

WRI 6023: Nonfiction Workshop

Spring 2026 Course Policies

Section 1 (Thurs. 7:00 PM-9:45 PM, BAC 156)
3 Units / LJWL Department

Professor: *Robbie Maakestad*
Office: *Bond Academic Center, 119*
Office Hours: *By appointment*

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PLNU MISSION

To Teach ~ To Shape ~ To Send

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service becomes an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we aspire to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

WRI 5023/6023 is an advanced instruction and guided workshop in nonfiction writing. Attention is also given to methodology in teaching nonfiction writing and to finding publication.

WRI 6023 LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who complete WRI 5023/6023 will be able to:

1. identify advanced aspects of theory, style, and structure in works of nonfiction;
2. analyze nonfiction written by professionals and peers to determine authors' writing techniques in relationship to target audiences and genre conventions;
3. employ advanced research techniques as necessary to meet the demands of nonfiction craft and content;
4. craft essays using advanced techniques specific to genre to create descriptive and evocative language;
5. apply advanced workshop techniques for constructive criticism of peers and in turn take criticism and use it to improve their own work;
6. format texts in a genre-appropriate and professional manner for submission to workshop and publication;
7. present written work to live audiences, demonstrating advanced strategies for audience engagement and oral communication.

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

In order to best reach our chosen audiences via the craft, terminology, and techniques of nonfiction, we will pursue these learning goals:

1. Further our knowledge of both the craft and art of nonfiction writing.
2. Grow our understanding of and learn to better apply general writing craft elements such as point of view, voice, story arc, dialogue, description, and scene/summary.
3. Grow in our knowledge of the nonfiction genre.
4. Endeavor to explain how written work affects both readers and writers. By studying literature as a writer – considering it as a craft as well as an art – we will come to a better understanding of what goes into creation of that literature.
5. Collaborate in workshop, and individually after those workshops, in order to explore and practice the discipline of revision.
6. Practice presenting our work to an audience of readers and of listeners.

Together, these learning goals allow us to see nonfiction writing as a process of art, craft, and discipline, which will benefit not just our ability to write creatively in this course, but also our ability to meet the creative and critical demands required of us in the future.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

Each of you will be responsible for preliminary drafts of writing assignments, written critiques of classmates' work, various reading and writing exercises that will aid our understanding of the discipline and craft of nonfiction, and four finished writing projects. Class time will be divided accordingly: lecture and discussion, small group discussion, in-class writing, and workshop.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Essay 1 – 200 points
- Essay 2 – 200 points
- Essay 3 – 200 points
- Essay 4 – 200 points
- Workshop & Participation – 200 points

TOTAL = 1000 points

REQUIRED TEXTS

Hanif Abdurraqib's *They Can't Kill Us Until They Kill Us* – ISBN: 978-1911545224

Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* – ISBN: 978-1250340610

John McPhee's *The Curve of Binding Energy: A Journey into the Awesome and Alarming World of Theodore B. Taylor* – ISBN: 978-0374515980

Mike Nagel's *Culdesac* – ISBN: 978-1957392271

Mike Nagel's *Duplex* – ISBN: 978-1957392004

Mike Nagel's "The Unintentionalist"

Elena Passarello's *Let Me Clear My Throat* – ISBN: 978-1936747450

George Saunders' *A Swim in the Pond in the Rain* – ISBN: 978-1984856036

George Saunders' *The Braindead Megaphone* – ISBN: 978-1594482564

Please purchase evening event tickets to attend the three Writer's Symposium By The Sea events this spring: <https://www.pointloma.edu/2025writers>

GENERAL COURSE POLICIES

RESPECT

Respect for other students and your instructor in our classroom is essential to a healthy classroom dynamic. We may discuss ideas and concepts that challenge your current thinking, so we all must respect one another and be open to new ideas. Show courtesy to other students and your instructor.

CANVAS

Throughout this course, students will be required to utilize Canvas to receive course grades and access any changes to the *Course Schedule* throughout the semester. If the *Course Schedule* is updated, students will be notified well in advance, but will need to download the updated schedule which the instructor will post on Canvas.

