

Sophister Module Description 2025-26

Full Name: The Art of Non-Fiction (ENU44023)

Short Name: AoNF

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Carlo Gébler; carlogebler@gmail.com

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: MT

Year: SS

Module content

The module is intended as an introduction to the history and production of non-fiction in some of its major forms: the essay; memoir; journalism; reportage; cultural history; literary criticism; and multiple hybrid contemporary forms.

The module will be exploratory and practical, using the study of published texts, structured exercises, class discussion and workshops to stimulate the production of new work. Students need to be aware that this is a writing module and writing (and the generating of text as well as the study of how non-fiction functions) is at its heart. Every week students and the module leader will examine a set text (titles below) which will have been read in advance: this discussion will focus on how the text functions and succeeds (or not) as a piece of non-fiction. Students will also (by prior agreement at the beginning of term) provide a piece of original non-fiction (not necessarily finished, and not less than a 1000 words in length and not more than 3000 words in length) in advance as hard copy to Carlo Gébler (who is teaching the course): this piece of written work will also be discussed in class; again, as with the discussion on the set text, the focus will be on the nature and efficacy of the material and whether or not it works as a piece of non-fiction art. The discussion of student written work in class will be focused, constructive and detailed; it will also be in depth. Participants may not previously have had the kind of attention that they will experience in the module directed at work they have written and they should come to the module prepared for this. Typically, students will have to provide at least one piece of non-fiction in advance for discussion in class over the course

of the term (although it could be more – the number of submissions is entirely dependent on the size of the class). Typically, two pieces written by students will be discussed in each class in conjunction with the set text. Finally, and this cannot be emphasized enough – this is a writing module and writing is at its heart. Seminar/workshop attendance is compulsory.

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this module a student should be able to:

1. Identify and show a critical understanding of some of the key authors and texts in the development of non-fiction forms.
2. Show an understanding of recent developments and possibilities in the production of non-fiction.
3. Demonstrate an awareness of some of the key debates about the nature of non-fiction.
4. Employ a range of high-level writing skills in producing a range of non-fiction texts.
5. Generate a piece of high-end non-fiction, ideally of a publishable standard.

Learning Aims:

To understand exactly what is involved in the creation of a non-fiction text (autobiographical, personal, essayistic, creative, polemical, biographical, et cetera) which is intended for publication

Assessment Details:

This module will be assessed by the submission of 5,000 words of non-fiction, to be submitted at the end of term. The nature and content of the essay will be agreed with Carlo Gébler in advance. Students will have the

opportunity to discuss their essay's structure, form and content during the contact hour, which either follow the class or be at some other mutually agreed time.

Content warning

Some texts on this module may include offensive language, including racial, gender-based, able-ist, sexual and other slurs, and may portray troubling events and narratives, including murder, abuse and sexual assault. We are committed to the critical analysis of these texts and of their contexts.

Preliminary Reading List:

Each week, one book will be studied in detail. The work should be read in advance of the class. It cannot be stressed enough that all texts must be read in advance.

Week 1: Archives

- Ursula Marx et al, eds., *Walter Benjamin's Archive* (2007) & Hugh Collins *Autobiography of a Murderer* (1997)

Week 2: Selves

- Irvin D. Yalom, *Love's Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy* (1989)

Week 3: Ethics

- Maggie Nelson, *The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning* (2011)

Week 4: Essays

- William Hazlitt, *Selected Writings* (1998) and Nick Kent, *The Dark Stuff, Selected Writings on Rock Music 1972 – 1993*. Students will read, at the very least, all the essays in the section Heroes (in Hazlitt's *Selected Writings* these are, 'My First Acquaintance with the Poets', *from* 'The Life of Napoleon', 'Edmund Kean' and *from* 'Liber Amoris: Conclusion') plus all of *The Dark Stuff*.

Week 5: Autobiographies & Autofiction

- J.R. Ackerley *My Father and Myself* (1968)

Week 6: Biographies

- Geoff Dyer, *Out of Sheer Rage: in the shadow of D.H.Lawrence* (1997)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Long Form Journalism/New Journalism

Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968)

Week 9: Nature Writing

- Tim Robinson, *Connemara: Listening to the Wind* (2006)

Week 10: Literary Criticism

- Elif Batuman, *The Possessed: Adventures with Russian Books and the People Who Read Them* (2011)

Week 11: Travel

- Jan Morris, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere* (2001)

Week 12: Food Writing

- M.F.K. Fisher, *The Gastronomical Me* (1954) which is contained in *The Art of Eating* (2004) a collection that brings together five of Fisher's best-known texts.

Carlo Gébler

Thursday 3 April 2025

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.

The School of English strongly supports Trinity's strategic commitment to the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion. Staff in the School are required to adhere to all the college's policies around issues of equality, diversity and inclusion, including engaging with appropriate training. The School also encourages its students to engage with the training made available to them in relation to these areas by Trinity's Equality Office. This training and further information about the college's policies can be found on their website: <https://www.tcd.ie/equality/>. The School acknowledges, however, that texts studied in its

modules may contain forms of representation or language that engage in and portray prejudice and discrimination of various kinds. Fostering the ability to engage critically with such texts, and the complex and challenging debates and deliberations to which they give rise, is an essential part of the School's educational mission. So too is instilling knowledge of the historical and sociolinguistic dimensions of what has and has not been considered offensive. As a community committed to open, respectful and responsible discussion, the School recognises that the direct quotation of discriminatory, derogatory terms from texts in lectures, seminars and tutorials should generally be avoided. It supports the right of its members to respond critically, openly and vigorously to ideas or opinions that they oppose, while affirming its commitment to fostering a robust intellectual environment in which all members can freely participate. The School also recognises the complexities of debates about teaching and questions of equality, diversity and inclusion, and undertakes to continue to work towards a better understanding of the issues involved.