



UNIVERSITY OF  
**KING'S**  
COLLEGE • HALIFAX

SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

Master of Fine Arts  
in Creative Nonfiction

## COURSE OUTLINE

### Writing Craft I: JOUR 6100.03 Fall Term 2021

#### Cohort Director:

**Stephen Kimber**, Professor of Journalism  
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#### Overview

Writing Craft I combines an intense June residency of online lectures, seminars and discussions with written assignments completed during the fall semester.

In advance of the residency, students will complete assigned readings, as well as submit a short writing assignment.

To fulfill requirements for Writing Craft I, students will “attend” all assigned recorded and livestreamed lectures and panels offered by faculty, mentors, and guest lecturers who will introduce them to the literary genre known as creative nonfiction, its history and various sub-genres, its ongoing professional, craft, and ethical debates, and the ways in which evolving publishing technologies are influencing the role of the nonfiction writer within the profession and in society.

Students will work with faculty and mentors to develop, refine, and critically evaluate their ideas for book projects before finalizing—in concert with mentors and faculty—the book project they will undertake during the program. By the end of the residency, they will be in a position to draft a one-page pitch for their project. Students will also receive instruction in how to prepare a professional nonfiction book proposal (to be completed as part of the Mentorship I course) and develop their author platform.

For Writing Craft I, students will write a 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical, or professional issue related to creative nonfiction – ideally, one that

touches on an issue related to the student's project. During the fall semester, students will present their papers online, and respond to papers from other students. Students will also compile a work plan for their book project and read and critique two nonfiction books related to the subject of the project.

**Relationship to Other Classes:**

JOUR 6100.03 is the entry point for the entire program, providing students with an understanding of the creative nonfiction genre they will carry forward into their mentorships, residencies, and projects.

During the residency, students will finalize the subject of their book project and learn how to prepare the book proposals that will be the focus of their first mentorship. The book report assignments will help students understand how their project relates to already published works on the same or similar topic.

The lectures on creative nonfiction as well as the sessions on preparing a book proposal and developing an author platform will help prepare students for the issues to be developed in Publishing Residency I.

**Learning Outcomes:**

At the end of Writing Craft I, students will have achieved the following learning outcomes:

- Developed a literacy about creative nonfiction writing as a distinct literary genre with its own history, ethics, craft, and professional issues.
- Developed an understanding of what it takes to turn a book idea into a book proposal.
- Learned how to devise a book research and writing plan.
- Enhanced their nonfiction writing skills through workshopping their own and other students' writing

## **Student Assignments**

**Pre-residency readings and assignment**

- **Readings:**

The books listed below are course texts we expect you to have read before the residency begins (we ask you to please read as many of these as possible, given possible supply challenges and delivery delays):

- Hart, Jack. *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Nonfiction*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 2011.
- Rabiner, Susan and Fortunato, Alfred. *Thinking Like Your Editor*. Norton. New York, 2003.
- Friedman, Jane. *The Business of Being a Writer*. University of Chicago Press, 2018.

**Deadline for reading these texts: June 5.**

### Pre-/Post-residency Assignment:

To make best use of the limited time Writer-in-Residence David Macfarlane has with us during the residency, we will provide an excerpt from his forthcoming book, *Likeness: Fathers, Sons, A Portrait* (Doubleday Canada), to read in advance of the residency. The book will be released in mid-May and we ask you to obtain a copy and to complete and submit the following post-residency assignment by Sept. 1:

- In 500 words, and citing specific examples, discuss the structure David has used in the book and assess how effectively it helps him to tell this story.  
**Due midnight, Sept. 1, 2021.**

