



CRW 5373

ADVANCED CREATIVE NON-FICTION

LEX WILLIFORD

TENTATIVE SYLLABUS, FALL 2023

PROFESSOR: Lex Williford (he/his/él)

SECTION: CRW 5373-001 (CRN 16196)

CLASS ROOM: College of Business Administration 330 Tuesdays 6 pm-8:50 pm

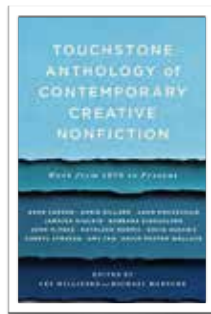
OFFICE: 520M, University Towers, Creative Writing Department (next to Burger King on Oregon Ave.)

OFFICE HOURS: On campus: 2-4 p. m. Thursdays or by appointment only.

E-MAIL lex@utep.edu

PHONE: 915-433-1931 (mobile). Most mornings when I'm not teaching, I write and illustrate, so please call me afternoons between 3 and 5. Please don't call after 5 p.m. weekdays or weekends unless it's important.

TEXTS:



Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: Work from 1970 to the Present, Lex Williford and Michael Martone, editors, 2007, ISBN-10: 1416531742, ISBN-13: 978-1416531746, Touchstone Books.

This book has two covers, the most recent shown here, but both anthologies have the same essays and page numbers. A good-condition used copy should be fairly inexpensive.

We'll read a wide selection of short creative nonfiction from this anthology.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Catalogue Copy: *Intensive study and practice in the various forms and approaches of creative Nonfiction including workshop discussion of individual student creative Nonfiction.*

This course will explore many of the forms the creative Nonfiction essay may take—Personal, Memoir, Contemplative, Lyric, Spiritual, Humorous, Nature and Travel. Reading professional examples of the form, students will write Critical Analysis essays of writing technique in the essays we read; using the free Adobe Acrobat Reader, students will also make comments on each other's essays to be revised for a final portfolio of 25-40 pages at the end of the semester.

GRADES:

STUDENTS' FINAL GRADES WILL BE DETERMINED BY EACH OF THESE ASSIGNMENTS:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Five Fifteen-Minute Exercises for Workshop Discussion weeks 2-7 of the semester (<i>Due no later than midnight Sunday the week before we discuss them in class.</i>) After workshops, please revise these exercises and upload them to Blackboard to receive an automatic 100, a nice boost to your final grade. 	5%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three 2-3 page Critical Analysis (CA) Essays: Analyses discussing an interesting writing technique used in our <i>TA</i> readings throughout the semester. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first day of class, you'll sign up to write a critical analysis of <i>all three TA</i> essays and use these analyses to begin our weekly class discussion. You may present these critical analyses in class informally or read your essays in class. Once you've presented the essays you've signed up to discuss, please upload <i>all three revised essays</i> to Blackboard for a grade <i>no more than two weeks after we've discussed the essays</i>, if possible. 	10%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-class participation and critiques of other students' creative nonfiction in workshops using Adobe Acrobat Reader. 	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One final portfolio (25-30 pages) of revised creative nonfiction written and workshopped throughout the semester. If you're also writing narratives of any kind—flash nonfiction, flash, fiction, prose poetry, autobiographical fiction, etc.—<i>what you submit to workshop should be new work</i>, revised later for your final portfolio after an in-depth discussion of your work. I prefer that you not turn in work you've already written unless you've spoken to me first—especially if you're working on your thesis. 	75%

1. WEEKLY SIGN-UPS FOR CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATIONS IN TA

On the first day of class, please sign up for **three** *Touchstone Anthology* (TA) essays to write **three** short (2-3 page) critical analysis papers of a specific writing technique you find interesting about the essay you've chosen (point of view, lyricism, voice, tone, structure, theme, setting, etc. or any other distinctive writing technique that surprises you and sets that essay apart from others you've read). *You'll use these analyses of writing techniques to begin the class discussion for all three of your scheduled essays in class.* If possible, please upload all revisions of your Critical Analyses for a grade on BB at least *two weeks after you've presented your paper in class and/or begun the class discussion* and all three critical analyses *no later than November 26*. Please don't turn these in at the last minute.

Note: I'd rather have you write **three** well-developed short analysis papers than one long research paper with both primary and secondary sources. Because these essays—all fairly recent—may not have many secondary sources, they're not required, but you're welcome to use secondary sources as part of your shorter papers if you find them.

WEEK NUMBER	TOUCHSTONE ANTHOLOGY ESSAY (Please read the TA essays listed below for discussions in the following week.)	YOUR NAME (First day of class: Sign up for two essays, one before Week 8 and one after.)
WEEK 2 September 5	Jo Ann Beard, "The Fourth State of Matter," 1.	
	Wendell Berry, "Getting Along with Nature," 17.	
WEEK 3 September 12	Eula Biss, "The Pain Scale," 28.	
	Mary Clearman Blew, "The Unwanted Child," 43.	Julio Barrera
WEEK 4 September 19	Charles Bowden, "Torch Song," 56.	
	Kelly Grey Carlisle, "Physical Evidence," 89.	
WEEK 5 September 26	Anne Carson, "The Glass Essay," 97.	Zazil Collins
	Bernard Cooper, "Burl's," 132.	
WEEK 6 October 3	Michael W. Cox, "Visitor," 141.	Julio Barrera
	Annie Dillard, "Living Like Weasels," 148.	
WEEK 7 October 10	Tony Earley, "Somehow Form a Family," 167.	Eric Ponce
	Anthony Farrington, "Kissing," 176.	Leah O'Daniel
WEEK 8 October 17	Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, "The Beautiful City of Tirzah," 190.	Emiliano Pérez Grovas Zapiain

