

Introduction for Students

When we sit down to write, we need something to write about, something that will stimulate our thinking and will interest others, too. All writers need a topic — journalists, historians, professional writers, poets, humorists, textbook authors like myself, and students like you. This book, *Food Matters*, aims to provide you with a topic: the subject of food. It offers reading and writing assignments that ask you to consider a range of questions about what you eat, how you make food choices, what those choices say about you and your culture, and why they matter. The book invites you to explore what others have written about food, and it provides a variety of writing opportunities for students with varied interests and backgrounds.

While the subject is food, the real purpose of this book is to provide you with a set of texts that provoke critical inquiry and lead to productive writing opportunities. To write well at the college level, you need to practice critical reading and critical thinking; you need to learn to analyze and evaluate the ideas you are asked to write about. Food is a great topic for engaging in a range of interesting, complex, thought-provoking issues — and thus for practicing critical reading, thinking, and writing. This book asks you to consider a range of issues, debates, problems, and questions about food. These are matters about which I hope you will care deeply — and thus about which you will have something to say, and, more important, *something to write*.

Why Food?

Do you eat breakfast? Is it from a box, your garden, or the corner coffee shop? Do you sit down with your family to eat? Or do you eat in your car, on the bus, or walking to work or school? Have you ever thought about where your food comes from? When you buy food, do you select what is cheapest, healthiest, or most ethically produced? Do you care if it is organic or conventionally grown? Does it matter if it was produced near

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where you live or on the other side of the globe? Do you think about whether it was picked or packaged or processed by workers who were compensated fairly? What is food anyway? Is it a product of nature? Is it a product of food science? Does it matter? What does it mean to *eat food*? Do you eat for health, for sustenance, for pleasure, or for something else? Where does your food come from? Do you know? Do you care? Is eating supposed to be pleasurable? social? for survival? How should we decide what to eat? On what should our decisions be based — on our sense of what is healthy, what is fast and easy, the organic food movement, the slow food movement, federal health guidelines, or on concern for the environment, animal rights, labor rights, or other ethical considerations?

These questions probably would not have been posed this way until recently. But an increasing number of authors and movements have propelled the topic of food to the forefront. News headlines, blogs, TV shows, documentaries, books, and advertisements bombard us with talk about food. What we eat, where it comes from, and why our food choices are important are issues that are increasingly visible in U.S. political, social, and cultural life. We are surrounded by writing about food, and the more we read about food and think through the lists of considerations, the more complex and confusing it gets.

You might start to wonder, as some prominent writers have, if much of what we eat can even be called food anymore. Or you might think that certain critics are too particular and their critiques are overblown. These complexities and difficulties are what make *food* such a viable writing subject. The confusion and controversy I describe — and the ongoing debates about food that accompany it — are a real opportunity for writers. I imagine that this is why so many professional writers focus on food, and I am certain that this is why writing about food is such a great opportunity for students like you to practice critical reading, thinking, and writing. In fact, it is because there are no easy answers and obviously right ways to think about food that the topic offers legitimate — and interesting — contested terrain for you to explore. There are many ways for you to join the conversation, and providing ways for you to consider, analyze, and write about real issues and controversies is the purpose of this book.

Reading, Thinking, Writing

Although this book focuses on food and asks you to contemplate difficult questions, it does not advocate a particular ethical stance or political point of view. Instead, the book offers a range of tenable and legitimate positions and invites you to weigh the evidence, consider your values and beliefs, and think through what really matters to you as you construct narratives and arguments about food. After all, the course in which you will use this reader is not primarily a course about food. This is a writing course; food is simply the occasion for writing.

When you sit down to write, how do you decide what to do? The authors in this book demonstrate the importance of considering the purpose and audience for which they are writing, the idea or emotion or position that they are trying to put forward or communicate, and the argument they want to make. How they write about their ideas — the form and structure their writings take — is at least partially determined by what they want to say. I encourage you to compare the genres included here and how the writers use rhetorical strategies that help them say what they want to say. I have chosen pieces that take a range of forms — essays, blogs, humor, magazine articles, academic arguments, book excerpts, and images. Not only do the pieces offer a variety of viewpoints on food, they also offer a range of models for writing and taking a stand on a particular issue or problem.

One unique quality of this reader is that by focusing on a theme, it allows you to delve into the topic of food on various levels — personal, political, social, moral, academic, environmental, and scientific. As you develop a base of knowledge about the topic, a sense of the key issues, and an understanding of the values and beliefs that motivate and inform various perspectives, you will become a kind of expert; this will allow you an opportunity to write about the issues in meaningful and legitimate ways. I hope your engagement with these texts will lead you to feel that it is worth your while to figure out where you stand in relation to the narratives, arguments, and materials offered here. This book invites you to join the scholarly conversation and to position yourself in relation to real issues, ongoing problems, and contested positions.