### Residency assignment

- Present a 5-8 minute “elevator pitch” for your book project to your mentor group (online) during the June residency.
- **Post-residency: Write a one-page — 350 word maximum — pitch for your book project.** Think of this as a slightly extended version of what you might find on the inside flap of your hardcover, or on the back cover of your paperback. Intrigue us, but don’t give away the ending. Sell, but don’t oversell. Make us want to buy in a way that won’t disappoint us when we read the book.
  - **Title:**
  - **Subtitle:**
  - **Author:**
  - **Description:** “Buyers read cover copy the way they browse the newspaper. The first paragraph must grab their interest and attention. Subsequent paragraphs should flesh out the story. What is the most important and/or timely selling point about your book? Think journalism 101: who, what, when, where, how and why and communicate this message in your lead paragraph. Don’t make the buyer dig for the most salient points.”  
**Deadline: Midnight June 30**

All pitches will be posted in Dropbox, allowing you and your classmates to review each other’s pitches and offer feedback and suggestions – input that is thoughtful and constructive. You will review and offer a brief response (100 words or so, in point-form bullet lists) to 5 other pitches.

**Deadline for responses to 5 other pitches: Midnight July 15**

### Post-Residency

- **Work Plan Assignment**

You will submit a Work Plan (no more than 1,500 words in narrative format or in point-form bullet lists) outlining what you believe you will need to do in order to write your book and, to the extent possible at this early stage, how you will go about accomplishing your work plan.

**Deadline: Midnight, August 1. Submit to [stephen.kimber@ukings.ca](mailto:stephen.kimber@ukings.ca)**

- **3,000-word Research Paper**

Students will write a 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical, or professional issue related to creative nonfiction. **(I'll send out an email with faculty- and mentor-suggested topics, from which you can choose. Or you can suggest your own topic, which must be approved in advance.)**

This is not an academic essay assignment. It's an opportunity for you to think more deeply about broader issues in creative nonfiction. We're looking for a thoughtful, well-sourced, well-crafted and carefully argued personal narrative of 3,000 words, more or less. Think, and make us think. Remember, it's also a writing assignment. Make us want to read it. (You don't need to do academic footnoting but if your sources are not apparent from the text and context, make sure they're flagged in endnotes or some other way.)

You will also read and comment on at least 5 other research papers posted in Dropbox.

**Deadline for selecting research paper subject: Midnight September 1. Submit to [stephen.kimber@ukings.ca](mailto:stephen.kimber@ukings.ca)**

**Deadline for submitting paper: Midnight October 24. Submit to [stephen.kimber@ukings.ca](mailto:stephen.kimber@ukings.ca)**

**Deadline for responses to 5 other papers: Midnight November 14.**

- **Book Reports**

- Students will read and critique two nonfiction books related to the subject of their book project. These can be books you're using as research on the topic of your project, or books that might be similar in theme or style to yours that will help you to get a handle on what else is out there. Read them and tell us — in no more than 500 words each— about each author and book, and what you've learned from the book that will be helpful to your work on your major project. **Submit your proposed titles for my approval by midnight September 1.**

**Deadlines for submitting book reports: October 10, December 1, before  
midnight. [stephen.kimber@ukings.ca](mailto:stephen.kimber@ukings.ca)**

### Assignments Summary

Assignment	Due	Value
Pre-residency readings	June 5	N/A
Writer-in Residence assignment	Sept 1	P/F (Pass/Fail)
1-page written pitch	June 30	10 per cent
Responses to 5 pitches	July 15	5 per cent
Research Paper subject choice	September 1	N/A
Research Paper	October 24	40 per cent
Research Paper responses	November 15	5 per cent
Work Plan	August 1	20 per cent
Book Report choices	September 1	N/A
Book Report 1	October 10	10 per cent
Book Report 2	December 1	10 per cent

### Student Evaluation:

**One-page pitch (10 per cent)/5 Responses (5 per cent):** Students will be marked on the basis of the clarity of their idea, their understanding of the book's target audience, and the quality of their writing.

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
<b>Content (70)</b>	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of what makes an effective one-page pitch by submitting an engagingly written, carefully constructed, succinct pitch for her or his book project, including a description of the story, its complication-development-resolution, the key characters and their story arcs, the larger themes, and why the book will appeal to a particular group of readers.	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of what makes an effective one-page pitch by submitting a professionally acceptable pitch for her or his book project, including a description of the story, its complication-development-resolution, the key characters and their story arcs, the larger themes, and why the book will appeal to readers.	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of what makes an effective one-page pitch by submitting a pitch that isn't professionally written and/or doesn't include all the key elements of the pitch.

