

**HIST 705:
Writing for the Academy and Beyond**

Mosse Humanities Building, room 2125
Wednesdays, 12-2pm

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Course Description

This workshop-style seminar encourages students to develop ways of writing history that communicate to wider audiences. It will provide students with practical skills and with plenty of feedback so as to help them become more confident and adept in the art of writing for the academy and beyond. We will spend much of our time discussing writing outside the bounds of academia, and we will gain the insight (via Skype) of a number of graduates of History Ph.D. programs currently working in non-academic worlds. We will also practice various forms of non-academic writing ourselves. For those interested, we will have a condensed four-session mini-workshop on various aspects of academic writing – e.g., writing grants, cover letters, conference papers, and job talks. (This part of the course will take place from March 4th to April 8th and is timed to coincide with when many students begin worrying about grants, prelims, and the prospectus; those uninterested can either opt out and return on April 15th or use these four weeks as an opportunity to focus on their writing goals and receive additional feedback on their work.) Finally, we will discuss strategies for tackling long writing assignments and for making the process of sending out job and grant applications not only manageable but also fun. All of the writing assignments for this workshop are flexible and tailored to student needs, and appropriate for students in their first few years in the program and for those currently working on their dissertations.

Course Requirements

Students may opt to complete one or more assignments, or may decide to focus on one overarching writing goal (e.g., completing a dissertation chapter). In all, you will be asked to complete a total of approximately 10,000 words of writing – 5,000 words for a draft academic or non-academic piece in your field of choice, and 5,000 words for the revised piece. If you are exploring multiple fields then you will be writing shorter assignments on a more frequent basis (these are the assignments currently specified on a week-by-week basis). Again, the amount of writing that you produce if you go this route will not bring you over 10,000 words, including revisions. If you are keen on working on a longer piece, we can accommodate that as well, though our goal is to get you writing no more than 20,000 words (including revisions) for this class.

In week 3, you will have the choice to continue the grab-bag approach to non-academic writing or to switch to one mode of writing or one writing task that you practice for the remainder of the semester. In the third week of the class, we will sit down together to create a writing calendar for you to get you moving on your writing goals.

There will be a light reading load for this class -- at most 30 pages per week. All of the readings will be posted on our Learn@UW site in PDF copy or via a shared hyperlink at least one week in advance. You are expected to do the reading carefully. If you sign up for this class, you are also committing to respect deadlines and provide constructive feedback on the work of your peers. You will be asked to lead discussion on one or two sessions of your choice. Finally, you will be asked to do some free-write exercises during class. These will not be collected but we will use them as the springboard for discussion. Please come to class each week with an open mind and equipped with your writing utensils of choice (notebooks, quills, laptops, tablets – just no phones, please). Writing can be a daunting undertaking; minimally, this class hopes to add a few skills to your toolkit, create community among graduate students, and provide you with a space to ask questions that you might not feel comfortable asking elsewhere.

The grades in this course will be on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory scheme. If you complete 75% of the assignments and show up most of the time, you will get a grade of 'Satisfactory' in the class.

I. Writing as a Practice

1. January 28: Introduction to the course. Writing as a practice.

Go over the syllabus. Start getting to know one another. Go over one another's writing processes and stages. Discuss writing goals and challenges.

In-class exercise: free write. Where do you write, when you write? What do you write with – a laptop, a tablet, a piece of paper and a pen? Do you love writing or hate it? What was the last piece of writing you most enjoyed creating?

Readings for next time:

- (1) Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook" (PDF)
- (2) Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1995, 95-109 (PDF)
- (3) Lynn Hunt, "How Writing Leads to Thinking," *Perspectives on History* (February 2010) (available @ <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2010/how-writing-leads-to-thinking>)

- (4) Stephen Elliott, "Where I Slept" (April 2009) (available @ <http://therumpus.net/2009/04/where-i-slept/>)
- (5) An op-ed of choice on a topic that interests you. If you're at a loss, you can take a look at this op-ed, written by a History Ph.D. student: Seth Anziska, "A Preventable Massacre," *New York Times* (September 16, 2012) {available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/17/opinion/a-preventable-massacre.html?pagewanted=all>}

Writing task:

- (1) Practice response letter. Pick one of the essays (Didion, Elliott, Hunt, or the op-ed piece) and write a one to two-page letter of response to it. Try to be as specific, detailed, and helpful as you can. We will share these letters in class.
- 2. February 4: What makes for compelling writing? Creative non-fiction and op-eds**

In-class analysis: Anziska, Hunt, Elliott, Didion.

