



2017

## Syllabus: Writing about Food

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# Writing about Food

Fall 2017

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*“A writing cook and a cooking writer must be bold at the desk as well as the stove.”* MFK Fisher

## **Course Description**

This course approaches food writing from a news reporting perspective. The Pioneer Valley is home to a network of food producers, from farmers and cheesemakers to brewers and beekeepers. Students will travel into the field to meet people who make and grow what we eat, conducting interviews and collecting information to synthesize into multimedia stories for publication around themes such as health, history, travel, ecology, animal welfare, social change, nutrition, and home cooking. Students will experience the full spectrum of food writing—blogs, magazine articles, personal essays, reviews, recipe-centered pieces, social and cultural commentary—and create stories in a variety of these forms.

Prerequisites: tbd. 4 credits.

Learning Objectives:

1. Generate story ideas through critical reading and personal experience
2. Conduct research and evaluate information using primary and secondary texts
3. Communicate effectively through writing and multimedia storytelling
4. Apply and improve descriptive and narrative writing
5. Critically evaluate one’s own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness through group critique.

Texts: All texts and media to view will be supplied through the LMS/Moodle.

## **Format and Assignments**

Members of the class are expected to attend class meetings, read the assigned readings, complete all written and multimedia storytelling assignments, and participate in class discussions and activities.\*

**Participation is paramount for group critique.** To give useful, constructive criticism for a fellow writer to inspire revision is to receive the same in return. This is how we become better writers, together. You will be asked to provide feedback on your classmates' writing assignments in the draft stage and they will do the same.

**Reading Responses (350-500 words each) & Quizzes.** Responses to questions posed in conjunction with assigned readings and films posted on Moodle (due dates indicated in course schedule below). Due by 10am on the day of the class for which it is assigned. The questions require you to analyze the representation, data, or argument in the work or reading. Answers may summarize the content or argument and evaluating the evidence of a story; connect the reading to contemporary or historic issues and events; compare and contrast perspectives; serve as a jumping-off point for writing and further research.

Reading response assignments will be graded check plus (95; clearly understood the reading and assignment, good analysis and commentary), check (85; understood the reading and assignment), check minus (75; does not demonstrate clear understanding of the reading and/or assignment), or zero (0; did not complete the assignment). The two lowest grades you receive will be dropped in the final calculation of your grade for this part of the class.

**Three 1000-word written assignments on food topics of your choice to be submitted to local and regional news outlets:** Suggestions for formats will be discussed in class such as 1) interview with a chef or food producer; 2) Recipe with a story; 3) service or travel-related food story; 4) review; or 5) personal essay. These assignments require you to evaluate possible sources of information on your topic, pick those that are most reliable and suitable, collect and analyze content, summarize your findings in your own words, and present the subject from your own perspective.

**Final Project:** For your final project, you will first propose a topic and meet with the instructor to submit your proposal. The final project will be 2000-2500 words in length and can incorporate one or more major themes and include one or more formats, one of which must employ digital audio and/or visual components.

### **Instructor Feedback**

The instructor will provide assessment and feedback in the form of line editing/production edit notes, AP style corrections, and organizational/content comments on stories and final project.

### **Assignments Policy**

Assignments will be docked one half grade per day late. The short Moodle writing assignments must be completed on time or they will not be counted.

### **Readings & Viewings**

Readings and media are listed on the attached course schedule and available through links on Moodle.

### **Grading**

**The recipe for your success is:**

Attendance & Writing Workshop Participation: 15%

Reading response & Quizzes: 20%

Three 750-1000 word written pieces, at least one of the three must have digital storytelling element: 30% (10% each)

Final project proposal (including meeting with instructor): 5%

Final Project: including multimedia / visual storytelling element/s: 30%

Grading scale:

93-100      A

90-92        A-

87-89        B+

83-86        B

80-82        B-

77-79        C+

73-76        C

70-72        C-

67-69        D+

63-66        D

62 or lower  F

## **Academic Honesty**

Cheating and plagiarism (uncredited copying) on exams or papers is cause for the grade F (0) for the entire course, not simply the assignment in question. In your assignments be careful to acknowledge—using quotation marks and footnotes as appropriate—the sources of distinctive phrases that are not your own and ideas that are not clearly common knowledge.

