



Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life

Philip Gerard (Contributor)

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Gerard covers everything from getting the assignment to conducting a stirring interview to working with an editor - including how to go "where the story lives" to experience the first-hand emotional facts - sights, smells, sounds - that will give your story immediacy; find the right form for the story you want to tell - essay, memoir, nature piece, political analysis, investigative exposes, personality profile; write an opening that catches the reader's attention and an ending that leaves a lasting impression; craft an engaging story by applying fiction elements such as dialogue, plot and conflict; find a voice readers can trust, and a writing style that "sings"; write other people's stories. (Gerard addresses such ethical and legal questions as libel, privacy, "off the record"); and revise your work in light of what you know now ... re-envision what the story really is. Throughout, you'll find examples, advice and inspiration from some of today's greatest nonfiction writers - such as Terry Tempest Williams, Annie Dillard, Barry Lopez and Ron Powers.

Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life Details

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From Reader Review Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life for online ebook

Tatra says

I liked his voice and the way he presented how to write creative nonfiction.

Christina says

I paid too much for this book when I had to buy the same type only more focused on the digital for another class. lots of common sense, some helpful tips.

Mark Hennion says

Gerard's book is absolutely indispensable for both writers as well as teachers. CNF covers every conceivable aspect of the craft. The book defines CNF's misunderstood nature, discusses its forms, presses upon and formulates assertions about what a story "is," and perhaps most importantly devotes chapters upon selecting a form and shaping the story.

I have no element to criticize in this book. Cover to cover, the book is generous, well-observed, didactic without becoming preachy, and avoids overly long quoting to demonstrate points (as far too many other how-to books do). Do yourself a favor: buy this book.

Nathan Albright says

The writer of this book is gives a great deal of thoughtful and personal advice about writing creative nonfiction. This is the term that has been more or less settled upon at the present time (and, since this book was published twenty years ago, for quite some time) for those writers whose work sits at the boundary between fiction and nonfiction. Since the time this book was published, the writing of personal essays and other creative nonfiction on blogs has become much more popular, and although this book does not discuss blogging at all, it does discuss the mindframe and attitude one should have towards writing nonfiction that has strong artistic and literary style, and as that category of writing happens to include travel writing [1], memoir/autobiography [2], personal essays [3], book and movie reviews [4], and similar writings, namely almost all of the writing I do and a large amount of the reading I do, I may be the precise sort of person that would best appreciate this book. I loved it. To be sure, not everyone else will love this book, but if you are a writer and you appreciate good writing about good writing, the odds are significant that you will love this book as well, not only for its content but for the fact that the author writes so well, providing an example of creative nonfiction and not merely a discussion of it.

In just over 200 pages the author manages to cover an impressive scope of material concerning the writing of literary nonfiction that aims to convey a commitment to truth while also showing an admirable attention to a storytelling approach and artistic form. Part of this book is a how-to guide from an instructor of creative

nonfiction at the University of North Carolina-Wilmington, showing how to experience the first-hand reality of a story that gives one's writing a sense of authenticity, writing a grabbing opening, crafting an engaging story using dialogue, plot, and conflict, finding a voice that readers can trust and a style that sings with lyrical beauty, writing other people's stories in an ethical fashion that avoids lawsuits, and revising a work to bring out its essential core. However, this book rises above the workmanlike effort a mere how-to guide by being itself an example of excellent and moving and lyrical prose itself. The book itself is divided into eleven chapters as the author covers such matters as defining creative nonfiction, finding an original subject that corresponds to one's passions and knowledge, researching, interviewing, working on assignment, deciding the form of one's creative nonfiction based on how much material it is and what genre it seems to fall into, telling a true story, putting yourself on the line to build interest on the part of the reader, dealing with mystery and structure, style and attitude, revising, and dealing with legal and ethical questions. The author then closes with a bibliography for readers that includes a selected research list for readers interested in a deeper look at the subject.

