



COMM/JOUR/FSST 345 Communicating Taste: Media and the Journalism of Food & Wine

Course Syllabus
Spring Semester 2025

“Food writing is stepping out. It’s about time. For far too long it’s been the timid little sister of the writing world, afraid to raise its voice.” — Ruth Reichl, *The Best American Food Writing* 2018

Instructor: Jacopo Cossater, M.A.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: none

Class Meeting Days & Time:

GROUP A: Mondays & Wednesdays, 2:15-3:45 pm

GROUP B: Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:00-5:30 pm

Office Hours: by appointment before class

Course Type: Standard Course

Course Fee: \$110.00

Course Description

Over the past three decades, food&wine criticism has established itself as a journalistic genre. From Robert Parker’s wine scores to *New York Times*’ Four-Star restaurants, the way journalism has begun to deal with these topics has changed dramatically. This course approaches food&wine writing from a news reporting perspective. In particular, it explores the way in which the largest newspapers and magazines in the world write about food&wine and other popular ways in which the language of food&wine is broadcast, especially social media and blogs. Students will travel into the field to meet people who make and grow what we drink and eat, conducting interviews and collecting information to synthesize into multimedia stories for publication around themes such as health, history, travel, ecology, social change, nutrition, and home cooking.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course’s learning outcomes, followed by the methods that will be used to assess students’ achievement for each learning outcome. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- *Develop* the ability to write clear, concise, accurate and interesting food&wine stories;
- *identify* food&wine trends and *describe* how they arise and develop, all over the world;
- *find, report and write* compelling stories about food&wine and engage the audience’s attention;
- *exhibit* working fluency in different modes of food&wine journalism, including restaurant reporting, personal essay, profiles, and recipe-driven essays;
- *demonstrate* news-gathering skills, including research and interviewing methods;

- use various narrative techniques in news and feature food&wine stories for print, the web, social media platforms (text, photography, video, audio, etc.).

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Office Hours	2%
Course journal	18%
Midterm assignment	25%
Group work (podcast)	20%
Final assignment	25%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional Excellent
A-	90% - 92%	
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Office Hours (2%)

Getting to know your professor makes you more comfortable with that person and therefore more likely to ask for help. It also might help for you to ask questions about the various assignments or discuss a paper idea. In this course, you get 2% of your grade for coming at least one time to office hours by Week 12.

Course journal (18%)

Students will be provided with a notebook at the start of the semester, which they will use as a personal space through which to reflect on course material and ideas. In-class assignments (e.g. summaries of assigned readings, analyses of primary sources, mental maps, reflections, predictive exercises) will be regularly scheduled and graded twice throughout the semester, i.e. before the mid-semester break (Week 6) and at the end of the course (Week 12). Each of these checks is worth 9% of your grade, for a total of 18%. Students will find the full prompt on Moodle for more information.

Midterm assignment (20%)

Students will write one original essay OR will produce a story in multimedia format (TikTok Video/Instagram Reel).

Group work - Podcast (20%)

Students will be formed into groups and will create a single podcast based on workshops and activities that will be due at the end of the semester.

Final assignment (30%)

Students will write one original essay AND will produce a story in multimedia format (TikTok Video/Instagram Reel).

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero. As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course, and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of

class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class. Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided. Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Utilizing ChatGPT or other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for the generation of content submitted by a student as their own as part of any assignment for academic credit at the Institute constitutes a form of plagiarism. Should the Institute become aware of a student's use of such platforms and services, the student will be subject to the same consequences and judicial proceedings as are in place for plagiarism (defined above).

Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set on silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, earbuds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions for anything other than note-taking, unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

Laptop/Smartphone Policy

An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, students are asked to keep computers and phones away and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have a vision or other accommodation; 2) if you are using a tablet to take notes, one which is not connected to the internet; 3)

if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools; or 4) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer.

