

**English 9CE: Creative Expressions**

Summer 2023, M/W, 9:30am-10:50am

Encina Hall, Room W202

John W. Evans, [wevbo@stanford.edu](mailto:wevbo@stanford.edu)

Office Hours: M/W, 11-12pm, Mariposa House, or by appt. on Zoom.

**Course Description:** English 9CE is a writing course that explores creative practice through readings, written exercises, collaboration, conversation, and play. We'll practice becoming more alert to the world, responding creatively to the things that interest and move us, taking risks, and seeing opportunities in failure and revision. You will connect with your own sense of creative practice through spontaneity, discovering your writing voice, and understanding how you see the world. You will also gain experience with multiple genres of creative writing as you translate your thoughts, feelings, and actions into written language. Together, we'll explore how we can become more alert to the world and how, through language, we can respond in fresh ways to the events of our lives. This course offers opportunities for you to experiment with form and content across genres, as you develop a creative and critical vocabulary to discuss your own work, and the work of your colleagues. You will walk out of class with dozens of pages of new material. This is an introductory course, recommended for students who have never taken a creative writing class before. It is a safe space in which to take risks, fail, grow, and thrive.

**Course Readings & Materials via Canvas:** Two days before class meets, I will post the in-class handouts and prompts to **Canvas—Modules (Week 1, Week 2, etc.)**. You can access these materials electronically or print them in advance via hard copy. After each class, I will send a class summary email that also looks ahead also to the next class. I will not distribute hard copy readings or materials/handouts in class.

**Distributing Work via Canvas:** You will post course assignments, including Blog Posts, to **Canvas—Discussions—Assignment Name**. There is no need to bring work in hard copy to class. Your colleagues have the option to either print your work or access it via device during class discussions and workshops.

**Course Requirements:**

Seminar Participation (50%): A seminar succeeds when its participants are punctual, engaged, thoughtful, and intellectually invested in each other's growth and success. Please arrive to each class on-time, in possession of the course materials, having completed the assigned work, and ready to make regular contributions to the class conversation. Your contributions should reflect close reading of the materials and originality of thought. Please be thoughtful about sharing the discussion space in the seminar.

Online Forum Participation ("Blog Posts") (25%): I will post to the class blog site each Wednesday either a discussion prompt about the readings for the following week OR a creative writing prompt. You will respond to the prompt in a thoughtful but informal essay post of 100-200 words, and also, reply briefly to later posts or replies by two colleagues. Posts are due no later than the following Saturday at 5pm. Posts are graded either "credit" or "no credit." A total of 6 "credit" posts (yours + two replies) made before the deadline will equal an A. (See "Blog Posts," p. 4 for more details).

Final Project (25%): You will develop a Final Project for the course that looks to your admiration and imitation of a writer of your choice. You will prepare a sketch/outline (See "Sketch," p.5) and other materials related to the development your Final Project. You will write self-evaluations that chart your pursuit of self-defined goals and risks as you pursue them during the course, and also, at the end of the term. During the quarter, you will develop your ideas and writing for this project. Final projects will be presented to the class and given letter grades (See "Final Project," p.4 for more details).

**Course Grading:** The highest grade that you can earn in this class is an “A.” You are always welcome to check-in with me regarding your grade. As detailed above, your grade breaks down:

Seminar Participation (50%)  
 Online Forum Participation (25%)  
 Final Project (25%)

**Attendance and Missed Work:** You are allowed two absences from class for the duration of the quarter. Thereafter, your grade will drop a full letter with each absence. There are no such things as excused absences in this course – you are given two absences in case of unforeseen circumstances, and additional absences will be penalized. Chronic lateness will negatively affect your grade. In coordination with the Office of Accessible Education, or a university official, I will work with you to best accommodate long-term situations. If you miss class, for any reason, please follow-up with a colleague regarding what you missed, arrange for any missed work, and come prepared to participate in the next class.

**Email Updates.** I will send out via email class summaries following each class, usually within 24 hours of our meeting. I cannot by Stanford policy distribute student emails for any reason. If you are uncomfortable sharing your email address with me, then you may opt out of the email summaries.

**Office Hours and Etiquette:** I will hold office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays, 11am-12pm. Feel free also to connect for a few minutes before or after class, too. Alternately, we can meet via Zoom on a different day, schedules permitting.

