

## AML4170, Studies in American Literary Forms: Early American Life Writing

Spring 2026

### Dr. Jodi Schorb

**Email:** Please message instructor directly using Canvas Inbox feature rather than standard email, jschorb@ufl.edu

**Phone:** Please message instructor via Canvas Inbox rather than calling the office phone: 352-294-2874, except during office hours.

**Response time:** Expect a response within 36 hours, usually less, except weekends.

### Office Hour Days, Locations, and Times:

**Tuesdays** 10:20-11:20 am in person in Turlington 4334 (starting week 2).

**Wednesdays** 9:30-10:30 am via Zoom (starting week 2); link is on the Course landing page.

**Thursdays:** 2:00-3:00 pm in person in Turlington 4334 (starting week 1)

Additional times/dates available with 48-hour advance notice.

### Course Description and Information

The course meeting time is **Tuesdays Period 5/6 (11:45 AM-1:40 PM) & Thursdays Period 6 (12:50 PM-1:40 PM)** in ANT 0213 (Antevy Hall, College of Design and Construction, just east of the Music building)

#### Course Description:

This course will introduce students to life writing, which includes diaries, journals, narratives, autobiographies, and other forms of self-writing.

The course will focus most on the origins of American life writing, from colonial America to the 1860s, asking how early "Americans" composed themselves. In other words, how did individuals select, arrange, and convey the events and vicissitudes of their lives into legible literary form?

Life-writing was the dominant genre of American literature, outnumbering fiction, poetry, short fiction, and other creative literary forms. Explorers, settlers and native peoples, Puritans and heretics, everyday men and women, exemplary citizens and prisoners, captives, and the enslaved: all told their stories. But for whom? And why?

No knowledge of life writing is expected, just a curiosity about individuals in the past and modes of writing one's story. Discussion questions include: What constitutes a "self"? What constituted "personhood" (a social and legal category)? How does life writing differ when selfhood is understood as communal, or exemplary, or autonomous? How did the historical transformation of "selfhood," including the rise of self-determining, individualist models of the self after the Enlightenment and across in the eighteenth century, impact the form and function of life writing? How did the rise of new social and literary movements change American life writing in the nineteenth century?

We will discuss the process of "self-making" across a range of self-authored genres of life writing, including travelogues, journals, letters, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies, captivity narratives, slave narratives, and more. We will also attend to the ways authors challenged traditional models and experimented with new forms of self-making.

#### Learning Outcomes:

Content: Students will demonstrate competence in the terminology, genres, methods, and historical development of American life writing, from its early forms through the emergence of "modern" autobiography. This includes hands-on experience getting familiar with manuscripts and early print forms.

**Communication:** Students will communicate their original ideas, informed knowledge, and analytical reasoning clearly and effectively through reflective analysis, literary analysis, peer review, and leading course discussion through regular panelist presentations.

**Critical Thinking:** Students will analyze primary sources carefully, logically, and creatively, developing their skills in critical analysis and reflection as a mode of engaged thinking and learning. Students will gain practice in locating and assessing reliable secondary source scholarship relevant to their course interests, and gain skills putting their own ideas into conversation with published scholars and peers.

**Prerequisites:**

The prerequisite to all 3000/4000-level courses in English are six credits of English (composition, creative writing, film/media studies/literature) at the 1000/2000 level or department permission. Contact John Murchek ([murchek@ufl.edu](mailto:murchek@ufl.edu)) if you need assistance determining whether you have met your prerequisites. This is a department-wide policy.

**Required textbooks:**

Austin Reed, *The Life and the Adventures of a Haunted Convict*. Edited by Caleb Smith, Yale University Press/Random House, 2016. ISBN: 9780812986914 (Modern Library edition.) Copies should be in the campus bookstore; otherwise use the ISBN to locate and purchase a print or electronic edition.

**Recommended anthology:**

Andrews, William L., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *Slave Narratives*. Library of America, 2002. ISBN: 9781931082112 (You will be assigned at least three or more of the texts in this affordable collection; while these narratives are available individually in the public domain, they are lengthy, and many students prefer using this affordable, reliable print edition.) Copies should be in the campus bookstore.

