

Syllabus: Travel Writing

Prague 2012

Prof. Frank Mungeam
frank.mungeam@gmail.com

OVERVIEW

This class will develop your skills at travel writing in two ways. One of the best ways to improve your travel writing is to voraciously read the works of excellent travel writers. In this course, you will sample some of the best, and read and review articles by great travel writers. Consuming the travel writing of your preferred genre is a habit that will continue to improve your own writing long after you complete this class.

Therefore, the large emphasis in this class will be on writing itself, applied to the travel genre. The questions we will ask, and seek to answer, include: Why do we travel? Why do we *write* about travel? What are the core genres and styles of travel writing? What are the components of a skillfully crafted travel article? And what are the habits of successful travel writers? During this class, you will sharpen your skills of observation, journaling, researching and reporting while writing two major class papers. We'll finish by exploring the business side of travel writing, including how to identify markets for your work and how to craft a query, the pitch letter for your work.

The class is divided into eight modules, two per week during the four-week class. Each module will include reading at least one excellent example of travel writing, reading from our course text, a writing exercise and a discussion topic on the discussion board. A travel article review of 750 words will be due at the end of week 1; a destination travel article of 1,000 words is due at the midpoint of the class at the end of week 2; and a travel essay of 1,500 words is due the final week of class.

REQUIRED READING

Required text for course:

Travel Writing

by L. Peat O'Neil
Writers Digest Books

Best Travel Writing of 2011:

True Stories from Around the World
by James O'Reilly and Larry Habegger
Solas House

CLASS ORGANIZATION

This class meets daily, Monday through Thursday, for four weeks in July. The class is divided into eight modules, two per week. For each of the eight modules, there will be a reading component, a writing exercise, and a discussion topic. Except where otherwise indicated, all writing assignments are submitted in class, and discussion posts are made to the class website.

ASSIGNMENTS / DUE DATES

Weekly Writing Exercises and Discussion Board Posts

For each module, there will be a writing exercise that is due at the end of that module (on Tuesday or on Thursday). There will also be an engagement topic for you to comment on, and to respond to the comments of at least one of your fellow students. These will also be clearly designated in the class website. Due dates for written exercises and discussion topics are detailed in the week by week syllabus below. Except where otherwise noted, assignments for each module are due in class on the last day of that module; you are encouraged to post your initial response to the weekly discussion topic earlier than that in order to give your fellow students a chance to respond. Likewise, your response to students' discussion posts is due by the end of a given module for full credit.

Travel Articles:

This course involves three longer papers: writing a travel article review, and crafting two full-length travel stories.

The **Travel article review** is due at the end of the first week of the course. This review should be at least 750 words in length, and should be from the class text *Best Travel Writing of 2011*.

The first travel article should be in the **Destination** genre as described on page 16 of the class text. This article should be at least 1,000 words in length and is due at the end of the second week in the course.

The second article will be in the **Personal Essay** genre described on Page 28 of the text. This should be at least 1,500 words. A draft will be due at the end of the third week of class and the final version is due on the last day of class.

Paper formatting requirements:

- **All 3 longer articles must be submitted in class by due date**
- **Format in MS Word, double spaced in 12 point Times Roman type.**
- **In upper left: Your name, class/section number**
- **Below your name, *in italics*, add the name of the magazine for which the article is intended.**
- **The article must have a headline**

GRADING

Points are earned in the course for quality of **weekly written exercises (3 points/week)**, participation in **weekly discussion board topic (3 points/week)**, and for the two major papers, the **Destination Travel article (points)** and the **Personal Travel essay (points)**, as follows:

Travel Article Review	12 points
Writing Exercises	24 points (over 4 weeks)
Discussion Board Posts	24 points (over 4 weeks)
Destination Travel Article	15 points (1000 words)
Personal Essay	25 points (1500 words)
Total points	100

Note: In the business of travel writing, articles must be submitted on time and in finished form. Consequently, in this class, writing assignments cannot be re-done to improve a grade, and late submissions will result in a loss of points.

