how to cut and paste, and how to manage files and folders, and how to send/read email messages. If you feel that you need to learn basic computer skills before the course starts, please ask the librarian’s help for online resources or solicit help from a friend or relative. Unfortunately, I will not be able to assist you in explaining how to use standard features of a software package. I highly appreciate students who are willing to experiment with technology and figure out on their own how to make something work.

General Applications: Please note that Microsoft Office is supported by the university, so that’s what I will use to upload files. Normally, the files that students create have to be compatible with **Microsoft Word** and Office 2003. However, you can copy any text into the DB (where your assignments are due) regardless of the word-processing program you use. Whether you are using MS Word, Wordperfect, or another word-processing program, BB will distort your document formatting (such as spacing, indentation, bold, italics, etc.) when you copy and paste text into the DB’s message box. If you want to maintain proper formatting in BB, you need to use basic HTML tags. Please let me know if you are a Mac user, because different guidelines might apply to you.

Email: As you know, Western assigns you an email account when you register for courses. This email address is used for all university communication, including this course. Your email address has to be consistent throughout the semester to avoid communication problems. Checking your messages on a daily basis is vital in this course.

Legal Issues: I don’t need to remind you that our e-mail system serves academic purposes only, and all rules of privacy apply. Please do not use another person’s email address, electronic resources, or information in an unlawful manner. Do not disclose another person’s email address and/or other personal information to a third party and do not use academic networks for commercial or proprietary work. Sending chain letters through the Internet is illegal and can have serious consequences. Please be advised that e-mail is not a private form of communication, therefore instructors are constrained by federal law from discussing individual grades in detail via insecure methods such as e-mail. To send this kind of information over the Internet, instructors need students’ previous signed permission. You can give me permission to do so in the Student Information Sheet posted under Course Documents.

Viruses: To protect ourselves from viruses, I suggest that you buy an antivirus program for your home computer and keep your virus definitions up-to-date. Please check your pen drives/CDs/disks/files for viruses frequently and regularly for your own and others’ safety, especially if you use public labs on campus.

Since your assignments are due on BB, you won't send me your homework via email. For all that, if you need to send your peers or me any kind of text, please do **NOT send it attached**. I do not open email attachments. You can copy and paste your assignment into the message box both on BB and in email. Composing assignments, messages, and BB postings in MS Word and then cutting and pasting the text into the message box is a way to protect your work from losing it. Internet connections are not always reliable, and you may lose a carefully composed, long message before you have a chance to send it off.

Sending Email Messages: Please save sending email messages to me for cases of emergency or when you need my immediate attention. My mailbox gets full very quickly, so I prefer that you post your questions under BB's DB. When sending a message to me or somebody else in class, please follow these guidelines. First, fill in the subject line. Always say "Eng 401/G" and then specify the topic of your message, e.g. "Assignment #1: Introduction" or "Quick question" or "SOS help" or "Emergency", etc. This will help me and others respond faster. Netiquette recommends that you use some kind of salutation before the body text of your message. You can call me Dr. Judith or Dr. Szerdahelyi in your salutation. Omitting the salutation sounds abrupt and impolite. When you have finished composing your message, please sign your full name and include what course and section you are in. I need to know whom I am communicating with when I am responding to your message. "jabrow2@wku.edu" or "Jane from your English class" does not give me enough information to respond in an efficient manner. I routinely ignore messages without a signature.

Signature Files: I strongly recommend that you create a **signature file** on your home computer. A signature file is a text file that appears at the bottom of the computer screen and goes out with every message. My signature file looks like this:

```
Judith Szerdahelyi, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of English  
Western Kentucky University  
16B Cherry Hall  
Vox: (270) 745-5765  
Fax: (270) 745-2533  
1 Big Red Way  
Bowling Green, KY 42104  
http://www.wku.edu/~judith.szerdahelyi
```

Your signature file will probably include different information. For example, disclosing your phone number and address may not be relevant or desirable for your purposes. On the other hand, including your course and section number and whether you are a graduate or undergraduate student would be important, at least from my point of view. I will certainly appreciate if you could create a signature file, because our communication will be less ambiguous and more professional.

