



Syracuse University

Project Advance

SUPA WRT 114

**Writing Culture: Introduction to Creative Nonfiction
Summer Institute Syllabus & Schedule**



July 11-15, 2022

Syracuse University, Hall of Languages, rm. 421

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What is this Document?

This document is your key to preparing for Summer Institute, including a schedule of our week together, a description of the work we'll be doing, a comprehensive reading list for each day of the seminar, and guidelines on how to prepare.

- For academic support or clarification on how to prepare for SI, please contact Ivy Kleinbart, ikleinba@syr.edu.
- For administrative support, information on obtaining graduate credits for SI, or to request accommodations of any kind, please contact SUPA's main office, 315-443-2404.
- If you have dietary restrictions or food aversions that we need to know about in planning our group lunch on Wednesday, please contact Sean Conrey (smconrey@syr.edu) and Ivy.

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Seminar Description

Writing creative nonfiction involves an intense process of excavation and interrogation of one's subject matter (which often includes the self). The essayist's challenge lies not only in choosing the "right" subject matter, but in figuring out how best to approach and present it: how to frame and structure the essay, what to talk about first, next, last, etc., what tone to adopt, what images to deploy, what details to include, which characters to draw into the spotlight, when to reflect or digress, and how best to locate and convey the truth. To be successful, the writer must develop an intimacy with the conventions of the genre, experiment broadly at the level of content and style, and share his/her writing with a community of supportive readers who can provide honest, thoughtful feedback.

Summer Institute offers an immersive experience in the study of creative nonfiction aimed at preparing you to introduce this complex genre to your own 11th and 12th graders. This course engages participants in a deep analysis of the genre and its many ethical and stylistic questions. We'll explore teaching methods and materials that will help you guide student writers in their creative processes. We'll read and analyze a wide sample of CNF literature as mentor texts, experiment with writing and revision exercises, practice responding to student writing, and develop writing and revision prompts, discussion questions, lesson plans, and other classroom materials that you can use when you teach this course. By the end of our week together, you'll be ready to draft your own syllabus for this course and teach it with confidence in your high school environment.

Summer Institute: Objectives

Teachers who participate in Summer Institute for WRT 114 will...

- Acquire an understanding of CNF genre conventions, ethical considerations, aesthetic possibilities, uses of research, and strategies for revising and developing creative nonfiction writing;
- Explore methods and approaches to teaching this genre and providing meaningful feedback and fair assessments to student writers;
- Become familiar with our shared SUPA WRT 114 syllabus, course structure, unit guidelines, and shared texts;
- Develop ideas for customizing your syllabus, and begin creating teaching materials for your course;
- Practice writing CNF in order to gain an intimacy with the creative process and its many challenges.

SUPA WRT 114 Course Texts

Tell It Slant functions as the main instructional text for this course. In addition to providing advice on the craft of creative nonfiction, this book offers a selection of writing prompts at the back of each chapter. Recommended usage: Units 1 and 2.

In Short is an anthology of flash nonfiction (2,000 words or less). These brief essays are useful in introducing students to a wide variety of voices and approaches to the genre of creative nonfiction, engaging them in the analysis of craft-related choices, and stimulating ideas for new essay topics. Recommended usage: Unit 1.

In Fact offers a diverse selection of lengthier creative nonfiction essays that will prove useful as students begin to think in more complex and sophisticated ways about the architecture of a sustained essay and the various types of research that might contribute to their own sustained writing projects. Recommended usage: Units 2 and 3.

Supplemental Essays from [*The Touchstone Anthology of Creative Nonfiction*](#), [*Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: I & II*](#), [*Telling True Stories*](#), [*The New Yorker*](#), [*Brevity Magazine*](#), and other sources will be used to support this course.

