

## **Writing the Long-Form**

Professor Evgenia Peretz

Zoom students: Thursday 9am EST

In-person students: Thursday 1:30p.m, Room 657

Class time will be 90 minutes-plus, to be followed by 90 minutes of asynchronous work. Some additional one-on-one time with professor can be scheduled.

## **Course Description**

This seminar focuses on the various components that comprise in-depth magazine stories.

In this class, students will:

- Write clear, accurate, and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner.
- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society.
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information.

To those ends, we'll dissect great modern and classic magazine stories for story, character arc, dialogue, scenes, structure, transitions, 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 and asynchronistic writing exercises, culminating in a 3,000+-word feature story replete with scenes, character, dialogue, and/or analysis. We'll do a lot of work-shopping both during in-person/zoom lessons and in during asynchronistic learning time.

## **Class organization:**

Due to the limitations we'll be dealing with—with some of us meeting by zoom, and some meeting in person—it will be especially important to really engage in one another's work in preparation for the workshops.

## **Required Texts**

*The New Kings of Nonfiction*, edited by Ira Glass

Selections from:

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

Several articles over the course of the semester.

### **Assignments**

1. Profile (1200-1500 words, 1st draft due **Wednesday a.m. Oct. 1**; second draft due **Wednesday a.m. Oct. 7**, final draft due **Thursday Oct. 15th**). Some or all of this material can be used in your final capstone project.
2. Final Capstone Feature (3,000+ words, 1st draft due **Wednesday a.m, Nov 11**; 2nd draft due **Wednesday a.m. Nov. 18**; 3rd draft due **Thursday Dec. 10th**). You must have your topic nailed down and approved by Sept. 24. (**Note the Wednesday a.m. due dates for pieces we will be workshopping. This will give you time to read your classmates' works in advance, so you can come to class prepared with constructive comments.**)
3. In-class contribution. This is a workshop/seminar, not a lecture course, so class participation is a must. Please come in prepared to talk about the previous week's reading and each other's work.

### **Grading:**

Profile = 15% of your final grade.

Capstone = 60% of your final grade.

Participation = 25% of final grade.

Grading will conform to the Journalism Department's policy:

A= publishable as is

B= publishable with light editing

C=publishable with a rewrite

D=major problems with facts, reporting, writing

F=missing key facts, containing gross misspellings, plagiarism or libel

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>

### **Academic Integrity**

Any plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration on assignments will result in a failure and could be grounds for failure in the course. All quotes must be original and verifiable. That means you must have a means of contacting anyone you quote for further clarification, or for me to verify accuracy of quotes. If you draw from someone else's work without properly crediting them, you will fail that assignment. If you put someone's words in quotes that means you spoke to them unless you attribute the quote to another source.

### **Accommodations**

Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with New York University's Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at 212-998-4980 or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu). Information about the Moses Center can be found at [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

### **Diversity & Inclusion**

The Institute is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. The Institute embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions.

**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. While I expect you to read all assigned material that doesn't mean we will have the time to discuss everything in class. Finally, given the unusual nature of the class and the unforeseen policy changes due to the Covid, I expect we'll have to be nimble, and ready to adapt.

### **Schedule**

#### **Class One, Sept. 3**

Intro to students. What kinds of stories excite you? Goals for the class?

What makes a great narrative? How is narrative different from commentary, news stories, etc.? Discuss character, narrative, point of view, access, style.

Introduction to basic structure.

Discuss capstone ideas.

Asynchronous writing exercise. Early memories. Write about an early memory—in the construction of a story.

*For next class:*

“How to Write a Profile Feature Article,” by *The New York Times*:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/learning/students/writing/voices.html>

Introduction, *The New New Journalism*, Boynton.

“The Lady and the Scamp,” by Evgenia Peretz, *Vanity Fair*  
<http://www.vanityfair.com/style/2017/03/nan-talese-publishing-career-marriage>

“Keeping up with the Millers,” by Evgenia Peretz, *Vanity Fair*  
<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2020/08/stephen-miller-and-his-wife-found-love-in-a-hateful-place>

### **Class Two, Sept. 10**

- Discuss elements of the profile. The profile as narrative.
- General discussion of last week’s reading.
  
- Deconstruct one of the articles for structure (two if time permits).
  
- Read your early memories stories aloud and discuss.
  
- Interviewing. How to approach interview subjects, prepare questions, conduct yourself; listening to answers, thinking on your feet.
  
- Ethics: On-the-record, off-the-record, on background, “checking quotes” with sources.
  
- Asynchronous work: De-mystifying the interview. Interview a classmate for a short profile. Record/take notes. (Note: this is **not** your main profile assignment.)

*For next class:*

Confirm your profile subject. Be sure that you have access.