SUBMITTING WORK

All written assignments will be submitted in class. Students will receive written comments on major papers with points earned.

COMMUNICATING

This syllabus and all course announcements and will be posted to the class website. All discussion assignments should be posted to the designated area of the website Discussion Board.

If you need to contact me directly with questions, feel free to use my e-mail address: **fmungeam@gmail.com**. I check my personal e-mail daily when you need fast answers. Please do **not** submit class assignments to my email address.

WEEK BY WEEK COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

WEEK 1 Mon/Tues: The Purpose of Travel

Good travel writing is about both good writing and 'good traveling.' In order to write about travel in a way that others want to read, we must begin by understanding what it is about travel that is interesting to us. The first week is designed to stimulate your thinking about traveling: Where do you like to go and why? What is the purpose of travel?

READ:

Why We Travel by Pico Iyer in salon.com

<http://www.salon.com/travel/feature/2000/03/18/why>

Travel Writing by L. Peat O'Neil

“Introduction”; pgs.1-10; Chapter One: “Getting Started”; pgs. 11-29.

(Start reading: Travel Article from *Best Travel Writing of 2011* that you will review in Week 2)

ENGAGE:

Is there a right and wrong reason for traveling, a right and wrong way to travel? Post your reactions to Pico Iyer's article by Wednesday. Respond to the posts of at least 2 other students.

WRITE:

Text Assignments Pgs 30 - 33: Ex. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12 (story ideas)

SUBMIT:

Proposed topic for “Destination Article”

WEEK 1 Wed/Thurs: Types of Travel Articles

READ

Travel Writing text: Chapter Four: “Structure and Pace”; pgs. 104 - 127.

Sample ‘How To’ article:

Seven tips to make your trip stress-free

Jordan Valinsky, CNN Travel

<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/TRAVEL/07/14/common.travel.mistakes/index.html>

(Continue reading: Travel article you’ll review)

ENGAGE:

Craft 3 headlines for How-To or Travel Tips articles and post to the Discussion Board. Give feedback to at least one other student on his or her ideas for How-to travel stories. Which ones would you want to read? How could the story slant of the ideas be sharpened? What would make the ideas original?

WRITE:

Text Assignments Pgs 128 - 130: Ex. 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7.

SUBMIT

750 word review of Travel Article from Best Travel Writing of 2011 - by Monday of Week 2

WEEK 2 Mon/Tues: The Travel Journal

Essential to good travel writing is detailed description. A Travel Journey is the surest way to capture the vivid details of a travel experience while they are fresh in your mind. Developing the habit of journaling during your travels can increase your recall, enhance your descriptive ability, and help generate more article ideas.

READ:

Text: Chapter 3: “The Travel Journal”; pgs. 77 - 101.

A Year in Provence by Peter Mayle (excerpt in PDF) – descriptive writing example

WRITE:

Text Assignments Pgs 30 - 31, Ex. 2, 3 (vivid descriptions)

Text Assignments Pgs 102 - 103: Ex. 1 thru 5:

Make a list of descriptive verbs, then nouns, then adjectives, then adverbs

Write about a place you’ve traveled to

Write about a place where you live worth visiting

WEEK 2 Wed/Thurs: Writing a Strong Lead

The most important paragraph of any story is the lead. If the lead does not grab readers’ attention, they may never get to the rest of your story. There are a number of different effective ways to lead off or begin an article. But they all share in common that their effect is to lead the reader into the rest of the story.

READ:

Magazine Writing that Sells, Ch. 5: The lead is to lead (pp. 49-65) by Don McKinney. Writers Digest Books. (Attached as PDF)

Chasing Lance across France

By Frank Mungeam, in WorldHum.com

http://www.worldhum.com/features/travel-stories/chasing_lance/

WRITE:

Write 3 different style lead graphs for your proposed article and post to Discussion Board by Wednesday.

