

**Writing 3401F: You're a Strange Animal: Writing Nature, Writing the Self****Section:** 001**Time/Room:** UC 1220 Mon 12:30-3:30**Instructor:** Dr. Tom Cull**Email:** tcull3@uwo.ca**Office:** 1425 University College**Office hours:** Via Zoom by Appointment***Break free of technology to become creative!***

**To provide the best learning experience for you and to encourage your creativity, all writing exercises will be created with pen and paper, both of which you should bring to each class. A small note pad or writing booklet for taking notes when we are on field trips is highly recommended.**

**DESCRIPTION**

Nature is a slippery fish. In this course, we will use poetry, fiction and non-fiction to capture (and release) some of the fundamentals of nature writing. We will write about nature, in nature. Campus will be our classroom. We will spend about half of our time exploring natural (and not so natural) features of Western Campus: hissing geese, tree species, birds of prey, groundhogs, creepy-crawlies, green spaces, parking lots, taxidermized animals in the basement of Natural Science, the river, the food court, the football field. In effect, we will become literary naturalists; we will learn to pay attention to nature, and think about how it may be captured—and released—through literature. You will need the following: notepad, pen, sturdy footwear, a sense of adventure.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will have demonstrated the ability to

1. identify and interrogate fundamental elements and themes of nature writing;
2. generate ideas in a variety of genres: poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction.
3. analyse and respond critically to published writing and the work of their peers;
4. identify and correct errors in composition, grammar, and mechanics; and
5. incorporate feedback into revisions.

**Course Readings**

**This course has no textbook or course package. The weekly readings appear in OWL in Course Readings and on the syllabus.**

**Course Requirements**

Image Poem	15% (Sept 30)
Flash Fiction	15% (Oct 21)
Creative Non-Fiction	15% (Oct 28)
Exercises Portfolio	25% (Nov 18)
Finals Assignment	30% (Dec 2)
	<b>100%</b>

## **Assignment Format**

All assignments must have your name, course name, section number, and instructor's name on the first page. Please type assignments (where appropriate) and use 12 point font.

## **SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS**

***In this course you will be required to submit the final version of each of your assignments electronically, through OWL to turnitin.com and provide your instructor with a hard copy in class the day the assignment is due.***

Late assignments will receive a penalty of 5% per day. To qualify for an extension, you must have a valid reason and contact your instructor prior to the deadline. Please see the medical accommodation policy below.

If necessary, please submit essays to the English and Writing Studies Department Drop Box across from UC 2431, **making sure you include your instructor's name and your section number**. However, do not

- fax assignments
- e-mail assignments

Keep copies (electronic, paper, or both) of all assignments submitted.

## **Email Policy**

Emails will be monitored Mon-Friday; students will receive a response in 24 – 48 hours. When emailing me please include your name, course, and section (or day). Please remember that all correspondence in university course should employ a professional tone and format (e.g. salutation and sign off).

## **STATEMENT ON EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION**

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity and wisdom that students bring to this class be valued and acknowledged as a strength and a benefit to all. My hope is that together, we can build a community of care and responsibility towards one another that, in turn, fosters creativity and engagement.

Important note: Given the sensitive and challenging nature of the material discussed in class, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of trust and responsibility in the classroom. I will attempt to foster an environment in which each class member is able to hear and respect each other. It is critical that each class member show respect for all worldviews expressed in class. It is expected that some of the material in this course may evoke strong emotions; please be respectful of others' emotions and be mindful of your own. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by either myself or other students, is particularly troubling or causes discomfort or offense. While our intention may not be to cause discomfort or offense, the impact of what happens throughout the course is not to be ignored and is something that I consider to be very important and deserving of attention.

