



MPJO-730-01: CRAFTING NARRATIVE NON-FICTION

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Mondays, 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. | Autumn 2015

Instructor: Howard Yoon

Downtown campus, room C229

- Office hours are by appointment only

COURSE OVERVIEW

What do David Sedaris, Erik Larson, Laura Hillenbrand, Jon Krakauer, Michael Lewis and Joan Didion have in common? They excel in one of the most popular styles of writing in today's market: narrative nonfiction.

The class will cover all the major genres of narrative non-fiction: web writing, short and extended magazine articles, and books. It will delve into the most popular forms of narrative writing, from historical to adventure to food and travel to the extended essay and business. Students will read from a diverse list of journalists, authors, pundits and teachers. They will learn to identify what makes an idea the best idea for a piece. They will also learn to craft tone and voice according to their style, their intended audience and their venue. They will learn why narrative non-fiction relies so heavily on counter-intuition, alternative points of view, and above all else, credentials.

This is an intensive long-form writing class. It is designed for students who have strong fundamentals in writing and good instincts for narrative writing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Develop the skills to identify and shape the elements of a good story.
- Determine the best way to tell that story, using point-of-view, tone, character and dialogue.
- Find your voice as a writer.

REQUIRED READING

Title: *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*

Author: Robert S. Boynton

Publisher: Vintage

Year: 2005

ISBN-10: 1400033560

Price: \$13.62 (Amazon)



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Title: On Writing Well
Author: William Zinsser
Publisher: Harper Perennial
Year: 2006, 30th anniversary edition
ISBN-10: 0060891548
Price: \$12.29 (Amazon)

Title: On Writing
Author: Stephen King
Publisher: Scribner
Year: 2010, 10th anniversary edition
ISBN-10: 1439156816
Price: \$12.39 (Amazon)

Title: Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University
Authors: Mark Kramer and Wendy Call
Publisher: Plume
Year: 2007
ISBN-10: 0452287553
Price: \$14.22 (Amazon)

Recommended reading:

I expect you to become a more voracious reader of magazines and newspapers. You should read magazines such as The New Yorker, The Atlantic, Vanity Fair, GQ, NY Times Magazine, Esquire, Outside, Washington Post Magazine, the Washington City Paper and even Reader's Digest. I encourage you to read as many daily newspapers as well, even if they are online. I will not grade you on the recommended reading, but I will talk to you about your reading list when we meet for our one-on-one meetings. The point here is not to force extra work on you. The point is for you to become fully immersed in the category of narrative nonfiction. The more you read, the more immersion can take place.

ATTENDANCE

As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in further reduction of the final grade. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

If, for whatever reason, you are unable to attend class, please obtain notes and assignments from other students for the material you missed. Please show up to class on time. If you



repeatedly show up tardy, it will have a negative impact on your grade — and you'll look bad in front of your fellow students.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, CLASS PARTICIPATION AND OTHER GUIDELINES

Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, ham radios and Nintendo DS's. If you are using a laptop, please do not surf the web during class.

Class participation is an integral part of this class and accounts for 30 percent of your grade. That includes showing up and participating in class discussions, demonstrating that you've done the weekly reading assignments and can contribute intelligent thoughts to the conversation. Engage in the class! You will get more out of it and so will the class.

Instructional continuity: In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

You will be expected to read passages from required reading, read pieces by your classmates, and write narratives. Turn in your work on time, challenge yourself in what and how you write your assignments, and show progress in your writing over the course of the semester. These three things will help in getting a good score in this category.

Unless otherwise stated, all work should be double-spaced and printed in 12-point font. You must learn to meet deadlines. If you need an extension, and you have a good excuse, contact me to discuss before the day your assignment is due. **You will lose a letter grade for every day your assignment is turned in late.**

Writing assignments:

These assignments are designed to improve your writing and to help you challenge yourself, as well as to prepare you for the final project.

- Goals: Write out in one or two pages why you're taking this class, what your background in writing is, and three personal goals you hope to achieve by the end of the semester. Be prepared to share this in class.
Deadline: 9/14, beginning of class
- One-page story
Deadline: 9/21, beginning of class
- Profile: Write a three- to six-page profile of someone.
Deadline: 9/28, beginning of class
- Dialogue: Students will recreate the dialogue that takes place in class on 9/28 but in narrative form.
Deadline: 10/5, beginning of class



- Travel narrative piece: Write a travel narrative piece of five to 10 pages.
Deadline: 10/19, beginning of class
- Memoir: Write a memoir piece of six to eight pages.
Deadline: 11/9, beginning of class
- Reported narrative: Write a reported narrative piece of six to 10 pages. As we will discuss in class, this piece will largely rest on your own investigation, research and interviews. But it can be drawn from your own experience.
Deadline: 11/23, beginning of class

Final project:

The final project will be a long narrative of 20+ pages. Most students will expand on an assignment from earlier in the semester. I will work with you during the second half of the semester in planning and revising this final project. The feedback you receive from your instructor and from your classmates on the weekly writing assignments will help give you a better sense of what areas you should develop for the final paper. More details on the specifics of this assignment will be covered in class.

Deadline: 12/13, 5 p.m. (this is one day *before* the final meeting of class)

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Class Participation:	30 points
Weekly Writing Assignments:	30 points
Final Paper:	40 points

Total: **100 points**

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program



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202-687-4246

<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>

- Academic Resource Center
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
202-687-6985
<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>.



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If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of our agenda. The instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.



CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2)

What is Good Narrative Writing?

