Memoir Writing
WRCR6218

Course Outline

Description:

Everyone has a story to tell but why write a memoir? Perhaps you feel compelled to honour someone who made a difference in your life. Most memoir writers want to document unique experiences, record something about their family history, and leave a written or multi-media legacy for future generations. Some memoir writers have had a life event that moved them profoundly. Others want to understand and heal old wounds. Whatever your interest, *Memoir Writing* is a step-by-step, introductory course to help you put your story on paper. You will develop writing techniques to examine, organize and translate your experiences into memoir. And you will find the narrative voice that will make your personal history interesting to other readers.

Course Goals*: Memoir Writing* is designed to help you decide which story to tell and how to tell it. This online course is intended for students with an interest in personal narratives who want to hone new writing skills. You don't need to have written before but you must commit to writing regularly over the six weeks of this course. You will learn how to mine important memories from your life, and set goals for a completed memoir. You will learn to narrow the focus of your life story and define the underlying theme that connects you with an audience – even if that is only a handful of loved ones. You will learn how to use literary devices such as story arc, scene, narrative summary and dialogue to make your work more readable and enjoyable. You are the central character in memoir and we will develop your authentic voice and gain insights about how to handle sensitive subjects and family secrets. As well, you will be given a mix of writing exercises to master the building blocks of memoir. We will do short, selected readings of great works of memoir.

Course Objectives: At the completion of this course, the student will be knowledgeable about the different forms of memoir and recognize the key elements of a good narrative. Through varied writing exercises you will develop a memoir skills toolkit that include these critical elements; how to plan, write, revise and improve your work. Your assignments will receive constructive feedback - an essential component of the creative process. Students will be encouraged to write several short pieces in a series of connected essays leading to a final portfolio of memoir work.

Texts: TBD

Evaluation: This is a graded course where a complete or incomplete will be issued. In order to receive a completion for this course, a student must**:**

- ➢ Submit all three memoir writing assignments
- ➢ Participate in at least three of the five Memoir Book Club Forums
- ➢ Participate in the five Memoir Writing Labs. Two are mandatory submissions: the 6 Word memoir and the Critique
- ➢ Attend 4 out of the 6 scheduled Zoom sessions

This course outline is a sample only and is subject to change.

Policy on Cheating and Academic Misconduct:

Academic honesty is a cornerstone of conduct at Western University. We cannot have freedom of expression without integrity. Students are responsible for understanding the nature of and avoiding the occurrence of plagiarism and other academic offences; please refer to the section on "Scholastic Offences" in the current University Academic Calendar, or on the web at http://www.westerncalendar.uwo.ca. Such offences include plagiarism, cheating on an examination, submitting false or fraudulent assignments or credentials, impersonating a candidate, or submitting for credit in any course any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course in this University or elsewhere (without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom the work is submitted). Students enrolled in non-degree courses are expected to abide by the University's code of conduct.

Code of Student Conduct:

The purpose of the Code of Student Conduct is to define the general standard of conduct expected of students registered at Western University, provide examples of behaviour that constitutes a breach of this standard of conduct, provide examples of sanctions that may be imposed, and set out the disciplinary procedures that the University will follow. For the complete Code of Student Conduct: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf.

Plagiarism:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between Western University and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

How often will the instructor communicate with me?

The instructor will reply back within 24-48 hours of all emails.

Policy on Late Assignments

The late assignment policy entails a 5% per day deduction, including weekends, up to a maximum of 5 days, after which assignments will not be accepted and a grade of zero will be assigned unless documentation for accommodation has been provided in advance.

How do I hand in assignments?

All assignments will be submitted electronically through OWL. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that all assignments forwarded to the instructor arrive before the due date. If you experience difficulty in submitting assignments through OWL, you are responsible for contacting the instructor and arranging an

alternate method of delivery (e.g. e-mail attachment) for the assignment.

When will I receive my grades?

Final grades will be available 2 weeks after the last scheduled day of the course. A grade report can be printed from myWCS.

Course Schedule:

Week 1

Introduction to Memoir

Memoir is a sub-genre of autobiographical writing that focuses less on historical dates, or an entire lifetime, and more on digging deeper into your own perceptions and experiences over a shorter period of time. The explosion of self-publishing options has encouraged many people to leave written legacies for loved ones in the form of memoir. We will introduce you to the memoir genre in its many forms and discuss the importance of finding and honing your unique voice. During the first ZOOM session, we will review the course objectives and how to get the most value from your readings, postings and assignments.

Week 2

The Form of Memoir

In writing, it pays to plan for success. For memoir, that includes gathering documents and photographs as well as thinking about what you want to write. You will learn how to organize your source material.
There are six forms of memoir. It is useful to start writing in the linear style: a story that progresses in an arc from Point A to Point B. But we will discuss the other forms of memoir including: outliers, braided, associative, framed and circular.
You will be given a variety of useful worksheets to help diagram your life. There may be one pivotal event, turning point or moment of discovery that stands out as particularly important or meaningful. And this may be where you start to write.

Week 3

Memory Mining, the Truth and the Narrative Arc

Memoir is a surprisingly flexible writing craft. From personal essays to highly creative non-fiction, great works of memoir can combine many things, including genealogy. But the heart of memoir is strong narration – a story told by you, the narrator. Truth in memoir is critical. We have to believe you are telling the story straight. But our memories can be imperfect and unreliable, open to interpretation and influence and prone to misdirection and distraction. You and your family members or friends may look at the same event with different eyes and observations. And that's the whole point. Making sense of these inconsistencies is what sets good memoir apart from bone-dry, fact-heavy writing. Creativity, based on truth, is also an important part of memoir. We recreate the events of the past and present them to readers in compelling scenes that form a narrative.

This week we will deepen our understanding of how to work with our memories and discuss the differences between factual and emotional truths. As well tonight we will review the story arc: beginning, middle and end, discuss plot as it relates to memoir and review the Freytag pyramid.

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Week 4

Honing Your Craft: Improve Focus, Narrative Voice and Sensory Description

The key to successful memoir writing is to find a focus and hold on to it. Life can be messy and hard to navigate. So what memories and experiences do you keep and what gets pitched as you write? Knowing, or finding out, what to include and leave out is how you develop your craft. Tonight we will discuss how to use sensory description and details that draw readers into your narrative.

The way to find your narrative voice is to put your readers in your shoes. You must invite your reader into your perspective and allow them to draw their own conclusions. Voice is like your memoir's fingerprint—only the narrator can give a memoir its own voice and style. Voice can help uplift and make readable the most wretched of life situations. Your voice is the glue that ties everything together; the scene structure of your memoir, your setting and your themes are united by your voice.

Week 5

Honing the Craft: Scene and Structure, Narrative Summary and Dialogue, Timing and Setting

This week we will review other major structural components of the craft of memoir including scene – the primary building block that gives structure to memoir writing. We will look at the nuts and bolts of narration and when to use narrative summary, dialogue and beats. And you will learn how to orient your readers to the story setting and manage a timeline.

Week 6

Where do you go from Here?

We will do a quick summary and listen to student readings. You will also get a Memoir Publication Resource Package this week that, includes a list of vetted memoir links and many ideas about how to get your memoir stories in print.