

**WRPR0363 -Fall 2018 – Science Writing for the Public  
Syllabus**

**Instructor:**

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to CTLR & Media Lab)  
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**Course Location: ATA 100**

**Office Hrs:**

Tuesdays & Thursdays: 1:30PM– 3PM  
And by appointment. [Sign up here.](#)

**Communication btwn Us:**

If you email me, it may take me a full day to respond. You may also want to text me (802)989-8025, but please, first line state your name as I don't respond to unsolicited texts.

**Technology in the Course:**

I am open to using computers during class, particularly for notetaking. There are times that I may say, *Google this or that*. But, I ask you NOT TO USE social media during class hrs.

It's also possible that you use a phone to write and find things on the web. I'm good with that too, provided that your phone is NOT USED for socializing during class.

**Course Description:**

**Meeting Days & Times: T/R– 9:30 – 10:45**

This class is an introduction to writing about science—including nature, medicine, and technology—for general readers and for online publication. Students will publish in our online magazine (constructed Spring 2017). In our reading and writing we explore the craft of making scientific concepts, and the work of scientists, accessible to the public through news articles and essays. The chief work of the class is students' writing. Students will also learn to manipulate images and how to use digital storytelling. 3 hrs sem. **CW, AMR, LIT, NOR**

## **Goals:**

By the end of this course, I expect you to be able to:

- Describe, Define, Explain and Discuss the characteristics for an effective, creative science essay for the general public.
- Be able to effectively communicate complex scientific ideas to a general public.

## **Class Participation:**

Being present and participating is critical in a seminar; however, not everyone is comfortable speaking in class. Thus, I have designed several alternative ways to engage with the material, your peers, and your professor: class discussions; in-class, small group discussions; writing assignments; one-on-one discussions with me. These 5 alternatives should provide for you pleasant, creative – and non-stressful – ways of engaging with each other, course materials, and your professor.

## **Diversity and Inclusivity:**

Middlebury College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended, and similar state laws (hereinafter "applicable law" or "law[s]"), which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Disabilities may include physical or mental impairments which substantially limit one or more of a person's major life activities, and which necessitate modifications to the facilities, programs, or services of the College. Middlebury College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws.

Please visit the [Diversity and Inclusivity website](#) to learn more.

## **Grading:**

We're not focusing on the *academic essay*, so grading, which is highly subjective, can get in the way.

I try to take "grading" out of the equation so as to enable us to concentrate on the content of the course – and your writing. Your writing can take many forms. It can, indeed, be an academic essay; however, depending on your subject, it could be a poem or a series of poem, a short story, a personal essay, and so on.

I am therefore going to try and negotiate a grade with each of you, which will happen in one-on-one conversations. I don't grade on a curve, nor do I grade with some idea of "perfect writing." Each assignment has its own degree of difficulty, so I add that into the equation.

In the end, since we're looking to publish, you will be your most demanding reader, I'm sure. We will therefore judge each piece accordingly: Does it meet the goals of the subject? Is the voice strong and personable?

By the end of the course you will have a *Writing Portfolio*. As we move along, you may want to publish one, two, or all your final pieces. This we will determine together in our workshops.

We will publish in the already established (by Middlebury students) online magazine, [Blurring Boundaries: College Essays](#).

**Note: Publishing *is not* a requirement of the course – it is a goal, though. Your grade IS NOT dependent on whether you publish. You can still receive an “A” and not publish a thing. REMEMBER THAT.**

### **Writing Assignments:**

Each assignment should be written in Word or in Google Docs (make sure to share with your peer writing tutor, any students that will be a part of your writing group, and me), whatever is easiest for you; each assignment should be double spaced; each assignment, where appropriate, will use [MLA Style](#).

It is possible that you end up working on one singular piece all semester long – or two pieces – even though there are several writing pieces assigned.

