

## IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

Whatsoever the circumstances or where ever a student or a professional is, the importance of language for him can never be undermined. And when it comes to communication, all those tend to be failures if they cannot communicate in good language.

Language is one of the most important areas of human development. Our communication skills set us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, and they're also what bring us together with each other. Language is obviously a vital tool. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but also it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships.

That is why emphasis is given to the writing and speaking better language in all spheres of communication. A journalist must have better communication skills in comparison to other people or professionals working in other fields.

Throughout history, many have reflected on the importance of language. For instance, the scholar Benjamin Whorf has noted that language shapes thoughts and emotions, determining one's perception of reality. John Stuart Mill said, "Language is the light of the mind."

For the linguist Edward Sapir, language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, and values characteristic of a community; it also represents a fundamental expression of social identity. "The mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiar potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language." In short, language retention helps maintain feelings of cultural kinship.

Here in Pakistan, we are blessed with virtually two official languages flourishing in a multicultural society. We all have the opportunity to learn about other cultures.

Since the adoption of official bilingualism though unofficially, we have been better able to provide to the younger generations the tools and knowledge for them to excel not only here at home, but beyond our national borders. This has allowed them to reach for the dreams and succeed in areas they may not have otherwise.

Language, of course, is knowledge, and in our world today knowledge is one of the key factors in competitiveness. Brains and knowledge are what create the prosperity and growth we tend to take for granted. In an advanced industrial society in an increasingly interdependent world, the knowledge of other languages becomes indispensable. Just think of how the advent of the Internet has changed our lives. For the last few years, millions of people across the world, who share common interests, are able to communicate with each other and exchange ideas. Not only are they able to do this due to the various technological advances, but also because they share a common language.

There is, of course, no denying that the knowledge of the English language is one of the most important tools available. It is one of the international languages, a tool of communication among countries, cultural groups, various companies and organisations, communities and friends.

English is but one of our de facto official languages; the other being Urdu, which is given the label of being 'Official'.

Although much is said about the importance of the English language, one cannot overlook the important economic and diplomatic relationships that our country has forged with other countries.

The knowledge of languages is an advantage that many hold. One can argue that it permits them to have a broader outlook on their surroundings, as they are able to look at issues with a broader perspective.

To achieve this end, a journalist must be working hard towards not only constantly improving it rather enriching his knowledge.

There are four key areas, which must be strived for all the time, as these help in naturally improving one's language, as cramming never helps anybody.

- **Reading** – devour books and magazines – A journalist must be reading newspapers and magazines on daily basis. Alongside these, he must be reading books of his subject, specialisation and taste. One of the things is like 'chewing' the material whatever you are reading.

- **Listening** – keep tuned to good channels – A journalist must be a good listener too. As long as, he is putting his ears into much of a use, he can get much of an information. Secondly, he must be watching television, and listening to good sources of information, which are luckily now available round the clock.
- **Speaking** – make a try, you will be better – It has been observed that quite a large number of journalists are not good at communicating verbally, and there are those who can speak very well but when it comes to writing they always leave bad impression. One must try to speak the language he writing in. ‘Never be afraid of speaking’ is the thumb rule.
- **Writing** – most important but no way impossible – For every journalist, writing is a must, and while doing so, he must be doing it to the best of his abilities. There are certain ways of improving your writing skills, and one must be following those.

### Feature writing

Every genre or kind of journalistic writing is a specialised one but it is also done by the novices, definitely checked by the professionals or specialists.

### Introduction

Any piece or writing that falls between the cut-and-dry news story on the one hand, and a fictionalised story or opinionated essay on the other hand can be a feature. When we say that Cut-and-dry news story, it means two things – first based on facts, and secondly, separated from the original stories, that is cut, and dry means something already known and discussed.

Simultaneously, it is also a product of factual reporting to which the writer adds story elements of imaginative writing and various interpretation reaching to extent of one’s own point of view, may be altogether different from others. However, it is also similar to a news story in which it gives the readers facts in an interesting form and manner.

Facts collaborated with study, research, and interviews of the experts on that particular subject and of people either benefiting or getting adversely affected.

It aims to instruct, guide and entertain the readers who know about the subject as well as those who do not know.

Apart from being news stories, both soft and hard, features are investigative primarily based on in-depth studies.

Its subject can be anything: places, a community, a farm, a business, education, science, economy, religion, philosophy; events, parades, programmes, concerts; people-well known or unknown animals-unusual or ordinary; objects of art or product.

Succinctly features can be anything or everything on which one wishes to write.

### Definition

A feature is a creative, sometimes subjective article, designed primarily to entertain and inform readers about an event, a situation or an aspect of society or life.

It is a complete portrayal of the subject being discussed. What does mean by complete portrayal – covering all possible aspects from all possible angles

### Explanation of the definition

#### Creativity

Unlike news story, feature writing allows a reporter to create a story virtually at will. Although still bound by the ethics of accuracy, fiction is categorically banned. A reporter can conjure a feature story in his mind and, after researching the idea, writes it.

**Subjectivity**

Some feature stories are written in the first person using “I” and “we”; thus allowing the reporter to inject his own emotions and thoughts. The inclusion of writer’s emotions and feelings makes the feature story subjective. The use of first person in feature writing is allowed but only when there is no alternative.

**Informative**

A feature story lacks hard news values, but must inform public about a situation or an aspect of life, which has not been reported in hard news stories. It goes beyond bare facts by amplifying them with study, research and interviews in order to instruct and guide the readers. News story presents bare facts, while a feature dramatises and supplements them by giving detailed information. It covers causes and background of the story.

**Entertainment**

All necessary information in detailed form with relevant photographs is collected, which provide entertainment to the readers.

**Unperishable**

While news stories are highly perishable, feature stories may be kept for days, weeks, or months. Many smaller newspapers try to store feature stories, because the media men know that the value of the feature story will not diminish with time.

A news story is hurriedly written while a feature story seldom has to meet a steep deadline. Since, deadline pressure is not there like that of a daily reporter, so a reporter can take sufficient time to write a feature and rewrite and improve it as much as necessary to get the best quality.

**Hence****Features....**

- Are factual, and require reporting.
- May or may not be timely. If they are timely and related to a current news event, they are likely to appeal more to readers.
- May be written in any form and style. The only criterion is that the form and style be appropriate to the contents and purpose of the story.
- Permit the reporter to use his knowledge and ingenuity to write a story original in ideas and treatment.
- Rarely have news leads. Instead, they more often have novelty leads.
- Usually strike the keynote in the opening sentences so that the readers come into quick contact with the subject.
- Usually are not cut in make-up.

**Concept and Scope of Feature****Detailed analysis of news**

News do exist in the newspapers, but never discussed at length considering and observing divergent kinds of constraints. Feature is expanded beyond the basic fact rather is fully supplemented with greater information. A feature usually covers all the underlying causes as well as the background of the news-story.

A feature employs the basic facts of the news-story in its explication, with special emphasis on further studies, research and interviews etc.

Feature gives the readers facts in an interesting form, and is framed and adapted to rapid reading. In a feature, commonly-understood and simple language is used, and all the relevantly useful elements of dramatic are utilised to the full extent.

**Aspects never noticed**

A feature usually aims at imparting and delivering the desired effect, instruction, guidance as well as entertainment to all the readers, including those who are already well-aware of the facts and figures of the subject and those who happen to examine and peruse the subject for the first time.

**Study, research, and interviews** of the experts on that particular subject and of people either benefiting or getting adversely affected.

A feature may include in its study of the subject; all the information, background of the matter, or the causes ascribed to a particular event.

A news-story usually has to be subjected to the strict demands of the dead line, in other words, a reporter has limited time to dispose of the news-story, whereas a feature writer has ample time at his disposal and has not to necessarily meet a dead line. A feature can be disposed of at a great leisure.

A news-story and a feature also differ as towards its contents, structure and form. A news-story is a somewhat a business-like matter to be disposed of in a business-like manner in a traditional and conventional form and structure. Whereas, a feature is written off-the-track manner, in unconventional manner, keeping in view the psychology of the people and in common-understood language and idiom.

**It aims to instruct, guide and entertain** the readers who know about the subject as well as those who do not know.

The objectives of a news-story are basically to communicate inform but the basic and bare facts; whereas a feature aims at instruction, information, knowledge besides missionary objectives for the improvement of morals and betterment of the lot of the people.

The news-story is written in a cold and logical manner, whereas a feature is designed to appeal to the emotions and passions of the people.

## SOURCES OF MATERIAL

A good feature writer has at his disposal the major sources of observation, experience and printed word. However, he can and must amply employ and utilise the sources for the newspapers and the magazines. Owing to the reason that for feature-writing, the writer has numerous sources at his disposal, the features have gained wide currency and popularity in comparison to the drab nature of news-story and column-writing. Hence, a feature writer must exploit all avenues and sources for making his features interesting, absorbing and informative. Besides, the usual sources of information, books can be and must be consulted. Rather keeping books as one's best friends is the key to success.

Feature-writing can be derived and deduced from several sources; as by observation, experience and printed material. As far as observation and experience is concerned, special talents must be there in the personal character of the writer. Relevant sources should be handled immaculately.

### **Following sources must be utilised for feature writing**

**Personalities:** Personalities of the past and present can be made the subject of personality-based features. There are a large number of living epoch-making personalities, whose achievements and in certain cases, failures, can be a subject. Some believe that the territorial limits are just meaningless, and any nationally or internationally reputed personality approached for the feature, but one must need to consider why he is choosing a particular personality for the feature. The writer must keep in his mind that he must be bringing to focus the person, who is in more than one way either influencing his readers, or can become so in the future. Fields of engineering, arts and craft, medicine, politics, economics, social welfare, educational field, and world peace are the usual areas from where personalities are usually chosen. However, there is an unending list of personalities, which can be extended to virtually every field and walk of life. Succinctly, any reputed person who has contributed largely to the betterment of the human beings can be an individual, who is a subject of one's feature. Moreover, personal interviews and biographies of can serve as a light-house to the common persons.

### **Commemorations**

These also come under the head of the divergent sources of feature-writing.

The sources of commemorative articles are numerous, including national and important international events, fairs, exhibits, personalities, historical event, as Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Azha, Eid Mild-un-Nabi, Shab-e-Barat and Shab-e-Meraj, Moharrum-ul-Haram, national heroes days like the Quaid-i-Azam, Allama Iqbal and many others.

All commemorative features may comprise personalities connected and related to freedom, specially their achievements. The commemorative features also consist of religious festivals.

Others may include days of armed forces of Pakistan other national and international events as First May, Wars launched for the territorial integrity of Pakistan, struggle for ideological integrity and the forecasts of the impending dangers etc.

### **Social and Cultural sources:**

Social and cultural features are not only great in number and variety; they are also multi-coloured and multi-purpose, as well as multi-dimensional. The social subjects may comprise reduction of family size, structure and nature of families in the past and the present conditions, and the study of those factors responsible for that state.

There have been drastic changes in the long and traditionally established institutions of families and marriages. It implies the study of the underlying causes, factors to detect the ailments, effects and the suggested remedial measures.

These features can bring out the salient features of the two social systems, that is, the East and the West, by comparison and by contrast. The social and cultural features may be based on the national and the foreign society, bringing into light the strange customs and traditions. These features have definite objectives, by presenting them theoretically and projecting the different social and traditional evils and malpractices, in order to allow and inspire the general masses to ponder over them. These are ushered in

for the betterment of the social and cultural structure of the society. Among these social evils are included the marriages on 'Watta Satta' arrangements, dowry and its long-ranging effects on the less fortunate families and its merits and demerits.

The social and cultural features are of multi-purpose nature. Even in daily life features can be arranged on the problems of daily life as the trends of modern life, hobbies, professions, places, scenes, entertainments and weather etc.

Definite objectives, theoretically and projecting the different social and traditional evils and malpractices, in order to allow and inspire the general masses to ponder over them, aiming at the betterment of the social and cultural structure of the society.

Features are also written on the problems of daily life as the trends of modern life, hobbies, professions, places, scenes, entertainments and weather etc.

### **Science and Technology**

This is rightly called the age of phenomenal scientific and technological inventions and improvisations, affecting all departments of life, which has not only changed the whole fabric of individual and social life, but also introduced drastic alterations in the basic thought traditionally held. Science has introduced a number of comforts and luxuries of life, never witnessed before.

It is quite in the fitness of things to write features on different phases of life as affected by scientific developments subjects to enlighten the general readers.

A good feature writer can make use of any of the field of science and technology, with positive approach in simple style, as to be fully intelligible to the general readers. There is no dearth for scientific and technological sources of information and feature-writing.

These features may consist of the biographical notes and achievements of the famous scientists and technologists their unique achievements, individual scientific inventions and their social and economic effects including both positive and negative effects on human life.

Features can be composed on the role of science and technology to make deficiencies in food resources, agricultural improvements and various allied mechanisation processes, search for sea foods and resources and utilisation. These may comprise subjects to study the various alternatives for the sources of energy, science's role in the improvement of medicine and health of humanity, lack of interest in scientific studies in Pakistan as well as lagging far behind in these fields, even compared with numerous under-developed countries. A good feature writer can ably undertake the study of the different aspects of our educational set-up, which has been causing the general slackness of programme to include scientific and technological curriculum. In short, there are countless sources of feature-writing in the main and major field of science and technology.

### **Psychological Features**

The new age of scientific and technological inventions and discoveries has drastically altered the very style of life and living, followed traditionally and in a most conventional manner, resulting in social problems of adjustment, mental and cultural gaps. These have collectively given rise to a number of psychological illnesses and ailments. It has not been yet possible to bridge the so-called gaps in the social fabric of life. There have been numerous psychological problems due to the constant stresses and strains of modern life, and social sub-structure has been abruptly shaken rather shattered. Whereas the process of adjustments has never been consistent with the drastic alterations.

There are psychological problems in the industrial units, individual and social problems, mental and cultural complicities, individual and family problems and numerous allied complexities. There is a growing class consciousness in the society, difference and wide gap between saying or confessing and actions, increasing trends of exhibition, pomp and show, instability in the marital matters, a wide difference between the income and expenditure and the relevantly frivolous efforts rather immoral acts to reconcile the expenditure with the income. Factually, there is strictly speaking a strain existing between the different classes of the society, which is ever on the increase, it is here that a good feature writer can choose and select any psychological problem for the betterment of mental and moral health of the individuals residing in the society.

**History**

History can be described as one of the main and collectively a major source of features. History is the record of life in all possible phases and aspects, concerning human beings all over the world. Historical features may relate to a recent event, or to past events affecting the present.

History can be world history, or national history. There is the Islamic history, replete with great events and greater personalities, with great feats and achievements their daring and courageous feats of unparalleled bravery and numerous dashing events. Historical features assist in tracing out the link between our past institutions and their transmission to the present and then to the coming generations. History reminds us our cultural, social and economic ties with our social institutions; rather it regularises and maintains our cordial linkage with our past institutions. It links us with the collective genius of our ancestors, besides imparting lessons of love for the masses.

In quite cases, besides repeating historical event, both directly or indirectly, feature writers are expected to be well-versed in historical events and personalities in order to make it as a good source.

**Expositional and Instructional Feature**

These are instructional and educational features, which can be called multi-purposes features, in which people are given instruction and explication on those subjects, which needs further explanation rather repeated lessons. These are the subjects, which are already under the knowledge of the general masses, as civil defence, traffic rules and regulations or first aid, but are not aware of the detailed information.

These sources of features are generally in the nature, which are meant for the education and instruction of the general people. Among the expositional and instructional features are included the social and cultural theories and distinctions, folk songs, evolution of folk lore and literature, their social and cultural values and inter-relationship, superstitions, latent social values and aspects.

An expositional feature undertakes to study and examine the origin, causes of its persistent existence, folk and romantic stories traditionally existing for the past hundreds of years. It takes into examination the nature, persistence, existence scope and structure of folk literature, besides its popularity, significance and effects. In this category, there are countless sources and further sub-sources of the existence and belief and faith in mysterious events, their influence and causes of permanent penetration and permeation in the present social set-up.

Moreover the sources of feature in this category take into scrutiny and study of the social etiquette and habits and the relevant contribution of different societies in that direction.

As such all those subjects and topics related to the social sub-structure fall in this category of exposition and instruction.

**Investigational Features**

Under this category, there are many other features, which require investigation and research on detailed scale. A good feature is usually based on research methods and investigation, taking the bare facts as tools and implements and weaving a feature in interesting manner, so as to project it in a befitting manner to the readers. The objective is to bring out all the possible aspects and angles of the subject concerned. In fact, these features are closely related to the methods of investigation and research. As such countless sources of features are invariably connected within the category of investigation and research; which forms the basic tools and implements for collecting the bare facts and figures, statistics, confirmed events in order to arrive at the solid conclusion. This process accelerates the speed to suggest and frame future actions and policies.

Though these features are burdensome and onerous, responsible and weighty which require very hard work, time-consuming, industriousness and heavy expenses.

In this connection, experimental feature-writing is rarely practised in Pakistan as in the western countries.

As such the relevant sources under this category should be handled immaculately.

The sources of information, instruction, guidance and especially the material and data are derived for the feature-writing as well as the articles. After the description of the main and major sources, we may briefly survey the other minor sources in their individuality and uniqueness.

**Electronic**

Means of communication keep a great deal in picking up the central issues, points and ideals, which are ideal for writing a feature. These means consist of the Internet, radio and television, where as large number of programmes are telecast and broadcast, necessarily requires explication and feature-writing. Fact-to-face include conversation, addresses, sermons, which is really very useful for gathering some points of public interest on which a feature could be composed in order to instruct, give food for thought for all.

Printed material may comprise newspapers periodicals, journals, magazines, publicity, advertising, bulletins, catalogues, and many other forms of printed materials. Their perusal can result in detecting some striking points and ideals for writing a feature.

Another source may be found in the form of institutions, broad-based as fairs, trades, business, industries, museums, exhibition, and educational institutions

**Social Subjects**

Social subjects like conventions, traditions, customs, anniversary days, and holiday are another vast field of sources for feature-writing, in which an observant feature-writer can find countless subjects for his features.



## INTERNET USAGE IN FEATURE WRITING

No doubt, the Internet has become a huge and valuable source of information for most of the writers, and people tend to use it more considering the fact that, as they say, it is just a click away. It is one of the most easily available sources of information to almost everyone at the fastest pace, and it has become hub of information, which is growing at a fast pace. Due to this reason, the Internet is considered to be the easiest way of information, and in abundance, surely too.

But for quite a few professionals, it is neither the easiest one nor a straight knowledge, as there are a huge number of issues to be tackled; otherwise the information gathered can be contentious, controversial, prejudiced and biased because there are a lot of knowledge bases, which are making them so.

The World Wide Web offers information and data from all over the world. Because so much information is available, and because that information can appear to be fairly “anonymous”, it is necessary to develop skills to evaluate what you find. When you use a research or academic library, the books, journals and other resources have already been evaluated by scholars, publishers and librarians. Every resource you find has been evaluated in one way or another before you ever see it. When you are using the World Wide Web, none of this applies. There are no filters. Because anyone can write a Web page, documents of the widest range of quality, written by authors of the widest range of authority, are available on an even playing field. Excellent resources reside along side the most dubious. The Internet epitomises the concept of *Caveat lector: Let the reader beware*.

However, it never means that you should not use it. There are certain issues, which must be tackled by the journalists, especially from developing countries, like ours.

The purpose of the discussion is to making the usage of the Internet more judicious sans making it contentious, as the gathering of the information from any dubious source or website can make the write-up both controversial and unreliable. Hence the idea is to get the ‘Right kind of material from the right sources’ by clearly identifying the subject, and authenticity of the sources.

### **Rationale for Evaluating What You Find on the Web**

The World Wide Web can be a great place to accomplish research on many topics. But putting documents or pages on the web is easy, cheap or free, unregulated, and unmonitored. There is a famous Steiner cartoon published in the *New Yorker* (July 5, 1993) with two dogs sitting before a terminal looking at a computer screen; one says to the other 'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog.' The great wealth that the Internet has brought to so much of society is the ability for people to express themselves, find one another, exchange ideas, discover possible peers worldwide they never would have otherwise met, and, through hypertext links in web pages, suggest so many other people's ideas and personalities to anyone who comes and clicks. There are some real 'dogs' out there, but there's also great treasure.

Therein lies the rationale for evaluating carefully whatever you find on the Web. The burden is on you - the reader - to establish the validity, authorship, timeliness, and integrity of what you find. Documents can easily be copied and falsified or copied with omissions and errors -- intentional or accidental. In the general World Wide Web there are no editors (unlike most print publications) to proofread and 'send it back' or 'reject it' until it meets the standards of a publishing house's reputation. Most pages found in general search engines for the web are self-published or published by businesses small and large with motives to get you to buy something or believe a point of view. Even within university and library web sites, there can be many pages that the institution does not try to oversee. The web needs to be free like that!! And you, if you want to use it for serious research, need to cultivate the habit of healthy scepticism, of questioning everything you find with critical thinking.

### **Internet as a very sophisticated propagandist**

Various anti-religion and anti-Pakistan websites are there, and being a Pakistani journalist, one must avoid those. Moreover, various groups have their own websites to propagate their own ideologies, which has also become an ‘Infectious Enthusiasm’ where everyone is trying to match the other. Hence it is resulting in more biased and prejudiced material.

On the other hand, blogs, websites are there by immaturish and biased contributors, and special interest groups, and Non-Governmental Organisations.

### **Scepticism**

A journalist never takes any thing for granted, as he confirms, re-confirms, the information prior to putting it in words. In simple words – he doubts everything until he is certain about that. Besides this, he is always looking for supporting information and examples before relating it to the readers. However, the scale for determining level of authenticity may vary from one person to another, but he never falls short of that.

### **Be very careful**

A journalist must be careful prior to using information regarding any government, Islam and its injunctions, as these are primary concerns in this part of the world. There are many propaganda sites, which are claiming to be official – though difficult to know and check, but one must be certain. Secondly, facts and data must be ascertained.

### **Use of journalistic filters**

- Is it possible?
- How it can be made appear so?
- Who can have ulterior motives?
- Use of the common sense
- It comes from within – who, why, when, where and whither?

### **Website checklist**

- Authority – who is doing it?
- Affiliation – whether connected with reputable organisation or institution
- Accuracy – many a time glaring mistakes
- Appearance – whether well-put together?
- Does it make sense having such website connected to a particular institution?
- Links to various websites
- Is it fair in judgments?

**Authorship** is perhaps the major criterion used in evaluating information. Who wrote this? When we look for information with some type of critical value, we want to know the basis of the authority with which the author speaks. Here are some possible filters:

- In your own field of study, the author is a well-known and well-regarded name you recognize.
- When you find an author you do not recognize:
- The author is mentioned in a positive fashion by another author or another person you trust as an authority;
- You found or linked to the author's Web/Internet document from another document you trust;
- The Web/Internet document you are reading gives biographical information, including the author's position, institutional affiliation and address;
- Biographical information is available by linking to another document; this enables you to judge whether the author's credentials allow him/her to speak with authority on a given topic;
- If none of the above, there is an address and telephone number as well as an e-mail address for the author in order to request further information on his or her work and professional background. An e-mail address alone gives you no more information than you already have.

**The publishing body** also helps evaluate any kind of document you may be reading. In the print universe, this generally means that the author's manuscript has undergone screening in order to verify that it meets the standards or aims of the organization that serves as publisher. This may include peer review. On the Internet, ask the following questions to assess the role and authority of the 'publisher', which in this case means the server (computer) where the document lives:

- Is the name of any organization given on the document you are reading? Are there headers, footers, or a distinctive watermark that show the document to be part of an official academic or scholarly Web site? Can you contact the site Webmaster from this document?
- If not, can you link to a page where such information is listed? Can you tell that it's on the same server and in the same directory (by looking at the URL)?
- Is this organization recognized in the field in which you are studying?
- Is this organization suitable to address the topic at hand?
- Can you ascertain the relationship of the author and the publisher/server? Was the document that you are viewing prepared as part of the author's professional duties (and, by extension, within his/her area of expertise)? Or is the relationship of a casual or for-fee nature, telling you nothing about the author's credentials within an institution?
- Can you verify the identity of the server where the document resides? Internet programs such as `nslookup` and `whois` will be of help.
- Does this Web page actually reside in an individual's personal Internet account, rather than being part of an official Web site? This type of information resource should be approached with the greatest caution. Hints on identifying personal pages are available in 'understanding and Decoding URLs'.

**Point of view or bias** reminds us that information is rarely neutral. Because data is used in selective ways to form information, it generally represents a point of view. Every writer wants to prove his point, and will use the data and information that assists him in doing so. When evaluating information found on the Internet, it is important to examine who is providing the 'information' you are viewing, and what might be their point of view or bias. The popularity of the Internet makes it the perfect venue for commercial and sociopolitical publishing. These areas in particular are open to highly 'interpretative' uses of data. Steps for evaluating point of view are based on authorship or affiliation:

- First, note the URL of the document. Does this document reside on the Web server of an organization that has a clear stake in the issue at hand?
  - If you are looking at a corporate Web site, assume that the information on the corporation will present it in the most positive light.
  - If you are looking at products produced and sold by that corporation, remember: you are looking at an advertisement.
  - If you are reading about a political figure at the Web site of another political party, you are reading the opposition.
- Does this document reside on the Web server of an organization that has a political or philosophical agenda?
  - If you were looking for scientific information on human genetics, would you trust a political organization to provide it?
  - Never assume that extremist points of view are always easy to detect. Some sites promoting these views may look educational.

Many areas of research and inquiry deal with controversial questions, and often the more controversial an issue is, the more interesting it is. When looking for information, it is *always* critical to remember that everyone has an opinion. Because the structure of the Internet allows for easy self-publication, the variety of points of view and bias will be the widest possible.

**Referral to and/or knowledge of the literature** refer to the context in which the author situates his work. This reveals what the author knows about his or her discipline and its practices. This allows you to evaluate the author's scholarship or knowledge of trends in the area under discussion. The following criteria serve as a filter for all formats of information:

- The document includes a bibliography.
- The author alludes to or displays knowledge of related sources, with proper attribution.
- The author displays knowledge of theories, schools of thought, or techniques usually considered appropriate in the treatment of his or her subject.
- If the author is using a new theory or technique as a basis for research, he or she discusses the value and/or limitations of this new approach.
- If the author's treatment of the subject is controversial, he or she knows and acknowledges this.

**Accuracy or verifiability of details** is an important part of the evaluation process, especially when you are reading the work of an unfamiliar author presented by an unfamiliar organization, or presented in a non-traditional way. Criteria for evaluating accuracy include:

- For a research document, the data that was gathered and an explanation of the research method(s) used to gather and interpret it are included.
- The methodology outlined in the document is appropriate to the topic and allows the study to be duplicated for purposes of verification.
- The document relies on other sources that are listed in a bibliography or includes links to the documents themselves.
- The document names individuals and/or sources that provided non- published data used in the preparation of the study.
- The background information that was used can be verified for accuracy.

**Currency** refers to the timeliness of information. In printed documents, the date of publication is the first indicator of currency. For some types of information, currency is not an issue: authorship or place in the historical record is more important (e.g., T. S. Eliot's essays on tradition in literature). For many other types of data, however, currency is extremely important, as is the regularity with which the data is updated. Apply the following criteria to ascertain currency:

- The document includes the date(s) at which the information was gathered.
- The document refers to clearly dated information.
- Where there is a need to add data or update it on a constant basis, the document includes information on the regularity of updates.
- The document includes a publication date or a 'last updated' date.
- The document includes a date of copyright.
- If no date is given in an electronic document, you can view the directory in which it resides and read the date of latest modification.

**If you found information using one of the search engines available on the Internet**, such as AltaVista or InfoSeek, a directory of the Internet such as Yahoo, or any of the services that rate World Wide Web pages, you need to know:

- How the search engine decides the order in which it returns information requested. Some Internet search engines 'sell' top space to advertisers who pay them to do so.
- That Internet search engines aren't like the databases found in libraries. Library databases include subject headings, abstracts, and other evaluative information created by information professionals to make searching more accurate. In addition, library databases index more permanent and reliable information.
- How that search engine looks for information, and how often their information is updated.

**All information, whether in print or by byte**, needs to be evaluated for authority, appropriateness, and other personal criteria for value. If you find information that is 'too good to be true', it probably is. Never

use information that you cannot verify. Establishing and learning criteria to filter information you find on the Internet is a good beginning for becoming a critical consumer of information in all forms. 'Cast a cold eye' on everything you read. Question it. Look for other sources that can authenticate or corroborate what you find. Learn to be skeptical and then learn to trust your instincts.

### **Search Engines**

Publishers of websites think: “Search engines are the roads people travel along when using the Internet to get places. If you're not putting out signs to capture their attention, they'll never find their way to you! However, you can use Google, Yahoo and Microsoft more frequently.

For Directories, prefer DMOZ, Yahoo directory and about

For News sites, prefer BBC, CNN, Yahoo news, Google news and Microsoft's MS NBC

Alerts on mobiles, go for

BBC, CNN, Yahoo and Google

Archives, prefer,

CNN, BBC and newspapers – many have since publication or later uploaded

For Facts, use

Wikipedia and World fact book

### **Evaluating web pages: Techniques to apply & questions to ask**

#### **Evaluating web pages skilfully requires you to do two things at once:**

Train your eye and your fingers to employ a series of techniques that help you quickly find what you need to know about web pages;

Train your mind to think critically, even suspiciously, by asking a series of questions that will help you decide how much a web page is to be trusted.

Begin by looking at your search results from a search engine or other source, following through by investigating the content of page, and extending it beyond the page to what others may say about the page or its author(s).

#### **1. What can the URL tell you?**

1. Before you leave the list of search results – before you click and get interested in anything written on the page – glean all you can from the URLs of each page.

2. Then choose pages most likely to be reliable and authentic.

#### **Is it somebody's personal page?**

Read the personal pages carefully:

Look for a personal name following a tilde (~), a percent sign (%), or the words 'users,' 'members,' or 'people.'

Is the server a commercial ISP or other provider mostly of web page hosting (like aol.com or geocities.com

#### **What are the implications?**

Personal pages are not necessarily 'bad,' but you need to investigate the author very carefully.

For personal pages, there is no publisher or domain owner vouching for the information in the page.

#### **What type of domain does it come from?**

(Educational, non-profit, commercial, government, etc.)

- Is the domain appropriate for the content?
- Government sites: look for .gov, .mil, .us, or other country code
- Educational sites: look for .edu
- Non-profit organizations: look for .org
- If from a foreign country, look at the country code and read the page to be sure, who published it.

**What are the implications?**

Look for appropriateness! What kind of information source do you think is most reliable for your topic?

**Is it published by an entity that makes sense?**

Who 'published' the page?

- In general, the publisher is the agency or person operating the 'server' computer from which the document is issued.
- The server is usually named in first portion of the URL (between *http://* and the first /)
- Have you heard of this entity before?
- Does it correspond the name of the site? Should it?

**What are the implications?**

You can rely more on information that is published by the source:

- Look for New York Times news from **www.nytimes.com**
- Look for health information from any of the agencies of the National Institute of Health on sites with **nih** somewhere in the domain name.

**2. Scan the perimeter of the page, looking for answers to these questions:****Techniques for Web Evaluation:**

1. Look for links that say, 'About us,' 'Philosophy,' 'Background,' 'Biography,' 'Who am I,' etc.
2. If you cannot find any links like these, you can often find this kind of information if you truncate back the URL.

INSTRUCTIONS for Truncating back a URL: In the top Location Box, delete the end characters of the URL stopping just before each / (leave the slash). Press enter to see if you can see more about the author or the origins/nature of the site providing the page.

Continue this process, one slash (/) at a time, until you reach the first single / which is preceded by the domain name portion. This is the page's server or 'publisher.'

3. Look for the date 'last updated' - usually at the bottom of a web page.

Check the date on all the pages on the site.

**Who wrote the page?**

- Look for the name of the author, or the name of the organisation, institution, agency, or whatever who is responsible for the page
- An e-mail contact is not enough
- If there is no personal author, look for an agency or organization that claims responsibility for the page.
- If you cannot find this, locate the publisher by truncating back the URL (see technique above). Does this publisher claim responsibility for the content? Does it explain why the page exists in any way?

**What are the implications?**

Some person or agency or entity creates all web pages with a purpose in mind. They do not simply 'grow' on the web like mildew grows in moist corners.

You are looking for someone who claims accountability and responsibility for the content.

An e-mail address with no additional information about the author is not sufficient for assessing the author's credentials.

If this is all you have, try emailing the author and asking politely for more information about him/her.

**Is the page dated? Is it current enough?**

Is it 'stale' or 'dusty' information on a time-sensitive or evolving topic?

**CAUTION:** Undated factual or statistical information is no better than anonymous information. Don't use it.

**What are the implications?**

How recent the date needs to be depends on your needs.

For some topics you want current information.

For others, you want information put on the web near the time it became known.

In some cases, the importance of the date is to tell you whether the page author is still maintaining an interest in the page, or has abandoned it.

**What are the author's credentials on this subject?**

- Does the purported background or education look like someone who is qualified to write on this topic?
- Might the page be by a hobbyist, self-proclaimed expert, or enthusiast?
- Is the page merely an opinion? Is there any reason you should believe its content more than any other page?
- Is the page a rant, an extreme view, possibly distorted or exaggerated?
- If you cannot find strong, relevant credentials, look very closely at documentation of sources (next section).

**What are the implications?**

Anyone can put anything on the web for pennies in just a few minutes. Your task is to distinguish between the reliable and questionable.

Many web pages are opinion pieces offered in a vast public forum.

You should hold the author to the same degree of credentials, authority, and documentation that you would expect from something published in a reputable print resource (book, journal article, good newspaper).

**3. Look for indicators of quality information**

1. Look for a link called 'links,' 'additional sites,' 'related links,' etc.

2. In the text, if you see little footnote numbers or links that might refer to documentation, take the time to explore them.

What kinds of publications or sites are they? Reputable? Scholarly?

Are they real? On the web (where no publisher is editing most pages), it is possible to create totally fake references.

3. Look at the publisher of the page (first part of the URL).

Expect a journal article, newspaper article, and some other publications that are recent to come from the original publisher IF the publication is available on the web.

Look at the bottom of such articles for copyright information or permissions to reproduce.

**Are sources documented with footnotes or links?**

- Where did the author get the information?
- As in published scholarly/academic journals and books, you should expect documentation.
- If there are links to other pages as sources, are they to reliable sources?
- Do the links work?

**What are the implications?**

In scholarly/research work, the credibility of most writings is proven through footnote documentation or other means of revealing the sources of information. Saying what you believe without documentation is not much better than just expressing an opinion or a point of view. What credibility does your research need?

An exception can be journalism from highly reputable newspapers. But these are not scholarly. Check with your instructor before using this type of material.

Links that don't work or are to other weak or fringe pages do not help strengthen the credibility of your research.

If reproduced information (from another source), is it complete, not altered, not fake or forged?

- Is it retyped? If so, it could easily be altered.
- Is it reproduced from another publication?
- Are permissions to reproduce and copyright information provided?
- Is there a reason there are not links to the original source if it is online (instead of reproducing it)?

### **What are the implications?**

You may have to find the original to be sure a copy of something is not altered and is complete.

Look at the URL: is it from the original source?

If you find a legitimate article from a reputable journal or other publication, it should be accompanied by the copyright statement and/or permission to reprint. If it is not, be suspicious.

Try to find the source. If the URL of the document is not to the original source, it is likely that it is illegally reproduced, and the text could be altered, even with the copyright information present.

### **Are there links to other resources on the topic?**

- Are the links well chosen, well organized, and/or evaluated/annotated?
- Do the links work?
- Do the links represent other viewpoints?
- Do the links (or absence of other viewpoints) indicate a bias?

### **What are the implications?**

Many well-developed pages offer links to other pages on the same topic that they consider worthwhile. They are inviting you compare their information with other pages.

Links that offer opposing viewpoints as well as their own are more likely to be balanced and unbiased than pages that offer only one view. Anything not said that could be said? And perhaps would be said if all points of view were represented?

Always look for bias.

Especially when you agree with something, check for bias.

## **4. What do others say?**

1. Find out what other web pages link to this page.

a. Use alexa.com URL information:

Simply paste the URL into alexa.com's search box.

You will see, depending on the volume of traffic to the page:

- Traffic rank
- Subjective reviews
- 'Site statistics' including some page history, sites that link to the page
- Contact/ownership info for the domain name
- A link to the Internet archive of website history 'Wayback Machine'

b. Do a link: search in Google, Yahoo!, or another search engine where this can be done.

### **INSTRUCTIONS for doing a link: search in Google or Yahoo!**

1. Copy the URL of the page you are investigating (Ctrl+C in Windows).

2. Go to the search engine site, and type link: in the search box.

3. Paste the URL of the investigated site into the search box immediately following link: (no space after the colon).

The pages listed all contain one or more links to the page you are looking for.

If you find no links, try a shorter portion of the URL, stopping after each /.

2. Look the page up in a reputable directory that evaluates its contents (Librarians' Index, Infomine, About.com, Academic Info, or a specialised directory you trust).

INSTRUCTIONS: Go to the directory and search for the title of the site you are investigating. Look for the publisher if you can't find a specific page from a larger site.



3. Look up the author's name in Google or Yahoo!

INSTRUCTIONS in Google: Search the name three ways:

- a. without quotes - Jabberwocky Web author
- b. enclosed in quotes as a phrase - 'Jabberwocky Web author'
- c. enclosed in quotes with \* between the first and last name - 'Jabberwocky \* Web author' (The \* can stand for any middle initial or name in Google only).

#### **Who links to the page?**

- Are there many links?
- What kinds of sites link to it?
- What do they say?
- Are any of them directories? Try looking at what directories say.

#### **What are the implications?**

Sometimes a page is linked to only by other parts of its own site (not much of a recommendation).

Sometimes a page is linked to by its fan club, and by detractors. Read both points of view.

If a page or its site is in a bona fide directory, think about whether there is much critical evaluation of the links in the directory.

#### **Is the page listed in one or more reputable directories or pages?**

#### **What are the implications?**

Good directories include a tiny fraction of the web, and inclusion in a directory is therefore noteworthy. But read what the directory says! It may not be 100% positive.

#### **What do others say about the author or responsible authoring body?**

#### **What are the implications?**

'Googling someone' (new term for this) can be revealing. Be sure to consider the source. If the viewpoint is radical or controversial, expect to find detractors. Think critically about all points of view.

#### **5. Does it all add up?**

1. Step back and think about all you have learned about the page. Listen to your gut reaction. Think about why the page was created, the intentions of its author(s).

If you have doubts, ask your instructor or come to one of the library reference desks and ask for advice.

2. Be sensitive to the possibility that you are the victim of irony, spoof, fraud, or other falsehood.

3. Ask yourself if the web is truly the best place to find resources for the research you are doing.

#### **Why was the page put on the web?**

- Inform, give facts, and give data?
- Explain, persuade?
- Sell, entice?
- Share?
- Disclose?

#### **What are the implications?**

These are some of the reasons to think of. The web is a public place, open to all. You need to be aware of the entire range of human possibilities of intentions behind web pages.

#### **Might it be ironic? Satire or parody?**

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Think about the 'tone' of the page.

- Humorous? Parody? Exaggerated? Overblown arguments?

- Outrageous photographs or juxtaposition of unlikely images?
- Arguing a viewpoint with examples that suggest that what is argued is ultimately not possible.

**What are the implications?**

It is easy to be fooled, and this can make you look foolish in turn.

**Is this as good as resources I could find if I used the library, or some of the web-based indexes available through the library, or other print resources?**

- Are you being completely fair? Too harsh? Totally objective? Requiring the same degree of 'proof' you would from a print publication?
- Is the site good for some things and not for others?
- Are your hopes biasing your interpretation?

**What are the implications?**

What is your requirement (or your instructor's requirement) for the quality of reliability of your information?

In general, published information is considered more reliable than what is on the web. But many, many reputable agencies and publishers make great stuff available by 'publishing' it on the web. This applies to most governments, most institutions and societies, many publishing houses and news sources.

But take the time to check it out.

**Conclusion –**

**Look before you leap, and for the Internet, look before you use it.**

- In this lecture, a senior journalist Zahid Chaudhry answered the following questions:
- How careful you are?
- What you usually do?
- How far is the Internet helpful?
- How the Urdu journalists using the Internet?
- How is different from the English journalists?

### WHAT MAKES A GOOD FEATURE?

A feature bears close similarities with the news-story, as it gives the readers facts in an interesting form, and is framed and adapted to rapid reading. As compared to a news-story, a feature is expanded beyond the basic fact rather is fully supplemented with greater information. A feature usually covers all the underlying causes as well as the background of the news-story.

From the study of the nature and definition of a feature, we may deduce the prominent and major analytic features and characteristics, which make a good feature.

#### **Compose collected material and data efficiently**

Another basic characteristic and attribute of a good feature is to compose collected material and data efficiently. The underlying point is the skill and ability to write clearly, accurately and with imaginative appeal. It should adopt a style of writing commensurate with the public genius and popular consciousness to make it a delectable and entertaining piece of prose. It should be simple, idiomatic and commonly intelligible to absorb the attention of the readers generally.

#### **Facts and figures**

**A feature must know the importance of correct facts and figures. It must be realised that there is nothing, which could be substantiated sans facts and figures. And there must be nothing divorced from reality.**

The features should be based on facts and figures, whose accuracy should not be questioned. Their accuracy should be consolidated and unquestionable.

Besides this, features should be characterised with thoroughness, complete in all respects as to be readily understandable and not lacking in any phase. Features are understood to be composed and designed to convey a sense of completeness in its contents and the intended message.

The subjects of the features are usually derived from the news-stories originating in the society. The facts should be sifted through wide reading, research and thorough investigation, with close touch to human interest. Only those feature writers will hold interest of their readers, whose features are based on facts, complete in all respects, thoroughness and clarity as well as accuracy.

A feature must research more facts, because he has enough time at his disposal. Features may be planned in advance in such a way that they are published at the time of some important events, for example, inauguration of some project or exhibition, Republic Day or Independence Day, anniversary etc. When a feature is published in this way to coincide with some events, its value and importance increases greatly.

