**WRPR0363 -Fall 2019 – Science Writing for the Public**

**Syllabus**

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| **Instructor:**  Hector J. Vila, PhD  Davis Family Library, Office #224 (next to CTLR & Media Lab)  Phone: 443-2181  Email: [hvila@middlebury.edu](mailto:hvila@middlebury.edu)  **Course Location: MBH 220**  **Course DAYS & TIMES : T/R, 11-12:15**  **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. | **Office Hrs:**  Wednesdays: 12:30PM– 3:30PM  And by appointment. [Sign up here](https://meetme.so/HectorJVila).  **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. |
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**Course Description:**

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**

**Learning 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.
* Be able to compose creative, engaging—and publishable—science essays for the public.

**Course Materials:**

All of the articles for the course will be linked on the course schedule, below, or when not available online, copies will be placed in a “readings” folder inside our course folder.

There are 2 full texts, however: *Maddaddam* by Margaret Atwood and *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* by Atul Gawande. These texts have been ordered for the college bookstore. You can, of course, pick these up wherever is easiest (and cheapest) for you

**Course Structure:**

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.

We will have writing workshops to critique each other’s essays approximately every other week. Before we get to that, we will (a) read essays/full-length texts and (b) examine and define the characteristics we find in each so as to understand the components of science writing for the public. This aspect of the course will be done in dialog. I will also ask you to write in class—I will give you prompts to help you focus in on an idea, a subject—based on our discussions about the readings.

As you can tell, and since I’m not giving you traditional assignments—*write about subject A*, for instance—it is important for you to be in class and alert as your writing will grow from the discussions and the in-class writing prompts.

Closer to a final deadline for a piece of writing, of course, I am also available for personal critique, advise, and suggestions.

**Grading Information:**

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 poems, 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 and based on my comments for each of your pieces. My comments tend to give you a very solid idea of how I am assessing your. work. 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. We will therefore judge each piece accordingly: Does it meet the goals of the subject? Is the voice strong and personable? Is the science accurate and communicate creatively for a non-science audience?

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](https://blurringboundaries.us/).

**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.**

**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](http://www.middlebury.edu/student-life/community-living/diversity-inclusivity/american-disability-act/policy) to learn more.

**Relevant Policies:**

Academic Integrity: As an academic community devoted to the life of the mind, Middlebury requires of every student complete intellectual honesty in preparation and submission of all academic work. Details of our Academic Honesty, Honor Code, and Related Disciplinary Policies are available in [Middlebury’s handbook](http://www.middlebury.edu/about/handbook).

[Honor Code Policy and Pledge](http://www.middlebury.edu/about/handbook/ug-college-policies/ug-policies/academics/acad-honesty): Faculty members may define additional actions as Academic Honesty violations for their particular departments and courses as appropriate.

*Note: I will speak to this in class: Given the nature of this course, the honor pledge does not have to be included in your essays. It’s enough to know that you are honoring the Code as we work together.*

**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](http://guides.middlebury.edu/citation/mla).

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.

Each is also possible that you focus on a subject that you feel may be best suited by a series. This is fine too. We can determine whether your subject is a series in consultation.

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.**

**September**

**10 Tuesday—**Overview of the course and *A Summer of Madness* (Oliver Sacks; hard copy in course folder)

**12 Thursday—**[*The Case for Less Sanitizing*](https://blurringboundaries.us/the-case-for-less-sanitizing-682786b80e83) (Fatmata Bah); [*What We Didn’t Know*](https://blurringboundaries.us/what-we-dont-know-858e048ce93b)(Gabby Fort); [*Altered Tastes*](https://newrepublic.com/article/128899/man-will-transform-eat) (Maria Konnikova); [*Dark Science*](https://hazlitt.net/feature/dark-science)(Omar Mouallen) + Writing (in class)

**17 Tuesday—** Workshop 1 – Rough Drafts Due in class.

**19 Thursday—**Revised Rough Drafts Due in class.

**22 September, Sunday, First Writing DUE (by midnight)**

**24 Tuesday—**[*The Man Who Gave Himself Away*](https://mosaicscience.com/story/George-Price-altruism-equation/)(Michael Regnier);[*The Secrets of the Wave Pilots*](https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/20/magazine/the-secrets-of-the-wave-pilots.html)(Kim Tingley); [*The Art of Cybersecurity*](https://blurringboundaries.us/the-art-of-cybersecurity-6dc1a49f26f6)(Aiko Hassett)+ Writing

**26 Thursday—**[*The Billion-Year Wave*](https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/gravitational-waves-exist-heres-how-scientists-finally-found-them)(Nicola Twilley)

**27—29 Friday—Sunday: Family Weekend**

**October**

**1 Tuesday—** *Maddaddam* (Margaret Atwood) + Writing

**3 Thursday—** *Maddaddam* ; [*These Scientists Found 2,500 Years of Economic History Frozen in Ice*](https://grist.org/article/these-scientists-found-2500-years-of-economic-history-frozen-in-ice/)(Miyo McGinn) + Writing

**8 Tuesday—**Workshop 2 – Rough Drafts Due in class

**10 Thursday—**Revised Rough Drafts Due in class.

**11—13 Friday—Sunday: Homecoming**

**15 October, Tuesday – Second Writing DUE (by midnight)**

**15 Tuesday—**[*The DIY Scientist, the Olympian, and the Mutated Gene*](https://www.propublica.org/article/muscular-dystrophy-patient-olympic-medalist-same-genetic-mutation)(David Epstein)+ Writing; [*Rooted Conversations*](https://blurringboundaries.us/rooted-conversations-ae82964dfe96) (Rose Kelly)

**17 Thursday** —[*He Fell in Love with His Grad Student –Then He Fired Her for It*](https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/azeenghorayshi/ott-harassment-investigation)(Azeen Ghorayshi) + Writing

**21-22 Monday – Tuesday – Midterm Recess (Classes Resume 23 Wednesday)**

**24 Thursday—**Workshop 3 – Rough Drafts Due in class + undoubtedly writing here

**29 Tuesday —**Workshop 3 – Rough Drafts Due in class

**31 Thursday –** Revised Rough Drafts Due in class

**November**

**5 Tuesday—**One more go over in class, with new revisions.

**10 November, Sunday, Third Writing DUE (by midnight)**

**7 Thursday—** *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End* (Atul Gawande)

**12Tuesday—** *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*

**14 Thursday—**[*Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream*](https://highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/park-rangers/)(Kathryn Joyce)

[*The Parks of Tomorrow*](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2016/12/national-parks-climate-change-rising-sea-weather/)(Michelle Nijhuis) + Writing

**19 Tuesday —**Continuation of the above + Writing

**21 Thursday—**Rough Drafts Due in class

**26 Tuesday—2 Monday – THANKSGIVING RECESS!**

**December**

**3 Tuesday—**Revised Rough Drafts Due in class

**5 Thursday—**Continuation

**6 Friday – Fall Class Term End**

**9 Monday – Reading Day**

**10 December, Saturday, Fourth Writing DUE (by midnight)**