

Writing Craft I

JOUR 6100.03

Course Outline — February 16, 2018

Faculty Supervisor:

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Mentors:

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Overview

Writing Craft I combines an intense summer residency at the University of King's College with a series of online seminars, discussions, and written assignments completed during the fall semester.

In advance of the summer residency, students will read a complete of assigned readings, as well as submit short nonfiction writing assignments.

During the summer residency, students will attend daily lectures and panels offered by faculty, mentors, and guest lecturers who will introduce them to the literary genre known as creative nonfiction, its history and various sub-genres, its ongoing professional, craft, and ethical debates, and the ways in which evolving publishing technologies are influencing the role of the nonfiction writer within the profession and in society.

Students will work with faculty and mentors to develop, refine, and critically evaluate their ideas for book projects before selecting—in concert with mentors and faculty—the book project they will undertake during the program. By the end of the residency, they will have produced a one-page preliminary pitch based on those discussions.

Students will also receive instruction in how to prepare a professional nonfiction book proposal and develop their author platform.

Before the end of the summer residency, students will have chosen a topic for a 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical, or professional issue related to creative nonfiction. During the fall semester, students will present their papers online, and respond to papers from other students.

Students will also read and critique three books related to the subject of their book project.

Relationship to Other Classes:

JOUR 6100.03 is the entry point for the entire program, providing students with an understanding of the creative nonfiction genre they will carry forward into their mentorships, residencies, and projects.

During the residency, students will select the subject of their book project and learn how to prepare the book proposals that will be the focus of their first mentorship. The book report assignments will help students understand how their project relates to already published works on the same or similar topic.

The lectures on creative nonfiction as well as the sessions on preparing a book proposal and developing an author platform will help prepare students for the issues to be developed in Publishing Residency I.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of Writing Craft I, students will have achieved the following learning outcomes:

- Developed a literacy about creative nonfiction writing as a distinct literary genre with its own history, ethics, craft, and professional issues.
- Developed an understanding of what it takes to turn a book idea into a book proposal.
- Learned how to devise a book research and writing plan.
- Enhanced their nonfiction writing skills through workshopping their own and other students' writing

Student Assignments

Pre-residency assignments

- **Readings:**

The books listed below are course texts we expect you to have read before the residency begins.

Hart, Jack. *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Nonfiction*.

University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 2011.

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

Larsen, Michael. *How to Write a Book Proposal*. New York: Writer's Digest Books, 2011.

Deadline for reading these texts: July 31.

- **Assignment based on writer-in-residence Charlotte Gray's *The Massey Murder***

In her essay, “What I Write.” (<http://www.charlottegray.ca/essay-What-I-Write.html>) Gray says she strives to “squeeze the juice out of the dramatic possibilities” uncovered during her research. Discuss how she does this, providing at least two examples from *The Massey Murder: A Maid, Her Master and the Trial that Shocked a Country* (HarperCollins). Length: 500 words

Due: July 31 before midnight.

- **Analysis of editor-in-residence Diane Turbide Editorial Letter**

Discuss what lessons nonfiction writers can learn, based on the feedback and comments contained in Diane Turbide’s letter to an author, about such points as storytelling techniques, character development, book structure, the use of detail and the length of a manuscript. Length: 500 words

Due: July 31 before midnight.

Residency assignments

- Present a 5-8 minute “elevator pitch” for your book project during the residency.
- **Write a one-page — 350 word — pitch for your book project.** Think of this as a slightly extended version of what you might find on the inside flap of your hard cover, or on the back cover of your paperback. Intrigue me, but don’t give away the ending. Sell, but don’t oversell. Make me want to buy in a way that won’t disappoint me when I finally read the book.
 - **Title:**
 - **Subtitle:**
 - **Author:**
 - **Description:** “Buyers read cover copy the way they browse the newspaper. The first paragraph must grab their interest and attention. Subsequent paragraphs should flesh out the story. What is the most important selling point about your title? Is it your author? Is it the subject matter supported by relevant statistics describing the target audience? Think journalism 101: who, what, when, where, how and why and communicate that message in your lead paragraph. Don’t make the buyer dig for the most salient points.”

