Further Reading

Under One Roof — guides to writing creative nonfiction, the writing process, and anthologies of every kind of essay

James Mulhern · Silver Current Press
Taught in person in Philadelphia

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How to Use This List

Nothing on this list is required. Every course reading is linked free on the course website, and our textbook, *Tell It Slant*, covers everything we practice. These books are for writers who want to go further — between sessions, after the course, or while revising the essay they plan to send out.



SILVER CURRENT PRESS
Read deeply. Think boldly.

Most are available from the Free Library of Philadelphia, including as e-books and audiobooks, and many are easy to find used. Entries follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 18th edition, and give the first or standard edition; later editions are fine.

Each entry notes the sessions it supports.

A Starter Shelf

If you read only five books, start here:

To begin writing: Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird*

To understand memoir: Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story*

To see the range of the essay: Phillip Lopate, ed., *The Art of the Personal Essay*

To write short: *The Best of Brevity*

To revise: William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

Guides to the Craft of Nonfiction

Books that explain how true stories are made — structure, scene, voice, research, and the contract with the reader.

Miller, Brenda, and Suzanne Paola. *Tell It Slant: Creating, Refining, and Publishing Creative Nonfiction.* 3rd ed. McGraw Hill, 2019.

Our course textbook. Organized by the material of a life, with chapters on forms, revision, community, and publishing, and a closing anthology of model essays. *Good for: All sessions.*

Gutkind, Lee. *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction — from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between.* Da Capo Press, 2012.

By the founding editor of *Creative Nonfiction*. Practical and energetic on scene, research, ethics, and the "true stories, well told" standard. *Good for: Sessions 1, 5, 7.*

Lopate, Phillip. *To Show and to Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction.* Free Press, 2013.

A master essayist and anthologist on the personal essay, the first-person voice, and how to think on the page. *Good for: Sessions 2, 11.*

Moore, Dinty W. *Crafting the Personal Essay: A Guide for Writing and Publishing Creative Nonfiction.* Writer's Digest Books, 2010.

Friendly and practical, from first draft to submission, by the founding editor of *Brevity*. *Good for: Sessions 2, 11–12.*

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction.* 30th anniversary ed. HarperCollins, 2006.

The classic on clarity, simplicity, and cutting clutter. Essential for the sentence pass of revision. *Good for: Session 11.*

Kidder, Tracy, and Richard Todd. *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction.* Random House, 2013.

A celebrated writer and his longtime editor on narrative, essays, memoir, and the writer–editor partnership. *Good for: Sessions 5, 11.*

Hart, Jack. *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction.* University of Chicago Press, 2011.

How to build scenes, characters, and narrative arcs from real events; strong on profiles and literary journalism. *Good for: Sessions 3, 5, 10.*

Guides to Memoir

For writers telling the story of their own lives — and the lives of others who appear in them.

Gornick, Vivian. *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.

The best short book on memoir's double voice: the situation (what happened) and the story (what the writer came to understand). Our recommended second book. *Good for: Sessions 2–3.*

Karr, Mary. *The Art of Memoir.* Harper, 2015.

Candid, funny, and wise on voice, truth, memory, and the ethics of writing about family. *Good for: Sessions 3, 5.*

Zinsser, William, ed. *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir.* Rev. and expanded ed. Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Memoirists including Russell Baker, Annie Dillard, Frank McCourt, and Toni Morrison on how they wrote their lives. *Good for: Session 3.*

Kephart, Beth. *Handling the Truth: On the Writing of Memoir*. Gotham Books, 2013.

By a Philadelphia-area memoirist and teacher; generous and exacting on truth, memory, and form. *Good for: Sessions 3, 11.*

Silverman, Sue William. *Fearless Confessions: A Writer's Guide to Memoir.* University of Georgia Press, 2009.

Practical exercises and clear guidance on voice, structure, and writing about painful experience. *Good for: Session 3.*

Barrington, Judith. *Writing the Memoir: From Truth to Art.* 2nd ed. Eighth Mountain Press, 2002.

A warm, practical guide to the craft, the personal challenges, and the ethical dilemmas of writing true stories. *Good for: Sessions 3, 5–6.*

Smith, Marion Roach. *The Memoir Project: A Thoroughly Non-Standardized Text for Writing & Life.* Grand Central Publishing, 2011.

A short, lively book on finding the one story worth telling and writing it with purpose. *Good for: Session 10.*

Goldberg, Natalie. *Old Friend from Far Away: The Practice of Writing Memoir*. Free Press, 2007.

Timed, associative prompts in the spirit of our in-class writing. *Good for: All sessions.*

The Writing Process and Revision

On the daily work of writing: getting started, keeping going, and seeing a draft again.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life.* Pantheon, 1994.

Beloved for its chapters on messy first drafts and "short assignments." The best book for anyone afraid to begin. *Good for: Sessions 1–2.*

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within.* Shambhala, 1986.

