

## Science writing

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**Start date** 11 November 2016**End date** 13 November 2016**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge**Tutor** Dr Helen Scales**Course code** 1617NRX038**Director of Programmes**

Emma Jennings

**For further information on this  
course, please contact**

Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr

[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Dr Helen Scales is a writer, broadcaster and marine biologist whose work combines a passion for science, conservation, exploration and storytelling. Her latest book, *Spirals in Time; the secret life and curious afterlife of seashells* (Bloomsbury 2015) was BBC Radio 4's Book of the Week and a Guardian bestseller. She is currently writing *From the Eye of the Shoal*, about the wonders of fishes. Helen's science writing appears regularly in BBC Focus magazine, BBC Wildlife Magazine, Hakai and the BBC website. She has a PhD in marine science from St John's College, Cambridge and has written about her research for a range of audiences and publications. Helen also writes stories for radio, making radio documentaries about science and nature for the BBC. Her documentaries for the BBC include *The Life Subaquatic*, exploring the dream of living underwater, and *Making Waves*, about the quest for the perfect wave. Find out more about Helen, including links to her writing, at [www.helenscales.com](http://www.helenscales.com).

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Introduction to the course: writing about science – what, how & why? Including setting a writing assignment for the weekend.
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Making science accessible
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Structure and style: making your writing effective and engaging
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Time for writing assignment
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Writing non-fiction books: breaking into the literary tool shed
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Final group discussion and tutor feedback on the writing assignment
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Sorting out your social media toolbox: how to write blogs and make tweets matter
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

1. To develop and enhance participants' skills as effective and engaging science writers.
2. To encourage participants to appreciate the value and role of good science writing.

### Content:

This course will explore the many ways of telling compelling non-fiction stories about science, whether it's a few hundred words or tens of thousands. We will consider why good science writing is important in the modern world and look to some of the great writers for inspiration.

The course will cover the spectrum of non-fiction writing from blogging through hard-hitting environmental reportage to headline-grabbing scientific discoveries.

The course will provide:

- advice on how to make your science writing more effective and engaging.
- practical tips on writing for the media including how to find stories, working with experts including interview techniques, and pitching to editors.
- advice on how to use structure and style to enhance the impact of non-fiction writing.
- guidance on avoiding the common pitfalls that science writers often fall into.
- an introduction to writing narrative non-fiction books including how to borrow literary tools and techniques from fiction writers.
- guidance on how to develop your voice and get it heard in a crowded marketplace.

### Presentation of the course:

The course will combine lectures, class discussions, practical writing exercises plus feedback and critique from the tutor on students' written work.

Students will be assigned a writing task to be completed over the weekend with group discussion and one-on-one feedback from the tutor at the end of the course. The writing assignment can be a science news story in the style of a chosen media outlet, a short feature or blog post of the student's choosing.

The tutor will provide a library of books that participants will be encouraged to borrow and use during the course.

### Outcomes:

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

1. Show an enhanced understanding of the science writers' craft
2. Apply that understanding to critical reading of other's work
3. Look for good stories and pitch them to editors

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Adams, Douglas & Carwardine, Mark	<i>Last Chance to see</i>	Arrow, 2009
Blum, Deborah	<i>A field guide for science writers</i>	OUP, 2005 (2 <sup>nd</sup> Ed)
Carson, Rachel	<i>The edge of the sea</i>	Houghton Mifflin, 1999
Chown, Marcus	<i>The never ending days of being dead</i>	Faber & Faber, 2007
Dawkins, Richard	<i>Oxford book of modern science writing</i>	OUP, 2009
Hamblyn, Richard	<i>The art of science</i>	Picador, 2012
Kurlanksy, Mark	<i>Cod: biography of a fish that changed the world</i>	Vintage, 1999
Parker, Matt	<i>Things to make and do in the fourth dimension</i>	Penguin, 2014
Pinker, Stephen	<i>The sense of style</i>	Penguin, 2014
Roach, Mary	<i>Six feet over: adventures in the afterlife</i>	Canongate, 2008
Skloot, Rebecca	<i>The immortal life of Henrietta Lacks</i>	Macmillan, 2010
Steinbeck, John & Astro, Richard	<i>The log from the sea of Cortez</i>	Penguin Classics, 2001
	<i>Writers' &amp; artists' yearbook 2016 (earlier editions are still useful)</i>	A&C Black Publishers, 2014

### Website addresses

Phenomena: a science salon hosted by National Geographic Magazine:

<http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/>

Guardian website: <http://www.theguardian.com/science/series/secrets-science-writing>

**Note** 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:* 14 July 2016