



FACULTY OF ARTS  
Department Of English

## COURSE OUTLINE

**English 695: Creative Non-fiction:  
Writing from experience and research toward narrative  
Fall 2021  
Class Schedule (Wednesdays/17:00- 16:45/online/synchronously)**

<b>Instructor</b>	Professor Aritha van Herk, CM, AOE, FRSC
<b>Email:</b>	<a href="mailto:vanherk@ucalgary.ca">vanherk@ucalgary.ca</a>
<b>Web Page:</b>	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
<b>Office Hours:</b>	Available for video consultations. ZOOM Office hours Wednesdays, 15:00 to 16:30, OR by appointment <a href="https://ucalgary.zoom.us/j/94097016412">https://ucalgary.zoom.us/j/94097016412</a> Meeting ID: 940 9701 6412 Passcode: <u>408277</u>

### Course description:

The Creative Nonfiction genre has gained considerable traction as a form investigating substantial intellectual questions in contemporary times. Although focused on narrative, it is less a genre in and of itself than a text instigated by voice and research, strong description, evocative images, and powerful revelations. While it relies on the author's ability to recount or to springboard from actual events, it relies also on imagination and craft to relay important ideas: stories of experience, loss, coincidence, accident, as well as local and global events. Most of all, the successful work of nonfiction incites reflection on a crucial moment of recognition that the writer can offer the reader. This course will examine several contemporary works of creative non-fiction, including examples of autobiography, memoir, travel narrative, literary journalism, and ficto-criticism as models to inspire and inform students' own writing of a work of creative non-fiction. The aim of the course is to enable students to undertake research and to develop a powerful piece of writing that is both creative and critical, whether a lyric essay, a personal meditation, a focused memoir, or a well-researched dive into an historical or place-based subject.

This is NOT a course in writing critical essays, but a course that aims to enable students to expand their notions of writing as persuasive or informative, in order to create a narrative that will stretch beyond an expository essay. It will be equally valuable to students working in Creative Writing or Literary Critical areas. This course is double numbered and taught synchronously with senior undergraduate course English 595, but as a graduate course, expectations and requirements are substantially higher for English 695.

The class will function as a workshop of the whole and the work students write will be workshopped at least twice in the term. Students will be expected to produce, by the end of the course, an 80-page work of Creative Nonfiction.

### **Course learning outcomes:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Read texts with greater creative and critical discernment
2. Undertake targeted creative research in contemporary, literary, and historical areas of non-fiction
3. Write persuasive and original prose
4. Write at a very high level of eloquence, succinctly, creatively, and grammatically
5. Engage in meaningful critique about non-fiction writing with peers.

### **Texts and readings:**

#### **Books that have been ordered and are available from the bookstore:**

Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*

Alain de Botton, *A Week at the Airport*

Helen Humphries, *The Frozen Thames*

Chelene Knight, *Dear Current Occupant*

Kim Thuy, *Ru*

#### **Optional/alternate books to be consulted:**

Andre Aciman, editor. *The Proust Project*

Brian Blanchfield, *Proxies: Essays Near Knowing*

Robert Kroetsch, *A Likely Story*

Alberto Manguel, *The City of Words*

Javier Marias, *Written Lives*

Jan Morris, *Journeys*

Giardini and Giardini, editors. *Startle and Illuminate: Carol Shields on Writing*

Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*

Tanya Talaga, *All our Relations*

### **Learning technology requirements:**

There is a D2L site for this course where the Course Outline, the Class Schedule, and other relevant class resources and materials will be posted (see [d2L.ucalgary.ca](http://d2L.ucalgary.ca)).

In order to successfully experience learning at the University of Calgary, students taking online courses are required to have reliable access to the following technology:

- A computer with a supported operating system, as well as the latest security, and malware updates;
- A current and updated web browser;
- Webcam (built-in or external);
- Microphone and speaker (built-in or external), or headset with microphone;
- Current antivirus and/or firewall software enabled;
- Broadband internet connection.

Most current laptops will have a built-in webcam, speaker, and microphone.

## **Assessments and Evaluation:**

Final project of 80-90 pages of a well-crafted work of Creative Non-fiction: 50%

Presentation and subsequent submitted paper on one of the model texts: 10%

Workshopped writing: 20%

Participation in workshopping, contributions to class discussion: 20%

Total: 100%

**\*\*There is NO FINAL EXAM in this class.**

**You must complete all components of the course to pass.**

**Extra credit? No. I am happy if students accomplish this much.**

You will submit material to be workshopped electronically, in doc form, to vanherk@ucalgary.ca; I will post it on D2L for your colleagues to access for workshopping. You will submit your final project electronically, as a **doc** to vanherk@ucalgary.ca

## **Attendance and participation expectations:**

Workshop Participation and Overall Participation (based on timely submission of material for seminars, workshop attendance, discussion and critical acumen) 20%

- In-class work will be used in the calculation of your participation mark. Attendance is an aspect of participation. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-3.html>
- Students are expected to attend class regularly and to be fully present and engaged in class discussion, part of the participation grade, as outlined in the assessment components section above. If for reasons of illness or other unusual event students miss a class session, they should contact the instructor.
- **There is NO EXAM in this course. Students are graded on their writing, their workshopping, their presentation, and their participation.**

## **Guidelines for in-class workshopping:**

Students will be marked for the quality of their engagement with the class, the insightfulness of their observations and the thoughtfulness of their contributions in offering responses and posing critical questions. Students are marked not only upon the quality of their work, but also upon their ability to incorporate commentary into their practice so as to develop their project.

