

CM 316: Travel Reporting Fall 2019

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Course Description

Travel reporting is a specific genre of journalism and non-fiction writing, with many sub-categories associated with it. This type of writing should be both reflective (your feelings and analysis) and informative (facts). It should be written for a general audience...for people who are either interested in reading about your experience or who may want to duplicated it...i.e., go to the same restaurant, tourists site, town, etc. Although the main assignment in this course is to write actual travel writing articles, the course also includes other assignments designed to help you develop your writing and observation skills.

This is a web-based (Moodle and blog) course. All work must be submitted on or before Monday, December 9th.

Specific Educational Objectives of the Course:

- Begin to master the technological and communication skills to disseminate information effectively through the deployment of appropriate communication platforms....in this case using a web-based blog tool...i.e., *create and maintain your own travel blog.*
- Synthesize knowledge using critical thinking and interdisciplinary approaches by researching and writing about multiple topics related to traveling outside of a student's native culture...i.e., *improve your critical thinking, research, observation, and writing skills.*
- Understand and value social/cultural differences and demonstrate awareness of and sensitivity for working effectively in a diverse and changing world by considering professional ethics and social justice within their travel reporting...i.e., *be sensitive to issues of diversity, global awareness, and social justice as you think and write about your travel abroad experiences.*

COURSE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The primary writing and reporting will be a public blog that students will set up on a blogging platform of their choice such as WordPress or Tumblr. Via the course Moodle site, you will also share/critique some of your blog articles with other members of the class (in small groups) to talk about your writing process and to get feedback from your

classmates. You will also be required to read a seminal travel book and give your analysis of this work (in small discussion groups). There will be a few writing exercises too that you will share with the professor.

I (the professor) will send group emails with suggestions and writing tips as well as general and individual emails for encouragement. My focus is on providing students with feedback and advice for finding a voice for their blogs and creating original narratives. Bloggers can tell wonderful stories and blogs should be distinctive and dynamic. Write cinematically. Experiment with visual storytelling.

As you consider the way we document experiences and tell stories today – for instance using private stories on Instagram or Snapchat that disappear within a day – consider how to create video stories on your blog that have lasting impact.

My goal is helping you improve your work throughout the semester. Think about your target reader. Also imagine what it might be like to read your blog in five years. What experiences would you like to capture? It's a good way to think through the process, therefore you will be assigned to a small discussion group that you can share with how your work is progressing, what challenges you are facing, and your agenda for the coming weeks.

There are some assignments such as the Writing Exercises and the blog posts that can mostly done at your own pace and are not due until the end of the semester (with some exceptions). Also, there are **SEVERAL STRICT DEADLINES** that you must meet, including having completed several blog posts prior to the critique assignment. **PLEASE REVIEW ALL THESE DEADLINES BELOW!** *Plagiarism of any kind is a violation of the university Honor Code and will not be tolerated. If I find a case of plagiarism, I will follow the Department of Communication's Honor Code Violation Policy.*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignment	Percentage
Weekly Blog Posts (14)	50
Blog Set-Up and Introductory Post	10
Travel Reading Exercise	10
Blog Critiques	10
Final Project	10
Writing Exercises	10
TOTAL	100%

Assignments

1. Writing a public travel writing blog – 50% (14 blog posts minimum)
2. Blog set up/first post (10%)
3. Travel Reading Exercise/Book Review (10%) posted on group discussion board
4. Blog Critique (10%) posted on group discussion board
5. Writing Exercises (10%) due on the last day of class
6. Final project (10%) not counted as a regular blog post; due by last day of class

IMPORTANT Key Milestones/Deadlines:

- Weeks One and Two: Set up personal travel blog; Introduce yourself to your discussion group in VoiceThread by **Sept. 10** and post blog link; Post your first blog article by **Sept. 12**.
- **October 7**: Deadline for finishing travel reading exercise (book review) and small group discussions; Start blogger critiques on VoiceThread (discussion groups will decide who goes first based on who had the most blog articles published).
- **October 22**: Deadline for first 6 blog articles to be published.
- **November 4**: Deadline for blog critiques to be completed on VoiceThread.
- **All work due December 9** (end of course) THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE. No work submitted after this date will be accepted/considered in course grading. The writing exercises and final project must be online by this date.

Note that while the travel reading exercise/review and critique assignments both rely on the discussion groups, they are individual and not group assignments. You do not need to wait on your group members to do these assignments. Indeed, based on your schedule you may want to complete these assignments as much as a week before the deadline or even earlier than that.

Public Blog Entries and Comments: (50%) A minimum of 14 **entries** but the more the merrier. I will NOT be grading each assignment individually but will give you feedback at least several times during the semester. If you go on a trip, you may want to post more frequently. Students may set up a public blog on one of several platforms. Instructions for Blogger are posted on Moodle, but you are welcome to use a platform of your choosing. Please set up a new blog for this class rather than integrating this as part of one you are using for other work such as photography, etc. Please review previous student travel blogs linked on Moodle to get some ideas. These posts are for public consumption, to be read by other people online, so you should be careful to eliminate typos and grammatical errors. If the blog posts seem sloppy, you will lose points. *You will also receive a separate grade for the blog set up and first post as a way to give you initial feedback.*

The public blog entries can be as long as you like but generally within the 300 to 600 word count. You may want to experiment with different lengths. They should be written for and be interesting to an audience that may find them online. One strategy might be to imagine a specific target audience for your blog—let's say college students planning to work over the summer or food lovers. If you go in this direction, make sure in your first posts to make clear that you are appealing to that audience. The posts can be on topics of your choice and a style of your choosing but assume people you don't know will be reading them.