#### **Meeting demands of readers**

A good and experience feature writer always keeps before him the demands of the readers, which warrants him a careful thinker and a sincere person, who give full weight to the basic elements of truth and accuracy. It implies that he should be well-read man, willing to consult the standard publications and books and work methodically by keeping the data and material in proper manner. He should be ready to work hard willing in a business-like manner and not subject to a mood, or inspiration. They are generally equipped with the proper initiative. He should be mentally alert and prepared to find out the ideas and material, with a keen sense for his subjects and inspiring materials.

#### **Instruct and Entertain**

**It must tell the reader how to go about certain things mentioned in the subject of feature!**

Without the inspiration, enthusiasm and confidence into the readers, the objectives of feature articles will be nullified. The features are meant to arouse noble feelings among the readers to think loftily about their social, cultural, economic and political establishments and allied problems and ailments.

Features should be aimed at creating zeal to think about their national problems, and to take practical part in the campaigns to solve them, and in mobilising the other forces. In short, features not only mobilise the public opinion, but also motivate them to think sympathetically and patriotically about their local, provincial and national problems.

Sometimes the feature writers take up light articles in order to match the generally depressing contents of the newspapers. As understood, news-stories are commonly impersonal, unattractive, bare facts, which do not absorb the attention of the readers generally. In view of this context, some feature writers adopt the light articles, which are eagerly sought. Therefore, these lightly written articles provide amusement and entertainment. Some of these feature writers become very popular with their readers who eagerly wait for their articles, which may come once or twice a week. These feature writers can even amuse and entertain their readers by writing about very commonplace subjects like domestic problems, problems of the newly-weds, husband and wife problems, personal crisis of mankind etc. There is no doubt that the least attended subject as a feature is always a good piece of journalism.

To achieve this, some feature writers take up another type of feature called the 'Personality Column', who filter the news through the mesh of their own personalities to give it an individual touch. Sometimes, these feature writers also give an idiosyncratic slant to their features.

These features are written regarding politics or some at other subjects. Generally, these features are written in a very light vein. Some of these features are social or political satires and have sarcasm.

### **Keen observation**

A realisation that from nearly every news event usually at least one feature story can be written

Another cardinal characteristic of a good feature is the keen sense of observation to detect those interesting points, which usually escape the eyes of a common man. The writer should be a man to possess the ability and to have a keen nose to sense the matters of interest around his environment, particularly the social set-up in which he resides permanently. Without, the keenness and curiosity, his feature shall not be able to find out the matters of common interest, and nor shall it be able to share that interest.

### **Written off-the-cuff**

Sometimes, features may have to be written without much notice. For example, if some event of great importance takes place either in a foreign country or in one's own country, then a feature may have to be written quickly. Recently, an intense earthquake struck and caused colossal loss of life and property in the AJK and adjoining areas, a number of feature articles appeared in several newspapers. The subject was dealt with in details, pointing out how the earthquake takes place, the destruction caused by an earthquake and the research for methods of predicting earthquakes etc.

### **Human interest**

Another characteristic of features is human interest or human value. This is a very popular source of writing articles. Such features can be written on ever-green subjects like health family, the equality between men and women, industry, economics etc. Now-a-days, many newspapers and magazines are full of features on freedom of the sex and other sexual practices. Features regarding the private lives of past and present important personalities, film stars etc., also quite popular. Many features have been written on the subject of divorce and its consequences.

### **Divergent subjects**

The writing of a controversial feature itself starts a very heated debate either through subsequent articles or through letters to the editor, criticising or appreciating the feature.

Features are also written on certain social, cultural and economic problems which have aroused considerable public interest, for example the juvenile delinquency, deteriorating law and order situation, increased in eve incidents, daylight robberies, gold chain snatching and ladies purse snatching etc. Sometimes, through these features a sort of running debate goes on in the press supporting or opposing a particular subject.

### **Constructive approach**

Features include the elements of constructive and reformatory approach, criticism, commentary, hard facts and events, statistical data, opinions and suggestions etc., which become naturally the centre of readers' attention. Feature even points out the corrupt elements in the various departments as well as the black sheep, and subject them to some extent of accountability.

**Meeting demands of the readers**

In the present age, the newspapers and the periodical cannot ignore the likes and dislikes, requirements, demands of the public psychology. Long articles with drab heaps of information, facts and figures are not consistent with the popular temperaments. That is the key of the success of the features as well as the papers. People like simple narrative and direct address to them. Viewed from the above context, feature appears the only branch of journalism, which provides entertainment, instruction and education, interest to the people.

**Attractive headlines**

Features are based usually on the news-stories, whereas the news originates from the happenings in the society. Another demand of the feature is its attractive headlines, which add to the beauty of the feature as well as attract the attention of the readers. The main element in the headline is its dramatic style, fashion and mood and suspense therein.

**Suitability of style, form and content**

Nothing must be beyond acceptable norms though style should be there, and nothing deliberately done in order to impress readers. Form must be accompanied by the well-constructed and maintained content, which must be to the point and concerning the issue being discussed.

**Using divergent tools**

A news-story and a feature also differ as towards its contents, structure and form. A news-story is a somewhat a business-like matter to be disposed of in a business-like manner in a traditional and conventional form and structure. Whereas, a feature is written off-the-track manner, in an unconventional manner, keeping in view the psyche of the people and in commonly understood language and idiom.

The news-story is written in a cold and logical manner, whereas a feature is designed to appeal to the emotions and passions of the people. In a feature, commonly-understood and simple language is used, and all the relevantly useful elements of dramatic are utilized to the full extent.

**Guidance**

Tell the reader how to react to certain situations, and how he must be thinking while considering a particular aspect of life or society. The feature must be considering it an obligation that it should guide the reader by telling him what is the issue besides sympathising with the reader's situation if appropriate. Summarise any actions required of your readers, and any follow up action items required of you for them. The objectives of a news-story are basically to communicate inform but the basic and bare facts; whereas a feature aims at instruction, information, knowledge besides missionary objectives for the improvement of morals and betterment of the lot of the people.

A feature may include in its study of the subject; all the information, background of the matter, or the causes ascribed to a particular event. A news-story usually has to be subjected to the strict demands of the dead line, in other words, a reporter has limited time to dispose of the news-story, whereas a feature writer has ample time at his disposal and has not to necessarily meet a deadline.

**Criticism and comments**

Criticism and comments bring to focus what you want to highlight, which is done by bringing in knowledge to give satisfaction through knowledge. Interestingly, it never means the feature is divorced from reality, as it is based on facts and actual events.

A feature usually aims at imparting and delivering the desired effect, instruction, guidance as well as entertainment to all the readers, including those who are already well-aware of the facts and figures of the subject and those who happen to examine and peruse the subject for the first time.

**Common and personal problems**

Something related to 'me' interests me more – is the principle for bringing the society under focus besides highlighting national and international scenarios.

**Pictorial importance**

A feature must never ignore the importance of charts and maps, as a full page sans any pictures looks dull and drab. Pictures and related material arouse readers' interest instead of full page without pictures, which bores the readers. For this purpose, bullets and blocks can be used.

**Literary style**

A feature must be written in good language and must carry the value of a literary style coupled with creative writing; otherwise the feature can become trite or boring.

**Novelty**

This comes through difference in content and pictures with the supporting information and examples. It must be kept in mind how these relate to your readers.

**Simplicity**

Simplicity in presenting facts should be along with the understandable language to the reader.

**Emphasis on layout**

Features generally engross the attention of the readers from the very beginning to the end. Moreover special emphasis is laid on its best possible layout, make-up, pictures, and highlights, and are allotted special and prominent place in the papers.

A nicely written feature always deserves a prominent place in a newspaper. Of course, a good feature should have an interesting beginning, a captivating middle and a worth remembering ending.

**Logical results and conclusions**

There is nothing, which could be considered as good journalism when it is not based on logic and reality. A feature must have a strong conclusion with pragmatic thinking working behind that. The conclusions round out the feature by linking up the conclusion with the beginning.

## DEMANDS OF A FEATURE

If on one hand, certain responsibilities and duties are to be fulfilled by the feature, then there are certain demands of every feature, which must be met by him as a writer of features.

They are:

### **Explanation**

The basic importance of the features is fullest explanation and explication of the difficult points, so as to make it more and more intelligible to the general masses at large. Feature-writing is actually at par with detailed reporting which includes all the requisite information and facts under study, suitable to be presented to the general readers. Features are uniquely based upon some interesting news-stories, which absorb the popular attention immediately or popular attention can be diverted. In the feature, the background of the particular news-story is presented side by side the present situation. For detailed information, all the relevant facts and figures are included in the feature. Feature not only includes the detail information as well as the personal feelings and impressions, which collectively assist the readers and the officials to arrive at some firm conclusions and to form public opinion.

### **Entertainment and Interest**

It has been justifiably said that feature is actually a news-story but converted into detailed and attractive and interesting form. Moreover feature writing also contains relevant photographs, turning it into a colourful and pictorial writings, which naturally increase their interest and entertainment. A feature is a news-story from facts point of view and is a drama or a narrative from the point of view of its particular style of description. The newspapers and the periodicals usually owe their success to the interesting and attractive narrative of its feature articles. A feature manifests the basic and bare facts of a news-story but in an attractive and attention-absorbing manner. Otherwise the features would have been considered as drab writings, particularly in this age of awful pre-occupations and lack of leisure and even more when thousands of voices and messages and writings follow the man. It is the objective and demand of the feature to provide materially all available and necessary information, facts and figures and equip and prepare the readers with moral values to confront and face the competition of age and times. So, feature is not a means of material and mental entertainment, but it renders moral and ethical services to the readers.

### **Information and guidance**

The features are usually objective-oriented, as to the information and guidance. The objectivity is the moot question of the feature-writing, which forms the basis of success of any newspapers, journal, magazine or a periodical. In other words, features are not enough merely to provide entertainment and interest but they also have an objective to serve.

### **Both sides of picture**

A feature shall, be considered consummate and perfect only if it gives and explicates both sides of picture of an issue, an event or a problem. Feature reflects the real life and is usually written on the current issues, and gets data and material from living society. A good feature writer gets information, facts and figures from the relevant persons and employs his sensitive thinking and observation This virtually makes a feature most interesting, alluring and attention absorbing immediately.

### **Diagnosis of Problems**

Another important demand of the feature is its diagnosis of problems prevalent in the society at a given period. Features are destined to reflect the mood of the society, to detect the underlying problems which have diseased rather marred the society. Features not only detect the problems, but also undertake to study and examine the causes and factors, which have led to a deteriorating state. They are meant also to suggest the possible remedies and feasible measures to be taken to check the onslaught. Features render valuable social services, by examining the countless social and psychological problems and their suggestive and possible solutions. The features impel the readers to ponder over the serious topics and

even habituate them to form a solid thinking, and to prepare them to face hard facts of life in a light vein with unconscious means without putting any unnecessary stress and strain on them.

### **Favourite of readers**

The readers are more interested in reading the feature rather than a column or an editorial. As a feature is more interesting, easily readable and intelligible and effective than a cold and logically written editorial and even a personalised column. Features are not only the favourite item for the readers, but even the feature writers usually earn and enjoy better reputation. A feature is a perfect article as it includes all the aspects of an issue, which the readers peruse with keep and deep interest and even increases the circulation of a newspaper on any day.

### **Attractive prose pieces**

The features are literally and figuratively compositions of superb beauty, with unique and excellent style of writings, on which the whole sub-structure of a newspaper stands solidly. They are really the moving spirit in the newspapers. Their beauty owed to excellent style of narrative and employing the bare facts and figures in such a manner so as to be easily digestible. Their presence not only increases the circulation of a paper manifold and even invests the papers with new meanings of importance and influence.

In the present age, the newspapers and the periodical cannot ignore the likes and dislikes, requirements, demands of the public psychology. Long articles with drab heaps of information, facts and figures are not consistent with the popular temperaments.

People like simple narrative and direct address to them.

Feature appears the only branch of journalism, which provides entertainment, instruction and education, interest to the people. Features generally engross the attention of the readers from the very beginning to the end.

### **Characteristics of features**

- They usually entertain more than they Inform, Instruct, or advise, although they may do all four.
- They may be of any length, ranging all the way from rather long magazine articles to the short human-interest story.
- They are factual and require reporting, but they are related to news stories in few other ways.
- They may or may not be timely. If they are timely and related to a current news event, they are likely to be more appealing to a newspaper's readers.
- They may or may not be timely. If they are timely and related to a current news event, they are likely to be more appealing to a newspaper's readers.
- They may be written in any form and in any style. The only criteria are that the form and style be appropriate to the content and to the purpose of the story.
- They permit the reporter to use all his knowledge and cleverness to write a story that is original in idea and treatment.
- They are well organised, always written from a carefully constructed plan or out-line.
- They rarely have a news lead. Instead they more often have novelty leads.
- They usually strike the keynote in the opening sentences, which permit the reader to come into quick contact with the crux of the story, and arouse interest.
- They usually are not cut in makeup. Thus, the reporter may use any devices of the fiction writer that he wishes suspense, surprise, dialogue, description, narration, climax, and the likes.
- They depend upon the writer to apply his imagination to the facts.
- They are written with friendly simplicity.
- They apply all the principles of effective writing to achieve unity, coherence, and emphasis, which are essential to all good writing.
- They use specific nouns, adjectives, and verbs to create vivid images, sounds, and feelings for the reader.
- They usually can be improved by rewriting to eliminate the writing faults.
- They bring the reader as close as possible to the experience or idea related in the story.



- 
- They use fresh, original figures of speech where appropriate.
  - They often incorporate, where appropriate, the suggestions of a number of well-known writers whose ideas follow in part:
  - Make the article replete with episodes and anecdotes.
  - Put something in quotation marks very early in the article.
  - Use the second person and bear the subject in upon the reader as a matter of urgency to him.
  - Make ideas concrete by use of specific figures and illustrations that readers understand.
  - Use dialogue and local colour, characterisations, and appeals to the senses. Let readers see, hear, taste, or feel what happened.
  - Keep the paragraphs short.
  - Use long sentences and short sentences judiciously mixed.

## CONDUCTING AND WRITING OF INTERVIEWS

Interview is an important aspect for feature writing. Newspaper and magazine features interviews are similar. The only important difference is that the typical newspaper feature interview may be somewhat less thorough because the newspaper writer frequently faces an imminent deadline.

### Definition

According to a loose or general definition, interview is ‘Asking questions to obtain information’.

Strict or technical definition: Asking questions to obtain opinions, ideas, or special information on a topic of interest from a prominent person or a recognised authority.

### Kinds of interviews

Following are the types of interviews:

**Informative:** This interview is to obtain facts from those responsible for something, or have witnessed an event or participated in a news situation; playing up the important facts.

**Opinion:** This is to obtain comments and opinions, and the writer play-up comments

Personality-based: This is done for a celebrity or well-known person to obtain facts of personality, his interests, life and activities. However, talking to the less known is a different case scenario.

### Kinds of interviews (availability of the interviewee)

It depends upon the availability of the interviewee, which makes the following kinds of interviews:

#### In-person interviews

Interviews for newspapers or magazines can be conducted in person, by telephone, email, in a group or by letter. Each category of interview has a unique purpose, as well as distinct advantages and disadvantages. For example, the skilfully conducted personal interview—the cornerstone of the story—should yield good quotations, accurate description and insight into the issues and individuals in the story.

The disadvantage of the personal interview is that it takes time—time to arrange, time to gain the confidence of the subject, time to get the necessary information and time to disengage from the interview.

#### Telephonic interviews

If the personal interview is like a full meal, the telephone interview is a fast-food sandwich because it serves a purpose, but in a minimal way.

The advantage of the telephone interview, usually used for a story’s secondary figures or for re-interviews of primary subjects, is its quickness, like fast food.

One disadvantage of using the telephone is that you cannot see the interviewee, which means you can’t describe him or her. The main disadvantage is that you cannot establish much rapport with the interviewee because of the impersonality of the telephone. To mitigate this disadvantage, work on your telephone manners and also provide verbal reinforcement for interviews, such as an occasional “Uh-huh” or “I understand.”

#### Group session

The third category of interview is the group session, often with a subject whose spouse or friend is present. A variation is an interview with a company employee in the presence of one or more corporate public relations representatives.

The only advantage to the group interview is that it’s better than no interview at all. Its disadvantages are that everyone in the room may want to answer your question, or—in the case of a PR representative overseeing the interview—the subject’s answers may be tainted.

To get the most out of a group interview, code your notebook so that you can ascertain who said what, or use a tape recorder. Also, make arrangements to contact the prime interviewee later by telephone for additional comments.

**Email/letter**

Occasionally a writer is unable to reach a source in person or by telephone. In that case, a written list of questions is an alternative to no interview at all. For example, if you repeatedly fail to reach a key executive in a major corporation, try submitting written questions. The executive may respond by email or letter, and may even telephone you, thus upgrading the quality of the interview.

The advantage to the written interview is that, like the group interview, it's better than nothing. Its disadvantages are numerous: You can't establish rapport with the subject; your source has ample opportunity to ignore or to be unresponsive to your questions; you have no opportunity for clarification or elaboration; and what you cannot see you cannot describe.

**Who to interview**

All ideas for interviews begin with a question: Who will be interviewed?

That sounds like an easy question, but the answer often can be elusive. For example, assume you're a newspaper feature writer and you want to write an odd-occupation story about a so far unselected professor at the university because you have learnt that more than half of the university professors supplement their income with outside activities. These activities range from consulting in their field to operating businesses.

You call the university's media liaison office and ask for help. The media representative provides you with three names: A broadcasting professor has a half-interest in a radio station; a business teacher does consulting for companies; and an English professor writes paperback romance novels.

Then the media liaison recalls that an education professor has recently quit his tenured post to buy and has started irrigating his land. With that, you've found your main *who* and, in the process, refocused your story, which will now be about university teachers, who leave teaching.

Your interviewee list isn't complete, of course. You'll need to talk to that teacher's former department chairperson and a few colleagues and students. For perspective, you'll need other examples of professors from the colleges, who have junked their teaching careers. And you'll need to find at least one expert who can explain why professors leave teaching.

(If you were freelancing this to a national general-interest magazine, you could still focus on the professor, but you probably would need to draw your other examples from universities across the country to give the story national scope.)

As you can see, the focus of your story should lead you to a key "who." But the right "who" also can change the focus of the story. Finally, except for the most superficial newspaper features, your "who" really should be a list rather than a single name.

**Asking for the interview**

The next step is to ask for the interview. Getting an interview is sometimes difficult because many people are wary of the press. For example, first-time interviewees may picture themselves confronted with questions such as, "Do you still beat your wife?"

The best way to ask for interview time is to explain quickly and clearly, who you are, why you want the interview and how much time you will need. Ask for enough time to complete the interview, but allow more time in your schedule in case the interview goes beyond the allotted period.

You may also have to explain to the interviewee how the story you want to write differs from investigative reporting and what the interview will be like.

Remember that no one (except perhaps government employees responding to questions about their work) owes you an interview. Everyone else who agrees to talk to you is performing a courtesy. To be sure, giving you an interview is not an act of pure altruism. The interviewee can benefit from the experience in numerous ways, including recognition and the excitement of a new experience.

Many newspaper and magazine writers agree that asking for the interview is worrisome.

If you are writing an in-depth profile and have the time, consider the advice of writer Gael Greene. Greene says: "In a profile, the ideal way for me to interview is practically to live with the person for two or three days, if possible. I have a list of questions and I have done as much research as I can, have talked to all their friends and ex-lovers and mates and so on. It's productive just to move in and sit there until

they stop being aware of my presence and are just being themselves. Then at some point, at lunch or dinner, I might ask a few questions—the soft, easy questions, and let them say the things they want to say.” In short, use common sense. If you’re interviewing an executive who can tell his secretary to hold his calls, the office probably is a good place for the session. On the other hand, if you were interviewing a factory worker, the workplace would be a poor location because it wouldn’t be private or quiet. Instead, meet the person at home, assuming you can have a private discussion there.

Keep following brief points in your mind always:

- Making an appointment in advance
- Arrange a time and place that are convenient, importantly for the interviewee and then the interviewer
- Use ingenuity and perseverance to obtain an interview if you fail to make an appointment
- Do not use unethical or devious means to obtain an interview
- Make appointments sufficiently in advance as people might be very busy
- Keep in unforeseen circumstances – might make you miss it
- Repeat time and place of appointment before hanging up the receiver—certain that there is no misunderstanding

### **Researching the interviewee**

When you’re granted the interview, you’ll need to research both the interviewee and the topic of the interview.

Your library research should be supplemented with calls to people who know your interviewee and understand the topic of your article. Prepare your interviewee for this by telling him what you’re going to do and—if the story is personal—by asking the interviewee for the names of two or three close friends.

Talk to your seniors and colleagues as well.

You should ask for a curriculum vitae, which is an academic resume. If your subject works for a large company, the company public relations office might provide you with a biography, but they are not required to do so.

With these sources, you should be able to piece together lots of information before you even talk. You’ll discover information such as his full name, age, address, academic degrees and title, previous employment record, and other information.

The point of all this is that if you enter an interview armed with detailed information about your interviewee, you’ll be able to spend the interview time more effectively and you’ll also be likely to flatter the subject with your thoroughness.

### **Conducting the interview**

Effective interviewing—the practice of getting another person to talk freely—is largely an exercise in human relations. To be successful at it, you must be part used-car salesman, part psychiatrist and part a secret agency man. You’ll use some of this human relations skill in asking for the interview and in conducting research. But most of that effort should be directed toward the interview itself—particularly the first few minutes of the session.

Professional writers say the secret to an effective interview is to make friends, and the sooner the better. Research has shown that the first four minutes of an interview sets the tone for the rest of the meeting, which means that you have about 240 seconds to establish a working relationship with the subject, or be left with an interviewee who may be unconcerned about your needs, unwilling to help and perhaps even hostile to your presence.

The interviewee will be sizing you up during those first four minutes, researchers say. For that reason, you need to be aware of your appearance, body language, voice, and word choice.

Let’s take **appearance** first; which experts say makes up about half of the first impressions. Dress appropriately. If you were interviewing a bank president in his office, blue jeans would be inappropriate attire. On the other hand, if you’re interviewing a factory worker in a blue-collar tavern, a business suit won’t help your cause. And if you are interviewing a religious figure, you need to wear a dress accordingly.

**Watch body language.**

Head nodding is friendly and reinforcing. A blank stare may be threatening. A slouch says you are lazy. Erect posture says you're alert.

Voice and word choice count for the other half of the impression, experts say. If you're used to speaking loudly, soften your voice in an intimate office setting—or expect the interviewee to try to get rid of you at the earliest opportunity. If you mispronounce a word or use poor grammar, the interviewee has every reason to suspect you're likely to misquote him or her in the article.

In short, the interviewee is deciding whether he or she likes what you look like and how you speak at the same time that he or she is sizing up what you're saying and how you're saying it.

Six simple techniques will help people like you—assuming you haven't shot yourself in the foot with inappropriate attire and elocution. First, be interested in your subject. Second, smile, while you talk and listen. Third, use the interviewee's name correctly. Fourth, be a good listener. Fifth, talk in terms of the other person's interests and with the other person's terminology. Finally, make the interviewee feel as though he or she is the most important person in the world by paying close attention while you're with him or her.

**Brief points**

- Be sure what your assignment is and what will you do
- Select aspects that will interest your reader
- Select a definite and limited topic which could be developed adequately in a limited time
- Learn about the person as much as possible, his accomplishments, opinions, likes, dislikes, personality
- From persons around you, from articles, books, either written by him or others about him
- Learn about the subject
- Gather enough information to speak intelligently on the topic
- Prepare a questionnaire, must be thought-provoking and current
- Questions in chronological order
- Questions of local interest
- Avoid embarrassing or personal questions, but not difficult ones
- Questions to bring out desired information

**Asking questions**

Think about your questions before you ask them. Most newspaper and magazine writers — even professionals of long standing — jot down their questions beforehand. Of course, you should be flexible about those questions. If you have 99 good questions but 'the subject says something stunning in the middle of the third answer, be prepared to follow that lead and spontaneously create new questions pursuing the new angle.

As you phrase the questions—whether in your mind or on paper—scrutinise how you ask each one because questions come in a variety of styles, each with its own effect. Here are four useful types of questions.

The **open-ended question** allows the respondent broad range in the answer. If the question is unfocused, the answer is useless. Let's assume you're interviewing students at the University for a Newspaper Feature. Here's an unfocused open-ended question you might—but shouldn't—ask.

Example: "What's your opinion of the university?"

Opinion of what? The interviewee will think. The bookstore? Dormitory conditions? Cafeteria food? Academic quality? Here is a more focused and useful version of the open-ended question.

Example: "How do you think the university's advising system can be improved?"

The **closed question** asks for a more narrow reply.

Example: "Which academic departments at the university have you heard positive things about?"

Example: "Which professors teaching general education courses would you recommend to a freshman entering the university?"

The **probe question** asks for amplification of an unresponsive or incomplete answer.

Example: “Why do you recommend Prof (name) basic course?”

The **mirror question** by repeating part of the interviewee’s answer, forces the respondent to amplify his or her answer and also gives you time to finish writing down the original answer. The mirror question often is coupled with a probe question.

In general, the writer should use focused open-ended, closed and probe questions, followed by an occasional mirror question, to slow down the interviewee and to clarify quotations.

The writer should specifically try to avoid three question types: yes-or-no, leading and loaded questions. Hypothetical queries may sometimes be used. Here are examples.

The **yes-or-no question**, which allows the interviewee to answer in only one of two ways, is virtually useless for the feature or magazine writer because it doesn’t yield a detailed answer (unless it is followed by a probe question).

Example: “Do you think Prof (name) is a good teacher?”

The **leading question** is considered unethical by many writers and editors because it strongly suggests the “right” answer to an interviewee.

The **loaded question**, designed to antagonise an interviewee, is equally manipulative.

A final type of question that occasionally may be used is the **hypothetical query**, which allows the interviewee to think about and comment on coming developments. You must be careful to pose hypothetical questions only about situations that are, in fact, able to occur.

Succinctly, you should carefully structure your questions. And when you structure the questions, you should build them along the lines of focused open-ended, closed, probe and mirror queries.

Most interviews require that the writer ask some “difficult” questions. Difficult questions are hard to define. If you’re writing a profile, the difficult question could be something like, “How much money do you make?” or “Weren’t you arrested in 1984?” Be sure to ask these questions at the end of the interview so that if the session ends abruptly, you will still have enough material to write your story.

The next step in the interview process depends upon the difficult question having been asked. If you have asked a touchy question, you should be prepared to help the subject recuperate from the trauma of being frank—or angry—with you.

Your interviewees will not usually be criminals and you are not a police officer, but the act of suggesting that something said will not sound as awful as the subject thinks it will is, in fact, effective human relations.

It is said that a writer’s personality will set the tone for the interview.

Journalistic techniques really grow out of the kind of person you are. Hostile people will be hostile reporters and friendly people will be friendly reporters. An interview is a conversation with slightly more questions than ordinary.... If you are friendly, that comes over. If you are hostile and paranoid, that comes over.

For example, investigative reporters tend to be paranoid. An investigative reporter once said: “We investigative reporters are all proctologists. You look up there and you expect to see something dirty and you do.” That’s what makes them so great.

Six interviewing tips most writers follow:

1. Don’t come into the interview with your mind made up about the interviewee.
2. Keep your ego out of the interview: Your subject is the subject—not you.
3. Don’t argue.
4. Listen; don’t keep talking.

5. Don't interrupt if the answer is not going the way you want it, unless you don't have time and must guide it quickly to a conclusion.

**6. Assume nothing. [For instance: how a name is spelled.]**

Never be ashamed of saying, "I don't understand, or "What does that mean?" or "Put it in layman's language, please." Neophytes are often so scared of looking stupid that they don't pursue matters as far as they should. But to ask is to learn, and to help your readers learn. To me, the only stupid question is the unasked question.

However, it is also said there is nothing [during the interview] that can be done by the book—nothing—except perhaps ask the really "hairy" question at the end.

People, whether they know it or not, can tell an awful lot from your body English, as one can tell from theirs and from their facial expressions. All reporters have to do this. It's not technique so much as instinct. All of this is based on gut feeling. There are ways of telling when a person's lying; the brief hesitations, the people who are loath to make eye contact. All these are clues.

The intensity of the questioning will vary with the writer. For example, who has flexible deadlines, likes to take more time with interviews. He initially spends perhaps an hour with an interviewee, then builds to longer sessions. One tries to hang out a lot, with all types of subjects, sometimes not even taking notes. One always works from the less significant to the more significant questions, until you know what you want to ask. You may use the time to ask and re-ask questions, listening for nuances and speech patterns.

**Brief points**

- Be there in-time
- Again introduce yourself clearly, may give visiting card
- If the interviewee asks you for drinks, tell him by remaining within limits
- Be friendly and courteous
- Congratulate or condole if there is anything of the sort
- Writer—tell him that you liked his book
- Make him feel what he says is hugely important
- Try to impart an impression that you are interested in knowing what he has to say
- Breaking ice yourself might ensue problems
- Avoid interrupting the interviewee
- Enable him to do most of the talking
- Keep him going smoothly but not permitting to wander away
- Digressing from the topic, follow with interesting questions
- Observe facial impressions, mannerism and gestures
- Interested in answering, getting perturbed or happy
- Vice-versa—you are also being observed, no cracking fingers, mobile switched off or on silent—ever picking unless emergency
- Take plenty of notes in abbreviated longhand, but not burying yourself
- Be sure you have exhausted all questions
- Ask if the interviewee wanted to say something else
- Exhaust all questions before finishing off
- Listen carefully
- Identify between important and unimportant details
- Understand if there were any ambiguities
- Spellings of all names
- Exhaust all questions before finishing off
- Thanks the person
- Observe requests if any

**Attribution guidelines**

During practically every interview, you can expect the interviewee to say at least once, “Hey, don’t put that in the story” or, “I’ll answer your question if you agree not to use the information in the story.” When that happens, you’re being confronted with one of the most vexing problems facing the writer—what to do about the “off-the-record” request.

When an off-the-record request is made (whether it’s in regard to something said or as yet unsaid), you have three choices: You can agree to keep the remark secret, you can absolutely deny the subject’s request, or you can bargain to use some or all of the information in your story. Off-the-record comments and information withheld by the subject are of little use, so most writers refuse requests to keep information secret and attempt to bargain.

To understand how you can change the subject’s off-the-record request into a usable quotation, it is helpful to know the etiquette under which most newspaper and magazine writers operate. First, any comment made during an interview is on-the-record unless the comment is granted off-the-record status by the writer. Professional etiquette requires you to keep your word only if you’ve actually given it. On the other hand, you are required to keep your word if you agree not to print an interviewee’s information prior to being told that information.

Successful bargaining requires understanding how quotations can be restricted. Typically, quotation agreements can be divided into five categories.

The first category is **for-direct-quotation**. Here, whatever the subject tells you can be used as a direct quote, a partial quote or an indirect quote. Here’s an example of a direct quotation.

Remarks made during most personal and telephone interviews, of course, are always on-the-record and for-direct-quotation, unless the subject advises you otherwise prior to making the remark.

Proceeding along a continuum of progressively less acceptable restrictions, the next category is **not-for-direct-quotation**. Here, you can identify the source and repeat the quote, but not within quotation marks. The purpose of this technique is largely to allow the source to claim having been misquoted if he or she is in hot water after the interview appears. Even though politicians enjoy using this approach, you should avoid it because it casts a shadow on your credibility should the subject deny having made the statement?

**Not-for-attribution** comes next. The lack of attribution forces you to connect a quote to a generalized source.

This kind of attribution—sometimes called background attribution—obviously has less credibility than a direct quotation or even a not-for-direct-quotation statement.

**Deep background** often refers to information given to a writer on the basis that it not be attributed to the source in any way. Usually the writer can get another source to corroborate the background information and then can attribute that information to the new source. Deep background is frequently used in news analysis articles.

The last, and worst, category is, of course, *off-the-record*, where you promise not to reveal either the information or the source.

Much of this is a tempest in a teapot because often interviewees want to restrict information in which you have little interest: They pledge you to secrecy and then tell you something that is irrelevant to the story.

Succinctly, the plan is to assume anything you’re told in an interview is for-direct-quotation unless you agree to an exception. If you agree to an exception, try to move the request along the continuum from off-the-record to at least not-for-direct-quotation or at worst not-for-attribution. Agreeing to hear important information on an off-the-record basis is a waste of your time.

In addition to off-the-record requests, some subjects demand to see their quotations or even the entire story as a condition of the interview. Their requests are usually rejected.

Magazine writers and editors sometimes verify quotations by reading key selections to a source by telephone. Most newspaper feature writers refuse all such requests. A lot of people ask to see the piece and you always have to say, ‘No.’



## Gathering material

### Note-taking Tips.

Researchers say that even if you're a careful listener, you will miss 50 percent of what a speaker—in this case, an interviewee—has to say. And if you don't record that information quickly, you will lose 50 percent of what you did hear. For that reason, note taking is critical unless you routinely depend on tape recorders.

First, use the correct tools. Writers have found that taking notes on standard paper slows down writing. Use a reporter's notepad, which typically is about four inches wide by eight inches long.

Most newspaper and magazine writers don't know shorthand. However, most writers do use some form of self-taught shorthand, which is another tool. At its simplest, that shorthand involves using numbers for words ("4" instead of "four") and dropping articles (such as "the") and other non-essential words. Still, note taking in this manner is an inexact art and depends on the writer's getting to a terminal or computer as quickly as possible to reconstruct the language of the interviewee. So—assuming you're not using a tape recorder and you don't know true shorthand—don't try to take down every word. Instead, rely on good notes for direct and partial quotations and on your memory to reconstruct the gist of what the subject said in indirect quotation.

An especially fast-talking interviewee may cause you to fall far behind in note taking, despite your reporter's notepad, self-taught shorthand and excellent memory. If that happens, consider asking your speeding subject to slow down.

Finally, be as inconspicuous as possible about your note taking. Keep your notes out of the line of sight of the interviewee. In fact, avoid letting the subject even see when you've stopped writing. This gives you the option of ignoring inane comments while taking copious notes of important ones.

### Tape recorder techniques.

To tape or not to tape, that is the question!

Most newspaper reporters facing daily deadlines seldom use recorders. Replaying and transcribing material takes too much time, they say.

On the other hand, magazine writers—especially freelance writers—use tape recorders frequently. So does newspaper feature writers who don't face short deadlines?

While there is disagreement among journalists about the value of recorders, all agree that if you use a tape recorder, you should use a good one.

The ideal machine, which should be small so that it won't distract the interviewee, ought to have a built-in microphone with an automatic gain control. The built-in mike will lessen the obtrusiveness of the machine; the gain control will automatically adjust the recording level for varying conditions. Recording should be indicated by a tiny light so you can check whether the machine is working properly. All are common features.

The machine also should have a tape counter and an audible forward cue so that you can locate specific segments of the tape later. The counter reading can be noted during the interview so you can later find the general location of important quotations, and the cue will allow you to play the tape back at faster than normal speed to pinpoint those quotations quickly. These are common features, too.

An end-of-tape warning signal to let you know when you're out of tape, and an auto-reverse capability so that the recorder will automatically record the second side of the tape, are important but less common features. So is a voice-activated recording system, which means the machine will record only when someone is talking, thus saying tape.

Even with all of this technology, it's a good idea to take notes as though the recorder did not exist. This will protect you in case the recorder fails and will also provide a table of contents for the tape.

Secondly, a tape recorder frees you to really listen to the other person and gauge interaction with them. You can look at them. They can look at you. They're not looking at the top of your head. That is disconcerting. The tape recorder gives the interviewer a chance to really respond to what the interviewee is saying, to think about it. Plus the fact that when you get back and have to listen to all of this again, it's really very helpful because you hear things you didn't hear at first, and inflections, pauses.

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Some reporters argue against using tape recorders. They can malfunction, tapes take time to transcribe, and taping encourages laziness on the part of the reporter. All of these points are worth considering. But tape recorders can be tested right before and during an interview.

**Closing the session**

If you've done a good job interviewing your subject, closing the session may be difficult because the subject, who probably has enjoyed the experience immensely, will want to prolong the interview. You must persuade him or her that the time has come to end the interview.

The best way to close the interview is to explain that the time you've asked for has long been up and you have another appointment. You should also add that you may have other questions (and the chances are good that, indeed, you will) and you would like to be able to telephone. The interviewee will usually be willing to continue the relationship and will probably insist that you call if you have the slightest question. With that, you should smile, thank the interviewee and leave.

**Writing the interview**

Feature and magazine articles usually require description. Description requires keen observation, the third component of reporting. Sometimes keen observation requires participation.

There are numerous approaches to describing people, places and events. What works in describing people is usually also effective for describing places and events.

Write immediately after, otherwise you may lose information after determine the kind of interview you had conducted. Hence you must include only the pertinent content, by avoiding the obvious and the stereotype information. One must use your originality and subject to determine the best order of information.

Begin with an appropriated lead, which must interest your reader.

Bridge the gaps carefully by re-reading whatever you have written.

## WRITING NOVELTY INTROS

Why intros or Intros are important? This is the first question, which comes to every person's mind whenever he is asked to write 'good' intros. Though definition of 'good' varies from person to person but generally we can say that 'what appeals to the readers and urges them to read the rest of the feature or article' is a good intro. However, every writer has different tools to make their write-ups interesting. While some apply the simple rule: "Let's talk your heart out to the reader!" or give a "Wake up call to the reader!" However, it is a must to enhance the readability.

It is always challenging the ability of the writer to write interesting intros. The Intros add vigour and colour to the writing in order to make features as interesting as possible, which is possible through imagination coupled with paying intense attention to facts.

However, warning is: Deliberate efforts must be used sparingly, rather the thumb rule is whenever you do it, make it natural, appropriate and unrestrained.

### When to write novelty intros

Follow the mentioned below rules:

When you have some facts that are not entirely straight news

When you have some facts that may be made much more interesting by a novel way of presenting them

When the use of a novelty intro seems natural, appropriate, and unrestrained.

- Let's talk your heart out to the reader!
- When the purpose to arouse reader's interest – for more information
- Avoid juvenile styles

One of the surest signs of the novice writer is his straining to find writing devices with the single virtue that they are different. Novelty intros should be used sparingly when the purpose of your intro is to arouse the reader's interest, not to satisfy it.

Beware that despite its variation from the straight news Intro, a novelty Intro for a feature story should still present the news feature, but in such a way as to pique a reader's interest for more information. Imagination combined with attention to facts is the requirement for successful novelty Intro writing.

### Types of novelty intros

#### Punch or astonisher intros

This consists usually of a short, snappy sentence set off in a paragraph by itself with the summary of other facts in the second paragraph, and used when you have one fact that is extremely important or startling

#### Background intros

This consists of a sentence or sentences describing an event in which the background overshadows the individuals who participate in it. It is used often for stories about carnivals, dances, gym exhibitions, music festivals and Homecoming events.

#### Exclamatory intros

This consists of short exclamatory sentences frequently set off in a paragraph, and is used for extremely striking information, often of a big news

#### Direct quotation intros

This consists of a speaker's direct words, and is used when what is said is more striking or important than the person who made the statement.

**Question intros**

This consists of a question usually set off in a paragraph by itself, and is used only when the question is the crux of a story.

**Description intros**

This consists of a description of either of a person, place, or event, and is used when a comparatively few words can formulate a vivid image in the reader's mind.

**Contrast intros**

This should be sharp and vivid to be most effective, and is used to point up opposites and extremes.

**Literary, historical or mythological allusion intro**

This consists of mostly of a quotation or a reference to a literary, historical or mythological character, and is used only when the reference is natural and appropriate.

**Parody intro**

This consists of a parody of well-known song, poem, quotation, book or motion picture title, and is used when the parody is appropriate and easily recognised and not trite.

**Atmosphere intros**

This consists of words or phrases that help to portray the setting or mood for a reader, and is used only when the setting or mood an event is interesting or significant.

**Suspended interest intro**

This usually consists of several sentences in which reader's interest is intensified as he continues to read, and is used most frequently for news-feature or feature stories which must be printed in their entirety to preserve their news interest.

## STRUCTURE OF FEATURES

Generally speaking, there might not any significance about the structure of a feature, and people will like to divide it into three major portions, that is, the Intro, body and conclusion. However, with the passage of time and considering the reservations and constraints of the readers, one must be giving due attention to the division, and especially the transition from one portion to another, as a reader must be carried along with it. Otherwise, he might lose interest in the middle, and would never read that article again.

A feature is seldom written in the traditional inverted pyramid pattern or it can be written in a narrative fashion, much like a good joke or anecdote. A good feature requires as much organisation as the straight news story, for the feature has to flow smoothly and parts of a feature story must be kept intact if it is to succeed. In the well-planned story, every paragraph, every sentence, should add to the total effect.

However, the structure may vary from feature to feature. However, it goes like this when it is written with the usual standards.

### **Intro or Lead**

The lead must attract immediate attention and pull the reader into the story. Leads can vary in style and content. You can use description, narration, dialogue, question, unusual statement, call to action, comparison-contrast. (Discussed in detail in the last lectures).

### **Transition**

No matter how good the lead is, you need a solid transition into the body of the feature. If you think of the lead as a lure to attract the audience, then the transition sets the hook. It makes the reader want to continue. And it promises some kind of satisfaction or reward. The reward can be entertainment, information or self-awareness but has to be something of value to the reader.

### **Body**

Sound knowledge of the subject, coupled with good writing skills, will let you take the reader through a variety of experiences. You should use the standard writing devices of crisp dialogue, documental but vivid fact and detail, careful observation, suspense and if appropriate, plot.

### **Body is the major area**

Whenever, one is writing the body of a feature – which can carry many short pieces – following points must be kept in mind.

### **Never fill it, important part**

People can try to fill the part only may be thinking that the reader has been gripped into a certain situation and he will stick to reading the feature. It is never the case as the newspaper reading is a willing one, and if the reader feels that he is being bored or over-burdened, he might leave it even in the middle of the feature. So every word and concept must be rightly written and rightly placed.

### **Should be well-connected, forceful and coordinated**

All the paragraphs of the main body should be well-connected with each other. Jumping from one idea to another should be well-thought and must be seen whether it is getting its connection to the previous or the following paragraphs. Never take it for granted that the reader is going to form linkages in the thought process.

### **Avoid unnecessary details**

When we say a particular portion of a feature is the main body, it never means that every detail should be put in order to fill that body. There must be only relevant details without any stuffing-the-sack idea. The writer must consider that the main body is as important as the other portions of the feature. Concentrating in the same manner like the way the Intro or the Lead is written, the reader will remain absorbed in the story.

