Creative Nonfiction I
A Survey of Narrative Writing Techniques
ENG 370
Spring 2015
T/TR, 12:15 to 1:30
Willard Room 306
Professor Mary Collins

Office Hours: MW 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Contact: collinsmae@ccsu.edu
T/TR 2:00 to 3:00 and 4:05 to 5:00 p.m. Ph: 860-832-2770 (o)
Diloreto Room 208-20 Ph: 860-904-5364 (h) before 9 pm

Course Description
This class focuses on storytelling techniques required to write true stories well told. Changing trends in media in the 21st Century have kept creative nonfiction (also often known as narrative nonfiction or even New Journalism) twisting in many directions with some of the best personal essay now on radio, for example, or presented as mixed media pieces on newspaper websites. We will focus almost exclusively on the print prose version of the genre both online and in print.

You will study the fundamental reporting and writing techniques required to craft fact-based stories with fresh angles, a strong voice, literary flair, reflection and insight. We will borrow techniques normally associated with fiction, but everything you write in this class will be based on fact.

Each week for the first six weeks we will isolate a specific technique, such as integrating creative research into a narrative flow, which will give you time to learn what you need to know about this genre before tackling a larger paper. The second half of the course we will apply those techniques to several papers and also study the art of engaging in an effective revision. Most of the important work takes place in class; repeated absences will really impair your ability to move forward to the next assignment. My goal: to expose you to an entirely new way of thinking about writing. You will learn writing techniques that you can use in many other classes at CCSU and for the rest of your life in a range of fields.

Prerequisite: ENG 105 or 110 (Grade of C- or higher)
CREATIVE NONFICTION COURSE SEQUENCE: ENG 370 is the prerequisite for ENG 375 (CNF2), which explores a range of genres, including humor, travel, and personal essay, as well as ENG 483 (Advanced CNF Workshop), the capstone course that often produces a professional publication as the class project. Creative Writing also offers a literature class in contemporary nonfiction. The Minor in Writing had recently been overhauled and updated and now includes several new classes, including Writing In and About Digital Media (200 level, available Spring 2016) and Publishing (300 level, available Fall 2015).

Professor Collins’ Quick Bio: I worked as a freelance writer and editor in Washington, DC for 20 years for a range of clients, but mainly for National Geographic and the Smithsonian. Since I arrived at CCSU in 2007, I have published an adult nonfiction book (American Idle), a 130-page online travel guide to American Revolution sites in Connecticut, many essays and travel pieces and served as an Artist-in-Residence for the National Park Service. In 2010 I won CCSU’s Teaching Award. For more on my work, visit www.marycollinswriter.net.
REQUIRED READING

- Eat, Memory: Great Writers at the Table, Editor Amanda Hesser, WW Norton, 2009
- A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation, Noah Lukeman, WW Norton, 2006
- Reading Packet and other Packets provided by instructor

PAPERS

Paper One: On a topic you choose the first day of class. Length 750 to 1000 words (three-to-five pages). Angle Jan. 15; Draft Jan. 20; Final Jan. 22. Bring in two copies.

Paper Two: Write a four-to-five page personal essay (1000 to 1200 words) or narrative story that somehow incorporates food. Be sure to do the reading prior to handling this assignment so you understand that you are writing narrative nonfiction and not a review. The Field Trip is meant to generate some ideas, but you do not have to write this paper about something related to Adong Market. Bring in 12 copies of the final paper. Angle Feb. 10; Draft Feb. 12; Final Feb. 17.

Paper Three: Write a four-to-five page paper (1000 to 1200 words) that includes someone besides you as a primary character in the story. You may still be a central figure, but tap into the interview skills you’ve learned and incorporate someone else’s voice as well. Angle Feb. 26; Draft March 5; Final March 10. Rewrite must be posted to Blackboard six days after we workshop your work in class. Post it by noon the day before our class AND BRING IN FOUR PAPER COPIES as well.

Paper Four: Write a five-to-six page literary essay or feature on a topic of your own choosing. Please use as many of the writing techniques we’ve studied as possible. A rewrite of this paper is required. Angle April 2; Draft April 7; Final April 14. Rewrite due one week after we discuss your paper in workshop.

Final Exam: Rewrite a paper you’ve already submitted and earn a new grade. I will be grading both the paper and your revision skills. Due during our final exam timeslot.

Guidelines for submitting papers:

- Listen carefully when I tell you how many copies to bring in. Sometimes you will workshop your paper in a small group and bring in just four copies but other times you must bring in copies for the entire class plus two for me (13, if you don’t count yourself). I always want TWO copies of your work because I like to keep your materials on file for at least three years. I have found exchanging papers on Blackboard nowhere near as productive as working with hard print copy, but for Paper Three to allow time for a decent workshop on the rewrites, you will be posting your rewrite on Blackboard. I understand you will run up some copying costs, but the students’ papers are the primary textbook for the class.

