The American Road:
An Investigation Through Inquiry, Interpretation and Experience
WRTG 3020 Sections 36, 40 (M/W 3pm & 430pm, respectively) Spring 2015

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Office Hours: Tu/W: 10-11am
Th: 12-1pm

Texts and Materials:
• Book One: Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck (required)
• Book Two: Into the Wild, John Krakauer (required)
• Book Three: Consider the Lobster, David Foster Wallace (required)
• Handouts on D2L (required)
• Loose-leaf notebook paper for in-class writing (required)
• Copies of your work when needed for class discussion (required)
• Jump drive, stapler (required)

Class Policies and Etiquette:
• Attendance in this class is mandatory (Attendance, page 3). Similarly, being absent from a scheduled conference will count as an absence (unless the conference was rescheduled 24 hours before the original conference time).

• As classes will be full of insightful discussions, enlightening workshops and edifying instruction, it is crucial that you attend all class sessions. In-class activities have been designed to boost your understanding of the readings, sharpen your writing and editing skills, and offer you the essential tools to succeed in this class. Simply showing up for class, however, will not be enough. I expect the class to be the site of lively intellectual activity, which is not the sound of one voice (mine), but rather your voices as you challenge your own beliefs, encounter new ideas, question our texts, welcome new points of view, and—always—contribute respectfully and thoughtfully. Regular participation during class will positively affect our collective classroom experience (and raise your final grade). Failing to contribute your unique voice will strip the class of its diversity.

• Group work is vital to this class and the only way group work is effective is if all members of the group participate. It is important that you be present on days of peer critiquing, not only for your benefit, but also because your group members are counting on your input. This activity plays a major role in your participation grade. Each instance of being unprepared for group work with count as an absence.

• Please be punctual. This class starts at 3pm/430pm. Late arrivals disrupt the class and are inconsiderate. Two late arrivals count as an absence.

• Cell phones and other such devices are both disruptive to the class and inconsiderate. Therefore, these gadgets must be turned off before class.

• Late assignments will not be accepted, unless prior arrangements have been made and verified. This is to encourage you to keep up with class assignments and to allow me to return work back to you in a timely manner.

• Your hard work is a reflection of yourself. Plagiarism and/or academic dishonesty will result in failing this course.

• This classroom is a safe haven for all ideas. Respect not only me as your instructor but also your peers. We are all unique individuals entitled to our own opinions and beliefs, however, any comments, jokes, or remarks that denigrate the worth of an individual’s physical/mental ability, body size, religion, race, creed, ethnic background, sexual preference, or gender are inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

I have read and understood these policies. Signature: ____________________ Date: _______
Course Description
The road is where both opportunities arise and dreams die. The road is peopled with a variety of characters—the outcast, the runaway, the opportunist, the felon, the lost soul, the intellect, the sopping wet and hopeless, the observer, the elitist, and the phony, just to name a few. While there are similarities between all these people, the road offers something different to each. In this class we will investigate the myriad reasons why we take to the road and attempt interpretations of what happens when we get there (wherever or whatever “there” is). Questions such as: In what ways might these forces, these exploratory impulses, be distinctly American, and in which ways are they more central to the essence of the human character? What is the role of the road in literature/media/art, and how does this role help shape public consciousness concerning the road? What do we seek to learn through travel? Can travel teach us anything about the value of slowing down or speeding up? Can it give us any insight into the human character that lies beneath cultural trappings? Also the anonymity of the road and its connection to writing will also be explored. Once we’ve heard from others, we will then attempt to enter the conversation ourselves through multiple personal narratives, written academic inquiries as well as our major semester project: a long-form piece of literary journalism.

Department Approved Curricular Goals
Critical Thinking and Its Written Application
As writers and as readers, students should leave 3020 able to:

- See writing as a form of personal engagement, demanding an awareness of the inherent power of language and its ability to bring about change.
- Pose and shape a question at issue.
- Locate and use resources when necessary to exploring a line of inquiry.
- Critically evaluate information sources for credibility, validity, timeliness, and relevance.
- Draw inferences from a body of evidence.
- Distinguish description from analysis and argument.
- Distinguish flawed from sound reasoning, and be able to respond to and challenge claims.
- Recognize a thesis, and understand the organic relationship between thesis and support in an essay.
- As writers, structure and develop points of argument in a coherent order to build a case; as readers, recognize this structure and development within texts.
- Critique one’s own works in progress and those of others.
- Recognize that academic and public writing is dialogic, addresses an audience, and anticipates the thinking, the questions, and the possible objections of readers.

