

# Travel Writing Workshop

**Credits:** 3

**Instructor:** Mary Gray, M.A.

**Office Hours:** Before class and by appointment;

## 1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Using Florence as their springboard for story ideas, students will learn the fundamentals of travel and destination-based writing, with the opportunity to practice the craft in various formats, from personal narratives to feature writing to service journalism. They will develop the necessary skills to write compellingly and sensitively about travel, avoiding clichés and cultural faux pas. While the first half of the course focuses on developing voice and equipping students with the tools to process their own experiences in the context of culture and the travel writing canon, the second half focuses more explicitly on the changing travel media landscape and the practical and business tools needed to become a travel writer or journalist. Occasional guest lecturers working in the field will shed further light on these topics. Interested students will have the chance, with guidance from their instructor, to pitch or to send finished pieces on spec to local or special Italy-interest publications.

## 2. CONTENT INTRODUCTION

What differentiates a “topic” from a “story?” How does one take a seed of an idea and transform it into a compelling narrative? How prominent or hidden should the role of the author be in a piece of travel writing? How does one effectively establish a sense of place, while remaining respectful of that place as a technical outsider? How can we find a fresh angle on a destination that’s been covered ad nauseum?

These are all questions that the course will explore through discussion of myriad examples of travel writing and differences within the genre – from the meandering, memoir-like prose of Henry James in *Italian Hours* to the spiffy service journalism of *The New York Times*’ “36 Hours In...” series. Students will experiment with their own writing and story packaging through both short journaling and brainstorming exercises (as a general rule of thumb, two paragraphs are expected for each journal assignment) and longer-form, more editorially refined pieces (at midterm and final).

Students will learn to move between – and even perhaps combine! – the literary/creative, journalistic, and service sub-genres of travel writing. We will also discuss, and carry out through fieldwork, practical strategies: how to find sources, how to effectively interview, how to shape a piece to fit a specific publication or audience, how to consider the visual component in publishing, the pros and cons of specializing versus generalizing, and the different ways of navigating the ethics of travel writing, “influencer culture,” and the pandemic-era shifts and sea changes in today’s complicated media landscape.

## 3. PREREQUISITES

College-level English composition equivalent.

## 4. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The course aims to strengthen students’ overall writing skills, equipping them to tell stories effectively and engagingly in a variety of formats, from traditional print features to online roundups and social media storytelling. Travel and students’ own experiences will serve as the source material, but students who complete this course successfully can apply some lessons to a variety of journalistic beats and writing genres.

Students will learn and develop strategies for idea generation, interviewing, on-site reporting, and researching. They will gain insight into how to market themselves and their stories, how to approach

editors with ideas, and how to adjust their tones and styles for different audiences and story formats. Through discussions of in-class and outside readings, students will also deepen their analytical skills by applying a critical eye to the media they consume (who wrote this text? Is there an agenda behind it? Who is the audience? What are the strengths and limits of it? etc.)

Unlike the mid-term and final articles, the frequent short journal entries will not be judged based on craft, but will serve the purpose of getting students into the creative practice of writing and reflecting regularly and coming up with possible story ideas and angles.

## 5. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND MATERIALS

Required readings, which include a mix of literary and journalistic texts, **will be provided to students in digital format.**

Students should purchase a small journal or notebook (a durable cover is recommended for ease of use during excursions).

Recommended shops for finding notebooks: Cartoleria Lory, Cartoleria San Frediano, La Scartoffia, Flying Tiger, Sogni in Carta, Fabriano, Feltrinelli RED

**All visual and reading materials will be collected in an electronic folder that students are encouraged to “bookmark” for easy reference. Contents may be changed and updated frequently during the semester.** Students are expected to keep up with what needs to be read and by when. It is the individual student’s responsibility to proactively communicate with the instructor or ask for further information if anything about the reading assignment is unclear.

Key texts used or drawn from – necessary excerpts of which will be provided by the instructor – will include:

Athill, Diana, *A Florence Diary*, 2016, Anansi International.

Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, 2007, Norton.

Baldwin, James, *Notes of a Native Son*, reprinted 2017, Penguin Classics.

Cameron, Julia, *The Artist’s Way*, 1992, TarcherPerigee.

Cheney, Theodore A. Rees, *Writing Creative Nonfiction: Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction*, 2001, Ten Speed Press.

