

FEATURE WRITING: OVERVIEW

GRADE LEVELS 9 - 12

OVERVIEW

Welcome to Feature Writing! In this lesson we will be going over the elements and structure of what is known as a Feature story, a common type of writing used in magazines. The fun of a feature is that you get to be a storyteller. Although there is structure, you can use facts and quotes and still be creative. You want to get across that features are written almost like fiction, but on a nonfiction topic. Usually they are written about celebrities, politicians, or community figures with interesting stories. Please refer to the JLI Lesson on Feature Writing for examples to read and use in class.

Types of Features

- Human Interest
 - Interviews
 - Informational Features
 - Personality Sketch
 - Featurettes
- **Human Interest** is just that -- interesting. It could be on anything from an event to a person or business, but usually has some type of oddity or emotional connection that makes it interesting. **Interviews** may focus on a single interview with a single person, and may even be in Question and Answer form. **Informational features** tend to be newsy, and about bigger topics. Usually these give information and are a little less story-like in their structure. A **personality sketch** is focused on getting to know a person, and see further into what makes them tick. GQ and Vanity Fair use these on celebrities very often. **Featurettes** are shorter, succinct features of any sort.
 - **The Lede** is the introduction, but rather than an introduction like they may be used to for a 5-paragraph essay, there is a good amount of creativity that can be expressed in a single sentence or two. In fact, it is encouraged. Show them some examples -- JLI has provided some, or peruse your local news outlets for some close-to-home examples.

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STRUCTURE

Lead (or “Lede”)

- It should create an image, send a verbal message and capture the reader’s imagination. The tone should fit the mood of the story and supply the theme or angle. It should lead the reader into the story.

Body

- It should be unified with all material relating to the theme. All unnecessary data should be omitted. Care should be taken to make certain that each sentence and paragraph adds to the impact of the narrative.
- The story is organized in a logical order. This does not necessarily mean chronological order. However the reader should be able to follow the narrative of the story as action jumps back and forth from the past, the present and even the future.

Conclusion

- The ending should give a sense of finality and resolution to the reader. It wraps up all loose ends and leaves the reader with a single, significant thought. It stands alone as the reader’s final impression.

Quotes

- Some of these are self evident but it’s important to know for the writing process. **Direct quotes** are exactly that -- a word-for-word restatement of something an interviewee has said. Indirect quotes will state the exact information, but not word-for-word. A **partial quote** may start or end as a quote, but turn into a different statement -- often a melding of direct and indirect quotes. A **paraphrase** might take a large block of information, say about the subject’s upbringing, and condense it into a small sentence or two. **Dialogue** is, well, dialogue, showing an exchange between two or more people.

Past, Present Future

- Sometimes a feature can be structured in what is known as a “**Past, Present, Future**” structure, wherein the beginning starts with a scene from the subject’s past, and then transitions into talking about what they are doing now, and ends with what they hope to do or are working towards.

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TIPS

- Some of these are self evident but it's important to know for the writing process. Direct quotes are exactly that -- a word-for-word restatement of something an interviewee has said. Indirect quotes will state the exact information, but not word-for-word. A partial quote may start or end as a quote, but turn into a different statement -- often a melding of direct and indirect quotes. A paraphrase might take a large block of information, say about the subject's upbringing, and condense it into a small sentence or two. Dialogue is, well, dialogue, showing an exchange between two or more people.
- This will probably be evident for a teacher, but it is important to emphasize the attribution of quotes. However, it may be friendlier to students because instead of learning MLA or Chicago, you simply say "David said" or "according to the World Health Organization."

Tips for Features

- Use at least three good quotes per copy block.
 - Go for a rhythm in your writing. Read it aloud. Combine longer more complex sentences with short simple sentences.
 - Avoid passive voice. ("A trip is being considered by me.")
 - Do not use start your lead with a quote -- unless it is a really spectacular quote which sums up everything.
 - Be colorful, specific, vivid, exciting. Use dynamic verbs!
- It's a good time to think about the effect of feature writing. Telling someone's story can have a lot of power. For example, getting to know the life of an immigrant can change views and minds on immigration. Understanding that celebrities are people can both bolster and lessen the power of their status. Aside from that, a lot of features are just fun to read, and many students get excited on reading about "extraordinary people" who they care about, such as musicians and sports stars, doing every day things.

Some Feature Examples

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/the-really-big-one>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/06/lolas-story/524490/>

<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2015/10/rihanna-cover-cuba-annie-leibovitz>

<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/13/us/all-she-has-150000-is-going-to-a-university.html>

RESOURCES AND STANDARDS

RESOURCES

SEARCHING ONLINE FOR PERSONALITY FEATURES -
www.21stcenturylit.org/vWorksheet.php?index=37

FEATURE LEDE WORKSHEET -
www.21stcenturylit.org/vWorksheet.php?index=52

INTERVIEWING WORKSHEET -
www.21stcenturylit.org/vWorksheet.php?index=35

HOW TO WRITE A FEATURE -
www.21stcenturylit.org/vWorksheet.php?index=48

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3

- Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6

- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3

- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.