Organization of the Book

Food Matters provides a sense of the contemporary conversations and debates about the purpose of food, the social and political forces that affect food choices, the ethics of eating, the relationship between food and the climate crisis, and the future of food. Each chapter poses a question and includes a set of carefully chosen selections that speak to the question by defining key terms, providing context, or taking a position. Although each chapter includes selections you can use to explore the chapter's guiding question, you might find that these are artificial divisions, as many of the selections could be responses to the lead questions of other chapters, too. I encourage you to make connections between and among them as you go.

Each chapter begins with an introduction that summarizes the themes and issues that are central to that chapter and poses some questions to think about as you read. Headnotes for each piece introduce the author and contextualize the selection. Following the readings, three sets of questions ask you to demonstrate your understanding of the text, to reflect on and respond to it, and to make connections between the readings and to conduct research. Effective responses to these questions will also take into account how your own values, beliefs, and experiences contribute to your understanding of the issues and the positions you take on them.

The book is organized around five questions for you to explore. These questions are intended as starting points for inquiry, though they are certainly not exhaustive in scope or topic. The first chapter, "What Is the Purpose of Food?," explores how we define food, the reasons we eat, and the varied purposes food serves in our lives — purposes that extend beyond nutrition to culture, politics, environment, and pleasure. The selections explore the complex ways food nourishes us, and in so doing they tie the definition and purpose of food to historical, cultural, spiritual, and political matters.

The second chapter, "What Forces Affect Our Food Choices?," examines the complex mix of laws, social realities, health guidelines, cultural pressures, and socioeconomic factors that help determine what we eat. While in one sense we determine what we eat, the selections in this

chapter ask us to look at the many larger forces at work that direct what food choices are available, where, and for whom.

The third chapter, “What Does It Mean to Eat Ethically?,” turns to an exploration of the role of ethics in determining what we eat and why our food choices matter. While acknowledging the larger political, social, cultural, and economic forces that affect food choices, the selections in this chapter ask us to consider what it means to declare that eating is necessarily a moral act.

The fourth chapter, “How Does Our Food System Contribute to the Climate Crisis?,” focuses on the ways food production both contributes to and will be affected by climate change. While the authors help explain the complex connections between our food system and climate change, they also identify problems we must confront and suggest potential solutions to the problems. This chapter challenges us to consider if and how we might change our eating habits to sustain the planet.

The fifth and last chapter, “What Is the Future of Food?,” identifies problems and possibilities that will influence the future of food. The readings indicate that this future will be no less complex than the present and that food production and consumption will continue to evolve as other aspects of society, culture, science, business, politics, and environment change. The chapter returns to themes of previous chapters and asks us to think critically about the scope and variety of influences that will affect our food choices in the future.

While each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of food, the chapters also include a range of genres and approaches to the topic. Academic essays, journalistic accounts, personal narratives, blogs, memoirs, images, and arguments are included. A range of disciplinary viewpoints are represented — science, history, social sciences, philosophy. The texts come from a variety of sources — newspapers, magazines, academic journals, government recommendations, online forums, blogs, and chapters of books. The selections represent a range of viewpoints, which are in conversation with one another. Although the questions are meant to be starting points for thinking, discussing, and writing, they are certainly not exhaustive. Thus, you

might choose to pursue other fruitful questions, connections, and potential occasions for writing that this collection suggests.

Writing That Matters

A course that centers on a theme provides real writing opportunities for you. You can examine a topic from a variety of angles and write about it from a variety of perspectives — personal, cultural, political, academic, journalistic, and ethical. Working with this book, you will read and write personal narratives, political pieces, and academic arguments. One benefit of spending a significant amount of time studying one topic is that doing so yields more substantial writing opportunities. Writing about food is a great way to stimulate your thinking about how your own experiences, values, and positions are related to larger scientific, cultural, academic, and ethical questions. While it goes without saying that everyone eats food, many people do not think much about the broader implications of their food choices. We wake up and eat breakfast, or we order a sandwich in a deli. But we do not always think or know much about where our food comes from, how it was produced, how it contributes to the climate crisis, or who harvested our vegetables or raised the livestock. Food matters to all of us, and we make food choices that affect the world around us whether we are aware of this or not.

We all need to eat to stay alive (or live to eat), and we all have a stake in the present and future food supply. This book gives you opportunities to examine, analyze, and write about the major arguments in the myriad controversies and debates surrounding food. This is good practice for the other kinds of writing you will be doing in college, work, and life. I hope you will find this to be an engaging and productive way to practice and develop your writing skills.