

# Writing the Mediterranean: Italy

Spring 2017

Travel Writing (Provisional Syllabus)



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## A Travel Writing Course, with a Spring Break Trip to Rome and Florence, Italy

This Journalism and Media Studies travel writing course will introduce you to the basics of travel writing, and offer you an opportunity to practice them, during a magnificent nine-day spring break trip to Rome and Florence, Italy.

Get detailed info about the travel itinerary and costs at Center for Global Engagement (CGE)

<https://globaleducation.rutgers.edu/>, or contact CGE program specialist Dan Loughrey, at [dloughrey@gaiacenters.rutgers.edu](mailto:dloughrey@gaiacenters.rutgers.edu)

**You must sign up for the project at CGE, by December 1, 2016.**

## **Course Description**

Draw inspiration from great Mediterranean journeys, and learn to write compelling journey stories of your own. We'll travel with Dante, Mark Twain, E.M. Forster, Edith Wharton and other important authors through one of the world's grandest regions, as we explore its legacy of war and exodus, cooking and eating, and romance and revenge.

At spring break, we'll visit Rome and Florence, to report on refugee and urban issues, and dazzling architecture and world-class cuisine, in two cities that have beguiled visitors for centuries.

In Rome, we'll interview African and Syrian refugees bound for wealthier and more welcoming parts of Europe, and consider the ways their presence has affected the city. We'll also explore under-the-radar neighborhoods, such as slum-cum-hipster Trastevere and Monti, and learn about Rome's contributions to Italian cuisine, by sampling such specialties as *spaghetti al la carbonara*, and the veal, prosciutto and sage creation *saltimbocca* (so good that it "jumps into your mouth").

We'll next travel north to Florence, and tour the homes and haunts of artists and writers who helped the city earn its reputation as an international literary destination. We'll learn about how the Great Flood of 1966 devastated artists' studios, destroying countless works of art, and ultimately changing the character of the city. We'll cap off our trip with a visit to Tuscany's Chianti region, before celebrating our journey with a traditional farewell dinner in countryside or town.

## **Prerequisite**

04:567:200 / Writing for Media or Journalism Major

## **Learning Objectives**

After completing this course, students will:

- \* Understand the main forms of travel writing;
- \* Know how to evoke a scene, capture dialogue and develop a narrative;
- \* Understand key themes that underlie nonfiction storytelling about modern Italy and the Mediterranean.

## Key Assignments

- \* Read and analyze great travel literature about the Mediterranean and Italy, to develop an understanding of both writing techniques and ways to apply them in a regional context;
- \* Practice developing your voice, evoking a scene, capturing dialogue and telling an original story
- \* Write a 1,000-word story about a (local) journey
- \* Write a 1,000-word reported story about a (local) travel destination
- \* In Italy, report a 1,000-word journey or destination story about one facet of our trip. You'll write and submit your piece after we return home. You are welcome to produce a short documentary or video story, of at least five minutes, instead.
- \* Optional assignment. To raise your course grade by 5 to 10 points, create a 15-picture photo essay, or an audio slideshow or video of at least 90 seconds. Due on the last day of class.

## Grades

Local journey story	25%
Local travel destination story	25%
Class writing exercises, reading analysis & other class participation	25%
Italy travel story	25%
Italy photo essay or video (optional – raises the class grade by 5-10 points)	

## Readings

Readings will focus on classic writing and literature about the Mediterranean and Italy, and will serve as models for your own work.

### **Required Book:**

The Italians / Luigi Barzini

### **Recommended Companion Books for Travel:**

The Seasons of Rome: A Journal / Paul Hofman

The Stones of Florence / Mary McCarthy

A guidebook, such as Lonely Planet Italy, The Rough Guide to Italy or Let's Go Italy (or the app versions)

**I will also provide a digital course pack of readings, drawn from:**

The Roads Not Taken / Thomas Swick

Cultivating Loneliness / Robert Kaplan

The Odyssey / Homer

Innocents Abroad/ Mark Twain

The Pillars of Hercules / Paul Theroux

La Bella Figure: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind / Beppe Severgnini

Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well / Pellegrino Artusi

The Dark Heart of Italy / Tim Parks

Roman Fever / Edith Wharton

The World: Life and Travel, 1950 – 2000 / Jan Morris

Rome and a Villa / Eleanor Clark

The writings of Margaret Fuller (the first American female foreign correspondent)

Desiring Italy: Women Writers Celebrate the Passions of a Country and Culture / Susan Cahill [editor]

