

Writing the City

13 July – 07 Aug 2026

CATEGORY Language, Literature and Creative Writing

COURSE STRUCTURE

You will receive a total of **45 hours of academic lessons** (one lesson equals 45 minutes; 15 hours per week). Lessons will comprise lectures, group work, discussion sessions, and excursions.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

HUWISU courses are grouped into different time tracks. Your course will take place in **Track C**

Tuesday: 1.30 pm – 3.00 pm & 3.30 pm – 5.00 pm

Wednesday: 1.30 pm – 3.00 pm & 3.30 pm – 5.00 pm

Friday: 9.00 am – 10.30 am & 11.00 am – 11.45 am

COURSE LANGUAGE

This course is taught in **English**, including the readings. For the understanding of the texts and the discussions in class, a language-level of B2 (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) is required.

TARGET GROUP

Everyone who would like to explore or improve their creative writing skills, B.A. to Ph.D. level. No writing experience required.

CREDITS & CERTIFICATES

Participants will receive **6 ECTS** credit points and a certificate if they attend regularly (at least 80% attendance), participate actively and fulfil all course assignments. Additionally, six weeks after the end of the course a Transcript of Records is issued by Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. All courses are accredited according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to the academic program, you are invited to **join our cultural and social program**. We offer a fine selection of interesting activities that aim to give you an unforgettable stay in Berlin. Through excursions, social gatherings, and sport activities, you have the opportunity to get to know the city, the university, and to meet students from all parts of the world. **Costs for these offers are included in the program fee**. Below, you find examples of previously offered cultural activities. You will be informed about the respective cultural program shortly before the start of the program via email as well as during the course period.



POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL GUIDED TOURS

- Federal Chancellery (*Bundeskanzleramt*)
- German Parliament (*Bundestag*)
- House of Representatives (*Abgeordnetenhaus*)
- Topography of Terror exhibition
- Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office

CULTURAL GUIDED TOURS

- Kreuzberg Tour
- Museum Island (*Museumsinsel*)
- Berlin Cathedral (*Berliner Dom*)
- Daytrip to Potsdam
- Exhibitions

SOCIAL GATHERINGS

- Welcome Session
- Beach Volleyball
- Farewell Get2gether

EXPECTATIONS & POLICIES

Preparation for lively discussions in the classroom: Be on time, have at least the required readings completed, and points in mind for discussion or clarification.

Assignments: Complete all assignments according to the specified requirements on the schedule including handing them over to the lecturer.

Commitment in class: Pay particular attention to the lecturer and respect differences of opinions (classmates', lecturers').

Academic guidelines: Comply with academic integrity policies (such as no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical) especially the academic honor code and the student code of conduct.

Attendance policy: No unexcused absences are permitted. Students must follow teachers' instructions to catch up on missed work – to excuse absence please contact the HUWISU office.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

To some, the city is a text that asks to be read; to others, the city is a multi-layered phenomenon that defies readability. None of this has ever prevented writers from writing about the city – and write about the city is what you will do in this course!

In numerous writing exercises, students will develop their creative and their critical selves. Writing assignments will draw on your own experiences of Berlin: capture the moment of your arrival, the strangeness of the new environment, the possible misunderstandings, and turn them into texts. Walk through a neighborhood, ride your bike or the subway looking for motifs and stories. Describe people you meet and turn them into characters. Research the history of a person, a building, a trend, a scene and take ownership of your urban experience – observe how you become a writer of Berlin. Writing will take place in-class, on-site and in take-home exercises. Be prepared to share some of your writing in class and to learn to give and receive constructive feedback.

Your writing will be supported by a class reader with various examples of urban writing, which we will use to study modes of narration, motifs, and kinds of composition. Reading assignments will be from European and American city texts but will eventually zoom in on representations of Berlin. How can literature, through the work of images, narrative perspective, plot structure, rhythms and juxtapositions capture the voices, spaces and characters of the city? What meanings of the city do individual texts create? With these questions in mind, you will venture out into the city and look for your own ways of capturing its essence, and/or the events that can unfold in its space.

Make sure you have a computer with you on which you can write your longer texts.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will have

- discovered/expanded their creative talents
- discovered Berlin's multi-layered spaces
- reflected on their own experience of the city in their writing
- familiarized themselves with the literary discourse of the city in general and Berlin in particular
- learned to critically respond to fictional texts
- developed their reading, writing and communication skills

READINGS

A course reader will be made available in the first session.

ASSIGNMENT INFO

You will write many smaller pieces, both in class and on special assignments that lead you into the city, and then share them in class. Some assignments will take you on weekend explorations around Berlin. You will submit one longer text for feedback during the semester and a portfolio of revised texts after the end of classes. In addition to writing, your work in class will consist of contributing to the discussion and, most importantly, giving feedback to your peers' writings.

Assessment Components

The final grade and the grant of 6 ECTS will be composed of the amount and quality of your work during the semester (30%), the portfolio (40%), the quality of your feedback and active participation in the class discussion (30%).

A minimum of 80% class attendance is required.

Failure to fulfil one of the above-mentioned components will result in your failing the class.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Donna Stonecipher grew up in Seattle, Washington, and Tehran, Iran. She received her MFA from the University of Iowa and her PhD from the University of Georgia. She is the author of six books of poetry, most recently "The Ruins of Nostalgia" (Wesleyan University Press, 2023), which was named a best book of the year by NPR; and "Transaction Histories" (University of Iowa Press, 2018), which was listed by *The New York Times* as one of the 10 best poetry books of the year. In 2018, she published a study entitled "Prose Poetry and the City." Her work has been published in many journals, and her poems have been translated into seven languages. She has taught at the University of Iowa, the University of Georgia, and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and has conducted workshops on poetry and translation around Europe and the United States. She translates from German, and her translation of Austrian poet Friederike Mayröcker's collection "cahier" was published in 2024. She lives in Berlin.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Arrival

Reflect upon your own situation as a newcomer to Berlin

Excursion to Ephraim Palais or Humboldt Forum (Berlin City Museum)

Literature of Arrival

Week 2: Places

Research and write about specific Berlin sites

Excursion to Wall Documentation Center

Space and Place in Literature

Week 3: People

Write a character study based on a Berliner you have observed or met

Excursion to the State Library (Staatsbibliothek)

People and Cities

Week 4: My Berlin

Write an extended piece/short story set in Berlin

Excursion to Alexanderplatz: Walking in the City

City and Self in Literature

Syllabus and writing exercises are subject to change depending on students' needs and interests.

The course and its syllabus are subject to change. Last update: January 2026