

COURSE OUTLINE

JOUR6200.03: Writing Craft II Summer/Fall Term 2021 MFA in Creative Nonfiction

Instructor/Cohort Director:
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Overview:

Writing Craft II combines an intense June residency of online lectures, seminars and discussions with written assignments completed during the fall semester. Officially, the course runs from June 5–December 6, 2021.

As part of the course requirements, students will be assigned to “attend” recorded and livestreamed residency lectures and panels offered by faculty, mentors, and guest lecturers on topics related to the craft of creative nonfiction, and participate in discussions in various formats.

This semester, in advance of the residency, students will be assigned to read an excerpt from the writer-in-residence’s book. After the residency, students will read the book and complete a written assignment on it, due Sept. 1

During the fall semester, students will ;

- submit a “Notes on Sources” essay assignment — and respond online to assignments written by other students,
- develop an annotated list of ten books of creative nonfiction everyone should read, and write book reports about two of them,
- and write an op-ed/ commentary based on their book project

Relationship to Other Classes:

JOUR 6200.03 will deepen students’ understanding of the creative nonfiction genre they will carry forward into the final year of the MFA and into their careers.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of Writing Craft II, students will have:

- Improved their understanding of creative nonfiction writing as a distinct literary genre with its own history, ethics, craft, and professional issues.
- Enhanced their nonfiction writing skills through workshopping their own and other students’ writing.

- Learned to produce a readable, informative and transparent exposition of the research techniques and sources used to prepare a creative nonfiction book.
- Expanded their knowledge and understanding of the creative nonfiction canon.
- Learned how to write an op-ed/commentary that showcases their book project and expertise.

Assignments

Deadlines

Sept 1	
Writer-in-Residence book assignment	Pass/Fail
Sept 1	
Annotated Essential Books List (10 titles)	Pass/Fail
Sept 27	
Book Report #1	15%
Oct 15	
Op-ed/commentary based on student's project	30%
Oct 30	
Book Report #2	15%
Nov 15	
Notes on Sources Essay	40%
Nov 29	
Five Responses to Notes on Sources Essays	Pass/Fail

Assignments detailed

Pre-/Post-residency Assignment:

To make best use of the limited time Writer-in-Residence David Macfarlane has with us during the residency, we will provide an excerpt from his forthcoming book, *Likeness: Fathers, Sons, A Portrait* (Doubleday Canada), to be read in advance of the residency. The book will be released in mid-May and we ask you to obtain a copy and to complete and submit the following post-residency assignment:

In 500 words, and citing specific examples, discuss the structure David has used in the book and assess how effectively it helps him to tell this story.

Due midnight Sept. 1

Submit as a MS Word attachment to dean.jobb@ukings.ca

Post-residency Assignments:

Book List/Book Reports

This is a two-part assignment.

Part 1: Your first task is to come up with your own list of “Ten Essential Books of Creative Nonfiction.” For each title selected, provide a paragraph explaining why it is on the list. **Due midnight Sept. 1. Submit as a MS Word attachment to dean.jobb@ukings.ca**

Compiling your personal Top 10 will be easy — and hard. Classic? Canadian? Historical nonfiction? Memoir? What constitutes *essential*, anyway? We would like you to think about which creative nonfiction books you believe everyone should read. The best way to begin thinking about what you might deem essential is to take a look at other people’s “best” lists. There are many out there. Here are a few to get you started:

- <https://www.abebooks.com/books/50-essential-non-fiction-books/index.shtml>
- <https://bookriot.com/2018/07/12/creative-nonfiction-books/>
- <https://thegreatestbooks.org/nonfiction>
- <https://www.bustle.com/articles/108532-17-nonfiction-books-that-need-to-be-on-every-womans-bucket-list>
- <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/tip-sheet/article/72863-10-essential-books-by-arab-writers.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/dec/31/the-100-best-nonfiction-books-of-all-time-the-full-list>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/books/the-best-canadian-nonfiction-of-2019-1.5382866>
- <https://medium.com/@strandbookstore/contemporary-trans-and-nonbinary-authors-to-read-today-3e68b7c35e04>
- <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/historical-nonfiction>

Part 2: During the fall term, you will read — and write a report on — two of the books on your list. We're happy to leave the treatment up to you, but each report should include:

- a description what the book's about;
- a mini-bio of the author;
- why you think it's an essential book; and
- your own critique of the book.

Word count: Approximately 1,000 words each. **Report #1 due midnight Sept. 27. Report #2 due Oct. 30 (Mark: 15% each). Submit as a MS Word attachment to dean.jobb@ukings.ca**

Suggestions:

- Don't "read" books you've already read. It's a waste of this opportunity.
- Read at least one book outside your genre comfort zone. If you love literary journalism, for instance, read at least one personal memoir.

Op-Ed/Commentary

Publishers encourage – make that expect – authors to write and publish op-eds and commentaries based on their books, to help with promotion and to showcase the author's expertise and writing style.

