



Nourish learning resource

Activities for writing about food

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Background

As part of Book Week Scotland 2017, Scottish Book Trust are inviting members of the Scottish public to submit short personal stories, poems, letters, diary entries and comic strip illustrations inspired by the theme Nourish.

Is there a food that brings you comfort as well as calories? Do you have a tale to tell about how food makes (or breaks) a relationship?

We want to read all about it!

Food gives us so much more than nutrients. We eat with friends, family and colleagues. Everyone has food experiences that they'll never forget. Maybe it was that perfect sunset pasta carbonara that inspired you to propose on holiday? Or granny's cloutie dumplings that sat like a lead weight in your belly for hours? Or that Christmas where the turkey was still raw inside so the family cut straight to pudding and port? This is your chance to nourish Scotland's readers with those meals on paper, if not actually on the plate.

We would like you to encourage the adult learners who attend your class to write their confession and share it on our website. These guidance notes are to help you help them to submit their work in any form they prefer.

We welcome entries in Gaelic and Scots as well as English. If one of your learners would like to submit in a different community language, please get in touch with Fran at frances.campbell@scottishbooktrust.com to discuss how to go about this.

Our favourite pieces of writing will be published in an e-book for Book Week Scotland 2017 as part of our national celebration of books and reading.

We are hoping to receive a variety of pieces, both in terms of form and tone. These might be childhood stories or humorous stories, or they might be letters or poems that deal with more personally meaningful subject matter.

The resulting e-book will showcase the different ways that the people of Scotland have chosen to respond to the theme.

Of course the theme of Nourish can raise difficult issues for some people who have had, or continue to have, a challenging relationship with food. We don't wish to discourage people from responding to the theme in whichever way they choose. However we are foregrounding a light-hearted and positive approach to the theme in order that we can try to maintain a balance of tone across the submissions we receive.

All pieces of writing submitted will appear online at Scottish Book Trust and a selection will be published, alongside commissioned authors' work, in an e-anthology entitled *Nourish*. Please refer to <http://scottishbooktrust.com/writing/nourish/submit-story> in advance of submitting your entries.

Entries can be submitted online or by post. All entries must be received by the closing date of 7th June 2017.

For further details about how to enter go to page 16.

Supporting adult learners to write creatively

This year's theme, Nourish, has been chosen to help adult learners create writing that will enable readers to experience a variety of emotional responses, such as empathy, surprise, laughter or sadness. We hope that the writing created will inspire readers to share their own stories. With this aim in mind, these brief guidance notes offer ideas of how to help and encourage adult learners to speak and then write about their personal experiences. We offer a range of creative approaches through which learners can choose to express their ideas.

The main focus of Nourish is on expressing ideas and experiences by sharing stories. We realise that some adult learners may be more comfortable creating spoken stories. Accordingly, any and all of the activities that follow can be completed verbally as discussions. Resulting stories can be scribed for adult learners who for any reason are not able to write their own story directly.

We welcome short submissions to Nourish: last year's *Secrets and Confessions* book had a number of short pieces including one that was only nine words long. Brevity can be your friend – writers, speakers and scribes take note!

We do not expect tutors or learners to do every activity. Pick and choose the ones that are most relevant to your learners – the ones that they would enjoy most. The common thread that runs through all the activities is that everyone's stories come from a range of experiences. Writing those stories can nourish both the writer and the reader!

Activity ideas for adult learners



Warm up Exercises

1. Generating ideas to help create your Nourish story

Split your learners into pairs and hand out the following questions. Each pair should take turns asking each other with the listener jotting down notes as their partner speaks.

Talking about food may rekindle unpleasant memories for some learners. People should only share information if they are comfortable doing so.

What's your food heaven – your absolute favourite? What's so great about it? When and where did you first eat this food? Who were you with?

- What's your food hell – the worst thing you can imagine eating? Why is it so bad? Have you actually eaten it before? When and where were you? Have you ever eaten it again?
- What food do you remember most from childhood? Describe the sight, smell and taste of it. Did someone else cook or prepare this food for you?
- Do you cook? Do you love to whip up new recipes? Or is cooking just part of the drudgery of daily life? Why? If you don't cook, who cooks for you? What's your kitchen like? The heart of the home? Or a fuel stop for a busy family?
- Has sharing food brought you closer to someone? How? Or has the opposite happened? Has food caused a problem in a relationship? Why? Different tastes or appetites? Or did a special meal turn into a disaster?

