



University of King's College

School of Journalism

Journalism 4950/5950
Narrative Nonfiction Workshop
Winter 2019

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Also: feel free to call me at home.
Classroom: Vroom Room, A&A.

Course Description

In this course we work to understand and practice the excellent form of journalism known as narrative nonfiction. (It is sometimes also called immersion journalism or creative nonfiction; at its best it is called literary journalism.)

We will learn by reading and discussing skillful articles and book excerpts by some of the best writers in this genre, and by reading articles about this craft.

In this course the reading load – especially in the first four weeks – is fairly heavy. (In the final two weeks the reading load lightens, to allow you more time to write and rewrite.) Please be good to yourself and keep up. Reading deeply – and afterwards considering what you have read – will help you be able to outline and write an excellent narrative. Doing all of the readings thoroughly is a key to success.

Spending serious time with the readings will also prepare you to discuss them in class. All class members will be expected to participate in reading discussions, and to lead at least one reading discussion.

Coming to class is crucial. A great deal of understanding is transmitted in class; please line up time with the people you are writing about, if at all possible, for other than the crucial in-class hours.

Some of the assigned readings are available online. You may want to print out them out to bring to class. If you do not print out a copy, make insightful notes so that in class discussions you can refer to specifics.

Many of the assigned readings are from the excellent *Telling True Stories -- A Nonfiction Writers' Guide*, available in the King's bookstore for \$20.

Learning Outcomes

This course aims for you to develop the skills needed to write a compelling, meaningful piece of narrative journalism. These skills include the interviewing, researching, outlining, writing and rewriting needed to create long-form narrative.

The best literary journalism establishes an intimate connection with the reader. It is honest; nothing is made up. It is accurate, fair, in proportion, and anchored in deep research. The writing is, in the words of former Nieman School chief Mark Kramer, "sparse, stylish and controlled."

Doing all of this involves a great deal of care, hard work and time. At least 40 hours a week of work are expected. Invest more time and you are sure to learn even more, and so do better work.

Course Schedule

Week 1

Monday, Jan. 7 **3:30-5:30 p.m. (All classes in this course are 3:30-5:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted.)**

Keys to narrative nonfiction.
Finding great narrative story ideas.

* It's an Honor, by Jimmy Breslin
<https://www.thedailybeast.com/its-an-honor>

Tuesday, Jan. 8

WORKSHOP: STORY IDEAS.

Readings assigned for this class:

- * The Food on a Table at the Execution, by Dave Anderson
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/05/sports/baseball/the-food-on-a-table-at-the-execution.html>
- * Difficult Journalism That's Slap-Up Fun, by Katherine Boo (in Telling True Stories, aka TTS, p. 14)
- * Delving into Private Lives, by Gay Talese (TTS, p. 10)
- * Finding Good Stories Off the Beaten Path, by Lane DeGregory (TTS, p. 20)
- * Finding Good Topics: An Editor's Questions, by Jan Winburn (TTS, p. 22)
- * Reporting for Narrative, by Mark Kramer (TTS, p. 24)
- * Doing Enough Reporting?, by Walt Harrington (TTS, p. 54)
- * ...And please start reading Harrington's lengthy essay about how to do this kind of work. We will discuss it in class on Wednesday.

Wednesday, Jan. 9

WORKSHOP: STORY IDEAS.

Readings for this class:

- * A Writer's Essay: Seeking the Extraordinary in the Ordinary, by Walt Harrington
<http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/1997/03/28/a-writers-essay-seeking-the-extraordinary-in-the-ordinary-2/>
- * When Man Falls, a Crowd Gathers, by Hart Crane
<http://storyoftheweek.loa.org/2010/05/when-man-falls-crowd-gathers.html>
- * What narrative writers can learn from screenwriters, by Nora Ephron (TTS)
- * Not Stopping: Time Management for Writers, by Stewart O'Nan (TTS)

Thursday, Jan. 10

WORKSHOP: STORY IDEAS.

Readings for this class:

- * The Third Winter, by Martha Gellhorn

* The Line Between Fact and Fiction, by Roy Peter Clark:
<https://www.poynter.org/news/line-between-fact-and-fiction>

Friday, Jan. 11

No class.

