

 **FabJob**<sup>®</sup> **GUIDE TO**

# **BECOME A FOOD CRITIC**



**BY PAMELA WHITE**

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Welcome

Welcome to the **FabJob Guide to Become a Food Critic**. In this guide I will lead you into the exciting world of food writing.

If you are a beginner, this guide will introduce you to this fantastic career and offer you the information you need to get started in it. You'll learn what type of education is available, how to get food writing experience and most importantly, **where the jobs are and how to get hired**.

If you are an experienced food writer or critic, you will find advice about expanding your career into different media you may not have considered and tips about moving into bigger markets.



The first step to becoming a food writer is to take a look at where you are now. Do you:

- have a **passion for food**?
- amaze your friends with your **'way with words'**?
- love to **travel** and always **try something new**?
- work most effectively on **your own time schedule**?

If you answered yes to even one of these questions, you may already have many of the skills necessary to become a food critic! In this guide you will learn how to use your natural talents to get hired as a food critic.

We'll show you:

**Tools** for developing your career path and building up necessary skills

**Techniques** for finding or even creating job opportunities

**Insight** into editors' and other employers' needs

**Ways to increase your income** through related food writings and other media

**Options** for entering the field of food critiquing through self-education and self-promotion

In the reasonably new field of food writing, you need **inside help** to be successful. This guide offers just that!

The guide was written and researched by food writer/critic **Pamela White**. Other established food writers such as **Christiane Lauterbach** of *Atlanta Magazine* and **Nancy Leson** of the *Seattle Times* offer insider-only tips and advice throughout the guide on a number of topics—advice that will give you the competitive edge!

If you are ready to dedicate yourself to the study of culinary arts and creative writing, either in school or in a self-study program...



If you are **excited** to break into new food frontiers...

If you are itching to **travel the globe** in search of culinary treasures and never stop learning...

**...then you are ready to become a food writer!**

## 1.1.1 The Life of a Food Writer

One drowsy late night I lounged on my couch half-listening to A&E's late-night 'Top Ten' series, which was showcasing the top ten possible careers. I snapped to attention when I heard that the **fifth best job** any one could have was mine: **food critic**.

As they whizzed through the responsibilities of the job, a *Los Angeles Times* food critic sat in shadow discussing the perks of her job. Front covers of *Gourmet*, *Bon Appetit* and *Vogue* floated across the television screen. "With a salary of six figures," the voice-over continued, "and free food, this job is number five."

Well, except for that six-figure salary I have yet to earn, they had everything else right on. Whether a food writer is hired as a freelance writer for a weekly newspaper or holds down a full-time magazine food editor position, I can think of no better way to spend the work day than dining on the **best and most exotic dishes** and then sharing that information with tens, or hundreds of thousands of readers.

Being a food critic is not only limited to the printed word: you might be making your dining experiences public by broadcasting them over the airwaves on a talk radio program, or sharing your restaurant picks on the noon or nightly news. Online publications use food writers to round out their content and some focus completely on culinary arts—all these businesses need your expertise!

So what exactly does a food writer do? We eat too much and too often. Those of us who are food critics get paid to tell our readers or listeners **our opinion** about the food, restaurant ambiance, wait staff and the value of the overall experience. This probably sounds like something you do anyway—spreading the word about your favorite restaurants? As a food critic, you will certainly choose your words more carefully, chiding the chef on his gaffes and praising him on his triumphs.

You will give your readers the **information they need** to decide if a particular rowdy family restaurant is right for them (even if it was wrong for you!), or if they might prefer to celebrate their anniversary at that intimate French restaurant that overlooks the bay. You have a certain responsibility to the readers to inform them, but at the same time you can't take it too seriously. After all it's food, and food should be fun.

Enjoy drama or playacting? Food critics work **anonymously**; otherwise their experience would involve special treatment and extra dishes—far removed from the average diner's. You will have to take steps to not be recognized, such as wearing a wig or heavy-framed glasses, gelling you hair back and changing your makeup or style of clothes.