OCTOBER 17	Diane Glancy, "Sun Dance," 201.	Zazil Collins
WEEK 9 OCTOBER 24	Lucy Grealy, "Mirrorings," 209.	Leah O'Daniel
WEEK 9 OCTOBER 24	Barbara Kingsolver, "High Tide in Tucson," 265.	Zazil Collins
WEEK 10 October 31	Lynch, Thomas, "The Undertaking," 334.	
	Martin, Lee, "Sorry," 343.	
WEEK 11 November 7	McClanahan, Rebecca, "Interstellar," 354.	Emiliano Pérez Grovas Zapiain
	Miller, Brenda, "The Date," 381.	Leah O'Daniel
WEEK 12 November 14	Norris, Kathleen, "Celibate Passion," 396.	
	Nye, Naomi Shihab, "This Is Not Who We Are," 401.	Eric Ponce
WEEK 13 November 21	Purpura, Lia, "Autopsy Report," 405.	Julio Barrera
	Selzer, Richard, "Imelda," 452.	
WEEK 14 November 28	Strayed, Cheryl, "The Love of My Life," 500.	
	Wallace, David Foster, "Consider the Lobster," 525.	Eric Ponce

WEEKLY SCHEDULE FOR GROUP EXERCISE WORKSHOPS AND REVISION DEADLINES

Because we'll miss the usual first day of class on MLK Day and because the schedule's become more complicated than I'd like, here's a simplified schedule that I hope makes the deadlines for group workshops and revisions a bit less confusing.

The revised exercises are more flexible than the other; just make sure you turn in all the revisions *two weeks after workshop*.

EXERCISES	WORKSHOP DRAFTS DUE NO LATER THAN MIDNIGHT WEEK/DATE	DUE FOR DISCUSSION MIDNIGHT THE SUNDAY BEFORE	DATE EXERCISE REVISIONS DUE FOR GRADE (100 FOR EACH 5%)
EXERCISE 1	Sunday, September 3	Week 2	Sunday, September 17
EXERCISE 2	Sunday, September 10	Week 3	Sunday, September 24
EXERCISE 3	Sunday, September 17	Week 4	Sunday, October 1
EXERCISE 4	Sunday, September 24	Week 5	Sunday, October 8
EXERCISE 5	Sunday, October 1	Week 6	Sunday, October 15

2. WEEKLY SIGN-UPS FOR INDIVIDUAL WORKSHOPS

We'll conduct *group workshops* of exercises prompted in class *before* and individual workshop documents *after* Spring Break.

On the first day of class please sign up for *two individual workshops of your work, first and second, listed below*. Group exercises should be no more than three pages long if possible. Individual workshops may be from 8-15 pp. You may further develop any exercise you wish as part of these longer workshops. You'll revise these workshop documents for your final portfolio at the end of the semester, and you may use each of these to begin exploring possible MFA thesis subjects, especially if your main interest is in writing a book of creative nonfiction essays or individual memoir chapters.

Please make a note of your workshop dates upload to the corresponding numbers in Blackboard's Workshop Upload Discussion Boards.

WEEK NUMBER	WORKSHOPS	SIGN UP FOR WORKSHOPS IN THE BLANKS BELOW
WEEKS 2-6 DUE SUNDAYS MIDNIGHT SEPTEMBER 3- OCTOBER 1	Group Exercise Workshops Only	See the schedule above or those listed in the All Exercises Group Exercises Workshop Uploads.
WEEKS 7-15 OCTOBER 8- DECEMBER 3	Individual Workshops Only	The individual workshop uploads deadline dates listed below are <i>all due the midnight Sunday preceding the date we discuss them in the class</i> .
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 7 October 8	First Individual Workshop 1	
	First Individual Workshop 2	
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 8 October 15	First Individual Workshop 3	Julio Barrera
	First Individual Workshop 4	Zazil Collins
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 9 October 22	First Individual Workshop 5	Eric Ponce
	First Individual Workshop 6	Emiliano Pérez Grovas Zapiain
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 10 October 29	First Individual Workshop 7	Leah O'Daniel
	Second Individual Workshop 1	
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 11 November 5	Second Individual Workshop 2	Julio Barrera
	Second Individual Workshop 3	
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 12 November 12	Second Individual Workshop 4	Leah O'Daniel
	Second Individual Workshop 5	Emiliano Pérez Grovas Zapiain
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 13 November 19	Second Individual Workshop 6	Zazil Collins

DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 13 November 19	Second Individual Workshop 7	Eric Ponce
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 14 November 26	Second Individual Workshop 8	
	Second Individual Workshop 9	
DUE SUNDAY MIDNIGHT FOR DISCUSSION IN WEEK 15 December 3	Week 15 optional group workshop of a cover letter and flash nonfiction submitted to <i>Brevity</i> or other literary magazines, including a final revision of the submission no more than 750 words in length.	

3. CONTACT INFORMATION SIGN UPS		
NAME	PHONE NUMBER (OPTIONAL)	UTEP E-MAIL ADDRESS
Barrera Moreno, Julio	915-252-0919	jabarreramo@miners.utep.edu
Collins, Zazil	915-279-9190	zacollinsapari@utep.edu
Gonzales, Carla		cvgonzales2@miners.utep.edu
O'Daniel, Leah	606-315-5673	lodaniel@miners.utep.edu
Perez Grovas Zapiain, Emiliano	915-704-6132	eperezgrov@miners.utep.edu
Ponce, Eric	214-299-1894	eaponce2@miners.utep.edu

SYLLABUS WEEKLY CALENDAR:	
The reading assignments listed below are all from the <i>Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction</i> . Please refer to Blackboard for web links to revisions of this syllabus and other downloadable course supplements.	
CLASS WEEK AND DATE	READINGS, EXERCISES, DEADLINES.
WEEK 1 August 29	AGENDA FOR WEEK 1
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> For Week 2, please read the following in the <i>Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction (TA)</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Foreword, Lex Williford, xi (optional). ✓ Introduction by Scott Russell Sanders, xv. ✓ Jo Ann Beard, "The Fourth State of Matter," 1. ✓ Wendell Berry, "Getting Along with Nature," 17. If you've not yet received your <i>Touchstone</i> anthology after Week 1, please read these nonfiction pieces as soon as you get the book. Please fill in sign-up slots 1-3 listed in the syllabus (pp. 2-5) at the beginning of class in Week 1; I'll fill in these slots after class with your signups and post the revised syllabus in Week 2. If you have time in the first week of class, please watch my four-part hour-long YouTube video on the Blackboard Home Page. If not, you can watch it in Week 2.