Child, Julia, and Prud’homme, Alex, *My Life in France (100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Edition)*, 2012, Duckworth.

De Botton, Alain, *The Art of Travel*, 2002, Vintage International.

Didion, Joan, *South and West: From a Notebook*, 2018, Knopf-Doubleday Publishing Group.

Didion, Joan, *The White Album*, reprinted 2009, Farrar Straus & Giroux.

Dillard, Annie, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 1974, Harper Perennial.

Eliade, Mircea (Willard Trask translation), *The Sacred and the Profane*, reprinted 1987, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Elkin, Lauren, *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London*, 2016, Random House UK.

Ephron, Nora, *The Most of Nora Ephron*, 2012, Alfred Knopf.

George, Don, *Lonely Planet's Guide to Travel Writing: Expert Advice from the World's Leading Travel Publisher*, reprinted 2013, Lonely Planet Publications.

hooks, bell (Gloria Jean Watkins), *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, 2009, Routledge.

Iyer, Pico, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home*, 2001, Vintage International.

Iyer, Pico, *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World*, 1994, Vintage International.

James, Henry, *Collected Travel Writings*, 1993, Library of America.

Laing, Olivia, *The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone*, 2017, Canongate Books.

Lamott, Anne, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, 1995, Anchor.

Lopate, Phillip (ed.), *The Art of the Personal Essay: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present*, 1994, Anchor Books Doubleday.

Miller, Henry, *The Colossus of Maroussi*, reprinted 1967, Penguin.

Miller, Henry (ed. Lawrence Durrell), *The Henry Miller Reader*, 1969, New Directions Paperbook.

Morris, Jan, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*, 2002, Da Capo Press.

Neville, Tim, *Travel Writing Guide*, 2018, World Nomads.

Orwell, George, *Down and Out in Paris and London & The Road to Wigan Pier*, reprinted 2021, Wordsworth Classics.

Rilke, Rainer Maria, (ed. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy), *A Year with Rilke: Daily Readings from the Best of Rainer Maria Rilke*, 2009, HarperOne.

Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters to a Young Poet* (M.D. Herter Norton translation), 1993, W.W. Norton & company.

Shapiro, Susan, *The Byline Bible*, 2018, Writer's Digest Books.

Strayed, Cheryl, *Tiny Beautiful Things*, 2012, Atlantic Books.

Talese, Gay, *Frank Sinatra Has a Cold and Other Essays*, 2011, Penguin Classics.

Tolentino, Jia, *Trick Mirror: Reflections on Self-Delusion*, 2019, Random House.

Wagner, Kenneth, and Magistrale, Tony, *Writing Across Culture: An Introduction to Study Abroad and the Writing Process*, 1995, P. Lang.

Wolfe, Tom, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, reprinted 1999, Antam Books.

Zinsser, William, *On Writing Well (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition)*, reprinted 2016, Harper Perennial.

Zinsser, William (ed.), *They Went: The Art and Craft of Travel Writing*, 1991, Houghton-Mifflin.

Various articles, essays and travel guides, both archival and contemporary, from *The Best*

American Travel Writing series, *The New York Times*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *Travel and Leisure*, *CNN Travel*, *Suitcase*, and other travel-themed and general-interest media outlets, magazines and literary collections.

## 6. GRADING POLICY AND EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Your final grade will be based on the following percentages:

25%	Class participation, journaling, and writing community membership
25%	Shorter and in-class writing assignments
25%	Mid-term Article
25%	Final Article

All student work must be original and the fruit of this class (i.e. not previously published or written for other purposes).

## 7. PLAGIARISM AND COPYING

Plagiarism is severely prohibited. Any student that makes use of words or ideas taken from another person's work without properly citing credit for the specific purpose of deceiving their professor will receive an automatic "F" on that assignment or exam. Should the offense be repeated, the student will receive an automatic "F" in the class.

## 8. EXAMS

In place of a traditional exam format, students will spend the first half of the semester working on their mid-term article for submission during mid-term exam week, and the second half on a final article for submission during the final week. **Students are strongly encouraged to pace themselves and to regularly bring in their work-in-progress drafts of the mid-term and final articles to their instructor so they can receive feedback as they go and avoid last-minute scrambling.**

## 9. ATTENDANCE AND BEHAVIOR POLICY

Students are required to attend all classes. If you miss class without an excused absence your grade will be lowered by one letter grade for each unexcused absence. If you are ill you should obtain a doctor's note in order to receive an excused absence. Missing more than four classes will result in an "F" on your transcript.

