

WRIT S4320 Travel Writing (Summer 2016) Course Notes

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Introduction

Good travel writing is simply narrative nonfiction (Literary Journalism), with an emphasis on people, place and time. In this course, you will learn how to travel and report, open your eyes and see a story, gather contextual detail, outline and create narrative structure, shape an arc and hang a great story on it. We will also go over the business of travel writing, how to pitch and how to get published.

The Reality of Travel Writing as a Job

Now travel writing is commercialized and most people do service writing: get paid to travel and write a piece nice about a place to attract more visitors. It usually describes service, hotel, transportation, and anything nice about business. The purpose of this is to sell a trip. However, this is superficial and commercial, and it is not real travel writing.

Avoid anything superficial and commercial. The things you write have to have something to do with the place you want to write about (context). Avoid luxury meals and wines because these are not natural to a common traveler. Keep it simple and natural i.e., eating a bag of popcorns.

Types of Travel Writing

History

You describe your experiential trip in 2016 while describing ancient Rome in 20 A.D. (see *digression*)

Destination

Write about certain destination and your experience there.

Journey/footstep

Emphasize the way you get there. Three paragraphs about your journey and three paragraphs about Hemingway. Then 3 for you walking the same path and then back to Hemingway.

Memoir

The only type of writing that can write as first person. Talking about your trip and your memory.

Object/Artifact

The purpose of the writing is to find/quest an artifact at the end of the walk.

Action Writing

The Action Writing/Free Writing

No long, flowery descriptions; write 5 minutes to 10 minutes (non-stop). Pen does not come off the pieces of paper. If there's nothing to write, just write "I don't know what to write." Sometimes write on a notebook is better and more comfortable than typing on a computer. Sometimes after some practice you will find the brain is processing much faster than your hand. This will access to your sub-consciousness, to the extent that you will never know what you are writing about and where it come from. However, you may put the weird word combination you wrote is never used before but is exactly what you want to describe. Although a lot of things may not make sense, and there's a lot of crap, later on it will be helpful when you throw some parts away and boil it down to an article you want.

Write the Imperfect

Don't try to write the perfect, beautiful pieces when you are writing at the first place. Do not listen to the voices in your head that tell you what you write is awful. Do not listen to the voices in your head that tell you what you write is great. Do not listen to anything, just write. Write without restraints. Writing is not the torturous thing, the voice, the thinking in your head (the self-consciousness) is.

Get rid of telling

In the first draft, you may tell readers that I love my uncle, for example. But in later draft, though action writing, you are supposed to show readers how you love your uncle without telling them. Gradually you are getting rid of the telling.

Writing Details

Contextual Detail

Details

A good travel writing is made of details (people, settings, places, and time). It has a looser structure, and 95% of it are details. The good thing about using details is that writers paint a picture and make readers "see to believe." The main purpose of this course is to write details that make stories work and get rid of any irrelevant details.

Contextual Detail

The detail has to be "*contextual*" meaning the details cannot be irrelevant and has to be related to the context of your writing. Unlike concrete details, contextual details are relevant to the story and is part of the story. Not all details are relevant and therefore writers should be selective about which detail to use. Hemingway's works are great examples of contextual details.

Five Senses to Show

Show, don't tell. You cannot tell your feelings; you have to use description to make audience feel that. Don't directly tell readers that the place is beautiful; describe the place to make audience believe that the place is beautiful. Instead of telling that the food is delicious, say that everybody stopped their work and sniffed when the food came out. Write what you *see, hear, smell, touch, and taste*.

Factual Detail and Relevant Detail

Truth

Write what is true and accurate. For example, there are two paintings in the classroom; there are forty people in the room.

Relevant details

Association goes along with the details. Although it may seem irrelevant, some details and truth tell a lot about the story and it is relevant. For example, the speed limit is 55. We can see the place the author was driving is a rural place or not, and we can even figure out the state in which he was driving. A gas station with the price of 1.5 dollars per gallon. We can deduce what year it is.

Writing Precisely: Break It Down and Concrete Details

Unnecessary Flowery Language and Modifiers

Don't try to use too grandiose, flowery language, adjectives, adverbs, metaphor, analogy, etc. Avoid adverbs ending with "ly". This will significantly improve your writing. Keep it simple: *subject, verb, noun*.