**Materials/Supply Fees:**

There is no supply fee for this course. My required and recommended books conform to the requirements needed for an **affordability badge**.

**Technology Requirements:**

- Ability to take notes and annotate pdf readings, which includes capacity to mark pdfs or online reading content, add comments, highlight text, write margin notes, and engage with required readings in a way that demonstrates close reading and preparedness.
- Regular access and use of the Canvas course page, including during class.
- Laptop or tablet in class to access readings and your reading notes.** Most readings are online in pdf or weblinks. Therefore, students will be expected to have readings handy, complete readings prior to the class, and be able to reference specific passages/pages in class. A smartphone is not an acceptable substitute for the level of reading preparedness and discussion readiness expected weekly in the course.
- For help with reading technology needed for pdf and online annotation, contact the UF Computing Help Desk: Phone: (352) 392-HELP (4357); Email: [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu); Walk-in: HUB 132.
- To successfully complete all readings and assignments, students are expected to meet [UF's requirements for Student Computing](#)  
[Links to an external site.](#) for computing and internet access; see IT Policies for definitions and resources.

**Credit Hours:** 3.

## Assignments and Graded Activities

Written Assignments	Brief Description	Course Weight
Reflective Analysis 1	A 3-page response; Identify something precise that you found yourself most thinking about and in 3 pages, explain yourself and guide the reader through a fuller analysis or thinking through this observation.	12.5%
Midterm Essay (Literary Analysis)	A 5–6-page essay with your own theses and line of argument, based on assigned primary and secondary readings and engaging with course unit ideas and resources. Instructor will provide the prompt.	20%
Group Activity	Hand-on Transcription of Life Writing for a Crowdsourced Public Archive Project	5%
Reflective Analysis 2	A 3-page response; Identify something precise that you found yourself most thinking about and in 3 pages, explain yourself and guide the reader through a fuller analysis or thinking through this observation.	12.5%
	You can do an additional reflective analysis and the grade will replace a prior reflective analysis	
Final Essay or Project	A 7–8-page literary analysis essay (or equivalent project) on a topic of personal interest emerging from course ideas and readings. See guidelines, which will be released one month in advance.	22%
Other	Periodic rapid homeworks to paste answers or type into a Canvas assignment box, which are not assessed but count towards engaged participation.	
Serving as Panelist	Each student will lead a 5-minute presentation that offers guided ideas to help peers gain a deeper or fuller understanding of the day's assigned readings. Panel presentation days will typically feature 3 students presenting thoughtful ideas for 5 minutes, followed by a 10-15 class discussion that panelists will facilitate. Guideline and rubric will be provided. Visuals encouraged but not required.	5%
Daily Attendance	See attendance policy in this document.	7.5%
Consistent Participation & Initiative	See details below. This includes in-class small group and full class discussion, coming prepared to discuss readings and questions given in advance, activity prep homework, contributing to Canvas discussions, responding to peers when asked, and overall course engagement.	12.5%
Peer workshops	Mandatory days (3) when you swap drafts of assignments ahead of final submission and offer constructive ideas to peers. Details on how to get full credit will be provided on the relevant assignment guidelines.	1 each 3%
<b>Total</b>	The instructor retains the right to make minor modifications to assignments in advance.	<b>100%</b>

### Grading Policy and Scale

Grade	Grade Percentages *
A	93.5-100
A-	90 – <93.5
B+	87 – <90
B	83.5 – <87
B-	80 – 83.5
C+	77 – <80
C	73.5 – <77
C-	70 – <73.5
D+	67 – <70
D	64- < 67
D-	> 61 - < 64
E	61 or under
Note to Crosscheck on Canvas autosettings.	

