

Life Writing Masterclass

Dates	Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 August 2022
Times	10.30–17.00
Location	Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre, British Library
Level	Beginners
Class size	Maximum 16 participants

Course description

Do you have a true story to tell? Whether the subject is you, your grandfather or Mary Queen of Scots, this two-day masterclass will explore the different ways in which your story can be told. This might be your first venture into the world of life-writing, or you might be halfway through a project. Either way, with the expert guidance of veteran biographer Frances Wilson, you will have the opportunity to hone your writing and develop your ideas in a creative, focused and supportive environment.

Please email adultlearning@bl.uk to discuss your access requirements as soon as you have booked your ticket.

Programme

Saturday 13 August

Life-writing in all its forms – memoir, autobiography, autofiction, biography, micro-biography, macro-biography, fictional biography and biographical fiction - is a rich and varied genre. On our first day we will decide which genre is best for you and consider voice, character, plot and narrative tension. Using excerpts from a variety of examples, we will discuss perspective, how to bring your characters to life, how to plan and structure your story, how to plot events, and how to produce dialogue which will keep the reader glued to the page. With writing exercises, Frances will help you find, or refine, your voice.

At the end of the first day, you will be given a short project to be completed for the Sunday morning. Please allow time in the evening for this.

Sunday 14 August

On our second day we will begin by reading and discussing your written work and how you might develop it further. Frances will lead the group in considering how to write a memoir if you have no memories, how to describe place without sounding like a travel brochure, how to negotiate the feelings of family members who may not want to be written about, and how to interpret letters, diaries and photographs. Participants are encouraged to bring along any relevant items to your life-writing such as postcards, manuscripts, diaries, newspaper cuttings, and ephemera. We'll discuss how to cite sources in your work and how and where to find more material. We will end with a summative discussion about developing your life-writing from here, including publishing possibilities.

Tutor

Frances Wilson is a biographer and critic with twenty years' experience of teaching life-writing. Her books include *The Ballad of Dorothy Wordsworth* (Faber, 2008, winner of the British Academy Rose Mary Crawshay Prize), *How to Survive the Titanic: Or, the Sinking of J Bruce Ismay* (Bloomsbury, 2011, winner of the Elizabeth Longford Prize for Historical Biography), and *Guilty Thing: A Life of Thomas De Quincey* (Bloomsbury, 2016, longlisted for the Baillie Gifford Prize, and shortlisted for the Historical Writers Association Non-Fiction Crown, the National Book Critics Circle Award, The Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and the Biographer's International Organisation Plutarch Prize), and *Burning Man: The Ascent of D H Lawrence* (Bloomsbury, 2021, longlisted for the Baillie Gifford Prize). She is currently writing a life of Muriel Spark.

Previous knowledge or experience

None required.

Facilities and Refreshments

On Saturday please gather outside the Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre, located on the lower ground floor of the Library, from 10.15am. The course will begin promptly at 10.30am.

On Sunday participants should **gather at Gate 5 on Midland Road from 10.15am**. You will be escorted into the building by a staff member at 10.25am. Further instructions will be emailed to you ahead of the course.

Tea and coffee will be provided in the morning on both days. Participants must make their own arrangements for lunch.

Accessibility

Please email adultlearning@bl.uk to discuss your access needs and we will do our best to meet them.