- All papers must be on white 8x11 standard paper, double spaced, 12 font type, and include PAGE NUMBERS AND SOURCES (at the end, not in the text)

- Each assignment should reflect the author’s skill in the various techniques we have covered up to the assignment deadline. For example, if we studied how to narrow a broad topic down to a narrow angle, then your paper should reflect some understanding of this important step. By papers three and four, I will grade you on all of the techniques.
**Plagiarism:** I have set up the writing steps in my class to make it hard for anyone to plagiarize, because I want to see the angle, draft and the final submission. I must make it clear that if you deliberately borrow material and try to pass it off as your own you will fail the assignment and possibly the class. I abide by the rules set out in the Student Handbook on the ccsu.edu site at www.ccsu.edu/page.cfm?p=541. In short, do your own work or expect fierce consequences. See the Reading Packet for the article, “Senator's Thesis Turns Out to Be Remix of Others Works, Uncited,” NYT, July 23, 2014, for an outstanding analysis of the various ways plagiarism can sneak into a paper.

**All deadlines are firm.** As a professional freelance writer and editor, I never missed a deadline. I want my class to mirror this real world work ethic. Missed deadlines cost publishers money and make it difficult for many other people involved in what is often a group project (designers, editors and others). I take attendance every day and give you a grade every day for your in-class participation. **If you expect to miss more than TWO classes all term, please see me after class. A third absence could result in a full grade reduction or even failure for the course.** Ninety percent of the most important work for this course takes place in the small group in-class exercises. Serial tardiness will count as a full absence and impact your class participation grade.

Please see me if you have a disability that requires special accommodation for completing the course assignments.

**OTHER ASSIGNMENTS**

- Interview Assignment: Transcript and one-paragraph angle due January 27.
- One-Page Portrait of a Place or Event. This personal observation skill assignment requires you to observe something in real-time, which means do not reflect back on something you experienced months or years ago. Due February 3.
- Humor/Voice Assignment (two pages) on a vacation or work-related angle. Due February 19.
- *Dash of Style*, Leads, Word Choice and Literary Flair Test, April 7
- Query Letter due April 28.

**GRADING**

I assume that most of you have little to no experience writing narrative nonfiction so I have built a course that allows you six weeks of few graded assignments as you build more confidence executing the writing techniques we’ll study. I do not grade the first paper, for example. You submit it and earn credit. If I feel it is not a college level paper, I will work with you one-on-one to help you raise the quality of the submission so you can earn credit. For the second paper, I will only grade you for the writing techniques we’ve covered up to that point in the course. By the third and fourth papers, I will grade you on all techniques. Of course that means the last two assignments (and the required rewrite of the fourth paper) carry a lot more weight in terms of your overall grade. My goal: to give you time to experiment and make mistakes with few consequences but then push you to execute at a higher level on all fronts in the second half of the term. **Papers account for 50 percent of your grade.**

**Class participation,** which includes small exercises, quizzes, and your general class participation, **counts for the other 50 percent of your grade.** Come prepared to discuss
EACH student paper and go the extra mile when you must step up and be the **Lead Reviewer** (see Lead Reviewer Packet for more details). Take this role seriously. I want to run a constructive workshop with rigorous but affirming discussions. In the end it’s all about moving each of you forward as a writer.

**Individual Conferences and Office Hours**
Each student must meet with me at the mid-term, but I also encourage you to make your way to my new office in Diloreto (Room 208-20 with a big tree poster on the door) as often as possible to discuss paper angles and more. I am striving for QUALITY not quantity in this class and often students come up with their best angles after having extended conversations with me. If you cannot see me during my regular office hours, please let me know and we can work out another arrangement.
From Topic to Story  
Jan. 13, Tues.  
Assignment: You will leave class today with two story ideas. Pick ONE and write a one-paragraph summary of that angle and how you plan to structure your personal essay. Bring in FOUR TYPED copies and be prepared to share your ideas with a group.

Our very own Professor Dowling will speak at the Mark Twain House tonight about his award-winning new biography of Eugene O’Neill at 7:00 p.m. Free.

Defining Creative Nonfiction  
Jan. 15, Thurs.  
Reading: Chp. 2, Structure in Storycraft; excerpt from Philip Gerard, Creative Nonfiction (packet)  
Assignment: Draft of first paper. Bring in FOUR copies for group discussion. Be prepared to discuss the hallmarks of creative nonfiction as they apply to your draft.