Choice of Words and Tense

Choose right active, precise words. Choose accurate, concrete, and precise verbs to describe different actions. Write the correct and exact name of things. It may take some research, but things you describe, especially those coming from a different place or culture, should have their own unique names. Use the right names, not general names and use concrete vocabularies to name plants, food, and anything you see (although readers may not know it, that shows you know what you are talking about).

“Do something” is always more precise than “be doing something.” Audience take their time to read your writing and more words will slow down their reading and waste their time.

Give as much information as you can in a sentence.

The good writing is always plain, true, original, and relevant, with details. In a precise piece of writing, everything is boiled down (condensed). Take a word away, the whole thing will break down.

Travelling

Picking a Destination

Places like Paris and India are being written by so many writers over and over again. Find a place that is bazaar and unknown. If it is close to home, that will be great.

Doing Deep Background Research

- (1) Before going to your destination, read books or novels about/in that country.
- (2) Read travel guide from books/websites. Gain a mainstream knowledge about what to see and find. Know the location—where you are at. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>
- (3) While travelling, bring a phone with data plan. Sometimes you need to find information; when you sit there and do action writing about a building, finding sources online will give you basic structure of this building and something to look for.

Focusing on Little Things

Find the things that are routine and banal. Go to places that are not flashy. Understand what is routine for the locals. Get what is actual like to live there.

Finding a Local Contact

Find the fixer in the business. Find the one who can give you some local insights and are knowledgeable about the place. Follow your gut and ask as much as you can. Ask locals about the ways to find experienced people who can give you the best insights, and the places, restaurants they recommend. The local contact can be found on the travel internet—there are people make it for a living. It can also be a person you come across in extreme conditions, chefs, bartenders, people in hospitality house, information desk, people work in a coffee shop, or people who are selling things in a park.

The purpose of the fixer is getting the characters in your story. Ask them more about what you plan to write. Get their contact information. If you are travelling alone, your local contact can be a character in your writing. Use details to describe what they look like, etc.

Reporting

Building Scopes

Don't write every places in this country. (I went there, and then I went there, and there...) Choose a specific place, like a park, district, or a building, narrow it down, and go deep into details. Write a general, larger scene, and then zoom in, write a smaller place to deeply dive into, hit the character, and tell the story.

Note Taking

Write everything you see. Write raw, rough, unedited materials including every details and action writings. Write what's in the North, South, West and East. Write characters and scenes. It is the easiest way to say what is flowing in your mind and in the end you will get a lot of words.

Observing is a way of isolating yourself. If you feel blocked, start with writing the truth, like there are three trees, or how many pillars in this building. It may seem irrelevant, but it is a good start. Don't write your feeling, and focus on the details and truth.

Recording everything about *characters*. A story needs a character to show the place. What he looks like, what's his eye color, etc. Find and tell something *unique* about them like gun stick to his shoe, shoe untied, his glitch, etc. Write *physical descriptions* on the note like how he smiles, or he closes his lips when smiling, or don't smile. Write *diction*—how they speak, their accents, phrases they use, etc. Represent something weird, beautiful, cool, new, or interesting.

Write every single day. Carry a hardcover notebook in your pocket specially for writing your notes (no other purposes because of distractions). It's better to write when you are there, find a place (coffee shop) to write everything around you, or you will forget the details. When you are tired at night but you have to write, to access your sub-consciousness. Although you feel that you are writing a lot of craps (starts with truth), a few days later you will find what you write is exactly what you want. Don't judge yourself when writing notes. After all you will discard most of it in the end.

Of course, don't write too much. There's no need to write every precise location, object arrangements, angles, measurements, and heights.

Interviewing

When you are not taking notes, find and talk with different people as many as you can. Ask them questions and find their stories. Interview Questions to begin: (1) How long you have been living there? (2) What's your personal history/story? (3) what's your family's history/story? (4) the story, history, or mythology about this place (probably not on history books) (5) what's weird about this place?

Get their contact information and email them your questions you don't get the chance to ask (you sometime need to send back their quotes to get permission). Find their backstories (personal history). Find out how he lives. You need as much information as you can to bring this person to life in your writing.

Some will find constrained while you are recording what they say. You can just talk to them first, and then transcribe what they said to the notes later on. Or, put your phone in your chest pocket with recorder on, and they won't notice that.

