TIPS FOR WRITING FEATURE ARTICLES

Note: Identify a worthy faculty member from your respective C of C school—make sure it’s not someone who has been featured before. If not sure check the Previous Articles alphabetical listing on the FOF site at www.cofc.edu/~facfocus

1. For our “Focus on the Faculty” project, write your 750-word articles as a regular Word document. Be sure to save your article on a hard drive or flashdrive. Turn articles in on paper this way and also include a copy of your professor’s photo(s).

2. Your article should have a short headline that captures in a very concise (if not catchy) way what the article is about.

3. Follow the headline with your byline in italics. Example: by Patrick Harwood

4. Double space the article—this will make copy editing easier than single spacing.

5. For online writing, do not use paragraph indentation. Write in block style paragraphs and have an extra space between paragraphs.

6. Keep each paragraph to only two or three sentences.

7. Your article needs to have several direct quotes from the professor! With direct quotations, remember that the quote mark goes outside the punctuation. Example: “A lot of hard work was put into that,” highway worker Larry Davidson said. Or: “Obama has said only the wealthiest Americans can expect higher taxes,” Vice President Dick Cheney said. “But voters should know that Senator Kerry has supported higher taxes for every income group.”
   • Don’t use excessively long quotes. Keep them concise. Quotes should provide opinion, emotion, color and/or provide a glimpse into your subject’s personality, motivation, etc. Don’t use quotes for matter-of-fact basic information.

8. Use attribution (the “who says so”) to indicate source of information, assertions and opinions that could be challenged or disputed. Example: This statement needs attribution: “College athletes are poor students.” This statement does not need attribution: “The College of Charleston is a public liberal arts and sciences institution.”

9. Keep article to around 750 words. Include word count at the beginning or end of the article.

10. Start your article with a strong lead sentence or paragraph that captures what the story is about—what is most unique or interesting about the professor and/or the research.
Such “summary” leads are the most common type used in news writing. Other feature types of leads are (from Reporting for the Media by Fedler):

- “Buried” or “delayed” leads—this is when a story begins with an interesting example or anecdote that sets a story’s theme. Then a “nut graph” follows in the second, third or fourth paragraph that summarizes the story and provides transition to the body.
- Suspenseful leads—these leads try to arouse readers’ curiosity, create suspense or raise a question in their minds.
- Descriptive leads—begin with descriptive details that paint a picture for the reader before moving gradually into the action. The description should be colorful and interesting, so that it arouses readers’ interest in the topic.

11. The Body of the story—Strive for flow and continuity in the body of the story.
   - Continue the flow established in your lead sentence(s).
   - Move the story along in a smooth, logical order
   - Using transitional phrases and words to move from one subject area to the next (examples of transitional words and phrases are: also, next, then, meanwhile, similarly, and along with, as a result of, in addition)
   - Include quotes from people who know your profile subject—this adds depth, detail and texture to the story, enhancing the reader’s understanding of this person.

12. Ending the story—Things to think about with the closing to your article (from Joe Hight in Fedler’s Reporting for the Media):
   - Is it a good closing sentence? Does it sound final? Is it pleasant to the ear?
   - Does it leave the reader in the mood you intended? If so, you are done. If not, rewrite the ending so it does leave the reader in the intended mood.
   - Strive for an ending that solves a problem, stirs an emotion or makes a point about an issue.

13. Also, for this article, try to include appropriate links for readers who may want to seek additional information. This can be to the professor’s home page, or to an organization the professor leads or is very active in, or to a link with information about a book or other research the professor is involved in.

14. It is recommended that you tape record the interviews you do for this article in order to ensure accuracy. If not, make sure you write down quotes accurately. Don’t hesitate to ask interviewee to slow down or repeat comments or statements that you think might be good quotes.

15. Your story will not have a chance of receiving an A or A- unless you have quotes in your article from someone other than your professor. We want, obviously, quotes from your professor but your article will be better if you have quotes from a colleague or student of your professor. Such comments should add insight into your professor’s character, personality, expertise, etc. Plus they can add color and perspective.

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