



The University of Western Ontario

HISTORY 9805

Writing History

Fall 2018

Mondays 9:30 am – 12:30 pm, Lawson Hall 2270C

Instructor: Professor Rob MacDougall

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Office Hours: TBA

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**DRAFT VERSION – CHECK BACK FOR UPDATES OR CONTACT PROF. MACDOUGALL
WITH ANY QUESTIONS**

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 will 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 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 10; a revised version of assignment from week 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9)
- 20% Revision #3 (due week 13; a revised version of assignment from week 11 and 12)
- 20% Participation and feedback on other students' work (every week)

Course Schedule and Readings

This is the schedule from Fall 2016. A revised syllabus with the schedule for Fall 2018 will be available soon, but in the meantime, this will give you a good idea of the structure of the course.

Week 1 September 14 Welcome to the Course

Read: 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 writing I admire: Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*;
 Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*; George Packer, *The Unwinding*.

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

Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapter 3.
 Barbara Tuchman, "In Search of History," in *Practicing History*, pp. 13-24.
 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-Séverin"
 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 me by 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-Séverin” (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 me by Sunday, Oct. 9.

Week 5 October 12 Introductions and Conclusions

Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 11-12, 17-18.

John R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, pp. 1-11.
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 me by Sunday, Oct. 16.

Week 6 October 19 Using Evidence

Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 15, 19, 21, 23.

Barbara Tuchman, “History by the Ounce,” in *Practicing History*, pp. 33-44.
Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, pp. 19-30.
Jonathan Spence, *The Death of Woman Wang*, pp. 1-17.

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

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

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

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

Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, pp. 73-83.
Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*, pp. 25-55.
Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland*, pp. 254-273.

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

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

Amy Reading, *The Mark Inside*, pp. 5-23.
Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, pp. 177-200.
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

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

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, 8, or 9. Email this to me by Sunday, Nov. 20.

Week 11 November 23 Rewriting: Paragraphs

Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 13-14.

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

Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 29-31.
Joseph Williams, *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*, pp. 17-43.
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.
Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*, pp. 277-300.
Gregory Semenza, *Graduate Study for the 21st Century*, pp. 214-237.

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

Additional Statements

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://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_accommodations_link_for_OOR.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: http://counselling.ssc.uwo.ca/procedures/medical_accommodation.html

Scholastic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and 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

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).

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.