

Writing non-fiction: telling true tales

Credit / award	Non-accredited		
Start date	4 February 2016	End date	3 March 2016
Day and time	Thursdays at 2.00pm – 4.00pm	No of meetings	5
Venue	Madingley Hall, Madingley, Cambridge, CB23 8AQ		
Course Director	Midge Gillies		
Fee	£150	Course code	1516NWR003
For further information on this course, please contact	Clare Kerr, Public Programmes Co-ordinator 01223 746237, clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk		
To book	See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262		

Course Director biography

Midge Gillies is a freelance journalist and the author of seven non-fiction books, including biographies of Amy Johnson and Marie Lloyd. In *The Barbed-Wire University* (Aurum Press, 2011) she explores what it was really like to be an Allied Prisoner of War in the Second World War. She is co-author, with Sally Cline, of *The Arvon Book of Literary Non-Fiction* (Bloomsbury, 2012) and is currently working on a book about army wives from the Crimea to the present day. She studied history at Girton College and has written for a range of national, international and regional newspapers and magazines and is Academic Director of Creative Writing at the University of Cambridge's Institute of Continuing Education.

Course syllabus

Aims

1. To develop an appreciation of narrative in non-fiction.
2. To identify a range of sources available to the writer of non-fiction.
3. To focus on either starting to write a longer piece or to continue a work in progress.

Content

Whether you're interested in your great-grandfather's four wives, a famous general or your own life history this course will help you to sift through the facts to find a compelling story. We will discuss the ethics of writing about the past and explore the tools available for anyone who wants to bring it to life on the page. This series of workshops will give you the chance to experiment with your own writing and boost your confidence in creating a sense of place and describing real people and their motives. It will also look at the ways in which non-fiction writers deal with gaps in their story and "missing people".

Session 1 (4 February): *Whose story is it anyway?*

Ethics and viewpoint. How to address the morality of writing about the past.

Session 2 (11 February): *Description*

Research and techniques used for description. How to gather detail that allows you to paint the picture.

Session 3 (18 February): *Knowing your cast*

Characterisation. How to bring real people to life.

Session 4 (25 February): *Creating a sense of place*

Writing about landscape and place. The techniques available to write about place.

Session 5 (3 March): *Mind the gap*

Dealing with missing people and gaps in a story. How to keep the story going whilst being true to your subject and reader.

Presentation of the course

Structured questions and discussions during the sessions.

Interaction between students and with the tutor via the VLE. There will be the chance to share your writing with other members of the group via the VLE.

Outcomes

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate the ability to describe effectively a place or person;
2. show an awareness of the ethical dilemmas of writing about the past;
3. show knowledge of the ways in which a writer can deal with a lack of available facts about an event or person.

Student participation

All students are expected to take an active part in this university-level course. Therefore, all students will be expected to:

- (i) attend at least two-thirds of the classes;
- (ii) participate actively in class.

Reading and resources list

Author	Title	Publisher and date
CLINE, Sally and GILLIES, Midge	<i>The Arvon Book of Literary Non-Fiction</i>	Bloomsbury 2012
GILLIES, Midge	<i>Writing Lives: Literary Biography (Cambridge Contexts in Literature)</i>	Cambridge University Press 2009
THOMPSON, Brian	<i>Keeping Mum, A Wartime Childhood</i>	Atlantic Books 2006
LEE, Laurie	<i>As I Walked out One Midsummer Morning</i>	Penguin Modern Classics 2014

Additional reading: *As wide a range of non-fiction, for example, biography, memoir, travel, nature and history, as possible*

Special offer: Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 18 January 2016