

# University of Wisconsin, Madison

## HIST 710/Inter-LS 700: Writing for the Academy and Beyond

Humanities 5255  
Wednesdays, 11-12:55pm

Professor Giuliana Chamedes

Spring 2020

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4:15-6pm, and by appointment\*

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### Course Description

Writing can be a daunting undertaking. This workshop-style seminar will add some 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. It also pushes you to think critically about the public humanities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it helps you become more confident and adept in the art of writing for the academy and beyond.

### Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of what constitutes public humanities work;
- Determine if and how they would like to engage in public humanities work themselves;
- Learn to approach writing as an iterative and creative process;
- Sharpen their oral communication skills; and
- Craft a personal writerly toolkit that will ensure smooth sailing in graduate school and beyond.

### Course Requirements

**WRITING:** You will write no more than 20,000 words (including revisions) for this class.

In week three of the class, you will commit to one of the following two paths:

Path 1: Create a lively and legible-to-all piece of academic writing. This may take the form of a 10,000-word article or dissertation chapter. It may also take the form of dissertation prospectus or grant proposal.

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\* Office hours by appointment only on 1/29; 2/5; 2/12; 3/4; 3/25; 4/1; and 5/6.

Path 2: Take a focused approach to exploring your interests in the public humanities through a series of short tasks that will prepare you for a particular para-academic or non-academic job, internship, volunteer opportunity, or solo project (to be completed on your own time, in the summer or fall of 2020). Students walking this path will also produce one polished piece of prose, which explores a key question of personal interest to them in the public humanities. The piece can have either a print or a digital audience.

**READING:** There is a light reading load for this class. All of the readings will be posted on our Canvas site at least one week in advance. There is no course reader.

**PARTICIPATING:** 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). You are expected to do the reading, as well as respect deadlines and provide constructive feedback on the work of your peers. We will be workshopping one another's work every week, starting from week 5. Each student will be workshopped twice. You will be asked to lead discussion on one occasion over the course of the semester.

### **Credit Hours**

The credit standard for this 3-credit course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the course's learning activities (at least 45 hours per credit or 9 hours per week), which include regularly scheduled meeting times (group seminar meetings of 115 minutes per week), reading, writing, individual consultations with the instructor, and other student work as described on the syllabus.

### **Methods of Assessment**

#### **1. Student Participation (20%)**

HIST 710/INTER-LS 700 is a discussion-led seminar with a heavy peer-review component. Its success depends on you. From week 3, in-class discussions will be led by a member of the class. A sign-up sheet for leading discussion will be circulated in week 1 of the class.

#### **2. Writing Notebook (10%)**

This is a notebook to be kept through the semester. You may keep it in whatever format you'd like. In addition to the prompts provided on the syllabus, please try to make at least one entry per week. The notebook should focus on issues that interest you and relate to your projects. It may contain sketches, stray bits of thought, research information, drafts of sentences, exclamations of curiosity or frustration, etc. Please bring your writing notebook to class every week. It will never be collected.

#### **3. Nine sentences exercise (a.k.a., formulating a first research question) (10%)**

#### **4. Formulating a revised and expanded research question (10%)**

#### **5. Sh#\$\$y First Draft (15%)**

#### **6. More Polished Draft (15%)**

#### **7. Final Piece (20%)**

## Schedule of Classes

### I. Writing as a Practice

1. **January 22: Introduction to the course. What functions does writing play; what does it enable? Writing as a practice (I): the notebook. Vivid writing.**

Go over the syllabus. Start getting to know one another. Discuss the functions writing can play in our lives. Does good writing lead to good thinking? Address the value of a writing notebook and the art of looking slow, looking again, writing often. Reflections on grounded, vivid, writing.

#### *In-class readings:*

- Lynn Hunt, "How Writing Leads to Thinking," *Perspectives on History* (February 2010)
- Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook," in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968.