Summer Institute Schedule

Monday, 7/11	Tuesday, 7/12	Wednesday, 7/13	Thursday, 7/14	Friday, 7/15
<p>8:00-9:45 Orientation Breakfast at the Sheraton SU Hotel & Conference Center (801 University Ave.)</p> <p>10:00-4:30 Day 1 Summer Institute (Hall of Languages 421)</p>	<p>8:00-4:00 Day 2 Summer Institute (HL 421)</p> <p>4:00-6:00 SUPA Barbecue (Schine Student Center, Panasci Lounge, 403)</p>	<p>8:00-4:30 Day 3 Summer Institute</p> <p>11:45-2:45 SUPA group lunch + admin. talks (Sims 309)</p>	<p>8:00-4:00 Day 4 Summer Institute</p>	<p>8:00-2:00 Day 5 Summer Institute</p>

Writing Workshop

During Summer Institute, we'll focus on strategies for teaching creative nonfiction; however, I'll also ask you to participate in the writing and workshopping process yourself in order to gain a deeper understanding of your students' experiences in this course. It's my hope and belief that writing within the genre will better equip you to mentor students with challenges they may face during the writing process. As part of the writing/workshopping process, I'll ask you to share some of your writing in small groups and in a large-group read-around at the end of our week together.

What to Bring

Summer Institute is an intense experience, so I want to make sure you're physically comfortable and have everything you need in order to complete the course. Here are some things I recommend packing for the week:

- Comfortable, casual clothing (dress in layers—air temperatures vary from classroom to classroom, and some can be a little cool in July);
- Laptop + skinny notebook;
- Book bag big enough to carry 3-ring binder (supplied by SUPA) + books;
- Snacks (optional);
- Anything else you need to make yourself comfortable: i.e., stress balls, socks, chewing gum, framed photos of loved ones, mystical action figures, colored pencils, magic wand, etc., etc., etc.

Summer Institute Preparation Checklist

- Refer to [Preparation Guidelines for SI](#) for details on the following:
 - [Sign up](#) for the essays you'd like to present during SI by **Tues. July 5th**
 - Prepare [presentation for Monday, July 11th](#)
 - Prepare [presentation for Tuesday, July 12th](#)
 - [Post writing prompts](#) for Tuesday's session by **Mon. July 11th**, end of night
 - [Post discussion questions](#) for Wednesday's session by **Tues. July 12th**, end of night.
 - [Post discussion questions and prompts](#) for Thursday's session by **Wed., July 13th**, end of night.
- Make a list of 20 CNF topics you *might* like to write about at some point in your life. Use the readings to spark new essay ideas. Reflect on the people, places, and experiences that have shaped you, significant struggles or challenges, life-changing adventures, regrets, passions, desires, etc. What keeps you up at night? What's the story that you (and only you) can—and, ultimately, must—tell? What's the story you'll always be running away from until you write it in a way that satisfies you? Pay attention to memories that come flashing back as you read for SI. Browse the prompts in *Tell It Slant*. Consider your experiences as a teacher: for example, what has it been like to teach during this pandemic, to bear witness to a growing epidemic of school shootings, to adjust to changes in technology, or any other aspect of your experience? During SI, I'll ask you to choose a topic from your list to explore throughout the week. I won't ask to see your list, so don't censor yourself during the brainstorming process; give yourself the freedom to consider the widest possible range of subject matter, and don't worry if some of the items on your list are "throw-aways."
- Begin acquainting yourself with the books for this course. The reading list for SI only covers a small selection from these books. Mark any additional chapters or essays you might like to assign on your own syllabus.
- If your school has offered WRT 114 in the past, please check to see whether you'll be using copies of *Tell It Slant* 2nd edition or 3rd edition. If you need a copy of the 2nd edition, contact Ivy.
- Time permitting, you can begin acquainting yourself with the [syllabus and course structure for WRT 114](#). We'll go over all of this during SI. I just want you to know how to find these important documents so you can access them easily when it comes time to write your syllabus.



Detailed Schedule & Preparation Guidelines for Summer Institute

The books and supplemental readings you'll need to prepare for Summer Institute have been mailed to you at your home address. The following calendar for our week together contains links to digital copies of all our supplementary readings for SI and most of the readings from our shared course texts, as well as a selection of supporting documents to help with course planning. Before doing the readings for each session, read the section marked "How to Prepare." Please make a serious effort to complete all or most of these readings in advance of Summer Institute. In the past, teachers who have not adequately prepared have struggled to keep up with the seminar. There's just not enough time during Summer Institute to do all of this reading on site. If you have any questions about these instructions, please contact Ivy (ikleinba@syr.edu).