Food writers have the perfect excuse to **travel**—on the publication’s tab. Your readers need to know what’s out there for a day trip or a trip around the world. Food writers are sent on assignment to France, Italy, Argentina, Australia, Vietnam and Egypt to bring back culinary secrets. Closer to home, you might be sent to do a round up of the Mexican restaurants in Chicago, or San Francisco’s restaurants on the wharf.

## 1.1.2 Benefits of the Job

The benefits to being a food critic are many. As a food writer I have eaten at restaurants I could **never have afforded** myself, as well as eaten **exotic food** I might not have chosen if I was not required to taste a wide range of dishes. How many times do amateur diners return to the same restaurants and order their ‘regular’ meal? This practice is not for food critics—once you start moving forward on your career, you’ll be anxious to explore new cuisines and exotic dishes.

It’s also **easy to make friends** when you feed them on savory shepherd’s pie one week and chocolate bread pudding the next. Food critics need to bring people with them to eat in order to sample as many of the menu items as possible.

When compared with salaries of journalists in general the **wages** are reasonably good, whether you are writing one article per week as a freelance writer, or working as food editor at a large paper or magazine. You also work a **flexible schedule** that is ideal for raising a family or avoiding the grind of 9-5.

There is a certain amount of **celebrity** that comes with the job. Letters and notes from readers offering you tips on restaurants or feedback on your writing will arrive on your desk. Casual introductions at parties will turn into discussions of how a particular couple travels the countryside trying out all the restaurants you rate highly. You may be asked to speak before students about writing, to be a celebrity judge at a fundraising pie bake-off or to donate a restaurant review to an auction supporting the local children’s hospital.

Remember that this is a job that you can **expand on**. For all but the top food writers in the nation there is always a larger paper, a bigger audience, a more prestigious magazine and another book to be conquered. If you crave **personal growth**, and never wish to stagnate in a career, then this is the one for you.

## 1.1.3 The Growing Market

Qualified, thoughtful food critics are sought after and it is certainly a burgeoning field. Every day **new opportunities are opening up**: weekly and alternative newspapers

attract readers with news of dining establishments; gardening and leisure time magazines are seeking food-related stories to meet the needs of their customers.

The **Internet** alone has opened a new world of wonder for food writers, and food critics in particular. E-zines, e-newsletters, websites on food and websites on cities or tourist destinations are advertising for writers knowledgeable about food. This book's goal is to prepare you to meet this growing field's needs. Follow the tips on study and writing practice and you'll be ready to enter this active market.



Here's more good news: the food world is getting bigger even as you read this. Chefs are creating **new culinary fusions** by combining two or more ethnic cuisines or rediscovering traditional ways.

Even if you don't have access to the world's greatest restaurants or culinary arts institutes, you can use the Internet as an invaluable research tool. In addition you will explore bookstores, study cookbooks and learn from local cooking teachers to grasp exciting new food preparation skills, understand trendy dishes and employ newly imported herbs and seasonings.

As the food world grows, **your skills will become more valuable**. The average diner needs your expertise, knowledge and guidance on where to go, what to order and how to eat it.

## 1.2 Inside This Guide

Each section of the **FabJob Guide to Become a Food Critic** is set up for a distinct purpose.

Chapter 2, **Getting Ready**, details the knowledge and experience potential employers will be looking for and how to meet these requirements, whether you are just starting your college career or are looking for a mid-life career change. It talks about **self-education, formal education** and the **types of experience** you can seek out as you prepare yourself for becoming a food writer.

Chapter 3, **Getting Hired** is the heart of the guide. We'll look at how to prepare an application package for potential employers so you can get hired even with limited food writing experience. This section is bubbling over with **story ideas** that will get your creative juices flowing when you start freelancing your food articles.

Individual sections in this chapter explore the places you can find jobs in food writing (such as newspapers and magazines), and even explain how to go about **creating the position you want**. Finally, this section goes over some related projects you can pursue at the same time to **expand your expertise** and **increase your marketability**.

Chapter 4, **Being Successful on the Job**, pulls it all together for you: you'll learn **7 essential tips for success** and how to overcome potential obstacles in your career path. Finally, this guide takes you step-by-step through your first restaurant review and sends you on your way to great success in publishing food writing.