The classic on timed, handwritten practice — the method behind our laptops-closed prompts. *Good for: All sessions.*

Dillard, Annie. *The Writing Life.* Harper & Row, 1989.

A short, intense meditation on the labor and devotion of writing. *Good for: Session 11.*

McPhee, John. *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

The master of American nonfiction on structure, drafting, revision, and working with editors. *Good for: Sessions 7, 11.*

Guides to the Forms We Practice

Craft books devoted to particular kinds of essays.

Moore, Dinty W., ed. *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction.* Rose Metal Press, 2012.

Twenty-six writers on the brief essay, each with an example and an exercise. *Good for: Session 4.*

Adrian, Kim, ed. *The Shell Game: Writers Play with Borrowed Forms.* University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

An anthology of hermit crab essays shaped like recipes, crosswords, lists, and ads, with notes from the writers. *Good for: Session 9.*

Singer, Margot, and Nicole Walker, eds. *Bending Genre: Essays on Creative Nonfiction.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 2nd ed., 2023.

Writers on lyric, hybrid, and experimental nonfiction — for those who want to push form. *Good for: Sessions 4, 9.*

Anthologies: A Range of Essays

Collections that show the full variety of the essay — classic and contemporary, long and brief, traditional and experimental.

Lopate, Phillip, ed. *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present.* Anchor Books, 1994.

The essential anthology: Seneca and Montaigne to Woolf, Baldwin, and Didion, with a superb introduction on the form. *Good for: Sessions 2, 11.*

Lopate, Phillip, ed. *The Glorious American Essay: One Hundred Essays from Colonial Times to the Present.* Pantheon, 2020.

A hundred American essays from colonial times to the present, tracing the form's growth. *Good for: Sessions 2–3.*

Oates, Joyce Carol, and Robert Atwan, eds. *The Best American Essays of the Century*. Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Fifty-five landmark essays of the twentieth century, from W. E. B. Du Bois and F. Scott Fitzgerald to James Baldwin and Eudora Welty. *Good for: All sessions.*

The Best American Essays. Annual series. Houghton Mifflin / Mariner, 1986–.

Each year's best, chosen by a guest editor. Robert Atwan edited the series from 1986 through 2023; Kim Dana Kupperman is now series editor. Any recent volume shows what editors are publishing now. *Good for: Sessions 11–12.*

Williford, Lex, and Michael Martone, eds. *The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction: Work from 1970 to the Present.* Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 2007.

A broad survey of contemporary essays, memoir, and literary journalism. *Good for: All sessions.*

Gutkind, Lee, ed. *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction.* W. W. Norton, 2005.

Twenty-five essays from the journal *Creative Nonfiction*. *Good for: Sessions 5–7.*

Root, Robert L., Jr., and Michael Steinberg, eds. *The Fourth Genre: Contemporary Writers of/on Creative Nonfiction.* Allyn and Bacon, 1999. Later editions from Longman and Pearson.

Essays paired with writers' reflections on how they wrote them — a textbook and an anthology in one. *Good for: All sessions.*

Anthologies: Brief, Lyric, and Experimental Essays

For flash, lyric, and hermit crab essays (Sessions 4 and 9).

Bossiere, Zoë, and Dinty W. Moore, eds. *The Best of Brevity: Twenty Groundbreaking Years of Flash Nonfiction.* Rose Metal Press, 2020.

The best pieces from *Brevity*, the magazine behind several of our course readings. *Good for: Sessions 4, 9.*

Kitchen, Judith, and Mary Paumier Jones, eds. *In Short: A Collection of Brief Creative Nonfiction.* W. W. Norton, 1996.

Short pieces from a few paragraphs to about 2,000 words — models for compression. *Good for: Session 4.*

D'Agata, John, ed. *The Next American Essay.* Graywolf Press, 2003.

Lyric and experimental essays from 1975 onward, for writers who want to break the mold. *Good for: Sessions 4, 9.*

Anthologies: Themed Collections

Collections built around one subject — useful models if the class ever considers a collection about 2601.

Jones, Daniel, ed. *Modern Love: True Stories of Love, Loss, and Redemption.* Rev. and updated ed. Crown, 2019.

Essays from *The New York Times* column: a model of short personal essays gathered around one theme. *Good for: Sessions 2–3, 11.*

Terkel, Studs. *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do.* Pantheon, 1974.

The great American oral history, told entirely in its speakers' voices. *Good for: Session 6.*

Single-Author Collections and Memoirs to Learn From

Books by one writer that model the forms we practice.

Montaigne, Michel de. *The Complete Essays.* Translated by M. A. Screech. Penguin Classics, 1993.

The founder of the form. Read "Of Repentance" (Session 11) and browse. *Good for: Session 11.*

White, E. B. *Essays of E. B. White.* Harper & Row, 1977.

The personal essay at its most graceful; "Here Is New York" and "Once More to the Lake" are models of place and memory. *Good for: Sessions 1–2.*

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son.* Beacon Press, 1955.