ENGAGE:

Post a lead from a travel article in *Best Travel Writing of 2011*. What do you like/dislike about it? Respond to the lead posted by another student.

SUBMIT:

Destination Travel article (1000 words) - by Monday of Week 3.

WEEK 3 Mon/Tues: The Travel Narrative and Travel Humor

Travel Narratives and Travel Humor stories are staples of the travel writing genre. A good travel narrative involves more than just a series of sentence that start with “I.” Using humor in travel writing is not about telling jokes or making fun of a place. This module will familiarize you with these travel writing styles, and give you the chance to think about when to use these approaches in your storytelling.

READ:***Big River, Tiny Raft***

By Chris Welsch

Minneapolis Star Tribune

<http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/travel/11281991.html?page=1&c=y>

Power Trip

Emily Maloney

Worldhum.com

http://www.worldhum.com/features/travel-stories/power_trip/

WRITE:

Post 3 ideas where using the narrative style would make sense for the story. For each, describe in a few sentences the ‘journey’ you would take your readers.

Post 3 ideas for using humor to tell your travel story, explaining how humor would help.

ENGAGE:

When is it more effective to use the narrative style of travel writing? Can you think of any situations where the narrative style would not work.

WEEK 3 Wed/Thurs: The Travel Essay

The most memorable travel articles do more than present a litany of places to see and things to do. They use imagination, context, humor and point of view to leave an indelible mark on the reader. This module examines an example of the Travel Essay (*Melancholy Beauty*), and challenges you to go beyond the mundane in your writing (*Roads Not Taken*).

READ:***Melancholy Beauty***

By Jason Wilson

Florida Sun-Sentinel

http://articles.sun-sentinel.com/2004-04-25/news/0404200399_1_cork-alentejo-portugal

The Travel Section: Roads Not Taken

By Thomas Swick

Columbia Journalism Review, 2001

<http://www.thomasswick.com/articles/roadsnottaken.html>

WRITE:

Post 1: Review Melancholy Beauty in 300-600 words. What message did you take away from the article? What is effective about the author's storytelling technique?

Post 2: Write a short (less than 200 word) article about a place you know or have visited in the style that Swick mocks. When you are done, write a second short (less than 200 words) in which you inject Swick's ideas of imagination, context and humor.

ENGAGE:

Read and comment on at least one other student's post. What was the key to taking the style of storytelling beyond the predictable?

SUBMIT:

Draft of Travel Essay (1500 words) - by Monday of Week 4

WEEK 4 Mon/Tues: Craft of Writing – Revising & Re-writing

Travel writing is both art and craft. The travel itself might be glamorous but arguably the most important part of the writing is the least glamorous: the re-write. Often it is in the revision process that average stories are transformed into compelling travel stories. This module focuses on the importance of fact-checking and rewriting to craft your piece into a compelling finished story.

READ:

Text: Chapter Six: "Fact Checking and Research Resources"; pgs. 162-185.

WRITE:

Text Assignments Pgs 186 - 187: Ex. 2 and 3 (rewrite don't highlight).

WEEK 4 Wed/Thurs: Marketing Your Travel Writing

A great, unpublished travel story can be like a great sermon delivered to an empty church. A crucial part of travel writing is the business of marketing your articles. This module covers the steps involved in identifying markets for your articles, and how to write query letters that will get your work published.

READ:

Text reading: Chapter Eight: "Marketing Travel Articles"; pgs. 213 - 252.

ENGAGE:

Post the topic and title of your Destination travel article and your travel Essay, and then for each article brainstorm and post to the discussion board 10 magazines you could submit the story to. Read another student's pitch list and add at least two magazines market idea to their list.

WRITE:

Write a query letter for each of your two stories.

(Text Assignments Pgs 253 - 254: Ex. 1, and 5)

SUBMIT:

Travel Essay (1500 words) by final day of class. No late papers accepted.