<b>Writing style (15)</b>	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.
<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics (15)</b>	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i> .	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style mostly consistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.

**Work Plan Assignment (20 per cent):** You will submit a Work Plan (no more than 1,500 words in narrative format or in point-form bullet lists) outlining what you believe you will need to do in order to write your book and, to the extent possible at this early stage, how you will go about accomplishing your work plan.

Criteria	Exceptional "A"	Acceptable B	Failure <B-
<b>Content (70)</b>	Demonstrates an exceptional understanding of what constitutes a clear, concise and practical work plan by submitting a bulleted list or narrative that indicates precisely how the student intends find material needed to produce their project. The material shows that the student as cast a wide net and come up with intriguing important questions to answer and ways to answer them.	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of what constitutes a practical work plan by submitting a plan that indicates how the student intends to research and organize the project.	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of what constitutes a clear, concise and practical work plan by submitting a plan that doesn't indicate how the student will organize and research the project.
<b>Writing style (15)</b>	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.

<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics (15)</b>	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i> .	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style mostly consistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.
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**3,000-word Research Paper (40 per cent)/Responses (5 per cent):** Students will write a 3,000-word research paper on an historical, ethical or professional issue related to creative nonfiction. Both the paper itself and the responses will be evaluated on the following criteria

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Exceptional A</b>	<b>Acceptable B</b>	<b>Failure &lt;B-</b>
<b>Purpose (10)</b>	The writer's central goal or argument is clearly stated and readily apparent to the reader.	The writing has a clear goal or argument, but may sometimes digress from it.	The purpose or argument is generally unclear.
<b>Content (40)</b>	Balanced presentation of relevant and legitimate information that clearly supports a central purpose or argument and shows a thoughtful, in-depth analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains important insights.	Information provides reasonable support for a central purpose or argument and displays evidence of a basic analysis of a significant topic. Reader gains some insights.	Central purpose or argument is not clearly identified. Analysis is vague or not evident. Reader is confused or may be misinformed.
<b>Use of References (10)</b>	Compelling evidence from professionally legitimate sources supports claims. Attribution is clear and fairly represented.	Professionally legitimate sources are generally present and attribution is, for the most part, clear and fairly represented.	Few sources, incomplete or unclear attribution.
<b>Organization (10)</b>	The ideas are arranged logically to support the purpose or argument. They flow smoothly from one to another and are clearly linked to each other. The reader can follow the line of reasoning.	The ideas are arranged logically to support the central purpose or argument. They are usually clearly linked to each other. The reader can—mostly—follow the line of reasoning.	The writing is not logically organized. Frequently, ideas fail to make sense together. The reader cannot identify a line of reasoning and loses interest.



<b>Writing style (20)</b>	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.
<b>Grammar, Spelling, Writing Mechanics (10)</b>	The writing is free or almost free of errors. Follows <i>Chicago Manual of Style</i> .	There are occasional errors, but they don't represent a major distraction or obscure meaning. Style inconsistent.	There are so many errors that meaning is obscured. The reader is confused and stops reading.

### **Book Reports (10 per cent each):**

Students will read and critique two nonfiction books related to the subject of their book project. Essentially what this assignment is asking you to do is to select three books relevant to your project. These can be books you're using as research on the topic of your project, or books that might be similar in theme or style to yours that you're reading to get a handle on what else is out there. Read them and tell us – in no more than 500 words each – about each book and its author, and what you've learned from the book that will be helpful to your work on your major project.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Exceptional "A"</b>	<b>Acceptable B</b>	<b>Failure &lt;B-</b>
<b>Book Description (10)</b>	Provides the reader with a succinct summary of the book's contents, approach, and style that includes information on its marketplace success.	Provides the reader with a useful summary of the book's contents, approach, and style but fails to offer information on its marketplace success.	Fails to provide the reader with a useful summary of the book or information on its marketplace success.
<b>Author Biography (10)</b>	Provides the reader with a concise, relevant-to-the-book's topic biography that demonstrates the student has consulted with numerous sources.	Provides the reader with a concise, relevant author biography.	Fails to provide the reader with a concise, relevant author biography.

