**ENGWRT0610:**

**Introduction to Journalism and Non-Fiction**

**Course Syllabus**

**Course Information**

Instructor: Peter Hessler

Email: [peterhessler@gmail.com](mailto:peterhessler@gmail.com)

Office: 322

Office hours: Monday 12 PM-1:50

Wednesday 4 PM- 6 PM

(Office hours will likely be adjusted during the term)

**Required Text**

Course readings prepared by instructor

**Description**

This course will focus on literary nonfiction writing. Our emphasis is not on breaking news or issue-based journalism; instead, we are primarily concerned with creating a sense of place, character, and story. We will explore forms ranging from the personal essay to the character profile to an exploration of a place. As part of the writing process, we will discuss outlining and editing, and students will peer-review each other’s work. Students will also be encouraged to use the resources at the Writing Center. For each paper, students will have the opportunity to improve their drafts after receiving feedback from their peers and other resources.

We will also learn about the challenges and the benefits of doing on-the-ground reporting: talking to people, observing the ways in which individuals and communities interact, and gathering the kind of information that helps us understand a place. Each student will develop an independent reporting project somewhere in the larger community of Chengdu.

This course is about writing and reporting, but it is also about reading. And by reading, we mean active reading—not just passively taking in information or reading for pleasure. Hopefully our reading selections *will* be enjoyable, but our job is also to analyze these pieces. We will think about how the writer researched the subject, how she organized her material, and how she told a story. Some of the classes will involve writers explaining their process and their decisions. (A large percentage of these classes will probably involve writers from the Hessler-Chang household, but hopefully that is OK.)

In this class, students will do some of their writing with their hands. Taking notes, sketching outlines, editing a paper—there are many things that can’t always be done on a computer or a phone. Please bring paper and pen to class, along with your laptop.

**Schedule**

Readings will be posted on Blackboard, and assignments will be explained in class. There will be three major assigned papers, along with a number of shorter writing exercises that will be done both inside and outside of class.

Please note that the schedule may be adjusted over the course of the semester. But our basic plan will be as follows:

Week 1: Introduction to literary nonfiction

Week 2: How to begin? Openings

First major paper assigned: Personal essay/memoir, 1,000 words or more.

Week 3: Who’s talking? Voice

Topic for personal essay due

Week 4:

Where is this? Scene and sense of place

Outline for personal essay due

Week 5:

Who is this about? Character

First draft of personal essay due

Week 6:

Profile: How to choose a profile subject, interview him or her, and how to write it.

Guest visit: Leslie Chang, author of *Factory Girls*

Second major paper assigned: a profile of 1,500 words or more. Each student will research and write a profile of a person who is not a friend or a family member.

Week 7:

Dialogue and quotations. How to capture the way that people speak.

Week 8:

Set piece: What is a set piece, and how can it be used in a story?

Revised personal essay due

Week 9:

How to choose a topic for a feature article?

First draft of profile due

Third major paper assigned: A feature story of 2,000 words or more, reported somewhere in Chengdu or in the region.

Week 10:

What is the story? Plot

Week 11:

Interviewing: Approaches and strategies. How to keep your eye out for stories, especially unexpected stories.

Each student will prepare a short statement on the progress of the research for his or her feature article. What is going well, and what are you finding difficult?

Week 12:

Capturing a moment: Writing about dramatic incidents or historical moments.

Final draft of profile due

Week 13:

Persistence: Staying with a story. The process of fact-checking and acquiring additional information.

First draft of feature story due.

Week 14:

Heavy editing: How to improve a feature story.

Week 15:

The personal and the political: Writing that touches on deep themes and issues

Week 16:

Writing in life: How to apply the writer’s lessons, and the writer’s perspective, to any career.

Final draft of feature story due.

**Student Use of Electronic Technology Policy:**

Students may use technology in appropriate ways during classes. But out of respect, please turn off cell phones, or keep them on silent, and they should be kept out of sight.

**Absences**

Students are responsible for all assignments, including in-class writing exercises. If you are absent, you should try to contact one of your fellow students to find out what work was missed. It is your responsibility to make up the work.

If you know that you will be absent, talk to your teacher beforehand in order to find out the work that you will miss while you are away.

Repeated absences will be reflected in the participation component of the grade.

**SCUPI Honor Code:**

Students in the course must follow the SCUPI Honor Code. This includes:

--must not get help from anyone to do his/her work without the teacher’s permission.

--must not get help from any outside sources to do his/her work without the teacher’s permission.

--must not copy the words of another and present those words as his/her own work.

Participating in these activities can result in an F. Turning in work that is not your own can result in an F.

**Participation:**

Active participation is critical to the class. This includes:

--arriving to class on time, and attending class regularly

--bringing class materials

--reading the assignments, carefully and thoughtfully

--participating in class discussions

--providing useful comments and suggestions to your fellow students in peer review sessions

--completing all assignments on time

**Assignments and Evaluation:**

Assignments will be graded on the final versions of the papers.

Essay 1—Personal essay: 15% of final grade

Essay 2—Profile: 20%

Essay 3—Feature story: 30%

Portfolio—A collection of shorter in-class and out-of-class assignments: 25%

Participation—10%