Personal experience braided with history and argument; the title essay is a model of the braided form. *Good for: Sessions 2, 7.*

Didion, Joan. *Slouching Towards Bethlehem.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968.

Essays of place, self, and reportage; "Goodbye to All That" is a classic essay about leaving a city. *Good for: Sessions 1–2, 5.*

Gornick, Vivian. *Fierce Attachments: A Memoir.* Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987.

A mother and daughter walking the streets of New York; memoir built on scene and the double voice. *Good for: Session 3.*

Karr, Mary. *The Liars' Club: A Memoir.* Viking, 1995.

A landmark of contemporary memoir, full of voice and vivid scene. *Good for: Session 3.*

Ephron, Nora. *I Feel Bad About My Neck: And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman.* Knopf, 2006.

Short, funny, candid essays on aging and apartment life — including her love of a New York apartment building. *Good for: Sessions 1–2.*

Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* Harper's Magazine Press, 1974.

Close attention to one place, sustained for a whole book. *Good for: Sessions 1, 8.*

Doyle, Brian. *One Long River of Song: Notes on Wonder.* Little, Brown, 2019.

More than eighty short essays by the author of "Joyas Voladoras." *Good for: Session 4.*

Gay, Ross. *The Book of Delights.* Algonquin Books, 2019.

Short daily essays on ordinary joys, drafted by hand — a model for a writing habit. *Good for: Sessions 4, 11.*

Books About Buildings and Places

Models for Session 10 and for anyone writing the story of 2601.

Mitchell, Joseph. *Up in the Old Hotel and Other Stories.* Pantheon, 1992.

Mitchell's *New Yorker* pieces, including the title story of a reporter and a restaurant owner exploring a building's abandoned upper floors. *Good for: Session 10.*

Tippins, Sherill. *Inside the Dream Palace: The Life and Times of New York's Legendary Chelsea Hotel.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013.

A whole book as the biography of one building and its residents. *Good for: Session 10.*

Austen, Ben. *High-Risers: Cabrini-Green and the Fate of American Public Housing.* Harper, 2018.

History and oral history of Chicago's Cabrini-Green told through its residents. *Good for: Sessions 6, 10.*

Brand, Stewart. *How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built.* Viking, 1994.

How buildings change with the people who use them; a free BBC series based on the book is linked on our course site. *Good for: Session 10.*

Perec, Georges. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces.* Edited and translated by John Sturrock. Penguin, 1997.

Playful meditations moving from the page to the bed, the apartment, the apartment building, the street, and the city. *Good for: Sessions 1, 10.*

Free Reading Online

Brevity — craft essays and flash nonfiction

Free to read online; several of our course readings come from here. https://brevitymag.com/

Creative Nonfiction — "What Is Creative Nonfiction?"

Lee Gutkind's short definition of the genre (Session 1). https://creativenonfiction.org/what-is-cnf/

Library of Congress — American Life Histories, 1936–1940

Thousands of Federal Writers' Project life histories (Session 6). https://www.loc.gov/collections/federal-writers-project/about-this-collection/

Studs Terkel Radio Archive

Terkel's interviews, free to hear (Session 6). https://studsterkel.wfmt.com/

Project Gutenberg — Montaigne's Essays

Cotton's translation, free (Session 11). https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/3594

Poets & Writers — Literary Magazines

How literary magazines work and a searchable database (Sessions 11–12). https://www.pw.org/content/literary_magazines

Hidden City Philadelphia

Free essays on Philadelphia's buildings and neighborhoods (Sessions 7, 10). https://hiddencityphila.org/

Archiveadelphia

David Kurlander's Philadelphia history newsletter, including an essay on 2601 Parkway (Session 10). https://archiveadelphia.substack.com/

Reading by Session

#	Session	Suggested reading
1	The Lobby — place	Lamott; Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones*; E. B. White; Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*
2	Moving Day — the personal essay	Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay*; Moore, *Crafting the Personal Essay*; Didion
3	Memory's Floor Plan — memoir	Gornick, *The Situation and the Story*; Karr, *The Art of Memoir*; Kephart
4	The Elevator — flash and lyric	Rose Metal Press Field Guide; *The Best of Brevity*; *In Short*; Doyle
5	Across the Hall — the profile	Gutkind; Hart, *Storycraft*; Kidder and Todd
6	Voices of 2601 — oral history	Terkel, *Working*; Library of Congress Life Histories; Austen
7	The Building's Biography — braided	Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*; McPhee, *Draft No. 4*
8	Across the Parkway — the arts	Dillard; Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay*
9	The Bulletin Board — hermit crab	Adrian, *The Shell Game*; *Bending Genre*; *The Next American Essay*
10	Other Roofs — building biography	Mitchell; Tippins; Austen; Brand; Perec
11	The Roof Garden — revision	Zinsser, *On Writing Well*; McPhee; Montaigne; *The Best American Essays*
12	The Mailroom — sending it out	Moore, *Crafting the Personal Essay*; *Tell It Slant*, Ch. 15; Poets & Writers

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