

ENG 3030: Analysis of Fiction and Nonfiction Prose

Science Writing, from Popular Science to Science-Fiction

SPRING 2025

Course Information

Instructor: Dr. Kate Simonian

Times: M/W 9-10.30 AM or 2.30-3.45 PM, depending on section

Office Hours: Mon and Wed, 12-2.30 PM, UH 301.35 or in Zoom Room 814 3610 6916 (both in-person and on Zoom are available), or by appointment

Email: kate.simonian@csusb.edu

Course Overview

A literary analysis of both fiction and nonfiction prose with special emphasis on how to write effectively about these forms of literature. Satisfies GE Writing Intensive designation (WI). Formerly ENG 303B.

In this class, we will be looking at SCIENCE! What is it? What does it do? Do we give it too much credit? Is it a powerful spark to artistic creation? How can we best write about it?

We will consider how science can be written about in compelling nonfictional forms (essays, podcasts, YouTube videos, etc.) and fiction (novels, graphic novels, films, radio plays, etc.). Our definition of fiction and nonfiction will be broad, and we will constantly consider how both forms of “prose” partake of one another. No quality piece of pop science can be compelling without the tools of fiction and narrative, and no science-fiction can do without scientific facts, data, and concepts.

This is a literature class, so we will be focusing not only on the philosophy of science, but the craft elements of texts. We will look at how to “close read” and marshal our evidence to support a thesis about what a text seems to say. For some projects, you will have the option to either write an essay or a creative piece of science-fiction or nonfiction with an accompanying explanation. Prepare to write ambitiously, read thoughtfully, discuss actively, and have fun!

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify techniques of fiction and nonfiction prose in the act of close-reading and employ a literary vocabulary when discussing these techniques.
- Structure an essay with a thesis supported by both literary evidence and external research.
- Articulate some philosophical areas of debate within science and how these can animate nonfiction and fiction.
- Consider the definitions of fiction, nonfiction, science-fiction, and science writing and how these are “fuzzy sets.”
- Enumerate strategies that work for your critical writing, as well as ways in which you hope to improve it.
- Embrace moral ambiguity and complexity, apply interpretive lenses, articulate multiple perspectives, and reflect on how social context affects meaning.
- Understand that the study of literature has more recently moved to incorporate more marginalized perspectives, and what the value of this may be.
- Thoughtfully analyze the work of peers using a neutral observation method.

Course Materials

- Readings will be provided as PDFs on Canvas or as linked websites.
- I may set one or two films, which will be available for a nominal fee online.
- You will need access to a computer, the internet, your school email, and Canvas.
- If you do not have a laptop, the library can loan you one. Check the library for details <https://www.csusb.edu/library/services/computers-library/laptop-lending> or call 909 537 5090.

Course Assignments and Exams

There will be 100 points possible in this course. **You must submit all major assignments to pass the course. That is, even if you have a passing percentage, if you do not submit one of the four assignments, you cannot pass.**

Participation (Synchronous and Asynchronous Attendance)	20
Homework Discussion Board Posts [general discussion or lit logs] (10 approx)	20
Assignment One	10
Assignment Two	10
Assignment Three	10
Assignment Four	10

Grading Scale: 94=A, 90 =A-, 87 =B+, 84=B, 80=B-, 75=C+, 71=C, 67=C-, 60=D+, <60=F

****By week two, the exact assignment dates will be on the “Key Dates” page on the Canvas site.****

Discussion Board Posts (20%)

Nearly every Wednesday, I will give you a reading and a low-stakes writing exercise to do for homework. These posts will be one of two things:

“Free think” or Creative Discussion Post

Read the work of one peer on the board and write at least a 50-100 word comment (about four to eight sentences). I will often pick interesting pieces you have written for us to talk about the following Tuesday. These are low stakes exercises: if you meet the word requirement and have answered the prompt, you will receive full credit, so don’t be afraid to take a chance and experiment.

