



WRITING THE ADVANCED TEXT STORY

Chapter 6

“All the News: Writing and
Reporting for Convergent Media”

Multimedia Reporting Course

THE ROLE OF FEATURE STORIES

- ▶ “Hard news” stories convey information about important and interesting events
- ▶ People get most of their news from these types of stories
- ▶ But many stories, especially those that do not concern a specific event or pronouncement, are better written as feature stories
- ▶ “Soft news” or feature stories are usually more interesting or unusual than important
- ▶ When the focus of a story is the how or why and not the what, then a feature approach is often used
- ▶ Feature stories do not follow the rigid inverted pyramid format
- ▶ Instead features can give writers a chance to showcase their creative talents to help lure readers into stories they might otherwise pass by

TYPES OF FEATURE STORIES

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- ▶ Profiles or personality features—describe interesting people
 - ▶ Human interest—people overcoming obstacles
 - ▶ Trend and Lifestyle- what's hot/ what's not, what's in/what's out
 - ▶ Occupation or hobby features—interesting, unusual jobs, hobbies, skills
 - ▶ Explanatory features—often sidebar stories that provide more detailed explanations of an organization, activity, trend or person in the news
 - ▶ Adventure features—describe unusual and exciting experiences
 - ▶ How-to-Do-It features—tell readers how to perform some task
 - ▶ Seasonal features—tie in with holidays and seasons
 - ▶ Historical features—often commemorate anniversaries of important events

PLANNING & WRITING FEATURES

- ▶ A feature writer needs to take as much time as possible to gather information, including the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures that will help take readers on a journey
- ▶ Once finished with research and interviews, the feature writer needs to develop a clear theme for the story
- ▶ In a sentence or two, be able to answer this question: What is this story all about? (motorcycle example, p. 96)
- ▶ Consider length- some features are pretty short, just 200 words
- ▶ These “brite” or “bright” stories regularly appear in newspapers and online news feature sections
- ▶ They give readers a chance to sit back and have a chuckle, no matter how sad or depressing the rest of the day’s news is
- ▶ Most feature stories, however, run much longer, 1,000-plus words
- ▶ They may take 200 words just to get the story started

FEATURE LEADS (AKA SOFT OR ALTERNATIVE LEADS)

- ▶ Anecdote
- ▶ Description
- ▶ Scene setting
- ▶ Quotation
- ▶ Question
- ▶ Suspenseful leads
- ▶ Ironic leads
- ▶ Direct-address
- ▶ Words used in unusual ways
- ▶ Multiparagraph
- ▶ Shockers— lead with a twist
- ▶ “Buried” or “Delayed” leads—these typically begin with an interesting example or anecdote that set a story’s theme, then a “nut graph”— perhaps the third or fourth graf- summarizes the story and provides a transition to the body

THE BODY OF THE FEATURE STORY

THE “WALL STREET JOURNAL FORMULA” (MOST USED- P. 110-2)

- ▶ This format/formula is also known as the focus style
- ▶ Story typically opens with a specific example presented in an anecdotal, descriptive or narrative lead
- ▶ A nut graf relates that example to a more general point and explains what the story is about
- ▶ The body of the story provides support for the general points (quotes, facts, developments, etc.)
- ▶ Story typically ends with another anecdote or description- often featuring the person or people featured in the lead- or speculates on a future development related to the lead
- ▶ See “Star Trek: Enterprise” example, pages 110-112

THE PERSONALITY PROFILE

- ▶ Used to present an overview of a person so that readers feel like they have had a glimpse into his or her life
- ▶ Such profiles can be challenging because people tend to be complicated or full of contradictions, and most provide elements of past, present, future
- ▶ Research- a writer needs to find out as much as possible about a person before interviewing him or her
- ▶ Should talk to subject's friends, colleagues, enemies (and be able to quote them) to get a true picture of the person
- ▶ But don't write a biography, trying to cover every aspect of person's life
- ▶ Instead, look for the facet of a person that readers would most likely identify with or care about
- ▶ Helps to develop a theme statement about the person- in a nutshell, is her or she an overachiever, a dependable friend, a diehard activist, a paradox or something else?
- ▶ This theme will help the writer determine what to use/what to leave out
- ▶ Examine profile story structure model on pages 115-118

PROFILE STRUCTURE FOR BEGINNERS

- ▶ Article opens with an anecdotal lead capturing the distinguishing theme of the subject of the profile
- ▶ The justification section provides three quick points to suggest that the person is worth knowing more about, beginning or ending with a nut graph that states the theme
- ▶ The amplification section describes the person's achievements
- ▶ The flashback section turns to the person's roots and recounts significant life events that led to his or her current status
- ▶ The flash forward section looks ahead and give readers some insights into what the person is likely to do or move on to next
- ▶ A closing anecdote or strong quote reinforces the central theme and provides a sense of continuity

THE HUMAN INTEREST STORY

- ▶ A true human interest story recounts how one or more people come to terms with a situation- either good or bad- outside their control
- ▶ The human interest story looks at things from a human perspective
- ▶ A human interest story might focus on someone who has won the lottery, a group of hikers stranded by an avalanche, a kidnap victim, someone dealing with a severe disability or other obstacle that most of us do not have
- ▶ Look at the “legendary” Reader’s Digest “Drama in Real Life” article format (p. 118) “to help the writer craft a gripping story”
- ▶ Do you know any people or have seen anyone around campus/work/neighborhood who could make a good subject for a human interest story?

TRANSITIONAL WORDS AND SENTENCES

- ▶ Features are meant to be read from start to finish
- ▶ Look for ways to link ideas from paragraph to paragraph in a smooth, flowing and logical way
- ▶ Think of the story as a train— the engine is the lead, and each car that follows is a paragraph. The couplings that hold the paragraphs together are transitions
- ▶ Transition words can help readers move from one idea to the next: “meantime,” “also,” “instead,” etc.
- ▶ Transitional sentences link paragraphs that contain diverse ideas
- ▶ The transition sentences, like lead sentences, should do more than report that another idea was “introduced” or “discussed” (“label” leads)
- ▶ They should instead present some interesting details about the new topic so readers will want to finish the story
- ▶ A good transitional sentence often serves the same purposes as a lead, summarizing the topic it introduces and revealing what was said or done about it



ENDING THE FEATURE



- ▶ While hard news stories often fade out, per inverted pyramid style, feature stories need to go out with a bang
- ▶ Feature story endings serve both to wrap up the story and to provide a sense of completeness
- ▶ A good ending reflects the tone of a story and seems exactly right for it
- ▶ Types of feature endings:
 - ▶ Summary- summarize main point of story, often using words of the subject (quote)
 - ▶ Circle- writer circles back to the lead and neatly close the story
 - ▶ Surprise- gives readers a jolt but at the same time must be right for the story- must be short, crisp and logically follow what's come before