

How to Write a Newspaper Article

The first thing prospective reporters must know is that newspaper articles are written differently depending on their format, or purpose. Newspaper articles can be divided into one of three categories: news articles, feature stories, and columns.

How to Write a News Article:

Pure news articles are the most structured type of newspaper article. A specific format must be followed in writing this type of article. The purpose of this article is to convey facts of an event to an interested reader.

Tips for writing a news article:

- 1) As with all newspaper articles, it should be set off with a headline. The headline shouldn't be a summarization of the article; instead it should serve the purpose of getting the reader's attention.
- 2) The story should start with a "lead paragraph" which is the summary of the story. Do not tease at the beginning or summarize at the end as you sometimes see on television news. Lay all your cards out on the table. The lead paragraph should include the who, what, when, where, and why of the story.
- 3) After the lead paragraph comes explanation and amplification, which deals with illuminating details. Use discretion in choosing details to include. Also, some details may not be as important as others. Put in order of importance from greatest to least. Don't feel the need to include everything you know, but do include everything you feel is important.
- 4) If the average reader will be confused reading the story, fill in the gaps with background information. When in doubt, give that information. Almost every piece on the O.J. Simpson case included in the explanation and amplification section the basic information on what he was on trial for even though it was basically common knowledge.
- 5) Do not use the first person. If you feel that it is absolutely important, think about writing a feature story or a column instead (see below).
- 6) NO BIAS. Personal prejudices should not find their way into the article. Again, use of an op-ed or column forum is recommended for personal opinions.
- 7) When possible, use quotes to flavor the article. However, don't use quotes for the sake of using quotes- make sure they are relevant. Also, make sure the quotes aren't a grammatical embarrassment—avoid run-ons especially.

How to Write Feature Stories

Features are interesting stories about people, places, and events. They aren't as concerned with conveying basic facts as in conveying a mood, feeling, or theme. Unlike writing news articles, there are no hard and fast "rules" for composing features. Features, common in newspapers, are even more common in magazines.

Tips for writing feature stories:

- 1) Many feature stories are biographical sketches of individuals. Often interviews with public figures (athletes or entertainers) or compelling people (such as a homeless person) can make for interesting feature stories.
- 2) Unlike in a news article, the feature writer is allowed much creativity in the story's composition. The order of presentation is based solely on the criteria of what makes for the most interesting read.
- 3) Pretend you are telling a story. Draw on storytelling techniques from other media, such as movies, theater, fiction, and music. This may include visualization of the scene you are creating. Sounds, smells, and textures can even be a viable means of expression. Paint a picture with words.
- 4) Metaphors and comparisons are fair game in feature stories. Your impressions can be communicated. For example, a feature on a political candidate can include the following: "Decked out in his garish jumpsuit, Greg Samsar bears a greater resemblance to a professional wrestler than a serious gubernatorial candidate."
- 5) Although personal insights are allowed in a feature, strive for objectivity. Tell both sides of the story: "Samsar responds to critics of his apparel by noting that Abraham Lincoln would go weeks without shaving." If you are featuring a homeless man and include comments critical of the police for enforcing loitering violations, give a police spokesman a chance to respond.

How to Write a Column

A column, or opinion-editorial (op-ed), is the most open ended of newspaper articles. It is a chance to express your opinion. There are not many rules to writing this type of article. The most important thing is to have all your facts straight. Other than that, simply follow the rules for writing a persuasive paper than you learned in your introduction to writing class. Always keep in mind that it is difficult to persuade readers by offending or insulting them.

A final piece of advice: Become a vigorous reader of newspapers. Read pure news articles, features, and columns and note what makes them effective. Good writers are always good readers.

Sources: www.freep.com/jobspage/academy/cliptips.htm
Lcweb2.loc.gov/amen/ndlpedu/lesson98/brady/article.html
Concordia University Wisconsin Comm 350 "Journalism" class notes and textbook

By Azor Cigelske