Writing About Food

A Guide to Good Food Journalism

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European Journalism–Fellowships
2014 – 2015
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EJF Berlin Internationales Journalisten-Kolleg

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Forewords

Greetings from the most popular döner kebab line of Berlin.

It's a chilly afternoon in October and I'm standing in a line in Kreuzberg. Leaves have fallen from the trees and crispy autumn weather makes me wrap my scarf tighter. Luckily the sun is shining and I know that soon I will get something warming. The line is getting longer behind me and I'm smiling.

It's actually quite funny that one of the most queued sights in Berlin is a tiny kebab stand. On the other hand, why not: beating hunger is one of the most satisfying things in life.

Though food is about much more than just taming one's appetite. For many of us, dining is more than a necessary procedure. Food is one of the easiest ways to express your opinion and show your values. One the one hand, you can make a statement by choosing organic, vegetarian, local or Fair Trade food. You may also boycott food from certain countries or boycott certain brands. One the other hand, you might choose to buy the cheapest food available and in that manner show that you are not interested in what you eat.

Food is a status symbol. In which restaurants you go to eat or where you buy your groceries, quickly gives an image about your standard of living. Food may also be a hobby. Writing or following food blogs, having fine dining at home, testing new restaurants, taking part in food happenings, sharing your own reviews or pictures of plates in social media, taking cooking classes, getting to know wines, food travelling – there are so many ways to carry it out.

Food is entertainment. The amount of cooking shows and food related TV-shows have exploded during the last decade. Food is to a larger extent than earlier an everyday topic in newspapers and magazines, and being a *celebrity cook* become a normal title. Food is business. Multinational food corporations, food industrialism, health products, losing weight, restaurant business, bonus

card systems, agriculture and food development are huge economical factors. And for most of us, food is a compilation to all of these things and it's combined in one simple question: "What should I eat today?"

As food is one of the main elements that the whole world is dependent on, I was actually quite surprised as I realized that there is not much literature about food journalism. Neither there are that many places in the world where you can attend to a food journalism course. Naturally there is plenty of food writing, but it's not seen as an independent field of journalism. So how, then, do you make good food journalism, and what is the role of food journalism? This is what I was thinking when it was my turn to get to the counter.

"One vegetarian kebab, please", I say with a bit of excitement and the man in Mustafas Gemüse Kebap stand nods towards me and starts to fill the soft bread. He spreads the spicy sauce to the sides, the herbal sauce to the middle and the garlic-yoghurt sauce at the bottom. His hands are quick, the tong moves fast as he grabs the green salad, the cabbage salad, the tomato pieces, the cucumber slices, the onion rings. The bread starts to fill. Next he takes a bowl of grilled, seasoned vegetables and adds a pile of them inside the bread with feta cheese crumble. He finishes the creation with a generous squeeze of lemon, fresh and chopped mint and parsley. I give him 2,80 euros and the most popular kebab in Berlin is finally in my hands. I hold my breath as I take a bite. And I take another, and another. It *is* really good. It 's not an unforgettable culinary explosion in my mouth but it's a damn good *döner*. All the tastes complete each other, the ingredients are fresh and the amount of sauces is perfect. I'm smiling again, it was worth waiting.

I would never have ended up in this kebab stand if there hadn't been so much fuss about it in the media. I've read reviews and articles about Mustafa. He is the reason why the selection of vegetarian *döners* has risen in this city. Everybody wants to get the same attention that he has, and to get the same line in front of the counter. But it wouldn't happen without the media and I wouldn't be standing happily next to Mustafa's and thinking about the

wideness of food journalism. And this is the main goal of my study: to show the spectrum of food journalism and to give tips about how to make it well.

I've interviewed the best food writers, producers, editors in chiefs, restaurant critics, cooks, food photographers and researchers for my study. I've also learned and lent a lot from American food writers. My guide is only scratching the surface for this wide theme, but I hope it will be helpful for anybody who wants to write about food or is interested in how food journalism is made.

1. Introduction to food journalism

1.1. What is food journalism – the variety of food writing

As a term, "food journalism" is relatively young. When I tell people that I'm working on a study about food journalism, mostly people think about restaurant reviews. And yes, a review can be a great journalistic piece of work. Besides giving information about a restaurant and the food they serve, it can tell about a certain food trend, or about a certain time or society, it can explain a certain feature of food culture or cover an ethnological or a historical story. It can explain a certain cooking method or tell about the people behind the food. Or it can tell you what not to eat, as the restaurant review of Hudson Cafeteria in *The New York Times,* written by William Grimes:

> The Jell-O arrives in a large Coke glass, topped with a cloud of whipped cream and dotted with a cherry. After several moments devoted to admiration, someone, inevitably, dips in with a long-handled spoon and actually tastes the thing. That's when ooh and aah turns into ugh. I don't know what toxic waste tastes like, but I am prepared to say that serving it chilled would not improve the flavor. A

> lot of the food is like that at Hudson Cafeteria. The Cherry Coke Jell-O is less a dessert than a text, packed with enough signs to keep a moderately competent cultural critic fully employed for months. You can eat it, if you like. But it's much more profitable to read it, to tease out its implicit challenge to the socially constructed notion of "good" food.
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> No one can order chop suey in the 21st century and not ponder deep questions. Why is this being served? Why did I order it? As a cultural gesture, does it truly exist if no one observes it? It's one thing to announce that you intend to buy the complete recorded works of the Carpenters, another thing entirely to listen to it by yourself. Similarly, the chop suey, once ordered, eventually arrives at the table like any other dish, at which point another question arises: Can anyone possibly eat it? (2000)

But food journalism is much more than just restaurant reviews. It’s about researching food and seeing how everything is connected. It can be hard news and investigative journalism, about how horse or rat meat is sold as beef, about poisonous milk powder, “mad cow disease”, or old food sold with new labels and foul ingredients in cheap fast food stores. With a wide range of topics such as food industrialism, legislation and politics – the buffet is open for investigative food journalists.

One of the big fields of food journalism is the health. Nutrition has clearly become a huge topic; you can’t avoid it in any media. And media is the reason why the low-carb diet spread over the world and suddenly even my mother is talking about carbs and proteins, instead of talking about bread and meat. And she is not the only one avoiding wheat after this trend filled the magazines. So the media really has an impact on what and eat.

One big field nowadays is how food impacts our health. Nutrition has clearly become a huge topic in food journalism. Let’s take the low-carb diet for example: because of the media and the widespread “news” about the advantages of a low-carb diet, now even my mother is talking about carbs and

proteins, instead of talking about bread and meat. So the media really has an impact on what we eat.

Food journalism is also storytelling. During the 10 months of my study, I've been touched by a story about a family who lives with food stamps, an American system that provides food assistance for poor people. I've laughed while reading the recipe for boiling water. I've been impressed after reading a story that reviewed all the 26 courses that one of the best restaurants in the world, Noma, is serving. I've been disgusted while reading an article about the last meals of murderers and rapists, I've been concerned while reading about food being produced completely artificial and I've smiled while reading a story about a couple who opened a restaurant after their "Cut the cheese" –cheese and wine nights became crazy popular in their home city. They spent all their money on cheese. And it turned out that the other one didn't actually like cheese, he was just in love.

There are a lot of good stories. And there are also gastronomical trends and phenomenons to cover. Why everybody was raving about kale two years ago? And why everybody is now doing craft beer and *kimchi*? What is the next *ramen* burger, pulled pork or *seitan*?

Food journalism can also be marketing, service journalism or blogging. It can be fiction or a first person essay, a memoir, a cookbook, a recipe or a photo. Or it can just feed curiosity. Where is the best fish soup in this city? What can you do with a waffle iron? How was the donut invented? How does it feel to live a month without supermarkets or multinational brands? Where does the black color in cola come from? What is inside of a nugget? How does the most expensive food in the world taste? What is the right way to eat pizza? These questions, for example, could be the ones that food journalism gives answers to. It all starts with the same questions that every good piece of journalism. What? Why? Who? Where?

But let's start with how to become one.

1.2. How to become a food journalist

Mainly there are two ways that people usually end up writing about food: through a culinary school or through a journalism school. I've also heard stories about people who just have been so determined with their passion and have had a witty pen, who have made it in the food journalism field. But either one of these educations, culinary or within journalism, is the standard.

There is no special degree program for food journalism available, but there are some universities in the world that offers courses about the theme. The most recognized is the University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, that is offering food related lectures and workshops in their Science and Environment department. One of the professors there is Michael Pollan, an awarded author and a journalist, who made his name through conscious critiques and reportages of the food industry.

If Berkeley is far away and you want to get to know food journalism better, there are also some online courses and some literature about the theme, like Dianne Jacob's *Will Write For Food*. It tells a lot about starting a food blog but has also great advices for other kinds of food writing.

The old-fashion way – like Julia Child did it – is to get into the field from a culinary school. If you want to write recipes, you need to know what kinds of flours work best for cakes, how is the temperature of boiling water affecting an egg being boiled, what is the problem if your bread isn't rising and which vegetables or fruits pair up well with goat cheese and what the heck is a *sous vide?*

Like the editor in chief Sanna Maskulin from *Glorian Ruoka & Viini* magazine says:

> For us a degree in house economics is not a must, but we have a lot of people with that background. Because our magazine has plenty of

> recipes, our writers need to have good skills to create a recipe and have a wide understanding about ingredients. So background with culinary or house economic studies definitely helps. (2015)

But it depends on where you work. If you are not expected to write recipes daily and you are doing more news and reporting, then a journalism school is the right background for you. Besides that, you need to have a huge interest and strong acknowledgment about food. You need to build your own special know-how. It’s all about when a passion turns into expertise. You need to follow the food field in general: restaurant business and public discussion concerning food topics, food trends and food medias.

Also you learn a great deal by travelling, by getting to know different food cultures, working in a restaurant and by tasting and cooking a lot – without prejudices. You don’t have to be a good cook, but cooking definitely helps. Here is what a food writer Monica Bhide says about the theme in her online food writing class:

> What if I don't like to cook? Do I need to cook to be a food writer? Or is it food writing if I don't cook? The answer is yes and no! It depends on the kind of food writing that you want to do. If you want to develop recipes, write pieces on how to use ingredients/cooking methods, etc., then you definitely need to cook. If you prefer to focus on, say, writing about wine, focusing on chef profiles or reviewing restaurants, or writing a book on the best fast-food joints in Bali, then you don't really need to, although I have found that I write better when I know more about the recipe/ingredient/ etc. that I am reviewing. It is more effective to write about how a steak should be cooked at a restaurant if in fact I have spent the time cooking steaks and know the difference between the various levels of doneness. My main point is this: You don't have to be a gourmet chef to be a good food writer. (2015)

1.3. The skills of a good food writer

Well, according to the editor of food pages in *Helsingin Sanomat*, Katja Bäcksbacka, you need a lot of skills:

> Internet is taking the field into the direction that you need to have strong writing skills. You need to know how to make selling headlines; the recipe is not enough anymore. If you want that people will click your article, you need to present a tip or a story that hooks the reader, for example: “Can you believe that you can make a dish in 5 minutes?” Skills in storytelling are highlighted, but you need to have the skills to develop and write a recipe. And you also need to know how to develop the picture and style a dish. It really is multitasking nowadays. (2015)

A good writer is a good writer, simple as that. And to become a better writer, there are lots of writing courses and literature to develop your writing. Reading is also very important. And to read different kinds of food stories, read the restaurant reviews from *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* or *Chicago Tribune*. Read the memoirs of chef Anthony Bourdain or restaurant critic Ruth Reichl. Read the food related novels by M.F.K. Fishers or Bill Buford and the books of food professor Michael Pollan or cookbook author and teacher James Beard. Whatever you read, read regularly and follow the food medias.

By reading, you’ll learn a lot, but when it comes to your own writing, there are some skills that are very important when writing about food. First of all, you need to be good at describing things. No matter if it’s a piece about a new restaurant, milk processing plant or a piece about the history of a Club Sandwich, you need to be able to describe it. Dianne Jacob writes in her guidebook *Will Write For Food*, that you need to use “show, not tell”.

> Don’t tell readers you didn’t like sitting at the table with your dad. Show them what it was like. Put them at the table with you. (2010, p. 135)

One great example of this is Bill Buford's book *Heat*. Buford, a writer and an enthusiastic home cook, was writing a profile about Mario Batali, one of the best-known chefs in America. To do that, he wanted to work for one of the Batali's restaurants. Batali took him in for his "kitchen slave" and Buford wrote a book about the whole experience. Here's Buford describing the first day he arrived to the restaurant:

> At seven a.m. I presented myself to the prep chef, a handsome, athletic woman in her forties named Elisa Sarno. I was eager, hopeful, utterly ready. But Elisa didn't seem all that happy to see me.
> I put on an apron and jacket, and was given a tour. One corner of the kitchen was taken up by the "walk-in", a refrigerated closet about the size of a small truck with floor-to-ceiling shelves. That week's *New York Times* restaurant review was pasted on the door, as was the custom – a reminder of the competition and of the importance of Babbo's three stars (very few restaurants, you learned, got even two). Another corner was given over to dishwashing. Pots, pans, and various plastic containers were stored overhead. Elisa was describing each one according to its size, but I was distracted by the dishwasher, a young angry man (I wasn't introduced but later discovered his name was Alejandro) who was assaulting a pot the size of a urban trash can with a high-pressured gadget that was spraying water powerfully in unpredictable directions.
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> "These are the one-quarts," Elisa was saying meanwhile, "and here are the two-quarts, four-quarts, six-quarts, and eight, all with their own color-coded lid. Hotel pans and half hotels are there, along with the sheet trays and half-sheet trays." The containers, I learned, were the medium of the prep kitchen – everything you did went into them so that it could be fetched later in the evening – and great weight would be expressed in the question such as: "Is *this* (chicken feet, say, or a quantity of beef cheeks) to be put in a six-quarts, or will it fit into a four?" I was already thinking about the private autistic language of the kitchen, in which everyone around me was so demonstrably fluent – is this what you learn in cooking school, what a hotel pan is? – when Elisa stopped suddenly. "Where did you put your knives?" she asked.

