

Unit Introduction



So far, your news writing training has been very structured. In writing news, it's laid out like a map: lead, bridge and body. News is important -- vital, in fact -- but in the long run it can be dry. News writing provides facts. It informs.

The feature story *entertains*.

Why do we write features? They help boost morale, and people like reading about themselves and others. On a more practical plane, though, let's face it: There's just not all that much hard news on military bases. Plus, most military publications are weeklies, so by the time a lot of hard news is printed, it's old news. Features can help mitigate that loss of news value.

Unit Objective

- Write a feature story

Unit Overview

- Parts of the feature story
 - Lead
 - Bridge
 - Body
 - Conclusion
- Interviewing

Feature writing

The challenge of feature writing is to make the article irresistible to read. You must pull the reader in with words. In feature writing there are fewer constraints, but you still must make the story clear and concise, and more importantly – **factually correct**.

The meek may very well inherit the earth, but they will probably spend most of their time on it waiting for deliveries, failing to get refunds on shoddy merchandise, and getting pushed around by customer service personnel.

“How to complain effectively” by Christine Winter, Chicago Tribune

Feature writing

A feature story can be about anything. It can make us laugh and it can make us cry. What you have to decide, as a PAO, editor, or feature writer is what kind of story works for your type of publication.

Children standing in the aisle, children sitting triple on the seats, children sitting on other children. So many children, in fact, that the policeman said he could not even see into the school bus windows.

Anne Keegan, Chicago Tribune

The Parts of a Feature Story

This is the part of the story that connects your lead to the body of your story. Some call it the bridge, some the focus, and it has been referred to as the nutgraf. What is a nutgraf? Think of it as the best part of the story. The paraGRAPH where the nut is stored. The place that tells us why we are reading this story.

Tie it back to your lead

Feature Lead

Bridge

Body

Perspective
Quotes
Description

Conclusion

CHOOSE ONE:

Summary lead
Narrative lead
Descriptive lead
Teaser lead
Freak lead
Direct address lead
Quote lead
Question lead
Combination lead

Through the use of description, quotes and various techniques tell the story in a colorful and interesting manner.

Luring 'Green' Customers

Companies pursue the ecology-minded shopper

By Michael Freitag

For six months, Paula Young has been buying "environment friendly" products like cat litter made from recycled newspaper and trash bags and disposable diapers made with biodegradable plastic.

Young, a 35-year-old commercial artist, said she became a "green consumer" after thinking about the number of her son's disposable diapers she was placing each week in the landfill near her home in Sudbury, Mass. "I'm not really an advocate," she said, "but I wanted to do something about the environment in my own small way."

She is not alone. A growing number of consumers are basing their purchases on environmental concerns, marketing experts say. And companies are beginning to devise marketing strategies that address them.

"I think we are about three years away from the point where 'environmental' will be as popular a marketing tool as 'natural' is now," said Joel Mokower, who is working on a guide on "green products" in the United States that will be published in April by Viking Penguin. Some major consumer product companies – like Procter and Gamble, McDonald's,.....

Feature Lead

(First paragraph)
Opening anecdote, focusing on an individual

(Second paragraph)
Loosely hook the anecdote into the point of the article, easing the reader into the piece

Focus / nutgraf

(Third paragraph / NUT GRAF)
Tell the reader what the story is going to be about

Body

(Fourth paragraph)
Introduce a quote from an expert or authority on the subject, or from a person central to the story



Conclusion

(Final Paragraph)
Ties back into the lead.

The feature lead

The feature lead is just like an attention step in a speech. Its purpose is to get your attention. In this lesson we will cover nine-feature leads:

Summary

Narrative

Descriptive

Teaser

Freak

Direct Address

Quote

Question

Combination



Could a story about tattoos becoming an object of beauty for women make a good feature story?

What are you going to write about?

The Summary Lead

Strong winds, combined lethally with a fire in a Queens high-rise building Thursday, created a “blowtorch” that roared through an apartment building and into a hallway, killing three people and injuring 22.

This lead summarizes the events and uses strong imagery to do it.

Blowtorch

Roared

Lethal



The Summary Lead

Two veteran motion picture industry executives were chosen today by the board of Walt Disney Productions here to head the troubled company a mouse built.



"Michael Eisner, what's-his-name and Cynthia Harris last September 24th at Disneyland."

This is not as strong as the first lead, but the writer could not resist the play on words, "the troubled company a mouse built." The writer didn't have to name the mouse, because most people are quite familiar with this "corporate symbol." In fact the caption of this photo (found on the internet, by the way) called the mouse "what's his name."

The Narrative Lead

VENTURA Calif. - Louis Chacon telephones the sheriff's office here recently and complained that there was a big snake in a toilet at the house he had just moved into.

Deputies investigated and found nothing in the bowl.

Chacon explained to them that the snake was very sneaky and only stuck its head out of a hole in the bottom of the commode when it thought no one was looking - that is, when a person had his back to the bowl.

Ouch! This narrative lead not only tells a story but the narrative plays out in our heads like a video camera. It is chronological, suspenseful, and will certainly make the reader want to finish the story. It plays on a common irrational fear.

