

Online Course Outline

Writing Africa - Beyond the Easy Stereotypes

Course Title: The New African Storyteller: A Practical Course on Writing About the Continent

Course Description: This practical, hands-on online course is designed for the new generation of African writers, journalists, and content creators. Drawing from the principles in "Echoes of Empire: How Western Media Recycle Colonial Myth About Africa" (Tila, 2026) this course moves from theory to practice. Through a series of short video lessons, practical exercises, and peer reviews, you will learn to identify and dismantle harmful clichés, report with nuance and dignity, and pitch complex, compelling stories to a global audience. Your mission: to actively shape how the world understands the continent.

Module 1: Deconstructing the Narrative - The Foundations

Objective: To identify the historical context of narratives about Africa and recognize the "single story" in contemporary media.

- **Video 1.1: Welcome & Your New Mission (5 mins)**
 - Introduction to the course and instructor.
 - The legacy of Binyavanga Wainaina's "How to Write About Africa."
 - Course goal: Moving from reactive criticism to constructive creation.
 - The power and responsibility of the modern African storyteller.
- **Video 1.2: Understanding the Colonial Gaze (7 mins)**
 - Defining the "single story" and the "colonial gaze."
 - How historical narratives shape today's news headlines.
 - **Practical Guidance:** Introducing the "Is this really an African story?" test from the Ebook.
- **Video 1.3: The Taxonomy of Clichés (10 mins)**
 - A deep dive into common stereotypes:
 - The "Savanna Sunrise" Opening
 - The "Tribe" Obsession
 - The "Primitive/Modern" Paradox
 - The "White Savior" Infrastructure
 - Poverty Pornography
 - **Examples:** Showing real-world examples from major news outlets.
- **Video 1.4: Language Masterclass - Words that Reinforce Stereotypes (8 mins)**
 - Analyzing loaded words: "hut," "dialect," "witchdoctor," "jungle," "native."
 - **Practical Guidance:** Providing a downloadable PDF of alternative, more precise language.
- **Exercise 1: The Cliché Audit**
 - **Task:** Find one international and one local news story about your city or country published in the last month. Using the "Taxonomy of Clichés," identify and highlight every stereotype, loaded word, and lazy framing.
 - **Submission:** Rewrite the lead paragraphs of both articles with specificity and nuance. Share the "before" and "after" in the course forum for peer feedback.

Module 2: The Craft of Nuance - Reporting Complexity

Objective: To equip writers with practical techniques for seeing and capturing the continent's dynamism, innovation, and complex social fabric.

- **Video 2.1: Beyond the Village - Reporting on Urban Realities (8 mins)**
 - Why urban Africa is one of the most under-reported stories.
 - Techniques for capturing the dynamism of city life.
 - **Cliché Clinic:** Deconstructing the "despite the poverty" trope.
- **Video 2.2: Reporting on Innovation Without Condescension (10 mins)**
 - Avoiding the "Silicon Savannah" and "Uber of Africa" frames.
 - Focusing on problems being solved, not Western parallels.
 - **Practical Guidance:** How to frame African innovators as pioneers.
- **Video 2.3: The Complexity Protocol in Practice (12 mins)**
 - Introducing three key methods from the Ebook:
 1. **The Layer Method:** Digging from the surface story to the systemic roots.
 2. **The Network Approach:** Mapping who benefits, who loses, and how systems interact.
 3. **The Time Telescope:** Connecting the present to the past and future.
 - **Example:** A step-by-step breakdown of a story about a new mall in Kigali.
- **Exercise 2: The Market Observation**
 - **Task:** Spend one hour in a local market, business district, or transport hub. Following the Ebook's guide, document specific observations about payment methods, supply chains, technology, and social networks.
 - **Submission:** Write a 500-word descriptive piece that captures the economic and social sophistication you observed. Focus on showing, not telling.

Module 3: The Power of Specificity - From Vague to Vivid

Objective: To master the use of precise, sensory details to bring places, people, and stories to life.

- **Video 3.1: The "African Sun" is Lazy Writing (7 mins)**
 - Explaining why specificity is the antidote to cliché.
 - Moving from the generic ("bustling market") to the specific ("Mama Sidi arranged tomatoes in pyramids of five").
- **Video 3.2: The Sensory Journalism Toolkit (10 mins)**
 - How to use all five senses as reporting tools.
 - **Practical Guidance:** Building a "Sensory Vocabulary" for your environment (e.g., variations of heat, textures of sound).
- **Video 3.3: The Architecture of Observation (8 mins)**
 - A blueprint for building a scene: Location > Time > Human Elements > Telling Details.

- **Example:** Deconstructing a well-written paragraph to show how the architecture works.
- **Exercise 3: The Commute Description**
 - **Task:** Describe a recent commute or short journey in 300 words. You are forbidden from using the following words: Africa, bustling, vibrant, chaotic, traditional, modern, poverty, struggle.
 - **Submission:** Post your description to the forum. The goal is for another student to be able to "feel" the reality of the journey through your specific details.

