

International History

Academic year 2020-2021

The Craft of Scholarly Writing

HI0120 - Printemps - 6 ECTS

Thursday, 16:15-18:00

Course Description

Over a hundred years ago the Russian writer Anton Chekhov said the following: "Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass." Despite the fact the writing in the humanities and social sciences is a different task than writing fiction, the bare tool box of the writer is nonetheless in its essence a universal set of skills and practices. For indeed, the art of writing evocatively is not only beneficial to novelists, but also to everyone who wants to communicate their ideas effectively. At one level, then, this course is designed to help scholars improve their writing skills in terms of structure and style. However, it is also a series of exercises in reading and writing carefully with the goal of improving one's scholarly craft. For, by attending to our writing (and to the writing of others), we can also deepen and expand our analytical and observational prowess. By working on the craft of prose, we equally hone the skills of the researcher (and the reverse). To those ends, this course will consist first of reading a mixture of scholarly and more literary samples of "great writing," and then mapping those samples in order to emulate different forms. The student will then build a consistent, daily writing practice that will help advance their writing goals within their own disciplinary framework.

➤ PROFESSOR

Carolyn Biltoft

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Office hours: Tuesday, 14:00-16:00

➤ ASSISTANT

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Assignments/Grading

- Daily writing exercise (five days a week) 10%
- Mapping and Peer Review 35%
- Attendance 5%
- Final Paper 50%

Mandatory Reference Readings:

- William Strunk and E.B White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Pearson, 1999)
- Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Ninth Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018)
- Umberto Eco, *How to Write a Thesis* (Boston, MIT University Press, 2015)
- Tracy Kidder, *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction* (New York: Random House, 2013)

Meetings

25/2 Week One: Welcome to the Writer's Life

- Welcome
- Explanation of assignments

4/3 Week Two: The Habit of Writing Introduced

- Introduction to the daily writing exercise <https://penzu.com/>
- Reading, Joan Didion "On Keeping a Notebook" found here
<https://accessinghigherground.org/handouts2013/HTCTU%20Alt%20Format%20Manuals/Processing%20PDF%20Sample%20Files/00%20On%20Keeping%20a%20Notebook.pdf>
- Bring to class a "Bio Sheet" with your name, your picture, your program and your goals for the semester. Hand in to the TA

11/3 Week Three: Shadows and Other Writer's Block

- Lecture on the Psychology of Writer's Block
- Read Working with the shadow <https://the-artifice.com/shadow-writing-guide/>
- Explanation of "shadow work" assignment for your 750 words writing

Recommended Reading

- Rosanne Bane, *Dancing in the Dragon's Den: Rekindling the Creative Fire in your Shadow* (New York: Nicolas Hays, 1999)

18/3 Week Four: Mapping an Exemplar

- Read, Robert Darnton, "The Great Cat Massacre,"
- In class "mapping exercise"
- Explanation of your next mapping assignment

25/3 Week Five: On Style and Influence

- Susan Sontag, "On Style," <http://www.coldbacon.com/writing/sontag-onstyle.html>
- Jonathan Lethem "The Ecstasy of Influence" found <https://harpers.org/archive/2007/02/the-ecstasy-of-influence/>
- Explanation of Mapping Exercise
 - Recommended Extra Reading: Tracy Kidder, *Good Prose, chapters 1, 4,5, 6*

1/4 Week Six: Mapping your own Master

- This week you will “map” your chosen piece of writing outside of class. Print or scan a copy of the chosen work. Work directly on the text, then scan and send your “map” to TA and myself as proof of the assignment

8/4 Week Seven: Easter No Class

15/4 Week Eight: Moving from the Map to the Page

- *Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers, chapter 5 “Constructing Your Argument”*
- Mini Lecture on the “Ugly Draft”

22/4 Week Nine: Hand in “ugly draft” of your introduction to me and to your peer-review partner

29/4 Week Ten: Lecture, “Turning Notes into Prose”

- Turn in comments on the introductions to your partner

6/5 Week Eleven: Turn in a Second Draft of your Introduction

13/5 Week Twelve: Writing and Being a Writer

- Annie Dillard, “Write Till you Drop” found here
<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/99/03/28/specials/dillard-drop.html>
- Explanation of Final Assignment

20/5 Week Thirteen: Writing Day No Class/Swap feed back with partners as needed

27/5 Week Fourteen: Writing Day/Individual Consultations As needed

7/6 All Assignments Due including Screen Shot of 750 words exercises