In-class exercise: free write. How does history (or your particular area of specialization therein) relate to current affairs? Does it offer political lessons? Moral ones? You may pick an issue that currently dominates the news or an upcoming anniversary as your starting point. Other option: ditch history, and just pick something that you find funny or interesting ("lumbersexuals," Chihuahuas, whatever). Make sure that you interrupt your free write only when you've hit on two topics that seem convincing to you.

Readings for next time:

- (1) Zinsser, "The Audience," in *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, pp. 24-32 (PDF)
- (2) David Shipley, "And Now a Word from Op-Ed," *New York Times* (February 1, 2004), and David Shipley, "What We Talk About When We Talk About Editing," *New York Times* (July 31, 2005) {available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/01/opinion/and-now-a-word-from-op-ed.html>; and <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/31/opinion/31shipley.html?pagewanted=all>};
- (3) Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts," in *Bird by Bird*, pp. 21-28 (PDF)

Writing tasks due next class:

- (1) Write a messy, first draft, op-ed on your topic of choice. Don't worry if it's imperfect; we'll edit it in class together. Your draft can be between 700 and 1,500 words long;

- (2) Come up with a few questions for Sasha Polakow-Suransky, staff editor of the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times*, responsible for assigning piece on foreign policy and international affairs (Sasha got into journalism after completing a Ph.D. in History)

II. Communicating with the General Public

3. February 11: Editing for journalism; writing for journalism (special guest: Sasha Polakow-Suransky, staff editor of the Op-Ed page of *The New York Times* and journalist)

In-class reading: George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”

Free-write teams: What would you keep in Orwell’s recommendations? What would you add? What about Zinsser and Lamott? What problems do you feel that you have in your writing – or with writing – that these tips might help you solve? What’s left out?

In-class assignment: Turn your peer’s op-ed into a 750-word op-ed in one hour or less.

Writing tasks due by next class:

- (1) Take your editor’s suggestions (or not), and revise your original op-ed and turn it into a 750-word piece
- (2) Write a short cover letter explaining what you changed, and what you didn’t

Reading/exploration for next time:

- (1) “How should historians respond to MOOCs?” (2014 AHA panel; available as a video here: <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/154407>; or in edited form as individual contributions here: <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2014/historians-respond-to-moocs>; here: <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2014/historians-respond-to-moocs/can-teaching-be-taken-to-scale>; here: <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2014/historians-respond-to-moocs/the-taylorization-of-the-historians-workplace>; here: <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2014/historians-respond-to-moocs/a-worthwhile-experiment>; and here: <http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/february-2014/historians-respond-to-moocs/history-a-la-mooc-version-20>
- (2) Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “The Mythology of Blogs: A Top-Ten List for the Uninitiated Historian” (available @

<http://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2009/intersections-history-and-new-media/the-mythology-of-blogs>)

- (3) Check out 'Zeega' (Zeega.com) and 'Khan Academy' (khanacademy.org)
- (4) Find one blog or online education tool that you find particularly interesting and that you would like to analyze as a group. Feel free to solicit suggestions from the group.

Note: Please schedule a time to meet me at some point this week for a one-on-one meeting to discuss your writing. In this meeting, we will decide together what you'd like to set as your writing goals for the semester. If you decide to focus on one kind of writing or one major writing task, we will put together a calendar to help you reach your goal. See below for an alternate reading/writing scheme for those working on one major project from week 4 on.

4. February 18: Writing for the internet: blog posts and online education tools

Free-write teams: Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the role that new media plays in education?

For next time:

- (1) Read lesson plans for high school history classes;
- (2) Check out Facing History and Ourselves (facinghistory.org) and the Center for Urban Pedagogy (welcometocup.org)

Writing task:

- (1) Write a blog post, online educational tool review, lesson plan, or a description of your not-yet-founded NGO (500-1,000 words)

5. February 25: Teaching history in junior high or high school (UW Madison PhD program alum TBA)

For next time:

- (1) Critically analyze the syllabus of a course you recently took. Do you see the logic that guided the readings? What worked about how the course was organized? What didn't? Why? No need to write out anything formal but bring in an annotated syllabus to discuss with the class.
- (2) Robert Boice, "Developing writing, then teaching, amongst new faculty," *Research in Higher Education*, 36.4 (1995), 415-456. (PDF)

- (3) Search online for models for the kinds of syllabi you'd like to create

III. Developing Style and Confidence in Academic Writing

6. March 4: Writing your own syllabus; prepping for prelims; defining and taking ownership of your academic persona

In-class exercise: defining a work schedule.

