



The University of Western Ontario
HISTORY 9805
Writing History
Winter 2020
Mondays 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, Lawson Hall 2270C

Instructor: **Professor Rob MacDougall**

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Course Description

This is a graduate course about the **writing** of history—the actual art and craft of writing historical nonfiction. It is not a seminar on research methods, historiography, or any particular subfield of history. It is a weekly writing workshop, in which we will all give and get criticism, working together to improve our writing skills.

The work of the course consists of **weekly writing assignments** that we will share and critique in class, paying attention not only to questions of evidence and argument but also to issues like voice, pace, storytelling, and style. We will also read advice on academic and other writing, along with samples of effective prose. The purpose of the readings is to suggest strategies and techniques that we can apply to our own work, and to help us each think about how and maybe even why we want to write about the past.

Course Materials

There is one required book for this course, which should be available at the Campus Bookstore:

Eric Hayot, *The Elements of Academic Style: Writing for the Humanities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

All other readings will be made available in PDF format or on reserve.

Assignments and Evaluation

There will be a **short writing assignment** (usually 300-600 words, but sometimes longer) **every week**. Each week we will all read and discuss a small set of the assignments submitted. On weeks 4, 8, and 12, you will hand in a revised version of one of the previous 3 weekly assignments. All assignments will be read, and all matter, but only the three revisions will receive numeric grades.

Course grades will be calculated as follows:

- 20% Weekly writing assignments (due every week; you may miss one without penalty)
- 20% Revision #1 (due week 4; a revised version of assignment from week 1, 2, or 3)
- 20% Revision #2 (due week 8; a revised version of assignment from week 5, 6, or 7)
- 20% Revision #3 (due week 12; a revised version of assignment from week 9, 10, or 11)
- 20% Participation and feedback on other students' work (every week)

Course Schedule and Readings

This is a draft schedule! The exact sequence of readings and assignments may change before January, but the general outline of the course is as follows.

Week 1 January 6 What Is Good Writing?

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 1-2.
Jill Lepore, “How To Write a Paper for This Class.”
Steven Pinker, *The Sense of Style*, pp. 11-26.

Short excerpts from three pieces of historical prose I admire: Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*; Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages*; China Miéville, *October*.

Write: Who are you, as a writer? Write a short piece of 300-600 words describing your experience with writing. What do you write? When and how do you write? Do you do any non-school writing? What kind of writing do you admire, and what kind of writing do you hope to do? Write for an audience who is curious to know about you and your experiences as a writer. Edit and polish your draft so you will make the kind of first impression you desire. Then upload or email the finished piece to me by **Friday, Jan. 10**.

Week 2 January 13 Writing as Practice

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapter 3.
Joan Bolker, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*, pp. 3-8, 32-48.
Joli Jensen, *Write No Matter What*, pp. 10-13, 41-74.
Paul Silvia, *How To Write A Lot*, pp. 3-47.

Examples of my own freewriting and writing logs.

Write: Think of something you know a lot about. It should not be an academic topic; it should be some other part of your life, like rock climbing, or dating, or the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or how the Blue Jays are doing this year, or how to make scrambled eggs. Pick something you like to talk about! Think of a position or opinion you hold on this topic, one that not everybody shares. Write a piece of 300-600 words laying out the issue and your position on it. Be as persuasive as you can. Upload or email the piece to me by **Friday, Jan. 17**.

Week 3 January 20 Writing to be Read

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 4-7 and Chapter 16.
Patrick Dunleavy, *Authoring a PhD*, pp. 11-17.

Excerpted introductions from several academic history articles:

Elizabeth A. Fenn, “Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America: Beyond Jeffrey Amherst.” *Journal of American History* 86:4 (2000).

Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91:4 (2005).

Rachel B. Herrmann, “The ‘Tragicall Historie’: Cannibalism and Abundance in Colonial Jamestown,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68:1 (2011).

Nina Silber, “Reunion and Reconciliation, Reviewed and Reconsidered,” *Journal of American History* 103:1 (2016).

Matthew Avery Sutton, “Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age,” *Journal of American History* 98:4 (2012).

