NOTE to prospective students: This syllabus is intended to provide students who are considering taking this course an idea of what they will be learning. A more detailed syllabus will be available on the course site for enrolled students and may be more current than this sample syllabus.

WR 239: Introduction to Fiction and Creative Nonfiction
“I Could Tell You Stories”

Instructor: Tanya Katz
School of Writing, Literature, and Film
228 Moreland Hall
Katz@onid.orst.edu

3 credits – This course combines approximately 90 hours of instruction, online activities, and assignments for 3 credits.

Course Description: This class explores how to write good stories, whether real or imagined. We'll read and write both fiction and creative nonfiction, identifying the elements that make stories more vivid, more human, and more true. Students will write short, informal pieces and one longer work in each genre, and will get peer feedback about one story and one essay.

As writers, how do we know the best vehicle to tell the stories we’ve lived and observed? This course addresses this question directly. In the reading component, we’ll look at works in both genres centered around themes: parents and children, friends and lovers, living with death, and telling stories. We’ll examine and discuss the ways the tools of each genre are used to reveal the heart of the story. In the writing component, students will write one piece in each genre, using techniques from the published pieces we’ve read. Through this exploration, students will gain a deeper understanding of the ways they can use the elements of good storytelling—voice, point of view, characterization, dialogue, description, setting, and rhythm—to bring any story to life, whether true or imagined.

This course combines approximately 90 hours of instruction, online activities, and assignments for 3 credits.

Learning Outcomes: As a result of this course, students will be able to
• Analyze prose styles and forms as a way of enlarging the repertoire of writing tools available to the writer
• Compare stylistic devices and techniques of each genre through exercises in point of view, tone, tense, figurative language, scene-setting, and using images.
• Identify a range of memoir and story architectures and learn how to structure those forms.
• Provide effective critique of other students’ writing based on the conventions listed above.
• Write short stories and creative nonfiction essays using the techniques practiced in the course.
Required Text:  *Writing Life Stories*, Bill Roorbach

Additional Readings:  In addition to the two short writing guides listed above, students will read the following essays and stories:

Parents and Children

Nonfiction
1. “Mastering the Art of French Cooking,” E.J. Levy
2. Excerpts from *This Boy’s Life*, Tobias Wolff
3. “Son of Mr. Green Jeans,” Dinty W. Moore

Fiction
2. “Homework,” Helen Simpson

Friends and Lovers

Nonfiction
2. “First,” Ryan Van Meter
3. “Irreconcilable Dissonance,” Brian Doyle

Fiction
1. “We Didn’t,” Stuart Dybek
2. “Yours,” Mary Robison

Living With Death

Nonfiction

Fiction
1. “A Temporary Matter,” Jhumpa Lahiri
2. “Compassion and Mercy,” Amy Bloom
3. “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried,” Amy Hempel

Telling Stories

Nonfiction
1. “Return to Sender,” Mark Doty
2. “Repeat After Me,” David Sedaris

Fiction
1. “People Like That Are the Only People Here,” Lorrie Moore
2. “A Conversation With My Father,” Grace Paley

NOTE:  For textbook accuracy, please always check the textbook list at the OSU Bookstore website.  Sample syllabi may not have the most up-to-date information.

Students can also click the OSU Beaver Store link associated with the WR 239 course information in the Ecampus schedule of classes for course textbook information and ordering.
**Discussion Board:** Each student will respond to prompts on discussion board about the published essays and stories we read. Students will be expected to respond to instructor’s prompts as well as to each other.

**Writing:** Students will write two pieces for the course: one submission in each genre of 1800-2000 words. Students will also write a series of small informal exercises, as outlined in *Writing Life Stories*. These informal writings will be posted to a class blog where other students will respond. Students will workshop one longer piece, which means they will distribute it to the class and then receive written feedback and discussion. Students will also submit a revision of the workshopped piece at the end of the term.
**Evaluation:** Written work will be evaluated based on the effective use of the following conventions: voice, point of view, narrative tone and distance, characterization, description, and organization and structure. We’ll discuss how to use these elements effectively in both the textbook chapters and also in the published pieces. Students will receive a scoring guide at the beginning of the term detailing the point distribution for each assignment.

