

Travel Writing — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a finished, pitchable piece. Each section maps to one course module and combines guided exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists you can run on your own trips and drafts. Work through it in order: by the last page you will have a controlling idea, a field-notes system, rendered scenes, a living sense of place, a braided inner journey, an ethics review, and a travel piece pitched to real editors.

From Trip to Story

Find the one idea inside a journey worth telling, then learn to observe and research a place like a writer.

Exercise: Trip-to-Story Sprint

Set a 20-minute timer. Pick a trip you have actually taken. Draft ten candidate situation sentences from it, naming specific places and moments, then convert your three strongest into story sentences using the formula: In [place], I came to understand [insight]. Circle the one whose meaning surprised you.

- List ten true situations from the trip in one sentence each (an arrival, an encounter, a wrong turn, a meal, a moment of doubt).

• For your three strongest, complete: In ____, I came to understand ____.

• Apply the disagreement test: could two thoughtful readers argue with this story sentence? If not, push it deeper.

• Where is the gap between what you expected and what you actually found? That friction is often the real piece.

Worksheet: Controlling Idea Worksheet

Lock the spine of your travel piece before you draft. Fill every field; revisit as the work evolves.
Working title

Situation (the trip itself, in one sentence)

Story (the meaning or tension, in one sentence)

The place and time span this covers

What I expected before going

What I actually found

Why a reader should care (the stake or the surprise)

The single image that captures the whole piece

Exercise: Field-Observation Run

Use the five field-observation techniques from the course on your next outing, anywhere, even your own city treated as foreign. Capture raw fragments fast in a notebook or voice memo without writing sentences for a reader. Target twenty concrete details you could not have invented at your desk.

- Five-senses sweep: in one spot, write one concrete line each for sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.
 - Overheard line: capture one verbatim scrap of real speech or dialect.
 - One telling object: name a single physical object that compresses something about the place.
 - Time-stamp note: log the same place at two different hours and note how it changes.
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Checklist: Foundation Readiness Checklist

- I can state the difference between my situation and my story in two separate sentences.
- My story sentence would survive the disagreement test.
- I have a field notebook with at least twenty concrete, specific, sensory details.
- I have a research stack including at least one writer native to the place.
- I have written one honest sentence naming the limits of my own vantage point as a visitor.

Scene and Sense of Place

Build immersive scenes, render a place as a living character, and write encounters that respect the people you meet.

Worksheet: Four-Part Scene Builder

Take one moment from your field notes and architect a 300 to 500 word scene. Fill each field using details you actually recorded, then write the scene from it. Do not explain the meaning at the end.

Grounding: where and when, in two sentences

Sensory layer: three concrete details across different senses (from your notes)

Action and encounter: what happens and is said in real time

The turn: the shift, realization, or rupture that earns the scene

The exit: the resonant image or line to end on

Summary bridge: one sentence of telling that leads in or out

Exercise: Cliche and Abstraction Hunt

Open your drafted scene and run a search-and-destroy on lazy language. Replace cliches and abstractions with concrete, specific, sensory evidence from your real notes, then cut any detail that does not also reveal place, character, or theme.

- Highlight every cliché (bustling, hidden gem, charming, off the beaten path, a feast for the senses).
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- Highlight every abstract word (beautiful, vibrant, magical) and replace at least five with concrete detail that shows.

- Lead the scene with a specific, ordinary detail rather than the famous, iconic sight.

- Confirm you have engaged smell and sound, not only sight, somewhere in the scene.

Exercise: Place-as-Character Portrait

Write a 400-word portrait of one place from your travels, treating it as a character with mood and contradictions. Show the place through the behavior of real people rather than landmarks.

- Open with a specific, ordinary detail, not the monument every reader has already seen.

- Engage the underused senses: what does this place sound and smell like?

- Name at least one genuine contradiction about the place (the holy city that is also a hustle).

- Show the culture through a habit: how people queue, eat, argue, or rest.

Checklist: Scene and Place Checklist

Each key moment is rendered in scene, not summarized.

Every scene contains a turn that justifies its presence.

Cliches and abstract adjectives have been replaced with concrete sensory detail.

The place leads with specifics and engages smell and sound, not only sight.

Every person I meet is a full human being, and no one stands in for a whole culture.

Voice, the Inner Journey, and Reflection

Braid the outer trip with inner change, lock a voice that holds wonder without cliché, and earn meaning without a postcard moral.

Worksheet: Two-Journeys Map

Map the outer and inner journeys of your trip side by side so the physical movement carries emotional meaning. Find the single outer moment that triggers the largest inner turn.

