ENGL 3200
Intermediate Creative Nonfiction

Required Texts:
NOTE: Materials for this class contain adult language and discuss adult situations.

Capote, Truman. *In Cold Blood*. Modern Library, 978-0375507908
Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Vintage, 1400078431
Haley, Alex *Roots*. Everyman’s, 978-1593154493
Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Vintage, 0679785892

There will occasionally be PDFs on WebCT/CourseDen. These are noted on your reading schedule.

Course Description:
This course is designed both to introduce you to the genre of creative nonfiction, complicate your notions of it as a genre, and to assist you in writing it—or writing against it.

Course Goals as Set by the Department:
Students will learn to write in the genres of poetry, short fiction, or creative nonfiction and become conversant with issues of technique in one of these disciplines. Students will develop an understanding of the defining characteristics one of these genres. Students will become more adept readers and writers as they consider model texts from a writer’s perspective. Students will learn to offer and receive constructive criticism in a public forum.

Assignments and Grades
Class participation: based on attendance and tardiness, preparation, willingness to talk, general attitude about the class and the work.

Journaling Assignments: When required (usually every other Wednesday), you’ll turn in at least 500 typed words in response to one of the prompts I’ll pass out. You may choose any on the list of prompts to develop; the journal is yours ultimately, your place to test and practice, and begin the pieces you’ll be workshopping and including in your portfolio. You’ll pass in your journals on loose sheets of paper or electronically; collect them in loose-leaf notebooks or in saved files you can email me. Journals are graded with a check plus (150 out of 100 points) and check (100/100 points) or a check minus (50/100 points). I save check pluses for work that really blows me away, so they’re very rare. I’ll pass out lists of prompts periodically in response to what I’m seeing as your interests or needs as writers/readers.

Response Work: We’ll start workshopping around the fourth week of the semester. This means you will be given essays by students in the course that you will need to analyze, discuss and write about. Your grade will be based on the depth, sincerity, tact, and usefulness of your response. Response letters are graded with a check plus (150 out of 100 points) and check (100/100 points) or a check minus (50/100 points). I save check pluses for critiques that really blow me away, so they’re very rare. In week three, you will receive a handout with instructions about the appropriate format for your response.

Midterm Portfolio: Your midterm portfolio allows you to tell me what skills you think would be most helpful for you to concentrate on, allows you to find examples where those skills are used well or badly (and to show you can discriminate between the two), and to work on those skills a little in your own pieces. Your midterm portfolio will include the following:

- a statement of at least 300 words describing what you see as the essential questions the genre (CNF) raises for you in your writing. These might be: how to represent people you know, how to balance telling the truth with being artful, how to remember dialogue, how to find material, etc.;
a statement of at least 300 words describing at least two skills that you’d like to work on this semester in order to help you with these questions: for instance, use of dialogue, use of metaphor, consistency of point of view, preciseness of language, and so forth. This description is not a list, but a rationale: what in your writing (in your journal or otherwise) leads you to believe this is an area you need to work on? You can cite passages from your own writing and your reading to support your reasoning;

a collection of at least three published pieces of creative nonfiction which are NOT on your syllabus that are either good examples or bad examples of ONE of the skills you’re interested in working on (you must include copies in your portfolio);

a single discussion of at least 300 words describing what, and how, all three might teach you something about THIS ONE SKILL that you could use in your own writing;

a collection of two revisions of journal entries that will use this ONE skill, moving them towards completed drafts. You don’t need to show you’ve already learned it; only that you’re working on it in these pieces. These revisions should each be at least 1000 words long (about three double-spaced pages).

Your midterm portfolio will be due Feb. 22 by 5pm.

Final Portfolio: This is a collection of

- at least three advanced drafts of your best pieces of creative nonfiction (for a total of at least twenty pages, or roughly 6,000 words). All work must be generated this semester for this class and revised in response to student and/or instructor feedback;
- Each piece must be accompanied by at least one early draft that shows significant revision in the advanced draft.
- You must include at least one set of response letters on one piece you included in your portfolio.
- You must write a summary of the contents of these letters, not to exceed 500 words.
- At least one of these pieces must have been workshopped in class.
- Your portfolio will also include a statement of analysis, not to exceed five pages or roughly 1,500 words, describing why you selected these pieces, what you think they show about your interests, what you think they do well, what you think they say about your weaknesses as a writer of CNF, and what you did in revision to improve each piece.

Your portfolio will be due at on the final day of class, and a ten-minute reading on that day from and/or discussion of your portfolio will constitute your final. We will not be meeting during your scheduled final.

Grades:
All work must be produced this semester for this course. I do not usually give extra credit. I use a standard, 10-point grading scale. I do not curve grades or drop low scores.

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