The Writing Process
As writers, students should be able to:

- Understand writing as an ongoing process that requires multiple drafts and various strategies for developing, revising and editing texts.
- Understand that revision is informed by critical dialogue.
- See the critical analysis of others’ work as relevant to one’s own writing.

Rhetorical Situation
Students should learn to:

- Exercise rhetorical skills: frame issues, define and defend theses, invent and arrange appeals, answer counterarguments, and contextualize conclusions.
- Value writing as a collaborative dialogue between authors and audiences, critics, and colleagues.
- Make decisions about form, argumentation, and style from the expectations of different audiences.
• Recognize that a voice or style appropriate to one discipline or rhetorical context might be less appropriate for another.
• Develop "topic"-specific language that is appropriate for the defined audience while also intelligible to a non-expert audience.

Mechanics and Style
Students in WRTG 3020 should learn to:
• Convey meaning through concise, precise, highly readable language.
• Apply the basics of grammar, sentence-structure, and other mechanics integral to analytical and persuasive writing.
• Develop skills in proofreading.
• Use voice, style and diction appropriate to the discipline or rhetorical context.
• Use paragraph structure and transitional devices to aid the reader in following even a complex train of thought.

CCHE CO3 Course Outcomes:
1. Extend Rhetorical Knowledge:
   a) Use texts from rhetoric, discourse studies, communication, or related disciplines to extend understanding of rhetorical concepts to the discipline that is the focus of the course.
   b) Develop sophisticated strategies for critical analysis of several genres, for specified discourse communities. These communities may include professional or disciplinary discourse communities.
   c) Learn more sophisticated ways to communicate knowledge to appropriate audiences.
   d) "Apply reflective strategies to the synthesis and communication of knowledge.

2. Extend Experience in Writing Processes:
   a) Use multiple drafts.
   b) Hone strategies for generating ideas, revising, editing, and proofreading for disciplinary or specialized discourse.
   c) Learn to critique own and other’s work.
   d) Use a variety of technologies (writing and research tools).
   e) Learn to evaluate sources for accuracy, relevance, credibility, reliability, and bias.

3. Extend Mastery of Writing Conventions
   a) Select and adapt genre conventions for disciplinary or specialized discourse.
   b) Use specialized vocabulary, format, and documentation appropriately.
   c) Control features such as syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

4. Demonstrate comprehension of content knowledge at the advanced level through effective communication strategies
   a) Ability to compose messages for specific audiences and purposes.
   b) Ability to communicate to the variety of audiences in disciplinary or specialized discourse.
   c) Ability to adapt content and style to respond to the needs of different audiences and rhetorical situations in disciplinary or specialized discourse.

Teaching Philosophy: I enjoy the teaching of writing and rhetoric and take great pleasure in my students’ developing proficiency in academic reading, writing, and critical thinking. I will gladly act as coach and mentor, but please be advised that I consider higher education an exercise in self-reliance, and I will not rescue students from the consequences of their choices. Please understand that enrolling in this class does not mean that you should expect me as your teacher to be solely responsible for your unique learning experience. I will do my utmost to ensure that you do improve your writing abilities and leave my class better equipped to handle future courses and job requirements; however, you must take responsibility if you fail to meet the demands of the course. I
expect that students will familiarize themselves with the course requirements and policies and do their best to follow these guidelines.

