

COM 691: *Writing Narrative Inquiry*

Spring 2012

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SYLLABUS

To be a convincing "I-witness," one must, so it seems, first become a convincing "I."

--Clifford Geertz

Those authors who would find many readers must endeavor to please while they instruct.

--Samuel Johnson

Writing "records the process of the speaker's realization"

--Don Geiger

I write because I don't know what I think until I read what I say.

— Flannery O'Connor

This course grew out of a desire to teach graduate students how to improve their style of writing about communication research in ways that would allow them to improve their odds of publishing in our field as well as to reach wider public audiences. It matured over the years into a series of writing workshops taught at conferences and through ASU that focused on scholarship written as narrative, specifically personal narratives, "creative nonfiction," and/or autoethnography.

Our class in Spring 2012 will be organized by the idea that narrative writing is a distinct form of expression. Skill in it may be learned by the thoughtful application of rhetorical and narrative theories as well as creative nonfiction best practices that create rich, evocative stories out of personal experiences, innovative research, and ethnographic fieldnotes.

Why choose this narrative form? Why not concentrate our energies on more traditional forms of scholarly writing, such as the argument-based essay or traditional research report? To answer that question is to raise two other questions: (1) does engaging in this style of writing produce a kind of knowing that unique, and (2) for those of us who are interested in communicating research to a wider public audience, is this the kind of writing that sells?

The answer to the first question is “yes.” Writing personal narratives does produce a way of knowing that is unique. The philosopher Sara Worth puts it this way: “traditional forms of knowledge (knowing *how* and knowing *that*) are not sufficient to cover a third kind of knowledge (knowing *what it is like*) in the way that storytelling can.” One reason for this “uniqueness” is the relationship writers of personal narrative develop with their material, or data. Inherent to this form of writing is “self reflexivity,” which demands that the critical lens turned outward is also turned inward, and questions about the writer’s standpoint, way of seeing the world, and interest in the topic are thoroughly explored. Only if readers trust the narrator will they also learn to trust the narrator’s story.



The answer to the second question is decidedly pragmatic. The majority of trade books and major magazine feature articles published in the U. S. are written in a style known as “creative nonfiction,” or what Lee Gutkind calls “the literature of reality.” Creative nonfiction is appealing to readers because it encourages authors to tell compelling stories that make full use of storytelling techniques borrowed from fiction, drama, poetry, and investigative journalism. As such, creative nonfiction provides the rhetorical and narrative architecture for structuring and making interesting to readers research-based human stories. These stories:

- Are written by knowledgeable people with firsthand experience in the fieldwork necessary to write them;
- Implicate the author in the telling of the tale;
- Are well researched and well documented;
- Feature real people in real situations that range from the ordinary to the exotic;
- Are powerful enough to change minds, spark public discussions, and influence policies.

These are the stories, and the preferred style of writing, that attract intelligent readers across multiple disciplines and reading cultures. And this is the style of writing that I will help you create in this course.

REQUIRED TEXTS



I will use my *Writing Qualitative Inquiry* (2008) as a core text as well as series of brief articles/videos about writing and narrative inquiry. Discussions of this material will begin each class and will lead to writing exercises and discussions of contributions and progress on your writing projects.

Because I am interested in narratives that draw on scholarship but appeal to broader public audiences, I will also include recent readings from scholars who have managed to do that. For example, Karen Ho's *Liquidated: An Ethnography of Wall Street* and Mark de Rond's *The Last Amateurs* both demonstrate the ability of ethnographic writing by academics to gain major attention that established their authors as public intellectuals shortly after receiving their respective doctorates.

I am also requiring my *A Need to Know: The Clandestine History of a CIA Family*. This ethnographic memoir represents a "crossover" book that also generated spin-offs for academic and popular audiences.

Throughout the course there will be additional readings and links to videos that introduce or elaborate on topics ranging from autoethnography and creative nonfiction to advice for writers from a variety of other writers.

Finally, I approach this course as a "writing workshop." My expectation is that all of us will be working on a publishable narrative throughout the course. Each week, two or three sample contributions will be examined and discussed by all of us in greater detail in conjunction with the assigned readings on writing and editing narratives.