The Descriptive Lead

Instantly, the fuel mix exploded into a tower of red, twisting flames churning wildly upward. Soon the blaze engulfed the building, its thick, black smoke darkening the morning sky.

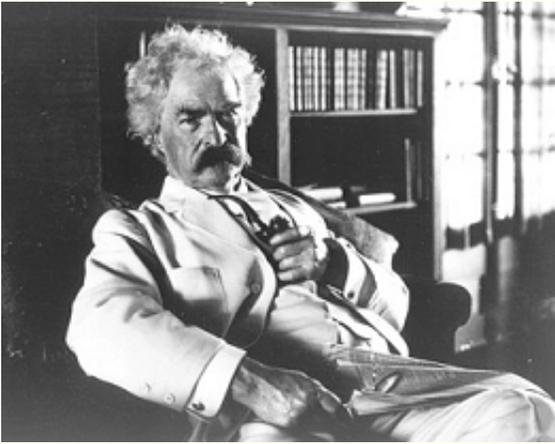
A descriptive lead is colorful. Use all your senses to describe the event. The words in red and bold should bring out the images in your brain.



Could a friend of yours who left the service to start a rock band make a good feature story?

What are you going to write about?

The Descriptive Lead



Mark Twain once said, "Don't say the old lady screamed. Bring her on and let her scream."

What Twain was saying was "show, don't tell."



The Descriptive Lead

Hot exhaust from a line of idling tractor trailers sets the rain caps on top of the its exhaust stacks flapping in a trucker's farewell wave as Curameng springs into the cab.

The roar of the 400-horsepower, turbocharged Cummins diesel engine competes with the stereo playing inside.



In writing your lead, particulars are good. You are drawing a picture for the reader. Words like “hot exhaust” make us mentally step back lest our fingers are burned. “Exhaust flaps flapping” bring forth memories or imaginings of the sounds of “tinny” metal bouncing on the bursts of hot exhaust. The driver does not simply get into the cab, but he “springs” into the cab, where we can envision a strident, single, athletic movement.

The Descriptive Lead

The 35-year-old Puckett, a 5-foot-8-inch, 216-pound knockwurst of a man, swings with a kick that could start a Harley Fat Boy and chugs around the outfield like the little engine that could. Diminutive, impish, always hustling, he has been as essential to midsummer nights as Puck himself.

Kostya Kennedy, Sports Illustrated

Kirby Puckett is described as a knockwurst of a man. It is an allusion to a sausage, but a sausage that has power like "a kick that could start a Harley Fat Boy." Anyone who knows motorcycles knows that a one-leg movement to start a Harley Davidson Fat Boy has to be powerful and quick. Kirby Puckett is described in terms of being "diminutive, impish," but the writer is quick to point out Puckett is essential to the game of baseball's "midsummer nights" as Shakespeare's main character Puck (a fairy creature) is essential to the play "A Midsummer Night's Dream." By doing so, Kennedy has given Puckett high praise using a literary allusion.



The Descriptive Lead

If researchers can perfect a new laser detection technique, doctors may start spotting cancerous breast tumors not much bigger than the period at the end of this sentence.

The author of this descriptive lead does not have to draw you a picture to get the point across. This is a common enough type of lead, and more than effective for what the author wants to do.



Could a story about the world's number one hot dog lover be a good feature story?

What are you going to write about?

The Teaser Lead

It is mid-afternoon on a Sunday afternoon in August, and the fog hugging the Golden Gate Bridge and rocky coastline finally has lifted. Tourists escaping the cable-car routine, locals fleeing cramped apartments, surfers who live on the edges of the city - they're all drawn here for one thing: Ocean Beach.

With the long expanse of fine sand and the lull of crashing waves, it looks like a California postcard.

And that is what makes this such a perfect place to die.

At this point if you're not feeling an overwhelming curiosity on why a beach is such a beautiful place to die, than you must be dead already! Where is this story going? Is this a story on suicides? Is this a story on a beachfront cemetery?

The line, "And that is what makes this such a perfect place to die" is the perfect line to make the reader turn the page.

The Freak Lead

John Scheer has been designing women's clothes for more than half his life.

He is now 10.

In your brain you should be going, "Whoa. Ten? You mean...Nah, he started at five years of age? How is that possible?"

The Direct Address Lead

You do not think that a Hollywood-perfect small town would go gaga over garbage cans, sparking a trend in trash that some predict will sweep the nation.

You also would not think a 66-year-old photographer and artist who wears rainbow colored suspenders would be the San Francisco latest trendsetter.

But then, you've never met Dick Horn - lover of rainbows, loather of over organization and painter of garbage cans.

The writer is addressing "YOU," yes, you. The start of every direct address lead is the subjective personal pronoun.

The Quote Lead

Imagine your story starting out this way.

“Sometimes history is written in hot, little dusty places on the Earth,” Maj. Gen. James N. Mattis, commander of the 1st Marine Division, told his troops when the mission to escort him into the city was done. “That’s what we did today, and it’s good history.”

The Quote Lead

What if the story started this way?

“It may be in the ninth inning, and we may be behind in the score, but I see my bases loaded and Jesus Christ coming to bat.”