<b>Analysis (50)</b>	Provides the reader with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book being reported on, a cogent comparison of the book's strengths, weaknesses, themes, and approach with the student's own book project, and a sense of how this information will influence the student's own book project.	Provides the reader with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the book being reported on, but the comparison of the book's strengths, weaknesses, themes, and approach with the student's own book project is lacking.	Fails to provide the reader with a clear analysis of the book or a comparison of the book with the student's own book project.
<b>Writing Style (30)</b>	The writing is compelling. It hooks the reader and sustains interest throughout.	The writing is generally engaging, but has some dry spots. In general, it is focused and keeps the reader's attention.	The writing has little personality. The reader quickly loses interest and stops reading.

### Submitting Written Assignments

Written assignments must be submitted as **email attachments using Microsoft Word**.

- Style and format: Times New Roman, 12 point, double-spaced.
- The file name must include your name and a one- or two-word description of the assignment. Example: "smith-book-report-2.docx."
- In the document itself, include at the top:  
Name:  
Date:  
Subject:
- Please use page numbering and/or a header.

### Grammar and Style

Proper usage and grammar are an expectation for all written work in this course. Although this course is offered through the School of Journalism, the publishing content is intended primarily for book content. As a result, we will follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* for all written work.

### Deadlines

Deadlines are crucial in the publishing industry. Learning to meet deadlines is a necessity for writers. So working to deadlines is a part of this course. Please email all assignments by the stated deadlines. If allowance is needed – for health or other reasons – please email or phone to request more time.

## Suggested Texts

- Curtis, Richard. *How to Be Your Own Literary Agent: An Insider's Guide to Getting Your Book Published*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Gutkind, Lee. *Keep It Real: Everything You Need to Know About Researching and Writing Creative Nonfiction*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008.
- Gutkind, Lee. *The Art of Creative Nonfiction: Writing and Selling the Literature of Reality*. New York: Wiley, 1997.
- Kidder, Tracy, and Richard Todd. *Good Prose: The Art of Nonfiction*. Toronto: Random House Canada, 2013.
- Kramer, Mark and Wendy Call. *Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writer's Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University*. New York: Plume, 2007.

## Official Stuff

### Academic Performance

Grading Scale:

A+	90-100
A	85-89
A-	80-84
B+	77-79
B	73-76
B-	70-72
F	<70

Students must achieve a B- in all classes.

Disputes over academic performance and assessment will be dealt with according to the Academic Regulations of the School of Journalism. Students may appeal decisions of the Journalism Studies Committee to the Faculty of Graduate Studies. For more information, see the King's calendar and the Dalhousie University Graduate Calendar.

### Accommodation

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests, quizzes and exams should make their request to the Office of Student Accessibility & Accommodation (OSAA) prior to or at the outset of each

academic term. Please see [www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca](http://www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca) for more information and to obtain Form A - Request for Accommodation.

A note taker may be required to assist a classmate. There is an honorarium of \$75/course/term. If you are interested, please contact OSAA at 494-2836 for more information.

Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

### **Academic Integrity**

The School of Journalism vigorously enforces the highest standards of academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the duplication in whole or in part of work created for another purpose. This can be work done by another student, published work or even a student's own work that has been re-purposed for a class. Plagiarism can be reflected in actual language, or in the duplication of an idea or a sequence. Do not cut and paste information from the Internet. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, consult your instructor. All cases of suspected plagiarism will be dealt with according to the policy.

Academic integrity issues will be dealt with by the Academic Integrity Officer of the University of King's College, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the Dalhousie Senate, as outlined in the King's calendar and the Dalhousie University Graduate Calendar.

As well, the School of Journalism has a **Statement of Ethics and Professional Standards** that must be followed. It can be found at <http://ethics.kingsjournalism.com>. Please read this material carefully.