CANVAS SUPPORT

If you have questions about the content you find in my Canvas course or need clarification on assignment instructions, please let me know. If you are unsure how to use any given feature in Canvas you will find the [Canvas Guides](#) to be a very helpful resource. If you cannot access something in my Canvas course or it appears that some part of the course is not working properly, please contact the Office of Instructional Technology for support at oit@pointloma.edu. Include specific information in the request (course ID, section, assignment or module name, etc.) to expedite the troubleshooting process. Screenshots are super helpful!

PLNU EMAIL

Students must regularly check their PLNU email for updates on assignments and scheduling.

TECHNOLOGY

Refrain from using technology during class time unless a classroom activity calls for it to be used. This means cell phones, laptops, iPads, and other electronic devices. Taking notes by hand has been shown to aid long-term comprehension much more so than typing notes, so by all means, *please take handwritten notes* in class.

Similarly, laptops should not be utilized during workshop class periods, except by the writer whose work is being discussed. There's an extensive pedagogy surrounding the workshop process – though it may seem old school, in-class comments written on the hard copy draft and on a printed copy of the workshop critique letter have been shown to result in better learning outcomes for writers as they discuss and critique writing. This also eliminates technological distractions during workshop discussion: how lucky are we as writers to gather around written work and discuss it free from screens throughout the workshop class period?

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. Therefore, regular attendance and participation in each course are minimal requirements. Attendance is mandatory on Workshop days and is factored into your Workshop grade. Participation in the Final Exam reading is also a requirement to pass this

course.

If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions (1 class period), the faculty member can issue a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent (2 class periods), the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university withdrawal date or, after that date, receive an “F” grade.

Students who anticipate being absent should contact the instructor in advance for approval and make arrangements to complete the required coursework and/or alternative assignments assigned at the discretion of the instructor. Acceptance of late work is at the discretion of the instructor and does not waive attendance requirements.

Refer to [Academic Policies](#) for additional detail.

WORKSHOP

Workshop participation, feedback, and attendance is mandatory. Throughout the semester we will be reading and critiquing one another’s writing as a whole class. Turn in a typed copy of your critique to your classmate who is being workshopped. One page, single-spaced is standard for a workshop critique letter. Workshop is not a time to disparage or rudely comment on the work of others. Written critiques balance positive and critical comments, though criticism should certainly be constructive and focused on the writing, not on the writer or the writer’s ability. If there are problems with feedback you receive (or if a classmate is not adhering to workshop expectations in their feedback), do not hesitate to contact me. Workshop should be a safe space where we work together to better one another’s writing; thus, the amount of effort you put into commenting on the work of others should be just as much as you put into producing your own work.

SUBJECT MATTER

This course will ask you to write whatever you want to write about. I respect you and truly believe that this class should allow you full creative freedom, so I leave all subject matter choices up to you. To that end, our class should function as a safe space: the content of student writing that’s workshopped in this class should stay in this class. If you are unsure/nervous about the content of your writing, feel free to discuss your ideas with me in advance.

CONTENT WARNING

Each of you comes to PLNU with your own unique life experiences which contribute to the way you perceive various types of information. All class content, including that which may be intellectually or emotionally challenging, has been intentionally curated to achieve the learning goals for this course. The decision to include such material is not taken lightly. If you encounter a topic or content that is intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually challenging, I encourage you to discuss with me. Class content is assigned for the sole purpose of expanding your intellectual and written craft abilities, and I will support you throughout your learning in this course.

PLNU COPYRIGHT POLICY

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

TURNING IN ASSIGNMENTS AND DUE DATES

All major assignments must be turned in on Canvas on the day they are due in addition to being printed and turned in hard-copy at class. Assigned work will have a due date and you will be expected to meet this requirement.

ACADEMIC HONESTY POLICY

Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when in reality they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination, or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course. Faculty should follow and students may appeal using the procedure in the university Catalog. See [Graduate Academic and General Policies](#) for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) POLICY

If it is part of your creative process, you are allowed to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g, ChatGPT, iA Writer, Marmot, Botowski, etc.) in this course, but before you turn in your draft, please speak to me about how you plan to use this tool in your work.

