

# Writing with Voice

Spring 2022 Semester — Jan. 5 to April 20

9:35-11:30 a.m. Wednesdays, Periods 3-5, Weimer 3219

University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications

**Instructor: Kristine Crane, MA, MFA**

**Email: [kcrane2015@ufl.edu](mailto:kcrane2015@ufl.edu) | Office Hours: TBD**

## Course Description

This is a writing-intensive, highly interactive course, focused neither on academic writing nor news writing. Instead, the focus is *you*: rather, your personal style on the page, the obsessions that bring you to the page, and your willingness and savvy in sharing your writing with the world. We will be engaging in both readings and writing assignments designed to help you find and cultivate your own voice and the subject matter of your writing as well as strategies for publishing and sharing your work. We will look at literary samples including memoirs, personal essays, and micro-essays, as well as the classic journalist column, along with newer storytelling forms such as blogs, radio essays and digital stories. We will engage with each other in a respectful, stimulating and safe environment based on the writing workshop model of deep reading, and a balance of praise and constructive criticism. Be prepared to read carefully, write deeply and listen to each other.

## Course Goals

### You will come away with:

- A sense of what makes various kinds of good personal essays work—and why we enjoy them. Understanding the elements of craft that underlie them.
- A more confident sense of your own voice and how to develop it.
- A sense for how to give and receive constructive feedback in a respectful, helpful way.
- Various writing exercises/practices to help you get essay-worthy material out of yourself.
- A more complete understanding of the publishing world for various types of essays.
- A know-how for creating multi-media essays in the form of audio stories or digital films.

## Required Texts

**Required reading material will be made available via links to online stories and essays as well as handouts, including chapters from:**

- “Writing About Your Life,” William Zinsser.
- “On Writing Well,” William Zinsser.
- “The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present,” Phillip Lopate.
- “Fifty-two Snapshots: A Memoir Starter Kit,” Sonja Livingston.
- “Tiny Beautiful Things: Advice on Love and Life from Dear Sugar,” Cheryl Strayed.
- “Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience,” Joe Lambert, Digital Diner Press.

**About me:** I'm a journalist and writer. I grew up in the literary town of Iowa City and then launched my journalism career in Rome, Italy after college, where I covered Italian culture and the Vatican for *The Wall Street Journal*, among other publications. After several years, I moved back to the U.S. to attend the Columbia University School of Journalism and become a health reporter. I also studied memoir and personal essay writing at Pacific University and am working on a memoir entitled *My Roman Girlhood*. I write a monthly column called *l'americana* for the Rome-based magazine *The American in Italia*, and a blog called 'Mother Tongue.' My journalism has been widely published, and my essays and stories have been published in *The Examined Life Journal*, *River Teeth Journal* and *The Florida Review*.

## Course Policies

### Attendance & participation

- Your attendance and participation are crucial to you getting the most out of the course.
- Please do the assigned readings before class and be prepared to discuss them. It's better if you can print them out and bring them to class, but laptop is also fine.
- Please do the in-class writing prompts and share your writing on occasion.
- Please bring a notebook and pen to every class.
- Excused absences include family emergencies, illness, jury duty, military service and professional conferences where you are presenting work, speaking on a panel, or accepting an award. Please document such cases and submit documentation to instructor.
- Regardless of the reasons for being absent, a student who misses too many classes risks not mastering the coursework. In such a case, he or she may be withdrawn from the course per UF policy:

*UF Attendance Policies* — <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

### Inclusivity and Respectfulness

- Because of the personal nature of the reading and writing we'll be doing in class, your utmost attention, maturity and respect toward your fellow classmates is necessary.
- We all have different but often overlapping stories. This is an inclusive environment, so please listen mindfully to each other as you provide and receive feedback. Exposure to different perspectives, values, ideals and experiences through our stories will make us all better, more compassionate and understanding writers.
- Do not share your classmates' writing unless they give you explicit permission to do so.
- Ask questions freely.

### Deadlines

- Deadlines are designed to push you to do your best work within a given timeframe. They help you learn the discipline of writing, which is an important counterbalance to the creative joys of writing. Respecting deadlines ultimately help you respect your own work.
- If you have an emergency, illness or other debilitating circumstance that prevents you from making a deadline, please let me know asap and also provide documentation of your

circumstance. Otherwise, late work will automatically receive one letter grade lower than it would have if handed in on time.