The Inferno / Dante Alighieri

A Room with a View / E.M. Forster

Christ Stopped at Eboli / Carlo Levi

The Decameron / Boccaccio

Gamorrah / Roberto Saviano

**Some blogs worth following:**

**Blogs about Italy**

Zoomata <http://zoomata.com/>

Arttrav <http://www.arttrav.com/>

Mozzarella Mama <http://www.mozzarellamamma.com/>

Not Just Another Dolce Vita <https://notjustanotherdolcevita.com/>

Tuscan Travel <http://tuscantraveler.com/>

Girl in Florence <http://girlinflorence.com>

The Italy Chronicles <http://italychronicles.com>

Italian Notebook <http://www.italiannotebook.com>

**Blogs about travel**

The Writer and the Wanderer <http://www.thewriterandthewanderer.blogspot.com>

Out of Eden Walk <http://outofedenwalk.nationalgeographic.com>

Vagabonding <http://www.vagablogging.net>

## Approach

The course will be divided into three segments:

- 1) Study of classic writing about Mediterranean and Italian themes, and practice in travel writing techniques
- 2) Our reporting and writing trip to Italy
- 3) Post-trip writing, editing and (optional) photo, slideshow or video creation

Typically, the first half of the session, or in the case of a twice-weekly class, the first day of the week, will be devoted to an Italian or Mediterranean theme, while the second half or day will be devoted to learning about, and practicing, a writing form or technique.

## Provisional Schedule

### Week 1 ITALY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

**1. Introduction and course overview.** From the heart of the world to the marginalized Old World. The legacy of quest, crusade, emigration and trade.

**2. Writing about places.** Introduction to two major forms of travel writing: the experiential story and the destination/service story.

Please have read for today's discussion:

“The Roads Not Taken,” by Thomas Swick

“Cultivating Loneliness,” by Robert Kaplan

### Week 2 THE SHADOW OF ROME (or, how to find new stories in a 2,500-year old city)

**1. Rome's postwar transition from a working class to a global city.** Neighborhoods, culture and the city's changing social, political and demographic complexion.

Please have read for today's discussion:

Selections from: The Italians, Seasons in Rome, Roman Fever and Rome with a Villa.

**2. Finding story ideas.** Compelling beginnings (the feature lead). Practice writing travel story leads.

### **Week 3 THE IDEALIZED MED**

**1. Sun, romance and humanity.** Italy and the Mediterranean Grand Tour.

Please have read for today's discussion: Selections from The Odyssey, Innocents Abroad, the Pillars of Hercules and the writings of Margaret Fuller

**2. In-class writing.** Interviewing techniques.

**Assignment: Write a 1,000-word story about a journey, using the techniques we are learning about in class.**

**Due: TBA**

### **Week 4 THE REAL MED**

**1. Provincial, corrupt and oppressed.** Writing about cultural traits. The influence of God and sex.

Please have read for today's discussion: Selections from The Italians, The Dark Heart of Italy, La Bella Figura and Gomorrah

**2. Capturing dialogue.** How to include people and their voices in your stories.

### **Week 5 URBAN VS. RURAL LIFE**

**1. and 2. Screening: "A Room with a View"**

Please have read for this week: Selections from The Decameron, and Christ Stopped at Eboli

Take-home assignment: Short reflective essay comparing the film with some of the themes of the course.

**Journey story due: TBA**

## Week 6 IMMIGRANTS AND EMIGRANTS

1. **Shifting from a country of emigration to one of immigration.** Attitudes toward arriving Albanians, Syrians and Africans. Obsessions and stereotypes.

Please have read for today: News stories about refugees and migrants in Italy. Songs and stories about early 20<sup>th</sup> century emigration.

2. **Destination stories for newspapers and magazines**

Elements of the magazine, newspaper or online travel story

For next class: Bring in a travel story about Italy that you like –or hate – and be prepared to critique it in class

**Assignment: Report and write 1,000-word destination story of your own, using the techniques you are learning in class. Due: TBA**

## Week 7 COVERING THE ARTS

1. **Evoking a place through its art and architecture**
2. **In-class writing:** anecdotes and narrative; showing vs. telling

## Week 8 THE FOOD AND WINE BEAT

1. **How a poor region developed one of the world's most beloved cuisines.** Founding of the Slow Food movement. The figure of the Italian food interpreter and seer: Arturo Pellegrini, Marcella Hazen and Lidia Bastianich. Italians vs. Italian Americans: food fight. The Chianti and other Italian wine regions.

Please have read for today's discussion: Excerpts from the work of Italian food writers. Stories from National Geographic Traveler; AFAR magazine; and assigned blogs.

2. **Assignment due today: Write a 250-word report about a Florentine or Roman dish,** and be prepared to discuss it in class. Please also include one captioned, credited photo.

**Destination Story Due: TBA**

## Week 9 POWER AND THE SEA

**1. How the sea expanded Italian power, and gave rise to the Italian city states.** Mussolini's revival of the idea of ancient Rome, and Italy as a maritime power, with the ill-fated invasions of Ethiopia and Albania (the former said to be the inspiration for the Evelyn Waugh foreign reporting classic "Scoop"). The Med as a draw for modern tourism. The problem of sea and seashore overuse, and environmental degradation.

