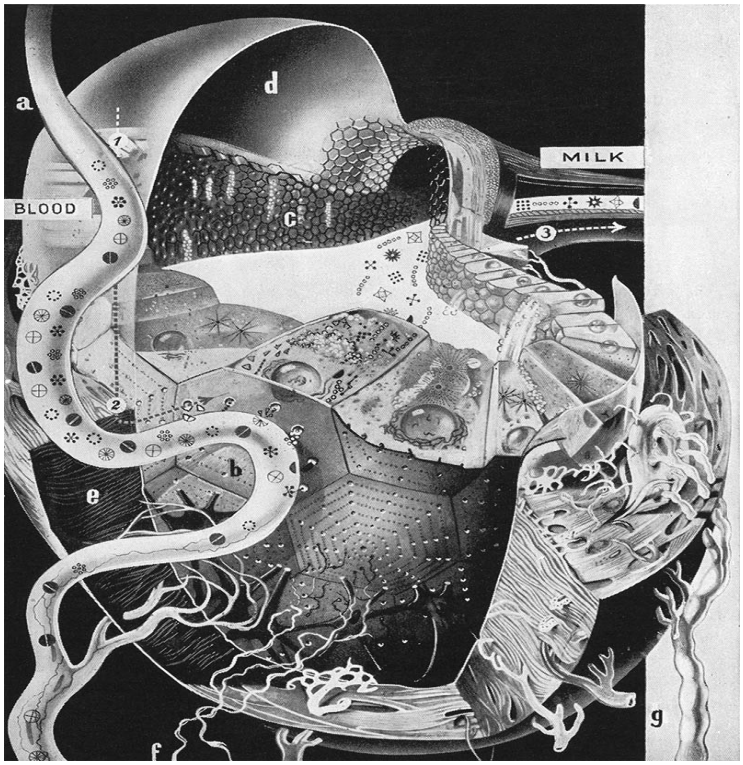
"Writing Science for Public and Scientific Audiences"

WRIT 408/508 | Spring 2027| Weds 4-6:50pm | Instructor: Prof. Catherine Gouge

How does science become credible, controversial, persuasive, and public?

This course is designed for students interested in how science is communicated, debated, and understood within scientific communities and by broader publics. Students from the sciences, humanities, and professional fields are all welcome.



Course Description

"Writing Science" explores how scientific knowledge is communicated, debated, and made persuasive. We will examine writing for both scientific and public audiences and consider how language, evidence, expertise, and communication practices shape what people know and believe about science.

Throughout the semester, we will investigate several questions: Why do scientific controversies emerge? What happens when scientific disagreement moves into public debate? How do scientists and other writers establish credibility and authority? How can science be communicated effectively across different audiences? And how do writing and rhetoric help shape scientific knowledge itself?

What We'll Read

Readings will draw from writings studies, science studies, health and medical humanities, and science communication and rhetoric, including work on scientific controversy, contested illness, scientific writing, expertise and credibility, and feminist approaches to science studies. Authors will include Michael Harker, Emily Schone, Joshua Schimel, Leah Ceccarelli, and Lawrence Prelli.

Course Format

WRIT 408 and WRIT 508 is a dynamic, interdisciplinary class of advanced undergraduate and graduate students. Students will share reading, writing, and discussion assignments and complete work appropriate to their level. Because the course depends on discussion and collaborative inquiry, students should be prepared to read thoughtfully, participate actively, and contribute their own disciplinary perspectives and interests.