

Mentorship III
MFA in Creative Nonfiction
JOUR 6201.06
Summer/Fall 2021
Course Outline

Cohort Director

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Overview

Mentorships are the creative centrepiece of the program.

During the course of the program, students will have the opportunity to work one-to-one on their book projects with accomplished professional writer-mentors, each with their own expertise, approach to nonfiction, and style of teaching and mentoring.

Priorities for this Mentorship course:

- You will produce and revise approximately 15,000 - 20,000 words over the course of the term.
- These assignments will usually be delivered in three instalments during the term, on deadlines set in the “contract of deliverables” (see below) drafted in consultation with your mentor at the beginning of the term.
- Each of these assignments will account for approximately 1/3 of the total word count required for the term (5,000 - 7,000 words each).
- Most of these submissions will be chapters (or chunks of chapters) of your manuscript. You will also prepare a draft book proposal as one of your first “deliverables” while in the program (and likely a revised and updated version later in the program) – each of these will count as one of the “deliverable” assignments required for the Mentorship course.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will apply the writing, research and craft skills developed in Writing the Craft and Mentorship courses to their own work, improving and enhancing their own writing skills.

Virtual June Residency

During the residency, students will meet almost daily (see the schedule) with their mentors in small group online workshop sessions to discuss assigned readings or craft-related (voice, plot, etc.) issues; undertake in-class writing assignments; and/or workshop their own and other students' work.

Contract of Deliverables

By the end of the residency, students will have negotiated a "contract" with their mentor, agreeing to the terms of the mentorship. While contracts may be tailored to meet the needs and goals of individual students, projects, and mentors, each contract must include provisions describing:

- the nature—proposal, manuscript section(s)—and descriptions of the writing assignments to be completed during the semester;
- the approximate number of words students will submit (normally 15,000-20,000 words, depending on the stage of the project, research requirements, etc.);
- the number of writing packages the student will submit (usually three per term);
- the deadlines for each submission;
- the methods for submission (by post, email, Google docs, etc.);
- how quickly the mentor will respond to student submissions (usually within one week);
- the method of responding to the submission, which will always involve a narrative response. Responses, as negotiated between mentor and student, may also include in-person, telephone, online or email discussions.
- standard paragraphs describing procedures for dispute resolution.

Please email a copy of the contract to your cohort director with a copy to your mentor. This will signal the mentor's approval.

If the mentor has any concerns that might adversely affect the student's final grade, he/she/they will provide both the student and the cohort director a brief explanation of those concerns in writing by the mid-point in the term.

It is the responsibility of the student and/or mentor to notify the cohort director of any issues or concerns affecting the contract or the mentor-mentee relationship in a timely manner.

At the end of the semester, the mentor will submit a brief written assessment of each student's progress, a copy of all marked submissions, and a proposed mark to the cohort director. The cohort director will be responsible for approving and submitting

final grades. The role of the cohort director will be to ensure quality and consistency across mentor-student relationships in the evaluation process. The mentor will provide the student with a written copy of the assessment once it has been approved by the cohort director.

Manuscript Evaluation (100 per cent):

Manuscript submissions will be judged on a professional basis.

- An overall mark of “A” indicates the work is considered publishable with minor structural and/or line editing.
- A mark of “B” indicates the material is publishable with some substantive structural and/or line editing.
- A mark below “B” indicates the material is not publishable as is, and would require significant rethinking, as well as rewriting and revising, to make it so.

Each book project is different and must be judged on its own requirements and merits. A memoir, for example, may not require the same level of documentary research as a work of historical nonfiction. The research methodologies employed to write a piece of historical nonfiction may be very different from the immersion reporting a writer of contemporary nonfiction must undertake in order to gather her or his information. And the lyrical quality of the writing in a collection of personal essays may be more significant than in an investigative exposé.

To complicate matters, some of the writing submitted during the Mentorship will be complete, finished chapters or sections, while others will be works-in-progress that may need to be understood in the context of the larger project.

The Manuscript Marking Rubric identifies criteria that apply—in varying degrees—to most nonfiction writing projects. As part of their contract of deliverables, the student and mentor will identify those criteria that apply to the student’s particular writing project, add in any missing criteria, and assign relative values to each.

This agreed-to rubric, which must be approved in advance by mentor and student, will be used to evaluate the work.