### Grading Criteria for Essays

#### A-range paper:

- has a sophisticated, convincing argument that require a strong level of interpretation and engagement with ideas and materials that goes beyond class discussion
- has an efficient introduction that frames what is to come and makes the paper's purpose and thesis clear
- is well organized in terms of its flow, arc, and use of transitions (There is a reason why your paragraphs are in the order they are in, and you have thought about what to argue or treat first, and what makes sense to come next, and what is best to build up to or reserve for later.
- has individual paragraphs with a strong focus and illustrate/develop the main paragraph claim.
- presents a judicious selection of textual evidence to support claims
- is written in a clear, concise and polished style
- has very few if any grammatical or mechanical errors
- cites direct quotes and all paraphrases using [MLA in-text \(parenthetical\) citationLinks to an external site.](#) format
- has a concise conclusion that does not repeat the thesis or summarize what was said. Better to end with a thought or perspective on the paper's main takeaway or "widens the lens" to give readers something to further to think about.
- includes any other requirements specified in the Assignment
- includes an "Outside Works Consulted" page in MLA bibliography format that includes **all** outside references that you paraphrased from, quoted from, or adapted language from, including webpages, reference pages (except the dictionary), blogs, academic articles, books, AI summaries, or other sources of information, which is also properly cited in MLA in-line citation in the body of your text.
- Reflects academic honesty, which includes never passing off another entity's language as if it is your own.

**B-range paper:**

- offers a convincing and capable argument with good interpretations and solid development (but might benefit from more complex development or subtler examples, or more risk-taking with examples, to boost development)
- has solid and framing in the introduction that makes its purpose clear a conclusion that does not simply repeat what was said.
- is adequately organized with minimal trouble spots
- has individual paragraphs that are largely clear in focus, but likely has some paragraphs that are not as sustained or persuasive or well developed as those in the A paper
- provides good textual evidence and guide the reader through what to pay attention to in the evidence, but evidence could be fuller or more nuanced
- is clearly written and engaging for much of the paper but likely has clear places to improve clarity and/or strengthen style to give more polish and sentence variety.
- is mostly free of grammatical and mechanical errors but has some clear mechanical or grammatical issues to target or improve, including citing direct quotes and paraphrases using [MLA in-text \(parenthetical\) citationLinks to an external site.](#) format
- has a conclusion that makes the essay feel resolved (but could be a fuller conclusion).
- addresses any other requirements specified in the assignment
- If draws on outside sources, essay includes an "Outside Works Consulted" page in MLA bibliography format that includes all outside references that you paraphrased from or quote directly, including webpages, reference pages (except a dictionary), blogs, academic articles, books, or other sources of information.
- reflects academic honesty, which includes never passing off another entity's language as if it is your own.
- Essay may align with rubric for the A paper, but has late penalties assessed that lower the grade

**C-range paper:**

- is passable and promising but has multiple areas that could use considerable improvement; these can include the following:
- would likely benefit from a stronger and more interesting topic that gives you more to do and engage with
- has insufficient framing in the introduction
- lacks a conclusion or feels very rushed in the end but does meet the main objectives and support its thesis.
- offers a partly convincing argument but has notable places needing improved evidence or explanation of evidence
- needs improved organization, or clearer logic and direction in terms of flow (paragraphs could be shuffled about with little no sense of a beginning, middle, end)
- has mixed development: some paragraphs are supported and developed; others feel flat and underdeveloped (overlapping or insufficient claims, inadequate wrap-ups, overreliance on quotations and/or plot summary)
- would notably benefit by more consistent textual evidence and source citation
- would notably benefit from clearer and stronger prose
- would notably benefit by reducing frequent grammatical and mechanical errors
- may not include all requirements specified in the Assignment
- reflects academic honesty
- may align more closely with rubrics for the A or B paper, but has notable late penalties assessed that lower the grade

**D-range papers:**

- likely struggles to narrow down a viable topic or has a superficial argument lacking adequate interpretation of texts
- has poor organization or meanders frequently
- lacks a clear framing and purpose in the introduction and/or clear or debatable thesis
- needs more purposeful or developed paragraphs that help guide a reader through ideas and are capable of sustaining an argument
- needs substantially more textual evidence (and analysis of the evidence) to support claims
- is not clearly written and difficulty parsing or making sense of claims substantially impedes the reader
- has frequent grammatical and mechanical errors that substantially impede the reader
- may not include needed requirements specified in the Assignment
- may not reflect academic honesty
- may fit the above rubrics better but has a substantial late penalty that lowered the grade.