Find an off-the-beaten path. Find something that is unique and ignore by common people. It can be a people with a surprising story (i.e. a homeless person found something on the beach and sold it for 100 thousand dollars; while I pick up something at the beach and I worth 5 bucks.) Go deep. Find something that is not on the news coverage.

If available, talk to a high-ranking person, like the mayor of a city. Readers think there are genuine and they will enjoy that.

Researching

Apart from writing details, do some research on the internet (Wikipedia, news media) and library about the backstory and history. The history of the building, the contemporary history, some echoes 400 years ago, the people who lived there, the native plants, or a historic picture I found in your journey, etc. and it can be your lede.

More Specifics on Searching: you should look for

- (1) Historical events that happened in or near the place you are writing about
- (2) How the place “came to be”
- (3) Any relevant notes that connect the past to the present. (i.e. The building was once a train station and now it is going to be train museum.)
- (4) Any well-known people who spent time there or were connected to your setting
- (5) Connections to institutions, eras, etc. (i.e. The place was once the capital of the British colonies.)
- (6) A brief timeline going back as far as you can (i.e. Spring Street in Soho was a fishing spot for Native Americans 1,000 years ago.)
- (7) What destinations within your setting are also historical sites. (i.e. Ellis Island, which is IN New York Harbor.)

Find and explain some basics information about where you are and tell the readers. Not everybody outside of New York knows “downtown” and not everybody outside of America knows the Central Park.

There’s no need to cite things from your research. Remember to say it with your own voice and paraphrase what you’ve got.

Incorporation

In the end, the note will include (1) life characters, (2) scenes, settings, and places, and (3) history/research/backstory. They are chunk and have no coherence. Large portion of them will be discarded, but through rearrangement of some piece it can create a good story.

Notes→Narrative Arc→Story

The story can look like: (see **outlining** section)

Lede (details)→digressions, backstory/history of character/place (another layer)→Experience (detail)→digressions, research character (go away again)

Your notes, along with outlines and threads (main approach), are important fundamentals when you arranging blocks/chunks of notes, creating the lede, digressing, wrapping up, editing, and polishing.

Techniques That Help with Reporting

- (1) Use voice recognition (dragon diction) and recorders. (Taking notes and Interviewing)

- (2) Make everything researchable: download a digital copy of a book; make notes and highlights on iBook and every notes and highlights will come together. (Researching)
- (3) Take photos and panorama, and shoot videos. This will help will revisit the details afterwards. (Taking notes)
- (4) Reduce any noise that distracts you while writing. App: White Noise.

Other Resources

The Black Belt – Field of Vision

<https://theintercept.com/fieldofvision/the-black-belt/> (the video on 6/7)

My personal note: storytelling is not only in writing, but also in shooting films and everyday talking. It's the same technique: zooming in, and using contextual details and backstories.

Structure

Lede

"Do the lede when you walk out of the interview."

Lede is the opening scene in journalism. It can be 1, 2, or 3 paragraphs in writing. In newspaper there are 21 words at least. It captures the attention of readers in its competition with other articles in the same magazine. Withhold information in the beginning to build on readers' sequential reactions. It can be catchy and informative; you can tell a little tale and anecdote. Start with nice and easy and make detail interesting.

It should be the most interesting thing in your note with great detail and best description. Best concrete detail and no flowery language.

Never ask your reader questions like "why I go here?" it's coy. Do not open with dialogue. It's hard to introduce all the characters within the short space and readers will be confused; long dialogue makes reader bored.

Nut Graf

Nut graf is the last paragraph of your opening scene that explains what your story is about, where you are and what you hope to find there. It is the summary of the entire story in 4-5 lines. You should

- (1) give the reason why you go there and tell the story about X (Angle, timeliness/good timing/the time peg), for example, my personal/family reasons (if writing a memoir), or something's happening there/recording breaking events. Make something specific.
- (2) summarize all the facts in your writing
- (3) create a bit of tension and suspense, aka, cliff hanger, i.e., make reader wonder you will get the information/whether you can find something to look for in the middle of nowhere/extreme conditions.

Nut Graf can be the only place that talks about you as first person (if not writing memoir). But in general, better avoid it.

Line Break

Let your readers have a rest. If the article looks like a Bible, nobody will read it.