Donald Worster, “A River Running West: Reflections on John Wesley Powell,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 26:2 (2009).

Write: Re-read one of the introductions you read for class this week and underline or highlight all the instances you can find of explicit metalanguage, both textual and paratextual. (What this means is explained in Hayot, Chapter 16, and will be discussed in class.) Read through again and underline or highlight all the implicit metalanguage you can find. Now create a “sentence skeleton” that strips out the content of the introduction to identify the underlying rhetorical moves. Finally, fill in the blanks of this skeleton with content on a different topic, perhaps the topic of your own research. (We will look at an example of this in class.) Upload or email the finished piece by **Friday, Jan. 24**.

Week 4 January 27 Rewriting: Strategy and Structure

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 8-10, 13-14.
Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*, pp. 218-236.

Robert MacDougall, “Sympathetic Physics: The Keely Motor and the Laws of Physics in Nineteenth-Century Culture” (multiple drafts).

Write: Rethink and rewrite your assignment from Week 1, 2, or 3. Pay particular attention to the structure or organization of your piece; think about metalanguage, paragraphing, topic sentences, Hayot’s “uneven U.” Be fearless and ambitious! The assignment is to rewrite—really rewrite, not just polish or revise. The rewritten piece should be strikingly different and measurably better than the original. Upload or email your thoroughly rewritten assignment to me by **Friday, Jan. 31**.

Week 5 February 3 Framing an Argument

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 11-12.
Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say / I Say*, pp. 1-29, 55-67.
Patrick Dunleavy, *Authoring a PhD*, pp. 18-42.

John R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, pp. 1-11.
Jill Lepore, *The Name of War*, pp. ix-xxiii.
George Chauncey, *Gay New York*, pp. 1-29.

We will also look again at the introductions from Week 3.

Write: Write a 300-600 word introduction to a seminar paper or article on any historical topic. This may be a revised introduction to something you wrote in the past (in which case you should revise thoroughly, and include the original for comparison), part of a paper you are working on this term, or

part of a hypothetical or imaginary paper that you are not actually going to write. Think about *engaging* your reader, *locating* your paper in its literature, and *teaching* your reader what they need to know to appreciate your argument. Your introduction should arrive at a clear thesis or argument statement, framed in some version of Graff & Birkenstein's *They Say / I Say* structure. Upload or email your introduction by **Friday, Feb. 7.**

Week 6 February 10 Using Evidence

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 15, 19, 21, 23.
Barbara Tuchman, "History by the Ounce," in *Practicing History*, pp. 33-44.

Christian Appy, *Working-Class War*, pp. 44-50.
Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, pp. 19-30.
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun*, pp. 41-74.

Write: Write a 300-600 word piece that uses rich historical evidence to support an argument. This may be a revised excerpt of something you wrote in the past (in which case you should revise thoroughly, and include the original for comparison), part of a paper you are working on this term, or part of a hypothetical or imaginary paper that you are not actually going to write. Think about choosing and curating your evidence, managing your reader's interaction with quotations, "showing your iceberg," and so on. Upload or email your piece by **Friday, Feb. 14.**

READING WEEK | February 17 – 21 | NO CLASS

Week 7 February 24 Engaging Counterarguments

Read: Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say / I Say*, pp. 68-101.

Martin Luther King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
Michael Kazin, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Meanings of the 1960s," *American Historical Review* 114:4 (2009).

Write: Write a 300-600 word piece that engages a counterargument (or counterarguments) to an argument you are making. Once again, this may be a revised excerpt of something you wrote in the past (in which case you should revise thoroughly, and include the original for comparison), part of a paper you are working on this term, or part of a hypothetical or imaginary paper that you are not actually going to write. Think about anticipating objections, representing them fairly, and answering them persuasively. Upload or email your piece by **Friday, Feb. 28.**

Week 8 March 2 Rewriting: Clarity and Style

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 27-31.
Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*, pp. 17-43.
Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*, pp. 11-56.

Some samples of prose for analysis.