Recommendations for Using Computers: I recommend that you decide on a **file management system** for this course early on so that you can stay organized throughout the course. If I were a student in this course, I would have a separate **folder** for each major essay--and separate files for each draft and revision of those essays--, a separate folder for DB postings, for the reflective journal, etc. If you use computers in the university's public labs, I suggest that you write

your name, course number, phone number, etc. on your pen drives/disks, so that they can be returned easily in case you leave them in the lab. Regardless of where you do your homework, please make several **back-up copies** of **all** your assignments (on your home computer's C:\ drive, Blackboard, pen drive, etc.) all the time. I encourage you to send yourself a copy of important documents via email. You also want to keep hard copies of your work, just in case all electronic copies get damaged. Again, please plan ahead and play it safe. We don't want anybody to drop or fail the course because of lost files or failures with the operating system.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE

This is a course in composing and talking about **creative nonfiction**. It is meant to be a “self-service course” in the sense that it allows you to design your own syllabus and assignments within certain parameters. I want to give you a great deal of freedom to decide on the course content so that you can write what you want to write, read what you want to read, and experiment with new genres and topics without being punished if something doesn't work. The course will be what you make it to be! What you put in is what you get out. It is your responsibility to make sure that you benefit from the course. When customizing the course according to your needs and preferences, be sure to challenge yourself and make the most of it.

The assignments are designed to help you learn to function like working writers: you will compose your works and, at the same time, study other writers and familiarize yourselves with specific subgenres and certain elements of nonfiction (truth, voice, memory, composing processes, etc.). In other words, this course focuses on creative nonfiction from two interrelated views: the practitioner's art and the critic's perspective. As your course book claims, it encourages you to learn the “craft the way most successful writers have learned theirs: by reading what other writers have written, by picking up tips and ideas from writers about the way they write, and by applying specific strategies culled from the readings to their own writing” (Root and Steinberg xvii).

You can expect to read, write, and discuss a lot in this course. You will be working on reading and writing assignments practically every day during this semester. I won't fool you by pretending that these activities are not time- and energy-consuming. You also need to remember that writing improves by writing, i.e. the more you write, the better you get. You will have regular reading assignments from *The Fourth Genre* (4G) or other books, including occasional online materials. Reading will be followed by online group and class discussion. You will keep a reflective professional journal or learning log that you will write into on a regular basis, reflecting on your own works-in-progress and your development as a writer and reader. More information about the journal follows below. There will be two major essays, a short one and a long one (in various subgenres of creative nonfiction). We will “workshop” papers, i. e. you will work with your peer group throughout the revision process giving and receiving feedback. Additionally, you can request feedback from the online tutors at **mycomplab.com**. Your instructor will give you feedback in optional one-on-one phone conferences. As for assessment, you will receive a “grade-so-far” which can be improved by revising your pieces for the final portfolio.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

By the end of the course, you will be expected to demonstrate:

- The ability to analyze and apply effective writing techniques for creating texts in various subgenres of creative nonfiction;
- An enhanced writing confidence and finding your own voice;
- An awareness that good writing is an authoring and crafting process made up of numerous steps and the ability to utilize those stages of the writing process that work best for you;
- An enhanced understanding of the rhetorical context of every situation and an ability to use it effectively in communication;
- A basic understanding of reading theory and how it helps your composing processes;
- Familiarity with what practitioners, scholars, and critics say about the various subgenres and purposes of creative and critical nonfiction;
- An enhanced understanding of how writing style can be improved and practice in improving your own writing style;
- The ability to work collaboratively on written assignments and to give constructive feedback to peers;
- Expertise and technical language to critique works-in-progress;
- The ability to be the reader and critic of your own writing;
- An awareness of the interconnectedness of reading, writing, research, and learning;
- A willingness and ability to reflect on your own lives through the process of reading and writing about others;

INSTRUCTOR'S ADDITIONAL EXPECTATIONS

Apart from the above aims and objectives, I would like you to:

- Write the best paper(s) of your life (and make me famous 😊)
- Submit something for publication
- Have your own individual goals, agendas, and projects that you are working towards in this class
- Learn something about writing that you have not had a chance to learn until now and that you consider important to learn before you graduate
- Have some space and the freedom to experiment with form, content, style, and genre
- Be involved in self-exploration and self-discovery through writing
- Show me how your mind works
- Keep drafting

REQUIRED TEXTS

Root, Robert L., and Michael Steinberg. *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction*. New York: Longman, 2005.

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. New York: Pocket Books, 2002.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. New York: Anchor Book, 1994.

Some online readings.

BUYING BOOKS

Although all three books are currently available at the university's bookstore in Bowling Green, you can buy either new or used copies from any other regular (Borders, Barnes and Noble) or online (amazon.com, ebay, half.com, etc.) bookstore. However, if you buy *The Fourth Genre* **new** from Western's bookstore, you will have free access to the publisher's **online tutoring service**. I believe that everybody in this course would benefit from the feedback they receive from Longman's trained writing instructors, but undergraduate students should really take advantage of this opportunity. I will not require that you buy the new book and use the tutoring service, but I **strongly recommend** that you do if you want a good grade. You can order your books online from Western's bookstore by going to this URL: <http://www.bookstore.wku.edu>.

STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES

Students with disabilities who require accommodations (academic adjustments and/or auxiliary aids or services) for this course must contact the Office for Student Disability Services, Room 445, Potter Hall. The OFSDS telephone number is (270) 745-5004 V/TDD. Please do not request accommodations directly from your instructor without a letter of accommodation from the Office for Student Disability Services.

BEFORE THE RULES

Before proceeding with the rules for the course, let me sincerely thank those students who are conscientious, courteous, and responsible while endeavoring to meet course obligations. Your efforts are noticed. I do appreciate your cooperation and your courtesies to me as well as to your classmates. I try to return the favor by doing my very best to help you succeed in this course.

Rules are necessary for establishing a common ground as the basis of our collaboration. Be sure to familiarize yourself with all the rules, and remember that you are responsible for your own learning. I will assume the role of facilitator throughout the course. I expect you to follow the course schedule or course calendar on a daily basis and to prepare assignments by the due dates without my having to remind you.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

There are no exams in this course, only due dates for reading and writing assignments. Your end-of-term portfolio carries the weight of an exam, but your grade is based on more than just your portfolio. The quality of your postings throughout the semester will also be obviously assessed. Although the passing grade is 61% in this class, it does not mean that completing 61% of the requirements will ensure a passing grade. You must **satisfy all requirements to pass** this course. The **quality** of your performance will translate into various grades. I expect you to keep track of what is due and when. Also, please keep a record of your grades (and missed deadlines if any).

LIST OF CLASS REQUIREMENTS

- A short “Brevity” piece with at least three initial rough drafts in a summer course and four initial rough drafts in a fall or spring course, with substantial multiple revisions of one piece.
- A long piece with at least two initial rough drafts and substantial multiple revisions of one piece.
- Meaningful participation in class and group discussions and activities
- Regular extensive and insightful postings to BB’s Discussion Board
- Evidence of completing all reading assignments (e.g. by posting to BB’s Discussion Board)
- A reflective professional journal or learning log to record what you have learned about your own writing and the writing process
- Three writing exercises of your choice from a list of assignments posted under BB’s Assignments section.
- Meaningful, constructive feedback (i.e. substantial, concrete suggestions for revision) on your peers’ essays
- End-of-term portfolio possibly in the form of a personal/professional website with a reflective video file
- For graduate students, an additional (research) project to be discussed later

WHERE TO POST ASSIGNMENTS: FOLDERS/FORUMS ON THE DISCUSSION BOARD

“Folder” (Forum and Thread) Management on BB’s Discussion Board: There are three kinds of “folders” or forums that we will use within the DB: personal folders, group folders, and class folders. Each kind of folder has a specific function and contains different kind of information, although duplicating information and making multiple postings is not only wise but sometimes necessary.

Personal Folders: If you go to our DB, you’ll see that every student has a personal folder. The folder (or forum) with your name is obviously your personal folder. You can consider it your own “personal property.” You can use it whichever way you like, in addition to posting **all** the required assignments **every time**. This makes it easier for me to have a quick overview of all your work at one glance when I go to your folder to assess your work. Be sure to keep your folder nice, clean, and “collapsible”. If you need to see an example of the recommended folder organization system, please check out the “Sample Student Folder” forum on the DB. Please be aware that folders are “open to the public” in the sense that anyone can go to your folder and read your assignments. This open system will help us create a community, understand assignments, and adjust standards. Please be aware that postings can only be removed by the person who posted them. Try to avoid posting messages in somebody else’s folder unless the assignment requires you to do so. When you are required to make a posting in another person’s folder, please do so by following his/her folder management system. Don’t leave a mess in somebody else’s folder by making misaligned postings. I have adjusted the specs on BB so that you can edit and remove your own postings.

Group Folders: Most of our work will be done in groups. Each group will discuss reading assignments in their own group folder. As a group, please decide on a system of postings so that your folder can remain organized. All reading-responses go to the group folder.

Class Folders: Occasionally, you will post assignments in designated class folders. The “Paper 1 Draft 1” and “Paper 2 Draft1” are examples of class folders where you post your drafts anonymously for anonymous feedback. Other times, you will post your opinion about various aspects of writing in class folders. Please watch my announcements for more details.