I am always open to listening to students' experiences, and I want to work with students to find acceptable ways to process and address issues that may arise. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing an issue directly with me, I encourage you to seek out another, more comfortable avenue to address the issue such as your academic advisor, or a faculty member. I have included below the contact information for the Undergraduate Chair of English and Writing Studies and the Writing Studies Program Director.  
Madeline Bassnett. Undergraduate Chair, English and Writing Studies [m.bassnett@uwo.ca](mailto:m.bassnett@uwo.ca)  
Brock Eayrs. Undergraduate Program Director, Writing Studies [beayrs@uwo.ca](mailto:beayrs@uwo.ca)

## ATTENDANCE POLICIES

Attendance at class is required to improve as a writer. Here is the Writing Studies attendance policy in this class:

- You may miss up to three hours (the equivalent of one week of class) of class meetings during the term without explanation. That means that the first three class hours you miss will be recorded as absences but *excused provided you don't miss any more*.
- However, if you miss a total of four to nine class hours (the equivalent of up to three full weeks of class), your final grade will be reduced by 10% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 72).
- If you miss a total of more than nine hours of class meetings (the equivalent of more than three weeks of class meetings) your final grade will be reduced by 15% (e.g. an earned final grade of 80% will be reported as a final grade of 68).

This policy will be waived only for medical or compassionate reasons. If you have good reasons for waiving an absence of one class meeting (e.g. if you've missed three hours, and need or want to miss another class meeting) discuss these reasons with your instructor within one week of that absence. If your absence is extended and prolonged (over one week of continuous non-attendance), then you should discuss it with your academic advisor in your home faculty, who may require documentation. That advisor may then contact all of your instructors. See also: 'Medical Accommodation Policy' below. Attendance also extends to tardiness. If you are more than 20 minutes late, you will be penalized an hour of attendance. Please make every effort to be on time as late entry can disrupt the flow of discussion in our class. Early departures from class, which have not been previously arranged with the instructor, will also be counted as an absence. If you leave during the break, you will be docked an hour of attendance.'

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**Note:** a class meeting missed in order to write a test, exam, or other form of 'make-up class' in another course will count as non-attendance, and will attract penalties as defined above if applicable. Instructors at Western shall not require a student to write a make-up test or similar at times which conflict with that student's other scheduled class times. If you are asked or 'required' to do this, you should immediately contact an academic counsellor in your Dean's office. If you elect to miss a class in order to write such a test, that is your choice; your absence will not be excused.

## SCHOLASTIC OFFENCES, INCLUDING PLAGIARISM

The University Senate requires the following statements, and Web site references, to appear on course outlines: "Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)"

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage of text from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence (see Scholastic Offence Policy as above).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>. *Note: In this course you will be required to submit an electronic copy of the final version of each of your essays to turnitin.com through OWL.*

## **PREREQUISITES**

The University Senate requires the following statement to appear on course outlines:

“Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.”

## **ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION AND CONSIDERATION**

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

### **Academic Consideration for Student Absence**

Students will have up to two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- for exams scheduled by the Office of the Registrar (e.g., December and April exams)
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are not met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact their Faculty academic counselling office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation. All requests for consideration for assessments worth more than 30% of a final grade must be directed to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.

In this course, all requests for academic consideration must be directed to the Academic Counselling office of the student's Home Faculty if a SRA will not be used.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's Home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see [Policy on Academic Consideration for Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#) and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf).

### Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

### Special Requests (Special Examinations, Incomplete Standing, Aegrotat Standing)

Please refer to the “Information for All Students in a Writing Course” for more detailed information. Briefly, remember that your instructor does not have the discretion to initiate, consider, or grant (or not) such requests; you must go directly to the Dean’s office of your home faculty.

### Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Health and Wellness

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

### Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>  
 Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>  
 Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>  
 Academic Support and Engagement <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Class Meeting Schedule (subject to change)

