**Writing about Food**

*Syllabus for Fall 2015*

*Hybrid Course*

Writing about Food Fall 2015 will give you a framework for writing about all aspects of food, using a news reporting perspective. With so much changing in the world of food -- the explosion of farmers' markets, artisanal food makers, and the new ways in which we look at food through the lenses of environment, animal welfare, nutrition and home cooking -- stories are waiting to be told. The framework will help structure storytelling about the food in our world today. Students will find stories, interview, report, and write as well as workshop other students' work.

This hybrid course begins with an intensive weekend Sept. 11, 12 and 13, 2015 that will outline the course plus give a solid basis for first projects, giving students a head start for the online portion of the course. In-class writing assignments, an in-class chef interview as well as outside-the-class reporting will be included.

For the online sessions, students will have assignments plus assigned readings that show a range of food writing, along with tips, direction, and help in collecting information and shaping stories, conducting interviews, and restaurant reviewing tactics. We will also read and critique examples of published food writing, both current and classic. There will be plenty of interaction between each student and the teacher as well as interaction with other class members. The class will also include practical ways for students to approach editors, market their work, and find outlets for work.

A Facebook Page will allow students to interact with links to articles, news, and food events. Instagram will also be used to share photos and food news.

Our textbooks will be "Best Food Writing of 2014" and "Will Write for Food." Additionally, there will be handouts from magazines, newspapers, and blogs. Short video clips will be used from time to time. Graduate students in journalism will have an additional project on a food issue, to be determined by the student and teacher.

You will be expected to complete a total of three short in-class assignments during the intensive weekend, and 6 written assignments – a short mini-profile of 500 or less words; a full profile of 1,000 to 1,200 words; a restaurant review of 800 words; a recipe story with recipe of 6-800 words plus recipe; and two smaller assignments of 300 words or less. Graduate student must also write a 1,000-1,200 word issue piece.

Three assignments will be workshopped in class, and you will have opportunity to revise. Timely submission of written work is essential to this course, especially because of the online aspect. Productive and instrumental participation is also very important.

*WAF Week by Week*

*Intensive Weekend at Harvard*

Friday, September 11, 5-8 pm

Meet and greet at Harvard: Orientation on what is expected of class members, what to expect of teachers. Introduction and exercises to get acquainted (interviewing each other and reporting); a light snack (provided by teacher) with an in-class writing exercise plus discussion of how to describe food. Discussion of assignments and course materials for online portion of course. Discussion of voice and why it is important in writing.

Saturday, September 12, 9 am to 5 pm

9-10:30 am: Discussion of profiles, the first assignment/project. Tips on how to find subjects, dos and don’ts in profiles, how to interview using “open” rather than “closed” questions. Tips on finding the interesting aspects of your subject.

10:45-noon: Chef Jose Duarte of Taranta will make a very short presentation and then be interviewed by the class. This interview will be an assignment for first class – a short profile as preparation for individual profiles

12- 12:30 Discussion of chef interview and discussion of following working lunch

12:30 – 2 pm Working lunch, involving leaving classroom as roving reporters and either interview someone in Square about food or find a food for later description.

2-3:30 pm In-class writing assignment from working lunch period

3:30 short break

3:50-5 pm. Teacher talks about restaurant reviewing: how to do it, what it entails, and personal experience of reviewing. Examples of current reviews and classic reviews are read and the state of restaurant reviewing discussed.

Assignment for next day is discussed (students are required to review where they eat on Saturday night – a restaurant of any type, or even home meal, with emphasis on description.)

Sunday, September 13

9 am -1 pm

9 -10:45 am Write mini reviews as preparation for longer reviews later in semester.

Read and discuss Short Orders, short pieces that appear in newspapers, magazines etc.

10:45 am -12 pm Class goes to Harvard Square Farmers Market, talks to owner of Kimball Farms or other farmer about business, direct marketing, agriculture today. This is for later assignment – take notes!!

12-1pm Reconvene at Harvard to discuss first assignments and course expectations and requirements for rest of semester. Handout: Rules of the Road: How to submit writing

Discussion of finding profile subject and being able to discuss Sept. 22

*Online Classes*

*All written assignments are due by noon the Sunday before class, ie Sept. 20 at noon for Sept 22; . This is for the sake of class discussion as well as making sure the online portion goes smoothly.*

**Sept. 22:**

**Readings** “Nacho No Match for Lunch Lady” and interview with author about setting up, interviewing and writing the piece; read pages 107-118 in Will Write for Food (2015 edition)

Have Profile Subject (2-3) and be prepared to discuss/defend

**Writing assignment (due noon Sept. 20)**: (1) a short, no more than 500 word piece on interview with Chef Duarte or reported piece on trip to Farmers Market. **This will be graded.**

*In Class:*

Discuss reading assignments.

Read aloud and discuss short profiles, with commentary by teacher

Discuss outlining and why it is important for longer profiles.