> “My knives?”
> “You don’t have knives?”
> “I’m meant to have knives?”
> “Oh, my God. Okay. Bring them next week.” She muttered to herself: “God I hate lending people my knives.” (2006, p.14-15)

You need to be the eyes, the ears and also the mouth for your reader. Bring the person inside the scene. In her food writing classes Monica Bhide encourages to add depth as much as you can:

> You are writing about your grandmother making meatloaf: where are you? What does it smell like? What year is it? What is playing on the radio? What can you hear? What is she wearing? Close your eyes and visualize as much detail as you can. Scan the room – what do you see? Every single thing you recall and write will make the essay richer. You can cut out things that don't belong later but at this time, just write it out. Everything – was she wearing pearls? Did she have curlers in her hair? Details. (2015)

Words also run out quickly. If everything is good or delicious, you are in trouble. You need to have a large palette of tastes but just as wide palette of adjectives. Words to describe - not just the taste - but the whole feeling that you get from a dish or an ingredient, the texture of it, the looks, the smell and the touch.

To be a good food writer, you also need to be curious - the basic and maybe the most important skill of a journalist. New things don’t always just pop up on your way, you need to find them. Here is what Bhide says about curiosity:

> This is what leads to creativity and innovation in a field that can be easily dulled with repetition. Think about it, if we all made everything with the same recipe each time, how boring would it be? A curious writer will swap his mayo for jalapeno to chocolate cream sauce and see what that does to his turkey sandwich; a curious writer will wander into his backyard to catch cicadas to see if there is a way to deep-fry

> the insects to make them delicious; a curious writer will spend hours in the library/bookstore/people watching to learn about new trends in food and drink and more. Being a good researcher and being able to find ideas where none exist are the trademarks of any good writer, not just food writers. (2015)

It is also important not to be ashamed to ask if you don't know or understand something, especially if you don't have a background from culinary school or working in a restaurant. Just the simple question "How is this made?" can open the whole dish or ingredient with a new perspective. And that is also being honest with your reader. If you don't know something, they probably don't either.

Be pedant. Fact checking is a procedure that just cannot be passed. For example if you are doing a story about the Chinese fortune cookies, you can first start by telling that they are not Chinese. A typical false fact based on the fact that in many cheap Chinese restaurants you'll be given a fortune cookie. So don't assume anything, always check. And don't rely just on Wikipedia. It will take some time to find the right person to answer your questions or the right source to your story but it's always worth it. You'll end up having much more information about your topic than you were looking for. Most probably you don't end up writing about all of it, but it will reflect from your story that you know what you are talking about. And there will always be a person to spot it if you haven't done your homework.

Dianne Jacob has a good example of what lacking the fact checking might lead into:

> I just read in the food section of a daily paper that Julia Child dropped a chicken on the floor during a television show, picked it up, and says it's fine to serve because no one will know. I've seen that episode. She was transferring a potato-based dish from the stove onto a plate and dropped some of it on the stovetop. No chickens were involved, but the writer of the newspaper story just took what she read somewhere and ran with it. In a perfect situation she would have been suspicious

> of that outrageous-sounding story, and she would have found a way to check it. (2010, p. 25)

1.4. Storytelling and creating your own voice

Besides facts, you need a good story. Wrap your information in a story – there is always one. No matter if you are writing about a food additive, a one-dollar burger or about steaming a cauliflower, you can find a story related to that, but be careful not to use too much nostalgia. Food memories are really strong and everybody has similar ones; the grandma's meatballs or pound cakes, the sandwiches you used to have on a summer picnic, the candies you used to buy as a child with your weekly pocket money, the hot dogs you always ate in a football or an ice hockey game. There are a lot of nostalgic food memories to reminisce, but you need more than that to make anybody interested in reading about your grandma:

> Bill LeBond, editorial director of Chronicle Books, once told a crowd at a cookbook proposals seminar that if he had to read one more book proposal from people who learned about cooking at their grandmothers' knee, he would throw up. (Jacob, 2010, p. 29)

So a grandma is not good enough, you need a story. And to make one, you need a good plan, advises the editor in chief Sanna Maskulin:

> You need a good script - a theme and a point of view. And from the beginning you need to think about your pitching speech: how would you sell your story? How would you tell your friend about it? What is the punch line, the point in your story? And you need to have a visual script as well, a plan how to tell the story also through pictures.
> The competition online is really harsh, your story needs to stand out. Starting from the headline. (2015)

A good tip is to prepare an “elevator speech”. It means that you need to be able to explain your story in few sentences – in a time that a ride in an elevator takes. If you can do it and the person will remember it after few days, you have a good story.

A good story also has a lot to do with how it’s told. Poor storytelling can destroy a great story and a less spectacular story can become a great one when it’s told well. And to become a good storyteller, you need to find your voice, your style. It will take time to create and polish it, but to be able to stand out, you need to do it. Dianne Jacob also writes about the importance of your voice in her book *Will Write For Food*:

> Voice helps readers form an image of the writer. To put it in modern business parlance, it’s as though you were creating a brand. It’s possible to write a story without using much voice, particularly in newspapers, where news stories are more likely to be straightforward.
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> (…) But for the readers to get the most out of a story, they should understand who you are, perhaps even trusting you more than liking you. Your voice gives the narrative unity and strength, says Goldstein. “Writers starting out are afraid to put their voice in there. They think, What if people criticize it or don’t like it? Without it, your writing can be a little pallid, and sounds like everyone else’s writing. Voice makes you sound sure yourself.” So don’t worry about being “writerly”, because it makes your work more serious and boring. Write the way you speak. (2010, p. 15)

I used to work as a radio DJ for ten years so I know a lot about finding your own voice. At first, I didn’t tell anything personal on air. I didn’t want to put my personality on line, even though I had the courage to talk on air. I wanted to play it safe. I was afraid of what people will think about me, my thoughts and I was totally terrified not to say something that makes me look stupid.

It’s not easy to reveal yourself for criticism. I started doing it step by step. At first I told stories about my relatives (yes, they probably appreciated it a lot) and occasionally also stories about me, my opinions, my reactions, my habits. The more I did that, the more I got feedback from listeners that they liked the show. When you show emotions, it’s easier for people to identify with you. It’s the same thing with writing.

In Germany there is currently only one newspaper whose circulation is getting up, and that is *Die Zeit*. Elisabeth Raether, a journalist who is in charge of the food content of *ZEITmagazin,* believes that it’s because their writers have particularly strong voices. Also she has a voice that people know:

> People trust me. I’m with them every Thursday and I share my life with them. They know about my preferences and my weaknesses; I don’t know how to bake a cake. They know that I’ll look after them; I don’t use conservatives, I use butter but I don’t drown them with it, I keep it healthy. They will feel good after eating these dishes. I also don’t send them in kitchen for three hours.
> There is no bullshit; I’m true to them. And it’s really important to be there with them every week. And really be there, be honest. (2015)

You know that you have succeeded to create your own voice, when somebody can recognize an article without having your name on it. There is only way to create and develop your voice: by writing a lot. And to write regularly. For example a diary could be a good way to produce at least some text every day.

Of course you can leave yourself totally out and just focus on telling somebody else's story. It doesn’t always have to (neither should it) be about you. But remember to bring the people close to the reader. Here is what the editor in chief of food magazine *Effilee*, Vijay Sapre said when I asked his definition of a good story:

> It's actually quite simple: I want to be able to imagine the people, without seeing them. I read a review about Elisabeth Kolbert's (Kolbert has been a staff writer at *The New Yorker* since 1999) book and the critic said, it was good but was it really necessary to tell the hair color of every person. And I realized that in *The New Yorker*, they always describe what people are wearing. And that is the smartest thing to do. You always pay attention to clothes and they reveal so much. Is she wearing a high heels or sneakers, jewelery or not. There are so many things that your clothes tell about you. And actually it's pretty damn difficult to describe food. So describe the people. (2015)

One more tip for the storytelling. As I said, a good elevator speech is the one that will be remembered after a few days. Well, that's the case with the whole story. So when you start writing it, think about the feeling that the reader will have after it. Make a strong argument, have a point. As Monica Bhide says in her writing classes, there needs to be something that the reader can "take away":

> When a reader is done with the essay – what did they learn? Don't ever start your essay with this. Write the essay and then put it away. Look at it later and see if it answers this question. If it does not, it needs massaging. The essay does not have to have a message or a moral. But it does have to do something. Is the intention to share a funny experience and make the reader laugh? If so, do you have a good punch line? Is it a walk down memory lane and the walk-away is nostalgic thoughts for the reader? You get the idea. Wherever it is that you are going with your essay, your reader needs to go with you. (2015)

And the most important thing, in words of Vijay Sapre: "Get a life".

2. Food trends, culture and people

2.1. Food trends – how they are made of and how to follow them

It hits you in the face, if you eat out a lot. The trendiest ingredient at the moment is easily recognized by it being served by almost everyone. Then you'll start seeing pictures about it on Instagram, reading about it from food blogs and food magazines. Eventually you can see it in your supermarket and in the canteen of your workplace. Finally your mother is cooking it. It has passed all the levels of the food trend chain and it's everywhere.
Each food trend reflects its own age. Some trends develop slowly and some come and go regularly, some just come and go. I don't think our grandchildren will be eating Cronuts™.

A food trend can also be something that grows with time or something that people already have been doing forever (like eating local food), but it's the restaurants and the media that turn these things into trends.
When Alice Waters opened the restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California in 1971, she was a pioneer as far as focusing on local and organic food in a fine dining restaurant goes. At that time, there were not many restaurants telling if the ingredients they were using were local or not. Well, today the situation is quite the opposite. And it's great. Many food trends (excluding Cronuts™) also have good aims simply because the key to good health is always something that many people are interested in. This is one of the reasons why everybody was raving about kale (and yes, many still are) few years ago. In *Best Food Writing 2014* yearbook, edited by Holly Hughes, there is a great article about "the Year of Kale", written by Jane Black. Here's how she describes the kale-mania:

> And now, we have kale: glamorous but respected; sexy but not in a cookie-cutter-way. The Cate Blanchett of vegetables. Like any starlet that has hit the big time, kale is everywhere. It has bumped romaine out of Caesar salad, it curls across pizzas and alongside locally raised pork chops. It's the muse for *50 Shades of Kale*, a cookbook and love letter too. "I hold her leaves in my hands," writes author Drew Ramsay. "Her fine, iridescent dust glimmers. I am invincible. Immortal. Potent."
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> (…) Why kale? The question echoes across the blogosphere. But kale's powerful allure on this side of the Atlantic is hardly a mystery. While most trendy foods appeal to only one camp of obsessives –acai is for health nuts; bacon is for food fashionistas- this most humble member of the cruciferous family is a crossover act: a uniter not a divider.
> To the fashionistas, kale is the poster child of a chic of the chic fram-to-table movement. Led by chefs such as Alice Waters and author Michael Pollan, its adherents prize "authenticity" and yearn for a simpler, more connected way of life.
>
> (…) But more important, kale offers to those who cook a badge of honor. Sure, they could buy foie gras or truffels. But that would be too obvious – too "one percent".
>
> To make something delicious out of kale demonstrates pluck, a trait prized by those who also raise chickens out back. Rightly or wrongly, it also signals a cook's commitment to farm-to-table values, like buying local and, of course, eating your vegetables. (Black, Hughes (Eds.), 2014, p. 180-181)

Kale was a massive trend. Beyoncé posed in a kale-shirt, yes my mother bought it too, it could be found in a tiny supermarket in Finland and finally there were also criticism that it doesn't taste good and the price of the kale chips is ridiculous. When people start to get bored with it, then you know it's been a big one.

But how to know when to react one? Sanna Maskulin, the editor in chief of *Glorian Ruoka & Viini* thinks it difficult, because you want to tell about them right away, but on the other hand, you can't tell about them too soon:

> There is no point in publishing kale recipes if there is no kale available in supermarkets. It has happened to us, we've been too early with some trends and then it's hard to bring them up again. (2015)

When an ingredient or a phenomenon becomes part of everyday conversations (and supermarkets!) you'll know that it 's a topic. Also Elisabeth Raether, who is in charge of the food page of *ZEITmagazin*, has had problems with timing of food trends:

> Like with food trucks four years ago, they were trendy in San Francisco and we wrote about them, but nobody was interested. There were only few at that time in Germany. Now they are everywhere. So you cannot be too early, but as the speed of social media and online is so fast, with a magazine or newspaper, you are always late. And that is why print cannot be a trendsetter. But we can tell all the layers of a trend, the story and people behind it, give perspectives. (2015)

So where to find the trends? Take a look at the menus of really good restaurants, listen what people are talking about and pay attention to the food pictures they are posting on Instagram and Pinterest. Some don't like the speed of Twitter, but for example the editor of the food pages in *Helsingin Sanomat*, Katja Bäcksbacka, says it's her most important source for finding the food trends:

> One good example about a trend that spread through social media was a smoothie bowl. I start seeing in Twitter these bowls with thick smoothie, decorated beautifully with fresh berries, seeds and fruits. At first the pictures came from America, then from Australia. It was a big hit in social media. I wanted to try that as well so I wrote a piece about it in my blog and few days later we published it also in the paper with a

> recipe and suggestion to try it on a Women's day brunch. The timing was great. (2015)

Seasonal eating is a trend that will always be in fashion, so just by following the seasons and national holidays, you have current topics. This means no asparagus recipes during winter - unless you are pitching a story for a magazine that has four issues a year, you can be sure that they are planning the Christmas dinners in summer and are interested in your new asparagus ideas in winter.

2.2. About food culture and people behind the food

If you are lacking a point from your story, think beyond what's on your plate. Where does the food come from? Where are the roots of that dish?
If you want to really understand the food better, you need to look at the history. Adjunct professor Maarit Knuuttila from the University of Jyväskylä, for example, recommends reading food related studies or books made by ethnologists and culture anthropologists. She also reminds us that food is always part of culture, not any disjointed feature. And to understand the cultural bonds, you need to know about food traditions. "There is very little writing about Finnish food traditions and no analysis about its nature, even our current food culture is based on that", says Knuuttila (2015).

Also Anni Pelkonen, the curator of the Hotel and Restaurant Museum recommends looking at the history:

> It's common that articles about food culture sometimes lack the knowledge of history. A phenomenon or thing can be presented as a new trend even it has been around decades, even centuries, like street food, organic food or local food. (2015)

When you write about food, the perspective you have, always tells about the culture that you come from. You write from within your social- and cultural

bubble. This is also a reason why travelling is very important for food writers, to get a wider perspective and to experience other cultures and their food. At least to realize what your perspective is: something that is common in Helsinki is not necessarily common in entire Finland. It's important to see the big picture before making conclusions. Without it you can fall in pretty wide generalizations that are just bad journalism.

Also opening up the context is really important when writing about food culture and explaining what kind of role that specific dish ingredient plays in that food culture. R.W. Apple Jr., a well-known food writer and a correspondent of *The New York Times*, traveled around the world and wrote about his experiences for forty years. In his book *Far Flung and Well Fed* you can find a huge collection of his food articles, from every continent. With Apple's articles you get the chance to visit different food cultures and learn about the steppingstones of the cultures.