**E papers (i.e. Failing):**

- are below the standards of college-level writing (argument, organization, development, grammar and mechanics)
- fails to adequately engage with the assignment and its requirements
- may not reflect academic honesty, which includes any attempts to pass off another entity's language or phrasing as its own (in part or in full)
- may be submitted too late to earn a passing grade

Below is an example of my preferred assessment rubric: it adapts the above criteria into an easy-to-read grid for students. I am working with UFIT on how to use this form to provide student feedback without needing to fill it in offline and upload it for each student.

Grading Rubric					
                                                             <img alt="Feedback icon" data-bbox="145					

## General Course Policies

### Attendance:

While I use the seating chart and attendance feature in Canvas (a feature called Roll Call Attendance), this feature is not capable of understanding that instructors allow a certain number of absences. As a result, its automatic grading function is unreliable. For this reason, the roll call feature is NOT directly synched into the Canvas grades. Instead, the feature that displays as "Roll Call attendance" is most useful for you to see how many absences you have on record. **I will assign a final attendance grade based on how well each student abides by the following course attendance policy:**

Students are allowed **three calendar days absence per semester**: these three "free passes" can be used for medical absences, personal emergencies, travel. But use them judiciously. Any additional absences will drop your attendance portion of the grade substantially.

Course attendance counts 7.5 points in the course. Students with more than three calendar day absences will not receive full attendance points.

If you have 3 or less calendar-day absences, you can expect **full credit (7.5 points)** for attendance. So, if you miss 1, 2, or 3 classes, you can expect to earn the full 7.5 points, no matter what "Roll Call attendance" displays.

If you exceed these allowed absences, you will earn a portion of these points or in extreme cases, no points at all: 4 absences earn 6-point total. 5 absences earn 5 points total. 6 absences earn 2 points total. **More than 6 absences: 0 attendance points.** (This can mean excess absences lower a final grade from a 92 (A-) to a B (84.5), because you do not earn any of the 7.5 possible points for attendance.

In the beginning, I will do roll call using a seating chart on Canvas so that I can learn names. Once I learn names, the seating chart makes it easy for me to take attendance visually during class by not reading names aloud. Therefore, if you arrive late, do come up to change your absence to present (late), but do so *after* class, to reduce further disruption. Repeated lateness can also lower your attendance grade.

Additional policies on attendance:

- If you do not attend one of the first two class meetings for any course and have not contacted the instructor with your intent to take the course, you can be dropped from the course (University Policy).
- Please reach out to me if something is substantially impacting your performance and you wish for any flexibility in a certain area or any added help.
- If you miss class, do not write to an instructor asking, "if you missed anything" or asking for info on "what you missed." If you must miss a session, you must also plan with a student to get notes before you return and also review any additions to the "Unit" Canvas Page or adjustments to the Daily Schedule of readings page.
- You are welcome to write to the instructor to briefly explain your absence and ask, "were there any announcements or changes to the schedule of readings for next class?"
- Students are expected to contact the instructor as soon as possible if they experience extended medical absences; this way, we (in conjunction with student services or the DRC) can work on a plan to keep up with the course, demonstrate ongoing engagement, and provide relevant documentation sufficient to adjust course deadlines, attendance policies, or other obligations.
- Students who become ill with viruses, colds, running fever, etc. are expected to be considerate of others and mitigate the risk of spreading illness in the tight quarters of our classroom when likely contagious. If you risk running afoul of attendance requirements due to serious illness, reach out to me for accommodation.
- University policy requires that absences be accepted with prior notice for university sponsored events (e.g., athletics) and religious holidays.

Requirements for make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found on [UF's Attendance Policies](#)[Links to an external site.](#) website.

### Added Help

#### Disability Accommodation:

Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. Please share their accommodation letter with me early (ideally in the first three weeks) and have a conversation with me so that we can co-create a positive, accessible, and accommodating learning and work environment.

