

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 at 2601 Pennsylvania Avenue,
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Contents

How to Use This List.....	1
A Starter Shelf.....	2
Guides to the Craft of Nonfiction.....	2
Guides to Memoir.....	3
The Writing Process and Revision.....	4
Guides to the Forms We Practice.....	5
Anthologies: A Range of Essays.....	5
Anthologies: Brief, Lyric, and Experimental Essays.....	6
Anthologies: Themed Collections.....	7
Single-Author Collections and Memoirs to Learn From.....	7
Books About Buildings and Places.....	8
Free Reading Online.....	9
Reading by Session.....	10

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.

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

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