Once each pair has had a chance to discuss the questions with each other, they can then share some of their answers with the rest of the group

if they are happy to do so. Make notes to refer back to later, if you think that would help your learners with the writing activities.

2. That scene where... finding inspiration in nourishing books and films

Ultimately learners will be writing their own stories, not rehashing those that others have already written, however, thinking of what we have read and watched can be a good way to begin to approach the theme.

Food in books and films is never just about food – what is happening between the characters? How do their meals and snacks feed into the film/book's bigger story?

In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the local people prepare a spread of food for Atticus Finch. On one level, this feast is a heartfelt thank you for his work as a defence lawyer. Yet it is also a way of sharing the traditions of the black community and acknowledging Atticus for honouring and respecting that community.

Ask your learners to think of examples of scenes in books or films where food played a central role. You could give further examples to start the conversation: the famous scene from *Oliver Twist* where our hero asks for more porridge; Miss Havisham's mouldering wedding cake in *Great Expectations*; or just about any scene from *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

Why are these scenes so memorable? Which details stick with us?

Ask your learners to describe these scenes as vividly as they can. Make notes of any powerful descriptive words or phrases that might come in handy later when learners are writing their stories.

This can be done as a whole group discussion or with the learners split into pairs or smaller groups according to the confidence and size of your group.

3. Just a note to say... writing postcards



Often our most memorable food experiences happen when we are away from home, maybe when travelling or on holiday.

Read the following postcards with your learners. They are intended as examples to help jog their own food memories and come up with ideas for their own Nourish pieces of writing.

Postcard 1: a romantic meal gone wrong

Hi Dawn, It's 30 degrees here, bright and sunny. All the locals are friendly and the hotel is very comfortable. I'm not having a great time though. Last night we went for dinner at a cute tavern on the seafront. Eating in the moonlight at an outside table – it should have been perfect really, except that Dan took the huff because there's no McDonalds in this resort. Seriously, we had fresh juicy prawns pan-fried in garlic butter and moussaka that was simply bursting with flavour. Mouth-watering stuff, but no, he wanted a Big Mac! He sat with a face like thunder and the only company I had was the sound of the waves lapping on the beach. I've had it with him. It's over.

See you on Tuesday, Debbie

P.S. You still looking for a flatmate?

Postcard 2: the intrepid traveller

Oi pai!

(That means 'hi, dad' here!) I'm becoming quite the gourmet. I know you warned me about eating from the roadside stalls but they're where all the locals eat and the snacks are amazing – more delicacies than snacks. At first I thought fried insects would be gross, but I'm coming round to them. They're like crisps, very crunchy crisps. I've only had traveller's tummy a couple of times, well, four, and the last time was pretty bad but I'm fine now. Maria, the lady who cleans at the hostel made me this cure – a hot, spicy tea. I think it had ginger and turmeric and maybe lemon. It sorted me out straight away – like a Lemsip, but nothing like Lemsip. It was definitely a hug in a mug though! People are so kind. I love it here!

Off to Sao Paulo tomorrow!

Love, Katie

Postcard 3: a blast from the past

Hey bro,

How're you doing? The walking's been good, lots of midges but we're on track to finish by Sunday. Last night we stayed in this odd little guesthouse. Comfy but chintzy – knickknacks and crochet everywhere. The landlady made us a hearty dinner of steak and kidney pie but I have to tell you about the pudding – egg custard! Remember? Just like grandma used to make, when we went to stay with her. Sweet and cinnamon with wobbly custard. The pastry was flakier than grandma's, a bit too flaky perhaps, but it took me straight back to those games of keepie-uppie in her backyard. And guess what? When we'd finished eating, just like grandma, she said very formally, 'Have you eaten an ample sufficiency?' I half expected to be given permission to get down from the table! Those were the days...

Off to soak my blisters, Dan x

The following discussion can be done as a whole group activity or in pairs as suits the learning needs and dynamics of your group.

Ask your learners if they have any stories to share with the group about food they have had on holiday or visiting other places and people.

- Did you try any new or strange food?
- Did you have any wonderful, memorable meals? Have you tried to recreate the meal back home? Was it the same? Why/why not?