WEEK 1
August 29

5. To familiarize yourself with this syllabus, weekly agenda, readings and discussions, as well as group and individual workshops, please visit the **Home Page (Start Here)** link in the left Blackboard (BB) menu. If you have questions about the syllabus or Blackboard, please raise them in Week 2.
6. Introduction to the course and syllabus.
7. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction:** TA, Brian Doyle's "Leap," 165.
8. **Exercise Prompt 1 for Discussion in Week 2:**
 - ✓ **Write about an incident of shaming, either a simple instance of embarrassment or a more complex rendering of your own unconscious projection on to or scapegoating of an "other," then feeling (or not feeling) regret, or being scapegoated or treated like an "other" by someone else.**
 - ✓ **This exercise may be about sexism, racism, homophobia, etc., of course, but the principle point is to make the reader *experience* and *feel* what you or others might have felt—an exercise in sharp significant details that *evoke* shame in the reader, or its opposite, empathy or empowerment. In short, write something that makes your reader blush or shows a moment when you or someone else *refuses* to blush.**
 - ✓ If you prefer to write alternative exercises, you can choose from exercises in the "Flash Nonfiction Mini-Anthology and Alternative Exercises" in the left Blackboard Menu, Home Page (Start Here).
 - ✓ Please upload your exercises to the correct weekly Workshop Upload Discussion Board for workshop discussion in Adobe Acrobat and in class.
- ◆ **A Few Notes about Group Exercises in Weeks 2-6:**
 - For your group exercises, please try to *write an entire narrative in fifteen minutes as quickly as you can*, usually a first-person narrative (flash fiction, flash creative nonfiction, prose poetry, a short novel/memoir chapter etc.) which moves toward some kind of reversal, recognition and/or subtle closure; then spend at least two hours revising and crafting your exercise for workshop. These are suggestions, not inflexible requirements because, as our readings this semester will show, creative nonfiction has a lot of room for genre-bending experimentation in forms, structure, and narrative techniques. These first six weeks are intended to free you up to imagine stories that burn most brightly in your bellies, that risk something important, and that focus on your own distinct obsessions and themes.
 - Focus on *creating the illusion of lived experience*, using sharp and surprising concrete images and details: objective correlatives that *carry* all our exercise prompts' abstractions—*shame, pain, fear, alienation, terror, joy, wonder, beauty*, etc. Try to *show and dramatize* abstractions *without finding it necessary to name or state those abstractions directly*.
 - Like many of our workshops, our discussions of exercises should focus less on errors or mostly subjective negative judgments than on what we find most compelling about each short piece you write, focusing on what's most promising, surprising, original and compelling, helping others to generate *more* material and to *deepen* that material if appropriate, *focusing at times on confusing or vague writing that could be more vivid, specific, authentic, authoritative and powerful or what the writer's written as narrative summary when a dramatic scene might be more effective and vice versa*.
 - Before uploading your exercises and other workshop documents, be sure to **read the syllabus schedule on pp. 3-4** to familiarize yourself with due dates for each exercise, individual or group workshops; *it's probably best to enter individual workshops and other deadlines into your personal calendars in Week 1 so you don't forget*.
 - Also, to save me time assembling many documents each week, please upload your exercises using these **file-naming conventions**:
CRW_5373_Exercise_2_YourFirstName_Last.docx/pdf.
 - You can access the weekly workshop upload discussion board either by clicking on the Home Page's red-linked label, [Workshop Upload Discussion Boards for Weekly Adobe Acrobat Workshops ONLY \(No graded assignments here please.\)](#) or by clicking on BB's left Menu item labeled **Click here to upload your ungraded Group and Individual Workshop Documents ONLY**.

<p>WEEK 1 August 29</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember: The purpose of all our discussion board threads is <i>only</i> to upload weekly workshop documents, not to discuss them online. Please don't make comments in the discussion boards themselves but instead click on the Adobe Acrobat e-mail I'll send you each Monday which links to shared weekly workshops documents we can all comment on in one place, giving you, I hope, sufficient time to make comments before our Tuesday evening classes. (Please comment <i>only</i> in Acrobat, <i>not</i> in Dropbox.) • On <i>Monday mornings before noon if possible</i>, I'll combine all the exercises into a shared group document that everyone can comment on with the <i>free Adobe Acrobat Reader</i> (https://www.adobe.com/acrobat/pdf-reader.html). The Subject Line of the e-mail with the comments link will usually come from Adobe Acrobat care of Lex Williford.
<p>WEEK 2 September 5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AGENDA FOR WEEK 2</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I'll e-mail and post a copy of this tentative syllabus (with your signups listed in Week 1) for discussion in Week 2. 2. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Blackboard Creative Nonfiction Presentation. 3. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>TA</i> Foreword, Lex Williford, xi. ✓ Introduction by Scott Russell Sanders, xv. ✓ Jo Ann Beard, "The Fourth State of Matter," 1. ✓ Wendell Berry, "Getting Along with Nature," 17. 4. Workshop Exercise 1. <p style="text-align: center;">FOR WEEK 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in <i>TA</i>: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eula Biss, "The Pain Scale," 28. Mary Clearman Blew, "The Unwanted Child," 43. 2. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in <i>TA</i> for next week, please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 3. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Please focus primarily on a specific narrative or lyrical writing technique you find interesting or innovative and cite three specific textual examples from the essay to illustrate that technique. <i>Please be sure to cite the page numbers and use correct Modern Language Association Style documentation</i> (https://style.mla.org). If you don't already have an MLA Handbook, you can order it from this site; it's an essential part of English and Spanish language graduate studies. You may also find the Interactive Practice Works-Cited List Template a useful shortcut to writing your bibliographies (https://style.mla.org/interactive-practice-template/). Also check that you've included a clear, original statement of thesis at the beginning and/or end of your analysis. ✓ Note: You don't have to revise or upload the CA to BB until we've all had a chance to discuss your CA in class. You may gain insights that you can integrate into your analysis. ✓ There's no specific deadline for these critical analyses, but please try to upload each analysis to BB <i>two weeks following our discussion of each essay</i>. 3. By Week 2, in Blackboard, please watch: <i>Four-Part Presentation: Introduction to Creative Nonfiction</i> (approx. 42 minutes). To save time we <i>won't</i> watch this presentation in class. If you have questions about the presentation or if you wish to discuss any part of the presentation at greater length, please bring your questions and ideas for discussion to class in Week 2. 4. Exercise 2 Prompt for Week 3: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Some writers I know have suggested waiting <i>at least ten years</i> before you try to write <i>the hard stuff</i>, especially difficult recent traumatic autobiographical material. Usually we need a certain level of distance and healing to write about the worst things that happen to us, to see those incidents not as curses or punishments but as gifts (or perhaps the other way around, when what once seemed a gift has become a curse). Without seeming too rosy or naïvely optimistic (unless your

