

San José State University
Department of English and Comparative Literature

English 135-01: Writing Nonfiction
Spring 2019

Instructor: Keenan Norris

Office: FO 128

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1:30-2:30PM, 6:15-7:15PM and by appointment

Email: keenan.norris@sjsu.edu

Classroom: Sweeney Hall 444

Class Days/Time: T/TH 12-1:15

Canvas

Copies of all course materials, such as the syllabus, major assignment handouts, readings, and Powerpoints may be found on Canvas.

Course Description

This course is a creative writing workshop course in nonfiction. In this class, you will learn how to build nonfiction articles and stories from initial proposals to final polished drafts (and public readings). The key to your success in this workshop, and as a writer in general, is serious and constant work. So plan to be part of a “community of writers” this semester, constantly reading, writing, revising, and giving extensive feedback to other writers throughout the semester.

Department Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

As stipulated by the English and Comparative Literature Department’s Curriculum Committee, students who earn a B.A. from this department will demonstrate the ability to:

- read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric
- show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature

- write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject
- develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively
- articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts.

Pedagogical Approach

This course operates in a seminar/workshop format, with much more class conversation than instructor lecturing. You are expected to come to class prepared to participate every single day.

Additional Information available online

You are responsible for reading the following information online at <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/comp/policy/index.html>

- Course guidelines
- Academic policies (academic integrity, plagiarism, ADA and AEC policies)
- Estimation of Per-Unit Student Workload
- Recording policies
- Adding and dropping classes

Required Texts/Materials

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin

Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets (selected chapters) by Svetlana Alexievich

Walter Benjamin and the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond (selected chapters) by Larry McMurtry

Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun by Faith Adiele

Classroom Protocol

Students are expected to arrive on time and be ready to work at the beginning of class. Please turn off or place on silent/vibrate your cellphones during class.

Course Requirements and Assignments

Because this is a 4-unit course, students can expect to spend a minimum of twelve hours per week preparing for and attending classes and completing course assignments. This course will have integrated into the syllabus the following 1-unit enhancement: extensive self-directed reading outside of class and consideration of that reading through a series of short blog posts.

*Two manuscript submissions (this includes proposal and draft)

*Interview project

*Reflection paper on required reading

Workshop participation

You will submit about 9,000-10,000 words of polished, revised prose this semester. All four of your writing assignments should be at least 2,000 words long, with some of them being longer so you can reach your 9,000-word minimum requirement. Two of the four assignments must include some sort of research, and only one may be written solely from personal experience. All of the projects may be written in first, second, or third person, or a combination of points of view. You must do the assignments in at least two different genres (i.e. profile, biography, opinion editorial, critical essay, narrative essay, etc.). And, you are welcome to do projects on your own or with one or two partners (you'll still write the same number of words).

You will also write three short (200-250 word) posts for our Writers Reading for Craft assignment.

All printed assignments and projects (except those completed in class) must be typed, double-spaced, use a normal font (12pt. Times New Roman), and be submitted in the proper format (i.e. a query letter, a manuscript).

All assignments are due on their announced due dates. Late work will be penalized one full letter grade for each class day that the project is late.

Grading Policy and Breakdown

*Two manuscript submissions (this includes query/proposal and final draft)

*Interview project

*Reflection paper on required reading Workshop participation

-Two of the four assignments must include some sort of research, and only one may be written solely from personal experience. All of the projects may be written in first, second, or third person, or a combination of points of view. You must do the assignments in at least two different

genres (i.e. profile, biography, opinion editorial, critical essay, narrative essay, etc.). And, you are welcome to do projects on your own or with one or two partners.

Total grade is out of 200 points:

Writing Assignment #1: 50 Points (Query/Proposal: 10 Points, Final Draft: 40 Points)

Writing Assignment #2: 50 Points (Query/Proposal: 10 Points, Final Draft: 40 Points)

Interview Project: 50 Points (-Query/Proposal: 10 Points, Final Draft: 40 Points)

Workshop Participation: 40 Points

-Reflection Paper: 10 points

Final grades will be reported as:

A+/A/A-/B+/B/B-/C+/C/C-/D+/D/D-/F.

The department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale defined in the 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.

All projects and assignments are due at the start of class on the announced due dates. In a participatory class like this one, participation is crucial and will be graded accordingly. In its simplest form, good participation is defined as active contribution to class discussion and workshop sessions, including giving and receiving well thought out and considered feedback.

Workshops

Workshops are the heart of this course. You are expected to be prepared for every workshop (which means you’ve read the manuscript, thought about it, and written down extensive ideas about it), and you are expected to be prepared to talk in class every day. 20% of your grade comes from workshop participation and absences will affect your workshop grade.

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, please refrain from using your cell phones during class.

Student Technology Resources

Computer labs for student use are available in the Academic Success Center located on the 1st floor of Clark Hall and on the 2nd floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library.

