

New York University
Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute
Eating the World: Food Writing and Reporting
Summer 2023

SS2: JOUR-UA 204.003 Professor: Stewart, Kayla
Tuesday and Thursday, 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM

To contact professor: kayla.stewart@nyu.edu

Course Description

“If I’m an advocate for anything, it’s to move. As far as you can, as much as you can. Across the ocean, or simply across the river. The extent to which you can walk in someone else’s shoes or at least eat their food, it’s a plus for everybody. Open your mind, get up off the couch, move.” — Anthony Bourdain

Food is the essence of humanity, an integral part of growth and livelihood. It is also deeply entrenched in the human experience. Food tells stories about memory, politics, culture, and society. Capturing these stories, and finding ways to examine the intersection of food, culture, politics, and identity, are essential skills for journalists reporting on food and travel.

Food writing takes many forms: memoir, recipe development and storytelling, and reporting – often all within the same body of work. In this course, students will learn how to use these genres in their own writing. They will explore topics like justice and equity; read and listen to work from journalists, cookbook authors, activists, and audio producers with a critical eye. Students will visit various restaurants, grocery stores, and/or farms and take field trips.

Assignments will include readings, audio listening exercises, Q&As, and one 1,500 reported piece. Students will learn that reporting on food, when done with rigor and empathy, can lead to some of the world’s most significant journalism.

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 reporting, personal essay, profiles, and recipe-driven essays

- Understand and articulate food journalism's function in a thriving global, 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. Do not arrive late to class without prior warning. It's disruptive and often disrespectful to your fellow classmates and guest speakers. 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. The room location will be shared ahead of the start of Summer Session II. 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 who'll speak about the trajectory of their careers and their work. 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 the assigned date at 9 a.m. to me via email: kayla.stewart@nyu.edu.

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

For each story, submit three different headlines and three sample deks. 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

When applicable, 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.

You will receive grades for each assignment by the Monday after submission. If you submit a rewrite by 5pm on the Friday of the week after you originally turned in your initial version of the assignment, I’ll take that rewrite into consideration for a grade change. (For example: Say you’d like to submit a rewrite for a piece you initially turned in on July 17th. You’d receive your grade from me by the 24th, and you’d have until 5p.m. on the 28th to send me a rewrite.) 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. I recommend you also read food sections from publications like *The New York Times*, *Eater*, *The New Yorker*, and your hometown’s local paper to get a sense of the different kinds of food writing that currently populate the digital landscape.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Please note that this is a preliminary schedule, subject to change based on the availability of guest speakers. We’ll regularly set aside time for writing sessions and collaborative exercises.

WEEK 1: Writing About Food (July 6th)

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.

READINGS

- Excerpt from, "Will Write for Food: The Complete Guide to Writing Cookbooks, Blogs, Reviews, Memoir, and More" (provided in class)
- [Don't Eat Before Reading This](#), Anthony Bourdain, *The New Yorker*, 1999

WEEK 2: Writing About Food (July 11th, and 13th)

If you've never written about food in your life, you might be wondering what stories you could possibly tell. A reasonable place to start is by looking inside yourself. The personal food essay is a crowded genre. It's difficult to write a unique, compelling personal food essay, but far from impossible. Throughout the week, you'll be exposed to work that demonstrates thoughtful, sharp food writing.

READINGS:

- [Notes on Cravings](#), M. F. K. Fisher, *The New Yorker*, 1968
- [Bread Pudding and the Comforts of Queer Baking](#), Bryan Washington, *The New Yorker*, 2019
- [When Food Is Just Numbers, I Never Win](#), Arianna Rebolini, *The Kitchn*, 2019

ASSIGNMENT, DUE JULY 17, 9 a.m.:

Write a 500-700 word personal essay on a memorable food experience in your life that may allow readers to better understand who you are and your place in the world. I'll circulate some writing prompts during class that will help orient you. Remember to include three different headlines and three sample deks. (We will discuss how to write headlines and deks in class)

WEEK 3: Learning How to Pitch, and Food and Identity (July 18th and 20st)

Some of the most compelling and impactful food writing revolves around identity. Food writers of color, queer food writers, and many others have used the genre to talk about politics, gender and sexual identity, physical abilities, memory, and so much more. On Tuesday, we'll learn how leaning into our identities—whatever they may be—can help us tell meaningful stories. We'll also learn about how to respectfully explore and share the identities of sources for reported pieces.

On Thursday, we'll go through 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.

This week's exercises will position you to start thinking about your final assignment, which will be a profile or feature story, 1500 words max, on a person, restaurant, or other aspect of food.

READINGS:

- [Black Communities Have Always Used Food as Protest](#), Amethyst Ganaway, *Food & Wine*, 2020
- [Distilled Identity](#), Osayi Endolyn, Gravy, 2017
- [The Provocations of Chef Tunde Wey](#), Brett Martin, *GQ*, 2019
- [Celebrating the Fish Fry, a Late-Summer Black Tradition](#), Korsha Wilson, *The New York Times*, 2018
- [The Lonely Legacy of Spam](#), Eric Kim, Food52, 2020
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ASSIGNMENT, DUE JULY 24, 9 a.m.:

Come up with three pitches, no more than 200 words, for potential story subjects, using what you've learned this 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, with two sources. (This week, unlike others, you'll need to include one headline/dek combo for each pitch—three headlines and deks total.)

