

Writing and Food (First-Year Writing Course)



Mural at the entrance to Sakura Tei, a savory pancake restaurant in Tokyo.

This first-year writing course teaches students to write effective academic prose, and addresses such topics as sound grammar, logic, and persuasive rhetoric. Though students read and discuss a variety of short texts, student writing is the primary focus of the course. As such, I have included essay prompts below. Assignments proceed through a recursive process of text production, analysis, and revision that gradually become more complex. I also quickly comment on and return student essays, ensuring that student writing consistently develops. Topically, the class focuses on the cultural and social practices relating to the production and consumption of food. Within this purview, we address such issues as gender, race, class, and Lenape native and global foodways.

Essay 1: Exploring Taste

In a three paragraph essay of approx. 350-600 words, respond to following prompt:

For the first paragraph, before eating something describe as precisely as possible the various characteristics of your chosen food item. Its appearance, its smell, does it make any sounds, etc.

For your next paragraph, after eating your chosen item describe the item's flavors, paying particular attention to the ways that your sense of taste differs from, supports, or challenges your other senses.

In the final paragraph, drawing on your experiences and the information presented in your first two paragraphs, explain what you take to be the relationship between your senses and taste. For example, how does smell affect taste? How does taste affect sight? How does touch affect taste? etc. You don't need to cover all of these, rather focus in on some productive, and potentially surprising, discoveries.

Essay 2: Artificial Reality

In a three paragraph essay of approx. 350-600 words, respond to following prompt:

Choose an artificially flavored item. Eat this item.

For the first paragraph, describe the item's physical characteristics, but do not identify (name) it.

For the second paragraph, identify the item, and then discuss how the item's name is or is not an accurate translation of the item's properties, as well as the broader implications of this accurate or inaccurate translation.

For the third paragraph draw on the Classen et. al. reading to help explain and elucidate your experience of the item's physical characteristics, as well as your second paragraph's discussion of the accuracy (or inaccuracy) of the item's name. Introduce the article (For example: "As Classen et. al claim in "Artificial Flavors"), quote and include a page number when appropriate , and include a Works Cited Page.

Works Cited

Classen, Constance, David Howes and Anthony Synott. "Artificial Flavors." *The Taste Culture Reader*. New York, Berg, 2005: 337-342.

Section: Cookbooks

Cookbook Homework 1: Cookbooks and Community

By the next class be in possession of a hardcopy cookbook that you would like to do an in-depth analysis of. Bring this cookbook to class. I recommend choosing a cookbook that is unique- the more interesting you find the cookbook, the easier it will be to make claims about it.

Feel free to raid your own or parents' libraries, draw on the university library (which has a surprisingly diverse selection of cookbooks), ask a friend, or purchase one.

Cookbooks present a different textualization of food than the critic's restaurant review, or the descriptions of flavor on the side of a food packet. Rather, cookbooks represent themselves as encapsulating a community and this community's relationship with food and other related cultural practices.

For next week's reading response, first read the article "Community Cookbooks," then write about some of the different connections Mastrangelo makes between the textual elements of cookbooks and such diverse topics as community, history, geography, and class. Include specific examples, and take note of any aspects you found particularly intriguing, surprising, or curious.

Works Cited

Mastrangelo, Lisa. 2015. "Community Cookbooks: Sponsors of Literacy and Community Identity." *Community Literacy Journal* 10.1 (2015): 73-86.

Cookbook Homework 2: Cookbook Photo Response

Explore the photos of your chosen cookbook. What equivalences, metaphors and/or analogies are the photos positing? What are the implications of these photos, what are they representing (beyond just food), and how? Include photographs or scans of the particular images you refer to in your analysis.

Cookbook Essay- Cookbooks and Communities

In a well written essay of five paragraphs, I want you to ultimately make a claim about the ways in which your cookbook depicts/ constructs a certain community. In other words, cookbooks not only describe a community, they also circumscribe a certain version of that community. The goal of this essay is not a book report style summary, but rather, you should present salient traits of your cookbook and interpret these traits with the goal of making a claim about what community is being represented.

Write your introduction **last**. Begin with three paragraphs of analysis. Each of these three paragraphs should attend to a one aspect of the cookbook. For instance, one paragraph could explore **recipes** (What type of language is used in the steps? What sorts of ingredients are used? What do these ingredients say about the community? etc.), **pictures** (What do the images represent? Are they of people, places, or food? etc.), **what we can we learn from forms of organization** (How are the table of contents, the chapters, and the index arranged and why? Are there no chapters, index or table of contents? Why?), **the way the book itself is constructed** (Is the cookbook made of glossy waterproof papers? Is it printed on cardboard? How might the very material makeup of the cookbook affect our understanding of the community being represented?), **the way the introduction, afterwards, or chapter headings are worded** (In what ways is the author prompting the reader toward a particular understanding of the community? What sort of language is used?), **typography** (Are different aspects of the cookbook rendered in the different fonts? What's the implication of this? What gets highlighted, and what doesn't and why?), **etc.**

Then, in a fourth paragraph, drawing on your previous three paragraphs, articulate a claim about how the cookbook is constructing a particular vision of a community. Some part of audience response (such as “this typography was hard to read, perhaps intentionally”) may make it in to your essay, but make sure that the essay is primarily about the text, its various traits, and how these traits construct a model of the community the cookbook is concerned with. Explicitly refer to specific examples from your three paragraphs of analysis as a means of supporting your claim.

Once these four paragraphs are written, go back and create a brief introduction that includes your cookbook's title and author(s), what particular traits your essay discusses, and drawing on the work you've done in your concluding paragraph, briefly identify the community you take the cookbook to be circumscribing.

Cite and analyze selections from your cookbook throughout, including quotes from recipes or the introduction when appropriate, photos when relevant (for instance regarding typography), etc. Be sure to include a Works Cited page.

Cookbook Homework 3: Class Cookbook

We're going to make a class cookbook, and everyone in the class will get a copy. We will choose a title for the cookbook today, and after the recipes have been submitted, we will discuss how we think the cookbook should be arranged.

Each student should submit one regular sized 8.5 x 11 jpeg or pdf. Your recipe can look however you would like, though it should contain at minimal the following information:

- Your Name
- The Title of the Dish
- A Recipe for the Dish

Beyond that your page is your own, and can include any range of text or images, such as drawings, pictures, a short description of the dish or why you chose it, a poem, etc. Your recipe can be done on a computer or by hand and scanned as a pdf. Having just written an essay about cookbooks, you probably have opinions on what works better or worse in a cookbook. Put those into use!