

English 5302
Creative Writing—Memoir
Fall 2020

Instructor: Dr. Laura Payne

Email: lbutler@sulross.edu

Office: MAB 114

Phone 432.837.8744/8151

Cell: 432.386.0554

Hours: (by appointment)

English 5302 is an advanced, graduate-level nonfiction, memoir-writing course. We will explore the limits of our creative and technical abilities in order to improve our craft, as well to further our critical thinking skills and pedagogies through discussions and analysis of our and our colleagues' work. The workshop will, of course, function as an academic course, which dictates the approach we take to writing and workshop. In essence, the course will focus on improving writing techniques (and subsequent products thereof) through documented methodologies while also examining and learning to clearly discuss these methods. After all, I hope that you will ultimately feel qualified and drawn toward the teaching of writing in your professional lives. This course will help you on the way.

The actual writing for this course is focused on manuscript workshop and revision, and how invention can and, indeed, should dictate both. The course will explore foundations of the memoir through the reading and discussion of masters in this increasingly popular genre. Finally, the course will examine and delve into the techniques of invention as central forays into the creation of nonfiction, memoir, of truthful storytelling.

I make the assumption that you are working on projects, either long or short, as we embark upon the course. We will begin with invention techniques and readings immediately, then move to drafting and workshopping and discussing directions we might take in order to revise and create/recreate improved versions. Then, we will explore how invention techniques, study of the masters, and consideration of writers' own discussion on craft so often found in these books can serve as openings for thoughtful and successful writing.

I have chosen texts I hope will prove helpful reading for serious memoir writers—especially those writers pursuing craft through academic channels. I have also chosen to mix texts on writing nonfiction as well as classic and contemporary (even a “popular” memoir) so we may gain a complete picture of the field as well as further our own opportunities to create and improve. You might recognize these writers for their mixed-genre writings, rather than just for subsequent nonfiction approaches, but the insight into nonfiction writing these texts provide should prove inspiring and instructive.

Course Goals and Objectives:

Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course the students will be able to:

1. Improve nonfiction writing using documented methodologies.
2. Apply these methodologies to the critical examination of the students' own and their peers' manuscripts.
3. Increase confidence in their ability to teach writing in their professional lives.
4. Identify and describe methodologies for improving memoir writing.
5. Describe how to use "invention" techniques to construct a manuscript workshop.
6. Describe how to apply these methodologies to create a successful composition and revision strategy.
7. Describe the foundations of the memoir and identify several masters of the nonfiction form.
8. Discuss how the masters' own discussions of the writing craft can serve as openings for thoughtful and successful composition and revisions.
9. Understand and articulate what makes memoir a unique art form and genre in the realm of prose publication.
10. Pursue publication of completed work.

Required Texts:

Julian Barnes. *Levels of Life*.

Sandra Cisneros. *A House of My Own*.

Zora Neale Hurston. *Dust Tracks on the Road*.

Mary Karr. *Lit*.

Anne Lamott. *Bird by Bird*.

Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola. *Tell It Slant*.

Bryan Stevenson. *Just Mercy*.

Michelle Obama. *Becoming*.

First Class and Beyond:

On the first day of class, I will post opening/welcoming remarks and suggestions for getting started in the course. On subsequent days, please check announcements for instructions, lectures, and answers to class questions/clarifications to the course, which will also be posted approximately each class day as needed appropriate (i.e. Monday-Friday). This is also where I offer written lectures and advice, so checking it is essential. I will be “off-line” on the weekends, which will begin by 12 p.m. Fridays and continue until 12 p.m. Mondays. If you have a major issue, either text or call my cell—if I do not answer, leave a message and I will call back. Simple questions can generally be answered quickly via text (oh, how the world has changed since I was a grad student!).

Coursework:

****Please note that you should write attached assignments in Microsoft Word or a pdf to ensure we may all utilize them. Let me know if you experience technical issues, and I will help you access help—we now have 24-hour BB assistance via SHSU (their number is listed on the main BB page). Blackboard only works best in Firefox, Safari, or Chrome (rather than Explorer).****

Major Assignments: Students are responsible for all assignments in this course and must satisfactorily complete all major assignments in English 5302 to receive a passing grade.

<i>Major Assignment</i>	% of Final Grade
Journal	20%
First Manuscript	20%
Second Manuscript	20%
Final Examination	20%
Discussion Boards	20%
Total Points	100%

The vast majority of this course will be completed via the writing and “discussion” of memoir and craft. We will read and write about selections from the required text for the course. You are expected to participate fully in a completely engaged manner and will be held accountable for your participation, both in formal and informal forums, throughout the completion of the course’s work. All of your participation must be thoughtful, sincere, and tactful. In the pursuit of these goals, we will write two memoir manuscripts.