- Were you homesick for any food that you couldn't get when you were away? What and why?

This activity can be extended to give learners the opportunity to write their own postcards home about a food experience. Some students might want to use their postcard as a springboard to writing a longer letter or story to submit to Nourish.

Of course, some learners may be daunted by the prospect of writing a full letter and they may find that the shorter postcard length suits them better. We specifically encourage short postcard-style submissions to encourage these learners to participate.

4. Adding flavour



Choose a few descriptive words that your learners said or wrote during one of the above activities. Maybe you noted down some key words during the activity. Taking turns round the group, ask if people can contribute more descriptive words that they might want to use when writing their stories. Scribe the words onto a board or screen as an aide memoire and also so that the learners can see the spellings. Powerful descriptive words are the seasoning of good writing and this is the chance for the group to share and collect the spices for their own stories.

It's a good idea for people who contribute words to this activity to volunteer an example sentence containing their word, either independently or with tutor support. This ensures that everyone in the group will get a sense of how to use vocabulary which may be unfamiliar to some learners.

This task can be very useful when your learners are completing their entries to be submitted to Scottish Book Trust's Nourish public participation campaign. Encourage your learners to use this activity to

help them add a little more detail to their work.

Below are some nourishing words that you may want to include in your group's word store.

Descriptive words for food		
Words to describe flavour	Words to describe the smell of food	Words to describe eating
spicy	fragrant	munching
sugary	tempting	gobbling
bitter	appetizing	sipping
sour	mouth-watering	nibbling
salty	aromatic	chewing
yummy	tantalizing	slurping
juicy	irresistible	scoffing
bland	pungent	swallowing
flavourless	rotten	pecking
peppery	smelly	tasting
hot	stinky	gnawing
fiery	honking	chomping
tasty	nauseating	biting

What to write

Write a humorous diary entry about food gone wrong



This activity follows on well from the first warm up activity above. If you haven't done that warm up with your learners, give them a few minutes to reflect upon their foodie memories and any occasions when something went wrong. Special occasion meals are fraught with expectation and the potential for mishaps. Encourage your learners to think about Christmas or other celebrations marked by food. Birthday and anniversary meals may also come to mind.

If you see your learners at a time prior to this writing session, you could ask them to look through their photo albums at home for any photographs of family meals or special occasions. This could spark some forgotten memories. If they are happy to do so they could bring photos to this session to 'illustrate' the discussion.

Ask learners if they are comfortable with sharing some of their memories.

It's good to scaffold the reflections with the following questions. You may want to have these displayed around the room.

- What was the occasion for the meal?
- Who was cooking?
- What went wrong?
- Did anyone save the day? How?

It may be helpful to give some examples to get the conversation started:

- The Christmas when the turkey was still frozen when it was carved at the table so everyone gorged on roast potatoes and then cut straight to pudding and port.
- Granny's 75th birthday cake that was eaten by the dog when it was left unguarded in the kitchen. (Where there are pets, there are often food mishaps. This might be a valuable source of stories!)
- The dinner date when one person got food poisoning. Is there any romance to be found in caring for your true love when dinner refuses to settle?

After discussion, allow time for note taking before drafting the diary entries/stories.

Remind learners that if they are choosing to recount this incident as a diary entry, they should write in first person. They could write as though the event has just happened. How old were they then? Which details should they include to bring the time and the incident to life?

Learners using photographs may want to consider using their photos as the basis for a comic strip. Computer software such as Comic Life allows people to upload images to storyboard a comic. <http://comiclife.com>

Write a story about feasting or fasting

Food is an important component of celebrations in every culture. A full belly makes it easier to appreciate a full heart. Encourage your learners to talk about occasions of food indulgence, maybe parties or wedding feasts, or the time when they took on the whole of the world buffet.

How did food enhance the occasion?

Is there a particular food that signifies celebration for you? A wedding biryani? A Christmas pudding? What makes food such an important



part of the party?

Then consider more restrained meals. It may be that your learners have experienced trying to diet to lose weight or for other health-related reasons. Have people noticed how all the TV adverts are for food when they're trying to count calories? Does anyone have food-related health successes to share with the group?

Some religions see fasting as a way to heighten our awareness gratitude for what we usually have. Have your learners experienced spiritual sustenance through fasting? Was there comfort to be gained in in the rituals and customs associated with fasting for faith reasons?

