
**JRN 413-813 MAGAZINE AND LITERARY JOURNALISM
WORKSHOP**

Time and Place: Thursdays 6:30-9:15 pm CL 305
Instructor: Trish Elliott **Office:** FNU 4010
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Office hours : Wednesdays 10 a.m. – 4 :30 p.m.

Course Description

This course will immerse you in the world of creative nonfiction, memoir, literary journalism and long-form writing. In-class creative writing exercises are employed to help get you back to that place where you first fell in love with writing. We will study the works of noted writers of the genre, examining how they applied literary techniques to nonfiction material. The focus of the course will be writing assignments leading to multiple drafts of an approx. 2,000-word fact-checked magazine article worthy of publication. The format of classes will be workshop-style, meaning students will share their projects with the class and critique one another's work. Graduate students will lead seminars on a nonfiction author or work, and will lead discussion on the book club selection.

Readings

All readings are available on UR Courses. Most are required as described in the syllabus schedule, and all are recommended. Graduate students will select an additional reading for the class.

- Erica Violet Lee, "In Defence of the Wastelands."
- Andre Dubus III, "Perhaps a flight attendant."
- George Murray, "I, witness."
- Alicia Elliott, "A Mind Spread Out on the Ground"
- Jack London, "The story of an eye witness"
- Ernest Hemmingway, "Hemmingway reports from Spain."
- Gay Talese, "Frank Sinatra has a cold."
- Tom Wolfe, "The last American hero is Junior Johnson. Yes!"
- Hunter S. Tompson, "Strange rumblings in Aztlan."
- Joan Didion, "Some dreamers of the golden dream."
- Gary Mason, "Bird fell to earth."
- Jon Franklin, "The ballad of Old Man Peters."
- Zadie Smith, "Generation Why?"
- Susan Orlean, "Life's swell."
- James Baldwin, "Notes of a Native Son."
- Toni Jenson, "Women in the Fracklands: On Water, Land, Bodies, and Standing Rock."

In addition, students will select a Book Club reading – a work of nonfiction that we will read together and discuss. Students are also required to read the past 2 issues of *The Crow*, available at the J-School and online at www.jschool.ca

Recommended reading

The following texts will be drawn on for class discussion and are recommended reading for the course. They are available in libraries, second-hand shops and, in most cases, as e-books online. Adding these titles to your bookshelf will provide many years of enjoyment and inspiration for your writing life.

- Gay Talese. *The Gay Talese Reader: Portraits and Encounters* (Bloomsbury, 2003); and *Fame and Obscurity* (Ballantine, 1993).
- Elissa Washuta and Theresa Warburton. *Shapes of Native Nonfiction: Collected Essays by Contemporary Writers*. (Univ. of Washington Press, 2019)
- Joan Didion. *Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Essays*. (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968).
- Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds. *The Art of Fact A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (Scribner, 1997).
- Jon Franklin, *Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction by a two-time Pulitzer Prize Winner* (New American, 1986).
- Maurice Legris, Thomas Kane, and Leonard Peters, *Writing Prose: Techniques and Purposes*. Third *Canadian* Edition (Oxford, 2003).
- Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (Random House, 1965).
- Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail* (Straight Arrow Books, 1973).
- Maggie Siggins, *Revenge of the Land* (McClelland and Stewart, 1992).
- Sharon Butala, *Wild Stone Heart* (HarperFestival, 2000).

Web resources (links provided on UR Courses)

- [Sask Aboriginal Writers' Association](#)
- [Creative Nonfiction Collective](#)
- [Sage Hill Writing Experience](#)
- [Creative Nonfiction: True Stories Well Told](#)
- [Electric Typewriter: 30 Great Nonfiction Writers](#)
- [Women Writing About the Wild: 25 Essential Authors](#)
- [The New New Journalism: Conversations with Writers](#)
- [The Crow](#)

Tentative Schedule

- Jan. 9** **Discussion:** Experiences of the past semester. Goals and expectations. What happens at writers' workshops. Definitions of literary journalism. Book club selection nominations.
- Workshop:** Story ideas – roundtable discussion.
- For next class:**
- George Murray, *I, Witness*. How does the author identify the social role of the writer?

- Andre Dubus III, *Once a Flight Attendant*. How does the author identify the social role of the writer? Whose definition does he draw on and why? Is it a true story?
- Erica Violet Lee, *In Defence of the Wastelands: A Survival Guide*. How does the author identify the social role of the writer? Whose definition does she draw on, and why?

Jan. 16

Discussion: Reading assignment questions. Getting started. Researching for longform nonfiction. Writing a query letter.

Workshop: Discussion of proposals and research plans. The query letter. Story technique and what it means for how you interview people.

For next class:

- Research action report.
- Read *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* (the original article, not the book!). How did the writer mix memoir and research?
- Take-home reading: *The Ballad of Old Man Pete*.

Jan. 23

Discussion: Narrative style. What makes a story – a review of some concepts.

Techniques: observation, reconstruction, scene by scene construction. Dramatic tension. Complication and resolution.

Workshop: Identifying complication and resolution.

