Magazine Writing: Being Pitch Perfect

Fall 2012

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Syllabus-in-Brief

Week 1: Introductions: Write a 400-word profile of yourself.

Week 2: Reviews: Write a 600-word review of a restaurant, book, movie, CD, TV show or anything else of your choosing.

Week 3: Travel stories: Write a 500-1,000 word story on a destination, hotel, attraction or any other travel-related subject.

Week 4: Story pitches, Part 1: Compose a pitch for one of your first two stories.

Week 5: Profiles: Write a 1,000-word profile of an interesting person in your community.

Week 6: Brainstorming the feature and preliminary research.

Week 7: Features, Part 1: Write the lead of your feature (the first 300 words) and compose an outline for the rest of the story.

Week 8: Features, Part 2: Write the rest of the feature, 1,200 to 1,500 words total.

Week 9: Story pitches, Part 2: Compose a pitch for your feature story.

Week 10: Revision: Submit revised copy of feature. Optional one on one conferences.

Required reading:

The Best American Magazine Writing, 2011, by the American Society of Magazine Writers
ISBN-10: 0231159404

My presence online:

I will be online three days per week, typically Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays though these may vary slightly if I have other deadlines. However, you can count on me being in the classroom at least three times each week, responding to posts as they
come in. The one thing to be aware of is that I will be moving to Singapore, and there’s a 16-hour time difference with the West Coast. (So don’t be surprised if my responses show up in the middle of the night!) I typically work for a few hours and then pick up the next time I log on, where I left off, with the next student. I check email daily and try to respond to it as soon as I can. If you have a question that you think other students might share, please post it in the thoughts/questions thread, which I'll put up every week along with the discussion questions.

I would like you to submit your weekly writing assignment by Wednesday night. If you are taking this course for a grade (or if you simply get busy or need a break), you are allowed to miss two of the weekly writing assignments, no excuses necessary. Please post your answers to the discussion questions by Thursday night. Answering discussion questions is optional. You don't have to do all of them, just the ones that provoke your interest and stimulate your imagination. I will also hold a weekly chat from 7-8 pm PST on Wednesdays. I may vary the time and date if a lot of students express that they can’t make them. All chats will be recorded and archived. They are a fun part of the class, but not crucial, so don't worry too much if you miss some.

**Mini-Workshops:**

Becoming a good reader is an important part in your development as a writer. Learning how to identify the strengths and weaknesses in others’ stories will help you recognize the strengths and weaknesses in your own. Starting in Week 1, we will form small groups in the Forum. The purpose of the groups is to foster an intensive community and to make sure all students receive peer feedback. Each week, you’ll see four different group folders in the Forum. The first four students to turn in their assignments each week should post them in the "Group 1" folder; the second four students should post in the "Group 2" folder, etc. This will be your small group for the week—you’ll only be responsible for reading and commenting on the students' pieces in your group. However, if you have the time and inclination, feel free to comment on stories in other groups, too. When we start working on the feature story at the end of the class, you’ll stay in the same small group for the remainder of the course so you can see how your groupmates’ pieces develop from start to finish and offer critiques and recommendations along the way.

**Workshop Feedback:**

When I’m critiquing someone’s work, I like to read the piece twice—the first time, I read for pleasure and an overall sense of the work. The second time, I know enough to begin asking questions and paying attention to specific issues. This is where you can be really helpful to your classmates—you may see problems with structure that the writer doesn’t see, for instance, or think of a better opener or closing line. The one thing to keep in mind is to always balance constructive criticism with positive reinforcement. Don’t shy away from making suggestions. (Being too nice negates the point of the workshop.) But be kind and generous. Read another’s work as you would like your own work to be read.
Grading:

For those of you who are taking this course for a grade, the breakdown is as follows. Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting (Friday of the last week of class) by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.

Writing Exercises: 50%
Full-Length Feature: 30%
Forum/Workshop Participation: 20%