History 9805
Writing History
Fall Term
Wednesdays 12:30 pm – 3:30 pm, Lawson Hall 2270C

Professor Rob MacDougall
Office: Lawson Hall 2228
Office Hours: Thurs, 10am-noon. I am in my office a lot, and you are always welcome to drop in. However, I will try to make a point of being in my office on Thursday mornings.
Email: rmacdou@uwo.ca

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.

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


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 5, 9, and 13, you will hand in a revised (and usually expanded) version of one of the previous 3 weekly assignments. All assignments will be read, and all count, 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 9; a revised version of assignment from week 5, 6, 7, or 8)
20% Revision #3 (due week 13; a revised version of assignment from week 10, 11, and 12)
20% Participation and feedback on other students’ work (every week)

Schedule
This schedule remains subject to change.

Week 1  September 14  Welcome to the Course

Jill Lepore, “How To Write a Paper for This Class”


Write:  What is a work of historical writing (a book, an article, a chapter, whatever) that you particularly admire, or wish you had written? What do you admire about the writing? How or why does it work for you? Write a piece of 300-600 words on this topic and email it to me by Sunday, Sept. 18.

Week 2  September 21  Writing as Practice

Joan Bolker, *Writing Your Dissertation in Fifteen Minutes a Day*, pp. 3-8, 32-48.
Paul Silvia, *How To Write A Lot*, pp. 3-47.

Examples of my own freewriting and writing logs.

Write:  What is something (ideally non-academic) that you know a lot about? Identify a controversy, issue, problem, or unanswered question in that area. What do different people think about this issue? And what do you think? Write a piece of 300-600 words laying out the issue and email it to me by Sunday, Sept. 25.

Week 3  September 28  Writing to be Read

Read:  Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 4-7 and Chapter 16.
Patrick Dunleavy, *Authoring a PhD*, pp. 11-17.
Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Sévérin”
Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past”
Francois Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery”

Write: Re-read one of the sample articles (Darnton, Hall, or Furstenberg) 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 instances of implicit metalanguage you can find. Then write a 300-600 word precis or summary of the article, capturing its argument with as much accuracy and precision as you can. Email this to Sunday, Oct. 2.

Week 4 October 5 Framing an Argument

Read: Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein, They Say / I Say, pp. 1-29, 55-67.
Patrick Dunleavy, Authoring a PhD, pp. 18-42.
Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Sévérin” (again)
Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past” (again)
Francois Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery” (again)

Write: Submit a revised and polished version of your assignment from Week 1, 2, or 3. Email this to Sunday, Oct. 9.

Week 5 October 12 Introductions and Conclusions

Read: Hayot, Elements of Academic Style, Chapters 11-12, 17-18.
Alan Taylor, The Civil War of 1812, pp. 3-12.
George Chauncey, Gay New York, pp. 1-29.

We will also look at the Darnton, Hall, and Furstenberg articles again.

Write: Write a 300-600 word introduction to a hypothetical or imaginary seminar paper or article on some historical topic. Think about engaging the reader, locating your paper in historiographical context, and teaching your reader what they need to know. End your introduction with a clear statement of your hypothetical thesis or argument. Email your introduction to Sunday, Oct. 16.
Week 6  October 19  Using Evidence

Barbara Tuchman, “History by the Ounce,” in *Practicing History*, pp. 33-44.
Robert Darnton, “Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin” (again)

Write:  Write a 300-600 word piece that makes an argument and supports that argument with historical evidence and examples. Email this to me by Sunday, Oct. 23.

Week 7  October 26  Engaging Counterarguments

Martin Luther King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Naomi Lamoreaux, “Rethinking the Transition to Capitalism in the Early American Northeast”
Francois Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery” (again)

Write:  Write a 300-600 word piece that engages a counterargument to your argument. Email this to me by Sunday, Oct. 30.

Week 8  November 2  Telling Stories

James Goodman, “For the Love of Stories”
Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, pp. 73-83.

Write:  Write a 300-600 word narrative account of a historical event. Email this to me by Sunday, Nov. 6.

Week 9  November 9  Teaching With Words

Amy Reading, *The Mark Inside*, pp. 5-23.
Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*, pp. 25-55. (again)
Write: Write a 300-600 word piece in which some specialized knowledge—information not likely common to the reader—is essential to understanding. Make an argument, tell a story, or describe an event, moment, or idea. Email this to me by Sunday, Nov. 13.

Week 10  November 16  Rewriting: Strategy and Structure

Robert MacDougall, “Sympathetic Physics: The Keely Motor versus the Laws of Thermodynamics” (multiple drafts)

Write: Submit a revised and polished version of your assignment from Week 5, 6, 7, or 8. Email this to me by Sunday, Nov. 20.

Week 11  November 23  Rewriting: Paragraphs

Robert MacDougall, “Sympathetic Physics: The Keely Motor versus the Laws of Thermodynamics” (again)

Write: Take a piece of historical writing you have done and still find interesting—it could be from this class but a longer piece from another course would be ideal. If the piece is longer than 1500 words, pull out a section of 500-1500 words. Rewrite the section paying careful attention to the principles of structure and paragraphing discussed in your readings and in class. Email the revised section to me by Sunday, Nov. 27.

Week 12  November 30  Rewriting: Sentences and Words
Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*, pp. 11-56.

Selected sentences from previous readings.

Write: Take the piece you submitted last week. Rewrite it again, paying careful attention to your sentences, and all the ideas about sentence structure and rhythm discussed in your readings and in class. Email the revised section to me by Sunday, Dec. 4.

Week 13  December 7  Being a Writer
Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 32-34.

Write: Submit a revised and polished version of your assignment from Week 11 and 12. Email this to me by Sunday, Dec. 11.