GRADING




There are three goals for the class, each one of them associated with a series of assignments that are then correlated with a grade. They are:

1. Discussion leadership and contributions	40
(assigned seminar leadership on readings/viewings plus overall informed contributions)	
2. Works-in-Progress	20
(first two pages, revisions, endings, proposal, etc.)	
3. Final project at the end of the course	40
Total Points	<hr/> 100


“You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don’t know what was in the newspapers that morning, you don’t know who your friends are, you don’t know what you owe anybody, you don’t know what anybody owes to you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be. This is the place of creative incubation. At first you may find that nothing happens there. But if you have a sacred place and use it, something eventually will happen.” — Joseph Campbell


“Good sentences are sent into the air like a series of jazz licks. You noodle around with tempo and sound until you get the perfect fit for that particular song, and then, so long as you can sustain it, God is on your side and everything comes easily and even the waiters smile.” – Wilfred Sheed

PLAN OF STUDY

DATE	TOPIC	READING
1/9	Intro to the course and to each other, explanation of the syllabus, general housekeeping. What is Narrative Inquiry? Choosing a Topic, an Audience, and an Approach First writing exercise ...	Buy books, get started on them ... Goodall, WQI, Preface Goodall, "Why 'Writing Qualitative Inquiry' Matters: A Factional Fable" (pdf on course website) D. Jean Clandinin, Stefinee Pinnegar, and J. Gary Daynes "Situating Narrative Inquiry Historically" http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/13548_Chapter1.pdf George Orwell, "Why I Write" (pdf on course website) Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. How To Write a Short Story http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmVcIhnySx8&feature=related For fun: http://iwl.me/
1/16 	MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR DAY NO CLASS	Goodall, <i>A Need to Know</i> (begin reading) Carolyn Ellis, Tony Adams, & Arthur Bochner, "Autoethnography: An Overview" (pdf on course website)
1/23	Discussion of <i>A Need to Know</i> Voice as attitude, and as character ... DUE: Your first two pages	Goodall, <i>A Need to Know</i> (all) Ron Pelias, "Qualitative Research: Writing into Realization" (pdf on course website) H. L. Goodall, "Writing Like a Guy in Textville," (pdf on course website) Terrill, "Character in Creative Nonfiction" (pdf on course website) Christopher Hitchens "Advice to Writers" http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTyxpaXOAIIE&feature=related Reading and evaluating your first two pages ...

<p>1/30</p>	<p>Discussion of “The 5 R’s of Narrative Writing”</p> <p>“Perhapsing”</p> <p>Second writing exercise ... (how would you write dialogue/description in scenes instead of this?)</p>	<p>Goodall, WQI, Chapter 1</p> <p>Elmore Leonard on Writing http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeZQl2nvnfM</p> <p>Lisa Knopp http://www.creativenonfiction.org/brevity/craft/craft_knopp_1_09.htm</p> <p>John Jeremiah Sullivan, “Mister Lytle: An Essay” http://www.theparisreview.org/letters-essays/6048/mister-lytle-an-essay-john-jeremiah-sullivan</p> <p>John Jeremiah Sullivan, “Upon this Rock” http://www.gq.com/entertainment/music/200401/rock-music-jesus?printable=true</p> <p>James Woods, “Reality Effects” http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2011/12/19/11219crbo_books_wood?currentPage=all</p> <p>(optional): D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly “Experience and Story in Qualitative Research” http://media.wiley.com/product_data/excerpt/36/07879434/0787943436.pdf</p>
<p>2/6</p> 	<p>Discussion of “Fingers on the Keyboard (Structuring)”</p> <p>Is there a difference between structuring an essay and structuring a story? Where does narrative inquiry come into this mix?</p> <p>Third writing exercise ... (how would you change the structure?)</p>	<p>Goodall, WQI, Chapter 2</p> <p>Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. on “The Shape of a Story” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ&feature=player_embedded</p> <p>Rebecca Skloot on Structuring http://www.theopennotebook.com/2011/11/22/rebecca-skloot-henrietta-lacks/</p> <p>Jennifer Ouellette “Cocktail Party Physics” http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/cocktail-party-physics/2011/12/21/the-science-of-mysteries-for-whom-the-bells-toll/</p>
<p>2/13</p> 	<p>Discussion of “Evaluating Narratives”</p> <p>DUE: Your first chapter/draft of narrative</p>	<p>Goodall, WQI, Chapter 4</p> <p>Jonathan Lethem “The Ecstasy of Influence” http://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/0081387</p> <p>Tom Bartlett, “Play it Again, Professor (pdf on course website)</p> <p>Flannery O’Conner quotes on writing, etc. http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/22694.Flannery_O_Connor</p> <p>Reading and evaluating your first chapter (selected from all submissions)</p>