Module 4: The Ethics of Storytelling - Interviewing with Dignity

Objective: To develop an ethical framework for interviewing that empowers subjects and rejects extractive storytelling.

- **Video 4.1: Are You an Extractive Journalist? (8 mins)**
 - Understanding the "extraction economy" of stories.
 - Introducing the Dignity Framework: consent, reciprocal value, narrative control.
- **Video 4.2: The Dignified Introduction & Question Architecture (12 mins)**
 - How to introduce yourself to build trust.
 - Transforming exploitative questions ("How does it feel to be poor?") into empowering ones ("What strategies have worked?").
 - **Practical Guidance:** Role-playing different interview scenarios.
- **Video 4.3: The Trauma Interview Protocol (10 mins)**
 - A sensitive guide to interviewing subjects about traumatic experiences.
 - Focusing on the future, not just the past, to preserve dignity.
 - The importance of visual consent.
- **Video 4.4: The Follow-Up - Journalism as a Relationship (7 mins)**
 - Why the story doesn't end at publication.
 - **Practical Guidance:** A checklist for maintaining integrity after an interview.
- **Exercise 4: The Re-Framed Interview**
 - **Task:** Find an interview online or in print where the questioning feels extractive. Identify the problematic questions.
 - **Submission:** Write a new set of 5-7 interview questions for the same subject that are framed around their expertise, agency, and goals, using the principles from this module.

Module 5: Writing About Home - The Insider's Superpower

Objective: To navigate the unique challenges and advantages of reporting on one's own community.

- **Video 5.1: Proximity is Not a Problem, It's an Advantage (8 mins)**
 - Leveraging your insider knowledge: language, networks, history, culture.
 - The challenge isn't distance but discipline.
- **Video 5.2: Balancing Intimacy and Distance (10 mins)**
 - Avoiding the "Protection Instinct" and the "Knowledge Curse."
 - Strategies for source diversification to avoid echo chambers.
- **Video 5.3: The Art of Translation (9 mins)**
 - Your role as a cultural, emotional, and systemic translator.
 - **Practical Guidance:** How to explain complex local realities without exoticizing them.
- **Exercise 5: The Two Traditions**
 - **Task:** As per the Ebook's assignment, write about a local tradition, custom, or social event twice.
 1. First, as if explaining it to a complete outsider.
 2. Second, as if explaining its nuances and evolution to a younger member of your own community.
 - **Submission:** Share both versions and reflect on which one felt truer and why.

Module 6: Selling the Real Story - Pitching with Power

Objective: To learn how to frame and sell nuanced, complex stories to local and international editors.

- **Video 6.1: The Psychology of an Editor (7 mins)**
 - Understanding what editors fear and what they value.
 - Why your pitch must disrupt patterns while addressing practical realities (time, budget, audience).
- **Video 6.2: The Architecture of a Persuasive Pitch (12 mins)**
 - A breakdown of the six key elements: Hook, Stakes, Access, Audience, Visuals, Impact.
 - **Cliché Clinic:** Reframing a typical "poverty in Kenya" pitch into a global "food security innovation" pitch.
- **Video 6.3: The Complexity Sandwich & The Preemptive Strike (10 mins)**
 - How to make complex ideas digestible for busy editors.
 - How to address an editor's likely stereotypical concerns before they can raise them.
- **Video 6.4: When They Say No (and How to Build Your Own Platform) (8 mins)**
 - Learning from rejection.
 - The power of self-publishing (Medium, Substack, YouTube) to prove a market exists.
- **Exercise 6: The Triple Pitch**
 - **Task:** Take one nuanced story idea you are passionate about.
 - **Submission:** Write three distinct 250-word pitches for it, tailored for:

1. A major local newspaper/outlet.
2. A legacy international outlet (e.g., BBC, Reuters).
3. A modern digital-native publication (e.g., Rest of World, Semafor Africa).

Module 7: The Final Mission - Building the New Narrative

Objective: To synthesize the course learnings into a final project and commit to a new standard of storytelling.

- **Video 7.1: The Future is Not Waiting for Permission (8 mins)**
 - Why the old media gatekeepers are losing relevance.
 - Your opportunity to build new platforms and set new standards.
 - The responsibility to include marginalized voices within the continent.
- **Video 7.2: Your Final Assignment & The Story Idea Checklist (10 mins)**
 - Walking through the final project requirements.
 - A detailed explanation of the "Story Idea Checklist" from the Ebook as a final vetting tool.
- **Video 7.3: The Challenge - What Will You Tell Us? (5 mins)**
 - A final, motivational call to action.
 - The three-generation project of narrative change.
 - Write as if Africans are your primary audience. Begin.
- **Final Project: The Nuanced Story Package**
 - **Task:**
 1. **Identify a Story:** Use the "Story Idea Checklist" to vet a nuanced, complex story about your community.
 2. **Produce the Story:** Write an 800-1000 word article or script for a 5-minute video/audio piece. The piece must demonstrate specificity, dignity in reporting, and complexity.
 3. **Craft a Pitch:** Write a persuasive 250-word pitch for the story.
 - **Submission:** Submit the story package for instructor and peer review. The top three projects will be featured on the course website.