Body (Blocks)

At least 6 paragraphs that covers what you did on your trip. There should be at least 1 graf with backstory/history, 2 scenes and 2 characters. Alternate between scene/character or scene/backstory like we spoke about in class. (see **digression** section and outlining example below)

The body comes from your notes. There's a lot of room and it is looser structured, and you can be creative. You should write in blocks. Blocks are 1-2 paragraphs that has a general topic and theme. It is the "building blocks" of the body.

Write everything about a certain topic and keep them only in that block (one place). For example, block 1 is all about description of A, block 2 is about description of B, block 3 is about political climate at that time, and block 4 is the backstory. Do not write something in the beginning and continue to write it in the middle. Do not separate things. When finishing reading about something, readers assume you tell all the stories about it and don't expect you to continue to write it later.

The block is an outlining idea that you can move one block to another place (copy-paste) freely without changing or adding any transitions or information. Every theme is tied together.

Kicker

Kicker is the closing paragraph/part. It is a final scene or character that you end your story with. There are several ways to close it:

- (1) Classic kicker (it's cheesy): closes the loop, back to the opening, loop back to the same scene you begin (or in the middle). Or close with similar scene.
- (2) Using profound quote (from your interviewee) to lift the whole story and end quickly.
- (3) Just description
- (4) Describing other scenes that seems irrelevant but surprising (difficult).

Outlining

Thread

A thread is all about you experiencing the place (the trip). It's you being there, seeing things, meeting and talking with people and go home—all about your physical activities. It is the catalyst of your writing.

Digression

Digression is a technique that enhances the depth of your description. You digress by researching and telling the story and history behind what you describe. (*See Reporting-Researching*). After telling the story, the word will naturally flow to the detail you want to describe. For example, telling the history of the building, how it was established, may help you describe why there's a token on the building if there's connections. Telling that something meaningful was here before at the same place increases the depth of your description. Tell the story, digress a little bit, and reframe your work. It's like branches in a tree. Bounce back and forth between two things: (1) present day (thread) and something else; or (2) research or historical to experimental (thread). You can write three paragraphs of thread, three paragraphs of digressions, three paragraph of thread, etc.

You can digress by telling

- (1) the **history** of the place you are visiting (your research or interview) (you can add your own interpretations)
- (2) the **character** you met and his or her personal history (your interview)

- (3) detailed description of a **scene**, an object or artifact (your research)
- (4) dialogue or a humor in your dialogue (your interview) (don't transfer information and give backstory in dialogue)
- (5) your food and meal (something else)
- (6) and more.

Sometimes when writing a book, one may input an extended period of time researching, for example, the history of the border. But in the end, there's only two sentences about what you have researched in the book when you describe the details in the broader. It's like shooting a movie—it took 6 hours to film a 30 seconds scene.

It is also completely fine when you deep dive into your research and tell readers some irrelevant information that has nothing to do with your story.

Telling your research is also a good way to introduce what other's saying instead of writing saying things all the times—it's a balance.

Example

Here's an example of an outline. An outline is a list of important scenes and characters. By creating an outline, you are able to know what to look for in your notes, and create a narrative arc in the end. Each numeral number is a block and each block is 1-3 paragraphs:

Lede: (*No backstory*)

1. **Scene:** Hiking to the town of Gaastroden (T=Thread)
2. **Detail:** Describe the mountains and ocean, set the scene (D=digression)
(*from research; describe **setting** and large picture instead of the view from where you stand; give a sense of where you are*)
3. **Character:** Introduce our hiking guide Johan (D)
(*Character 1: guide, his personal story*)
4. **Nut graf:** explain why I am there and what I plan to do.

(*line break*)

Body:

1. **Backstory:** Where/what are Faroe Islands and what is the growing tourist scene there
(*The history of the country, Macro. This place is usually backstory.*) (D)
2. **Scene:** wake up first morning and tour capital city of Torshavn (T)
3. **Character:** Introduce our city guide (D)
(*Character 2: guide, his personal history*)
4. **Backstory:** Faroe Islands culture, economy, government, current issues (D)
(*The history of city, Micro*)
5. **Scene:** Go to the island of Mykines the following day (T)
6. **Character:** local Mykines man who tells us the history of the island (D)
(*Character 3: local fixer*)
7. **Scene:** driving to the extreme northern tip of the country that night (T)

Kicker

8. **Scene:** Wake up at a guesthouse on the northern tip of the country (T)
9. **Character:** Interview local man, get history and funny stories (D)
(*Character 4*)
10. End on a story (quote of mythology) he tells us.