## 10. COURSE CALENDAR (subject to change)

*In-class excursions around Florence that complement the material to be covered on a given day will take place periodically and will be announced during the first week of class.*

*"Journal checks" will take place every week. Entries are expected to be around two paragraphs.*

Week	Day	Topics
Week 1	1	<b>Presentation of Course and Expectations</b> -Overview of syllabus, writing community guidelines -Introductory questionnaire -Why travel? Why write?
	2	<b>The Canon: Travel Writing Tradition</b> -Role of the narrator -Character development

		-Details that make the difference
<b>Week 2</b>	3	<b>Topics vs. Stories</b> -Finding fresh angles on tired travel subjects -Writing leads -Balancing showing and telling -Specificity as the key to compelling writing -Discussion and guidelines for midterm article assignment
	4	<b>First Look at First Person: Is Everything Really Copy?</b> -Idea generation and prewriting techniques -Balancing internal and external in first-person narrative travel writing -Avoiding the “zoo tour” trap <b>SUBMIT MIDTERM ESSAY IDEA PROPOSAL</b>
<b>Week 3</b>	5	<b>From Travelogues to TikTok</b> -Traditional versus emerging forms of travel writing and travel media -Audiences: who’s the reader/consumer?
	6	<b>Workshop Day: First Look at Midterm Articles</b> -“Darlings” vs. “dockers”: learning to self-edit effectively <b>“WORK-IN-PROGRESS” ROUGH DRAFT OF MIDTERM ESSAY DUE</b>
<b>Week 4</b>	7	<b>Workshop Day Two: Peer Review</b> -Collaborative workshopping of each other’s pieces-in-progress
	8	<b>Guest Speaker and “High Yielding” Q&amp;A</b>
<b>Week 5</b>	9	<b>A Service Journalism Approach to Travel Writing</b> -Itineraries, roundups/listicles, and how-to’s -Guidebooks -Balance of being authoritative vs. being prescriptive
	10	<b>MIDTERM ESSAY DUE</b>

<b>Week 6</b>	11	<b>No class</b>
	12	<b>No class</b>
<b>Week 7</b>	13	<b>“The Return:” After-Break Reflections</b> -How does it feel to return to Florence if you were away? How did you experience Florence differently than usual if you were here during the break, and existing outside your normal routine? -Discussion and guidelines for final article assignment
	14	<b>Editorial versus Commercial Content and the Ever-Grayer In-Between</b> -PR versus advertising -Influencers versus journalists -Press trips -Branded travel content and transparency -Critically evaluating media
<b>Week 8</b>	15	<b>The Art of the Interview in Travel Writing</b> -“High yielding” questions -Balancing challenge with comfort -Choosing sources -Usage: interview as ‘ingredient’ versus ‘interview as final product’
	16	<b>“WORK-IN-PROGRESS” ROUGH DRAFT OF FINAL ARTICLE DUE</b>
<b>Week 9</b>	17	<b>Workshop Day: First Look at Final Articles</b>
	18	<b>Breaking into travel writing</b> -Timely hooks and “news-pegging” travel stories -“Querial killers” -Becoming an expert in your own backyard -Economizing editorial: one destination, many stories
<b>Week 10</b>	19	<b>Workshop Day Two: Peer Review of Pieces-in-Progress</b>
	20	<b>Writing for Multimedia Platforms</b> -Geolocal audio tour format -Podcasting, video voiceovers -One story, many formats -Thinking about the “total package”

	21	<b>Sustainable Travel in a Post-Covid World</b> -Pitfalls of mass tourism -Shifts in how we travel, how we cover travel
<b>Week 12</b>	22	<b>Writing Home</b> -Getting curious in your own backyard -Using writing to navigate “reverse culture shock”
	23	<b>Final Reflections</b> <b>FINAL ARTICLE DUE</b>

### 11. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

SRISA strives to foster an all-inclusive learning environment that best caters to its students' needs. While faculty frequently work one-on-one with students, there are some situations in which special accommodations are required. Should a student have any academic accommodations regarding test taking or otherwise, they must present an official letter from their home University to the SRISA Director within the first week of class stating the accommodations.

### 12. DISCLAIMER

This Syllabus may be amended as the course proceeds. You will be notified of any changes.