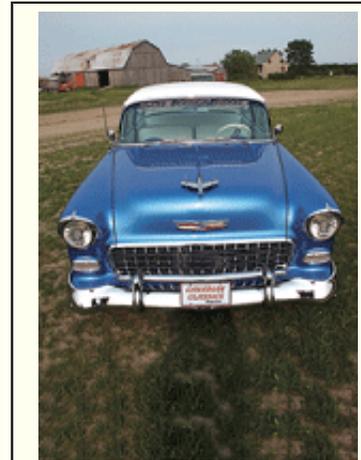
Something is about to happen. It makes you want to read the story because it built up a sense of expectation, right? In baseball, loaded bases and a particularly good hitter (Jesus Christ) *would be the high point of any game.*

The Quote Lead

If you are going to start out your story with a quote, make it a good quote. In fact, make it an outstanding quote.

“By the time they get in here, there’s no more belligerence, no more fight,” said a prison hospital attendant. “They are really quite cooperative and polite at this final stage. They just sit there and quietly die.”

The above quote is attributed to a prison hospital attendant in Northern Ireland’s Maze Prison where IRA men were starving themselves to death.



Could the national obsession about cars make a good feature story?

What are you going to write about?

The Quote Lead

The quote you choose to start off your story is so important that Douglas Looney of Sports Illustrated said the following:

"I would fly across the country for one quote."

You may not have to do that, but you should take the time to look for the best quote possible to start your story. If you cannot find a good one, then do not start your feature with a quote lead. Ask yourself, is it worthy to start the story? Well, is it?

The quote lead quiz

Click on the best quote to start a feature story for your command paper.

Quote 1

"His dedication and ingenuity are evident in every thing he does."

Quote 2

"I received a lot of support from my NCOIC and another cook who appeared before (Cook of the Quarter) board."

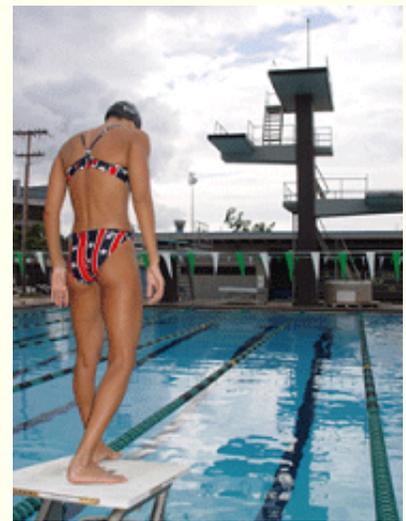
Quote 3 "I get home at eight. I'm so stressed and tense I can't relax. For the last three days, I've had about 16, no 18 hours of sleep. Sometimes I start talking and I get so worked up I start crying. It's just a release."

The Question Lead

Where are the scariest, most scream-inducing gut-wrenching roller coasters in the world?

If you are a lover of roller coasters, you just might like the above lead. The lead makes you ask yourself the question, "You know, I never thought about it before, but where are the scariest, most scream-inducing gut-wrenching roller coasters? I really would like to know!"

For a question lead to be truly effective the question must truly grab the readers' attention and arouse curiosity.



Could a story about someone training for the Olympics make a good feature story?

What are you going to write about?

The Combination Lead

Take blood from the dead and give to the living?

In Russia they do.

Sgt. Cynthia P. Clinger, a medical sergeant from Fort Knox, Ky., says there is not a need for blood drives like there is here. They take living blood cells from cadavers, and as long as that person was healthy, they can use the blood for transfusions.

Is this a combination question/narrative lead?



Could a story about a friend who took an unusual vacation make a good feature story?

What are you going to write about?

Bridge / nutgraf

O.K. You have written a GREAT lead. So now you have to write the second part of your feature story. Some know it as a nutgraf, or the bridge. *For this lesson we will refer to it as the bridge.* This part of the feature story tells the reader why they are reading the feature article in the first place. If you want to keep your reader long enough to read the BODY then place the BRIDGE high in the story, approximately in the fourth or fifth paragraph.

The Descriptive Lead

Viola Marriot wakes up every morning at 5:30 with her gunnery sergeant husband, and for the next 12 hours, she will be at home and at work.

Although her first child will not arrive until 6:45, the early morning allows her time to do paperwork, clean the house and cook breakfast.

Bridge

This has been her lifestyle for the last three years as a licensed child care provider, one of the most demanding jobs as more and more dual-income military families try to find affordable alternatives to institutional care.

The Summary Lead

The winner was weeping, the loser was seething, and the last place finisher was accused of influencing the outcome.

The fans? Well, they just went back to their reading.

Bridge

Such was the scene Wednesday morning at the Indiana University Track Stadium following the first-ever women's race walking event in the Pan American Games.

The BRIDGE focuses the story.

A reporter and an editor talk about the bridge

Reporter: I want to write a story on a marathon runner.

Editor: So? This paper has done six stories on marathon runners in the last 3 years.

Reporter: Well, it's really a story on the Navy Physical Fitness Program.

Editor: Isn't that just a little broad?

Reporter: Well it's about a sailor who runs marathons!

Editor: Isn't that just a little vague?

Reporter: Vague? How so?

