

**FACULTY of LAPS  
Writing Department  
Professional Writing Program**

**Course:** AP/WRIT 4002 6.0 Periodical Writing and Publishing Practicum

**Time/Location:** Wednesday 14:30-17:30 RS 101 A

**Course Instructor:** Paul McLaughlin 416-951-1957 (cell); paul@paulmclaughlin.ca (email); www.paulmclaughlin.ca (website); www.thescribbler.ca (class website for articles, etc.).

Because I don't have an office, please make appointments by email. I am happy to talk on the phone or on Zoom with you.

**Course Description and Objectives:**

The course provides students with advanced instruction in periodical writing styles and craft with a goal to publish their own material in a course-run digital periodical or professionally.

The overall purpose of the course is to teach you how to write a magazine-style feature article. However, this must also be tailored to the realities of today's workplace: we must look at where people primarily consume articles and how to write to meet their needs.

To do so requires an understanding of the basic skills of periodical journalism, including: finding and developing story ideas, conducting research, interviewing, formatting quotes, establishing scenes, working ethically and legally and story structure.

These skills will be explored through lectures and in-class discussion, deconstruction of existing articles, and guest lectures. They will ultimately be learned by writing a feature article in three drafts over both terms.

**The goal will be to get as many of you published as possible.** At minimum, your article can be published on the class website, www.thescribbler.ca, which I own and operate (with student help). It's a voluntary decision as to whether it's posted.

Articles for magazines, newspapers and websites are written in a non-academic language and style. **ALL** written material for this course will be submitted, to the best of your ability, in the style used in magazines, newspapers and (certain) online publications. Your work for this course does **NOT** require a bibliography or footnotes. You will be shown examples in class of how to incorporate sources into your work.

The goal is to develop a style that is clear, concise, active in voice, descriptive, interesting, engaging and accurate.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are extremely important. If you are weak in these areas, you will have to work on these essential basics throughout the course.

Knowledge of current affairs is also critical for journalists. You will be expected to follow what's happening in news, the arts, politics, sports, etc. on an ongoing basis.

**Be prepared for pop quizzes on current events and on assigned readings.**

How you do on these will have an impact on your participation mark. **My best advice:** read newspapers daily, in print and/or online.

**IF YOU MISS A CLASS** it is up to you to find out from a fellow student or from me if any work was assigned for the following week. **IGNORANCE** is not an excuse at this level.

**Assignment Advice**

A feature article that requires research and a minimum number of interviews can't be done at the last minute. Those of you who know how to produce from scratch an acceptable essay in the wee, late hours a day or so before deadline will find that approach **DOES NOT WORK** in this course.

You will have to arrange to interview people (a minimum of 5), and that process can take a fair amount of time to negotiate. **YOU HAVE BEEN FOREWARNED** that to succeed in the final capstone assignment requires planning and action taken early on. To delay courts disaster.

By the end of the course, I hope you will have a far greater understanding of how to write feature articles at a professional level. Even if periodical writing is not your primary interest, the skills acquired in this course will serve you in whatever kind of writing you eventually pursue.

The course will also explain how the online sites and the magazine and newspaper industries work, how to survive as a freelancer, and how to pitch proposals to periodical and non-periodical clients.

This is a highly practical course conducted by an ongoing professional writer. You will be introduced to the world of professional writing as it exists today, to help prepare you for a possible career in which you write for a living.

**Course Text / Readings:**

*The New Journalist* edited by Paul Benedict, Tim Currie and Kim Kierans

*The War of Art*, by Steven Pressfield

*Digital Writing*, Dan Lawrence, Broadview Press

Rather than having you pay for a reading kit, and to cut down on paper, I will be emailing articles to you on an ongoing basis. **YOU MUST CHECK YOUR EMAIL TO SEE IF AN ARTICLE(S) HAS BEEN SENT.**

**Assignment Submission:**

All assignments must be emailed to paul@paulmclaughlin.ca in a Word document. Make sure your name is on the assignment. If there are attachments, incorporate them into one file. Put your name on the file so it's easy for me to keep track of you. Example: johndoequery.doc.

**ALL ARE DUE BY 11:59:59 P.M. ON THE DUE DATE.**

**Late Penalties:** There are no extensions without a valid, documented reason (such as illness). Please do not ask for more time so the assignment can be improved. Making a deadline is essential in the professional writing world. Late assignments will lose 20% per week (one day late = 20%; eight days late = 40%, etc.).

**Marks:**

The final grade will be based on the following assignments:

**First Term:**

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|----------------|--|
| Assignment #1: | 10% (feature pitch, due Oct. 6, details provided in class)                     |
| Assignment #2: | 10% (descriptive piece; due Nov 7; details provided in class)                  |
| Assignment #3: | 25% (1 <sup>st</sup> draft of feature, due Dec. 21; details provided in class) |

**Second term:**

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| Assignment 4: | 30% (final draft of feature; due date to be determined)  |
| Assignment 5: | 15% (fix article for website; due date to be determined) |
| Assignment 6: | 10% (participation, tests)                               |

**Course Outline (first term):**

Like journalism, the course can change as events dictate. For that reason, I am not presenting a syllabus for second term until I have a clear sense of what the class needs to learn to best succeed.

Also, the following is subject to change for the same reasons:

September 06: Introduction

September 13: How to generate story ideas  
 Reading: TNJ, Developing Story Ideas (part 2, #11)

September 20: Writing article pitches  
 Readings: TNJ: What's a Good Story? (part 1, #7)

The War of Art (from page one to page 57)

- September 27: Descriptive writing and other feature writing elements  
 Readings: 1) "Behind the Murder That Shocked Bay Street," Toronto Life.  
 2) Reading: TNJ, reporting Basics, etc. (part 2, #12)
- October 04: Guest speaker David Hayes on structure (readings will be sent to you)
- October 11: Reading Week
- October 18: Interviewing workshop  
 Reading: TNJ, Interviewing in the Digital Age (part 2, #14)
- October 25: Scenes, Leads, using quotes, using first person  
 Reading: 1) "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold"
- November 01: Interviewing workshop (2)
- November 08: Out-of-class time to conduct interviews, etc.
- November 15: Plagiarism and other legal and ethical pitfalls  
 journalists have to deal with when doing stories  
 Reading: "Janet's World"
- November 22: Preparing your article and research  
 Reading: Chapter One, Digital Writing
- November 29: Optional one-on-ones with me regarding your draft
- December 06: TBD

**Also:**

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the following information, available on the Senate Committee on Curriculum & Academic Standards webpage (see Reports, Initiatives, Documents) - [http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate\\_cte\\_main\\_pages/ccas.htm](http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate_cte_main_pages/ccas.htm)

- York's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures/Academic Integrity Website
- Ethics Review Process for research involving human participants
- Course requirement accommodation for students with disabilities, including physical, medical, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities
- Student Conduct Standards

- Religious Observance Accommodation

## **AI**

You are not permitted to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) in this course. Submitting any work created through the use of generative AI tools will be considered a violation of York University's Senate Policy on Academic Honesty. If you do not know whether an online resource or tool can be used in this course, please contact your instructor for guidance. For more information, please review [AI Technology & Academic Integrity: Information for Students](#).