U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

This course contributes to the achievement of one or more goals of U. N. Agenda for Sustainable Development:



Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Course Introduction & Introduction to journalism and news

Meeting 1: *Course Introduction: logistics, topics, assessments - Each student will introduce her/him/ them self (name, school, where they live, experience in writing or producing multimedia stories) - Discussion: a recipe, a restaurant review, a food story, the three journalistic lives of the same ingredient.*

Readings:

- [Bourdain, A. \(1999\). Don't Eat Before Reading This. *The New Yorker*.](#)

Meeting 2: *Introduction to journalism and news - Definition of journalism and the role of journalists in society - Ethical principles of journalism - Different types of news and how they are gathered and verified - The importance of neutrality and objectivity in news.*

Readings:

- The Missouri Group (2008), *News Reporting and Writing*, 9th edition, Bedford-St. Martin. Pages 96-106 (“What news is”).

WEEK 2

Introduction to food writing & Social media

Meeting 1: *Our favorite food writers/pieces of food writing - Discussion: What is food writing? Does it have (to have) a certain form, content, style? What is NOT food writing? What is good writing?*

Readings:

- Thurner, B. (2013), *Specialist Journalism*, 1st edition, Routledge. Pages 96-106 (“Food Journalism”).

Meeting 2: *Social Media, what they are, how they work, How to measure the results of a post (metrics).*

Assignment: *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. By the end of the week write a short essay of at least 230 words (1.500 characters - including spaces) on what you think is your favorite dish, explaining why.*

WEEK 3

Gathering and verifying information

Meeting 1: *Assignments review - Gathering and verifying information - Sources of information and how to evaluate them - Tools and resources available to journalists in gathering information.*

Readings:

- The Missouri Group (2008), *News Reporting and Writing*, 9th edition, Bedford-St. Martin. Pages 91-93 (“Accurate information”).

Meeting 2: *Workshop - Wine tasting: (almost) every product has a story to tell.*

WEEK 4

Social Media Food & Pitching and Reporting

Meeting 1: *Food writing in the era of social media (Instagram focus).*

Readings:

- Feldman, Z. (2021), 'Good food' in an Instagram age: Rethinking hierarchies of culture, criticism and taste, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Pages 1-7.

Meeting 2: *Pitching and Reporting - Best practices for reporting stories: 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.*

Readings:

- The Missouri Group (2008), *News Reporting and Writing*, 9th edition, Bedford-St. Martin. Pages 133-136 ("The inverted pyramid").

WEEK 5

Social Media Food & Pitching and Reporting

Meeting 1: *Reviews and Criticism: Anatomy and purpose of (restaurant) criticism*

Readings:

- Woodward K. (2017), [How to Write a Restaurant Review](#), Karen Woodward's Blog.

Assignment: *We will begin to understand how to write a restaurant review, starting with one of your experiences. By the end of the week write a short essay of at least 300 words (2,000 characters - including spaces) on a restaurant you visited in Italy.*

Meeting 2: *Podcast introduction: the basic structures of journalist podcasts*

Readings:

- Morris, T. (2020), *Podcasting For Dummies*. Pages 85-96 ("Before You Hit the Record Button").

WEEK 6

Journalistic writing

Meeting 1: *Journalistic writing - Structure of a news article: headline, summary, lead, body - How to write clearly, concisely, and effectively - The importance of word choice and tone in journalism - Practical examples of journalistic writing and editing activities.*

Readings:

- The Missouri Group (2008), *News Reporting and Writing*, 9th edition, Bedford-St. Martin. Pages 160-168 ("Good writing begins with good reporting").

Meeting 2: *Workshop: the great story behind a beer, Birrificio Altotevere (San Giustino, Perugia)*

Readings:

- Rao, T. (2017), Oysters: a love story, *The Best American Food Writing 2018*. Pages 232-233.
- Roy, R. (2017), [For the Love of Hilsa](#), Roads and Kingdoms.