Assignment: Write a 700 – 1,200 word op-ed/commentary based on your book project or a related subject or issue. **Due midnight Oct. 15. Submit as a MS Word attachment to dean.jobb@ukings.ca**

Op-Ed/Commentary Assignment Rubric (Mark: 30%)

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Analysis and Relevance to Student's Project and Expertise (50)	Provides the reader with a clear, thoughtful analysis of an issue or subject related to the student's book project.	Provides the reader with an acceptable analysis of an issue or subject related to the student's book project.	Fails to provide the reader with a clear analysis of an issue or subject related to the student's book project.
Writing Style and Readability (50)	The writing is compelling. Hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is engaging, but has dry spots. In general, it keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.

Notes on Sources Essay

Complete a 1,500-word narrative “Notes on Sources” essay, explaining the research, writing, ethical and other issues and challenges related to the development of your project.

As nonfiction writers, we sometimes reconstruct scenes and/or incorporate dialogue we didn’t personally witness. Unlike daily journalists, we don’t always attribute every fact or source of information within our text since, to do so, would slow down the narrative. And, unlike academics, we also prefer not to footnote every scrap of information within the text.

So how can readers decide whether to trust that the information we have presented as nonfiction is as accurate as we can make it? Many nonfiction writers use a “Notes on Sources” essay at the end of their book to explain how they’ve handled their research and attribution. Was that scene reconstructed from participants’ journals or contemporary news accounts? In cases where recollections of events differ, how did the writer decide which view was more credible? Are you basing dialogue on available transcripts, a report in the newspaper, interviews with the participants, or your own recollections? Is material in quotation marks reproduced verbatim from interviews, court records or other documentation?

A Notes on Sources essay is usually placed before specific endnotes (if used) that document, in detail, the sources used within the manuscript. The essay allows you to focus on the narrative flow in your storytelling while still providing readers with insights into how and why you did what you did, with transparency about your sources of information and the choices you made.

What we’re looking for in this assignment is that overview — 1,500 words explaining your effort to tell the truth as best you can. Your manuscript isn’t complete, of course, so work with what you’ve done. You’ll likely incorporate some or all of this assignment into the Sources/Endnotes section of your book. **Due midnight Nov. 15. Submit as a MS Word file uploaded to DropBox (submission details to follow)**

Notes on Sources Assignment Rubric (Mark: 40 %)

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Content (60)	Provides the reader with clear, comprehensive, detailed information on the sources of all facts and information not otherwise obvious from the text itself.	Provides the reader with information on the sources of most facts and information not otherwise obvious from the text itself.	Fails to provide the reader with useful information on the sources of all facts and information not otherwise obvious from the text itself.
Writing style (30)	Despite the fact-heavy content, the writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.
Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics (10)	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i>	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style inconsistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.

Responses to Notes on Sources Essays (Pass/Fail)

Read five of the essays submitted by your fellow students, then respond to each one in 300 words, primarily as a reader. Address the following questions:

- Does the essay make clear how the writer gathered and evaluated key information used in the book and/or the writer's approach to any factual issues raised by the book?
- Is the essay written in an engaging way that goes beyond simply providing information about sources?
- Does reading the essay intrigue you enough that you'd like to read more?

Given that most readers come to Sources and Endnotes sections *after* they've read the book, we're at a disadvantage reading these as standalone essays. There's nothing to be done about that, except to acknowledge reality and do our best to be helpful to you, the writer, by raising any questions we think readers might have.

DropBox submission details to follow. Due midnight Nov. 29. Submit a list to dean.jobb@ukings.ca of the students whose work you have responded to (names only – I'll access and review the responses online)

Useful stuff

Submitting Written Assignments

Written assignments (unless otherwise noted) are to be submitted as an **email attachment in Microsoft Word** to dean.jobb@ukings.ca

Style and format: Times New Roman, 12 point, **double-spaced**.

- The file name must start with your last name and include a one- or two-word description of the assignment. Example: "smith-book-report-2.docx."
- In the document itself, include at the top:
 - Name:
 - Date:
 - Subject:
- Use page numbering and/or a header.

Grammar and Style

Proper usage and grammar are an expectation for all written work in this course. Although this course is offered through the School of Journalism, the publishing content is intended primarily for book content. As a result, we will follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* for all written work.

Deadlines

Deadlines are crucial in the publishing industry. Learning to meet deadlines is a necessity for writers. So working to deadlines is a part of this course. Submit all assignments by the stated deadlines. If allowance is needed – for health or other reasons – please email or phone me to request more time.

MFA Texts

Friedman, Jane, *The Business of Being a Writer*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Hart, Jack. *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Rabiner, Susan and Fortunato, Alfred. *Thinking Like Your Editor*. Norton. New York, 2003.

Suggested Texts

Gutkind, Lee. *The Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality*. New York: Wiley, 1997.

Kidder, Tracy, and Richard Todd. *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2013.