Read: “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)

“Unfollow,” by Adrian Chen, *New Yorker*  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/11/23/conversion-via-twitter-westboro-baptist-church-megan-phelps-roper>

### **Class Three, Sept. 17**

- General discussion of last week's reading. How are these profiles *narratives*?
- Deconstruct "Love Thy Neighbor."
- Discuss your profile pitches
- Capstone status

*Asynchronous work:*

- Write up profile of your classmate, based on your interview from previous week.
- Read storyboard of Adrian Chen's "Unfollow."  
<https://niemansstoryboard.org/stories/annotation-tuesday-adrian-chen-and-unfollow/>

*For next class:*

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

### **Class Four, Sept. 24**

- The "write-around."
- Discuss Frank Sinatra profile.
- Talese handout, about writing of Sinatra piece.
- Profile and Capstone status. You must have your capstone topic nailed down and approved.
- Read profiles of classmates aloud and discuss
- Asynchronous work: write descriptive, engaging prose, channeling Gay Talese. Describe a live scene with people doing something engaging. This can be family members, people in a café, a park, etc.

*For next class:*

First draft of your profile due on **Wednesday a.m. Sept. 30**

### **Class Five, Oct. 1**

- Editing workshop: We'll workshop about half of the profiles in class.
- Asynchronous work: Workshop remaining in pairs or small groups.

*For next class:*

Second draft of your profile, due **Wednesday Oct. 8**

Start nailing down sources for your capstone

**Class Six, Oct. 9**

-Workshop second drafts of profiles. (We'll switch up from previous week which profiles we do as a group.)

Asynchronous work: Workshop remaining profiles in pairs or small groups.

*For next week:*

**Final draft of your profile due Oct. 14<sup>th</sup>**

Evgenia Peretz, "Code of Silence," Vanity Fair,  
<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/12/inside-georgetown-prep-culture-of-omerta-scandal>

Patrick Radden Keefe, "The Family That Built an Empire of Pain," New Yorker  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/10/30/the-family-that-built-an-empire-of-pain>

Reporting for your capstone should be underway!

**Class Seven, Oct. 15**

Narrative investigation. Discuss how to penetrate closed worlds; use legal documents; approach subjects with challenging allegations.

Discussion of previous week's reading.

Asynchronous work: Reveal a secret about yourself—in the form of a story.

*For next class:*

Read Michael Lewis:

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/11/usda-food-stamps-school-lunch-trump-administration>

"Jonathan Lebed's Extra-Curricular Activities," by Michael Lewis, from the *New Kings of Nonfiction*

Interview with Michael Lewis from Boynton

Continue reporting for capstone, collecting sources.

**Class Eight Oct. 22**

Michael Lewis, master of the narrative. What makes him so good?

Deconstruct Dept. of Agriculture story structure. Dissect scenes from both stories that work especially well.

Capstone status

Asynchronous work: more engaging prose! Describe a live scene with characters, channeling Michael Lewis.

*For next class:*

“The American Male, Aged Ten,” by Susan Orlean, from *The New Kings of Nonfiction*

Interview with Orlean from *The New New Journalism*

Continue reporting your capstone, start formulating the themes, anticipating areas to be filled in.

**Class nine, Oct. 29**

Offbeat topics

Discussion of previous week’s reading.

Orlean’s “storyboard” of her piece

Read aloud asynchronous exercise from last week and discuss.

Asynchronous work: Begin outlining your capstone.

*For next week:*

Write outlines of your capstones.

More selections from *Kings of Non-fiction*

**Class Ten, Nov. 5**

Discuss reading from last week.  
Discuss your outlines (possibly in small groups)

Asynchronous work: start work on your nut grafts—even if it's not the first paragraph of your story. I will give feedback as you get into your first drafts.

*For next class:*

First draft of capstones due **Wednesday Nov. 11**

**Class eleven, Nov. 12**

We'll go over a few capstones as a group.

Asynchronous work: Break into smaller groups for the remainder.

*For next class:*

2nd draft of your capstone.

**Class Twelve, Nov. 19**

Workshop 2<sup>nd</sup> draft of capstones, same as previous week. (We'll switch which ones we do as a group.)

Asynchronous work: Break into smaller groups for the remainder of capstones.

*For next class (in 2 weeks):*

Read more selections from *New Kings of Nonfiction*

Work on final draft of capstone. You can schedule one-on-one sessions with me during this period OR you can have that session during the next class period.

**Nov. 26      THANKSGIVING**

**Class Thirteen, Dec. 3**

We'll workshop your capstones, one-on-one with me, roughly 20 minutes each. (NB: You can move your session to an earlier date if you wish.)

**Class fourteen, Dec. 10    Capstone final draft due.**

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