<p>WEEK 2 September 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ narrator is a child, for example), consider what changes you might have experienced to see something difficult, tragic or traumatic in the past as something comic, positive or even revelatory later (or vice versa). Write about an incident of loss (or a winning triumph), a moment of injury and/or pain (or ecstasy)—physical, emotional and/or psychological—that changed you and your life or others’, if not right away, eventually. Focus on writing the event itself and the reversal of expectation in another scene or event, perhaps ten days—or even ten years later. Note: <i>Don’t write about trauma if you’re not ready yet to do so.</i> ✓ If you prefer to write alternative exercises, you can choose from exercises in the “Flash Nonfiction Mini-Anthology and Alternative Exercises” in the left Blackboard Menu, Home Page (Start Here). ✓ Please refer to A Few Notes about Group Exercises in Weeks 2-6 in the syllabus in Week 1 above as a reminder of how to approach your exercises this semester and how to use Adobe Acrobat to make comments on others’ exercises and workshop documents. ✓ After you’ve installed Acrobat Reader, please leave a short paragraph or two comment at the end of each student’s exercise each week using Adobe’s Sticky Note commenting tool and make suggestions about how writers might revise their exercises as stand-alone pieces of flash creative nonfiction, etc. or more fully develop and deepen them into something longer—part of an essay collection or memoir in progress. <p>4. If you have time, please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 3 (and each week thereafter). I’ll set a deadline about <i>two weeks after workshop</i> for each workshop document if you wish to add other comments before each review closes.</p>
<p>WEEK 3 September 12</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AGENDA FOR WEEK 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please check my revised syllabus to make sure everything is correct, especially about your contact information. If not, please let me know what I need to change. 2. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB and RMFGWCN</i>. 3. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Eula Biss, “The Pain Scale,” 28. ✓ Mary Clearman Blew, “The Unwanted Child,” 43. 4. Group Workshop students’ Exercise 1 to revise for a grade on Blackboard. <p style="text-align: center;">FOR WEEK 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Charles Bowden, “Torch Song,” 56. ✓ Kelly Grey Carlisle, “Physical Evidence,” 89. 2. If you’ve signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 4. After we’ve discussed your CA, please revise and upload it to Blackboard for a grade. 3. Exercise 3 Prompt for Week 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Please write about a moment of peaceful (or awkward) silence, a moment when you or someone else decides <i>not</i> to say something important or not to confront another person or problem, or any outwardly seeming undramatic moment that changed everything, for you or someone you know. In some respects, this silence may be the result of a revelation: That we often can’t tell others how we really feel or vice versa for many reasons—and not just because we keep secrets from each other—and our revelations may come from this recognition, that we silence ourselves or that others do, too, for better or for worse. Or we convey in our lives and in our writing how we communicate without words in moments of meaningful silence. When, in other words, does saying nothing become meaningful, especially if there’s a conflict between thought and speech, or when we realize that saying nothing but acting in silence can change us and others. Such silences may also be about missed opportunities to say what we feel or mean

<p>WEEK 3 September 12</p>	<p>and the courage to say those things out loud. In other words, write to <i>show</i> the power of silence. It may seem counter-intuitive, but we write about <i>meaningful</i> silence most effectively <i>in dramatic scene</i>. In fact, the <i>silent scene</i> may sometimes be <i>the most difficult dramatic scene to write</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If you prefer to write alternative exercises, you can choose from exercises in the “Flash Nonfiction Mini-Anthology and Alternative Exercises” in the left Blackboard Menu, Home Page (Start Here). ✓ Please refer to A Few Notes about Group Exercises in Weeks 2-6 in the syllabus in Week 1 above as a reminder of how to approach your exercises this semester and how to use Adobe Acrobat to make comments on others’ exercises and workshop documents. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. If you have time, please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 4. 5. After workshop, please revise Exercise 2 and upload it to Blackboard for a grade (100).
<p>WEEK 4 September 19</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AGENDA FOR WEEK 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>The Best of Brevity (BoB)</i> and <i>The Rose Metal Field Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction (RMFGWCN)</i>. 2. Discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Charles Bowden, “Torch Song,” 56. ✓ Kelly Grey Carlisle, “Physical Evidence,” 89. 3. Group Workshop students’ Exercise 3 to revise for a grade on Blackboard. Remember, you’ll receive a 100 for each revised exercise you turn in for a grade. <p style="text-align: center;">FOR WEEK 4</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Anne Carson, “The Glass Essay,” 97. ✓ Bernard Cooper, “Burl’s,” 132. 2. If you’ve signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 5. 3. Exercise 4 Prompt for Week 5: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Either</i> write a story about a vivid dramatic childhood reversal in your own life <i>in the present tense and in the voice and point of view of the child you were</i>. Remember: In many cases, the first-person point of view of a child narrator is by its very nature the point of view of an <i>unreliable</i> narrator, so that whatever ironies might occur to an adult reader would have often been <i>completely inaccessible to a child</i>. ✓ <i>Or</i> write a story about a vivid dramatic childhood reversal in your own life <i>in the past tense and in the voice of the adult looking back to the child you were</i>. The child’s dialogue may be childlike, of course, but the adult relating the story of that past event may be <i>far more reliable and articulate</i>, showing and exploring the ironies of the experience and may suggest what the adult narrator learned from that childhood reversal, that surprises rather than tells us what goes without saying. ✓ If you prefer to write alternative exercises, you can choose from exercises in the “Flash Nonfiction Mini-Anthology and Alternative Exercises” in the left Blackboard Menu, Home Page (Start Here). ✓ Please refer to A Few Notes about Group Exercises in Weeks 2-6 in the syllabus in Week 1 above as a reminder of how to approach your exercises this semester and how to use Adobe Acrobat to make comments on others’ exercises and workshop documents. 4. If you have time, please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 5. 5. After workshop, please revise Exercise 3 and upload it to Blackboard for a grade (100).

