Creative Nonfiction I: A Plan for Success  
CNF 01 WB  
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Preliminary Syllabus

Writers Write!

We already lead very busy lives. We have work we do, family, friends. We take care of our health. We relax and have fun--because we need to! We have a lot on our plate. Our lives are full and complete.

Considering a book project means you're about to complicate your life times two. You'll be living your regular life but you will also be thinking about this project of yours and your writing. You'll engage an interior life and work to make this interior life manifest on the page, striving to create and share an experience with a reader. It is a big task. Your present life and the rich imaginative life you are embarking on are two worlds with a lot of tendrils between.

This course is designed to get you started on the complex task of managing these two worlds together--living the life you are already engaged in and adding this other writing life.

It is surprisingly difficult emotionally to carve away the time to write and to succeed in our personal goals, and has everything to do with boundaries that hinge on our deep desire to both care for others and care for ourselves. I want to help you manage both of these important lives successfully and find a balance between the two that will enhance each.

The goals for this course are simple:  
1. Happiness: To enrich our spirit through writing and developing a writer's life.  
2. Habit: To habituate our effort towards our goals (to see us through rough times).  
3. Balance: To balance our time and expectations effectively so that we achieve our reasonable goals.  
4. Flexibility: To consider new approaches, save time, and thereby achieve a sustaining return for our investment.  
5. Patience: To understand we're creating something of infinite value, and that is not a book, but our lives as they are lived.
6. Generosity: To project a generosity of spirit toward ourselves and others, seeing the universality of struggle—which is striving for life.
7. Change: To grow as human beings, to become aware that art is a way to deepen our connection with others, ourselves, and the world.

Course Description
The foundation of this course is daily writing—producing material. The expectation is that you write a minimum of 5 minutes a day and produce from 250-750 words a day over a 5 day week. I will ask you to keep a Writing Log—a simple list of the date, time, and your word count. We’ll have a discussion board dedicated to our Writing Logs where we will lay bare the trials, tribulations, and occasional joys of doing this foundational work. Clearly this means one of your first tasks in this course will be scheduling your time.

Secondly, we will share one of these writing—or any selection of 750 words—each week. Others in the class will read this selection and respond to it. Our responses will be positive and encouraging—that’s a mandate. Not critical. We are dealing with burgeoning work and one thing I really believe is that all writing is good writing. We will nurture. We will cultivate. We will love, respect, and admire the energy and risk involved in producing work and sharing it with others. Guided by your work and you as individuals, I will also work toward gently leading students to new ground.

Thirdly, each week I’ll have a Craft Talk. In these I will share some ideas with you about process and writing craft. These are designed to be a guide, making suggestions you might take or exposing you to ideas you might find useful. You might decide to use the craft talk to shape some of your daily work. You might find these don’t apply to your work of the moment.

While mostly we’ll be concerned with writing for our reader, we will also have weekly readings so that we can play the role of reader. Did the work stimulate you, emotionally and intellectually, or did it turn you away? We will try to reduce these “feelings” into discernible “authorial choice” which we can then emulate or reject. We will discuss these in a forum and talk about them informally during Zoom sessions.

Overview of our 10 Weeks
Week One: Start Writing! Scenes and Summary
Week Two: What is a Story and How do I Find It?
Week Three: Research: Delving into the World and Ourselves
Last, last Word
What you are taking on is difficult. Scheduling is difficult. Writing is difficult. Taking time away from loved ones is difficult. Even if writing a book has always been your dream, realizing our dreams is difficult. What we are doing here is not easy. It is not simple.

That is why we have 10 weeks in which to work. And that is why we are doing it together.

By the end of this course, I want you to be able to reflect on and embrace your accomplishments. I want you to be happy about your work. I want you to be excited about it's future while still understanding that it will take to complete it—happiness, habit, balance, flexibility, patience, generosity, and change.

We aren't building our book on hopes and dreams. Writing a book can only be built on a love of writing—and that comes not from obligation but from feeling all that writing will give you in return, that your investment in time, in effort, and in this course, will be paid back many times over.

Required Texts
Ariel Levy (Editor), Robert Atwan (Editor), The Best American Essays 2015 (ISBN 978-0544569621)
Mark Kramer (Editor), Wendy Call (Editor), Telling True Stories (ISBN 978-0452287556)