Tentative Syllabus, Spring 2022

Professor: Lex Williford

Section: CRW (CRN 29513)

Class Room: Classroom Building C301. If Omicron becomes a significant problem, we may have to conduct a few classes via Zoom. I’d prefer to have in-class sessions, but it’s difficult to predict what COVID will have in store for us this semester and beyond.

Office: EDUC 901A

Office Hours: On campus (EDUC 901A): 2-4 p.m. Tuesdays or by appointment only. Please let me know if you plan to come ahead of time to make sure your time doesn’t overlap with others.

E-mail: lex@utep.edu

Phone: 915-433-1931 (mobile). Most days when I’m not teaching or making comments on student documents, 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.


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

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 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 their performance in each of these assignments:

- Five Fifteen-Minute Exercises for workshop discussion weeks 3-7 of the semester (Due no later than midnight Friday the week before we discuss them in class.) After workshops, please revise these exercises and upload them to Blackboard to receive an automatic 100, a nice boost to your final grade. 5%

- Three Short-Short Critical Analysis (CA) Essays: Responses to writing techniques of the creative nonfiction readings in TA throughout the semester.
  ✓ You’ll begin the discussion for the first two of these essays in class.
  ✓ You’re not required to begin discussion of the third essay, but please upload all three essays to Blackboard for a grade no more than two weeks after we’ve discussed the essays, if possible. 5%
In-class participation and critiques of other students’ creative nonfiction in workshops using Adobe Acrobat Reader.  

One final portfolio (25-40 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. —what you submit to workshop should be new work, 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.

Semester Overview:

Each week this semester we will follow this basic schedule:

1. No later than Friday midnight, weeks 2-6, the week before we’ll workshop documents, please upload a short-short exercise (2-3 pp. max) to the appropriate week in Workshop Discussion Boards for class discussion in Weeks 3-8. I’ll batch download all these group exercises from Blackboard, then merge them into one document in Adobe Acrobat format, then share them with everyone through an Adobe Acrobat e-mail link. You may make comments either online through a web browser, or you may open these on your computer directly in the free Adobe Acrobat Reader.

2. Workshop two individual nonfiction pieces in Adobe Acrobat Reader for the individual dates you’ve sign up for after Spring Break.

3. Please read and follow the Weekly Deadlines below for each week this semester. Please add your deadlines to your computer calendar and plan at least two weeks ahead to meet your sign-up deadlines for critical analyses and creative nonfiction workshops. Please don’t wait until the last minute to prepare for and upload your individual or group assignments.

1. Weekly Sign-ups for Critical Analysis of Essays in TA

On the first day of class, please sign up for two Touchstone Anthology (TA) essays to write a short (2-3 page) critical analysis 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 writing technique that surprised you that sets that essay apart from others you’ve read). Please sign up for one essay to discuss before mid semester and one after. You’ll use these analyses of writing techniques to begin the class discussion for two of your scheduled essays in class. Upload all revisions of your CAs for a grade on BB no later than April 24. Please don’t turn them in at the last minute.

Note: You’ll also write a third short critical analysis which you may choose among any of the essays you find interesting or compelling and upload all three short critical analyses to Blackboard for a grade.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Number</th>
<th>Touchstone Anthology Essay (Please read the TA essays listed below for discussions in the following week.)</th>
<th>Your Name (First day of Class: Sign up for two essays, one before Spring Break and one after.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 24</td>
<td>Wendell Berry, “Getting Along with Nature,” 17.</td>
<td>Po Germán Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Charles Bowden, “Torch Song,” 56.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 7</td>
<td>Kelly Grey Carlisle, “Physical Evidence,” 89.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td><strong>Exercise 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 8</strong></td>
<td>March 7</td>
<td>Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, “The Beautiful City of Tirzah,” 190.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 9</strong></td>
<td>March 14-18</td>
<td>Spring Break — No Classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 12</strong></td>
<td>April 4</td>
<td>McClanahan, Rebecca, “Interstellar,” 354.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 13</strong></td>
<td>April 11</td>
<td>Norris, Kathleen, “Celibate Passion,” 396.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exercises</strong></th>
<th><strong>Workshop Drafts Due No Later than Midnight Week/Date</strong></th>
<th><strong>For Discussion 6 pm Monday</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date Exercise Revisions Due for Grade (100 for Each 5%)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 1</td>
<td>Friday of Week 2, January 28</td>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Sunday, March 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Exercise 2