WEEK 5 September 26	AGENDA FOR WEEK 5
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Anne Carson, “The Glass Essay,” 97. ✓ Bernard Cooper, “Burl’s,” 132. 3. Group Workshop students’ Exercise 4 to revise for a grade on Blackboard.
	FOR WEEK 6
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Michael W. Cox, “Visitor,” 141. ✓ Annie Dillard, “Living Like Weasels,” 148. 2. If you’ve signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 6. 3. Exercise 5 Prompt for Week 6: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ I can think of very few moments more dramatic than someone saying <i>no</i> to something or someone else. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Either write about a moment of denial, internal or external, a bald-faced lie or a seemingly harmless white lie that affected you or someone you know and changed everything. ✓ Or write your own prompt, something to challenge yourself, to write something you <i>must</i> write now or have <i>avoided</i> writing for too long, a narrative that for whatever reason risks writing an unflinching memory that you’ve not yet had the courage to write. If it turns out that you’re still not ready to write such a story yet, write about some change in your life that you feel you’re ready to explore, with greater insight and wisdom. ✓ If you prefer to write alternative exercises, you can choose from exercises in the “Flash Nonfiction Mini-Anthology and Alternative Exercises” in the left Blackboard Menu, Home Page (Start Here). ✓ Please refer to A Few Notes about Group Exercises in Weeks 2-6 in the syllabus in Week 1 above as a reminder of how to approach your exercises this semester and how to use Adobe Acrobat to make comments on others’ exercises and workshop documents. 4. When you’ve finished revising and crafting your exercise, please upload it to this upload discussion board: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Exercise 4 Workshop Upload (Discussion Board): Please Upload for Group Workshop Comments and Class Discussion in Week 6: Due No Later than Midnight Friday, February 18. 5. If you have time, please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 6. 6. After workshop, please revise Exercise 4 and upload it to Blackboard for a grade (100).
WEEK 6 October 3	AGENDA FOR WEEK 6
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Michael W. Cox, “Visitor,” 141. ✓ Annie Dillard, “Living Like Weasels,” 148. 3. Group Workshop students’ Exercise 5 to revise for a grade on Blackboard.
	FOR WEEK 7
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tony Earley, “Somehow Form a Family,” 167. ✓ Anthony Farrington, “Kissing,” 176.

<p>WEEK 6 October 3</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 7. 3. If you have time, please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 7. 4. Individual workshops begin next week. 5. To refresh your memory about when you've signed up for individual workshops in Weeks 8-16, please refer to this syllabus pp. 4-5, <i>Weekly Sign-ups for Individual Workshops</i>. 6. If you haven't done so yet, set a reminder in your calendar application for your first and second individual workshop due dates so you don't forget your weekly Sunday midnight individual workshop deadlines. 7. Once I've combined individual workshop documents, I'll prepare them for comments on Monday mornings before noon if possible and send an e-mail with an Adobe Acrobat Document Cloud link for everyone's comments. Please be sure to make your comments before our classes begin each week.
<p>WEEK 7 October 10</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AGENDA FOR WEEK 7</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Tony Earley, "Somehow Form a Family," 167. ✓ Anthony Farrington, "Kissing," 176. 3. Individual Workshops. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ For workshops in Weeks 8-16, please refer to this syllabus pp. 4-5, <i>Weekly Sign-ups for Individual Workshops</i>. Please make comments on workshop documents before class and come to class prepared to discuss each other's work each week. <p style="text-align: center;">FOR WEEK 8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, "The Beautiful City of Tirzah," 190. ✓ Diane Glancy, "Sun Dance," 201. 2. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 8. 3. Individual Workshops. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ For workshops in Weeks 8-16, please refer to this syllabus pp. 4-5, <i>Weekly Sign-ups for Individual Workshops</i>. Please make comments on workshop documents before class and come to class prepared to discuss each other's work each week.
<p>WEEK 8 October 17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">AGENDA FOR WEEK 8</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, "The Beautiful City of Tirzah," 190. ✓ Diane Glancy, "Sun Dance," 201. 3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops. <p style="text-align: center;">FOR WEEK 9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lucy Grealy, "Mirrorings," 209. ✓ Barbara Kingsolver, "High Tide in Tucson," 265. 2. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 10. 3. Individual Workshops.

WEEK 8 October 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ For workshops in Weeks 8-16, please refer to this syllabus pp. 4-5, Weekly Sign-ups for Individual Workshops. Please make comments on workshop documents before class and come to class prepared to discuss each other's work each week.
WEEK 9 October 24	AGENDA FOR WEEK 9
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lucy Grealy, "Mirrorings," 209. ✓ Barbara Kingsolver, "High Tide in Tucson," 265. 3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.
	FOR WEEK 10
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lynch, Thomas, "The Undertaking," 334. ✓ Martin, Lee, "Sorry," 343. 2. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 3. 3. If you've signed up for an individual workshop in Week 11, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board <i>Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here</i>. 4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 10.
WEEK 10 October 31	AGENDA FOR WEEK 10
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lynch, Thomas, "The Undertaking," 334. ✓ Martin, Lee, "Sorry," 343. 3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.
	FOR WEEK 11
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ McClanahan, Rebecca, "Interstellar," 354. ✓ Miller, Brenda, "The Date," 381. 2. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 12. 3. If you've signed up for an individual workshop in Week 11, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board <i>Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here</i>. 4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 11.
WEEK 11 November 7	AGENDA FOR WEEK 11
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. 2. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ McClanahan, Rebecca, "Interstellar," 354. ✓ Miller, Brenda, "The Date," 381. 3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.
	FOR WEEK 12
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Norris, Kathlene, "Celibate Passion," 306. ✓ Nye, Naomi Shihab, "This Is Not Who We Are," 401.