University policy regarding Academic Honesty is explained at this website:  
[http://www.umass.edu/dean\\_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/codeofconduct/acadhonesty/)

## **Etiquette**

Yes, etiquette! Such as... arriving for class on time; not talking over others in class; not leaving the room during class; not using electronic devices except to take notes. Your full attention is requested the duration of each class and during field experiences.

## **Support & Resources**

### **24/7 UMass Online Help Desk and Technical Support**

Phone: 1-888-300-6407

Email: [amherstsupport@umassonline.net](mailto:amherstsupport@umassonline.net)

Click on Live Text Support to text chat with a customer service representative

**Students with disabilities** should make themselves known to the teaching assistants and instructor the first week of class. The instructor must receive a “Notification of Accommodations” from Disability Services. Special arrangements for note-taking, tests, assignments and any other contingency must be agreed upon with the instructor and your teaching assistant. Special arrangements for tests must be made one week or 3 lectures before the test. All discussions will be confidential. You can meet with your teaching assistant or the instructor during office hours or by appointment to discuss arrangements.

### Contact Information:

Disability Services, 161 Whitmore Admin. Bldg.

181 Presidents Drive, University of Massachusetts

Amherst, MA 01003-9313, Phone (V/TTY): 413-545-0892

Fax: 413.577.0122

Email: [ds@educ.umass.edu](mailto:ds@educ.umass.edu)

Website: <http://www.umass.edu/disability/>

**Disability Services at the University of Massachusetts** provides members of the University community with the finest educational opportunities and the most appropriate accommodations available for people with disabilities.

\*According to the U.S. Department of Education, a 4-credit course that meets 3 times a week requires 9 hours of work per week outside the classroom on the part of the students. You can use this as a guide, on average, to estimate how much time per week it will take you to do the reading and writing assignments for this class.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1: September 5-8, 2017**

#### **Welcome & Introductions**

**In-class writing and group critique:** My Favorite Food

**Tuesday: Discussion:** Introductions, Syllabus and Moodle tour.

**For Thursday: Read & View:** “Introduction to American Food Writing,” by Molly O’Neill; [How I broke into Food Writing](#) By [Jessica Battalina](#)

“False Prophets” excerpted from *The Gospel of Food* By Barry Glassner.

“The Pleasures of Eating;” Wendell Berry. “Bread and Watermelons” (Thoreau); “Black Cake” (Dickinson); “Kitchen Confidential” excerpt (Bourdain); “Traveling Man’s Burden (Trillin).

**Prepare: Reading Response & Discussion:** On American Food Writing

**In-class writing and group critique:** Guilty Pleasures

### **Week 2: September 11-15, 2017**

#### **Food Writing & Social Change**

**Read & View:** “Fast Food Nation,” excerpt. “America Your Food is So Gay;” Alice Waters: “The Farm-Restaurant Connection;” “The American Table.” Pollan & Reichl; “My Organic Industrial Meal”

**Response and Discussion:** We are what we eat... and what we eat is heavily salted with economic, environmental, and social politics. Food writing often addresses these issues.

Films: *Fast Food Nation*. *Super Size Me* (2004);

**Visit to Barstow’s Farm, Saturday September 9, 2017 11a-1p.**

### **Week 3: September 18-22, 2017**

#### **Food Writing & Social Change (Continued)**

**Read & View:** “On Eggs”; “How Junk Food Can End Obesity”; “Me, Myself, and Ribeye”; Olive Oil resources collected (Extra Virginity excerpt) Films: *Food Inc.* (2008); *King Korn* (film, 2007).

**September 19, 2017: Field Trip to Atlas Farm, Deerfield MA:** Meet with the farmers and workers. Learn about partner farms and suss out potential story ideas and themes.

