

Reading as a Writer

ENGL-UA 9201

NYU London: Spring 2024

Instruction Mode: In-person

Instructor Information

- Instructor
- email
- Office Hours:

Course Details

- Day
- Location

Course Description

Non-fiction writing is currently booming, as the lines between ‘real events’ and the imagination are increasingly being questioned. The best writers are embracing and experimenting with the ‘essay’ form, where fictional techniques such as narrative, pacing, and dramatization are combined with traditional non-fiction subjects such as memoir, philosophy, and journalistic reportage. In this course, you will study the works of a diverse range of writers, analyzing the craft of non-fiction through careful close readings. The class will include regular professor-led workshops, in which you will present your own experiments with the technical elements from the reading seminars. Guest speakers will come from contemporary non-fiction’s strongest voices. Learn how to combine the personal with the political in your writing, and discover how creative non-fiction is an exciting way to explore the most urgent questions of our times.

Course Objectives

1. An ability to identify and articulate the techniques of non-fiction writing
2. Improved experience at applying the craft of the literary essay to their own work
3. A broader sense of the interests and scope of contemporary non-fiction
4. A firm grounding in the transatlantic non-fiction tradition

Assessment Components

If you are an NYU London study-away student, you are expected to attend in person. If you are accessing the class remotely, you must attend synchronously.

Assignments / Activities	Description of Assignment	% of Final Grade	Due
Portfolio	A collection of four short pieces developed in the workshops.	35%	N/A
Midterm	A 1500-2000-word piece in the style of a celebrity profile.	20%	March 23
Final Paper	A 2500-3000-word piece of creative non-fiction, developed using the skills studied during the semester.	35%	May 11
Class Preparation	Completing readings and coming prepared to discuss them; participating in seminars and workshops.	10%	N/A

Assessment Expectations

Letter Grade	Grade Percentage	Description
A-range	A = 93-100% A- = 90-92%	Excellent, sophisticated work that demonstrates lucid, original thinking, superior writing skills, and sustained critical engagement with the course concepts and requirements
B-range	B+ = 87-89% B = 84-86%	Solid work demonstrating some original thinking, and clear writing skills. A good deal of potential and clarity,

Letter Grade	Grade Percentage	Description
	B- = 80-83%	but overall it may be less consistent or fully achieved.
C-range	C+ = 77-79% C = 74-76% C- = 70-73%	Satisfactory work demonstrating fair writing skills. An effort to sustain thinking and develop ideas will be evident, but will not be thoroughly executed. There may be omissions, mistakes, or inaccuracies. Writing may be stale and unfocused, or simply lack clarity.
D-range	D+ = 67-69% D = 65-66%	Weak work with clear flaws and a lack of engagement with the course concepts and requirements. May lack structure and will be muddled, with confusions of language and ideas. Likely to be underdeveloped, with variable presentation. Grammar and punctuation is lacking.
F	F = below 65%	Inadequate work with a lack of engagement with the course requirements. Fails to address the prompt, offers of little to no structure, and exhibits high levels of confusion or misunderstanding.

Course Materials

Required Text(s) & Materials

- Your professor will provide copies of readings posted to the Content section of Brightspace. These should be printed and brought to class.

Resources

- **Access your course materials:** [Brightspace](#)
- **NYU London and Living in London Info:** [LDN](#)
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](#)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](#) (nyu.mywconline.com)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](#)

Course Schedule

Depending on availability, guest lecturers may be subject to change, or their dates rearranged. The professor reserves the right to change some readings with adequate notice.

Topics & Assignments

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Session 1 January 26	Course introduction: What is Creative Non-Fiction?	Selected readings about the Literary Essay.	
Session 2 February 2	Is the past another country?: Memoir and Memory	Jhumpa Lahiri, 'Teach Yourself Italian' Deborah Levy, <i>The Cost of Living</i> trilogy Vladimir Nabokov, <i>Speak Memory</i>	Group A Workshop
Session 3 February 9	World of Wonder	James Fox, <i>The World According to Colour</i> Amia Srinivasan, 'What's it like to be an octopus?' Virginia Woolf, 'A Mark on the Wall'	Group B Workshop / Group A Final
Session 4 February 16	Creating Ideas: Philosophy and Non- Fiction	Roland Barthes, <i>Camera Lucida</i> Kyle Chayka, 'How Nothingness Became Everything We Wanted' Zadie Smith, 'Meet Justin Bieber!'	Group A Workshop / Group B Final
Session 5 February 23	Guest writer visit: TBC	To be selected by guest writer.	Group B Workshop / Group A Final
Session 6 March 2	Midterm preparation: The Celebrity Profile	Caity Weaver, 'Dwayne Johnson for President!' Taffy Brodesser-Akner on Gwyneth Paltrow, Mark Doty, 'Insatiable'	Group B Final In-class writing exercise (ungraded)
Session 7 March 9	The Personal and the Political	James Baldwin, 'Notes of a Native Son' Anne Enright, 'A Writer's Life' Andrew O'Hagan 'City of Prose'	Draft of midterm for peer review.