DUE at 6 p.m.: Your story idea. Please write your story idea in one sentence, and then start a new paragraph and explain it in less than 200 words. Be clear on why this idea works for creative nonfiction. Suggest possible scenes, questions this story seeks to answer, who will be your primary character(s), your role (if any) in the story, etc.

Week 2

Tuesday, Jan. 15

OBSERVATION

Reading discussions:

- * Another Day of Life, by Ryszard Kapuscinski
- * Stasiland, by Anna Funder

Wednesday, Jan. 16

WORKSHOP: CLASS STORY IDEAS

INTERVIEWING

Readings:

- * Being There, by Anne Hull (TTS)
- * Good Prose, by Tracy Kidder and Richard Todd, 13-28
- * Profiles, by Jacqui Banaszynski (TTS)
- * ["Why I Write"](#) by Joan Didion

Thursday, Jan. 17

THE CAMERA

Reading discussions:

* [Frank Sinatra has a Cold](#) by Gay Talese

* Hiroshima, by John Hersey. AN ONLINE LINK EXISTS:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1946/08/31/hiroshima>

Plus readings:

* Reporting for Narrative, by Mark Kramer (TTS)

* Participatory Reporting: Sending Myself to Prison, By Ted Conover (TTS)

* To Tape or Not to Tape (various authors) (TTS)

Friday, Jan. 18

DUE at 6 p.m.: Observation assignment.

Week 3

Tuesday, Jan. 22

SCENES

Reading discussions:

* Trial by Fire, by David Grann

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/09/07/trial-by-fire>

* In Cold Blood, by Truman Capote

Plus readings:

* Storycraft, by Jack Hart, 89-106

* Reconstructing Scenes, by Adam Hochschild (TTS)

* Setting the Scene, by Mark Kramer (TTS)

* Six Tips for Crafting Scenes, by Laurie Hertzler, <http://nieman.harvard.edu/stories/six-tips-for-crafting-scenes/>

* (Narrative) J School for People Who Never Went, By Adrian Nicole Leblanc (TTS)

Wednesday, Jan. 23

WORKSHOP: Observation assignments.

OUTLINES

Readings:

- * Summary vs. Dramatic Narrative by Jack Hart (TTS)
- * Weaving Story and Idea by Nicholas Lemann (TTS)

Thursday, Jan. 24

VOICE

Reading discussions:

- * Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream, by Joan Didion (annotated by Patsy Sims)
- * Las Vegas: The Odds on Anything, by Michael Ventura

Plus reading:

- * On Voice, by Susan Orlean (TTS)

Friday, Jan. 25

DUE at 6 p.m.: Scene, Outline.

Week 4

Tuesday, Jan. 29

DIALOGUE

Reading discussions:

- * The Muse of Coyote Ugly Saloon, by Elizabeth Gilbert

<https://www.gq.com/story/elizabeth-gilbert-gq-march-1997-muse-coyote-ugly-saloon?printable=true>

- * Coyotes, by Ted Conover

- * Svetlana Alexievich, excerpts from Voices from Chernobyl

<http://www.theparisreview.org/letters-essays/5447/voices-from-chernobyl-svetlana-alexievich>

- * Black Boy, by Richard Wright

Plus readings:

- * Field notes to first draft, by Tracy Kidder (TTS)
- * Transforming One Hundred Notebooks into Thirty-five Thousand Words, by Sonia Nazario (TTS)
- * Storycraft, by Jack Hart, p. 127-136
- * Revising – Over and Over Again, by Anne Hull, p. 205 (TTS)

Wednesday, Jan. 30

WORKSHOP: SCENES

Thursday, Jan. 31

No class.

Friday, Feb. 1

DUE at 6 p.m.: Major Story First Draft.

Week 5

Monday, Feb. 4 and Tuesday, Feb. 5

One-on-one interviews.

