

**VIVEKANANDA COLLEGE
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NAAC ACCREDITED GRADE – ‘A’



Topic: Feature Writing

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Feature Writing

Features are not meant to deliver the news firsthand. They do contain elements of news, but their main function is to humanize, to add colour, to educate, to entertain, to illuminate. They often recap major news that was reported in a previous news cycle. Features often:

- Profile people who make the news
- Explain events that move or shape the news
- Analyze what is happening in the world, nation or community
- Teach an audience how to do something
- Suggest better ways to live
- Examine trends
- Entertain.

HARD NEWS AND SOFT NEWS

A news story can be hard, chronicling as concisely as possible the who, what, where, when, why and how of an event. Or it can be soft, standing back to examine the people, places and things that shape the world, nation or community. Hard news events--such as the death of a famous public figure or the plans of city council to raise taxes--affect many people, and the primary job of the media is to report them as they happen. Soft news, such as the widespread popularity of tattooing among athletes or the resurgence of interest in perennial gardening, is also reported by the media. Feature stories are often written on these soft news events.

There is no firm line between a news story and a feature, particularly in contemporary media when many news stories are "featurized." For instance, the results of an Olympic competition may be hard news: "Canadian diver Anne Montmigny claimed her second medal in synchronized diving today." A featurized story might begin: "As a girl jumping off a log into the stream running behind her house, Anne Montmigny never dreamed she would leap into the spotlight of Olympic diving competition." One approach emphasizes the facts of the event, while the feature displaces the facts to accommodate the human interest of the story. Most news broadcasts or publications combine the two to reach a wider audience.

TYPES OF FEATURES

The news feature stories:

A hard-news subject told in feature style. This type of story has its basis upon timely news happening with a human-interest angle is called a news feature. Often a news happening can be made much more interesting or newsworthy by writing it in a semi-feature sort of thing. A news feature is generally timelier than a straight human interest or a long feature story.

Informative Feature:

This type does not use many of the fiction writer's devices, since its purpose is to inform more than to entertain. It may be very closely related to the so called "New Journalism". Facts for this type are usually obtained from interviews, library research and personal observation. To create interest feature writer, includes human-interest elements in his feature. Its success depends upon the accuracy facts and the style and form with which it is presented.

Personality profiles:

A personality profile is written to bring an audience closer to a person in or out of the news. Interviews and observations, as well as creative writing, are used to paint a vivid picture of the person. It is very popular among the readers as everybody wants to know about other people. These features are written about those men and women whose stories are worth telling because they are historical characters in whom interest survives long after they are dead. This type is not easy to write as it is an uphill task to portray a personality with artistic preciseness. Facts about the person are obtained from his friends, teachers, relatives and associates. While writing a personality sketch a feature writer must avoid, stereotyped pattern that finds its way into these features very often.

Personal Experience Story:

This Feature Story is in the form of an interview. It must deal with an unusual experience or a wonderful accomplishment. The writer must be careful not to enlogize the subject but rather allow the facts to tell the story by themselves.

Human interest stories:

A human interest story is written to show a subject's oddity or its practical, emotional, or entertainment value. Human-interest sketches are written under the influence of humorous and pathetic incidents that are reported in the daily routine. It usually develops from an ordinary incident or situation but due to fantastic style of composition appeals to the emotions. But it must be kept in mind that it is based upon facts of a timely nature. Its news value is almost nil and it would not have been published if it were not presented in an interesting and entertaining style. Therefore it entertains more than it informs. It may be written about almost anything i.e. person's places, animals etc.

Historical Feature :

It deals with events or personalities of the past, have interest for present day readers because the facts these features give:

- are timely.
- are unique.
- throw new light on an old story.
- debunk wrong popular beliefs.
- promote speculation and imagery among the readers.

Interpretative Feature :

Interpretative features inform, instruct and throw light on the background of certain problems. The following topics are usually discussed under the heading of interpretative feature.

- Social problems
- Economic problems
- Political problems
- Problems of everyday life

Popularized Scientific Feature :

Popularized scientific articles, bridging the gap, which separated the scientist and journalist for a long-time present scientifically accurate facts in a non-technical easily understood language

Trend stories:

A trend story examines people, things or organizations that are having an impact on society. Trend stories are popular because people are excited to read or hear about the latest fads.

In-depth stories:

Through extensive research and interviews, in-depth stories provide a detailed account well beyond a basic news story or feature.

Backgrounders:

A backgrounder--also called an analysis piece--adds meaning to current issues in the news by explaining them further. These articles bring an audience up-to-date, explaining how this country, this organization, this person happens to be where it is now.

WRITING AND ORGANIZING FEATURE STORIES

- Feature writers seldom use the inverted-pyramid form. Instead, they may write a chronology that builds to a climax at the end, a narrative, a first-person article about one of their own experiences or a combination of these. Their stories are held together by a thread, and they often end where the lead started, with a single person or event. Here are the steps typically followed in organizing a feature story:
- Write a lead that invites an audience into the story. A summary may not be the best lead for a feature. A lead block of one or two paragraphs often begins a feature. Rather than put the news elements of the story in the lead, the feature writer uses the first two or three paragraphs to set a mood, to arouse readers, to invite them inside. Then the news peg or the significance of the story is provided in the third or fourth paragraph, the nut graph. Because it explains the reason the story is being written, the nut graph--also called the "so what" graph--is a vital paragraph in every feature. The nut graph should be high in the story. Do not make readers wait until the 10th or 11th paragraph before telling them what the story is about.
- The body provides vital information while it educates, entertains, and emotionally ties an audience to the subject. The ending will wrap up the story and come back to the lead, often with a quotation or a surprising climax. Important components of the body of a feature story are background information, the thread of the story, transition, dialogue, and voice.
- Provide vital background information. If appropriate, a paragraph or two of background should be placed high in the story to bring the audience up to date.
- Write clear, concise sentences. Sprinkle direct quotations, observations and additional background throughout the story. Paragraphs can be written chronologically or in order of importance.
- Use a thread. Connect the beginning, body and conclusion of the story. Because a feature generally runs longer than a news story, it is effective to weave a thread throughout the story, which connects the lead to the body and to the conclusion. This thread can be a single person, an event or a thing, and it usually highlights the theme.
- Use transition. Connect paragraphs with transitional words, paraphrases, and direct quotations. Transition is particularly important in a long feature examining several people or events because it is the tool writers

use to move subtly from one person or topic to the next. Transition keeps readers from being jarred by the writing.

- Use dialogue when possible. Feature writers, like fiction writers, often use dialogue to keep a story moving. Of course, feature writers cannot make up dialogue; they listen for it during the reporting process. Good dialogue is like good observation in a story; it gives readers strong mental images and keeps them attached to the writing and to the story's key players.
- Establish a voice. Another key element that holds a feature together is voice, the "signature" or personal style of each writer. Voice is the personality of the writer and can be used to inject colour, tone, and subtle emotional commentary into the story. Voice should be used subtly. The blatant intrusion of a distinctive voice into news writing has been called gonzo journalism--an irresponsible, if entertaining, trend in contemporary writing according to traditionalists.
- Conclude with a quotation or another part of the thread. A feature can trail off like a news story or it can be concluded with a climax. Often, a feature ends where the lead started, with a single person or event.

Reference:

Bruce Itule & Douglas Anderson, *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*, 3rd. Edition, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.

Books on Journalism and News Reporting

Bruce Itule: Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Communication at Arizona State University.

Crossing Over: 2000 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing