

PROFILES

A profile is essentially a life sketch in words of someone who is in the news. Simply, it is a bio-data of the subject but done in an interesting manner unlike the boring tone of a resume.

The subject could be a celebrity, a sportsperson, an ordinary man who has achieved something, done something good for the society, a social worker or even a murderer. The subject must have done something in recent times that merits telling people about his life, his work his achievements or his bad deeds, his weaknesses his wrongdoings.

The idea is not only to inspire or warn people by telling about his achievements or wrongdoings, as the case may be, but also to entertain people by putting such things in an interesting manner.

For writing a profile, the first thing you need to do is identify a subject. As said earlier, the overriding concern or reason to pick someone worthy for a profile is not what he or she has achieved but rather what has he done in recent times that your readers want to know more about him. If the subject is being mentioned in the newspapers, which stimulates readers' desire to know more about him, about his life. Where he was born? Who were his parents? What kind of upbringing he or she has had? How has he succeeded in life – his trials and tribulations or what has he done to merit a mention in the news columns of a newspaper? Before all these questions start nagging the reader, a journalist should publish such a person's profile to help satiate his readers' quest for more private information about an individual.

Once you have identified a subject for writing a profile, you have to research and find out all the details about him. Today you can do that by trawling the internet, if the person is known or famous. But for an 'unknown quantity' you can't depend on the internet or books or periodicals for that matter. In such a scenario talking or interviewing people close to the person, those who have seen him grow into the personality he is now is a must. You need to identify people associated with your subject and interview them to find more details about the subject. You should also talk to people or experts in the same field or people who are either his peers (seniors) in the profession and also his contemporaries or rivals to get a correct picture about him.

As the best source of information about a person would be the person himself, one should speak or interview the subject himself whenever possible. Interviewing a person or people associated with him is the best to flush out (gather) information about him or her. You can get authentic information (the facts), anecdotes, right quotes and also his opinion on various issues, personal information like his likes and dislikes, his hobbies and how he approaches his work. During an interview, you can also observe the subject closely, watch his

mannerisms, his reaction to various questions, his body language etc and putting all such information would help the reader understand the subject of the profile better.

Profiles have to be balanced, they should not only mention about the good work done by the subject, his strengths, but also bring out his mistakes and his weaknesses. Profiles should talk about a person's past, his present and his future.

TIPS TO WRITE A GOOD PROFILE

Lead: The lead must typify the essential core of the individual's personality or character. Try to choose a paradox so that the reader is forced to ask, "How can this be?" The selection of the anecdote requires the writer to perform a mini psychoanalysis on the subject. Ask yourself, "What qualities make the subject stand out from his or her fellow human beings?" What aspects make them interesting to your readers?

Justification: Take an idea imparted from the lead, sum it up in a general statement and then add three disparate achievements to it. For example: (1) the subject owns 14 Porches (suggests wealth); (2) he has 15 affairs (connotes a kind of roguish and tacky charm); and, (3) he writes a syndicated column that's published in 2000 newspapers all over the world (indicates success in his chosen profession.)

Note that these qualities cannot be deduced from one another. (E.g. Wealth does not imply charm or charm literacy.) Once again, there is an element of a paradox here — a contradiction seemingly exists. How can these qualities co-exist within one person?

Amplification: This section is comprised of the subject's present-day doings and achievements. It is generally easy to write but there is an inherent problem — the story becomes so upbeat that the subject ends up seemingly too good to be true and the story loses credibility. To allay the reader's growing skepticism you have to introduce a "twist or jolt".

Twist or jolt: A twist or jolt typically reflects discredit (by giving some negative traits of his character or negative things he has done) on your interview subject but usually in a nice or benign way. Sometimes if the person is a real hard case the twist or jolt is presented in a less flattering way. This shows that the hero of the story has human flaws and this causes the reader to formulate a new question: "How did the person get that way?" This invariably leads us into our next section.

Flashback or History: The flashback is used to illustrate how the subject became the person he is today. It is typically a chronological account of his life and his achievements. It is used to bring the story back up to the present and then, just when the person is becoming larger than life you throw in another twist.

Twist: This twist is usually not as nice as the first one. It may deal with such things as a personal failure in their chosen profession (a failed novel, movie, etc.), a failed relationship (the subject is involved in a nasty divorce), battling personal demons such as drug or alcohol addiction, or financial loss. By now the reader has learned of the subject's present and his or her past. All that's left to wonder about is their future.

Future: Outline the subject's plans, hopes and goals for the future. Write about new projects the subject has on the go (i.e. the new novel, movie, etc. they're working on), changes in their personal life (i.e. about to marry again), or some financial success (i.e. struck it rich by investing in crude oil companies, etc.) With the future sketched out, all that remains is the closing anecdote.

Ending: This could be done with an anecdote that must have some connection with the opening lead. It should be an anecdote or incident that brings out the essential quality of the subject. (eg. if the opening anecdote involved an incident with a mountain lion when the subject was age 14, the closer might show that the subject still after big game but instead of hunting them with a gun he/she now hunts them with a camera.)