

**Course Title:** Your Ticket to the Truth: Getting Started in Creative Nonfiction

**Course Code:** CNF 63W

**Instructor Name and Bio:** Rebecca Schuman

*Rebecca Schuman is the author of the comic memoir Schadenfreude, A Love Story, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Pick, a People pick of the week, a Hudson Booksellers Best Book of 2017, and a Fodor's Holiday Gift Guide selection. Her essays have been published by Slate, Guernica, The Washington Post, The Atlantic, Literary Hub, Longreads, Quartz, and elsewhere. She received an MFA in writing from The New School and a PhD in German literature from UC Irvine.*

### Class Sessions and Recording

Meeting days and times: **Wednesdays, 12 noon** (Pacific time)

Meeting location: Zoom\*; attendance is optional and class sessions will be recorded

*\*(link details shared with registered students prior to first class meeting)*

### Course Features:

- Live session (Zoom meeting)
  - Lecture, discussions, Q&A & some guided writing time
  - Interaction and active participation encouraged but not required
  - Optional for all students; recorded
- Assignments & Coursework
  - All assignments and materials posted in Canvas at the start of term
  - Students will respond to up to three (3) short prompts per week
  - Workshop-style environment where most feedback is from classmates
  - Instructor will provide feedback on select assignments
- Individual conferences available by request

### Course Summary

Has anyone ever heard you tell a story about your life (or someone else's!) and said, "Hey, you should write that down"? Well, you should! And now you can. If you have 20-60 minutes, you've got the time it takes to get started in creative nonfiction. By the end of this five-week course – through three inspiring short prompts per week – students will have created up to 15 new short pieces of nonfiction (or a few long ones!). Throughout this course, students will be inspired to explore (and possibly mix and match) genres such as memoir, biography, humor, history, longform journalism or prescriptive (how-to) writing. No prior writing experience is required, but the flexible nature of this course also makes it a useful element of an experienced writer's praxis.

*\*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

## Grade Options and Requirements

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.
- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Students must attend and/or watch at least 4 class sessions.
  - Students must submit work to 60 percent of writing prompts.
  - Students must respond to groupmates on 50 percent of prompts.
- Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)
  - For an “A” grade:
    - Students must attend and/or watch all 5 class sessions
    - Students must submit original work to 85 percent of writing prompts
    - Students must respond to classmates on 85 percent of writing prompts
  - For a “B” grade:
    - Students must attend and/or watch 4 class sessions
    - Students must submit original work to 75 percent of writing prompts
    - Students must respond to classmates on 75 percent of writing prompts
  - **NOTE:** *This course does not distribute grades below a B-. If you elect a graded option and cannot meet the above requirements, please speak to the instructor on how to convert to a CR/NC or NGR*

*\*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

## Textbooks/Required Materials

All course readings will be linked online from Canvas. While no readings explicitly require purchase, some pieces are from media sources (e.g. *The New Yorker*) that employ paywalls after a set number of monthly free views.

## Tentative Weekly Outline

*Note: all writing prompts are for inspiration purposes only, and students may take their assignments in any direction they choose; the point is to write three times weekly for at least 20 minutes per session!*

### WEEK 1 (Jan 9-13): Intro to Nonfiction Writing

Reading: CJ Hauser, “The Crane Wife”

Prompt 1 (20-60 minutes): What is your writing voice?

Prompt 2 (20-60 minutes): What interests you?

Prompt 3 (20-60 minutes): Conflict vs Thesis: What are you interested in writing about?

*Peer feedback on all pieces; submit one (1) for instructor feedback*

### WEEK 2 (Jan 16-20): How Do People Talk?

Reading: Joan Didion, “California Notes”

Prompt 1: How does dialogue work?

Prompt 2: What does it mean to take liberties?

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 365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305  
 continuingstudies@stanford.edu  
 650-725-2650

Prompt 3: How do we keep dialogue moving?

*Peer feedback on all pieces; submit one (1) for instructor feedback*

### **WEEK 3 (Jan 23-27): Set a scene**

Reading: David Sedaris, “Laugh, Kookaburra”

Prompt 1: Let’s get lively with detail!

Prompt 2: Action that sparks!

Prompt 3: Would you like to play with flashback?

*Peer feedback on all pieces; submit one (1) for instructor feedback*

### **WEEK 4 (Jan 30-Feb 3): Finding Your Truth**

Reading: Jesmyn Ward, “On Witness and Respair”

Prompt 1: Dare to express a conflict!

Prompt 2: Conceal or reveal!

Prompt 3: Whose ‘truth’ is *the* truth?

### **WEEK 5 (Feb 6-10)**

Reading: Rosecrans Baldwin, “Camp Midlife Crisis”

Prompt 1: Try humor (or not)!

Prompt 2: Make a character pop!

Prompt 3: What does ‘resolution’ mean to you?

## **Confidentiality**

Classroom discussions are built on trust. That’s why it’s crucial we all agree that the work we present here, and the personal information we share, stays within this group. *Reminder:* Sharing comments or personal information posted by group participants is not permitted without express permission from that writer.

## **Time Management Basics**

Students taking this course for credit can expect to spend approximately 2-5 hours a week on this class: reading, writing, responding to other students’ work and answering discussion questions. Each week will also feature an additional optional hour of Zoom chat. When life gets hectic, please prioritize writing and responding to other students’ work. But please remember that this course is low-stakes and meant to be enjoyable and edifying for you – and to that end, if your life gets hectic, please remember that our “deadlines” are more like *guidelines*.

## **My Online Presence**

I am on Canvas 3-4 days during the week, reading new posts and responding when I can best stimulate conversation. I also check my Canvas messages about once per weekday, and will respond as promptly as I can, though after 5 pm Pacific you may assume that I am “off the clock” attending to the duties of life; the same is true on weekends and holidays.

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