GROUP WORK

Learning happens in collaboration with your peers during group activities and discussions. There will be almost no assignments in this course that do not involve some kind of collaboration with your peers. You will be divided into groups of 4-5-6 members each and engage in collaborative learning through both synchronous (“real time”) and asynchronous (“threaded”) activities. You will participate in asynchronous small/large-group discussions when you discuss your readings or answer questions in your group folder and during peer editing workshops when you give feedback to your group members in their personal folders. During workshop cycles, you will probably want some “real-time meetings” (in person, via chat, etc.) and give one another feedback that way, too. I recommend that each group select a **leader** (or maybe somebody could volunteer for this role) who is responsible to organize the group’s activities, e.g. s/he sets up the group’s special workshop schedule, arranges times and places to “meet” virtually or otherwise, has information about when group members are available and how/when they can be reached, etc. Groups are expected to be autonomous and work in close collaboration.

Group Chats, etc.: The best way to prepare and discuss assignments is through meeting in person. If living at a distance does not allow group members to do so, here is what I recommend. For synchronous group meetings, I suggest group chats via BB’s Virtual Classroom, Windows’ net-meeting/online collaboration function, or a five-way calling on the phone (if you have that capability). As always, be creative with your solutions as to how you can make this class work. Please be aware that all chats are recorded and archived. Although I will not participate in your chats, I will occasionally monitor your work asynchronously.

Your performance in these activities counts towards your participation grade. I ask you to be responsible group members, since your performance can have an impact on another student’s grade. Make every effort to support others in their work. Building a community of writers will not only allow you to have more fun in the course, but it will also develop a sense of camaraderie and a chance to seek help from others when you need it.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

I expect you to write papers because you have something to communicate and not because an assignment is due or you need credit to graduate. I invite you to take risks, to leave your comfort zones, experiment with writing, try new forms, styles, genres, and tones when you decide on your assignments. You will never be punished if something doesn’t work, as long as you write something else that does.

You will write **two major essays**: one short piece (500-750 words) and one longer one (3000-5000 words). You will prepare at least three initial rough drafts in a summer course and four initial rough

drafts in a fall or spring course for the short piece and two for the long one. Peer feedback will help you decide which draft to choose for further revision before you submit it for a grade.

Note: When you choose your assignments, please refrain from pieces of fiction. I am an advocate of creative non-fiction, and your assignments should fall under this category.

I would like to encourage you to write one humorous piece as one of your assignments.

We will **workshop** both papers. Please read about the workshop process under Course Information.

Additional writing assignments include regular Discussion Board postings, three writing exercises of your choice, a reflective professional journal, peer feedback, optional blogging, optional personal diary, and optional games.

PAPER FORMAT AND ACCURACY

The usual formatting guidelines (double spacing, one-inch margins, etc.) required for research papers in f2f courses are irrelevant in this course. Word files will be distorted in BB unless you use HTML. What you need to remember is that you always post your paper in the forum's message box. Please do not post papers as attachments! Make sure that your posted electronic paper is single-spaced and not double-spaced. Instead of indenting paragraphs, please leave a line blank between sections.

All assignments, including Discussion Board postings, journal entries, peer feedback, etc. have to be **well composed, spell checked, and proofread**—even if your tone is otherwise informal. All of your writing has to be “premeditated.” Do not post spontaneous comments that may contain typos or surface errors unless you are satisfied with a low course grade. This rule doesn't apply to postings in our synchronous chat sessions. The occurrence of typos, etc. in live situations are considered natural. When you edit your drafts, remember that you cannot rely on your spellchecker only. If you do, the result might be what Dr. Jablonski put this way: “Wile it will tell ewe that a word is miss pelt, it will knot tell yew if it is the core wrecked ward.”

GRAMMAR

This course was not designed to help you with your grammar and usage skills or to provide you with systematic, structured grammar instruction. If this is contrary to your expectations, you probably signed up for the wrong course. It is assumed, however, that you have fairly sophisticated language skills at this level. Surface errors in assignments will not be tolerated. If you are making mistakes because you are not familiar with the rules, you can always learn them. All you need is a good grammar book and determination. In my opinion, pre-service, secondary-level teachers should have reliable language and usage skills before they are allowed in the classroom. If you feel that you need help in this area, and want to stay in this course, please contact me. I want you to take a proactive approach and set up an individual study plan. I can direct you to online grammar books (such as Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*) and exercises (by Diane Hacker) that will allow you to review grammar rules and principles and to complete exercises and quizzes. By the end of the course, both you and I have to see measurable improvement in your usage.

If your grammar skills are generally strong, but have a quick question about something, please use **mycomplab's** online **Tutor Center** or the **OWL** (Purdue University's Online Writing Lab available at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>). I will generally focus on content in my feedback, but will point out serious mistakes to you in our phone conferences.