**Friday of Week 3, February 4**  
Week 4  
Sunday, March 27

### Exercise 3

**Friday of Week 4, February 11**  
Week 5  
Sunday, April 3

### Exercise 4

**Friday of Week 5, February 18**  
Week 6  
Sunday, April 10

### Exercise 5

**Friday of Week 6, February 25**  
Week 7  
Sunday, April 17

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## 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. Individual workshops may be from 8-15 pp. max. please. You may further develop any exercise you wish as part of these workshops. You’ll revise these workshop documents for your final portfolio at the end of the semester.

Please upload to the corresponding numbers in Blackboard's Workshop Upload Discussion Boards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Number</th>
<th>Workshops</th>
<th>Sign up for Workshops in the Blanks Below</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weeks 3-7</strong></td>
<td>Group Exercise Workshops Only</td>
<td>See the schedule above or those listed in the All Exercises Group Exercises Workshop Uploads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weeks 8-16</strong></td>
<td>Individual Workshops Only</td>
<td>The individual workshop uploads deadline dates listed below are all due midnight Friday the week before we comment discuss them in the class.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **For Week 8**  
**Due Friday**  
**Week 7**  
March 4 | First Individual Workshop 1 |  
**Po**  
**Ana** |
| **Week 9**  
**Spring Break — No Classes** | First Individual Workshop 2 |  |
| **For Week 10**  
**Due Friday**  
**Week 9**  
March 18 | First Individual Workshop 3 |  
**Israel** |
| **For Week 11**  
**Due Friday**  
**Week 10**  
March 25 | First Individual Workshop 4 |  
**Germán** |
| **For Week 12**  
**Due Friday**  
**Week 11**  
April 1 | First Individual Workshop 5 |  
**Alyssa** |
| **For Week 13**  
**Due Friday**  
**Week 12**  
April 8 | First Individual Workshop 6 |  
**Jacob** |
| **For Week 14**  
**Due Friday** | First Individual Workshop 7 |  
**Marisol** |
| **For Week 15** | Second Individual Workshop 1 |  |
| **For Week 16** | Second Individual Workshop 2 |  |
| **For Week 17** | Second Individual Workshop 3 |  |
| **For Week 18** | Second Individual Workshop 4 |  |
Lex Williford  
Spring 2022  
Syllabus: CRW 5373

### 3. Contact Information Sign ups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number (Optional)</th>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marisol Adame</td>
<td>915-500-9330</td>
<td>madame4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germán Barrera Toro</td>
<td>786-771-2365</td>
<td>gbarrerato</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alyssa Estrada</td>
<td></td>
<td>arestrada6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Po Ku</td>
<td>626-808-7462</td>
<td>pjku</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Llurba Ferreira</td>
<td>915-540-8861</td>
<td>aillurbafer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Phillips</td>
<td></td>
<td>jbphillips2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel Terron Holtzeimer</td>
<td>656-600-8533</td>
<td>itertonhol</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Syllabus Weekly Calendar:

The reading assignments listed below are all from the *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*. Please refer to Blackboard for web links to revisions of this syllabus and other downloadable course supplements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Week and Date</th>
<th>Readings, Exercises, Deadlines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MLK Day</strong>&lt;br&gt;No class, alas, alas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **For Week 2**<br>Week 1<br>January 17 | 1. We won't meet class on this three-day holiday, but I'd like for your to do some reading in the text since we've lost a week in UTEP's usual 16-week schedule.  
2. Please read the following in the *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction* (TA):  
   ✓ Foreword, Lex Williford, xi (optional).  
   ✓ Introduction by Scott Russell Sanders, xv. |
Week 1
January 17

3. If you’ve not yet received your Touchstone anthology, please read these nonfiction pieces as soon as you get the book.
4. If you have time in the first week of class, please watch my four-part hour-long YouTube video at the bottom of the Blackboard Home Page. If not, you can watch it in Week 2.