**Criticism:** My primary goal as the instructor of this course is to cultivate an environment in which you feel comfortable managing the many vulnerabilities inherent in writing creative nonfiction and sharing it with strangers, while expanding your knowledge base of craft and form. A secondary goal is to demonstrate a particular creative and critical faculty, as I have developed it. To this end, my feedback during workshops is generally positive and encouraging, while my written feedback can be more critical.

**Readings:** Readings are selected to emphasize those formal and thematic elements that I think will help you to develop as readers and writers of creative nonfiction. I assign more readings than we can discuss in a given class, with the hope of offering many models for your writing. The student(s) leading the day’s discussion chooses the readings we’ll spend time with in class.

**Content Warning and Class Climate:** Our course readings and classroom discussions will often focus on mature, difficult, and potentially challenging topics. As with any course in the Creative Writing Program, course topics are often political *and* personal. Readings and discussions might trigger strong feelings: anger, discomfort, anxiety, confusion, excitement, humor, and even boredom. Some of us will have emotional responses to the readings; some of us will have emotional responses to our peers’ understanding of the readings; all of us should feel responsible for creating a space that is both intellectually rigorous and respectful. Above all, be respectful (even when you strongly disagree) and be mindful of the ways that our identities position us in the classroom. I expect everyone to come to class prepared to discuss the readings in a mature and respectful way. If you find yourself struggling with the course materials, here are some possible approaches to take. Read the syllabus so that you are prepared in advance. Please approach me ahead of time if you’d like more information about a topic or reading. If you think a particular reading or topic might be especially challenging or unsettling, you can arrive to class early and take a seat by the door so that you can easily exit the classroom as needed. If you need to leave or miss class, you are still responsible for the work you miss. If you are struggling to keep up with the work

because of the course content, you should speak with me and/or seek help from the Office of Accessible Education (OAE).

**Access and Accommodations:** Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. We welcome you to our class. If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit [oae.stanford.edu](http://oae.stanford.edu). If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.

**The Honor Code:** The Honor Code is the University's statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;
2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code;
3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code;
4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.

**Emergency Numbers:** Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): 650-723-3785; The Bridge Peer Counseling: 650-723-3392.

**Finally—I will do everything in my power to make this an enjoyable and valuable learning experience for you!**

## COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

*(please note the due dates for these assignments are listed on the Course Calendar, p. 7.)*

**Blog Posts (Weeks 2-9, as specified).** I will post to the course blog site on Canvas every Wednesday a discussion prompt about the readings for the following week. You will be asked to respond to the prompt in a thoughtful but informal essay post of 100-200 words. Your contributions should incorporate (where appropriate) the hallmarks of good critical and creative writing: thoughtfulness, energy, originality, question-asking, and engagement with the texts and prompt. The deadline for these online responses will be 5pm on the following Saturday. 7 posts are required for the quarter (meaning that you are free to choose which week you don't post), and in order to foster continuity, your post should incorporate a minimum of 2 responses to your classmates' posts: respond to some aspect of the post before yours, and to one other post. If yours is the first post for the week, come back later to write your responses. Posts will be graded either "credit" or "no credit." A total of 7 "credit" posts made before the deadline will equal an A for 25% of your final grade.

**Starting A Class Discussion (Weeks 2-8).** During the quarter, you will work with a peer or peers to co-start a class discussion on a day's assigned readings. Follow the guidelines below. You do not need to turn in any written work to me for your presentation.

1. **Quickly introduce the authors and readings to the class (2-4 minutes).** Give a very brief biographical sketch of the authors. Summarize the readings broadly, and talk about what you enjoyed. Be concise. There is no need to be comprehensive here.
2. **(2-3 minutes) Identify two short passages from any part of the readings to begin our discussion:**
  - a. a passage related to some formal concept we've talked about in class to date.
  - b. a passage that you enjoyed.

Read each passage out-loud to the class, citing page/paragraph/line # as you do so. It is fine to read a short work in its entirety. Then, come up with an easygoing "first question" to start our discussion. Your goal is simply to kick-off a friendly chat.

In all, this should take you **no more than seven (7) minutes of in-class time to complete**. Please be mindful of the time. I will jump in at some point to point us in the next direction.

**Sketch of Final Project (Week 4).** Write a 1-2 page narrative sketch or visual outline of your Final Project. This outline should take the critical or creative form that you find most useful for organizing your thinking about and planning for the Final Project. Include any ideas for specific research, reading, and writing that you are conducting as you plan for the Final Project. Bring copies for all of your colleagues, and for me (~16, to be safe).

