Course Title: The Art and Craft of Literary Journalism  
Course Code: CW 08 W  
Instructor: Rebecca Sacks

Course Summary:

Welcome to Literary Journalism. Let’s start by acknowledging that the term “literary journalism” may not be familiar to you. That’s completely fine! In fact, during the years that I worked in journalism—first as a staffer at Vanity Fair in New York then as a freelance writer in Tel Aviv—I do not think I ever used the term myself, even though I was definitely writing within the genre. Literary Journalism is sometimes called “New Journalism,” which is maybe a helpful distinction: Whereas traditional journalism may have emphasized unbiased, impersonal reporting that centered on the objective conveyance of facts; starting in the mid-20th century, writers like James Baldwin, Truman Capote, and Joan Didion began forging a new approach to journalism that was closer to story. In this class, we’ll be exploring how to use the tactics of fiction (more in the tentative schedule on what those tactics are) to tell true stories. It’s an exciting genre because it allows us to probe the distinction between truth and facts. What are the truths of a story that can only be conveyed through narrative?

This is a course for anyone. Anyone who is interested in telling true stories—from individuals with no experience in creative writing, to experienced nonfiction and fiction writers—is welcome. This class will be a place to develop new skills. There will be an opportunity to produce your very own piece of long-form piece of literary journalism, and even guidance on how to pitch your work to publications.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Grade Options and Requirements:

1. □ No Grade Requested (NGR)  
   1. o This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided.

2. □ Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)  
   3. o Students must participate in at least 70% of the class in the form of discussion posts and writing assignments.

4. □ Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)  
   5. o In addition to participating at a rate of 70%, students must
participate in the final workshops and submit a draft of the final writing assignment: a 10-to-20-page piece of literary journalism.

1. I will not be assessing your writing and assigning you a letter grade based on that. Rather, grades will be given to reflect good faith participating in the class.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

**Tentative Weekly Outline:**

The goal of this course is to empower you to write your own pieces of literary journalism, which is really to say, the goal of this course is to help you develop techniques to tell true stories in a rich, immersive way.

As I mentioned above, Literary Journalism is reportage that uses the tactics of fiction. So what are these “tactics of fiction”? Too many to count! But we will be focusing on those most relevant to our genre. Here is a tentative breakdown of the first four weeks:

- Week 1: All about Voice: turning ourselves into a narrator
- Week 2: Finding your Characters: depiction and desire
- Week 3: Setting: how to create atmosphere and narrative pressure
- Week 4: Story shape: how to find your “inner” story through narrative

For these initial weeks, I’ll assign about 20-35 pages of a reading per week: a combination of contemporary magazine articles and passages from our required book, Vivian Gornick’s *The Situation and the Story*. Each week, you’ll have discussions questions to respond to on Canvas, as well as short (~500-word) writing assignments. The goal is to identify how writers use these techniques and to experiment with them on your own.

I will be giving you feedback on the writing exercises, which will also be a chance for you to explore ideas for the full-length piece of literary journalism (10-20 pages) that is our Final Assignment. If you opt to participate in this final assignment, then by the end of week 3, you will be submitting a proposal. I will give you feedback on your proposal by the end of week 4.

In weeks 5-8 we will be turning our attention to reportage techniques:
Week 5: Art of the Interview: approaches and tactics
Week 6: Art of the Personal Essay: expanding the definition of literary journalism
Week 7: Background Research: how to incorporate it into your stories
Week 8: Art of Pitching: a guide to pitching your work to magazine editors

Each week during this time, you will be given a reading about 15-25 pages. There will be discussions questions posted, but they will be less demanding than those from the first half of the course, as we shift our focus to drafting a longer piece of journalism. I will offer short, optional writing assignments geared toward helping you create the building blocks of your own piece of literary journalism.

If you decide to write the full-length piece of literary journalism (remember: a draft of this final assignment is required for a letter grade), the goal will be to create a rough draft by the end of week 7.

In weeks 9-10 we will be workshopping rough drafts of our full-length pieces, with the understanding that they are exactly that: rough drafts. If you choose to sign up for these workshops—you must sign up if you wish to do them—you can expect feedback from your peers as well as from me.

**Tentative Zoom Schedule***:

During weeks 1-7, I’ll be available each week for a Zoom office hour: **Tuesdays, 12-1pm PT**. In cases when I need to change my office hour, I will give you advanced notice. This weekly session is not a course requirement, but rather an opportunity for us to check in. It’s your chance to ask questions, discuss the issues that come up in class, and get to know your classmates. In weeks 8-10 I will hold optional student conferences in lieu of Tuesday office hours.

*Please note that the Zoom schedule is subject to change. The live video sessions are recorded; student attendance is optional

**Readings:**

The only book you are required to purchase is Vivian Gornick’s *The Situation and the Story*. Weekly assigned articles will be available for a small fee.