**But never omit important if it is required so**

If unnecessary details are to be avoided, then it never means that the important should be missed or omitted from the feature. Obviously the responsibility of keeping this intact and observing the rule lies with the writer.

**Building towards the climax**

Main body should be used as a portion, which is building the feature towards the climax. Hence, it must be planned in this manner that reader is expecting the climax after the main body.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion should give the reader a sense of satisfaction. You need to tie the conclusion to the lead so that the story has unity. Often you can do this through a short, tight summary, occasionally, you can conclude with an anecdote or a quote that sums up the substance of the story. With a narrative approach, you build toward a climax.

**Length**

If a reporter asks how long a feature story should be, the editor may reply, 'as long as you keep it interesting.' Feature stories vary in length from two or three paragraphs to 15 or 20 triple-spaced sheets of copy. Readers' interest is the main yardstick by which they are judged. And editors are paid to accurately assess readers' interest.

## SELECTION OF PICTURES, ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

Many have undoubtedly heard many a time the old cliché “one picture is worth 10,000 words.” This Chinese proverb helps to explain the popular appeal of news pictures. Never every reader-interest survey reveals a dominating interest in ‘picture’ material.

Jack Woodford, a successful pulp novelist and non-fiction author, gives over 50 per cent weight age to write-ups and pictures.

### Reasons for popularity of pictures:

They bring us closer to an event by enabling us to see with our own eyes what a writer has seen with his. Secondly, they somehow seem more truthful than news stories although, of course, pictures can be faked just as can news stories of poverty-stricken children in the foreign countries are hard for many of us to believe, but seeing a picture of these under-nourished children in bread lines and soup kitchens make the situation appear real.

Thirdly, they help us to feel that the persons about whom we read are real people. We see in our paper names of presidents, English royalty and Hollywood stars, but they remain just names until we can associate their names with their pictures.

Fourthly, they help to point up or increase the human interest of feature stories. Lastly, they help to enhance the make-up of a paper by giving variety and vitality to it.

Pictures appeal vividly to our past experience as well as to certain basic drives or deep seated tendencies, which most humans possess in various degrees of intensity.

The following list is not all-inclusive, but it should serve to classify the principal appeals made by the general run of the newspaper pictures:

1. Struggle (including certain sports)
2. Fear
3. Sympathy
4. Children
5. Animals
6. Obscenity or Nudity (in limited cases)
7. Beauty
8. Play
9. Familiarity
10. Humor

### Writing is not the only thing, pictures and maps do the rest of the job

No doubt, the importance of a good write-up can never be undermined, but in the present-day journalism, one can never consider pictures, illustrations and maps of lesser value. These actually contribute towards the general understanding of the feature, and one must be considering readers’ constraints of time while writing long features sans illustrations.

### A picture communicates better than a thousand words

When a picture is placed along with the article, if a reader does not read the feature, he can actually see a picture and makes an impression. Sometimes, a picture stays in mind for very long instead of the words related to that particular illustration.

People of all ages see pictures, if don’t read

All cannot read but all can see except the blind ones. And those who see always remember

But pictures can motivate the ‘viewers’ to read the feature

If a reader is not interested in reading any feature, a good picture can make him read the article, as his interest can be incited through visuals.

It is an international language understood by even the illiterate

A good picture or illustration can be understood by any person, speaking any language or living in any country. Succinctly, a feature can go unnoticed, but not a noticeable picture.

### **What have not been able to write, you can say it through pictures?**

There are many occasions in the life of a journalist when he cannot write something owing to certain pressures on him, but a photographer can solve his problem with the picture. Or the writer can come up with an illustration to say something sans getting into troubled waters.

### **Selection of pictures**

#### **Careful and cautious**

One must be very careful and cautious in the selection of the pictures, as these carry a really huge importance in the over-all impression of the feature.

#### **Related to the subject**

Only those pictures and illustrations should be considered for publication, which are relevant to the subject under discussion. Be certain that you have made the right choices from among the pictures and illustrations you have collected for the publication.

#### **Arousing interest**

Pictures should be evoking the interest of the readers in the features and they must feel like reading the text.

#### **Bringing beauty to the pages**

In present day world when the reader is fighting against running time, and he always feel that some thing visual should satisfy his urge for knowledge, then pictures and illustrations help him. Moreover, these also bring beauty to the pages.

#### **Keeping in mind editorial policy of the newspaper**

Selection of the pictures and illustrations must be made according to the Editorial policy of the newspaper. Most of the newspapers do not allow the usage of obscene or nude pictures; hence it is binding upon the writer and sub-editor or editor to select pictures and illustrations.

#### **Supporting the subject and its theme**

These must be supporting the subject or the angle of the story. Contradiction in the portrayal could destroy the over-all impact of the feature.

#### **Clear pictures**

These should be clear as blurred pictures irritate the reader. However, if the picture is pretty old or taken from a distant angle, but if it carries importance, then it can be printed. However, effort must be that all illustrations and pictures should be clear.

#### **Black and white pictures can be printed**

In this age of colored newspapers, black and white pictures and illustrations can be used. However, coloring of these pictures should be avoided. However, it is not binding as well.

#### **Local pictures**

Preference should be to use local pictures. Whenever, foreign pictures are used along with local features, it looks odd. Under compulsion, it can be done.



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**Sources****Photographers**

Employed photographers of the newspapers must be used and given an idea of the feature and ask them to bring pictures. Most of the times, they come up with better pictures even beyond your expectations.

**Library**

Every newspaper has a library where old and new pictures, which must be used up to the maximum extent.

**Reference section**

Sometimes the reference section of the newspaper also carries good illustrations, which need some hard work.

**Internet – precautions**

The Internet is most heavily used source these days, but it must be kept in mind that flagrant use can cause problems. First, the frequency of the pictures must be checked. Secondly, sometimes the size of the pictures can vary and when it comes to printing, it can be reduced to an unprintable size. Thirdly, it is must be seen whether it carries the authorization of copying or not.

**Books**

Illustrations and pictures from books can also be used, but the copyrights must be observed.

**Designers' expertise**

In case, if the visuals are not available, the page designers can be briefed about the feature, and asked to prepare an illustration.

**Usage of pictures****Sizing of the pictures**

The pictures and illustrations should be sized according to the design of the page, and this is done by the designer, but suggestion can be given.

**Blown up pictures**

Again the choice lies with the designer of the page; however, pictures can be blown in size, if their pixels stay in tact.

**Small pictures**

Small pictures are used, and especially with the interviews, that is, cut-out heads look appropriate.

**Collage– favorite of a few**

An amalgamation of picture arranged in a specific manner, called Collage, is a favourite of quite a few, but these must be used sporadically.

**Usage of maps**

Maps can be for good purpose, especially when the feature is about areas and distances.

**Usage of illustrations**

Illustrations give an overview of the content of the feature, and designers can be helpful in this regard.

**Usage of Alaamti pictures**

Sketches and cartoons can be used to good effect, and if used sporadically, impart good impression.

**Cropping of pictures****Using pictures from your own perspective**

Pictures must be used according to the content, and what could be visualized through that particular visual.

**Avoiding useless spaces**

While cropping pictures, or cutouts, extra spaces should be filled with text.

**Objective-orientated**

The cropping pictures should be used with an objective, and sporadically instead of frequent use, which can become trite or boring.

**Layout of pictures**

- Designers' prerogative, but you can say
- Designers have to right to assert, but the concerned editor has the right to suggest-cum-advise the reader.
- Placement and highlighting it from one's perspective
- Pictures can be placed and highlighted from the writers' perspective. However, if he is consulted, then things can be better.

## FEATURES AND EDITORIAL POLICY

In Pakistan, every year if not thousands, then hundred of newspapers and magazines are published. In 1988, when the new ordinance for the procurement of the declaration was made easy, it also increased the number of venturists many fold. However, there few which were published for a year or so or they got popularity among the readers.

In the same manner, many youngsters came to journalism but quit after some time, while only few remained in the field and were successful too. This is primarily due to the reason that those writers or journalists did not abide by the editorial policies of the newspapers; hence they are never needed by the newspapers. They deemed that they are not involved in ‘self-expression’ and the policy of the newspaper nor anything else must hinder their way. They forgot that the writings of the newspaper are not literary (that is, to act as ‘literature’ or as a ‘book’) rather these are journalistic, and are written for the readers.

The editors believe that quite a large number of writings are printed as those are not in accordance with the character and policy of the newspaper, and they think that the writers should be trained into clarity and maturity of mind. Most of the articles and features are not published just for the mere consideration that the writers want them to be printed.

### **Slanting or angling feature**

Giving turn or twist to the subject as per the editorial policy – anti-government or social – is an almost certainty that the feature could get published. In journalistic terms, it is called as ‘slanting’ a feature.

One can learning it from newspaper reading, that is, the subjects – what kind of subjects are being picked up by the writers – and their treatment – how the writers are treating them, that is, from what perspective they write about the subject.

Many a time, it also happens that one newspaper has rejected a particular feature, while the other has published it. It is primarily because of the difference of the editorial policy of various newspapers. However, every feature can be printed in every newspaper, except a few exceptions, and which is possible either by deleting or adding some material, which is either required or not needed.

Secondly, length or subject of the feature can be a problem. Different newspapers need different lengths of features besides being comfortable about a particular subject.

Look at one of the ordinary levels, that is, selection of pictures and vocabulary, and writing captions, fresh writers do not consider all these as important as these are. Resultantly, their features are rejected.

When a writer selects a suitable subject, then he must write according to the editorial policy of the newspaper, he is targeting. He must consider the making of the feature, general impression, details to be included or excluded, length, crux, pictures, language, and facts, which must be all there according to the editorial policy.

New writers keep on writing in their own flows, and then the put the onus of their failures on novelty and modernism. They never realize that creation the last two, take a lot of effort. They must realise that what is being published, from what angle and what the editor demands.

However, the question arises: Why writers fail in slanting the features according to the editorial policy of the target newspaper? Firstly, it is primarily because of the ‘Ignorance about editorial policy’. If one editor has rejected his feature, it could be published by another. It does not mean problem with the subject, rather it is the editorial policy.

The writer must know about the target newspaper. To know this, one must be involving himself in the Constant reading of the paper, and see the treatment of various themes, and the kind of subjects being picked up.

Secondly, he must be which ideologies are being favoured or rejected or whether it is being done though the direct approach or in an indirect manner.

On the other hand, a few of the feature writers want that the editorial policy must be according to the wishes without realizing that it is never changed for one writer.

Good writers are always required by a newspaper, but most of the write-ups are of ordinary nature. On the other hand, some newspapers develop writers, but not all of them.

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On the other hand, quite a few features are rejected owing to the reason that they are trite, and nothing new is discussed.

**Knowing what the editor wants!**

It is a must to know what the editor intends to print, and if the feature is according to the editor's requirements, then it is printed for sure whereas the editor outlines its requirements according to the wishes of his readers. For instance, if the editor wants that a certain feature must be written at a particular time, and his readers will take interest in that, the editor will get it written.

In order to do this, the writer must listen to what the editor wants him to write and in turn, act on the directions in true spirit. Good editor makes writer understand what his readers wants to read, and meeting the editor is a must as he tells the writer what he cannot understand from mere newspaper reading.

However, the editor can bring changes in the editorial policy, when he sees change in the demands of the readers, but it is never an easy thing to do, and never done impulsively. Secondly, the editor gives the writer latest update about the change in the editorial policy of the newspapers.

**Know what you can do best!**

It is a must for the writer to know on what he can write best. If he can write on social issues better, he must not attempt at political subjects, as it can be against his nature. It does nothing, but helps in the writer's failure.

On the other, a few of the writers, when they have not developed their own style, try to copy masters of that particular area. 'Never try to copy the style of others', as you are born with your own and you can use it to the best possible extent and become a success story. Remember! It is a small world, and rarely copying goes amiss. Hence, it is better to follow your instincts.

## HUMAN INTEREST AND FEATURE WRITING

Human interest is hard to define. Most editors say stories about children, animals or human emotions have automatic human-interest value. Consequently, a story about a little girl and her father combing the city for their missing sibling has guaranteed reader appeal. So does a medical feature about a young woman struggling to cope with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or one about a doctor at the research hospital trying to find a cure for baldness?

Consequently, if you want to write a profile about a man who traps or frees birds for a living, you probably have a sufficiently unusual story for broad reader appeal.

The talking bird story also has unusualness—assuming the little fellow really can muster up verbs and nouns—as well as human interest and proximity.

Of course, you can write a feature without conflict, human interest, importance, prominence, proximity or unusualness, but if your feature has none of these qualities, it is probably not going to be very interesting. And dull features do not appeal to anyone except perhaps the subject of the article.

However, unusualness is extremely important to the feature writer. A university teacher who turns junkman is, in fact, unusual. A junkyard owner who earns his doctor of philosophy degree and becomes a university teacher is equally unusual. On the other hand, a male registered nurse is less unusual, and probably is not worth a story. Verification is the key to deciding if a story is truly unusual.

A strong human interest feature does three things: (1) It describes an extraordinary experience; (2) it shows how people have coped with a problem common to many people; and (3) it focuses on a timely issue of wide regional or national concern.

A human-interest story may emphasise such news elements as relationships, drama, conflict, or oddity. While the inverted-pyramid pattern of organisation is not common in this type of feature story, punch and anecdotal leads can be used effectively.

Another type of features are those of human interest or human value. This is very popular source of writing features. Such features can be written on ever-green subjects like health, family, equality between men and women, industry, economics etc. Nowadays, many newspapers and magazines are full of features on freedom of expression.

### Understanding the human interest story

There must be something appealing to the emotions, not only of the writer but also of the readers as well. This could be developed from a situation or an incident, but must be based on facts of timely nature.

A human-interest story entertains the reader more than informs, except for the fact that it is usually based on facts of a timely nature. It has little news value and probably would not be published except for the interesting style in which it is written. Hence, it entertains the reader more than it informs though it influences a great deal, in certain cases.

It must be short and crispy, averaging between 75 to 200 words. However, it is not as such a strictly defined parameter.

It can be written about almost anything – from living to inanimate – that is, persons, places, animals and objects. However, it is more personal and intimate, than being objective. Hence, it is meant for enlivening the news pages, both in make-up and content despite the fact that it is frequently based on generally accepted truths that everyone knows what happens when young boy meets his parents after he has been kidnapped, but people like to read about emotions.

It is not necessary that it must be a story of an ordinary man; rather he achieving an extra-ordinary feat is better, while the extra-ordinary person cannot be erased from this list.

### Obtaining facts

The feature writer must develop a habit observing keenly and of being intellectually curious. He must learn to think of interesting little happenings, and registering them, both in his mind and notebook. He must also recognise particular sources of human interest, that is, any unusual situation or incident, which can touch emotions by arousing interest or sympathy.

Any major news event can have a human-interest angle.

**Knowing how to write**

Think before writing by outlining the order in which you will present the facts, and from where to start and finish, may be closing either with a surprise or dialogue, as most of the human-interest stories follow the regular pyramid order. However, it is advisable that following a narrative or chronological order is better because most of the human interest stories follow this order, whereas some stories follow a combination of the pyramid and narrative orders.

**Now the question is:**

How many angles could be made possible? The writer must determine the emotions to which he wishes to appeal. As such stories are short, the writer must appeal to only one emotion.

The writer must try to present a story in original way to hold the readers' interest. Secondly, it must be written for a particular reader, not for everyone and any one as it cannot be consumed and understood by all.

Avoid presenting the story in the form of a condensed synopsis, as it will not let the reader become involved in the situation. A reader must become part of the event if the story is to be really successful. However, try to build the story on one full-length scene, by not using too many details, and must be bringing up few characters. Also avoid summary, if possible!

The writer can use 'Direct quotation', as the more familiar the quotation is, the more interesting it will be for the reader.

The usage of a question, striking statement, verses or quotation, paradox, contrast, description and literary or historical allusions (more familiar the allusion is, the more it will be interesting for the reader) can be pretty useful in making the story interesting. Succinctly, novelty intros are the key to hold the readers' interest. However, do not give away the point of the story too soon.

One must be following the lead or intro with concrete, actual and solid details. Try to include some dialogue if possible as the story becomes more personal the readers will hear the persons speak, and the story looks more interesting.

The writer must be building suspense if he can, but it must not be over done. He must avoid telling too much of a story, and try to explain just enough of a point to suggest the rest to the readers, as they like to associate their own experiences with what they read.

The writer must never try to moralise, as it is all up to the reader to give meanings to the story.

He must use devices of the fiction writer to hold readers' interest by using simple, specific, exact and colourful words, and short sentences. Hence the generalisations must be avoided, as the stress is on 'individualise the typical'.

However, do not sentimentalise or over-write something, besides avoiding triteness, lack of clearness and verbosity.

**Re-writing the story**

If there is a need to re-write the story, it must be done by eliminating the following writing faults:

**1. Stodginess (Boring)**

- No unfamiliar in the familiar
- No phrases that hit off the ideas in ways that are different
- Clichés, platitudes, standard verbal equipment

**2. Verbosity (Using too many words where a few can do)**

Too many verbal stimuli for the required effect, inducing weariness, tempting readers to skip

**3. Circumlocution (An indirect way of saying something, especially unpleasant)**

The stimulus always coming, never arriving; hence the reader is always uncertain, impatient and irritated.

**4. Lack of clearness (Clarity in communication)**

- Involved phrases

- Long sentences
- Ideas badly arranged

**5. Lack of dramatic quality** (Novelty)

- No luring quality
- No awakening of the readers' curiosity

**6. Abstractness** (Nothing concrete in words)

- No vivid pictures
- Slips of the mind

**7. Absence of rhythm** (Flow of expression)

- Nothing which carries on
- Jerky
- Disordered
- Clumsy

**8. Monotony of rhythm** (Triteness)

No variety

## NEWSPAPER FEATURE STORY

The concept is to write something like a non-fiction short story: quotation-filled, descriptive, entertaining, informative. First, it needs to do some research – check the newspaper library for previous stories about the subject. Story will be even stronger if a nationally or an internationally recognised source is used.

Beginning reporters working for small-circulation dailies are expected to be able to write both news and feature stories. Often a reporter's first months on the job may consist of even more feature writing than weighty news writing, until a "beat" is assigned or the reporter otherwise gains the confidence of the editor.

Feature writing, then, is a crucial weapon in the arsenal of writing talents required of the professional print journalist, particularly now, when broadcast news also is focusing more and more on such popular stories.

A feature story is a journalistic article that is typically both original and descriptive. Some feature stories are geared toward entertainment with little information. Other features inform, but entertain little. The best combine both aspects.

A feature story is original in two ways. First, it is original in respect to the way it is written. News stories are commonly written in what is called the inverted pyramid style. This rigid form, which evolved about the time of the American Civil War, demands that a story begin with a one-paragraph lead of one or perhaps two sentences summing up the essence of the story. The lead is short, typically less than 35 words. The rest of the story is written in a declining order of importance, with information proceeding from the most important to the least important.

The inverted pyramid made sense during the Civil War because stories often were filed using telegraph lines, which could be disrupted at any time. In that situation, it obviously was a good idea first to send a summary—or what journalists today call the lead of the story—and then to transmit the rest of the story with information in a declining order of importance. The inverted pyramid style of news-writing makes even more sense today, for two reasons. First, readers can quickly scan the story by reading the lead and perhaps a few additional paragraphs. Second, busy editors can cut lengthy news stories simply by removing less important material from the bottom of the story.

Unlike the news story's inverted pyramid style, the feature story's form is more fluid. Feature stories probably date to the beginning of world journalism, but they began to assume their modern form in the United States in the "penny press" of the 1830s. They most strongly resemble short stories in structure. For example, they have distinct beginnings, middles and ends. Feature stories, unlike news stories, aren't intended for the scan-fling reader. They must be read completely in order to make sense. They also must be edited carefully by removing various sections from throughout the text, rather than just from the end.

Features are also original because they can be about virtually any subject that falls within the realm of "human interest," unlike news stories, which presumably are written only because they cover newsworthy events.

Human interest obviously means what "interests" people and a good rule of thumb is that anything that interests the feature writer and the editor is also likely to interest a substantial number of readers. Human-interest stories can be about both "people" and "things," but journalists know that "people" stories typically are more interesting and are more often read than are stories about "things." For that matter, stories about unusual events are more interesting than stories about usual events.

In summary, if you've found a story about a person and something about that individual is unusual, you probably have a good feature story idea.

Actually, feature stories need not even have the element of oddity for them to contain human interest. Some feature writers maintain they can write a good feature story about absolutely anyone and have, in fact, proved it by opening the city telephone directory at random, pointing to a name, and then doing a feature story on the person they've selected.

### An overview

Feature stories tend to be descriptive, another element of the definition. News stories are supposed to be objective, which often precludes description. For example, the news writer would rarely describe the



subject of a news story by height, weight, hair colour, and kind and type of clothing, unless that description was vital to the story. Yet the feature writer routinely uses this type of description.

A kind of description, evoking imagery, is encouraged in a feature story. But it would likely be edited out of any news story.

A feature story must remain above all journalistic, in addition to being original and often descriptive. By that, the feature writer is expected to subscribe to the same standards of journalistic accuracy as the news writer. He or she must verify the information, quote accurately and be fair and precise with description.

And the feature writer follows journalistic “style.” Style is nothing more than a uniform approach to punctuation, capitalisation, abbreviation, titles and, in some cases, spelling. Most American newspapers today have a fairly uniform journalistic style. At one time, however, newspaper reporters would have to master a local style every time they moved to a new newspaper.

In summary, a feature is subject to the same accuracy and style requirements as any other story in the publication.

A feature story traffics in entertainment or information or both. It should also have entertaining moments, perhaps through examples or “anecdotes” told by the mechanic. However, there is nothing wrong with a feature that’s very entertaining, with little valuable information. “Entertainment” in this context can mean an interesting, amusing—or moving—feature story.

A feature story, then, is significantly different from a news story. The feature has a beginning, a middle and an end, and is intended to be read completely and edited with care. The feature can be written about almost anything, but commonly is written about an unusual person, place or activity. It is accurate, usually filled with description and may be sheer entertainment, information-oriented or a combination of both.

### **Newspaper feature story types: News and timeless features**

Unlike flavours of ice cream, there are only two basic kinds of newspaper features.

One type is the news feature, which usually is tied to a breaking news event, is placed in the same general location as the breaking story, and is often written under deadline pressure. This type of news feature is called a “sidebar,” in that it is a “side” article that accompanies the main news story. A variation is a news feature that appears after the publication of the hard news story. Such a follow-up story is often called a “second-day” feature.

The other basic kind of feature is the timeless story, which does not have to be used immediately in the newspaper and can sometimes be written leisurely over a period of two or three days or even weeks or months.

The news feature is perhaps a little less common than the timeless feature in most American newspapers. This may be because the news feature often results in at least two stories on a given event: the news, or “cover,” story and its news feature. Two stories, of course, mean the editor will have to find twice as much space and commit twice the staff time to coverage of a single event. At many newspapers where space and personnel are at a premium, editors are often reluctant to make that decision. In addition, feature stories, because of their use of description and detail, are often very difficult to write under deadline pressure. Thus, because of space, staffing and time problems, many editors are prone to ignore feature angles on breaking local stories.

For example, assume you are the editor of a small-town afternoon newspaper. Your deadline is about noon. A school bus filled with children on a field trip crashes at about 9:00 A.M., and you learn about the accident shortly before 10:00 A.M. You could easily assign a reporter to the story, which could gather the facts by telephone and have the news story written by noon. However, if you want a sidebar feature about the crash—perhaps a personality profile of the heroic bus driver who pulled injured children from the wreck—the story would be far more difficult to write by the noon deadline because it would probably require an interview with the driver, who might not be immediately available by telephone. In addition, the thorough feature writer would want to see the crash site firsthand and interview witnesses as well as surviving children. That means more time. All of this would be difficult for one reporter to accomplish by the noon deadline and probably would require assigning a second reporter to write the feature.

A good editor would assign the second reporter to do the feature if a reporter were, in fact, available. If the editor lacked personnel, the available reporter could write the news story for deadline and the feature for publication on the following, or second, day of the coverage.

It is also possible, of course, to write a news feature about a continuing news event and to publish that feature on a day when there is nothing about the main event in the paper. For example, if gasoline prices have been skyrocketing for the past few weeks, it might be appropriate to research and write a feature about the expense of getting a gallon of gasoline from the well to the neighbourhood service station.

Here's another example. A child is bitten by a rabid skunk. A feature writer is assigned to do a story on the medical treatment required for humans who have been exposed to rabies. This story might follow the original news story by four, five or even more days. Both of these examples, however, are generally known as second-day stories.

The other basic type of feature, the timeless feature, is described by just what the words imply—a story frozen in time. Like frozen food, the timeless feature will keep for a long time without spoiling. A timeless feature might be written in early March and held for April or even May before it is published. The careful feature writer, of course, will check back with the subjects of the story before it is published to ascertain that no facts have changed since the interview. In most instances, nothing will have happened. In other cases, ages or addresses will have to be updated. In rare instances, feature writers will find that major changes will have occurred, perhaps even including the death of the featured subject or of others in the story.

The news feature and the timeless feature have a number of characteristics in common. They are original, both in form and subject matter. They both use description to give them life. They are held to tight journalistic standards of accuracy. They inform or entertain, and sometimes they do both. In short, they both fall within the definition of what a feature story is supposed to be.

In addition, news and timeless features share at least one other characteristic: They are popular with readers. Many studies have shown that readers of general-circulation newspapers tremendously enjoy well-written features. And a feature story with a photograph is an almost unbeatable recipe for high readership because studies have shown that pictures also have extremely high readership value.

And in that sense, feature stories are a lot like ice cream. Few ice cream lovers are neutral about a hot fudge sundae smothered with rich, foamy whipped cream and capped with a blushing cherry. And few newspaper readers are neutral about a well-written, anecdotally rich, professionally illustrated news or timeless feature.

### **News features: Categories and appeals**

Feature stories, while journalistic, are first and foremost stories, with beginnings, middles and ends. These stories—albeit with different characters in different circumstances—tend to recur so frequently that they can be divided into familiar categories built around topics of universal appeal.

Let's look at the categories first.

There are at least 15 widely recognised types of newspaper features and many more when individual variations within categories are considered. All can be either news or timeless features, with the exception of the “commemorative” feature, which is almost always tied to a breaking news event.

Remember that while some categories are about things, people are more interesting. The effective feature writer will try to transform the “thing” feature into a “people” feature.

### **The Business Story:**

The problem with the business story is that it is easy to write a lacklustre little feature about what a business sells (such as live lobsters), makes (such as cardboard caskets) or provides (such as removal and replacement of aircraft warning lights for television and radio towers). Such stories, however, are boring (except to the owner of the business), and interesting stories are usually very hard to come by because business owners are fearful of tarnishing their images and (unlike government agencies) are not required to provide you with any information unless shares in the business are traded on the stock exchange.

Here's how you can handle the business feature. In most cases, you should focus on an employee or the owner of the business. If the business has competition, you should look for a timely or unusual angle—a reason for writing the story about that particular business at that particular time—and then try to concentrate on an individual. You should also mention the competition to avoid the appearance of giving the business free advertising space. On the other hand, if it is a business with no competition, you could

zero in on why the owner started the business and what impediments he or she faced on the road to success. Success is a universal appeal often used by storytellers.

Above all, be aware that you are not writing a free advertisement for the business. If your article reads like copy you would expect to see from the business's advertising agency, press the "delete" button on your video display terminal and start over.

### **The Commemorative Story:**

Commemorative stories are news features pegged to the anniversary of an earlier news event. The commemorative story is usually written initially at the first anniversary, with other stories following at five-year intervals. Depending on the event, you can interview people who originally were involved in the story, or, if the individuals are dead or otherwise unavailable, you can write an article capturing the mood of the anniversary.

### **The Explanatory Story:**

You can show the reader how electricity or natural gas reaches consumers' homes, how a check written at a store in a distant city reaches the local bank, how a television newscast is assembled, or how a radio commercial is created. Again, you should focus on a person in the process.

Be forewarned: This type of story requires saturation research; you have to know almost as much about the process as does the expert in your story.

### **The First-Person Story:**

In the typical first-person story, something dramatic happens to the writer that is so personal that nothing less than the first person singular ("I") is appropriate. For example, read the first 45 words from an award-winning New York *Times* feature about toxic shock syndrome.

### **The Historical Story:**

The historical feature is usually loosely pegged to a breaking news event, which gives the feature writer an excuse to do some research in the library and to show readers how their community or world has changed.

### **The Hobbyist Story:**

Everyone collects something, ranging from stuffed aardvarks to matchbook covers. Some hobbyists have extraordinary collections. As a feature writer, your job is to make certain that you are writing about the right collector—the one with the biggest, best or most unusual collection in your area. Check this out by talking to other collectors who can identify dealers who in turn can lead you to national publications that provide a clearinghouse for collectors across the country. If you're about to interview a collector with 10,000 rubber ducks and the editor of the national publication serving rubber-duck collectors says that's a big collection, you're in business.

### **The How-To Story:**

The interview with one or more experts who advise the reader how to accomplish a tricky task is a meat-and-potatoes newspaper feature story. Because experts make a living charging customers for such information, they are often reluctant to give much free advice in an interview. Consequently, you may find yourself calling a number of professionals before you are able to piece together a coherent, helpful account. These stories are usually timeless articles but can be news features if they are pegged to a season or a news event such as a flood (for instance, how to dry a wet carpet).

### **The Invention Story:**

You have probably heard about an inventor who is developing a light bulb that never burns out or perhaps toothpaste that stains teeth red when they are inadequately brushed. Inventors are good feature material. But there's a hitch to this kind of story: Inventors usually will not give interviews until they have formally applied for a patent to protect their ideas, and conservative inventors will not discuss their ideas until a patent has actually been granted, a process that often takes years. Timing is the key.

**The Medical Story:**

People get sick. And people die, some well before their time. There are strong feature stories in illness and death, albeit tough ones to write.

Let's look at stories of illness first. Serious illnesses require huge amounts of money. Some people don't have adequate medical insurance. Thus, relatives of a sick person—often of a sick child—frequently seek out feature writers to chronicle the family's financial plight in hopes that the story may trigger donations. If the medical insurance is adequate but the disease is unusual, the medical story often is focused on the struggle to find the appropriate treatment. If the ill person has recovered from the disease, a story can be written tracing the struggle to overcome the illness.

A variation on the illness story is the medical breakthrough story, which often focuses on a doctor who has succeeded in isolating the cause of a disease.

Stories about impending death are extremely difficult to write because of the emotional toll on both the interviewee and the feature writer. Nonetheless, such stories are occasionally written. A person who learns of terminal illness undergoes certain attitude changes. Eventually, many people approaching death find comfort in leaving a message for the living—perhaps a warning to live life fully or to avoid the habits that have brought on the disease. The feature story carries that message.

**The Number Story:**

This kind of feature uses interviews with experts and a familiar number such as “10” to put a problem—and sometimes a solution—in perspective.

**The Odd-Occupation Story:**

Who washes the outside windows of the city's tallest building? What's a workday like for a modern gravedigger? Who heads the city police bomb squad, and what does that work involve? And who changes the little light bulbs on top of the local television station-transmitting tower?

Every community has scores of individuals with unusual jobs—occupations that are dangerous, unappealing, or simply strange. Such stories should prove interesting to your readers.

A cautionary note: In the past, some fairly ordinary occupations became “odd” when a female selected a traditionally male job—such as automobile mechanic—or a male opted for a traditionally female-filled position, but less feature value exists today in sex-role stories. A male “nanny” might be interviewed in a wider feature about child-care experts, but not merely because he is a male looking after a child.

The usual story approach requires you to find a person who has held an odd occupation for some time and who enjoys it, and to interview that person about how the job is performed, why he or she chose the field, or both.

**The Overview Story:**

Some kinds of features—for example, stories dealing with missing children or with arson—can be supported with voluminous statistics from various official sources. These statistics can be used to provide the reader with an informational overview of the problem, in addition to the emotional, humanistic qualities you will want to inject into the story.

**The Participatory Story:**

Participatory stories go back to the days of Nellie Bly of Joseph Pulitzer's New York World. Bly, whose real name was Elizabeth Cochrane, had herself committed to a New York State insane asylum in order to write about conditions there. Frank Sutherland, a reporter for *The Tennessean* in Nashville and later president of the Society of Professional Journalists, did the same thing in Tennessee about 75 years later. And the participatory story is the trademark of writer George Plimpton, who, among other things, joined a football team and acted in a movie for stories.

Hunter S. Thompson, who used to write for Rolling Stone magazine, called this blatant injection of the writer into the story “Gonzo journalism.” Gonzo or not, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with living a role in order to write about it, unless you misrepresent yourself to write about the intimate details of other people. And even that may not be wrong in the case of investigative reporters such as Bly and Sutherland, who had no other means to investigate serious social problems.

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However, most feature writers using this approach will, like Plimpton, make arrangements beforehand and will “live” the story with the permission of the participants.

In Pakistan, it is a rarity.

**The Profile Story:**

You can profile practically anyone or anything. Of course, profiles are usually written about people, with their cooperation. You usually pick someone of interest, ask the subject for an interview, research and then interview the individual and finally talk to other people who know the subject.

The profile—with or without cooperation—should paint a word portrait of the subject. The reader should come away from the profile with an understanding of how the person looks, sounds, and thinks.

Groups, institutions, events, and things can be profiled, too. In fact, in the early 1980s writer Tracy Kidder even profiled the birth of a computer in his award-winning book, *The Soul of a New Machine*.

**The Unfamiliar Visitor Story:**

A visitor often offers a unique perspective on a local problem, culture or event. If the visitor is available for an interview, his or her perspective can often help readers understand their world better.

Some of these features tend to be further categorised because they are published in specific newspaper “sections” such as business, entertainment, fashion, food, health, home, religion, society and travel. For example, profile stories often appear in business, entertainment, health, religion, and society and travel sections.

On the other hand, first person and participatory stories often wind up in newspaper Sunday “magazines.” And commemorative, historical and unfamiliar-visitor stories frequently find their way into a newspaper’s primary news section.

## THE NEWSPAPER FEATURE STORY IDEA

### What newspaper readers want to read!

Newspapers try to perform five roles. There are lovely formal names for these roles—names such as the commercial, information, opinion, public forum and entertainment functions. But readers, who are not at all interested in the functions' fancy formal names, call the various parts of the newspaper package “advertising, news, editorials, letters to the editor,” and “the comics.”

The names the readers use are self-explanatory, with the exception of “the comics.” What readers really mean when they talk about comic strips is the newspaper's ability to entertain and emotionally and intellectually intrigue with material ranging from column to the crossword puzzle to the funny feature story about the local issue or a person.

Comics, columns, crosswords and features are extremely important to readers.

The basic secret to writing features that readers will like is to recall that although features come in both news and timeless varieties, they are, more importantly, also thing- or people-oriented. A feature about how tombstones are manufactured would be a “thing” story, of course, but an article about the woman and her wondrous bird would be essentially a “people” story.

### Which would you rather read?

Probably reader will select man and dog story because strong features are almost always people stories. In addition, the story has some traditional news characteristics that add to reader appeal.

News characteristics: qualities such as conflict, human interest, importance, prominence, proximity, timeliness and unusualness. Let's look at each quality and see how these characteristics can add punch to a feature story.

### Conflict

Most of us live our lives with little major daily conflict which may explain why professional football and boxing are so exciting to some people. Thus, real-life conflict is unusual and interesting for most of us.

Consequently, an explanatory feature examining why a 12-year-old Florida boy killed his mother and little brother fascinated readers of The Miami Herald.

And a profile tracing a mother's year-long successful search for her missing 15-year-old daughter had equal appeal for readers.

Conflict comes down to this: Would you rather read a story about a dramatic, emotional cross-country search for a missing child or a business story about a wealthy local woman who opened a boutique specialising in Scottish woollens?

### Human interest

Human interest is hard to define for a few. Most editors say stories about children, animals or sex have automatic human-interest value. So do stories about health. Consequently, a story about a little girl and her father combing the city for her missing puppy has guaranteed reader appeal. So does a medical feature about a young woman struggling to cope with acquired immune deficiency syndrome or one about a doctor at a hospital trying to find a cure for baldness?

### Importance

Importance refers to universality. The more people affected by the subject of a feature, the more readers the story will attract. For example, a how-to story advising readers of a clever way to cut home electricity bills by 50 percent has more importance—and probably more readers—than a how-to feature about constructing a farm house. Why? Bringing down the electric bill has more appeal to most people than does constructing a farmhouse.

**Prominence**

The Chief Minister of the province has prominence. Most probably, your best friend does not. A hobbyist story about the governor's stamp collection has more reader appeal than a story about your friend's similar collection. Names make news, the saying goes. Names also make features.

**Proximity**

Proximity simply means closeness to your readers. A story about someone who lives a thousand miles from the newspaper's readers has less appeal than a similar story about someone in the newspaper's home circulation area. So, an odd-occupation feature about a local university professor who junks his teaching career to open an auto salvage yard has more reader appeal than does a story about a lawyer in another province, who decides to become a pianist.

**Timeliness** means little to feature writers, unless they are writing a news feature.

**Unusualness**

However, **unusualness** is extremely important to the feature writer. A university teacher who turns junkman is, in fact, unusual. A junkyard owner who earns his doctor of philosophy degree and becomes a university teacher is equally unusual. On the other hand, a male registered nurse is less unusual, and probably is not worth a story. Verification is the key to deciding if a story is truly unusual.

Is your trapper the most experienced or the best known? Is he the most successful, or is he at least typical? Do other trappers respect him?

Of course, you can write a feature without conflict, human interest, importance, prominence, proximity or unusualness, but if your feature has none of these qualities, it is probably not going to be very interesting. And dull features don't appeal to anyone except perhaps the subject of the article.

**How to get ideas**

If you become a reporter, who occasionally receives a feature assignment, you will rarely have to worry about unearthing feature story ideas. The ideas will come from your editor, and your most serious problem probably will be transforming the editor's occasional sows' ears into silk purses.

On the other hand, if you are a full-time newspaper feature writer—especially one assigned to a Sunday magazine or a features section—you will be expected to formulate many of your own assignments.

Pulitzer Prize-winner Madeleine Blais explains why: "At a magazine of a newspaper, usually the editors will allow a writer to pick stories because they don't want writers spending months on material they don't like."

Feature writers get ideas from a variety of sources. They read newspapers and magazines both for national articles that can be localised and for area news stories that can be turned into features.

That process is called "writing off the news."

Feature writers often have long, neglected story lists. Most of stories are self-assigned, but always appreciate a good suggestion.

Sometimes writers turn to the feature category first. For example, if you want to write an odd-occupation story, you might choose the occupation first and find the specific subject later.

Feature writers also keep their eyes and ears open. They read billboards and advertisements in the Yellow Pages, watch television, and listen to the radio, all in quest of ideas. They also tell friends that they're looking for good stories and, often, friends tip them about people, places and things worth writing about.

Invariably, the ideas pour in—some worth investigating, others not, but all requiring focus.

**Focusing ideas**

Focus is simply a matter of reducing a potentially large quantity or material into digestible components.

When you go to a fast-food restaurant, you don't order a cow. You order a hamburger. When you write a term paper for a world history class, you don't choose a mega-topic such as "The History of Germany." Instead, you focus the topic on something such as "The Political Factors in the Selection of Berlin as Capital of Germany."

And similarly, when you select a feature story topic, you don't begin with an idea such as "missing children." You narrow the topic to a bite-sized chunk such as "teenaged runaways."

An unfocused feature wastes the writer's time. It also wastes the editor's time. If a feature is unfocused, it is usually far too long. Removing unnecessary words, sentences and paragraphs is the editor's job. One editor might send an unfocused story back to the writer for more work. Another more adventuresome editor might hack through the verbiage like a berserk explorer pushing through the Amazon rain forest, removing both the bad and occasionally the good with an electronic machete. Yet another editor might simply kill the story, thinking—correctly, perhaps—that it's not worth anyone's rewrite time.

Worst of all, an unfocused feature wastes the reader's time, should it survive editing. In general, if a reader can't figure out what the story was about in the first several hundred words, the reader will desert it for more pleasant experiences.

Focusing, then, is a matter of narrowing. For example, let's suppose you want to write a feature about prisons. Your first focusing decision is easy: Because you're writing for a local newspaper, you should narrow the topic to prisons in your state or immediate locality.

The next narrowing exercise is also easy: Are you going to do a story focused on the keepers—the guards and wardens—or the kept—the inmates? If you narrow the topic to the keepers, you have a number of categorical possibilities, including an explanatory story about a day in the life of a warden or guard, an odd-occupation story about an unusual prison employee such as a tracking-dog handler, a participatory story where you arrange to be a guard for a day, or a profile about a key prison official.

Let's assume you narrow your focus to a profile about a little-known but important prison employee. Whom do you pick? The chief prison administrator? The top prison doctor? A warden?

If you focus on a warden, you have to decide which one. Do you pick the youngest warden? The most experienced warden? The warden who runs the toughest prison in the system? Research will help you narrow your focus still more. For example, if one prison in the system has received heavy news coverage lately because of inmate complaints, the warden of that facility may be your best bet. You should obtain his name from prison officials and check the newspaper's library for background information on him. If he looks like a good candidate, you have successfully focused your story.

While you search for a focus, don't overlook clues to the point of your story. The point, prior to any interviews, is more of a question than an answer. Is the warden's religious faith, courage and perseverance (assuming he has any of those qualities) keeping him sane in his high-pressure position? Is the warden's story even more elemental: good (presumably the warden) versus evil (the inmates)? A definitive point probably will not emerge until after interviews with the warden, colleagues and former inmates, but thinking about what the story may be about before you write it also helps focus your efforts.

### **Ideas that didn't work**

Newspaper feature writers usually get their feature once they have accepted an assignment. That's because newspaper feature writers are professionals who understand that news organisations cannot afford to assign too many time-consuming stories that don't pan out. Consequently, professional newspaper feature writers have learned how to turn lemons into lemonade when necessary.

But you're probably a novice journalist.

Here are six-feature story ideas, suggested by beginning journalists. The ideas are for 1,500-word stories for a daily newspaper with state-wide circulation. The ideas as suggested didn't work. Let's see why.

#### **Feature Idea 1:**

A business story about your city's first non-profit vegetarian restaurant, where lunch is the only meal served, the menu is limited, and tipping is prohibited. The proprietor is a religious figure, who considers chicken 'haram' as it is not being bred through natural process.