Refining Angles and Structure  
Jan. 20, Tues.  
Assignment: Paper One due January 22. Two copies for me. We will not workshop these papers.

Creative Research Techniques  
Jan. 22, Thurs.  
The Art of the Interview  
***I will stage a live interview in class to demonstrate various interviewing techniques. Please do not be late because I will invite a guest and start the interview at precisely 12:15.  
Reading: Read the sample transcript in the Packet and identify one possible story angle for a profile based on the content in that transcript. Come prepared to share your idea with the class.  
Assignment: Write up a transcript of the interview you had with your assigned fellow student. You do not need to precisely quote every word but **at least 50 percent of the transcript must be direct quotations, not just paraphrased material.** Write ONE paragraph that describes what sort of angle you might take on a profile if you were to write a piece on the person you interviewed. **DO NOT NEGLECT TO TAKE THIS STEP** because this is the most important part of the interview assignment. Can you see the best story line in the material you have gathered? Bring in TWO COPIES. Due January 27.
Art of the Interview II  
Jan. 27, Tues.
Reading: Chp. 10 in *Storycraft*; Pain Scale by Eula Biss, Sewanee Review (packet); Creative Research Packet with authors Kidder, Pollan and Didion (provided by instructor)  
Assignment: Come prepared to discuss the various ways the authors in the Research Packet use research to power their narratives.

Using Creative Research to Power a Story  
Jan. 29, Thurs.
Reading: Tea on the Balcony, Mary D’Ambrosio, July 3, 2014, Worldpress.org; Lead Reviewer Packet  
Assignment: After reading D’Ambrosio’s story, visit a place and write a 300-to-400 word portrait about it; use as many senses as possible. **Do NOT write about a place you’ve visited in the past.** I am studying your personal observation skills on this assignment. Due February 3. Bring in FOUR copies.

Writing Techniques Review  
What’s a Lead Reviewer?  
Feb. 3, Tues.
Reading: Chps. 11 and 13 in *Storycraft*; Read in *Eat, Memory* the following short pieces: I Scream, Orange Crush, Bean There, Line of Sight, Expatriate Games, Our Lady of Lawser; and revisit The Intimacy of Forks (packet)

FIELD TRIP TO ADONG MARKET  
Feb. 5, Thurs.
**We will meet in the parking lot behind Willard** and carpool to Adong Market, which is located off of New Britain Ave. about four miles from campus.
Assignment: Story angle for Paper Two on a topic that somehow includes food in the story. Bring in four copies to share with a group. Due February 10.

Workshop Angles for Paper Two  
Feb. 10, Tues.
Reading: Revisit readings in *Eat, Memory* for inspiration for your own essays/stories  
Assignment: Draft of Paper Two, due February 12. Bring in four copies for group work.

Workshop Drafts for Paper Two  
Crafting a Voice  
Feb. 12, Thurs.
Assignment: Paper Two due February 12; **Bring in 12 copies** (two for me and enough for the rest of the class)  
Reading: Read the Voice packet and come prepared to discuss what gives the authors’ work so much personality.
BJ Novak, writer for *The Office*, author of an acclaimed short story collection and a new children’s book, will read and speak at the Aetna Theater as part of a special Mark Twain House program. Thursday, February 12, at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are $30 and if you want one you should buy it the first week of this term.

**Crafting a Voice**  
**How to be an Effective Lead Reviewer**  
**Feb. 17, Tues.**

Reading: Read papers assigned for workshop and come prepared to discuss. Read the Lead Reviewer Packet  
Assignment: Write a short 300-to-400 word humorous piece that projects a lot of voice. Use the reading samples as a guide for ideas on writing techniques. Bring in FOUR copies. Due February 19.

**Workshop Second Papers**  
**Workshop Voice Submissions**  
**Feb. 19, Thurs.**

Reading: Read papers assigned for workshop and come prepared to discuss.

**Workshop Second Papers**  
**Feb. 24, Tues.**

Assignment: Story angle for Third Paper. Bring in FOUR typed copies of your idea for group discussion. Write a four-to-five page story that includes someone besides you as a primary character. You can still be in your own narrative, but strive to tap into the interview skills you’ve studied this term and incorporate someone else’s voice as well. Due February 26.  
Reading: Excerpt from Suzanne Strempek Shea’s *Shelf Life* (packet). Study how she integrates a range of characters into her chapter on children rushing to the bookstore just before the start of school to grab the books on their summer reading lists.