Editor: What makes the runner so special?

Reporter: Well, she is very physically fit, and she does it to keep physically and mentally tough. She's a good example.

Editor: That's fine, but it sounds like it came out of a can. It's been done before, and I suppose we will do it again. (Sounding bored). I suppose we can do the story. It's just too bad there isn't something fresh you can tell our readers.

(The reporter thinks for a moment.)

Reporter: Well, she does have a unique way of training.

Editor: How so?

Reporter: She runs 15 miles a day on a cinder track, carrying 10-pound weights in each hand. She wears custom made coarse wool running clothes, and she ALWAYS runs the last five miles barefoot.

Editor: Now, you can write the story.

A story with a BRIDGE - titled: Other People's WHEAT, By Stephen P. Williams, New York Times.

There's a framed color portrait of gleaming trucks and combines in the trailer that is home to Belinda and Delton Robison as they follow the ripening wheat from Texas in the early spring to Montana, where it sometimes snows on the harvest. Delton likes shiny things and trades his six combines in every year, the way some people trade in Cadillacs. The cockpit of one of this year's four-wheel-drive John Deere 9600's is an air-conditioned tinted glass box that floats two stories above the dusty chaos of the wheat field. Looking out from Delton's brown leatherette seat, with country music coming over the stereo, the orderly rows of wheat below seem distant. The roar of the spinning header is not louder than a comforting hum as it chops the grain and feeds it into the heart of the combine, where a large steel cylinder rubs against a concave plate to free the berries from the chaff.

The Descriptive Lead

By fall, the Robisons will have cut about 35,000 acres of other people's wheat. Farmers hire harvesters, also known as weed whackers, cutters and custom crusties, because the \$168,000 combines, in use on each farm only one week or so a year, aren't cost effective. Crews are.

Bridge

Most modern harvesters couldn't survive without hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of computers and heavy machinery. The Robisons have about \$1.5 million tied up in machinery alone. They move in a spotless mile-long convoy of seven red dump trucks pulling the green combines; three red service trucks outfitted with color-coded tools, generators and welders; Belinda's van; Delton's pickup, and four house trailers with showers, VCRs and bikes for the Robison's three kids. Most of the mud flaps sport chrome silhouettes of an impossibly shapely woman, except for those on Belinda's van, which are decorated with Grecian male torsos.

Body

--Story continued on next page.

--Story continued from previous page

When the 12 young crew members arrived at the Robison family farm in Candia, Kan., in April, they were as green as the wheat, lured from across the Midwest by ads in farm publications that promised the chance to "experience the country as a combiner." Most were farm-raised, but few had ever followed the harvest. Their pay is \$1,200 a month, plus room and board, which is better than working at a convenience store. Most return to family farms or college in the winter. "We enjoy the work because we're free," Heath DeWeese, 19, says. "We've got the best machinery. Going down the road everyone stares at you and your combine and it makes you feel like you're king of the road."

Belinda, 35, drives, cooks (she rarely repeats the same menu twice in a month) and does the books. When the men aren't cutting, they're fixing machines, cleaning machines or driving machines.

Staying awake can be tough. Tod Davis, 23, who has harvested for five seasons, sometimes relies on chemicals to keep him going. "Take two Vivarin with a liter of Pepsi and you're wired to go," he says.

The crew gets time off only when it rains, because, as the 36-year-old Delton says, "If I got time and I can do it, I'm gonna cut it." One day, as a great bank of blue clouds formed in the distance in Tribune, Kan., Delton said, "I hope that cloud doesn't go and do something stupid and come over this way."

The crew, banging on a broken-down combine to get it running again, was rooting for the storm.

Body

Conclusion

Body

SO LET'S TALK ABOUT THE BODY OF YOUR FEATURE. There are several things you can do to punch up the body of your feature story. In the story below note the use of **descriptive words** to capture the emotion of a particular moment in time. The Scud missile was the most potent weapon in the Iraqi armory during the Persian Gulf War of 1991. *New York Times* journalist Eric Schmitt describes the efforts of US Air Force Strike Eagle crews to destroy Scud missile launchers and other Iraqi targets during Operation Desert Storm.

Scud Hunting ERIC SCHMITT

IN SAUDI ARABIA, FEB. 23 -- Preparations for an allied ground offensive have brought no respite for the men who fly the Air Force's F-15E Strike Eagle jets. For them, the air war remains a deadly race of dodging **spitting anti-aircraft guns** and **streaking rockets** over targets they have christened Scudville, Samstown, and Rat a Tat Tat.

In the crater-pocked landscape they stalk their quarry: tanks, bridges and the main targets, long-range Scud missiles.

The search is carried out in a **cramped cockpit** for up to eight hours, with fliers peering into the darkness and then down to the **surreal glow** of an infrared radar screen that turns night into day on the ground below.

The two-man F-15E crews on Scud patrol do not talk openly about death or fatigue, their two greatest worries. They busy themselves with routine tasks to crowd out **fears of exploding surface-to-air missiles**. They speak of **'spanking'** a 60-ton Iraqi tank they blast into a **burning metal carcass** with a laser-guided 5000-pound bomb.