#### **Problem:**

Too unfocused. This idea is like an all-you-can-eat restaurant. There are at least three good stories here; if you focus on (or eat, to continue the simile) everything, you will have more than you can comfortably digest. But if you choose one course, you will have a good meal. People are more interesting than things, so a first choice would be a story about a religious person, who is serving his creator by serving hungry people. An alternative selection would be to interview the employees of this unusual establishment, particularly if they have worked for other restaurants and can provide colourful comparisons.



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A third choice would be to focus on customers who eschew fast-food hamburgers for the restaurant's boiled beans and curried corn.

**Feature Idea 2:**

A how-to story about selecting and caring for a puppy.

**Problem:**

This story is unfocused also. Practically everyone loves a puppy (except those who have to clean up after it). And practically everyone values free advice from professionals. So what's wrong with this story idea? Books have been written about caring for them. The books about selection suggest that different people want and need different kinds of dogs, so your first task is to focus on a type of recipient.

How about pre-school children? Then we need to lop off the "caring-for" aspect to keep the feature within acceptable length. Finally, let's add timeliness—a birthday purchase—to let readers know why they are reading this story.

Ultimately, then, our story is about selecting a birthday puppy for a preschool child. That kind of keenly focused story will be easier to write and will make more sense to readers.

**Feature Idea 3:**

An odd-occupation story about a state patrolman on his shift.

**Problem:**

One of the first withdrawals from the idea bank that beginning feature writers make is the "ride-along" story. Many police agencies make provisions for citizens to ride along with officers during a shift, and reporters often take advantage of this opportunity to get to know the community and crank out a feature while they are at it. But the ride-along story has been written so many times it's a journalistic cliché. There are focusing techniques, however, that you can use to salvage this idea.

One is to pick a veteran cop working the toughest shift (that's 11:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. on a hot weekend night with a full moon) in the roughest part of town. Another is to ride with a specialist, the officer with the most driving-while-intoxicated arrests for the preceding year. Another is to pick the best-educated cop, the one with the doctoral degree in psychology. Focus, focus, focus.

**Feature Idea 4:**

An overview story about headaches and the various treatments for them, using prominent local neurologists and university medical centre physicians as sources.

**Problem:**

Writing a story about headaches is like writing a term paper about "The American Short Story." How about focusing on new non-drug treatments for tension-caused headaches? Or, if you want to focus the topic with laser-beam precision, talk to paediatricians about headaches afflicting children. You'll also want to find some headache sufferers to humanise the story.

**Feature Idea 5:**

A profile of a local apartment complex designed for the physically disabled.

**Problem:**

Profiling people is difficult; profiling a place is even more difficult. Are we going to read about the history of the apartment complex or about how living there has made life easier for the residents? If you're going to focus on the residents—and you should—the story will be easier to write and more meaningful if the focus is narrowed to two or three typical residents. And you shouldn't just interview the subjects; you should live their day with them to really get the feel of how the apartment design helps.

**Ideas that worked**

Professional journalists usually succeed in making their feature stories interesting. Experienced journalists don't have a monopoly on good features; they only have a better batting average than beginners. Novices

do hit home runs. They succeed by starting with a good idea and focusing it. Here are some well-focused features written by beginners:

- A commemorative story about a lawyer who fled his homeland and, two decades later, found himself owning a chain of children’s clothing stores in the United States;
- An explanatory story about how the clothes for the professional cricket team are washed to remove grit and grime;
- A first-person story about surviving an attack by a rabid dog;
- A historical story about past patrons of the oldest hotel, which is scheduled for demolition;
- A hobbyist story about a local resident who has the country’s largest private collection of antique automobiles;
- A how-to story explaining a prominent psychologist’s tips for handling depression;
- A medical story about an ailing 76-year-old man struggling to finish his degree before he dies;
- A number story about how ten peculiarly named castes in the province got their names;
- An odd-occupation story about the state highway department’s only full-time explosives expert;
- An overview story about efforts to relocate endangered species;
- A participatory story about spending a shift as a department-store;
- A profile of a blind fan obsessed with the “Star Trek” television series; and
- An unfamiliar-visitor story about a local university student trapped in troubled areas during a military action.

Getting a solid feature story idea is a little like hitting a ‘six’, which is the result of a good pitch, combined with judgment, skill and a little luck on the part of the batter? Often, a large number of balls must cross the plate before the batter sees a potential hit and swings. Like a batter, you should recognise that you will need to explore many ideas before you find one worth developing. If you come up with a dozen ideas and then carefully focus each one, you will have a good chance of scoring.

Newspaper feature writers usually size stories by column inches. A column inch is a block of type one-inch deep and one-column wide or very roughly 50 words. Magazine writers usually size articles by the number of words. Thus, 20,000 words convert to about 400 column inches.

## MAGAZINE FEATURE VERSUS DAILIES

### Feature versus Column, News and Editorial

#### Feature versus Column

A feature is a dramatized description of the basic facts of news in interesting manner; whereas a column is that form and shape of writing, which is allotted a special place in the paper under a permanent title. Both feature and column draw their material and data from the news-stories, which in turn originate in the society.

Column is rather a relatively personalized form of journalism reminiscent of past traditions and practices in the sub-continent, whereas a feature is an informal type of writing in which any subject can be attempted to make it an interesting description of a story. A feature is rather a long description ranging from 1000 to 3000 words, whereas a column is rather a limited form of humorous writing.

A Column aims to laugh off a serious matter in light vein. It may contain the germs of criticism, sarcasm, humour or similar elements; whereas a feature may be written on any subject under the sun and on the earth, in informative, instructive, guiding, educative and in entertaining form in simple language and with dramatized elements. A feature may consist of more than one headline, highlight and with abundant pictorial material, whereas a column is a personal type of composition with no scope of pictorial supplement and material besides of headline and highlight.

As to style and form of composition, a feature is narrative with dramatic elements with positive objective to inform, educate, instruct and guide the masses in light and attractive style. On the other hand, a column usually projects a personal touch, and is a direct address to the reader, creating an informed, friendly and gossiping type of atmosphere.

A feature is a pre-planned venture requiring elaborate studies, preparation, collection of relevant data and material from different sources as an interview, books periodical, magazines reference books and various other sources. A column does not need any pre-planned studies, interviews and collection of facts.

A feature is usually related to recent issues, happenings and episodes, whereas a column takes the universal moral, scientific and technical principles of happenings in the universe. A feature revolves around a stylish composition with the sole and definite objective to absorb the attention of the readers immediately, by creating suspense with the assistance of dramatic elements.

A feature is invariably written in narrative style of writing, with proper parts and paragraphs. Contrarily a column is light writings, and frequently are drab, cold, logical and deductive style of writings. Besides column has more than one style.

#### Feature versus News:

News is an event or happening about which people are most interested and anxious to know the details, and a journalist likes to tell; whereas a feature is a spontaneous type of composition, developing on a news-story of deep human interest with dramatic and narrative elements addressed direct to the readers in an alluring and attention-absorbing manner.

News consists of bare and hard facts and presented similarly without any kind of addition or alteration. A feature is an objective type of writing, sharing common pains, sufferings in national affairs to be presented to the readers and the government

The features are universal, comprehensive, and all-enveloping type of writing based on hard facts of life; whereas news is gauged according to different scales of territorial, geographical and human interests. A feature does not necessarily make any difference or distinction between a caste, colour, or race or class of people. News is value-oriented writing to a particular territory, or geographically limited and comprehensiveness. Whereas a feature is of a universal value regarding of any kind of distinction or difference, and appeals to the whole humanity equally and simultaneously. It has its psychological roots in humanity. News may comprise elements of mobility, riots and disturbances, massacre, killings and other forms of extremism. Human society has a variety of colourful activities, different aspects, angles, reactions, which give rise to attraction and interest for the human beings.

Features are composed in view of the social inter-actions. News has a temporary existence, and is not durable from its very nature and structure, and its values are always subject to changes and alterations. Features are somewhat of permanent value basing their material and data on the facts relating to the different aspects, angles and during human interest. Hence the interest attraction of a feature cannot possibly be limited to any geographical areas. Features are preserved for future references. There is a wide difference in the objectivity of the news and a feature. The scope and the objectivity of the news is limited; whereas a feature is comprehensive and universal from its objectivity point of view, and its effects are not immediate and emergency type as in the case of news, but are permanent. A feature writer enjoys a greater freedom in his writing, in his approach to write a feature. In the feature, personal feelings and passions can be included to make it a direct address or sermon to the readers. On the other hand a report has to depend on the bare facts of the news, in his writing and approach and cannot possibly add his likes and dislikes, and adopts the strict policy of not adding anything personal or impersonal.

### **Feature versus Editorial:**

Editorials are collectively the name for those articles, published and given under the editorial page, which may consist of a leading article and other small articles.

Editorials are usually written on serious matters of national and international significance, besides current affairs. As such editorial articles are basically related to the national and international topics of grave and serene nature and scope. Contrarily features are related to expository and explanatory affairs of light nature and essentially related to the social order and structure, and are generally limited to the national basis. Their scope and range relate to the social problem of the country or a nation.

The readership of the editorial is very limited one as being serious and drab prose, its objectives are to instruct and educate the readers. The readers of the feature are numerous as their nature scope and range and even the structure are based direct with relation to the general interest of the people, their social order, structure and problems. The feature readers are countless who are deeply interested in perusing the serious essays of feature composition, which are durable, effective and unique in nature and deeply embedded in the psychology of the human beings. As for as the nature and structure is concerned, feature are light socially-based articles, narrated in an attractive manner with profusion of dramatic elements; whereas the editorials are based on good deal of research and investigation and its sources of information and facts and figures are derived and deduced on national and international scale.

There is a wide difference between the objective of the editorial and the feature. A feature may appeal rather adopt the mode of preaching or delivering moral messages; whereas an editorial is a problematic, academic and investigational writings or articles, weaves in a cold and logical style of description. A feature aims at projecting the social problems, ailments and diseases, diagnosing the underlying causes and even suggesting the possible remedies and measures to tackle with them. Features take into consideration the various customs, traditions and conventions with regard to their merits and demerits, moral lessons, teachings, guidance instructions, serving the post-mortem of the prevailing social evils etc. An editorial is an amalgam of superb material and data of current affairs, conveying the serenity, seriousness logically arranged matter in cold and logical manner.

As to the types and forms, editorials are generally informational, deductive and entertaining articles which are less attractive to the readers, Whereas features can be arranged in numerous forms and types as commemorative features, experimental or research features, personality, based on travelogue and countless other general features. There is a world of difference as to the style and language of description. An editorial requires a high academic and literary style and language due to its very nature, whereas a feature is composed in commonly understood and intelligible style and language; which naturally attracts the largest a number of readers.

### **Magazine temperament versus daily paper**

Certain differences are there between the magazine features and the features written for the Daily. Almost the same is applicable to the 'Freelance writer versus staffer'.

Mostly, magazines rely on the freelance writers besides the staffers of the magazine. No doubt, the latter are more reliable, and can be held responsible for anything unwanted more easily than the former. However, once a freelancer loses his credibility, it is always very difficult for him to get back on to the track. Secondly, freelancers tend to be less communicative with the editor as compared to the staffer who

has to stay in touch with him. He can get his problems resolved more easily and quickly than what the freelancer does.

### **An overview**

Writing features for magazines and newspapers is quite a different ball game, and one can visible differences in the treatment of the subjects. If not in entirety, then features for these both are different to quite a large extent.

### **How people fare in both areas?**

The writer has to consider before writing whether he is writing for a magazine or a daily. It is primarily because of the nature of the write-ups, and the space where he has to be very careful.

### **Which is considered of more value?**

No doubt, some hard-hitting features written for the dailies make a huge impact; whereas the importance of magazines cannot be negated considering the fact that magazine readership is bit different, as it wants subjects to be treated at length. Some people do call it 'laid back approach' as well.

### **What it entails to be a feature writer for the magazine?**

A feature writer of the magazine has to write in detail covering the subject from all possible angles. Moreover, he has also to talk to a number of people, both experts and ordinary ones. Ultimately, it comes out to be a long piece of writing, which is also occasionally divided in to short pieces, which added to beauty of the display and enhance the readability.

### **Deadlines**

#### **Steep deadlines for the dailies**

A journalist has to write mostly against steep deadlines while writing for dailies, whereas it is not a case with the magazines as such. However, both case scenarios could be reversed, which is as such a rarity. Nevertheless, a steep deadline is not a case for the magazine features, as their deadline varies from hours to days and weeks. Hence the feature writer for the magazine is comparatively as ease, and can work really well on his subjects. That is why, the magazine features are comprehensive and detailed ones.

### **Spaces**

One finds shrinking spaces of the dailies, which are due to numerous reasons, like that of the advertisements and lots of news items. Hence when the dailies have fewer spaces, this adds to the possibility of less number of words, which is not the case with magazines.

That is why; features in dailies are always marred by short of space, which is why magazines become more important.

Sometimes, for magazines, the writers are given a chance to come up with as many words as they like. However, mostly, the word limit is specified.

### **Room to play**

Journalists feel more comfortable, while writing for magazine, primarily because of the allowed word limit, more space and long deadlines. Secondly, they have more room to play with ideas, words and space besides being more time at their expense.

Thirdly, limited words are written for dailies, which are in minimum possible time, whereas one can write at length for magazines.

### **Long life versus short**

Dailies have short shelf life in comparison to magazines, whereas magazines have longer shelf life. Dailies are once seen or read by the readers, and then put aside by them. Secondly, the magazine features also become part of history, as people keep them in their book rags. Hence one can say the Dailies enjoy less weight age in comparison to magazines, when feature writing comes.

**Word limit**

As said earlier, features in magazines are given comparatively bigger space and room, whereas there is a less of margin in Dailies.

**Playing with the idea**

Practicing feature writing means that considering all ideas, and these all ideas can be put at one place when it comes to magazine writing. However, this is not truly done for Dailies, where one idea is picked up and tackled from one angle so that it could be accommodated in a limited space.

**From all possible angles**

For magazines, the Discussion on the subject is from all possible angles, which is not usually done for the Dailies, as the feature writer is sticking to one point and presenting it, while never digressing from the line given to the writer by the editors. However, a bit of a digression for magazine features is a possibility.

**Display of the feature**

Magazines give huge display to features, whereas the Dailies, which are always running short of space, do not have this liberty. Secondly, the pictorial aspect of magazines make them more interesting for the readers, which is also primarily because of the changed circumstances where the readers do not have much time to read long pieces placed without any break in the text.

**Giving what reader wants**

Readers look for more and more information though they might be running against time. Their satisfaction lies in the having the required material with them, even they do not have time to read them fully. Only a magazine provides such an information and satisfaction to the readers.

Dailies do the same, but at the limited level and in different shades that is, coming up with follow-ups and discovering news angles of the subject.

### WRITING THE SPECIALISED FEATURE STORY

It is 12 am, and the deadline for the late edition of your newspaper is 12:45 am. You don't have much on your mind except late dinner when the city editor beckons you over. He is talking on the phone, but he puts his hand over the mouthpiece and tells you, "Ali that kid who got bitten by the rabid dog just died. Give me a piece on the rabies epidemic we had one or two years ago, will you?"

The city editor means that another reporter is writing the straight-news story of the child's death and that you are to write a backgrounder on a previous rabies outbreak as an accompanying story. He means now. He means in time for the late edition.

You know enough to trot to the hospitals and look under 'R' for rabies (provided record is maintained). With old news clips in hand, the lazy writer—and there are many such—would be content to rehash old facts and hand the city editor a short review of the earlier news event.

But you're enterprising. While the clock ticks, you put in a call for a rabies expert in the provincial health department whose name you've spotted in the old coverage. He's out, so you leave a call back and phone the city communicable disease officer. You next phone the head of animal pathology at a nearby university, at the veterinary university. Then you phone this year's president of your county's veterinarian association.

Now you have fresh quotes and new facts to go with the old ones. The health department expert doesn't get back to you, but you're able to hit your terminal and put together a fast feature about a worried citizenry that has quadrupled its calls to animal-control officers about strays since the news first broke that a rabid animal had bitten a boy.

You include potential danger signs in the behaviour of both wild and pet animals. And certainly you include facts about the previous rabies outbreak that hit the city.

Instead of a simple backgrounder, you've written a sidebar.

#### SIDEBARS, PROFILES AND SERIES

Sidebars, Profiles and Series are three great staples of the newspaper and magazine writer. Like any feature article, they can be thought up and proposed by individual writers, but they are among the features most commonly assigned by editors.

Sidebars, meaning any story that accompanies a main story, might be little more than statistics, such as listings of polling places to be run with a story on an upcoming election, but like profiles they often tend to be "colour" stories, whether they accompany a newspaper story or a magazine article. Series can be colourful, too, but they can also be anything at all that interests you, your editors and your readers. They are often fact-filled and cover highly important topics.

#### The Deadline Feature Sidebar

Sidebars for a magazine, like any other magazine piece, are seldom written against extreme deadline pressures. But newspaper sidebars don't always have that advantage. Because they often accompany breaking news, they are frequently written against a ticking clock.

The subject matter of deadline feature sidebars is as varied as a day's news. They do, however, have certain characteristics:

The sidebar can be straight fact, but it's often a feature story, strong on human interest

The sidebar is usually assigned by the editor.

The straight-news story that the sidebar is written to accompany is usually breaking news.

The sidebar may run on the same page as a straight-news story or it may run on the jump page or another page altogether.

The sidebar must be able to stand independently. That is, it must contain a tie-back to the main story or enough brief mention of the salient facts to enable readers to understand it even if they skipped the straight-news story.

The sidebar often must be written with as much haste as the straight-news story it accompanies, but it can be and often is written very well.

As with any colour story, the sidebar can be bright if the main news event is a happy one or it can be grey if the event is tragic.

The details you select to tell your tale will be dictated by the news event.

A deadline feature sidebar written by Linda Wilson of The Daily News in Longview, Washington, was part of a massive Pulitzer entry in 1981. It is also a common type of feature written in exceptional circumstances.

Wilson was assigned to cover a funeral.

Every reporter covers a funeral sooner or later. An assistant city editor hands you a scrappy pile of your day's assignments, or the city editor simply yells at you, and you're off to attend the last rites of some noted person, either famous or infamous, or some anonymous citizen unfortunate enough to have died during a major news event.

Standing alone, the one sidebar still gleams with quality. And it wasn't an easy story to cover. As in any funeral coverage, the writer had to interview grieving family members and friends. Not many mourners welcome reporters at such times. To complicate the picture, the two dead 21-year-olds lived together but weren't married, a common enough situation for the times but one for which suitable terminology and even attitudes still hadn't been developed.

### **The Profile**

Profiles, like sidebars, are major contenders for both newspaper and magazine space, though the term itself may not always mean the same thing to editors and writers.

For a daily newspaper, the line blurs between the profile, the personality piece and the interview. In fact, profiles are often referred to as personality pieces or personality sketches, the major difference being that of length, whereas interviews may have a typical profile lead then move on to basic interview material.

Profiles are in-depth studies of miscellaneous people of whom nothing is required except that they be interesting. Magazine profiles usually run much longer than newspaper profiles, but the major ingredient is depth.

A true profile, whether short or long, must enable readers to see and get to know the subject, and you can't accomplish that just by throwing in a couple of adjectives.

Most profiles are staff-written, because most newspapers and magazines have well-qualified writers on their staffs who can handle any good profile idea.

The freelance writer who doesn't yet have a big name stands little chance of an exclusive interview or series of interviews with a famous person. But lesser folk can be of great interest to them. The freelancer on the spot gets the opportunity.

The profile is a staple of the writer's diet. Ways of writing them are as varied as the people about whom they are written. Present tense is commonly used but is by no means mandatory. Attaining the necessary depth is the trick, and this is accomplished by research, observation and skilful interviewing.

If a feature story has a news peg, the writer always is smart to make good use of it, and story has a strong, straight-news element from the beginning.

In reading it, remember again the difficult process of selection that writers face when they have plenty of material for a book-length manuscript but have only limited space in which to tell their stories.

It is best to interview both subjects and the subjects' acquaintances to get a fully rounded picture. But as you have also seen, a good profile can be written without ever talking to the subject.

Several interesting writing techniques give extra punch to story.

Short paragraph style probably catches more eyes.

Half-dozen words per sentence, one sentence per paragraph!

No means boringly uniform in use of the one-sentence paragraph; frequently uses longer paragraphs; and concentrates the one-per-graph technique in the beginning and end of the story, where needing dramatic effect, first to interest the reader enough to start the story and then to bring it to a strong conclusion.

Although magazine writers rarely use this short-paragraph technique, you'll find it useful from time to time in writing newspaper features.

One journalist even created a successful career as a columnist by developing a particular style that rarely varied from the one-sentence paragraph, but it suited his material well. As with most writing techniques, however, overuse is rarely a good idea. Overall, use extreme simplicity of presentation. Do not fuss with



the situation. The apparent simplicity by no means prevents skilful use of solid literary techniques, such as the foreshadowing. Same simplicity to the strong ending.

All this, while writing on deadline. Good writers with well-polished writing tools know they can rely on their skills.

### **The Feature Series**

The series is a showcase of the daily newspaper, just as it is a standard for many top magazines. Writing a series requires great chunks of time from both writers and editors. Running a series requires great chunks of space. Although a feature series, like any other feature, can be written about any interesting subject, the time and space commitment usually mandates that the feature series be focused on important subjects and issues.

What effect will budget and tax cuts have on state aid to the poor? Is our water supply running out? Is the religious right unduly influencing the selection of a state's public school textbooks? Any topic of profound or far-ranging influence on a newspaper's or magazine's readership can and has been considered a suitable topic for a series.

A finely crafted multi-part series can win in almost any category—public service, investigative reporting, explanatory journalism, national reporting, international reporting.

Series often treat subjects of lesser importance. For example, when cities or states approach major anniversaries, a replay of history is usually seen in series form.

Beats, such as medical beats, can turn up a feature series on new treatments or threatening diseases in a region. Spring wildflowers can be a series topic in season, and wire services can and do generate series on both serious and frivolous topics.

When a series is specifically a feature series, it, like general features, is usually told in terms of people, rather than numbers and statistics. No series of any type can be written successfully using a straight-news, inverted pyramid form.

The series demands that each new instalment be read as a one-shot story by the casual reader: It must have an attention-getting lead; it must have enough of a tie-back to preceding instalments to make the general topic comprehensible; and it should have a solid, preferably suspenseful ending to hook the reader into coming back for more the next day.

The ability to be divided into satisfying segments, whether three parts or seven, distinguishes the newspaper feature series from a single magazine article on the same subject.

Apart from this, the feature series and the article both require strong feature techniques and excellent research and writing. The prose style of a series can be deliberately simple and understated.

It can be richly textured and bristling with apt quotes and facts. Or it can be some other style altogether, suitable to the subject matter and well honed by the individual writer. But the prose must be excellent, for you're writing a showcase piece.

To set the mood, start each of the four "chapters" in series with a lead describing a scene. Each begins with a different person's point of view, and then is developed chronologically from material gleaned through exhaustive interviews, transcripts and records.

Had the preceding material been less intriguing and dramatic, many readers might not have read this far. But a compelling mystery on your hands, easily strong enough to keep the attention of most readers.

There's one more thing to watch for. Interspersed among the quotations are occasional presentations of thought patterns. Some of the quotes were taken from the transcripts, others from interviews and conversations. The thought patterns were based on people's recollections.

### **Story types**

Now that you have all the tools to write your feature story, you need to decide what kind of story you're going to write.

It's important to understand from the get-go what form your story's going to take.

There are five basic approaches to feature writing. For almost any topic you can adopt any of the five and come up with a good story.

Each writer will have their own favourite approach, but it's important to be versatile enough to tackle all five. (Usual favourite is the Explanatory Piece).

Below are the five different approaches you can take for a topic like the harm effects of smoking:

**Profile:** People who have suffered diseases as a result of smoking

**Explanatory pieces:** How smoking leads to diseases

**Issues and Trends:** The rise of smoking among women in urban areas

**Investigative:** How cigarette companies use innovative marketing to target teens

**Narrative:** The story of the first person to successfully sue a cigarette company for causing him to develop cancer.

Remember, it is important to be clear about the type of feature story you want to write. Don't jumble the different styles together.

### MODERN FEATURE AND ITS TREATMENT

The modern feature is definitely marginalised by the time constraints of its readers. No doubt, with the media boom, a lot of information is pouring in for the readers, who also the viewers of the television channels, both local and international. Hence this ‘double dose’ of the print and the electronic media is considered to be pretty heavy on the minds of the people. However, both the media are providing them with a lot of information as well.

It is also a point of concern for the print media men that the readers are facing time constraints besides lack of interest on the part of the readers. On one hand, the media men are fighting on the front of keeping the readers’ interest intact, and on the other, due to the time constraints people are facing due to divergent reasons; it is making the media men take some measures to keep their readership cling to newspaper reading.

How reader is tight-scheduled?

No doubt, present day reader is tight-scheduled, and he has less time at his expense than the previous years. Consequently, we have seen that the newspapers have adopted divergent changes to keep their readership intact.

The same is true of the treatment of the Feature, which one can see changing as well, not only in its layout rather in the treatment of the content as well.

The above-mentioned argument in any way must not be considered that the age of the newspapers is over. It must be borne in mind that our print media has to also go a long way, not only in its quality rather reaching out to rest of the population, which out number the present readership. However, it is continuously changing, definitely for the better, but there is a visible down-slide as well.

One thing must be considered that even today the Pakistani reader is looking for good material to read, and he keeps track of many incidents, and socio-political issues.

#### Readers’ constraints

##### Reader is running short of time

The reader running against time, as he is interested in many divergent activities. His social life has changed a lot over the previous years. Moreover, the electronic media is taking his lot of time. Besides, his frequency of moving out of his home, besides his working hours, has increased a lot. Resultantly, he is running short of time, and can only attend to those things, which are on his priority.

As newspaper reading is a voluntary one, hence he most of time browses the newspaper, and only reads those news items or features which really make him to do so.

##### Looking to read only ‘interesting’ and short pieces

As the readers is running short of time, he is only interested in reading those articles, features or news items, which are really short and of huge interest for him. Hence the subjects of the features are very carefully chosen considering the interests of the readers. Then these are developed into short pieces.

##### He needs break from the usual stuff

As the material should be different from the usual stuff, about which either the reader does not have any information or the angle is totally different from the previous ones. Moreover, he is looking for different material every time; thereby adding to the pressure on the editorial staff to come up with different material discussed from divergent angles in entirety.

##### If long articles, he will read never

Long articles are considered to be cumbersome for the readers to read. Most of them think that they will read that particularly long feature in the evening, as they do not have time in the morning, and it is rare ‘that evening’ arrive in the life of the reader as he might be busy in another chore by that time. The maximum under the given circumstances, he will do is that he will keep that particular feature in his record. Will he read that ever again? It is the million-dollar question.

However, one of the suggestions is that one can and must break that particular long piece into different small pieces, which should seem to be really ‘separable’ from the rest. Arbitrary breaking-up of the long feature can cause damage to its singleness.

### **His time being taken by other things**

No doubt, the time of the readers has been taken by his social life and the electronic media. However, some people have the habit of reading newspapers, magazines and books; so the writing is also for them.

### **Running against time with a lot of choices**

No doubt, the reader is running short of time, and he has a lot of choices at his disposal. If one newspaper is not coming up to the expectations of the readers, they can switch over to another immediately as there are multiple of choices with them.

### **Less time, less space**

If the reader is running short of time, so do most of the journalists, as they have look towards many other issues including their self-improvement. However, they have to write against the steep deadlines as well. Hence one can say that they have less time to write more. Moreover, they have less space in the newspapers to accommodate maximum in the form of more information, but less of words to be used in writing that.

### **On the other hand, the writers are well-aware of their readers’, editors’ and newspapers’ limitations.**

### **Short pieces**

This is no more an age of long articles, and the writers prefer to write less (less number of words), but try to say more, that is, communicate more, while taking into consideration what makes it interesting for the readers.

In most of the newspapers, one can see writers are not writing long pieces, as there is no one out to reader all. That is why; breaking long articles in to short, but comprehensive pieces is being practised, and advised.

It is also of huge importance that short and crispy articles fetching more readerships.

### **Emphasis on layout**

This is the age of colour and beauty to attract the readership and due weightage is given to pictorial layout of the newspapers. The layout designers are especially employed for improving layouts, as they are not only qualified rather are also experienced. This trend was not there a few years back, but now even the vernacular newspapers are employing university graduates.

It is so after the realisation that importance is no more given to dull and drab ‘black and white’ pages. However, these pages can also be made look good through the designing.

Writing good pieces, then coupled with better layouts, hold the key to beautiful magazines and newspapers.

### **Pictorial importance**

Present-day journalism is giving huge importance to pictures, maps and illustrations as quite a large number of readerships likes to evaluate a newspaper or a magazine. Moreover, quality pictures and illustrations make a publication look beautiful.

On the other hand, writing short pieces and highlighting them with good pictures make the reader to take more interest. And pictures with interesting captions make the publication more interesting.

Pictures without captions mostly carry no meanings, and in most of the cases, these are considered to be ‘mum’ pictures. This is usually done in magazines as almost all the pictures published in the newspapers are captioned. However, the quality of the captions can vary.

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Now emphasis is laid on using quality pictures by exploiting all possible sources, including office photographers.

**Interesting headlines**

One must avoid traditional and trite headlines, as oft-repeated subjects and titles make the reader think that the editors are no more creative. Coming up with interesting and attention-fetching headlines is considered to be of huge import. Avoiding already used headlines and coming up with new genuine expressions are always good.

Another trend of giving by-lines and catch-lines to get the reader more interested in your feature.

**Pictures, maps, etc...**

One must not undermine the usage of pictures, illustrations and maps, as it makes the reader know what is the written-matter carrying. This is only possible through good pictures, because present-day feature makes it happen for the readers.

**On to Urdu journalism**

Urdu feature is catching up fast with the trends of English journalism, as the Urdu reader is almost of the same view about reading a newspaper like that of English. Hence one can see an abundant usage of pictures, cropped heads, small pieces and comments separated from the rest of the pieces. These all tools are used to keep the readers' interest intact.

**Briefs**

Emphasis is being given on short pieces because these take less time to read besides making the reading easy. Moreover, it also helps in getting the idea across to more readers more easily. In today's journalism, long articles are avoided, and breaking up of the long pieces into many short pieces is preferred. However, it is done while considering the importance and subject.

## MODERN FEATURE WRITING TECHNIQUE

### The Blundell Technique

First attempt at feature writing can be a total mess coming back with all kinds of interesting nuggets of information. And resultantly included all of them in the essay. One can thought it might have been great. Story can be too long, no structure and basically can go nowhere. There are bits and pieces of interesting stuff you have in there but after reading the first few paragraphs, one is totally lost. One doesn't know where the story is heading.

Showing it to a senior definitely helps.

However, present day writer can use an approach developed by William E. Blundell, who pioneered the technique for the Wall Street Journal (and later wrote a book entitled 'The Art and Craft of Feature Writing').

Blundell's technique is still used by the Journal and countless other papers.

### Here's a simple outline of the Blundell Technique:

1. The Lead (Intro)
2. Nut Graph (Angle)
3. Main Body (Blocks)
4. Conclusion (Ending)

Let's elaborate further on the Blundell Technique:

#### 1. The Lead

The lead (or intro) for the article is typically three paragraphs long. It's usually an interesting anecdote that may not, at first glance, seem to be related to the topic at hand. Its purpose is to provide an interesting and

Simple-to-understand illustration of the issue you are writing about (the anecdote is basically a microcosm of the bigger story you intend to tell) and to draw your readers to the Nut Graph. (By the time they read the Nut Graph, they would have understood the Lead's relevance to the story).

When journalists talk about the beginning of a story the word they use is "the lead". Sometimes it's spelled "lede", a throwback to the pre-computer age when the word for the intro to the story had to be distinguished from the word for the molten lead used in printing newspapers.

An effective lead makes a promise to the reader, that you have something important and interesting to tell them. A good lead beckons, invites, informs, attracts and entices.

The best kinds of leads are anecdotal in nature. The short story is meant to be a microcosm of a bigger issue.

Here's an example of a three paragraph lead followed immediately by a Nut Graph.

#### (Three Para intro)

For five days, Alia's husband, high on drugs, threatened to kill her. He hit her and abused her. Terrified, Alia fled the house when she finally got the chance and ran to a local business to call the police. "He would kill me. He's very scary," Alia said. "He would walk through walls if he had to."

#### (Nut Graph)

The police advised her to contact the Domestic Violence Centre in the Federal Capital, and Alia found her way there.

The anecdotal lead above uses one specific example to illustrate a larger topic. In this case, Alia's story is a gateway to a larger story on the Domestic Violence Centre.

Anecdotal leads are a mainstay of feature writing. When used well they can be very effective in drawing the reader towards the Nut Graph.

Here are some comments by some journalists on Leads:

“I look at leads as my one frail opportunity to grab the reader. If I don’t grab them at the start, I can’t count on grabbing them in the middle, because they’ll never get to the middle... My leads are there to get you in and to keep you hooked to the story so that you can’t go away.”

**N. Don Wycliff, Chicago Tribune**

“I might write the first sentence 10 different times. Take a look at it, and it’s not quite right. It’s the right thought, but it’s not the right wording. Or it’s the right wording, but it’s not the right thought.”

**Steve Lopez, Los Angeles Times**

“I have to have a lead or I can’t write anything. I have to have my first sentence, because that’s my whole piece. That’s the tone that says what is this piece about, it’s the theme, the thing by which everything hangs. If I don’t have that first sentence, I just can’t keep going forward.”

**Susan Trausch, The Boston Globe**

## **2. Nut Graph (Angle)**

The Nut Graph is a paragraph that explains your entire article in a nutshell. Many writers find the Nut Graph to be the hardest aspect of feature writing. Once they’ve figured out their Nut Graph, everything else falls into place easily.

The relationship between the Lead and the Nut Graph can be thought of in this way:

The intro highlights an individual case. The Nut Graph, meanwhile, illustrates how that individual case is actually representative of a bigger trend or how it fits into a bigger overall picture.

This is a well-worn formula that’s still used by the Wall Street Journal and countless other publications today. Central to this approach is the Nut Graph. Without it, you really don’t have a story. Blundell calls it “the main theme statement, the single most important bit of writing I do on any story.”

Remember, in the Blundell Technique, up to three paragraphs can be used for the intro (but never more than three). Here’s an example of a Blundell Technique used in a story in the Financial Times:

### **(Three Para intro)**

Physicists are just like the rest of us in at least one respect. When they go online to search for information, they expect the earth.

Bebo White, who runs the website for the Stanford Linear Accelerator Centre, a high-energy physics laboratory in California, knows this all too well. “They get very frustrated if we don’t return good results, and quickly,” says Mr White.

And what do the expert visitors to the centre’s website look for most often? That day’s cafeteria menu, says Ruth McDunn, another technician on the site.

### **(Nut Graph)**

Call it the Google Effect. Expectations of search engines have skyrocketed. Whether it involves complex specialist knowledge or the completely trivial, there is a general belief that everything should be available instantly at the click of a mouse.

Many writers really struggle to find a Nut Graph for their stories. This is because they are not clear what their stories are about in the first place.

Address this question: “What is this story really about?” in one word. Greed, politics, sacrifice, loss, redemption, family, hope, freedom? It could be any of these things. But once you know what your story is about, you will have focus. A good story should leave a single, dominant impression. This is called your ‘angle’.

Now all you have to do is to express your angle in two or three sentences.

That is your Nut Graph.

### **Journalists say:**

“The most important thing in the story is finding the central idea. It’s one thing to be given a topic, but you have to find the idea or the concept within that topic. Once you find that idea or thread, all the other

anecdotes, illustrations and quotes are pearls that hang on this thread. The thread may seem very humble, the pearls may seem very flashy, but it's still the thread that makes the necklace.”

**Thomas Boswell, The Washington Post**

Ken Wells, a writer and editor at the Wall Street Journal, describes the Nut Graph as “a paragraph that says what this whole story is about and why you should read it. It's a flag to the reader, high up in the story: You can decide to proceed or not, but if you read no farther, you know what that story's about.”

**3. Main Body (Blocks)**

The main body of the article consists of several blocks, each representing a different aspect of the main story. It's always a good idea to pepper your blocks with quotes and examples to make it more interesting and credible.

With the Nut Graph sorted out, it is now to share with you another aspect of the Blundell Technique. And this has to do with the blocks that he uses to organise materials for his feature stories. The body of the story is a series of information blocks. But they're not about time. They're organised by subject.

In a story about egg production, one block might be about foreign competition. Another might be about the environmental effects of an egg farm. Another might be about daily work on the farm.

These are arranged in the way that seems to best support the focus of the story. Writers will usually find clever ways to bridge each of these blocks. Or they might insert subheads to introduce each section and to help organise the story.

The block structure pares a big, overwhelming writing job into manageable chunks for writer and reader alike.

Each block should make its point with three examples, proofs or illustrations. (Two are too few; four are overkill)

Blundell has six key blocks that he would use in his feature articles:

**History:** What's the background to this situation?

**Scope:** What is the extent of the problem?

**Cause:** Why is this happening?

**Impact:** Who and what is affected by this?

**Action of contrary forces:** Who is doing what about this?

**The future:** How is it going to be in the coming days, weeks, months and years?

Not all these blocks need to be included in your final story. Nor must they appear in the order presented above. But if you have the material to answer all six questions above, you've got the ingredients for a very good feature.

**4. Conclusion**

The conclusion is something that ends your story with a punch. There several types of conclusions. The best kind usually contains a passage that either sums up and/or reinforces the central message of the story. In feature writing, leads get most of the attention, but endings are equally, if not more, important.

A good ending absolutely, positively, must do three things at a minimum, says Bruce DeSilva of The Associated Press

Tell the reader the story is over.

Nail the central point of the story to the reader's mind.

Resonate. “You should hear it echoing in your head when you put the paper down, when you turn the page... It should stay with you and make you think a little bit.”

There are three conventional types of conclusions.

**The default one** – used by many writers – is to end with a snappy quote from someone mentioned earlier in the story. But it's the lazy man's approach to conclude writing (using this technique, usually when the deadline is fast approaching).



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**A better approach** is to tie the conclusion to the lead. So, if you start off with a particular anecdote, you also end with something related to that anecdote. Occasionally, this approach is used. But be aware that it can get a bit corny if you don't do it well or use it too often.

**The best approach** is to provide some solid facts to sum up and reinforce the central message of the story. You can use a specific detail, a concrete image, a fact or a statistic to conclude the story. But it must be impact and memorable.

## ADVICE TO FEATURE WRITERS

### A guide to better writing

Usually, when you're good at something, you don't bother to analyse or think about the mechanics of the technique. You just do it either because it comes naturally to you or because you've been doing it for so long that it's become ingrained in you.

Now, are good writers born or taught? This imponderable is probably asked in all professions, especially ones involving artistic endeavours. It's that old nature versus nurture debate. How much of what you are as a person is a result of your genes and how much is influenced by your environment? No one really knows for sure.

But trying to figure this out is not just an academic exercise. As a writer, an editor or a writing coach, one must know what produces great writing. Is the ability to write well something latent in someone – who, perhaps, was born with the right mix of intelligence, language capabilities and imagination? Or is good writing something that anyone, with the right amount of determination and training, is capable of producing?

One can tilt a little bit towards the nature side of things. You can teach someone to be a capable writer, but the really good ones are born with that special blend of creativity that allows them to rise above the rest.

So, if you're not a natural born writer, does that mean you can't produce good articles? No! Good writing is something that can be observed, learnt and repeated.

There is one quality that must be inherent, though, and that is the love of writing. Only with genuine desire will you have the perseverance and discipline to do all the things you need to do to improve.

At its most fundamental, you'll have to read a whole lot more than the average person. And write whenever you have the chance. Write, write, and write!

It may be true that great writers are born that way but with hard work and a steady devotion to the craft, anyone can be made – if not a great writer – at least a good one.

### Tip 1: Love Writing

If you find writing to be a chore; if you grumble each time your editor gives you an extra assignment; if you'd rather be doing something else other than writing, you should be asking yourself: 'What am I doing in this profession?' If you don't love writing, give up. You really have no business being a writer because you won't be very good at it. It's as simple as that.

“Writing a book is like rearing children – willpower has very little to do with it. If you have a little baby crying in the middle of the night, and if you depend only on willpower to get you out of bed to feed the baby, that baby will starve. You do it out of love. Willpower is a weak idea; love is strong. You don't have to scourge yourself with cat-o'-nine tails to go to the baby. You got to the baby out of love for that particular baby. That's the same way you go to your desk... I write because I love writing.”

**Donald M. Murray, writing coach and Boston Globe columnist.**

### II: Love Reading

If you don't love reading, you should also be questioning yourself whether being a writer is the right profession for you. For it's only when you read a lot – about your topic of specialisation as well as general knowledge material – that you can become a good writer.

But reading is not just for acquiring knowledge. It also helps you to learn about different writing styles and ultimately allows you to eventually develop your own writing style.

### Be an avid reader.

The more one reads, the more he understands the process of writing, for one does not just read, he also analyses the different writing styles.

“You should read and read and read. That is your only hope of ever developing a decent individual style.”

**Steven Koch, Princeton and Columbia writing teacher**

**III: Find Role Models**

It is said that imitation is the sincerest of flattery. But for those of us trying to become better writers, imitation is more than flattery; it's a powerful and time-honoured way to master the craft.

Some very important lessons are learnt by writing down turns-of-phrases by other writers. But don't just copy. Analyse. If a particular phrase or sentence is appealing to you, don't just enjoy the words. Ask yourself what it is you like about it. Break the sentence down and try to understand why those words managed to elicit a reaction from you.

In the end, you must use your own words to become the writer you want to be. But you can learn loads by initially copying and analysing the style of other writers. Through this method, you gain an intimate understanding of the way good writers construct their sentences.

“Do not fear imitation. Nobody sensible pursues an imitative style as a long-term goal, but all accomplished writers know that the notion of pure originality is a childish fantasy. Up to a point, imitation is the path to discovery and essential to growth.”