Monday, 7/11: Intro. To CNF & Flash Nonfiction (Unit 1)

10:00-12:30 Introductions to each other & to CNF (Genre, Ethics, and Craft)

We'll begin by discussing some of the ethical challenges and complexities involved in writing creative nonfiction. When you teach WRT 114, it will be important to have some readings on your syllabus that introduce students to the genre of CNF. Consider using any combination of the readings below on your own syllabus, or bring in another reading of your choosing that does similar work.

Readings for Mon. morning:

- Mimi Schwartz, [Memoir? Fiction? Where's the Line?](#) (course packet)
- Bret Lott, [Toward a Definition of Creative Nonfiction](#) (course packet)
- Lee Gutkind, [The Creative Nonfiction Police?](#) (*In Fact*, xix-xxxiii)
- Lauren Slater, [Three Spheres](#), *In Fact*, 3-23

How to Prepare:

The first three readings above (Schwartz, Lott, and Gutkind) explore the many complexities involved in telling "true stories." As you read these essays, annotate key passages that help you gain a better understanding of the genre. For example, how much, if any, leeway does the CNF writer have in bending the *actual* truth in order to render an emotional truth? What's the role of the imagination in this genre? Also consider: what challenges do you anticipate your students may face in attempting to reveal or confront complex or painful truths, and how might their processes of unearthing these truths pose challenges for you as a teacher? Finally, as you read Lauren Slater's essay, try to identify key passages where you see Slater making interesting choices in her approach to the ethics of truth-telling, revelation, and self-positioning. Annotate anything else that interests you about this essay.

1:30-4:30 The Basics of Craft + Flash Nonfiction

Unit 1 of WRT 114 focuses on a subgenre of creative nonfiction known as "flash nonfiction." Over the course of 4-5 weeks, your students will develop a [flash nonfiction portfolio](#) (approx. 10 pp. double-spaced). Your main focus as a teacher during Unit 1 will be to introduce students to the craft of writing creative nonfiction and to help them acquire the tools and skills they'll need to compose vivid and dynamic flash nonfiction pieces. During this session, we'll review some of the fundamental elements of the craft of creative nonfiction writing. Then, we'll analyze a range of flash

nonfiction pieces and examine how these writers render effective scenes and stories that manage to recreate emotional and visceral *experiences* for the reader.

Readings for Mon. afternoon:

Tell It Slant (TIS): beginning of ch. 12 (pp. 169-180), ch. 1-5 (pp. 3-67), & pp. 239-241, “Reading as a Writer”
Brian Doyle, [Leap](#), *TIS* 245-246
Paisley Rekdal, [The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee](#), *TIS* 270-273
Brent Staples, “The Coroner’s Photographs,” *TIS* 274-278

In Short:

Jerome Washington, [Blues Merchant](#), 85-86
Brenda Peterson, [Growing Up Game](#), 115-119
William Kittredge, [Interlude](#), 123-124
Vivian Gornick, [On the Street](#), 144-145
Stephen Dunn, [Locker Room Talk](#), 149-151
Gerry Sharp, [Falling Stars](#), 201-202

Supplementary Texts (see course packet):

Ryan Van Meter, [If You Knew Then What I Know Now](#)
Lance Larson, [The Bluest Eye](#)
Christina Tang-Bernas, [\’in-english\](#)
Hope Edelman, [Strong Men](#)
Sally Ashton, [Afternoon Affair](#)
Sabrina Hicks, [Twenty Minutes](#)

How to Prepare:

For our session together, please prioritize *TIS* ch. 12, “The Basics of Writing in Any Good Form.” Pay special attention to Miller & Paola’s explanation of scene construction. Read/skim *TIS* ch. 1-5 quickly (for the gist), and check out the prompts at the backs of the chapters. Basically, just start familiarizing yourself with this book and think about which introductory chapters you might assign. As you read the list of flash nonfiction pieces, notice & annotate the craft-related choices these authors make (as addressed in *TIS* ch. 12). Notice the range of subject matter, writing styles, and approaches to the genre. Consider which essays might resonate with your students. Finally, choose **one** of these pieces to analyze in greater depth and present when we meet for Summer Institute. Click [here](#) to designate your choice by July 5th.