From the language that holds sway in daily conversation and abbreviated virtual language, a nuanced vocabulary may seem archaic, but is increasingly desirable. The current reliance on “thing,” “you know,” and “like” are markers of a lazy tongue. One key objective of discussion is a focus on improving your eloquence by moving beyond such limited vernacular. Please take notes on oral fixatives and work to enhance your eloquence in both oral and written form.

In terms of evaluative positions and their critical expression, your personal tastes are a less useful benchmark than objective evaluation. When reading any text, the questions you must confront

are not whether or not you “liked” the material, but whether it is convincing, effective, and interestingly developed. If you determine that some aspect of the writing works well, explain what and why. And if you find some aspect of the writing does not work well, explain what and why. Abusive or personal comments will not be tolerated.

Learning is about confronting uncomfortable ideas. At some point during this class, we are likely to encounter sensitive material, material that will challenge your thinking or upset your expectations. These challenges are about enhancing your clarity and capacity for critical thinking. They are part of an intellectual education.

### **Conduct:**

As members of the University community, students, employees, and academic staff are expected to demonstrate behaviour that promotes and maintains a positive and productive learning environment. Academic conduct is outlined in the University of Calgary Calendar, and the Code of Conduct. Policy and procedures, including Non-Academic Misconduct, can be found at: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

Academic or non-academic misconduct will NOT be tolerated. Every e-mail, every text that you send, every comment that you make (on ZOOM, on D2L, or in Chat) is public, not anonymous, and is part of your university record. Inappropriate comments, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or any other prejudicial conduct will not be tolerated.

### **USE OF INTERNET AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION DEVICES IN CLASS:**

Laptops and mobile devices are of course necessary tools for this online course but must be used in a manner appropriate to formal course and classroom activities. Please refrain from accessing websites and resources that may be distracting to you or other learners during class time. You are not to take screen shots, surf the net, text message your friends, play games, or do assignments for a different class. Cell phone notifications are to be turned off during class; please do not entertain us with dings and ring tones.

Students must be aware of the University’s Internet and email use policy, which can be found at <https://ucalgary.ca/legal-services/university-policies-procedures/acceptable-use-electronic-resources-and-information-policy>

### **GUIDELINES FOR ZOOM SESSIONS**

Zoom allows us to meet at specific (meaning synchronous) times for a “live” video class, so that we have the opportunity to connect with each other virtually and discuss relevant work as a learning community. To help ensure that Zoom sessions are private, do not share the link or password with others, or on any social media platforms. Zoom links and passwords are intended ONLY for students registered in the course. Zoom recordings and materials presented in Zoom, including any teaching materials, must not be shared, distributed or published without the instructor’s permission.

The use of video conferencing relies on participants acting ethically and with integrity; and in accordance with the principles of fairness, good faith, and respect (as per the Code of Conduct). When entering Zoom, you play a role in helping to maintain an effective, safe, and respectful learning environment. Please be mindful of how your behaviour affects others and show everyone in this class courtesy and respect. For more information on how to get the most out of your zoom sessions visit: <https://elearn.ucalgary.ca/guidelines-for-zoom/>

Participants are asked to use names officially associated with their UCID (legal or preferred names listed in the Student Centre). Please always use your first and last names when you submit material to Professor van Herk, as well as the course name and number.

If you are unable to attend a class, please contact Professor van Herk. Please be prepared to join class in a quiet space that will allow you to be fully present and engaged. Students should ideally turn on their webcam.

### **Zoom protocol**

- Close ALL other programs not pertinent to the class on your device.
- Make sure you have adequate headphones that allow you to speak and to hear the instructor.
- Attend Zoom sessions from a quiet place. Set up a Zoom background if there is activity going on behind you.
- Keep your microphone on mute unless it is your turn to speak.
- If enabled by the instructor, use the chat function to ask questions and participate during a session. You may NOT privately message classmates.
- Multiple classes in Zoom can be fatiguing given the demanding visual cues our brains try to process. The following tips can help manage Zoom fatigue:
  - o Choose “Speaker View” so you can focus your attention on one speaker
  - o If possible, attend Zoom classes in a quiet environment with minimal distractions
  - o If possible, take breaks from screens between Zoom sessions and practice Zoom well-being.Because our class is two and one-half hours, we will take a break mid-way.