2/20	<p>Discussion of Mark de Rond's <i>The Last Amateurs</i></p> <p>DUE: Your revisions</p>	<p>Mark de Rond, <i>The Last Amateurs</i> (all)</p> <p>Mark de Rond on Cambridge Boat Races ethnography: http://www.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/646940;jsessionid=5991A06C86D616679827D216537D6C6A</p> <p>Carl Zimmer on science writing: http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/primate-diaries/2011/12/20/carl-zimmer-part-one/</p> <p>Reading and evaluating your revisions (selected from all submissions)</p>
2/27	<p>Endings and Narrative Trajectories</p> <p>DUE: Your ending</p>	<p>Reread Chapter 2 on “set-ups and pay-offs”</p> <p>Rebecca O’Connor “What We Lost” http://therumpus.net/2011/10/what-we-lost-when-we-lost-barbara-jean/#author-bio</p> <p>Geoff Nicholson, “Drink What You Know” http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/01/books/review/Nicholson-t.html?_r=1&nl=books&emc=booksupdateemb3</p> <p>Reading and evaluating your endings (selected)</p>
3/5	<p>Submitting work to presses and publishers</p> <p>Fourth writing exercise ... (Revise and resubmit, or what?)</p>	<p>Goodall, WQI, Chapter 3</p> <p>Dedi Felman, “What Are Book Editors Looking for?” (pdf on course website)</p> <p>Kathy Miller, “My Father and His Father: An Analysis of World War II Correspondence” (pdf on course website)</p>
3/12	<p>DUE: Your proposals</p>	<p>Carole Fungaroli Sargent, “Five Persistent Publishing Myths Among Scholarly Authors With Big-Bookstore Dreams” (pdf on course website)</p> <p>Reading and evaluating your proposals (selected)</p>
<p>SPRING BREAK</p>		<p>Begin reading Karen Ho, <i>Liquidated</i></p> <p>And this award-winning essay by David Graeber: “On the Invention of Money – Notes on Sex, Adventure, Monomaniacal Sociopathy and the True Function of Economics”: https://bitly.com/</p>

3/26	Discussion of <i>Liquidated</i> Fifth writing exercise ... (How would you improve Ho?)	Karen Ho, <i>Liquidated</i> (all) Zadie Smith, "Fail Better" (pdf on course website)
4/2	Every time you make a typo, the errorists win. Editing, Layering, and Self-Reflexivity	Nice wiki on reflexivity/history http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reflexivity_(social_theory) Special Issue CS-CMon Reflexivity (TOC) http://csc.sagepub.com/content/11/2.toc Goodall, "Deep Play in a Poker Rally" (pdf on course website) Novelists' Rules for Writing http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/feb/20/ten-rules-for-writing-fiction-part-one http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/feb/20/10-rules-for-writing-fiction-part-two
4/9	The Future of Narrative in an Electronic Age	Ana Menéndez: The Future of Narrative (pdf on course website) Carl Zimmer on science writing, blogs, ebooks, etc. http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/primate-diaries/2011/12/20/carl-zimmer-part-two/
4/16	Success inside and outside of the Academy Wrap-Up and the Future ... 	Goodall, WQI, Chapters 5 & 6 Goodall, "Casing the Academy for Community" (pdf on course website) David Foster Wallace on postmodern life http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwS5pEfcQNk
4/23	DUE: FINAL PRESENTATIONS AND PROJECTS	Leonard Cohen: "Forget your perfect offering, there is a hole in everything, it's how the light gets in."