> Pie is to the Midwest as rice is to China. When Norman Rockwell wanted to conjure up an image of wholesome American life, he painted what I always took to be a Midwestern farmwife, apron on, carrying a pie to the dinner table. Not by happenstance do we say that something typical of our life is "as American apple pie". (Apple Jr, 2009, p. 90)

One might think that the historical stories have a bad habit of giving "the good old times" perspective, but when talking about Finland, according to curator Pelkonen, it can be quite the opposite:

> Sometimes it troubles me that journalists tend to pick mostly negative things from our restaurant and food culture: rules and regulations, bans and orders. It is true that our restaurant culture have had and still has some regulations that seem to make no sense but the history of our food culture is also filled with improvements, successes, resilience and unique things and ingredients. These are themes that I would love to see more writing about. (2015)

Another interesting approach for food is to tell about the people who have been some way involved in what you have on your plate: the farmer, the driver, all the people who in some way or another participate in the chain of food industrialism, the chef, the owner of the store where you buy your groceries. The chain can be much, much longer depending on which country it comes from. It can even be surprisingly long even if you are using ingredients from your own country. Following the chain and talking with people along the chain is very eye opening.

And people are interested in people. I actually think that is one of the biggest changes that has happened in food journalism in the last decade, it's become more about people: grandmothers, chefs, farmers, bakers, idealists – people with passion for food. Foodies reading about foodies! And it's also a reflection of our time. People are brands. Top chefs have been stars for ages but only for small audience. Then came the cooking shows in television. The massive increase of these shows during last decade is the reason why we know so many chefs by name.

And after the golden age of faceless food industrialism, when we were just celebrating the easiness of microwaving, new fruits and products in our supermarkets and not giving a damn if it's local or ethical, we are now interested again. Interested in people: in a fine dining restaurant, it is common, that you are told the name of the farmer who grew your carrot. You are given the name of the farmer who raise the pig you are eating. You are given the name of the pig. The point is, names are important in order to make more personal feeling, the feeling that there are actual people behind the food. And yes, an actual pig.

And you remember these stories: you probably know about a guy who used to be a researcher, but now he makes cheese in your town and the blue cheese is really good. You also may know that there are these sisters from the USA who started a cupcake café near your work because they were missing American cupcakes. You now that there is this Italian guy who fell in love in

your country. Even his girlfriend didn't feel the same he decided to stay and the café is now serving the best espresso in your town. And you have heard the story about this Swedish guy whose car broke down in the street and on that spot there was a business space for rent. He took it as a sign, rented it and is now running a great bar in that space.

Everybody loves stories. And when it comes to food writing, people are a great way to bring your story closer to the reader. Make it more personal, it doesn't have to be about you.

3. Investigative food journalism

3.1. Food industrialism

In food journalism, the investigative journalism concentrates mainly on food industrialism. And it should. Food industrialism is an extremely huge field of industrialism as food is vital to us. We need it and the industry wants to find all the possible ways to answer our needs – even the ones we didn't know we had. And because the industry stands for business, it means a lot of people who want to make money, and apparently more money. And to make more money, you need to increase the volume of your industry output and keep the costs of the production low. It's as simple as that. But when you start cutting the production costs, it usually means that the quality of ingredients decrease and/or people get less salary. This is where investigative journalism comes in, if there is something suspicious, about how the business rolls and where the cuts are made.

Yet it's nothing new for investigative journalists to take on food as an issue. In 1906, Upton Sinclair, novelist and muckraker, revealed the unsanitary

practices of a Chicago meat packing company in his book *The Jungle*. It was a huge scandal and the book became a bestseller. And it also had an impact: meat consumption decreased and new food hygiene laws were introduced. Still today the health issues are a big theme for investigative food journalism. A Finnish book *Ruokapyramidihuijaus* [Food Pyramid Scam] tells how the food industry and nutrition is affecting our everyday life choices and what happens behind the scenes in food industrialism. The authors Susanna Kovanen and Harri Lapinoja write also about the consequences of shipping food around the world:

> One food product can contain ingredients from even tens of different countries. Also the health risks from food moving across the borders as bacteria and contagious diseases spread more easily from country to another, not just between people but also between animals. We've seen the increase of vulnerability in global food industry lately, after the different food catastrophes that mostly are attached to factory farming of animals and processing meat products. (2014, p. 21)

The legislation is also a big theme and it plays a significant role concerning the global movability of food and how the food is processed and farmed. Processing the food is yet another big theme. A professor, a food writer, an author and the director of the Knight Program in Science and Environmental Journalism at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, Michael Pollan, has written several articles and books about food. In his book *The Omnivore's Dilemma* he follows the food chains that sustain us—industrial food, organic or alternative food, and food we forage ourselves—from the source to a final meal. The book contains a great deal of information how the food industry works and about the history of the food industrialism.

> The dream of liberating food from nature is as old as eating. People began processing food to keep nature from taking it back: What is spoilage, after all, if not nature, operating through her proxy microorganisms, repossessing our hard-won lunch? So we learned to salt and dry and cure and pickle in the first age of food processing, and to can, freeze, and vacuum-pack in the second.

> (…) In the third age of food processing, which begins with the end of World War II, merely preserving the fruits of nature was deemed too modest: The goal now was to improve the nature. The twentieth-century prestige of technology and convenience combined with advances in marketing to push aside butter to make shelf space for margarine, replace the fruit juice with juice drinks like Tang, cheese with Cheez Whiz, and whipped cream with Cool Whip. (Pollan, 2006, p. 90-91)

Many products we see in the supermarket on cheese shelves or milk shelves are not cheese or milk. They are products that resemble cheese or milk, maybe contain some as well. But they are good business, as Kovanen and Lapinoja writes:

> Processing food increases the profit as you can turn a cheap ingredient with help of additives, aromas and manufacturing methods to functional groceries which stand up for the health requirements and which can be modified endlessly to respond the newest food trends. This transferable skill to modify ingredients is one of the strangest features of food today. Food can be deconstructed into particles and then build in a new form. You can leave out all the ingredients that are stigmatized to be harmful and add all the ingredients that are at that time told to be beneficial, such as fibres, vitamins, probiotics and protein. (2014, p. 48)

And processing food has a lot to do with chemical additives. They are vital for making it possible to storage and to move ingredients around the world and keep them “fresh”. Without the additives and new technologies in industrial farming, it would be really difficult for us to eat a tomato in the winter. And it’s good for the business to have the tomatoes in the supermarket around the year. And as Michael Pollan presents in his book *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, that is the way to keep your nuggets “fresh”:

> But perhaps the most alarming ingredient in a Chicken McNugget is tertiary butylhydroquinone, or TBHQ, an antioxidant derived from petroleum that is either sprayed directly on the nugget or the inside of the box it comes to “help the freshness”. According to A Consumer’s Dictionary of Food Additives, TBHQ is a form of butane (i.e. lighter fluid) the FDA allows processors to use sparingly in our food: It can comprise no more than 0.02 percent of the oil in a nugget. Which is probably just as well, considering that ingesting a single gram of TBHQ can cause “nausea, vomiting, ringing of ears, delirium, a sense of suffocation, and collapse.” Ingesting five grams of TBHQ can kill. (2006, p. 113-114)

There also are questions of human rights, animal rights, natural resources and other environmental issues that are big themes inside the food industrialism. If you just start to follow one product that you find from your kitchen, starting by reading the ingredient list, then finding out where it is made and sold, what kind of journey it has made before ending up in your local supermarket, in which shelf it is to be found and why the shopkeeper has placed it there, how it is marketed to us, and where the costs come from – then you have a story. And not to forget the current news themes. In Europe, for example, one topic could be how Belarus is importing EU-products to Russia, despite the food sanctions or the poor quality of hospital food in the UK.

3.2. Scams and scandals

The mad cow disease, Chinese milk scandal with 300 000 babies got sick (Huang 2014), horse meat sold as beef (*The Guardian* 2015), in 2002 McDonald's Corp. ended up paying $10 million to settle a class-action suit filed on behalf of millions of vegetarians and Hindus that charged the company with serving french fries flavored with beef tallow without letting people know (*New York Times* 2002), a Finnish meatball company was forced to rename its product because of the low-meat content – meatballs simply

became balls (Ramaswamy, 2014) – the list of food scandals and hoaxes goes on.

Some of them are indisputably clear crimes, but an interesting question is if something is a scam if it's just something that people are assuming? Like in the case of vegetarian fries. Everybody assumed that fries are vegetarian. McDonald's defended themselves by saying that they never said so.
I had an experience where I tried to live with Finnish food for one month. Well, it turned out quite impossible as salt and all the additives are made abroad (and yes, there are additives almost in everything). But there were root vegetables, berries, mushrooms and water that I could enjoy. And the Finnish rye bread, or I thought so. It turned out that our national symbol most of the time was not made of Finnish rye flours. Even though they are marketed with pictures of Finnish national symbols, the blue and white flag, rye fields and with the words: "real Finnish bread". The defense was the same, they said that they've never said that it was *completely* made of Finnish flours, I just had assumed it. So is it a scam?

One more example about an exposure that is happening in the world of food industrialism: Michael Pollan writes in *The Omnivore's Dilemma* how corn runs the American food industrialism and everywhere in the world we end up eating loads of corn, probably without knowing it. At least I didn't have a clue about the widespreadness of corn products.

> Corn is what feeds the steer that becomes the steak. Corn feeds the chicken and the pig, the turkey and the lamb, the catfish and the tilapia and, increasingly, even the salmon, a carnivore by nature that the fish farmers are re engineering to tolerate corn. The eggs are made of corn. The milk and cheese and yogurt, which once came from dairy cows that grazed grass, now typically come from Holsteins that spend their working lives indoors tethered to machines, eating corn.
>
> Head over to the processed foods and you find ever more intricate manifestations of corn. A chicken nugget, for example, piles up corn

> upon corn: what chicken it contains consists of corn, of course, but so do most of nugget's other constituents, including the modified corn starch that glues the thing together, the cornflour in the batter that coats it, and the corn oil in which it gets fried. Much less obviously, the leavings and lecithin, the mono-, di-, and triglycerides, the attractive golden coloring, and even the citric acid that keeps nugget "fresh" can be all derived from corn.
> To wash down your chicken nuggets with virtually any soft drink in the supermarket is to have some corn with your corn. Since the 1980s virtually all the sodas and most of the fruit drinks sold in the supermarket have been sweetened with high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) –after water, corn sweetener is their principal ingredient. Grab a beer for your beverage instead and you'd still be drinking corn, in the form of alcohol fermented from glucose refined from corn. Read the ingredients on the label any processed food and, provided you know the chemical names it travels under, corn is what you will find.
>
> (…) Corn is in the coffee whitener and Cheez Whiz, the frozen yogurt and TV dinner, the canned fruit and ketchup and candies, the soups and snacks and cake mixes, the frosting and gravy and frozen waffles, the syrups and hot sauces, the mayonnaise and mustard, the hot dogs and the bologna, tha margarine and shortening, the salad dressings and the relishes and even in vitamins. There are some forty-five thousand items in the average American supermarket and more than quarter of them contains corn. (Pollan, 2006, p. 18-19)

These are just few examples about results that investigative food journalism has revealed. There is a lot of assuming and a lot of digging possibilities. It needs a lot of time and work, but if you want to become a food writer, I suggest that you try it even once, to follow a food product all the way to its roots, find out what it is made of. It's truly an eye-opening experience.

3.3. Controversial health studies

Everybody wants to be healthy. Even if you don't do anything to support your health, you want to be healthy. Food is often thought of as a fast way to improve your health and nowadays as you look at the shelves in supermarket, it seems to be a really easy way. The mount of "health products" is stunning. Since in many countries the legislation has made even some rules against too high promises or false associations that companies use on marketing concerning health, there are many products that are "good for you", or so we think.

Kovanen and Lapinoja write in their book *Ruokapyramidihuijaus* [Food Pyramid Scam], that nowadays the nutrition is considered as purely scientific topic.

> Science has produced large amount of knowledge about the function of body and nutrition. Many truths that are considered scientific – also in field of nutrition – are stuck to our minds with popularized versions. We think for example that low-fat means healthy or that bread is real health food as grains have fibres. Modifying scientific information for people is challenging and often it leads to harmful simplifications. (2014, p. 18)

Besides that we can fill our shopping trolley with products that are supposed to improve our health, we want to know how to live healthy. Or at least know how to lose some weight, easily. Almost everybody think that they have few kilos to lose and that is why diets are such a common topic in media. And yes, let's be honest, most of us have more than just a few extra kilos. For example in America more than one-third (34.9% or 78.6 million) of U.S. adults are obese (*The Journal of the American Medical Association* 2014). So articles that tells you how to live healthier and how to lose weight are indeed popular. And they have a huge impact on people: for example, the low-carb boom and the 5:2 diet were enormous hits and really impacted the way people eat.

Big dietary trends like low-carb diet or Weight Watchers are also business worth of million of dollars. Media has the power to boost the business. Professor Michael Pollan is talking about *a national eating disorder*, a phenomenon very familiar in Finland as well:

> … in the summer of 2002, *The New York Times Magazine* published a cover story on the new research entitled "What if Fat Doesn't Make You Fat?" Within months, supermarkets shelves were restocked and restaurant menus rewritten to reflect the nutritional wisdom. The blamelessness of steak restored, two of the most wholesome and uncontroversial foods known to man –bread and pasta– acquired a moral stain that promptly bankrupted dozens of bakeries and noodle firms and ruined an untold number of perfectly good meals.
>
> So violent a change in a culture's eating habits is surely the sign of a national eating disorder. Certainly it would never have happened in a culture in possession of deeply rooted traditions surrounding food and eating. But then, such a culture would not feel the need for its most august legislative body to ever deliberate the nation's "dietary goals" – or, for that matter, to wage political battle every few years over the precise design of an official government graphic called the "food pyramid". A country with a stable culture of food would not sell out of millions for the quackery (or common sense) of a new diet book every January, It would not be susceptible to the pendulum swings of food scares or fads, to the apotheosis every few years of one newly discovered nutrient and the demonization of another. It would not be apt to confuse protein bars and food supplements with meals or breakfast cereals with medicines. It probably would not eat a fifth of its meals in cars or feed fully a third of its children at a fast-food outlet every day. And it surely would not be nearly so fat.
>
> Nor would such a culture be shocked to discover that there are other countries, such as Italy and France, that decide their dinner questions basis of such quaint and unscientific criteria as pleasure and tradition, eat all manner of "unhealthy" foods and, lo and behold, wind

> up actually healthier and happier in their eating than we are. We show our surprise at this by speaking on something called the “French paradox”, for how could a people who eat such demonstrably toxic substances as foie gras and triple crème cheese actually be slimmer and healthier than we? Yet I wonder if it doesn’t make more sense to speak in terms of an American paradox – that is, a notably unhealthy people obsessed by the idea of eating healthily. (Pollan, 2006, p. 2-3)

As the media has such a great impact on eating, how should we write about it and how do we know which studies to trust? A legalized dietician Hanna Partanen told me that the biggest problem is that not so many people can read researches and statistics right:

> You should get acquainted with the quality of the research, for example is the research made with test persons and how many were there, or was it done with mice or rats. Also learn to read the statistics. A few months ago there were a few really bad articles about sugar and protein. In one article a journalist had used this chart from the Finnish Food Composition Database about which ingredients contain the most and the least protein and sugar. So in the article it was told that gelatin is a good source of protein and the cupcake frosting is good source of sugar.
>
> A while ago I read a story from the biggest newspaper in Finland saying that dried oregano is a good source of fibres. This is not the way to do it. The charts should be put into perspective with the normal amount of use of that certain ingredient and how much people in Finland in general use these ingredients. (2015)

Checking the sources and talking to somebody who has more knowledge about nutrition and reading research is something you really need to do when writing about health studies. Also when writing about a new study saying something opposite that is commonly thought, you need to remember that one study doesn’t change the consensus, even if it's new.

