Assignments for the semester:

One short midterm paper, one final paper, plus a class presentation and an informal paragraph each week on what most struck you (either positively or negatively) about that week’s reading.

- Weekly: A short paragraph on your top-of-mind thoughts/reactions/questions about the week’s reading. Informal, but it helps to marshal your thoughts and makes discussions via Zoom easier.

- Class presentations: We will have two short presentations each week on the book we’re discussing in class that day. Everyone should send me your 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} choices and I’ll try to match you with one of your favorites (beginning with \textit{Eminent Victorians}). One presentation will be on the author and the background of the book—a short gloss on the author, the book’s critical reception and any placing of the book historically that’s helpful. (For example, Lytton Strachey upended the entire tradition of Victorian biography. That would be central to any critical discussion of \textit{Eminent Victorians}.) The other presentation will be a close reading of the text—the language, structure, how the author builds the narrative, felicitous phrasing (or not!) The close reading discussion will follow along from the critical tenets that we talk about in “Telling Lives.” How does each biographer transcend the pedestrian march of facts so common to the genre? How does he or she put the character across? Is there a clearly defined narrative, not just a compendium of facts? The discussions will begin in Week 3 (Feb. 22). They should be informal but informed.

- Week 6 (March 8). Due: A one to two-paragraph exploratory proposal for your final paper. Everyone should schedule a short Zoom session to discuss with me.

- Week 8 (March 22). Due: A three-page book review on any book assigned in the class. (You can also propose a book that’s not on the syllabus.) Pretend you’re reviewing the book for a short review in the Sunday book review section of \textit{The New York Times}. Remember to look at the critical tenets of what makes for a good biography.
• **Week 12 (April 19).** Two to three-page outline due for your final paper project. Also meet with me to discuss.

• Final paper in lieu of an exam, due **May 17-19.** This will be a chapter in a putative biography about a subject of your choice. Or it can be a chapter in your own autobiography. Or it can be a long—10 to 12-page—comprehensive book review, along the lines of a review in *The New York Review of Books.* We will ramp up to the final paper in stages. I’ll meet with you individually on Zoom to discuss your initial ideas. There’s a reason for this: It’s better to discover that there’s too little known about your subject, say, or that you can’t find a defining moment around which to organize a chapter in your autobiography, before it’s too late!

• **Grading**

  50% written assignments
  50% class participation and your class presentations. Class participation is extremely important!