'You're trained to hit targets, not people, so you never have to see anyone eye to eye,' said 1st Lt. Glenn G. Watson, a 24-year-old weapons officer from Austin, Tex. 'But at night, you are alone in bed knowing there are people out there and you're bombing them.' At a sprawling air base [careful – "sprawling" tends toward cliché] in central Saudi Arabia, two squadrons...



You can add life to your feature by using figures of speech. In this lesson we will cover:



- Metaphors
- Similes
- Personifications
- Hyperboles
- Anecdotes

Body

Metaphor

The word metaphor comes from the Greeks. Its original meaning is “carry something across” or “transfer.”

The common dictionary definition: “a comparison between two things, based on resemblance or similarity, without using “like” or “as.”

But the ancient Greeks seem to have a better definition when it comes to feature writing: “the transferring of things and words from the proper significance to an improper similitude for the sake of beauty, necessity, polish, or emphasis.”

In other words, you should use metaphors ONLY for the sake of beauty, necessity, polish or emphasis. It should bring something to your story, help to provide a way for the reader to visualize or see the story play out in more colorful terms.

The following are examples of metaphors:

She has a sea of troubles.

He knew he was going to be toast when he got home.

Watch out for DEAD METAPHORS - they are overused, trite, and everyone has heard them.

DO NOT USE THEM. If you use them in your feature assignment, you will lose points.

Let's look at some examples of some fresher metaphors.

Body

Metaphor

The news that ignited his face snuffed out her smile.

The doctor inspected the rash with a vulture's devotion.

On the sidewalk was yesterday's paper, an ink-stained sponge.

Body

Reasons to use metaphors

1. They enliven ordinary language.
 - Readers like reading things in new and interesting ways.
2. They encourage interpretation. Yes, sometimes people like to think.
 - The line: "On the sidewalk was yesterday's paper, an ink-stained sponge" allows you to work at imagining the image. It allows the reader the chance to imagine that paper in the "mind's eye."
3. Metaphors are more efficient than ordinary language.
 - Instead of writing: "My dorm is small. There is very little room, and it's drab and poorly lit. I can barely get out of it in the morning. I feel like there is nowhere to go, and no one wants me to leave my room."
 - Say it in fewer words: "My dorm is a prison."
 - The above five-word sentence says it all, and what's more, you have eliminated 38 words.

Body

Similes (SI H-mih-lees)

Similes are comparisons that show how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in one important way to the story or the point the author is trying to make. A simile is usually introduced by the words "like" or "as."

Like the metaphor, the simile is to make writing more interesting or entertaining.

His face was as ugly as old running shoes.

Mr. Smith had a mind like a computer.

Do you remember the story, "Other People's Wheat" near the beginning of this lesson? Look at this quote:

When the 12 young crew members arrived at the Robinson family farm in Candia, Kan., in April, they were as green as the wheat...

"...green as the wheat..." is another way as saying they were new to the business.

Body

Transitions

One way improve the copy in the body of your feature is to use transitions. Transition literally means movement from one place to another. What you have to do is find a word that carries the reader into a new sentence or paragraph.

Here is a list of useful transitional words arranged according to functions.

Time	Contrast	Cause/Effect	General to Specific
Then Now Next First Second	However Nevertheless Yet Even through despite	Therefore Thus Hence Consequence so	In fact Especially For instance For example
Reference	Summary	Attitude	Addition
The former The latter The following	In summary To sum up In conclusion	Fortunately Unfortunately naturally	Also Too Furthermore Moreover

Body

Transitions

Let us look at a paragraph with the transitions removed.

When I first began attending college, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I am an accounting major. I will probably go into business for myself as a tax accountant. I have a much better idea of my goals. Last year I didn't know what to do with my major. When I was a freshman, I didn't even know I'd be an accounting major. Three years can make a lot of differences in terms of a young woman's career.

Now let us put them into the paragraph.

*When I first began attending college, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. **Now** I am an accounting major, **and I know that someday**, I will probably go into business for myself as a tax accountant. **At the present time**, I have a much better idea of my goals. **Last year, however**, I would did not know what to do with my major. When I was a freshman, I didn't even know I'd be an accounting major. **This shows that** three years can certainly make a lot of differences in terms of a young woman's career.*

Body

Personification



Do you recognize this fellow? This is the most familiar symbol for our country. Uncle Sam is a personification, representing our country by a tall lanky fellow, not unlike Lincoln.

In the past "Uncle Sam" has been depicted in cartoons as compassionate, but not unwilling to roll up his sleeves and get into a fight.

Body

Personification



CHARLES DELIUS

Vers le Trocadéro, Paris 1926

Paris has always been described as a woman.

“Paris is the queen of cities.”

Body

I am silver and exact.
I have no preconceptions.
What I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful.

What is this poem personifying? Click on the mouse to see the answer.



Personification



Personification is the act of attributing human characteristics to abstract ideas or things.