4. Restaurant critics

4.1. What does it take to become a restaurant critic?

A restaurant review is always an opinion of one person, just like any review. And when it's a question of an opinion, there are always different ones. When I worked as a producer for the food pages in *Helsingin Sanomat* weekly appendix *Nyt* (that contained the restaurant reviews of *Helsingin Sanomat*), I got to read all the feedback that came from the reviews. One specific email has really stayed in my mind; there was a reader who was angry because the critic, Anna Paljakka, had been harsh to a certain restaurant. The complainer said: "I would like to know, in how many top restaurant has Paljakka worked, and how well she can cook, when she can afford to judge the restaurant like that." This is a very common way to express your upset about a review – to question the proficiency of a restaurant critic. Here is what a restaurant critic Teemu Luukka from *Helsingin Sanomat* thinks about the theme:

> It's a topic that always raises discussion. Who is competent to judge or rate anyone's doings in general? Should the person making the review be on the same level or better than the person who is being reviewed? Could the Beethoven's Symphony Number 9 be reviewed only by a person who had composed a piece that is on the same level or close? And who would review that piece? (2015)

Luukka furthermore says that in his opinion good general knowledge about restaurants, food and ingredients are good basis for restaurant critic. He reminds us that a restaurant critic is a restaurant critic, not a chef. A critic is a professional restaurant visitor – the chefs are not necessarily that. The chief of the French Culinary Institute of New York, the respected restaurant critic Alan Richman says, that he doesn't cook at all, but he's sure that he has eaten in more restaurants than any chef who disses him (Luukka, 2015).

Der Feinschmecker, a highly valued German food magazine that also publishes yearly two *Der Feinschmecker Restaurant Guides* (one is about fine dining, the other one is about every day restaurants) with the 1000 best restaurants in the country. A restaurant critic Stefan Elfenbein, whose area is Berlin, all "new" federal states (former GDR), as well as Poland, Turkey and the entire United States, writes approximately 250 restaurant reviews in a year. He is one of the few who does it as a full time job. For Elfenbein the job is not just being a restaurant critic, but being a food critic as well:

> We or I frequently test products – the best butchers in Germany, the best bakeries, the best goat cheese in Brandenburg! I also do interviews with innovative people, farmers who produce something special. So, ingredients are not only part of my work on the plates in the restaurant. While testing a restaurant, however, you learn everything else by eating, asking, comparing.
>
> My brain is like a mega-phonebook of aromas. And not only of the good, perfect or exciting ones! I also storage the taste, send and texture of burned sauces, spoiled fish, old vegetables… And yes, a culinary degree helps, but again it is the capability of writing which makes you a starting restaurant critic. (2015)

To expand your taste palette, you need to travel and experience different food cultures. Anna Paljakka, for instance, says that she "use to retell an author Erno Paasilinna by saying that you need to live that kind of life that you have something to write about." (2015) Paljakka has lived, worked and cooked in USA, Italy, Denmark and Vietnam; also she has spend time in Japan, Stockholm, Brussels and Berlin. And that is how you collect your palette or phonebook of flavors – by eating and tasting a lot.

One useful skill for a restaurant critic is the knowledge of cooking methods as well as eating methods – and to open them up for the reader. I for example learned a lot from one single restaurant review of Ruth Reichl, the former restaurant critic of the *The New York Times*:

> “Omakase,” I said, “we are in your hands.” And then I added that my friend had never tasted sushi. He smiled broadly as if this were a pleasure and turned to say something in Japanese. The man beside us swiveled in his seat, looked at my friend and said, “You are very lucky.”
> And so she was. “First,” Mr. Uezu asked, “sashimi?”
> The answer to this is was yes; serious sushi eaters always start with sashimi. Mr. Uezu set a pair of boards in front of us, helped them with shiny, frilly green and purple bits of seaweed and began slicing the fish. Next to him an underling was scraping a long, pale green root across a flat metal grater. “What’s he doing?” my friend asked.
> “Grating wasabi,” I replied. “Very few places use fresh wasabi, but the flavor is much subtler and more delicate than the usual powered sort.”
> The man scooped up little green hillocks and set one on each board. Beside them Mr. Uezu placed pale pink rectangles of toro.
> I showed my friend how to mix the hot wasabi with soy sauce and dip the edge of her fish into the mixture.
>
> (…) “Now sushi?” Mr. Uezu asked.
> “Yes,” my friend said. “Yes, yes.” She was clearly hooked.
> “One piece each?” Mr. Uezu asked. “In Japan we always serve sushi in pairs, but I like to serve sushi one piece at a time so you can taste more.” His hands hovered over the fish in the case, selecting Japanese red snapper, crisp giant clam, small sweet scallops.
> “Can I use my fingers?” whispered my friend.
> “Yes,” I said. “But be sure to dip each piece into the soya sauce fish side first; it would be an insult to saturate the rice with soy and ruin the balance of flavors.” (2005, p. 77-78)

Spending some time in a restaurant kitchen will be very useful, not just to understand how the kitchen works, but to understand the whole world of restaurant business. You don’t need a culinary degree, but to be able to cook yourself and to have some experience working in a restaurant won’t exactly harm you either. It will also help you to appreciate and understand the work of kitchen staff, as Paljakka realized:

> I once did a story about how it feels to work as a kitchenhand and how terribly hard work that was. At the end of the day I was exhausted and willing to eat a cold sausage. A few times I was allowed to serve dishes and I realized my total uncomprehending for the job. I didn't notice the dirty dishes or the full ashtrays. I didn't have eyes on my back. (2015)

Understanding the whole procedure, how an ingredient turns into a significant player of a fine restaurant meal, is important, but the most important skill still is the writing, as Elfenbein emphasizes:

> You have to be able to put the experienced into precise and at the same time, colorful and let's say "yummy" words – and this often under time pressure. Most food critics therefore are trained journalists. (2015)

4.2. A guide to make a good review

People read restaurant reviews for many reasons. Some readers are active restaurant visitors who want to know in which restaurants they definitely want to go next. Some are people who rarely go to eat out, but when they go, they want to be sure the place they pick is the best one in town at the moment. Some read the reviews just for fun, with no interest to go into fancier restaurants but they are enjoying the stories. Well-written reviews are stories from a city and its people, at their best they can be compared to novellas. And a good review will serve every reader.

As there are different kinds of readers, there are different kinds of critics. Anna Paljakka says it's important to define your role as a critic:

> Are you a spokesman for the reader or a consumer? Or are you an expert of food? I feel more like a spokesperson. I try to pass on the

> experiences to those people as well who have no intention to go to eat in the precise restaurant. (2015)

4.2.1. Where to go, with whom and how – do I need a disguise?

So which restaurants get tested? The ones that you have something to say about. Mostly they are new, interesting restaurants. Restaurants from chefs who already have a name in the business and restaurants that have made a fuss about themselves, the ones that people are waiting for. And then there are these hidden gems: the small restaurants who keep a low profile, the ones that need to be discovered. Often they are ethnic restaurants and located outside a downtown area. Restaurants in the best spots of the city are always interesting, to see if they are worth the parade spot. And the classics – the ones that have a good reputation – need to be checked from time to time, to see if they are still worth the reputation.

As the restaurant has been picked with the editor, the work starts. Some background scouting might be a good idea. What is the restaurant promising? How is their image? Who is the owner? What is the history? But you don't want too much information because in a way, you are in a role of a normal customer. Usually you should visit the restaurant for the second time so you can do more fact checking between the visits. The first impression is important, you don't want to ruin that with too much information.

To get a good understanding about the restaurant, three visits would be ideal. For example Teemu Luukka has a rule that he wants to taste at least four smaller courses and four main courses – some of them from the plates of your dinner guests. The reactions of your guests are also important, but you also need to think about what kind of company you want to take with you. If you are doing a review about a new Chinese restaurant, you might want to take a person with a good knowledge about Chinese food. It is important that the

person is there to help you to create the picture about the restaurant, as Paljakka advices:

> I try to find a person who is just perfect for this certain place. I want it to be an experience for s/he. I've seen all kinds of cynics who want to come a long or these gourmands who lack the capability to describe and analyze what they taste. Also you don't want to take care of your relationship or family issues while having a review dinner – I've seen it happened as well. (2015)

Or maybe you just want to take somebody who knows how to shut up, as restaurant critic Stefan Elfenbein puts it: "Mainly I take only two people, two friends of mine who love to eat and do not have the need to talk. Testing needs the full concentration on the restaurant situation." (2015)

Reserve the table with a false name or with a name of your guest. You don't want them to know that you are coming. An extreme example comes from the restaurant critic Ruth Reichl, who has told about her use of disguises in her memoir *Garlic And Sapphires - The Secret Life Of a Food Critic*. When she worked as a critic for the *The New York Times*, she created different kinds of alter egos with the help of an acting coach. Together they invented several characters and they did it properly: names, life stories, clothing, makeup, wigs, personalities, and way of talking. She actually got frightened herself about how deep she went into the roles sometimes. And it really did have an effect on the service whether she wore a spinster, grey Betty, or red-headed joyful Brenda or frumpy, blonde Molly. In her book she writes that the worst service she got as "an old lady":

> At our table things were considerably less cheerful. The service was so slow that after a great deal of small talk and five pots of tea, I felt compelled to apologize. " I always seem to get bad service," I told Helen. "I don't know why."
> "Well, I do," she snapped. "You look like an old lady. And waiters consider old ladies their natural enemies. They think that they will complain constantly, order the cheapest dishes on the menu, and

> leave a six percent tip. I have found that it is essential to appear prosperous when going out to eat." (2005, p. 215)

If the critic is recognized, there will be more hassle and Reichl says the steaks were bigger and the seats better, but there is not much to change on the spot. The service will definitely be different but there is not much you can do about the food. Still you'll always get the most truthful image if you are treated as any of the customers.

Many restaurant critics try to stay as anonymous as they can and the only way to do it is to know the chefs as little as possible, skip the restaurant opening parties and staying out of publicity. Paljakka feels that her anonymity is explained by its unlikelihood:

> I'm far away from the age that my readers are. I don't look like my readers do. Lately I've also acted a bit hick! I'm like this woman from the countryside, telling how good the water in Helsinki is and being worried if I will get my train on time. There probably is some old picture of me hanging in the walls of some restaurants. But the smart cards have been a bless, my name won't be shown as I pay. Earlier I needed to deal with cash or not to come again. But there always is the danger of waitresses changing the restaurants they work – some might come across in surprising places. (2015)

4.2.2. What to eat and how to write about the whole experience

You want to get as versatile samples from the menu as possible, so that should be the guideline when you are choosing what to eat. Figure out with your guest who orders what before you start placing the order, so it won't cause any awkward situations as the waitress arrives. Trust me, I've witnessed these weird moments many times where for example your guest orders the same thing as you and you need to say that s/he can't order the same dish without revealing the true reason why s/he should order something different. You also want to pick the dishes that really show the skills of the

restaurant. For example, if you are having antipastos, order the ones that are handmade, not the ones that usually are readymade – olives or sun-dried tomatoes won't tell much about the quality of the restaurant, bread or a signature starter will.

Stefan Elfenbein starts the visit by asking for a menu. And then he will ask the name of the waiter, just to show respect for their work. Then he starts picking the dishes:

> I'll pick the ones which seem the most unusual, exciting, creative… or also very traditional or difficult to prepare, or which show the handwriting of the chef. I ask for recommendations because the reaction interests me. And usually the service "likes" every dish or is too polite to give clear answers. But sometimes the service is trained to "sell" the most expensive dish… the same counts unfortunately often for wine by the glass. (Elfenbein 2015)

Service is a huge part of the whole dining experience and it tells a lot about the restaurant. Does the waiter know the list? Has s/he recommendations? How are you treated? A good waiter can save the dinner or absolutely destroy it.

Anna Paljakka emphasizes how important it is to feel welcome when you enter the restaurant. She says it often is forgotten in Finland, though it really is important as that is how the first impression of the restaurant is made – do you feel welcome or not?

Talking with the waiter about the menu or the dishes can also be frustrating if the person doesn't know the dishes. Or the wines. A Finnish restaurant critic Jouni K. Kemppainen once asked a waiter for the region of the German wine the waiter was serving. He looked at the bottle and answered: "It's from Trocken". *Trocken* means dry. Teemu Luukka tells that he often calls the chefs after the visit to check some details.