Wednesday, Feb. 6

TONE AND MEANING

Reading discussions:

- * Mrs. Kennedy at the Moment, by Gloria Steinem
<https://classic.esquire.com/article/1964/10/1/mrs-kennedy-at-the-moment>
- * The Tiger, by John Vaillant
- * The Priest of Abu Ghraib, by Jennifer Percy
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/priest-abu-grahib-180971013/>

Plus: WORKSHOP: FIRST DRAFTS

Week 6

Tuesday, Feb. 12

FINE EDITING

Reading discussions:

- * Untitled, a 2018 Narrative Nonfiction paper by 2018 King's BJ Celie Deagle
- * The Loneliness of Being an Immigrant, a 2017 Narrative Nonfiction paper by 2018 King's MJ Lu Xu: <https://thewalrus.ca/the-loneliness-of-being-an-immigrant/>

Thursday, Feb. 14

CLASS CELEBRATION: 2:30-4 p.m.

DUE at 11:59 p.m.: Story Second Draft.

ENJOY a long weekend before your final workshop!

Assignments and marks

In this course you are required to submit:

- An observation exercise.
- A scene, preferably for your 3,000-word article.
- An outline of your 3,000-word article.
- Two drafts of a 3,000-word narrative nonfiction article.

Marks for the course will be distributed this way:

10 percent for the scene;
 20 percent for the first draft;
 50 percent for the second draft;
 10 percent for reading quizzes;
 10 percent for effort and class engagement, including leading and participating in reading discussions.

(No marks are allotted for the outline or the observation assignment.)

Factors considered in awarding marks on both drafts include:

- the ability of the reader to see the scenes and hear the dialogue
- readability, ie. the quality of the writing, including precise verb and noun choices, concise editing, smooth segues, artful touches such as metaphors and similes, and tone and flow
- the design of the story structure
- how anchored the story is in necessary research
- how compelling the reader will find the lead
- the resonance of the ending.

Also considered will be the story's meaning. Is it significant? What, ultimately, has the reader learned about the human condition?

Deadlines and Grading

Deadlines are firm in journalism, and so will be treated seriously in this course. Any late paper will be docked one-third of a letter grade per day.

Grade Scale

Grade	Grade Points		Definition	Explanation
A+	4.30	90-100	Excellent	The story has all of the best characteristics of narrative journalism including: a compelling lead; credible dialogue; visible scenes; appropriate voice, tone and flow; and a memorable ending. The story is also anchored in research, and is meaningful – it gives readers insights and fresh understanding into the human condition.
A	4.00	85-89		
A-	3.70	80-84		
B+	3.30	77-79	Good	Many of the best characteristics of narrative journalism are here, but some are missing or lack skill in execution. There is some evidence of research, but more would give the story greater depth. Readers receive some insight, but little that will resonate for long.
B	3.00	73-76		
B-	2.70	70-72		
C+	2.30	65-69	Satisfactory	The story reveals some understanding of the characteristics of narrative journalism, but the story is not particularly compelling or flowing, some of the scenes and dialogue are weak, and the story overall is not a particularly flowing, compelling or enjoyable read.
C	2.00	60-64		
C-	1.70	55-59		

D	1.00	50-54	Marginal Pass	The story reveals some understanding of the characteristics of narrative journalism (listed above), but in other places reveals a serious lack of understanding. Research may also be lacking, misunderstood or incorrect.
F	0.00	0-49	Inadequate	The story lacks some of the most important characteristics of narrative journalism (listed above). This suggests the writer does not have a full grasp of what makes narrative a distinct form, or did not put in the required effort, or both. Research may also be lacking, misunderstood or incorrect.
INC	0.00		Incomplete	
W	Neutral and no credit obtained		Withdrew after deadline	
ILL	Neutral and no credit obtained		Compassionate reasons, illness	
P	Neutral		Pass	
TR	Neutral		Transfer credit on admission	

Ethics and Safety

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with and abide by the School of Journalism Handbook of Professional Practice: <http://kingsjournalism.com/handbook/> It includes the King's Journalism ethical standards, Safety First guidelines and much more.

An example of what you will find in the Handbook: "To do journalism well, you must sometimes be uncomfortable. You should never be unsafe. If you run into trouble, or if you feel a situation might put your or others' personal safety at risk, bail out and call your instructor right away."

Open up and take a read of the Handbook. It helps.

Absences

A student who is absent for up to three consecutive calendar days and misses a test or graded assignment must contact the course instructor in advance of the date of the academic requirement. They must then complete and submit a [Student Declaration of Absence Form \(Journalism\)](http://kingsjournalism.com/absence-form/) <kingsjournalism.com/absence-form/> to the instructor in person, via email or through Brightspace no later than three calendar days after the last day of the absence. For courses weighted three or six credit hours, a Student Declaration of Absence can be submitted for two separate absences, up to three days each, per course per term. For a 9-credit hour workshop, a Student Declaration of Absence can be submitted for a single such absence.