**2. Final prep for trip; review plans for Italy travel writing assignments**

**Week 10 AND WE'RE OFF!**

**Spring break trip to Rome, Florence and the Chianti**

**March 10 - March 18**

Each student will report and write at least one pre-assigned travel story, and will have the option of developing an extra-credit visual piece

**Week 11 REST AND RECOVERY – NO CLASS**

**Week 12 ITALY STORIES DUE**

**1. and 2. Please bring your work to class for a writing workshop. In the case of a five-minute visual story, be prepared to screen your work-in-progress.**

**Week 13 INDIVIDUAL EDITING SESSIONS**

**1. and 2. One-on-one editing sessions with your professor**

**Week 14 FINAL REVISIONS ON STORIES DUE**

1. Optional photo and video submissions also due. Presentations and screenings.
2. Potluck party, with Italian dishes. Presentations and screenings.

**Policies**

**Attendance policy**

We'll do some of our most important work in class, so attendance is key. A death in the immediate family or a severe illness (doctor's note required) are the only excuses accepted for absences. If you miss more than two classes, your final grade will suffer.

## Deadlines: No late assignments accepted

Missing deadline is a grave offense in journalism; a closely-researched, beautifully-written story is of no value if it lands on the editor's desk as the magazine is going to print, or after the website goes live.

Likewise, assignments for this class must be turned in on deadline.

**Late assignments will not be accepted.** Complete deadline assignments to the best of your ability within the assigned time frame.

**Note:** Professors regularly hear lines like these:

"I accidentally left it in my draft box."

"I had trouble filing to Sakai."

"My computer was set to the wrong time."

"Dropped my laptop on the sidewalk; I need time to write my story over."

"Lost my flash drive."

If you are having computer trouble, please move immediately to one of the 16 computer centers on campus <https://oit-nb.rutgers.edu/hours>, or to a computer owned by a family member or friend. Even if your regular computer isn't available, I expect you to file your assignments on time.

## Grades

We'll use the following grading scale:

A (90-100) = Excellent; the work is publishable with only minor changes.

B+ (87- 89) = Well-written and reported. The article may have a "hole," or require additional material, but is free of factual error, and has no more than three grammar or punctuation errors.

B (80-86) = Generally sound work, presented in a grammatical and readable fashion. The prose may need some reworking; and the story may require further research and detail.

C+ (77-79) = Acceptable. There may be structural issues, and more reporting is likely needed. Awkward phrasing, syntax, grammar and punctuation have derailed the piece.

C (70-76) = Average. There are several organizational and writing problems, and the story has factual errors, or significant information gaps. The piece is laced with spelling, grammar and punctuation errors.

D+ (67-69) = Poor work, lacking in direction or appropriate research. Please meet with me to discuss.

D (60-66) = Very poor work. Many things have gone wrong. Please meet with me to discuss.

F (59 and under) = Unacceptable. Please meet with me to set up a plan for improvement.

## Academic misconduct

Disruptive classroom behavior, cheating, and plagiarism can jeopardize your standing in this class. Plagiarism, the use of work (ideas, words, images, tables, code, mathematical formulas) other than your own without appropriate attribution, will result in an automatic “F” for the course, and possibly further disciplinary action. Do your own work. Ignorance of the rules is not justification for plagiarism. Make sure you understand how to attribute work for printed and online sources. We will be guided by the Rutgers policy on academic integrity <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

## How to submit assignments

Please post all completed assignments to the class Sakai site. I will return your work, with comments and grades, on the same interface.

## Special concerns

**Disability services:** Students who have disabilities are welcome in this course. If you think you need special accommodations in this course related to a disability, you must first contact Disability Support Services at [dsoffice@echo.rutgers.edu](mailto:dsoffice@echo.rutgers.edu) or (848) 445-6800. You can learn more at <http://disabilityservices.rutgers.edu>

**Counseling:** I am always happy to talk with you about concerns related to this course or your career. Sometimes, however, college students experience personal problems that need help that faculty members don't have the training to give. If you are feeling overwhelmed or having issues in your personal life, you might want to talk to someone in the Rutgers CAPS counseling offices. They are at 17 Senior St. on the College Avenue campus (across from the parking lot behind the gym) and 61 Nichol Ave. on the Douglass campus. You can make an appointment by calling 848- 932-7884 or you can stop by the Senior Street office from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. CAPS has many support groups for students around common issues such as grief and loss, chemical dependency, trauma and life transitions. You can learn more at <http://rhscaps.rutgers.edu>

**I look forward to working, and traveling, with you!**