Unfortunately of course, lack of resources can also restrict the amount that people have to eat. I will always remember the cash-strapped winter that my family ate truly awful bran flakes from an unmarked box for breakfast every morning. My resourceful mother had found a budget supermarket that needed people to test new own brand products. They tasted like pencil shavings but we went to school fed.

Jack Monroe writes a practical and compelling blog about cooking and eating on a very tight budget. This might spark some interesting discussion or ideas for learner's stories. Jack's blog can be found at <https://cookingonabootstrap.com>

If they feel comfortable sharing their experiences, your learners could discuss their experiences of feasting or fasting before writing their story. Be aware though, that for some people the issue of too much or too little food may trigger some difficult memories. The Scottish Book Trust website has links to organisations that offer professional support should you feel this is appropriate for any of your learners.

Writing about the food of love



'My love is pizza shaped. Won't you have a slice? It's circular, so there's enough to go around.' (Dora J. Arod, *Love quotes for the ages. And the ageless sages.*)

Sharing food is one of the most instinctive (and appreciated) ways that we show our love. Think of a parent feeding a child or how romance can blossom over a dinner date, and never forget the deep-seated 'cupboard love' that pet dogs show us each time we go to fill their food bowls.

Ask your learners to consider a time that they showed their love through food. This doesn't necessarily mean that they cooked a fancy meal. The following examples might spark ideas:

- The friends who ate shop-bought chocolate cake and washed it down with Prosecco for an impromptu divorce party.
- The dad who gave his son tutti frutti ice cream as a post-operation treat to cheer him up.
- The burnt toast served in bed at seven a.m. on Mother's Day because you and your brother couldn't wait any longer to give mum her home-made card.

It's a good idea for learners to plot out the beginning, middle and end of their stories in brief notes before writing the full draft. Like a recipe, what are the key ingredients that this story needs?

The final warm up exercise where learners collected descriptive food words can be useful here to help develop richer detail when the resulting stories are being written.

Creating a letter about a memorable meal

Everyone's a critic now, or so they say, and food is a topic that we all have strong opinions on. One person's ideal meal is a dog's dinner to someone else.

Ask your learners to think about a meal which they have eaten that stood out for positive or negative reasons. This activity is well suited to meals that people have had in restaurants or cafes, however, it could equally relate to a meal that was eaten at a friend or relative's house.

Ask learners to consider the following questions for discussion and for note taking:

- Where was the meal? Think about the details of the setting – indoor, outdoor, busy or quiet...
- What did you eat? Think about the sight, smell and taste of the food.
- Did you have companions? Who? What did you talk about?
- Why did the meal stand out? This might be because of more than the food. The ambience and sense of occasion, the company of loved ones – all can make or break a meal.

If you were a reviewer how many stars would you award it out of five?

Reading a few restaurant reviews with your learners may give them a flavour (pun intended!) of the sort of thing they could write. Most local newspapers include restaurant reviews. Or you could look at print or online examples from the national press such as *The Herald* or *The List*.

- http://www.heraldscotland.com/life_style/
- <https://food.list.co.uk>

Learners should write their letters as if to the cook whether that be the brother-in-law who cooked the best ever Sunday lunch or the restaurant chef who charged a fortune for tiny, fancy portions.

Possible extension: before writing, if your learners have the confidence to role-play, and if time permits, learners could pair up and take turns to be the chef and the eater. The eater can give the chef verbal feedback. If that feedback is critical, encourage the opportunity for humour rather than harshness!

Note: we very much hope that learners will submit their letters to Nourish at the Scottish Book Trust website. However, if submitting letters from this activity, they should make the letter recipients anonymous by changing the names of the chefs or restaurants, especially if they make strong criticism.

We are what we eat – writing a poem about food and identity



We are what we eat and what we eat can bring us a lot of comfort as well as calories. Favourite soul food might be stovies, masala dosa, nonna's homemade pasta or a shared takeaway from the local fried chicken shop. These are the recipes that nourish the spirit as well as the body, recipes for food that reminds us where we come from and what holds us together.

Ask your learners to talk to each other about the food that they identify with most. The following questions might be a good starting point:

- Which food brings your family together?
- Which food would represent you? Why?
- Would you be spicy or sweet?

