

The Art And Craft Of Feature Writing

Based on
The Wall Street Journal Guide

The Art and Craft of

Feature WRITING

From initial idea to final self-editing, a step-by-step guide to reporting and writing as a continuous, interrelated process—with emphasis on storytelling techniques

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The art and craft of feature writing is a nuanced and intricate form of journalism that transcends the mere reporting of facts. It allows writers to delve into the human experience, explore complex subjects, and weave narratives that resonate with readers on a deeper level. Unlike news articles that are often time-sensitive and focused on delivering information quickly, feature writing offers a canvas for creativity, storytelling, and in-depth analysis. This article aims to explore the various elements that constitute the art and craft of feature writing, the techniques employed by successful feature writers, and the role of research and interviews in creating compelling narratives.

Understanding Feature Writing

Feature writing is characterized by its depth, detail, and a focus on the human condition. It often covers a wide range of topics, including:

- Profiles of interesting individuals
- In-depth explorations of social issues
- Travel narratives
- Cultural critiques
- Personal essays

The goal is to engage the reader, provoke thought, and often elicit an emotional response. While news articles answer the "who, what, when, where, and why," feature articles delve into the "how" and "what does it mean," offering a more holistic view of the subject.

The Structure of Feature Articles

A well-crafted feature article typically follows a specific structure, though there is room for creativity. Common elements include:

1. **Lead:** The opening paragraph is crucial. It should hook the reader and provide a glimpse of the story. This can be achieved through an anecdote, a striking fact, or a provocative question.
2. **Nut Graph:** This paragraph follows the lead and explains the significance of the story. It sets the context and outlines what the reader can expect.
3. **Body:** The body of the article develops the story. It includes details, quotes, and insights that build upon the lead and nut graph. Writers often use sub-headings to break up the text and guide the reader.
4. **Conclusion:** The ending should resonate with the reader, leaving them with a lasting impression. It can tie back to the lead or provide a call to action.

Crafting the Story: Techniques and Styles

Feature writing is as much about technique as it is about style. Here are some techniques that successful feature writers employ:

1. Show, Don't Tell

One of the most effective techniques in feature writing is to "show" rather than "tell." This involves using descriptive language and vivid imagery to create a scene that allows readers to visualize the story. Instead of stating facts, writers should depict situations, emotions, and environments, allowing the reader to experience the narrative.

2. Character Development

In feature writing, characters are essential. Writers should take the time to develop their subjects, providing background information, personal anecdotes, and motivations. This depth creates empathy and connection between the reader and the subject.

3. Dialogue

Incorporating dialogue can bring a story to life. It adds authenticity and breaks up exposition. By using direct quotes, writers can allow readers to hear the voices of those involved in the story, making the piece more relatable and engaging.

4. Narrative Arc

Like a good story, feature articles often benefit from a narrative arc. This means establishing a beginning, middle, and end, which helps create tension and resolution. A well-structured narrative keeps readers engaged and invested in the outcome.

The Role of Research in Feature Writing

Research is a cornerstone of feature writing. Unlike news articles that may rely on quick facts, feature articles demand a deeper exploration of the topic. Here are some key aspects of research in feature writing:

1. Background Research

Before embarking on writing, feature writers must conduct thorough background research on their subject. This may involve reading books, articles, or reports to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Background research helps frame the narrative and provides context for the reader.

2. Interviews

Interviews are often the heart of feature writing. Engaging with subjects allows writers to uncover personal stories, insights, and emotions that enrich the narrative. Here are some tips for conducting effective interviews:

- **Prepare Questions:** Develop open-ended questions that encourage detailed responses.
- **Listen Actively:** Pay attention to the interviewee's answers and be willing to deviate from your questions to explore interesting avenues.
- **Build Rapport:** Establishing a connection can lead to more honest and revealing answers.

The Importance of Revision and Editing

Once a draft is complete, the revision process is vital in feature writing. This stage involves refining the narrative, clarifying ideas, and tightening the prose. Here are some steps to consider during the revision process:

1. **Read Aloud:** Hearing the text can help identify awkward phrasing and pacing issues.
2. **Check for Clarity:** Ensure that the story flows logically and that the main points are clear.
3. **Seek Feedback:** Sharing the article with peers or mentors can provide valuable insights and suggestions for improvement.
4. **Edit Ruthlessly:** Cut any unnecessary words or sections that do not contribute to the overall narrative.

Embracing the Challenges of Feature Writing

While feature writing can be immensely rewarding, it also presents unique challenges. Writers must navigate tight deadlines, manage extensive research, and grapple with writer's block. Here are some common challenges and ways to overcome them:

1. Time Management

Feature writing often requires significant time investment for research and interviews. To manage time effectively, writers should create a schedule that outlines their research, writing, and revision phases.

2. Overcoming Writer's Block

Writer's block can be daunting, but there are strategies to combat it:

- Free Writing: Set a timer and write continuously without worrying about grammar or structure.
- Change Environment: A new setting can spark inspiration and creativity.
- Take Breaks: Sometimes stepping away from the work can lead to new insights.

Conclusion

In summary, **the art and craft of feature writing** is a dynamic field that blends creativity with journalism. It allows writers to explore complex topics, share human stories, and engage readers on a profound level. By mastering the structure, employing effective techniques, conducting thorough research, and embracing the challenges of the craft, writers can produce feature articles that inform, inspire, and resonate with their audience. Whether you are a seasoned journalist or an aspiring writer, honing your feature writing skills can open doors to new opportunities and experiences in the world of storytelling.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is feature writing?

Feature writing is a style of journalism that focuses on in-depth storytelling, exploring human experiences, emotions, and detailed narratives, often going beyond just presenting facts.

What are the key elements of a compelling feature story?

Key elements include a strong lead, engaging anecdotes, thorough research, vivid descriptions, a clear structure, and a strong conclusion that ties back to the main theme.

How does feature writing differ from news writing?

Feature writing is more narrative and descriptive, allowing for a deeper exploration of a topic, while news writing is focused on delivering facts quickly and concisely.

What techniques can be used to enhance storytelling in feature writing?

Techniques such as using vivid imagery, incorporating quotes, creating a strong narrative arc, and utilizing character development can enhance storytelling.

How important is research in feature writing?

Research is crucial in feature writing as it provides depth and credibility, allowing writers to present accurate information and diverse perspectives.

What role does voice play in feature writing?

Voice is essential in feature writing as it helps convey the writer's personality and perspective, making the story more relatable and engaging for readers.

What are common themes explored in feature writing?

Common themes include human interest stories, social issues, cultural phenomena, personal journeys, and profiles of interesting individuals.

How can writers develop their own unique style in feature writing?

Writers can develop their unique style by reading widely, practicing regularly, experimenting with different formats, and finding their own voice and perspective.

What are some challenges faced in feature writing?

Challenges include maintaining reader interest, balancing storytelling with factual accuracy, managing extensive research, and meeting deadlines while ensuring quality.

How can digital platforms enhance feature writing?

Digital platforms allow for multimedia storytelling, enabling the incorporation of images, videos, and interactive elements that can enrich the reader's experience and engagement.

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