- Lit Logs

Sometimes I ask for what I call a “lit log.” In every lit log, you will do four things:

- 1) Paste in a GIF of your reaction. (You may decide you need to explain why you used said GIF, or what part it is reacting to, but this is not necessary.)
- 2) Put in a two-to-three-sentence summary of the plot, or, if it is a nonfiction piece, a summary of the argument.
- 3) A “golden quote.” This can be a sentence or phrase you found upsetting, interesting, crucial, wrong, etc.
- 4) A discussion question. That is, some question you wonder, or some question that you think might spark conversation or debate in the class.

Together, these posts will make up 20% of your grade. **Most weeks the reading and post should take no more than an hour. Tell me if they are taking longer for you, and we’ll come up with a solution.**

****In sum, you are only given homework following class on Wednesdays. You do a combined homework covering both Monday and Wednesday classes, which is always due on Sunday by midnight.****

Participation (20%)

Because so much of this course depends on in-class discussion, participation is a huge part of your grade. Participation is partly about attendance. I ask only that you email me if you must miss a meeting or if you will not be able to regularly attend sessions. You may have four class absences without penalty. After that, your grade may be effected. **If you do not at least attend 50% of class sessions, you cannot pass the class.**

Participation is also about communication. If in doubt, it is always better to let me know what is happening, even if you email me after class has started. Participation involves coming to classes prepared (having done the readings), paying attention, and speaking. If you have an anxiety condition, email me and I will come up with some other way for you to participate. If you have not had time to read the assigned material, come to class anyway. *If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed, make up any work, or contact me for an explanation of assignments that were distributed.* Finally, participation is gauged by your ability to engage in polite and constructive feedback with your peers, contribute new or valuable material to discussions, and to be a good team-player.

Assignment One (10%, Due March 9)

You will do a literary analysis of a science article.

Assignment Two (10%, Due March 23)

You will be writing a transcript for a scientific documentary on an alien species of your own creation.

Assignment Three (10%, April 6)

You will analyze the world-building within a fictional world of your choice.

Assignment Four (10%, April 27)

You will analyze a “found text” of your choosing.

Final Assignment (20%, Due May 18)

You will write either an essay or an annotated science-fiction piece with a reflective statement. The writing will be either be about, or be inspired by, a text of your choosing. We have no exam. Your final grade is determined by your final assignment (uploaded to Canvas by Friday May 18, by midnight PST). **I cannot accept a late final.**

If you want to drop this course, the final date to do so is on Valentine's Day, the 14th February.

Grading Policy

- Please format manuscripts in the following way: 12 pt. Times New Roman/Arial/Helvetica/legible font, double-spaced, one-inch margins, with page numbers. You may print/copy on both sides of the paper. Your header will look like this:

Your Name

My Name

English 3030

Word Count: #

Title

- I grade based on three things: 1) Whether you follow the rubric, 2) Effort, 3) Improvement. Everyone, if they work consistently, can get an A in my course. This is based on an idea called “labor-based grading,” which has been shown to be particularly effective for the greatest range of students. The idea is that students who are not as strong at writing are not penalized for their skills when they come into the class. Likewise, those students who have very strong writing skills cannot just “wing it,” but are encouraged to grow as well.
- **You Will Be Busy, but I Don't Believe in “Busy Work.”** Most of this class’s activities will be directed by you. But if I have asked you to do something, it is not simply to occupy you or make it look like I am teaching. I try to be as respectful of your hectic and complex lives. Every activity has a carefully thought-out rationale that relates to the course objectives. If you’re a teacher-in-training yourself, or just curious, you can ask me what the function is of anything we do. I enjoy talking about teaching.
- I design assignments to be as transparent as possible. I want you to succeed. If you are on academic probation, have a specific grade average you want/need to maintain, or are just keen to improve your grades, email or talk to me ASAP and we can come up with a plan to keep you on track.
- I recommend completing all “easy grades,” such as homework, because just completing them gives you 100% for that component.