On the whole, you need to make sure that your writing is error free. **Consistent** grammatical mistakes in your postings or other assignments will prevent you from getting a good grade in this course. If you have mistakes in your portfolio drafts, I will not be able to give you an "A" even if your writing is otherwise superb.

READINGS

Reading assignments come from two major sources: (1) from your required course books and other published print or electronic materials and (2) from your peers' essays and postings, including blogs. To pass this course, you will have to complete all the reading assignments and provide evidence that you have done so. Posting a well-composed, extensive reading-response piece on our DB is probably the easiest way to prove this. Reading-responses will be part of our small- or large-group discussions. Be prepared to contribute with smart, thoughtful comments and insightful analyses of the readings. Postings will be part of your participation grade. Guidelines for DB postings are below. Sample reading-responses can be viewed under Course Documents.

Our main course book is *The Fourth Genre* or *4G* for short. Along with other published reading materials, *4G* will inform you about the theory and practice of creative nonfiction. I will assign several essays to read each week, but you will usually have two or three options, so you can decide which essays you want to read. This "information gap" between students' reading will hopefully create a lively exchange of comments on the DB. Please check the Course Calendar to find out what your choices are. When you read the *4G* essays, look at them as models for your own writing and as examples of the kind of papers I expect you to write. You also have the option to read essays above and beyond what I assigned for extra credit.

King's *On Writing* and **Lamott's *Bird by Bird*** contain invaluable advice for aspiring writers. You are required to read both books for this course.

Additionally, you will read essays and articles published by online journals or other creative nonfiction websites. Your Course Calendar will tell you what these online sources are how you can access them. There are many creative nonfiction books that I did not require for this course (so as to keep your budget low), but would recommend that you have a look at, since they contain excellent models for your assignments. You can do this for free if you to amazon.com. You can sample the first 20 pages of any book without paying a fee.

If you choose a project that includes research, it will probably involve some more reading.

Reading your peers' BB and blog postings is an important part of building a community in this course. To maintain a conversation with your peers, you will be expected to read their postings and respond to them regularly.

Editions and Page Numbers: The page numbers associated with your reading assignments are based on the third (latest) edition of *4G*. If you buy a different edition, page numbers will differ. Please make sure that you go by author and title, and not by page numbers when you look for your readings. Furthermore, some essays might actually have been omitted and/or replaced in the newer edition. If so, there are always online sources where you can access the required reading. I'll refer you to them, but be resourceful and google your own reading source if you are experiencing a problem. If you can't find the same reading online, please read something else from *4G*.

DISCUSSION BOARD POSTINGS

Asynchronous Discussion Board postings serve the same purpose as class/group discussions do in a f2f environment. You will make several postings each week, depending on how many and what kind of reading assignments are required for that week. There are different kinds of postings: they can be reading-responses, responses to reading-responses, and answers to and comments on the instructor's and peers' questions/postings. It is expected that you contribute to our class and group discussions regularly according to the guidelines below. The quality, frequency, length, and depth of your postings will count towards your participation grade.

Reading-Responses: The purpose of reading-responses is to facilitate maximum learning for you and your peers. You will respond to theoretical texts and models of creative nonfiction in separate postings. If there are three theoretical pieces due on a certain day, for example, you can skillfully combine them; you don't need to post responses to all three of them separately. Your initial posting to individual readings should be no less than 300 words and must contain enough material to convince the instructor that you have read and engaged the text, carefully considered the issues it discusses, etc. At the end of your post, you will raise a question or controversial/problematic point that will elicit further discussion. Your postings should be well composed, clear, accessible, smart, and error-free. We are looking for breadth and depth in these posting for a good grade. Your posting should include citations from the text or elsewhere to better support your argument. When reading actual creative nonfiction pieces (as opposed to reading about the theory), your goal is to analyze them critically as you would other pieces of literature and to see what you can learn from these pieces that will help your own writing and writing process.

Responses to Peer Postings or Responses to Reading-Responses: Since your own postings are only the initial stage of a conversation within a small or large group, responses to peers' postings are essential to facilitate a real discussion. As soon as your peers' postings are available, you will read all group members' postings and respond to at least two of them. These responses are a couple of paragraphs in length each. You can answer their questions and/or respond to interesting ideas in their posting. Please avoid clichés and “padding” in these responses. Comments like “Thank you for sharing,” “What a great idea,” “I found your response really intriguing,” or other general statements without specific additional information and insight, will not help the discussion or your grade. Do not just restate their argument; expand it. Personalize your posting and avoid giving the same response to several peers.