A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from Media Services located in IRC 112. These items include digital and VHS camcorders, VHS and Beta video players, 16 mm, slide, overhead, DVD, CD, and audiotape players, sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. All Writing Specialists have gone through a rigorous hiring process, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. In addition to one-on-one tutoring services, the Writing Center also offers workshops every semester on a variety of writing topics. To make an appointment or to refer to the numerous online resources offered through the Writing Center, visit the Writing Center website: <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>. For additional resources and updated information, follow the Writing Center on Twitter and become a fan of the SJSU Writing Center on Facebook.

SJSU Peer Connections

Peer Connections, a campus-wide resource for mentoring and tutoring, strives to inspire students to develop their potential as independent learners while they learn to successfully navigate through their university experience. You are encouraged to take advantage of their services which include course- content based tutoring, enhanced study and time management skills, more effective critical thinking strategies, decision making and problem-solving abilities, and campus resource referrals.

In addition to offering small group, individual, and drop-in tutoring for a number of undergraduate courses, consultation with mentors is available on a drop-in or by appointment basis. Workshops are offered on a wide variety of topics including preparing for the Writing Skills Test (WST), improving your learning and memory, alleviating procrastination, surviving your first semester at SJSU, and other related topics. A computer lab and study space are also available for student use in Room 600 of Student Services Center (SSC).

Peer Connections is located in three locations: SSC, Room 600 (10th Street Garage on the corner of 10th and San Fernando Street), at the 1st floor entrance of Clark Hall, and in the Living

Learning Center (LLC) in Campus Village Housing Building B. Visit Peer Connections website at <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu> for more information.

Spring 2019 Course Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change with fair notice. You will be notified well ahead of time of any changes.

Week 1

Welcome and Introduction to the Course.

The Many Genres of Nonfiction.

Form workshop groups.

Prep: Think about your first project. Prepare your pitch.

Reading: *The Fire Next Time*

Week 2

Building the Work

Pitch meeting.

Proposals and Query Letters. Introduce Writers Reading for Craft Assignment.

Prep: Draft query (Bring in five copies)

Draft of First Query due.

Query workshop. (Bring in 25 copies)

Reading: *The Fire Next Time*

Week 3

First Query due.

Prep: Work on Writing Assignment #1, which follows from the query topic.

Research: Gathering Information. Leads

Class Discussion: *The Fire Next Time*

Week 4

Meet with Your Workshop Groups

Prep: Work on Writing Assignment #1. Groups read drafts, make notes for full-class workshop.

Full-Class Workshop (4 writers, 4 pieces)

Short reflection paper (1 page) on *The Fire Next Time* due

Week 5

Meet with Your Workshop Groups

Prep: Work on Writing Assignment #1. Groups read drafts, make notes for full-class workshop.

Full-Class Workshop (4 writers, 4 pieces)

Reading: *Walter Benjamin and the Dairy Queen*

Week 6

Full draft of Writing Assignment #1 due.

Essay as Journey

Feedback and editing workshop.

Prep: Think about Project #2 ideas.

Reading: *Walter Benjamin and the Dairy Queen*

Week 7

Second Query due.

Prep: Work on Writing Assignment #2.

Class Discussion: *Walter Benjamin and the Dairy Queen*

Short reflection paper (1 page) on *Secondhand Time* due

Week 8

Art of the Interview

Pitch meeting

Prep: Work on Writing Assignment #2. Read drafts, make notes for full-class workshop.

Reading: *Secondhand Time* (selected chapters)

Week 9

Full-Class Workshop (4 writers, 4 pieces)

Prep: Work on Writing Assignment #2.

Meet with Your Workshop Groups. Read drafts, make notes for full-class workshop.

Reading: *Secondhand Time* (selected chapters)

Spring Break

Week 10

Full-Class Workshop (4 writers, 4 pieces)

Work on Writing Assignment #2. Meet with Your Workshop Groups

Prep: Finish draft of Writing Assignment #2. Bring in 5 copies.

Reading: *Secondhand Time* (selected chapters)

Week 11

Full draft of Writing Assignment #2 due.

Feedback and editing workshop.

Prep: Revise, edit, and wrap up second project. Bring in one paper copy to submit. Think about Interview Project ideas.

Class Discussion: *Secondhand Time*

Week 12

Introduction of Interview Project

Pitch meeting.

Prep: Write query.

Bring 25 copies of query. Workshop queries.

Short reflection paper (1 page) on *Secondhand Time* due.

Week 13

Third Query due.

Prep: Work on Interview Project. Read drafts, make notes for full-class workshop.

Reading: *Meeting Faith*

Week 14

Meet with Your Workshop Groups.

Prep: Work on Interview Project. Read drafts, make notes for full-class workshop.

Full-Class Workshop (4 writers, 4 Pieces)

Reading: *Meeting Faith*

Week 15

Full-Class Workshop (4 writers, 4 Pieces)

Meet with Your Workshop Groups

Prep: Finish Interview Project. Bring in 5 copies.

Week 16

Full draft of Interview Project due.

Full draft of reflection essay (2 pages) on *The Fire Next Time*, *Walter Benjamin and the Dairy Queen*, *Secondhand Time* or *Meeting Faith* due

Feedback and editing workshop.

Last Regular Class Meeting

FINAL EXAM PERIOD