**WRITING FOR A WIDE AUDIENCE**

**Fall 2018 Course - Wednesdays 2-5pm**

**JOUR-GA 60 001 Class number 21489 Room 20 Cooper Square, Room 700**

**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 budding 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, etc. You will work on writing that is rigorous, but never jargon-riddled or obscure; accessible to readers who don’t share your water-cooler; and compelling to people 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 Masters and PhD students who want to learn the art of communicating through mass media.

 **Professor Tunku Varadarajan**, a former editor of Newsweek International, is the Virginia Hobbs Carpenter Research Fellow in Journalism at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and a contributing editor at POLITICO Europe. He was an editor at the *Wall Street Journal* from 2000 to 2007 (including a five-year stint as the newspaper’s op-ed editor), an executive editor for opinion at *Forbes*, and served at the *Times of London* as both the New York and Madrid bureau chief. He has been a clinical professor at the Stern School of Business at New York University, an adjunct professor at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism and at CUNY’s Graduate School of Journalism, as well as a lecturer in law at Trinity College, Oxford. tunkuvaradarajan@gmail.com

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***Week 1***

Reading (to be done before class):

[Excerpt from “The Common Reader,” Virginia Woolf](http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/w/woolf/virginia/w91c/chapter1.html)

[‘Prof, No one is reading you’](http://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/prof-no-one-is-reading-you)

[Kurosawa on writing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-McmgQbee0)

Introductions. Please prepare to describe yourself to the class: your academic background, your reasons for taking this class, your future plans.

Think about: What does a “wide audience” mean? What is expertise?

Assignment (no written submission required): Please identify ONE recently published piece that you think is a good—or bad—example of how to write for a wide audience. And be prepared to explain why you think so. You can source it from anywhere, including online, but be sure that the publication is intended for a *general readership*. (i.e., The New York Times or The Economist is OK, for instance; The Clinical Nurse Specialist or The Grumpy Economist is not!)

***Week 2: LETTERS TO THE EDITOR***

Guest: Tim Lemmer, Letters Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*

Reading (to be done before class): [George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"](http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm)

Writing assignment: Letter to the Editor

In-class Workshop: Letter to the Editor

Think about: The difference between “letters” and “comments” (online).

***Week 3: THE OP-ED***

Guest: David Shipley, Editor, Bloomberg View

**Reading:**

[“A Few Tips for Opinion Piece Writers,” Andrew Leigh (for Australians, but the advice applies universally)](http://people.anu.edu.au/andrew.leigh/pdf/OpEd_Tips.pdf)

[This one is written for Duke University faculty](http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped)

[The College Rankings Racket, by Joe Nocera](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/29/opinion/nocera-the-silly-list-everyone-cares-about.html)

[Where the Gods Live On...and On, by Tunku Varadarajan](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/14/opinion/tendulkar-finally-retires-from-cricket.html)

[Treat the Patient, Not the CT Scan, by Abraham Verghese](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/opinion/27verghese.html)

[Gunning for Google, by Richard A. Epstein](http://www.politico.eu/article/eu-google-hunt-ill-conceived/)

**Assignment:** Write a 600-800-word op-ed, including an attractive 'hed' [headline]. Copy to be submitted to me by 9AM on Feb. 10.

**Think about:** What is 'opinion'? How is it different, if at all, from 'analysis'? What is 'bias'? What is 'ideology'?

***WEEK 3 The Op-ed- II***

***WEEK 4 The Book Review***

*Assignment: Write a book review of ANY book you have read, new or old. Don’t review from memory, but actually read/re-read the book.*

[Writing Book Reviews: A guide, from the University of Indiana, Bloomington](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/book_reviews.shtml)

[John Updike’s rules for reviewing books](http://biblioklept.org/2010/04/14/john-updikes-rules-for-reviewing-books/)

[The Art of the Book Review | Michael Lind](http://thesmartset.com/the-art-of-the-book-review/)