**Grading**

| Assignment #1: Best Driving Song | 75pts (7.5%) |
| Assignment #2: A Picture is Worth 1000 Words | 75pts (7.5%) |
| Assignment #3: Text Analysis/Response | 50pts (5%) |
| Assignment #4: Road Narrative | 200pts (20%) |
| Assignment #5: Literary Journalism | 350pts (35%) |
| Proposal | 12.5pts |
| Workshop Draft | 12.5pts |
| Response Letters | 50pts |
| Preface | 12.5pts |
| Work Cited | 12.5pts |
| Final Draft | 250pts |

**Reading Quizzes** (1 for OM&M, 2 for ITW, 1 for CTL) 100pts (10%)

**Participation** (in-class discussion & peer review workshops) 50pts (5%)

**Attendance*** 100pts (10%)

**Total** 1000pts. (100%)

*Everyone starts with 100 points and is giving two “freebies”. You lose 20 points for your third, fourth, fifth and sixth absences. On your seventh you lose 20 points (taking you down to 0 attendance points) AND are given a 0/50 for Participation. On your eighth absence you automatically fail the course. However, not losing points is SO easy. Just show up here twice a week for 16 weeks. (Also…2 tardies equal one absence.). Only (advanced-notice) school-related functions and religious observations represent an “excused” absence.

A=940-1000pts, A-=900-939pts, B+=870-899pts, B=840-869pts, B-=800-839pts, C+=770-799pts, C=740-769pts, C-=700-739pts, D+=670-699, D=640-669pts, D-=600-639pts, F=0-599pts

**Major Assignments**

- **A#1 & A#2 “Suite”**: A short persuasive editorial (Best Driving Song) & a short descriptive essay (The Story Behind a Photo). *(Approx 8 pages total)* See Project Prompt on D2L
- **A#3: Into the Wild Analysis/Response**: Take a passage from Into the Wild and briefly analyze it (400-600wds). What specifically do you think Krakauer is trying to say in this passage? What makes you think this? How does it connect with larger themes in the book? (Consider: subject, story, theme, context, imagery, word choice, syntax, comparisons, etc.) You will present your analysis to the class.
- **A#4: CNF Road Narrative**: A brief narrative essay in which the author draws from his/her own personal beliefs, thoughts and experiences “on the road” to reflect on a larger question, idea or concept. An essay disguised as a story…with a point. *(Approx revised 8 to 14 pages)* See Project Prompt on D2L
- **A#5 Literary Journalism Essay**: A creative nonfiction essay where author takes the role of participatory journalist and collects data through experience, interview, research, etc. in an attempt to reflect on and offer answers for larger questions, concepts and/or ideas influenced by the “outsider perspective”. Single-sentence prompt: Give something specific an honest look. *(16-20pgs, 30 including revisions)* See Project Prompt on D2L
Writing Center: If you want additional help with your writing, the Writing Center in Norlin Library is a great place to go to talk about ideas, improve your thesis or essay organization, or just generally work on your writing skills. All students are invited to bring their writing to the Writing Center for feedback and advice. Students are welcome to bring writing from any discipline at any stage of the writing process. Fifty-minute consultations with experienced writing consultants are available by appointment at no charge to CU students. Because the Writing Center is a very popular campus resource, please plan to make reservations at least one week in advance. Reservations can be made through the Writing Center website or in person. WC: To (a) Improve your planning, logic, and organization; (b) Refine your clarity, style, citation, and grammar; (c) Prevent procrastination and writing anxiety. Find more information at: http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html

Disability accommodations: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries under Quick Links at Disability Services website (http://disabilityservices.colorado.edu/) and discuss your needs with your professor.

Classroom Behavior: Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Discrimination and Harassment: The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities. (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://hr.colorado.edu/db/

Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html and at http://honorcode.colorado.edu

Religious Observances: Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. In this class, I ask that you contact me at least one week
ahead of the date(s) that you will be absent so that we can discuss any assignments/class material that you will miss.

**Course Calendar:** (This is a tentative schedule for the Spring 2015 semester. For each project you will receive an in-depth project calendar that highlights the reading and due dates in more depth.)