For long-term absences of more than three consecutive days, a student should follow the same procedure and contact their course instructor within five calendar days after the last day of the absence. Documentation from an on-campus or other health care professional is required to support a long-term absence and should describe how the medical condition affects the student's ability to fulfill academic requirements.

A student experiencing a long-term absence, or more than two short-term absences, is encouraged to meet with the Journalism School's Undergraduate or Graduate Coordinator, or the School Director.

Inclusive Behaviour

King's prides itself on inclusiveness and respect for others. Our classrooms and newsrooms are public spaces in which racist, sexist, homophobic or intolerant comments or humour will not be tolerated. Do not screen such videos, images or web pages on school equipment or in school facilities. Offensive behaviour is not just disrespectful to your colleagues and to your profession; it may constitute harassment under the King's Code of Conduct. For more information, go to the [King's website](http://ukings.ca) <<http://ukings.ca>> and find the Yellow Book.

Contacting the Police

Students must talk to the professor before they contact Halifax Regional Police or RCMP. On approval of their request, they must send the police an email from their official school account and cc it to the professor.

Academic Integrity and Intellectual Honesty

Plagiarism is stealing someone else's work and presenting it as your own. It is a form of academic fraud; do it, and you can end up in big trouble. The most common cases of plagiarism involve students who cut and paste material from the Internet or copy something

without giving the original author credit. In journalism, giving credit is called attribution. Do not cut and paste. Do attribute your sources.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offence. Punishment can range from getting zero on the assignment to failing the course, being suspended or being expelled from the university. It's in your best interest to adopt good habits when it comes to sourcing material. For more information, go to the [King's website](#) and find the section Intellectual Honesty on page 33 of the 2018-19 academic calendar.

Violations of academic integrity are handled by the university's Academic Integrity Officer, and are taken seriously. If you have any doubt about proper citation for an academic paper or proper attribution in a piece of journalism, talk to your instructor.

Accessibility

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests and exams should make their request to the Advising and Access Services Centre (AASC) prior to or at the outset of the academic year. Please visit www.dal.ca/access for more information and to obtain the Request for Accommodation – Form A.

A note taker may be required as part of a student's accommodation. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term (with some exceptions). If you are interested, please contact AASC at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom, untouched, so that students who require them will be able to participate in the class.

Photo Policy: staging photos or video

Journalists aim to capture telling, specific and true images. Doing this requires advance thought and planning.

Sometimes it's not possible or appropriate to seize a "moment" as it happens, and you may need to stage activities. This is not the same as fabricating them.

For example, if profiling a duck carver you may ask her to repeat an action so you can choose the best shots and sequences. What's key is that you capture this action as it would have happened naturally. For example, don't add elements – power tools, a homey plaque with a quote about ducks – that would not have naturally appeared.

Know that there is a difference between features and news. We don't stage news, period. You may ask a singer to sing for a feature photograph, but don't pretend he is singing at a concert you didn't shoot. At a demonstration, you may not prompt a protester to wave a sign, chant, or feign emotion.

Always discuss the staging of any image or activity with your instructor – prior to shooting.

Photo policy: photo illustrations

Photo illustrations may be used to convey the meaning of a news or feature story.

Usually they feature a primary object: a gavel, stop sign, microphone, etc.

When people appear in photo illustrations, they must be anonymous and generic. A photo illustration should never be misconstrued to be a news photo, or a picture of a “real” person. If you use a model, ensure that she cannot be misconstrued to be “real”, but only a symbol or idea.

This may be done through framing and/or composition and/or exaggerated processing and filtering (blur, posterizing, pixelating and so on). As a rule, photo illustrations should be captioned as such, perhaps with a creator credit.

Generic images should not be the default option for any story. Consider what relevant and specific images (including contributed images such as archival photos, home movies, etc.) you might use when starting your research.

Always discuss a photo illustration with your instructor – prior to shooting.

Appeals

Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism. These are described starting on p.136 of the King’s Academic Calendar.