GEO 605
Writing Geography

Spring 2017
Eggers 155

Tuesday, 2:00-4:45pm

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Introduction
We read and write articles, books, and dissertations. We hire, promote, and tenure people based on
their writing. But, for the most part, we do not teach writing in graduate school. Students are
expected to learn how to write by reading articles and books, hoping to master the craft of writing
through osmosis. If students are lucky, their supervisors will show them how to write. Yet their
professors might have trouble doing so since they learned how to write mostly through trial and
error.

GEO 605 Writing Geography is designed to rectify this. This course introduces graduate students to
the fundamentals of storytelling and tools of creative nonfiction for writing in geography and related
disciplines. It is a techniques course like qualitative or quantitative methods but focused instead on
the craft of writing. We will discuss weighty matters such as how to structure dissertations and write
research grants. We will also address such seemingly mundane topics as punctuation, grammar, and
the pros and cons of different citation styles. Your other courses may have touched on these
matters, but we will explore them in more depth and likely from a different perspective.

Yet there are deeper justifications for this course beyond equipping you with tools to write clearer
theses and articles. Except for a few notable exceptions—some of who are faculty in this
department—most geographers write only for other geographers. This has far less to do with the
nature our research or the topics we explore than the manner in which we present our work. We can
find ways to alter this state of affairs even given our disciplinary norms and the realities of academic
publishing.

Grading and Assignments
To earn an A, students must complete all the assignments, carefully read and comment on fellow
students’ work, and have no unexcused absences.

In addition to class participation, this course includes weekly short writing assignments related to
course topics. At the end of the course, students will produce a 15-20 page paper, possibly a major
revision of a thesis chapter or essay from a previous course, employing the techniques we discussed
in the class.
This is a writing seminar. You will spend a considerable amount of time writing and discussing your classmates’ writing. A couple days before each class, you will submit the required writing assignment on Blackboard. By noon the day before class, I will select three submissions for us to discuss on and post them in a folder on Blackboard. Students are expected to read these carefully come to class prepared to discuss them. Questions to consider include How effective are these pieces? Are they clear? Evocative? Scholarly? Why or why not?

Finally, I have left time open at the end of the course for what I call “Students’ Choice.” This will be an opportunity for us to discuss topics not included on the syllabus that you think we should address.

**Students with Disabilities**
If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

**Religious Observances**
SU’s religious observances policy, found at [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm), recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

**Texts**


** All of these books are available for purchase at the SU Bookstore. Of course, cheaper copies are probably available from Amazon and other online retailers.

Highly recommended…


Schedule
January 17  Why does academic writing stink?

Diagnosing the Problem
• especially p.4-7.

Alternatives and Solutions
Sword, Stylish Academic Writing, 3-22.
Olson, Houston, We Have a Narrative, 1-21.

January 24  Writer’s Diet | Introduction to Storytelling

Writer’s Diet
Sword, Writer’s Diet
• Read entire book focusing on the end of each chapter and appendix where Sword explains how to address common problems in academic writing (e.g., weak verbs, overreliance on abstract nouns, etc.) and how the Writer’s Diet web site works.

Storytelling
Sword, Stylish Academic Writing, 35-57, 122-134.
Hart, Storycraft, 5-40.
• This is optional but highly recommended. Storytelling was the focus of his address. Plenty to consider here. (Skip the intro material and start watching around ~10:00).

Assignments
After reading the chapters from The Writer’s Diet, submit a sample of writing from a paper you wrote for another course (~250 words) to the Writer’s Diet web site (Google “Writer’s Diet”). Print the response and be prepared to discuss it in class. Then, submit a sample from an academic writer you admire and print that response. According the web site, what are strengths and weaknesses of your writing? Of the scholar you admire? To the best you can tell, how does the web site assess writing? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this tool?

January 31  Storytelling II

Olson, Houston, We Have a Narrative, 68-173.

- Read the selection and mark/note different plot pts. (ordinary world, inciting incident, etc.) in the Deep Story Hochschild narrates.

**Assignment**

Using the movie narrative handout on Blackboard, watch one of the listed films and identify the key points. How closely does the film adhere to the basic narrative structure Olson and others describe?

The WSP Model. Using one of your former articles, seminar papers, or your MA thesis (if you’ve written one or in the midst of writing one) do the following:

- Write the one-word focus/theme of the project (Word)
- The one-sentence description of the project (And/But/Therefore)
- The one-paragraph story of the project using the “hero’s journey” (Paragraph).