Kramer, Mark and Wendy Call. *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writer's Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University*. New York: Plume, 2007.

Curtis, Richard. *How to Be Your Own Literary Agent: An Insider's Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.

Gutkind, Lee. *Keep It Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Creative Nonfiction*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008.

Academic Performance

The course uses the following grading scale:

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
F	<70

Students must achieve a minimum grade of B- in all classes. Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism and the Dalhousie University Faculty of Graduate Studies. For more information, see the King's calendar and the Dalhousie University Graduate Calendar.

Accessibility

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers to inclusion related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. If you experience barriers related to the design, instruction, and/or experiences within this course please contact the [Student Accessibility Centre](#). Please note that a classroom may contain specialized furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require them will be able to participate in the class.

Academic Integrity

At King's and Dalhousie, we are guided in all of our work by the values of academic integrity: honesty, trust, fairness, responsibility and respect. As a student, you are required to demonstrate these values in all of the work you do. Plagiarism — stealing someone else's work and presenting it as your own — is a form of academic fraud and unethical journalism. The most common instance involves copying material from the Internet without attributing it. If you have any doubt about proper citation for an academic paper or proper attribution in a piece of journalism, contact your instructor. For more information, consult the section on Intellectual Honesty on p. 19 of Dalhousie's [Graduate Studies Calendar](#) (Find "PDF Versions" at the top of that page) or p. 34 of [King's academic calendar](#).

Learning & Support Resources

In addition to resources at King's, many are available to you at Dalhousie University. These include the [Student Health & Wellness Centre](#), the [Indigenous Student Centre](#), the [Black Student Advising Centre](#), the [LGBTQ2SIA+ Collaborative](#), and the [South House Sexual and Gender Resource Centre](#), among others.

Ethical Conduct

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the Journalism School's [Handbook of Professional Practice](#) and abide by its ethical standards. For nonfiction book writing, there may be some differences in approach from those of daily news gathering. If in doubt, please discuss with your mentor or cohort director.

Fair, Inclusive and Safe Conduct

All students in the School of Journalism should feel they are participants in a respectful, fair and safe learning environment. Classrooms and online course delivery systems are spaces where everyone should feel welcomed and supported. The School expects students, staff and faculty to abide by the highest standards of collegial learning. The University has policies, procedures and resources to guide students' experience. If you are concerned about your learning environment you may take a range of steps to initiate a discussion or a process:

Meet with the course instructor: You are encouraged to discuss concerns about a particular course first with the instructor. The instructor may be able to address concerns informally. Such concerns may relate to grading, course content, interpersonal issues with other students, or any other issue. The instructor may also direct you to other resources within the University. If you have an unresolved issue with an instructor, you can also:

- **Meet with your Cohort Director.**
- **Appeal a final grade** in a course by filing a [Request for Reassessment of a Final Grade](#) form.
- **Provide written comment on an instructor** in the Student Ratings of Instruction, distributed near the end of the course. Evaluations are reviewed by the Director each year and used in tenure and promotion decisions for Faculty.

Meet with the MFA Executive Director: The Executive Director welcomes any comment on the experiences of students within the MFA Program. Concerns may be addressed informally — especially as they relate to the curriculum, academic environment and interpersonal issues. The Executive Director may refer students with more specific or serious concerns to individual policies, procedures and resources of the University. Inclusion and respect for others are key values of the program. An experience of racism, intolerance or inequitable treatment will typically prompt cooperation between the Executive Director and the Equity Officer, and may also include the Director of the Journalism School, in working toward immediate and longer-term resolutions.

Meet with the Journalism School Director: The Director welcomes any comment on the experiences of students within the School. You may also write a letter to the School Director to express a strong concern about an experience in the School. The Director may bring it to a meeting of Journalism Faculty and will keep the letter on file.

Meet with the Equity Officer: King's Equity Officer is available for consultation on any issue concerning equity, diversity, inclusion, discrimination and harassment. The officer administers the Policy and Procedures for Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment, found in the [Yellow Book](#). If you have concerns about your experience in the School, you are encouraged to seek advice and assistance from the officer, who also receives complaints and administers the process for resolution under the policy. This policy is part of the University Code of Conduct, also found in the Yellow Book, which governs conduct by all members of the University community.

Meet with the Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Officer: The SVPRO provides support around experiences of sexualized violence and administers King's [Sexualized Violence Policy](#). This support is confidential and can include [informal discussion, academic accommodations, and assistance with disclosures and reports](#). All decisions regarding disclosure of sexualized violence are in the hands of the individual disclosing. Academic accommodations may be available to those who do not wish to make a formal report. The SVPRO is also available if you are supporting someone who has experienced sexualized violence. The SVPRO is Jordan Roberts <jordan.roberts@ukings.ca>, 902 229-6123.

Appeals

Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism. Students may appeal decisions of the Journalism Studies Committee to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. For more information, see p. 42 of King's Academic Calendar.