

## **Writing the Long-Form**

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Thursday 1:30 p.m. - 5:10 p.m., 7<sup>th</sup> Fl. Library

### **Course Description**

This seminar focuses on the various components that comprise in-depth magazine stories. We'll dissect great modern and classic magazine stories (as well as one or two books, screenplays and/or teleplays) for story, character arc, dialogue, scenes, structure, transitions, verb tense, point of view and style. We'll discuss interviewing techniques, and various ethical questions that may arise from interacting with subjects. The goal is to create memorable narrative non-fiction stories that hold a reader's attention to the last page.

This is a challenging course with a heavy reading load and a high bar for writing assignments, befitting third-semester graduate journalism students. There are a number of assignments, including a profile, a first-person narrative, in-class writing exercises, a case study involving an in-depth interview with a working journalist, culminating in a 3,000+-word feature story replete with scenes, character, dialogue, and/or analysis. We'll do a lot of work-shopping in class, and along the way work on your pitches, research, and interview techniques, time management, outlines, editing and multiple drafts. We will hear from several top journalists about their careers, work, and methods. I'll be assigning a piece or two by these writers before they come and speak. Please read their work with care and be prepared with thoughtful questions.

### **Required Texts**

*Wizard of Lies*, by Diane Henriques

#### **Excerpts from:**

-*The War at the Wall Street Journal*, by Sarah Ellison

- *The New New Journalism, Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*, by Robert Boynton

-*Blurred Lines*, by Vanessa Grigoriades

I'll provide links to many magazine stories and other resources over the course of the semester. Be sure you have access to the Internet and your email while in class. Bring a laptop!

## Assignments

1. Profile (1500 words, 1st draft due Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>; final draft due Oct. 19th) = 10% of your final grade. Some or all of this material can be used in your final capstone project.
2. Journalist case study (due Nov. 2nd): Interview a working journalist about a favorite narrative story = 10%.
3. Final Capstone Feature (3,000+ words, 1<sup>st</sup> draft due Nov 16th; 2<sup>nd</sup> draft due Nov. 30; 3<sup>rd</sup> draft due Dec. 14th) = 70%. You must file each draft of your capstone on time. For each missed deadline, I will deduct half a point from your final grade. You must have your topic nailed down and approved by Sept. 28.
4. In-class assignments and discussion on assigned reading = 10%.

Looking for long-form articles to read? A terrific resource is Nieman Storyboard:  
<http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/category/whys-this-so-good/>

The Pulitzer Prize Website has a trove of wonderful material:  
<http://www.pulitzer.org/pulitzer-stories>

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. Missing a class without an excused absence will result in a reduction in your final grade. The university recognizes only the following as excused absences: documented illness, family emergency, and religious observance. Email in advance if you must miss class.

**Academic Dishonesty:** You are participating in a community of scholars in which academic integrity is a primary value. All work must be your own. Ideas and quotations of others must be properly sourced. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will result in failure in the course and possibly expulsion from the University.

**Electronic Devices:** All cell phones must be off during class time. Use of your laptop is limited to work we're doing as a class.

## A Word on Trigger Warnings

Over the past few years a heated debate has raged in academia (if you can say anything rages in academia) over the use of “trigger warnings.” One common definition of a trigger warning is “a statement at the start of a piece of writing, video, etc., alerting the reader or viewer to the fact that it contains potentially distressing material (often used to introduce a description of such content).”

Trigger warning proponents point out that some students in any given class may have suffered some level of trauma, whether it arises from sexual assault, violence, or other types of abuse. They should therefore receive fair warning when a reading or discussion relates to material that could cause them discomfort.

Critics of trigger warnings contend that the world is often messy, disturbing, and violent, and that graduate school is a time for intellectual growth. Therefore a professor's role is to challenge students so they learn to engage rationally with arguments, ideas, opinions, and principles they might find upsetting or deeply offensive.

While NYU does not subscribe to any university-wide position on trigger warnings—the administration advises anyone who might be traumatized by a reading or video to seek appropriate help at the university's health center—the journalism faculty believes our entire profession should come stamped with a giant trigger warning. Part of what we do as journalists is to seek the truth no matter where it may lead. This sometimes takes us into violent, disturbing places.

In this course we will read and discuss articles that may deal with some disturbing themes. If you believe this could trigger in you any psychological or health problems, you should contact NYU Wellness Exchange, located at 726 Broadway, 4th floor. The 24-hour Wellness Hotline is 212-443-9999.

At times you may find yourself vehemently disagreeing with the writer of an essay, article, feature story, interview subject on camera, another student, guest, or your professor. I encourage you to speak up and share your perspectives, but do it in a way that fosters mutual respect. Be aware that reasonable people can have views that may appear “extreme” to some.