<p>WEEK 11 November 7</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 12. If you've signed up for an individual workshop in Week 12, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board <i>Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here, Thread 9C, Individual Workshops Due for Discussion in Week 12 April 1.</i> Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 12.
<p>WEEK 12 November 14</p>	<p>AGENDA FOR WEEK 12</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Norris, Kathleen, "Celibate Passion," 396. ✓ Nye, Naomi Shihab, "This Is Not Who We Are," 401. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.
	<p>FOR WEEK 13</p>
<p>WEEK 13 November 21</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Purpura, Lia, "Autopsy Report," 405. ✓ Selzer, Richard, "Imelda," 452. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 13. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 13.
	<p>AGENDA FOR WEEK 13</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Purpura, Lia, "Autopsy Report," 405. ✓ Selzer, Richard, "Imelda," 452. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.
<p>WEEK 14 November 28</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FOR WEEK 14</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Please read in TA: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strayed, Cheryl, "The Love of My Life," 500. ✓ Wallace, David Foster, "Consider the Lobster," 525. If you've signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week, Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 14. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Tuesday class time, Week 14.
	<p>AGENDA FOR WEEK 14</p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from <i>BoB</i> and <i>RMFGWCN</i>. Discuss publication of creative nonfiction and review literary submission materials. Discuss TA Essays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strayed, Cheryl, "The Love of My Life," 500. ✓ Wallace, David Foster, "Consider the Lobster," 525. Discuss Final Portfolio Cover Sheet and Portfolio Guidelines. Begin discussing <i>Lex's Litsub Materials</i> for a publication workshop in Week 15. An overview of publishing resources online. Discuss thesis potential thesis projects—or projects after you graduate—in creative nonfiction.
<p>FOR WEEK 15</p>	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you wish to workshop a revision and a cover letter to submit a 750-word piece of flash nonfiction to <i>Brevity</i> (or to another creative nonfiction magazine such as <i>Creative Nonfiction</i>) in Week 15, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board <i>Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here</i>. 2. Please prepare your Final Portfolio to turn in for a final grade.
WEEK 15 December 5	AGENDA FOR WEEK 15
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Any additional Workshop Documents? 2. Workshop 750-word essays and cover letters to <i>Brevity</i> or other creative nonfiction literary magazines. 3. Questions about the Final Portfolio?
MIDNIGHT FRIDAY DECEMBER 8	FINAL PORTFOLIOS DUE.

WRITING CRITICAL ANALYSIS PAPERS

Manuscript Guidelines:

Your short critical analysis papers should be:

1. Double-spaced.
2. One and one-half pages long, no more than two (or three if you just can't help yourself). This paper length suggests you should focus on one single point of craft, technique, characterization or theme, writing directly and concisely and not getting off topic. Make your point, cite an example and explain it; then move on to the next. Don't digress, unless the digression is important. The more you focus, the better; the more you support your assertions, the better.
3. Written in the "literary" present tense, as if the events are occurring now. ("Colonel Fitts kisses Lester Burnham" not "Colonel Fitts kissed Lester Burnham.")
4. Based upon your own original observations about a specific writing technique as it applies to a specific story of your own choosing (recurring images, metaphors, a specific point of character analysis and so on).
 5. Not based upon other sources you've read. (This isn't a research paper, and you shouldn't rely on outside sources. I'm interested only in your own original observations about the story you've chosen to write about.)
 6. Given a focused and specific title: "Set Ups and Pay Offs for Colonel Frank Fitts' Homosexual Homophobia in American Beauty" (Please don't put quotation marks around your own title.)
 7. Paginated.

Before I define critical analysis and describe a few approaches to writing your Critical Analyses essay, let me be clear up front.

What I'd Prefer That You *Not* Write:

1. **Plot Summaries, which**
 - a. Simply tell us what happens in an essay or story. (Colonel Frank Fitts, a violent homophobe, kisses Lester Burnham. Then . . .)
 - b. Tend to follow the plotline of the story: This happens; then this happens.
 - c. Assume that we don't know the story. (You can assume that we not only know the story but know it well, having read it many times closely.)
2. **Critical Evaluations, which**
 - a. Tell us whether you believe the story is good and why, like a review.

Critical evaluations follow this logical syllogism:

Major Premise (a limited and supportable generalization): Many good films have this element.
 Minor Premise (an application of a specific instance): This film has this element.
 Logical Conclusion: Therefore, this film is good (or not good).

c. Example:

Major Premise: Many good dramatic films are both surprising and inevitable, preparing us for surprising moments with subtle but well-conceived set ups and payoffs.

- a. Example one: Chinatown.
- b. Example two: Mystic River
- c. Example three: Unforgiven

Minor Premise: *American Beauty* is both surprising and inevitable, preparing us for Colonel Fitts' kiss with subtle but well-conceived set ups that show he hates homosexuals because he hates himself.

- d. Example one: Jim and Jim
- e. Example two: Ricky and Lester's pot deal.
- f. Example three: Colonel Fitts' beating up his son when Ricky lies and tells his father he's gay when he's not.

Logical Conclusion: Therefore, *American Beauty* is a good movie.

I've described plot summaries and critical evaluations at some length here because I don't want you to fall into the trap of summarizing the story or telling us whether you like or dislike the story. While I believe using critical analysis in writing workshops is a great way to begin, writing critical analyses is different from workshops. Descriptive writing workshops tend toward critical analysis, and prescriptive workshops toward critical evaluation and, at times, personal response: Here's how the author used this particular writing technique and this is how well it worked (for me).

