New York University
Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute
EAT NYC: Food Reporting and Writing
Summer 2019
SS2: JOUR-UA 204-002
Professor: Sen, Mayukh
Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM
20 Cooper Square, 652

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Course Description
“Food, it appeared, could be important. It could be an event. It had secrets.”
— Anthony Bourdain

It’s an exciting time to be a food journalist. The field is incredibly dynamic, due to both the nature of digital media and shifting cultural mores. A vividly-written recipe column can give you ideas for what to cook for dinner tonight; an evocative restaurant review can tell you where to go for brunch.

But there’s more to food journalism than recipes and restaurant reviews. Food isn’t just a fluffy diversion. The above quote from the late Anthony Bourdain captures the ethos of this class: Food deserves to be taken seriously. Food has many stories to tell.

Over six weeks this summer, you’ll immerse yourself in food journalism’s many forms. These include the aforementioned recipes and restaurant reviews; personal essays; profiles of chefs, cookbook authors, growers, service workers who bring food to our plates; long-form pieces on food history. You’ll figure out how to package stories visually, too, an essential skill in our digital age. Guest speakers will include some of the most important voices working in food journalism. Together, we’ll explore our city; New York City itself provides a wealth of food stories waiting to be written.

By the end of the class, you’ll be in a position to confidently pitch the story you’re proudest of to a publication. Whether you’d like to pursue food journalism as a career or merely get your feet wet in it, you’ll fare well if you bring eagerness and a dose of healthy journalistic skepticism to every story you encounter. And you must have a good appetite.

Learning Objectives
In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate awareness of journalism’s core ethical values
- Write clear, accurate and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner
● Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
● Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
● Ensure that sources, whether derived from interviews or written documents (books, articles), are easily verifiable and can be held up to the scrutiny of fact-checking
● Exhibit working fluency in different modes of food journalism, including restaurant criticism, personal essay, profiles, and recipe-driven essays
● Understand and articulate food journalism’s function in a thriving democratic landscape

Course Expectations
This class is for a spectrum of students: those who may have a fleeting interest in food journalism, ones who may want to pursue food journalism as careers, and people who fall in between. Regardless of which of these groups you belong to, though, you’ll need to show up to class on time and deliver assignments promptly, and those who don’t will be downgraded. If you need to miss class for any reason, you’ll need to notify me before class via email or text. Active class participation is as important as the strength of your work, too. You’ll be bouncing ideas off of one another as you learn how to navigate the current food journalism landscape. Any strong journalist must know how to communicate their ideas clearly and confidently.

Assignments and Class Structure
The class will meet twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, between 3 and 6 p.m. You’ll have regular reading assignments each week that will help serve as models for the reporting you’ll do in this class. Make sure you’re setting aside enough time to do actual reporting for stories: Writing assignments will range from 500 to 1000 words.

Each week, we’ll have a guest speaker from the world of food media, past or present, who’ll speak about the trajectory of their careers, their work, and the different facets of the food journalism industry they occupy.

These guest speakers are meant to give you advice and guidance—please use these sessions to engage with them and soak up their knowledge.

All assignments will be listed on the syllabus. They’ll be due on Fridays at 9 a.m. to me via email: mayukh.sen@nyu.edu.

You’re expected to conform to AP style for all assignments.

For each story, submit three different headlines and one sample “dek”. We’ll go over this in class, but a dek is an explanatory sentence, two sentences tops, that gives more context to what the story’s about, further enticing a reader to click on a story and read it.
All assignments should be typed and double-spaced. On the first page, in the upper left corner, include your last name, date, and the page number.

**Fact-Checking**
On the last page of each assignment, you’ll need to list the names and contact information (phone or email) for your sources. If you’re working from books or previously-published articles, cite those at the end as well (formatted as such: writer, publication, date published, headline or title).

**Grading**
Your final grade will be determined by the following metrics:

- Weekly assignments 50 percent
- Final assignment 25 percent
- Participation & attendance 25 percent

**Grading will conform to the Journalism Department’s policy:**
A = publishable as is
B = publishable with light editing
C = publishable with a rewrite
D = major problems with organization, facts, reporting, writing
F = missing key information, containing gross misspellings, plagiarism or libel

**Revisions**
Journalism is a collaborative process—a strong editor will give feedback to a writer to make a point more lucid and sharper. I’ll be your editor in this class, working with you to get your strongest work out of you. We’ll be working on tight deadlines that mirror the quick, breakneck pace of journalism.