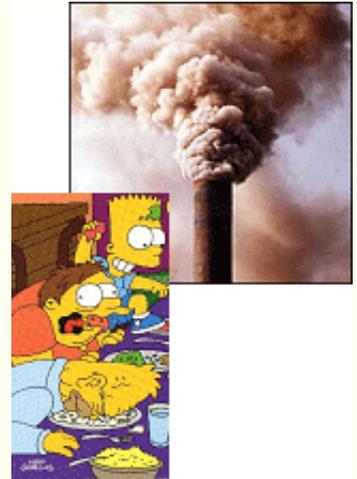
Sylvia Plath's poem, "Mirror," seems to be talking. She describes, or rather the mirror describes itself as "silver" and without preconceptions. The mirror is talking as if alive.

I am silver and exact.
I have no preconceptions.
What I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.
I am not cruel, only truthful.

Body

The smokestack belched out black fumes.

A smokestack cannot belch. It is not human. But in feature writing it's OK for it to belch. Let it belch.



Body



Some said that the drill sergeant's eyes were as deep as "the black pits of hell."

However scary the drill sergeant's eyes were, they are not the pits of hell. But in writing they could be the personification of the pits of hell. After all, this carries over a sense of fear that the recruit is feeling.

Hyperbole (Hi-PER-bowl-lee)

A hyperbole is an exaggeration. It is used for effect and is not to be taken literally.

The white-coated fellow made **mile-high** ice cream cones.



Well, we know that no can really make "mile-high ice cream cones."

We do, don't we?

Hyperbole



The Web Site usingenglish.com describes hyperbole as the following:

"...over statement or exaggerated language that distorts facts by making them much bigger than they are if looked at objectively. The media use it a lot to make stories seem more important or interesting than they really are (an apparently unfair boxing decision was described as the 'crime of the century' by one newspaper which seems excessive when compared to murder).

"Professor Wilson was far larger than the observatory he worked in. He was a giant in a small institution."

Anecdotes

Let's say you're doing a story on the small portions that are given by upscale restaurants. Your story might include the following anecdote:



"While attending a private dinner party one evening, Alfred Hitchcock, whose famously portly profile portrayed a certain fondness for food, was dismayed to find that the portions being served were far from adequate.

"At the end of the evening, the host bid Hitchcock farewell. 'I do hope you will dine with us again soon,' she added.

"'By all means,' Hitchcock dryly replied. 'Let's start now.'"

The key is to make the anecdote relevant and interesting enough it enhances the point of your story.

Encourage your interview subject to provide anecdotes, especially those that involve them personally.

"Bud:" Example of personification in a feature story:

RECYCLE

Bud's short life here has been traumatic. He was ripped from his family of six, physically drained and disfigured by strangers and then abandoned along a dark roadside. But thanks to an alert soldier, Bud's future looks bright.

Feature Lead

Bud, the aluminum can, was picked up and deposited in one of the 350 white and blue recycling boxes on post. He is one of the thousands of cans this year that will complete a journey of collection, compacting, melting and remolding through the fort's and the Alcoa Recycling Company's aluminum recycling programs. At the end of the journey, Bud will emerge as a shiny new can.

Bridge

Bud is not the first can to begin this journey. The fort began recycling in October 1989, according to program coordinator colleen Wheeler, chief of the fort's supply and maintenance branch.

Body

"It all started with Congress, who told Department of the Army, who told Training and Doctrine Command, who told Fort Harrison, 'You will start recycling,'" Wheeler said.

"We contacted Alcoa, and the company got us started by giving us 250 collection boxes and loaning us a couple of collection trailers." She said the program got off to a slow start, taking about four months to fill the first trailer with cans donated by the community. Each trailer is a giant blue cage on wheels. They measure 12 feet long, 6 feet wide and 6 feet high. They look more suited for caging a polar bear than a pyramid of empty cans.

By comparison, it now takes about a month to fill a trailer, Wheeler said. She credits command and community involvement for a portion of the increase.

"Command interest and support has helped us a lot," Wheeler said.

"The headquarters has told the commands here to support recycling, and they do.

She said the biggest recycling surge came this spring when the post's contracted soft drink vendor switched from steel to aluminum cans, greatly increasing the supply of recyclable aluminum cans.

--Story continued on next page

--Continued from previous page

Meanwhile, back in his cardboard collection box, Bud, the recyclable can, anxiously awaits pickup during a morning collection run Monday, Wednesday or Friday. When Bud is lifted from the box, he falls into the hardworking hands of Terry Van Skyock and Kelly Akers, the two post employees who do day-to-day recycling work.

Conclusion

"In an average week, we'll pick up about 120 bags," Van Skyock said. "I expect we'll be picking up a lot more after the post landfill closes in October."

Feature conclusions

Every feature lead has a complementary feature conclusion. Use the lead as your blueprint for the conclusion:

If your lead is a narrative or descriptive lead, consider finishing or tying back to it in the conclusion.

If you ask a question in the lead, consider giving an answer -- perhaps one you've been trying to steer the reader toward throughout the story.

If you have a quote lead, consider whether a quote conclusion might be effective.

Whatever you choose to do, the conclusion is just as important as the lead: it must make the reader feel as though the story is complete, and he/she has gotten everything out of that story that you promised in the beginning. Your task with the conclusion is to bring the reader "full circle."

Note: A list of hours of operation, phone numbers, etc., is not a feature conclusion! Deductions will be taken if you use this kind of conclusion.