Midterm assignment: *Write a 450 words (3.000 characters - including spaces) essay on a subject that has aroused your interest (a chef, a restaurant, a recipe, a wine, etc.) OR produce a 60 seconds story about it (TikTok Video/Instagram Reel) - A full prompt is available on Moodle.*

Semester Break

WEEK 7

Restaurant's reviews & Podcast introduction

Meeting 1: *Food writing in the era of social media (TikTok focus)*

Meeting 2: *Wednesday, 12 March, 7:30PM - Workshop: restaurant experience, creative cuisine (Ristorante Luce, Perugia).*

Readings:

- Gold, J. (2017), Is dinner for two worth \$1,000?, *The Best American Food Writing 2018*. Pages 92-96.

Assignment: *By the end of the week produce a story/reel to share on social media (TikTok or Instagram) about the experience we had at the restaurant. No minimum length.*

WEEK 8

Ethics and Journalistic & Recipes

Meeting 1: *Ethics and Journalistic - Responsibility The importance of accuracy, responsibility, and transparency in journalism - The role of editors and editing in journalism - Ethics in the use of images and data in news - Journalism in the digital age: challenges and opportunities.*

Readings:

- The Missouri Group (2008), *News Reporting and Writing*, 9th edition, Bedford-St. Martin. Pages 485-489 (“Three ethical philosophies”).

Meeting 2: *Cookbooks and Recipes - Recipe writing/ cookbooks focus*

Readings:

- Raff, J., [Cookbooks Are So Much More Than Recipes and Photographs](#), Literary Hub.

WEEK 9

Podcast pre-production & Press office

Meeting 1: *Podcast pre-production: scouting, pitching, and outlining*

Meeting 2: *Workshop: cheese - To be confirmed*

Readings:

- Rao, T. (2017), *The Best American Food Writing 2018*. Pages 229-231 (“The joy of reading about cooking”).

WEEK 10

Podcast production & Food producers

Meeting 1: *Podcast production: organization and recording*

Meeting 2: *Writing about food producers - The relationship between journalism and press office*

Readings:

- Battilana, J. (2013), [How I Broke Into Food Writing: Advice From Tasting Table's Senior Editor](#), Forbes.

WEEK 11

Meeting 1: *Workshop: a practical creative writing workshop. We will do some writing in class and discuss critiquing and feedback.*

Meeting 2: *Podcast production: post-production and publishing - International Journalism Festival introduction and discussion*

Readings:

- DeVore, J. (2014), [Life in Chains: Finding Home at Taco Bell](#), Eater.

WEEK 12

Social media food & Food Reporting

Meeting 1: *Focusing on food through social media - Impact of Food Reporting. Discussion about how food journalism can have a real impact on the industry, businesses, and communities, and the ethical responsibilities that come with this influence.*

Meeting 2: *Podcast student showcase: group listens to final projects*

Final assignment: *Write a 800 words (5.000 characters - including spaces) essay on a subject that has aroused your interest (a chef, a restaurant, a recipe, a wine, a food producer, etc.) AND produce a 60 seconds story about it (TikTok Video/Instagram Reel) - A full prompt is available on Moodle.*

Appendix A: Assignment Instructions

Midterm & Final assignment

Please note that for the midterm assignment it is possible to choose whether to write an essay or to produce multimedia content. For the final exam both must be done, on the same subject.

- **Option 1: Writing a 3.000/5.000-characters essay**

Step 1: Choose a Subject

Select a subject that genuinely sparks your curiosity. It could be a food producer, a greengrocer, a butcher, a chef, a renowned restaurant, a delicious recipe, a specific wine, or any other food-related topic you are passionate about.

Step 2: Research

Before you start writing, it's essential to conduct thorough research on the chosen subject. You can use books, articles, reputable websites, and interviews to gather information and gain a comprehensive understanding.

Step 3: Create an Outline

An outline is crucial for organizing your thoughts and ensuring your essay flows logically. It should have an introduction, several body paragraphs discussing different aspects of the subject, and a conclusion.