**Stephen Koch, Princeton and Columbia writing teacher**

**IV: Be a Specialist**

You won't go very far as a generalist. It's a dog-eat-dog world out in the writing market, with plenty of competition ready to eat your lunch. To carve a niche for yourself, decide on a topic or area that you will specialise in. Then,

**i) Read prodigiously about the topic**

**ii) Talk to people in the industry**

**iii) Devour books and magazines, and constantly comb the web for knowledge.**

The best specialist writers constantly read about their area of specialty. As a result, they are well-versed in the language, issues and events relating to those topics. They are like a sponge, absorbing knowledge all the time.

But it's not enough to read. You need to be on the ground. You need to be everywhere, from product launches to press conferences. You need to invest time talking to everyone and anyone that matters in that particular industry.

Quite often, specialty writers know their stuff so well that their industry contacts sometimes turn to them to find out the latest industry news and gossip. When you've reached that level, you would have carved a niche for yourself.

**V: Be Versatile**

Being a specialist doesn't mean being rigid and unable to write about any other topic or in any other style other than the niche you've carved for yourself?

As a professional writer, you have to specialise in something but be versatile enough to do a broad range of stories. There is, of course, a limit to how diverse a person can be as a writer. But as a general rule, it's a good idea to expose yourself to a handful of genres.

“If you have any talent as a writer, you have to be versatile. I can write a long story. I can write a short story, I can write a feature, I can write a hard news story. You have to be able to do that as a reporter. If you tend to write the same kind of story all the time, you're not really growing as a writer.”

**Russell Eshleman Jr, The Philadelphia Inquirer**

**VI: Be Your Own Harshest Critic**

Good writers are rarely satisfied. They write a word, then tap the delete key and start all over again. Multiple times. They're always trying to find a more compelling lead to draw in the reader, a stronger angle, and more colourful quotes to spice up the story, a snappier conclusion leaves a lasting impression on the reader.

To be a good writer, you must constantly review your work. Once you've finished writing an article, take a short breather, walk around the house, have a coffee, and then read your story from start to end. When doing so, role-play the reader. Pretend you're reading the story for the first time.

Does the lead make you want to keep reading? Does it take you too long to learn what the story is about and why it's important to you? What questions do you have about the story? Are they answered in the order you would logically ask them? Was the conclusion memorable enough? Be your own harshest critic.

Do this until you are sufficiently satisfied with what you've got (as a good writer, you should NEVER be fully satisfied).

### **VII: Be a Stickler for Accuracy**

Of course, everyone makes mistakes, no one is perfect, but writers must take great care to get their facts right. Otherwise they lose their greatest asset: Credibility. If you're known to regularly get the small things wrong, your ability to get the big picture right will be questioned by your readers.

#### **Three rules of thumb to avoid making mistakes:**

1. Get it right the first time around. During an interview, take the necessary time and care to read back the spelling of the source's name and other names they mention. As for all the details you need right there and then. Don't fact-check after the fact. Do it during the reporting process.
2. Don't rely on memory and never assume. During the writing, constantly refer to your notes and other materials you have gathered while reporting the story. Also, do not make assumptions. If the facts, details or quotes you need are not in your notes, do a follow up interview (by phone if necessary) to get them straight from the horses' mouths.
3. Verify that you've got it right. After you're done writing, it's never a bad thing to read back the relevant portions of your story to the people you've interviewed. This is particularly important when you are writing about something complex. For example, if you're describing a complicated financial transaction or an unusual medical procedure, there's nothing wrong with asking the people you've interviewed to listen to what you've written. Ask them: "Have I described it correctly?" They will tell you.

### **VIII: Be Smart with Numbers**

Dealing with numbers is always a tricky thing. When you write a feature story that involves lots of numbers, make sure you tell the story in a way that allows people to understand the significance of those numbers.

#### **Relativity**

Remember that number, in of themselves, have little significance to readers. Their value to your story comes from their relative values, not their absolute values. So, when you must refer to numbers in a story, make a point to compare them to something else. Here's an example:

"The Bakun Dam would flood 69,640 hectares of forest."

That sentence above means nothing to the average reader who would have no clue how big 69,640 hectares is. Now, let's have a look at this next sentence.

"The Bakun Dam would flood 69,640 hectares of forest, an area roughly the size of Singapore."

Now, it's easy for anyone visualize just how big Bakun Dam is. Get it?

#### **Rounding Off**

Unless you are writing a financial article or report, you don't need to use precise figures. Rounding off is a good practice that makes your story flow better. So, it's okay to say "nearly doubled" or "about three times as much as" and remain both accurate and understandable.

For example, if 32.56 per cent of students flunked the final exam, it'd be perfectly fine to say that "about one in three students failed to make the grade".

Similarly, if someone has been working his trade for 29 years and six months, it's fine to say, "Mr. Lee has been selling his famous assam laksa for nearly three decades."

**IX: Write Tightly**

When you write, remember to write tightly. One of the main reasons writers like to write long articles is because it's much easier to write loosely. But that's a lousy practice.

Writing tightly requires you to cut out all kinds of stuff from your precious article. And nobody likes to do that. But being a professional writer means having the discipline to murder your darlings.

Every time I write an article, I still have to force myself to cut out some of my favourite bits from the story. It's always a struggle but I eventually do what's necessary. What survive my scalpel are the absolutely essential bits.

**Three rules of thumb for writing tightly:**

1. Never write a paragraph where a sentence will do; and never use a long word where a short one will do
2. If it's possible to cut a word out, cut it out
3. Stick religiously to assigned word length. This will force you to cut out non-essential information and avoid detours that might be interesting to you but will detract from the focus of your story.

Keep your copy tight, you should start by distilling your raw notes and quotes before you even begin writing. The danger of not doing so is that everything ends up being used. Then what you get is a jumbled mess, not a story.

Remember, in composing your story, you only want the most illustrative anecdotes, the most essential details and the most memorable quotes. So, be merciless in cutting out everything else.

The next time you find yourself thinking “I shouldn't be wasting this quote” remember the “iceberg effect”. When you see an iceberg, all you are seeing is the tip. A huge chunk of it is hidden away beneath the surface of the water. Similarly, every good story is derived from a whole bunch of interviews, data and research material that don't necessarily make it to the final story. Their roles are to help you gain a better understanding of the topic you are writing about.

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.”

**William Strunk Jr, author of *The Elements of Style***

“If you used every quote you got, your stories would go on forever... So you use your quotes to bolster the main points of your stories, and then cut it off...”

**Russell Eshleman, Jr, *The Philadelphia Inquirer***

A common response I get from writers when I ask them to cut out stuff from their stories is “But, I don't want to waste anything”. That's a wrong attitude to have. Just because some information doesn't get used doesn't mean it's wasted.

“The main rule of a writer is never to pity your manuscript. If you see something is no good, throw it away and begin again. A lot of writers have failed because they have too much pity. They have already worked so much; they cannot just throw it away. But I say that the wastepaper basket is a writer's best friend. My wastepaper basket is on a steady diet.”

**Isaac Bashevis Singer, winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize in Literature**

**X: Add Colour**

It doesn't mean your story should read like an SMS.

I always remind non-fiction writers that even though we write about real world people and events, ultimately, we are still storytellers. The qualities that make up a good story still need to be in our articles. That's why it's important for you to add colour to your stories.

An effective way to add colour is to use vivid details where appropriate. When you describe something or someone, make a point to provide a sense of place, a sense of the personalities involved and a sense of time, so that the readers feel like they are actually there.

Below are some comments by journalists from various publications on how they use detail to add colour to their stories:

“In a good story, a paranoid schizophrenic doesn't just hear imaginary voices, he hears them say, ‘Go kill a policeman.’”

**David Finkel, The Washington Post**

“You ask the questions: What was it like? What did it feel like? Take the reader where he cannot go. What is it like in those woods? What is it like on that island? What is it like in that person's dreams? And you do that by accumulating every bit of meaningful detail and using it where it seems appropriate. It's what you leave out sometimes that is as important as what you put in.”

**Carol McCabe, The Providence Journal**

“When I sit down to write a story, I want people to see the story, I want people to feel what I feel, hear what I hear, taste what I taste, and smell what I smell. So those are kind of the basic Writing 101 things that I'm using. The colours, the smell, the marked-up pages of his Bible... Oftentimes, when I'm in these situations interviewing people, I have a finite amount of time. As they're speaking and the tape recorder is rolling, I'm writing down these details all the time. It's like, what am I struck by? Her kitchen is perfectly clean. It's black and white. A little girl sitting in her high chair, but she's not eating her Cheerios, all the things that are happening around me...”

**DeNeen L. Brown, The Washington Post**

### **XI: Write the Way You Speak**

When Don Murray showed up for his first day as the Boston Globe's writing coach more than 25 years ago, he claimed he could tell straight away who the top three writers at the Globe were.

He looked around the room and pointed out a man and two women who indeed turned out to be the best writers in the newsroom.

How did he do it? Did he have some magical insight? No, actually it was something more down to earth. According to Murray, he could tell who the best writers were because “their lips move when they write.”

More often than not, good writers actually read out their stories, to themselves, to hear whether what they wrote sounds right. I've long used that technique even before I had heard about Murray's anecdote. And I can vouch that it really works to improve your writing.

If a sentence doesn't sound right when you read it – for example, it doesn't flow so smoothly or is awkward in some way – then you know you'd better rewrite that sentence.

“Effective writing has the illusion of speech without its bad habits,” Murray says. “The reader hears a writer speaking to a reader. The writing should flow with grace, pace, and clarity – not the way we speak but, better than that, the way we should speak.”

When you compose your article, write as if you were speaking to someone. That's the best way to get your message across because it makes your articles simple to understand.

So, the next time you want to know if your article reads well, read the damn thing – aloud! If it doesn't sound good to you, you can be certain it won't sound good to others.

### **XII: Assume they don't know and don't Care**

There are two assumptions I always make before I attempt to write on, whether it's a straight news piece, a feature story or a commentary. They are:

The reader doesn't know anything about the topic I'm about to write on

The reader doesn't care either

The first assumption forces me to put in the necessary background information to make the story understandable even to someone who has no clue about the topic.

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The second assumption forces me to make the story interesting. It shouldn't just appeal to the hardcore who care deeply about the issue. Even those who don't care should find the article so compelling, they'd want to read the whole thing through.

## COLUMN WRITING

### Definition

Column has been described as an editorial with a by-line by the journalists. There are many phases of similarities between a column in an editorial, which makes their distinction and difference, really matter for experts' opinions. They bear close similarities as far as their form, style and material are concerned. However all the columns cannot be said to have close similarities with an editorial. It has been rightly said that column-writing is one -of the most satisfying and rewarding journalistic exercise or assignment which is equal to personalised journalism. It is the field where a column writer is invested with ample independence and liberty to write on any topic or subject, with a clear flair of creative approach.

### Various definitions

- “All those writings are columns published on regular basis under a permanent caption in the periodicals and the periodicals.”

– **Prof Shafique Jhallandhari**

- “A certain type of writing under a permanent caption”

– Prof Maskeen Ali Hijazi

- “There are certain permanent topics in every newspaper. Under some presented news announcements or information. Under some are given humorous, medical or scientific writings. These permanent topics and their matter are given name of columns. And the writer is called columnists.”

– **Dr Abdus Salam Khurshid**

From the above definitions, we can naturally gauge the nature of the column writings, on a wider canvas and scale. Actually columns serve the purpose of dividing the page vertically or reducing its length of lines in the newspapers, which makes the reading of the newspapers easy and enjoyable and especially to make correct connection between the different lines of the newspapers.

Apparently, the columns go to a long way in making the pages of the newspapers a beautifying proportions and symmetrical division of the newspapers and the periodicals. Column also implies more in length than in width, also utilised for the purpose of headlines, for example single column headline, double column headline etc.

### Scope and Importance for a newspaper

Analysis from the foregoing study and examination of the nature and definition of the column-writing, we can analyse the following essentials and basic points which go into the forming of a column.

The column-writing can cater to the needs of the newspapers, periodicals with equal significance.

Column-writing can be equated with the concept and practice of personal journalism of the past.

Columns are written on a multitude of subjects, with a natural flair of conversation and a direct address to the readers without any intermediary. There are syndicated and non-syndicated columns on diverse topics. It can be said that any subject is an apt subject for the columnist.

Under a column, different news, announcements, and information can be gathered. Columns are really the concise and precise rather pointed comments on the news of the day. Column may include in its range the humour, criticism, wisecracks, judgements, observations, philosophies, apologies etc.

Columns are the unique devices of direct contact and address with the general masses, as being the most modern and sophisticated form of personal journalism of the past. These are the decorating pieces of the newspapers and hold the position of permanent topics and subjects.

Column-writing is a unique form of lively journalism, and is easily attuned to the information, instruction, address, entertainment and amusement, guidance, enlightenment of the readers.

Columns are of multi-purpose nature and can include diverse writings on national and international topics and subjects, social and cultural issues, literacy and light subjects, economic and political subjects besides humorous writings, and sarcastic writings, which were replaced, by the serious subjects. Both are equally



popular and important. Today column-writing includes anecdotes, short essays, reviews, and editorials, comments, on news, announcements, and readers' contributions.

A column is both a general and a specialised writing, which may entail the elucidation or expression of the policy of the newspapers, or it may be based on the independent thinking of an individual.

It is asserted that the style and approach in writing a column is usually determined by the local conditions and the predilections of the concerned writers. However the sole criteria for gauging the success of a columnist lie in his efficiency and proficiency to attract and hold the readers. A successful columnist must possess some cardinal points to impel the readers to continue the perusals of the column carefully and with deep and keen interest. However it is estimated that only from ten to fifteen percent - people who read the editorials from beginning to the end. However the columns are most sought after and consulted frequently.

Columns are published with the real name of the writer or under a pseudonym. However, most of the writers are writing with real names.

Columns are considered to be the most powerful medium of any newspaper, next to news. However, the importance of the features and articles is never undermined.

Moreover, a column has the longest life of all newspaper items, as people like to keep track of the writers' thinking. This also adds to the fact that the columnists are the most criticised of all as well.

One of the important reasons behind the popularity of the columns is that these can be written on any subject as well. From personal experiences to any research done in any part of the world, is a subject for a columnist.

### **Why most powerful?**

- Columns' message is always very strong, both for the readers and people who are connected to the writing in any way. Hence people prefer to analyse and react.

Secondly, columns are read by those who are either the decision-makers or their critics; hence it adds to the fact that the columns are most powerful part of any newspaper.

- Present-day columns are mostly political, which is due to the political situation of the country. Nevertheless people are writing on other subjects, which are of common interest.

- Columnists become known over a short period of time depending upon the subject choice, language, ideas and their wisdom beside other attributes.

- While writing a column over a period of time, the best of the writers comes out in the columns, which is another reason for the popularity of the columns and columnists.

- News can be one-sided version at time, but analysis, criticism, and solution given in the columns are definitely presenting a well-rounded picture. Due to this reason, columns are considered to be the highly opinionated write-ups. However, balancing factors are always there to have better write-ups.

### **Scope**

Column writing is the hardest type of writing of all because it requires good thinking.

To write a good column requires more than just the ability to articulate an opinion. Your opinions must make sense, provide insight and be convincing. And you must do all this in an entertaining way.

Anybody can be trained to write straight news because it's very mechanical. Feature articles, though also somewhat formulaic, are harder because they require good writing.

But column writing is the hardest type of writing of all because it requires good thinking.

To write a good column requires more than just the ability to articulate an opinion. Your opinions must make sense, provide insight and be convincing. And you must do all this in an entertaining way.

It requires you to be almost like a lawyer. Through your arguments, you will need to convince the jury (your readers) that your client (your viewpoint) is right. Shaping a powerful argument takes practice and requires both breadth and depth of knowledge as well as the ability to critically analyse a particular issue.

Column writing is different from other forms of writing because unlike straight news and feature writing, as columns have dedicated readerships.

A columnist develops a following because his readers feel they can gain knowledge, insight and entertainment from reading his writings.

## COLUMN WRITING IN MODERN AGE

The present day columnists are very important part of the journalism. With the passage, they are being given more and more importance. See at the newspapers, where the editors are giving more space to the columnists on the Op-Ed pages especially. They are considered to be part and parcel of the political journalism.

Besides, news and analysis by the article writers, columnists have been able to carve out an important niche for themselves. Resultantly, people follow their favourite columnist whenever they switch over from one newspaper to another; hence goes the readership with them to that particular newspaper. This also substantiates the reason that the editors give a lot of importance to the established columnists, as they are not fetching their own readership with them, rather big names among the columnist, also bring better reputation to the newspapers.

Succinctly, columnists have become an important ingredient of the political journalism. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they do not write on other issues.

### Columns

Columns and columnists are synonymous to each other. In certain cases, both of them have become so popular with the readers that if the name of one is slipped out of the reader, he can recall him with the other. For instance, if the name of the writer is forgotten, people do remember them by recalling the name of the column. Hence, these both go side by side.

In no way, we can undermine the importance of the columnist for newspapers. Earlier, the vernacular or Urdu newspaper columnists used to well-known, but with the passage of time, English columnists have created their own space, and they have become equally important. Now, English columnists are being translated in Urdu and are regularly printed. However, this has not happened from Urdu to English so far. Nevertheless, sometimes it is also done.

### Columnists and columns

#### Diversity of thought

The popularity of the columnists can be attributed to the fact ‘diversity of thought’, as the columnists are not always writing about one subject. Even if they are writing about one subject, then they make it certain that their ideas do not seemed to be copied from each other. Consequently, we find many aspects of a single subject, while many writers are following the same editorial policy of the newspaper.

Hence, while reading many columns, the reader can find diversity of thought about the same subject. On the other hand, these writers are also following different editorial policies about the same subject. Consequently, one can also find columns, both pro and anti-government, pro one political party or against a political or democratic dispensation.

Moreover, they are found tackling the same subject from different angles, which adds to the beauty of the columns. Secondly, the columnists always adapt well to the changing circumstances, and develop their write-ups accordingly. For instance, in case of curbs on the media and if they are being considered to be a threat to democracy, then they change their style, but always stick to the truth and the editorial policy of the newspaper.

So the columnists bring of diversity of thought to their columns, which always bring in the element of unpredictability causing constant interest for the readers.

#### Individuality

Despite the fact that in given circumstances, hardly more than two subjects are considered to be hot for discussions, but the columnist always keep their individuality intact by discussing the subjects from divergent angles. Hence the columnists are constantly keeping their name as an individual’s name, and will resent to be labeled someone copying thoughts of others.

No doubt, they are considered to well-read people, who are having their own genuine thoughts about a particular subject. Plus, inspiration a few of them might take from others, but always rely upon their own

ideas. Consequently, we see that all of them might condemning or approving the same thing, but they will be writing from their own particular perspective; hence keeping their individuality intact.

### **Hired by newspapers**

#### **Most sought-after writers**

At the moment, most of the columnists are kind of freelancers – those who are contributing columns regularly – but they are the most sought-after writers, as the editors want that a particular writer should be writing for his newspaper. No doubt, such writers do have a large following of the readers, who ultimately go for that writer, and resultantly, the readership of the newspaper is enhanced.

Recently, there has been virtually a competition among editors of hiring columnists, while the other was trying to keep them with his newspaper. This competition is pretty stiff among the editors of the Urdu writers.

#### **Highly-paid writers**

The columnists are highly-paid writers, and their perks are increasing every year. Now an ordinary columnist is being paid at least six figures by the editors, whereas the top writers are earning far more than this. Today's columnist besides having good status in the society, he is also well-off, whereas he is being more and more every day.

### **Subject variety**

#### **On all possible subjects**

The columnists write on every subject – from individual cases to personal ones, from society to politics, from environment to endangered species – you name one subject and you will find numerous writers writing on that particular subject. So there is a variety of subjects a reader can read.

#### **But politics takes lead**

However, despite variance of subjects, we find that most of the columnists are writing about politics. It is primarily because of two reasons. First, all well-known columnists are political writers; hence as every one tries to be popular one, so he follows the same subject. Secondly, as Pakistan has been politically volatile country, and its people are politically motivated masses, hence there is a huge room for a political writer to be accepted by the readers.

Hence, we find more and more people writing on politics, which have gained popularity.

### **Both media**

#### **Urdu columnists**

Urdu columnists are more known among the masses, which is primarily due to two reasons. First, a large scale readership (every literate Pakistan reads Urdu newspapers) and secondly, their appeal to the emotions. Hence the Urdu columnists are more popular among the masses.

#### **English columnists**

As English newspapers do not have widespread readership and these newspaper have a limited influence, which is only among the highly educated people, so the English columnists are not that popular in comparison to the Urdu writers. However, they have on readership, which is loyal to them.

### **Orientation of columnists**

#### **Mostly political**

As mentioned earlier, the columnists are writing on politics. However, the society or the social issues come next to politics. Nevertheless, all subjects pertaining to the interest of the readers are discussed in columns.

## ENGLISH AND URDU COLUMNISTS

There are certain differences between Urdu and English columns and columnists.

### Urdu – as a popular readership

Urdu columnists are addressing the popular readership, as the Urdu newspapers reach every literate reader of the country. Besides this mass appeal, these dailies are also read by the elite also. Hence their readership varies from the local vendor to the decision makers of the country. With this, wide range of readers; it becomes easy for the columnists to choose subjects of their choice because every subject will be read across the country, which makes the Urdu columnists more popular among the masses.

The Urdu columnists are always coming up with popular ideas, as they find readership of varied senses and tastes. However, they try to discuss the popular ideas, that is, what is being discussed or considered to be a hot subject.

Secondly, they are treating these subjects as popular themes because these are liked by large number of readers.

On the other hand, the English columnists are meant for selected class of readers, as English is still a language, which is read, written and understood by a few literate of the society. Hence the English columnists are addressing a selected readership, who is reading the columns to apprise themselves with new ideas, as they are already familiar with the problems and issues related to them.

If the English columnists are treating popular ideas, but they are always doing differently through comparisons, contrasts and arguments. Pragmatism is the basic line, which they following all the time.

### Meeting requirements of readers

Urdu columnists are addressing those issues, which their readers want to be discussed, which also add to the popularity of the columnists. So the Urdu columnists are writing on those subjects, which are concerns of their readers. However, they are always following editorial policy of the particular newspaper for which they are writing.

On the other hand, the English columnists are telling readers to think in a particular way, while discussing a subject. They write in a way, which they deem is good for their readers. Hence they are always trying to be more pragmatic rather than appeal to emotionalism or popular sentiment.

### More of anecdotal

Urdu columnists take due advantage of repeating events, bringing in more anecdotes and discussing them from their own perspectives. Most of the Urdu columnists do share their personal experiences or others to make their columns interesting.

Moreover, using letters written to these columnists is also popular with them, as this quoting of letters fetches more readerships as well.

For English columnists, it is a case of more of analysis of the situation, less of anecdotes, and less of the personal perspective or quoting of incidents. They stick to objectivity sans any ingredient of dramatization.

### More of popular appeal

It is thought that the Urdu columnists are playing up to the gallery, as they are writing what Urdu readers want to read. Secondly, they are in certain cases playing up the emotions, and it is rarely avoided because it is considered that an Urdu is more emotional in comparison to an English one as he attaches more pragmatism to his thought than emotionalism. Nevertheless, the Urdu columnists are giving pieces of advice to their readers, and imparting awareness to them simultaneously.

On the other hand, the English columnists remain docile on emotional front, as they try to make their readers think and believe in them. Secondly, they are rarely giving hype to popular expression.

**Meant for a widespread readership**

The Urdu columnists have stupendous number of readers, who follow them continuously, and the writers are making moves to keep their readership intact.

Whereas the English columnists have limited readership in comparison to Urdu journalism, and have limited following, but this is pretty well-read, and these readers are expecting their columnists to remain pragmatic.

**Using column as a popularity tool**

Urdu columnists are using their columns as a popularity tool, and they are gaining popularity among the readers. On the other hand, the English columnists are bent upon ‘teaching’ their readers with an obvious advantage of being popular among them. Hence the latter writers are using less of an appeal to the emotions, and stick to arguments.

**English—meant for a selected readership**

Few might disagree but the fact remains that English columns are meant for selected readers whereas the Urdu columns are for all and sundry. Hence, this makes columnists change their subjects and Treatment of the subject considering their readership. Simultaneously, it has also given rise to the fact that a few writers are taking their readers for granted in contrast to those who are putting an effort to making the column rich.

**Difference in treatment of subject**

What is popular today is the subject for Urdu columnists. They are following how people are thinking, and they think the same and bringing minor changes in the thought process to achieve the ultimate objective. Moreover, the Urdu columnists are mostly concentrating on politics; however, variance in subject is there, but it is less.

On the other hand, the English columnists try to be unique in approach and subject, and their effort is to communicate what is different, and through varied arguments.

**More of didacticism, less of chat**

Columnists teach besides entertaining the reader. The Urdu columnists might find it to make columns ‘chatty’, but English columnists resist this trend as the Chatty columns find places in less serious spaces. Whereas it has more of English magazines stuff. It is a fact that serious columnists of both languages resist being chatty.

**Letting readers know**

Both types of columnists try to let readers know what is happening. However, their styles can vary from one to another. However, both of them know this thing very well that the readers should be informed, taught and entertained, and never make them learn wrong things. Moreover, they are providing them room to observe and reach a conclusion. However, conclusion is also given for less brainy.

**Using less devious ways**

The regular columns are facing different problems like that of less material. Secondly, they are constrained to write run-of-the-mill ideas. In certain cases, slackness hits then and they are found occasionally wondering what to do now.

However, one thing must be kept in mind that serious readers can never be cheated rather know when the writer is being ‘very serious’ or just ‘serious’ for the sake of it.

However, the columnists’ fear of losing their readers is always in their minds like a hanging sword, and this keeps them charged-up for every issue. Moreover, they are looking for more and more subjects, and then making an effort to discuss them from different angles.

## TYPES OF COLUMNS

There are divergent types of columns owing to the subject variation.

It is said “Columns, like news stories, may fit into several pigeonholes at the same time.”

### 1. Reporting-in-Depth Columns

Background, perspective, and interpretation are given to various happenings, usually already presented in hard news. In these columns, current news events are related to the past and also to the future.

### 2. “I Think” or Opinionated Columns

Either because of extensive training, long time observations, or sheer lack of modesty, Columnists set themselves up as experts and then expound their opinions for the general public. They try to compensate in heat for what they cannot provide in light.

### 3. Gossip Columns

Everybody likes to learn a juicy bit of gossip. One whole field of column writing is built on this characteristic. Such a column contains little except its unquestionably titillating value; this needs not be the writer’s exclusive domain. The uncovering of a government scandal may have profound (and beneficial) ramifications. No daily newspaper carries a gossip column and its natural habit is the film magazine, which flourishes on gossip, some malicious, some harmless but unquestionably titillating.

### 4. Humorous Columns

Columnist tries to find the humorous aspects in life to amuse readers. Sometimes, these spotlight an event more clearly than thousands of words of expounding and explaining. Many papers still shy of having regular daily humorous column. Columns are much liked, which contain some satirical comments.

Many papers still shy of having regular daily humorous column. However these columns are much liked, which contain some satirical comments.

### 5. Essay Columns

Just as nature and colour editorials have appeal for many a metropolitan daily editor, so the columnist, who arouses a similar nostalgia and mood in his writing, attracts attention. These require perceptiveness or possibly just and overpowering interest in people. All authors do not possess this.

This type of column is rare today. Students of English literature will recognize the essay columns of Joseph Chesterton and A.A. Mime. As an essay, it has style. Its range is unlimited but it must stick to one rigid rule-it must never be deductive or dull.

### 6. Personality Diary Columns

The Diary columns come from public figures, who are talking about their interesting incidents with others.

### 7. How- to-do or Advice Columns

These educate the readers, as there is a gentle instruction written in such a way as not to appear to be a lesson. These columns usually appear on magazine and daily pages.

### 8. Sports Column

There was a time when some leading newspapers had their daily sports columns, but this is getting to be rarer these days. However, event-based article-cum-columns are there. Some newspapers try to make-up for the dearth this way. Perhaps it is still a field less trodden.

### 9. Question and Answer Column

This column comes in various colours. It could be a medical column in which a qualified doctor answers

queries on health. It could be a sober column in which readers ask questions about their personal problems and get appropriate answers depending on whether the questions are plain, plain silly or serious. Under this style of column-writing, a columnist gives a question and then answers it. By this style, a columnist makes the columns easy to understand and intelligible even to the general readers. This style of writing a column gives ample opportunities to the columnist to raise questions of national and paramount importance and then answers them in easy and understandable style and language. In this way, a good columnist paves the way for instruction, teaching and improving educational values and standard of the general masses in an effective way.

### **11. Standard Column**

This type of column handles editorial subjects of lesser importance and deals with each in a paragraph or two. They are unsigned and are frequently the work of two or more members of the editorial staff. Outstanding columns in this category are ‘Topics of the Times’ in the New York Times.

### **12. Political columns**

These are an extension of the Standard Column, but it is considered of very serious nature. This is especially done in pursuance of the Editorial policy of the newspaper, and these are considered to be one of the most-read columns.

### **13. The Middle Column**

The ‘middle’ is so-called because it occupies a position on the editorial page between the main article and the standard column. Its sole purpose is to lighten what could otherwise be serious reading, which an editorial page normally is and is expected to be. It is generally humorous and in any event it should be entertaining and is usually written in a lighter vein. In length it is about 500 words and the more off-beat it is the better.

### **14. The Hodge-Podge Column**

Here the columnist presents to his reader a Hodge Podge of stuff a little or no consequence on the principle that variety is not only the spice of life but a sure formula to catch reader’s interest.

### **15. Editorial Column**

It is properly called the signed editorial column. In it we find what resembles an editorial in form, but an editorial so palpably personal that it is a cross between an editorial and a column. When an editor writes a piece under his own name he is trying to lay his prestige on the line.

These do not necessarily depend on humorous elements only. They are and can be handled efficiently by the experienced and stylish writer of columns. Its demands are different than the other forms of columns. In it are included one’s personal views and opinions on any subject or topic in the world like an editorial in any style.

### **16. Specialized Columns**

These types of columns are generally limited and confined to a single subject or topic, with the underlying purpose to render better and detailed service to the subject or topic under study and examination. It may be confined to a single department of life or learning. Specialized Columns are arranged in accordance with the circumstances. Under specialized columns are included the columns like, ‘Legal Column’, ‘Religious or Deeni Column’, ‘Astrology’ or Palmistry Column’, ‘Sports Columns’, ‘Fashion Column’, ‘Medical Column’, ‘Women’s Column’, ‘Students, Laborers’ or Children Column’. In the specialized Columns, there is simplicity of language and style and no literary tastes are added unnecessarily, nor do they reflect any personal or individual trends. Specialized Columns can be called ‘Professional Columns’.

### **17. Miscellaneous Columns**

These mainly comprise of commentary and criticism on books, Criticism columns on films and theatre, columns on performance in sports, columns on the study of the impending and actual changes in the different walks of life etc.

**18. Literary Columns**

Today, we notice a good number of columns on the national and foreign literature and literary trends, literary and educational problems, columns on literary congresses held in and outside the country. These usually serve to convey a detailed report and the activities taking place on the national as well as the international arena. They also serve the purpose of explanation and explication and thus manage to enrich and enlighten the reader about the coming changes in literary tastes and upsurge of certain literary movements in the world.

In a sense all these, in essence, are opinion pieces, as are editorials, theatre, film, art and music criticisms. It is not every reporter who can aspire to be humorous columnists, an art critic or a sports commentator. From each a certain amount of expertise is called for, the critic, in the first place, must have credibility. In other words, he must have a wider knowledge of life and letters. The narrow specialist may have credibility but it is the specialist generalist who will have the audience. To review any piece of creative work, the reviewer must not only be aware of the artist's own past work, but must be able to judge it in the context of other works of the same genre either of his contemporaries or his predecessors or preferably both.



## OBJECTIVES AND IMPORTANCE OF COLUMNS

Some objectives must be fulfilled by columnists, as these add to the importance of columns.

Before discussing the significance of the column-writing, it is necessary to study and examine the nature and utility as well as the temperament of the columns, which collectively adds to the concept of column-writing. There is a personal and individualized tinge in the column-writing. The tone of the column-writing is often friendly and of amicable atmosphere. The columns are written by those journalists, who have vast experience information, knowledge and keen observation in attractive and alluring style of writing.

### **Friendly atmosphere**

It is the objective of the column-writing to make a friendly and amicable atmosphere, without any intermediary between the direct contacts with the columnist. The readers feel a newness, freshness and friendliness in the writing and reading of columns of diverse nature.

### **Essence of Experience**

The columnists undertake to mingle their life-long experience and knowledge in their columns, in friendly tones and amicable atmosphere. The columnists mould and mobilize the readers to sustain a fair amount of desirability to go through the columns.

### **True genuine public opinion**

To enrich their knowledge, information and to form a strong habit for reference, cross-reference and repeated consultation are carried out. A personal column based on wisdom and worldly and religious knowledge assists the columnists for true and genuine public opinion.

### **Individuality**

The tinge of personal and individual inclination is predominant present in the column-writing. We usually notice few names of columnists in all the newspapers and periodicals, whose columns enjoy popular approval. Their writings and sayings are given proper importance and weight due to individuality and personal address.

### **Propagation of supreme values**

Mainly current affairs and the issues of the times are the subjects of these columns. The art and the demands of the column-writing are to present the issues by detailed explanation and explanation. The Columns are mainly made the means to propagate the high values in the society, serve as deterrents of social and other evils and suggest measures to combat the evils and other social malpractices and other reformatory measures. The masses are constantly reminded the supreme values of life besides other matters, which are usually, overlooked by the general masses.

### **Colourful statements**

The various columns are manifestations of stylish and colourful statements and pieces of prose. A single newspaper contains usually more than one column on different permanent subjects or topics or captions. These present a pageantry of colourful pieces of prose-writing, different standard styles of writing, excellent literary pieces. All the readers can enjoy the particular styles and logical compositions with the background of intensive and extensive reading and experience of long years of practice. Each and every column strongly portrays the writer's expertise, mastery on style and language, wide scholarship etc. The various columns assist to get rid of the freedom and tedium of the other types of writings, included in the newspapers, as articles, essays etc. The style and language of the columns comprise essentially of literary taste, poetic thought, humorous tinge, dramatic and narrative style, simplicity, spontaneity, rhetoric and preaching finish, scholarship, learning, knowledge, pathos, sympathy- almost all other colours.

**Analysis**

The columns necessarily work on analytical process, with thought provoking operation, besides providing opportunities to the learned people and intelligentsia to offer their views and opinions and analytical studies of the issues under discussion. Columns objectively project the excellently composed pieces of prose, logically and rhetorically knit arguments, stylishly framed wordings, which collectively serve to guide and instruct and habituate the readers to think on sound foundations individually and collectively.

**Auxiliary to Editorial**

Though columns comprise of diverse subjects and topics but also, include those subjects and topics, which incidentally or otherwise have been excluded or missed in the editorial page. In this way, columns are actually the supplements to the editorials and prove the best auxiliaries to the editorial articles.

**Direct address to the readers**

A column is in fact an address made by the columnist direct to the readers. The columnist creates a friendly atmosphere, which is most conducive for exchange of views for discussion and especially for the transmission of news, views, and opinions. In this particular atmosphere, routine mode is applied to analyze and discuss the problems of everyday life. Sometimes, a columnist often gives answers to the queries of the readers, besides some selected portions of the readers are presented. Sometimes, a columnist selects some news for further detailed discussion, information and guidance for the readers. All functions of personalized journalism are accomplished through these Columns.

A columnist may attain good readership and find a sound place among the readers, by exhibiting a note of authority. A columnist characterized with authority commands a great respect among the circles, for the soundness of his views and opinions. His columns are kept in great esteem and his sayings are given full weight. This very quality makes him cautious about his judgments and sayings. In other words, he has to be on guard against rash judgments, immature thoughts, half-truths and obvious propaganda.

**Cater to newspapers needs**

Columns cater to the needs of the newspapers, periodicals with equal significance and are supplementing the material of news and analysis.

**Personal journalism of the past**

The modern style of column-writing is actually the substitute form of personalized journalism of the past, rather fulfilling the demand of formerly practiced personalized journalism. This change was caused due to drastic change in the missionary object of the journalism. Today missionary zeal has factually submitted to the industrial and commercial spirit of the changed times. As compared to an editorial, a column is published with the name of the writer. As such, the column-writing is accomplishing the objectives of formerly personalized journalism. - The columns invariably are built on attractive language and style, effective mode, which not only increases its readership, but also influences its reader in an effective manner.

Columnists' voice is directly reaching to the readers and their concerns are considered for discussion 'What cannot be said in open about issues, lets talk about them in columns' is the idea as personal thoughts and opinions brought to focus whereas never letting the canons of journalism transgressed.

In the past, a columnist was usually the editor himself and the columnist of the present age is the representative of the past traditions. In the column-writing, a columnist addresses directly to the readers and accomplishes the most desired effects, by attracting the attention of the readers.

Written on a multitude of subjects

Columns on legal, medical, psychological, economic and political issues and list cannot be exhausted. Hence, there is a variety for readers to readers and writers to write.

**Unique form of lively journalism**

Columns bring to focus what people want to read. When a columnist is interested in writing his heart out, he can as he lives to the expectations of his readers. Even if he to discuss history but in a different perspective, and never let the column get bore, as he discussing not the trite ideas, rather he is enriching it through bright and lively statements besides bringing in personal experiences and knowledge.

**Of multi-purpose nature**

Columns are of multi-purpose nature. Sometimes, columnists are telling the reader to behave in a certain way, whereas sometimes they are informing the readers about an issue, and sometimes a columnist is giving vent to his emotions. Besides these, the columnist is also transmitting readers' voice to the concerned. Hence, there are many purposes, as the kinds of columns are.

**Generalized and specialized**

Columns are both generalized and specialized one because 'for all and one person by all, but a specialized one' is the rule. Secondly, a columnist is talking about one subject by bringing many others because of the personal knowledge and experiences, which augment the argument. Columns are for all, and just a selected few read them. However, columns are for masses, well-read and intelligentsia alike.

A columnist may build up a sound reputation and prestige as well as a large following by exhibiting an attractive 'personality. This preposition of attraction is too broad and is an elusive term to be exact by confined within a definition. This peculiar preposition can be understood by studying and examining the practical examples by the famous columnists all over the world. The characteristics of a renowned columnist may be his attractive personal quality, delightful quips and genuinely likeable man, his deep humanity and his appealing sensitivity etc. These kinds of columns can be called the personalized ones. Some columnists earn reputation by precipitating national scandals and congressional investigations.

**Diversity of thought**

There is always a diversity of thought in the columns, by which readers amply utilize in their practical life. Almost all topics are included in the columns, as medical, legal, psychological, scientific, technological, social, cultural, economic and political issues. The list does not exhaust here, as there can be columns on the interests of the children, women, auto care, recipes, music, archaeology, sports, films, reviews, palmistry, astrology, radio and television. We find different styles of narratives, description, logically arranged prose compositions, linguistic and literacy pieces of excellence. There is always a balance and moderation in the columns, and a fair amount of independence and freedom of expression of personal opinions and thoughts, which are usually absent in other forms and departments of journalism.

**Interview**

- A senior journalist and columnist Muhammad Shujja-ud-Din talked about the following aspects:
- What a columnist must try to achieve?
- Present-day columnists and their readership?
- How important is for a columnist to improve himself?
- What methods he must employ to make his columns rich?

### WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIALS AND BASIC POINTS THAT GO IN TO THE FORMING OF A COLUMN?

From the foregoing study and examination of the nature and definition of the column-writing, we can analyse the following essentials and basic points which go into the forming of a column.

The column-writing can cater to the needs of the newspapers, periodicals with equal significance.

Column-writing can be equated with the concept and practice of personal journalism of the past.

Columns are written on a multitude of subjects, with a natural flair of conversation and a direct address to the readers without any intermediary. There are syndicated and non-syndicated columns on diverse topics. It can be said that any subject is an apt subject for the columnist.

Under a column, different news, announcements, and information can be gathered. Columns are really the concise and precise rather pointed comments on the news of the day. Column may include in its range the humour, criticism, wisecracks, judgements, observations, philosophies, apologies etc.

Columns are the unique devices of direct contact and address with the general masses, as being the most modern and sophisticated form of personal journalism of the past.

These are the decorating pieces of the newspapers and hold the position of permanent topics and subjects.

Column-writing is a unique form of lively journalism, and is easily attuned to the information, instruction, address, entertainment and amusement, guidance, enlightenment of the readers.

Columns are of multi-purpose nature and can include diverse writings on national and international topics and subjects, social and cultural issues, and literacy and light subjects, economic and political subjects besides humorous writings, and sarcastic writings, which were replaced, by the serious subjects. Both are equally popular and important. Today column-writing includes anecdotes, short essays, reviews, and editorials, comments, on news, announcements, and readers' contributions.

A column is both a general and a specialised writing, which may entail the elucidation or expression of the policy of the newspapers, or it may be based on the independent thinking of an individual.

It is asserted that the style and approach in writing a column is usually determined by the local conditions and the predilections of the concerned writers. However the sole criteria for gauging the success of a columnist lie in his efficiency and proficiency to attract and hold the readers. A successful columnist must possess some cardinal points to impel the readers to continue the perusals of the column carefully and with deep and keen interest. However it is estimated that only from ten to fifteen percent - people who read the editorials from beginning to the end. However the columns are most sought after and consulted frequently.

## STYLE

The successful columnist is one who has developed a personal style, but there are some general principles that can be followed. They are given below:

### **Style of writing (Personal)**

Style of writing depends upon one's attitude, and it is only altered with the passage of time. But with most of the cases, it remains the same. No deliberate efforts must be made at changing it or copying it from others. That is why it is said that it better to pursue writing with one's personal style, which is better instead of a borrowed one.

### **General and a specialised writing**

Any type of writing, whether general or a specialised one may entail the elucidation or expression of the policy of the newspapers, and it may be based upon the independent thinking of an individual. Hence, column is always an extension of the newspaper.

### **Style and approach**

This is usually determined by the local conditions and the predilections of the concerned writers. However, one criterion for gauging the success of a columnist lies in his efficiency and proficiency to attract and hold the readers, and it matters less, what style he is following. Nevertheless, he must be natural in his style because if he would borrow it, he would not be able to continue it for a long time. A successful columnist must possess some cardinal points to impel the readers to continue the perusals of the column carefully and with deep and keen interest, as columns are most sought after and consulted frequently.

### **How can a columnist improve it?**

#### **Use Humour**

Humorous touch in style creates interest and communicates very complex message in a light way.