Besides the service, you should pay attention to the atmosphere, the surroundings, cleanliness, the smells, the sound, the energy, the tableware, everything. And make notes. This is the tricky part, as you don't want the staff to notice that you make notes. There are many ways: some send SMS to themselves, some make notes on the toilet. Paljakka tells that she used to carry a small notebook around. Sometimes the staff came to ask what she is writing – and she told them. Nowadays she takes a picture with her phone and/or has her iPad with her, as it is so normal that people carry these things at restaurants. She also asks her guest to write her thoughts about the food after the dinner. Elfenbein has his own tactic to do notes in restaurants:

> I always have a book or a city guide on the table. I underline things in the book with a pen so that it looks like I were a tourist or a visitor. With the same pen I make my notes on empty notebook pages between the book pages. Once or twice during a visit I go to the restroom to make longer notes. I never take any pictures of the dishes I eat. I picture cannot tell you how things tasted. Only your notes – and again it is about writing – are precise enough to in the end justify the grade you give in your own piece. (2015)

Yes, it is about the writing. And when writing about food, it is really important to be able to describe the food that you've eaten. Teemu Luukka says it's crucial to be able to explain and give reasons for why something is good:

> Just by avoiding the word "tasty", you'll manage somehow. Anybody can say when food is good, but not anybody can tell why it 's good. The "goodness" is explained too seldom, even in reviews made by actual critics. In this sense, reviews made from classical music or rock concerts are more developed. Unfortunately when stories are being edited shorter, they usually cut from the parts where the arguments are. It's a shame because arguments are exactly the part that reveals the quality of the critic. (2015)

And what to do then, if the food is just okay? When there is not much to write about? This is how the critic is also measured, how to write an interesting

review even though everything is just fine. You need to find your angle – or decide not to write the article. *Der Feinschmecker* has very clear guidelines in their writing. Elfenbein tells that each grade is carefully evaluated and justified and even the words are carefully selected:

> Certain words may only be used for certain categories: “wonderful”, “exceptional”, “exciting” is usually only used for higher categories. In a lower category a “good” or “fresh” or “juicy” is mostly just enough.
> If a dish is just okay, it doesn’t fit any of our categories. If the restaurant has only “just ok” dishes, we either will not write about it or – if it is new, the new hot spot à la social or other media – we simply clearly describe the problems: no aromas, products old, try, out of the freezer, no ability of cooking techniques. Any other or “new” way to describe “just ok” would not be a restaurant critic. It would be PR, silly, or a lie. (2015)

This is something that is commonly forgotten when talking about the job of the restaurant critic. There also are dinners that are not published. The mediocre and bad food doesn’t usually end up in the paper because it’s taking the space from some good review. In her book *Will Write For Food*, Dianne Jacobs says that most publications and websites keep negative reviews to a minimum, unless the place is famous, expensive, or new and opened to great fanfare. Most editors and writers believe it’s best to tell readers about places that excite them and give them a reason to go out, rather than telling them where not to go (Jacobs, 2010, p. 146).

If you are going to rip the restaurant into pieces, you also need to do it classy and describe well what actually went wrong. Here’s a nice example from Ian Frobe from *Riverfront Times*:

> The problems are apparent as soon as you walk in the door. The blissed-out faux-Portishead lounge music like the soundtrack to a soft-core flick on Cinemax. The open fireplace in the center of the dining room. The cushy booths big enough to hold an entire bachelorette party and the bride-to-be's inflatable replica of Jon Hamm's penis.

> Is it 1997? No. Did the hostess, having run out of menus on one of our visits, ask us to share a single copy? She did. Does the menu feature Asian-fusion cuisine? You bet your bulgogi sliders it does.
>
> (…)I still can't figure out the squid. Admittedly, that's not entirely Takaya's fault. On a recent episode of the public-radio Zeitgeist prodder This American Life, a reporter obsessively bird-dogged a rumor that (once, maybe) a pork processor somewhere had packaged pig rectums (or, as they're called in the industry, "bung") as "imitation calamari." When the investigation proved fruitless, the reporter resorted to a blind taste test in which he pitted fried calamari against fried bung. One of the two participants preferred the bung.
>
> I was not one of the tasters, and I'm pretty damn sure I've never eaten pig-butt rings à la calamari, but I suspect that in a blind tasting I'd have chosen 'em over the deep-fried squid I ate at Takaya. (2013)

The review doesn’t always work in the way you would think. I remember one review that was really trashing this Italian restaurant in Helsinki. The seafood risotto, for example, was described with the word “repulsive”. And what happened – the place was packed afterwards because people wanted to see themselves how horrible the restaurant was.

4.3. The power of a critic – consequences of a review

The most respected restaurant critics do have consequences. The most recognized critics can actually have huge impact on restaurant's income, so the responsibility is also heavy.

Anna Paljakka tells that there have been a few restaurants that have already struggled and after her negative review, they had to close the doors. But she reminds that a negative review can also raise counteraction; people start to defend the place. Paljakka has also witnessed a couple of times that her

review has affected the prices or the menu. For example in restaurant Välimäki the food costed 170 euros, the wines paired with the menu was 140 euros and the champagne costed 30 or 40 euros per glass. After her review the champagne was included in the cheaper wine packet and it's been poured with a generous hand, Paljakka tells.

"The power and therefore the responsibility is immense," says Stefan Elfenbein and shares the consequences of his work:

> Half a grade, half a "Feinschmecker" to one whole "F", up or down, can have an impact of several 100 000 euros more or less a year. We, the restaurant critics, can and do decide in some cases whether a restaurant will be known, not known, continue to exist or disappear. But this is not up to us to decide. We and I only describe what we eat. We don't judge. We put it into perspective through years of experience and comparisons.
>
> This year, I took two of the once well-known Berlin restaurants out of the list of Germany's Top 500 in the upcoming Guide, after years of writing about them. I know they will disappear. One the other hand I added several new places and great place of young chefs who might just need that well deserved and understood moment of support to survive. (2015)

Teemu Luukka also has seen it happen that a restaurant has been bankrupt shortly after his one star review: "Unfortunately one of the chefs was a friend of mine and he got fired. Later he said, that I was absolutely right; the restaurant didn't give the change to make good food because they were saving in everything." He has also witnessed the opposite reaction:

> Once I gave five stars to a new restaurant, Toca, and it was sold out for months. The first day after the review, all they did was answering the phone and taking reservations. Also some of the ethnical restaurants in suburbs of Helsinki have been full for months after my

> four star review. I don't actually follow the consequences, but you will hear about them. (2015)

Readers might disagree with the review, but mostly if somebody disagrees it's the restaurant. Unless it's a really praising review. Best consequence obviously is, if the review leads into improvements in the restaurant. To be judged never feels nice, but it also should be seen as a good counseling, as the critics are professional restaurant eaters.

Anna Paljakka has had two extreme experiences with restaurants getting mad about her reviews. The first one was a restaurant, Suomenlinnan Panimo, that served food that tasted like refrigerator – and this happened in both of her visits, so Paljakka wrote about it. After the review, the restaurant promised food with 50% discount for everybody who will write a review on the restaurant's webpage. They had cleaned the refrigerator and of course the reviews were mostly good. But even more extreme was Paljakka's conflict with restaurant Bronda and its owner Tomi Björck:

> In my review about Bronda, I praised a couple of really good dishes and wondered about the really bad ones. I was asking if there were Jekyll and Hyde working in the kitchen. The company, BW Restaurants (that Björck leads with Matti Wikberg, having five highly valued restaurants) is also known with their problems with service, many people say that the staff is haughty and uncouth. The ultracrepidarian service had also a big influence on my review – I ended up giving two stars out of five. The same morning that the review was out, Tomi Björck posted on his Instagram a picture with a hashtag #fuckyougranny and words "up yours, you don't get it", or something like that.
>
> I've never met him.
>
> After an hour, the post was deleted. Online forums went nuts, there were over 600 posts and some people were really nasty on him. After a couple of days the headline poster of a yellow paper was screaming,

> “Tomi Björck told a critic to fuck off”. They made a cover story about it and the story went all the way to Sweden where BW Restaurants also has one restaurant. I got away with the whole thing with little attention, even though I at first was afraid there would be paparazzis hiding in the bushes.
>
> At first Björck said that these things come and go, but later, probably under a pressure of a few women's magazines that he was co-operating with, he made a public apology where he said they always take the reviews seriously and was sorry for the bad and embarrassing choice of words. In the apology he invited me for a dinner to Bronda and said he would have liked to hear more about what were wrong with the dishes. A couple of weeks later as the apology reached me, I just answered that his apology sounded sincere. (2015)

5. Recipes

5.1. How to write a recipe

Writing a recipe might sound easy but actually it’s a whole lot of work. And the work comes from the fact that the recipe has to work. You really have to be sure that the person who will try it, will succeed with it. In order to be certain about that, the recipe needs to be developed to its perfection. Developing a recipe actually is the most demanding part of the whole process. You need patience and time. Here is how Dianne Jacob describes the process in her book *Will Write For Food*:

> You might think recipe writing is linear, where you create a seafood pasta dish, write the recipe, and send it to a friend to see if she can recreate it accurately. It sounds simple enough. But that’s not how it

> works. Let's say you taste the pasta dish and decide it could use improvement, maybe some parsley and lemon juice. You add "1/4 cup parsley" and "1 tablespoon lemon juice" to the ingredients list and make the pasta again. Now it tastes better, but still needs more zing. You revise the ingredients list one more, this time changing it to "2 tablespoons lemon juice" and "2 tablespoons capers". You make the pasta again.
>
> (…) "Three is not the magic number of times to make a dish. What if you realized, upon tasting the third version of pasta dish, you should have kept the lemon juice to one tablespoon instead of two. Should you make the pasta again, just to be certain? The best recipe writers would say yes. (2015, p. 203)

Even as many as five tests will not be enough - maybe not even ten. Managing Culinary Director of *Serious Eats*, and author of the James Beard Award-nominated column *The Food Lab*, J. Kenji López-Alt wanted to find the perfect chocolate chip cookie recipe. Not an easy task. In his demonstrative article *The Science of the Best Chocolate Chip Cookies* he opens the process of developing a recipe in detail:

> For the past few months, I've had chocolate chip cookies on the brain. I wake up in the middle of the night with a fresh idea, a new test to run, only to discover that my 10 pound flour bin has been emptied for the third time. Did I really use it all up that fast? I'd put on my coat and walk out in the cold New York winter night, my sandals leaving tracks in the snow as I wander the neighborhood, an addict searching for a convenience store that will sell me flour at 3 in the morning.
>
> I'm talking chocolate cookies that are barely crisp around the edges with a buttery, toffee-like crunch. You see, I've never been able to get a chocolate chip cookie exactly the way I like. I'm talking chocolate cookies that are barely crisp around the edges with a buttery, toffee-like crunch that transitions into a chewy, moist center that bends like caramel, rich with butter and big pockets of melted chocolate. Cookies

> with crackly, craggy tops and the complex aroma of butterscotch. And of course, that elusive perfect balance between sweet and salty.
>
> Some have come close, but none have quite hit the mark. And the bigger problem? I was never sure what to change in order to get what I want. Cookies are fickle and the advice out there is conflicting. Does more sugar make for crisper cookies? What about brown versus white? Does it matter how I incorporate the chocolate chips or whether the flour is blended in or folded? How about the butter: cold, warm, or melted?
>
> So many questions to ask and answers to explore! I made it my goal to test each and every element from ingredients to cooking process, leaving no chocolate chip unturned in my quest for the best. 32 pounds of flour, over 100 individual tests, and 1,536 cookies later, I had my answers. (López-Alt, 2013)

So this is what developing a recipe can be like. A person who has a long experience with writing a recipe, good knowledge of ingredients and the proportions, usually can make it with a few testing times. Chef and cookbook author Pipsa Hurmerinta tells that she usually start concretely with making the dish with that idea the she had in the first hand. After that she will google similar dishes and see how it's been approached elsewhere. Then she'll write the base for a recipe and make it again. Sometimes she nails it on the first time, sometimes she need to modify it – and sometimes it just won't come together and then she'll dump the idea. Usually she'll test the dish about two times. If it seems tricky, she'll ask her mother or sister to test it (Hurmerinta 2014).

Reliability is something that you don't want to lose. A magazine that is based on recipes need to be sure that the recipes really work, so the recipes are usually tested two or three times. One of these testing times is usually the time when they are prepared for the picture. Some magazines use trainees from culinary schools or reader groups to test their recipes.

Besides the headline, you need to have an introduction. The idea of ingress, *a headnote*, is to raise the interest. Let's take chocolate brownies for example. Everybody knows brownies; this flat, baked dessert square, a cross between a cake and a soft cookie in texture that comes in a variety of forms. Depending on its density, it may be either fudgy or cake and may include nuts, icing, chocolate chips, or other ingredients. Typically eaten by hand, often accompanied by milk or coffee (Wikipedia 2015a).

You know what I mean. Many people know the recipe by heart, so why would you read another brownie recipe? You will, if the headnote interests you or raises feelings. But there must be something else than just the title.

The approach can for example historical, like this:

"You could hear her laughing in the kitchen. Everyone could, her laughter was so loud that even the hotel guests in the lobby turned around. It was year 1893, a prominent Chicago socialite, Bertha Palmer, whose husband owned the Palmer House Hotel there, had asked a pastry chef for a dessert suitable for ladies attending the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. She had requested a confection smaller than a piece of cake, though still retaining cake-like characteristics, easily eaten from boxed lunches. And the laughter? Well, the chef had executed the task so well that Bertha couldn't stop hugging him. Brownie crumbs were flying from her mouth, as she couldn't stop laughing either – it was divine and she was thrilled. This is how the chocolate brownies were born."

Or the ingress can be a personal one, like here:

"The rusty voice of Klaus Meine was flowing into my ears, the smoke machine had just puffed a new load of smoke in the dance floor. Just enough to hide the insecure hands fumbling in the dance partners back. Klaus was singing about *Wind of Change*, the elementary school disco had just reached the point where people try to find somebody to paw as it was the last dance. And I sighed satisfied. Not because I was in the dance floor, but because I was

leaning on the canteen desk and I just have had the first bite of brownie in my life. It was love at the first bite."

Or your headnote can be just really simple and informative, like this:
"A brownie is the most popular pastry in Finland. Every year, three million brownies are being sold in supermarkets; you can find it from birthday parties, school canteens, nursing homes and fine dining restaurants. It's a classic that just doesn't go out of fashion."

Okay, I just made up those numbers, but you'll get the idea. When you have the recipe, the headline and the introduction done, it's time to start to write the actual recipe. Here are a few tips that I've gathered as a result of my interviews:

- Always list the ingredients in the same order as they are used in the recipe. Always.
- Be specific. If you write apples, tell what kind of apples.
- It is easier to tell the measurements for ingredients before anything has been done with them. So it's better to state the amounts as "three middle-sized carrots" or "300 grams of carrots" than "4,5 dl/350 g of grated carrot".
- If your recipe requires some special preparations, special instruments that you don't maybe find in every kitchen (like steamer) or ingredients that are difficult to find (for example some exotic spices), warn about these in the beginning.
- Don't use terms that your mother wouldn't recognize.
- Give tips, about how to variate your recipe and in what kind of situations they are perfect. And with what they it could be served.
- If the recipe is not yours, say it. Recipes don't have copyrights (unless it's considered as an artwork), but it is a rule to give credit to the original author.