If you submit a rewrite within four days of getting feedback, I’ll take that rewrite into consideration for a grade change. The final grade for a revised assignment will be an average of the two grades. In the event that your two grades are close to one another—say, a B- and a B—I’ll go with the higher grade.

**Academic Integrity**
Any plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration on assignments will result in a failure, and could be grounds for failure in the course. All quotes must be original and verifiable. That means you must have a means of contacting anyone you quote for further clarification, or for me to verify accuracy of quotes. If you draw from someone else’s work without properly crediting them, you will fail that assignment.

**Reading**
All of the assignments for this class will be available online. You’ll get more out of the class if you read each Wednesday’s Food section of the New York Times. I recommend
you also read the following food publications to get a sense of the different kinds of food writing that currently populate the digital landscape: Eater, the New York Times food section, TASTE, and Food52.

CLASS SCHEDULE
Please note that this is a preliminary schedule, subject to change based on the availability of guest speakers. We’ll take trips to restaurants or other food-related venues, have group workshops in class, and set aside time for writing sessions.

WEEK 1: The Basics, and the Personal

We’ll spend this week getting to know one another: What brought you to this class, and what food means to you (if it means anything at all—though I’m betting it does!). We’ll discuss what the function of a food journalist is in America today.

Just so we’re all on the same page, we’ll go through basic reporting practices: How to conceive of and pitch a story, how to identify interview subjects, how to approach those subjects, how to record an interview, what to look for in an interview, and then, finally, how to structure a story once you sit down to write it.

If you’ve never written about food in your life, you might be wondering what stories one could possibly tell. A reasonable place to start is by looking inside yourself. The personal food essay is a crowded genre. It’s easy to write an adequate personal food essay, but astonishingly difficult to do it right. You’ll read some of the strongest examples of the genre before tackling it yourself.

READINGS:

- Food Porn, Molly O’Neill, Columbia Journalism Review, 2003
- Crying in H-Mart, Michelle Zauner, The New Yorker, 2018
- Let’s Call It Assimilation Food, Soleil Ho, TASTE, 2017

GUEST SPEAKER, JULY 11: Anna Hezel, Senior Editor of TASTE. In advance of her visit, please familiarize yourself with the article on TASTE’s homepage.

ASSIGNMENT, DUE JULY 12, 9 a.m.: Write a 500-700 word personal essay on a memorable food experience in your life—the best meal you ate, the worst meal you cooked, or anything else that may allow readers to better understand who you are and your place in the world. Maybe it’s about a favorite food you had growing up or one you absolutely hated, a meal you shared with someone you loved or despised, or the ritual of going to the grocery store you visited as a kid.
WEEK 2: The Art of the Profile

Food stories are fundamentally human stories: What we eat tells us who we are. Profiles have always been a substantial part of food writing. The more classic, and now somewhat exhausted, mode of profile writing tends to focus on chefs who have the status of celebrities; it’s a tough genre to nail. Your subjects don’t have to be famous: Some of the richest profile subjects are people who can so easily be overlooked, even though their work is crucial they are to the way we eat today.

This week, you’ll read different kinds of profiles and get a sense for how to write about a wide variety of subjects, as well as how to source those stories. This will position you to start thinking about your final assignment, which will be a profile, 1500 words max, of someone in the food industry.

READINGS:

- A Day in the Life of a Food Vendor, Tejal Rao, the New York Times, 2017
- The Gay Man Who Brought Tapas to America, Mayukh Sen, TASTE, 2018
- The Provocations of Chef Tunde Wey, Brett Martin, GQ, 2019

GUEST SPEAKER, JULY 18: Korsha Wilson, freelance food writer for the New York Times, Washington Post, Food & Wine, Eater, and elsewhere. In preparation for her visit, please read the following recent pieces by her:

- Tracing the Footsteps of Patrick Clark, Food & Wine, 2019
- A Critic for All Seasons, Eater, 2019

ASSIGNMENT, DUE JULY 19, 9 a.m.: Come up with three 100-word pitches for potential profile subjects, using what you’ve learned in the previous week about what makes a strong pitch. We’ll discuss these pitches as a class. This will lay the groundwork for your final assignment, which will be a reported profile, 1500 words max, ideally with two sources (one of whom is an “expert”; we’ll discuss what makes an expert in class).