#### **Express private thoughts**

Let the public know that you share their concerns, pleasures and fears.

#### **Personalise your column**

Use specific names, places, and events. Let readers identify with you as you wander through the community. Share ideas that you have picked during golf matches or card games.

#### **Be creative**

Experiment with words and their meanings. Play with sentences and paragraph structure. Build images. Be descriptive.

#### **Use dramatic elements**

Study good storytellers. Learn how to build suspense to a climax.

#### **Borrow technique from fiction**

Description and dialogue can recreate scenes and sharpen story lines.

#### **Sharpen your vocabulary**

Search for precise words. Don't be content with coming closer to the meaning of a word or sentence. Take the extra time with your writing to be exact.

**Learn to listen to others**

Careful observation and keen perception result in evocative writing. Ask questions and probe other's interests.

**Write for others**

Though the subjects you choose are your own, your responsibility is to please your audience.

## GENERAL STYLE OF THE COLUMN

### Five General Styles

There are five general styles, employed in the column-writing. It now depends on the columnist to choose and select the style of a column according to his aptitude, personality and attitude in close consonance with the type of his column. The selection of an appropriate style also depends on the nature of material a columnist desires to employ.

#### I) Unified Style

When a column is desired to be composed and written on a simple subject throughout, a columnist is said to have utilised the unified style. As per unified style, such column is in fact an essay formally or informally in order to attune his topic and approach. A unified style is generally used by the political columnist, the sports columnist. These columnists used the unified style to discuss a single subject on each day. It is also useful for those who cater to single-idea columns.

#### II) Anecdotal Style

In this style, a number of unrelated and related stories and a variety of observations are gathered in a single column. These unrelated stories and varied observations however could bear no similarities and have no bearing on each other. By anecdotal style, a columnist is able to include several subjects ranging from six to ten anecdotes or observation in a single column. However he separates them from each other by asterisks or by other typographical devices.

#### III) Departmental Style

When a columnist has arranged and managed such material, which can be easily divided and separated into different departments, it is known as a departmental style. This style greatly assists in turning each and every department interest absorbing one, easy to understand and handle. It is most effective for random observation, little known information and provocative bits of news of general interest, which all collectively make the columns most popular and generally practised. The departmental columns may be given such names as, “in the mailbag”, “lest we forget”, “things to remember”, and “Passing Parade”. Besides the departments may be separated by asterisks or some other typographical devices.

#### IV) Unrelated-facts-style

Under this style of column-writing, a columnist presents a mass of facts which have little or more bearing on each other. In view of the diversity of material, this style serves the best purposes, by arranging and presenting the facts without any apparent order. In order to make distinction among several unrelated-facts, the columnist simply separates them with one or more periods. It is somewhat a pause, which depends on the arrangement of the facts. A columnist usually enlivens and freshens the interest by variety, surprise or by any other device.

#### V) Question-and-Answer Style

Under this style of column-writing, a columnist gives a question and then answers it. By this style, a columnist makes the columns easy to understand and intelligible even to the general readers. This style of writing a column gives ample opportunities to the columnist to raise questions of national and paramount importance, and then answers them in easy and understandable style and language. In this way, a good columnist paves the way for instruction, teaching and improving educational values and standard of the general masses in an effective way.

## STRUCTURE OF A COLUMN

### **Intro or lead**

In the lead or intro, it is about bringing to focus what columnist wants to say, and the crux of the matter is here. However, there is a distinct difference between Instructive and Opinionated columns, and hence their Intros are changed accordingly, where the tone may vary from simple directive approach to a more casual, or informal style. Directions are always carefully written to eliminate ambiguity.

No doubt, a column is a personal writing to the writer, but it must attract the reader, and the writer must keep the reader following the write-up.

### **Nut graph (angle)**

It is usually determined by local conditions and the predilections of the concerned writers. The success of a columnist lies in his efficiency and proficiency to attract and hold the readers, and he must possess some cardinal points to impel the readers to continue the perusals of the column. Any 'Angling' must be considering readers' intent and understanding. Otherwise, after giving an understanding, slant of the column is better, and there must be nothing beyond the common understanding.

### **Main body**

Bring in all facts, arguments and analyses in the main body. Besides this, comments must be added as well. However, effort should be at trying to keep the focus of the reader by never letting loose on arguments. However, nothing irrelevant should be written, as they say 'Never take the body for granted'. This is also the portion where one should be coming up with suggestions and advices besides rounding up of the views and news.

### **Conclusion**

This is summing up the column, where one must be raising the questions or answering the questions previously raised. Nothing ambiguous is said to conclude the column.

Success of the conclusion is that the reader must feel satisfied after reading the column, and he must feel that all questions answered, and nothing has been left unanswered.

### **Structure because of content**

Structure of a column varies from subject to subject, but one must be sticking to the subject and coming up with the usual format required under the head, and making the subject clear to reader. Format can be fluctuated, but not digressing to achieve novelty because the effort is to make the reader understand the subject by following a particular subject.

Pointing out different structures of columns may seem a useless exercise, since column writing is so individual. However, the following Structures are more common:

#### **(a) Q&A**

The questions come from readers and the answers are supplied by the columnist.

#### **(b) Grab bag**

Some columns are a collection of events coming up, awards handed out, gossip and anything else too small for a headline. However, more newspapers are abandoning these for a thematic grab bag.

#### **(c) Anecdote**

Columns built around a single anecdote take on the character of a mini-feature.

#### **(d) Feature**

A feature, usually a profile, is a common column format. The difference between this and a regular feature is the greater length of the regular feature, and, sometimes, personal involvement of the columnist indicated by the use of personal pronoun.



**(e) Instructive**

The tone may vary from the simple directive approach to a more casual, informal style. The directions are always carefully written to eliminate ambiguity and writers often give the material an “idiot run” to be sure there are no steps missing.

**(f) Opinionated**

The columnist, as column is personal writing to the writer,

### COLUMN WRITING TIPS

Many young writers prefer to write columns rather than straight news or features. Straight news is deemed to be boring, covering press conferences and reporting who said what. Feature stories involve too much reporting and require discipline to follow a set structure. Columns, which are essentially opinion pieces, are much looser and therefore easier. Or so it seems.

Anybody can be trained to write straight news because it's very mechanical. Feature articles, though also somewhat formulaic, are harder because they require good writing. But column writing is the hardest type of writing of all because it requires good thinking.

To write a good column requires more than just the ability to articulate an opinion. Your opinions must make sense, provide insight and be convincing. And you must do all this in an entertaining way.

It requires you to be almost like a lawyer. Through your arguments, you will need to convince the jury (your readers) that your client (your viewpoint) is right. Shaping a powerful argument takes practice and requires both breadth and depth of knowledge as well as the ability to critically analyze a particular issue. So, is there a methodology for training someone to become a "good thinker"? I'm not sure about that but I'm certain it helps to be well-read, inquisitive and willing to listen to various viewpoints. If you're someone who likes to write but doesn't want to do research or think deeply about an issue, forget about column writing.

Studying your role models will help you to develop your own voice. Follow the work of several established columnists and analyze their writings to discover how they project their arguments and how they make effective use of anecdotes, quotes and statistics. From there, you can learn the tricks of the trade and eventually develop your own distinctive voice and style.

Column writing is very different from other forms of writing because unlike straight news and feature writing, columns have dedicated readerships. A columnist develops a following because his readers feel they can gain knowledge, insight and entertainment from reading his writings. It's a great honor to be given a regular column but remember; to do it well requires a great amount of dedication to the craft. Lastly, a word of advice. Be ready for criticism. If you can dish it out, you've got to be able to take as good as you got. When you take a strong stance on anything, there's bound to be someone offended by what you wrote. And they will write to you – often in less than polite language - to let you know exactly what they think of you and your opinions. It goes with the territory.

Now, onto the tips.

#### **1. Write with conviction**

Put forward your opinion as something you truly believe in. Argue your case with conviction. Come down hard on one side of an issue. Be unequivocal. Never ever sit on the fence.

#### **2. Maintain your focus**

Make your column about one thing and one thing alone. Don't muddle the message. Maintain your focus. That's the only way to make a strong impression on your readers and to convince them that your point of view is correct.

#### **3. Understand opposing viewpoints**

Be mindful of the opposing argument. Anticipate objections to your point of view and deal with them convincingly with sound reasoning. If you're not familiar with the opposing view, you will not be able to argue your points well.

#### **4. Refer to facts**

Your arguments, however logical, will not carry much weight unless they are accompanied by facts that support your position. Don't overdo this and inundate your readers with statistics and figures. But do make use of facts from reputable sources.

**5. Use analogies**

Analogies are useful for illustrating a point, especially when the topic you are writing about is somewhat complicated or technical. Using a simple analogy from everyday life makes the issue more understandable and relevant to the reader.

**6. Be critical**

People like reading columnists who dare to criticize real life people, not just nameless concepts and policies. Naming names might create a bit of controversy but as long as you do not libel anyone and don't go overboard in your criticism, it works well to make your column an interesting and exciting read.

**7. Do reporting**

It is possible to write columns without doing any reporting but the best columns typically involve some form of reporting. When you report, you get on the ground and you gain a better sense of what's really happening. When you write from an ivory tower, it shows.

**8. Localize and personalize**

Localize your story whenever possible. Also tie it to some personal experience, yours or that of someone you know. This makes an otherwise esoteric and distant topic more real, relevant and memorable to the reader.

**9. Be passionate**

Generally, people don't like to hear a soft or passive voice when they read a column. So be aggressive – even arrogant, to an extent. People want to see passion. They want to feel energized. If the issue doesn't seem to excite you, the writer, it's certainly not going to excite the reader.

10. Provide a solution: Last but not least, don't just raise an issue. Have the conviction to suggest a solution. Columns that criticize certain policies but offer no solutions are useless. People read columns because they want to gain insight and answers. If you don't provide those, you've failed as a columnist.

**How do you write a column?**

Before writing a column, think about purpose, audience, content and structure.

**Purpose**

Why are you writing? Is it to inform the community about an event? Does the paper's editor, the community or co-workers want it? Are you entertaining, informing or educating? Do you seek an identity or exposure?

**Audience**

Whom are you trying to reach? Who are you reaching? Decide on your audience. Write in their language, at their level, about things the audience needs to know or wants to know.

**Content**

What will your column discuss? How will you discuss it? Answering why and how will help determine what. Remember, columns should be based on facts and should be accurate.

Names are crucial in a personal column. Personal columns may be informal; yet accuracy and sourcing material counts.

**Structure**

How will your message get to your audience? There are other types of columns besides the personal column, too. Some of these cover specific topics or types of information. They can be "question and answer," "new ideas," "how-to-do-it" pieces or "calendars." Personal columns often have departments. These departments help you to write your column. Departments can be "coming events," applications, notes or some of the categories suggested for the non-personal columns.

Before writing, decide on the purpose, content, audience and structure. Personal columns should have many local names. They also use words like: "I," "we" or "you."

**Column suggestions**

When writing a column, do

- Give the reader timely, helpful information.
- Develop a structure and keep it. Write on a regular schedule.
- Write simple and short sentences and paragraphs.
- In personal columns, use local names and places.
- Let others speak for you by use of quotes and references.
- Learn the difference between a column and a news story.

**When writing a column, don't**

- Use technical or complex words.
- Talk in jargon or unfamiliar terms.
- Talk about one topic constantly.
- Include too much detail or material. You should be stimulating interest, not exhausting a subject.
- Refer to yourself as a third person (this author, your reporter) or quote yourself. Instead use mine.
- 

**Tips on column writing**

- Write the way you talk. But don't discard good English usage and grammar by being friendly and informal.
- Try to uncover a "lead" or opening that will catch the interest of your readers.
- Use a variety of material, not just one subject.
- Write about people. Keep heavy subject matter to a minimum. When using subject matter, try to tell the story through the experiences of local people.
- Write simply. Avoid technical or difficult words, long sentences, and long paragraphs.
- Don't weigh your column down with too much detail. Try to stimulate interest in a subject, but don't exhaust the subject.
- Jot down ideas, names, figures, impressions, etc., in a note pad while visiting farms and homes. This provides the very best column material.
- Be timely. Keep up with the effect of weather conditions, seasons, etc., pointing out the significance of these conditions locally.
- Remember the people you're talking to and give them information that will benefit them in a way they can understand.
- Always get your column to the editor on schedule. Remember, the editor is holding space for it.

**An example**

The first steps to column writing are remembering why you are writing and your audience. In the sample column, "Helpful Hints," the columnist has a general homemaker audience in mind.

The style is light with personal pronouns (I, you, your) liberally included. The lead sentence clues the reader to the column's tone. The rest should continue to develop this tone.

Notice the entire name is given the first time. After that, it is only a first-name basis. Sentences are short and so are paragraphs. Credit is given when the columnist is quoting another source.

One topic has been given primary emphasis. Shorter topics follow this lead topic. That means this column can be shortened by cutting paragraphs from the bottom up, just like a news story.

## SELECTION OF A TOPIC

There are certain things, which must be kept in mind. However, it is always considered, ‘how readers will react to it’, prior to selecting the topic.

### **A difficult task**

Selection of a topic is though a difficult task, but it plays an important role in the success of a columnist. So a lot of thought must be put before writing a column. In certain, even brainstorm with others is also a good idea because besides giving you new ideas, they add something to your arguments. Plus it also helps in seeing both sides of the same picture. However, it must never be taken for granted.

Finding a new topic or subject every day or every alternative day is definitely difficult, and usually regular columnists can fall prey to this. Sometimes they are looking for subjects.

### **Choose from the news items of dailies**

One of the easiest ways to find an idea is of discussing news items, and it is never considered to be a bad idea. This also helps in actualising the dictum ‘Bring to focus what is current’, and news items aptly cover this idea.

However, there should be required links, which must never let the reader miss extensions of the news items.

When a columnist has chosen an idea, he must discuss it in a wider perspective, that is, the present situation in background. This also helps in maintaining the currency of a column.

Selection of news depends upon the writer. It is not always a big or small news, but its quality is that it induces the writer to write.

### **Current – May be any incident**

Sometimes unreported incidents can be a subject of a column, and the columnist never chooses an incident against editorial policy. However, for even an unreported incident, currency of the incident is a must. One basic criterion for such a selection is how far the incident has affected, adversely or positively, the readers. Even if you have to dig out the possibilities for this, do it. ‘See what others do not see’ is the basic idea of looking for possibilities.

One must not be making it a stick against others by choosing a particular incident for a specific person.

### **Close to your heart**

Subject must be touching your heart or mind, and it can even any incident from ordinary life, may be a chat with the family or some one coming up with a statement. Succinctly, anything that makes you think, and you want to share can be a subject for column, but it must never be a trite or routine subject.

### **Try to find a scoop**

On the other hand, writers try to find a scoop, and are always looking for a big news, which has not been reported so far. For this, they talk to people, who are either taking big decisions or ordinary ones. In the process, the columnists are sharing information to get more information. They never keep mum, and wait for a big news, rather they move out and see what is happening around them.

### **Of interest to the readers – that is primary**

One of the basic things is that the columnist should not give boring stuff to readers, and must make an effort of making it as interesting as possible. Moreover, he can make any subject look different, which can be the same one for others, by making it more interesting for the readers. He also makes an ordinary subject interesting with his own observation, and even makes minor subjects look big through his column. However, it does make it certain never to bore his reader by writing about that what he does not want to read.

**Appeal to the geographically connected people**

The columnists never choose a subject, which is divorced from the people of the locality, as proximity becomes more interesting when the situation is either compared or brought to a particular context. He also tries to discuss matter concerning the readers. He transmits information about how the environment is changing because of external influences, while opting for newer approach.

**Never based on rumour, what is being talked about?**

While talking to people, much of a gossip one listens to, which can make no sense, and it should be avoided. Gossip is usually less brainy and true, and one must think about it. A good columnist never targets someone on mere hearsay, and he confirms whatsoever being said. He confirms the ‘news’ and ‘views’ before writing about it.

**An idea, a sentence**

A mere idea striking your mind is a subject or a sentence spoken by anyone can be a subject too. A columnist keeps his eyes and ears open to look for the possibilities, and coming out as something as a subject, while never over-estimating or under-estimating an idea or a sentence.

**Those who write on topics are rare**

Writing on a topic and with a fresh approach is a rarity, as more writers are writing about news topics or something happening around him. But it is a must for his mind to consider it as a topic.

**Choosing news scattered and suiting to mood**

Society, others’ lives, your own and happenings around you, are subjects, and never let your surrounding go unnoticed. A columnist makes use of every opportunity, as he is a keen observer looking for good and bad both. Whereas he is never a pessimist through and through, while he keeps good watch for the positivity.

**Never go away to find topics, society points out**

Society and life want you to write about them, as these provide a never-ending line of subjects, and there are many subjects in line, and never been touched for long. Subjects are like passengers, trying to ride the same bus, but if queued, it is better, otherwise, mess, and no one will be on board.

**Life is the topic asking you to write on me**

Life is the most prominent subject. Look at what affects it, adversely or positively, see and evaluate concerns of the people, while it is better never leaving it to others’ imagination.

**Things keeping in Queue**

A writer must be having titles prepared with him, while points added in that from time to time. Ultimately, the writer one day has enough material to choose and write on any one. Suggestion is to keep all subjects under your belt, while an incident can help you write all points. A writer must be keeping matter with him, as many subjects need that.

**What strikes your mind, you must write**

Your first and last tutor is your mind, and the writer must be using mental filters before accepting any idea to write on, and preserve information about it. However, whatever appeals to him mind, should be contextualised as well by seeing what readers will approve or not, and then look for the ways to make it acceptable for the readers.

After the mental filter and the editorial policy have endorsed the idea, the writer can definitely write on every subject, but primarily, it must strike his mind.

## QUALITIES OF A COLUMN WRITER

### Personal

A columnist must possess some qualities at the personal level, as these are essential for him to be known as a better individual as well.

### Professional

Someone with just personal qualities is never a successful professional, until he possesses certain qualities, which are a must for any professional.

### Highly Educated

It is a fact that not all columnists are well-read or educated. In Urdu journalism, we find that there are many columnists who are not highly well-qualified, but with the passage of time, they have mastered the traits of columnists and they are now heavily paid by the newspapers. No doubt, they have definitely well-read now. Those who are not into reading, expose themselves, sooner or later.

On the other hand, degrees do matter now, as these have become a pre-requisite to the introduction because time has changed. Now people definitely see who is talking and what, especially when the media is progressing day and night; hence making it pertinent for a columnist, to be well-read and educated. It is deemed so because he will understand the changing times, and will be able to make readers comprehend too.

Secondly, it is important for him to have knowledge of the related fields for which he is writing.

### Widely Read

Reading is a must for every one, but for a columnist, reading of almost all subjects is a necessity because knowing everything around him and mastering one can do. One subject, he must know it thoroughly because a columnist acts as a preacher-cum-opinion maker; hence he must know things to put them in a proper perspective.

### Well-versed in Language

Good command of the language is also a must for a columnist, whereas a reporter or an editor can do with simple language, but a columnist has to play with words to create humour, situation, criticism, argument and conclusion. So it is very important for a writer to present ideas in better language. For columnists, it is a must that they write in the best language.

### Sense of humour

Humour makes a columnist popular, but it is a must for him that he never uses gross language or dirty jokes. Some columnists, mostly of the Urdu newspapers and English rarely, use jokes but to good avail. Actually, in the process, they are making comparisons, which is again popular with Urdu columnists. Good sense of humour making the column look softer in its outlook.

### Quality reporter

A columnist has qualities of a good reporter, as City diary or personal columns cannot be based on news items. The columnists move around and look at the society besides seeing through the news to get insight. Moreover, they are also looking for a scoop and think and probe like a reporter, while analysing things like a columnist.

### Complete knowledge about laws and ethics of journalism

Huge responsibilities are on a columnist's shoulders, when he is writing. He knows the laws, and keeps journalistic ethics in mind besides never relegating the editorial policy to redundancy.

A responsible columnist never creates a problem for the editors by being oblivious to the above.

He also knows the readers well, and always give due respect to their religious feelings and nationalistic sentiments.

**Creative capabilities**

Creative capacity is the hallmark of a columnist because if it is not there, then he cannot make columns interesting, and hence cannot guide readers. Secondly, he will also fall short of topics and subjects.

**Intelligence coupled with hard work**

A columnist must work hard besides earnestly using brain and argument. He must know how to keep his readership intact. He must look for new subjects because he does not want that his readers get bore with the ideas oft written about.

**Honesty and integrity**

A columnist never plays in the hands of the corrupt elements, and he always keeps his honesty and integrity unscathed. A lot of attempts are made at columnists for ‘buying’ them, and money-bags afloat in critical times besides other favours are given. If any nefarious is done, it is but exposed and known to people.

**Knowing the ‘players’, manipulators, advertisers**

A simpleton can be robbed, but a simple columnist cannot be, as he knows about players, manipulators and advertisers, who are looking for favours in respective areas. A wise columnist never throws them away or get too close to them, as they are also his source. He keeps a safe distance.



### WHAT MUST BE PRACTISED BY A COLUMNIST?

It is a must for a columnist to do his job well. Besides some personal and professional capabilities, he must be practising a few steps.

#### **Musts for a columnist**

He must have qualities, both at the personal level and at the professional as well. He should never let himself become stagnant, as he looks for constant improvement in all spheres.

A few are must qualities of a good writer, which he ought to possess.

#### **Art of writing / mannerism of speaking**

Every columnist has a unique style or mannerism of speaking and the art of writing, and he must exploit it besides have good usage of language.

Secondly, reading ads to vocabulary, which is a must for art of writing, as usage of good words is the most important; otherwise imparts a bad impression.

He should have ample usage of similes and metaphors, as one thing is seen from different perspectives.

However, in all this, the usage of good words and continuation of thought matter.

Art of writing tells about the writer, and his expertise. In case of poor language, the understanding of subject is faulty. Secondly, if the columnist does not add literary touch to the writing, he cannot create beauty in his write-up.

Sometimes even if the name of the writer is not written, a reader can adjudge who has written that particular piece. This is the stage where a writer is truly recognised.

#### **Pleasantness**

Pleasantness is an integral part of the opinionated column, but it is also the most difficult one to create, especially when one is writing about a tragedy or an unpleasant thing. It is considered that creating pleasantness is as difficult as repeating a spontaneous loud laughter, whereas an artificial laughter is a possibility.

It is a tool of the columnist through which he engraves his importance, as even the ‘targeted ones’ also enjoys words creating pleasantness.

#### **Brevity**

Once Maulana Muhammad Ali Johar was asked to write briefly. To this, he replied: “I do not have time to write briefly.” Hence writing ‘briefly’ is a very difficult and tedious job, and not every one can do this.

It is a fact that short columns are read more, whereas even many well-known writers have written in sequences, which is not an impressive thing to do these days.

As a columnist has to complete his subject in not more than 1000 words; hence he has to be brief, but comprehensive simultaneously.

#### **Individuality-cum-novelty**

Creating individuality or novelty is another big asks which distinguishes one columnist from another.

However, nothing should come in the category of over-doing, as it must remain a column.

Repeating something for the reader what he might have forgotten or telling him something new is always good.

Creating frequency with the reader through an understanding is also important so that both, the writer and the readers, do not face the same problem of understanding, which is possible through knowing what the writer wants to communicate and how his readers will react to that. This is also done through writing about the same issues, which are to be tackled by both.

**Purity of language**

Columnist must keep purity of language as a priority, besides grammatically correct language. Spelling mistakes are cognisable (criminal) offences, which cannot be tolerated at any cost. Mistakes change the meaning, and destroy the impression of the columnist.

Moreover, he should have nothing colloquial in his write up.

**Fluency**

Simple language and difficult expressions go hand in hand, but the columnist must never try to show-off his word prowess or intellectual superiority. It done so he will not be popular among readers.

Column writing is not a competition, as a column is meant for readers from an average intellect to the highest one. So the columnist must keep the fluency of language and ideas intact.

**Argument and rationalism**

Argument and rationalism are a must, but the writer must not turn them in to a sort of mathematics. He must write openly, but like a poet observing a few rules, which are meant to enhance the beauty of the poetry. His argument is to act as a guiding principle, while the rationalism keeps the columnist sane despite being emotional. On the other hand, over-doing of rationalism can make column boring; hence he must be keeping the balance between argument and rationalism, and sentiments.

**Avoid hyper mannerism**

Mannerism, a must but a columnist should avoid hyper mannerism. He must follow the rules, but violate them sometimes to enhance interest. He is ought to write like as if talking to a friend, while communicate like as if he is an intellectual discussing important subject. He must behave like a down-to-earth person, but touching the sky through his thought. With this, a sense of ownership and frankness are imparted to the readers.

**References**

References are usually determined by the local conditions and the predilections of the concerned writers. One criterion for gauging the success of a columnist lies in his efficiency and proficiency to attract and hold the readers. A successful columnist must possess some cardinal points to impel the readers to continue the perusals of the column carefully and with deep and keen interest.

Columns are most sought after and consulted frequently, so only correct references should be used, while there is nothing ambiguous, and if there is an ambiguity, better not go for it.

If a mistake is made while quoting figures and facts, it causes embarrassment for the writer as well as for the newspaper besides adversely damages the reputation of the columnist.

**Paragraphing**

The last but an important part of the column is the paragraphing, which is equated with balanced colours in a picture. There should not be paragraphs, which are difficult to read and understand rather the whole write up should look like a continuous writing. Remember! Paragraphs look good on paper.

## SOURCES OF MATERIAL OF COLUMNS

Sources of material for columns depend on their types. For instance, if one wants to write a serious column, for background one has to look for book, magazines and newspapers, as usually such a matter is available. However, for an impressionistic, the columnist will use his creative powers.

However, various factors must be kept in mind as per types.

There are many sources of columns' materials. However the source of material usually is consistent with the nature and the structure of the column to be handled. In case the column relates to a simple matter, the sources shall be correspondingly easy to be handled or otherwise a complex one.

Sources of material for the specialised columns, as on health, stamps, books etc. are fairly easy and readily available. The specialist writer of the columns may be a doctor, a scientist, a sportsman, physician, a religious scholar, a scholar, for literary column etc. They disseminate their ideas and views with special reference to the modern research and various other references to refresh the readers with the learning in their specialized columns.

### Constant factors

Personal qualities of observance, reading and listening are a must for a columnist. History, books, periodicals, newspapers, television, reference sections and talk of the town develop the thought and perspective of the writer. Besides these, he uses memory, incidents and personal experiences to enrich his columns.

For opinionated or reflective columns, a columnist relies upon his thought and idea. However, he nurtures the idea in mind, while taking hints, and writing points simultaneously.

### Four important factors

Observations, and experience, reading, interviewing others (for seeking information) and reporting act as four important factors for any columnist.

Many people are seeing a lot of things, but they do not concentrate on them. A columnist creates a difference, which is equivalent to the pictures of the same scene taken with a quality camera and otherwise. Hence a columnist is looking at things, which are generally ignored or not noticed by people. In the same vein, his experience is different from that of the ordinary. Then he describes that in a different way to that of the ordinary people.

## Column types and sources of material

### 1. Reporting-in-Depth Columns

Background, perspective, and interpretation are given to various happenings. However, current news events are related to the past and also to the future.

Writers own relationship with people, who are the decision-makers and those who are directly involved brings a lot of material for the columnist. Besides this he has to read constantly, while never leaving the track of things.

### 2. "I Think" or Opinionated Columns

Either because of extensive training, long time observations, columnists act as experts, and then expound their opinions for the general public.

In the reflective-type or opinionated of columns it is not so difficult to gather the material. The reflective columns may relate to an event, a change or any other aspect of life. He can gather the materials intuitively and by employing the imaginative capabilities. The real task implies how to best transform his reflections into an appealing composition. In sports world it can be materialised by rehashing the past events and performance by the sportsmen and in the political column, it can be accomplished by making an evaluation of the great figures of the past and the present times. In short reflective columns consist of appraisals.

### 3. Gossip Columns

A columnist learns to break a juicy bit of gossip, while talking and listen to others, besides uncovering a scandal. No daily newspaper cares for a gossip column, and its natural habit is the film magazine, which flourishes on gossip, some malicious, some harmless but unquestionably titillating.

Its sources are obviously through constant interaction with people, newspapers and magazines.

### 4. Humorous Columns

In this column, humorous aspects in life and satire are written besides drawing contradictions, historical references and comparisons. Many papers still fight shy of having regular daily humorous column.

However these columns are much liked, which contain some satirical comments.

Their sources of materials are really difficult to look after and gather. It is all the more difficult because genuinely humorous material is hard to find or to invent. It has been rightly said that a few persons can continue their humorous columns consistently and persistently and a few survive.

In a sense all these, in essence, are opinion pieces, as are editorials, theatre, film, art and music criticisms.

It is not every reporter who can aspire to be a humorous columnist, an art critic or a sports commentator.

From each a certain amount of expertise is called for, the critic, in the right place, must have credibility.

In other words, he must have a wider knowledge of life and letters. The narrow specialist may have credibility, but it is the specialist generalist who will have the audience. To review any piece of creative work, the reviewer must not only be aware of the artist's own past work, but must be able to judge it in the context of other works of the same genre either of his contemporaries or his predecessors or preferably both.

### 5. Essay Columns

Books, other writers, nostalgia and mood, requires perceptiveness or possibly just and overpowering interest in people

This type of column is rare today. As an essay, it has style. Its range is unlimited but it must stick to one rigid rule-it must never be deductive or dull.

Another type of column is usually stated to contain the philosophic material which otherwise is difficult to find in an easy way. In the philosophic columns, different aspect of life styles may be studied, examined and criticised or even satirised. Moreover a columnist usually probes into the complexities of life in the light of the prevalent concepts and circumstances. The requirement and demand of this column is its original approach without which these columns shall lose their interest. Originality should be so projected in a manner so that the readers should not make any complaint against these columns. In other words, the readers should meet with original ideas so that the ideas implied in these columns should not be traceable directly to other source. However this is a most difficult type of column and very few columnists gain real sources and popularity.

### 6. Personality Diary Columns

This kind of columns come from public figures, which are mostly well-known, and occasionally less known but compared with others.

Another source of material for the columns consists of anecdotes, titbits, gossip and patter. Apparently their sources of materials are difficult to find and gather, but an experienced columnist can manage by digging hard for the material. For light columns like these, there has been always a keen competition and much hard work is being put individually and by a panel. There have been the syndicated columnists who manage these materials to utilise in their columns. They usually own special staffs of reporters who do leg-work for them. Besides these conventional sources of material, a columnist also is assisted by friends who provide tips, by publicity agents and by tipsters who supply materials for their columns against some payment.

### 7. How- to-do or Advice Columns

This column is by a specialist, who knows his subject. It is about educating the reader through both personal experiences, and bookish knowledge. It is meant for readers, who are seeking experts' opinion.

### **8. Sports Columns**

It is by experts of their respective fields, whereas in Pakistan, cricket is more popular. However, we find less number of columnists in comparison to other areas. There was a time when some leading newspapers had their daily sports columns, but this is getting to be rarer these days.

Sources for material remain newspapers, magazines, current issues and people around.

### **9. Question and Answer Columns**

Readers usually send questions, and divergent subjects are covered. ‘Confidante’ is one such example. This column comes in various colours. It could be a medical column in which a qualified doctor answers queries on health. It could be a sober column in which readers ask questions about their personal problems and get appropriate answers depending on whether the questions are plain, plain silly or serious. Under this style of column-writing, a columnist gives a question and then answers it. By this style, a columnist makes the columns easy to understand and intelligible even to the general readers. This style of writing a column gives ample opportunities to the columnist to raise questions of national and paramount importance and then answers them in easy and understandable style and language. In this way, a good columnist paves the way for instruction, teaching and improving educational values and standard of the general masses in an effective way.

In the past, a columnist was usually the editor himself and the columnist of the present age is the representative of the past traditions. In the column-writing, a columnist addresses directly to the readers and accomplishes the most desired effects, by attracting the attention of the readers.

Questions are given to the columnist, who answers by using his expertise.

### **10. Political columns**

These are the most popular ones, and are fetching huge readership, who are responding to it better, which primarily due to the fluid political situation of the country.

A good political columnist employs originality for readers in his approach, in striking a new note, new material, using a generally unique style of language and design, ability to invent and coin new words and an unusual twist of thought. In order to maintain the interest, and attraction of the readers, a columnist should adopt an air of originality rather than report any imitation of the standard columnists.

To him, history books, newspapers, personalities and people around them are acting as good sources of material.

### **Interview**

- A young columnist Amal Shakeb shared her experiences
- Her views about the column writing
- How the writers are picking up subjects?
- Choice of material and subjects
- How far columnist is a reader-oriented?

## USEFUL WRITING DEVICES

Let's look at some standard writing devices that can strengthen your material in the process of revision. Once you add these simple techniques to your personal writing kit and learn to incorporate them automatically into the first draft of anything you write, a lot of the pain will go out of the revising process.

### 1. Be specific

Every writer will give you this advice, and it will invariably be toward the top of the list. It's an important rule. Whenever possible, skip generalisations and be concrete. "Kareem was attacked by an animal" isn't nearly as effective as "Kareem was bitten on the knee by a Dog."

Focus on things that can be seen or heard or measured. Give the reader specific people, places, sounds, colours, smells, scenes and sensations.

Generalities are too abstract. They mean different things to different people. If you want all your readers to see the same thing, be precise in your selection of words and images.

### 2. Use 'Active Verbs'

It's better to make the subject of your sentence do something, rather than let something be done to it. "The owl hooted" is stronger than "An owl's hoot was heard." The first is active, the second passive. But there's more to putting action in your verbs than merely avoiding the passive voice.

Just as with the first device, the advice here is to be precise. English is a rich, living language, one of the ripest writing tools in the entire world. Take advantage of it. Never settle for the first verb that pops into your mind if there's a better one available. Look for verbs that are closer to your meaning. Don't use "shout" if what you really mean is "bawl" or "bellow" or "roar" or "shriek."

Check your thesaurus for synonyms. Thumb your dictionary for precise meanings.

Remember, verbs can be abstract, too. "The wind blew through the trees" tells the reader something, but not enough. Was it a soft breeze? Try imagery. "The wind whispered through the trees." Perhaps it was a heavy wind. "The wind thrashed the trees." Either verb gives the reader a better clue than the first to the strength of the wind. But if you use imagery, be selective. Many writers have a tendency to get cute. Be careful. Imagery should be used to illuminate, not to show off.

### 3. Brighten your article with quotes

Your readers like to hear people talk. If you're writing a profile about a specific person, by all means let the reader listen in on what the profile subject has to say. But quotes will enliven your copy even if you aren't writing a profile. For example, if you're writing about a thing or an event or an idea, and you refer to some authority to buttress your presentation, open the authority's mouth and let him or her say something.

Use quotes freely. But again, be selective. Don't give the reader simple pleasantries or small talk, unless the quotes say something important about the person. Make sure your quotes are meaningful.

At the same time, no matter how valuable the quotes might be, you'll seldom want to put together an article that is all quotes. Too many quotes can be just as boring to a reader as too few quotes. If you have a piece that calls for many, many quotes, paraphrase a number of them. Otherwise your pace and flow will suffer.

### 4. Use Characterisation

Not only do your readers want to hear a person talk, they want to see the person. Give them a glimpse, such as this example:

"Faraz is a short, rumped little man who wears a blue beret and his collar turned up. He has a fat nose and big ears and he looks a bit like one of the gargoyles on the Cathedral Notre Dame."

Or give them a long, close look, such as this example:

"You don't want to fool with Joaquin Jackson. His face, as worn and weather-beaten as the scabbard of his Winchester rifle ("If I can see you, I can hit you with it"), is sometimes about as friendly as a "Don't Mess with Texas" sign. A fine Swiss-made cheroot or a Lucky Strike often projects horizontally from his

lips. The forbidding visage surmounting a 5-foot-5, 200-pound body adds up to one intimidating character.

One sees both men clearly. And, of course, there's more to characterisation than description. A writer can also give readers insight into a person's character by showing the person in action, or by demonstrating the person's attitudes and personality, or by presenting significant biographical details or even through the reactions and comments of other people.

If you intend to delve into a subject's character, you should get to know the subject well. So be observant when you go in for an interview. Watch for mannerisms. Make notes of things that impress you visually, as well as taking down the subject's words.

### **5. Lard your copy with anecdotes**

Anecdotes are important. Not only do they keep a story moving and keep a reader's interest at high peak, but they also help to illustrate character traits. The essence of any good article is the anecdote. Newspaper features use them. Magazines go in for them heavily.

How do you rake up good anecdotes? You interview your subject and ask leading questions. You talk to your subject's friends and enemies. You look through his or her press clippings. If you have the time, you follow your subject around on the job and watch. Do everything you can to track down those telling details, those small stories that show your subject in action. A key anecdote is worth work.

### **6. Show, don't tell**

This device is related to both the anecdote and the first rule, to be specific. Don't be judgmental. If you tell the reader a person is friendly, or nervous, or angry or despondent, the reader may get some idea what you mean, but judgmental words represent different things to different people. So show the reader. Show the shy smile, or the shaking hands, or the gritted teeth or the long, low sigh. Don't write, "The professor acted strange." Instead, write: "The professor drooled on his tie, staggered against the blackboard and slid to the floor, moaning." Now the reader knows what you mean by "strange."

### **7. Describe scenes**

While on the subject of visuals that put your reader in the middle of the action, here's another. Vivid, brief description of scene and setting can help immensely in holding readers' attention and propelling them through a story. Of course you can't avoid using descriptive passages when you're presenting anecdotes. They're part of the package. But description can also create atmosphere or mood without telling a story.

A quick description not only allows a reader to visualise the place, it tells the reader something about the patrons.

### **8. Use vivid figures of speech**

This device is handy, but it can be dangerous. Some figures of speech sparkle and are entirely appropriate. Like H. Allen Smith's famous weather forecast: "Snow, followed by small boys on sleds." Saul Pett is a master of the turn of phrase. His article is filled with them. He calls the bureaucracy "an immovable yeast." He tells us Uncle Sam yearly lets "billions slip through his fingers and disappear into the sinkholes of waste, mismanagement and fraud." He describes that same Uncle Sam as a "10-ton marshmallow, lumbering along an uncertain road of good intentions."

If you can bring off a fresh, original approach to some colourful saying or simile or outright cliché, you can brighten your copy immeasurably. The danger is that they often fall flat. And a coy, cutesy or over-contrived figure of speech is worse than none at all.

### **9. Use Analogies**

Like figures of speech, bad analogies can get you in trouble, but good analogies are effective. An analogy is a comparison of similarities.

Often, with technical information, the use of analogies can help explain complex ideas. The image comes to mind instantly, helping to clear away confusion.

**10. Use Humour**

Readers welcome the light touch. Even if your subject is serious, slide a bit of humour into it if you can. Anecdotes can be funny. So can quotes or simple narrative.

Humour can spruce up your copy and keep it moving. But humour is surprisingly difficult to write. Don't press for it. It will come naturally, or not at all. And keep it brief. No joke works well if you spin it out too long.

**11. Use Direct Address**

A standard device for involving your audience, as James Lake did with the POW story, is to address the reader directly.

Direct address reaches out to readers and pulls them into the story, making them active participants rather than passive observers. No matter how well you write, if you don't weave your facts around your readers and force them to participate, your mass of information may be too remote to keep them interested. The appeal may be direct, or it may merely be implied. But if you decide to use the open, direct, "you" approach, make sure it shows up quickly in the article, preferably in the lead, or even in the first sentence, to signal readers that it's coming.

**12. Use the Question-Asking Device**

Another technique that helps to involve readers is to ask them a question. Theoretically, readers will try to come up with an answer, reacting to your question. But don't bank on it. Once you've introduced the question, go on quickly to answer it, either briefly or at length. Unless you're purposely striving for suspense, leaving a question unanswered may seriously irritate your readers and send them away from the article, muttering.

Equally important, the question-asking device often serves as a useful transitional instrument. It can get you from one completed topic to the next with very little effort. Then it promptly answers its own question, moving to new material with scarcely a ripple.

**13. Use Carry-Over Transitional Devices**

Often, when you're writing, ending a thought with one paragraph, and then needing to begin an entirely new train of thought with the next. This is a dangerous moment. If you blithely skip on to the next thought without any bridge or link between the two, the effect can be jarring. Jar your readers often enough and you may lose them. It's better to keep your copy flowing smoothly by providing some kind of transition or hook to pull the reader along. One method is to forge a link between the first sentence of your new paragraph and the last sentence of the preceding paragraph.

Examples include:

- His books depart from tradition in another way...
- Perhaps so, but DEA officials say...
- The Russians have other cards to play as well...
- But that's only half the answer...
- Still not satisfied? Then try...
- But most circus fans were asking a different question...
- Meanwhile, a search for solutions continues...

**14. Use Overlapping Words or Ideas**

This is another good transitional device. It calls for fashioning your link between divergent paragraphs by repeating words or ideas, even though the new paragraph will tackle a totally new concept.

**15. Stick to "Said" for Attributions**

Some beginning writers go to extraordinary lengths to find synonyms for the most common of all speech attributions. They follow their direct quotes with such constructions as: he expostulated, she averred, he remarked, she stated, he added, she recounted, he responded and on and on and on. Best advice is: Don't. "Said" is one of the most useful tools in the writer's kit. It becomes like punctuation—a comma or a period, unnoticed by the reader except to identify the speaker. If someone "shouts" or "snarls" or



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“hisses,” fine. Say so. But if your speaker is talking at a normal conversational level, stick to “said” or “says.”

Furthermore, if a direct quote is long or complex, don’t wait to the end of it to identify your speaker. Play fair with your reader. Put the attribution high, after the first spoken sentence or even at the beginning of the paragraph.

### **16. Write Clearly**

Your reading audience can’t read your mind. They have only your words to help them follow the logic of what you’re saying. If you commit something to paper that you think may be confusing, back up and start over. Clarity is vital. If your writing language is clear, you can use all sorts of writing tricks and techniques with good effect. If not, forget it. Your readers will already have flipped the page and gone on to another article.

These writing devices are a sampling of the professional tricks available to help you turn good prose into better prose. There are many others. But these sixteen are all basic.

You’ll learn more as you extend your writing experience, and you’ll invent a few for yourself

## COMMON WRITING PROBLEMS

Mastering all the available techniques will take time. Excellence in writing, like excellence at any pursuit, takes practice and application. But once you learn to gather your research materials, structure your writing, and use all the literary tools efficiently and properly, you are well on your way.

