

## ENG 111: Blurred Boundaries in Creative Nonfiction

Room: South Hall 17

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### Required Texts:

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, Rebecca Skloot

*Lying*, Lauren Slater

*Blurring the Boundaries: Explorations to the Fringes of Nonfiction*, ed. by B.J. Hollars

Handouts available on Moodle

A reading journal

**Course Description:** Michel de Montaigne says, “Every man has within himself the entire human condition.” By fairly and accurately investigating the larger meaning of a personal experience, a nonfiction writer can speak to the universal. The nonfiction writer is, therefore, tasked with honesty in their pursuit of discovery and greater knowledge. Often we hear this described as a pact formed with the reader.

However, we also know that memory can be fallible. David Lazar asserts that “Nonfiction blends fact and artifice in an attempt to arrive at truth, or truths.” And he is not alone in making the claim that literary nonfiction requires some invention. Calling on memory for meaning may, at times, involve some imagination. So, then, where do the boundaries (if there are any) lie between fiction and nonfiction? What obligation does the nonfiction writer have to the reader? How does structure and form contribute to this discussion?

To join the conversation surrounding truth and reality in nonfiction, we must first understand what others are saying. In order to do this, we will read and analyze texts that may fit or defy the conventions of creative nonfiction as a genre. While investigating these texts, we will examine the choices each writer makes and consider why they might have made them. By reading actively, writing for different audiences, and participating in class discussions, we will hone our critical thinking skills while making and supporting our own claims regarding blurred boundaries in nonfiction. We will also be evaluating our own assumptions regarding writing strategies, memory, and fact along the way.

This course will also introduce you to college writing through a number of writing situations. Be prepared to write your way through this course. You will be expected to make complex arguments, thoughtfully reflect upon the writing process, and analyze texts with a keen eye. Beyond that, we will collaborate frequently on revision and perform generative writing to arrive at well-organized and well-supported essays. I encourage you to use this as an opportunity to challenge yourselves, discover new things, and take risks in your writing.

**Class Format:** We will meet twice a day, from 9:30-11 a.m. and 1:00 to 3p.m (after our initial 9:00 am meeting on the first day of class). The format of class sessions will include discussions, journal

responses, in-class writing assignments, writing workshops, and group activities. You are required to have a journal with notes on the readings, passages, questions for discussion, and/or ideas for your papers. Assigned reading and journal responses should always be done **before** class. This will prompt you to begin thinking critically about the reading prior to our class meetings, and it will allow you to identify important passages and questions to guide our discussions.

## Overview

**Participation:** This is a student-centered class, and our discussions require active participation to be successful. Since discussion will be an integral part of the course, you must be prepared for class, on time, offer productive discussion of the course readings, and show respect and sensitivity toward others. Preparation for each class meeting involves not only reading and re-reading the materials but also taking notes and completing journal responses. The degree to which this course will be satisfying and engaging depends largely on you. Participation in class discussion and workshops will contribute to your final grade.

**Short Writing Assignments and In-class Writing:** To grow as academic writers, we will complete many in-class writing activities, along with several short writing assignments. Exploring your thoughts in writing (pre-writing), participating in a number of writing situations, and contributing to a writing community through workshops and revision are all vital to your development as an academic writer.

**Essays:** You will complete three essays during the block. Leading up to each final draft, you will perform generative in-class writing, participate in workshops, and complete significant revisions. Workshops are not only an opportunity to help your peers with their work by offering thoughtful feedback, but they are also an opportunity to get ideas for approaching various writing tasks, to understand a wide range of rhetorical elements available for revision, and to practice assessing a piece of writing for its effectiveness.

We will go over specific prompts and rubrics in class (also found on Moodle). You will always know what is expected of you and how to complete an assignment.

**Oral Presentation:** Accompanying your final paper on the role of truth and reality in creative nonfiction, you will develop a 10 minute presentation (with two minutes for questions). You will need to adjust your final paper to reflect an understanding of the audience and situation.

### Grading:

Short Writing Assignments/In-class Writing:	15%
Participation:	15%
Essay One	15%
Essay Two	25%
Essay Three with Presentation	30%

## Policies and Procedures

**Attendance:** Because this is a collaborative class that relies on your participation, it is critical that you make a committed effort to attend every single class. You are allowed **two** unexcused absences

before it affects your final grade. Use common sense and save these for emergencies. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to obtain any notes from classmates and to check in on any announcements, information, or materials.