**January**
12(M) General Course Intro; “Anonymous Essay” prompt
14(W) Anonymous Essays Due; A.E. exercise/discussion; A#1: Best Driving Song Intro/Prompt
   HW: Brainstorm, outline, draft A#1
21(W) A#1 Rough Drafts Due; Small group peer review workshop
26(M) A#1 Final Due; A#1 “Presentations” (Pt1); In-Depth Syllabus and Project Review
28(W) A#1 “Presentations” (Pt2); A#2: the Story Behind the Photo Intro/Prompt

**February**
2(M) A#2 Lecture: Details and Empathy; Context exercise
4(W) A#2 Rough Drafts Due
9(M) A#2 Final Drafts Due; A#2 “Presentations” (Pt1)
11(W) A#2 “Presentations” (Pt2); A#4: Road Narrative Intro/Prompt
   HW: Read Of Mice and Men J. Steinbeck
16(M) Of Mice and Men Reading QUIZ #1; OM&M Discussion; A#3: ITW Response Prompt
18(W) OM&M Discussion; A#4 Lecture: Structure
23(M) Into the Wild QUIZ Reading #2 (first half, to pg 102); ITW discussion; A#3: Response #1
25(W) ITW discussion; A#3: Response #2; A#5: Literary Journalism Intro/prompt

**March**
2(M) Into the Wild Reading QUIZ #3 (finish book); ITW discussion; A#3: Response #3
4(W) ITW discussion; A#3: Response #4; Transcendentalism Lecture: Writing as Community
9(M) A#4 Rough Draft Workshop (Pt1) (First two in four person group)
11(W) A#4 Rough Draft Workshop (Pt2) (Second two in four person group)
16(M) A#4 Review…come with questions
18(W) A#4 Due; A#5 Discussion
   HW: Read in CTL: “Up, Simba” & “Consider the Lobster”

23-27 **Spring Break**

30(M) A#5 Topic Proposal Small Group Discussion
   HW: Read in CTL: “Up, Simba” & “Consider the Lobster”

**April**
1(W) A#5: proposals due; CTL Reading QUIZ #4;
6(M) A#5 Review…come to class with questions
   HW: Read in CTL: “The View From Mrs. Thompson’s”
8(W) “The View From Mrs. Thompson’s” discussion; A#5 Questions
13(M) A#5 Structure lecture
15(W) A#5 In-class drafting
20(M) A#5 Rough Draft Due (emailed to group by midnight)
22(W) A#5 Peer Review Letters due; Peer review workshop
27(M) A#5 Final Draft Due
29(W) Last Day of Class
What song makes you just wanna hit the road and leave it all behind? What song always makes you roll down your windows, glide up the volume, and ease down on that old friend, the accelerator? What song sets you free? What road anthem has never let you down? What song saves your morning by providing a soundtrack to your soul-crushing commute? What song enables you to put your problems in the rearview? What song delivers you to the horizon every single time? In short, what's the best driving song?

**Assignment:** Construct a 1000-word editorial that argues for (or asks reader to consider) the Best Driving Song.

**Purpose:** A writing & rhetoric refresher. School is back in session & we need to be in top academic form ASAP. To refresh our minds on the basics of rhetoric & argumentation (and to get our writing chops back), this assignment asks you to compose a short persuasive essay about a song of your choice.

**Required Criteria:**
- an introduction that (1) captures the readers’ interest and “eases” them into the topic at hand, and (2) provides an thesis (either implicitly or explicitly);
- your definition of what makes a good driving song (for it is very difficult to prove something to a reader if they are unaware of the criteria);
- two to three elements of supporting evidence/reasons as to why your thesis is “true”/meets the definition of good driving song. (Yes, this is an opinion piece, but opinions w/o support can never be persuasive);
- topic sentences near the start of each body paragraph that identifies the main point of the paragraph;
- transition sentences that guide the reader from one idea/paragraph to the next;
- a conclusion that reiterates the main claim and wraps up the essay by leaving the reader with something new.

**Audience:** Your contemporaries/classmates.

**Advice:** Start ASAP; brainstorm (what makes for a good driving song? Why? Make a playlist of possible song choices); note-take on the merits of a few, outline; draft; revise with an eye towards embedding the criteria in the essay as to nearly render it invisible; edit, revise, reread, revise, print.