Criteria	Exceptional “A”	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Focus	The writing has a clear purpose and the writer maintains focus throughout.	The writer has a clear purpose but the focus sometimes strays.	The writer’s focus is not discernible.
Structure	The story unfolds in a creative but logical, compelling way that	The story unfolds in a logical way that supports and develops	The story doesn’t unfold in a logical way, making the focus

	supports and develops the focus. The writer establishes a narrative complication, then develops and resolves it over the course of the work.	the focus. The writer establishes a narrative complication but fails to some extent to develop and resolve it.	unclear. There is no clear complication-development-resolution.
Scenes	The story is told in clearly delineated scenes that use character, setting, action, dialogue, and detail to advance the narrative, while providing the necessary context to understand the larger story. We hear, taste, feel, smell. Each scene contributes to plot, character, setting and tone. The writer heeds the screenwriter's admonition to "get in late, get out early."	The story is told in scenes that use character, setting, action, dialogue, and detail, while providing some context to help the reader understand the larger story. The scenes may not always be clear and sometimes start too early or end too late.	Scenes are missing or unclear.
Setting	Settings are described in a way that help the reader visually identify where action takes place as well as establishing appropriate mood. Setting does not overwhelm story.	Settings are described in a way that help the reader understand where action takes place but don't establish mood. Setting sometimes overwhelms story.	Settings are not described, or described in a way that doesn't help situate the reader or establish mood.
Character development	The characters aren't just real people; they feel real. Readers can see, hear and feel their emotions. Readers know what's at stake for each major character and can observe their story arcs. The character's role in the plot is clear. Their dialogue is authentic.	The characters seem—mostly— real. Readers know what's at stake for most major characters, and understand their role in the plot.	The characters may be real but they don't feel like it. It's not clear what's at stake for each major character or their role in the plot. The veracity of the dialogue is questionable.
Voice	There is a consistent, compelling voice and tone in the writing that is appropriate to the story.	There is a consistent voice and tone in the writing that is appropriate to the story.	The voice and tone are inconsistent and/or inappropriate to the story.

Point of view	Point of view is clear and consistent within scenes and from scene to scene.	Point of view is mostly clear and consistent within scenes and from scene to scene.	Point of view is unclear and inconsistent.
Authorial role	The writer's role—as omniscient narrator, fly-on-the-wall, participant-observer, etc.—is clearly understood and integral to the story, providing the reader with a unique perspective.	The writer's role is clear.	The writer's role is unclear or doesn't seem integral to the story.
Universality	The writing illuminates larger universal themes in a clear but unobtrusive way.	There are larger universal themes in the story but the author either hasn't articulated them clearly or has overstated them.	There are no larger universal themes apparent in the story.
Research: Documents	The writing incorporates documentary materials in a compelling way that integrates naturally into the narrative flow.	The writing incorporates and integrates documentary materials into the text.	The writing fails to incorporate or integrate documentary materials into the text.
Research: Interviews	The writer has used information from interviews effectively to tell the story without making the story the interview.	The writer has used information from interviews to tell the story, but the story itself seems captive of the interview.	The writer has failed to use information from interviews to help tell the story.
Research: Immersion	The writer has used immersion field reporting to bring the story alive for readers, allowing them to understand the story from the inside out.	The writer has used immersion field reporting to tell the story but the reader isn't always clear about its purpose.	The writer's immersion field reporting is sloppy or self-indulgent; its purpose is unclear.
Attribution, transparency	The writer makes clear in the text, or endnotes and footnotes the sources of all important material without interrupting the narrative flow.	The writer makes clear in the text, or endnotes and footnotes the sources of most important material in the text. Attribution occasionally interferes with story flow.	The writer fails to make clear the sources of important material in the text.
Writing style	The writing is compelling. It hooks	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it	The writing has little personality. The reader

	the reader and sustains interest throughout.	is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	quickly loses interest and stops reading.
Grammar, spelling, writing mechanics	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.
Creativity	The story is original, the ideas fresh, the language unique.	The story is well and competently told, but there are few fresh ideas or insights.	Story is hackneyed, derivative and pedestrian.

Useful stuff

Submitting Written Assignments

Written assignments should be submitted as **email attachments using Microsoft Word**.

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-submission-2.docx.”
- In the document itself, include at the top:
 - Name:
 - Date:
 - Subject:
- Please 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.

Please email all assignments by the stated deadlines. If allowance is needed – for health or other reasons – please email or phone to request more time.

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.