

Creative Nonfiction is a genre that encompasses the personal essay, the journalistic essay, and memoir. You are unlimited in your choice of topics, subjects and form. Here is a list of writing exercises that you may find will lead quite naturally to a piece that you love, one that you will turn in to complete Assignment #1.

- A. **Postcard Sketch:** This is a travel essay in which you attempt to capture the mood and feel of a place—a city or a particular region. Imagine that you are writing several short impressions of this place in “snapshots.” Label each snapshot I, II, III, IV, V, etc. Each section should be able to stand alone, but when placed in order, they should add up to an overall impression of a city/place.
- B. **Second Person:** Write about a distinct memory in the second person voice. Tell the whole story in the second person. “You are digging a hole next to the apricot tree, your fingernails crusted with dry dirt, your bare toes wiggling in dust.” Second person point of view allows you to keep an emotional distance that might lead you to recall surprising details.
- C. **Write a tradition essay,** in the style of Montaigne, in which you meditate on a subject such as “On Lying” or “On Smells” or “On Dogs” or “On Hatred” or “In Defense of Smoking” or “Against Happiness.” Don’t be afraid to use the traditional form but to write on an absurd topic or contemplate the ridiculous.
- D. **Photographs of You:** Take 3 photographs from your childhood in which you appear. This essay will be written in 3 sections, one for each photo. Each section of your essay will begin with an artful description of that photograph. After writing a description, let your mind wander and go where it pleases, as long as you stay focused on that time of your life. Your finished essay should be a portrait of your childhood.
- E. **Tell a story about a traumatic moment from your life.** Begin directly in the action and use the present tense to tell your story, as if it were happening at this moment. Do not give background information but let the details of the story reveal to the readers the situation and context.
- F. **Go to a place that you would never, under normal circumstances, go to willingly.** For example, if you hate shopping, go to a crowded mall. Or if children annoy you, go to a busy park and sit with the parents. Sit on a bench and observe what you see. Your essay will be series of sketches that, if done correctly, will reveal to you why you feel such an aversion to that place.
- G. **Think microscopically.** Go for a hike and sit on a rock. Observe the birds and their behavior. Observe the careful work of the ants and the patterns of their lives. What are the clouds doing? What human sounds do you hear? What nonhuman sounds do you hear? Use Thoreau’s “Battle of the Ants” as a model.

- H. Historical Fiction #1: Write a portrait of a close relative by telling the story of an event that defines his/her life. Tell the story in 3rd person. Include imagined dialogue, description of setting, plot, as though you were telling a fictional story. (*When Ruth found her three-year old brother face down in the puddle, it was the event that would define the rest of her life. For the rest of her childhood, she would hate her dark skin whenever she looked in the mirror and she would avoid looking at her body by covering herself in baggy homemade dresses, as if to punish herself for the crime of not having paid attention.*)
- I. Historical Fiction #2: Take a brief piece of a historical event of which you have some familiarity and write a dramatic retelling of that event. (For example, the death of Juana Maria, the last surviving Chumash Indian from California's Channel Islands). Base your dramatic retelling as closely as possible on original events.

Hope this gives you some good starting points. Remember to read the essays I post on the website and from the textbook. All of those essays are good models for other subjects and forms of nonfiction.