Discuss subjects for longer profiles

Discuss How to Pitch Profiles to an Editor.

Discuss Workshopping – how it works etc

**October 6**

**Readings** “A Toast Story” in Best Food Writing 2014; http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/16/dining/ruth-reichl-my-kitchen-year.html?ref=dining&\_r=0

NYT <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/meet-chef-lives-micro-apartment-174404055.html?soc_src=mediacontentstory&soc_trk=fb>

[(Links to an external site.)](http://finance.yahoo.com/news/meet-chef-lives-micro-apartment-174404055.html?soc_src=mediacontentstory&soc_trk=fb)

**Writing assignment (Due noon Oct. 4) (1)**

First Draft of Profile

Link to first 8 profiles will be emailed to students by evening of Oct. 4, critique and be prepared to workshop in class Oct. 6

*IN Class*

Discuss readings

Workshop first 8 profiles

Discuss commentary and readings by teacher

**October 20**

**Readings:** “Waiting for the 8th” in BFW; read Dining Out chapter in Will Write for Food

**Writing assignment:** Either Farmers’ Market or Duarte interview (whichever one you didn’t do before) 500 words

Read and critique last 9 Profiles for Workshopping

*In Class*

Amanda Strauss of Schlesinger Collection at Radcliffe (MFK Fisher, Julia Child etc papers and cookbook collection) will talk about collection and how to access it.

Second week of Workshopping

Students will read critiques of others’ works aloud; teacher will offer commentary

Teacher will give concrete ways to improve material and tips for editing, trimming, and polishing profiles.

Discuss readings – the human element in food, how to get deep into a subject

Discuss restaurant reviews and how to select a restaurant to review.

**November 3**

**Readings:** “How to Boil Water” BFW; Ruth Reichl’s famous review of Le Cirque

**Writing Assignments**

Bring to (virtual) class example of a restaurant review; write to discuss in class why the review worked or didn’t work

Polish your profile (due Nov. 19) and be ready to discuss how it’s going in class

*In Class*

Discuss published restaurant reviews

Discuss current state of reviewing, Yelp, etc

Discuss comic element in reading and in restaurant/food writing – what is funny, what works, what doesn’t

Workshop last profiles

Student will tell class what restaurant they’re reviewing and why.

Discussion of Recipe with Story assignment

**November 17**

**Readings** Melissa Clark stories with recipes (2) will be emailed to class by Nov. 8; “Against the Grain, the Urge to go Gluten Free or “Is it anti-science to be anti-GMOs”

**Writing** assignments: First draft of restaurant review due Sunday, **Nov. 22 at noon (links will be mailed to class for workshopping Dec. 1)**

Final of profile due Nov. 19

*In Class*

Discuss recipe stories.

Discuss pitches for recipe stories – how to do them, where to direct them, what works what doesn’t, why doing a pitch is a good idea to define/sharpen your writing

Discuss issue pieces and the journalistic emphasis on people in issue stories

Discuss last points on final drafts of profile pieces; marketplace ideas on profiles – where would you sell them, what kind of audience would be interested

Discuss restaurant reviews and any issues/problems

**December 1**

**Readings:** Find and read a classic piece of food writing – some examples are James Beard, Julia Child, MFK Fisher, Edna Lewis, Waverly Root, AJ Liebling, Clementine Paddleford, Colette, Ernest Hemingway, RJ Apple – Be prepared to read and discuss in class

 **Writing assignment** First draft of restaurant review (due noon Nov. 22)

Pitch to an editor on Recipe story with recipe description (Due Dec. 1 or before)

**FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS: First draft of issue piece of 1,200 words or less as discussed with teacher (due Nov. 30)**

*In Class*

Workshop restaurant reviews; the links will be sent out Nov. 22; all students should have short comments: Does the lead work, does the review either make you want to go there and/or is useful to the reader

Discuss and read classic food writing in class: Why it’s important to read the classics, how food writing has changed for the better, not for the better? Voice in classical food writing

**December 15**

**Reading:** The Marketplace: Where to start; how to sell; What to expect. Find a published example of food writing with a strong voice to share with class. It could be something you really like or really hate. Or it could be great but flawed in some definable way. You will discuss in class – and if possible email to class members before class

**Writing assignment:** Recipe story with recipe (due noon Dec 13); students will be emailed link; critique and bring to class for workshopping.

Graduate students and others: Finished issue pieces (due Dec. 22)

*In Class*

Workshopping of recipe pieces

The Marketplace: discussion by teacher with extensive interviews/clips from working freelancers and editors.

Discussion of published food writing with a voice

Course wrap-up: Highlights from writings on what we learned and what we wished we know more about

**Finished recipe stories are due Dec. 18**

**Finished graduate issue pieces are due Dec 22**

**Grading will be on following criteria:**

Mini-profile – 10 percent

Profile - 30 percent

Review - 20 percent

Recipe story - 20 percent

Short assignments -10 percent

Participation -10 percent