

Writing Nonfiction

ENGL 135

Spring 2026 Section 01 Hybrid 4 Unit(s) 01/22/2026 to 05/11/2026 Modified 01/26/2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Brook McClurg

Email: brook.mcclurg@sjsu.edu

Office: FOB 114

Phone: Office Phone: (408) 924-4047

Office Hours: 12-1:30pm M/W and by appointment. All times available via Zoom or in person. Office: FOB 114.

Course Information

Class Time: 1:30pm-2:45pm Mon. and Wed.

Classroom location: **Engineering Building 303**

Course Description and Requisites

Advanced creative writing workshop in literary nonfiction. Study of legacy and contemporary models. Course may be repeated for credit for up to 12 units.

Prerequisite(s): ENGL 71, ENGL 100W, ENGL 105, ENGL 129 or instructor consent.

Letter Graded

Classroom Protocols

Participation: To qualify as participation, you are expected to come to class having read the readings/assignments due that day. You should be prepared to listen carefully to your peers, ask questions, and offer your own insight. Your input is important to the class.

Workshop Submissions: You will have (3) workshop submissions this semester. Given the number of students in this class, we will employ a small group workshop model. You will upload your piece to the discussion board thread on the Friday before we are to engage in workshop (by 11:59pm). Since our workshops are on Wednesdays this semester, this will give your peers a few days to read your work and prepare comments. (**Submissions should be Word doc or PDF ONLY.**) No Google docs! If you create in Google docs, be sure to convert it prior to submission. Works turned in in the wrong format will be late until they are fixed and resubmitted.

Peer Review: We will be responsible for reading and commenting on the work of your peers. You must be present to engage in workshop and you will have prepared in advance. In a typical workshop, we would annotate the document and write a letter of approximately 1/2 to 1-page responding to the work. Your critique should include both positive and critical comments. You should approach this rhetorically, however, and present the information as carefully as you would wish your own feedback to be. We will discuss strategies and Best Practices to aid you with this. You will upload your response notes to the discussion board thread before our workshops. (**Submissions should be Word doc or PDF ONLY.**)

Reading Responses: You will write two posts per week for 12 of the weeks in this semester; one that is your response to the readings, and one response to your classmates. (There are 16 total weeks of class. You can decide which weeks you won't comment.) I will count your best 10 (comment and response) toward a grade. These responses can be about **ANY** of the readings for class **but MUST be posted by 11:59pm the night before we discuss that work in class** (e.g. If you wish to discuss something we are going to discuss Monday, you should be posting by 11:59pm Sunday evening).

Attendance: SJSU does not currently penalize for missing classes, nor will I. However, given that your participation is so vital to this course, you are expected to show up to each scheduled class. You should expect nonattendance to lessen your participation grade, for obvious reasons. Any assignments/activities given in those meetings cannot be made up at a later date. It is your responsibility to contact a classmate for notes. There is no need to contact me about missed assignments or readings as they are all outlined in Canvas.

Assignments: All assignments are due by 11:59 pm on the day they are assigned unless otherwise noted by me. (Note: Peer review notes are due before class.)

Late Assignments: Due to the nature of this course--namely, that for workshop you must show up with work to be reviewed, and prepared to review someone else's work--it matters that your stories and notes are submitted on time. Stories or assignments turned in late receive a 10% deduction per 24-hour period.

Conduct: Writing is a vulnerable exercise, doubly so at the beginning levels, and triply in a Nonfiction context. Everything we discuss in class will be handled with the utmost respect and care. You will likely read work that deals with sensitive and/or controversial topics. We will handle these as carefully as we would like our own work to be treated. A creative writing course is unique in the world of academia--indeed the world at large--in that we often share thoughts, views and life experiences, that are most important to us. We will all work together to create an atmosphere that is welcoming and inclusive for all.

Accommodations/Assistive Tech: If you need any special accommodations or assistance in technology due to disability, you should contact the Accessible Education Center and me.

Academic integrity: Your commitment as a student to learning is evidenced by your enrollment at San Jose State University. The Academic Integrity Policy F15-7 requires you to be honest in all your academic course work. **For this class, this includes absolutely no use of any AI or generative text apps or programs, unless discussed with me; your personal and original writing is fundamental to the work in this course.** Faculty members are required to report all infractions to the office of Student Conduct and Ethical Development. Visit the Student Conduct and Ethical Development website for more information.

Title IX Disclosure and Mandatory Reporter Status: In this course, the topic of sex (including sexual misconduct/sexual violence) may emerge either purposefully or inadvertently in readings, films, class discussions or other class materials. We recognize that such topics may be particularly upsetting for some; we encourage all students to seek the support they need. While making personal connections with the topics studied in any course can be a meaningful and important endeavor, please be aware of the following policy regarding confidentiality and disclosures of incidents of sexual misconduct/sexual violence.

