

## SCIS316: Writing about science, health and the environment

June-October 2024 (T2), 15 points

*The pandemic clarified that science is inseparable from the rest of society, and that connection works both ways. Science touches on everything; everything touches on science.*

Ed Yong, *The Atlantic*, 2021

*Never has there been a greater need for writers who can communicate about the environment in such clear, immediate and powerful ways, who can envisage the past as well as the future.*

Isabella Tree, *Granta*, 2020

This workshop focuses on creative nonfiction writing on topics in science, health and the environment. You'll work with award-winning science writer Rebecca Priestley and will explore a diverse range of creative nonfiction – including essay, reportage, memoir, travel narrative, and biography. Whether you're a specialist in a particular branch of science; a health researcher, practitioner or consumer; an environmental enthusiast or activist; or a writer or student wanting to engage more deeply with these topics, this course will support you to write creatively and convincingly about science, health and the environment.

**Course readings:** Students will be provided with a printed course reader with additional readings provided online. In 2024, the reading list will include local writers such as Emma Wehipeihana, Nic Low, Maia Ingoe and Ingrid Horrocks as well as international writers such as Ed Yong, Angèle Saini, Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, Robert Macfarlane, Rebecca Skloot, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Hope Jahren and more.

**Workshops:** Workshops will focus on discussion of set readings and presentation and discussion of student work. The first six weeks of the course will include weekly writing exercises and in the second six weeks of the course students will focus exclusively on their writing portfolio. Weekly workshops will be held on the university's Kelburn campus on Fridays, 10am-1pm, starting 12 July and concluding 11 October.

**Assessment:** SCIS316 is 100% internally assessed, based on your creative nonfiction writing portfolio (80%), a written reflection on three pieces of writing that have informed your own work (10%), and your feedback on other students' work in progress (10%). Each portfolio will be assessed by the workshop coordinator and one external assessor.

**Applications:** Workshop numbers are limited to 12 students. Please apply by 3 June 2024 by sending a 5 to 10 page writing sample and a cover letter to Rebecca Priestley at [Rebecca.Priestley@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Rebecca.Priestley@vuw.ac.nz).

In your **Cover Letter**, please introduce yourself and tell us why you want to do this course. Is there a topic you're particularly interested in writing about (it's fine if there's not)? If you're an existing student, what else you're studying? Or what line of work are you in? Where do you feel you fit on the 'science, health and the environment' continuum? Are you interested in writing about all these areas or one maybe more than others? In your **Writing Sample**, please don't

send an academic essay, rather we want to know how *you* write. Please send something that is for a general rather than an academic audience. It could be published or unpublished, part of a personal essay, a magazine article, an opinion piece, or something else.

**Workshop coordinator:** Rebecca Priestley is a professor in the School of Science in Society, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington. She has written widely about topics in science, health and the environment, with a focus on climate change, sea level rise, nuclear issues and anxiety. She taught CREW352: Science writing workshop at the International Institute of Modern Letters with Ashleigh Young from 2013-2018, and launched this course as a special topic in 2022. She was the *Listener* science columnist for six years and her writing has also been published at *Scientific American online*, and in *Granta*, *Griffith Review*, *North and South* and *New Zealand Geographic*. Her creative nonfiction books include Antarctic eco-memoir, *Fifteen Million Years in Antarctica* (2019) and *End Times* (2023). She was the winner of the Prime Minister's Prize for Science Communication 2016, the Royal Society of New Zealand Science Book Prize 2009 and has twice been longlisted for the Ockham Book Awards General Nonfiction Prize (2020, 2024).



School of Science in Society Pūtaiao ki te Pāpori  
Wellington Faculty of Science Te Wāhanga Pūtaiao  
VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON Te Herenga Waka  
PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand  
<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/science/schools/science-in-society>