In preparing your presentation, refer to *TIS*, pp. 239-240, “Questions for Reading as a Writer.” Choose 1 or 2 questions from this list that elicit interesting findings in context with your chosen essay, and use them to kick off our conversation (or lead with another question of interest). Also, tell us which, if any, chapters from *TIS* 1-5 you think would pair well with the piece you’ve chosen. This is a very low-key exercise, so please don’t let it stress you out! Your role will just be to set up our conversation and add any insights you’ve gained from “studying” this essay in depth. We’ll probably only have about 15-20 minutes to discuss each piece.

Tuesday, 7/12: The Personal Essay (Unit 2)

In Unit 2, students will write a single [sustained personal or lyric essay](#) (6-8 pp. double-spaced) over the course of 4-5 weeks. Just as WRT 114 becomes a little more challenging for students at this point in the course, it likewise becomes more challenging to teach. You'll need to learn how to mentor students in the development of this type of essay project and help them cultivate stronger peer editing skills so they can support each other with meaningful feedback on early drafts of their essays. With this in mind, our session on Tuesday will build on prior conversations about craft and ethics to focus on the special challenges and demands of composing lengthier CNF essays. In addition to analyzing a handful of personal essays, we'll discuss strategies for composing writing prompts aimed at nurturing the development of a single essay project, and we'll consider how best to respond to deeply personal student writing in ways that are supportive, honest, and constructive.

8:00-11:30 Intro. to The Personal Essay | Presentations

Our morning session will focus on some of the most challenging aspects of crafting personal essays, including concepts of movement, framing, structure, voice, and self-characterization. We'll analyze a collection of personal essays as mentor texts and examine the writer's craft-related choices and the effects of those choices.

Readings for Tues. morning:

TIS: ch. 8 (pp. 101-115), end of ch. 12 (181-187), & ch. 11 (pp. 151-166)

Supplementary Texts (see course packet):

Phillip Lopate, [On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character](#)

JoAnn Beard, [The Fourth State of Matter](#)

Adam Gopnik, [The Driver's Seat](#) ([or this version](#), if you prefer and don't hit a paywall)

Bernard Cooper, [Burl's](#)

In Fact:

Meredith Hall, "Shunned," 49-70

Jewel Parker Rhodes, [Mixed-Blood Stew](#), 382-394

How to Prepare:

Start with chapters 8, 12, & 11 in *Tell It Slant*, which will help ground your thinking about the personal essay. After you finish reading ch. 11, "The Particular Challenges of Creative Nonfiction," take about 20 mins. to write a brief (private) journal entry about your own challenges as a CNF writer. What emotional or ethical challenges do you struggle with, or what do you think would be hardest for you if you tried writing the essay you *really* needed to write? Use some of the vocabulary introduced in this chapter to structure your response. Please don't self-censor, as you will not be asked to share what you've written (unless you want to!).

Next, read the essay by Phillip Lopate and annotate take-aways on personal essay writing and the art of turning oneself into a character. [Lopate's essay is a high priority text](#). The remaining 5 readings (Beard, Cooper, Gopnik, Hall, and Rhodes) are personal essays, some of which you might like to assign on your Unit 2 syllabus. Read through these pieces and choose **one** to analyze in greater depth and present to the larger group. Click [here](#) to designate your choice by July 5th. Also, try drafting one writing prompt that grows out of your reading of each of these essays (so, 5 essays; 5 prompts). See [strategies](#) for composing writing prompts. [Post your prompts here](#) by July 11th, end of night.

In preparing your presentation, I'd like you to do two things: **1)** Spend a little time analyzing how the author seems to be "turning themselves into a character" (as Lopate says we must). Hint: try not to confuse the writer's [ethos](#), as established by their narrative voice, with their depiction of themselves as a *character*. See if you can

pinpoint specific places where the essayist creates a strong sense of themselves as a *protagonist*. How do they come across in these moments? What does their *character* say and do that reveals his/her personality, fears, obsessions, desires, motivations, etc.? 2) Take stock of what else interests you about this essay at the level of craft and ethics, and use these observations to reverse engineer a few discussion questions that you can present to the rest of us to open up the conversation. If you find it useful, you can refer back to *TIS* pp. 239-240. You can either print these questions for the group or create a Google doc that you can share with all of us.

