

**New York University**  
Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute  
Syllabus JOUR-UA 204

**Food Writing and Reporting**  
**Summer 2024**

Professor: David Tamarkin  
Office hours

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Office hours: [Day(s) of Week] [Time of Day]., or by appointment

### **Course Description**

There's no beat like the food beat. What other line of journalism lets you explore culture, economics, history, real estate—and enjoy pasta and cupcakes while doing it? Every newspaper, magazine and website touches on food at least a little bit, because food touches every part of our lives. So all journalists should know how to write about food well.

In this course, students will explore food writing through readings, guest speakers, field trips and, most important, writing assignments. Students will learn to write compelling restaurant reviews; identify and report on a major food trend; and write an essay that uses food as a lens through which to look at a moment in history (or one's own personal history). Along the way, we'll touch on the ethics of food writing and learn how to avoid some dreaded food writing clichés.

Editing and revision will be given as much time as writing in this class. By the end of the course, students will have at least three polished pieces—a mix of genres and styles—that can be used for clips.

### **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
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
- Exhibit working fluency in different modes of food journalism, including restaurant criticism, trend reporting, and recipe-driven essays
- Understand the function of value of an effective and timely pitch

### **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](tel:212-998-4980) or [mosescsd@nyu.edu](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu). Information about the Moses Center can be found at [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://www.nyu.edu/csd). The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

## **Diversity & Inclusion**

The Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute is committed to creating an anti-racist learning environment that embraces diversity, complexity, and honesty. We are an intellectual community enriched by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, sex, gender identity, class, ethnicity, sexualities, abilities, religion, and culture. Our student body is excitingly international. We welcome a multiplicity of perspectives. We acknowledge that listening to other perspectives on some of these issues may be personally challenging, and we accept that challenge. We further acknowledge that our profession, journalism, and our home, New York University, have participated in the systemic racism that underpins U.S. history. We are committed to teaching and practicing fair, rigorous, and engaged journalism that helps all our communities move toward justice and equality.

## **Assignments and Course Structure**

The class will meet twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 6 and 9 p.m. Each session will include a mix of lecture, discussion, and collaborative work. Journalism is a collaborative effort, so the writing assignments of the week will often be shared in some manner in the class, and workshopped further as a group.

Every week there will be a guest speaker, a journalist who will share their methods and their perspectives on food writing. This is a vital part of each class, an opportunity not just to learn from accomplished writers but also to sharpen your interviewing skills.

While smaller exercises will be assigned, the major assignments of the course will be three articles, each one between 500 and 1000 words. Each of these will be edited and returned to the student, who will revise the piece and submit it again.

## **Readings**

The readings for this class will consist of articles and essays from newspapers, magazines, digital publications, newsletters, and books. The vast majority will be available online; those that aren't will be distributed via email as PDFs. In addition to these readings, students are encouraged to make a habit out of reading a variety of food publications, such as:

- The food section of your hometown newspaper
- The food sections of the New York Times, LA Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal
- Eater.com
- Saveur
- Food & Wine
- Bon Appetit
- Whetstone
- The Bittman Project

- The newsletters and/or podcasts of notable food writers such as Hetty Lui McKinnon, Marian Bull, Deb Freeman, John Birdsall, etc.

### **Course Requirements**

Students are not expected to have any food writing experience prior to joining this class. However, during these six weeks they are expected to be curious and ravenous consumers of food journalism. Class discussions will hinge on every student having completed their readings for the week; likewise, many class activities will necessitate that that week's assignment is complete and ready to be shared. Each week's readings will include pieces by that week's guest speaker, and students are expected to have absorbed those pieces so that they may more effectively interview the guest.

### **Grading**

Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Feature 1: 20 percent

Feature 2: 20 percent

Feature 3: 25 percent

Other assignments: 10 percent

Participation and 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

### **WEEK 1 Trend Reporting**

In this first week we'll get to know each other, specifically by asking an important question: why do we want to write about food? Why should *anybody* want to write about food? What is the potential of food writing to contribute to a more equitable and empathic society? And what are the pitfalls of food writing that we should try to avoid?

We will also dive into trendspotting. Like all lifestyle journalism, food writing must be attentive to trends in eating, cooking and dining. This week we will learn how to identify (and corroborate) a trend, how to pitch it, and how to write about it with accuracy and style.

### **WEEK 2 Food, Climate, and Identity**

How and what we eat is informed by factors far beyond trends, and some of the best food journalism is put through the lens of a writer's (or subject's) personal identity. This week we'll read work from writers who use food to explore issues beyond the table, such as history and politics.

We'll also explore how food writing can crossover with climate reporting, and grapple with the ethics of writing about foods with large carbon footprints.

### **WEEK 3      Restaurant Reporting and Criticism**

Restaurants are crucial to the infrastructure of eating, and food writing can have a major impact on what kind of restaurants thrive. This we'll explore both restaurant *reporting* and restaurant *criticism*. For the latter, we will eat dinner together as a group at a local restaurant.

### **WEEK 4      Writing About Cooking**

A good writer can convince people to cook new things, sometimes in entirely new ways. We'll tackle persuasive writing about cooking this week, and also explore writing about cooking that educates on techniques, illuminates ingredients, and offers new perspectives on why cooking is (or is not) worthy.

### **WEEK 5      The Food Essay: Personal and Historical**

Drawing on the readings and discussions from week two and week four, this week we will dive even deeper into the food essay. How can we use food to tell a story about our past, or the past of our communities? Personal essays are particularly tricky, as they are prone to sentimentalism and cliché; we will address these pitfalls and ways to avoid them.

### **WEEK 6      Shaping and Sharing Our Final Projects**

We will spend this week immersed in the art of revision, as we shape the three longer articles we wrote throughout the course into publishable pieces.