

## **Food Justice Journalism Assignment**

“Eating and storytelling are inseparable.”  
“[This book] is as objective as any work of journalism can be.”  
“Can we tell a new story?”

—Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating Animals*

Your Food Justice Journalism assignment is meant to take you from a personal story about ethical eating issues to a larger, societal story—one that’s attempting to make a persuasive argument about a specific problem related to questions of food justice in the United States (and, perhaps, globally). Remember what Jonathan Safran Foer says at the end of *Eating Animals*: “[Y]ou don’t dine alone,” and “eating is a social act.” Your assignment, then, is one in which you will constantly consider how food production, preparation, presentation, and consumption doesn’t happen in a vacuum but as part of a wider social network.

The societal story you’re going to tell will draw on at least four distinct outside sources to describe your central problem, or “the what,” that you wish to explore. But your piece will also need to tell a *persuasive* story. You’ll need to make an argument about your chosen topic, one that’s meant to try and convince a target audience about how and why this issue matters when it comes to food justice. So whether you’re writing about food deserts in urban areas, the widespread problem of child hunger, the copyrighting of seeds and other organic materials by agribusinesses, our cultural taboo against fat, the gendering and racializing of certain foods, the elitism of foodie culture, undocumented workers’ rights at slaughterhouses or apple farms, you’re going to think socially, politically, and *persuasively* about your chosen topic.

Moreover, since no piece of journalism is truly objective—and since food isn’t just fuel but is also thought, metaphor, idea, spirit, emotion—you will also use yourself as a source. Thus, your experiences, beliefs, senses, concerns, desires, and/or hopes are legitimate parts of your persuasive argument.

### **Required Components**

At basic, this assignment asks that you:

- 1) Decide upon a clearly defined problem that speaks to issue of food justice in the U.S. (and, possibly, the globe) that you wish to research;
- 2) Find at least three secondary sources—meaning academically credible sources—on this problem. As we discussed in class, these secondary sources could range from articles or books by various professional experts (historians, anthropologists, chemists, biologists, etc.); data from governmental agencies or research universities; interviews (that either you or someone else conducts); literary or spiritual texts (though if you go this route, *only one* of your sources may be a piece of literature or a spiritual text, such as the Bible or the Quran); or various food-focused encyclopedias. Web sources are fine, as long as they come from a site with the suffix .edu or .gov;
- 3) Come up with a coherent, specific, and *persuasive* argument about your selected problem. Your argument should be determined by what you’ve discovered within your secondary sources. Did you find out something about the way in which Starbucks markets some of its coffee as “Fair Trade” in order to present itself as an ethical company? Or did you come across contradictory research among scientists on whether GMOs are a way to feed the world or are potentially dangerous for human consumption? Whatever you learned through your sources, take that learning and focus your ideas even further by fashioning a clear argument that comes out of your research, and keep this articulation of your argument to no more than three sentences. Even Foer himself is quite clear in *Eating Animals* about the two central arguments of his book: “[This book] is an argument for vegetarianism, but it’s also an argument for another, wiser animal agriculture and more honorable omnivory.” Try to be this clear and this concise;

- 4) Choose your audience: college students such as yourself? Americans writ large? Public intellectuals? Social activists? Industrial farmers? The Latin-x community? Middle-aged, liberal white women of Scottish ancestry? (That would be me.)
- 5) Find one more outside source from popular culture, and remember that you, too, are a source. As A. Breeze Harper, Simran Sethi, Michael Pollan, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Eric Schlosser do, you'll have to approach the writing of your Food Justice Journalism assignment by synthesizing a number of sources, and yet I don't just mean the three secondary ones. These will be an excellent start, but you'll also use at least one popular culture source (blog, advertisement, TV show, etc.) as well as yourself as a source. (Not sure what I mean by "popular culture"? Well, Harper brings in Coca-Cola; Sethi talks of Hershey's; Pollan watches the Food Network; etc.) So you'll have to think carefully about these two additional sources and how to build credibility (ethos) on the page: i.e., how and where you insert American popular culture into this article as well as yourself into a piece of "objective" journalism, giving your own ethos close consideration. Tell an anecdote, bring your own body or family into the discussion—whatever it may be. But whatever you choose, *do choose it*. Don't be random;
- 6) Cite *all four* of your secondary sources, both through in-text MLA citations as well as through a final Works Cited bibliography page at the end of your paper. In other words, the final paper *must quote or paraphrase parts of all three critical sources as well as the popular culture source*, although I have no requirement about how much material you need to use from each; and, finally,
- 7) Finally, develop a structure. Note that in coming up with a form for your paper, you're required to a) make a clear, persuasive claim; b) use yourself as the narrator or storyteller, utilizing the first-person "I"; c) also use yourself as a participant in the story; and d) quote from your secondary sources as evidence for your argument. And since you'll want to make both logos-based (rational) and pathos-based (emotional) appeals in order to persuade your audience, you'll also want to design a structure that follows a clear process of reasoning or an unfolding of sequential ideas—and yet one that also convinces your readers about the validity of your argument through appealing to their emotions. In other words, allow your piece of Food Justice Journalism to find its own form, given the elements you've selected and the case you hope to make (remember how distinct Harper's, Pollan's, Sethi's, Foer's, and Schlosser's structures are within their articles). On pain of dismemberment, *do not write your paper as a version of the five-paragraph essay!*

## Specs

Your paper should be approximately four or five double-spaced pages long, *not including* your Works Cited page, which is a separate page altogether. Both in-text and Works Cited citations must follow accurate MLA citation style; use the current version of the MLA handbook or the on-line Purdue OWL. *No other source is accurate. Trust me. And since you'll only get one shot at these citations, ask me questions if you're unsure.* Make sure that your paper is clean: run a spellcheck, of course, but you should also do your best not to have comma splices, typos, or easily fixable mistakes such as "it's" when you mean "its." Remember that, if you want feedback as you write, I am available to help.