**Present, Monday Jan 26th**

**Present, Wednesday Jan 28th**
**Those presenting song must be prepared with the song; those presenting photo must be prepared with the picture.**

A#2: A Picture is Worth 1000 Words (75pts)

S. Caldes
3020-Spring 2015

Rough Drafts Due: Wednesday, Feb 4th
Final Drafts Due: Monday, Feb 9th
Presentations: Monday, Feb 9th and Wednesday, Feb 11th

Prompt: Describe a favorite photograph of yours (from “the road”) and relay its significance.

The focus of this short assignment is descriptive writing and contextualization. Description: Show/recreate for the reader the experience/photo. Embed meaning into the description. Make the experience/photo come alive with strong, unique details. Contextualization: Photographs are a lot about the backstory—the action, events, setting, characters, etc. that combine to create significance, meaning and understanding. The context is everything the reader needs to know to understand the “story” of the photograph.

Required Criteria: (use this as a checklist) Once again, this criteria is meant to be understood before drafting, but implemented during the revising and rewriting stage.

- **Δ** Showing over Telling. Your description is your support; your details are your proof. Ex. Don’t tell the reader something was “beautiful” (and thus make them “take your word for it”); show them the specifics that made it beautiful (so they can “see”/decide for themselves).

- **Δ** Details, details, details. Help the reader visualize both the photograph and the significance through vivid, unique, descriptive details.

- **Δ** Figures of Speech. Utilize at least two metaphors or similes.

- **Δ** Sensory Detail. Touch upon at least three of the five senses.

- **Δ** Begin with a Bang. Open your “story” with action (and not background info).

- **Δ** Implicit over Explicit. While it is acceptable to directly tell your reader what you’re trying to say, you have to first earn it. You have to first make us see and feel and believe the significance already; your direct statement should only be putting to words that which we already “know”/intuit through the descriptions and contextualization.

- **Δ** Grammar and Sentence-Structure. Your paper should be lucid, well edited, revised, and adhere to the rules of Standard Written English. Consider rules of paragraphing to create a focused paper that builds.

- **Δ** Include a copy of the photograph at the end of the essay. (AND, for those presenting this assignment, a digital copy.)

Other than that it is up to you. I want to see something that has been worked on, pored over and cared for. To make the reader care, you must care.

Present, Monday Feb 9th

Present, Wed Feb 11th
A#3: Into the Wild  Response & “Presentation”  
(50 points)  

S.Caldes  
Spring 2015  

Take a passage from Into the Wild and briefly respond to it (400-600wds). What specifically do you think Krakauer is trying to say in this passage? What makes you think this? Support your interpretation with textual evidence. (Consider: subject, rhetorical situation, narrative, larger context, imagery, word choice, syntax, comparisons, etc.) Due: Feb 23rd-Mar 4th; depending on sign-up sheet)  

Example: Pg 125-127  
In the passage where Candido is bringing America back to their “new” “home”—the lean-to against the steep canyon walls—we get our first (and possibly only) moment of extended tenderness, of love in its most primal form. Boyle seems to be arguing in this passage for the supreme pleasures (and necessity) of the simple life.  

Let’s first consider the plot: America has just returned home after a somewhat difficult day, but that difficulty goes unexamined by America, for she has her mind on better things, having just earned her “first money ever” (123). Candido has finally felt somewhat healed and able, and after their camp has been destroyed, he refuses to wallow and instead has spent the day creating a new, better, more secluded “hut” for himself and his love (124). A tough, but good day for them both.  

While we do not get the specifics of their lovemaking, the details of the events leading up to it pave the way for an emotional, powerful, symbolic scene. We open with the sensual ritual of their dinner preparation (“the fire settled and the hamburguesa meat snapped and hissed in the bottom of the pot…they would dip into the hot grease with their tortillas to take the edge off their hunger”). Next, we receive teasing glimpses of their nakedness (Candido “watched his wife’s limbs and hips and breasts fill with light”), and a tangible representation of their love (“her pregnancy a reality like “dough rising in a pan”). And lastly, the delicate and metaphor-laden way in which they eat (“he put his hands on her breasts and let her feed it into his mouth…He took the sardine between his lips, between his teeth, and he licked the golden oil from her fingers”) (124-127). These images and circumstances all work to create a mood unlike anything we’ve seen thus far in the text. The joy they get from these simple pleasures, joy that is thus imparted on the reader, speaks volumes about where Boyle argues true love and true appreciation for life can be found. This scene solidifies who the true protagonists in this novel are.  

