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Freelance Writing: A Lesson about Querying

Last week, an anguished student in my food writing class blurted out her dilemma. She had pitched a story to a national magazine editor, and two months later got no response. That part's standard. So she pitched the same story to another national magazine editor. Then the first editor emailed back to say she wanted the piece.

Now, you might think this is a nice dilemma, having two national magazines wanting your story. But the student had to tell editor No. 2 she couldn't write the story, even though she had pitched it, because she was writing it for a competitor. Think she'll ever write for magazine No. 2 again?

Obviously this student has query letters, content and a writing style that editors like, even if it takes them a while to tell her so. She could have avoided this problem by pitching the same story, angled a little differently, to a non-competitor.

I get a lot of resistance when I suggest to students that they not send out the same query letter to more than one publication. I guess from their standpoint, they put a lot of work into the story and if one publication doesn't want it, why not send to another? The above story illustrates why, and there's another reason: they don't all want the same angle.

Let me give an example. Let's say I went to a mushroom festival at the Oakland, CA museum and learned all about types, where to harvest the wild ones, and their health benefits. A story for *Edible East Bay* magazine would focus on mushrooms within the context of place: where they grow in the East Bay, whether readers can go on trips with skilled hunters, and which local chefs hunt and cook them.

A story on the medicinal benefits of maitake, reishi and shiitake mushrooms for *Taste for Life* national magazine (free at some markets and health food stores) would focus on what I learned at the festival, not where I live, because locality does not interest them. But it still takes advantage of the same information. There would be no conflict if I sold two stories on mushrooms, at the same time, to two different publications. They do not compete with each other, and the information is angled differently so the same readers could enjoy both stories if they happened upon them.

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Letters

Regarding cookbook recipes that don't work (last newsletter), I believe the skill of cooking has

been lost. People rely too heavily on the recipe and not enough on their senses, including common sense. No one recipe can come out of the same if it is cooked in a thousand different kitchens. Ingredient brands vary, ovens and stoves vary, produce, dairy, and meats all vary from region to region and season to season. Plus, the cook's ability to follow the recipe correctly varies tremendously.

I see this repeatedly as a culinary instructor. One recipe + 30 students = 30 different outcomes. Blaming cookbook authors is unfair, and ignores the real problem. Our generation learned to cook from TV and magazines, not from our moms and grandmothers, like we should have!

-- Leslie Bilderback, <http://culinarymasterclass.com/>

I wouldn't necessarily say I have recipe deal breakers. I read different kinds of cookbooks with different expectations. I read Paula Wolfert and Diana Kennedy expecting not necessarily to make many of the recipes at home (perhaps one or two in a book), but to learn other things or be inspired.

As for roasting tomatoes, maybe only 2 is a bit much, but roasting is passive time. It's nice to sometimes to have some on hand ;-).

-- Gizelle Perez

If I haven't said it before now, then I am a miscreant--your email newsletter is always welcome in my inbox. It's often read on my Blackberry screen. I get to just keep scrolling down and feel full and satisfied at the end. Thank you!

-- Jairemarie Pomo, author of the *Hog Island Oyster Lover's Cookbook*.

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Cookbook Saga: Oprah Tried Our Grilled Pizza!

As you know from reading these newsletters, I've written a cookbook, *Grilled Pizza and Piadina*, with Chef Craig Priebe, which came out this past spring.

It turns out that one of Craig's biggest fans is the executive producer of the Oprah Winfrey show, who remembered Craig's pizzas from the Atlanta restaurant he had for years. This guy got Craig into Harpo Productions last week to make 50 grilled pizzas for 100 employees. He also purchased 100 copies of our book. Apparently Oprah's personal assistant took a few slices and Oprah tasted them, but we haven't heard anything more.

Craig, of course, is dying to get on her show. He's an awesome promoter and hard worker. Over the summer he sold 80 copies of our book at a Williams Sonoma demo. It's kind of like that joke: What are the six most important words to an agent? "Nice to see you again, Oprah."

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News from Clients and Students

Mary Karlin's book on wood fired cooking is already available for pre-order on Amazon, even though it doesn't come out until spring, from Ten Speed Press:

http://www.amazon.com/Wood-Fired-Cooking-Techniques-Backyard-Fireplace/dp/1580089453/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1221511827&sr=1-1

Andrew Behrs got a new agent to represent his culinary book about Mark Twain. Her name is Emma Sweeney, <http://www.emmasweeneyagency.com/>.

At a summer party of the Culinary Historians of Northern California I bumped into **Robert Brower**. He said that since attending my (now defunct) Book Passage Food Writing Conference twice, he

- wrote 12 entries for The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America
- downsized those 12 entries for The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink
- wrote an introduction for a facsimile edition of Simple Italian Cookery, the first Italian cookbook published in America in 1912, for the Culinary Trust of IACP
- wrote about Abby Fisher, the San Francisco author of an early African-American cookbook, for Repast, the Quarterly Publication of the Culinary Historians of Ann Arbor.

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Resources

-- Need to travel to research your book, but lack funds? Apply for a travel grant specifically aimed at food writers. The Culinary Trust accepts applications from September 15 - December 15, 2008. See: http://www.theculinarytrust.com/html/grants_for_food_writers.html

-- Would you like to use podcasting as a way to create and distribute audio content? Gabcast lets you phone in your podcast and embed it onto your website. What could be easier? See <http://www.gabcast.com/>

-- I first discovered Irena Chalmers as a speaker, where she gave a talk so witty and mischevious that I vowed to get to know her. We've kept in touch, and for the last several years she's taught a 20-week food writing class at the CIA in Hyde Park. Her book, Food Jobs: 150 Great Jobs for Culinary Students, Career Changers and Food Lovers, has a long and informative chapter on publishing, television, the internet, radio and "all things media," including an essay by yours truly. Check it out at http://www.amazon.com/Food-Jobs-Culinary-Students-Changers/dp/0825305926/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1221678495&sr=8-1.

-- Wondertime, a Disney magazine aimed at parents of children from infant to 8 years old, has a circulation of over 200,000 and dedicates itself to helping parents nurture their children's love of learning. That includes food. Here's a snapshot of a pieces in the magazine: <http://wondertime.go.com/life-at-home/article/how-to-choose-healthy-snacks.html>. To query, email the editors: wondertime.editors@disney.com.

-- The American Culinary Federation now publishes *Sizzle*, targeting culinary students. Send queries to Editor-in-Chief is Katie Ayoub at The American Culinary Federation, Inc., 180 Center Place Way, St. Augustine FL 32095. Or email her at sizzle@acfchefs.net.

-- Premiering this month is *Sibo*, a weekly Italian cooking magazine from the Italian Culinary Institute in New York that exists only online. It sister publication, Italian Cooking and Living, is still in print. See <http://www.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/?i=5537>.

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News You Can Use

-- Are food blog users neurotic or bored? In a study of 1800 respondents, 79 percent said they consulted American food blogs at least daily, if not multiple times a day. They liked the candid

writing style and approachable personalities, diverse voice and varied topics. Most believed food blogs had equally reliable information as print food journalism.

The survey was part of Leena Trivedi-Grenier's Master's Thesis in Gastronomy for the University of Adelaide, Australia and Le Cordon Bleu. Most of poll respondents were female younger adults, married with no children, and affluent, making more than \$100,000 per year. Most participants felt food blogs built a better community than print food journalism, and some attributed this to the comment section, although most said they rarely left comments, preferring to be "passive participants." For more on Leena see <http://www.leenaeats.com/>.

- Still wondering whether you should start a blog? Michael Ruhlman says his blog has
- Helped him sell books
 - Gives him more media attention
 - Makes it easy to spread an idea because other blogs pick it up

He also said his website makes him about \$1000 per month from ads and click-throughs to Amazon. Check out his blog, <http://blog.ruhlman.com/>, where you can learn, through links, that Anthony Bourdain's mother is a copy editor at *The New York Times*. Who knew?

