

## **B.A. (Honours) in Contemporary English Studies**

<b>Course Title</b>	:	Writing Your Life
<b>Course Code</b>	:	ENG385
<b>Recommended Study Year</b>	:	2 <sup>nd</sup> & 3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
<b>No. of Credits/Term</b>	:	3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	:	Lecture and Tutorial
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	:	2 hours Lecture/week 1 hour Tutorial/week
<b>Category in Major Programme</b>	:	Disciplinary Elective
<b>Prerequisite(s)</b>	:	N/A
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	:	N/A
<b>Exclusion(s)</b>	:	N/A
<b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>	:	N/A

### **Brief Course Description**

Most of us spend a lot of time narrating aspects of our life-story to others. We do this in conversations or email exchanges with friends and relatives, but also with people we don't know well - say prospective employers or doctors. These stories can be about events in our lives, or about 'who I am', that is, about our sense of 'personal identity'. Often they are about both. In order to tell such stories well we need to have some grasp of the art of story telling. If we wish to put these stories on paper - to write autobiography - we need a still greater command of this art. We need to master the craft of autobiographical writing. This includes knowing how to address and hold a reader; how to create a narrative structure; how to select which details should go in and which should be left out. Above all, you need to find your own voice - the voice that is 'really you' and which conveys to your reader a sense of 'who you are'. Learning the craft requires hard work, but it is great fun and it can deepen your understanding of your self and your life. This course is designed to help you become accomplished in the crafting of autobiographical narrative.

### **Aims**

1. To help you find the voice that is natural and effective for you;
2. To introduce various genres of autobiographical writing, some very personal (e.g., confessional autobiography), others more impersonal (e.g. comic autobiography, travel writing, descriptions of places or events that do not require you to probe your inner feelings);
3. To introduce aspects of autobiographical craft;
4. To develop your English language skills so that you can write with fluency and confidence about various aspects of your life;
5. To introduce you to high quality examples of published autobiographical writing from Hong Kong, Australia and America and help you to analyse the narrative methods employed in such work.

## **Learning Outcomes**

The course should help students to explore and describe important aspects of their lives, to master aspects of narrative technique, and to improve their written English.

## **Indicative Content**

1. Introduction to the genres of autobiographical writing
2. Starting to write: letting memory lead you to scenes/feelings/themes that have rich narrative possibilities
3. Discussion of your first piece of writing: what sort of writer do you seem to be, and what sort of narrative voice do you seem to have
4. Establishing a relationship with your reader
5. Narrative structure and sequence
6. Narrative selection: learning what to include and what to leave out
7. The craft of scene building
8. Dialogue and reported speech
9. Image, metaphor and experimentation with syntax
10. Narrative commentary: its uses and abuses

## **Teaching Method**

The course will be taught through seminars (writing workshops) which will include several activities. In about six of these I will give an informal lecture about some aspect of course content. In about three of the seminars a published autobiographer will read from his or her work and discuss it with the class. We will also discuss an autobiographical movie. Sometimes we will analyse excerpts from published autobiographies. The core seminar activity will involve 'workshopping' student writing. The seminars will provide a supportive environment in which you can read at least one piece of your work and invite comment from your colleague in the group. The best kind of comment is sympathetic, constructive - but also rigorous. We learn most about autobiographical craft when we have an audience which can provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of our writing and can suggest ways in which our writing can be improved. Seminars are the ideal forum for such comment.

## **Measurement of Learning Outcomes**

Through written assignments, class discussion of student writing, and regular individual consultations with the teacher.

## **Assessment**

Class performance: 30% of total mark, comprising attendance (10%), workshop

presentation (10%), contribution to class discussion (10%).

Two written autobiography assignments: 70% of total mark, comprising first assignment (20%), and second assignment (50%).

### **Required Readings**

An anthology of autobiographical writing, including Hong Kong examples (to be distributed)

### **Supplementary Readings**

Miller, Patti Writing your life: a journey of discovery. Sydney: Allen & Unwin <http://www.allen-unwin.com.au/>, 2001.