You will also complete a course journal that will hold course materials generated this semester. The course journal will consist of only assigned writings in the form of “elements,” the prompts for which are listed in the syllabus. You will participate in directed discussion boards, which will answer and/or bounce off discussion prompts as directed in the syllabus. These also serve as the class participation component of the course, as they mirror the reading schedule. Discussion boards will influence the course grade as significantly as the manuscripts. Finally, you will write a timed final examination in essay form, which pulls together the work from the semester.

****I expect your coursework to mirror the time you would take with this course if it were an onsite course. Thus, you should spend approximately three hours a day working on this course, with additional time for formal reading and writing assignments determined by your personal pace.**

Detailed Assignment Description:

Discussion Boards—The discussion boards allow us to speak to one another. Think of the discussion boards as the “cyber” equivalent of sitting in a seminar room with one another and talking about our readings, writings, thoughts and reactions to the coursework. The first discussion boards will ask you to do just this. Please answer in detailed manners, using examples and analysis of the why and how of your answers. The posts must be approximately three to five hundred words. Responses to posts should be approximately one to two hundred words. The discussion boards will improve our teaching and practice of methodologies of fiction and poetry, and theories on and about fiction and poetry through improved abilities to articulate your growing knowledge-base and expertise in the field of creative writing.

Readings—The readings for the course involve two valuable types of writing: (1) nonfiction-memoir by masters of literature and (2) theoretical writing about nonfiction writing and literary analysis as determined by the text. Thus, we will be able to read great and varied examples of literature as a way to model techniques while also glimpsing the craft of writing via those masters. This allows us to increase confidence in our writing and analytic abilities as a way into our writing and ultimate teaching of writing. All great writers read. Reading serves as a primary and crucial step toward developing our skills.

First Memoir Manuscript—The first manuscript will ask you first to write a traditional memoir based on narrative design and clear themes, chronology, and personal, anecdotal evidence developed via concrete, sensory details. The memoir will mirror fiction in that it will feature scenes and characters, as well as a narrative arc. The memoir will be an original piece of yours in which you indeed attempt to develop techniques of the form. The story will be typed, in Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 10-15 pages in length, and utilize MLA style.

Second Memoir Manuscript—This assignment will mirror the first except that it will focus itself as a literacy narrative (i.e. a memoir about language, communication, writing).

Course Journal—The course journal will consist of prompts which ask you to journal about what you read, analyze techniques authors use when writing, or to expand your own ideas for course writings. The goals of journal exercises are to facilitate clear understanding of literature and writing as well as develop your abilities to write freely and with confidence. Obviously, the responses are as valuable as the effort put into them. Please feel free to use any of the notebook exercises as inspirations for further, more formal assignments—they are meant to be such. **I will evaluate your effort on these exercises once, at the end of the course. It will be turned in as a single Word attachment.** But please write the exercises as they are due—this will maximize their success for your endeavors. Each entry should be a minimum of 300 to 500 words. The precise prompts are listed in the syllabus per selected class day.

Final Examination—The final examination will pull together the key ideas and aspects of the memoir form and of your own writing. That is, I will ask you to write fully-developed essays that explore key concepts and personal analyses of the session's work. The goal of this assignment is to apply our discussions and growing skills in analysis of nonfiction, the readings of such, and your writing skills. It will also measure your ability to pull together the session's significant ideas comprehensively and clearly.

Late Work: All major assignments and/or projects, etc. are due on the dates assigned by midnight, unless otherwise noted. You are responsible for all assignments in this course and must complete all required work in English 5302 to receive a passing grade.

Late assignments will receive a full letter grade deduction for being late. This means, if you turn in your assignment late and it receives a B, it automatically will be reduced to a C. Please contact me early if you are experiencing challenges so we may make arrangements. Strong communication with faculty is key, especially in graduate studies and especially in an online environment.

Attendance: As this is a web-format literature/writing course, consistent participation is absolutely necessary. Remaining current with the course schedule and taking part during the expected due dates will not only keep you personally engaged, but also will ensure that other participants of the course can benefit from your thoughts, ideas, and reactions toward the reading and writing assignments. *If you miss due dates, I will not expect others in the class to consider your work in arrears. Late work will result in an automatic ten points being taken off your grade; thus, if you received a B on an assignment, it will be reduced to a C. I do not accept any late work for this course after the final exam period has ended.*

****Please note that this course is an online format which necessitates that students complete discussion boards and major assignments on the day on which the assignments are made due. Thus, discussion boards must be posted by midnight on Tuesdays and responses be posted by midnight on Thursdays. This will ensure that**

the course's discussions move forward timely and with minimum inconvenience to your fellow students. After I have graded each discussion board, you may not redo or make it up. Thus, if you miss the assignment (i.e. I have posted a 0 in the grade book), you will not be able to make it up and will lose the credit. If I have graded your posts with a partial grade due to its being incomplete, you may not complete it. Please move on to the next assignment.