- Upload to Canvas. Please try to upload your exercises, when possible, to the discussion board or assignment box, rather than emailing them to me (unless I've specified otherwise). If you are in a pinch, you can email me an exercise, of course, but if you send me a PDF, I cannot annotate it. So please, if you email me an exercise for feedback, send a Word doc.
- If possible, please use subject headlines in emails. That is, try something like this: 3030_Maria_Rodriguez_Need Extension. No worries if it's not perfect; just see if you can get the 3030 in there.
- If your work is late, I may not be able to give you feedback.

Course Policies

- **Emails.** I check my emails daily. Expect a response within 24 hours unless it is on the weekend. I am striving for some work-life balance, so if you send me an email after five PM, I will not read it till the following morning. If you send me a question the night before an assignment is due, I will try to respond in time.
- **Don't panic.** Tech glitches happen, emails go missing, things fail to upload. I am not unreasonable in the face of these mishaps, but please communicate with me.
- **Be on Time.** We have a limited time in class and will need every single minute. That means classes on time. Aim to arrive a few minutes early. Please do not disrespect your classmates or me by coming late. That said, if you are late, it is better to come late than not at all.
- **Technology.** Please don't obviously check your phone in class, unless it is an emergency. I know it's tempting to multitask, but please don't open your laptop and do non-class-related work either. If people do this, I'll have to insist on closed laptops for portions of class.
- **Be courteous.** You may make a point passionately, but the following will not fly: interrupting, hogging the floor, raising one's voice, sarcastic put-downs, eye-rolling/scoffing, or making others feel like their contributions are not important. This classroom is a safe space for everyone, regardless of political affiliation, religion, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, or illness. It is crucial to frame our opinions in a constructive way. Any behavior that threatens the safety in which true intellectual thought can occur will result in a warning, and if it persists, in removal from the class.

This class is also a place to practice the professionalism and social grace required of you as fair-minded adults, writers, and public intellectuals. Part of your participation grade depends on your ability to entertain ideas that are foreign to your own, and to accept the co-existence of more than one value system. It is acceptable to challenge an opinion, provided it is done in a non-hostile and reasoned way. In this class, you will never be penalized for the stance that you take; you will be graded solely based on the *nuance, expression, and techniques* that you marshal to make your point or tell your story. Feel free to write what you want, but be aware that what you think, like what everyone else thinks, is open to criticism and must be defended artistically or intellectually. I will be held to the same standards. Basically, respect your peers as equals.

- **I'm here to help.** If you ever want to talk, email me, or grab me after class. If it's a lengthy matter, drop by my office hours or make an appointment with me. I'm here to read drafts or discuss your progress in the class; in fact, I hope to confer with you many times this semester. Please contact me if: you have an illness (physical or mental) that might impact your work, you suffer from social/speaking anxiety, you are under financial hardship, you work long hours, you are in many extracurricular groups, you have a course overload, you have suffered exceptional circumstances such as the death of a partner or close family member, you have court-mandated duties, etc. If you speak to me about such pressures *before* they impact your work, we can come to an accommodation. I will be unable to do as much *after* an assignment is due, or by the end of the semester.

Communicate with me if you have concerns about the course or other related topics. I do not want you to worry or feel uncertain about something because you're nervous about asking. I want you to enjoy this class, and that's hard if you are stressed out.

*****In sum, communicate, communicate, communicate! I am understanding, but I need to know what's happening. Reach out to me no matter how many classes you've missed. Reach out to me if you're embarrassed by how much work you owe. Reach out to me because there's very often something that can be done.*****

Tips to Succeed in This Course

- **Speak.** I understand that it can be challenging to express thoughts aloud, but try. Your voice is an essential contribution, and your perspective important. You have no idea who else is sitting there, trying to summon up the courage to ask a similar

question. There are no silly questions: often questions that seem silly reflect the most profound engagement. Very often I will ask the class for thoughts and feelings. Usually, feelings come before thoughts. For example, that line makes me uncomfortable, or that idea is beautiful. Emotions can be lightning rods. If you feel something about the text, say so! It is likely that we can take that feeling up like a string, and it will lead us to an important thought.