Special Notes

First paint a big picture, tell the audience where you are, and then zoom in. The body is not necessarily organized chronically—you can rearrange the parts and make the most interesting part appearing first. The second half of the body is like elective course in college. Write what is most interesting.

Drafting and Editing

Most important part of the draft is to get to the end.

Fast, Broad Strokes: First Draft

Write in Blocks, Move Information Around

Stay with the outline and copy and paste the notes into blocks that cover a scene, character, detail or backstory. Make sure every block has same theme. Do not break the block, or everything will fall apart. Create another copy of your original, unedited notes, so that when you cut and paste some parts into the draft/manuscript, you can still refer to the original part without looking at the one that is broken apart.

Ellipses

Leave the gap between paragraphs. When writing in blocks, paragraphs may not be well-connected—it's the gap between information. Leave it there. Don't add transitions.

Use External Monitors

- 1) Photographs, Videos, Sound Recordings
- 2) Outlines for the article (or printed copy)
- 3) Notes from reporting
- 4) Manuscript/Draft: the working part for the final article.
- 5) Internet browser: to search for resources and do research. Use Wikipedia, Google Maps (street view, satellite view, and find out the street name)

Sync your manuscript so that you can read it everywhere. Good ideas often come away from the computer. Wherever on subway, restaurant, and other place, record the good ideas immediately on your script so that you won't lose them when you get back to your computer.

Use "TKs"

"To come," to fill in later. Additional material will be added later. It can be random facts, statistics, additional research, additional interview, etc. Don't stop till the end of the draft. Don't hung up when you stop to care about those—use TK to make sure you keep moving and run smoothly to the next section and get to the end. Don't lose momentum and speed.

Changing the Outline After Finish

When writing, stick to the outline. Prevent any thoughts, "passions" that may lead you to another direction. Your guts may lead you to traps. If you find you need to change the outline when doing the first draft, make a note, but do not change it after the first draft is completed. Talk to your editor and do a revised outline.

Medium Strokes: Second Draft, Self-Editing

Tense, Dialogue

Read through the draft and make sure the tense is consistent and not mixed up. Think about dialogue and extended quotes; use your gut feelings and cut excessive quotes.

Pacing

Pace deep research and digressions. Make sure they have similar pacing—not too long, have the same length in each block, not irrelevant. Appropriate portion of lede, body, and kicker. Number of paragraph of thread and digression should be even.

Withholding, Imbalance, Cliff Hanger

Be restrained. Use contextual details and withhold information to put *question marks* among readers to urge them to finish the story. Just write around. Tease readers in the beginning (lede). The goal is to create suspense and tension, and make readers uncomfortable. Leave readers in the dark. And then feed them with details and actions before revealing. Sequentially bring readers through story. Show don't tell.

Leave the juicy details (relate to characters or play) and reveal them in the end. It is purposeful and aims to achieve emotional reactions and echoes and make readers worth reading through constant state of imbalance.

Withholding information→Question mark and darkness→Imbalance
Details→**Reveal information** in the end (pay-off moment)

Pull out and cut good information from paragraphs and place them every 5-6 paragraphs later. An article with missing information is intriguing. Cliff hanger is usually placed at the end of paragraph and it is planted later on.

Connection, Echoes

All the digression can be connected or floating (not connected). It may be a little hard but all your digressions, characters may be connected in some way in your article. It requires deep research and interview, and it can be a good suspense when readers find out the connection you set in the later paragraph.

Characterization

Make sure your character is real. Your reader can see, smell, hear, taste, and touch.

Mile Marker

A mile marker is a simple sentence reminder of what we will be talking about next, like “around the corner” “looking down...” “down the street.” Make sure you are dropping mile markers every now and then.

Avoid Getting Hung Up

If you stuck on one sentence or paragraph when self-editing, leave it there. Do a second read and move on, it will solve.

Small Strokes: Last Draft

Working on vocabularies, spelling, grammar, and sentence structure.

Keep It Simple

Subject, verb, noun. Small words/sentences, complex ideas. Use active verbs, concrete detail with few modifiers, and contextual detail that is highly relevant to the story.