Any work that utilizes AI-based tools must be clearly identified as such, including the specific tool(s) used. For example, if you use ChatGPT, you must cite ChatGPT including the version number, year, month and day of the query and the statement "Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>."

Further, you must include with your draft the sequential prompts and methodology that you used to generate the creative piece so that the other students can see how it was utilized in your writing process. Failure to indicate AI as part of the work will be considered plagiarism.

It is important that you protect your colleagues' intellectual property. Critiques of your colleagues' works may not be done with the help of AI. Providing AI with samples of your colleagues' works will result in an F in this course.

SPIRITUAL CARE

PLNU strives to be a place where students grow as whole persons. To this end, we provide resources for our students to encounter God and grow in their Christian faith. If you have questions, a desire to meet with the chaplain, or if you have prayer requests, you can contact the [Office of Student Life and Formation](#).

PLNU ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and activities. Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in the Bond Academic Center

(EAC@pointloma.edu or 619-849-2486). Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will issue an academic accommodation plan ("AP") to all faculty who teach courses in which the student is enrolled each semester.

PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their AP in that particular course and/or if they do not wish to utilize some or all of the elements of their AP in that course.

Students who need accommodations for a disability should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to assure appropriate accommodations can be provided. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC.

LANGUAGE AND BELONGING

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe and hospitable learning environment for all students. As Christian scholars we are keenly aware of the power of language and believe in treating others with dignity. As such, it is important that our language be equitable, inclusive, and prejudice free. Inclusive/Bias-free language is the standard outlined by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and it is the expected norm in university-level work. Good writing and speaking do not use unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about personal qualities such as age, disability, economic class, ethnicity, marital status, parentage, political or religious beliefs, race, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Inclusive language also avoids using stereotypes or terminology that demeans persons or groups based on age, disability, class, ethnicity, gender, race, language, or national origin. Respectful use of language is particularly important when referring to those outside of the religious and lifestyle commitments of those in the PLNU community. By working toward precision and clarity of language, we mark ourselves as serious and respectful scholars, and we model the Christ-like quality of hospitality.

You may report an incident(s) using the [Bias Incident Reporting Form](#).

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND DISCRIMINATION

In support of a safe learning environment, if you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual discrimination or misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that accommodations and resources are available through the Title IX Office at pointloma.edu/Title-IX. Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, faculty and staff are required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office.

If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Counseling Services at counselingservices@pointloma.edu or find a list of campus pastors at pointloma.edu/title-ix.

CENTER FOR ENRICHING RELATIONSHIPS

PLNU graduate students are able to receive *free* face-to-face and telehealth counseling services through the Master of Arts in Clinical Counseling program (MACC). This service is provided

by supervised therapists-in-training at the Center for Enriching Relationships. To contact the Center for Enriching Relationships, please call 619-858-3105 or visit <https://www.enrichingrelationships.org/plnu-macc> to submit an online request. Your inquiry is confidential. Please note that once the form is submitted it may take up to two days to process and respond to your request.

If you need emergency assistance, please call 911 or the Access and Crisis Line at (888) 724-7240.

PREPARATION

You will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss readings, share your work, and comment on other students' work. Being prepared for each class is vital in creating a writing classroom that is conducive to learning—take notes on the assigned readings as this allows you to remember the material more fully. Back up your written work as you're responsible for turning work in on the due dates. You are also expected to regularly check your PLNU email for updates to the schedule and assignments.

FINAL EXAMINATION POLICY

Successful completion of this class requires taking the final examination on its scheduled day. The final examination schedule is posted on the [Class Schedules](#) site. If you find yourself scheduled for three (3) or more final examinations on the same day, you are authorized to contact each professor to arrange a different time for one of those exams. However, unless you have three (3) or more exams on the same day, no requests for alternative final examinations will be granted.

For this course, the final will be a required in-class reading from your favorite final project revision during the final exam. Our scheduled final exam time is **DATE/TIME/LOCATION TBD**. Since the final is a class activity, it cannot be rescheduled, so make sure that you will be able to attend. You must attend and read at the final exam reading to pass this class.