12:30-4:00 Begin Syllabus Planning & Analyze Student Writing

After lunch, we'll finish our discussion on the personal essay, analyze a few sample student essays, and discuss approaches to providing feedback. We'll also do a little course planning before heading off to the SUPA barbecue.

Readings for Tues. afternoon:

Tell It Slant: Ch. 13, "The Writing Process and Revision" (193-201)

From Back of Course Packet...

Sondra Perl & Mimi Schwartz, [20 Ways to Talk about CNF](#)
sample student writing ([sample #1](#) & [sample #2](#))

How to Prepare:

Read *TIS* ch. 13, and browse through Perl & Schwartz's "20 Ways" piece. Then read and annotate the first two sample student essays at the end of your course packet, focusing on how you would give these students honest, generous, and constructive feedback. If you wish, you can wait until Monday night of SI to prepare for this part of our seminar. The reading load is very light, and it might make more sense to wait until after we've spent a full day discussing the genre before you consider how you'd respond to these sample student essays.

Wednesday, 7/13: The Lyric Essay (Unit 2)

The shared assignment for Unit 2 is labeled, "[The Personal/Lyric Essay](#)," so as to invite students to experiment with some of the new forms and modes of expression they'll learn in studying the lyric essay. Students aren't expected to write lyric essays, but by exposing them to new, surprising, and deliciously weird experiments with form and language, we're encouraging them to consider a wider range of possibilities for self-representation and allowing them stylistic freedoms that probably haven't been made available to them in previous ELA courses. So, in some ways, this is really the heart of the course!

Wednesdays' session will once again expand the boundaries of our thinking about CNF by showcasing possibilities for even more complex forms of movement, lyricism, and structure. We'll review Miller & Paola's chapter on the lyric essay, discuss pedagogical approaches to integrating the lyric essay into WRT 114, and analyze a handful of examples. We'll also hold a writing workshop so you can share your own work and practice responding to each other's writing in pairs or small groups.

8:00-11:30 The Lyric Essay

Reading List:

Tell It Slant: Ch. 9, "Innovative Forms" (pp. 119-132)

Ira Sukrungruang, "Because, the Ferguson Verdict," 279-281

In Short:

Charles Simic, [Three Fragments](#), 191-192
Gretel Ehrlich, [A Match to the Heart](#), 219-220
Jerry Ellis, [Into the Storm](#), 233-236

Supplementary Texts (see course packet):

Jill Lepore, [The Prodigal Daughter](#) (or [this version](#) if you prefer)
Christiane Buuck, [France in Twenty-Five Exposures](#)
Eula Biss, [The Pain Scale](#)

How to Prepare:

Read *TIS*, ch. 9, and then read and annotate the selection of lyric essays. Consider how each writer's formal, stylistic, and rhetorical choices function in the service of their content-level explorations and how these choices seem to curate a kind of *experience* for the reader. Please prioritize the three lengthier essays by Lepore, Buuck, and Biss. I've generated some [discussion questions](#) to launch our conversation on these essays. You do not need to answer these questions in advance of our conversation, but I invite you to preview them and consider them as you read. I'd also like to ask each person in the group to contribute one additional discussion question on each of these three essays in advance of our conversation on the 13th. You can add your questions to the charts at the bottom of my discussion questions.

11:45-2:45 Group Lunch & Admin. talks: Emily Beck & Sean Conrey (Sims 309)

If you have any dietary restrictions or profound food aversions, please let me know, so I can make sure we have food for you!

3:00-4:30 Small Group Workshop + Revision Heuristics

How to Prepare:

Bring some of your own writing to share with one or two other people in the seminar—something you might like to build on for our final read-around on Friday. This could be an early draft, and it doesn't need to be lengthy—say, 2+ pages? The more writing you can share, the easier it will be for another person to provide you meaningful feedback. Printed copies are ideal (and I think the Sheraton Hotel has a business center), but if that gets difficult in any way, maybe just plan to share a gDoc, or share digitally in whatever way works.