WEEK 4: Cooking (July 25th and 27th)

READINGS AND AUDIO:

- [A Beloved Indigenous Dessert Evolves With Each Generation](#), Kevin Noble Maillard, *The New York Times*, 2022
- [Why Spoonbread Matters](#), Deb Freeman, Food52, 2022
- [The Best Party Dessert Comes From Hawaii](#), Genevieve Ko, *The New York Times*, 2021
- [How to Make Really Good Bread, Mark Bittman](#), *The New York Times*, 2021
- Excerpt from, "Jubilee: Recipes from Two Centuries of African American Cooking: A Cookbook" (provided in class)
- Excerpt from, "Mosquito Supper Club: Cajun Recipes from a Disappearing Bayou" (provided in class)
- Excerpt from, "Sumac: Recipes and Stories from Syria" (provided in class)
- [Ghanaian Spinach Stew With Sweet Plantains](#), *The New York Times*
 - Recipe from Charles Cann, Adapted by Francis Lam
- [Moqueca \(Brazilian Seafood Stew\)](#), *The New York Times*
 - By Yewande Komolafe
- [Sambal Goreng Tempe](#), *Bon Appétit*
 - Lara Lee
- [Cooking by Feel with Vivian Howard & Nik Sharma](#), The Splendid Table, 2022

ASSIGNMENTS, DUE JULY 31, 9AM:

Please confirm with me, via email, the topic of your 1,500 word reported piece.

Share a recipe that you enjoy cooking, or would be interested in trying. This can be a family recipe, a recipe pulled from online or a cookbook, or a recipe you create. Write a 150–250-word headnote that explains what the recipe is, why readers should cook the dish, and any useful tips. Be sure to read the headnotes included in the readings for an example. 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 while writing in a way that speaks to a home cook directly. Remember to include three different headlines and three sample deks.

At the beginning of this week, I'll distribute a document that contains an "as told to" with a figure in the food industry along with key biographical details about them. Write a 600-word profile of this person drawing from this material. You should also list two potential secondary sources you would want to talk to for this story (indicating why you think their perspective would be relevant to the piece) and five questions you would ask each of those sources. Give me a clear roadmap for your reporting. Remember to include three different headlines and three sample deks.

WEEK 5: Restaurants and Food Systems (August 1st and 3rd)

Across the world, restaurants have been a respite for society. They play an economic social, and cultural role, as do the food systems behind them. This week's readings will focus on various approaches that writers have taken to analyze restaurants and food systems, readying you for your final assignment.

READINGS:

- [Banh Mi in a Drive-Through? Vietnamese Restaurants Reach for Fast-Food Success](#), Priya Krishna, *The New York Times*, 2022
- [Black Farmers Breathe New Life into Agriculture in the South](#), Drew Wayland, *Civil Eats*, 2020
- [Living Off the Land in Greenland](#), Natasha Amar, *Whetstone*, 2022

ASSIGNMENT, DUE JULY AUGUST 7, 9AM:

Write an as-told-to with a chef, restaurant worker, farmer, or other food professional of choice. Your as-told-to should be no longer than 500 words, based on an interview with your subject. An as-told-to is much trickier than it sounds: You'll want to make sure the copy flows naturally enough so that it feels conversational, but your piece should also be cogent, thus requiring some self-editing. This exercise will help you refine your sense of what narrative details matter and which ones you should discard. Remember to include three different headlines and three sample deks.

Food stories are fundamentally human stories, so focusing your narrative gaze on one character will reveal many truths about the food industry and its inequities. The more classic, and now

somewhat exhausted, mode of profile writing tends to focus on chefs who have the status of celebrities. I'd like to direct you away from that genre and instead orient you towards subjects who can easily be overlooked, even though their work is crucial to the way consumers eat today.

This week will focus on the mechanics of profile writing—how to draw a reader in and sustain their attention, what details to focus on when you find yourself facing hours of audio and pages of transcripts—so that your final assignment is as strong as possible. Our readings this week are profiles that use observational touches to bring their subjects to life. Consider this week a warm-up for your final assignment.

WEEK 6: Food and Travel (August 8th and 10th)

Food is a core part of travel. To truly learn from and develop a deeper understanding of a culture, it's imperative to understanding the food that serves as a foundation. In this piece, we'll examine the world of food and travel reporting—from religious ceremonies to longstanding “tourist” foods, to burgeoning groups of chefs working to diversify dining. There are lots of readings and audio assignments this week, but they are well worth the time!

READINGS AND AUDIO:

- [Ramadan Nights Provide Cherished Pause in a Sudan on the Brink](#), Declan Walsh, *The New York Times*, 2022
- [How Facebook became working-class Mexico's favorite food delivery app](#), Leo Schwartz, *Rest of World* 2022
- [What the Heck Is Crab Rangoon Anyway?](#), Dan Nosowitz, *Gastro Obscura*, 2019
- [New York City's Chinatown Looks Ahead to the Future](#), Francis Lam, *Condé Nast Traveler*, 2021
- [A Journey into Ethiopia's Bale Mountains National Park](#), Alexandra Fuller, *Travel + Leisure*, 2017
- [These Chefs Are on a Mission to Decolonize West African Food](#), J.R Patterson, *Condé Nast Traveler*, 2021
- [Underground Aams Trade, Part 1](#), Proof, Ahmed Ali Akbar, 2021
- [Underground Aams Trade, Part 2](#), Proof, Ahmed Ali Akbar, 2021

CLASS ACTIVITY, AUGUST 9th:

Video activity

CLASS ACTIVITY, AUGUST 11th:

Class will begin at 5pm, please meet in front of the journalism school at 20 Cooper Square. We'll have a class dinner at a restaurant within the five boroughs. The restaurant will be determined during the course.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT, DUE AUGUST 11, 9AM:

Submit your final assignment, a food story approved in consultation with me, maximum 1,500 words, with at least two supporting sources who will lend credibility to your reporting. Remember to include three different headlines and three sample deks.

WEEK 7: Final Stories (August 16th)

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.

ADDITIONAL CLASS ACTIVITIES:

Video activity

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.