## Course Grading

The minimum score to pass this course is a C, or 72.5. Scores are rounded to the nearest whole point: 89.4 rounds down to 89 (B+), while 89.5 rounds up to 90 (A-).

|    |        |
|----|--------|
| A  | 100-93 |
| A- | 93-90  |
| B+ | 89-87  |
| B  | 86-83  |
| B- | 82-80  |
| C+ | 79-77  |
| C  | 76-73  |
| C- | 72-70  |
| D+ | 69-67  |
| D  | 66-63  |
| D- | 62-60  |

### Assignments: Due by the beginning of class time

- Personal Essay 1 (**Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>**)
- Personal or Issue-based Essay 2 (**Feb. 9<sup>th</sup>**)
- Review (**Feb 16<sup>th</sup>**)
- Blog package (**Feb. 23**)
- Micro essay (**March 2nd**)
- Audio essay (**March 16<sup>th</sup>**)
- Digital story (**April 13<sup>th</sup>**)
- Revision:** on or before the last day of class (**April 20**).
- Practicum:** on or before the last day of class (**April 20**).

### Grading Rubric

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| 100 points | Class participation                      |
| 100 points | Personal Essay 1                         |
| 100 points | Personal/issue essay                     |
| 50 points  | Review                                   |
| 50 points  | Blog                                     |
| 50 points  | Micro Essay                              |
| 100 points | Audio Essay                              |
| 100 points | Digital Story                            |
| 50 points  | Revision of one of the above assignments |
| 50 points  | Practicum (optional)                     |

## **Assignment descriptions**

### **Class participation**

Come to class prepared to discuss assigned readings and each other's work. Part of becoming a writer is becoming a reader who reads like a writer. We'll talk about assigned readings and each other's work in terms of what we like and dislike, but also craft elements that makes writing work.

We will also do regular in-class writing exercises that you are expected to do and share—at least a half dozen times throughout the semester. I will keep track of your sharing.

Every other week, we will hold an informal workshop in class to look at each other's work. These essays—between 500 and 1000 words—will be separate from the listed graded assignments and will count as part of your participation grade. These pieces will be based on our in-class writing prompts, or the outside weekly prompts that I give you.

### **Personal Essay 1**

This first essay will be on a topic of your choosing, and our in-class writing assignments will build up to it. Word length: 800-1200 words.

### **Personal Essay 2**

This essay will also be on a topic of your choosing, and you will write it in the first-person, but it will also be based on research of a topic that you feel passionately about. You may include interviews as well, as part of your research. 800-1,200 words.

### **Review**

Review writers are writing about something else—films, food, books, but they are also giving glimpses of themselves—and their own personalities—through the way they write about those subjects. You'll get to pick something to review, developing your personal essay by showing us your taste in whatever-it-is.

### **Blog package**

Design a blog for yourself using the simple Adobe Spark platform, or a platform with which you are familiar. Give it a name, mission, and strategy for defining and building your audience. Write the first (introductory) post, and one other post, and provide some graphic element. Max length of blog post: 600 words. Hand in the mission statement and strategy separately, in one Word doc emailed to me.

## Micro Essay

The super short essay is a way to cut to the chase and go for the jugular in 250 words or less. Style and word choice are everything, as it's often harder to write short than long. You may also submit a photo with this assignment if your piece is inspired from a photo. Think the NYT's tiny love stories. Max length: 250 words.

## Audio Essay

Say it out loud. Literally. Oral storytelling predates writing. How can we resurrect this ancient form of communication, and how does telling our stories out loud inform their written form? We will listen to some radio essays in class, and you will then tell one of your own. Include written script as well as digital mp3 file. Length: 3-5 minutes.

## Digital Story

Think of your life like a movie. Take one little scene from your life and tell the story behind it in a multimedia way, using both sound and visual elements. You needn't be tech-savvy to do this assignment. We will do in-class tutorials in WeVideo software to help you put your film together. Length: 3-5 minutes.

## Revision

It's rare to get a piece of writing right on the first try. Revision is at the heart of the writing practice, and you'll get a chance to revise one of your assignments for a better grade (I'll scrap the lower grade for the higher).

## Practicum

You'll have the opportunity to potentially publish one of your essays in *The American in Italia*, an online Rome (Italy)-based publication of which I'm associate editor. We publish essays of 600-1,200 words on a rolling basis. OR, pitch your essay to another publication of your choosing (please consult with me before doing so).

**Weekly schedule \*Note that this schedule and the readings are subject to change. Stay tuned to weekly announcements in class and via email for changes.**

**Week 1, Jan. 5: Introductions to the essay, the course, and each other**

**Readings:** "Writing About Your Life: A Journey into the Past" by William Zinsser, chapters 1-3.

**Week 2, Jan. 12: Memory: school days, growing up, family life/Details and description: cultivating your senses on the page. Why "the devil is in the details" and how to make details work for you.**

**Readings:** Aristotle’s “On Memory and Reminiscence;” E. B. White’s “Once More to the Lake.”

Excerpts from Sand Hall’s “Tools of the Writer’s Craft.”