## **The Syllabus**

A syllabus is a guidepost for the semester. While I'll try to adhere to this schedule we may skip around if the natural flow of the lessons dictate. No class is the same; if you have additional ideas for topics we should cover, I'm all ears. Sometimes links to articles can disappear or change. If so, let me know and I'll find alternative sources. While I expect you to read all assigned material that doesn't mean we will have the time to discuss everything in class. Nevertheless, these are high quality stories well worth the read. By analyzing them you will be further on your way to becoming a better writer.

## **Schedule**

## **Class One, Sept.7**

Intro to students. What do you love about narrative writing? What kinds of stories excite you? Goals for the class?

The power of a story

What makes a great magazine story?

Discuss character, narrative, point of view, structure, style.

Reading as a reader v. reading as a writer.

Ethics: Plagiarism, fabulism, attribution, getting in trouble-ism.

Finding topics to write about. The “peg.”

The art of the story pitch.

Capstone status

In-class writing assignment: Secrets. Reveal a secret about yourself--in the form of a story.

Read for next class:

“How to Write a Profile Feature Article,” by *The New York Times*:

<https://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/writing/voices.html>

“The Man the White House Wakes Up To,” by Mark Leibovich, *New York Times Magazine*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/25/magazine/25allen-t.html>

“Margaret Atwood, the Prophet of Dystopia,” by Rebecca Mead, *The New Yorker*

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/margaret-atwood-the-prophet-of-dystopia>

“The Lady and the Scamp,” by Evgenia Peretz, *Vanity Fair*

<http://www.vanityfair.com/style/2017/03/nan-talese-publishing-career-marriage>

“On a Wing and a Prayer,” by Liz Welch, *Real Simple*

<http://lizwelch.com/article/on-a-wing-and-a-prayer>Liz Welch

## **Class Two, Sept. 14**

The art of the profile.

Dissecting profiles for structure, style, and technique. Dramatic tension.

Interviewing. How to get the interview, prepare questions, conduct yourself;

listening to answers, thinking on your feet.

Ethics: On-the-record, off-the-record, not-for-attribution, on background;  
“checking quotes” with sources.

Tipping your hand as a reporter vs. letting the subject speak for himself/herself.  
How to outline long-form narrative features.

Capstone status.

Liz Welch to discuss article on Melanie Driscoll, interviewing subjects, creating a narrative

For next class:

Come up with a profile subject. Before you pitch in class be sure that you have access. Remember: boring people produce boring stories, so find someone doing something interesting or important. **Profile due Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>** at the start of class. **No extensions.**

Read for next class: More Profiles. Read for structure, character arcs, narrative, and the greater idea.

“Unfollow,” by Adrian Chen, *New Yorker*

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/23/conversion-via-twitter-westboro-baptist-church-megan-phelps-roper>

“Love Thy Neighbor?” by Stephanie McCrummen, *Washington Post*

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-a-midwestern-town-that-went-for-trump-a-muslim-doctor-tries-to-understand-his-neighbors/2017/07/01/0ada50c4-5c48-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.3f7f4e1204c4](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/in-a-midwestern-town-that-went-for-trump-a-muslim-doctor-tries-to-understand-his-neighbors/2017/07/01/0ada50c4-5c48-11e7-9fc6-c7ef4bc58d13_story.html?utm_term=.3f7f4e1204c4)

“The Woman Who Knew Too Much,” by Suzanna Andrews, *Vanity Fair*

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/11/elizabeth-warren-201111>

Also:

“Arthur Miller’s Missing Act,” by Suzanna Andrews, *Vanity Fair*

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2007/09/miller200709>

### **Class Three, Sept. 21**

Discuss students’ profile pitches.

Discuss previous week’s reading—characters arcs, how to turn a “profile” into a narrative; what’s the larger idea?

More structure: Ledes, nut grafs, outlining, themes, and transitions.

In-class exercise. De-mystifying the interview. Interview a classmate you don't know that well, jot down notes, tell us what you learned. A great interview isn't that much different from a great, probing conversation.

Speaker: Suzanna Andrews on Elizabeth Warren profile—how a profile is a way into larger, important ideas. Also, she'll discuss Arthur Miller piece, ethics surrounding privacy.

Capstone status

Read for next class: Narrative writing

“The Troubling Question in the French Jewish Community: Is it Time to Leave?” by Marie Brenner, *Vanity Fair*

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/07/anti-semitism-france-hostage-hyper-cacher-kosher-market>

“Big Blue,” by Evgenia Peretz, *Vanity Fair*

<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2002/07/surfing-scene-200207>

“Addict, Informant, Mother,” by Susan Dominus, *NYT Magazine*

[https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/magazine/addict-informant-mother.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/magazine/addict-informant-mother.html?_r=0)

“What Happened to the Girls in LeRoy,” by Susan Dominus, *NYT Magazine*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/11/magazine/teenage-girls-twitching-le-roy.html>

## **Class Four, Sept. 28**

Capstone status. You must have your topic nailed down and approved.