If you have more than one session that you can devote to this activity, ask your learners to talk with relatives about the food that they think defines them as a family. Is it a traditional food? Where did the tradition originate? (It might be an old or new tradition.) Is there one recipe or many variations? Who prepares the food?

There are several ways to develop these conversations into a poem:

- Writing a humorous poem in which they liken themselves or a relative to a favourite food item.
- Writing an ode to (or by!) their soul food.
- Creating a poem that details the preparation or consumption of the special food, being sure to highlight the various ways that the food nourishes the cook and the eater(s).

Remind your learners that poems don't need to rhyme! Again, encourage learners to refer back to the collected word list from the warm up activity to help add vivid detail to the poems.

Submission guidelines

We would like your learners to submit their short writing on the theme of Nourish. Pieces of writing should be no more than 1,000 words in length although we welcome much shorter pieces too. Writing can take the form of a story, letter, poem, diary entry or comic strip. Some people may want to submit recipes, however, please remind learners that we are not producing a cookbook – any ‘recipes’ would have to share more with us than just instructions for making a meal.

Scottish Book Trust may publish some of the submitted writing in the e-book we are compiling to celebrate Book Week Scotland 2017. To this end, submitted writing should aim to inspire others to write about their nourishing experiences too. It should also stick to these loose rules in order to fit in with the aims of the project:

The story should be true.

- It should be about something that is personal to you.
- You can choose to define ‘Nourish’ however you wish – it is a very broad topic so feel free to go ‘off menu’!
- The story should illustrate what made this particular meal or culinary occasion so meaningful, memorable or humorous. Plus it should engage the reader emotionally.
- We are looking for the writing to be accessible so, although we don’t want to put any restrictions on the writing style or tone, we would ask you to bear in mind the wide audience we will be speaking to.
- Any literary format is encouraged. We welcome entries in Scots and Gaelic as well as English. If one of your learners has written their piece in a different community language, please contact us before submitting so that we can discuss how best to proceed.
- Entries must be no more than 1,000 words. (We are strict about this!)
- One entry per person.

Please encourage learners to submit their writing to the project. They might be selected to feature in the e-book we compile for Book Week Scotland. Workshop leaders/tutors/support workers are encouraged to prepare their own piece for inclusion in the project as well.

How to submit:

Entries can be submitted on Scottish Book Trust’s website or by post. All entries must be received by the closing date, 7th June 2017

Visit <http://scottishbooktrust.com/writing/nourish/submit-story>

Complete the online form and submit it to us electronically or print it out and post it to us at the following address:

FAO Frances Campbell, Scottish Book Trust, Sandeman House, Trunk’s Close, 55 High Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1SR.

If you need help submitting your story or have any questions about the project, please contact Fran at frances.campbell@scottishbooktrust.com or 0131 524 0170.

Other things to consider

Mental health and wellbeing

As always with our annual campaign, people will interpret the theme in a wide range of ways. You should be aware that this theme may lead people to share very personal and emotionally affecting stories and it is important to be prepared for this. Being prepared to listen to what someone wants to tell you is a very powerful supportive act in itself, however you may also need to be prepared to point people towards organisations that provide specific, professional support.

We will be providing links to a range of support organisations on the Nourish website – this will be a useful resource for anyone who might need more support than you are able to provide. Please ensure that you deal sensitively with any information that is shared with you, and remember that there is a possibility that this is the first time your learner has told anyone else their story. Always be honest, open and clear about your role as a literacy support worker.

Ground rules

Because we specifically ask participants to share true, personal stories, it is important that your learners feel their experience is valued and heard. As with any wide-ranging theme, you may find that a variety of experiences and very different perspectives are discussed. In order to ensure that everyone's contributions are heard and respected, you may wish to establish some agreed ground rules before the group begin the activities. These rules may include:

- **Respect** – give undivided attention to the person who has the floor (permission to speak).
- **Confidentiality** – what we share in this group will remain in this group. If someone wishes to share their story further, for example by submitting it to Nourish, that is their decision.
- **Non-judgmental approach** – we can disagree with another person's point of view without putting that person down.
- **Sensitivity to diversity** – we will remember that people in the group may differ in age, race, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, ability, and/or parental or relationship status and we will be careful about making insensitive or careless remarks.

Have a good time – when sharing stories it's fine to have a good time!