**Writing for a Wide Audience**

JOUR-GA 60  9/1/2022 - 12/14/2022

**1:30 PM - 4:30 PM M**

[**20 Cooper Square, Rm 700**](https://www.google.com/maps/search/20+Cooper+Square,+Rm+700?entry=gmail&source=g) **Loc: Washington Square**

**Writing for A Wide Audience** is grounded in the idea that expertise is a wasted asset if not shared with non-experts. The purpose of this course is to help you, the emerging expert/specialist, learn how to **write** for the wider public – for people outside your academic discipline, whether it’s public policy, science, technology, math, engineering, law, medicine, business administration, the arts, etc. You will work on writing that is rigorous but never too technical or obscure, and produce op-eds, personal essays, reviews, and profiles that are accessible and compelling to readers with little knowledge of your subject.

The class has a flexible curriculum, and the material evolves based on students’ needs and subjects. It is ideal for MA and PhD students who want to practice the art of communicating through mass media.



**Professor Amy Finnerty,** a writer and editor**,** has been a regular contributor  to The New York Times Book Review, The New York Times Magazine, The  Wall Street Journal, and The Financial Times, among other publications. She has  been an editor of Foreign Policy magazine and World Affairs Journal, taught  writing in the Literary Studies program at The New School and through the PEN  America Writers in the Schools initiative, and mentors NYC students in  programs that promote college access.

**WRITING FOR A WIDE AUDIENCE**

***Professor:* AMY FINNERTY**

***Class time:* Mondays, 1:30-4:30**

**Syllabus**

\*Please note that there may be changes (in sequence or topics) during the course of the semester. Best not to “race ahead” in your study of the syllabus.

**Course Description**

The course aims to help aspiring specialists learn how to write for readers beyond their academic disciplines — “the public.” Students will work on writing that is authoritative but free from jargon and accessible to general readers with little or  no previous knowledge of the specialists’ subjects.

**Learning Objectives**

In this course, students will:

* Write clear, accurate and engaging prose
* Demonstrate the critical thinking, independence, and creativity required by debate in a democratic society
* Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information -Learn how to simplify the abstruse, convey ideas to a wide audience, and critique the writings of others in a constructive and collegial manner

**Course Structure**

This class is an interactive workshop, which means that students will have several writing assignments during the semester (approximately seven submissions of varying lengths.)

Important:

* Students must come to class **prepared not only to discuss their own work, but also to evaluate their classmates’ writing.**
* Submitted pieces **will not receive letter grades**, but will earn written feedback and editing suggestions on most submissions.
* Student writing will be submitted online **by 9AM the day before** each class in which it is required.
* Occasionally, we will have **guest experts** visit class. In the past the class has  welcomed editors/writers/reporters from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Politico, The Washington Post, Jacobin, The Guardian, and other  publications.

**Readings**

There is no set textbook for this course. Readings will include material published in magazines, journals, and newspapers, as well as excerpts from books. All material will be available online or provided by the professor.

**Course Requirements**

* Reading of assigned texts before class
* Timely completion of written assignments
* Close reading of other students’ writing for discussion in class

**Grading**

* There is no midterm or final exam

*Final grades will be calculated as follows:*

75% of the grade based on written, submitted assignments; 25% on class participation

**SYLLABUS (WEEKS I - XIII)**

1. **CLASS I: GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

Introductions:

Please prepare to describe yourself to the class: Talk informally for about five minutes each, telling us about your academic background, your reasons for taking this class and your future plans.

* Reading (to be done before class):

1. “Prof, No one is reading you” <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/prof-no-one-is-reading-you>

1. “Professors, We Need You!” <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/opinion/sunday/kristof-professors-we-need-you.html>
2. “Why Is Academic Writing So Academic?”  
   <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/why-is-academic-writing-so-academic>

*Think about the following: What does a “wide readership” mean?*

* Assignment (no written submission required)

1. **CLASS II: OP-ED WRITING - I**

This will be the first of two classes on the op-ed, the short opinion piece.

* Assignment: Write an op-ed on a topic of your choice (650-800 words.) Read classmates’ submissions before class for workshopping.