Profile status

Have students identify lede, nut grafs of previous week's reading.

Discuss what makes great narrative writing. Turning issues, ideas, trends, a sub-culture, a person, into a narrative.

Action scenes; creating characters and character arcs that readers care about; descriptions; weaving personal history, anecdotes, and background information into your story; what to reveal when; keeping the “mystery” alive through the

story.

In-class exercise: early memories. Write about an early memory—in the construction of a story.

Speaker Susan Dominus, *New York Times Magazine* feature writer, discusses her pieces; how to enter complicated, fraught worlds; interacting with subjects in trouble; balancing telling the truth with respect for one's subjects.

Due next class: The write-around

First draft of your 1500-word profile, no extensions.

“Magazines, Bring Back the Write-Around,” by Ron Rosenbaum, *Slate*:  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the\\_spectator/2007/10/magazines\\_bring\\_back\\_the\\_writearound.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_spectator/2007/10/magazines_bring_back_the_writearound.html)

“Frank Sinatra Has A Cold,” by Gay Talese, *Esquire*:  
<http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a638/frank-sinatra-has-a-cold-gay-talese/>

“He Comes First,” by Evgenia Peretz, *Vanity Fair*  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/magazine/donald-trump-primary-win.html>

### **Class Five, Oct. 5**

Profiles due

Discuss the write around. How to crack a story when it seems no one will talk to you.

Editing workshop: We'll break into small groups, each led by a professional editor/writer, to work on your profiles.

Rewrite strategies.

Reading for next class: Sarah Ellison on the Murdoch empire

Excerpt from *War at the Wall Street Journal*, by Sarah Ellison

“The Rules of Succession,” by Sarah Ellison, *Vanity Fair*  
<http://www.vanityfair.com/style/2011/12/murdoch-kids-201112>

“Roger Ailes' Final Days,” by Sarah Ellison, *Vanity Fair*  
<http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2016/09/roger-ailles-fox-news-final-days>

## **Class Six, Oct. 12**

Workshop profile drafts in progress.

In-class assignment: creative description.

Speaker Sarah Ellison to discuss reporting on Murdoch empire; working sources over the course of several years; how to make business stories accessible, interesting, character driven.

Read for next class: First Person Stories

“I Think You're Fat,” by A.J. Jacobs, *Esquire*: <http://www.esquire.com/news-politics/a26792/honesty0707/>

“My Republican Journey,” by Dan Savage, *The Stranger*, 1996

“Escape the Matrix,” by Virginia Heffernan, <https://www.wired.com/2017/08/uncanny-valley-internet/>

**Final draft of your profile due Oct. 19<sup>th</sup>, no extensions.**

## **Class Seven, Oct. 19**

Final draft of your profile due.

You, the story (stunt journalism).

Present v. past tense; immediacy; quotes and dialogue; “said” v. “says”

In-class editing exercise: trimming your prose.

Speaker Virginia Heffernan, cultural critic, opinion writer, pod-caster, author of recent book *Magic and Loss* (about the Internet). She will discuss her Wired article about Internet anxiety; what makes an essay, a column, a review, a podcast; navigating one’s social media presence.

Read for next class: New Journalism and Literary Reportage.

“Radical Chic,” by Tom Wolfe, *New York Magazine*, 1970

“Wall Street on the Tundra,” by Michael Lewis

<http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2009/04/iceland200904-2>

Plus, excerpt of interview with Lewis from *The New New Journalism*

*Also read:*

“Follow the Blood Money,” by Adam L. Penenberg, Pando:

<http://pando.com/2014/02/23/called-to-account-a-suicide-bombing-a-lawsuit-a-bank-accused-of-financing-terrorism/>

Also, line up a journalist to interview for your **case study (due Nov. 3)**.

**Start thinking about pitching to editors.** Start with an organizing principle, a hard news lede of sorts: what is your story about and why is it important? Then build your pitch out from there. Offer an engaging anecdote or two. Introduce your main character.

### **Class Eight Oct. 26**

Pitch your journalist case study subject.

Journalism case studies (handout)

Discussion of previous week’s reading. New Journalism; Literary Reportage

Adam Penenberg to discuss Hamas story, telling riveting stories from court documents.