Due: August 14 before midnight.

Post-residency

- **3,000-word Research Essay**

Students will write a 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical or professional issue related to creative nonfiction. (I’ll send out an email with faculty- and mentor-suggested topics, from which you can choose. Or you can suggest your own topic, which must be approved in advance.)

This is not an academic essay assignment. It’s an opportunity for you to think more deeply about broader issues in creative nonfiction. I’m looking for a thoughtful, well-sourced, well-crafted and carefully argued personal

narrative of 3,000 words, more or less. Think, and make me think. Remember, it's also a writing assignment. Make me want to read it. (You don't need to do academic footnoting but if your sources aren't apparent from the text and context, make sure they're flagged in endnotes or some other way.)

You will also read and comment on at least 5 other posted research papers.

Deadline for essay: October 25 before midnight.

Responses: November 15 before midnight.

- **Book Reports**

Students will read and critique three books related to the subject of their book project. Essentially what this assignment is asking you to do is to select three books relevant to your project. These can be books you're using as research on the topic of your project, or books that might be similar in theme or style to yours that you're reading to get a handle on what else is out there. Read them and tell me — in no more than 500 words each— what you've learned from them that will be helpful to your work on your major project.

Submit your proposed titles for my approval by September 1 before midnight. Due dates for reports: September 20, October 18, November 22, all before midnight.

Assignments Summary

Assignment	Due	Value
Pre-residency readings	July 31	N/A
<i>Massey Murder</i> assignment	July 31	P/F ¹
Editorial Letter assignment	July 31	P/F ²
1-page written pitch	August 14	10 per cent
Research Essay	October 25	40 per cent
Essay responses	November 15	10 per cent
Book Report 1	September 20	10 per cent
Book Report 2	October 18	10 per cent
Book Report 3	November 22	10 per cent
Participation ³	N/A	10 per cent

Student Evaluation:

One-page preliminary proposal (10 per cent): Students will be marked on the basis of the clarity of their idea, their understanding of the book's target audience,

¹ P/F= Pass/Fail.

² P/F= Pass/Fail.

³ This is a mark to reflect your engagement and participation during the residency. All students start with a 10. You can lose points for not showing up for scheduled events, being consistently late for lectures and presentations, etc.

and the quality of their writing.

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Content (70)	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of what makes an effective one-page book proposal by submitting an engagingly written, carefully constructed, succinct pitch for her or his book project, including a description of the story, its complication-development-resolution, the key characters and their story arcs, the larger themes, and why the book will appeal to a particular group of readers.	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of what makes an effective one-page book proposal by submitting a professionally acceptable pitch for her or his book project, including a description of the story, its complication-development-resolution, the key characters and their story arcs, the larger themes, and why the book will appeal to readers.	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of what makes an effective one-page book proposal by submitting a pitch that isn't professionally written and/or doesn't include all the key elements of the pitch.
Writing style (15)	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 (15)	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 mostly consistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.

3,000-word Research Paper (40 per cent)/Responses (10 per cent): Students will write a 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical or professional issue related to creative nonfiction. Both the paper itself and the responses will be evaluated on the following criteria

