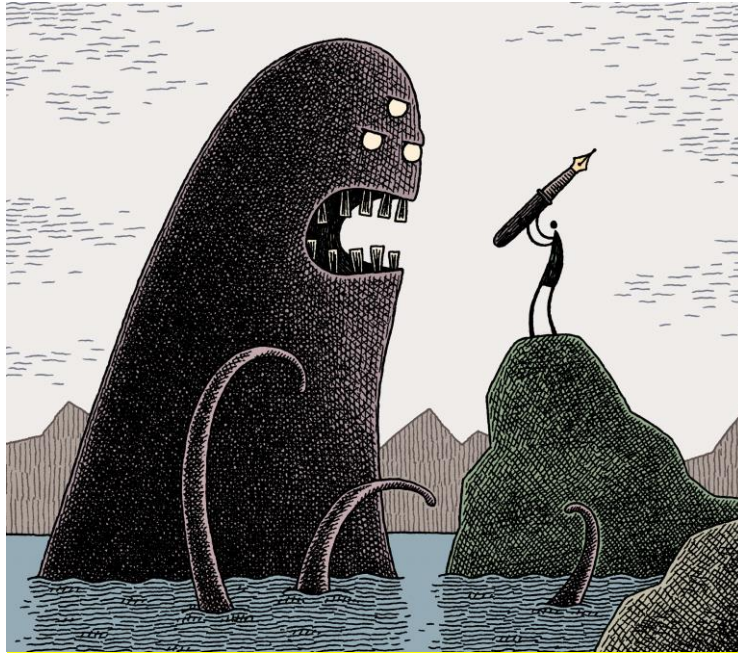


History 9805B
Writing History
Winter 2025



Instructor: **Professor Rob MacDougall**

Email: rmacdou@uwo.ca

Office: **Lawson Hall 2228**

Office Hours: **Thursdays, 2-4 pm** (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! 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 read and discuss 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.

Learning Objectives

Students who succeed in History 9805 should be able to:

- identify structures and conventions of historical nonfiction writing, and analyze historical writing as writing
- analyze, evaluate, and give constructive feedback on the writing of their peers
- reflect on their own writing and writing processes
- revise their written work to incorporate feedback and reflection
- write history with clarity and grace

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 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 use most is the 5th edition of the abridged version:

Joseph M. Williams & Joseph Bizup, *Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace*, 5th 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 due every week**. Sometimes this will be something new, sometimes this will build on or revise the assignment from the previous week. That is worth repeating: **when you enroll in this class, you are committing to sharing a new piece of writing with the entire class 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 the writing assignment will be due a few days before class; 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 and polished version of the writing you have been doing for the previous three weeks**. 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 polished version of writing from weeks 1, 2, and 3)
- 20% **Revision #2** (due week 8; a polished version of writing from weeks 5, 6, and 7)
- 20% **Revision #3** (due week 12; a polished version of writing from weeks 9, 10, or 11)
- 20% **Participation & feedback on other students' work** (every week)

More details on the assignments will be available at the start of term.

Course Schedule and Readings

This is only a draft schedule, still subject to change. For up-to-date information and instructions, including the weekly assignments, see our course site on OWL after term begins.

Week 1 Introduction to the Course

History as writing. Can good writing be taught? Writing in order to think. Unlearning the habits we've taught you.

Read: Eric Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 1-2.
Joseph Williams, *Style*, "Understanding Style."
Short excerpts from a few pieces of historical prose I admire. (In 2022, we read Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map*; Jill Lepore, *Book of Ages*; Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*.)

Week 2 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.

Week 3 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."
Sample introductions to historical monographs. (In 2022, we read the introductions to Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell, *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War* and Robert Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question*

of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland.)

Week 4 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. (In 2022, we read several drafts of an article by me, along with Anne Lamott’s beloved “Shitty First Drafts.”)

Week 5 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; sample introductions to several journal articles in history. (In 2022 we read the introductions to Matthew Avery Sutton, “Was FDR the Antichrist? The Birth of Fundamentalist Antiliberalism in a Global Age”; Elizabeth A. Fenn, “Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America: Beyond Jeffrey Amherst”; and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past.”)

Week 6 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. (In 2022, we read Martin Luther King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and a well-known exchange between Robert Finlay and Natalie Zemon Davis on Davis’ *The Return of Martin Guerre*.)

Week 7 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. (In 2022, we read excerpts from Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*; and Christian Appy, *Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam*.)

Week 8 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*. (In 2022, we also read Clark’s essay length appreciation of one single breathtaking sentence that Clark dubbed “the sentence of the year.”)

Week 9 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. (In 2022, we read excerpts from Richard Hofstadter’s *The American Political Tradition*; Kristen Richardson’s *The Season: A Social History of the Debutante*; and Stephen Pyne’s *Style and Story: Literary Methods for Writing Nonfiction*.)

Week 10 Telling Stories

Narration vs argument. Showing vs. telling. Unmotivated background. How to tell a joke.

Read: Zachary Schrag, “Storytelling.”
Excerpt from Stephen Pyne, *Voice & Vision*.
Other excerpts and examples. (In 2022, we read excerpts from Rick Perlstein’s *Nixonland*, Amy Reading’s *The Mark Inside*, and China Mieville’s *October: The Story of the Russian Revolution*.)

Week 11 Reaching an Audience

“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 21st Century*; Alfred Fortunato and Susan Rabiner, *Thinking Like Your Editor*, other excerpts and samples. (In 2022, we read Steven Pinker, “Why Academics Stink at Writing,” and several responses.)

Week 12 **Being a Writer**

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

Read: Hayot, *Elements of Academic Style*, Chapters 32-34.
Williams, *Style*, “Ethics of Style.”
Stephen Pyne, “Theory and Practice.”

Additional Statements

Accessibility Options

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are strongly encouraged to register with Accessible Education Western (AEW), a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both AEW and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction. 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. Francine McKenzie (fmckenzi2@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.

Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

All writing submitted in this course must be your own. We may experiment with generative AI tools for educational purposes but such tools should not otherwise be used for writing assignments in this course. Any use of such tools must be clearly acknowledged and explained.

Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the

past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca

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

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 decide 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

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health Support at <https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

- 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

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, Department Manager, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84963 or e-mail vangalen@uwo.ca.