Tips about pitching to editors

Read for next class: Crime Reporting/ POV

“An Incendiary Defense,” by Jeffrey Toobin, *New Yorker*

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1994/07/25/an-incendiary-defense>

“All O.J., All the Time,” Dominick Dunne, *Vanity Fair*

<http://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1995/05/dunne199505>

Due next class:

Journalist’s case study: Interview a journalist about a favorite narrative non-fiction longread (1,000 words). **No extensions.**

Refine verbal pitch for the pitch panel.

## **Class nine, Nov. 2**

Journalist case study due

True crime. Same story, different points of view.

Editors roundtable. Pitch your capstone stories to a panel of magazine editors and writers, who will offer feedback.

*Read for Next class:*

“The American Male at Age 10,” by Susan Orlean, *Esquire*:

<http://www.courses.vcu.edu/ENG200-dwc/orlean.htm>

Plus, excerpt with Orlean interview from *The New New Journalism*.

Sarah Lyall, *New York Times* feature writer, on Brexit and Boris Johnson:

“Will London Fall?”

[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/11/world/europe/uk-london-brexit.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/04/11/world/europe/uk-london-brexit.html?_r=0)

“Luck Runs out for a Leader of Brexit Campaign”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/01/world/europe/boris-johnson-brexit-conservatives.html>

“Boris in Wonderland”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/04/06/world/the-saturday-profile-boris-in-wonderland-2-wonderlands-actually.html>

[Note: Sarah may want to have students read and discuss alternate pieces.]

## **Class Ten, Nov. 9**

Journalist case study due.

Writing about the unexpected

Capstone status.

Speaker Sarah Lyall on making sense of Brexit; explaining an important financial story through a colorful character—Boris Johnson; interviewing techniques; coming up with stories.

*Read for next class:*

Ginia Bellafante series on Laguardia Community College

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/05/nyregion/community-college-students-face-a-very-long-road-to-graduation.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/nyregion/raising-ambitions-the-challenge-in-teaching-at-community-colleges.html>

“The Big Uneasy,” by Nathan Heller, *New Yorker* (or move this to week of Dec 1 reading, but I’m afraid that week may be too heavy?)

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/05/30/the-new-activism-of-liberal-arts-colleges>

### **Class eleven, Nov. 16**

First draft of capstone due

Speaker Ginia Bellafante to discuss her series on Laguardia Community College, turning the larger issue of economic disparity in the city into a narrative with a strong central character. She will also discuss her long career at *The New York Times*, from fashion critic, to television critic, to weekly columnist for “Big City” section; the current state and future of *The New York Times*.

Editing workshop: We’ll break into small groups, each led by a professional editor/writer, to work on your drafts.

*Read/watch for next class (in two weeks):*

Finish *Wizard of Lies*,

Watch “Wizard of Lies,” HBO

Read script to episode 9 (Mark Fuhrman episode) of “The People vs O.J. Simpson,” based on the book by Jeffrey Toobin (or read 20-page treatment of this limited series).

*Due next class (in two weeks):*

**2nd draft of your capstone. You must complete a full draft that you have polished on your own. No major holes. No extensions.**

**Nov. 23      THANKSGIVING**

**Class Twelve, Nov. 30      Second draft of your capstone due.**

Discuss *Wizard of Lies*.

Discuss adaptations. How magazine articles become books. How books become television series or movies, using the *Wizard of Lies* and Jeffrey Toobin's O.J. reporting as case studies.

Workshopping 2<sup>nd</sup> drafts of your capstones: We'll break into small groups led by professional editors and writers to peer review your drafts.

*Read for next class: Reporting on Hot Button Campus Issues*

Except from new book *Blurred Lines. Rethinking Sex, Power, and Consent on Campus*, by Vanessa Grigoriades,

“A Rape on Campus: A Brutal Assault and Struggle for Justice at UVA”: *Rolling Stone*:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20141120205928/http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/a-rape-on-campus-20141119?page=2>

*Rolling Stone* editor's note: <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/a-rape-on-campus-20141119#ixzz3NdXmIamg>

“Rolling Stone and UVA: The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Report: An Anatomy of a Journalistic Failure,” by Sheila Coronel, Steve Coll, Derek Kravitz: <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/a-rape-on-campus-what-went-wrong-20150405#ixzz3y6uXcGs9>

### **Class Thirteen, Dec. 7**

Responsible reporting on hot button Issues; the pitfalls

- Discuss Nathan Heller piece on campus activism at Oberlin from *New Yorker*
- The *Rolling Stone* disaster.

Vanessa Grigoriades to discuss reporting her book.

### **Class fourteen Dec. 14 Capstone final draft due.**

Jobs talk: networking, cover letters, resume, interview techniques, and how to get a job in journalism.