#### Writing notebook exercises:

- Walk over to the Chazen and practice looking slowly, grounding yourself in time and space, and playing with voice. Select a work of art that speaks to you for whatever reason. In your notebook, imagine two different sorts of writers (e.g., the artist vs. the art historian; the anthropologist vs. the journalist, etc.). Then, write two paragraphs that describe the artwork in vivid detail from the point of view of your two characters. The only rules are that each imaginary character is responsible for two paragraphs, and that both characters need to write as vividly as they can (within whatever voice is available to them). Make sure to snap a few pictures of the work of art you've chosen before you're done – you'll need the pictures in week 2.
- Identify a piece of academic or non-academic writing you've completed in the past three years that you feel is animated by a central question that really compelled you at the time (and perhaps compels you still). After having re-read the paper, jot down the animating question in your writing notebook. Please bring the piece with you to week 2 of class. It will not be collected.

2. **January 29: Writing as a practice (II): choosing your writing site and time of day. Our animating question(s): academia and the public humanities.**

In class, we will discuss the Chazen museum exercise, exorcise writerly demons, and address some essential preliminaries: where we write, when we write, and how often we write. Then, we will do a writing exercise to get us thinking about how we tend to formulate research questions. Next, we will each spend some time discussing a piece of academic or non-academic writing we've completed in the past and how, in that case, we went through the process of identifying and formulating an animating question.

*Reading (to be completed prior to class):*

- Anne Lamott, “Radio Station KFKD,” in *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*. N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1995.

In-class exercise: Return to your work of art by taking a look at the pictures of it you snapped last week. Return to your two imaginary characters as well. Then, write two paragraphs for each of your two characters. Paragraph one should contain questions that your character might have about the work of art; paragraph two some ideas for how your character might actually go about answering those questions.

At-home assignment: the **nine sentences exercise**. What are three animating questions you have right now (about broad ethical or political or other matters; that emerge from your study of the humanities and/or of particular texts and figures; etc.)? Lean into it: be kind to yourself but exacting too. Start from those three animating questions. In nine sentences (three per question), reflect on nine different ways those questions could potentially be more strongly integrated into your research, writing, and everyday life.

***Please upload your nine sentences exercise as a Word file under “Assignments” on Canvas by 5pm on Friday, January 31<sup>st</sup>.***

### **3. February 5: Prospectus, proposal, grant. Setting your writing goal for the semester.**

This is the week to formulate your writing goal for the semester. With the help of our discussion leader, we will talk about how to put together a research plan for yourself, whether it comes to academic or non-academic writing. We will also talk about writing for money – and what sort of writing that is.

At-home assignment: **Formulating a revised and expanded research question.** In two sentences, describe your writing goal for the semester. Then, in two to three pages, double-spaced, write up a reflection on the animating research question(s) that are integral to your writing goal, and how you will go about answering them.

***Please upload your piece as a Word document under “Assignments” on Canvas by noon on Monday, February 10<sup>th</sup>.***

*Readings:*

- Wendy Laura Belcher, “Designing Your Writing Schedule,” in *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- Christina M. Gillis, “Writing Proposals for ACLS Fellowship Competitions,” at *The American Council of Learned Societies* website.
- Karen L. Kelsky, “Dr. Karen’s Foolproof Grant Template,” at *The Professor is in* website.

**4. February 12: Sending a message. Special guest: Patrick Iber (Assistant Professor, Department of History; *Dissent*, Editorial board)**

With the help of a *New York Times* article penned by our special guest Prof. Patrick Iber and an NGO pamphlet which we will read together, we will think about what question(s) animate the author(s) and how to send a message that will resonate with a non-academic audience. We will also discuss Prof. Iber's experiences in writing for a broad public and serving on the editorial board of *Dissent*.

*Readings:*

- Patrick Iber, "The U.S. Needs to Stay Out of Venezuela," *The New York Times*, January 31, 2019.
- Center for Urban Pedagogy, "Is Your Landlord Harassing You or Your Neighbors?"

**5. February 19: Evaluating your evidence. Writing early.**

In-class discussion, led by discussion leader: Writing early.