As your instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help maintain a safe learning environment on our campus. In the event that you choose to write, speak or otherwise disclose information about having experienced sexual misconduct/sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking and specify that this violence occurred while you or the perpetrator were a SJSU student, federal and state laws require that I, in my capacity as a “responsible employee,” must notify SJSU’s Title IX and Gender Equity Officer. The Title IX and Gender Equity Officer will contact you to inform you of your rights and options and connect you with support resources, including possibilities for holding accountable the person who harmed you. Please be advised that you will not be forced to share information and your level of involvement will be your choice.

In Nonfiction workshops, we take for granted that the things being written about are true, which can possibly trigger the need for your professor to report to the above office in ways that fictional writings might not require. There are other craft elements, too, at your disposal, such as the use of second or third person POV, or aliases, and many more. These are useful tools that communicate clearly that this work is not about you (the author), and that you are not in any such distress. I say all of this in the spirit of meeting three concurrent allegiances: 1) I would like to connect anyone in distress with the resources that they need; 2) I am required by the school to do so if I learn of it; AND 3) I would also like this workshop to be a safe space for you to write about the subjects you’d like—both the easy and the complicated—without the need for further follow up that a student might not desire. Please see me if you would like further clarification.

This syllabus is subject to change throughout the semester.

Program Information

The following statement has been adopted by the Department of English for inclusion in all syllabi: In English Department Courses, instructors will comment on and grade the quality of student writing as well as the quality of ideas being conveyed. All student writing should be distinguished by correct grammar and punctuation, appropriate diction and syntax, and well-organized paragraphs. The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as 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.

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a +(plus) or -(minus) grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO)

Upon successful completion of an undergraduate degree program in the Department of English and Comparative Literature, students will be able to:

1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric.
2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature.
3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject.
4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively.
5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts, including structures of power.

Department Information:

Department Name: English and Comparative Literature

Department Office: FO 102

Department Website: www.sjsu.edu/english (<https://www.sjsu.edu/english>)

Department email: english@sjsu.edu (<mailto:english@sjsu.edu>)

Department phone number: 408-924-4425

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area C2: Humanities

Area C Arts and Humanities courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. C2 Humanities courses encourage students to analyze and appreciate works of philosophical, historical, literary, aesthetic, and cultural importance.

GE Area C2 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a C2 course, students should be able to:

1. analyze and understand works of philosophical and humanistic importance, including their temporal and cultural dimensions;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such texts;
3. analyze and assess ideas of value, meaning, and knowledge, as produced within the humanistic disciplines; and
4. research and write effective analyses of works of the human intellect and imagination

Writing Practice: Students will write a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

[Your course books are available at our campus bookstore. \(https://sjsu.bncollege.com/course-material-listing-page?bypassCustomerAdoptions=true\)](https://sjsu.bncollege.com/course-material-listing-page?bypassCustomerAdoptions=true) Feel free to buy them elsewhere, if you prefer.

[Crying in H Mart: A Memoir](#)

By zauner, michelle

Edition : 21

Publisher : PENG RAND

ISBN 13 : 9780525657743

[BRUJA](#)

By ortiz

Edition : 25

Publisher : UCP

ISBN 13 : 9780810148567

[Predator: A Memoir, a Movie, an Obsession](#)

By monson, ander

Edition : 22

Publisher : MAC HIGHER

ISBN 13 : 9781644452004

[Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative](#)

By gornick, vivian

Edition : 01

Publisher : MAC HIGHER

ISBN 13 : 9780374528584

All other texts for this course will be found in Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

The assignments for this course will give you experience writing in several Nonfiction sub-genres, and in all phases of the writing process, including: prewriting, writing, revising, and editing. You will receive feedback from your peers and from your instructor, which you are welcome to take into account during your revision process. You are not required to.

The readings for this course have been curated for the beginning writer, with ideas of breadth and inclusion in mind. My hope is to introduce you to a broad range of styles, voices, and subject matter. This will help you along the path of creating your own distinct writerly voice.