It is recommended that you follow these guidelines when attending Zoom sessions, but even with the best protections, inappropriate activity may occur. If an incident that affects your learning or ability to focus or participate takes place, talk to your course instructor immediately.

Should you suspect your class has been disrupted by individuals outside of the class, or a security breach has occurred, you can report to IT Security. Contact the IT Support Center at 403.220.5555 or [itsupport@ucalgary.ca](mailto:itsupport@ucalgary.ca).

### **Grading System:**

The University of Calgary’s Graduate Studies Grading System, as described in the Calendar, will be used in this course. <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-1-2.html>

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade Point Value</b>	<b>Graduate Description</b>
A+	4.00	Outstanding performance
A	4.00	Excellent performance
A-	3.70	Very good performance
B+	3.30	Good performance
B	3.00	Satisfactory performance
B-	2.70	Minimum pass
C+	2.30	All grades of "C+" or lower are indicative of failure at the graduate level and cannot be counted toward Faculty of Graduate Studies course requirements. Individual programs may require a higher passing grade.

Assigning grades for creative work is complex. Your final grade will consist of an evaluation of your writing, your performance in workshops, your presentation on a model text, your follow-up paper on your presentation, your participation, and your final 80-page project. All written work is graded (using the letter system) and returned to you.

Your attendance and engagement are part of your participation grade. You are expected to attend, and to use what you learn to enhance the quality of your writing.

Following is a detailed description of how Professor van Herk evaluates Writing:

**A-/A/A+: Exceptional work**

The work is at a very high level, virtually publishable. Use of language is precise and evocative; figures of speech are imaginative and original; the content is interesting; the approach is fresh, and the form chosen the best possible, every element engaged with sophistication and elegance. A+ is a grade earned only in very rare instances, for work that is absolutely stellar.

**B+/B/B- range: Good work**

The work is acceptable, but not as innovative or refined as possible, and would benefit from more extensive revision. It shows heightened use of language, striking imagery and diction, and an interesting perspective or point of view. Word choice and description are generally exact and thoughtful.

According to the University Calendar (F.1), instructors may use their discretion when rounding upwards or downwards when the average of term work is between two letter grades.

Although the A+ is solely an honorific that entails no additional points in the four-point system, the course instructor employs this mark only to distinguish superlative work that exceeds expectations in style, correctness, intellectual depth, breadth, and sophistication.

The interpretation of the graduate university grading system can be found at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-1-2.html>

## **Academic Integrity:**

This course, like all courses at the University of Calgary, holds students to high standards of honest and responsible scholarship. Please consult the [Academic Integrity website](#) for a detailed description of university policies, which will be enforced in this course. Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to Graduate Studies for a ruling.

Plagiarism is academic misconduct; it occurs when a student presents the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of another person as their own. Another equally serious form of plagiarism occurs when a student submits work they have written for credit in other courses. Consequences for plagiarism include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Using any source whatsoever without clear documentation is a serious academic offense.

## **Deferral of term work and final examinations:**

Should you require an extension for completion of course work, an [Application of Deferral of Term Work](#) must be completed. It is the student's responsibility to initiate this process with the instructor.

## **Grade appeals:**

To pursue a Reassessment of Graded Term Work or a Reappraisal of an Academic Assessment, Consult the [University Calendar](#) and request advice from the English Department at [engl@ucalgary.ca](mailto:engl@ucalgary.ca). Please note that mere dissatisfaction with a grade is not sufficient grounds for appeal.

## **English Department Website:**

For more information about graduate courses, policies, events and contacts in the Department of English.

English Graduate Students' Association:

<https://arts.ucalgary.ca/english/current-students/graduate/english-dga>

## **Student Academic Accommodations:**

The Student Accessibility Services website is available [here](#). University accommodation policies can be found at the following links:

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6-1.html>

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6.html>

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6-2.html>

**Program Advising and Student Information Resources** is done through the Graduate Students Office of the Department of English.

E-mail: [enggrad@ucalgary.ca](mailto:enggrad@ucalgary.ca)

Graduate Chair, Dr. S. Forlini: [sforlini@ucalgary.ca](mailto:sforlini@ucalgary.ca)

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/gs.html>

**Instructor's Intellectual Property**

Course materials created by instructors, including presentations, posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams, remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may not be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

**Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy**

Student information will be collected in accordance with usual classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty. Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

**Research Ethics**

If a student wishes to undertake an assignment that will involve collecting information from members of the public, they should speak with the course instructor and consult the CFREB Ethics (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/research/researchers/ethics-compliance/cfreb>) before beginning the assignment.

**Sexual violence policy:**

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/sexual-violence-policy.pdf>

**Other important information:**

- [Wellness and Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Student Success](#)
- [Student Ombuds Office](#)
- [Student Union \(SU\) Information](#)
- [Graduate Students' Association \(GSA\) Information](#)
- [Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points](#)
- [Safewalk](#)

**Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI):**

Please participate in [USRI Surveys](#) toward the end of the course. The feedback they provide helps us evaluate teaching, enhance student learning, and guide students as they select courses.