Feature Story Examples

The following are feature stories saved in a pdf format. Click on the files and review them. Try to find the lead, bridge (nutgraph), body, and conclusion while you study them.

[The Big Mac Attack](#)

[Pilot follows in footsteps of fighter-flying father](#)

[Married to the military](#)

The Art of the Interview

A big part of writing a feature is knowing how to interview. It takes skill, finesse and a willingness to ***LISTEN.***



There are two types of interviews:
Planned
Unplanned



A planned interview

This is the recommended type of interview. This allows you time to do some research before the interview is conducted.

A reporter once was working on a story about a CEO of an important firm in the community. After the reporter filed his story, his editor who knew the CEO, asked the reporter why he didn't include the fact that the CEO had once been a clown in the circus. The reporter went back to the CEO and asked, "Why didn't you tell me you were a clown in the circus?" The CEO responded, "Because you never asked..."

The unplanned interview

Remember the five Ws? Use basic journalism techniques to get the who, what, when, where and why of the story. You are going to have to think on your feet to get all the information you need. If you don't, you will have to set up another interview.

What to do before the interview

RESEARCH your subject.

1. Check the internet
3. Check the library
5. Talk to individuals in the same profession

These sources will provide you with questions to ask and possibly a direction for your feature article.

Conduct a preliminary interview

Reporter: Hello, Colonel Smith? This is Lieutenant Peters. I was wondering if I could ask you a few questions before the interview on September 8th.

Smith: Sure, what's up?

Reporter: First of all, could you give me a few names of individuals who you served with in your last command? I would like to talk to a few extra people to really get an understanding of your time in the 101st Airborne.

Smith: Well, there are a few people you could talk to. I have a sergeant major who served with me. He and I graduated from the same school when we were both enlisted.

Reporter: You held enlisted rank?

Smith: I sure did. Kowalski knew me when I was a private.

Reporter: I would very much like to talk to him.

Smith: I'll get his number.

Reporter: Sir, is there a time we can send the photographer out to your office?

Smith: Let me check my calendar.

Prepare Questions before the Interview

Prepare a list of questions before you go into the interview. Make sure you have more than you need. Your subjects may be very busy and don't have time to be WAITING for you to figure out your next question.

1. How long have you been a short order cook?
2. What is the hardest thing about the job?
3. Do you have to go to school to be a cook?
4. Where did you go?
5. What is the most complicated dish you ever made? And what is the recipe?
6. Can you crack an egg with one hand?
7. I saw in a movie a waitress yell to the short order cook in the back of a diner, "SOME BEATEN EGGS IN A FIGHT, WITH A PIG IN THE MIX." Is it true that short order cooks and waitresses have a special language for orders? If so could you tell us the code?

Memory Lane:

I can still remember my first interview. I was a brand new military journalist sent to the headquarters company to interview the Sgt. Maj. of our division.

The man did not smile. In fact, I believe that he never smiled in his life.

I asked him one question.

I asked him a second question, and then went blank.

I actually started to sweat. I was just about to open my mouth on a third question, when he said: "I got a lot of work to do. So, let's wrap this up."

It was then I went totally blank.

--Military Journalist,
MPAD, 1982

The Art of the Interview



Keep the door open to call them for additional information. *“Sir, may I call you in case I have to verify some facts?”* If you run out of questions, try this: *“Is there anything you would like to tell me?”*



Your job is to draw the person out. Asking them yes or no questions is not enough information to put together a story. You must craft together questions that get the person talking. If they say, “I’ve never told anyone this before...” You KNOW that the interview is going well!



A requirement of interviewing is to be polite. Do not rearrange their office, or intrude on their time by trying to stay longer than planned. Before the interview you should have found out how much time the subject has to spare. Use your time, but let them decide if you can stay longer.



Look interested (even if you have to fake it). By showing a child-like curiosity in the subject you may build that empathy needed for a successful interview. If you are doing an interview with a short-order cook, you might crack a few eggs to see what it's like. If your interview is with a paratrooper, ask if you can try on the chute. Everything is interesting. *You will be a poor reporter if you are bored.*



Ask questions that are relevant. Do not ask questions where you could have gotten information from somewhere else. A lot of military personnel develop military biographies. Civilian types have resumes. Looking over these documents before the interview will save time.

During the interview

Be prompt, even better...be early. But not TOO early!

Always ask permission if you are going to use a tape recorder. When you start the tape leave an identifier on the tape, "This is Lt. William Cain, about to conduct an interview with Jim Beesler. Mr. Beesler do you know that you're being recorded?"

Take good notes. A reporter's notebook seems to work best. It has a heavy hard back and the width is small enough to fit in any pocket.

Upon writing down a name, ask for the proper spelling. When you get it, draw a square around the name. This is a note to yourself that you checked the spelling.

If you don't understand something – say so.

"Sir, could you please explain that to me?"



The tape recorder concentrates on what is said, and allows YOU to concentrate on the description, setting, and atmosphere.

The tape recorder eliminates your interviewee ever saying the following: "I didn't say that."

Put fresh batteries into the recorder before the interview. There is nothing worse than losing an interview.

