

Features

Foundations of Journalism
Emerson College
Spring 2013

Features

- Soft news stories
- Types of feature stories*
 - Profiles
 - News features
 - Spot features
 - Trend stories
 - Service stories

*Review Week 2 Powerpoint if necessary.

Features

- Show rather than tell.
 - Hard news should tell the story by just laying out the facts.
 - In features, the writer “paints a picture.”
 - Details
 - Emotion
 - Taps senses
 - Observation

Features

- Utilizes essentials skills from hard news writing.
 - Gathering information (facts, data, etc.)
 - Extensive research
 - Thorough interviews
 - Clear and tight writing
 - Defined angle
- But more room for creativity.

Preparation

- Journalists should be well-versed in the subject of their feature.
 - Whether it's a person or topic
 - Read clips
 - Do research
 - For understanding
 - For storytelling purposes
 - For interview preparation

Preparation

- Good features (especially profiles) are not just “talk to a person or two and that’s it.”
- Must be almost a mini-expert.

Overreport

- The vast majority of what you report for a feature will not make your final version.
- Get down details, specifics, observations.
- Read/research far more on the subject than you will actually use.

Overreport

- Better to have too much than not enough.
- Details are absolutely essential for effective features.

Deadline

- Because you are expected to do more reporting for a feature than a hard news story, you will rarely be under as tight a deadline.
- However, because you are expected to do more reporting, you need/are expected to take advantage of this additional time to do that extra (over) reporting.

Observation

- Details are essential in features. One way to get detail is through observation.
- Know what to look for. Look for specifics.
- “If observations are not there..., no amount of skill in writing can compensate.”

Observation

- Observe:
 - What is ordinary?
 - What is going on?
 - What is out of the ordinary?
 - How so?
 - Details.
 - Color.
 - Sensory experience (when relevant)
 - » Sounds
 - » Sights
 - » Smell
 - » Touch
 - » Taste

Observation

- Scenes that you witness.
- Anecdotes that unfold.
- Look to capture the scene and/or moment.

Interviews

- Overreport in interviews.
 - Don't feel bad if you don't quote someone
 - Get friends, family, colleagues, critics.
 - Seek to paint a full picture.
- Look for specifics and details.
 - Dates
 - Details
 - Anecdotes
 - Examples

Interviews

- Look to “get inside the person’s head.”
 - What were they thinking?
 - What was going through their mind?
 - How did they feel
 - Little more flexibility for attributing this kind of perspective in features.

Creativity

- Storytelling
 - Not inverted pyramid
 - Usually builds to a climax
 - Conclusion

Creativity

- More room for voice/tone
 - Hard news = no tone/voice.
Straightforward.
 - Features = writer can set tone.
 - Tone should match the story.
 - Be mindful of tone consistency.
 - Word choices.

Creativity

- Just let the power of the narrative propel the story without the showiness of your words interfering.
- Opportunity to show a bit more range as a writer.
- Not a license to go into flowery language/literary mode.

Writing

- Writing still needs to adhere to the journalistic rules.
 - AP Style
 - Clear
 - Concise/tight

Ledes

- Features use non-traditional (soft news) ledes.
 - Zinger
 - Anecdote
 - Scene setter
 - List lede
 - Question lede (Avoid/Limit)
 - Quote lede (Avoid)

Structure

- Features do not adhere to inverted pyramid.
- Usually will build to a conclusion.
 - Features often return to the lede at the end.
 - Snapper/kicker
- Often a series of illustrative anecdotes pieced together.

Anecdotes

- Select anecdotes that fit with your story.
 - If great anecdote doesn't fit, it may need to be cut.
 - News judgment.
- Should fit at least one of the following:
 - Give a specific example
 - Be illustrative of a larger point/idea
 - Give a specific insight into your subject

Categories of Features

- Profiles
- Sidebars
- Backgrounders
- News Features
- Human Interest
- Brights

Profile

- Portrait of a person in words
- Not just a list of facts
 - Resume
- Not a biography
 - Entire life story
- Delves beneath the surface
 - What makes this person exciting or newsworthy

Profiles

- Need angle/primary theme.
- Set up angle/theme in lede.
 - Support it in the body.
 - Likely return to it in the conclusion

Profiles

- Create a sketch of a person's life.
 - Public and private
- Should include multiple voices.
- Research/additional reporting also important.
 - Read up on person's background
 - Read up on stories about relevant topic

Sidebars

- Mainbar = main story.
 - Also referred to as centerpiece.
- Sidebar = story that complements mainbar.
- Sidebars discuss/flesh out one aspect of larger story.
- Can be anything from profile of a key player in a story to service feature

Backgrounders

- Do exactly what the name suggest - they give background on a topic/news story.
- Rely heavily on research.

News features

- A newsworthy story that isn't necessarily pegged to any specific current/unfolding news story.
 - Usually timely, but not time sensitive.
- Not to be confused with a spot feature.
 - Deadline feature that focuses on breaking news.

Human Interest

- Profiles = individuals of interest
- Human interest = broader picture stories of interest
 - Circumstances in people's lives
 - Happenings/events of interest
 - “Slice of life”

Human Interest

- Name pretty much says it all
- May use an individual as lede, but if the focus is on the bigger picture story, it's human interest, not a profile.

Bright

- Feel good stories.

Features

- As a rule, do not use “says” in place of “said.”
 - All present tense: recalls, shouts, etc.
 - Quote happened in the past.
 - Exception, can (do not have to) use with scene setting or anecdotal lede to pull people in.
 - Then “said” throughout
 - Never alternate between the two in body of your story.