**Week 3, Jan. 19: Perspective and structure: who are you and where are you telling your story from: today, ten years ago?**

**Tone and tense: Is your story sad or funny (or both)? Present/past?**

\*Personal essay #1 due

**Readings:** Excerpts from David Sedaris’ *Me Talk Pretty One Day*; and, *When Breath Becomes Air*; Josie Rubio’s NYT “Dating While Dying;” selection of New Yorker essays.

Excerpts from Vivian Gornick’s “The Situation and the Story;” Philip Lopate’s “Writing Personal Essays: On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character;” Selected “Modern Love” stories from *The New York Times*.

**Week 4, Jan. 26: From inward to outward: writing about issues that move or affect you.**

**Readings:** Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail;” Lee Martin’s “Looking Outside the Self: Research and the Personal Essay”; A selection of contemporary reporters’ “Reporters’ notebook” first-person columns from the field.

**Week 5, Feb. 2: Writing about food, books, films, and places**

**Week 6, Feb. 9: Blogosphere: how to create, sustain and market your own blog.**

**Readings:** A selection of popular blogs; excerpts from “Julie & Julia.” “From Blog to Book Deal: How Six Authors Did It.” \*Personal essay #2 due.

**Week 7, Feb. 16: Packing a punch: the micro essay.**

\*Review due

**Readings:** Excerpts from Beth Ann Fennelly’s “Heating and Cooling: 52 Micro-Memoirs” and Abigail Thomas’ “Safekeeping”; and *The New York Times*’ ‘Tiny Love Stories.’

**Week 8, Feb. 23: Out loud: oral storytelling**

**Readings:** SelfNarrate’s “Break Your Invisible Chains” guidebook to storytelling; excerpts from NPR’s essay collection, “This I Believe;” excerpts from David Sedaris’ “The Drama Bug” on *This American Life*; *The Moth*.

\*Blog package due

**Week 9, March 2:** Revision and review: review the concepts that we’ve learned so far; talk about revision and editing.

\*Micro essay due

**Week 10, March 9: Spring break**

**Week 11, March 16: Your life as a movie: introduction to digital stories**

\*Audio essay due

**Readings:** Excerpts from Joe Lambert’s “Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience”; “Scene making” in “Writing Life Stories” by Bill Roorbach

**Week 12, March 23: StoryCenter digital storytelling technique**

**Readings:** Excerpts from Joe Lambert’s “Seven Stages: Story and the Human Experience” and “Digital Storytelling Cookbook;” and “The Listening Way” in “Writing Life Stories”

**Week 13, March 30: Story Circle & story lab**

**Week 14, April 6: Wrapping it up: how to sustain your writing practice and ideas for publishing.**

**Readings:** Excerpts from Louise DeSalvo’s “Writing as a Way of Healing,” and Natalie Goldberg’s “Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within;” The Write Life’s “22 Websites and Magazines That Want to Publish Your Personal Essay.”

**Week 15, April 13th: Digital story due/sharing session**

**Week 16, April 20th: Workshop/sharing**

**UF and College of Journalism and Mass Communication Policies**

**Accommodations for Special Needs**

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with disabilities and who have registered with the UF Dean of Students Office. This office will provide relative documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodations.

**UF Disability Resource Center:**

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

Personal or health issues such as depression, anxiety, stress, career uncertainty and or relationships can interfere with your ability to function as a student. UF’s Counseling and Wellness Center (CWC) offers support for students in need. CWC is located at 3190 Radio Road and open each weekday from 8 to 5.

**UF Counseling and Wellness Center:**

<http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc> (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

## **U Matter, We Care:**

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact [umatter@ufl.edu](mailto:umatter@ufl.edu) or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

## **Plagiarism, Academic Honesty and Conflicts of Interest:**

- The College of Journalism and Communications is committed to upholding the university's academic honor code.
- Academic dishonesty of any kind shall not be tolerated in this course. To be certain, academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to using any work done by another person and submitting it for a class assignment; submitting work done for another class; copying and pasting text written by another person without quotation marks and or without complete attribution, which usually includes a link to the original work; using images produced by someone else without explicit permission by the creator.

## **Course Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.”

## **Academic Resources**

*E-learning technical support*, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to [Learning-support@ufl.edu](mailto:Learning-support@ufl.edu). <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

*Career Resource Center*, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <http://www.crc.ufl.edu/>

*Library Support*, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

*Teaching Center*, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>

*Writing Studio*, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

*Student Complaints Campus*: [https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF\\_Complaints\\_policy.pdf](https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf)

*On-Line Students Complaints*: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>

Cheryl Strayed's "The Love of My Life," and excerpts from her "Dear Sugar" essay collection;