### **Week 4: September 25-29, 2017**

**Popular Food Writing Formats:** The Interview; Service / Travel Story; Recipe With a Story; Review; Personal Essay.

**Read:** [Parmesan Cheese is Not What it Seems](#); American Cuisine Whatever That Is (interview with Robert Sietsema and Jonathan Gold); Toques from the Underground (Dana Goodyear/The New Yorker). Kitchen Horrors (Laurie Colwin). *Pete Wells Has His Knives Out* (Ian Parker, New Yorker) Best Apps for Foodies; with multimedia-- Jollof Rice NPR August 2016 <http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2016/08/30/491380208/jollof-rice-west-africans-dish-it-up-with-a-hefty-serving-of-smack-talk>

**Discussion:** Publishing in local and regional news outlets i.e. *Gazette*, *Amherst Wire*, *Republican*, *Greenfield Recorder*, *Edible* magazine.

\*Schedule final project proposal meetings with Instructor by October 6

**Farm Visit: Black Birch Vineyards, Thursday 9/28 3:30 p**

### **Week 6: October 2-6, 2017**

#### **Fine Ingredients: Information and Images**

**Guest Lecturer: Jim Kelly, Librarian**

**Discussion:** Just as the best food hails from great ingredients, so does the best food writing: how to find, sort, and value sources of information; discuss and share resources.

**Read:** Library of Congress/Serving up Food collections; The Culture Issue: How did we all get so food obsessed? (bon appétit, March 2016)

Taking quality photos in the field with emphasis on food photography

**Group Critique:** Drafts of first 1000-word story

### **Week 7: October 9-13, 2017**

#### **On Cookbooks**

**Field Trip TBD**

#### **Readings & Viewing:**

Test Kitchen Cooks Talk the Science of Savory (NPR), The Future of

Cookbooks (Slate.com), The Future of Cookbook Publishing (Chow.com); Cookbook Collectors (Travel&Leisure), The Food Establishment, Nora Ephron; [The Archive of Eating](#); Film: *Julie & Julia*.

**Discussion:** Why do we need & read cookbooks? Do we need real books or will virtual books do?

**Writing: First 1000-word story due**

**Week 8: October 16-20, 2017**

**Field Trip #3 TBD**

**Memoir**

**Reading & Viewing:** *Heat* (excerpt) Bill Buford. “Peanut butter and Bonhomie”; “Hersheyettes” (Volk); “Bachelor Cooking” (Fisher); “Take in the State Fair” (Keillor); excerpt *Double cup love: On the trail of family, food, and broken hearts in China* / Eddie Huang.

**Reading Responses Due**

**Week 9: October 23-27, 2017**

**Recipes**

Discussion: The Art and Science of Recipe Writing and Testing

Reading: [Cookbook Recipes Need to Be Tested Here’s Why](#); [How to Develop a Recipe Like a Test Kitchen Editor](#)

Class Exercise: Recipe Test Swap

**Group Critique:** Drafts of second 1000-word story

**Week 10: October 20-November 3, 2017**

**Food Blogs:** Why are food blogs so popular and lucrative?

Read/Review: Daily Beast, Chow, <https://food52.com>, Salon; Survey Best Food Blogs

**Writing: Second 1000-word story due**

**Week 11: November 6-10, 2017**

**Food Magazines**

**Discussion:** Travel, adventure, and food all seem to roll into one genre when you read today’s best food magazines. What is so important about “place” when writing (and reading) about food?

**Reading & Viewing:** “Looks Aren’t Everything” (Britchky); “Hot for Tamales”; SURVEY: *Lucky Peach*, *Cook’s Illustrated*; *Food & Wine*; *Saveur*; *bon appétit*; & *Martha Stewart*

**Group Critique: Third 1000-word story due**

**Week 12: November 13-17, 2017**

Reading: *The Culinary Imagination: From Myth to Modernity* Sandra Gilbert

**Recipe Test Results and Responses Due**

**Week 13: November 20-24, 2017**

Thanksgiving Week/no class

**Week 14: November 27-December 1, 2017**

**Group Critique:** Final Project Drafts including multimedia elements

**Week 15: December 4-8, 2017**

**Individual meetings** with instructor on final projects

December 15, 2017

**Final Projects Due**