

**COURSE SYLLABUS FOR OLLI
“ARTFUL ESSAYS FOR PLEASURE AND PUBLICATION”**

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Fall, 2018

5 Tuesdays, Sept. 25-October 30 (no class 10/16)

Goals: Examine what makes an excellent personal essay by reading examples by well-known essayists. Then write in a variety of genres, including first-person essay, travel essay, opinion piece, and blog post. Find appropriate markets and submit essays for publication, for those interested.

Reader for the class is available on Sept. 18th at Krishna Copy, 2001 University (at Milvia).

(510) 540-5959

Guidelines for assignments:

Assignments are due by 5 pm on the Sunday before Tuesday class.

All work must be typed, double-spaced.

Word limit is 500-750 words.

One submission per assignment

Send essay as an attachment to erfishel@gmail.com

Make copies to bring with you to class.

Week 1, September 25: What makes a memorable personal essay

Discuss the characteristics of a great essay, using as an example, “Healthy Body, Unhealthy Mind” by Pico Iyer from the *NY Times*.

From the good essay checklist: Start with a catchy lede; establish a viewpoint; create a dramatic arc, take the reader on a journey; use the devices of fiction to make your experience vivid (good scene-setting and characters, pacing, dialogue); end strong: what’s the take-away?

We’ll also use Philip Lopate’s terrific essay, “The Personal Essay and the First-Person Character” to discuss how to create yourself as a character—“Start with your quirks,” he suggests. “Maximize [your] small differences and project them theatrically.”

In-class writing:

Write about a small experience that had a big impact on your life. Start with a dramatic scene and build toward your moment of realization.

Examples: Anne Lamott, “Sustenance,” Jaime Lowe, “Letter of Recommendation: Fanny Packs,” Roger Cohen, “Mow the Lawn,” Jennifer Finney Boylan, “A Woman at the Boys’ Reunion.”

Assignment:

Write about a personal passion, something you're good at or know a lot about: being a friend, parent or pet owner; swimming or gardening; presidential politics or Civil War history; reading mysteries or historical fiction.

Examples: Joan Didion, "On Keeping a Notebook," Nora Ephron, "I Feel Bad About My Neck."

Week 2, October 2: Writing the short opinion piece

We'll examine a batch of essays from KQED's "Perspectives" series (that runs on the radio at 88.5 for 3 minutes every morning) to understand how to convey an opinion in just 375 words. Learn how to write short but persuasive and to-the-point prose, pruning unnecessary words and allowing the message to be clear.

In-class writing:

Choose a topic that's timely or meaningful to you, and write the opening to a "Perspectives" piece.

Assignment: Finish at home and submit. 375 words.

Week 3, October 9: Crafting the travel essay

We'll explore several travel essays by writers including Pico Iyer and Bonnie Tsui and see how they capture place through their feelings and reactions as well as "the sound, the smell, the tang of a place," as Iyer once put it in an interview. We'll also review several student essays from the online travel publication, "Your Life Is A Trip."

In-class writing:

Read a recent *NY Times* "Travel" essay by Stephanie Rosenbloom, "Finder, Keeper" and write about something you found on a trip that becomes a keepsake of that place.

Assignment: Finish at home or write a new piece for "Your Life Is A Trip" (as discussed in class). **Deadline to submit is Friday, October 19th.**

No class on October 16th.

Week 4, October 23: Writing online: blogs, Facebook, and other social media

Explore a variety of examples of personal writing online from popular blogs including David Lebovitz (The Sweet Life in Paris); Seth Godin (Marketing); BA50 (Better After 50) and PBS's Next Avenue (2 websites for readers over 50). Learn the special skills of writing for online media and how to create compelling, concise, conversational content.

In-class writing: Imagine that you are starting a blog and write an introductory "About Me" blog post of about 200-300 words.

Week 5, October 30: Places to publish your personal essays

I'll share my extensive list of good places to publish essays both in print and online media, and we'll discuss the protocol of sending work to editors (query letters; cover letters; follow-up; and so on).

In-class writing:

The literary magazine, *The Sun*, puts out a year's worth of topics for "Readers' Write" and publishes a selection of the best submissions in every issue. We'll write on one of 2018's topics: eg. "Equality" and "Beyond Belief."