Getting Fresh Eyes

Getting the draft done early and settle it down for a while. Print out a hard copy and read it to find grammar errors; write on laptop and read on iPad; invite another person to read your draft (they will find your errors, point out parts that are “meaningless” and parts requires more info while you didn’t think about). (To avoid blindness to your mistake.)

Putting the piece down for a couple of weeks and then picking it up. Go through it with a red pen and smooth out all of the sentences, paragraphs, and blocks. Send it to some friends and get their feedback, then go through it one more time before sending it out for publication

Narrative Traps and Suggestions

1. You Can’t Make Readers Happy, But You Can Lose Them Easily

2. Don’t Worry About First Paragraph

Don’t be self-censored. Write the first few paragraphs without worrying and write smoothly.

3. Avoid First Person and Talking about Yourself

Avoid writing in the first person at all cost (except memoir). The job is to make the readers feel like the first person through your description.

No diary and self-centered piece. Nobody cares about you; they care about what you see. (A few first person in nut graf is fine but try to avoid it.)

4. Avoid How You Feel

“kill your baby.” The things you care and write about may not be important to your readers. Be ready to delete your favorite, precious lines. You are not readers.

5. Avoid Being Sentimental, Flowery, and Whimsical

6. Maintain Informal Personal Voice

Use basic vocabulary and say what it is. Be casual and plain. Elegant, simple expression is the goal. Write sparsely. Remain personal, self-deprecating. Do no show off or mock readers in a condescending way.

7. Avoid the Following

- (1) “I was once happy (A) and sad (Not A).”
- (2) “Once again,” I found myself in...
- (3) The sky is hovered and clouds below... (It is saying white is white and unnecessary)
- (4) The sky is hovered “as I” entered the... (slow down description)
- (5) “apparently” “Here I was” (cliché, coy, canned, and sarcastic)
- (6) This is “a land of” ...
- (7) “enthraling” “enthralled” (show don’t tell)
- (8) “itch” (urge) travel “itch”.

8. Don’t Open with Dialogue

9. Don’t Ask Questions

Don’t ask questions. (i.e. “something crashes down through the brush, sounding awfully large—a big bat? A turkey vulture? An ocelot?”) you are the person who see it, not the readers.

10. No Foreign Words

No italics and foreign words. Describe everything in English unless the foreign word is relevant to the story and gives contextual details like the name of a local beer. It is also good to give readers a clue about what it means after saying the word by adding description at the end of the sentence.

11. No Double Negative

Just say positive.

12. Don't Personify Everything

"Mountain is like an old lady; the sky is full of crying tears." Mountain is mountain and sky is sky. They are not people.

13. Make Analogy that Everyone Knows

"If you want to see the invisible world, look at the visible one." Howard Nemerov, "On Metaphor"

Write something not tangible/readers don't know by describing something tangible/they know and can relate to. Example: as tall as Empire State Building; secret guarded like a nuclear arm place.

14. Go Deeper

Proceeds your writing **deeper and deeper**. A good example: "when I lived on Schermerhorn Street I used to sit and watch the Moorish garden, symmetrically planted with curving lines of white stones laid out in the earth, and they would sit in white robes—twenty or thirty of them, eating at a long table, and served by their women who wore the flowering purple and rose togas of the East."

15. Don't Write Convolved Sentence That Doesn't Make Sense

"My first misperception was distance." WTF does that mean? The author was trying to say his 20 min drive turned to 6 hrs. Just say 20 min to 6 hrs. don't write convolved vocabularies and sentences that are indecipherable. People write these kind of stuff to prevent people understanding it and criticizing it.

16. Avoid Transitions

Avoid direct transition words like "and, although, however, etc." Let your words flow naturally. When you describe different things, the best writing will lead readers know your transition without words that indicates that transition. Be okay with sudden abrupt movement from A to B.

17. Use Past Tense

Be consistent with tense. It gives more flexibility to write in past tense, but you can also write in present tense.

18. Use Standard Font and Style

1.5 space, Times New Roman. No indented paragraph to make it easier for graphic designer (no strict rules).

19. Present Both Sides

Present both bright side and dark side of what you write, if it has both sides.