Assignment categories:
- Creative Nonfiction Essay (1) 20%
- Short story (1) 20%
- Informal writing on blog: (9-10) 20%
- Discussion board: (10) 20%
- Workshop letters: (6-10) 10%
- Revision 10%

**Sample Schedule**

**Week 1**—Introduction to the writing and drafting process  
Read Roebach, Intro and chapter 1; Watch youtube video of Tobias Wolff; Read excerpt from *This Boy’s Life* and “Homework”  
Assignment: Informal writing exercises from textbooks posted to class blog; responses to readings posted to discussion board

**Week 2**—Lecture: The Nature of Memory  
Read Roebach chapter 2; read “Mastering the Art of French Cooking,” “Son of Mr. Green Jeans,” and “Boys”  
Assignment: respond to readings on discussion board; informal writings posted to class blog

**Week 3**—Lecture: Scenemaking  
Read Roebach chapter 3; read “The Fourth State of Matter” and “Yours”  
Assignment: respond to readings on discussion board; nonfiction essay proposal; informal writing posted to class blog

**Week 4**—Lecture: Characterization  
Read “First,” “Irreconcilable Dissonance” and “We Didn’t”  
Assignment: submit first essay to small group; respond to readings on discussion board; small group feedback on first essay draft

**Week 5**—Peer Workshop of Essays

**Week 6**—Lecture: Dialogue  
Roebach, chapter 5; read “The Aquarium,” “A Temporary Matter,” and “Compassion and Mercy”  
Assignment: submit first essay; respond to readings on discussion board

**Week 7**—Lecture: Story Architecture
Read Roerbach chapter 10; read “The Love of My Life” and “In the Cemetery Where Al Jolson is Buried”
Assignment: informal writing on class blog; respond to readings on discussion board

**Week 8**—Lecture: Point of View
Read “Return to Sender” and “People Like That Are the Only People Here”
Assignment: informal exercises posted to class blog; respond to readings on discussion board

**Week 9**—Peer workshop of short stories
Assignment: Submit workshop responses to other students’ stories; engage in discussion regarding stories on discussion board

**Week 10**—Lecture: Revision
Read “Repeat After Me,” and “A Conversation with My Father”
Assignment: respond to readings on discussion board

**Exam week**—Revision of one large assignment due

**Statement Regarding Students with Disabilities:** Accommodations are collaborative efforts between students, faculty and [Disability and Access Services (DAS)](http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/). Students with accommodations approved through DAS are responsible for contacting the faculty member in charge of the course prior to or during the first week of the term to discuss accommodations. Students who believe they are eligible for accommodations but who have not yet obtained approval through DAS should contact DAS immediately at 541-737-4098.

**Student Conduct:** The online classroom is a special environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to this learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained. Differences of viewpoint or concerns should be expressed in terms which are supportive of the learning process, creating an environment in which students and faculty may learn to reason with clarity and compassion, to share of themselves without losing their identities, and to develop and understanding of the community in which they live. Conduct which disrupts the learning process shall not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action and/or removal from class. Unheeded warning will be referred to the Student Conduct and Community Standards Office for disciplinary action. (See “OSU Student Conduct Regulations” for more information.)

**Academic Dishonesty**, in any form, is not tolerated at Oregon State University. Any plagiarism or use of someone else’s writing (including sentences or phrases), information, or ideas without proper attribution and citations – intentional or accidental – may result in an F on the paper or for the course. See [http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/](http://studentlife.oregonstate.edu/studentconduct/) for further information. Also, a written report of Academic Dishonesty will be filed with the Student Conduct and Community Standards for further disciplinary action. Recycling your own work from other classes is
considered self plagiarism and is not allowed.

**Resources:** I will be in contact via email, so please check your ONID email account regularly along with the class Blackboard site for assignments, class materials, and discussion board, etc. The online writing lab is also available for extra help with drafts of your work. See their site for complete details. http://cwl.oregonstate.edu/owl.php

**Student Evaluation of Teaching**
We encourage you to engage in the course evaluation process each term – online, of course. The evaluation form will be available toward the end of each term, and you will be sent instructions through ONID. You will login to “Online Services/MyOSU” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.