Every award-winning writer whose material appears in this book has gone through the learning process. Each has learned from his or her errors and gone on to write better features. Some writers don't. The key is one of commitment. If you are serious about writing, don't let mental and literary lapses get you down. By all means, avoid them whenever possible. But if a mistake slips through, don't ignore it. Learn from it. Despite repeated attempts at developing good write-ups, there are numerous problems, which mar the writing capabilities of the writers – ultimately causing annoyance among the readers. Generally speaking, these are:

### 1. Eliminate unnecessary words

Most writers agree that it's easier and quicker for them to write long than it is to write short. But tight copy consumes fewer column inches, and it's punchier and more interesting to read. So stop before you write. Ask yourself what your article is about. Ask yourself what you want to say. When the answer to these two questions is firmly in mind, it's easier to stay on track.

### 2. Eliminate clichés

Most people often think and talk in clichés and stereotypes. Clichés are a kind of mental and oral shorthand, allowing you to create quick images without having to work at it. But don't let the clichés go from thought to paper. "Needle in a haystack. Busy as a bee. Straight as an arrow. Throw caution to the winds" – if it sounds too familiar to you, strike it from your copy.

### 3. Don't overuse adjectives and adverbs

As juicy as they might be, adjectives and adverbs slow the pace of reading. And if you've chosen your noun or verb precisely, an adjective or adverb may weaken the impact. Look at every sentence you write. Check the adjectives. Are they necessary? What about the adverbs? Can you get along without them? If they seem important to the sense of the sentence, leave them. If they seem superfluous, strike them.

### 4. Don't use too many big words

Every writer likes to show off. If you know words like *propinquities* or *sesquipedalian*, you're tempted to drop them into the copy to demonstrate how erudite you are. Don't. If the word is too big or too unusual, it will stop readers in their tracks. And if the reader has to go the dictionary just to see what you mean, you've defeated your purpose—to keep the reader moving smoothly through the copy.

### 5. Don't misuse words

On the other hand, you, as the writer, should stop and use a dictionary. Use it often. Misuse of words is one of the more common writing errors. You think words mean one thing when the dictionary will tell you clearly that they mean something else. The most flagrant misuses occur with similar-sounding constructions such as lie/lay, sit/set, and affect/effect, compose/comprise and imply/infer. You would be wise to brush up on the proper meanings of all five of these potential disasters. For example, imply means to insinuate. "Are you implying that I'm a linguistic dolt?" Infer, often used incorrectly as a synonym for imply, actually means to deduce. "Do I infer that you think I'm a linguistic dolt?"

The two words are used interchangeably by the uneducated, but they are not interchangeable. If you use such words incorrectly and the error gets into print, somewhere out there among your readers a number of linguistic purists will catch the error and will sneer at you. Cut the sneers to a minimum.

### 6. Don't be a careless speller

While you're looking in the dictionary, check for proper spellings. Some writers are good spellers, through years of practice and experience, but every writer has blind spots. Misspelled words are among

the most visible of errors, and they always make you look bad. If you are a poor speller, wear out a dictionary per year if you have to. Check and double-check words you chronically misspell until you work your way past the mental block. And don't just look up difficult words like accommodate, boutonniere, connoisseur, eleemosynary and tonsillitis. Sometimes simple words will throw you. Gray/grey, for example. Even though you may see it spelled "grey" in print, it's wrong. "Gray" is the American spelling. "Grey" is British. Take the first dictionary preference if two are listed. Nor can you always depend on those handy spelling aids you learned as a child, such as "i before e, except after c." The memory guide may work most of the time, but there are notable exceptions. "Society," for one. "Weird, ""seize," "inveigle," "leisure," for others. If you aren't sure about a word, check the dictionary. In time, the correct forms will stay in your memory.

### **7. Avoid jargon**

Stay away from phrases that crop up within various professions and make sense only to people, who work in those professions. You've heard police officers on local television using terms such as "apprehend the perpetrator." That's fine for an officer filling out an arrest report. You're better off, though, saying "arrest the suspect." All fields of activity have their own jargon: Scholarly researchers use terms like "manipulated orientation" and "usual viewing mode" and "experimental protocols"; yacht lovers use "bowsprit" and "semi-circular deviation" and "gunk hole"; writers toss around terms like "graf" and "lead block" and "double-truck."

Don't make your readers work overtime to understand. Of course if you're writing for a specialised audience and a specialised market you'll sound naive if you don't use the specialised jargon they expect. Just make sure you use it correctly.

### **8. Don't use sexist language**

Many readers are offended by sexist terms like businessman, newsman, sportsmanship, mankind, founding fathers, maiden voyage and Lady Luck. They would prefer business executive, reporter, fair play, humankind, forebears, first voyage and just plain luck.

Of course, you can go a little crazy and end up with clumsy writing trying to deseed every single word you put to paper, so use common sense. Don't change "manipulate" to "personipulate." Half the battle is being aware that words can offend. The best way to check a term for pejorative content is to ask yourself whether you would use the same term for the opposite sex and whether you would want it said about you.

### **9. Don't mind-read**

When writing about people and using the occasional paraphrase to season your direct quotes, there's a tendency to drift into word constructions such as "The mayor feels that big business is wrecking the economy. Don't. It's better to say, "The mayor *says* big business is wrecking the economy." The same advice holds for describing emotions. Don't say, "The senator was angry. Tell us "The senator shook his fist at the audience and demanded silence." We'll get the idea. Mind reading is for clairvoyants and has no place in the professional job of reporting.

### **10. Avoid partial quotes**

Interview techniques take practice, and many beginning writers have difficulty "getting the entire quote," so they write happily along and "quote only as much" as they are certain, that is correct in their notes. But "partial quotes" are obtrusive and harder "on the reader" than full quotes, as you will naturally have noticed in these two sentences. If you have only a piece of a quote that seems important to you, ask your source to repeat it until you get it all. With practice and experience, you'll eventually learn to jot down quotes more quickly and fully.

### **11. Avoid redundancies**

Like clichés, some redundancies slip into the language and appear to grow roots. You see them so often that you begin to use them without thinking. You write "close proximity" and "assemble together" and "true facts" without considering the improper waste of words. You describe something as "plain and simple" or "right and proper" or "reasonable and fair," adding unnecessary verbiage. If you're a freelance writer getting paid by the word, this is not the way to increase your word count.

**12. Don't switch tenses**

Some apprentice writers have difficulty choosing tenses. Attributions hop back and forth from present tense to past tense:

Murtaza says government waste must stop. He said, "It has become rampant."

Which is it to be? "Says"? "Said"? Pick one and stick with it. Check to see if you have placed your subject in space and time. If you have, past tense is better. "Murtaza, testifying at a special session last Tuesday, said But if your speaker is floating, pinned neither to a specific location nor a specific time, present tense is often best. "Murtaza, a supporter of free trade, says whichever you choose, use it throughout your story. Consistency is the hallmark of a good writer.

**13. Don't allow inconsistencies in style**

A good writer also uses a consistent pattern in punctuation, spelling and other language basics. To help you maintain consistency, use a good stylebook. Many newspapers and magazines have their own style and consistency rules.

If you work for a single publication, learn the proper style and use it. If you are a freelancer writing for several publications, you might decide to make it easier on yourself by using the Associated Press stylebook. Most editors are acquainted with the wire-service stylebook and will at least recognise that you've tried to regulate consistency in your writing.

The main purpose of any set of style rules is to help you reach a level of uniformity. Editors will appreciate your copy more if you show consistency with spellings, punctuation, numerals, capitalisations, abbreviations and so on. They prefer their own style, of course. Just remember that style is basically only a matter of preference. It varies from publication to publication. The clever writer will pick up on style preference and give each publication the style it likes.

**14. Avoid common grammatical mistakes**

Good grammar is a sign of an educated person. If you want to sound like a clod, save it for informal chatting with your friends and family. Don't inflict sloppy grammar on editors or on readers. There are, unfortunately, hundreds of rules and principles governing proper grammar and usage, far too many for easy memorisation. Most people who commit grammatical gaffes do so without even realizing it. But ignorance is no excuse. Like someone sitting at a dinner table eating peas with a spoon and mashed potatoes with a knife, you'll still look bad. Until you become more conversant with the mechanical details of good writing, the only salvation is to buy a good grammar handbook—something simple like Strunk and White's *The Element of Style*, or something more complex like Penn's *Reference Handbook of Grammar and Usage* or any of the other detailed handbook and refer to it frequently. Even after you reach a good working relationship with the basic rules of grammar, it's a good idea to go back and review the rules every two or three years. Even good writers tend to forget the principles and need occasional tune-ups.

In the meantime, check your current awareness by looking at the following four examples, dealing with nominative versus objective pronouns, dangling participles, noun/verb/pronoun agreement and split infinitives. If you don't quickly recognise the all-too-prevalent error in each, you may be in trouble.

**15. Don't misuse ellipses**

One of the quickest ways to irritate an editor or a copy desk is to use ellipses (those three dots... that separate copy) incorrectly. The ellipsis is a favourite device of the beginning writer, although no one has ever figured out why. Sometimes beginners use two dots, sometimes a half-dozen, but innovation in punctuation is frowned upon. If you want to appear professional, make sure you use ellipses only when necessary and only correctly. There are three proper uses for the ellipsis. One is formal: to indicate an omission from quoted or cited material. The other two purposes are dramatic. Use ellipses to denote pauses ("We could get the money, but it would be ... wrong"), or to suggest a sentence that trails off, without being completed ("Frankly, my dear, I don't give a.....")

**16. Avoid exclamation points**

Unless you're writing for a market that likes exclamation points (like James Lake's adventure magazines for men), you might as well put a piece of tape over that particular word processor key and never use it again. Frequent use of the exclamation point will mark you as the greenest of amateurs. You can't punch up a dull piece of copy by applying the to it. Once you learn to get along without the exclamation point, you can remove the tape and put it back into your writing repertoire for the infrequent occasion for which it will be handy.

**17. Don't mistreat quotation marks**

Another piece of standard punctuation that gives many writers fits is the simple quotation mark. It shouldn't be a problem. The rules are hard and fast. But the errors crop up anyway. Here's a rule worth remembering: For American publications, periods and commas that run adjacent to the quote mark go *inside* the quote.

Questions marks, colons and semicolons may be inside or outside, depending on the sense of the sentence and whether they are part of the quotation. If you're writing features and magazine articles, you'll be using lots of quotes, so you may as well turn to some handy guide and learn all the rules now.

**18. Use common comma sense**

Some punctuation rules are definite—quotation marks, question marks, periods, ellipses, semicolons and colons. Other punctuation rules can be moderately soft, depending on the style rules used by your target publication. Hyphen rules fall in this category. So do some comma rules. The main thing about commas is to use them sensibly. Will you put a comma before the "and" in a series or not? Formal English says yes. General English says it's optional, unless you're following a specific style guide, such as AP style, which says no. All comma rules aren't that soft. If you aren't sure, check your nearest style or grammar handbook.

## WRITING THE COLUMN

There are certain aspects, which must be kept in mind prior to proceeding for writing the Column. Besides this, there are a few thumb rules, which must be practised by the columnist, even after writing the column.

### Certain thumb rules

#### 1. Present your views while keeping others' in mind

Never be so sure that whatever you are writing is the final word. The writer must try to see what others are saying or writing. Secondly, it is always useful never to neglect others' point of view, as this is the only way you can differentiate from others.

#### 2. Insert minor incidents to keep it interesting

Always keep interesting incidents in you mind, and use them frequently in your columns depending upon the situation. However, the incident must be always relevant to the subject, while the far-fetched elaboration of incident could bore the reader. Secondly, the proximity of the incident carries more weight, as the people know about the place and people.

#### 3. Verifying the facts again and again

Never consider baseless rumours as part of the write-up. However, one must consider the Plausibility as a possibility. Nevertheless, the facts must be verified, and there must not be a doubt about them. Better check and re-check the facts

#### 4. Never attack others who can't answer

Many are silent readers, while even popular figures, many a time, cannot answer. So better is that the writer should never criticise those, who cannot reply him back. It is advisable to keep columns free of such elements.

Many writers do this, while others, mostly from the vernacular press, indulge in such tactics for the popularity of their columns.

#### 5. Keep away from your personal prejudices

One must try to be a balance writer. No doubt, it is a difficult ask, but it is a must and should be given due importance because personal prejudices could be very dangerous, as these can bracket a writer with a particular group or section. So it is better that one is better known for pragmatic writings.

#### 6. Never give decisions considering it your right

Decisions are up to the readers, while arguments, pro or anti, are a writer's right. Readers are the best judges, and the writer can give opinion, not judgment, because he must never assert you.

#### 7. Encourage people volunteering for material

People must be encouraged to contribute thought, idea or material for write-ups, as many people have good ideas to share. However, these must be verified prior to writing by using journalistic tools.

#### 8. Never play in the hands of advertisers

People come to a columnist for vested interests, and he must be beware of them, and should never let others use him in any way. Columnists are considered to be a staple for the advertisers, and they do not become a tool in their hands.

**9. Bring out lighter aspect, even hidden one**

Serious matters are discussed by readers, but somewhat light material or observation makes the write-up interesting. An undertone makes the reader think and get amused. Dry spell of words must be followed by something lighter.

**10. Present the unknown at once**

One can present unknown facts or break a story, but without any delay or deliberation, do it immediately! Delay can damage the impact of the ‘unknown’, and flash it across the page immediately.

**11. Go back to actual topic after any digression**

Any digression is never positive, but if there is, it should be relevant to the subject. Once it is done, comeback to the main topic immediately! However, too many digressions or deviations can damage the beauty of the column, and one must stick to subject always.

**12. Give balanced views, analysis and criticism**

Arguments must be balanced, and observations from both sides, while the writer must not give judgment on anything. Let readers know what is right, and never show one-sided picture, and show both sides of the same coin.

**13. Bring in appropriate and interesting analogies and comparisons**

Comparisons and contrasts prove the point. When arguments are over, think of a comparison, as all characters and incidents have equals in history. Writers must focus on them to prove their point, while there should be no forceful comparisons and contrasts, as it must be made to look natural even if distantly placed.

**Writing the columns****1. After selection of topic and gathering of material**

Think what you want to focus on! Think, think and think hard besides brainstorming with others, while never making a decision about writing which you ain’t certain about!

Look at the acceptability and readability of the article, accepting the slant or angle. Advice is: Never try to make it too different to make it digestible!

**2. Writing the best way otherwise goes to dust**

Be certain that you are at your best when you sit to write. If not feeling inclined, do not write! When written with your heart into something, even readers feel it! Give your best, otherwise your written piece could be thrown in to the dustbin, and better you do it yourself if you ain’t feeling satisfied with the effort.

**3. Think what you want to write**

You must know what you want to write, as writer is the best judge to place his content in an appropriate manner. Better it is that the subject and angle are clear in your mind at least. Write down the aspect you want to consider as more important one, while the rest of the material should be outlined in mind as well.

**4. Express your thoughts in good language**

There is no alternative to good language, and good idea presented in good language fetches more readerships.

One must never commit errors while writing, as even minor mistakes are a huge jolt to the reader, and there is a stern response besides bad impression of the writer is created among the readers.

**5. Use the understandable language**

Definition of good language is not ‘difficult to understand’ language, rather it must be understood by the readers or the target readership.

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Never pick unknown words and expressions, and you must communicate in good language rather than difficult language. However, it never means that it should become colloquial.

**6. One portion to creativity, second deliberate effort**

Creativity is a natural phenomenon, which can be made better through hard work, and one must never undermine deliberate effort. Make yourself realise that you must do good job with a lot of thinking process behind this.

Creativity coupled with hard work brings best results!

**7. Avoid artificiality**

Artificiality is visible in everything, and one must be natural with the ideas and their description. Difficult words, unknown phrases and far-fetched ideas make the write-ups look artificial in most of the cases.

**8. Keep your mind on track**

Never digress from the subject, and if done, there must be a purpose behind this. Come back to the original subject as soon as possible, and stick to the main point or slant of the write-up. Digressions should be well-connected to the main subject.

**9. Concentrate on the subject**

Avoid digressions, and stick to the subject, besides never letting yourself wander around and then come to the subject.

Remember! Reader also wanders and may take him ages to come back to the subject

**10. Avoid confusions – if you are yourself, avoid it or clear it**

Confusion begets confusion, and if the writer is confused about something, he should not initiate it as long as he is clear about it.

His confusions can confuse his readers, which must be avoided, as he can form negative opinion about you.

**11. Confirmation, good idea**

Confirm facts, and never be uncertain about what you are writing. If uncertain, confirm it prior to writing.

**12. Use dictionary**

In case of confusion either about the spellings, usage or meaning of a word, consult dictionary. Use dictionary as a primary source of checking spellings, meanings and usage of words.

**13. Never float half-baked ideas**

Let idea ripe in your mind, as half-baked ideas can cause a big rebuttal. Sometimes, it can cause damage to your repute as a writer.

Throwing an idea for discussion is not an issue, but its acceptability should be evaluated. Think and think hard prior to floating an idea!

**14. Stick to reality**

Nothing should be divorced from reality and the characters and situation must be near to facts. Fictional characters can be equated to real characters, while comparison of an ideal situation to that of real is possible, but nothing should be divorced from reality.

**15. Liberate yourself from artificialities and over-deliberateness**

Too many artificialities and over-deliberateness can make your write-up hard to conceive, as the meanings can be lost, and idea gets mutilated.

One must adhere to facts explained through understandable language.



**16. Qualities of good writer must be there**

Adopt qualities of a good writer! If not, try hard and make it a natural process of your life. Good at language and understanding of the issue are two basic keys.

**After writing the column****1. What to do when you have written the column**

Writing is not the one and the only thing, as certain steps must be followed even you have written your piece well. Follow them strictly, as your first document is not the final one.

**2. Some think, your job is over, while others differ**

You are never through with the job even when you have written it once, while some people really consider it difficult to check their write-ups. They must as well. And if not, then ask some body before you send it for printing.

Sub-editor's job comes later, first is yours!

**3. At least one reading is a must**

One perusal is a must. Check language and facts, while never letting anything skip your mind and eyes.

**4. Keep missed the following in mind: words or links**

Look for words missed during writing, as one can miss a lot while writing, which can only be filled in by you.

Do it yourself, as others may not understand this!

**5. Do the job of a sub-editor and editor**

Checking language is your duty, and never thinks others will mend it for you.

Suggestions are: Delete extra words, look what could be not good for your write-up, do the job of a sub-editor, look if something is against the editorial policy of the newspaper and last, never leave for the editor to do so.

**6. Re-write if you are not satisfied and happy**

If not satisfied, re-write it!

Never send the article for printing if the job is not done well. Keep it with you and write a new one.

**7. Re-check facts**

Re-check facts, as nothing should be wrong there.

Do not take it for granted that it will be corrected as you have already checked it. There could be a lot of mistakes.

**8. Confusion, talk to expert or consult source**

If the confusion persists even after writing, talk to the expert of the subject. Never send confusion-ridden writing to the editor.

**9. Read it from readers' point of view**

How will it sound to the reader? Ask this question many a time to yourself.

Read aloud to feel this, while becoming a reader for some time.

**10. Double meanings result in confusion & bad taste**

Never use words imparting double impressions. If deliberate, make it certain that they impart that impression which you want to be communicated to others. And nothing should be in bad taste, as the readers can feel disgusted about it. Avoid such case scenarios!

**11. Show it someone and consider observations**

Asking somebody to read the piece, is always a good idea, while listening carefully to the observations made thence.

Make it certain that if such a situation has arisen, it must be made clear. Consider readers' observations are like a judgment.

**12. Read after printing, words, paragraphs, ideas changed**

Never miss changes made after printing, as you must read your printed version. See what changes have been made, why and who has done so, so that you can know the authority and capacity of the person.

Confirm with the editor, and try to know the mistake.

**13. Feedback, important than what you consider, reply**

Feedback should be evaluated as something of utmost importance, and one never be less considering towards the observations.

Listen and read carefully, as these make you a better writer.

Keep your ears and mind open to criticism, while being patient.

## ARTICLE WRITING

Three aspects to be discussed under this title: Introduction, Aspects and Article writing in the present age.

### Introduction

Article is an important element of magazine journalism, which is preferred by all, that is, both novices and experience writers. Interestingly, it has never seen a decline. However, there are new writers, who try their hands with changes in structure.

### Article closely connected to features and columns

Article is closely connected other forms of writing, especially features and columns. A feature can contain many articles, while a column can be an article-cum-commutative piece. There are certain structural and subject similarities.

### Definition

“A piece of writing bringing the subject to fore from one angle with a beginning, a middle and ending, while all parts are juxtaposed systematically.”

### Contents

Content of the article varies from subject to subject possibly discussing the subject from one, but prominent angle, which is totally unlike a feature.

In an article, the writer is not discussing a subject from all possible angles, and is sticking to an aspect only. Besides these, no personalised version is allowed. However, there are people, who are including personal views blatantly.

### Style

As style varies from individual to individual, the information and instruction remain the basic elements, and it is less of a personalised version of subjects. But present day article carry personal events as articles, but there is no room for personal comments in articles. However, observations and suggestions from the third party can be given, while never letting your own opinion sway the subject. It also sticks to the point sans any digressions.

### Main Segments

Following are the main segments of an article.

#### Intro

A powerful quote can also make an exciting, intriguing article lead or intro.

#### Nut graph

Give a slant to the idea to get the reader involved

#### Main body

Bring the subject to life, a little story that narrates the subject or a sort of anecdote.

Intrigue, Excite or startle the reader nothing hooks readers faster than a question that asks something they have always wondered about.

Readers, Editors and even writers like to puzzle over paradoxes of all kinds.

Appeal directly to the readers' emotions or use some sort of persuasive matter.

#### Conclusion – Ending never means to stop writing

Leave a feeling among readers that article has come to a successful conclusion

Ending is a reiteration, a summation or in some cases a statement that there is more to be learned

**Subjects – from the most serious to ordinary**

Article can vary from very serious to ordinary, that is, from religious to political, and from social to personal.

Mostly social aspects are considered for writing, while politics are primarily for columnists and op-ed pages.

**Article in modern times**

Divergent views about the popularity, as some consider its popularity dwindling; while to some still consider a popular type of writing. But it is not exactly the case, as people are still writing and being successful.

Magazine is the main area though Op-ed pages also finding spaces for articles.

**Lost its importance—if so then why being written**

It is usually determined by the local conditions and the predilections of the concerned writers. One criterion for gauging the success of an article lies in his efficiency and proficiency to attract and hold the readers. A successful writer must possess some cardinal points to impel the readers to continue the perusals of the column carefully and with deep and keen interest. People are still reading, writing and talking about articles.

**Still existent and popular**

Articles are being contributed to magazines in a large number, while novices start with writing articles, and then move to other genres. However, not only novices, but also experienced writers do work on it.

**Most important part of the magazine journalism**

Magazines carry articles plus columns, while the features are the usual part.

But articles are comparatively easy to write, and is a popular genre. Most magazines are carrying articles, while there is a less usage of articles in dailies, but under certain circumstances, articles are published.

**How being contributed?**

Both, novices and experienced writers, and freelancers and staffers, are contributing articles on their own, where sometimes they are requested to, which are named as ‘Solicited versus unsolicited articles.

For solicited, the guidelines are given.

**Who write?**

All can contribute, and articles are published depending upon the quality and subject. Both freelancers and the staffers, but mostly freelancers do this, and are being paid well. However, the beginners and experienced both write this.

**First step towards better writings**

Mostly it is advised by others to start writing articles, and mending their ways of writing besides imparting training the novices in the art of writing.

Later, they move to other genres, like features and columns, as experience is gained through the article-writing. Magazines act as a net-practice arena for the novices.

**Learning the ropes**

Article-writing is towards making an improvement towards other kinds of writing, as the basic training is imparted about the subject treatment, structural handling, concluding the subject and playing with the idea.

**Making it happen for you**

Let the writers start writing! When article length can vary, hence novices have bigger room to play. They can write from two to three paragraphs to full-fledged articles, while letting the idea and writing ability to mature over a period of time. For beginners, they first must consider it for writing, and then follow other kinds of writing.

## HOW TO WRITE AN ARTICLE?

A good article must entertain, which is dished out from a service of catchy facts, figures and formulations, and the fact should be not only accurate, but also plentiful. There should always be rule that collect always more information than we think we are going to use; so you choose the best and the most apropos in making the points.

Following must be kept in mind prior to writing an article:

- Research, research, research
- The library
- The reference collection
- Periodicals
- Indexes and abstracts
- How to locate and work with primary-source people

### **Research, research, research**

There are at least four practical reasons why writers should stick to dependable sources and keep track of what they are:

#### **1. A fact is only good as its source**

The basic idea is proving your point or assertion through a fact, while never letting your mere thought become an argument through the tangible basis of the fact. Moreover, the source and fact go side by side, and both are given equal weight as fact sans solid source lacks credibility. Hence both facts and sources must be credible because correct facts, but dubious sources create no impression.

#### **2. It is more efficient**

Researching for material and information have no comparison or equivalent, and one must be looking for more and concrete information. On the other hand, the research gives news horizons to your thought – From language to the enrichment of the ideas – and one must be working towards enriching your document through more reading, and usage of divergent sources.

#### **3. It is more believable**

Talking with proofs makes it more believable, while references to the sources confirm what you say, as people tend to believe easily. A journalist never creates a make belief environment because he uses sources besides doing research on the topic. Moreover, a writer's name becomes credible when he is using recognisable sources of information.

Secondly, if the source of the fact is authoritative, its mention lends credibility.

#### **4. It is safer**

Having a credible source, and conducting research makes it easy to believe, and safer for the writer to be certain about his facts. It is always recommended that one must be never losing contact with the basic source of information, while always letting oneself stay beyond doubt.

There are five reliability checks against which you can measure the facts you research. At least one of them can be used to assess every piece of information you encounter.

#### **1. Accuracy**

If one has seen an event happen and reported it carefully, he and his readers assume, the journalist has also reported it accurately. A writes always adds accuracy to the write-up through facts, which are correctly mentioned, and in turn, his readers never doubt facts mentioned. Accuracy of facts is the key to a successful writer

**2. Authenticity**

Not to be confused with accuracy, authenticity is what you get automatically from a primary source. It comes from the horse's mouth – the logical, natural origin for the chosen information. If you cannot confirm your data, you be careful to present them as authentic statements and not verified facts. Research brings authenticity to the write-up when the facts are rightly and correctly placed.

**3. Credibility**

The source's way of telling his facts and backing them up or his proven track record, may lead you to the subjective conclusions that the source is credible and his facts can be believed. That is who to present the information to the readers.

Credibility of a writer is because of authenticity of facts, which are confirmed through research, as it is the basic agenda behind every write-up. Nothing is done better, if the idea not properly investigated and facts not confirmed.

**4. Plausibility**

You may conclude that, subjectively, the fact makes sense to you and presumably to other people. That is how you will write it – not as verified fact but as plausible consideration.

**5. Corroboration**

Corroborate means to add proof or certainty to an account, statement or an idea with new information. Without corroboration, it will be difficult to prove the statement to be correct. Have facts and figures, comments, eyewitness account etc to prove your point, and never leave assertions sans corroborating them with facts.

You may obtain information from a separate, also believable source that substantiates the first source's fact. Then you will have objectively demonstrated, if not the accuracy, at least the honesty of your source. In reporting the fact you will probably tell the reader of the corroboration, although that is not always necessary.

**The library**

The library is the major depository of the secondary sources, and a useful lead to primary data as well.

**1. Information through libraries/The librarian**

Libraries are still the best sources of information where one can find books, magazines and journals, both national and international. Books are available on different subjects, and one can always consult them for historical perspective or at least a literary point of view.

All the above add to getting concrete information, as books and general interest magazines articles can be useful for providing an overview of the subject one is researching, especially if one is not familiar with in depth.

Also tell the librarian precisely what you need.

**2. Using the available information**

Exploit sources available to you at the first option, and look for more after this while using all possible options – from primary to secondary to tertiary.

Never take anything for granted and consider it as if confirmed besides taking into consideration what is useless to others, as one must be looking at all the possible angles.

**3. The reference collection**

One's references should be known to him, and must be readily available whenever required to revert back. The writers must mention the reference when quizzed by someone about the reference. He must also keep the references both in his mind, and in record, for the future usage.

**4. Periodicals**

Magazine and journals have long shelf life, and their content is usually well-researched and aptly described with facts and figures. In this sense, the research journals take lead over the magazines. There is always quality, and the writer must look for that, while never compromising on less known sources.

**5. Indexes and abstracts**

Index is a collection of information stored on a computer or on a set of cards, but in alphabetical order. Prefer your own abstracts for future use, as briefs and specifics go a long way for a writer, who must prefer such indexes and abstracts, which can impart information within shortest possible time.

**6. Search services**

Searches should be readily available to you whenever required, and never let them pass to oblivion, and keep those intact. Constant connection keeps you attached to such services.

**7. Inter-library loans**

Request for books from other libraries, and one can request the librarian. You must get to know the people around, and arrange books for your subject.

**8. College libraries**

Our college libraries are the least explored, and good books are rarely read. It is always better for you to go to your college or any other college. You are certain of getting the required information.

**9. Newspapers**

Keeping an update about the changing circumstances, and for this, the newspapers are still the best source of information, while television comes next to this. Use newspapers and related products as a primary source, while reading and browsing newspapers daily. It is also recommended that one must be going through magazines also.

**10. Journal articles**

Journals, especially foreign, still a better source of information though there can be problems about the proximity, and finding them.

Read and understand the conditions when and where the article was written, and then apply that on your situation, as it is said that one must never apply foreign theories until relevant to your situation.

Moreover, the contextualisation of the concepts should be done.

**11. Sources from previous articles**

Get track of the subject through articles published in newspapers, magazines and journals, which are usually available in more one language. Besides specificities, these also add to the general knowledge. One can keep cuttings of the articles if relevant to the subject or area of interest.

## TYPES AND SUBJECTS OF ARTICLE

There are seven broad types of article, which are usually considered by editors, while the subjects are ranging from political to personal experiences. Besides this, there are certain factors behind the making of articles.

### Seven Broad Types

#### 1. Interview articles

These articles are based on recognised authorities or famous persons' opinion or ideas in which prominence is given to the concept and ideas of the person, while considering that what he is important for the readers. However, it is always suggested that one must be never tempering with his point of view.

#### 2. Utility articles

These articles aim to help the reader by giving him definite directions or advice about a particular issue because all human beings want to be wiser, healthier and wealthier. Hence suggestions are given through the experts' point of view in such articles.

#### 3. Personal Experience articles

Unusual experiences are written to entertain, help or inform. In this regard, travelogues carry personal impressions of the writers, as the personal experiences part of the same theme, while most of the writers like to do this.

#### 4. Confession articles

These articles reveal innermost feelings of a person in a confidential tone, while the intimate experiences or of others; people are uninterested in publishing name. The 'Inside story' of the unknown is to entertain, reform or inform.

#### 5. Personality sketch or success articles

These are the articles about success of unknown, and well-known, who have surmounted obstacles to acquire fame or fortune. These articles are written to inspire, instruct and guide readers, who are seeking solutions and adjustments in life.

#### 6. Narrative articles

These articles present facts through devices, like short story. It is in a conversational and description style, which is used to heighten effect and entertain as well as inform the readers.

#### 7. Opinionated articles

These articles are based on writers' opinion, thought, observation, criticism, appreciation, and are used to give readers insight about certain issues.

### Subjects of Articles

#### 1. Political

One of the most popular subjects is political, while article only of experts are considered to be worthy for publishing, and only the well-known take much of the space. Moreover, socio-political comments are more popular.

#### 2. Social

This is another popular subject, which is equally considered good for novices and expert writers. However, new subjects are less attempted besides the fact that the old subjects from fresh angles are also a rarity. Nevertheless, social issues are tackled with great devotion.



**3. Economics**

Mostly, only the specialists are writing about this subject, while less of novices are joining this kind of writing or are inclined to it. Hence it has become a field for experts only. This is also part of the professionals' magazines, while the newspapers carry commerce sections. However, there are fewer number of magazines of this subject.

**4. Personal experiences**

Usually, the writers are not explicitly sharing their own experiences, and are found depicting personal experiences as of others. However, the practice is of writing about personal experiences by connecting various instances of others.

**5. Opinion-based**

Personal opinions are shared through articles, and many writers base their articles on personal opinions. English newspaper carry more opinion-based article than the Urdu or vernacular dailies. Fashion articles are mostly opinion-based, while the political articles do carry this impression as well.

**6. Travelogues**

These are more popular with Urdu writers of magazines, as personal impressions are coupled with general information. Besides this, Urdu writers are also bringing in fantasies, which is less of case with the English writers.

**What factors are considered, must be kept in mind, and observed while writing above subjects?**

1. Editorial policy
2. Readers' demands, milieu and perceptions
3. Keeping the society and circumstances in mind
4. Never giving low scope to subjects
5. Considering the subject from the required angle
6. Never taking the facts and figures for granted
7. Considering the writing job as a serious subject
8. Checking the subjects and language

**Interview Amal Shakeb**

Talked about

1. Articles and writers
2. How modern writers are writing articles?
3. What are the areas of interest they have?
4. Quality of writers
5. Subjects discussed by writers

## FIVE COMMANDMENTS, NO PROFESSIONAL FORGETS

Following are the basic commandments, which must not be forgotten by any professional.

1. Make your point and prove it
2. Generalise, but don't use generalities
3. Separate fact from opinion
4. Locate universal images and experiences
5. Entertain

### How to successfully write?

Article writing is an excellent way to get your message out, especially if it appeals to your readers because they expect and enjoy quality articles. Meet their needs and they will come back for more.

Writing your first article can be very challenging for some and not as challenging for others. Whether you feel challenged or not, you can become a skilled article writer by learning and practicing the following tips.

#### 1. Mind Map to overcome writer's block

Visualise the three parts of a bicycle wheel - the hub (centre), spokes, and rim. Spokes extend from the tiny hub at the centre of the wheel and are attached to the rim. When mind-mapping, your subject is the hub, arrows are the spokes, and the points you make about your subject are the rim.

Use only circles and arrows when mind-mapping. First, put your subject in the hub. Draw an arrow (spoke) from the hub to the rim. Then draw a circle on the rim and put the first point you will make about your subject inside that circle. Repeat the process for all the points you intend to make. When finished, you should have a circle in the centre of circles that are connected by arrows. This is the outline for your article.

#### 2. Use Key Words

Use words in your title that attract readers and search engines. These words are known as keywords. Do a Google search to find keyword tracker sites. Follow the instructions on the site. Remember this will select which keywords to use - the greater the number after the word, the greater the interest.

#### 3. Know Your Niche

What's your passion? What are you interested in? Appeal to readers with the same passion or interests. Who would know their needs better than you? But there's always a possibility that your readers may have a different interest. Build a relationship with them through your articles to see what their present needs are. Then write a message addressing their needs.

#### 4. Write Conversationally

Let your heart speak to the heart of your reader. Your head is your knowledge centre, it wants to be formal. But your heart is informal; it just makes your points. Easy reading helps your readers know, like and trust you.

#### 5. Use Quotes, Illustrations, or Case Studies

Give examples your readers can relate to and understand. Stories are an excellent way to make points.

#### 6. Create an Attention Grabbing Title

The importance of titles cannot be over stressed. Your title must capture the interest of your reader or your article will not be read.

**7. Presentation of Your Message**

Your article can be the best on the market, but if it is lumped together, readers won't read it. Just as chefs make dishes attractive, make your articles attractive. Learn to use short paragraphs, subheads, numbers, and bullets to add variety to your articles.

**8. Rewriting - Blending Your Head and Heart**

After pouring out your heart on paper (also known as a heart dump), take a break. No editing is required. Later, come back and edit your article before submitting it.

**9. Final tip**

Use an article writing template.

**Seven basics to keep in mind****1: Write well**

If you are going to spend the time and put in the effort, then make sure you write well. Always use your computer's spell check. Furthermore, proofread your articles for proper grammar, which is a common pitfall for many writers.

**2: Write often**

Beginning writers often struggle with the idea of having writer's block. The truth is writer's block is just a form of stalling and procrastination to keep you from writing.

**3: Keep an idea bank**

This is quite possibly your best tool. Yet, many writers don't make it a habit of keeping a running list of ideas. Compile them in a notebook and carry it with you everywhere, so you'll never miss another idea again.

**4: Write passionately about your topic**

If you're going to write, then write whole-heartedly. Your readers will know in an instant if you have no interest in what you're writing about.

**5: Use quick outlines**

When you start with a quick outline before you begin writing, you are able to stay focused in your article. This helps tremendously if you tend to ramble or go off on tangents.

**6: Have something important to say**

If you're going to write articles, be sure you have something of great value to say. Rambling on for 400-600 words about nothing in particular will drive your readership crazy and may even turn them off and cause them to avoid your future articles.

**7: Be confident in your writing abilities**

All too often, we writers tend to be our own harshest critics. Rather than nit-picking your articles to the point of desecration, focus on your positive writing traits. Keep these seven commandments of article writing in mind the next time you write and you'll be just fine.

**What you ought to know**

There are some basic principles you need to know about writing articles.

**1. Consistency is key**

If you intend to write articles to submit to article directories for the sole purpose of article marketing, then you must be consistent. You can't submit a few articles one time and expect to see huge results. Article marketing requires persistent writing and submitting to the directories.

**2. Clean copy counts**

One of the worst mistakes writers make is not proofreading their articles before submitting. It drives editors crazy to receive articles that are riddled with grammatical and spelling errors. Do a quick spell check on your computer and proofread your article for proper grammar usage.

**3. Passion perfects your message**

Whenever you write about a subject, speak passionately about the topic. When a reader can feel the fiery passion inside you as you write, they can more easily relate to what you're saying.

**4. Your resource box is as important as your article**

This is the place where you get your two seconds of advertising. Make your resource box fun and interesting. Compel readers to click to your website for more.

**5. No article is complete without a specific call to action**

Every article you write should contain a call to action. This usually comes in the resource box at the end of the article. Provide good information in the body of the article. Define a problem and tell readers how to solve it. Then give them a reason to click for more at the end.

**Write like a professional**

Have you been salivating over other writers' articles? Do you wish you could write with the authority and detail that they do?

**1. Capture every idea**

For some reason, a lot of writers don't do this, and I can't understand why. If you are a writer, your best friend should be a notebook and pen. Keep one with you all the time. Every time you have an idea, even if it seems like a silly one at the time, write it down. This idea bank will be a lifesaver for you many times over when you get ready to write articles.

**2. Determine the main idea for each article before you begin to write**

You should never start an article if you don't know where you'll begin or end. This may work okay for essays, but when you write articles, you need to have a plan.

**3. Create a fun headline for your article**

Headlines will either grab a reader's attention or bore them. There is no in-between. Start your article off with a fun, attention-grabbing headline that will make readers want to keep reading.

**4. Write in a conversational tone of voice**

It's funny because new writers tend to freeze up and start writing with their "head" voice. They use big words and long sentences. Don't do that! You'll confuse readers and make them walk away and never come back again. Write in short, straight to the point sentences. Write like you talk.

**5. Use bullets and lists**

Technology has drastically decreased our attention spans. Use this to your advantage in your articles. Include bulleted points and quick lists in your articles. This makes your articles easier to read and more consumable.

**6. Write short paragraphs**

Again, don't be long-winded. Keep your paragraphs 3-5 sentences long, at the most. Don't cut your thoughts short, but be mindful of running on and rambling. Be succinct.

**7. Proofread and edit your articles**

Never submit an article before proofreading and editing it. If you do, you'll probably end up with simple spelling mistakes and grammatical errors that could have been caught early on.

**8. Be entertaining and interesting**

As you write your article, think about how you carry on a normal conversation with someone. Write with this in mind. Say what you have to say in an interesting way.

**9. Loosen up and have fun**

Finally, don't be so uptight in your writing that you lose your sense of self. If you write stiff and rigid, that is exactly how you'll come across to those who read your work. Just have fun with it!

## ARTICLES WRITING MISTAKES

Making your articles available for reprints by publishers is the cornerstone strategy in building an avalanche of readers.

If you want your articles to be picked up and massively distributed by others, here are seven common mistakes, which must be avoided by the article writers.

### Mistake #1

#### **Too many grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors**

You've been super busy writing articles. Your eyes are tired. Your brain hurts. Don't start slouching yet! Lots of writers pound out countless articles every day. There's nothing wrong with that if you are pounding out content of exceptional quality.

Be cautious of these common mistakes article writers make when they're tired:

- Misspelled words
- Poor grammar

These are the top two common article-writing mistakes.

### Mistake #2

#### **Too much hype, bragging and self-promotion**

If you are as good as you know you are, there is no reason to fill the body of the article with hype, gratuitous links or blatant self-promotion. Readers are smart and will see right through your "hype-veil."

Better to only sell or pitch your company in the RESOURCE BOX below the body of the article.

Research indicates that the resource box often gets a 3 per cent CTR (Click Through Rate) on the Internet and 40 readerships. Be sure you take advantage of that by not selling hard in the body of the article.

### Mistake #3

#### **Content-based on what you need to learn, and what your reader needs**

Put yourself in your reader's shoes and ask yourself, "What does this article offer me?" Research what your reader wants to read by doing survey's with your own audience to find what people are looking for.

### Mistake #4

#### **Making your article broad or superficial in content**

It's better to go in-depth on a narrow topic. Define it. Explain it. Relate to it. Use bullet points or numbered lists. Offer a secret or expertise that you have around the topic. Be original in covering your topic as narrowly as possible in a way that has not been done by others. Brevity is golden.

### Mistake #5

#### **Headline and article summary does not grab readers' attention**

The headline is often 95% of the initial reason why someone might read your article or pass it over for another article. Don't bore your audience out of the gate with a dull headline or worse, a boring introduction to the article.

If you have to use two sentences to make your headline, you're thinking too hard. Keep it simple and make it brief. Use keyword research tools to optimise your article title.

**Mistake #6****Plagiarising or 'buying articles'**

It's ok to research the Internet for article ideas, but it's not ok to copy word-for-word of any article. Paraphrasing can also be classified as plagiarism. Be original. Let the words flow from your mind into your article. You will sleep better at night and your articles will have a higher value with the editors and in the marketplace.

Buying articles is not a great idea...especially if you do not get an exclusive licence to use them. What good is the same article if thousands of people call it their own? If you do outsource your article writing to ghost writers, make sure you have an exclusive right or licence to the works.