- Introduction: Introduce the subject, briefly explain why it interests you, and present the purpose of the essay.
- Body paragraphs: Each paragraph should focus on a specific aspect or topic related to the subject. You can talk about the history, significance, cultural aspects, personal experiences, or any other relevant information.
- Conclusion: Summarize the key points and leave the reader with a strong closing statement or final thoughts about the subject.

Step 4: Write the Essay

Using the outline as a guide, you can start writing your essay. Express your thoughts clearly and use descriptive language to make your writing engaging and captivating.

Step 5: Edit and Revise

After completing the first draft, you should carefully edit and revise the essay. Check for grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors. Ensure the essay is coherent, and the ideas flow smoothly.

A 3,000/5,000-characters essay is about 430/720 words.

- **Option 2: Producing a 60/90 seconds story (TikTok Video/Instagram Reel)**

Step 1: Develop the Storyline

A compelling story needs a captivating plot. Create a storyline that revolves around your chosen subject. It could be a focus on a specific ingredient (a fruit, a vegetable, a cut of meat, a fish, etc.), a behind-the-scenes look at a chef's journey, a recipe-making adventure, a restaurant review, or a wine-tasting exploration.

Step 2: Gather Content

You should collect all the necessary materials to tell your story effectively. This may involve visiting the grocery store, the chef or the restaurant, taking photos or shooting videos, and conducting interviews (recommended).

Step 3: Create the Story

Using the gathered content, put together your story. Edit the footage and add any necessary narration or captions to complement the visuals.

Step 6: Edit and Finalize

Just like with the essay, the final step involves editing and refining the story. Ensure the clips flow smoothly and include any necessary transitions or effects.

Remember to have fun and be creative throughout the process! This project is an excellent opportunity for you to explore your passion and share your interests with others through a captivating video or reel.

Group work (podcast) assignment

In this activity, you will create a podcast that delves deeper into the captivating world of a specific food&wine argument. Your podcast episode will take your audience on an immersive journey, uncovering the secrets, stories, and nuances behind this culinary delight. Whether it's exploring the versatility of a particular ingredient, understanding a chef's culinary path, sharing a delightful recipe adventure, reviewing a remarkable restaurant, or experiencing the art of wine-tasting, your podcast aims to enlighten and delight food enthusiasts.

- Students will be divided into groups of three.
- The idea is to make a single episode, a sort of pilot for a possible podcast
- The minimum length of this assignment is 4 minutes, the maximum is 8
- Umbra Institute podcast room will be available for this course, reservation is highly recommended

Instructions:

Step 1: Choose Your Focus

Decide on the central theme of your podcast - whether it's focusing on a specific ingredient (e.g., a fruit, a vegetable, a cut of meat, a fish, etc.), a chef's culinary journey, a unique recipe-making adventure, a review of a remarkable restaurant, or a delightful wine-tasting exploration.

Step 2: Research and Planning

Conduct extensive research on your chosen theme. Delve into its history, cultural significance, and its impact on the culinary world. Plan your podcast episodes to cover intriguing aspects that will captivate and engage your listeners.

Step 3: Episode Structure

Prepare a well-structured outline or script for each podcast episode. Incorporate engaging storytelling, interesting anecdotes, interviews, and, if applicable, delightful recipe sharing or wine-tasting experiences.

Step 4: Recording

Utilize recording equipment and audio software to produce your podcast episodes. Ensure that your voice is clear, enthusiastic, and easy to follow.

Step 5: Editing

After recording, edit the episodes to create a seamless and professional flow. Enhance the listening experience with appropriate sound effects or background music, keeping it aligned with your podcast's theme.

Remember, your podcast episode is an opportunity to share your passion and knowledge about the subject with a wider audience. Be engaging, informative, and enthusiastic as you take your listeners on an exciting journey through the world of food&wine. Enjoy the process, and let your passion for food and storytelling shine through in every episode!