Write: Rewrite your assignment from Week 5, 6, or 7. Pay particular attention to the clarity and style of your prose. Be mindful and meticulous in rewriting! Make every sentence more stylish, more precise, more effective or enjoyable to read. Upload or email your beautifully rewritten assignment to me by **Friday, Mar. 6.**

Week 9 March 9 Telling Stories

Read: Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*, pp. 204-217.
James Goodman, "For the Love of Stories."

China Miéville, *October*, pp. 5-38.

Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, pp. 254-273.

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, pp. 125-164.

Write: Write a narrative account of a historical event. A piece of 300-600 words is long enough, but you may go longer if the story demands it. You can experiment with form and structure, tense, direct dialogue, or historical speculation if you wish—or you may stick closely to the norms of academic history. Do whatever you think you need to tell your story in a compelling or engaging way. Upload or email your story by **Friday, Mar. 13.**

Week 10 March 16 Teaching With Words

Read: Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*, pp. 250-267.

Amy Reading, *The Mark Inside*, pp. 5-23.

Christian Appy, *Working-Class War*, pp. 174-205.

Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*, pp. 25-55.

Write: Write a short piece in which some specialized knowledge—information not likely common to the reader—is essential to understanding. A piece of 300-600 words is long enough, but you may go longer if the material requires it. Describe an event, moment, process, or idea. Teach us something we didn't know in a way that is clear and compelling. Upload or email this to me by **Fri, Mar. 20.**

Week 11 March 23 Getting Published

Read: Steven Pinker, "Why Academic Writing Stinks and How To Fix It."
Rachael Cayley, "In Support of Academic Writing."
Gerald Graff, *Clueless in Academe*, pp. 115-154.

Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, pp. 1-28.

Erik Larson, *The Devil in the White City*, pp. xi, 290-298.

Referee and editor's reports on my "Sympathetic Physics" article.

Write: Now that you've been through the class, are you a different writer? Write a follow-up to the piece you wrote in week 1 considering your identity as a writer. A piece of 300-600 words is long enough, but you may go longer if you feel so inspired. Have your attitudes toward writing changed or have they stayed the same? Do you know anything about writing, or yourself, that you didn't know before?

Is there anything you feel you can do that you didn't before? What do you hope to develop further? Where do you see yourself going with your writing? Upload or email this to me by **Fri. Mar. 27**.

Week 12 March 30 Being A Writer

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 32-34.
Gregory Semenza, *Graduate Study for the 21st Century*, pp. 214-237.
Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*, pp. 277-300.

Write: Rewrite your assignment from Week 9, 10, or 11. Do your best to incorporate all the lessons you have learned in this class. Pay attention to both structure and style. Use the rewriting process to make the piece not just better but deeper, to say or do more than the original piece. Upload or email your masterfully rewritten assignment to me by **Friday, Apr. 3**.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously. Students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitute a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Accessibility Options

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 519 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

Information regarding accommodation of exams is available on the Registrar's website:

www.registrar.uwo.ca/examinations/accommodated_exams.html

Medical Issues

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Please go to:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_illness.pdf

to read about the University's policy on medical accommodation. In the event of illness, you should contact Academic Counselling as soon as possible. The Academic Counsellors will determine, in consultation with the student, whether or not accommodation should be requested. They will subsequently contact the instructors in the relevant courses about the accommodation. Once the instructor has made a decision about whether to grant an accommodation, the student should contact his/her instructors to determine a new due date for tests, assignments, and exams.

Students must see the Academic Counsellor and submit all required documentation in order to be approved for certain accommodation. Please visit https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/index.html to view all updated academic policies regarding medical accommodations.

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

Students are expected to retain all research notes, rough drafts, essay outlines, and other materials used in preparing assignments. In the unlikely event of concerns being raised about the authenticity of any assignment, your instructor may ask you to produce these materials; an inability to do so may weigh heavily against you.

The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers:

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of Publication and page number. Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writer's ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source; these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction, your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases, in their suspension from the University.

Support Services

Students who are in **emotional/mental distress** should refer to Mental Health @ Western, http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact **Heidi Van Galen, Administrative Officer**, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84963 or e-mail vangalen@uwo.ca.