Assignments Overview: You will create three original works, one of which will be revised significantly by the end of the semester. You will engage in peer review of these creative works to assist you in those revisions. You will also respond to the readings that we do each week, which will help inform our in class conversations. In lieu of a final exam, you will construct a portfolio of your best work for submission.

| Unit | Project Name | CLO | Word Count | % of grade |
|------|-----------------------------------|-------|------------|------------|
| 1 | Submission 1 (Flash) | 1,2,4 | 500-1000 | 5% |
| 2 | Submission 2 (Narrative) | 1,2,4 | 1500-2000 | 10% |
| 3 | Submission 3 (Essay or Reportage) | 1,2,4 | 1800-2500 | 10% |

| | | | | |
|--------|--|---------|---------|------|
| 1-3 | Peer Reviews, Drafts, Conferences (3 @ 5% each) | 3,4 | 200-300 | 15% |
| 1-3 | Reading Responses (24 total required. I will score your best ten of each (reading response and reply to peers). | 1,2,3,4 | 150-300 | 20% |
| 3 | Participation (In class work & discussion) | 1,2,3 | N/A | 15% |
| 3 | Final portfolio: -Revision of Unit 2 or 3 Submission -Statement of Developing Aesthetic -Example of your best peer Review -Example of your best Reading Response | 1,2,3,4 | | 25% |
| Totals | | | | 100% |

Workload and Credit Hour Requirements: Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of 45 hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course-related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, and clinical practice. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

All works should be:

- In **12 pt. font**, preferably TNR, or a similar, easily readable text.
- Double-spaced** (unless it is an important craft element for it not to be so)
- Each page should be **numbered** to aid in our analysis of it(!).
- Have **your name** somewhere on the first page
- Any work short of the minimum word count will lose points.
- Late Assignments lose 10% per day for every day they are late. (If it's due at 11am, it is late and loses 10% at 11:01, and loses 20% by 11:01 the following day, etc.)

✓ Grading Information

Breakdown

| Grade | Range |
|-------|----------|
| A+ | 96%-100% |
| A | 93%-95% |
| A- | 90%-92% |
| B+ | 87%-89% |
| B | 83%-86% |
| B- | 80%-82% |
| C+ | 77%-79% |
| C | 73%-76% |
| C- | 70%-72% |
| D+ | 67%-69% |
| D | 63%-66% |
| D- | 60%-62% |
| F | <59% |

Assessing creative work can be different from other academic work. Here is generally how I will be grading your creative pieces:

A = Meets the minimum requirements of the prompt and is publishable with minor revisions.

B = Meets the minimum requirements of the prompt but needs more significant revisions.

C = Meets the minimum requirements of the prompt but needs substantial revisions.

D = Does not meet the minimum requirements of the prompt and is incomplete.

F = Nothing submitted for this assignment.

Your reading responses and peer feedback will be graded based on the quality of the input, the insightfulness of the critique and criticism, as well as the ability to present these in a manner that feels supportive to those receiving them. (We will spend time in class discussing best practices for how to do this.)

There is no extra credit for course.

As mentioned above, all late work loses 10% per day. For obvious reasons, you must be in class to get participation points.

Note: You must pass with a C- or better for credit.

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Spring 26 WEEKLY SCHEDULE

| Week | Date | Monday | Date | Wednesday |
|------|------|--------|------|-----------|
| 1 | 1/26 | | 1/28 | |

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|---|------|---|------|--|
| | | <p>Introductions</p> <p>Review Syllabus/Structure of this course</p> <p>Discussion - CNF timeline/origins/A Brief History of the genre and changes over time</p> <p>Opening writing exercise : your hometown.</p> | | <p>Discussion: Differentiating Autobiography, Memoir, Modes and Genre & Writing: Abbreviated forms.</p> <p>Read (in class): "A Taxonomy of Nonfiction" by Babine; Excerpts of "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold." Talese; "When New Journalism was New" Talese</p> <p>Read (at home): The Situation and the Story by Gornick (pp 3-26)</p> |
| 2 | 2/02 | | 2/04 | |
| | | <p>Discussion: Flash Readings</p> <p>Read: <i>Crying in H Mart</i> by M. Zauner (pp. 1-75)</p> <p>Writing: First memory, still life.</p> <p>NOTE: Turn in Fri. 2/6 by midnight for workshop 2/11! Flash Forms, max 1,000 words</p> | | <p>Discussion: A primer on shapes and forms: Flash, Braids, Hermit Crabs/False Documents, Narrative Shapes, Review of some examples.</p> <p>Read: Flash works in class</p> <p>Writing exercise: TBD</p> |
| 3 | 2/09 | | 2/11 | Workshop Round #1 |
| | | <p>-Discussion: Rules for workshop: Standard or otherwise? (group discussion and vote)</p> <p><i>Read: Crying in H Mart</i> by M. Zauner (pp. 76-150)</p> | | <p>Workshop</p> <p>Turn in your notes to Canvas prior to class.</p> <p>-Event on campus: Two-Minute Play Workshop</p> |
| 4 | 2/16 | | 2/18 | Round #2 Workshop begins |