Instead, I'd like for you to write an original critical analysis about a well-focused and specific technique the writer uses in a story.

A Few Assumptions You Can Make about Your Readers

When you write your critical analysis papers, please assume that

1. Whoever's reading your paper is already familiar with the story and wants to find out something new about it that we may not have considered.
2. That we don't want to be told the story again. We've read the story a dozen times and know it as well as you do.
3. That we're less interested in whether you like or dislike the story than in whether you can discuss specific writing techniques the story writer has used to make her story effective.

I'm often surprised that students—yes, even graduate students—don't know what critical analysis is or how to approach a critical analysis paper. It's enough to say here that story telling and critical analysis are completely different writing skills but that the ability to use critical analysis can improve the study of story writing.

Critical Analyses: A Few Definitions

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word *critical* as:

1. Inclined to judge severely and find fault.
2. Characterized by careful, exact judgment: a critical reading.
3. Of, relating to, or characteristic of critics or criticism.

These different connotations of the word *critical* may contribute to students' misunderstandings about how to approach critical analysis in a paper such as this. (A similar misapprehension occurs when people oppose Critical Race Theory, thinking of it as a so-called reverse-racist shaming of white children for the sins of their ancestors. This idea may be *critical*—finger-wagging blame—but it's not *critical thinking*.) For this paper, I suggest that you ignore definitions one and three and focus on definition two:

“Characterized by careful, exact judgment: a critical reading.”

In other words, you don't have to be critical in the sense that you have to find fault with the story or have to play movie critic. An example of this misunderstanding: When white nationalist Republicans get up in arms about "Critical Race Theory," they assume they're being criticized. Besides, man, it's just a theory, like, you know, evolution. *A Hoax!* To put it another way: You're not workshoping the story; you're analyzing how it was written by focusing on a particular writing technique.

According to the 4th Edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, analysis is the

1. The separation of an intellectual or material whole into its constituent parts for individual study.
2. The study of such constituent parts and their interrelationships in making up a whole.

Writing fiction or creative nonfiction is about combining complex parts into a satisfying, organic whole, making the whole enterprise look easy and making us want to read and reread a story again and again—so we can analyze it and ask, How'd she do that?

Writing about fiction is about identifying those complex parts and discussing one or two or three of them in a focused, intuitive way.

Here's a straightforward way to approach your critical analysis papers:

Writing the Critical Analysis Paper

1. **Write a clear, concise, well-focused and original thesis statement about one specific writing technique a writer has used in a story of your own choosing**—preferably a story you admire:

Alan Ball, the Academy Award winning screenwriter for *American Beauty* (directed by Sam Mendez, 1999), uses subtle but well-conceived set ups to pay off the kiss Colonel Frank Fitts, a violent homophobe, gives to Lester Burnham at the of Act III, making that climactic moment and Lester's murder both surprising and inevitable.

The specific writing techniques—the “constituent parts”—described here are set ups and pay offs, and the purpose of the paper is to show evidence of how the screenwriter uses these techniques. The best way to show such evidence is to

2. **Cite and enumerate specific textual examples from the primary text** (the fiction, creative nonfiction or poetry itself) **and/or appeals to authority** (what the writer, other writers or critics have written about the fiction, creative nonfiction or poetry), carefully citing quoted materials correctly according to MLA Style.
 - If you're not sure how to cite quotations, buy a copy of the *MLA Handbook* here: <https://www.mla.org/Publications/Bookstore/Nonseries/MLA-Handbook-Eighth-Edition>. If you're a graduate student and don't already have the most recent edition, now's the time to buy it.
 - Or you can go to the MLA Style Center here: <https://style.mla.org>.
3. **Examples of paraphrased textual examples (without direct quotations):**

The first set up [EXAMPLE 1] occurs early in Act I, when Fitts' gay neighbors, Jim and Jim, appear at his front door with the housewarming gifts of flowers and pasta from Falacci's (*American Beauty* shooting script, 21). Colonel Fitts doesn't yet realize that Jim and Jim are a gay couple, but as he shuts the door in their faces he rolls his eyes, suggesting that he thinks something's not quite right: Jim and Jim are just a little too friendly, friendlier than real men ought to be.

The second set up [EXAMPLE 2] occurs when Fitts see Lester jogging with Jim and Jim (62) and begins to believe that Lester must be gay, too—all part of a misunderstanding that works to set up the larger misunderstanding that his son Ricky and Lester are lovers later in the third act.

And so on. For each example, don't just slap quotations into your paper. Remember that we're more interested in *your interpretation* of scenes, techniques, characters, etc. and their importance to your thesis statement than the quotes themselves, so explain how each example is important. (Also be sure to use quotation marks for direct dialogue and carefully explain where we are in the story, which page number, what the characters' s are, and so on. Be sure to put the page number in parentheses at ends of paraphrased or quoted sentences.)

4. **In your conclusion, concisely but specifically explain the deeper implications of the techniques you've described as they relate to your thesis statement and what they may suggest:**

It's not enough simply to surprise a reader—killing off a main character at the end in an unexpected car accident, for example—but that surprise also must feel inevitable. If a set up is too obvious, the pay-offs in the film become predictable, but if they're subtle, like the steady progression of set ups showing Colonel Fitt's irrational and violent homophobia, we're surprised at first but then look back through the script (or watch the film again) and realize: *That kiss is the only thing that could have happened*. As Hamlet says of King Claudius, Colonel Fitts "doth protest too much" about "those fucking fags"; his pathological and violent hatred of homosexuals reflects a deeper self-hatred, and just as Colonel Fitts kisses Lester Burnham, we realize the colonel is a gay man in a terrible kind of denial; worse, he's a homophobic homosexual. Such violent homophobia, we come to discover, may be far more common and unsettling, even terrifying, than we may have ever thought.

Final Suggestions

In your critical analysis, it's probably best to focus on **one specific and original point about writing technique** you wish to make about a story you've read, supplying at least two or three well-explained examples from the story itself to support your thesis.