**Workshop Paper Three Story Angles**  
**Developing Characters**  
**Feb. 26, Thurs.**

Mid-Term Conferences. REQUIRED.  
**March 3, Tues.**

Each student will meet with me at his or her assigned time in my office in Diloreto Room 208-20 NOT in our classroom. I’ll assign you a 20-minute time slot.  
Assignment: DRAFTS of Paper Three due March 5. Bring in four copies for group discussion.  
Reading: Read the Art of Revision Packet

**Workshop Paper Three Drafts**  
**The Art of Revision**  
**March 5, Thurs.**

Assignment: Paper Three due on March 10. **Bring in 12 copies** (2 for me and enough for the rest of the class).
Who is Your Potential Reader? Studying Potential Markets for CNF
March 10, Tues.
Reading: Read papers assigned for workshop discussion and come prepared to discuss
them with the rest of the class.

Workshop Paper Three
March 12, Thurs.
Reading: Read papers assigned for workshop discussion and come prepared to discuss
them with the rest of the class.
If we discuss your paper in class today, your rewrite must be posted to Blackboard by
Monday, March 16 at noon so students in your assigned revision group have time to
read them over prior to class. Bring in FOUR print copies as well on March 17.

THE BIGGEST ENGLISH DEPARTMENT EVENT (probably ever) on Careers for
English Majors and Writing Minors on Thursday, March 12, 4:00 to 6:30 in
the Connecticut Room at Memorial Hall.
* A panel of accomplished professionals from publishing, nonprofits and other
organizations will speak about the huge variety of ways you can apply writing, editing
and critical thinking skills in the work force
* More than a dozen alumni that graduated in the last 5 years who have good jobs in a
range of fields will be on hand to socialize with you. Network while eating free food!
* Seize the chance to find out more about all of the exciting changes going on in the
English Department, such as several new classes, including a Publishing course, a new
class on Writing in and About Digital Media, and more.
* Find out more about the department’s expanded Internship Program

Free and open to all. You do not have to be an English Major or writing minor to attend
this event! Indeed, we are eager to spread the word about all of the exciting things going
on in our programs so bring your friends!

Workshop Paper Three
March 17, Tues.
Reading: Read to page 111 in A Dash of Style
If we discuss your paper in class today, your rewrite must be posted to Blackboard by
Monday, March 30 by noon so students in your assigned revision group have time to
read them over prior to class. Bring in FOUR print copies as well on March 31.

Workshop Revisions of Paper Three
A Dash of Style: Punctuation as Storytelling Tool
March 19, Thurs.

Spring Break March 23-27
No Classes
Workshop Revisions of Paper Three
Leads, Word Choice and Literary Flair
March 31, Tues.
Reading: Complete *A Dash of Style*
Assignment: Paper Four angle; bring in four typed copies for group discussion

Review of Lukeman
Workshop Paper Four Angles
April 2, Thurs.
Assignment: Test on Lukeman, Leads, Word Choice and Literary Flair on April 7
Paper Four Drafts due April 7; bring in four typed copies for group discussion.

Test on Lukeman, Leads, Word Choice and Literary Flair
Workshop Paper Four Drafts
April 7, Tues.
Assignment: Bring in just TWO copies of your fourth paper draft on April 9. You will work intensely one-on-one with your Lead Reviewer on line level issues in class.

Lead Reviewer Teams Work on Fourth Paper Drafts
Review of Lukeman Test
April 9, Thurs.
Assignment: Paper Four due April 14. **Bring in 12 copies.**

Techniques Review
CNF on the Radio: The Latest Frontier
April 14, Tues.
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop discussion and be prepared to discuss them with the class.

Workshop Paper Four
April 16, Thurs.
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop discussion and be prepared to discuss them with the class. If you workshopped your paper today, your rewrite is due April 23. **Bring 12 copies** (two for me and enough for the rest of the class. The entire class will workshop all of the fourth papers a second time.)

Workshop Paper Four
April 21, Tues.
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop discussion and be prepared to discuss them with the class. If you workshopped your paper today, your rewrite is due April 28. **Bring 12 copies** (two for me and enough for the rest of the class. The entire class will workshop all of the fourth papers a second time.)

The Art of the Query Letter
April 23, Thurs.
Assignment: Write a query letter for one of your papers for this class. Identify a legitimate target publication and try to find out about the submission guidelines. Due April 28.

**Workshop Revisions of Group I, Paper 4**  
**Share Query Letters**  
**April 28, Tues.**  
Assignment: Read papers assigned for workshop. Select the paper you wish to revise for the final Exam. Bring in two copies of the ORIGINAL submission.

**Workshop Revisions of Group II, Paper 4**  
**Workshop Papers Selected for Final Exam**  
**April 30, Thurs.**

**Final Exams May 4 to 9**  
Post your Final Exam paper to Blackboard by the end of the time slot assigned for our final exam.