I'll explain how this can be done in class and I'll also keep emphasizing this option, but generally speaking it goes like this: You may get your first writing piece to a great place, but you find that more can be done, so as we continue reading and writing, you continue to edit, add, revise. When the second workshop comes around, you would then submit the new, revised version of the original – and on like that until you're complete, satisfied. Each piece will therefore be different and taken as a stand-alone for grading purposes.

This does not mean you need to get obsessed about your piece; there is a time when letting go works in your favor. Nothing is perfect – or original. Your work this semester is to find the most creative, passionate, and intelligent way to write about *experience*.

**NO PDF's, please.**

**Texts:**

There is a singular text for this course and it will be used primarily in three ways: 1. For an understanding of how each author uses writing to describe, analyze, and come to some realizations about science and science related topics and themes; 2. For an understanding of how form and subject inform one another in the writing; 3. As models for our own writing – motivation, stimulus, and technique.

We will write about each of these things nearly every class; we will discuss these subjects as well; and we will use this method as the basis for our writing workshops.

*The Best American Science and Nature Writing* (Hope Jahren, 2017)

**September**

**11 Tuesday** – Overview of the course and *Introduction* (Jahren talks about the importance of Science Writing for the Public); *Altered Tastes*, Maria Konnikova (from *The New Republic*)

**13 Thursday** – Omar Mouallen, *Dark Science* (from *Hazlitt*) + Writing (in class)

**18 Tuesday** – Workshop 1 – Rough Drafts Due in class.

**20 Thursday** – Revised Rough Drafts Due in class.

**23 September, Sunday, First Writing DUE**

**25 Tuesday** – Michael Regnier, *The Man Who Gave Himself Away* (from *Mozaic*); Kim Tingley, *The Secrets of the Wave Pilots* (from *The New York Times Magazine*) + Writing

**27 Thursday** – Nicola Twilley, *The Billion-Year Wave* (from *The New Yorker*) + Writing

**October**

**2 Tuesday** – Becca Cudmore, *The Case for Leaving City Rats Alone* (from *Nautilus*) + Writing

**4 Thursday** – Robert Draper, *The Battle for Virunga* (from *National Geographic*) + Writing

**5 - 7 Friday - Sunday - Family Weekend**

**9 Tuesday** - Workshop 2 - Rough Drafts Due in class

**11 Thursday** - Revised Rough Drafts Due in class.

**12-15 Monday - Tuesday - Midterm Recess (Classes Resume 15 Monday)**

**17 October, Wednesday, - Second Writing DUE**

**16 Tuesday** - David Epstein, *The DIY Scientist, the Olympian, and the Mutated Gene* from *ProPublica*) + Writing

**18 Thursday** - Continuation of above + Azeen Ghorayshi, *He Fell in Love with His Grad Student - Then He Fired Her for It* (from *BuzzFeed News*) + Writing

**23 Tuesday** - Workshop 3 - Rough Drafts Due in class

**25 Thursday** - Workshop 3 - Rough Drafts Due in class

**19-21 Friday - Sunday - Homecoming!**

**30 Tuesday** - Revised Rough Drafts Due in class

**November**

**1 Thursday** - One more go over in class, with new revisions.

**4 November, Sunday, Third Writing DUE**

**6 Tuesday** - Sonia Smith, *Unfriendly Climate* (from *Texas Monthly*); Kathryn Joyce, *Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream* (from *Huffington Post Highline/The Nation Institute Investigative Fund*) + Writing

**8 Thursday** - Tom Philpott, *How Factory Farms Play* + Writing

**13 Tuesday** - Michelle Nijhuis, *The Parks of Tomorrow* (from *National Geographic*) + Writing

**15 Thursday** - Continuation of the above + Writing

**20 Tuesday - 26 Monday - THANKSGIVING RECESS!**

**27 Tuesday – REGROUP Workshop 4– Rough Drafts Due in class**

**29 Thursday - Workshop 4– Rough Drafts Due in class**

**December**

**4 Tuesday – Revised Rough Drafts Due in class**

**6 Thursday – Continuation**

**7Friday – Fall Class Term End**

**10 Monday – Reading Day**

**15 December, Saturday, Fourth Writing DUE**