If you wish, you may focus on the significance of a recurring image, a particular point of characterization, a reversal in character or audience expectation, interesting uses of or shifts in point of view and so on. We'll talk about the many other possibilities in class.

Critical thinking and writing rely not just on citing specific examples supporting your generalizations but also your well-supported interpretations. We may live in "post fact," "post evidence" era, but that "fact" illustrates just how important a college education is and just how many of us need to learn how to think clearly and how to write critical analysis that holds up to legitimate skepticism and scrutiny.

What's most important is for you to make some kind of original statement about a writing technique used in the story, and what you learned by close reading and analysis, supplying concrete textual examples from the story whenever possible to support your observations. The more examples you give, the more you explain those examples' significance, the better. The more you write about what interests you, has given you an insight into your own writing, the less a chore writing these analyses might be.

Why are these analyses supposed to be so short? To paraphrase Pascal, it takes more time to write a short essay than a long one. Paradoxically, the more coherent and easy to read your essay is, the more work—and craft—you've probably put into it.

A GRADING RUBRIC FOR CRITICAL AND RESEARCH PAPERS

A

1. Shows surprising and original insight into a story and/or a writer's technique.
2. Goes beneath the surface of a story's theme, characterization, structure and so on, pointing out something significant that may not be immediately obvious, showing that you're not just familiar with the story but have given it a close reading.

3. Makes clear, focused, insightful statements of thesis.
4. Shows surprising and original insight into a story and/or a writer's technique.
5. Goes beneath the surface of a story's theme, characterization, structure and so on, pointing out something significant that may not be immediately obvious, showing that you're not just familiar with the story but have given it a close reading.
6. Makes clear, focused, insightful statements of thesis.
7. Has a clear organizational scheme suggested by the original thesis statement.
8. Cites specific textual examples from the story and explains how they're relevant to the paper's original thesis statement.
9. Supplies clear transitions from paragraph to paragraph, sentence to sentence.
10. Is readable, concisely written, direct and clear, free of gobbledygook (and bullshit), grammatical and punctuation errors and other problems.
11. Organizes logically, by topic, not chronologically.

B

Includes at least three of the elements listed in A above.

C or lower

1. Doesn't have an original, surprising or clear statement of thesis.
2. Doesn't cite examples or explain them in a coherent way.
3. Dwells on the obvious, making broad generalizations that anyone could agree with.
4. Skims the surface of a story without really considering writing technique at all.
5. Gives just a personal response about a story's themes or characters, written at the last minute or in a general or impressionistic way.
6. Summarizes the plot. This happens; then this happens.
7. Evaluates the story:
 - I like (or don't like) this story because . . .
 - This is a great (or a lousy) story because . . .

If you have any questions about the short critical analysis papers you write this semester, please ask those questions in class. If you're confused, there may be others in class who are, too.

Showing how critical thinking works is one of the most important things we can do when we teach and learn in any setting, not because it's some kind of humanist indoctrination but because we want everyone to think for themselves, to give concrete evidence and to synthesize that evidence in an original and insightful way.

A FINAL NOTE ON MY WORKSHOP PHILOSOPHY

Only one rule applies to the critique of manuscripts in this class: Kindness is the only wisdom. The principal task of this workshop is to create a safe place for writers to be honest and authentic in their discussions and their work. Some writers may be struggling to find the courage to write stories of difficult events that have happened to them personally, or to people they know. The last thing we need to do as a class is to make the discussion of these stories difficult, too; doing so may cause writers to withdraw and stop taking risks for fear of making mistakes or being honest. There are no mistakes in this workshop, only opportunities to see, understand and revise.

If a writer has troubles with his or her story or poem, try to find a way to deliver that information in a non-personal, nonjudgmental way, with empathy and compassion and without undo sarcasm or judgment. One approach is simply to describe how you read the story or poem, what it meant to you, focusing on one or two techniques (*irony* or *sarcasm*, for example) the author has used that have contributed to that effect. Focus on what poet John Ciardi says is most important: not just *what* a poem or story means but *how* it means.

The more I teach writing, the less faith I have in giving advice, especially the whole notion that a poem or a story is something to find problems with and "fix." If the author discovers that she has been misinterpreted in a descriptive analysis, then it follows that she will have to revise. Avoid using such subjective judgments as *good* or *bad* or *I really like/dislike this poem/story*. Even *This story works/doesn't work* isn't particularly helpful, unless you add, *for me*, and even then you must say *how* and

why so that the author can have concrete, practical feedback to go back home and revise with. Each of us reads a story differently, with our own distinct visions, and that's what makes workshop such effective places to discuss our work. Take what you can use and forget the rest. We all have a right to tell our own stories in our own ways, and we all have a right to our own interpretations of others' stories and poems so long as there's evidence from the text to support our views. We may interpret the image of a child's flying saucer toy lying upended in a bathtub as a hint that a story is about alien abduction, but if there's nothing else in the story to support that point then perhaps the story may be about something else, the death of a child, say, or the grief of a father and mother.

We show our work to others to help us when we're too close to it to trust our instincts completely about whether what we've written does what we'd intended, whether what's in our heads has gotten onto the page. Workshops should be both honest *and* supportive, writers telling other writers not necessarily what they want to hear but what they might need to hear to make their stories work better, meanwhile helping them through the sometimes painful task of revision: re-seeing their own work clearly with some dispassionate distance, finding their stories and poems in the process of rewriting them, making unconscious elements more conscious. Workshops should also be open, generous, productive and fun, everyone feeling free to laugh a great deal—and not at others' expense—meanwhile recognizing that criticism must never be equated with cruelty or preoccupations with who's up or down but always with the shared difficulty of the work itself, always balancing a commitment to honesty about the work's effectiveness with mutual respect for those who create it and their individual creative processes and aesthetics.

My *Poets & Writers* essay, "Toward a More Open, Democratic Workshop," explores further a few key premises of my workshop philosophy, here's a link: <http://www.lexwilliford.com/BSE/PW.htm>.