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| | | <p>Discussion: Elements of Narrative Storytelling</p> <p>Read (in class): "The Fourth State of Matter" by J. Beard (Canvas)</p> <p>Read: <i>Crying in H Mart</i> by M. Zauner (pp. 151-240)</p> | | <p>Workshop</p> <p>Read: The Situation and the Story by Gornick (pp. 89-156, On Memoir)</p> |
| 5 | 2/23 | | 2/25 | |
| | | <p>Discussion: On Writing Characters and POV - Choices, limits, implications.</p> <p>Writing: Flat and Round Characters.</p> <p>Read: <i>Predator: A Memoir, a Movie an Obsession</i> by A. Monson (pp. 1-60).</p> | | Workshop |
| 6 | 3/02 | | 3/04 | |
| | | <p>Discussion: Your truth, Their Truth and the Truth: When Competing versions arise.</p> <p>Read: <i>Predator: A Memoir, a Movie an Obsession</i> by A. Monson (pp. 61-120).</p> | | <p>No Class Meeting (due to AWP)</p> <p>(Online activity in lieu of class will be provided.)</p> |
| 7 | 3/09 | | 3/11 | |

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|----|------|---|------|--------------------------|
| | | <p>Discussion: Writing Childhood</p> <p>Read: <i>Predator: A Memoir, a Movie an Obsession</i> by A. Monson (pp. 121-180).</p> <p>Writing: Writing in two time perspectives.</p> | | Workshop |
| 8 | 3/16 | | 3/18 | |
| | | <p>Discussion: The Personal Essay & Writing Place</p> <p>Writing: Seeing anew.</p> <p>Read: <i>Predator: A Memoir, a Movie an Obsession</i> by A. Monson (pp. 181-220).</p> | | Workshop |
| 9 | 3/23 | | 3/25 | Round #3 Workshops begin |
| | | <p>Discussion: To Essai - What does an essay do? Brief history of</p> <p>Read: <i>Predator: A Memoir, a Movie an Obsession</i> by A. Monson (pp. 221-270); <i>The Situation and the Story</i> by Gornick (pp. 89-156, On the Essay)</p> | | Workshop |
| 10 | 3/30 | | 4/01 | |

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|----|------|--|------|------------------------|
| | | Spring Break This week | | Spring Break This week |
| 11 | 4/06 | | 4/08 | |
| | | <p>Discussion: The Prose Lyric- on losing linearity</p> <p>Writing: Time and framing.</p> <p><i>Bruja</i> by W. Ortiz (pp. 1-75).</p> | | Workshop |
| 12 | 4/13 | | 4/15 | |
| | | <p>Read: <i>Bruja</i> by W. Ortiz (pp. 76-125).</p> <p>Reportage/Magazine/True Crime</p> <p>ICR Read: "The Falling Man" by Junod, "What Happens There" by D'agata</p> <p>Discussion: Ethics of Writing Creative Nonfiction</p> <p>Special topics in CNF: Dialogue, writing others, writing disabilities</p> <p>Writing: Different techniques for dialogue.</p> | | Workshop |
| 13 | 4/20 | | 4/22 | Workshop Round #3 |

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| | | <p>Discussion: Framing of Events</p> <p>Read: <i>Bruja</i> by W. Ortiz (pp. 126-175).</p> <p>Read (in class): "Alive" by Drummond (Canvas) "The Body in Room 348" (Canvas); "The Fact of a Body" (excerpt) by Marzano-Lesnavitch (Canvas)</p> <p>Writing: On Proximity to people/events.</p> | | Workshop |
| 14 | 4/27 | | 4/29 | |
| | | <p>Discussion: Writing Travel & Eco-concerns; Reviewing the review.</p> <p>Read: <i>Bruja</i> by W. Ortiz (pp. 176-238).</p> <p>Discussion: What Makes this good (art vs. magazine writing)? Considering different blogs, reviews, articles.</p> <p>Writing: Food/Music/Art review</p> | | Workshop |
| 15 | 5/04 | | 5/06 | |

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| | | -Basics of Publishing & Submissions -Course Final is a portfolio turn-in due TBD via email. Details forthcoming. -A class reading (public or private, as the class decides) Final TBD. | | -A class reading (public or private, as the class decides) and submission party. Course Final is a portfolio turn-in. Tentatively due May 15th by 3pm. |
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*In all three of your workshops, you should feel free to write in any form that we study this semester. While I have labeled the various workshops, "Narrative" or "Essay," it is because this is our primary object of study for that unit. You can mix and match as you see fit.