Week 2
January 24

Agenda for Week 2

1. In Week 1, I’ll e-mail and post a copy of this tentative syllabus for discussion in Week 2.
2. 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, please raise them the first class day.
3. That day, I’ll pass around syllabus signups 1, 2 and 3, listed above. I’ll fill these in on this syllabus once I have all your hand-written information, then e-mail and post a revised syllabus in Week 3. I’ll also bring printed syllabi for everyone in class.
4. Introduction to the course and syllabus.
5. In class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction: TA, Brian Doyle’s “Leap,” 165.
6. If we have time, in-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from The Best of Brevity.
7. Discuss:
   1. Blackboard Creative Nonfiction Presentation.
8. Discuss:
   ✓ TA Foreword, Lex Williford, xi.
   ✓ Introduction by Scott Russell Sanders, xv.
9. If we have time, we may do a fifteen minute in-class exercise: two lies (fiction) and one truth (creative nonfiction).

For Week 3

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.
   ✓ 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. Please be sure to use correct Modern Language Association Style documentation (https://style.mla.org). Also check that you’ve included a clear 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 two weeks following our discussion of each essay.
3. On Blackboard, please watch: Four-Part Presentation: Introduction to Creative Nonfiction (approx. 42 minutes). To save time we won’t 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 3.
4. **Exercise Prompt 1 for Week 3:**

- 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 someone refused to blush.

- For your exercises weeks 2-7, 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 seven weeks are intended to free you to imagine stories that burn most brightly in your bellies, that risk something important, and that focus you 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 abstractions without finding it necessary to state those abstractions directly.

- Like many of our workshops, our discussions of exercises should focus less on correction or judgment 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, focusing at times on confusing or vague sections that could be more vivid, specific, authentic and powerful.

- 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 workshop.

- Also, to save me time assembling many documents each week, please upload your exercises using these file-naming conventions:

  - CRW5373_Exercise2 (or Week12_Workshop)_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.)](https://www.adobe.com/acrobat/pdf-reader.html) or BB's left Menu item labeled Click here to upload your Group and Individual Workshop Documents ONLY. Please be sure that you've uploaded to each correct weekly upload link.

- **Remember:** The purpose of all our discussion board threads is simply to upload weekly workshop documents, not for online discussion. Please don't make comments in the discussion boards themselves but instead click on the Adobe Acrobat e-mail I'll send you each weekend which links to shared weekly workshops documents we can all make comments on in one place, giving you, I hope, sufficient time to make comments before our Monday evening classes.

- When you've finished a draft of your first exercise or workshop story, please upload it to BB's weekly workshop upload discussion boards for the correct week, in this case:

  - Exercise 1 Workshop Upload (Discussion Board): Please Upload for Group Workshop Comments and Class Discussion in Week 3, Due No Later than Midnight Friday, January 28.

- On Saturday, I'll combine all the exercises into a shared group document that everyone can comment on with the free Adobe Acrobat Reader ([https://www.adobe.com/acrobat/pdf-reader.html](https://www.adobe.com/acrobat/pdf-reader.html)). Please don't download Acrobat Pro DC, an expensive paid yearly subscription I use to assemble and share class 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 standalone 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.

4. Please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 3 (and each week thereafter). I’ll set a deadline about two weeks after workshop for each document if you wish to add other comments before each review closes.

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**Agenda for Week 3**

1. Please check my revised syllabus to make sure everything is correct. If not, please let me know what I need to change.
2. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction** from *The Best of Brevity*.
3. Discuss:
4. **Group Workshop students’ Exercise 1 to revise for a grade on Blackboard.**