Pitching

Pitch Letter

A rule to know: Editors hate Public Relations people. You can do simultaneous submissions (more than one magazine). Subject: Your Destination

- (1) Opening: Start with first person and familiar greeting. Be casual to show that you are confident. Address to a specific person, do not say "to whom it may concern."
Hey/Dear John, How's it going?
- (2) Tell what it is and don't do title—it's cheesy. Read their magazines and know what they run, how they run, whether they have run this story before. If it's less than 7 years, make sure it is fresh pitch.
I have a story you might be interested in. I really like the feature you did at...
- (3) Perfect summary of your story in 3 lines.
I. Destination and general gist. *Colonial Tour at Williamsburg; Surfing tour at Japan.*
II. Say deeper. When did you there and why you write this. *It is incredible!*
- (4) Closing: *Thank you so much for considering this. Looking forward to talking to you.*
Write your name, number, and email address at the end. *Sincerely, XXX.*
Attach the spec piece. Microsoft Word, Times New Romans, 12 fonts, 1.5 space, bold headline with word counts and byline (by XXX).

Media to Pitch

Lonely Planet	http://www.lonelyplanet.com/
World Hum	http://www.worldhum.com/
Nowhere	http://nowheremag.com/
Frommer's	http://www.frommers.com/
Budget Travel	http://www.budgettravel.com/
Mediabistro	https://www.mediabistro.com/
Matador	http://matadornetwork.com/
The Atlantic	http://www.theatlantic.com/
Afar	http://www.afar.com/
The Huffington Post	http://www.huffingtonpost.com/
Departures	http://www.departures.com/
Condé Nast	http://www.cntraveler.com/
Reader's Digest	http://www.rd.com/
Outside	http://www.outsideonline.com/
Buzzfeed	https://www.buzzfeed.com/travel
The New Yorker	http://www.newyorker.com/
Cat Fancy	
Inflight magazines	
Community of Literary Magazines and Presses	http://www.clmp.org/

Some magazines require you to write what they want and to follow their "templates."

Following Up

2 weeks after sending out, if you don't hear back, just write them back. Do it short. *"Just write to check in if you..."*

3-4 weeks not hearing them, do it again, wait till they say no. Some editors have filters and won't see your email after a long time. When waiting their replies, prepare to move on.

Polishing Your Portfolio

One clip and simple. Write awards, degree, and workshops you have attended. Make a website for you. Print business cards with professional, or school logos. Sometimes you can get a media pass when travelling and you can get access to some cool place not open to public.

Final Checklist and Reminders

Writing

1. Show don't tell. Write what you see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.
2. Begin with simple, quiet, nice and easy: subject, verb, and noun. Make detail interesting.
3. Write in a non-descending tone and give readers credits. For memoir piece, say something self-deprecating, like "I'm lost," "I'm idiot."
4. Create a dialogue with your readers and you want readers to question you. After reading the first nut graf, they want to prove you are wrong.
5. Write precisely: name things, people, and action; no vague and general terms like "everything, something, a place".
6. Write the truth.
7. Short, concrete detail with few modifiers (concisely). Give as much information as you can in a single sentence. Do not use transitions or adverbs (words that end in "ly") and use as few adjectives as possible.
8. Contextual detail that is highly relevant to the story. (Be selective).
9. Use active verbs.
10. Don't write for your own pleasure.
11. Don't let passion blind you and write more and more which leads to digression (from outline).
12. Solid backstory and history.
13. Limited attention span: when you write be sure to rest (Pomodoro Technique) to keep your attention; your article should also keep readers attention (cliff hangers, line breaks, be restraint and withhold information a few times).
14. Find a specific angle to tell readers why you are there and find a theme that is connected through threads and digressions.
15. Write in blocks, keeping all info about a character, scene, detail or backstory contained in one series of paragraphs.
16. Build the scope, write from large scene to small details.
17. Find connections and common themes, create suspense and imbalance.

Editing

1. You are your own worst editor (do not self-censor; look for fresh eyes)
2. Balance your thread and digression (pacing).
3. After your draft, smooth things out, and put it down for some time for fresh eyes.
4. Do not add transitions, but feel free to reword phrases to make them more readable. Do not try to be fancy, simply tell it like it is and keep as many of the original descriptions and lines from your notes as you can. Those are usually the most powerful. It is ok to smooth things over, though, and make your story flow from start to finish.