Course Title: The Freelancer’s Life: Magazine Writing
Course Code: EGL 83 W
Quarter: Winter 2017
Instructor: Justin Bergman

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 option at any point before the final class meeting by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies office.

Writing Exercises: 30%
Full-Length Feature: 30%
Pitches: 15%
Forum/Workshop Participation: 25%

Required Reading Materials:

Title: Writer for Hire: 101 Secrets to Freelance Success
Author: Kelly James Enger
ISBN-10: 1599635496

Title: Best American Magazine Writing 2015 (to be released Dec. 15)
Editor: Sid Holt
ISBN-10: 0231169590

Tentative Weekly Outline:

Week One: How to develop sellable ideas?
You’ll start by brainstorming ideas for two feature-length magazine stories to research, pitch and write over the 10-week course—one profile and one long-form feature story, preferably in the same genre (i.e. business, culture, medical, travel). Specific attention will be paid to what makes an idea marketable to magazines and how to find the right hook and approach.

Week Two: Finding the right magazine fit
Identify three specific magazines that you can target with your ideas for both stories and read several issues to study the editorial tone. Think about how your ideas would fit in the magazine. Would they fall under a specific recurring column? Which narrative tone would be right? Start the reporting process by doing background research and looking experts/others to interview.

Week Three: Writing a pitch for Story 1
Now that you have some research done, write a pitch for the first story: a 1,000-word profile piece on a subject of your choice, specifically tailored to one of the magazines you’ve identified. Specific attention will be paid to how to market yourself to editors and what elements are crucial to get your pitch noticed.
Week Four: Preparing for a profile interview
Like an editor at a magazine, the instructor will commission you a profile piece with specific instructions on how to carry it out. This week is devoted to contacting your profile subject and writing an outline for the interview, with a proposed line of questioning and ideas on how to carry out the interview in the most evocative way.

Week Five: Writing the Profile
Write a multi-layered profile story on your interview subject, with special attention on the types of details that show his/her personality, the proper amount of background and context to fully develop the story, and how to choose the right quotes.

Week Six: Writing a pitch for Story 2
Write a pitch for your second story—a well-reported, 2,000-word feature. This time, think about how the feature would be packaged in a magazine spread—what recommendations would you make for the photography and art? How do sidebars work? At the end of the week, you'll receive your second story commission from the instructor, with specific instructions on how to report it.

Week Seven: Reporting the feature
This week is devoted to research and reporting. Among the questions we'll discuss: How do you identify the people you need to interview? How do you approach them? How much background can you take from the web and what are the rules on using material from other media sources? What is color and how do you incorporate this into your story?

Week Eight: Organizing your thoughts and writing the intro
The writing process starts with organization and a battle plan. First, transcribe your notes and develop an outline for the structure of the story—who are the key voices and how will you fit them in? Then, begin by crafting a colorful, attention-grabbing intro for your story to draw the reader into the piece and make them keep reading.

Week Nine: Finishing the feature
Write the rest of the feature, making sure to stick closely to your outline and including the right amount of character and scene development, dialogue/quotes and background information. We'll also discuss how to handle sidebars for a feature story and how to write a photo memo with instructions on how to shoot the piece.

Week Ten: Editing and workshopping
Learning to write gets easier when you also try your hand at editing. You'll be paired with another student and edit each other's stories, bringing a keen eye to the structure, grammar and other essentials that contribute to a great magazine story.