I would like to encourage you to get back to the person who has just responded to your initial posting. This would be third round of postings within the group, and you can obviously go on. If

you give substantial responses to more than two group members, or maintain a long intelligent discussion with the same group member, or participate in other groups' discussions, you will get extra credit.

Labeling: It's important that you pay special attention to how you label your postings and your work in general. You want to give as much concrete information about the content of your posting to the viewer as you can to help his/her orientation. Nobody likes to waste time by clicking on links randomly whose titles are not informative. Viewer-friendly postings are always much appreciated. To make the viewing process more efficient, here is what you can do. Please fill out the **Subject line** for all your postings. If you are replying to a previous posting, but your topic is different, be sure to fill out the Subject slot again. Don't just hit reply. Your titles and labels must be clear and accurate. They should indicate what you viewer would find when clicking on the link. Using labels like "response 1," "response 2," etc. is not very informative for an outsider.

Please post your pieces in the message box as part of a forum/thread and not as an attachment. Also please remember to maintain the privacy of participants and the confidentiality of their information. In general, abide by the rules that apply to academic policies.

POSSIBLE CLASS BLOG

Since the required postings do not leave much room for spontaneous comments or to discuss issues related to class organization and management, we could launch a class blog that will allow you all to do just that. If there is enough interest, I will launch a class blog at Easyjournal.com so that you can discuss any aspect of the class that is not a requirement. Its function would be very similar to the QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS section in the DB, except I would not monitor it very closely. Posting would be voluntary and would not count towards your grade. You could ask one another about assignments, share best practices, give advice, commiserate, etc. We can use somebody else's blog space also. Let me know on the DB if you like this idea. You might want to check out the blog platform by clicking the link below.

<<http://www.easyjournal.com>>

REFLECTIVE, PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL

Journals are a wonderful way to acquire written fluency. Journal entries provide you with a space to reflect on your ideas and record your development as a reader and writer. Keeping a professional journal can help you do several things: you can use journal entries to figure something out; to understand what you think and how you think; to make observations about your challenges, successes, and revelations in connections with reading and writing. In this sense, you would be using your journal in a "writing to learn" mode. You will write in your journal as often as you want to, but at least a couple of times a week. There are no length requirements, but if you don't give me enough material, it'll be hard for me to judge how you think about your progress and will question if there is progress at all. Another reason why you should take your journal seriously is that this content will give you the material for your reflective portfolio cover letter.

“Professional” means that this journal is not a personal diary. In this type of journal, you will write about things related to class, and you don’t typically record the days’ events (unless you have a purpose with them or can be related to an assignment or revelation). These entries always have beyond-the surface intellectual content and reflect serious thinking.

The primary audience of your journal is you yourself. I will monitor your postings, but won’t read everything all the time. A random sample of your postings will give you your journal grade, so all postings have to have the same high quality.

Posting guidelines: Please post your journal entries in your personal folder as one long file. After your initial posting, click on “modify” and add more text. Please make your postings visually reader friendly and always add the new date of your posting.

If you keep a personal diary or a personal blog in addition to your required professional journal, you’ll get extra credit. These are, however, optional assignments.

DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Instead of taking a final exam, you will compile an electronic writing portfolio for this course. This end-of-term portfolio stands as the record of your development as a writer, reader, and critical thinker. It also shows your involvement in the course. I recommend that you start working towards your portfolio as you are reading these words.

The digital portfolio can be published in different places. The easiest way to publish your portfolio is in BB. Think about it as posting a separate thread in your own personal folder. Then you can post all portfolio items as “replies” to this thread with the appropriate title in the subject line. The portfolio can also be posted as part of your published personal website in Western’s free server space or elsewhere on the web. (Western’s website space is not to be confused with BB’s Homepage.) I would strongly encourage you to learn basic web-authoring skills while you are in this course. If you do, you’ll get extra credit. Most importantly, digital literacy is extremely marketable in the world of work. English majors should seriously consider all opportunities to improve their technology skills.

An additional possibility to improve your technology skills is to create a video file (something similar to my video files) or short movie for your portfolio. This project is an option for ambitious students and for those who want to add more genuine fun to the course. Basically, you would shoot a video and put it on the web as part of your portfolio. I can give you information about where and how to get technical help for this project if you choose to do it. The content and function of the video can be negotiated and depends on your personal goals and creativity. All ideas are welcome, but here are some of mine:

- Instead of the portfolio cover letter, you can introduce your work in a video.
- You can take an aspect of creative nonfiction, the writing process, peer editing, etc. and shoot a documentary or an interview with students and experts.
- You can do a “video paper” which is a combination of text (i.e. your assignment) and the reflection on that text, including additional background information of your topic, life, etc.

