

International History

Academic year 2019-2020

The Craft of Scholarly Writing

HI120 - Spring - 6 ECTS

Wednesday 16h15 - 18h00

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 Biltott](#)

[Office hours](#)

> ASSISTANT

[Frank Afari](#)

[Office hours](#)

Syllabus

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

19/2 Week One: Welcome to the Writer's Life

- Welcome
- Explanation of assignments
- Introduction to the daily writing exercise (<https://750words.com>)

26/2 Week Two: To Write Well You Must Read Well

- Robert Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: WW Norton, 1996) intro and chapter 1.
- Explanation of next week's assignment

Recommended Reading

- Roland Barthes, *The Pleasures of the Text* (London: Hill and Wang, 1975)

4/3 **Preparing for the Labor Ahead:**

- Identify the previous draft or piece of writing you will work to improve throughout the course of the semester.
- Submit a summary of your writing goals for the semester (can be your 750 words exercise)

11/3 **Know Your Subject, Know Thyself**

- 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 **Mapping an Exemplar**

- Read John Forrester, "Freud and Collecting" in John Elsner, Roger Cardinal, *Cultures of Collecting* (New York: Reaktion Books, 1994) pp 224-251.
- Show proof of your shadow writing exercise
- In class "mapping exercise"
- Explanation of your next mapping assignment

25/3 Mapping a Master

1/4 On Style

- Tracy Kidder, *Good Prose, chapters 1, 4,5, 6*
- Writing an introduction
- Explanation of Peer Review/Rewriting Assignment

8/4 Exchange Drafts with Partner

15/4 Easter No Class

22/4 Crafting an Introduction/Argument

- *Kate Turabian, A Manual for Writers, chapter 5 “Constructing Your Argument”*
- Turn in Peer Review/Map to Partner

29/ 4 Rewrite Your Introductions/Thesis Statement

- Return to partner/professor by the evening of 5/5

6/5 In Class Editing/Feedback Session

13/5 Turn in Revised Introduction

20/5 Writing Day

27/5 Writing Day

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