

Practical Science Writing

(HPSC0151)

Course Syllabus

2022-23 session (T1) | Helen Pearson | helen.pearson@ucl.ac.uk

Course Information

This module supports students to develop essential and advanced science writing skills in order to communicate science to different audiences and through different channels. The module is taught by a practitioner and is heavily focused on practical exercises.

It involves a combination of lectures, practical in-class exercises, discussion and critique, as well as independent work, during which students will receive formative feedback whilst working on the development of their submitted assignments.

Basic course information

Course website:	See Moodle
Moodle Web site:	Search “HPSC0151”
Assessment:	Coursework
Timetable:	See portico
Prerequisites:	None
Required texts:	See reading list
Course tutor:	Helen Pearson
Contact:	
Web:	
Office location:	22 Gordon Square
Office hours:	TBD

How is the course organised?

Teaching for this course takes the form of weekly two hour sessions. A quarter to a third of each session is devoted to discussing theoretical and practical issues. In the remaining time students complete practical tasks under the guidance of the course tutor. These will include producing and submitting content on which you will receive formative feedback.

The table below provides you with an *indicative* list of the weekly themes for the lecture material and for the practical activities. The course tutor reserves the right to change part of this list, or the order of topics, at short notice.

Each week specific items from the reading list may be suggested. These are indicative, for those willing to go deeper into one subject.

Synoptic Schedule

UCL Week	Lectures	Practicals	Readings
	Topic	Topic	
06	<p>Why write about science? Science writing in all its forms, from journalism to PR.</p> <p>Making complicated things clear and simple.</p>	<p>Getting over fear of the blank page by getting stuck in straight away.</p> <p>Write at least 2 paragraphs about a press release or paper, making it clear and accessible.</p>	See list at end of document
07	<p>What shall I write about?</p> <p>How to find a story; what makes a story newsworthy.</p> <p>Basics of news writing.</p>	<p>Assess a selection of press releases and decide which you would write about. What's interesting? What's newsworthy?</p> <p>Write at least 2-3 paragraphs of a science news story, including headline.</p>	
08	<p>How to interview: why, how and who</p> <p>Goals of interviewing. Getting a balance of opinion and diversity of sources.</p>	<p>Prepare and take part in a mock interview panel. 'Journalists' will prepare and ask questions and 'experts' will prepare and give answers.</p> <p>Write a short story, with quotes, on the discovery from the expert panel, ready to be edited next week.</p>	
09	<p>The importance of editing Why edit, and what the process is like.</p>	<p>Edit a partner's story from last week, with explanatory comments and queries for the author.</p> <p>Discuss the edits and respond to them. How does it feel to be edited?</p>	
10	<p>Going short: How to write headlines and social media posts</p>	<p>Identify what makes headlines and social posts work e.g. keywords, SEO terms or other strategies.</p> <p>Headline workshop: brainstorm several ways to improve a poor headline. Write two social media posts to sell the story.</p>	
11	READING WEEK		
12	<p>Going long: Writing a feature story or profile. Narrative writing.</p>	<p>Reverse engineer a feature story of your choice: work out who was interviewed & how the story was reported & structured.</p>	

		Develop provisional ideas for a feature story or profile of your own.	
13	How to pitch: selling your story idea Components of a pitch: what's new, why now, why here? What editors want to see.	Write a bullet point pitch for the feature story/long form article you want to write. Pitch your feature to the group in 3 minutes and take questions/feedback.	
14	Voice and style: making your writing engaging and original	Analyse a longer form piece of writing: what sentences do you love/hate and why? Write / rewrite the lead of a story to make it engaging, distinctive and yours. Experiment with your style.	
15	Flavours of science writing: journalism, opinion, promotional writing & more	Discuss a piece of journalism, opinion and PR on the same piece of news. Identify the key differences between them. Rewrite the top of a science news story in a new style e.g. to make it opinionated or promotional.	
16	Going super-long: writing science books	Bring in a science book you loved/hated and explain why; or discuss the science book you dream of writing. Rewrite a paragraph of a previous story to make it more book-style and discursive. Try relaxed writing.	

Readings:

Some specific additional reading may be provided in class each week.

General

Throughout the course you should regularly read, and critique, science news outlets such as:

BBC https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science_and_environment

New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/section/science>

New Yorker for outstanding long-form science features <https://www.newyorker.com/>

Nature <https://www.nature.com/news>

Also: The Economist, New Scientist, Science and many more from around the world.

Science Writers' Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Pitch, Publish, and Prosper in the Digital Age

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Science-Writers-Handbook-Everything-Publish/dp/0738216569>

The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2021

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Best-American-Science-Nature-Writing/dp/0358400066>

The Craft of Science Writing: Selections from The Open Notebook

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Craft-Science-Writing-Selections-Notebook/dp/1734028009/>

The Open Notebook Pitch Database

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/pitch-database/>

Getting Started in Science Journalism: collection of articles

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/getting-started-in-science-journalism/>

ONLINE RESOURCES:

The Open Notebook : non-profit organization that provides tools and resources to help science, environmental, and health journalists at all experience levels sharpen their skills.

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/>

Getting started in science journalism

<https://www.theopennotebook.com/getting-started-in-science-journalism/>

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit	Weight
CW	Portfolio of science writing made up of two articles.	Article 1: 16-Nov-2022 Article 2: 21-Dec-2022	Up to 2,500 words	100%

Please Note: All deadlines for submission are at 05:00 PM

Detail of assessments

Description, Assessment Brief:

Portfolio of science writing

Working on your own, you will produce a portfolio consisting of two original pieces of science writing of no more than 2,500 words in total, each aimed at a stated audience and media outlet and showcasing the best of your writing. The recommended combination is:

- One 500-word science news story for publication in a major science news outlet e.g. BBC or New York Times. It must include at least one real interview conducted by phone/ in person.
- One longer-form item of science writing (maximum 2000 words), such as a feature or opinion article, for publication in a media outlet of your choice.

Other combinations of articles for your portfolio may be possible, in consultation with the tutor.

Assessment Criteria:

Your work will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Choice of interesting, original subject and/or news value
- Clarity, accuracy, ability to make complex concepts clear and interesting
- Structure
- Original reporting, interviewing and research; evidence of work to find original source material
- Headlines
- Accurate targeting for the chosen audience and media outlet
- Where appropriate, voice, language and style of writing

Aims & objectives

Aims:

The aim of the module is to support students to develop advanced science writing skills, to communicate science to different audiences and through different channels, using different formats. Through this practical approach, students will be invited to reflect on what is science communication, why it is done, what are the social and political roles of science communication.

Objectives:

By the end of the module, students will:

- Be confident that they can undertake any kind of writing assignment in relation to science communication;
- Have knowledge of a range of texts, genres, aesthetic forms and cultural practices, and the ability to produce close and informed analysis of these;
- Possess an understanding of production processes and professional practices within media, cultural and communicative industries;
- Be able to work across a variety of group and independent modes of study, and within these to demonstrate flexibility, creativity and the capacity for critical self-reflection

Teaching team

Module Tutor	[COURSE TUTOR] [email address] <u>Office hours:</u>
Graduate Teaching Assistant	

Reading list