Date	Focus	Readings/Topics
Week 1 Sept 13	Introduction to Class: What is Nature? What is Nature Writing?  Class trip: Forest Bathing  Writing Exercise: Images	Poems: Lucille Clifton: The Earth is a Living Thing: <a href="https://poets.org/poem/earth-living-thing">https://poets.org/poem/earth-living-thing</a>  Terese Mason Pierre Myth <a href="https://thewalrus.ca/myth/">https://thewalrus.ca/myth/</a> The Age of Trees: <a href="https://www.shrapnelmagazine.com/poetry/two-poems-terese-mason-pierre">https://www.shrapnelmagazine.com/poetry/two-poems-terese-mason-pierre</a>  Amy Lowell: Hoar Frost: <a href="https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/hoar-frost">https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/hoar-frost</a> Mary Oliver: Wild Geese: <a href="https://goo.gl/yeJ9Da">https://goo.gl/yeJ9Da</a> Arthur Sze: The Owl: <a href="https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/owl">https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/owl</a> Sherman Alexie: Pow-wow at the End of the Word: <a href="https://goo.gl/QvukVo">https://goo.gl/QvukVo</a>  <b>Image Poem Assigned</b>
Week 2 Sept 20	Theme: Writing the Land, Decolonizing Nature	<i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> by Robin Wall Kimmerer: Chapter Skywoman Falling (Course readings on OWL)  Image and Description

	Writing: Images	<a href="https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70212/learning-image-and-description">https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/70212/learning-image-and-description</a>
Week 3 Sept 27	Flash Fiction Fiction writing exercise  Image Poem workshop  <b>Class Hike: Brendon Samuels (birding)- response writing</b>	David Heubert's Enigma: <a href="http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2687087047">http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2687087047</a>  The Trouble with Wilderness <a href="https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html">https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html</a>  Tanis MacDonald: <a href="http://towncrier.puritan-magazine.com/author-notes/tanis-macdonald/">http://towncrier.puritan-magazine.com/author-notes/tanis-macdonald/</a>  <b>Flash Fiction Piece Assigned.</b>
Week 4 Oct 4	Trees. Tour of Sherwood Fox Arboretum.    Exercise: Tree Interview <b>Image Poem Due in Class</b>	The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben (chapters Intro, 1 and 2). See Course Readings on OWL
Week 5 Oct 18	Flash Fiction Workshop Creative Non- Fiction Campus Walk.  Exercise: Photography Ekphrastic or Early Memory	Annie Dillard: <a href="https://public.wsu.edu/~hughesc/dillard_weasel.htm">https://public.wsu.edu/~hughesc/dillard_weasel.htm</a>  <b>Creative Non-Fiction Piece Assigned</b>
Week 6 Oct 25	Creative Non- Fiction Workshop <b>Flash Fiction Due in Class</b> Exercise: Season's Shift	George Monbiot: <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/09/forget-the-environment-new-words-lifes-wonders-language">https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/aug/09/forget-the-environment-new-words-lifes-wonders-language</a>  Rachel Carson: Silent Spring: <a href="https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/06/16/silent-spring-part-1">https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1962/06/16/silent-spring-part-1</a>  <i>Braiding Sweetgrass</i> by Robin Wall Kimmerer: People of the Corn, People of Light (course readings on OWL)

Nov 1		READING WEEK: NO CLASS
Week 7 Nov 8	Exercise: A walk in the Woods  Graphic Exercise: Graphic Mapping <b>Creative Non-Fiction Due</b>	<a href="http://www.artnews.com/2014/06/05/comics-artist-lynda-barry-on-teaching-non-artists-to-draw/">http://www.artnews.com/2014/06/05/comics-artist-lynda-barry-on-teaching-non-artists-to-draw/</a>
Week 8 Nov 15	A River Runs Through Campus! (River cleanup)  Exercise: Dirty Nature	Wernor Herzog Film: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkbT5007scc">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkbT5007scc</a>
Week 9 Nov 22	Animals. Tour of Zoological Collection  <b>Exercises Portfolio Due</b>	John Berger: Why Look at Animals: <a href="https://goo.gl/Ama1au">https://goo.gl/Ama1au</a>  The End of Animals? Guardian Article: <a href="https://goo.gl/diBPmc">https://goo.gl/diBPmc</a>
Week 10 Nov 29	Nature Writing and Ekphrastic responses: A visit to GardenShip and State Final Assignment Workshop	.
Week 11 Dec 6	<b>Final Assignments Due</b>	Wrap-up discussion Publishing Nature Writing