REVIEWS TO READ

Being Mortal—By Atul Gawande

[Reviewed in The Guardian](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/22/being-mortal-medicine-what-matters-atul-gawande-review)

& [The New York Review of Books](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/01/08/better-way-out/)

[Finding Zero—By Amir Aczel](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/21/science/finding-zero-a-long-journey-for-naught.html?rref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Fscience-books&action=click&contentCollection=science&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=10&pgtype=collection)

[American Vertigo—By Bernard-Henri Levy](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/29/books/review/29keillor.html?_r=0)

Finally, remember that book reviews are subjective. Here, just for fun, some excerpts of negative reviews of literary masterpieces:

“***Lolita***, then, is undeniably news in the world of books. Unfortunately, it is bad news. There are two equally serious reasons why it isn’t worth any adult reader’s attention. The first is that it is dull, dull, dull in a pretentious, florid and archly fatuous fashion. The second is that it is repulsive.” — Orville Prescott, *The New York Times,* 1958

“Mr. Melville is evidently trying to ascertain how far the public will consent to be imposed upon. He is gauging, at once, our gullibilty and our patience. Having written one or two passable extravagancies, he has considered himself privileged to produce as many more as he pleases, increasingly exaggerated and increasingly dull…. In bombast, in caricature, in rhetorical artifice — generally as clumsy as it is ineffectual — and in low attempts at humor, each one of his volumes has been an advance among its predecessors…. Mr. Melville never writes naturally. His sentiment is forced, his wit is forced, and his enthusiasm is forced. And in his attempts to display to the utmost extent his powers of “fine writing,” he has succeeded, we think, beyond his most sanguine expectations… We have no intention of quoting any passages just now from *Moby-Dick*. The London journals, we understand, “have bestowed upon the work many flattering notices,” and we should be loth to combat such high authority. But if there are any of our readers who wish to find examples of bad rhetoric, involved syntax, stilted sentiment and incoherent English, we will take the liberty of recommending to them this precious volume of Mr. Melville’s.” — *New York United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, 1852

Week 5: The Blog

Week 6: Why I Write: A personal statement for public consumption

[**J**oan Didion, “Why I Write”](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uploadedFiles/schools/whitmanhs/academics/english/Why%20I%20Write%20Didion.pdf)

[George Orwell, "Why I Write"](http://www.orwell.ru/library/essays/wiw/english/e_wiw)

**Discussion** of Didion and Orwell essays of the same title: Why do we write?

500-word submission.

Week 7: PITCH FOR LONG FORM PIECE

Week 8:

A PERSON DESCRIBED: Profiles, obituaries and interviews

Readings:

*Profile:*

[Angela Merkel / The New Yorker](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/01/quiet-german)

*Obituary:*

[Margaret Thatcher in the Economist](http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21576081-margaret-thatcher-britains-prime-minister-1979-1990-died-april-8th-age)

[Oriana Fallaci in The Atlantic](http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/12/she-said-what-she-thought/305377/)

*Interview:*

[Paul Theroux / Wall Street Journal](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122066012828905783)

[Milton & Rose Friedman / Wall Street Journal](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB115352827130914276)

[Frank Gehry / Wall Street Journal](https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB116683600262058277)

WEEK 9: LONG-FORM PITCH

WEEK 10: TWEETING

We will have the terrific Brian Ries of CNN [<https://twitter.com/moneyries>] as a guest.

Do read:

<https://jfturcotte.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/heine-and-turcotte-2012-tweeting-as-statecraft1.pdf> & <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/02/the-unbearable-lightness-of-tweeting/385484/>

Also, spend a couple of hours studying (1) Donald Trump's Twitter feed. How does he use the medium? How does he engage a wide audience? & (2) these two feeds: <https://twitter.com/bill_easterly>

and <https://twitter.com/neiltyson>

In addition, think of a Twitter feed that you regard as doing a good job of reaching a wide audience. Come prepared to talk about it.

WEEK 11: Long-form prep

WEEK 12: One-on-One

WEEK 13: Writing for a foreign reader

WEEK 14: LONG FORM