WEEK 3: Eating Out

Restaurant criticism is a highly coveted, somewhat misunderstood profession. You’ll read examples of how to do restaurant criticism right, making the experience of eating a restaurant sound both approachable and alluring (unless, of course, your meal is neither of those things, in which case you’ll learn the delicate art of the pan), describe the food in ways that feel vibrant and devoid of cliche, and report if necessary.

READINGS:
Malagon serves marvelous food to those allowed into downtown Charleston restaurant, Hanna Raskin, The Post & Courier, 2019

GUEST SPEAKER, JULY 25: Emily Weinstein, Deputy Food Editor of The New York Times. In advance of her visit, please read Wednesday’s Food section of the New York Times in print (stories are available online here).

ASSIGNMENT, DUE JULY 26, 9AM: Write a 500-800-word review of a meal at a restaurant of your choice.

WEEK 4: Writing the Recipe
A lot of food journalism, as it exists today, provides a service: It tells you where to eat, or what to cook. We’ll focus on the latter this week. Many kinds of food articles, whether they’re profiles or trend pieces, can have recipes attached to them. The internet is flush with recipes; so are old food magazines. So what makes a good recipe? It’s one that’s written accessibly, even for the least proficient of home cooks, with a surrounding story full of voice, personality, and warmth.

• Genius Recipes, Kristen Miglore, Food52 (Please read the three most recent installments)
• Eat, The New York Times Magazine (Please read the five most recent installments)

GUEST SPEAKER, AUGUST 1: Kristen Miglore, Creative Director for Genius at Food52. We’ll be discussing her Genius columns, which you’ll have read earlier this week.

ASSIGNMENT, DUE AUGUST 2, 9AM: Pick any recipe you’d like—one you cook often, one you’ve found from a cookbook or a blog—and write a 400 - 600-word story about it, styled after one of the above columns, along with a 100-word headnote (we’ll go over what makes a good headnote) that concisely and accurately describes the dish. As you’ll see, the best recipe columns have journalistic backbone: Skilled recipe writers are able to shed light on the story of a certain dish, or its history, while writing in a way that speaks to a home cook directly. If a recipe is written by a food blogger or cookbook author, you’ll want to speak to them about that story; if there’s an intriguing history, speaking to a food historian or other source who can authoritatively qualify this dish’s intrigue.

WEEK 5: Food History, Past and Present
There’s an increasing interest in telling stories of the history of food: How certain ingredients became popular, how certain chefs or cookbooks architected modern-day
culinary techniques, or a controversy from a bygone era that has more in common with the present day than one may think.

The most compelling food history pieces focus on stories that were overlooked or ignored in their time, but brilliantly make the case for how those stories hold lessons for how we eat and cook today. Tracing that line directly from the past into the present is a challenge more journalists have increasingly taken on, but the best examples of the genre weave together living and written sources to tell these stories.

**READINGS:**
- America, *Your Food Is So Gay*, John Birdsall, Lucky Peach, 2013
- The Sad, Sexist Past of Bengali Cuisine, Mayukh Sen, Food52, 2017

**GUEST SPEAKER, AUGUST 6:** Elazar Sontag, Assistant Editor at Serious Eats. Prior to his visit, please familiarize yourself with Serious Eats and the work on his website.

**ASSIGNMENT, DUE AUGUST 9, 9AM:** Pitch and write a story about a food history-related topic that firmly establishes its relevance to the present day. This story should be at least 800 words (it can go slightly beyond 1,000 words if the subject demands it), but you must quote at least two, no more than three, expert sources in the piece.

**WEEK 6: Pitching Your Final Stories for Publication**
This week, you’ll present the profiles that you’ve been working on for the duration of our time together. We’ll discuss strategies for how and where to pitch to, and how to optimize your story for publication.

**GUEST SPEAKER, AUGUST 13:** Peter Meehan, Food Editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. Please acquaint yourself with the paper’s food section before his visit.

**ASSIGNMENT, DUE AUGUST 16, 9AM:** Your final assignment, a profile that brings to life the story of someone who works (or, if a posthumous profile, worked) in food, maximum 1500 words, with at least two supporting sources who could lend credibility to your reporting.

**Accommodations**
Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with New York University’s Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

**Diversity & Inclusion**
The Institute is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment. The Institute embraces a notion of intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions.