

## AN INTRODUCTION TO FEATURE

Traditionally, in newspapers, a major part of resources and efforts go into gathering hard news, which is the bread and butter for every journalist.

But as the media world is changing in this era of 24x7 live news channels delivering the BREAKING NEWS every minute and the ubiquitous Internet, news is disseminated within few minutes of its happening. Television, radio, the web are all far better equipped at breaking a news story than a newspaper, which is obviously under time constraints because of printing and distribution work and has a fixed frequency for a day. Thus newspapers have undergone a sea change from what they were around two decades back. Newspapers now camouflage hard news as soft to present it through opinion pieces, analysis and features.

A feature is a stylized piece written in leisurely manner that goes beyond the hard news into the reasons and consequences of the news. Earlier, a feature used to be predominantly of entertainment value in newspaper but in today's changed scenario, it has become more 'newsy' and thus has found its way to the front page.

So much so that sometime you'll even find the lead story written in what used to be regarded as a features style. The accent now is not simply on what happened - the hard news - but increasingly on the how and the why - the exploration of detail and the human angles that vividly bring home the point of the story and put it in context.

So today, features deal with all areas of journalistic interest and are a major expression of a paper's editorial identity. They add depth, and allow the exploration of different angles to a story. They can anticipate trends, help form opinions and create links with readers.

Features are more persuasive, because they allow the reporter to go behind the immediate headline detail and provide context and analysis. They are not dependent on a breaking story, although they may well take a breaking story into new territory. And if the research and the story are good enough, it may turn out to be breaking news in its own right.

Unlike the traditional hard news story, features allow a more flexible structure and provide the reporter with ample opportunities to display imagination and style. Feature writers are not bound by the sparse, staccato style of the news report, but can adopt a variety of techniques to tell the story, which doesn't have to come to the point in the first two paragraphs.

### TYPES OF FEATURE

Features are stories that speak of people, places and situations. Celebrities, films, travel, music, sports, fashion, food, health, careers and such themes are the favourite hunting ground of Feature writers.

There are various types of features:

**News feature:** As the name suggests, this type of feature has a news event as its peg. A news feature goes beyond what has happened and investigates the reasons, analyses its consequences and narrates how it all happened.

### GENERAL FEATURES

Such features are not bound by news and can be written and published at any time. Their main purpose is to entertain the reader though they also contain elements that inform, educate the reader and also give him an opinion.

**Personality Feature (profile):** This type of feature is woven around the subject's personality. It's basically a profile of the subject and tickles the imagination of the readers who would find juicy fulfillment in them. It gives the various character traits and

informs the reader about someone's achievements. The rich and famous celebrities are a common subject and have a curiosity value.

**Life Style Features:** Changing fashion trends and life-styles make an interesting reading. But writing a life-style feature is not everybody's cup of tea. A passion for fashion and knowledge of the industry are essential to be a good fashion feature writer. All leading business magazines carry life style features which are more or less showpieces of a changing society.

**Travel Features:** The Travel theme is also very popular as a feature subject as people always want to know about new places. A good travel feature induces the wander-lust of the reader and makes them fly to the described place in their dreams. People and places are always exciting but the places recommended must be worth spending money, time and trouble. Travel features demand exceptional descriptive and narrative skills.

**Hobby Features:** People have pursued for various hobbies and a very few exceptional genre have the taste of interest in various hobbies. Stamp collecting, gardening, reading, music, photography are the common hobbies but some uncommon hobbies like cloud watching, bird watching, lizard eating, bees collecting etc. present exotic feature avenues. A hobby feature that has to say about exceptional hobbies interests the readers.

**Social interest feature:** Though a feature story is predominantly for entertainment of the readers, general features could also be used to raise awareness and social problems and other important issues.

Social interest feature is one way to raise serious issues. These have the power to expose burning issues like the problems of education system, poverty, corruption, drug addiction, women issues, bring to light stories of hapless victims, etc. The writer calls for a debate to show the magnitude of the problem through case studies, anecdotes and quotes and a lot of writing stuff challenging the perspective. The USP of such features is that they can be written at any time and unlike the news features should not follow soon after the news event. These features help raise important issues and could be written at any time, give analyze the problem in depth and give solutions and help educate the readers. Though such features it is possible to raise awareness about important social evils like dowry deaths, female foeticide, drug abuse among college students, racism, untouchability, alcoholism etc that would otherwise find a place in the news pages only when an important incident related to these practices occur. Besides these matters like environmental issues, science etc could also be raised through features.

As a writer gets lot of time to plan and execute a feature and good enough space to write it unlike a hard news story, he can probe an issue fully and explore all angles in detail, thus giving the reader all the dope on the issue thus helping him make up his mind. A serious issue raised through a feature can provoke the reader into taking a decision.

**Career Features:** These features focus on Career guidance. Choosing the right career, getting started, aptitude and such feature writing are good breeding grounds for beginners. Stories that give insight to careers, role models, career planning, mid career crisis lead to interesting and informative feature writing.

**Business Features:** In a market driven world with day-to-day crisis and boom, business feature writing provides a platform to give an insight into the business world. Exploring ideas, opportunities, market trends, dizzy world of CEOs, corporate ladder, alliances, mergers and various other issues are some of the subjects. Feature writing on business is a challenge and needs in depth knowledge of the subject, issues, various laws and rules related to business.