Criteria	Exceptional A	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Purpose (10)	The writer's central goal or argument is clearly stated and readily apparent to the reader.	The writing has a clear goal or argument, but may sometimes digress from it.	The purpose or argument is generally unclear.
Content (40)	Balanced presentation of relevant and legitimate information that clearly supports a central purpose or argument and shows a thoughtful, in-depth analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains important insights.	Information provides reasonable support for a central purpose or argument and displays evidence of a basic analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains some insights.	Central purpose or argument is not clearly identified. Analysis is vague or not evident. Reader is confused or may be misinformed.
Use of References (10)	Compelling evidence from professionally legitimate sources supports claims. Attribution is clear and fairly represented.	Professionally legitimate sources are generally present and attribution is, for the most part, clear and fairly represented.	Few sources, incomplete or unclear attribution.
Organization (10)	The ideas are arranged logically to support the purpose or argument. They flow smoothly from one to another and are clearly linked to each other. The reader can follow the line of reasoning.	The ideas are arranged logically to support the central purpose or argument. They are usually clearly linked to each other. The reader can—mostly—follow the line of reasoning.	The writing is not logically organized. Frequently, ideas fail to make sense together. The reader cannot identify a line of reasoning and loses interest.
Writing style (20)	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	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.

Book Reports (10 per cent each):

Students will read and critique three books related to the subject of their book project. Essentially what this assignment is asking you to do is to select three books relevant to your project. These can be books you're using as research on the topic of your project, or books that might be similar in theme or style to yours that you're reading to get a handle on what else is out there. Read them and tell me — in no more than 500 words each— what you've learned from them that will be helpful to your work on your major project.

Criteria	Exceptional “A”	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
Book Description (10)	Provides the reader with a succinct summary of the book's contents, approach, and style that includes information on its marketplace success.	Provides the reader with a useful summary of the book's contents, approach, and style but fails to offer information on its marketplace success.	Fails to provide the reader with a useful summary of the book or information on its marketplace success.
Author Biography (10)	Provides the reader with a concise, relevant-to-the-book's topic biography that demonstrates the student has consulted with numerous sources.	Provides the reader with a concise, relevant author biography.	Fails to provide the reader with a concise, relevant author biography.
Analysis (50)	Provides the reader with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book being reported on, a cogent comparison of the book's strengths, weaknesses, themes, and approach with the student's own book project, and a sense of how this information will influence the student's own book project.	Provides the reader with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book being reported on, but the comparison of the book's strengths, weaknesses, themes, and approach with the student's own book project is lacking.	Fails to provide the reader with a clear analysis of the book or a comparison of the book with the student's own book project.
Writing Style (30)	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.

Course Texts

- Hart, Jack. *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 2011.
- Rabiner, Susan and Fortunato, Alfred. *Thinking Like Your Editor*. Norton. New York, 2003.
- Larsen, Michael. *How to Write a Book Proposal*. New York: Writer's Digest Books, 2011.

Suggested Texts

- 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.
- 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.

Official Stuff

Academic Performance

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 B- in all classes.

Issues regarding deadlines and penalties for late submission, if any, will be specified in the contract of deliverables.

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 the King's calendar and the Dalhousie University Graduate Calendar.

Accommodation

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests, quizzes and exams should make their request to the Office of Student Accessibility & Accommodation (OSAA) prior to or at the outset of each academic term. Please see www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca for more information and to obtain Form A - Request for Accommodation.

A note taker may be required to assist a classmate. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term. If you are interested, please contact OSAA at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

Academic Integrity

The School of Journalism vigorously enforces the highest standards of academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the duplication in whole or in part of work created for another purpose. This can be work done by another student, published work or even a student's own work that has been re-purposed for a class. Plagiarism can be reflected in actual language, or in the duplication of an idea or a sequence. Do not cut and paste information from the Internet. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, consult your instructor. All cases of suspected plagiarism will be dealt with according to the policy.

Academic integrity issues will be dealt with by the Academic Integrity Officer of the University of King's College, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Dalhousie Senate, as outlined in the King's calendar and the Dalhousie University Graduate Calendar.

As well, the School of Journalism has a statement of ethics and professional standards that must be followed. It can be found at <http://ethics.kingsjournalism.com>. Please read this material carefully.

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.

Submitting Written Assignments

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

- The file name should include your name and a one- or two-word description of the assignment. "smith craft essay.docx."
- The document should include, at the top:
Name:
Date:
Subject:
- Please use page numbering and/or a header.

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.