In order for any appearance in class to count each day, you must: be fully prepared for class (bring your journal with thoughtful responses and/or questions, read selections for the day, etc.), participate fully in all activities and discussions, and arrive on time. Cell phones should be turned off at the start of class. You will not need laptops or other devices in this course unless you have a documented learning disability that requires them. Texting or allowing your phone to go off during class demonstrates a lack of respect for your classmates' time and is harmful to a collaborative classroom. Texting during class will result in an absence for that day.

**Deadlines:** All assignments are due on the dates listed on the syllabus. This includes all drafts for workshops. Because this class moves quickly, I will not accept any late work. In-class activities may not be made up.

**Academic Honesty:** Cornell College holds students to a high level of academic integrity, so it is essential that we approach the work of others with respect and honesty. Remember to always quote and cite your sources — any work or idea produced by someone else — appropriately using MLA guidelines (The Cole library website includes information on MLA documentation).

You can find more information on Cornell's policy regarding academic honesty, including consequences for academic misconduct, here: <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/catalogue/academic-info/academic-honesty.shtml>.

**Accommodations:** Students who need accommodations for learning disabilities must let me know and provide proper documentation within the **first three days** of the block. For more information, see [cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml](http://cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/documentation/index.shtml).

**General Information:** Feel free to see me during office hours or by appointment to discuss the course, feedback, revision, or your work at Cornell generally. I am happy to address any questions or concerns you might have, so please don't hesitate to reach out.

**Class Schedule:** We will meet every day from 9:30-11 a.m. and 1-3 p.m. The schedule is subject to change. You must print all Moodle readings and bring them to class for discussion.

### **Week One**

Monday	11/24	AM: Introduction to Course  PM: bell hooks, "Critical Thinking" (in-class); Lee Gutkind, "What is Creative Nonfiction?" (Link found on Moodle)
Tuesday	11/25	AM: <i>They Say, I Say</i> , "Reading for the Conversation" (in-class); Sean Prentiss, "Eternal Sunshine of the Nonfiction Mind: A New Philosophy for Understanding Truth and Creative Nonfiction" (Moodle)  PM: Lauren Slater, <i>Lying</i> pages 1-106
Wednesday	11/26	AM: Lauren Slater, <i>Lying</i> pages 107-217; Introduce Essay One Prompt  Dartmouth: Writing for College  PM: No Class  Due: Summary of Conversation by 7 p.m.
Thursday	11/27	No Class
Friday	11/28	No Class

### **Week Two**

Monday	12/1	AM:  PM: Essay One Workshop
Tuesday	12/2	AM:  PM: Rebecca Skloot, <i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> pages 1-151; Introduce Essay Two prompt  Dartmouth: Coming up with Your Topic  Due: Essay One by 7 p.m.

Wednesday	12/3	AM: Groups meet with Jen Rouse (Research Discussion)  PM: Rebecca Skloot, <i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> pages 152-313; MLA Annotated Bibliography Discussion  Dartmouth: Developing Your Thesis
Thursday	12/4	AM: Research Conferences  PM: Research Conferences
Friday	12/5	AM:  PM:  Due: Annotated Bibliography by 7 p.m.  Dartmouth: Considering Structure and Organization

Note: You must have a draft of Essay Two sent to your group members and Shawn by noon on Sunday. Additionally, you must read and be prepared to discuss each essay by your designated workshop time.

### **Week Three**

Monday	12/8	AM: Essay Two Workshop with Shawn Doyle  Dartmouth: Attending to Grammar and Attending to Style  PM: Monica Berlin, "The Eighteenth Week" (Blurring the Boundaries)
Tuesday	12/9	AM: Essay Two Workshop with Shawn Doyle  PM:
Wednesday	12/10	AM: Naomi Kimbell, "Whistling in the Dark" (Blurring the Boundaries); Introduce Essay Three Prompt  PM:  Due: Essay Two by 7 p.m.
Thursday	12/11	AM:

PM: Watch *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

Friday	12/12	AM: Michael Martone, “Asymmetry” (Blurring the Boundaries)  PM:  Due: Film Response by 7 p.m.
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**Week Four**

Monday	12/15	AM: Steven Church, “Thirty Minutes to the End” (Blurring the Boundaries); Interview with Steven Church (Moodle)
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PM:

Tuesday	12/16	AM: Essay Three Workshop
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PM:

Wednesday	12/17	AM: “Ryan Van Meter, “Monster” (Blurring the Boundaries)
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PM:

Thursday	12/18	AM: Oral Presentations
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PM: Oral Presentations

Friday	12/19	AM: No Class
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PM: No Class

Due: Essay Three by 7 p.m.