Grading Scale:

Percentages and Grade Equivalents:

A= 90-100% B=80-89% C=70-79% D=60-69% F=59% or below

Disabilities Statement: Persons with disabilities that may warrant academic accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that we may make arrangements to ensure the most hospitable and enhancing (cyber) learning environment as possible.

Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request for accessibility services. Students seeking accessibility services must contact Counseling and Accessibility Services, Ferguson Hall, Room 112. The mailing address is P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832. Telephone: 432-837-8691.

Academic Ethics: It is the responsibility of students and instructors to help maintain scholastic integrity at the University by refusing to participate in or tolerate scholastic dishonesty. Any student who represents someone else's work as his or her own will automatically receive a zero for that assignment, which will likely result in a failure for the course. Plagiarism can be purposeful or inadvertent, but either results in an unacceptable and unethical academic performance. Plagiarism will most likely result in a failure for the course.

A Writer's Reference: I strongly recommend all students and instructors of writing and literature own and utilize Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*. It is a sound, credible, and particularly usable stylebook.

Distance Education Statement: Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as Smarthinking, library resources, such as online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website. Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires secure login information to verify students' identities and to protect students' information. The procedures for filing a student complaint are included

in the student handbook. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website.

Syllabus

Date	Assignment
------	------------

*****It is crucial that you check and read announcements daily, as this is where I write lectures and make course announcements and clarifications. Announcements scroll up from oldest to newest, so, if you have missed some days, please read through the dates (think social media feeds).**

Week One *read course introduction and policies

Discussion Board 1: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 1 of *Tell It Slant*.
From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

Journal Element 1: Execute two exercises from the “Try It” section in Chapter 1 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Two

Discussion Board 2: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Ch. 2 of *Tell It Slant*.
From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

Bird by Bird

Journal Element 2: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 2 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Three

*read Assignment: “Manuscript One”

Discussion Board 3: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 3 of *Tell It Slant*.
From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

Bird by Bird.

Journal Element 3: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 3 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Four

Discussion Board 4: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 4 of *Tell It Slant*.
From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

Dust Tracks in the Road

Journal Element 4: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 4 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Five

****Manuscript One Due!!!**

Discussion Board 5: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 5 of *Tell It Slant*.

From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

Dust Tracks in the Road.

Journal Element 5: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 5 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Six

Discussion Board 6: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 6 of *Tell It Slant*.

Just Mercy.

Journal Element 6: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 6 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Seven

Discussion Board 7: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 7 of *Tell It Slant*.

Just Mercy

Journal Element 7: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 7 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Eight

*read assignment “Manuscript Two”

Discussion Board 8: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 8 of *Tell It Slant*.

Lit.

Journal Element 8: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 8 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Nine

Discussion Board 9: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 9 of *Tell It Slant*.
From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

Lit.

Journal Element 9: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 9 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Ten

*****Manuscript Two Due!!!**

Discussion Board 10: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 10 of *Tell It Slant*.

From the *Tell It Slant* anthology—choose an essay

A House of My Own

Journal Element 10: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 10 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Eleven

Discussion Board 11: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 11 of *Tell It Slant*.

A House of My Own

Journal Element 11: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 11 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Twelve

Discussion Board 12: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Chapter 12 of *Tell It Slant*.

Levels of Life

Journal Element 12: Choose and write one exercise from the “Try It” section in Chapter 12 of *Tell It Slant*.

Week Thirteen

Discussion Board 13: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: Epilogue, *Tell It Slant*

Becoming.

Journal Element 13: Write the “Try It” exercise from the Epilogue.

Week Fourteen

Discussion Board 14: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: *Becoming.*

Journal Element 14: Discuss which of the memoir pieces (one long-form and one essay from the anthology) you enjoyed the most and which pieces (again, one long-form and one essay) you enjoyed the least. In this discussion, illustrate the aspects of each piece which lead to your determinations.

Week Fifteen

**Final Examination Due!!
Journal Due!!**

Discussion Board 15: Answer to the prompt as listed in Blackboard.

Readings: See the final examination assignment.

Journal Element 15: Pull the course together in terms of what you discovered about writing, about your life, about nonfiction as a genre and art form. In terms of your pieces, what were you most please with? What do you hope to continue to develop?