- Video autobiography or memoir as an alternative (but not substitute) to your written assignment.

These projects should not be very long. Space on the server might be limited and viewers lose interest if the video is longer than 10-15 minutes. Please let me know at the beginning of the course if you are interested in this project.

In addition to posting your portfolio online, you will submit a copy of your portfolio on a CD, DVD, or floppy disk which I will keep for my own records. (No zip disks please.) You can send this to me via regular mail towards the end of the semester.

Again, it is important that you keep several electronic copies (and at least one hard copy) of **all** your work throughout the semester.

Here is what you will include in your portfolio:

Tentative Checklist for Portfolio	✓
Letter to the reader (arguing for a grade + self-evaluation + reflection on what you have learned in the course + explaining changes between drafts, etc.) or Reflective video or other movie	
List of Extra Credit assignments + reference to location of evidence	
Revised Paper 1 (final draft)	
Revised Paper 2 (final draft)	
Your best writing exercise	
Your most impressive Discussion Board posting	
Confidential evaluation about peers' performance as a group member to be sent to me via email	

Not preparing a portfolio equals a failing grade. Incomplete portfolios will not be accepted and will not be graded.

GRADES

In this class, grading is not done on a curve, so everybody can get an "A." Your final grade will be based on the quality of your portfolio; the quality of your individual writing assignments (papers, exercises, etc.); your willingness to take risks and learn new things; your willingness and ability to work in peer groups; the quality of your feedback on peer's papers; your participation and involvement in class and group activities/discussions; the evidence for completing your reading assignments; the quality of your Discussion Board postings; the quality of your journal/learning log entries; the effort you put into the course; your peers opinion about your performance, and your general attitude towards the class and your writing.

Final grades will be based on the following approximate distribution:

- End-of-term portfolio 25%

- Participation (class and group discussions, DB postings, reading assignments, reliability as a group member, etc.) 25%
- Paper 1 10%
- Paper 2 10%
- Writing exercises 10%
- Feedback 10%
- Professional journal or learning log: 10%

In general, your work (papers, journal, feedback, portfolio, etc.) will be assessed holistically, but we will always discuss what I will be looking for in an assignment. I will read your major papers carefully and give you feedback on them in an optional phone conference. You will also get a “grade-so-far” at that point. The feedback I give you should tell you where you stand exactly and what needs to be done to improve your grade. Papers can always be improved by substantial revisions towards a final, portfolio draft. Please note that the draft I see will indicate a stage towards the middle of your writing process. Since there is a lot more for you to revise before you can consider a draft final, grades tend to be in the “C” range. Please note, however, that revising will improve your grade in the portfolio.

As to assessing other writing and reading assignments, be aware that I will be monitoring your progress closely, but I will not read every word you write for all your assignments all the time. Instead I will browse through your postings systematically (reading responses, feedback, journal/learning log, etc.) and make occasional comments that I’ve been there. You need to maintain the same high quality of all your assignments so that whatever I happen to read could be considered a fair representation of your work in general.

Your **participation grade** includes your reading-response postings based on readings, your participation in class and group discussions, your reliability when giving feedback during workshops, your willingness and ability to keep deadlines, your peers’ evaluation of your performance throughout the course, and your professional behavior.

GRADING SCALE

Percentages

91% to 100% = A

81% to 90% = B

71% to 80% = C

61% to 70% = D

60% = F

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES

- Video project.
- Reading more than just the minimum requirement. Every time you have an either/or choice in your reading requirement, you will get extra credit if you read both pieces.
- Giving extra feedback: you can give feedback you your peers outside your workshop group, or you can give feedback to our group members on later drafts.

- Submitting your paper to a journal for publication or participating in a writing contest.
- Helping your classmates with info and encouragement when they need it.
- Using the OWL and/or the online tutoring service + evidence that you did
- Submitting a well-designed digital portfolio as part of your personal website--if based on your own web-authoring skills.
- Participating in the class blog, fun, and games.
- Positive attitude and willingness to learn and take risks.
- Professional demeanor when interacting with others and doing your work.

Basically, you will get extra credit for everything you do beyond and above the requirements.

GRADUATE (RESEARCH) PROJECT

If you are NOT a graduate student, you can skip this section. Graduate students will do an additional project of their choice for this course. This research-based project has to be related to creative nonfiction and further your career goals. If you are going to teach in secondary education, you can do a project that will help your teaching. You choose a topic relevant to teaching writing in your context, then research it, and come up with a product. You are not writing a research paper though. Your product can take many shapes and forms, including notes, journal entries, assignment descriptions, annotated bibliographies, and a set of web URL's grouped by categories, etc. For example, you might want to think about how you can teach creative nonfiction to your middle school students. What are the best practices to teach them how peer feedback works? How can you get them to revise meaningfully? What kinds of genres would they enjoy most? What concrete assignments would you give them? How do you teach them to accept constructive criticism? These are just a few questions to consider, but you can do whatever seems most useful to you. You will have to write a detailed proposal and post it in your folder, and I'll get back to you. Proposal guidelines will be posted under Course Documents.