Here is what food writer Monica Bhide says about giving credits in her food writing classes:

> As with any writing, be very careful about copying anything. There are no true original recipes so if you are worried about that, don't be. What you need to be careful of is not to take someone's signature recipe, change two things and call it your own. That is called an adapted or derivative recipe and needs to be credited as such.
>
> (…) A good rule of thumb for a basic recipe is to change at least 3 to 4 ingredients, and add your unique touches to the recipe. (2015)

And the most important thing in writing a recipe is clarity. It's almost impossible to be too clear. A reader must understand the recipe at the first time s/he reads it, to have a vision about how the dish is made. If it seems too complicated, most of the people will drop it. Bhide presented a good example in her food writing class:

> Be careful about using words like blanch, sautee, simmer, sweat - instead give clear visual clues and directions on how to achieve the desired outcome. If you are writing directions to say, boil an egg, you could say as this person did in a letter to London's *Daily Telegraph*, "If you boil an egg while singing all five verses and chorus of the hymn 'Onward Christian Soldiers,' it will be cooked perfectly when you come to Amen." Or be specific about bringing the water to a boil, the number of minutes to let the eggs sit, etc. (2015)

When you write the recipes precisely, they will take more space, but that would still be better, though, than taking the risk that the reader would be lost with the recipe. Editor in chief Sanna Maskulin says that for the writers in *Glorian Ruoka & Viini*, it's very important that the first-timer will nail it as well:

> You cannot write, "cook until it's done". You need to write, "cook for ten minutes until it's done". This way the recipes will be longer, but every step of a recipe need to be opened. It's the only way to guarantee that it will work and the dish will succeed. (2015)

And as in any food writing, you need to have a reason for your story – why is it important? If it's, let's say, an apple pie recipe, how is it different from all the other apple pie recipes in the world or why is it important to publish this recipe just now? To whom are you writing this recipe and why should s/he be interested in it? Why is it worthy of attention, why is it better than other similar recipes?

5.2. Food photography

People taking pictures of their food is nowadays such a typical sight that it's already something you don't pay that much attention to anymore. Yes, my mother is doing it as well. Some find it comic, but for me it's like taking a picture of anything – a memory of a place or time. But it also reveals how important the outlook of food is. I also believe that Instagram has made restaurants and cafés to put more effort into the visual part of dishes – as they know these will be photographed. Just recently a cook in a small kebab stall said to me while giving me my order: "Guten Appetit – but first you take a picture of it!"

But of course the way food looks has always been important. If it's appealing, you want to have it or do it. And this is why photos are such a vital part of the recipes. Also if you are planning to have a food blog, you need to have good pictures. That is how the first impression of a blog is made and the pictures need to be so good that they'll make the visitor to want to read the text as well.

A Finnish food photographer Sami Repo told me he has noticed that more visual food stories are now appreciated in food magazines as well as photographer originated food stories. It depends on the skills of the photographer but when dealing with top food photographers, the whole story might be made based on a photo.

Normally a food photo is made so that first the editor contacts the photographer and he will do the shooting with help of the person who has written the recipe or/and with a help of an art director or a food stylist. It all depends on the budget as well. Repo says that in Finland there usually is no budget for the food stylist. And sometimes the photographer might work totally on his own.

A photographer Silvio Knezevic, who is one of the two food photographers for *ZEITmagazin* food section *Wochenmarkt* tells that he often cook the dishes himself. Before studying photography he was working as a chef for several years. For Knezevic the process starts as he goes buying the ingredients for the picture on the market. If he sees one or some ingredients from the recipe that look very interesting (e.g. lemons with leafs) he might make the picture from the preparations step of the dish. Or he might decide to show the completed dish. “Then I / we start cooking and preparing the set, which means choosing the underground, the props and setting up the light. Then I’ll start taking the pictures,” Knezevic describes (2015).

And how to make the food look good? Repo says that there haven’t been any tricks made to food in decades, it might have happened in 60’s, 70’s, 80’s or 90’s – but not anymore. All the food is edible. Knezevic agrees:

> No, we never use stuff like hairspray. The food itself looks already great, why destroying it with chemistry? In the past most of the food photographers were still life photographers who were seeking perfection. But the perfection of a T-bone steak or bean is its imperfection. It will never look like a light bulb, but they tried with hairspray, color and wire. In my studio there are only different brushes on the set, which you can moisten the stuff that dries out. (2015)

So there are no tricks, but Knezevic says to make the food look better some fresh herbs, good salt and grounded pepper on top always look good – “But not on creme brulee!” (2015)

Storytelling in food photos is a phenomenon that has been trending. “Yes, they want stories. Couple years ago even more, but it’s still there. Urban city, earthy things, design and own vision – these are the trends now,” says Repo. Also Knezevic is talking about storytelling:

> I also think that nowadays the food pictures have more of a narrative, especially the props. It shall look very cosy and vintage. You could think that most food bloggers are flea market traders (or living in their grandparents house). But I hope this trend has its peak right now and I think that it’s going in two directions. First, more in a subtle, ingenious narrative way of showing food, and on the other way a very reduced, sharp graphic look. But you can’t tell, nowadays all looks and trends co-exist; we lack a zeitgeist. (2015)

For me it seems that taking pictures of food is the zeitgeist of today, but Repo thinks it has it peak and it’s calming down:

> Few years ago there was the fear that there won’t be that much work for food photographers anymore, but professionals are professionals – the ones who really are. The “amateurs” have shaken things a bit as stepping into our territory, but I see it as a good thing. (2015)

So does Knezevic: “I think it’s great that many people deal with cooking and eating. They should only photograph it less, it tastes better when it’s hot.” (2015)

6. Appearance

Food journalism can be mainly found in food magazines, newspapers and online. There are also some radio programs, food related radio stories and a lot of food related documentaries, and TV-shows, but in this guide the focus is

on written food journalism. The types of appearance are diverse. *Will Write for Food* – guidebook divides the food stories in 13 categories:

1. Recipes. For many publications, recipe based stories are a huge focus. Most of these stories comprise a short introduction followed by three to five recipes. The feature article might include small bits of side information for example on technique, a guide to choosing unfamiliar ingredient, and information about its history, where to buy it, how to serve it.
2. Trend. Usually articles on trends are reported, meaning you interview and quote experts and sources, and to come conclusions based on their expertise. Or your own observation.
3. Guide. Here you'll educate readers on how to make choices about a particular subject, such as how to buy organic, select winter greens, or brew exotic teas.
4. News. In news reporting, you would interview several people and piece together their comments for an article on a breaking development.
5. Personality profile. Based on an interview with one person, such as a chef, restaurateur, food producer, retailer, or food personality, the focus is on an interviewee who has achieved recognition, made a significant contribution, or performs unusual work.
6. Interview. Similar to a personality profile, interviews take the form of questions and answers that follow an introduction and brief biography of the interviewee.
7. Roundup. Usually a comparison or list, roundups help readers to choose from a group, such as five kinds of Indian spices, or ten great Italian restaurants.
8. How-to. Teach readers how to solve a problem or do something better. These articles can be technique based, such as how to make great mashed potatoes, how to find vegan restaurants in New York, or how to choose the right kitchen equipment.
9. Human interest. There are stories about warm hearted people who do good deeds, such as soup kitchen cooks who feed 350 homeless people every day or a group that sells baked goods for a cause.

10. Historical background. Pique an editor's interest by combining history with other forms listed here, such as destination or service writing.
11. Cookbook reviews and restaurant reviews.
12. Destination and travel. Food-based travel pieces might take you to a food festival, a region known for artisan foods, or a city famous for its restaurants.
13. First-person essays. Personal stories related to food, a wide list of possible subjects such as telling your experiences on doing something for the first time, such as served as an apprentice in a restaurant, having a funny cooking story or cook unusual holiday dishes. (Jacob, 2005, p. 112-116)

6.1. Food journalism in newspapers

In newspapers, the restaurant critics are considered as the first form of food journalism. Of course there has always been food related news, but the restaurant critics are often considered as the starting point, the point when eating well and restaurant culture started to interest people in a bigger scale. In Germany, the first restaurant critics were published in the early 1970's. Not that many people were interested about Michelin stars at that time, but when a restaurant called Tantris got two Michelin stars in 1974 (there had been one-star-restaurant since 1960's but that was the first time a German restaurant got two stars), things changed. This is how a long-term restaurant critic Bernd Matthies from *Der Tagesspiegel* reminisces those times:

> That was the big bang. Suddenly there was good food in Germany and we needed to write about it. This is how it started. After the *Wirtschaftswunder* (the economical rise after the Second World War) you started to find better ingredients in Germany, like lobsters and cognac. With better ingredients it was possible to make better food. The men who wrote the first restaurant reviews were Wolfram Siebeck and Gert von Paczensky. Paczensky invented the food writing in Germany. He had humor in his reviews, he had his own voice. The

> reviews were more of lists about what was on the plate and whether it was good or bad, without explanations why something was good or bad. But the dishes were also very simple, with only a few ingredients. *Nouvelle cuisine* has just arrived and it was exciting. And there was a lot of crying about how can someone combine fruits and seafood in one dish – how is it possible! (2015)

Matthies wrote his first review in *Der Tagesspiegel* in 1988. He was the first one in Berlin to write about food and has done it ever since.

Der Tagesspiegel has a very typical approach to food when it comes to food journalism in newspapers. They have a food page once a week and it usually includes a review and small news or articles about food topics. This is how it's done in most of the newspapers today. Some might give the whole spread, but it's very common that the space is given once a week. Normally food journalism in newspapers means a recipe or/and a restaurant review. It could be followed by smaller news about new restaurants or cafés or other food related news and current topics. Naturally there are also other pages covering food related topics in their normal newsfeed.

A common way also seems to be that newspapers with a weekly food page have a producer, but the writers, especially restaurant critics, are journalists who cover mainly other fields, but also have a passion for food. A full-time food journalists are quite rare and a newspaper with it's own food department is very rare. It's also common that the food writers are freelancers. When staff writers exist, they are often migrated from another section of the newspaper. The biggest newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*, is putting a lot of effort to the food content:

> We have two full-time journalists who make the food content with a help of freelancers. There are 5-10 food pages per week (includes the adds), in the *Thursday* annex. The pages have recipes, wine of the week, a longer story about a person or a trend and a series about two flavors that are perfect for each other. We also produce every evening one recipe for the online evening edition and two daily food articles

> (news and phenomenons) for the online. Top of this we also make videos, publish a cookbook a year and make extra pull outs for the subscribers and for the marketing. (Bäcksbacka, 2015)

In *Helsingin Sanomat*, the restaurant reviews are in another annex, the *Nyt* annex that is a more of a guide for the weekend with information about upcoming events. In Germany, *Die Zeit* has put all their food content in their weekly magazine, *ZEITmagazin,* from the beginning – over 40 years now. The produced and writer of the food pages, Elisabeth Raether, tells that they do time to time food reportages and investigative food journalism:

> We have food theme issues twice a year and we raise food topics that people talk about. For example eating meat. Vegetarian food is such a big issue in this country, but so is meat. Germany produces a great deal of cheap meat and people buy it just because of the price. This is something we need to talk about. I want to believe that in the future people would buy their food in other basis than price, but the change is slow. Like it was with tobacco industrial. (2015)

In *ZEITmagazin* the weekly content is one page with a recipe and a story connected to that. Raether tells that the recipes are simple and healthy: “But I don’t mention it. A lot of vegetarian food and a lot of ethical choices, but I don’t say it. People want to have fun and eating is supposed to be fun.”

In *ZEITmagazin*, the pictures are very important. They invest a lot in them and have a big visual department. The magazine uses two photographers; one of them is German and other one is from London – because they couldn’t find a person with right style from Germany. Raether says that the pictures are so important that they won’t publish a story if there are no photos that match their quality standards.

Four years ago *ZEITmagazin* gave up restaurant critics, Raether tells that it was a big decision:

> We had a living legend Wolfram Siebeck. He was the person with whom people learned how to cook. He was a pioneer, also with restaurant critics in Germany. Michelin stars are still important and there is a place and time for the fancy restaurants, but the times have changed and people don't want this anymore. They don't want to be told where to go. The expensive restaurants are not part of everyday life, they want ideas what to cook in the evening. We show them the ideas what we are cooking and they are welcome to join us. (2015)

In general you could say that the restaurant reviews are still highly valued in American newspapers: many newspapers have their own restaurant critic and the reviews are long. Many European newspapers are giving up the restaurant critics and have reviews done with freelancers, but the reviews are still there – in one way or another. A restaurant review could be replaced by a food column. *Berliner Zeitung*, for example, has a food column where a food journalist Tina Hüttl goes into a restaurant once a week and tells about her experience. It's not always a fancy restaurant; it can be a hot dog stand, an older restaurant, or it can be a new and hyped restaurant, a tiny lunch café or a Michelin star restaurant (Hüttl, 2015). The format is not that structured as it usually is with restaurant reviews. She also has a very personal touch, as it is a column, so she shares more than just thoughts about the food and the place, she tells about her life or about the person she is dining with, in a chatty approach.

One reason why the newspapers are cutting down the restaurant critics or/and reviews is, like in *Die Zeit*, that some think that it's an old fashion style to tell about restaurants. But the bigger problem has to do with money. To send a critic to test a fine restaurant a couple of times every now and then in order to get a good understanding about the quality of restaurants, costs a lot of money, and to do this weekly, is really expensive.

6.2. Food journalism in magazines

For this study I interviewed food writers from Finland and Germany and I've also followed American food publications for along time. When talking about the food magazine's contents, it's really important to remember the dimensions. The variety of publications has a lot to do with the size of the country. It determines the content because you need to think about the whole food magazine scene in that particular country. In Finland there are seven food magazines (Wikipedia 2015b), whereas in Germany I can find in Berlin from my nearest magazine kiosk over 30 food magazines and there are more.

So in Finland it's impossible to publish a niche food magazine. A magazine that goes around one certain diet or ingredient, at least one that could make a profit or break-even. As in Germany or America you can find a magazine that is about beef, cupcakes, vegan baking or low-carb recipes. Well, several magazines about these topics and so many more with even more specific audiences.

One could wonder how all of these magazines manage to stay alive and how there can be so many of them. A German food critic and a journalist Bernd Matthies told to me that in Germany there are magazines that are paid by the owner: "They don't make money but they are good for the imago. But no one is making money in this field, I would say."