- **Discomfort.** You may feel uncomfortable because you are directionless and don't know what to write about. I understand. The pressure to write can be overwhelming. "Blanking" is a thing, but there are plenty of strategies to overcome it. If you're stuck, or have been painfully stuck for a more-than-usual amount of time and don't know what to do, reach out. Another bad kind of uncomfortable is if you feel unsafe in the class or unsure of what you are meant to be doing or why you are being asked to do it. If you feel uncomfortable in this way, speak to me immediately.
- **Take notes.** The action of taking notes aids retention, even if you never look at them.
- **Don't try to please me.** I am not a professor who grades you based on whether you agree with me. What produces the best writing is you exploring your own voice, ideas, passions, and experiences. Write what excites you. Whenever I give you a prompt, feel free to take it in a wildly different direction. Prompts are there to get you started, not slow you down once you take off.

RESOURCES

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability, please read the below information to have your right to accommodation met. If you have an undocumented disability, please contact me or indicate this on your first-day questionnaire, along with what accommodations you prefer.

Contact Services to Students with Disabilities at (909) 537-5238 or ssd@csusb.edu.

If you require assistance in the event of an emergency, you are advised to establish a buddy system with a buddy and an alternate buddy in the class. Individuals with disabilities should prepare for an emergency ahead of time by instructing a classmate and the instructor.

Please contact SSD them as early in the semester so that we can work together to accommodate your learning needs. Contact Accessible Technology Services for help with technology at www.csusb.edu/ats. There is a University Center for Developmental Disabilities: www.csusb.edu/icdfr/funded-projects/university-center-developmental-disabilities. Here is the Campus Accessibility Guide: www.csusb.edu/campus-accessibility-guide.

Academic Honesty

Please refer to the course bulletin's [Academic Regulations and Standards](#) for the University's policy regarding cheating and plagiarism. These activities will not be tolerated in this class. Become familiar with the policy and what constitutes plagiarism. Any cheating or plagiarism will result in failing this class and a disciplinary review by the University. These actions may lead to probation, suspension, or expulsion.

Examples of Plagiarism include but are not limited to:

- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work)
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it your own
- Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit
- Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases
- Submitting a piece of work you did for one class for another class (without my permission)

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. You may submit your papers in such a way that no identifying information about you is included. Another option is that you request, in writing, that your papers not be submitted to www.turnitin.com. However, if you choose this option you will be required to provide documentation to substantiate that the papers are your original work and do not include any plagiarized material.

Academic integrity means taking responsibility for one's own class and/or course work, being individually accountable, and demonstrating intellectual honesty and ethical behavior. If you borrow another writer's material, that is okay, but you must document the source according to the Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines. A good resource on how to do this can be found at the Purdue Online Writing Lab:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html. That said, this course will be about producing your own work, which means that although you may be influenced by another writer, you cannot borrow their content.

If you plagiarize, you may violate CSUSB's Plagiarism and Cheating policy. **In sum, don't plagiarize. It's very easy to spot and not worth it. If you plan to plagiarize because you've run**

out of time, speak to me about an extension instead. Accidental plagiarism will still be treated as academic dishonesty. “Patch writing” (when you take someone’s words and go through and replace words and phrases) is also considered plagiarism, so please ask if you are in doubt.

Important Note About AI

In this course, you can use Generative AI Tools such as ChatGPT or Copilot for parts of some assignments. It can only be used for small components of your writing, and your writing will improve fastest if you do not use it at all. To maintain academic integrity, you must disclose any use of AI-generated material. Exercise caution and avoid sharing any sensitive or private information when using these tools. Examples of such information include personally identifiable information (PII), protected health information (PHI), financial data, intellectual property (IP), and any other data that might be legally protected.

Include the following statement in assignments to indicate use of a Generative AI Tool:
“The author(s) would like to acknowledge the use of [Generative AI Tool Name], a language model developed by [Generative AI Tool Provider], in the preparation of this assignment. The [Generative AI Tool Name] was used in the following way(s) in this assignment [e.g., brainstorming, grammatical correction, citation, which portion of the assignment].”