**Quarter Contract (Week 5; due via blog).** Write a ten-point (10) bulleted list in response to the prompt, "I would earn an *A* in English 9CE this quarter if I walk out of class *able to do* the following five (5) things AND having *at least tried to take* at least three (3) of the following five (5) creative, critical or personal risks."

**OPTIONAL Final Project Cold Read Excerpt Workshops (Weeks 6 and 7).** Bring to class with copies to share a short excerpt (2-3 pages, or 700 words max.) from a working draft of your Final Project. Include two specific written questions soliciting helpful feedback from the class.

**Final Project (Week 8).** You will select a writer you admire, from our syllabus or elsewhere. You are responsible for reading on your own approximately 50 pages of their work: 2-3 stories or essays, a novella, a few chapters from a novel or memoir, scenes from a play, poems, etc. (You can also, of course, read much more than fifty pages; this is just the minimum), Based on your reading, devise an assignment for yourself inspired by a craft element or strategy in their work. Your result should be 5-10 typed pages of creative writing within a single

genre. You will informally present your Final Project to the class during Week 9 or Week 10. Bring copies for all of your colleagues, and for me (~16, to be safe).

**Guidelines for Presentation of Final Projects (Week 8).** Your presentation will be informal, around 5-7 minutes in length. Your presentation is a chance to talk through your intentions for the project, your challenges and successes in writing it, and how your thoughts about creativity and expression have changed during the term. A successful presentation will generally summarize the project and speak to a couple of the course concepts and/or the questions and ideas that we have generated about creativity, writing, and expression during the class. Finally, you will read a short excerpt from the project out-loud to the class. No additional written work is due for your presentation.

**COURSE CALENDAR:  
WORKSHOP SCHEDULE & DUE DATES**  
(*subject to change and supplement, as our progress requires*)

*Remember that weekly **Blog Posts (see p.4)** are posted Wednesdays and due no later than SAT at 5pm.*

Week 1 (6/26): Voices.

6/26—Bowden, “Dumb Kids Class.” Diaz, from *Ordinary Girls*. Limon, “Joint Custody.”  
6/28—Horn, from *Voice of the Fish*. Komunyakaa, “Facing It.” Paz, “My Life and the Wave.”

Week 2 (7/3): Attention and Time.

7/3—Doty, “A Collection of Minerals.” Ginzburg, “He and I.” Didion, “Goodbye to All That.”  
7/5—Foley, “The Wrestler and the Cornflake Girl.” Johnson, “Emergency.” Forche, “The Colonel.”

Week 3 (7/10): Seeing and Not Seeing.

7/10—Beard, “The Fourth State of Matter.” Merrill, “Lost in Translation.”  
7/12—Winterson, “Art Objects.” Barthes, from *Camera Lucida*.

Week 4 (7/17): The Natural World.

7/17—Dillard, “Seeing.” Hass, “Meditation at Lagunitas.” Graham, “Reading Plato.” Pollan, “How Corn Took Over America.”  
7/19— **Sketch due with copies for all.** Workshop Sketch (no prepared feedback).

Week 5 (7/24): Science and the Sacred.

7/24— Kenyon, “Let Evening Come.” O’Brien, “The Lives of the Dead.” Soyinka, “Why Do I Fast?” Vuong, from *On Earth...*  
7/26— Borges, from *Labyrinths*. Labatut, from *When We Cease to Understand the World*. Eshel, from *Futurity*.

Week 6 (7/31): Puzzles

8/7— **OPTIONAL Final Project Cold Read Excerpt Workshop #1.**  
8/9—**Sign up for Final Project due dates.** Readings TBD.

Week 7 (8/7): Learning.

8/7— **OPTIONAL Final Project Cold Read Excerpt Workshop #2.**  
8/9—Boland, “Quarantine,” “Moths.” Tallent, “Instruction.” Perillo, “Transcendentalism.” Oates, “Lovely, Dark, Deep.”  
Rich, “Split at the Root.”

Week 8 (8/14): Final Project Workshops. End of Class..

8/14— **Final Projects Due, Students 1-5.** Presentation of Final Projects, Students 1-5.  
8/16— **Final Projects Due, Students 6-10.** Presentation of Final Projects, Students 6-10.