

# Specialized Types of Stories

Chapter 14

# Four Types of Specialized Stories

- A new reporter told to write a speech or a meeting story would immediately understand what was asked of her. But someone who has never worked in a newsroom might scratch her head when asked to write a bright, a follow-up, a roundup or a sidebar. Yet all are common assignments for beginning reporters.

# “Brights”

- Brights are short, humorous stories that often have surprise endings



# “Follow-Ups”

- Follow-ups--also known as “second-day” and “developing” stories--report new developments in stories that were reported earlier
- Major news stories rarely begin and end in a single day, so news organizations prepare a fresh article or broadcast report each time a new development arises
- Stress the new developments in the lead and body of the story. Summarize the important background and earlier developments. Don't assume readers/viewers know what happened earlier.

# “Roundups”

- Roundups—to save space or time, news organizations summarize several different but related events in roundup stories
- Traffic roundups are most common; instead of publishing separate stories about each traffic death that occurs in a single weekend, newspapers and broadcast stations may summarize several fatal or otherwise newsworthy accidents in a single story.
- Or news organizations may report all the weekend crimes, fires, drownings, or graduation ceremonies in roundup stories

# “Sidebars”

- Sidebars are related to major news stories but are separate from them
- Sometimes, news organizations use them to break long, complicated stories into shorter, more easily understood ones
- Other times, sidebars report information of secondary importance
- Sidebars also may give readers additional information about the main topic; usually from a different source or perspective

# Feature Stories

Chapter 15

# Feature Stories vs. Regular News Stories

- Features are different than regular news stories
- Regular news stories usually strive to inform the public about important topics
- Straight news stories are often written in the inverted pyramid structure

# Features of Feature Stories...

- Feature stories can read more like nonfiction short stories
- They strive to inform, but they also can amuse, entertain, inspire or stimulate
- Because of their emotional appeal, such stories are also known as "human interest" stories

# More Feature Features...

- Feature writers borrow techniques from fiction and other creative writing, often using description, sensory details, quotations, anecdotes, scene setting, plot structure and other novelistic elements to dramatize a story's theme and to add more details.

# Features=Good Journalism

- Like regular news stories, features must be journalisticly sound
- Nothing can be made up
- They must be factual, fair and balanced, based on verifiable information
- They also must be objective—they are not essays or editorials

# Selecting a Topic and Gathering Information for a Feature

- The most crucial step in writing a good feature story is making the topic fresh, dramatic, colorful and exciting
- Reporters use all their senses—seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and sometimes tasting
- They record how people move, speak and dress
- They give audience members a reason to care about the subject

# Finding Good Feature Topics

- Feature writers find story ideas by being curious and observant
- News stories may provide spin-off topics for features.

# Starting the Feature Story

- After selecting a topic likely to interest a large audience, reporters must narrow the subject and find a central point that emphasizes, perhaps, a single person, situation or episode
- For example, a profile cannot summarize a person's entire life, so a reporter might discuss just one aspect: a single experience, trait or achievement that sums up the person's character
- If reporters fail to identify a central point, their stories become long, disorganized and superficial. This can leave readers and viewers confused, and they will quit the story

# Types of Feature Stories

- Profiles or Personality features—describe interesting people
- Historical features—often commemorate anniversaries of important events
- Adventure features—describe unusual and exciting experiences
- Seasonal features—tie in with holidays and seasons
- Explanatory features—often sidebar stories that provide more detailed explanations of an organization, activity, trend or person in the news
- How-to-Do-It features—tell readers how to perform some task
- Occupation or hobby features—interesting, unusual jobs and hobbies are featured

# More Types of Features

- Personal experience features—story written in the first person, from the reporter's perspective (Post Courier feature about reporter with "restless legs")
- Behind-the-scenes features—take readers backstage for an inside view of some event
- Participatory features—inside view through the senses of a reporter who is actually experiencing an event or situation (first marathon race)
- Medical and Business features

# Types of Feature Leads

- Features may begin with basic summary leads
- But features more often begin with alternative leads whether quotations, anecdotes, questions, action, descriptions, shocking facts, or a combination of these techniques
- The main idea with the lead should be that it interests people, luring them into the stories

# The Body of a Feature Story

- There are no hard rules about how feature stories should be organized
- It can follow the inverted pyramid format or it can more chronological
- Whatever the form, the story must be coherent
- All the facts must fit together smoothly and logically
- Transitions must guide the audience from one segment of the story to the next

# The Ending of a Feature Story

- A feature should have a satisfying conclusion, perhaps ending with an anecdote, quote, key word or phrase repeated in some surprising or meaningful way
- Avoid ending with a summary. These are too likely to state the obvious, to be repetitious, flat or boring
- After finishing a feature, a professional will edit and rewrite it many times

# Angling the Feature

- A professional will also angle the feature for a particular audience, publication or news program, emphasizing the story's relevance and importance to it
- Look at "Ideas for Campus Features" on pages 391-3





# Homework for Friday

- Read Chapter 14, Feature Stories, and answer True/False Questions
- Brainstorm and try to come up with two or three topics for each of the three articles. Type what you think you might do for each of these articles. Include what the article will be about; if it's an event or activity, when and where it is; who you will interview; and why you think the story is newsworthy and of interest to the campus community. Remember the three articles you will be writing:
  - Meeting/Event Article
  - Issue/Controversy Article
  - Human Interest Feature Story