

HOW TO WRITE A FEATURE

Feature writing is sometimes more difficult than straight reporting as a feature should have flair, style and also entertainment value. As a feature is different from a news report and does not have “hard news” component, a feature has to have something to attract a reader, grab him and make him read the feature.

To write a feature one

Here are some useful tips that will help you write a good feature:

SUBJECT

Before you write down something, you should decide on what you will be writing about. The most important criteria for choosing a subject for your feature will be whether people will be interested to know about that subject. Write down everything you know about your subject and the time period you’ll be focusing on. Write down everything that puzzles or interests you and what you hope to find out. When reviewing this writing, pay particular attention to the questions you’d like answered and angles you’d like to explore or a peg for your feature. Also do some research about the subject. Try and find out more about it and write down that too.

GATHERING DETAILS

Once you have decided on the subject, you need to gather information about it. Information can be gathered from books, encyclopedia, though interviews and also by visiting the scene of the incident.

It helps the interview go more smoothly if you’ve done some research beforehand. If you’re going to interview someone about their wartime experiences, read as much as you can about that war. If you’re going to interview someone about what they were doing or thinking during a particular time period, research the highlights from that era.

PREPARE QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

A list of questions should be prepared before the interview. There will also be questions that you’ve thought about that you’d like answers to. The most important thing about interviewing is to relax and pay attention. Sometimes, people that are being interviewed are nervous and tense. You will have to put them at ease so that they can give the information you need correctly.

And, if you’re paying attention to what the person is saying, he or she will be more apt to talk openly about their experiences and you can also ask him supplementary questions on the basis of what he/she has said just then.

WRITING YOUR FEATURE

If you were paying attention during the interview, the chances are good the person said something that piqued your interest or produced an emotional response — a gut reaction. Maybe he or she said something that surprised you, made you sad, or made you angry. Whatever it was that stood out for you during the interview would probably be interesting to other people. It might be what you end up writing about. But whatever you write about, write sincerely and honestly. Make sure your article is accurate and fair to everyone involved. Keep your readers interested and entertained. Remember how important your lead and your conclusion are — the lead “hooks” the reader -- and the conclusion, which should summarize your article, is generally what stays with the reader. The body of the article, where you hopefully included as many quotes as possible, is where you make your case.

Edit your first draft: When reviewing your first draft, make sure that you stuck with your focus. Do all of your ideas, quotes, and facts support your thesis? As tempting as it is to include a great story or fact, if it doesn't help you make your case, you should probably take it out.

Editing your second draft: Once you have edited your first draft and taken out all extraneous and unnecessary stuff, read through it again. Does it make sense? Could someone that didn't know the interview subject or the topic follow it and come to the same conclusion that you did? Did you use the best words you could to express your ideas? Make sure that your sentences, and then your paragraphs, read clearly. Don't forget to check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.

Preparing the final copy: The final copy may be your third or fourth or seventh or eighth draft. Make sure you incorporated all of your edits and then proofread the article before handing it in.

A note on leads: A summary lead is usually for a straight news story. A feature story should begin imaginatively. There are several kinds of leads to “hook” a reader into reading your article:

- **Quick Burst lead** — a series of short, direct statements: “When fire broke out in her home, Sapna Awasthi rescued her children. After the home was gutted, she rebuilt it herself.

Sapna is among those who believe in doing things themselves and so she actually rebuilt her home herself – brick by brick.”

- **Surprise lead** — an eye-opening beginning: “All she did was take a break after varnishing the piano. And then the fire started.”
- **Contrast lead** — an opening with opposites or differences: “It was a big fire and Sapna Awasthi is a small woman.”

- **Figurative lead** — an opening figure of speech: “Friends and family always said she was stubborn as a mule. It’s a good thing she is or Sapna Awasthi would have lost both her children in a house fire.”
- **Allusion lead** — an opening reference to literature: “When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.’ Mary Rogers meditated on the words of Isaiah after rescuing her five children from their burning house.”
- **Expert lead** — an opening quote from an expert. “This could have been a disaster,” said Fire Brigade Chief Vinayak Mane. “I don’t advocate going into burning buildings but if this little lady hadn’t gone into that inferno to get her children out, we would be lining up body bags right now.”
- **Suspense lead** — an open-ended beginning. “A fire started in the living room —and the children were still inside.”
- **Question lead** — an opening question: “How many of you have the courage to enter an inferno? Would your mind change if your children were inside?”

The lead is followed by the body text of the feature and while writing it, care should be taken that there is connectivity in the sentences, that one sentence leads into the other. Care should also be taken to ensure that the point/issue/news element or question raised in the lead is answered in the subsequent paragraphs so that the reader’s interest is satisfied and he is not left wondering what you were trying to say in the lead.

As you have taken pains to choose the best lead for your story, you should also take care to ensure that it ends in interesting manner. The last few paragraphs should give some opinion about the subject or conclusions of the story.