

Food Writing/Reporting

JOUR 4160/6160-001

Fall 2025

Class Meeting: TR 1-2:25 p.m., MJ 212

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Office: 326 Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: MW 12:50-2:20 p.m.

TTH 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Develops expertise in the specialized niche of food writing with narrative stories and multimedia content

Prerequisites

JRSM 3120 and 3526

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

- “The Best American Food Writing 2023,” by Mark Bittman and Silvia Killingsworth. Available in paperback and ebook.
- Wednesday food section of The New York Times and local food coverage. (We will discuss how to access news sites at no charge in class.)
- A smart phone and access to a laptop or a desktop computer. Journalists today need to be in constant contact with the Internet and social media, so make sure you have the devices to make that happen.
- A camera or smart phone for taking digital photographs.
- A clip-on microphone for recording interviews for video and audio.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the term year courses available to you, click on the link for JOUR 4160/6160 - 001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

Course Requirements

Popularly referred to as the new rock and roll, food these days encompasses much more than what we put on our plates. For writers, the new bounty of consumer interest encourages

Storytelling through the lenses of food culture, food history and the health of our planet. In this class, students will use descriptive narratives and multi-media to cover a range of topics, including restaurants and chefs, food trends and the social politics of what Americans eats. Field trips may also be on the menu, as students discover for themselves why Memphis is quickly becoming one of the South's most popular food destinations.

- Assignments will be completed both in and outside the classroom, so attendance and participation in class are vital. Class time is also valuable for discussions, so please be on time.
- Here's how attendance works: I'm not interested in hearing excuses. You get three free passes during the semester. After you cash in your passes, missed classes are reflected in your final grade. For example, if you miss one additional class, your final grade drops a letter grade. If you miss two more classes, your grade drops again. So if you miss six classes, your final grade drops two letters.
- If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to complete missed work. If you are unsure about deadlines, ask classmates or check the online system.
- To be a good writer, you need to be a good reader. Reading outside of class will be required regularly and will be the basis of class discussions and possible quizzes.
- All assignments must be filed to the Canvas drop box by midnight (11:59 p.m.) on the day they are due. Late assignments will not be accepted.
- All written assignments will be graded on content, readability, story structure, word count, grammar, punctuation and AP style.
- Assignments for food writing involve several components. You must complete all parts of the assignment to receive a grade. Assignments that are incomplete will not be graded, and students will receive a zero.

Grading

Story assignments: 75 percent

In-class work, homework, quizzes: 25 percent of semester grades.

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4% B+=86.5-89.4%;B=82.5-86.4%;B- =79.5-82.4% C+=76.5-79.4%;C=72.5-76.4%;C-=69.5-72.4% D+=66.5-69.4%;D=59.5-66.4%
F 0-59.4%

Other issues

Food writing is a vehicle for becoming better writers, reporters, storytellers and problem solvers. Yes, food writing is fun, but it is not frivolous. While food writing does not conform to strict rules

of traditional print journalism, it is at its heart narrative storytelling based on fact, accuracy, voice, observation and description. In other words, don't cut corners with research and reporting. And remember this: Opinion in your stories needs justification, and that justification comes from complete and accurate reporting.

COURSE SCHEDULE

A flexible syllabus is necessary to respond to events as they occur in real time. Deadlines for assignments may change, so check due dates regularly.

WEEK 1 - Introductions: What is food? How does it impact our culture and community? How does the media cover food? How do you find story ideas?

Week 2 - Description, anecdotes and voice

WEEK 3 - Key Ingredients

WEEK 4 – Food Writing and History

WEEK 5 – Food Writing and Society

WEEK 5 – The Politics of Food Writing

WEEK 6 – The Visuals of Food Writing

WEEK 7 – A Food Writer's Tool Box

WEEK 8 – Break

WEEK 9 – Personality-Profile in Food Writing

WEEK 10 – People, Personalities and Food Producers

WEEK 11 – Food Celebration

WEEK 12 – Seasonal Traditions

WEEK 13 – People, Personalities and Food Producers

WEEK 14 – Portfolio Week

WEEK 15 – The Finale

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 4160

- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)

- Develop expertise in food writing - a specialized niche of news reporting - by reading and analyzing books, newspapers, magazines and online format
- Recognize how food writing combines lifestyle, business and entertainment reporting to cover cultural and political history and current trends
- Improve information-gathering techniques, including interviewing and research, through classroom exercises and story assignments
- Understand the journalism ethics governing food writing through classroom discussion and assignments
- Learn to separate fact from opinion by writing restaurant reviews and memoirs

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Take occasional quizzes on textbook content and other required readings
- Develop expertise in a specialized news niche
- Report, write, and edit multi-source stories for print and online both individually and as part of a team
- Work across multiple platforms, including print, podcasts and social media
- Develop and refine photography skills
- Analyze the writing styles and techniques of leading American food writers
- Follow events, news and developments in food, both locally and nationally

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn the importance of verification, attribution and accuracy in all completed projects
- Study new forms of narrative non-fiction, such as essays, memoirs, first-person experiences, and recipe development
- Recognize the skills pertinent to niche, or specialized, journalism.

Understanding

- Recognize how food writing and criticism rely on the same fundamentals as news reporting: ethics, experts, accuracy and balance.
- Identify and develop individual voices within stories (funny, confessional, relaxed, self-deprecating, approachable, etc.)
- Understand the historical and cultural connections between people and food.

Application

- Produce and publish stories using technologies vital to today's journalist.
- Work as a team to produce and publish a final project that meets professional standards.
- Network with local food and restaurant leaders.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.