**February 7   Explanatory Narrative**

Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*, 87-98.
Kosek, Jake. *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico* (BB)

- For these pieces by Pollan and Kosek, highlight or mark all the scenes in the article or chapter. How do the two writers divide their works into sections of scenes and explanations? How do they move the plot along? (Remember, a narrative has to “move”. There has to be some sort of journey—of a person, an idea, a thing, an animal, etc.)

**Assignment**

Write an explanatory narrative. Two scenes with an explanation in the middle. Use the explanatory narrative tips described by Hart and demonstrated by Pollan and Kosek. (500-750 words).

**February 14   Titles and Openings | Personal Narratives**

**Titles and Openings:**

Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*, 63-86.
Robert Wilson, *Seeking Refuge: Birds and Landscapes of the Pacific Flyway* (BB)

**Personal Narratives:**


- Reread the parts of the article where Cronon discusses his own intellectual and scholarly journey (basically, the beginning and end of the article). Note the plot points in his story.

Filkins, Dexter. *The Forever War*, “‘Hells Bells’” and “The Kiss.”
Assignment
Write a personal narrative following the structure in Hart, *Storycraft*, 208-214.

Also, retitle at least one (or more if you feel like it) seminar paper, conference presentation, etc. using the guidelines Sword offers at the end of the assigned chapter in *Stylish Academic Writing*. Be prepared to share your original and new title in class.

February 21 Character


- In Biehler’s book, the “characters” are animal pests. How does she describe these non-human animals as characters? Is she using the same sorts of techniques explained by Hart and Meyer?

Guest Speaker: Kate Erickson, script writer and story editor.

Assignment
Vividly describe a person from your research, or if you have not begun your research, describe a friend or someone in your family. To do this effectively, you might need to embed this character description in a scene or brief narrative. If you are really daring, you might choose an institution, such as a NGO, animal, or government agency as your character. (~250-500 words)

Also, bring a photocopy of part of a nonfiction book or article that describes a character vividly. In class, be prepared to discuss why this is an evocative character description

February 28 Literature Reviews


Visiting Speaker: Jamie Winders

Assignment
In an article of your choosing, identify with a notation or a highlight places in the text where the author is summarizing other scholars’ work (“they say”) and explicitly discussing how his or her approach builds upon, differs, or challenges these scholars’ ideas (“I say”). Be prepared to discuss in class the interplay of the author’s ideas and that of other scholars. How is the author situating himself or herself in the literature?

March 7 Jargon | Employing Theory

Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*, 112-121.


**Assignment**

Identify an article or book where an author uses jargon (or what, perhaps, other academics or non-academics might call jargon) in a clear, effective, or even artful way. Be prepared to discuss it in class.

**Visiting Speaker:** Matt Huber

**March 14**  
**Spring Break. No Class.**

**March 21**  
**Scene**

**Readings (Scene)**


**Assignment**

Vividly describe a scene. Examples include a rally, meeting, or journey. (250-500 words)

**March 28**  
**AAG Conference. No Class.**

**April 4**  
**Careful Writing: Grammar, English Usage, and Writing Guides**

Sword, *Stylish Academic Writing*, 135-146.

*Chicago Manual of Style*, chapters on punctuation and grammar


**Visiting Speaker:** Steven Featherstone

**Assignment**

Read the chapters in *Chicago Manual of Style* on grammar and punctuation. You’ll be surprised at how many things you do incorrectly. Make a list of *at least five* rules with which you are unfamiliar with or frequently break.

Also, bring a writing guide you have found helpful to class. This could be a writing book or perhaps a handout a teacher or professor gave you years ago that you still find useful.

**April 11**  
**Settings and Sense of Place**


- Optional. A fascinating piece exploring an underappreciated sense—smell—in American history. How can writers evoke smell in their writing? Why would they bother to do so?

**Assignment**

Vividly describe a setting. Perhaps visit a place in Syracuse such as Armory Square or the shore of Onondaga Lake. (300-500 words)

**April 18**  **Grant Writing and Storytelling**


**Visiting Speaker:** To be announced.

**Assignment**

Write a one-page proposal for your thesis or PhD dissertation project using the Foolproof Grant Template. Upload on the course Blackboard page.

**April 25**  **Students’ Choice**

**This class will focus on a choice, or choices, by the class. Readings, assignment, and visiting speaker to be announced.**

**May 2**  **Geography Slam! (optional)**