

**Travelers' Tales
Nonfiction Workshop - Fall 2015
English 242, Section 1**

**We travel, some of us forever,
to seek other states, other lives, other souls.
— Anais Nin**

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

One survey found travel writing to be the second most desired profession on the planet—after movie star. In this semester's nonfiction workshop we will explore its nuts and bolts by doing writing exercises, critiquing manuscripts, reading examples, discussing markets, going on field trips, and meeting with some of the genre's finest practitioners. Luckily we live in one of the most desirable travel destinations in the country, so even if you can't trek to Nepal, you can write marketable stories about the Bay Area.

REQUIRED READING

The Best Travel Writing, Volume 10: True Stories from Around the World; eds. James O'Reilly and Larry Habegger

OPTIONAL READING

The Best American Travel Writing 2015, ed. Andrew McCarthy
The Way of Wanderlust; Don George
Lonely Planet's Guide to Travel Writing; Don George
The Travel Writer's Handbook; Jacqueline Harmon Butler

**I heard the Queen Mary blow one midnight.
The sound carried with it the whole history of departure,
longing and loss.
— E.B. White**

**We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all
our exploring will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.**

— T.S. Eliot

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR ENGLISH 242

- To understand the roots of travel writing
- To improve your skills as nonfiction writers
- To improve your skills as editors
- To prepare you for the MFA exam for nonfiction
- To acquaint you with the methods of professional writers

WORKSHOP

Students will be asked to workshop at least two major pieces of travel writing over the course of the semester. Submissions may be essays or articles, but should range from 1,500 to no more than 5,000 words. Pieces submitted for workshop should be complete and polished...not drafts with bracketed phrases like [clever conclusion to go here].

During the workshop process students will learn to critique each other's work, which is a very different skill than being a good writer. The trick is to 1) praise what's good 2) ascertain what's wrong with a piece 3) offer positive criticism and suggestions on how to fix it—while realizing the individual style and goals of the author may differ from one's own. Students will bring paper copies of your writing projects to class; the work will then be distributed, critiqued at home, and brought to the following class for discussion. Editors are asked to offer line edits on the page and at least a paragraph of typewritten comments that address the overall tenor of the work; please bring two copies of the latter, one to return to the author, and one for me.

SHORT ASSIGNMENTS

We will also do short, two-page writing assignments on a specific topic each week. These will serve to generate ideas for longer works, and to help us develop techniques for writing concisely. Short assignments also give the opportunity to experiment, as they will be graded simply on quantity (the fact you've done the assignment) rather than quality. Students should hand in ten two-pagers over the course of the term; you may choose which weeks to omit according to your preference. As these assignments are not graded, I will not be providing comments on them, merely reading them for content.

MARKET PRESENTATION

Each student will give a brief presentation on how to submit to a publication which publishes travel. [Note, you may peruse *Best American Essays 2015* for ideas.] This project will teach us how to research markets for our work by reading samples, studying the publication and reviewing their submission guidelines. You should post a written synopsis to our class blog giving us details, i.e. everything we need to know to submit work. By the end of the semester we will have a collection of potential markets for the work you've produced in class.

**Journeys, like artists, are born and not made.
A thousand differing circumstances contribute to them,
few of them willed or determined by the will
—whatever we may think. They flower spontaneously
out of the demands of our natures—and the best of them lead us
not only outwards in space, but inwards as well.
Travel can be one of the most rewarding forms of introspection.
— Lawrence Durrell**

PAPER FORMAT

All material handed in should follow the same guidelines as those for submitting professional manuscripts:

- typewritten, double-spaced, black ink with copy dark enough to be easily read
- one-inch margins on all sides
- text on one side of the paper only
- 12-point type in a highly-legible font, preferably Times New Roman or Courier New
- your name and the assignment title single-spaced in the upper left-hand corner of the first sheet
- title centered on the first page
- page numbers included
- pages stapled or paper-clipped together

Points will be subtracted for improper formatting.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

Students are welcome to disagree with one another during class discussions; however, all our dialogue must be conducted with respect for each individual's opinions and work. In addition, the following practices are forbidden while class is in session: the use of laptops or cell phones.

OFFICE HOURS

Please feel free to visit me during my office hours; it's a good idea to make an appointment, otherwise I work on a first-come, first-served basis. Email is meant for brief questions and I encourage you to use it sparingly; this is not an online course. If you are absent, please contact one of your classmates to find out what you missed.

ATTENDANCE

Required, because English 242 depends on your participation each day. You are allowed one unexcused absence before your grade can be dropped, and students who come in after roll call will be considered absent. If you are ill, or are presented with an emergency that will cause you to miss more than one class, please contact me as soon as possible.

**Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed
by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do.
So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor.
Catch the trade winds in your sail. Explore. Dream. Discover.
— Mark Twain**

GRADE REQUIREMENTS

Grades are meant to reflect—quite simply—the quality of a student's work. Final grades will be calculated thus:

50% workshop submissions (see grading guidelines below)

20% 10 two-page assignments (on the number completed)

20% verbal and written critiques (on the student's dedication to helping his or her peers)

10% market presentation (on the quality and delivery of information)

There are no examinations for this class.

Grading Guidelines:

A paper: has a creative approach, polished prose free of mechanical problems, keeps the reader's interest, is organized logically, flows smoothly, impresses the reader with the author's ethos and command of the topic, was delivered on deadline and within the appropriate word count.

B paper: has all the above except may contain one or two minor areas for improvement.

C paper: C is considered "average" by departmental policy. Usually a C paper offers lackluster creativity and/or content and needs further refinement at the prose level.

D paper: is either substantially shorter than the required word count, or has so many problem areas that it is difficult to follow because it contains poorly-crafted content or a plethora of mechanical problems. It is below the standard of writing acceptable for a graduate course.

F paper: is a failure to achieve the majority of requirements outlined above for an A paper.

DEPARTMENTAL GRADING POLICY

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the official SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C = average; D = below average; F = failure. In English Department courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of the ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs.