Creative Nonfiction Study Sheet

Goals of this Study Sheet
This study sheet aims to inform you about what creative nonfiction is, as well as explain the different forms of this genre. In addition to that, this sheet will give you some advice on how to start writing creative nonfiction.

What is Creative Nonfiction?
The word “creative” refers to the craft of writing, the weft and weave of the literary tapestry. The designation “nonfiction” refers to the sequence of events or facts presented—it is the creative aspect which, of course, gives it flair. There are many subgenres within the realm of creative nonfiction—personal essays, memoirs, literary journalism, vignettes, micro-nonfiction, research papers, poetry to name a few—but it may not always be personal. Creative nonfiction can be an account of something or a stylized interview, as long as there is a factual aspect.

Essays
The writing in these essays – personal, narrative, memoir – should reflect you, yes, but should also lend itself to the content in a beneficial way. Say you are writing a narrative about a personal memory – a sunny childhood day, maybe. Use language that is brief to reflect the thought process of a child, push colors forward to express emotion in the narrative. Structure is more important with essays and can also affect tone effectively.

Literature
You’ll be able to make a lot more stylistic choices while working with literature. When writing creative non-fiction, you have more freedom from grammatical errors, especially in poetry or micro-fiction. Many times, grammar is disregarded completely for far more experimental modes. Take Everything Is Illuminated by Jonathan Safran Froer, for...
example. It is an account of the journey he made to Odessa, Ukraine, in attempt reconnect with family roots he had lost during the holocaust. Throughout most of the book he takes a tone of affected amusement, with the exception of a harrowing chapter that detailed the brutalization of a woman in a shtetl (a small town) during the inception of the holocaust. During this sequence, grammatical caution is thrown to the wind as he takes on a stream-of-consciousness flow to echo the onslaught of trauma expressed by the woman. This furthered the emotional impact of her dialogue.

**Journalism**

Journalists write “stories.” They do report what happened, yes, but they have to engage the reader. Perspective is what is most at play in this form of creative nonfiction. A story in journalism must feel as a meandering tale would, full of twists and turns that makes it all the more enticing due to its factual background. Is a restaurant visit thrilling without the proper words to describe both the critic’s palate and experience? For example: in Pete Wells’ review of Guy Fieri’s restaurant Guy’s American Kitchen & Bar, we are taken through a veritable hurricane of emotions through scathing commentary that spins a tall tale of a poor restaurant experience. Wells’ language is drastic and cutting, and the reader is taken along a wild visual journey with him as he condescends to review every bite of food that passes his lips.

**Advice**

Don’t be afraid to experiment with word choice and sequence of events—just make sure to stick to overarching structure of the subgenre you are working within. As you tell your story, don’t rely entirely on your own wittiness to keep the reader engaged; trust in the events and heart of the story itself.

**Source Referenced**

From the Writing Center at the Academic Resource Center

John Tyler Community College