In this introductory class, I'll talk about the book publishing industry and the role of narrative nonfiction in the reading market. Then I'll cover the elements of good narrative writing: the basics of grammar, vocabulary and word choice. Then I'll expand on the building blocks of good writing. They include an eye for detail, simplicity, a need to stick to the story and the importance of revision, revision, revision. We'll reverse-engineer several unconventional narratives to see what they're made of and how they work. There will be in-class writing assignments.

Assignment: One-page on personal background and goals

Deadline: 9/14, to be turned in at the beginning of class

NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 9 – LABOR DAY

WEEK 2 (MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14)

Voice and Tone

What's the difference between voice and tone? What is writing style? How does your voice change when you write an email at work versus an email to a friend? What is it about your writing style that changes? This week we will go over the elements of voice, style and audience and how they're related. We will study examples of authors who have strong voices to learn how and why they are different.

Assignment: One-page story, details to come.

Deadline: Emailed to me before class on 9/21

WEEK 3 (MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21)

Setting and Description

How do you choose what to write about, especially when it comes to setting and environment? This week will be devoted to capturing the setting and environment of a piece. We will examine the ways writers use setting to support their storytelling. During class, you will be allowed to leave the building to observe a setting, take notes and write a brief description of what you saw.

Assignment: Profile, details to come.

Deadline: 9/28, beginning of class

WEEK 4 (MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28)

Dialogue

Dialogue is one of the hardest and most underrated skills of narrative nonfiction. Amateur writers often times think dialogue comes easily. The class will break into groups and converse



with one another, while at least one student is listening and taking notes. Then each person will be asked to recreate the dialogue.

Assignment: Dialogue in narrative form

Deadline: 10/5, beginning of class

Assignment: Prepare a pitch for your travel story and be prepared to discuss it

Deadline: 10/5, beginning of class

WEEK 5 (MONDAY, OCTOBER 5)

Travel Narrative / Dialogue Critiques

Travel writing is one of the most common forms of narrative writing. It's also the most easily botched. Why? Because so many people who travel feel their journey is worth recording as a story. We will treat part of this class like an editorial review session, where we discuss various story ideas as a group to help fellow writers with their travel assignments.

Assignment: Travel narrative piece

Deadline: 10/19, beginning of class

Assignment: Read profile pieces by your fellow classmates. Be prepared to discuss them.

Deadline: 10/19, beginning of class

WEEK 6 (MONDAY, OCTOBER 12) NO CLASS FOR COLUMBUS DAY – MAKEUP DATE/PLACE TBA

We will do a makeup session at some point this semester that may consist of a field trip offsite. The date, time and location are TBD and will be announced as soon as possible in class. Please be aware that the time for the session may be outside of normal class hours. Once the date and time are set, please get in touch with the instructor individually if your work schedule will make it difficult to attend this session.

WEEK 7 (MONDAY, OCTOBER 19)

Profile Workshop

We will discuss the profiles in class. Around this time, I will also begin to schedule one-on-one meetings before and after class and also at my office to provide feedback about your writing—your strengths and weaknesses and the goals for the rest of the semester.

Assignment: Read and edit your classmates' travel narratives. Be prepared to discuss in class. Remember that participation is 30 percent of your grade.

Deadline: 10/26, beginning of class

WEEK 8 (MONDAY, OCTOBER 26)

Travel Narrative Workshop / Introduction to Memoir



We will finish the profile workshop and move on to the travel narrative pieces. I'll also be discussing the category of memoir writing. What makes memoir so difficult to pull off? Why does it feel so easy? What's the difference between autobiography and memoir?

Assignment: Memoir, details to come.

Deadline: 11/9, beginning of class

Assignment: Finish reading your fellow classmates' travel narratives.

Deadline: 11/2, during class

WEEK 9 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2)

Travel Narrative Workshop

We will continue to critique the travel narratives.

Assignment: Memoir completion

Deadline: 11/9, beginning of class

WEEK 10 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 9)

Guest Lecturer

Introduction to the Reported Narrative

This class will feature one or possibly two of my clients coming in to talk about their careers and the art of writing narrative. I'll also discuss the third type of narrative you'll be writing: the reported narrative. This will be a story that you have to conduct research on, something that can possibly take place from your personal experience but largely rests on your investigation and research and interviews.

Assignment: Read your classmates' memoir pieces.

Deadline: 11/16, beginning of class

Assignment: Begin work on a reported narrative.

Deadline: Final narrative due 11/23, beginning of class

WEEK 11 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16)

Memoir Workshop

We will start to critique the memoir pieces, which will also continue on into next week.

Assignment: Finish your reported narrative.

Deadline: 11/23, beginning of class

Assignment: Finish reading the memoir pieces.

Deadline: 11/23, beginning of class



WEEK 12 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 23)

Memoir Workshop

We will finish the memoir workshop.

Assignment: Read the reported narratives.

Deadline: 11/30, beginning of class

WEEK 13 (MONDAY, NOVEMBER 30)

Reported Narrative Workshop

We will start to critique the reported narrative pieces, which will also continue on two weeks from now.

Assignment: Finish required reading assignments.

Deadline: 12/7, beginning of class

WEEK 14 (MONDAY, DECEMBER 7)

Reported Narrative Workshop and Pitch Session

In addition to conducting a workshop on the reported narrative pieces, I will have a live pitch session in which students will be asked to present their ideas for their final papers, and the class will provide feedback on the idea and ways in which the student can execute the story.

Assignment: Final project

Deadline: 12/13, 5 p.m. (one day *before* the final class)

WEEK 15 (MONDAY, DECEMBER 14)

Final Discussion and Second Round of One-on-One Meetings

We will have a discussion about the future of long-form writing. Then I will conduct final one-on-one meetings in class and revisit each student's personal goals that were written in the first week of the semester.