

English 242: Nonfiction Writing Workshop

San José State University

Professor Tom Moriarty

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Office Hours: By appointment.

Overview

This course is a creative writing workshop course in nonfiction. In this class, you will learn how to write nonfiction stories from initial proposals to final polished drafts. The key to your success in this workshop, and as a writer in general, is serious and constant work. So plan to be reading, writing, revising, and giving extensive feedback to other writers throughout the semester.

Course Objectives

- To teach students the process of planning, researching, reporting, and writing nonfiction stories.
- To teach students concepts and terminology for discussing nonfiction writing.
- To help students develop into successful writers of nonfiction.
- To help students develop as critical readers and editors.

Pedagogical Approach

This course operates as a seminar/workshop, with lotsa discussion and not too much lecture. You are expected to come to class prepared to participate every single day.

Required Text

Follow the Story: How to Write Successful Nonfiction. James B. Stewart. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Grades

Your work and participation in this workshop will be graded according to the following standards: A = Excellent work. B = Good work. C = Satisfactory work. D = Unsatisfactory work. F = Failure.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

One Writing project	100 pts.
Another Writing project	200 pts.
A Third Writing project	250 pts.
Workshop participation, which includes:	200 pts.
• Written comments on drafts	
• In-class discussions of your colleagues' work	
Queries	50 pts.
Leading Reading Like a Writer Discussion	100 pts.
Where to Publish Presentation	100 pts.

A = 900 - 1,000 points

B = 800 - 899 points

- C = 700 - 799 points
- D = 600 - 699 points
- F = less than 600 points

Projects

You will submit about 10,000-12,000 words of polished, revised prose this semester. All three of your projects should be *at least* 3,000 words long, with some of them being longer so you can reach your 10,000 word minimum requirement. Two of the three projects must include some sort of research, and only one may be written solely from personal experience (so only one memoir or autobiography). All the projects may be written in first, second, or third person, or a combination of points of view. You must do projects in at least two different genres (i.e. profile, biography, opinion, essay, narrative, etc.). And, you are welcome to do projects on your own or with one or two partners (you'll still write the same number of words).

You will also give a market presentation in small groups of 1-3.

All projects must be typed, use a normal font (12pt. Times New Roman), and submitted in the proper format (i.e. a query letter, a manuscript).

All assignments are due on their announced due dates. Late projects will be penalized one full letter grade for each day the project is late.

Additional Information Available Online

You are responsible for reading the following information online at <http://www.sjsu.edu/english/comp/policy/index.html>

- Course guidelines
- Academic policies (academic integrity, plagiarism, ADA and AEC policies)
- Estimation of Per-Unit Student Workload
- Recording policies
- Adding and dropping classes

This syllabus is also available online at:

<https://www.sjsu.edu/english/currentstudents/syllabi/index.html>

English MA and MFA Program Learning Outcomes are available at:

<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/ma/learningoutcomes/index.html>

<http://www.sjsu.edu/english/graduate/mfa/mfalearningoutcomes/index.htm>

Workshops

The workshops are the heart of this course. You are expected to be prepared for every workshop (which means you've read the manuscript, thought about it, and written down extensive ideas about it), and you are expected to talk in class every day. 20% of your grade comes from workshop participation and absences will affect your workshop grade.

Students are welcome to disagree with one another during class discussions and workshops; however, all our dialogue must be conducted with respect for each individual's opinions and work.

Grading Policy

The department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale defined in the SJSU Catalog (“The Grading System”). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A = excellent; B = above average; C= average; D= below average; F = failure.

All projects and assignments are due at the start of class on the announced due dates. Late projects will be penalized one full letter grade for each day the project is late. Quizzes and exercises may not be made up.

Zoom Etiquette

When you join the class each day, please mute your microphone. We will organically figure out what works best for workshoping, in terms of not talking over each other. Options include using the Chat function, Raising Your Hand function, and maybe just waving at each other when we want to talk next. We can also maybe record feedback sessions and share screens when we want to show the writer something particular in their text. Let’s try it out, share our impressions of what works and what doesn’t, and come up with something really cool.

You might also want to think about doing a couple of things so you look good on Zoom. Here is a link to five easy tips (the main ones are: have good lighting in front of you, not behind you, and don’t point your camera straight up your nose):

<https://www.inc.com/jason-aten/5-ways-to-look-your-best-on-your-next-zoom-meeting.html>