-- Karla Cook, a freelance journalist for the *New York Times*, started a website that gathers and distills food related stories. Not only is it a great source to catch up on the news if you're a food junkie, but it sometimes shows you who has pitched a successful freelance story, and on what topic.

<http://www.thefoodtimes.com/home.html>

-- Have you always wanted to join the International Association of Culinary Professionals? Maybe you've thought you don't have the credentials or you don't want to spend the money. Wait no longer. Annual dues are \$220, but now you can join as an "Emerging Professional" for just \$75, and have the same privileges as any other member. You must be

- A current full-time post-secondary student pursuing a culinary or related degree
- A current part-time post-secondary student pursuing a culinary or related degree
- An individual who has taken on a culinary-related position (or changed his/her current position to have a culinary focus) for the first time within the past two years.

This is an amazing deal. Join now and enjoy our teleconferences with famous authors, the quarterly newsletter, and get ready for the annual conference in Denver next spring. See <http://iacp.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=562>. Please say I referred you.

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Just for Fun

Food photographer Matthew Carden has created a delightful new planet where little people harvest marshmallows in wheelbarrows and scuba dive into a glass of red wine. See <http://www.350degrees.com/>

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Upcoming Classes

October 14 - November 18, 2008
Online 6-Week Class on Food Writing,
UCLA Extension
<http://www.uclaextension.edu/>
\$360

If you've always wanted to take one of my classes, but couldn't do it in person, now's your chance. With my first online class, you can study at your own pace.

Because The University of California, Los Angeles offers through its journalism department, it is geared to writing for newspapers, magazines and the Internet. Each week we'll focus on sharpening your skills in a particular area: coming up with culinary story ideas, researching and writing a story, restaurant reviewing, recipe writing, and writing for publication. You'll read a lecture, follow links, discuss subjects with other classmates on discussion boards, and produce short articles and reviews as homework.

Enrolment has already begun. **Only 10 seats are left.** All you need is a deep interest in food and food writing, and desire for personal development or growth. Some of those who enroll will be UCLA students looking for an elective to satisfy the Journalism Certificate program. You do not need to take the class for a grade but are welcome to do so.

January 20 – February 17, 2009

Break into Food Writing

7-9 p.m., 5 Tuesdays

Book Passage

<http://www.bookpassage.com/>

Corte Madera, CA

\$225

Become a food blogger, jumpstart a freelance writing career, write restaurant reviews or learn what's required in writing a cookbook. This class gives you a taste of several aspects of food writing and helps you discover which you like best. Discover your voice in personal essays and how to write recipes that really work. Tap into memories of cooking, feeding friends and family, culinary travel and food shopping that make food writing irresistible

May 11-15, 2009

Symposium for Professional Food Writers

<http://www.greenbrier.com/site/foodwriters.aspx>

The Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, USA

\$1453-\$2235 Double Occupancy (last year's rates)

I first attended this conference in 1999, and now return as a speaker. I'll offer individual coaching on freelance writing. My particular sessions are a workshop on proposal writing, and a panel, "How to Sell Your Food Book Idea With or Without an Agent."

Other Events You Might Enjoy:

-- **Asian Culinary Forum**

October 10-12, 2008

San Francisco

http://www.asianculinaryforum.org/ACF/Asian_Culinary_Forum_-_Home.html

-- **A Conference on the Moral, Economic and Social Life of Coffee**

October 31 – November 1, 2008

Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

<http://www.coffeeconference.org/>

-- **Tasting Histories**

UC Davis, CA

February 27 and March 28, 2009

<http://foodandbody.ucdavis.edu/tastinghistories/program/>

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Please forward this email to anyone you think might be interested. All previous issues are now archived on my website, <http://www.diannej.com>. There's a place to sign up there as well.

To change your email address or unsubscribe, please email me: dj@diannej.com

I will not rent, trade or sell my email list to anyone for any reason.

Happy Fall,
Dianne

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