In the world of food magazines, there are also food related custom and trade magazines, inflight magazines and corporation magazines. But in this chapter we'll focus on traditional food magazines. I would say that the food magazines could be divided in three groups: the recipe magazines, the lifestyle food magazines and the niche food magazines. A good example of a magazine where the content is based on recipes is *Essen & Trinken*, the oldest food magazine in Germany started in 1972. Editor Claudia Muir from *Essen & Trinken* says that it was like Germany was waiting for it: "Everybody who

wanted to learn cooking bought the magazine. The content hasn't changed that much during these years. It's still about recipes and inspiration." (2015)

In a magazine that is based on recipes, the editorial staff is based on chefs. The corporation (Gruner + Jahr) that owns *Essen & Trinke*n, has all in all five food magazines, and there are eight chefs making the recipes. In an issue of *Essen & Trinken* there is 43-52 recipes in an issue.

An example of a lifestyle food magazine is the Finnish magazine *Glorian Ruoka & Viini.* Their audience is mostly 40-50 years old educated women who have an active relationship with food, according to them, even passionate. Their reader is a good eater but don't necessarily cook herself. She values good tips in the kitchen and things need to be fast and easy. She is willing to pay for the quality ingredients and she wants to know what's trending (Maskulin, 2015).

Here's how the editor in chief of *Glorian Ruoka & Viini*, Sanna Maskulin, describes their content:

> It can be divided in four: First section is food, recipes and the people behind the food. Second section is drinks: wines, beers, cocktails and non-alcoholic drinks. All drinks. Third section contains traveling, producers and restaurants, including restaurant reviews. The fourth section covers food trends and current food topics, lifestyle and utensils. But the main focus is on recipes. Weather the reader is going to try the recipes or not, they are important. Once we cut the amount of recipes from 60 to 30 and we got instant demands from readers to bring back the wider scale of recipes. Even they wouldn't necessary cook from the recipes, they want to read them. Imagine them.
>
> Readers want things to be easy. Less dishes, less ingredients. Simple and insightful recipes that make you feel that yes I can and yes, I have time for this and yes, it will work out. (2015)

A typical niche food magazine could be a magazine that is devoted to one diet or an ingredient, but there is also a new wave of food magazines that is mostly based on long stories and food writing, not so much on recipes, if at all. The editor in chief Vijay Sapre, told me that he wanted to do his food magazine *Effilee* without recipes at all. He says that readers ask for them, so they took in a few. For Sapre, the magazine is all about stories.

> I like good stories. But because it's difficult to promote a magazine that is about "good stories", you need a theme. And as I love food, it was a natural theme for me.
>
> Writers often ask from me how long the story should be. My answer is: usually the story knows how long it should be. If there is a good author with a good story, I'll find the room for a long piece. But I also do heavy editing. Sometimes I can cut half of it out. I like editing.
>
> I'm also a big refuser; I often think that there must be better stories out there. And I will look for them. Every month I've been offered a story about guy who has left his job and start farming or making beer. I've heard this too many times, not interested. But sometimes, a really modest or ordinary topic can turn into great story in hands of talented writer. So Effilee is about good stories. (2015)

Long stories are something that many writers dream about: to have the time to really concentrate on one subject. But long stories are expensive and inhouse journalists don't often have time to do them. Also Effilee have had to cut down the expenses:

> We started out big. There were almost ten people but now there is my wife, an editor and me. It's more organic now, but we cannot afford more. I would love to do more fact checking. Proofreading we do, it's old-school but I want to have it.

> We are paying our bills. The dream would be that the magazine would not have any ads. Like *Art of Eating*. So it would be based just for subscription. (Sapre 2015)

And now we get to the question of money. Almost all the newspapers and magazines are struggling with money and trying to find out new ways to get it – and so are the advertisers.

6.3. Commercial co-operations

Food journalism is always about business. A good review of a restaurant can have a huge impact on its income. The story of a newly-opened cafe, whose owner has overcome hardships, can attract sympathetic customers. Praising a new organic, local bio-burger in an article could have a greater economic impact than paid advertising. Food journalists have an ethical responsibility to be objective and readers rely on their honesty. And nobody wants to risk their reputation. Readers also are clever; they know when a story is missing a point of view, say, if it's just a presentation of a new product.

In a recipe, when a brand is being mentioned, it is usually for the reason that it will help the reader to find the right kinds of products, for instance a right sized product or to help them realize that a certain brand represents a certain ingredient. Here's how Sanna Maskulin from *Glorian Ruoka & Viini* explains it:

> We sometimes do mention product names in recipes, but it's never sponsored. For us it's more about service journalism. For example if we talk about a almond liqueur and have after it written "(for example Amaretto)", it can help people to recognize the almond liqueur and maybe to remember if they have it at home.
> It's our own profit to keep ads and other material separated. We need to be trustworthy and reliable. In food blogs these rules might become a bit blur, but for us it's all about our reputation. (2015)

The advertisers always want new ways to be involved with consumers. Boundaries between advertisements and journalistic content are being stretched: in some magazines it's already possible to buy sponsored articles. In food magazines, the most common way to do commercial co-operation is by doing *advertorials*. An advertorial is an advertisement in the form of editorial content. The term "advertorial" is a blend of the words "advertisement" and "editorial." In printed publications, the advertisement is usually written in the form of an objective article and designed to look like a legitimate and independent news story (Wikipedia 2015c).

In some magazines, advertorials are made by the magazine's own content producers. If sponsors want to promote a new product, Maskulin says, their own content producers in *Glorian Ruoka & Viini* will develop the recipe for it and make the picture.

> That way we can do the advertorials. And it will fit in our other content. These content producers are different people than our writers, we keep these separately; our journalists won't do these pieces. And they are always marked as "adverts". (Maskulin, 2015)

In some magazines the same people who do the content for magazine do the editorials as well, like in *Essen & Trinken*:

> We do advertorials where our chefs make the recipes for the ads. It's always titled as *anzeige*, an advert. We don't tell in the ad, who has made the recipe. But we want to do them ourselves as a guarantee of the quality. Readers are really clever; they know that we wouldn't put a brand in a recipe unless there would be a reason for it. And the reason would never be advertising. We need to think about our reputation. We put a brand name in a recipe only if it will help to success with the recipe. (Muir, 2015)

Newspapers and food magazines are dependent on advertisers. You need to keep the advertiser happy, yet to still write critically and objectively about

food. A warning example from Finland in the 1960's: A magazine called *Uusi Kuvalehti* published an article that claimed the fat in Margarine comes from dead animals. The sales of Margarine plummeted and advertisers boycotted *Uusi Kuvalehti*. The magazine quickly went bankrupt (Kovanen & Lapinoja, 2014, p. 38).

In Finland, if the biggest newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* for example praises a cheap sparkling wine, you can be sure that it's sold out in every wine store in the whole country, as the market is so small. And the wine importers obviously want to advertise in *Helsingin Sanomat*, as it's a really important source for the consumers to find new wines. It is a double-edged sword, though, since the newspaper does not always give praise, though, and that is the risk the advertisers take. It also has happened that there has been an ad for a restaurant and next to it a review that totally puts the restaurant off. The rules of commercial co-operations are very clear to everyone. Nobody wants to lose their reputation by doing something that is against the ethics of a journalist. But still, the lines are stretched sometimes. The editor in chief of *Effilee*, Vijay Sapre told me that he does, what he calls *dirty deals*:

> If there is a potential advertiser, I could do a story about them. On the next edition, the might have an ad. Sometimes readers spot it write and ask about it, and I say yes, we did it. I'm surprised that we still have so good reputation! But when advertiser wants to be able to control the content, we say that then it will be marked as an ad. Usually they don't want that and we get our freedom.
>
> If there is a travel story, yes, it could be paid. Our agreement with the restaurant critics are, that they are paid themselves, but truth is, I don't want to know. (2015)

As mentioned earlier, food journalism is always about business. The topics are related to somebody's business but it's also about the business of the publisher. All the magazines and newspapers are dealing with a difficult economic situation and are wondering where to get the money from and how

to find the advertisers. And when dealing with food brands, it can be even more difficult than one might think. Here's Sapre's example:

> My friend has a magazine about cars. The difference in our magazines is that he can do a story about Mini and get a load of money for the company for doing that. And people love it because they like Mini. Many people are fans of the big brands. But in food genre, people hate the big brands. And this makes is very difficult to survive in this field financially. The brands people love: small bakeries, independent winemakers, guy doing a cheese in his home – they don't have the money to buy adverts. They are poor people. It took me few years to realize this. (2015)

7. Going online

7.1. The online content of newspapers food sections and food magazines

Which content should we put online and should we put it there for free? These are two of the biggest questions in every newspaper and magazine today. The main concern is ultimately how to make money online? Obviously, nobody knows the answers. As we now know, it all got off on the wrong foot. Once you put some content online for free, it's not easy to start asking for money for it. In order to that, you have to make something extra to justify the cost. And to be able to make some extra material, you need more journalists or you need to cut the content from somewhere else to have the time to do it. But as you don't have the money for this and you don't want to cut anything to keep the old quality, you are in the same trouble as everybody else in the media business.

The jungle of online content is as colorful as the field of newspapers and magazines. And when it comes both food sections in newspapers as well as food magazines, there are all kinds of versions: some papers or magazines don't put anything online, some put all of their content online. Some put different content that they put in print, others only partly.

Compared to Germany, Finland is pioneering in terms of really putting effort to online distribution. The producer of the food content in *Helsingin Sanomat*, Katja Bäcksbacka tells about their working methods:

> Our policy is "digital first". It means that we publish articles first online and then we'll see which ones are popular and create updated or modified versions about them for the print. Sometimes we put our main story online on the night before. But we also have exclusive content every week on the print. (2015)

This is really a groundbreaking business model. In all the newspapers and food magazines in Germany, which I've visited while doing my interviews for this study, online first –thinking is still very far away. The content, or some of it, is always published online later, although it may take weeks.

It was surprising to notice that in many magazines in Germany, they have their own online departments that are in charge of the webpage content. In Finland the journalists themselves think about the online distribution, already in the early stage of the whole process: while planning the article it is important to think about how a given article will be presented or "sold" online, what makes a catchy headline and what will get clicks, shares, online attention. Not so much in Germany.

Essen & Trinken publishes all their recipes online, three weeks after they are published in the magazine. Claudia Muir tells that the editorial department doesn't actually have anything to do with the online content: "The online department is completely different department, so we don't think about the

online. We do have Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts; the people from the online-section are using them." (2015)

Also in *ZEITmagazin* the department is totally separated. Elisabeth Raether who is in charge of the weekly food page, focuses just in the printed content.

> I know that my food column is really popular online but I don't think about, I don't need to. The column with a recipe goes online two weeks after it's published. There is also some extra content like the blog pick of the week, but I'm not in charge of that, just the print content. I would like our webpage to be as a cookbook, hopefully that will happen in the future. (Raether, 2015)

The food magazines often offer some kind of a recipe bank online. It could be one with recipes from the magazine or one with more interaction with the readers, like *Glorian Ruoka & Viini* does:

> We have an online service called Soppa365 that we do together with all the lifestyle magazines of Sanomat Corporation. It's a portal with recipes, a few blogs and a platform where you can create your own cookbook. It's developing all the time. With the portal we want to learn what our readers want from an online service and we react on that. So it's also an experiment for us. Soppa365 is gathering wider audience than our magazine, so it's also a good way to present our magazine for the new audience.
>
> Of course we think a lot about the online presence but it's not leading the process. The money still comes from the print. (Maskulin, 2015)

A good food website offers current themes, inspiration, tips and a personal, human touch. They might just have recipes you get "anywhere", but if they at least are on a website with a personality, where it feels like you are taken care of, that is something that might make you come back. The website follows trends and covers the current food topics, and by following it, you get the

feeling that know what is happening in the food world and what the recipes are that everyone is talking about at the moment.

So yes, you need to have recipes. The new, trendy recipes interest readers, but usually the most popular recipes may also be very basic. A reader may want to be able to check if there is something in a meatball recipe that he just don't remember while he is making a shopping list, or how many eggs you need for the pancakes or what the temperature for roasting a chicken is. And then the recipes need to be reliable.

7.2. Social media

"It's like sex, everybody likes it." (Raether, 2015).

Simply because it is so true, this is one of my favorite quotes that I've heard while doing the interviews for my study. Everybody likes food. It's a sexy topic. And this quote is referring to food in social media. A nice food photo on Facebook or Instagram can get lots of likes, if it's really beautiful, even more. If it's funny or surprising, it will get a lot of likes but also shares. All in all, social media love food topics.

Social media is a great tool for a newspaper or a food magazine in order to be close to their readers: to be more personal, more fun and more informal. Readers like that. Still, many media don't put much effort there. The editor in chief of *Effilee* Vijay Sapre sums it up well: "If you want to do social media, you need to do it well. I don't have the manpower for that at the moment. And social media is not the place to get money." (2015)

So it's the same problem as in putting content online. You want to keep the quality of printed content, but still do more for the online content. And to be able to do that, you need more money for the manpower, but you are not getting any income from the online content. And definitely not from social

media. So it's just for the attention, reputation and image. As Sapre says, if you are doing social media, you need to do it well and that means being active. The speed of social media requires that to get the attention.

And if you make the effort and use social media, there are some new problems: the copyrights of pictures - whether you have the rights to put them online and how to control them online - as well as how you manage to follow along with the speed of online media. Like Katja Bäcksbacka from *Helsingin Sanomat* says, the speed brings new challenges:

> One big challenge of nowadays is the short life of a food article. Stories and recipes come and go so fast online, that it's sometimes really frustrating when there is a story that have been done with a great effort and then it will just fly through Twitter feed and in the worst case scenario, "nobody" will notice it. So the challenge is, how to get people to find all these great articles and how to rise them later again, so the life of an article would be longer.
> On Instagram and on Twitter our writers are with their own names, in Facebook we have a profile for the food section of the newspaper. Social media is really important in the future, but we need to have clear rules, what to publish and where. (2015)

And this is a question that many editors and journalists ask themselves nowadays: how important is the social media? Just by checking how much time people spend nowadays on social media, you can tell that it's important, at least for the visibility. That is also why it's more likely that the money will come from advertisers rather than from the readers in future in social media.

Social media is the fastest way to find out what's trendy at the moment. In *Helsingin Sanomat* I've been told that they wouldn't hire a journalist who is not on Facebook. They also provide Twitter training for their journalists. So the knowledge of social media is well appreciated in Finland. The German press is much more traditional and the focus is still mainly on printed editions. Instagram is starting to warm up, Twitter is just for a relatively small group of

people and many people use Facebook with made-up names to keep their privacy. So the social media don't play such a big role as it does in Finland or in USA where it's very common that food magazines are very active for example on Twitter.