A couple of op-ed guides. Somewhat basic but not without value:

1. [A Few Tips for Opinion Piece Writers](http://andrewleigh.org/pdf/OpEd_Tips.pdf)   
   Andrew Leigh, Updated February 2008  
   ([http://andrewleigh.org//pdf/OpEd\_Tips.pdf](http://andrewleigh.org/pdf/OpEd_Tips.pdf))
2. [Tips for Aspiring Op-Ed Writers](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/tips-for-aspiring-op-ed-writers.html)

Bret Stephens, Aug. 25, 2017 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/opinion/tips-for-aspiring-op-ed-writers.html>)

Op-Ed examples

1. [Beijing, a Boon for Africa](https://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/28/opinion/beijing-a-boon-for-africa.html) — Dambisa Moyo, *June 27, 2012.*
2. [Treat the Patient, Not the CT Scan](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/opinion/27verghese.html) — Abraham Verghese, *Feb. 26, 2011.*
3. [If You Think Republicans Are Overplaying Schools, You Aren’t Paying Attention](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/21/opinion/democrats-public-education-culture-wars.html) — Jennifer Berkshire and Jack Schneider, *March 21, 2022.*
4. [Why Should Immigrants ‘Respect Our Borders’? The West Never Respected Theirs](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/07/opinion/immigration-reparations.html) — Suketu Mehta, June 7, 2019.
5. [Remember, No One Is Coming to Save Us](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/30/opinion/sunday/trump-george-floyd-coronavirus.html) — Roxane Gay, *May 30, 2020.*
6. [The Criminal Justice System Stalks Black People Like Meek Mill](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/17/opinion/jay-z-meek-mill-probation.html) — Jay-Z, *Nov. 17, 2017.*
7. [Opinion: Anti-Asian hate crimes are not a reason to bolster policing](https://nyunews.com/opinion/2022/03/10/anti-asian-policing-increase/) — Shriti Bungle, *Mar. 10, 2022.*

[The Zelenskys’ Defiant Vogue Cover](https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-zelenskys-defiant-vogue-cover-olena-leibovitz-culture-ukraine-beauty-art-identity-institutions-west-putin-russia-11659377020) — Melik Kaylan, Aug 1, 2022.

1. [The West Is Kidding Itself About Women’s Freedom in Saudi Arabia](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/19/opinion/saudi-arabia-women-rights.html) — Megan K. Stack, *Aug. 19, 2022.*
2. [Ukraine Is the Next Act in Putin’s Empire of Humiliation](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/26/opinion/russia-ukraine-putin.html) — Peter Pomerantzev, *July 26, 2022.*
3. [ANTONIUK: Yale should admit more students from war-torn countrie*s*](https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2022/03/11/antoniuk-yale-should-admit-more-students-from-war-torn-countries/) *—* Oleksii Antoniuk, *Mar. 11, 2022*
4. [A year on from a devastating siege, Kashmir is being turned into a colony](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/aug/05/devastating-siege-kashmir-colony-india-crushing-dissent) — Mirza Waheed, *Aug. 5, 2022.*
5. [The Constitution Is Broken and Should Not Be Reclaimed](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/19/opinion/liberals-constitution.html) *—*Ryan Doerfler and Samuel Moyn, *Aug. 19, 2022.*

**3. CLASS III: OP-ED WRITING - II**

* Assignment: Write an op-ed on a topic of your choice (650-800 words). Be prepared to discuss.

**4. CLASS IV: THE BOOK REVIEW – I**

* Assignment: Write a review (700-800 words) of ANY book you have read, new or old, *within your field  of expertise*. The review should deal with subjects within the discipline you are studying as a graduate student. Don’t review from memory, but actually read or re-read the book. Alternatively, you can offer a review of a crop of books that addresses a theme within your discipline.
* Readings:

How-To Guides:

1. [Writing Book Reviews:](https://wts.indiana.edu/writing-guides/writing-book-reviews.html) A guide, from the University of Indiana, Bloomington   
   <https://wts.indiana.edu/writing-guides/writing-book-reviews.html>
2. [John Updike’s Rules for Reviewing Books](http://biblioklept.org/2010/04/14/john-updikes-rules-for-reviewing-books/), *April 14, 2010*.