Thursday, 7/14: Writing About Culture & Literary Journalism (Unit 3)

During Unit 3 of this course, you'll have the choice to develop your own assignment or borrow/modify one of the sample assignments found [here](#). You may choose to develop an assignment around Writing about Culture or Literary Journalism, but please stick to teaching one assignment. Students will have approximately 5-6 weeks to compose this essay (6-8 pp. double-spaced). Unit 3 requires a few slight paradigm shifts. First, the writing will require a more outward-tending focus than was necessary in Units 1 and 2. If you choose to teach a literary journalism assignment, your students will need to conduct research, and they'll be working in a new subgenre of CNF that draws on slightly different conventions and poses new ethical dilemmas. We'll split our time on Thursday and discuss some of the different options for how you might approach Unit 3.

8:00-11:30 Writing about Culture

We'll start the day with a conversation on the many meanings and resonances of the term "culture," strategies for introducing this term to students, and ways of getting them to think more deeply about how their own experiences and identities have been culturally informed. We'll discuss ideas of culture in a few sample essays and brainstorm possibilities for building a culture unit that would leverage your teaching & research interests while also appealing to your students.

Readings:

John Edgar Wideman, "Looking at Emmett Till," *In Fact* 24-48

Meredith Hall, "Shunned," *In Fact* 49-70

Harrison Candelaria Fletcher, [Open Season](#) (*Brevity Magazine*)

Naomi Shihab Nye, [Thank you in Arabic](#) (course packet)

How to Prepare:

Preview [discussion questions](#) before reading the essays above. Then, as you read, annotate with these questions in mind and work to draft your own prompts and discussion questions in context with these essays. Submit discussion questions and prompts by Wednesday, July 13th, end of night.

12:30-4:00 Literary Journalism + Analysis of Student Writing

If you've never written journalism either at school or professionally, some of the concepts in this unit will be new to you, but as with any new genre, the best way to learn how to write or teach it is to spend time with a few mentor texts you admire and notice some of the specific moves and choices that make these essays so powerful.

The first seven readings below were excerpted from the book [Telling True Stories](#), which is not required for this course but is a great reference for teaching literary journalism. All of the craft essays in this book are very brief, as you'll see. I chose the selection below strategically to help support a unit on profile writing, but some of these short essays may also apply to other types of literary journalism. Please preview this [sample assignment on profile writing](#) to gain a context for the research and writing your students will do in this unit.

Readings (see course packet):

Isabel Wilkerson, [Interviewing: Accelerated Intimacy](#)

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, [Narrative J School for People who Never Went](#)

Jacqui Banaszynski, [Profiles](#)

Tomas Alex Tizon, [Every Profile is an Epic Story](#)

Jon Franklin, [A Story Structure](#)

Deneen Brown, [To Begin the Beginning](#)

Bruce DeSilva, [Endings](#)

Alissa Quart, [When Girls Will Be Boys](#) (or, [this version](#))

Alexis Okeowo, [Out of Bounds](#) (or, [this version](#))

ALSO: sample student [essay #3](#) & [essay #4](#) from the back of your course packet

How to Prepare:

Again, the first seven readings above (Wilkerson through DeSilva) are short craft readings intended to guide students through the process of conducting an interview and composing a profile piece. Read and annotate these pieces with an eye towards the useful practical advice they offer and the ethical considerations they pose

for the literary journalism writer. Then, read and annotate the sample profiles by Alissa Quart and Alexis Okeowo. Consider these [discussion questions](#) as you read.

The sample student writing can be read and annotated the night before our session together.

Friday, 7/15: Syllabus Construction & Guest Speakers

We'll wrap up our week together with an in-depth look at how to prepare your syllabus for WRT 114, a conversation with two experienced WRT 114 teachers, and a read-around at the end of our session in which you'll have the chance to share some of the writing that grew out of this week's work.

8:00-10:00 **Revision Unit & Syllabus Construction**

10:00-11:30 **Group Brunch + Guest Speakers**
Heather Roberts, Holland Patent High School
Melinda Breed, Fayetteville-Manlius High School

11:30-12:30 **Share Unit 3 Ideas**

How to Prepare:

Start brainstorming ideas for the assignment you might like to teach during Unit 3. Skim back over our reading list for Summer Institute, and consider which ones might fit well with the idea you have in mind. Also consider any additional essays you've discovered in *In Short*, *In Fact*, or *Brevity Magazine*. Try adding some of your ideas to the [Unit 3 Planning Chart](#) in advance of our conversation.

12:30-1:30 **Read-Around & Seminar Evaluations**