[Links to an external site.](#)

#### **Technical Difficulties:**

For help with technical issues or difficulties with Canvas, please contact the UF Computing Help Desk at:

- [UF Help Desk](#)[Links to an external site.](#)
- 352-392-HELP (4357)
- Walk-in: HUB 132

Any requests for make-ups (assignments, exams, etc.) due to technical issues should be accompanied by the ticket number received from the UF Computing Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You should email your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

#### **Additional University Academic Policies and Resources**

##### **Honor Pledge:**

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. [See the UF Conduct Code website for more information](#)[Links to an external site.](#) If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

##### **In-Class Recording:**

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures, but the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. **The only allowable purposes are** (1) for personal education use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. **All other purposes are prohibited.** '

**Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.** A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by an instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course.

A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentation such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

**Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited.** To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to **social media**, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services.

A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

##### **University-wide policies:**

To support consistent and accessible communication of university-wide student resources, please review the web page with the academic policies and campus resources: <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>[Links to an external site.](#)

## Course Schedule

You will consult the **Daily Course Schedule** on Canvas (under "Pages," left sidebar, under the drop-down menu) for weekly topics, readings, and homework to prepare.

You will consult the Canvas "**Assignments**" tab (left sidebar, under the drop-down menu) for assignment guidelines. Instructor retains the right to make changes to the course schedule of readings and activities to improve flow, to budget added time, to adjust to any campus closures or documented instructor absences, to attend more fully to strong student interest areas, or for other pedagogical reasons.

Week	Topic	Assignments
1 (1/13, 1/15)	Introduction, Short Activity, Confessional Literature: St. Augustine, <i>Confessions</i> (excerpt). Panel signups begin.	
2 (1.20, 1.22)	Unit 1: Writing Selves Before Modern "Selfhood." Background reading on Puritan Spiritual Autobiography.  Diary of Thomas Shepard Diary (c. 1640), from Diary of Michael Wigglesworth (1653-57), Letter by Ann Bradstreet, "To My Dear Children" (1672)	Homework due (Introduce yourself), T.  Panel 1 (R)
3 (1.27, 1.29)	Captivity Narratives: "A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration off Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682)	Panel 2 (R)
4 (2.3, 2.5)	Communal Selves: Early Indian "Autobiography" (Definitions & Debates): Speech of Red Jacket (1793); Corn-Planter & Seneca Chiefs, Letter (1790) & oral legend, "The Message-Bearers" (circa 1820)	Panel 3 (R)
5 (2.10, 2.12)	Wrap Unit 1.  Begin Unit 2: The Transformation of Selfhood Background reading on Enlightenment Selfhood.	Peer Workshop (T) Reflective Analysis 1 Due (W)
6 (2.17, 2.19)	Jean-Jacques Rousseau, excerpt from Confessions (1765-1770); Benjamin Franklin, <i>Autobiography</i> (1791; 1793).	Panel 4 (R)
7 (2.24, 2.26)	Franklin, continued. <i>Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison as told to James Seaver</i> (1824).	Panel 5 (R)
8 (3.3, 3.5)	William Apess, <i>Son of the Forest</i> (1829)	Peer Workshop (T) Midterm Essay Due (F)
9 (3.10, 3.12)	Frederick Douglass, <i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave</i> (1845)	Panel 6 (R)
10 (3.17, 3.19)	Spring Break	
11 (3.24, 3.26)	Douglass (as needed). Begin Unit 3: Romantic vs. Gothic Selfhood Henry David Thoreau, from <i>Walden</i> (1854)	Panel 7 (R)
12 (3.31, 4.2)	Thoreau (as needed). Austin Reed, <i>Adventures of a Haunted Convict</i> (1858-59)	Peer Workshop (T). Reflective Analysis 2 Due (W)
13 (4.7, 4.9)	Continue Reed. Harriet Jacobs, <i>Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl</i>	Panel 8 (T*)
14 (4.14, 4.16)	Continue Jacobs.	Panel 9 (T*)
15 (4.21)	Small group work, Class wrap.	
	Final Essay or Project due finals week.	