

# GRADUATE NONFICTION WRITING WORKSHOP ENG 242

**CLASS NUMBER 23996**

**FULLY ONLINE**

**UNITS: 4.0**

**Class:** Tuesday, 4 PM-6:45 PM

**Dates:** 1/26/22-5/16/22

## **THE ESSENTIALS**

“The artist appeals to that part of our being... which is a gift and not an acquisition—and therefore, more permanently enduring.” Joseph Conrad

In this course, we will examine different types of **personal nonfiction**—in particular, memoir and the personal essay—with an eye toward prose and structure. We will read works from a diverse set of writers and discuss authorial choices, including matters of writing personal nonfiction ethically as well as beautifully. Students will be guided to workshop each other's work as practice for becoming peers' first readers; they will do so mindfully of different backgrounds and experiences. (Class to be held remotely.)

I hope that what you draw from this workshop, and its materials, will last you a lifetime. There are few things more extraordinary to me than literature and the act of creating it, and we will be discussing the substance and craft of personal nonfiction at great length throughout the semester. However, the material of the class will not end at craft; I think it does graduate students a disservice to ignore matters of the professional writer's life. Therefore, we will also be discussing agents, queries, pitching, book proposals, and other relevant matters.

**Professor:** Esmé Weijun Wang (she/her)

**Core syllabus information re: University Policies, etc.:** [sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php](https://sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php)

Email: [esme.wang@sjsu.edu](mailto:esme.wang@sjsu.edu) (I am unlikely to check my email on weekends)

# Graduate Nonfiction Writing

## REQUIREMENTS

### Required texts:

All readings will be made available via PDF on Canvas or will be linked to on Canvas.

### Recommended texts:

- 1.) *Body Work* by Melissa Febos
- 2.) *How to Write an Autobiographical Novel* by Alexander Chee

**Attendance & participation:** Your presence is essential to the quality of class discussions and critiques. Plus, it's just depressing to do a Zoom when no one is there. If you are having technical issues, please seek help with SJSU's tech department so that it is not an ongoing problem. Please do let me know as soon as possible if you are planning not to be in class so that I can know what to expect.

**Class participation:** I recognize that this is a difficult one for some people, but it's very important to learn to participate frequently and constructively in graduate seminars, *especially* in a creative writing class, where we'll be doing a lot of workshopping. Speak up. Don't be afraid to take risks and ask questions. I'll be looking for *at least two or three comments* from each student in each class meeting. Other ways to participate include reading your work aloud when I ask for volunteers, coming to office hours and discussing your work, and participating actively during workshop.

**Zoom policy:** I do not require that you have your camera on during class, but this is a policy that should not be abused. Please continue to maintain regular participation during class, even if you do not have your camera on.

**Portfolios:** A final portfolio, consisting of at least twenty pages of polished prose (generally one or two personal essays or a chapter of a memoir). These will be due at the semester. Because revision is such an essential element of the writing process, you will need to do at least one major revision out of the two essays. More information will be given about these portfolios as we grow close to the deadlines. (See Course Schedule.)

**Participation in the writing activities:** This includes in-class and out-of-class writing exercises, one online public reading response, written responses to the assigned reading, and rough drafts of essays and/or memoir. Much of this will be discussed in detail later.

**Written responses:** Prior to class discussion (6 PM the previous day), you will be expected to submit a paragraph of approximately 100 words, about your thoughts on each essay, to Canvas. This is, in part, to show me that you've done the reading; more importantly, however, what you submit will help guide discussion on the following

# Graduate Nonfiction Writing

day (e.g. showing me what might be confusing, what might be interesting, etc.). The more interesting your responses, the more interesting our discussions will be.

## PLAGIARISM

I'm sorry to even have to mention this, but plagiarism, or the act of using another writer's words (even a short phrase) or ideas without giving him/her proper credit, is not tolerated at this university. Plagiarism may result in a failing grade, expulsion from the class, and/or from the university. Don't try it! For more information about plagiarism, consult <https://libguides.sjsu.edu/plagiarism/home-page>

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

10% Public reading response	Bookstores and other literary organizations frequently run online readings and discussions. You are expected to attend at least one reading/event and write a 1-2 paged, single-spaced response by the end of term.
10% Writing exercises	
30% Draft of personal essay/memoir chapter	
20% Feedback on workshopped pieces	
30% Final portfolio	

## CLASS SCHEDULE

This schedule is not set in stone, though I will inform you of any changes.  
Description and Detail; Dialogue

Feb 1	Introductions; review syllabus; icebreaker; Reading Like a Writer/How Does Workshop Work?
Feb 8	Indexing as creative discovery <b>6-8 paged essay due Feb 15</b>
Feb 15	Point of View and Narrative Voice
Feb 22	Ethics & questions of memoir
Mar 1	Accessing & writing emotion
Mar 8	Writing about things that hurt
Mar 15	Obsession & the creative process
Mar 22	Pitching
Mar 29	Book proposals
Apr 5	Workshops
Apr 12	Workshops
Apr 19	Workshops

# Graduate Nonfiction Writing

Apr 26	Workshops
May 3	Workshops
May 10	<b>Final portfolio due; Public Reading Response due;</b> sharing revisions; wrapping up