By comparison, the lives of the homeowners in Arroyo Blanco seem dull and static, filled with worries of how to remain “content” and without any understanding of true passion. Up until this point, Boyle has used a deft hand in an attempt to remain unbiased as to the lives, hardships and joys experienced by the four main characters, but from this passage on, we can no longer view them (Delaney and Kyra, Candido and America) as equals. One group understands; the other group just doesn’t get it. And while what helps Candido and America understand or “get it” can be argued from many different angles, The Road, has to be one of those perspectives.  

Candido and America are closer to nature and therefore closer to each other. Candid and America do not take for granted the true pleasures and necessities and downright good fortune that smiles down upon us every single time we are lucky enough to place good food in our hungry mouths. In comparison, remember the “disaster” of Delaney and his “ruined…scorched” tomato and mussels sauce, and how Jordan “wasn’t hungry anyway” (109). Or later, consider the juxtaposition of the tofu and veg that Jordan pushes around his plate. Candido and America also seem to understand the joy in companionship that stems from the road itself (in so many ways, both literal and figurative: Candido gets hit on the road, forcing America to work—which she loved! The communal joy they receive from building something (a life) together; even consider the amount of time we see America and Candido together in comparison to Delaney and Kyra who we often only
see alone, etc.) In short, the road is hard, but that difficulty, those hardships, creates a real comparison that enable Candido and America to find real joy in that which is not so hard.

Assignment #4: Road Narrative

S. Caldes
PWR 3020 (200 points)
Spring 2015

Prompt: create a short, narrative essay in which you draw from one of your own personal experiences “on the road” to highlight an important point, message, epiphany or larger, relatable idea/concept about life. (I’m not saying that this has to be reduced down into one cliché moral, but I would argue that the more specific the point you want to make, the better your chances of implicitly crafting it into your creative nonfiction narrative.)

Required Criteria:

* Organic “Jumping Off Point” (image- or action-driven way to enter the story);

* Necessary Context ONLY! Build meaning, lay groundwork, impart backstory (cast, setting, time, etc.) relevant to your essay’s “point”. (In the drafting stages, don’t be subtle laying your groundwork. Save “shaping” (nuance) for the revision stages);


* Conclude not by wrapping things up in a neat, easy to understand paragraph, but rather conclude by offering the reader something (an idea, a feeling) to ponder that helps them further reflect on, relate to, and/or connect with the essay and its “controlling idea”.

Caveat: a single, short trip/“experience” as the centerpiece is highly recommended. Often times summaries of “extended stays” or many trips/experiences lend themselves to non-descriptive essays that lack a strong narrative, a discernable purpose and, the life-blood of good writing, acute detail. The smaller, more specific the centerpiece, the better your chances at creating a meaningful (successful) personal narrative. (Even if you want to write about a semester abroad, make sure you’ve isolated down a few specific instances that can work as the main story/scene. For example, make sure that the narrative does not attempt to capture (and thus summarize) the entire 3 months abroad, but rather the extended stay is the context (backstory) and the focus is the recreation of one particular evening or weekend or moment that, with shaping and storytelling conventions, could capture the feeling of the entire trip.) And remember, per usual, “on the road” is in quotes for a reason; you are in charge of what exactly that means. You can, of course, take it literally and write about a road trip, or you could create your own connotative definition and interpret “on the road” in a much more figurative, abstract way.

Length: 2500 words (+/- 10%)

A Few Last Points: (1) Consider your audience. Once established, your intended audience considerably affects your essay. Explanation, overall purpose, certain details, background information, etc. are all contingent on audience. (2) Know that when it comes to POV there is more than just first person past tense. (3) Whether this is told chronologically or not, the organization must build towards a “climax” (point where your theme is fully realized). And lastly, (4) consider all the storytelling conventions we’ve discussed thus far (generating reader interest through action, naming, detailing, showing vs. telling, image-driven scenes, sensory details, metaphors/similes to generate apt comparisons, fastidiously adhering to the “emotional truth”, only including what is necessary, omitting what doesn’t push forward the theme/argument, etc).
Rough Draft Due: March 9th (Peer Review Group #1); March 11th (PRG #2)
Final Draft Due: March 18th

A#4: Literary Journalism
350 points

S. Caldes
Spring 2015

Project Calendar: (All dates are tentative)
- Proposal 12.5 pts: Due: Wed. Apr 1st
- Workshop Draft 12.5 pts: Due: Mon. Apr 20th
- Response Letters 50 pts: Due: Wed. Apr 22nd
- Final Draft 250 pts: Due: Mon, Apr 27th

Single-Sentence Assignment Prompt: Give something specific an honest look.

General Advice: To achieve a good, specific topic, the best advice I can give is: (1) think long and hard—and be able to answer, in depth, “Why?”—before choosing this specific topic; (2) be curious and passionate—passionately want to investigate the “truth” about something. The second part of the prompt, giving something an honest look, is the meat. To accomplish this task, you must be upfront and honest with the reader. Let them know your reasons for your inquiry. You must also look within yourself as to truly understand (or at least attempt to understand) your own subjectivity regarding the chosen topic. This means a lot of true reflection will need to take place before, during and after the initial drafting of this paper if it is going to have the depth, honesty and support that real literary nonfiction requires.

Background: In the “Introduction” to The Fourth Genre (the CNF Bible) it discusses the need for “personal presence” in literary journalism pieces. It claims that good CNF takes the reader “on a journey into the mind and personality of the writer” (xxiv). The CNF writer is, ultimately, the reader’s guide, or, as Phillip Lopate claims, “the essayist is an explorer” and “the essay is an enactment of the creation of the self” (xxv). Nonfiction writer Marianna Torgovnick expands on this idea, offering that the CNF writer “must feel free to explore the autobiographical motivation for their work, for often this motivation is precisely what generates writers’ interest in their topics” (xxv). But a good piece of literary nonfiction goes far beyond this personal purpose, for it also “reaches for connections that extend beyond the purely personal” (xxv). Consider Phillip Lopate’s advice: “the hallmark of the personal essay is its intimacy. The writer seems to be speaking directly into your ear, confiding everything from gossip to wisdom. Through sharing thoughts, memories, desires, complaints, and whimsies, the personal essayist sets up a relationship with the reader, a dialog—a friendship, if you will, based on identification, understanding, testiness, and companionship.” In short, no matter how close (involved, participatory) or how far (removed, strictly observant) you remain from your subject(s), you still must make your presence felt for the reader and create a voice that is “personal, individual,” honest, and “not omniscient” (xxvi). Further, “including this personal voice in cultural criticism surrenders so much authority—or the pretense of authority—generally found in academic writing, but substitutes it for the authority of apparent candor or personal honesty” (xxv). To conclude, W. Scott Owen writes, “As the world becomes more problematic, it is in the little excursions and small observations that we can discover ourselves, that we can make an honest connection with others” (xxv).

Some Specifics: You are going to have to DO something. This is going to be more obvious for those of you whose “specific something” you are giving an honest look to is an event or location (think “Consider the Lobster”), but even if your “specific something” is more abstract, you’ll still need a literary artifice. (Think of this as a Jumping Off Point of sorts; a way to enter the essay.) So say if you were going to give TAXIDERMY an honest look, you would of course give us the history, the evolution, the science, the purpose, the facts, the fads, etc., but also you would have to visit a house of taxidermy, interview taxidermists, and shadow a professional as they take a carcass and transform it into a “piece of art/memorabilia.”) Get it? (Sidebar: if you are by chance a taxidermy fanatic (who isn’t?), then maybe this, because of your long-standing interest and bias, wouldn’t be the best option—FOR IT WOULD BE MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO GET TO “ZERO” (as opposed to something you know nothing/next-to-nothing about and do not have a history with nor an opinion about). Ratio of artifice/narrated activity to research: approximately 1:1 (50/50 split).

