

HL 2020 Creative Writing Workshop

Telling the Truth with Fiction, Memoir, and Reportage

Division of English, Nanyang Technological University
Semester 2, AY 2015/2016

Day:

Location:

Seminar Leader: Nicholson Baker

Contact Details: _____@ntu.edu.sg

Office: HSS _____

In this course we'll talk about the ways a working writer can use words in sequence to create delight, surprise, sympathy, and enlightenment in a willing reader's mind. The workshop will meet once a week, for three hours. Each week I'll ask for one writing assignment – fictional or non-fictional – of 250-300 words, and we'll discuss one or two assigned short readings. The writing you turn in can be a continuation of something you wrote the week before, or it can be something new.

The readings will mainly come from the online archive of *The New Yorker* magazine. We will sample, burrow, and browse, moving forward more or less chronologically, and see what we turn up in this venerable weekly bazaar of American literature – while discussing matters of style, length, copyediting, fact-checking, and page layout – in passages of fiction and nonfiction by writers such as John O'Hara, Robert Benchley, Elizabeth Bishop, Vladimir Nabokov, Lillian Ross, Joseph Mitchell, John Hersey, John Cheever, E.B. White, Maeve Brennan, Emily Hahn, Alice Munro, and Rachel Aviv. A subscription to *The New Yorker*, in order to read the archive, is required.

In addition, each student should come with a single published sentence that he or she has encountered that week that seemed noteworthy in some way – noteworthy beautiful or wise or not at all good – and we will write these sentences on the board and take a close look at some of them. And, finally, each week one or two students will give short presentations about particular writers or genres or styles as they come under consideration.

There are a thousand ways to tell any story, and the world is filled with an infinitude of stories. The aim of this class is to expand our notion of what's possible.

SEMINAR NOTES:

- Please be present, please have your writing and reading done, and please be on time. If you are more than 20 minutes late to class it will count as an absence.
- Please no side conversations.
- Computers are fine--some people think better when typing than when writing by hand--but please no texting or other digital distractions.
- Let me know as soon as possible if you have any disability or other issue that requires special accommodation in class. (Examples: you need to sit in a special position so you can see or hear well; you need to leave your phone on in case of a family emergency; you need to leave class early to attend a medical appointment, etc.)
- Any writing that is not your own should be in quotation marks, unless everyone will recognize that it's by somebody else (even if they don't remember whom it's by), e.g., "The best laid plans of mice and men."
- Computers in class are fine--some people think better when typing than when writing by hand--but please no texting or other digital distractions.

REQUIRED TEXT:

The digital edition of *The New Yorker*, available as a free resource through the HSS Library.

ASSESSMENT:

Course grades will be determined by the following:

Class participation	20%
Weekly writing, due at the beginning of class	70%
In-class presentations	10%