Workshopping two student proposals.

*Reading:*

- Paul J. Silvia, "Specious Barriers to Writing a Lot," in *How to Write a Lot: A Guide to Practical Academic Writing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009.
- Robert Boice, "Wait"; "Begin Writing Early (Before Feeling Ready)," in *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*. London: Pearson, 2000.
- John R. Trimble, "Getting Launched," *Writing with Style: Conversations on the Art of Writing*. London: Pearson, 2010.

At-home assignment: **The sh\$#%y first draft.** Please upload at draft that is at least 70% of the length of your final writing project. The paper needs to be in complete sentences.

***Please upload your sh\$#%y first draft as a Word file under "Assignments" on Canvas by noon on Monday, February 24<sup>th</sup>.***

**6. February 26: Fierceless mercy: What to do with a first draft?**

In-class discussion (led by discussion leader): editing yourself. Editing for content and focus.

Workshopping two student papers.

In-class exercise: Fierceless editing.

*Readings:*

- Anne Lamott, “Shitty First Drafts,” in *Bird by Bird*.
- Robert Boice, “Let Others Do Some of the Work,” in *Advice for New Faculty Members: Nihil Nimus*.

**7. March 4: Content, structure, argument**

In-class discussion (led by discussion leader): content, structure, argument.

Workshopping two student papers.

*Readings:*

- Cathy Birkenstein and Gerald Graff, “They Say,” in *They Say/I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York: WW. Norton, 2006.
- Bill Cronon, Liese Dart, and Brian Hamilton, “Positioning Your Argument,” available at Professor William Cronon’s personal webpage.
- Wendy Belcher, “Strengthening your Structure,” in *Writing a Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*.

**8. March 11: Sentence-level writing**

In-class discussion (led by discussion leader): sentence-level writing

Workshopping two student papers.

*Readings:*

- Wendy Belcher, “Editing your Sentences,” in *Writing a Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*.
- Helen Sword, “Smart Sentencing,” in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012.

**ENJOY SPRING BREAK! (MARCH 14-22)**

**9. March 25: NO CLASS TODAY. Class off for good behavior.**

*Reading:*

- Anne Lamott, “Writer’s Block,” in *Bird by Bird*.

At-home activity: The **more polished draft**. Please upload a complete version of your final writing project.

***Please upload the more polished draft in Word form on Canvas by noon on Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup>.***

## 10. April 1: What to do with a solid first draft?

In-class discussion (led by discussion leader): editing tips. Back to structure. Editing for precise language and grammar.

Workshopping two student papers.

*Reading:*

- Wendy Belcher, "Revising and Resubmitting your Article," in *Writing Your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*.
- Steve Dunham, "Editing for Precise Language," and "Editing for Grammar," in *The Editor's Companion: An Indispensable Guide to Editing Books, Magazines, Online Publications, and More*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2014. Pp. 46-81; 82-108

## 11. April 8: The peer review process; writing an academic journal article. Special guest: Kathryn Ciancia (Assistant Professor, Department of History)

*Reading:*

- Kathryn Ciancia, "Borderland Modernity: Poles, Jews, and Urban Spaces in Interwar Eastern Poland," *Journal of Modern History* 89, 3 (September 2017)

## 12. April 15: Final touches; hooks and sinkers

In-class discussion (led by discussion leader): hooks and sinkers

Workshopping two student papers.

*Reading:*

- John Trimble, "Openers," and "Closers," in *Writing with Style*.
- Wendy Belcher, "Opening and Concluding Your Article," *Writing your Journal Article in Twelve Weeks*.
- Helen Sword, "Hooks and Sinkers," *Stylish Academic Writing*.

## 13. April 22: Roundtable: My public humanities. Special guests, invited by students, TBA.

Workshopping two student papers.

## 14. April 29: Concluding thoughts; before and after

At-home activity: **The final version.**

***Please upload the final version of your paper in Word form on Canvas by noon on Wednesday, April 29<sup>th</sup>.***

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