"I think when you go out to do an interview your only mission, really, is to come back and give the reader an idea of what the person's really like."

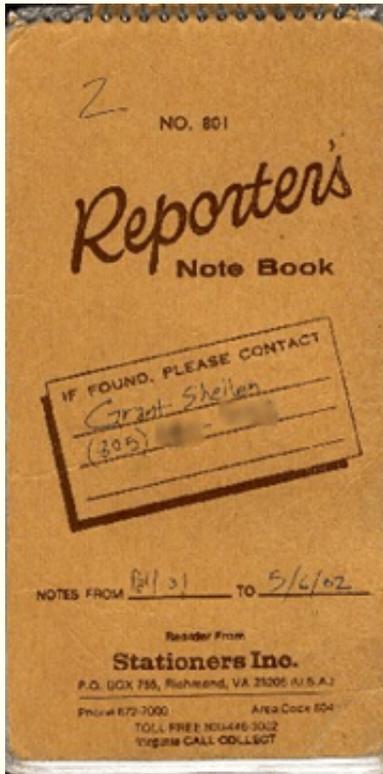
--Sally Quinn

A tape recorder captures everything in the room. It captures phone calls, people that come into the room to talk to your interview subject. It provides you with the sound of the office, the sound of the platoon training in the background, the sound of a kid asking "daddy" for a piece of candy. It captures atmosphere and color.

For instance, let's say you were recording an interview with a Colonel Smith on a bench near the parade field. When you listen to the tape you can hear platoons practicing close order drill in the background. He is talking over the noise, but for a moment he stops to listen to the troops out on the field.

"With the sound of a platoon sergeant barking out orders in the background, Smith stopped for a moment to listen. The look on his face was almost like he was listening to music. His music."

Taking Notes



ALWAYS, always supplement your recorder with GOOD notes. If something goes wrong with the recorder, you have NOTHING to fall back on.

Unfortunately, tapes usually have to be transcribed. So, be prepared to spend a lot of time listening to and rewinding your tape. Using a tape recorder takes time.

People are funny about tape recorders. You could possibly meet a person that actually “clams up” when you turn it on.

So what are you going to do?

“You know, we don’t need this on. I’ll just shut it off.”

“Interviewers today rely too much on the tape machine. They don’t listen. They don’t carry on a conversation, which the machine gives them a chance to do...”

George Plimpton

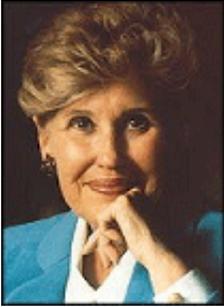
Taking Notes

It is hard to write every word when a person is talking. You might have to develop your own personal shorthand. People tend to speak at a higher rate of speed than the average person can write.

Word	Short Hand
extraordinary	extraord
Brigadier General	G *
Major General	G **
Lieutenant General	G ***
Sergeant Major	SMaj
Fort Leonard Wood	Ft LW
Court Martial	CM
October	Oct
HUMVEE	HMV

What kind of abbreviations is up to you? The key here is whatever works!

An interviewing style



Erma Bombeck was a well-known humorist . She was a housewife who took up writing columns for papers across the country. The following is an excerpt from an interview.

Reporter to Erma Bombeck: "Were you the funniest kid in your class?"

Bombeck: "No, I was the shyest."

Reporter: "Really? Many people would find that very surprising. How so? Why were you of all people so shy?"

Bombeck: "As a child I had a lot of insecurities. For a long time, it was hard for me to even go up to a person and shake their hand. Humor is just a cover-up for your insecurities. Why did I become a humorist -- I don't know, maybe it was to compensate for that shy girl that's still inside me. I think a lot of people do things because other people want them to do it that way. Do you know what I mean?"

Reporter: "Not exactly."

By saying "Not exactly" the reporter has just left the conversation open to more explanation. Don't accept "Do you know what I mean?" You want the interview subject to explain further.

After the interview review your notes!



If you have to fill in gaps or decipher abbreviations...it will be considerably easier immediately after the interview. Memory fades!

TYPICAL INTERVIEWING FAULTS

1. Failure to define and clearly state the purpose of the interview
2. Lack of preparation
3. Failure to probe ("Why? What do you mean by that?")
4. Vagueness (failure to ask for concrete details)
5. Convoluted or over-defined questions (interviewers making bad speeches rather than asking precise questions.)
6. Insensitivity
7. Failure to listen
8. Filibustering
9. Aimlessness



Unit Summary

We know that a feature story is to entertain. We have reviewed types of feature leads, and the overall structure of a feature story. Included in this lesson are even suggestions to improve your writing through the use of literary devices.

We strongly suggest that you review the sample feature stories included in this lesson. Use your local newspaper to see if you can spot a feature story and dissect the lead, bridge, body and conclusion in the story.

Remember, find someone to interview and apply the interviewing techniques pointed out in this lesson. Interviewing is basically meeting people and having an interest in who they are. Being a good interviewer takes confidence and a healthy curiosity about other people.

Make sure that you review your notes immediately after the interview and fill in any gaps that you might see.

You are telling a story in words. This assignment should be fun and entertaining for you, but for your reader as well.