Part of what makes this book such an excellent read is that the author knows what he is talking about on several levels. For one, he is an excellent reader of creative nonfiction, with insightful comments such as the following: "We realize, all at once, that they've been making art the only way art can be fashioned, out of the imperfect things of this world (15)." The author speaks as a knowledgeable writer of creative fiction, giving voice to the anxieties writers often face in our work: "But in fact most writers I know are just as timid around strangers as the average nonwriter--some even more so. After all, we writers are used to spending long stretches of solitary time in small, isolated rooms, with only the company of our word machines. We hate to bother people. If the person in question is famous, we feel a bit like imposters and are reluctant, even apologetic, about taking up that person's valuable time. You would think that practice would make it easier to approach complete strangers and ask questions, but in my experience, at least, it never gets easier (56-57)." And the author has also thought long and hard about the tradeoffs made by writers who are under compulsion to write despite its immense costs on their personal happiness and well-being: "In some sense, the writer is always the interloper, the eavesdropper, standing just outside the conversation, on the edge of the memory, participating in it but also already using it, and not always comfortable in the dual role. We feel like spies in the family circle, looters of the family album, under cover agents recording the most intimate conversations of our friends. Informers on ourselves. We give up our lives to make words, telling as many of our secrets as we dare. We give up something--privacy, the freedom of anonymity, the freedom to forget and be forgotten about (146)." It is not only that the author knows how to read and how to write, but pours out of the agony of his soul the struggles faced by a writer who wants to be true to themselves and to the shabbiness of the reality that we often write about, and also to turn that shabby reality into something beautiful and artistic. For those of us who struggle in this task, this is an excellent book to read and reflect upon and apply.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

[2] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2016...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2013...>

[3] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2010...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2010...>

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/2015...>

[4] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.blog/cate...>

Brendan O'Meara says

Great insights into the craft of creative nonfiction. Helped me get out of a slump.

Kienie says

The order in which the advice comes is a bit odd. I'd put advice about structure and form before tips on research and interviews, but I guess that's just me. I'm also fascinated by Gerard's awe of technology, especially computers. He is a guy who owns a typewriter that he's had to work on before, so I understand that a laptop is mind-blowing. It's more precious than annoying, especially since I still remember a world before internet.

Most of the information is basic: the genres, the importance of editing, the forms a work can take. His insights into publishing are potentially helpful, but he doesn't go too in depth about the non-writer side of the business. I almost wish he had.

He also slams *In Cold Blood* for inventing dialogue and dream sequences, calling that sort of writing fiction and not true non-fiction. He then breaks down the correct way to create characters in a non-fiction narrative. The advice is basic, but good things are worth repeating.

On the whole it was an easy read, written in an uncomplicated style.

I'm not going to reread it anytime soon though.

Bruce Brodowski says

I have published three books now and am currently working on a memoir-fiction mix. I didn't know much about craft. I have learned so much from this book. I look forward to attending a November 2013 three day workshop with Philip Gerard. This book has helped immensely in the way my memoir will now be written.

Karen says

A solid book that discusses research in creative nonfiction. While I don't think Gerard says anything new, I do think this is a good book for beginners. I did really enjoy his chapter on editing/revising (which really has nothing to do with research, but was a good read anyways!)

T. Fowler says

A good book with much practical advice

Janet Hartman says

Gives good pointers on writing real life stories in journalist style.

Kim Stallwood says

Writing is hard work. And every now and then I find it helpful to read a book about writing. I've enjoyed reading Creative Nonfiction by Philip Gerard. Its focus is on creative nonfiction and it's a useful primer on the subject. Creative nonfiction, according to the back cover blurb, reads "like fiction, but stays loyal to the Truth." Which maybe a poetic rather than a literal way to describe it but I think it works. In fact, it sums up the book well, as it's a mixture of inspiration and general advice as well as practical advice and brief examples.

Rachel says

If you don't want to write, stay away from this book. It's so inspiring, succinct, and helpful. I only wish I'd read it earlier. It makes me really glad to have Philip Gerard as my teacher. This is one of those books that may end up tattered, held together by duct tape, never reaching the shelf because it's always out for reference. Such good stuff, and I think students at all levels could benefit from it--it could start high-schoolers, or even middle-schoolers, off on the right foot, and I, in graduate school, feel vastly wiser and more writerly for having read it.

La says

Read through this book to brush up on my knowledge of nonfiction writing. Now, I'm inspired to integrate all of this new information into my writing. I'd definitely recommend it to anyone interested in writing

nonfiction.

Lori says

Good for non-fiction writers.

Jamie says

It was helpful in breaking down the process of writing creative nonfiction, but there were also a few chapters I could have easily skipped that read like a textbook. Overall, it is worth reading for anyone interested in the learning more about the genre.