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**For Week 4**

1. **Please read in TA:**
   - 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, 1. 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 2 Prompt for Week 4:**
   - Some writers I know have suggested waiting at least ten years before you try to write the hard stuff. Usually we need a certain level of distance and healing to write about the worst things that happen 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 being Pollyannaish or seeming too rosy or naïvely optimistic, consider what changes you might have experienced to see something difficult or tragic in the past as something comic, positive or even revelatory later (or vice versa). Write about an incident of loss (or winning), a moment injury and/or pain (or ecstasy)—physical, emotional and/or psychological—that changed you and your life, 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.
   - If you'd prefer not to use this prompt, write whatever burns most brightly in your belly.
   - Refer to **Exercise 2 Prompt for Week 4** in the syllabus 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.
   - When you’ve finished revising and crafting your exercise, please upload it to this discussion board:
     - **Exercise 2 Workshop Upload (Discussion Board): Please Upload for Group Workshop Comments and Class Discussion in Week 4, Due No Later than Midnight Friday, February 4.**
4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 4.
5. After workshop, please revise Exercise 2 and upload it to Blackboard for a grade (100).
### Week 4
**February 7**

1. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction** from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. **Discuss:**
   - ✓ Kelly Grey Carlisle, “Physical Evidence,” 89.
3. **Group Workshop students’ Exercise 2 to revise for a grade on Blackboard.**

### Agenda for Week 5
**February 14**

1. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction** from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. **Discuss TA Essays:**
   - ✓ Bernard Cooper, “Burl’s,” 132.
3. **Group Workshop students’ Exercise 3 to revise for a grade on Blackboard.**

### For Week 4

1. **Please read in TA:**
   - ✓ 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 3 Prompt for Week 5:**
   - ✓ Write about a moment of peaceful (or awkward) silence, a moment when you or someone else decides *not* to say something incredibly important or not to confront another person or problem, or any outwardly seeming undramatic moment that changed everything, for you or someone you know.
   - ✓ If you’d prefer *not* to use this prompt, write whatever burns most brightly in your belly.
4. **When you’ve finished revising and crafting your exercise, please upload it to this upload discussion board:**
   - ✓ Exercise 3 Workshop Upload (Discussion Board): Please Upload for Group Workshop Comments and Class Discussion in Week 5, Due No Later than Midnight Friday, February 11.
5. **Please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 5.**
6. **After workshop, please revise Exercise 3 and upload it to Blackboard for a grade (100).**

### For Week 6

1. **Please read in TA:**
   - ✓ Michael W. Cox, “Visitor,” 141.
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 4 Prompt for Week 6:**
   - ✓ I can think of very few moments more dramatic than someone saying *no* to something or someone else. 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.
   - ✓ If you’d prefer *not* to use this prompt, write whatever burns most brightly in your belly.
4. **When you’ve finished revising and crafting your exercise, please upload it to this upload discussion board:**
   - ✓ 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.
| WEEK 5  
February 14 | 5. Please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 6.
6. After workshop, please revise Exercise 4 and upload it to Blackboard for a grade (100). |
---|---|
| AGENDA FOR WEEK 6 | 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from The Best of Brevity.
2. Discuss TA Essays:
   ✓ Michael W. Cox, “Visitor,” 141.
3. Group Workshop students’ Exercise 4 to revise for a grade on Blackboard. |
| WEEK 6  
February 21 | For Week 7
1. Please read in TA:
   ✓ Anthony Farrington, “Kissing,” 176.
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. Exercise 5 Prompt for Week 7:
   ✓ Write your own prompt, something to challenge yourself, to write something you must write now or have avoided 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.
4. When you’ve finished revising and crafting your exercise, please upload it to discussion board:
   ✓ Exercise 5 Workshop Upload (Discussion Board): Please Upload for Group Workshop Comments and Class Discussion in Week 7: Due No Later than Midnight Friday, February 25.
5. Please comment on Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 7. |
| AGENDA FOR WEEK 7 | 1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from The Best of Brevity.
2. Discuss TA Essays:
   ✓ Anthony Farrington, “Kissing,” 176.
3. Group Workshop students’ Exercise 5 to revise for a grade on Blackboard. |
| WEEK 7  
February 28 | For Week 8
1. Please read in TA:
   ✓ Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, “The Beautiful City of Tirzah,” 190.
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 Begin in Week 8.
4. 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, Weekly Sign-ups for Individual Workshops. 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 Friday midnight individual workshop deadlines. I don’t outline where or when to upload these individual workshop documents, assuming that by now dates in BB should be clear and sufficient.
5. If you’ve signed up for an individual workshop in Week 8, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board:
   ✓ Week 8 Individual Workshops: Due in Week 7 for Discussion in Week 8 No Later than Midnight Friday March 4. |
**Week 7**  
February 28

1. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 8.

