



The University of Western Ontario

History 9805  
**Writing History**  
Fall 2022



Meetings: **Mondays 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm, Lawson Hall 1227**

Instructor: **Professor Rob MacDougall**

Email: [rmacdou@uwo.ca](mailto:rmacdou@uwo.ca)

Office: **Lawson Hall 2228**

Office Hours: **TBA**. (These are drop-in hours, when you may drop in without an appointment, for any reason. I am also happy to talk to you other times, in person or on Zoom. Just email me to set it up.)

### **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 together, 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, available from the Western bookstore and other sellers in paperback or e-book format:

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

There is also a **recommended** book for this course: Joseph M. Williams, *Style*. First published in 1981, this excellent writing guide has been revised and republished many times, often with different co-authors and subtitles. (It was originally just titled *Style*; then it became *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*; then *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*; there is also an abridged version, called *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*, which has itself gone through multiple editions). Unfortunately, it keeps going in and out of print, and out-of-print editions are often very expensive. If you are in a position to buy a copy of this book, in any version or edition, I encourage you to do so. If you cannot, I will make the necessary lessons available to you. The edition I will use most is the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the abridged version:

Joseph M. Williams & Joseph Bizup, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Pearson, 2015).

All other readings will be made available online.

## Assignments and Evaluation

This class is a writing workshop. There will be a **short writing assignment** (usually 300-600 words, but sometimes longer) **every week**. That is worth repeating: **when you enroll in this class, you are committing to submitting a polished piece of writing every week**. This is no small thing! But the more you are able to put into this weekly writing, the more you will get out of this course. Each week we will all read and workshop 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 detailed feedback and numeric grades.

Your course grade 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 & feedback on other students' work** (every week)

## Course Schedule and Readings

This is only a draft schedule, very much subject to change. For the most complete and up-to-date information and instructions, visit our weekly lesson pages on OWL (the tabs labeled Week 1, Week 2, etc).

### Week 1      January 3      Introduction to the Course

Can good writing be taught? Unlearning what we've taught you. Writing in order to think.

**Read:** Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 1-2.  
Joseph Williams, *Style*, “Understanding Style.”  
Short excerpts from some pieces of historical prose I admire.

**Write:** Write a short piece of 300-600 words describing your experience with writing, both in and out of academic context. I am interested in your identity as a writer but also (maybe more) in your writing process. What do you write? When and how do you write? What kind of writing do you enjoy, and what kind of writing do you admire? 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. 7.**

**Week 2**      **January 10**                      **Writing as Practice**

“Practice” as in piano, and also as in mindfulness. Making time to write. Committing to revision. Our first workshop. Tools, not rules.

**Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapter 3.  
Williams, *Style*, “Correctness.”  
Excerpts from various writing advice books.

**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, dating, hockey, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or the best way to make scrambled eggs. Pick something about which you have strong opinions. Think of a position or opinion you hold on this topic, one that not everybody shares. Write a piece of 300-600 words that advances your argument or point of view, aimed at an audience that knows very little about this topic. Upload or email your piece to me by **Friday, Jan. 14.**

**Week 3**      **January 17**                      **Writing for Readers**

No ideas but in readers. My model for feedback. Read/write for others as you would have them read/write for you.

**Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 6-7.  
Williams, *Style*, “Actions” and “Characters.”  
Other excerpts and samples.

**Write:** Write a piece of 300-600 words about the same topic you wrote about last week, but this time, write for an audience of experts deeply immersed in the details of this topic. You can make the same argument as you did in the piece last week, but you may need to refine or reframe it for this audience. Upload or email the finished piece by **Friday, Jan. 21.**

- Week 4**      **January 24**                      **Writing with Clarity**  
When to get picky. Cohesion and coherence. Managing information. The Uneven U.
- Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 8-10.  
Williams, *Style*, “Cohesion and Coherence” and “Emphasis.”  
Other excerpts and samples.
- Write:** Rethink and rewrite your assignment from Week 1, 2, or 3. Put in action Williams’ advice on clarity, cohesion, and coherence; think about paragraphing, structure, and Hayot’s “uneven U.” Be fearless and ambitious! The assignment is to rewrite—really rewrite, not just polish or copy edit the original. Upload or email your thoroughly rewritten assignment to me by **Friday, Jan. 28.**
- 
- Week 5**      **January 31**                      **Framing an Argument**  
They say/I say. The work of an introduction: engaging, locating, and teaching; establishing a shared context, posing a problem, offering a solution.
- Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 11-12.  
Williams, *Style*, “Motivation.”  
Other excerpts; some introductions to works of historical argument.
- Write:** Write a 300-600 word introduction to a seminar paper or journal 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 Hayot’s three tasks of an introduction: engaging, locating, and teaching; and about Williams’ three tasks too: establishing a shared context, stating a problem, offering a solution. Upload or email your introduction by **Friday, Feb. 4.**
- 
- Week 6**      **February 7**                      **Engaging Counterarguments**  
Planting a naysayer in your text. Verbs of argument. Modality and authority. Who cares? So what? And yet...
- Read:** Williams, *Style*, “Global Coherence.”  
Excerpt from Gerald Graff & Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say / I Say*.  
Other excerpts and samples.
- Write:** Write a 300-600 word piece that centers on, and argues against, a historian or a historical argument you do not agree with. 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 using counterargument to structure and sharpen your own argument. Upload or email your piece by **Friday, Feb. 11.**

**Week 7      February 14      Using Evidence**

Showing your iceberg. Curating your sources. Managing quotations. “History by the ounce.”

**Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 15, 19, 21, 23.  
Williams, *Style*, “Concision.”

Some excerpts from historical works presenting rich historical evidence.

**Write:** Write a 300-600 word piece that deploys rich primary source evidence in service to 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. 18.**

**READING WEEK | February 21-25 | NO CLASS**

**Week 8      February 28      Writing with Style**

The secret lives of sentences. Balance and symmetry. Troubleshooting long sentences. Pedantic punctuation stuff.

**Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 27-31.  
Williams, *Style*, “Shape” and “Elegance.”  
Excerpt from Roy Peter Clark, *Writing Tools*.

**Write:** Rewrite your assignment from Week 5, 6, or 7. Put in action Williams’ and Hayot’s advice on graceful, stylish 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, March 4.**

**Week 9      March 7      Describing Characters and Settings**

Historical imagination and its limits. Rich description. Who are your protagonists? “Agency” as a dramatic question.

**Read:** Deborah Harkness, “Finding the Story.”  
Barbara Tuchman, “History by the Ounce.”  
Other excerpts and samples.

**Write:** Write a 300-600 word description of a historical character or setting. Describe your subject as vividly and convincingly as you can. Look for “corroborative detail that provides artistic

verisimilitude.” Think about showing and telling. You can experiment with historical imagination if you wish, or you may stick closely to the norms of academic history. Upload or email your piece by **Friday, March 11**.

**Week 10      March 14                      Telling Stories**

Narration versus argument. Showing and telling. Unmotivated background sections. How to tell a joke.

**Read:** Excerpt from Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*.  
Other excerpts and examples.

**Write:** Write a narrative account of a true historical event—a story. 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, March 18**.

**Week 11      March 21                      Publishing**

“Why academic writing stinks” (or doesn’t). Contrasting academic and popular history. Audience, audience, audience. Agents and editors. Peer review.

**Read:** Excerpts from Gregory Semenza, *Graduate Study for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*; Alfred Fortunato and Susan Rabiner, *Thinking Like Your Editor*; other excerpts and samples.

**Write:** Imagine a dream project: a historical writing project you would love to undertake. It could be an article, a book, a thesis or dissertation, a work of historical fiction, a film, an exhibit, a game, anything that involves real historical research and interpretation. Write a 300-600 word proposal for your project, describing the project, clearly identifying the audience it would reach, and selling your reader on its value. Upload or email this to me by **Fri. March 25**.

**Week 12      March 28                      Being a Writer**

Remaining a writer. Only writing writes. Writing as a social practice; writing groups and writing for life.

**Read:** Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 32-34.  
Williams, *Style*, “Ethics of Style.”  
Other excerpts and samples.

**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 your 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, April 1**.

## **Additional Statements**

### **Accessibility Options**

You may also wish to contact Accessible Education (formerly known as Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD)) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation. See: [Accessible Education - Academic Support & Engagement - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](https://www.uwo.ca/accessible-education/)

### **Request for Accommodations/Medical Issues**

Students are entitled to their privacy and consequently they do not need to disclose personal information to their course professors. In the event that students feel the need to discuss personal information, they should see the graduate chair. Unlike undergraduate students, graduate students cannot be referred to Social Science Academic Counselling to have their medical or non-medical circumstances evaluated and to receive a recommendation for accommodation. Those facilities are for undergraduates only, and there is no process beyond the department to secure recommendations for accommodation. Our process is that faculty should deal with routine requests for extensions. However, a student's request for accommodation (on medical, non-medical, compassionate grounds) should go to the graduate chair, Prof. Laurel Shire ([lshire@uwo.ca](mailto:lshire@uwo.ca)) who will consult and communicate with faculty. Additionally, faculty and students should communicate with the grad chair about any case in which work is not submitted before grades are due. In the event that the graduate chair is also the course professor, then a request for accommodation can be taken to the department chair.

### **Copyright**

Lectures and course materials, including power point presentations, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by copyright. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own educational use. You may not record lectures, reproduce (or allow others to reproduce), post or distribute lecture notes, wiki material, and other course materials publicly and/or for commercial purposes without my written consent.

### **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.

For more information on plagiarism and other scholastic offenses at the graduate level see:

[https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the

licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

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 are 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 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.

If a History graduate course professor suspects course work of possible plagiarism, or if a graduate supervisor suspects a cognate or thesis of possible plagiarism, the faculty member will meet with the student. If the issue is not resolved, the student then meets with the graduate chair to discuss this situation, and so that the student can present or respond to evidence. Afterwards the graduate chair will make a decision about whether misconduct has occurred and any penalties; this will be communicated in writing to the student within 3 weeks. The student may appeal this decision to the Vice-Provost (Graduate) within 3 weeks of the issuance of the chair's decision. If the student does not appeal, the Vice-Provost will review the case. The Vice-Provost may confirm affirm, vary, or overturn the graduate chair's decision or penalty.

Information on the appeals procedures for graduate students can be found here:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/appealsgrad.pdf)

### Support Services

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

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their **health and wellness** a priority.

Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca/> and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/>

Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca/>

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at [http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental\\_health/resources.html](http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html)

UWO has many services and programs that support the personal, physical, social, and academic needs of students, in a confidential environment. The Student Development Centre (SDC) has trained staff and an array of services to help students achieve their personal, academic and professional goals. See: [Academic Support & Engagement - Western University \(uwo.ca\)](http://www.uwo.ca/academic-support-engagement/)

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](mailto:vangalen@uwo.ca).