Freelance writing: from war reporting to book reviews
U49 JRN 356
Syllabus: Fall 2019
(This is a draft syllabus. Reading assignments, paper due dates and final project dates will be settled before class starts.)
Classroom: TBA
Time: Tuesday 6-8:30 p.m.

Instructor: Clara Germani
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Office hours: by appointment

Course overview:
Freelancing can be as dangerous as backpack reporting in war zones or as safely cerebral as writing an oped on a laptop in your den. Good news- and feature-writers can earn a living wage, experts in their fields can inform and influence, and wordsmiths can satisfy their creative desire. If you’re not hankering to be a journalist but you’re a professional – a teacher or school administrator, a surgeon, a lawyer, an accountant, etc – you may want to write about your field in trade publications.

This course, taught by a journalist experienced on the "buying" and "assigning" end of the freelance market, will cover the basics of understanding the organization you want to write for, identifying and narrowing your topic for a pitch, interviewing and researching, bringing your story in on deadline, and how to deal with editors and contracts.

Final coursework will be a semester-long project – using all those skills -- to create a pitch and develop a 1,000-word article.

Basic writing is not taught – though we will practice and I will critique where necessary.

There will be guest speakers who write or edit for national news publications and special interest magazines, and freelance articles to read and discuss. The instructor's background is here: claragermani.com

Grading:
30 percent – class attendance and participation in discussions, broken down as follows:
(10 percent actively engaging the professor or speaker in discussion – this grade will be posted on Canvas within 24 hours of class; 20 percent for written questions submitted before each speaker, and for brief written responses about speakers
30 percent – no more than six small in-class and take-home writing assignments, which will include personal essay, written responses to reading assignments and guest speakers. Meeting deadlines is essential in freelance writing and any assignment not turned in on time will be marked down one full grade for each 24-hour period it is late.

40 percent – final project which will be a semester-long assignment, using the skills being taught. The project will include these parts: an idea proposal that includes thesis, who the audience is, potential publication, research on editors to pitch; a pitch letter; and a final 1,000 word article, that will be crafted during the semester and submitted at various phases for critique and revising with the professor. Submission, sale and publication of the article is not required – but the professor will offer direction on this if the student wants to try. Meeting deadlines is essential in freelance writing and any part of this assignment not turned in on time will be marked down one full grade for each 24-hour period it is late.

Policies:

• Plagiarism, recycling of papers submitted for other courses and similar infractions, will be taken seriously and can lower your grade. It’s your responsibility to know the university’s policy on plagiarism, cheating, falsifying data, and practices of deceit, dishonesty, and inappropriate behavior. It is available here: http://studentconduct.wustl.edu/academic-integrity

• Basic writing is not taught; but writing grades will be depend on accuracy of facts, making a clear point, concise writing, choice of supporting quotes, great ledes, attention to grammar, and … evidence that you have proofread your submission and corrected it.

• Attendance is required. If you have to miss a class, contact me before class starts or it will be considered an unexcused absence. More than three unexcused (work, doctor, family) absences will result in failure of the class.

Academic integrity:

It is highly unprofessional and unethical to copy or plagiarize in academia, although working in groups within the class may be permitted on a joint project or a case-by-case basis. Therefore, if any student is found to have plagiarized in the research paper or cheated on an exam, he or she will be in danger of making an inferior or even failing the course.

Disability statement:

Washington University is committed to providing accommodations and/or services to students with documented disabilities. Students who are seeking support for a disability or a suspected disability should contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 314-935-4062, located in Cornerstone, Gregg Hall, http://disability.wustl.edu. The DRC is responsible for approving and arranging all accommodations for students.

Reading materials will include selected pages from freelance writing guides, articles done by freelancers, basic journalism training materials. The following are examples of
the kinds of “how to” reading we will do – but not all of these will be on the final list, which will be issued a month before class starts.

Society of Professional Journalists ethics code.
The Business of Freelancing, by Jane Pierson
The Quick and Dirty Guide to Freelance Writing, by Scott Carney
Writer for Hire: 101 Secrets to Freelance Success; Kelly James-Enger
The Complete Guide to Article Writing: How to Write Successful Articles for Online and Print Markets, by Naveed Saleh
Writer’s Market 2018: The Most Trusted Guide to Getting Published; Robert Lee Brewer

Tentative weekly schedule

(The schedule will be responsive to class needs and may be adjusted during the semester; but due dates for each part of the final project will remain the same)

There will be up to six small in-class and take-home writing assignments including exercises, reading responses and speakers. Dates of these TBA

Tentative speakers I expect to join us via Skype or with us in class:
Washington Post and St. Louis Post Dispatch book review editor; former assignment editor at Wooden Floor magazine; two or three freelance reporters for major news publications such as The New York Times, Forbes, etc; an assignment editor or freelance writer from Kaiser Health News and/or the Hechinger Report; personal essays editor for The Christian Science Monitor.

1. **Aug. 27 Familiarization:** who the students are and who the instructor is; course expectations. Assignment: write a 600-word-minimum personal essay about yourself for the next class.

2. **Sept. 3 Potential markets:** Who takes freelance material and how to discover the submission process for print and online publications. We will learn to dissect a freelance article to see the process by which it was conceived, pitched, assigned, executed, edited. Guest freelancer to speak. Reading assignment TBA.

3. **Sept. 10 Course project** discussion. We’ll work together to analyze ideas and potential markets. Submit your proposal before the next class. How to see potential story ideas.

4. **Sept. 17 Your project proposal.** Analyze proposals together in class. In-class writing exercise – TBA. Reading assignment TBA.

5. **Sept. 24 The pitch:** How to find, approach and pitch an editor. Guest editor to speak. Reading assignment TBA.
6. **Oct. 1 Journalistic basics:** While basic writing is not taught in this class, we will for the next three classes cover some journalism basics: standard practices such as how to craft a news lede or feature anecdotal lede or how to start a persuasive oped or book review, how to and how not to use quotes, interview techniques, ethics and fairness, hazard training discussion, etc.

7. **Oct. 8 Journalistic basics continued.**

No class Oct. 15 - FALL BREAK

8. **Oct. 22 Journalistic basics continued.**
9. **Oct. 29 Critiques:** By this point we should have some drafts of final project pitch letters and/or final project articles. We will begin to share. Guest speaker.

10. **Nov. 5 The business of freelance reporting** – Money – what can you expect? Contracts (to sign or not to sign), negotiating pay and expenses; time management on a project; your tax responsibilities; libel insurance, maintaining a professional website, etc. Guest speaker.

11. **Nov. 12 Critiques:** sharing of final article drafts and progress will continue. Guest speaker.

12. **Nov. 19 Critiques:** By this point we should have some drafts of final projects that we will begin to look at. How to proofread before you submit – this can make or break your reputation.

13. **Nov. 26** First draft of final article due – discussion in class.
14. **Dec. 3** Last Class.
15. **Dec. 10** Final article due.