Outer journey: the places, moves, and encounters in order

Inner journey: what the narrator believed at the start

Inner journey: how that belief changed by the end

The single outer event that triggers the biggest inner shift

How the outer world externalizes feeling (a storm, a missed train, a closed border)

Where interiority is currently too heavy and buries the place

Where the inner thread is currently missing entirely

Exercise: Voice Trap Audit

Write a one-page voice sample describing a single moment from your travels, then audit it for the genre's two opposite traps and analyze your own choices.

- Highlight every purple word (breathtaking, stunning, magical, speechless) and replace each with a concrete detail.

- Check whether your narrator ever sneers at tourists or finds a place beneath them; restore genuine curiosity.

- Mark your average sentence length, three signature word choices, and your default stance toward the experience.

- Read the page aloud: where do you stumble, and where does it sound like a brochure?

Exercise: Reflection That Opens Doors

Return to your strongest scene and add three sentences of reflection after it, then test each against the postcard-moral trap.

- Write three sentences of reflection that arise from this specific scene, not from travel in general.

- For each, ask: is this a fridge-magnet slogan (we are all the same, the journey is what matters), or a specific surprising truth?

- Cut anything that closes meaning with a cliched life lesson.

- Rewrite the survivors to admit uncertainty and connect this one moment to the larger idea of your piece.

Checklist: Voice and Reflection Checklist

The inner journey is anchored to specific outer events, not floating free.

Interiority is present but does not drown the place the reader came for.

Purple adjectives are gone and the narrator never sneers at the people around them.

My voice is consistent across pages when read aloud.

No paragraph delivers a postcard moral about the meaning of travel.

Structure, Ethics, and Getting Published

Impose a structure matched to a market, decide the ethics of writing across cultures, then revise and pitch to real editors.

Worksheet: Structure and Market Worksheet

Choose a spine for the piece and match it to a target publication before outlining. Read three recent pieces in that outlet first and reverse-engineer their shape.

Chosen structure (service / narrative-arc / braided / themed-mosaic)

Target publication and specific section

Word count the venue expects

Opening moment (the charged scene I open on, not the airport)

The controlling idea every section must serve

Where practical information sits (if a service piece)

Does the narrator or the place change by the end? (yes / no)

Exercise: Cross-Cultural Ethics Triage

Run your draft through the four-question framework and write a one-line decision for each issue you find: revise the framing, recenter the story, change identifying details, or reconsider naming a fragile place.

- Representation: am I depicting this culture in full complexity, or flattening it into exotic, primitive, or unspoiled?
 - Centering: whose story is this really, and does a community exist only to serve my personal epiphany?
 - Consent and exposure: have I respected the privacy of people, especially the vulnerable, who did not sign up to appear in print?
 - Consequence: could publicizing this fragile, sacred, or secret place harm it, and would the people recognize themselves as full humans?
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Worksheet: Five-Pass Revision Tracker

Revise your piece in separate passes from largest concern to smallest. Date each pass as you complete it so you never mix structure work with cliché-hunting and comma work.

Structural pass — date and notes

Scene pass — date and notes

Inner-journey pass — date and notes

Ethics pass — date and notes

Line pass (read aloud, kill cliché) — date and notes

Final word count

Ready to pitch or submit? (yes / no)

Checklist: Pitch and Submission Readiness Checklist

- The piece has been through all five revision passes and opens at a charged moment.
- I have run the cross-cultural ethics triage and recorded a decision for each issue.
- I have a target list of five to ten outlets with word counts, sections, guidelines, and rates noted.
- My pitch leads with the angle and hook, not the destination, and proves I know the publication.
- I have pitched or submitted to at least three venues and set up a tracker for responses.

Your Action Plan

1. Week 1: Complete the Trip-to-Story Sprint and lock a Controlling Idea Worksheet.
2. Week 1: Run a Field-Observation Run and build a research stack including a writer native to the place.
3. Week 2: Build two scenes with the Four-Part Scene Builder and run the Cliche and Abstraction Hunt on each.
4. Week 2-3: Write a Place-as-Character Portrait and a respectful encounter with one real person you met.
5. Week 3: Map the two journeys and draft a paragraph that braids an outer event into an inner realization.
6. Week 3-4: Run the Voice Trap Audit and add earned reflection to your strongest scene, cutting every postcard moral.
7. Week 4: Choose a structure, name a target publication, and build a one-page outline of eight to twelve sections.
8. Week 5: Run the Cross-Cultural Ethics Triage on the full draft and record decisions.
9. Week 5-6: Take the piece through the Five-Pass Revision Tracker to pitch quality.
10. Week 6: Research five to ten outlets and pitch your angle, or submit your essay, to at least three.