LETTER GRADE GUIDELINES

880 - 899 points	B+	920 - 1000 points	A	900 - 919 points	A-
780 - 799 points	C+	820 - 879 points	B	800 - 819 points	B-
680 - 699 points	D+	720 - 779 points	C	700 - 719 points	C-
		620 - 679 points	D	600 - 619 points	D-

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1 Researched & Experimental Essays**
01/13 – Elena Passarello’s *Let Me Clear My Throat*
- Week 2 Humor & Place Writing**
01/20 – Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place*, Mike Nagel’s *Culdesac*,
Mike Nagel’s *Duplex*, Mike Nagel’s “The Unintentionalist”
Workshop 1.A Drafts Due to Hand Out to Class
- Week 3 Workshop 1**
01/27 – Workshop 1.A
Workshop 1.A Critiques Due in Class
Workshop 1.B Drafts Due to Hand Out to Class
- Week 4 Workshop 1**
02/03 – Workshop 1.B
Workshop 1.B Critiques Due in Class
- Week 5 Essays about Literature**
02/10 – George Saunders’ *The Braindead Megaphone* (in full)
George Saunders’ *A Swim in the Pond in the Rain* (Pgs. 1-118,
165-248, 385-392)
Workshop 2.A & 2.B Drafts Due to Hand Out to Class
Essay 1 Revision Due
- Week 6 Workshop 2**
02/17 – Workshop 2.A
Workshop 2.A Critiques Due in Class
- Week 7 Writer’s Symposium By the Sea & Visiting Writers Series Week**
02/24 – Workshop 2.B
Workshop 2.B Critiques Due in Class
Workshop 3.A & 3.B Drafts Due to Hand Out to Class
- 02/25 – **Afternoon Event:** Judy Woodruff, Fermanian Conference
Center, 3PM
Evening Event: Judy Woodruff, Brown Chapel, 7PM
Buy Ticket if you want one: <https://www.pointloma.edu/2025writers>
- 02/26 – **Afternoon Event:** Jamaica Kincaid, Fermanian Conference
Center, 3PM
Evening Event: Jamaica Kincaid, Brown Chapel, 7PM
Buy Ticket ASAP: <https://www.pointloma.edu/2025writers>
- 02/27 – **Afternoon Event:** George Saunders, Fermanian Conference

Center, 3PM

Evening Event: George Saunders, Brown Chapel, 7PM

Buy Ticket ASAP: <https://www.pointloma.edu/2025writers>

Week 8	AWP Conference 03/03 –	NO CLASS—AWP Conference
Week 9	Spring Break 03/10 –	NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK
Week 10	Workshop 3 03/17 –	Workshop 3.A <u>Workshop 3.A Critiques Due in Class</u> <u>Essay 2 Revision Due</u>
Week 11	Workshop 3 03/24 –	Workshop 3.B <u>Workshop 3.B Critiques Due in Class</u>
Week 12	No class? 03/31 –	No class – payback for Writer’s Symposium week
Week 13	Music Writing 04/07 –	Hanif Abdurraqib’s <i>They Can’t Kill Us Until They Kill Us</i> <u>Workshop 4.A & 4.B Drafts Due to Hand Out to Class</u> <u>Essay 3 Revision Due</u>
Week 14	Workshop 4 04/14 –	Workshop 4.A <u>Workshop 4.A Critiques Due in Class</u>
Week 15	Workshop 4 04/21 –	Workshop 4.B <u>Workshop 4.B Critiques Due in Class</u>
Week 16	04/28 –	John McPhee’s <i>The Curve of Binding Energy: A Journey into the Awesome and Alarming World of Theodore B. Taylor</i>
Week 17	Final Exam Week FINAL EXAM READING: 05/05 –	Combined Genre Workshop Reading, Time, Location Tbd, <u>Essay 4 Due</u>

** This schedule is subject to change at my discretion. I’ll let you know with plenty of time if changes are made.

** All reading assignments must be read for the day that they appear on the syllabus.