Also, students should post photos, and experiment with videos, and other stuff that may be of interest to readers. Remember, this is writing (or producing) for publication. THE KEY HERE IS TO GET BEYOND THE “POST CARD TO HOME” POST, where all you say is “I went here and it was amazing.” You want to tell stories, establish a rapport with the reader, develop characters, and impart valuable information, including useful facts and links, and so on. You want this to be of interest to readers who don’t know you.

Remember that a blog is a web-based tool, and therefore the norm for good blogging practices is to include photos, links, videos, and social media embeds in your posts. Each post should include one photo OR video taken by you. However, you can also include other videos or photos, but it should be clear who the author of the media is. DO NOT INCLUDE professional photos where copyright permission would not likely be granted to you to use it (i.e., photos found on photographers websites or in newspaper articles).

You also should try to post a variety of stories. You can develop different kinds of stories and the reading and the writing exercises may suggest different ways of reporting travel stories. Some common travel stories are:

- How to (do something abroad, get somewhere, act somewhere, etc.)
- Reviews and recommendations (the best food in somewhere and why or ten things to do when you are in....)
- Travelogue (but read *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain first to see how it is done.)
- Gaining a personal insight
- Looking back (why place X was my favorite place)
- Personal growth (I used to be this way but now I am this way)
- An interesting character that you have met and why.
- Historical insight into a place
- Comparison (how X place is the same and different than Y place)
- Cultural differences between Americans and where you are (once again, read *The Innocents Abroad*.)

Feel free to use one or all of these kinds of travel reporting stories. However, we will have SIX STORIES THAT EVERYBODY WILL WRITE. THEY ARE:

1. Your first impression of what the semester might hold for you and a first experience in that direction.
2. A story about a visit to a tourist/vacation/nature site.
3. A story about your experience doing something completely new.
4. A story about a routine activity (riding public transportation, eating with your host family, grocery shopping, going to the pharmacy or doctor, etc.)

5. A story that is essentially a food review of your host country.
6. An Instagram worthy story – basically a post with your best photos of your experience

Try to find a voice you feel comfortable with. You may want to imagine yourself as a character. For example, what does the world you are in look like to a college student—not you personally but a “typical” college student you may imagine. Humor is always good if it works but don’t feel like you have to try to be funny.

The key on the blog posts is that I want to see growth. I want the final posts to be more interesting, better observed, better written and more engaging than what you were doing in the beginning. Show me that you can incorporate the reading and writing exercises in your work.

Travel Reading Exercise (Book Review & Discussion): (10%)

You are to write a 500 word review and reflection of any travel book on this list in your group discussion forum: <https://www.lifehack.org/348957/25-books-travel-that-will-change-your-life>

You can select any book that you like from this list. If there’s something not on this list that you’d like to read on your travels, email it to me and I can review. Maybe it’s a book about something historical in your host country or maybe it’s a fiction book that is really tied to the place or a particular period. **If you’d like to choose a different book, please email me your selection no later than September 23rd.**

I read *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac while studying abroad in Australia. It enhanced my experience along the Great Ocean Road. I’d like you to try and have the same experience.

You should begin by summarizing the book and offering a brief review. Then, write about your experience reading during your travels. How did the book complement or enhance your travel experience? Did the book encourage you to look at things differently? What was it like to read the work of another traveler while on your journey? How will this reading experience shape your travel blogging going forward?

You should post your own summary/reflection by October 7th and then comment at least once on the posts/reviews put up by your other classmates in your discussion group (to be completed by October 17th).

Writing Exercises: (10%)

Submit the writing exercises posted on Moodle by the last day of class, Dec. 9 in the dropbox. All assignments should be placed in one larger Word document. See Moodle for more detailed instructions.

Blog Critique: (10%)

You will be assigned to a small discussion group for the critiques and reading summary discussion. For your blog article critiques you will have a VoiceThread discussion where each student (one at a time) will do short video saying what the highs and lows are of your writing so far, and what you have been writing about, and each member of your small group will read a few of your articles and offer feedback (a critique).

The critique exercise has two goals. By getting feedback from more people than me, people who are writing the blogs you are critiquing may be able to improve them. Secondly, by reading another student's blog, you may be able to improve your own. In your critiques I do not want you to be overly harsh or too easy. Be honest and helpful.

Since I want the blog critiques done in time to have an impact on the last several blogs, they need to be completed by the due date of November 4th

Final Project: (10%) You have two options for the final project. You can write a 1000-word reflection on travel blogging as a medium for processing cultural/social diversity and contemplating social justice/global awareness. For the reflection to work, you have to demonstrate that you have read your classmates' blogs and other examples of Travel Writing online. **OR** you can write a substantive 1000-word travel article that is modeled after the "36 Hours in ..." series from the *New York Times*. Pick your favorite city or region that you visited and provide a guide for those who find themselves there on an impromptu weekend away.

Please begin thinking about this project at least midway through the semester and email me with any questions.

GRADING CRITERIA : The "Grading Modules" section at the bottom of Moodle page contains grading rubrics for each of the main assignments. I recommend that you consult these rubrics before completing each assignment to have a better understanding of what is expected and how they will be graded.

Course Grading Scale

A	93-100	Grading Policy: Students earn the grades they deserve based on the quality of the work completed; students are not given grades.
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	67-69	
D	60-66	
F	Below 60	