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## **Sietsema and Others Muse on the Future of Food Journalism**

By Sarah DiGregorio

In this month's *Columbia Journalism Review*, Robert Sietsema [pens a feature](#) on the history of restaurant reviewing; the importance of anonymity; the increasing number of writers not only identifying themselves, but also accepting free meals; and how food blogs and sites like Yelp have changed the landscape.

It's a fascinating piece, and it raises questions for anyone who enjoys reading food writing. Do you care if a writer has gotten free food for a review? (Thankfully, that's never the case here at the *Voice*.) Is a piece useful to you if the reviewer has been fawned over, or knows the restaurateur personally?

Some of questions about online media and anonymity have been addressed by others, but not within the larger historical context and personal experience that Sietsema brings to bear. As for the question of free food, it seems like the elephant in the room of the food writing world--rarely talked about, always there.

It's unclear if the new FTC blogging regulations on disclosure for endorsements will cover positive reviews of restaurants based on free food. The FTC says:

The revised guides specify that while decisions will be reached on a case-by-case basis, the post of a blogger who receives cash or in-kind payment to review a product is considered an endorsement. Thus, bloggers who make an endorsement must disclose the material connections they share with the seller of the product or service.

Might an in-kind payment be an expensive bottle of wine, or an entire comped meal? Even if it is, it's doubtful that it would be enforced.

If these questions interest you, tell us what you think. You may also want to check out [Culintro](#)'s panel discussion, [The Future of Food Journalism](#), with Francis Lam from *Salon*, Gabriella Gershenson from *Time Out New York*, and Brian Halweil of the *Edible*

magazines. The discussion is next Monday from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. and costs \$35 for members, \$50 for non-members.