DEADLINES AND LATE WORK

After you've had a chance to review the Course Calendar and pick up contact with your group members, I recommend that you design your own personal/group schedule that includes minute details about group postings, "meetings," chats, etc. You could work ahead of time and also around group members' (work, etc.) schedules and still make the deadline posted in the Course Calendar. I know that several of you will leave town or be on the move during the course, so please make every effort to accommodate everybody. We need to make this course work for all.

As you will see, most of this class involves you directly in writing, responding, and reporting in small and large groups. Missing deadlines might have a negative effect on your peers' performance, especially during workshop cycles. Therefore, missing workshop deadlines and not allowing your peers enough time to give or receive feedback will have serious consequences, including a low participation grade. If you are forced to miss an assignment due to illness or an emergency, I'd rather that you post your reading response late than your workshop draft. I expect you to notify your workshop group and me if "life happens" and you need an adjustment. Three late postings for reading responses are allowed without penalty as long as you keep all involved parties informed. Remember that keeping the communication channels open is crucial in this course.

CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY/PLAGIARISM

Although the nature of this class and the kinds of writing we do here makes it seem redundant that I talk about plagiarism, I need to do it anyway. This class is held in accordance with the academic integrity policy of WKU. (Please read the policy on p. 27 in the Undergraduate Catalogue.) Violating this policy may result in a failing grade for the assignment.

To represent written work taken from another source as one's own is **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is a serious offense. The academic work of a student must be his/her own.

One must give any author credit for source material borrowed from him/her. To lift content directly from a source without giving credit is a flagrant act. To present a borrowed passage without reference to the source after having changed a few words is also plagiarism (Undergraduate Catalogue 27).

In other words, plagiarism is the unauthorized use of someone else's materials (in any form, printed or published on the web) without using proper citation conventions to indicate the source or by using that work as one's own. If you want to quote somebody, make sure that you use quotation marks and document your source. As a rule of thumb, do not copy more than three consecutive words—without quotation marks—written by somebody else. Even if you rephrase any ideas into your own words, your source needs to be acknowledged.

Additionally, the work that you turn in for credit this semester must be not only your own, but it must also be produced **specifically for this class**. You may not submit a paper or portion of a paper that you completed in the past, even in a slightly altered form, or a paper that you are also working on for another class.

Finally, if you plagiarize, you deprive yourself of gaining the skills that you would acquire by writing on your own. Additionally, if you consider the penalties for turning in plagiarized work, you will quickly find that it is simply not worth it.

MY ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT TEACHING, LEARNING, AND WRITING

My goal is to help you succeed in your studies as well as in life. Seeing my students' success is one of the greatest pleasures and rewards in life.

I expect you to learn in this course in order to know. The work you do in this class will be for yourself and not for your instructor. Consequently, your success will depend largely upon the goals you set for yourself and your persistence to pursue them. In other words, what you put into the course is what you will get out.

Writing cannot be taught by rote learning; only practice makes the master. I can, however, give you meaningful feedback on your writing that you can use to revise and improve your paper. My job, as I see it, is that of a facilitator. My hope is to create a friendly environment in which you can learn.

Students often ask me to be “brutally honest” in my feedback. I am. I believe that’s the only way to improve anybody’s writing. All-positive feedback has never helped me improve mine. Also, my cultural background makes it difficult for me not be anything but straightforward. Please let me know in your self-evaluation how you take criticism. If you are sensitive, I’ll make an effort to be “mild.”

FINAL COMMENTS

Note: This course is based on the assumption that students are responsible for their own learning. What you put in the course is what you get. It is your responsibility to make the course work for you. If you decide to stay in this course after reading the syllabus, I will assume that you agree to its terms and requirements. After Tuesday, Jan. 18th, you will have to pay a \$20 fee if you decide to drop the course.

- The schedule and procedures in this course are living documents and subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. Changes will be announced on BB’s DB.
- Should there be any loopholes in these rules, I will decide the outcome and solution.
- I wish you an enjoyable and rewarding semester. I’m doing my best to make this course fun for you. Good luck with your studies!



Comments or questions about this document should be directed to Judith.Szerdahelyi@wku.edu.

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