<http://biblioklept.org/2010/04/14/john-updikes-rules-for-reviewing-books/>

Examples of Book Reviews:  
*(Note — some of these are longer that your word limit for the assignment)*

1. [‘Finding Zero’: A Long Journey for Naught](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/21/science/finding-zero-a-long-journey-for-naught.html) — Amir Alexander on Finding Zero, *April 20, 2015.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/21/science/finding-zero-a-long-journey-for-naught.html>
2. [‘The Sum of Us’ Tallies the Cost of Racism for Everyone](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/23/books/review-sum-of-us-heather-mcghee.html) — Jennifer Szalai on The Sum of Us, *Feb 23, 2021.*   
   <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/23/books/review-sum-of-us-heather-mcghee.html>
3. [The Great Stewardess Rebellion review: stirring study of what Roe v Wade helped vanquish](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/may/07/the-great-stewardess-rebellion-review-nell-mcshane-wulfhart-clara-bingham) — Clara Bingham, *May 7, 2022.* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/may/07/the-great-stewardess-rebellion-review-nell-mcshane-wulfhart-clara-bingham>
4. [Jared Kushner’s ‘Breaking History’ Is a Soulless and Very Selective Memoir](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/books/review-breaking-history-jared-kushner.html) — Dwight Garner <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/17/books/review-breaking-history-jared-kushner.html>
5. [Ocean Vuong’s ‘On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous’ is permanently stunning](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/ocean-vuongs-on-earth-were-briefly-gorgeous-is-permanently-stunning/2019/05/28/b1f8a1ba-7ff7-11e9-95a9-e2c830afe24f_story.html) — Ron Charles, *May 28, 2019.* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/ocean-vuongs-on-earth-were-briefly-gorgeous-is-permanently-stunning/2019/05/28/b1f8a1ba-7ff7-11e9-95a9-e2c830afe24f_story.html>
6. ‘Come to This Court and Cry’ Review: A Ghost in the Family — Tunku Varadarajan, *Aug 19, 2022.*  <https://www.wsj.com/articles/come-to-this-court-and-cry-review-a-ghost-in-the-family-review-11660923735?mod=djembooks>
   1. [A Yale professor frets about a waning aristocracy](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/a-yale-professor-frets-about-a-waning-aristocracy/2019/08/23/99b70bd8-acb5-11e9-bc5c-e73b603e7f38_story.html) — Michael S. Roth, *Aug 23, 2019.* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/a-yale-professor-frets-about-a-waning-aristocracy/2019/08/23/99b70bd8-acb5-11e9-bc5c-e73b603e7f38_story.html>
7. [Becoming by Michelle Obama review – race, marriage and the ugly side of politics](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/14/michelle-obama-becoming-review-undoubtedly-political-book) — Afua Hirsch, *Nov 14, 2018.* <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/14/michelle-obama-becoming-review-undoubtedly-political-book>
8. [How Toxic Is Masculinity? A crop of new books reconsiders feminism’s stance toward men](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/08/08/how-toxic-is-masculinity) — Zoë Heller, *Aug 1, 2022.* <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/08/08/how-toxic-is-masculinity>

**5. CLASS V: THE FILM REVIEW**

* Assignment: Write a review (600-800 words) of ANY film, new or old, within your field of expertise.  Don’t review from memory, but actually watch or rewatch the film.
* Readings:

How-To Guide:

1. [9 Tips for Writing a Film Review](https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/9-tips-for-writing-a-film-review/) — *June 2, 2017* (Note: (As with all primers, this one is to be treated as guide not gospel): <https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/9-tips-for-writing-a-film-review/>

Sample Reviews:

1. [‘Licorice Pizza’ Review: California Dreaming and Scheming](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/25/movies/licorice-pizza-review.html) — Manohla Dargis, *Jan 13, 2022.*<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/25/movies/licorice-pizza-review.html>
2. [Sublime Domesticity: The Intimate Grandeur That Is ‘Roma’](https://www.wsj.com/articles/sublime-domesticity-the-intimate-grandeur-that-is-roma-1542820986) — Joe Morgenstern, *Nov. 21, 2018* <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sublime-domesticity-the-intimate-grandeur-that-is-roma-1542820986>
3. [Little Women’s Real Feminist Problem](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/little-womens-real-feminist-problem/604429/) — Caitlin Flanagan <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/01/little-womens-real-feminist-problem/604429/>
4. [How “Parasite” Falls Short of Greatness](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/how-parasite-falls-short-of-greatness) — Richard Brody, *Oct. 14, 2019.* <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-front-row/how-parasite-falls-short-of-greatness>
5. [Green Book Review: A Road Trip Through a Land of Racial Clichés](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/15/movies/green-book-review.html) — AO Scott, *Nov 15, 2018*.  <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/15/movies/green-book-review.html>
6. [Vice Review – Ambitious, amusing, but confused portrait of Dick Cheney](https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jan/26/vice-review-dick-cheney-christian-bale-adam-mckay-amy-adams) — Wendy Ide, *Jan. 26, 2019.* <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/jan/26/vice-review-dick-cheney-christian-bale-adam-mckay-amy-adams>
7. [Writer for Hire Is a Wanted Man](https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/19/movies/19ghost.html) — Manohla Dargis, *Feb. 18, 2010.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/19/movies/19ghost.html>
8. [Review/Film; A Flashy New Lawyer in an Unflashy Town](https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/13/movies/review-film-a-flashy-new-lawyer-in-an-unflashy-town.html) — Vincent Canby, *Mar. 13, 1992.* <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/13/movies/review-film-a-flashy-new-lawyer-in-an-unflashy-town.html>

**CLASS VI: WHY I WRITE: A personal statement**

* Readings:

1. [Why I Write](https://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/wiw/english/e_wiw) — George Orwell <http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/wiw/english/e_wiw>
2. [Why I Write](https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/05/archives/why-i-write-why-i-write.html) — Joan Didion, *Dec. 5, 1976.* <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/12/05/archives/why-i-write-why-i-write.html>
3. [The Personal-Essay Boom Is Over](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/jia-tolentino/the-personal-essay-boom-is-over) — Jia Tolentino, *May 18, 2017.* <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/jia-tolentino/the-personal-essay-boom-is-over>
4. [The Bennington Girl](https://www.guernicamag.com/the-bennington-girl/) — Jill Eisenstadt, *May 11, 2021.*  
   <https://www.guernicamag.com/the-bennington-girl/>
5. An Excerpt From Minor Feelings — Cathy Park Hong    
   <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/articles/minor-feelings-excerpt/>
6. [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html) — Martin Luther King Jr., *April 16, 1963.*<https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html>
7. [Everything I Know About Elite America I Learned From ‘Fresh Prince’ and ‘West Wing’](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/10/opinion/sunday/television-culture.html) — Rob Henderson, *Oct 10, 2020.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/10/opinion/sunday/television-culture.html>
8. [Swimming: A Plan B Essay](https://www.pshares.org/issues/spring-2012/swimming-plan-b-essay) — Lauren Groff, *2012.*<https://www.pshares.org/issues/spring-2012/swimming-plan-b-essay>
9. [“Did I Simply Think That I Should Behave Like a Girl?”](https://newrepublic.com/article/124265/did-simply-think-behave-like-girl) — Jan Morris, *November 20, 2015.* <https://newrepublic.com/article/124265/did-simply-think-behave-like-girl>

* Discussion: *Why Do We Write?*
* Assignment: Write 600-700-words using the title, "Why I Write," or one of your choice. Use this as an opportunity to explore why you do so, with honesty and candor  
  **OR**   
  Write a personal essay on any theme you choose. Remember that you are writing this for a public readership, not as a personal diary entry.  Calibrate how much you wish to reveal or hold back. And as you write, ask yourself: *Why would this be of interest to a reader who doesn’t know me?*

**CLASS VII: Food**

* Readings:

1. [At La Piraña Lechonera, a Machete, a Shower of Pork and Other Magic](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/21/dining/la-pirana-lechonera-review-pete-wells.html) — Pete Wells, *Jun 21, 2022.*   
   <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/21/dining/la-pirana-lechonera-review-pete-wells.html>
2. [Jimi Famurewa reviews Three Uncles: Masterful Cantonese roasting house is ancient artistry in a slick new frame](https://www.standard.co.uk/reveller/restaurants/three-uncles-review-brixton-london-restaurant-jimi-famurewa-b994122.html) — Jimi Famurewa, *April 13, 2022.* <https://www.standard.co.uk/reveller/restaurants/three-uncles-review-brixton-london-restaurant-jimi-famurewa-b994122.html>
3. [Restaurants](https://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/29/arts/restaurants-065093.html?pagewanted=1) — Ruth Reichl, *Oct. 29, 1993.* <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/29/arts/restaurants-065093.html?pagewanted=1>
4. M.F.K. Fisher: TBD

* Assignment: Write a 400-500 word review of a restaurant, food truck, café, or meal of any kind.

