

Features Writing Techniques

Feature Story vs. News Story

Hard news stories move briskly through the five W's and the H, packing in just enough detail to give readers a clear picture of the news. Immediacy is everything in hard news. In features, the immediacy of the event is secondary. It's replaced by reader interest. Bare facts are surrounded by elaboration, interpretation, mood, context, detailed description, emotion, irony and humor.

The goal of a feature story is to communicate the truth -- not fiction -- in a different way than a hard news story.

Writing Process

Story Ideas

Feature story ideas come from everywhere -- from your editor, personal observation, conversations overheard in the dining facility, etc.

Once you have a story idea, decide exactly what focus you want to emphasize.

Your focus is the angle you want for the story.

Remember your audience -- who you're writing for when writing features.

Collecting the Information

Always do background research for your story, if possible. You must have a clear idea of your subject before you set the interview.

Plan your questions Always collect more information than you need. It's better than not enough. Capture the emotion. People want to know how your subject feels about why he/she does something. Use all your senses. See, hear, smell, touch, taste. Make notes of how people move, dress, speak, etc. Observe. Train yourself to notice everything.

Write the story

- Use descriptive verbs and nouns instead of adverbs and adjectives.
- Use only the best quotes. The quotes must SAY or SHOW something.
- Be specific in description. Create a detailed picture the reader can SEE.

Revise and rewrite

Write the story, then polish it. Test your story by asking "What is this story about?" Your lead and focus transition should answer that question.

Feature Writing Techniques

Figurative language helps recreate scenes or sensations. It's how a writer shows vs. tells the story. Devices include:

- Metaphor -- An implied comparison between two unlike things. (EXAMPLE: To the soldiers in his unit, Jacobs walks on water.)
- Simile -- A stated comparison between two unlike things. (EXAMPLE: The borders in Israel shift almost as often as the sands in the Judean Hills.)
- Personification-- Giving life-like characteristics to something lifeless.
- Hyperbole -- Emphasizing something by deliberately overstating or understating it.
- Good feature stories contain anecdotes, description, attributive verbs and direct quotes.