

Creative Nonfiction

CNF is the product of the truth (nonfiction) told using literary elements often reserved for the telling of fiction. This structure is the creative part. The successful work of Creative Nonfiction will include **information**, and in presenting this information the writer must strike a balance between the “public” story and the “private” story. Memoir and Biography/Autobiography are two small components that make up the field of creative nonfiction. Other sub-genres include nature writing, travel writing, and literary journalism.

Literary Elements common to CNF

- Conflict
- Non-Chronological Order of Events
- Writing in Scenes—**Show; don’t tell**
- Resonance—a repeated key image that creates unity or that might be used as a transition instead of literal transitions (next, then, etc.)
- Dialogue
- Figures of Speech (simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, etc.)
- Writer’s Voice/Tone
- Character Development
- Open ending that permits for multiple interpretations

Gutkind’s 5-R’s of CNF

- Real life
- Reflection—Writer finds the Universal Theme (Goes Beyond the self to connect with the reader).
- Research—Writer seeks information
- Reading—Evidence of research, that the writer has read on the subject and is expert
- (w)riting

How Do We Judge the Quality?

LOW	HIGH
Most info from <i>outside</i> the writer (Informative and Transactional)	Most info from <i>inside</i> the writer (Personal Memoir)
Static thinking, done deal; writer presents the final judgment	Movement of mind; writer <i>unfolds</i> her thinking and changes, becomes part of the story
Closed ending: only one interpretation possible	Open ending: two or more possible interpretations (ambiguity)
Tells story in chronological order	Shows <i>scenes</i> not dependent on time, yet fit together
Tells (reports, summarizes, generalizes)	Shows (dialogue, metaphor, details, and details about details)
Literal transitions (<i>next, however, therefore, second, third, finally, etc.</i>)	Resonance (key image, word, phrase recurs, sometimes in ironic ways)

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Another Measure of CNF Quality

1. MECHANICS: Is the manuscript free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors?
2. HOOK: Is the reader drawn into the work from the beginning?
3. NARRATOR: Does the narrator come across as interesting, engaging, and authoritative?
4. OTHER CHARACTERS: Are they revealed with significant details and/or motivations so readers get a full sense of who they are and what they mean to the narrator?
5. TECHNIQUE: Is there a proper balance between showing and telling? Are transitions smooth? Does the active voice predominate over the passive? Is tone appropriate to subject matter?
6. LANGUAGE USE: Is the writing fresh and free of cliches? Does the choice of words keep the reader embedded in the work? Does the writer rely on strong nouns and verbs, rather than adjectives and adverbs?
7. DIALOGUE, NARRATIVE, EXPOSITION: Does any dialogue sound natural to the people and the situation? Does each person have a unique voice? Is there a proper balance between dialogue and narrative? If exposition is used, is it balanced by other forms of telling, and does it help the work explore and develop ideas thematic to the piece?
8. SETTING AND SCENE: Is the work grounded in time and place? Can you see, feel, hear, smell, and taste the setting? Do settings enhance or detract from the work?
9. STRUCTURE: Does the structure suit the material? Does it help move the piece toward its resolution? Did the writer find the best entry and exit point? Is every scene necessary? Is the ending earned and yet unexpected?
10. ORIGINALITY: Does the work seem fresh and original? Does it have its own twists on character, plot, setting, form, or argument that make it unique?
11. FACTS: Are any arguments well-supported with facts? Is any research artfully woven into the prose? Do the details strain credibility, or are they believable?