**CLASS VIII: THE INTERVIEW**

* Assignment: Conduct an interview with someone (a professor who teaches you; a prominent name in your field; a friend; a family member—anyone whose story, thoughts, or  ideas might be of genuine interest to a wide audience) and write a 1500-1800 word piece.    
  *Note: This is not to be written in Q&A form.*

* Readings:

1. [Aliko Dangote, Africa’s richest man, on his ‘crazy’ $12bn project](https://www.ft.com/content/50f53eac-8370-11e8-96dd-fa565ec55929)— David Pilling *July 11 2018.*  
   <https://www.ft.com/content/50f53eac-8370-11e8-96dd-fa565ec55929>
2. ‘[All the terrorists are migrants’](https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-interview-terrorists-migrants-eu-russia-putin-borders-schengen/) with Viktor Orbán — Matthew  Kaminski, *Nov. 23, 2015.* <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-interview-terrorists-migrants-eu-russia-putin-borders-schengen/>
3. [Sayaka Murata: ‘My parents don’t want to read my books’](https://www.ft.com/content/b38bd728-68aa-11e8-b6eb-4acfcfb08c11) — Leo Lewis, *June 8 2018.*<https://www.ft.com/content/b38bd728-68aa-11e8-b6eb-4acfcfb08c11>

**CLASS IX:  DOCUMENTARY REVIEW [SHEBA, CAN YOU RECOMMEND A BETTER DOCUMENTARY THAT LENDS ITSELF TO CONFLICTING OPINION/DEBATE?]**

* Assignment: For this class, we will all be reviewing the same documentary. The aim is to compare writing on, and analysis of, the same "document." Write an 800-word review of a documentary, mentioning specific scenes from the film.

Film TBD

**CLASS X: ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS**

* Activity: Each of you will meet me individually to discuss your progress and your idea for  a long-form piece.

**CLASS XI: LONG-FORM PITCH**

* Readings:

1. [Revealing and Obscuring Myself on the Streets of New York](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/revealing-and-obscuring-myself-on-the-streets-of-new-york) — Hilton Als, *Oct. 25, 2018.* <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/personal-history/revealing-and-obscuring-myself-on-the-streets-of-new-york>
2. [An Unnamed Girl, a Speculative History](https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/an-unnamed-girl-a-speculative-history) — Saidiya Hartman, *Feb 9, 2019.*  
   <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/an-unnamed-girl-a-speculative-history>
3. [Herman Melville at Home](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/29/herman-melville-at-home) — Jill Lepore, *July 22, 2019* <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/07/29/herman-melville-at-home>
4. [Private Schools Are Indefensible](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/private-schools-are-indefensible/618078/) — Cailtin Flanagan, *Mar. 11, 2019.*

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/private-schools-are-indefensible/618078/>

1. [How Ukrainians Saved Their Capital](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/09/how-ukrainians-saved-their-capital) — Luke Mogelson, *May 9. 2022.*

https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/05/09/how-ukrainians-saved-their-capital

6. [We Will All Mourn, and We Will All Be Mourned](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/29/opinion/why-we-judge-each-others-grief.html) — Perri Klass, *May 29, 2022.* <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/29/opinion/why-we-judge-each-others-grief.html>

* Assignment:

You are required to submit a long-form piece (2000-2500 words) for your final class. Each of you will make a brief formal presentation on the same theme as your long-form piece. You will listen to each presentation in class and critique it, offering suggestions.   
*Note: No submissions or visuals required, nor any prior reading of each other’s texts.*

**CLASS XII**

* Activity: Guest speaker.

**CLASS XIII and Class XIV  
          LONG-FORM PRESENTATIONS**

* Activity: Students will critique each other’s long-form pieces.

*Note: This is the last formal day of class.*