

ENGL 5012: Advanced Creative Nonfiction

Georgia College & State University · Fall 2025

Instructor	Dr. Kerry Neville
Meeting Time	Mondays, 5:00–7:45 PM
Prerequisite	Admission to M.F.A. program
Submissions	GeorgiaView Discussion Board by 12:00 PM Wednesday (before Monday workshop)
Portfolio Due	Friday, December 12, 12:00 noon

COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

A course in the traditions and innovations of nonfiction writing, emphasizing modern and contemporary examples while also reviewing historical precedents in prose form and some theory.

This course asks fundamental questions about the genre:

- What are the limits of creative nonfiction?
- At what point does an essay leave the world of fact and enter the realm of fiction or poetry?
- Are the borders between genres rigid and unyielding, or are they porous?
- How can we move seamlessly between them during a single essay to communicate the complexity of experience?

We will explore a variety of strategies for creative nonfiction writing while producing your own experimentations within the essay form. Over the course of the semester, our focus will be on writing process and development:

Semester Goal: Write one long essay (or memoir chapter) in progressive drafts—drafting, research, expansion, distillation, and revision—polished and ready for submission.

TEXTS & MATERIALS

- Assigned readings distributed online (free)
- **Writer's journal**—required throughout the semester (bring to every class)

While we will have weekly readings from published work, we will also largely employ the workshop method.

WRITER'S JOURNAL

You are responsible for keeping a writer's journal throughout the semester. Bring it to class every week and be prepared to share from it.

Your journal is a space for:

- Reflections on the assigned readings
- Ideas and early drafts for your essay
- Ephemera that inspires you—imagination's bits and pieces, feathers, photos, clippings, anything

GRADES & PORTFOLIO

Students will compile their work in a portfolio. The portfolio is a reflection of your effort and investment in the course and should include:

- Your final revised essay
- An introduction to your work (aim for 1–2 single-spaced pages)

The introduction should address:

1. Your writing choices
2. The extent and success of your revisions
3. The influence of any of our literary models on your work
4. What you've gained in keeping a writer's journal
5. Anything else relevant to your development as a writer

DISCUSSION LEADERSHIP & WRITTEN RESPONSES

You and a colleague (or two) are responsible for **leading discussion once during the semester** on the assigned texts—focusing on craft strategy, form, voice, structure, or whatever makes you go WOW!

Written responses are always required for other students' workshop submissions.

WORKSHOP ETHICS

Workshop is a space for creation, risk, and discovery. To protect that space, we approach each other's work with:

- Compassion, curiosity, and respect
- A commitment to helping each other see more clearly, ask good questions, and imagine new possibilities
- Focus on the work, not the writer
- Generous reading—assuming there's intent behind the draft, even if we don't fully see it yet
- Openness to breaking literary rules—that's often where the most exciting work comes from

Remember: every one of us is capable of brilliance.

GIVING & RECEIVING FEEDBACK

You may feel nervous, vulnerable, or hesitant about sharing works in progress. That's normal—every writer does. I prefer the term “feedback” over “critique” because we are all part of an ongoing conversation, not a judgment, about our works in progress.

We are working writers. All of us—wherever we are in this journey—start with the same fears and insecurities when we begin something new. Feedback should not be dictatorial; we are not here to tell each other what to do. Your feedback should be supportive. Always read each other's work with these questions in mind:

Six Questions for Workshop Readers

1. What is this writer's vision and how can I best help support it?
2. What is compelling about the piece? What am I curious about?
3. What are the most vivid moments—in terms of scenes, details, dialogue, descriptions? Where do I go WOW?
4. What places in the piece still need development, expansion, clarification, or compression?
5. What questions do I have about the piece? What gaps would be helpful to fill in?
6. What emotions did this piece stir up as I was reading? How was I drawn into the writing and storytelling?

COURSE SCHEDULE

Workshop submissions due: GeorgiaView Discussion Board by **12:00 PM Wednesday** before the Monday workshop.

DATE	READINGS & ACTIVITIES	NOTES / DUE
AUGUST		
Aug 18	Introduction <i>"Why I Write,"</i> Joan Didion <i>"On Asthma and Death,"</i> Seneca <i>"The Things I've Lost,"</i> Brian Arundel <i>"Girl/Thing,"</i> Anna Vodicka <i>"Bear Fragments,"</i> Christine Byl	First class meeting
Aug 25	Discussion: opening readings	Mindmaps Due
SEPTEMBER		
Sep 1	No Class — Labor Day	
Sep 8	Wunderkammer exercise	Research Due Workshop 1
Sep 15	<i>"Goodbye to All That,"</i> Joan Didion <i>"Mississippi: A Poem in Days,"</i> Kiese Laymon	Workshop 1
Sep 17	Visiting Writer: Michael Garriga	★ Special event (Wednesday)
Sep 22	<i>"Shipping Out,"</i> David Foster Wallace	Presentation 1 Workshop 1
Sep 29	Workshop discussion	Workshop 1
OCTOBER		
Oct 6	Visiting Writer: Karen Salyer McElmurray	Class Visit
Oct 13	No Class — Fall Break	
Oct 20	<i>"Creating Meaning Through Structure,"</i> Morano <i>"Killing Wolves,"</i> Simpson <i>"After the Tsunami,"</i> Komatsu	Presentation 3 Workshop 2
Oct 27	<i>"The Crane Wife,"</i> CJ Hauser <i>"Cocooning,"</i> Samuel Ernest	Presentation 4 Workshop 2
NOVEMBER		
Nov 3	<i>"Notes on Cravings,"</i> MFK Fisher <i>"Hazardous Cravings,"</i> Alex McElroy	Presentation 5 Workshop 2
Nov 5	Book Launch: Kerry Neville	★ Special event (Wednesday)
Nov 10	<i>"Architectures of Revision,"</i> Stabile	Workshop 2
Nov 17	No Class — Small Group Workshops	Small Group Workshops
Nov 24	Conference Week	Individual conferences

	DECEMBER	
Dec 1	Revision Workshop	
Dec 8	Revision Workshop	
Dec 12	No Class Meeting	PORTFOLIOS DUE 12:00 noon

QUICK REFERENCE

Workshop Submissions Due Wednesdays 12pm (before Monday class)	Discussion Leadership Once per semester (sign up early)	Portfolio Due December 12 12:00 noon
---	--	---