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Session 8 March 23	Screening and discussion: Joan Didion, <i>The Center Will Not Hold</i>	Joan Didion, 'Goodbye to All That'	Midterm Due
Session 9 March 30	Cyber-Sentences: Writing about digital life.	Patricia Lockwood, 'The Communal Mind' Laurence Scott, <i>Picnic Comma Lightning</i> Jia Tolentino, <i>Trick Mirror</i>	Group A Workshop
Session 10 April 6	In Your Nature: Eco-Writing	Annie Dillard, 'Total Eclipse' Robert Macfarlane, <i>Landmarks</i> Robin Wall Kimmerer, 'Speaking of Nature'	Group B Workshop/Group A Final
Session 11 April 13	Subversive Essays	Hilary Mantel, 'Royal Bodies' Leslie Jamison, 'In Defense of Saccharin(e)' Parul Sehgal, 'The Case Against the Trauma Plot'	Group A Workshop/Group B Final
Session 12 April 20	Guest writer visit: TBC	TBD	Group B Workshop/Group A Final
Session 13 April 27	The Newer Criticism: Creative Reviewing	Patricia Lockwood, 'Christ Comes to Stockholm' Karl Ove Knausgård, <i>A Death in the Family</i> Emily Nussbaum, 'What Tina Fey Would Do For A Soyjoy'	Group B Final Final Assignment Presentations (ungraded)
Session 14 May 4	Course Review	Preparation for Final	

Week/Date	Topic	Reading	Assignment Due
Final Assessment May 11			Final Essay Due

Course Policies

Classroom Etiquette

- **Unless the professor specifies otherwise, digital devices of any kind may not be used during class.** Phones and laptops must be stored in your bag during workshops and seminars. Exceptions will be made for students with academic accommodations from the Moses Center. Unless you have special academic accommodation that entitles you to take notes on a computer, please make notes with pen/pencil and paper.
- Please avoid leaving class to visit the washroom, except during the mid-break. Eating is not permitted in class.

Final exams

Final exams must be taken at their designated times. Should there be a conflict between your final exams, please bring this to the attention of the London Academics team (nyul.academics@nyu.edu). Final exams may not be taken early, and students should not plan to leave the site before the end of the finals period.

Academic Honesty, Plagiarism and Late Work

Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the [University and school policies](#). You can find details on these topics and more on this section of our NYUL website (<https://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/academic-policies.html>) and on the Policies and Procedures section of the NYU website for students studying away at global sites (<https://www.nyu.edu/academics/studying-abroad/upperclassmen-semester-academic-year-study-away/academic-resources/policies-and-procedures.html>).

Attendance

Key information on NYU London's absence policy, how to report absences, and what kinds of absences can be excused can be found on our [website](#) (<http://www.nyu.edu/london/academics/attendance-policy.html>)

To ensure the integrity of the academic experience, class attendance is required and expected promptly when class begins. These rules apply to class excursions and activities as well.

Members of any religious group may, without penalty, excuse themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations, but must follow NYU London's

absence reporting procedure. Please note that an absence is only excused for the holiday but not for any days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. See also [University Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#)

Moses Accommodations Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented and registered disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (+1 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Inclusivity Policies and Priorities

NYU's Office of Global Programs and NYU's global sites are committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion. In order to nurture a more inclusive global university, NYU affirms the value of sharing differing perspectives and encourages open dialogue through a variety of pedagogical approaches. Our goal is to make all students feel included and welcome in all aspects of academic life, including our syllabi, classrooms, and educational activities/spaces.

Pronouns and Name Pronunciation (Albert and Zoom)

You can edit your pronoun and name pronunciation information on your Albert account, making it visible for faculty and staff. Information on how to do this can be found on the [Pronouns and Name Pronunciation web page](#), and for more information on how to make these changes in Zoom, please see the [Personalizing Zoom Display Names website](#).

Bias Response

The New York University Bias Response Line provides a mechanism through which members of our community can share or report experiences and concerns of bias, discrimination, or harassing behavior that may occur within our community. For more information, including how to report an incident, visit the [Bias Response Line website](#).

Your Lecturer

I am a writer, academic, and broadcaster. My essays and criticism have been published in the New York Times, Financial Times, New Yorker, New Statesman, Boston Globe, the Guardian, WIRED, and the London Review of Books, among other publications. I can be

heard regularly on BBC Radio 3 as a presenter of the arts and ideas programme *Free Thinking*.

My first book, *The Four-Dimensional Human: Ways of Being in the Digital World* (Penguin Random House, 2015 / W.W. Norton 2016) explores what it feels like to live in a networked environment, and won the Royal Society of Literature Jerwood Prize for Non-Fiction. In 2019 it was named WIRED magazine's 'Top 10 Non-Fiction Books of the Decade'. My second book, *Picnic Comma Lightning* (Random House, 2018 / W.W. Norton 2019), considers our experience of reality in the twenty-first century. I know intimately how exhilarating and frustrating the writing process can be. I teach this class as a fellow practitioner – when it comes to the craft of composing good sentences and paragraphs, we are all in this together!