One big field of food journalism, which social media has stepped into, is the world of restaurant reviews. They are everywhere. It can be just a picture, a few sentences, a Facebook group, a long report about your restaurant experience. They are everywhere, though, so does that change the role of printed restaurant reviews? Restaurant critic Teemu Luukka sees that the reviews are surely getting a lot of attention:

> Before social media, all we had were the print reviews. So all in all reviews actually have now an unnaturally big role. Though, the role of food and eating out wasn't that big ten years ago. Food is the rock music of today.
>
> As there is so much writing about restaurants, it might raise the value of printed reviews if they are made with skills and seriousness. If the quality is the same as in social media, we are doomed. I think that all kinds of reviews will have bigger demand in the future. But the quality is the thing that matters in the end. (2015)

The restaurant critic from *Der Tagesspiegel* Bernd Matthies sees that the Facebook had cut down the need for restaurant reviews: "You can build a Facebook site for your restaurant. Then you ask 150 people to be your friends and the will spread the word. They'll do the advertising." (2015)

Restaurant reviews also have new competition from online services, such as Tripadvisor or Yelp, where anybody can rate a restaurant. But the problem with these services is that you have no idea about the reviewer's background: is he eating sushi for the first time in his life or has he lived in Tokyo for 20 years? Is eating out for him an active hobby or a once-a-year happening, has he a long history with veggie burgers or is he eating a veggie burger because somebody made him do it? And what is the food culture and restaurant level

that he is comparing at the current restaurant? Or is the review written by the mother of the owner? So with these reviews, it's really hard to tell if you want to rely on them or not.

Normally you'll ask your friends, what restaurant they would recommend. You want an opinion from somebody you know and trust. This is the same kind of a quality guarantee that you get when you read a review from a restaurant critic that you "know". And this is also the secret of a successful food blog.

7.3. Food blogs

When I talk with people about food journalism, during the first five minutes somebody normally complains about the number of food blogs. It's actually quite interesting, because it reveals that all food writing is considered as food journalism and also the amount of food blogs is nowadays so massive that it's started to annoy people. And that is also a reason why it feels unfair to talk about them as a mass: the spectrum of food blogs is huge and the level differences are colossal. Anybody can start a blog and no writing skills are needed. This is of course also the charm of the blogs. But the variety goes from blogs filled with typos, sponsored stuff, no point of views and scrubby pictures from funny, clever, beautiful and witty blogs, some with stunningly great photos.

"Yes, the reader must be very confused. And there is a lot of terrible content." (Meurling, 2015)

This is how the founder of Berlin Food Stories -blog Per Meurling sums up the current situation. Berlin Food Stories is a three-year-old blog that reviews restaurants and cafés from Berlin in English. Merlings goal is to be the most well-known and independent food blog in the city, answering one simple question: where should I eat in this city?

Meurling is not a journalist but he says he does the blog with the same professional ethics as traditional restaurant critics: he always goes more than once to test a place, pays with his own money and do the visits anonymously. The reviews are quite long and his voice is loud and clear, including the swearing. And as said before, people like when a writer has a voice they'll recognize, a voice that stands out and is loyal to the reader, not for the restaurant or the sponsor. Berlin Food Stories has 1500-2000 unique visitors per day and Meurling, a native of Sweden, is planning to expand his blog to Stockholm as well.

> Sweden and Germany are in whole different level when it comes to blogs. The history of blog culture is way longer in Sweden. Especially the fashion blogs are already in that level that there are people who live with the incomes a their blog. It's a profession and the symbiosis with commercialism has been found. Also in many Swedish food blogs the commercial co-operations are professionally made.
>
> In Germany the food topic generally picked up speed only a few years ago. Yes, there are a lot of blogs and some are getting money for it, but the blog culture is just starting to develop here. (Meurling, 2015)

In Finland in food related press events it's already normal that over half of the guests are food bloggers. One reason is that the food journalists don't have time anymore to participate in so many press events and another is that the advertisers see the food blogs as good and cheap visibility. In Germany you don't see many bloggers in press events. The gap between bloggers and journalists is big and it's a gap between generations.

So why to start a blog? To develop yourself as a food writer or to bring something extra for your newspapers or food magazine's online content, as Katja Bäcksbacka from *Helsingin Sanomat* does: "A blog is a good channel for us to publish a bit lighter stories than in the newspaper. There you can present things more personally. You can also lift smaller themes easier and

pick out old recipes again when you think it's the right time to remind about them." (2015)

Like Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, a blog is also a good way for a corporation to show the more "human side" of the media house. Of course you need to do it good.

Most of the food blogs try to give an answer to the "What should I eat today" – dilemma. It's a good theme, because the question is current everyday. But you need more than that. Here are some advices from Dianne Jacob. As she writes in her book *Will Write For Food*, you need to find your style and focus:

> When you start a blog, you might not have much of a focus. I've seen many new blogs based on loving food, where people just want to express their knowledge, joy and passion. For some, blogging is a way people discover what they're passionate about. Initially, though, a broad theme, such as "I love food", can feel overwhelming or vague. Try to distill your interest down to a theme or structure.
>
> (…) At this point you are probably thinking, "Why should anyone care about what I have to say?" Good question, and a valid one. If all you want to do is a document what you ate, probably few people will. Your job is to make readers care. Food blogging is about more than your performance in the kitchen or a list of the dishes you ate at a restaurant. Instead, develop your storytelling skills so readers keep coming back. Use humor, self-deprecation, confession, guilt, and suspense. It's about drawing readers in, and weather people can relate to your experience. It's about eliciting emotions and reminding readers of events in their own lives. (2010, p. 67-68)

I can't emphasize enough the importance of point of view and a personal touch in food writing. A blog is a great way to practice it. Besides a good text you need good photos if you are going to do recipes. My tip is, take a photography class. That's the easiest way. Learn the basics of photography and get a decent camera. Learn how to style a picture. And the best way to do

it is to see what kind of pictures others take. Read food magazines and food blogs. Whose food pictures do you like, what is so good in their pictures? Copy that, learn how to do it. And then do something different. What is your style, how is it different from others? If you want to stand out, you need to have the personal style also in the pictures.
If you are not the Pioneer Woman (a very popular blogger who is well known for including pictures of every step of a recipe, even the boiling water), remember that less is more, like Dianne Jacob highlights:

> The key is to post photos that add value. A shot of you pouring olive oil into an empty sauté pan doesn't tell the reader anything, nor does a photo of a orange on a countertop. (2010, p. 82)

So it's back to the basics. You need to have your own voice (see pages 14-17) and develop a visual side to that as well. And when you got it, think about what do you want to say with your blog and with your pictures.

8. The future of food journalism

8.1. Visions for the future

In every interview I've made for this study, I've naturally talked with people about the future of food journalism. It's closely attached to the question of the future of newspapers and the whole current turmoil of the media world – as everybody is wondering what to do with online content. And how to get money from there? For this, I don't have an answer, none of us do. But here are a few visions for the future from each topic that is presented in this study.

8.1.1. Food trends

Health is the big theme of today and the interest in healthy food doesn't go away anytime soon. "Well-being", "naturalness" and "organic" are the hit

words besides “healthy”. And it’s a great thing concerning the future: together with environmental concerns, health issues have an effect on the future of the planet. But as Sanna Maskulin from *Glorian Ruoka & Viini* says, when writing about these themes, you need to find a way to present the healthiness in a way that is not too pushy or preaching.

> It needs to be healthy, but the flavor comes first. Reader can’t feel that they are giving up on something – instead they are achieving something. In the future nobody will succeed with food journalism without thinking about health. But you need to be able to present it right – in a way that reader gets a good feeling about it. That is the clue.
>
> Nutrition is dominating the discussion about healthiness. We need to talk about the flavors and the experience on eating instead of giving orders. Feeling is getting more and more important. (Maskulin, 2015)

The importance of feelings can also been seen in the rise of storytelling in food journalism. People and their stories are getting more space in the food pages; food related stories make us cry, smile or wonder. And the personal approach also means that we are talking more about persons: chefs, farmers and producers, for instance, are persons who we get to know by name. So a personal touch – either from the writer or the subject – is trendy.

8.1.2. Investigative food journalism

This morning, I just read about a meat allergy that is spreading in Sweden through tick bites. Actually it would be quite positive news for the planet if the meat production would reduce because of an allergy. But this wasn’t a quickly spreading epidemic, so that is not the case here. Food safety, though, is. That is a theme in investigative food journalism that is really getting attention, and it should. Epidemics spread more easily when food is being imported from around the world and if the hygiene of food is being negligent.

Also food forgery is a big field of crime nowadays. Lying about the country's origin, selling hoax meat (for example selling horsemeat as beef), reducing the amount of main ingredient and replacing some of it with a cheaper substitute, producing food in farms and factories where human rights are stamped – these are all examples of the food crimes happening all over the world.

Food as a political weapon is a third current theme in investigative food journalism. For example, how Belarus is importing EU-products to Russia despite the food sanctions.

8.1.3. Restaurant reviews

The future of restaurant reviews is, as we have seen, a very interesting subject. All the restaurant critics I've talked to are wondering about it as well. One thing is clear: newspapers are lacking money and restaurant reviews cost a lot. In the future there will not be so many inhouse restaurant critics, instead, freelancers will do them. So who is paying? The editor in chief of *Effilee,* Vijay Sapre said, that he doesn't want to know. It's already happening that the reviews are based on fewer tests than they used to be, but almost everybody wants to keep the distance from the restaurant and pay the dinners themselves. It's also, as I discussed earlier, a question of anonymity.

The New York Times legendary restaurant critic Ruth Reichl went to see an acting coach, she used wigs and clothes that fitted her alter-egos, used characters, always paid with cash, and made a lot of trouble to disguise. She said that when she wasn't in disguise the steaks were bigger, and service was faster and better. But she also had a big budget. Bethany Jean Clement, a restaurant critic for Seattle's alternative weekly *The Stranger*, wrote an article *The End of Anonymity*, about not being anonymous in her work. She wrote that in a smaller city it just is impossible, at least if you also do interviews about chefs. But she came to the conclusion that there is not that much that a restaurant can do to improve the experience (Clement, 2012). The ingredients

are the same, the chef is the same. The critic will notice if superimposed acting will appear.

If the restaurant critic is active in social media and covers other food stories and knows the local food people, then anonymity is almost impossible to have.

One new operator in the field of restaurant reviews is these online search services (like Yelp and Tripadvisor) that offers loads of anonymous restaurant "reviews". It's quite a jungle. As a counterbalance to them, readers still value the long, well-written reviews. But is it going to be newspapers that publish the reviews in the future or some other publications, as Bernd Matthies from *Der Tagesspiegel* suggests:

> You just need to find the way to make it financially successful. In the future, *Michelin Guides* might be the ones who succeed. But in general I would say the printed, quality food critics are dying but the field of food writing is crowing. (2015)

I believe that there will be a need for traditional restaurant reviews in the future as well, but there could be room for reviews that are written in a style of a column. That would give the freedom to tell about a new restaurant without the need to visit a restaurant for several course meals for several times (that is also economically good solution for a newspaper) and gives the possibility to bring more of the writer's personality into the story.

8.1.4. Recipes

In general you can say that the amount of vegetarian recipes is clearly rising, veganism is not a strange term anymore and as I said, health issues is something that is considered more when writing recipes. Of course there will always be room for crazy deep-fried chocolate bars, cupcakes, mudcakes and melted marshmallow stuffings, occasionally. Health interests more than ever.

But what is really changing in the future is the whole process of writing a recipe, says Katja Bäcksbacka:

> Now you need to think about the selling headline already when you start making the recipe. There are already million of soup recipes – why would this recipe get attention online and social media? Sometimes really good recipes don't get noticed because there just is no hook. (2015)

Since taking pictures of your food is something that almost everybody is doing, the food pictures are playing a more important role in storytelling nowadays, and so are the videos. The newest trend is a recipe without a recipe: you just show how the dish is done with one picture or with the help of a short video.

8.1.5. Appearance and online

"Videos, videos, videos". That is what almost everybody who I've interviewed is saying. People want videos. As YouTube has over a billion users, it's videos are watched millions of hours every day and the incomes from mobile watching is increasing over 100% every year (YouTube, 2015), it's only natural that it's the way where people are looking. And this is happening in all food media; in the websites of newspapers, food magazines and like Per Meurling from Berlin Food Stories -blog says, also in food blogs:

> Blog platforms are getting better, there are easy tools for make them look more nice with some effort, the photos are getting better and it's getting easier to make a stylish layout. So there will be more. And video content, that's the future, because with videos you can make money. (2015)

The online content is dividing the field because of the question of how to get money from it. As you can sell ads in videos, video productions are raising interest within editorial staffs. It's trendy, new, and short well-made video clips

spread in social media might achieve the wanted attention. So it's definitely a new way of presence in food journalism.

Another rather new phenomenon is that newspapers are publishing their own food magazines. For example *Der Tagesspiegel* does it four times a year, *Helsingin Sanomat* have now done it twice. It's also a good way to sum up the restaurant reviews that have been published in the paper during the year.

And the future of food blogs? Many people seem to think that the golden era of food blogs is over. The field is too big and messy and blogs have become very commercial. The bloggers are still learning the ways to make commercial co-operations in a way where they don't start to annoy readers.

There are great food blogs that are taking the readers from food magazines, these blogs are personal and standing out with a loud own voice, but as a whole the food blog field is very mixed, many seem to lose their interest on following blogs. Even the bloggers are saying that they are not following blogs anymore. The strongest, most personal and well written will live, as it is a question of quality in the end.

8.2. Conclusions

There has never been so much writing about food as there is today. And there is a lot of bad food writing: stories made with weak backgrounds, stolen recipes, controversial health studies published with too little research if any, nice and vague restaurant reviews that are not telling anything, blogs that are written just to get free stuff. But still I would say that food journalism is revelling in a golden era.

The amount of well-written background articles, touching human-interest stories, restaurant reviews comparable to novellas, and exposés about food-related hoaxes or scams are rising. And the truth is that the biggest global

problems we have (such as public health, obesity and famine, nature resources, poverty and global warming) are attached to food, so it is a field of the future. And it’s of course also an issue that every one of us is dealing with every day.

Like Ruth Reichl said: “Every time you go into a grocery store you are voting with your dollars and what goes into your cart has real repercussions on the future of the earth.”

And I think it’s also part of the media's responsibility to help the consumer to make those decisions. In my opinion the amount of food journalism seems to be rising, but in the future it’s more about the bigger themes, the bigger picture – everything that food is attached with, will be on the plate.

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