A few more things: (1) You can’t just make points; you have to earn them. This means that you need to qualify and substantiate your claims, but you also must first prime the reader for them. (It should be noted here that there will not be any in-text citation for this piece, so you must, however, (Ia) use outside sources AND introduce and contextualize them. For this assignment, research means: outside texts (both scholarly and non-), interviews, observations, general Internet investigations, flyers, brochures, advertisements, etc. (Think about “Consider the Lobster,” DFW always lets us know where this info is coming from (PETA, taxi driver, “It’s all right here in the encyclopedia,” etc.) in the text itself.) (2) Attempt to take the opposition OUT. To do this, prove to the reader that you’re an honest, inquisitive human who is trying to understand this topic completely because no one can truly oppose that! Show that you realize your subjectivity and make attempts to explain it, illuminate how it does and does not factor into your “honest look.” (Again, think DFW. He’s being a little bit of a jerk, but he owns it.)

The Criteria: 1. It must be at least 3000 words (no limit) 2. It must include at least 6 elements of “research” 3. Three of those elements must be either books, or peer-reviewed/scholarly articles. 4. It must contextualize all outside “research”. 5. It must
adhere to the rules of Standard Written English. It must attempt something specific and substantiated and honest/true. 7. It must be constructed in a lucid and comprehensive way that builds towards illuminating/proving something to a specific audience (i.e. correctly uses topic and transition sentences and signposts to guide the reader along).

1. A#4 Proposal
   Length: 300 words (about a page)  12.5pts  Due: April 1st
   What: The Subject
   How: The Artifice/Activity/Experience(s)

   **Paragraph One:** Why this subject? What about it interests you? What do you think your voice/analysis will add to the conversation? What is your current understanding of this topic? (What about does the majority of the public have wrong?)

   **Paragraph Two:** Why this particular activity? How will this artifice “activate” and create a “baseline” for your piece of literary journalism? How is your ethos increased via this activity?

   In both of these sections, please relay (1) how specific elements of the A#4 prompt will be addressed/met and (2) that you are sincerely interested and passionate about this subject/activity.

   (Note: These proposals are TELLING ME WHAT YOU ARE DOING. They are NOT ASKING ME IF THIS IS OK.)

2. A#4 Workshop Drafts
   Length: Complete RD  12.5pts  Due: April 20th
   Copies of your complete Rough Draft (min. 2400 words) must be delivered (by hand or electronically) to your 3-4 group members by midnight on April 23rd. Hint: While we are all working for the Final Draft, the RD should be fairly representative of what you want/hope your final to be. Also, don’t fall completely in love with your RD too early. You’re going to be receiving constructive criticism regarding your draft and this is much easier to swallow if you’re actually interested in making it better rather than expecting only to receive praise for its perfect beauty. Completion of these requirements will get you the full 12.5 pts.

3. A#4 Peer Review Letters
   (2 copies of each letter)
   Length: 3, 400-500wd “letters”  50pts  Due: April 22nd

   YOUR GROUP:
   Name: ____________________________ Email: ____________________________
   __________________________________
   __________________________________
   __________________________________

   For each of your group members’ rough drafts you will be writing a single-spaced, 400-500 word (approx 1-page) “letter” to the author regarding their draft. This is a common practice in creative writing workshops as it allows the editors to truly collect, express and explain their thoughts clearly before discussing these suggestions for revision with the author. While your letter can touch upon many different things, three criteria must be addressed specifically: **First**, you must explain for the author how you read and understood their piece. This is a chance for them to get specific feedback on how their work is received and where further clarifications are required. (This should, for the most part, be “fact-” and not opinion-based.) **Second**, express to the author what you think they “did well”, or what you think “works”. This is your opportunity to discuss what you liked (images, ideas, claims, explanations, etc.) about the piece. Be thorough and specific. **Third**, express to the author your suggestions for revision. It is important to be direct and truthful here, but be gentle; writing is a very personal act—as it is connected to both intellect and personality—so full-on attacks will rarely even be heard. Make sure you explain WHY you’re making these suggestions so the author can clearly understand your reasoning behind your suggestions. (It should be noted that you will not simply receive the 50 points
(17 for each letter) for completing the assignment. I will be grading these letters based on their adherence to the criteria listed above. I should also add that these are formatted as letters to encourage camaraderie and conviviality. We are, after all, just a group of young writers trying to hone our craft.)