

Course Outline: Canadian Topics: Life Writing

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH | FALL/WINTER 2026-2027

Note for students: This short course outline is provided for planning purposes only. Course information is tentative and subject to change; the final course syllabus will be available by the first day of classes.

Course Code

AP/EN 4252 6.0A (Y) – Canadian Topics: Life Writing

Course Description

This course offers students an introduction to the theory of life writing in general and to the rich practice of life writing in Canada in particular, from the late nineteenth century to the present, with special attention given to works written by binary and non-binary subjects known for their practice as writers and by subjects speaking from a minority position. Through readings of selected texts and criticism, students will enhance their understanding of how life writing has been defined theoretically and what factors, including aesthetic and editorial traditions as well as political and social contexts, have contributed to the emergence and evolution of life writing texts in Canada and shaped how these texts have been perceived by writers and readers. A varied sampling of the remarkable corpus of Canadian life writing texts will offer students an opportunity to explore in depth how life writing has made a fundamental contribution to Canadian culture, and how contemporary Canadian writers are transforming the genre.

The course takes as starting point that reading literary works, in this case, life writing texts, is a tremendous source of interpersonal knowledge and personal enrichment. By deepening our understanding of the breadth of the human condition and its challenges and rewards, we add meaning to our lives. For this reason, the course pedagogy is learner centered. Students will be encouraged to reflect and build on their own knowledge and point of view as readers and writers.

Course Delivery

Delivery Mode: ONLN asynchronous

There are no designated meeting times and days. The course is given on an asynchronous basis. Each week is set out as a separate learning module on eClass, providing students with links to a wide range of multimedia learning resources, including short lecture notes, video walk throughs of weekly concepts, worksheets to help students apply the weekly concepts, interviews with authors as well as online platforms and films related to the life writing texts being discussed. Students are expected to read the required readings and participate weekly in small online discussion groups, around structured learning activities. The Internet format encourages

interactive pedagogical strategies and reinforces individual learning opportunities. All four assignments, including two research essay assignments, one reading test, and a course journal are submitted over eClass, and deadlines are flexible. Students receive individualized feedback on their assignments and have an opportunity to use this feedback to revise their work to improve their skills and mark. The two research essay assignments include options for both traditional essays and creative (un)essays. The course journal offers students an experiential learning experience as they reflect on their journey through the course. Students are encouraged to see learning as a process whereby they can develop learning skills they can apply to enhance their academic success and their path to lifelong learning and writing.

Course Materials

Blais, Marie-Claire. *A Writer's Journey*. Trans Linda Gaboriau, Burnaby, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 1996; Callaghan, Morley. *That Summer in Paris*. Toronto: Exile Press, 2007; Fontaine, Naomi. *Kuessipan*. Trans. David Homel. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013; Glassco, John. *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, New York: New York Review of Books, 2007; Joe, Rita. *The Song of Rita Joe: Autobiography of a Mikmaq Poet*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996; Laferrière, Dany, *The World is Moving Around Me: A Memoir of the Haiti Earthquake*, Trans. David Homel. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2013; Meigs, Mary. *Lily Briscoe: A Self-Portrait*. Burnaby, British Columbia: Talonbooks, 1981; Raab, Elisabeth M. *And Peace Never Came*, Waterloo Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997; Roy, Gabrielle, *Enchantment and Sorrow*. Trans. Patricia Claxton. Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1987. Excerpts from a diverse range of other readings will be available in a course kit.

Sample course materials assigned for week 2 on the traditions of autobiography and biography include: two short readings available in the course kit (a summary is also provided on the course website). To give students some concrete examples of how these kinds of life-writing can play out, they are encouraged to access short CBC interviews about three types of biographical or autobiographical texts: 1) Lucy Maud Montgomery's final volume of her journal; 2) Charlotte Grey's biography of Canadian writer and suffragette Nellie McClung; and 3) Chester Brown's comic book biography of Métis leader Louis Riel.

Tentative Grade Breakdown and Deadlines

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
First-term research essay or creative (un)essay (2000 words)	20%	Asynchronous	November 9, 2026, flexible
First-term reading test (2000 words)	15%	Asynchronous	January 7, 2027, flexible

Assessment	Weight	Mode	Tentative Deadline
Second-term research essay or creative (un)essay (2000 words)	20%	Asynchronous	March 3, 2027, flexible
Course journal	25%	Asynchronous	April 5, 2027
	100%		

Additional Information

Category:	C
Historical Requirements:	N/A
Open To:	Yr 4 Hons. (EN, ENPR, CRWR students only)