

**ENGLISH 135 Nonfiction**  
**Dr. Regina Arnold**  
**Spring 2023**

**Professor Arnold:** [regina.arnold@sjsu.edu](mailto:regina.arnold@sjsu.edu)

**TIME:** T/Th 3:00 – 4:15

**Location:** Online

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is a creative writing workshop course in nonfiction. In this class, you will learn how to write nonfiction 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

This is a 3-unit lower-division course designed and administered by the Department of English & Comparative Literature at San José State University in accordance with the University’s General Education Program Guidelines to fulfill Core General Education requirements in the “C2” Letters area of Humanities & the Arts.

This course will focus on the three major genres of nonfiction: memoir, criticism, and reportage. In addition to exploring how those genres are put together, we will ask ourselves what makes reading them, and writing them, important and necessary to understanding the world around us. In addition to reading and analyzing major works in all three genres, students will create new works of their own. Class will consist of a mixture of discussion of published works, writing exercises, and writing workshop-style discussion of student work.

**Prerequisites:** Completion of English 100w, 71, or equivalent.

**Department Student Learning Objectives (SLOs):**

Learning Outcomes and Course Goals

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to do the following:

SLO 1: 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.

SLO 2: Show familiarity with major literary works (of poetry), genres (styles), periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.

SLO 3: Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject

### **English 135 GE Course Goals (GELOs): Core General Education requirements in the Letters area of Humanities & the Arts**

1. Decipher and understand the form and content of assigned literary works
2. Comprehend the historical and cultural contexts of assigned literary works
3. Recognize the accomplishments of and issues related to writing by men and women representing diverse cultural traditions
4. Acquire through both individual and collaborative/workshop efforts of a written and oral nature the skills necessary for reading, discussing, analyzing, interpreting, and—most importantly—emulating and writing works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction;
5. Communicate such skills with clarity and precision
6. Develop the ability to write literary works that express intellect and imagination and that represent diversity in human cultures
7. Respond to literature through clear and effective communication in both written and oral work
8. Read and respond to texts with both analytical acumen and personal sensibility;
9. Appreciate how literary works illuminate enduring human concerns while also representing matters specific to a particular culture
10. Write works of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction that are of interest and value to the writer, to other students in the course, and to a diverse reading audience.

### **Course Design**

This course meets in person twice a week. Tuesday classes will consist of lecture and presentation, and Thursdays classes will be devoted to workshopping your own writing. Please come to each class prepared accordingly: having done the reading for Tuesday, having done the writing for Thursday. There are two short full-length books and the rest of the reading are relatively short essays, one per week: Each student will be responsible for doing a presentation, and leading a discussion, about *one* of the authors on the reading list, and this presentation counts as one of your graded assignment. A sign-up sheet will go out the first week.

### **Texts**

All readings, except Coates, will be available on Canvas.

- Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Between the World and Me."
- George Orwell, Shooting an Elephant & Why I Write
- Hunter S. Thompson, "He Was a Crook" & "Fear & Loathing" excerpt
- Joan Didion, "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream" & "The White Album."
- Michelle Zauner, "Crying In H-Mart."
- Hanif Abdurraqib, In Defense of Trap Queen" & "A Night in Bruce Springsteen's America"
- James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook" (from "The Fire This Time.")
- Lauren Hough, "I Was a Cable Guy."
- Lindy West, "Shrill."

Note: except for Coates, your reading is an excerpt from a longer book. You should consider purchasing and reading the full book by the author you are presenting on.

### **Assignments**

1. 2 nonfiction narratives (memoir, review, or other), with revisions
2. Workshop assessments of 3 classmates
3. Presentation
4. Short in-class writing assignments

### **Grades**

Grades will be based on 3 measures: full completion of assignments, full class participation, and good course citizenship. To receive an A grade, students must turn in all assignments including in-class exercises, give a single presentation on one of the readings, and exhibit good citizenship, especially in the area of workshop participation, i.e. peer review and commentary. A B grade will indicate that the student has missed one or more of these milestones. A C grade will indicate that the student has not fully participated in class, in workshopping, and/or has missed turning in a major assignment. A D grade indicates that a student has not fulfilled many of these assignments. An F is reserved for a student whose attendance and participation is deficient to fulfill learning goals.

**Note:** *writing is a creative endeavor that is subjective, personal, and often difficult to accomplish. Therefore, your efforts in creative writing will not be judged by me in a hierarchical manner but will be fully assessed via written feedback. **The goal is completion, not perfection.***

### **WORKSHOP RULES**

Workshopping is an important part of any writing practice. It consists of giving and receiving constructive feedback on unfinished (or even finished) work. In this class, you will be giving feedback to no more than four of your classmates on any given assignment. This means you will read their work and provide one (or more) pages of written thoughts, which will be turned into both me (the instructor) and the writer. This feedback should include a brief summary of what you believe to be the overall purpose, message, and stakes of the text, as well as *specific* ways in which you think it could be improved. For example, you might suggest clarifying something that's confusing to you, adding or subtracting something, or going in a different direction. You may also wish to add praise, i.e. mention what you think reads especially well, or portions that you believe were moving, successful, or otherwise excellent. You may also wish to give light proofreading help – if you see a typo or spelling error, for example.

What you will NOT give is harsh criticism. This is not the *New Yorker*. Please address your fellow students as you yourself wish to be treated. If a student receives feedback that they feel is neither constructive nor civil, please report it to me.

**ENGLISH 135 SCHEDULE:**

**Week 1: Jan. 26**

Introduction to nonfiction

Introductions/Course design/fairy tale princess (Imbach)

Reading: *Between the World and Me*

**Week 2: Jan. 31 – Feb. 2**

The fiction of nonfiction.

Presentation: “Between the World and Me”.

Reading: Orwell

**Week 3: Feb. 7 - 9**

Me-search, memoir, and me.

Presentation: Orwell

First Assignment: The Keep Things

Reading: Zauner

**Week 4: Feb. 14 - 16**

Presentation: Zauner

Workshopping first assignment

Reading: Abdurraqib

**Week 5: Feb. 21 - 23**

Presentation: Abdurraqib\*

Workshopping First assignment

Reading: Hough

\*Hanif Abdurraqib will be speaking at the Hammer Theater on Thursday, class is required to go.

**Week 6: Feb. 28 March 2**

Presentation: Hough

Workshopping

Rough Drafts/First Assignment/Peer Reviews

Reading: West

**Week 7: March 7 – 9**

Presentation: Linday West

First Assignments Due/Presentations of them.

Reading: Didion

**Week 8: March 14 - 16**

New Journalism

Wolfe vs. NYTimes

Presentation: Didion

Second Project: Montaigne

Reading: Hunter S. Thompson

**Week 9: March 21 - 23**

Presentation: Hunter S. Thompson

Workshopping second project

Reading: SONTAG

**SPRING BREAK: March 27 - 31**

**Week 10: April 4 - 6**

Presentation: Sontag

Workshopping second project

Reading: DFW

**Week 11: April 11 - 13**

Presentation: DFW

Workshopping second project

Reading: Sedaris

**Week 12: April 18 - 20**

Presentation: Sedaris

Workshopping

Reading: Baldwin

**Week 13: April 25 - 27**

Presentation: Baldwin

Workshopping

**Week 14: May 2 - 4**

Rough Drafts/Peer Reviews/Presentations

**Week 15: May 9 - 11**

Office Hours – Final Presentations --