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**Week 8**  
March 7

**AGENDA FOR WEEK 8**

1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. Discuss TA Essays:
   - Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, “The Beautiful City of Tirzah,” 190.
3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.

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**FOR WEEK 10**

1. Please read in TA:
2. No assignments or class next week.
3. 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.
4. If you’ve signed up for an individual workshop in Week 10, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board **Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here**, Thread 9, Individual Workshops Due for Discussion in Week 10 March 18. Also note that this deadline occurs midnight Friday at the end of Spring Break.
5. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 10.

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**Week 9**  
March 14-18  
**Spring Break/Mid-Semester**

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**Week 10**  
March 21

**AGENDA FOR WEEK 10**

1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. Discuss TA Essays:
3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.

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**FOR WEEK 11**

1. Please read in TA:
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 **Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here**, Thread 9B, Individual Workshops Due for Discussion in Week 11 March 25.
4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 11.

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**Week 11**  
March 28

**AGENDA FOR WEEK 11**
### Agenda for Week 12

**March 28**

1. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction** from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. **Discuss TA Essays:**
3. **Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.**

**For Week 12**

1. Please read in **TA:**
   - 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 12, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board *Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here,* Thread 9C, Individual Workshops Due for Discussion in Week 12 April 1.
4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 12.

### Agenda for Week 13

**April 4**

1. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction** from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. **Discuss TA Essays:**
   - Nye, Naomi Shihab, “This Is Not Who We Are,” 401.
3. **Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.**

**For Week 13**

1. Please read in **TA:**
   - Nye, Naomi Shihab, “This Is Not Who We Are,” 401.
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 12, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board *Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here,* Thread 9C, Individual Workshops Due for Discussion in Week 12 April 1.
4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 13.

### Agenda for Week 14

**April 11**

1. **In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction** from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. **Discuss TA Essays:**
3. **Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.**

**For Week 14**

1. Please read in **TA:**
2. If you’ve signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in **TA** for next week,
3. Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 14.
4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 14.
### Agenda for Week 14

1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. Discuss TA Essays:
3. Discuss Scheduled Individual Workshops.

### For Week 15

1. Please read in TA:
   - Wallace, David Foster, "Consider the Lobster," 525.
2. If you’ve signed up for a critical analysis of a specific reading in TA for next week,
3. Please write an analysis (no more than 2-3 pages please) to begin our class discussion of your assigned reading in Week 15.
4. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 15.

### Agenda for Week 15

1. In-class reading and discussion of flash creative nonfiction from *The Best of Brevity*.
2. Discuss publication of creative nonfiction and review literary submission materials.
3. Discuss TA Essays:
   - Wallace, David Foster, "Consider the Lobster," 525.
4. Discuss Final Portfolio Cover Sheet and Portfolio Guidelines.
5. Begin discussing *Lex’s Litsub Materials* for a publication workshop in Week 15.
6. An overview of publishing resources online.
7. Discuss thesis potential thesis projects—or projects after you graduate—in creative nonfiction.

### For Week 16

1. If you wish to workshop a revision and a cover letter to submit a 750-word piece of flash nonfiction to *Brevity* (or to another creative nonfiction magazine such as *Creative Nonfiction*) in Week 16, please upload your workshop document to the BB discussion board *Upload Your Weekly Workshop Documents Here*, Thread 9F, Optional group workshop for those planning to submit flash nonfiction to *Brevity* or elsewhere, Due for Discussion in Week 16 April 22.
2. Please comment on Individual Adobe Acrobat workshop documents by 6 pm Monday class time, Week 16.
3. Please prepare your Final Portfolio to turn in for a grade.

### Agenda for Week 16

1. Workshop 750-word essays and cover letters to *Brevity*.
2. Questions about Final Portfolio?

### Final Portfolios Due

13.
**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 workshopping 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.
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.
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.