Reading for next time:

(1) Wendy Belcher, "Designing your plan for writing," in *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* (PDF)

(2) Lamott, "Writer's Block," in *Bird by Bird*, pp. 176-183 (PDF)

Writing for next time:

- (1) Create a writing calendar for yourself
- (2) Write a messy, low-stakes, one-page description of the main academic project you've decided to tackle: syllabus aims, your MA dissertation, or your prelim field aims

7. March 11: Creating your 'elevator blurb'

In-class exercise: read descriptions out loud and receive feedback from peers

Reading for next time:

(1) Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012, 48-62 (PDF)

(2) Wendy Belcher, "Drafting your Abstract"; "Revising your Abstract," in *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* (PDF)

Writing for next time:

- (1) On the basis of the suggestions you received in class, revise your messy, low-stakes, one-page description of your syllabus aims, your MA dissertation, or your prelim field aims

8. March 25: Grant-writing and job-application letters (I)

In-class reading and analysis: Job application letter sample and grant sample

Reading for next time:

- (1) Helen Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012, 76-98 (PDF)
- (2) Two more successful sample job letters
- (3) Two more successful sample grant applications

Writing for next time:

- (1) Please write up your first draft of a grant-application or job-application letter

9. April 8: Grant-writing and job-application letters (II)

In-class editing of grant apps and job letters.

Reading for next time:

- (1) Pick one briefing of the International Crisis Group on a topic of interest to you:
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions.aspx>
- (2) Reflect: What are the conventions of this genre? Would it be hard or easy for you to write something like this? Why?
- (3) Come up with a few questions for Rob Bletcher, Deputy Program Director, International Crisis Group

Writing task:

- (1) Provide feedback on your writing partner's grant-application or job-application letter, following the peer-review handout

IV. Historians Writing for Government, NGOs, Museums, and Business

10. April 15: Policy-writing for the not-for-profit sector (special guest: Robert Blecher, Deputy Program Director, Middle East Program, International Crisis Group)

Reading for next time:

- (1) Sky Marsen, "Research and information management," in *Professional writing: the complete guide for business, industry and IT* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) (PDF)

Writing task:

- (1) Revise your grant-application or job-application letter per the suggestions you received

11. April 22: Technical writing; writing for business (special guest: Constantine 'Dean' Pagedas or David Santschi)

Reading for next time:

- (1) Explore the U.S. Holocaust Museum online archive and interactive learning features
- (2) Locate one other historical museum on a topic of interest to you and take a look at their online exhibitions and at the job descriptions of the employees

Writing task:

- (1) Get ready to chat someone up about the central idea in your job-application or grant-application letter

12. April 29: Historians writing for museums (special guest: Suzanne Brown-Fleming, Director, Visiting Scholars Program, U.S. Holocaust Museum)

In-class exercise: Dry run – presenting your elevator blurb, again (4 mins, max)

Reading for next time:

- (1) "Policy Planning Staff," U.S. Department of State (@ <http://www.state.gov/s/p/>)
- (2) Watch a few of the 'daily press briefings' of Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Dept of State (available @ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/index.htm>)

Writing for next time:

- (1) Revise your mini-speech, per the suggestions received

13. May 6: Historians writing for government (special guest: Michael Kimmage, advisor in the Office of Policy Planning, at the State Department, with a focus on Russia/Ukraine)

In-class exercise: 4-minute polished elevator speech

Free write/discussion: A writer's toolkit; a scholar's survival guide

Alternate reading/writing scheme for students interested in completing one big writing goal this semester:

Weeks 1-3:

Common syllabus (see above)

Week 4:

Trimble, "Getting Launched," *Writing With Style*; creating your plan

Check out chapters 1 and 2 in this incredible useful guide as well:

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~histlit/forms/SeniorThesisGuide2010.pdf>

Week 5:

Trimble, "Thinking Well"; Belcher, "Reviewing the Related Literature"

Week 6:

Belcher, "Presenting your Evidence"

Week 7:

Belcher, "Giving, Getting, and Receiving Feedback"

Week 8:

Trimble, "Openers"

Week 9:

Trimble, "Middles"; Belcher, "Improving your structure"; revise for structure

Week 10:

Trimble, "Closers"

Week 11:

Belcher, "Editing your sentences"

Revise for structure (again); revise for style

Week 12:

Revise for style (again)

Week 13:

Seal the deal