For next class:

- *The Crow*, 2018 issue: Which story or stories have an inciting incident? Rising action? Tension? Obstacles? Crisis? What is an example of a comedy? A tragedy?

Query letter due

Have “Scene” draft ready for next class.

Jan. 30

Workshop: “Scene” student readings and critique

Discussion: Key dramatic elements.

For next class:

- Gary Smith, *Bird Fell to Earth*. Find examples of scene by scene construction, dialogue, interior monologue and reconstructed scenes. How do you think the writer got inside the story and did his work? What is the story’s resolution?
- Susan Orlean, *Life’s Swell*. What is the writer’s position in the story? How does this impact the narrative and resolution?
- Come prepared to discuss the progress of your research and interviews, and how you think the story will come together.
- Begin working toward a first outline.

Feb. 6

Discussion: The research file. Review of how to prepare a fact-checker’s pack.

Laying the research foundation for a feature story. Working research and interviews into the text. Story structure from beginning to middle to end.

Workshop: Group exercise – naming the key elements within each student’s piece of work.

For next class:

- Identify your story’s beginning, middle, and end. Is it topic or subject-driven, comedy or tragedy?

- Gay Talese, *Frank Sinatra has a cold*.
- Tom Wolfe, *The last American hero is Junior Johnson. Yes!*
- How did the authors use surrounding characters to draw a picture of the central character? Draw comparisons/contrasts to last week's readings.

Final draft of scene piece due.

- Feb. 13 **Discussion:** Character development and the role of characters. Narrative structure.
Workshop: Blocking out your outline.
For next class:
- Toni Jenson, *Women in the Fracklands*.
 - Joan Didion, *Some dreamers of the golden dream*.
 - How do they introduce tension? What creative nonfiction techniques are in use? Where is the reader situated in relation to the text? Compare and contrast techniques and tone.
- Feb. 20 READING WEEK – No class
- Feb. 27 **Discussion:** Creative writing. Hearing the story's voice. Imaginative approaches to language and storytelling. Clear and active language. Illustration.
Workshop: Reading and discussion of "Character" drafts.
Feature story outline due
For next class: Finish reading the book club selection and be prepared to discuss.
- March 5 **Book club meeting** – discussion led by graduate students.
Character piece due.
For next class:
- Assigned readings and questions provided by grad students.
 - Additional reading: Zadie Smith, *Generation Y*. How does the author infuse techniques of creative nonfiction into a movie review?
- March 12 **Graduate student presentations.**
Additional discussion: Using nonfiction techniques in short-form platforms (news, reviews, obituaries, etc.) The editorial process. Re-writing, restructuring, polishing. Fact-checking, trimming and padding. Editor's queries, filling holes. The writer's life from the sublime (discovering your creative voice) to the mundane (freelance contracts, tax returns, copyright, etc).
- March 19 **All first drafts complete.** Editorial conferences
- March 27 Editorial conferences
- April 2 Editorial conferences
- April 9 Final class. Readings of excerpts. Titles and decks. **FEATURE STORIES DUE.**

Assignments

Marking grids are posted on UR Courses

1. Query: A letter describing the theme and topic you intend to undertake. The query should not only show you have a good grasp of the undertaking, but should also showcase your writing style.

Due: January 23 Value: 5 per cent

2. Scene piece: 500-600 word descriptive scene, using techniques of literary journalism. The scene should be considered a single element in your longer article.

Due: February 6 Value: 15 per cent

3. Feature Story Outline: Identify the theme, major dramatic elements and block out the story structure.

Due: February 27 Value: 5 per cent

4. Character piece: 500-600 word character description using techniques of literary journalism. Again, the portrait you draw should be considered a single element in your longer article.

Due: March 5 Value: 15 per cent

5. Feature Article: The main focus of this course is the approx. 2,000-word feature magazine article that you write. It must include substantial research, including at least three interviews in the final draft. It will be evaluated in the same way a magazine editor would evaluate both a proposal for an article and the completed article. Curiosity, initiative, originality, accuracy, ability to organize, ability to write in a clear and intriguing style, imaginative ideas, ability to work independently, grasp of techniques discussed in class, ability to respond to editorial suggestions, as well as ability to work to a deadline will all be factored into the evaluation. Relevant fact checking information must be included with the final draft.

Due: First draft: Any time before March 19 Final draft: April 9

Value: 45 per cent

6a. Class Participation (undergraduate): Your class attendance, participation in classroom activities and adherence to deadlines will be graded.

Value: 15 per cent

6b. Seminar Presentation (graduate): Lead a 30-minute seminar on a work or works by a nonfiction author featured on Electric Typewriter (<http://tetw.org>). Analysis will be literary and contextual. Written notes and references to be submitted to instructor in the form of an 8 – 10 page paper. Please consult with the instructor in advance. Please provide advance readings to your classmates.

Due: March 15 Value: 15 per cent

Late assignments will be penalized 5 per cent per day. Assignments submitted later than one week from the due date will not be accepted. The final assignment must be submitted within five days of the last day of class to receive a grade.