**Mistake #7****Don't burn out the RESOURCE BOX by overloading it**

The RESOURCE BOX is your pay-off for giving your article up for reprints, but don't abuse the welcome mat.

**Mistake #8****Vague or generalised writing**

Are you being straight forward and to the point in your article? Be careful not to "beat about the bush." Say what you mean, and mean what you say.

**Mistake #9****No "meat" in your message**

Does your article contain valuable information to the reader?

**Mistake #10****Rambling**

Again, get to the point. Don't use half your article trying to get to where you're going. Get to the point and get there fast.

**Mistake #11****Article is too long**

While there are no word count rules for article writing, it is wise to be careful not to get too long-winded, especially if your article will be printed online. Be succinct.

**Mistake #12****Article is too short**

If you try to take too many shortcuts just to make a shorter article, you will probably leave your readers hanging. Be precise and concise in your articles. Don't cut the length just to make the article short.

**Mistake #13****Too many tenses**

Watch out for multiple verb tenses in your articles. If you begin by writing in the past tense, stay there.

**Mistake #14****No subheadings**

Gone are the days when people use to have sub-heads in the articles. Now it is clear cut written in a straightway; hence there is no need to write sub-headings as an interested reader will read through if the writer had made it interesting.

**Mistake #15****No clearly defined paragraphs**

In addition to having your article proofed by others, you may also want to be sure that you have clearly defined paragraphs. Nothing is worse than a big blob of text with 20 run-on sentences.

Many readers no longer read articles in depth and often only 'scan' your article. They want small bites of information that can be easily digested... also known as "info-snacking."

**Mistake #16****Not keeping the voice in the same person**

Keep your "voice" in the same person throughout the entire article. If you are using the first person voice (I, me) or the second person (you, we, us) or the third person (they, them, he, she)...be consistent by staying in one voice for the entire article.



## WRITING THE ARTICLE

There are four elements of a good article – encompassing the write-up from the beginning to the end – which are primarily used for keeping readers’ attention intact, as these help in making your article interesting.

### Four elements

Following four elements are aimed at getting the readers’ attention, and make them take interest in the write-up and want to read the article.

- **What the article is about?**  
A reader must immediately get an idea about the subject of the article, and it must be clear immediately in the few initial lines, if not in the first two to three lines.
- **How specifically stated is the subject of the article?**  
There should not be an ambiguity about the subject of the article, as it must be clear for the reader to understand it as well. Clarity in the writer’s mind must be clarity for the reader too. It is always a two-way traffic.
- **Is there a subjective ingredient?**  
Every subject being discussed must have tangible material for the readers. Mere statements do not make good articles, rather the arguments must be well-supported by facts and figures.

### Various parts of article

#### 1. The lead or the Intro:

Articles’ jumping ‘point of view’ is to be done in one or two initial paragraphs, as the lead is built into the very first one or more paragraphs is the bait that hooks both reader and editor into reading on into the story. A good lead is the best selling tool.

Every professional magazine writer can pick up an article and know instinctively. “That’s a great lead!” or “Boy! What washout of a lead!” Most of the great writers have been found writing the lead instinctively, while giving a little room to deliberate effort though an effort can make a lead better certainly.

It is always good that one brings the subject to life immediately, and the easiest way to get the reader involved in the subject. There are various approaches to make it so. Some writers lead off with an anecdote, while choosing the most dramatic examples are uncovered by research.

Secondly the formula “It’s happened to somebody” - “it could happen to you” is also used to intrigue, excite or startle the reader, besides incorporating questions into the lead.

Readers, editors and even writers like to puzzle over paradoxes of the all kinds. These too make an intriguing leads. Besides using of paradoxes, writers used both questions and startling statements to hook his readers into wanting to know more.

A really powerful quote can also make an exciting, intriguing article lead.

Another way of writing a good lead is coming up with an appeal to the readers’ emotions.

#### 2. The topic sentence

It is important to let readers know early just what you plan to talk about in your article so they do not expect something more or something different from what you are prepared to deliver. Disappointed reader lead of loss of readers. The place to announce your topic is in your topic sentence, which always comes right after the lead.

The topic sentence can be a phrase or may have several sentences long. It can be very simple and obvious, or can be disguised in a quote, question or statistic. It may be tactfully and smoothly sewn onto the end of the lead, stand by itself or begin the next paragraph.

The focus or objective parameter is always part of the topic sentence, while the slant or subjective approach – your own point of view about the topic – not written directly, but implied or between the lines. This is how it is revealed. The ‘Slant’ is what you are writing about or how you write about it. It is author’s point of view basically.

### **3. Main body**

To comprehend fully how you get meat onto the body of an article – Long section between the beginning and end – you must understand the techniques that every professional writer learns to use.

When it comes to writing the body, there is no choice for the writer: The slant must pervade in every paragraph.

A writer brings in anecdotes, quotes, and exposition (data supporting your point of view) to fill the main body, but these are always relevant to the subject, and nothing is divorced from the idea, which is being considered for writing.

Pros and cons? Moderate or extreme? Reasoned or impassioned? These questions should be answered by the writer himself, whereas most of the writers do not often tell what will be the slant.

### **4. Ending**

When you have said everything, there is to say, it not enough simply to stop writing. When the time comes to an end your article, it is important to create a proper ending, which is the fourth essential element in a magazine article.

The ending leaves readers feeling that the article has come to a successful, satisfying conclusion. This is not to say that you must save your conclusion about your subject for the ending. The general pros and cons of the topic are most often assessed within the focus and slant messages of the topic paragraph. Hence the ending must impart an impression to the reader that the article has come to an end, successfully and satisfyingly.

The ending is a reiteration, summation, and even in some cases a statement that there is more to be learned or to be said than the reader has been told. End it like they way you want to remain in readers’ mind!

### What to do when you have written the article?

Besides writing the first draft, there are certain steps, which must be actualised, after one has written the article

#### What to do?

##### 1. Writing the first draft

One can write the first draft with much ease, but he should not try never to take it casually, as it is the base on which the rest of the building will be structured. You must make it the best through a natural flow of the write-up and thought process.

##### 2. Find the point

One of the writer's trip-ups, in getting a story onto paper, is becoming so involved in orchestrating the wealth of statistics, anecdotes, and quotes he discovers in his research what he overlooks or drifts away from the story's purpose.

When your research is completed, go over it all with your article's original proposal in front of you. Does the information you found match what you expected to find? Do you have the kinds of experts you thought of including in the article. Are your anecdotes and quotes strong enough make the points you have to make? In short, do the extensive data in your files fulfil the sketchy picture you want to draw? What is the focal point? Think about it and make it clear at least in your own mind.

Maybe the writer does not mention it explicitly, and then it must be an under-current of the whole article. Besides this, the theme should be felt running between the lines.

##### 3. Organise the material

Never miss what you have with you, and keep all the relevant material within your excess. It is better that it is in your mind, and is in a sequence. One must have a hard copy or notes about the subject with him. Moreover, you can jot down a formal outline or make notes, but whichever works best for you, you must begin with an unclouded perspective of exactly how your article's first draft is to be organised. The perspective may change once you have got your first draft typed or you may discover that an anecdote fits better in a different place or leads to a different conclusion than you thought it did. But unless you begin with a plan you will come out with a hodgepodge of long notes instead of the first draft.

##### 4. Chronological order

Your ideas must be developed in the chronological order, besides keeping all of them in an order, as haphazardly jointed points never impart a good impression. This also brings sequence to the thought, which the writer is ultimately bringing it on the paper.

##### 5. Point-to-point organisation of material

Always have the sketch of important points in your mind, as it is a must for the writer to have sequence to the thought as well. Never take it for granted that things will come to your mind automatically, as you should write these down in a point-to-point organisation. In the end, you must then confirm that you have exhausted all the ideas.

Some arrangements to be considered are:

- From the general point to its specific aspects
- From the easy concepts to the more difficult ones
- From the least controversial to the most controversial
- From the least complicated to the most complicated
- From the theoretical to the practical

**6. Pick out and write the lead**

Think what could be appropriate for the lead, while making it really good and happening. You should never let it remain loose. To avoid this, the writers use all rules and norms of good leads for the articles too.

**7. Can you state the paradox?**

See where the conflict or paradox lies! What are the differences between reality and ideals? Who is not letting it happen? Point out the reasons for all these besides suggesting ways to resolve the issue. If you mention the solution, and only talk about the problem, you are also part of the problem.

**8. Contrast, anecdote, and comparison**

Bring to focus the comparisons and contrasts to a particular situation, while relating the anecdotes, both national and international. Remember! Contrasts, anecdotes and comparisons enhance clarity.

**9. Write the body, using transitions and sub-topic sentences**

Moving from lead to body is considered to be difficult, as you have to carry the reader along. One must use good transition for this. Losing a reader during the transition is always of huge concern for the writers.

In certain cases, even developing a sub-topic sentence for is a good idea.

**10. Write with sub-heads wherever possible**

Writing of the Sub-heads is not a very popular idea, but still works under a few circumstances, while depending upon the kind of write-up. Sub-heads can be helpful to the writer as well, as the writing does become interesting.

However, it is popularly considered that it hinders smooth reading.

**11. End with a bang**

Ending must be forceful, and should come quickly, but pragmatically.

Never make it too quick and short that it does not conclude the article.

Conclude the article by focusing on the rules of good conclusions.

**12. Harkens back to the lead**

Never make the conclusion divorced from the Lead, as it must have at least some reference to the Lead, even though an implicit one. Explicit reference is not a bad idea even, but it should be connected to the lead.

**13. End on ironic note**

Bringing irony can make the conclusion memorable. For this, a writer always has some points in his mind, and uses them whenever he feels like using it.

**14. Re-check with the topic sentence**

Important points must be re-checked, and one must follow it as a habit. Also check whether the connection is being formed or not.

**15. Re-read, re-write and re-read**

Re-read the read ones and re-writer where-ever required. Then re-read it. Put heart and soul in to it. Give yourself a break and then work on the above.

**16. Ask somebody to do the favour before sending**

Some writers find it difficult to re-check on their own, and then they ask somebody to help them out.

Simple rule is that a writer never trusts one eye.

“Work hard on the final document prior to sending to the editor”, is the thumb rule!

## TEN STANDARD ARTICLE FORMATS

These are classified as articles on the basis of the material.

### 1. How to articles – easiest of articles

These articles tell the readers “What is the subject and how it must be handled?” These are considered to be the easiest by the experts. However, layman or an immature writer cannot do this.

People like to know how things must be handled, and how issues must be tackled.

Such articles provide an answer to these questions.

### 2. Profile and interview articles

These are pretty common in English journalism as far as profile is concerned, whereas in Urdu, interview is part of the routine. However, both are popular with daily and magazine journalism, but magazines take lead.

All articles are never profile or interviews, as interviews are considered to be part of public relationship effort, while profile can show real person according to a writer.

### 3. The informative articles

Most articles fall in this category in which divergent kinds of information is given. In these articles, all subjects can be brought under discussion.

It is comparatively an easy article type for the experts, while novices avoid writing such articles.

Nevertheless, novices become experts later as far as such writings are concerned.

### 4. The expose` articles

An expose` is “A public report of the facts about a situation, especially one that is shocking or has been kept secret”. It is considered to be part of making the article writing most successful, but it is found less in both Urdu and English journalism, whereas daily journalism carries this banner.

### 5. Personal experience, reminiscence and As-Told-To articles

All these three take most of the space meant for articles. Personal experience is popular with the novices and new writers, while reminiscences (writing about past) is covered well by senior writers. As-Told-To (kind of interviews) is a field of everyone.

### 6. The essay or personal experience articles

Essay is difficult to write, as the writer cannot keep readers’ interest intact. However, these are still written by a few.

An essay is a running kind of article, and personal experience gained recent currency with English journalists. Now it is coming to Urdu journalism as well.

### 7. Humour and satire articles

These articles are less attempted by all writers, and hence these are a forte of a few. Writers of humour and satire can be counted on fingertips, while few keep on trying. In this field, the exits and arrivals are constant.

### 8. Inspirational articles

These articles show how minor and impaired people achieved high tasks, and how these people are becoming extra-ordinary. Writers look around for such examples to inspire others for reaching the highest. A lot of people write about such successful examples to a great length.

**9. The historical articles**

Journalism is current, but history is its context, and the thumb rule is ‘Let history flow with the current’. Articles about historical events are written, but are mostly connected to the current ones, and historical events are never written in isolation.

Journalism is about history, never writing complete events, but becoming part of the history for tomorrow.

**10. The Roundup articles**

Activity of any nature is summed up in this format of articles. Seminars, conferences, festivals etc. are covered for magazines, which are part of the roundup articles. These are not difficult to write if the writer has been attending the functions.

## LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WRITERS

The press in this country these days is among the freest in the world. The brilliance of our forebears was in linking press freedoms with the other guaranteed freedoms — religion, right of assembly and speech and redress of grievances. This intertwining of revered freedoms has made it doubly difficult to tinker with the free status of the press, no matter how volatile public opinion may become. (And, unfortunately, in times of national unrest, there are always a few “public-spirited” individuals who would like to see one or another of the First Amendment freedoms curtailed.)

No government can afford to give blanket freedom to its press system.

### Legal and ethical considerations for writers

As free as the press may be in this country, there are still certain restrictions and limitations that writers must keep firmly in mind. The most important of these, for your purposes, are the laws pertaining to libel, privacy and copyright. However, there are also some pertinent ethical restrictions not governed by law. Ethics are a personal, private matter to be decided by each writer according to the dictates of conscience, but publishing etiquette demands adherence to some basic ethical principles.

### Libel

Libel is a false statement about a living person that does damage to that person’s reputation in the community in which he or she lives. It may also cause embarrassment or humiliation, or affect a person’s ability to make a living. The four most commonly cited classic examples of libel (though some sound antiquated and naive), called libel *per Se*, would be to charge someone falsely with the commission of a crime, or to suggest that a woman is unchaste, or to charge that someone has or has had a loathsome or contagious disease or to bring discredit on someone in his or her profession, such as calling a doctor a quack or claiming that a lawyer is an ambulance chaser.

If you, through carelessness or malice, make a libellous statement about a person, you could easily end up in court. And that can cost you time, anxiety and money. There are three kinds of damages that a libel claimant can ask a court to award. The first is general damages, granted for injury to reputation. The second is special damages for specific pecuniary loss — which means a true monetary loss, such as an erosion of business or losing one’s job as a result of the libel. An outside source is usually required to prove the extent of special damages, unless the libel is *per se*, one of the four classic examples given above, in which case no proof of actual damages is necessary. The final form of damages is punitive, and is usually sought by the claimant as a punishment against an author or a publisher for making the mistake. Punitive damages can be awarded only if the writer or publisher has shown reckless disregard or malicious intent to harm, meaning they knew the statement was false or had reason to suspect it might be false.

Mistakes are easy to make. You might think only that you have a solid piece of information, or you might copy a name wrong from your research notes or you might quote a person incorrectly in a way that makes him or her look incompetent. So lesson number one in avoiding libel difficulties is: Be careful. Check and double-check your facts. If you’ve written something that appears to be libellous on the face of it, make sure you can trust your notes. Most good newspapers and magazines have legal advisers to worry and fret over possible actionable material, but even the best of lawyers miss a few. The job begins with the writer. If you are sure of your facts and can back them up, then much of the danger is behind you. If you’re not so certain of your facts, think long and hard before you use them.

If a potentially libellous statement slips through and you end up in court, how do you protect yourself? For years, the most frequently used defences were the common law defences: truth, fair comment, fair report of a judicial or official proceeding. Then, in the landmark *The New York Times v. Sullivan* ruling in 1964, the Supreme Court opened a new door to libel defence. The plaintiff, Sullivan, was a public official, a police commissioner who charged that he had been libelled in a civil rights advertisement that ran in *The New York Times*. The Supreme Court, overturning an Alabama court decision that found in favour of Sullivan, said that a public official could not maintain a suit for damage to reputation unless the official could prove that the libellous statement was published with actual malice. You’ve heard the term before.

It has nothing to do with the dictionary definition of malice. Actual malice, as defined by the court, means that the writer or publisher either knew that the statement was false or went ahead and published it with a reckless disregard for whether or not it was false. This decision has since expanded to include public figures—people who are consistently in the public eye, such as very well-known professional athletes and entertainers and other celebrities.

“Neutral reportage” usually occurs when a writer has written an accurate report about a public figure based on information received from a reliable source. Even if the reporter doubts the truth of the material, he is protected in some jurisdictions because he has made an accurate and “neutral” report.

### **Invasion of privacy**

If you think libel laws are confusing, wait until you get into the ticklish rights of privacy. From the standpoint of the writer, this is a scary and dangerous area.

Traditionally, there are four separate divisions to the tort of invasion of privacy. You can fall afoul of the law if you cast someone in a false light; if you reveal intimate details of someone’s life; if you misappropriate someone’s name or likeness; or if you intrude physically into someone’s private life.

The first area is vaguely similar to libel. You can cast someone in a false light in one of three ways. You can take a factual situation and embellish it (by adding dialogue or thought patterns, for example). You can take a factual situation and fictionalise it (the kind of thing we see in TV docudramas, complete with actions and reactions that may not have taken place). Or you can take a factual situation and distort it (by leaving things out, or changing the meaning). Any of these situations can lead to a “false light” invasion-of-privacy suit.

But a key difference between libel and a false-light invasion of privacy is that the false-light tort does not require proof that the statement is defamatory.

The second sort of privacy touches on the publication of intimate and embarrassing personal details of someone’s life. It might be as simple as reporting that a professional cricket player sleeps on a bed of nails as a form of toughening up, or it might be a shocking revelation of the bizarre sexual preferences of a movie star. The real problem here is that even if you are telling the absolute truth, and has photographs and signed affidavits to prove it, the mere publication of hitherto unknown peculiar personal habits can get you in trouble.

The third form is easier to understand. It encompasses the misappropriation of someone’s name or likeness for commercial purposes. Traditionally, that means you can’t use someone’s name or photograph in an advertisement endorsing a product without that person’s express permission. Lately, however, this law has sprouted a few extra tentacles and has reached out to examine works of fiction in which real people are used as peripheral figures. There are even arguments as to whether or not the estates of dead people can take issue with the use of a late celebrity’s name or likeness for commercial purposes. These new applications are still fluid in our country, but if they ever firm up they could open new problem areas for writers and publishers.

The final area of invasion of privacy has only slight potential for involving newspaper feature and magazine article writers. It deals primarily with physical intrusion in a person’s private life — unauthorised wiretaps, trespassing on private property to gather information, seeking interviews under false pretences, stealing photographs, unreasonable intrusion in a person’s private affairs. In general, cases are decided by punishing the unreasonable intrusion, not the publication that develops from it. But if the publication falls in the second area—publication of intimate and embarrassing personal details—the method in which the information was gained might be considered a damning circumstance and go against you.

### **Copyright Law/Copyright protection**

Copyright law is designed to protect the work of the individual writer, yet few writers seem to understand how it works and what it actually protects. For one thing, if you are the author of a copyrighted magazine article, you don’t own the facts contained in that article. All you really own are the words you used to describe those facts. Facts and ideas can’t be copyrighted.

There are several good reasons for a writer to do his or her best to understand copyright law, but the two main reasons are these: First, you have to learn as much as you can about copyright regulations in order to



increase your own protection and rights as a writer; second, you'd better understand the rights of other writers before you start incorporating their facts and words into your own work.

In general, copyrighting an *unpublished* or *published* article is extremely simple. The law provides automatic copyright protection for all unpublished material from the moment it is written. Material written after March 1, 1989, which is later published, also receives automatic copyright protection. As a result, use of the familiar copyright notice (the word "Copyright" or the symbol ©, the year the work was created and the name of the copyright holder) is voluntary—but recommended—for such material, as is registration with the Copyright Office. By the way, one copyright for a magazine is enough to protect all contributions in that issue of the magazine—including your particular article.

But that doesn't hold true for newspaper writers. Under the current law, if your writing efforts are "work made for hire," then the copyright falls to the employer. That means a newspaper reporter has no individual protection for stories written in the line of duty. A reporter may write a book or a magazine article on private time and get protection, but if he or she is writing as an agent of the newspaper, on company time, the stories belong to the parent organization. That's why columnists have to get permission before they can publish collections of their columns.

But assume you're a freelancer and that you own the rights to every original piece of work that you write. You are not actually selling your articles to magazines or newspapers when you submit them and collect your checks. Rather, you are licensing the publisher to reproduce your work and publish it. You are giving the publisher paid access to certain rights.

If a magazine requests your article under these terms and you agree, you give up the right to use the material in the same form at any later date. That means you can't sell it to anyone else for a reprint, use it later as part of a book, or option it to the movies.

### **First Serial Rights**

This means a magazine or newspaper (or any other periodical that publishes regularly in an ongoing, or "serial," fashion) has the right to run your article first. After that, the rights revert to you. First serial rights are usually designated as first North American serial rights, or first serial rights.

### **Second Serial Rights**

This usually refers to reprint rights after some other magazine has run your article, though it also covers first-time printing rights for a chapter or an essay from a book that you may have published.

### **Simultaneous Rights**

This won't happen often, but you may have occasion to use it. If you have a timely article that appeals to more than one market and the markets do not have overlapping or competing readerships, you may wish to specify to an editor that you are submitting the piece elsewhere at the same time and offer only simultaneous rights.

There are other terms, of course, such as world rights. Rights to the articles you have been reading in this book, for example, were assigned to the authors as nonexclusive world rights in all languages. That allows the authors of this book and the publisher to market around the world, even in translation, without affecting any other rights of the original writers.

### **Copyright infringement**

Just as the copyright law protects you from piracy of your work, it also serves to protect other writers from misuse of their materials when you are researching a new article. The Copyright Act tries to give us a clear picture of what constitutes infringement. It states that anyone who violates the exclusive rights of the copyright owner has infringed on that copyright. Then it goes on to list those rights. They are:

1. Reproduction of the copyrighted work
2. Preparation of derivative works based on the copyrighted material
3. Selling, renting or lending copies
4. Performing the work in public
5. Displaying the work in public

Basically, this means you can't pick up someone else's material and pass it off as your own. To lift another writer's words and incorporate them into your own work is plagiarism. And plagiarism is clearly an infringement of copyright. But infringement can take other forms, as well. Even if you paraphrase another writer's words, but use a major portion of his or her research, construction and general thought—enough to diminish the value of that writer's work—you may be guilty of infringement.

It comes down to a ticklish question. How much can you copy or excerpt from another writer's work without stepping across the infringement boundary? There is a hazy doctrine called "fair use." Even without the author's permission, copyright law allows you to copy a portion of another writer's words, so long as you do so within reason. The problem is to determine how much is within reason.

There are no hard-and-fast rules, so you have to use common sense. But a few sections of the Copyright Law provide some guidelines that may help you determine whether you may be exceeding the limits of fair use. For example, consider the purpose of your copying. If you are using someone else's words for critical or educational reasons, you may have more latitude than you would for commercial purposes. At the same time, consider the nature of the work you are copying. In theory, you can quote more safely from a textbook or scholarly work than you can from a popular commercial work. Also, you should give some thought to the ratio of words in relationship to the length of the copyrighted work as a whole. For example, 200 words from a full-length book might be perfectly acceptable, but 200 words from a 300-word article would be outrageous. With some copyrighted materials, even a fair and sane ratio won't help. Fair use is generally not applicable to poetry, musical lyrics, and dialogue from a play, entries in a diary, private letters, charts and graphs, author's notes or case studies.

What about crediting your source? Will that help you avoid the onus of copyright infringement? There are two answers. The first is: Always credit your source if possible. It is simply good manners. The second answer: No, even if you do credit your source, it won't necessarily get you off the legal hook.

### **Ethical guidelines**

When you attempt to fashion a system of personal ethical standards, you are embarking on a climb up the side of a self-constructed mountain, hoping for a morally acceptable view from the top. But the view is often murky. Ethics are a very personal thing. You set the standards for yourself. Laws, even when hammered into a confusing jumble of vague and seemingly conflicting social ideals, are meant for everyone. But an ethical stance can be determined by only one person, the one who intends to live within its parameters. You break the law, and you offend society. Go against your own ethical standards, and you offend mainly yourself.

The reason for soft codes is probably obvious. Professional journalists are extremely jealous of their freedom. To allow some outside force to set to paper clear and usable rules and insist that they be followed would be a direct challenge. An individual newspaper or magazine or other publication might well create a solid set of guidelines and demand that anyone accepting work and payment from that publication must adhere to the parent organisation's rules and regulations, but few publishers would cheerfully accept the enforcement of rigid guidelines from outside the organisation, even if the outside source were an amenable society of like-minded individuals.

So you come back to personal ethics, and the guidelines you will choose to enforce for yourself. Others may make suggestions. Editors may make suggestions. Your co-workers may make suggestions. But the only person who can force you to take the high road is you. Some of your choices may be made on moralistic grounds. Others may stem from your political or social upbringing. You may base some choices on the expectations of the markets for which you write. You may even make some ethical decisions for reasons of expedience, the knowledge that to do otherwise might wreck you forever with a particular editor or set of editors. Whatever your reasons, your decisions may make the difference between whether you are a good writer or an untrustworthy writer.

Let's take a look at some of the ethical situations you might have to face.

### **Truth and Accuracy**

Because you are a writer of non-fiction, this is one ethical condition that has no flexibility. Journalists are expected to report truthfully and accurately. The truth may not always be apparent, but it's your job to try to root it out. You'll make mistakes. Everyone does. But the quickest way to lose the respect of your editors, your peers and your audience is to falsify information deliberately.

As a writer, you owe a debt to your sources and to the people you write about. You can't always write nice things about people. That isn't the way reporting works. But you can at least attempt to write fairly. If a person has good traits and bad traits and you intend to mention the bad traits, perhaps it would be fairer if you touched on the good traits as well.

A good way to check your material for fairness is to put yourself in the position of the person about whom you are writing. Examine your copy as though it had been written about you. Do you consider it accurate? Is it fair? If your answer to either question is no, maybe you should reconsider and take another look at your selection of facts.

### **Doctoring Quotes**

Does a writer have a moral right to tamper with someone else's words? It isn't always easy to formulate ethical guidelines, because sometimes—as with direct quotes—you'll find several distinct schools of thought, each with its own rational foundation. Many writers consider direct quotations to be inviolate. Such writers stick to verbatim quotes and refuse to change a single word. And they have a large following. Other writers are willing to dress up a quote, to change the structure entirely, as long as the essence remains the same.

Many writers aren't willing to get that far, but prefer a middle position. They might remove parenthetical expressions or repetitions from a subject's speech, but otherwise leave the quote as it stands. And many writers clean up a subject's accidental bad grammar, especially if it's the kind of innocent oral slip that we all make when talking.

When a subject uses consistent bad grammar or commits amusing linguistic muffs, some writers prefer to leave it in as revealing of character. But if it's just a slight goof, a temporary loss of syntax that has nothing to do with character or the meaning of the quote, most writers feel duty-bound to correct it.

### **On and Of the Record**

Most writers don't like off-the-record material. But if your source places something off-the-record and you listen to it without objection, then you are morally committed to keep it off-the-record. That could cause real problems if you later unearth the same information from another source. A frequently recommended procedure for those times when someone says, "This is off-the-record," is to interrupt immediately and tell the source in that case you'd rather not hear it. The source can then change his or her mind and put it on-the-record, or pass on to something else. Nor should you allow anyone to make something off-the-record retroactively. When a subject tells you something and *then* says, "By the way, that was off-the-record," you shouldn't allow it to pass. If you have consistently stuck to your guns about not accepting off-the-record status, it will now be easier for you to say, "I'm sorry. I never listen to off-the-record material. If you intended that to be off-the-record, you should have told me sooner so I could warn you not to say it." You may end up with some ill feelings between you and your source, but at least you won't feel morally inept.

### **Made-up names and places**

As a general rule, you will not make up people or places. Other writers as well have been caught with their imaginations showing, though not usually with such publicly disastrous results.

There may be times when invented names or places or composite people will be acceptable, even mandatory, but the key is not to try to pass them off as real. If you want to show a hypothetical average man, or a representative average working mother or a composite of several persons, make sure it's obvious that they're made up. The easiest way to do this is to use Ali or Eman or some variation. Or put the name in quotes, to signal the reader that you're dealing with "hypothetical" cases. With or without quotes, hypothetical characters should have nice, simple names. Readers will often accept hypothetical illustrations if they deal with plain, average people, because readers realise it could happen to anyone.

### **Confidential Sources**

If you promise anonymity and confidentiality to a source, you have a moral obligation to live up to your side of the bargain. Confidentiality has been with us a long, long time, and it has been extremely useful. Without it, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein would never have broken a number of their important

Watergate stories. But there may have been an erosion of trust in confidential sources. Many editors now insist on knowing the identity of a confidential source before they will run the material that comes from it. Suppose you have made a promise of confidentiality to a source, and your editor puts you on the spot, demanding the name. What would you do? Live up to your agreement? Take a chance on losing your job? Ethical crises can come in a number of forms.

### **Editorial Bias**

While discussing the subject of interference from editors and executives in the daily reportorial process, let's dismiss a public phantom. A number of people outside journalism seem to believe that editors and executives go around killing stories and hiding facts that disagree with their politics or their biases. It can happen, surely, but it's rare. Newspaper and magazine executives are usually better journalists than the reporters they oversee (that's often how they rose to executive positions in the first place), and they are as eager for the truth, as ready to break a story, as any writer. If you're worried about editorial influence in your future, don't be. Most editors and executives have as high a standard of ethics as yours will ever be, and they are not apt to influence your copy unduly. If you happen across one of the few exceptions, you must then make an ethical choice of your own. Will you accept improper influence to protect your job? Or will you move on to a better newspaper where such practices are not acceptable?

### **Pretence and deception**

There will be times when you're after a story and it would be easier to get your information if you could only pretend to be someone else. What do you do? This is another of those hazy areas that depend largely on the circumstances and what role you wish to play. Can you pretend to be a police officer in order to question the victim of a crime? No. Can you pretend to be a customer in order to check alleged illegal practices at an auto inspection station? Probably. The main dividing line seems to be whether you actively engage in deception or merely go along with pretence. If you tell someone you are an insurance salesman, you are involved in deception—you have lied about yourself to make your position more advantageous. On the other hand, if you attend a meeting of outraged citizens, knowing they intend to turn reporters away, and you sit among them without paper and pencil in evidence, and they assume that you are one of them and you allow them to continue with that assumption, have you really acted unethically? Many people would say not. The outraged citizens might disagree, of course, once they see your story in print. Some writers can never be comfortable in any role but the honest, obvious, straightforward presentation of themselves as writers. Others don't mind deception if it gets good results. You must make the final decision for yourself. And be sure your decision doesn't go against the policies of your publication.

### **Conflicts of interest**

Newspaper and magazine writers, since they have to deal with the public day in and out, are usually friendly people. So they make friends. Being human, they may also make enemies. If you are assigned a story about a friend, a relative or even an enemy, you owe it to your editor and your conscience to make that personal relationship known before you go out to cover the story. The same holds true for any business-story assignment that involves a firm in which you hold some financial interest. You may be perfectly capable of covering such a story objectively and writing it objectively in spite of any personal connection, but the proper ethical position is to make sure the editor knows of your relationship in time to reassign the story, should that be the editor's preference. After all, others may know of your personal relationship as well, and appearances can sometimes be as damaging as actually mishandling the story.

### **Multiple submissions**

For freelancers, a common ethical situation is whether or not to submit an idea or an article simultaneously to more than one potential publication. The standard answer is no. Do not. Learn patience. Send your ideas and your finished articles to one publication at a time. But there is a different stance on this subject, which is being taken by more and more professionals in the field. It holds that editors are not dumb, and they know that writers these days are often sending queries to several magazines at one time. So what do you do? No one can legislate your ethics for you. You'll have to decide how to handle this question on your own. But be aware that some editors may well be offended by the practice of multiple queries and may not be willing to consider future article ideas if they catch you at it. On the other hand,

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maybe such unyielding editors aren't the kind you care to work with anyway. The decision is yours. As for multiple submissions of a finished article, about the only time it is allowable is when you have a topic that is hot, timely and important. Even then, you should notify the editors that you are making multiple submissions.

**Multiple versions**

Here's another ethical situation that confronts mainly freelancers. Once you have gone to a great deal of trouble to gather research and fresh information on a specific topic, there is always the temptation to use your material for more than one article, giving it a fresh slant, a different construction and a whole new set of words. Is this permissible? Generally, yes, as long as subsequent articles are submitted to markets that are not in direct competition with the market that purchased your first version. For example, if you worked hard to prepare a definitive article on database research and placed it with one of the leading computer magazines, you wouldn't then turn around and rewrite the same idea for a competitive computer magazine. Neither editor would be very happy to see the same general information appearing in the pages of a rival magazine. However, if you sell your original version to a computer magazine, then give your story angle a fresh twist and write a piece showing the value of database research to freelance writers and sell it to one of the writing magazines, there should be no cause for unhappiness on the part of either editor. You could then go on to rewrite the material for a business journal, or for a publication aimed at librarians or scholars or historians or any other specialised magazine directed toward a non-competitive audience of people who might benefit from your information.

**Making ethical decisions**

Got the idea? There are many other ethical situations that can tease your conscience: freebies, paid junkets, personal gifts, when to use a concealed tape recorder, use of names of juvenile offenders, breaking a story when you know it may cause injury to someone, using "leaked" information. Consult your common sense. Anyone can tell when, for example, some minor gift from a source is only a pleasant gesture and when it is a would-be bribe. And above all, consult both your conscience and the policy of your newspaper or magazine.

## REVISION

### Importance of language

Whatever the circumstances or where ever a student or a professional is, the importance of language for him can never be undermined. And when it comes to communication, all those tend to be failures if they cannot communicate in good language.

Language is one of the most important areas of human development. Our communication skills set us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, and they're also what bring us together with each other. Language is obviously a vital tool. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but also it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships.

There are four key areas, which must be strived for all the time, as these help in naturally improving one's language, as cramming never helps anybody.

- Reading – devour books and magazines – A journalist must be reading newspapers and magazines on daily basis.
- Listening – keep tuned to good channels – A journalist must be a good listener too.
- Speaking – make a try, you will be better – It has been observed that quite a large number of journalists are not good at communicating verbally, and there are those who can speak very well but when it comes to writing they always leave bad impression.
- Writing – most important but no way impossible – For every journalist, writing is a must, and while doing so, he must be doing it to the best of his abilities.

### Feature writing

Every genre or kind of journalistic writing is a specialised one but it is also done by the novices, definitely checked by the professionals or specialists.

Any piece or writing that falls between the cut-and-dry news story on the one hand, and a fictionalised story or opinionated essay on the other hand can be a feature. When we say that Cut-and-dry news story, it means two things – first based on facts, and secondly, separated from the original stories, that is cut, and dry means something already known and discussed.

Succinctly features can be anything or everything on which one wishes to write.

### Sources of material

A good feature writer has at his disposal the major sources of observation, experience and printed word. However, he can and must amply employ and utilise the sources for the newspapers and the magazines.

Owing to the reason that for feature-writing, the writer has numerous sources at his disposal, the features have gained wide currency and popularity in comparison to the drab nature of news-story and column-writing. Hence, a feature writer must exploit all avenues and sources for making his features interesting, absorbing and informative. Besides, the usual sources of information, books can be and must be consulted. Rather keeping books as one's best friends is the key to success.

Feature-writing can be derived and deduced from several sources; as by observation, experience and printed material. As far as observation and experience is concerned, special talents must be there in the personal character of the writer. Relevant sources should be handled immaculately.

### Internet usage in Feature Writing

No doubt, the Internet has become a huge and valuable source of information for most of the writers, and people tend to use it more considering the fact that, as they say, it is just a click away. It is one of the most easily available sources of information to almost everyone at the fastest pace, and it has become hub of information, which is growing at a fast pace. Due to this reason, the Internet is considered to be the easiest way of information, and in abundance, surely too.

But for quite a few professionals, it is neither the easiest one nor a straight knowledge, as there are a huge number of issues to be tackled; otherwise the information gathered can be contentious, controversial, prejudiced and biased because there are a lot of knowledge bases, which are making them so.

The purpose of the discussion is to making the usage of the Internet more judicious sans making it contentious, as the gathering of the information from any dubious source or website can make the write-up both controversial and unreliable. Hence the idea is to get the 'Right kind of material from the right sources' by clearly identifying the subject, and authenticity of the sources.

### **What makes a good feature and writer?**

A feature bears close similarities with the news-story, as it gives the readers facts in an interesting form, and is framed and adapted to rapid reading. As compared to a news-story, a feature is expanded beyond the basic fact rather is fully supplemented with greater information. A feature usually covers all the underlying causes as well as the background of the news-story.

From the study of the nature and definition of a feature, we may deduce the prominent and major analytic features and characteristics, which make a good feature.

Another basic characteristic and attribute of a good feature is to compose collected material and data efficiently. The underlying point is the skill and ability to write clearly, accurately and with imaginative appeal. It should adopt a style of writing commensurate with the public genius and popular consciousness to make it a delectable and entertaining piece of prose. It should be simple, idiomatic and commonly intelligible to absorb the attention of the readers generally.

A feature writer must know the importance of correct facts and figures. It must be realised that there is nothing, which could be substantiated sans facts and figures. And there must be nothing divorced from reality.

The features should be based on facts and figures, whose accuracy should not be questioned. Their accuracy should be consolidated and unquestionable.

### **Demands of a feature**

If on one hand, certain responsibilities and duties are to be fulfilled by the feature, then there are certain demands of every feature, which must be met by him as a writer of features.

They are: Explanation, Entertainment and Interest, Information and guidance, both sides of picture, Diagnosis of Problems, Favourite of readers, and Attractive prose pieces.

### **Conducting and writing of interviews**

Interview is an important aspect for feature writing. Newspaper and magazine features interviews are similar. The only important difference is that the typical newspaper feature interview may be somewhat less thorough because the newspaper writer frequently faces an imminent deadline.

### **Writing novelty intros**

Why intros or Intros are important? This is the first question, which comes to every person's mind whenever he is asked to write 'good' intros. Though definition of 'good' varies from person to person but generally we can say that 'what appeals to the readers and urges them to read the rest of the feature or article' is a good intro. However, every writer has different tools to make their write-ups interesting. While some apply the simple rule: "Lets talk your heart out to the reader!" or give a "Wake up call to the reader!" However, it is a must to enhance the readability.

It is always challenging the ability of the writer to write interesting intros. The Intros add vigour and colour to the writing in order to make features as interesting as possible, which is possible through imagination coupled with paying intense attention to facts.

However, warning is: Deliberate efforts must be used sparingly, rather the thumb rule is whenever you do it, make it natural, appropriate and unrestrained.

### **Structure of features**

Generally speaking, there might not any significance about the structure of a feature, and people will like to divide it into three major portions, that is, the Intro, body and conclusion. However, with the passage of time and considering the reservations and constraints of the readers, one must be giving due attention to the division, and especially the transition from one portion to another, as a reader must be carried along with it. Otherwise, he might lose interest in the middle, and would never read that article again.

A feature is seldom written in the traditional inverted pyramid pattern or it can be written in a narrative fashion, much like a good joke or anecdote. A good feature requires as much organisation as the straight news story, for the feature has to flow smoothly and parts of a feature story must be kept intact if it is to succeed. In the well-planned story, every paragraph, every sentence, should add to the total effect. However, the structure may vary from feature to feature. However, it goes like this when it is written with the usual standards.

### **Selection of pictures, illustrations and maps**

Many have undoubtedly heard many a time the old cliché “one picture is worth 10,000 words.” This Chinese proverb helps to explain the popular appeal of news pictures. Never every reader-interest survey reveals a dominating interest in ‘picture’ material.

Jack Woodford, a successful pulp novelist and non-fiction author, gives over 50 per cent weightage to write-ups and pictures.

They bring us closer to an event by enabling us to see with our own eyes what a writer has seen with his. Secondly, they somehow seem more truthful than news stories although, of course, pictures can be faked just as can news stories of poverty-stricken children in the foreign countries are hard for many of us to believe, but seeing a picture of these under-nourished children in bread lines and soup kitchens make the situation appear real.

Thirdly, they help us to feel that the persons about whom we read are real people. We see in our paper names of presidents, English royalty and Hollywood stars, but they remain just names until we can associate their names with their pictures.

Pictures appeal vividly to our past experience as well as to certain basic drives or deep seated tendencies, which most humans possess in various degrees of intensity.

### **Features and Editorial Policy**

In Pakistan, every year if not thousands, then hundred of newspapers and magazines are published. In 1988, when the new ordinance for the procurement of the declaration was made easy, it also increased the number of venturists many fold. However, there few which were published for a year or so or they got popularity among the readers.

In the same manner, many youngsters came to journalism but quit after some time, while only few remained in the field and were successful too. This is primarily due to the reason that those writers or journalists did not abide by the editorial policies of the newspapers; hence they are never needed by the newspapers. They deemed that they are not involved in ‘self-expression’ and the policy of the newspaper nor anything else must hinder their way. They forgot that the writings of the newspaper are not literary (that is, to act as ‘literature’ or as a ‘book’) rather these are journalistic, and are written for the readers.

### **Human interest and feature writing**

Human interest is hard to define. Most editors say stories about children, animals or human emotions have automatic human-interest value. Consequently, a story about a little girl and her father combing the city for their missing sibling has guaranteed reader appeal. So does a medical feature about a young woman struggling to cope with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or one about a doctor at the research hospital trying to find a cure for baldness?

Consequently, if you want to write a profile about a man who traps or frees birds for a living, you probably have a sufficiently unusual story for broad reader appeal.

A human-interest story may emphasise such news elements as relationships, drama, conflict, or oddity. While the inverted-pyramid pattern of organisation is not common in this type of feature story, punch and anecdotal leads can be used effectively.

### **Newspaper Feature story**

The concept is to write something like a non-fiction short story: quotation-filled, descriptive, entertaining, informative. First, it needs to do some research – check the newspaper library for previous stories about the subject. Story will be even stronger if a nationally or an internationally recognised source is used.

Beginning reporters working for small-circulation dailies are expected to be able to write both news and feature stories. Often a reporter’s first months on the job may consist of even more feature writing than



weighty news writing, until a “beat” is assigned or the reporter otherwise gains the confidence of the editor.

Feature writing, then, is a crucial weapon in the arsenal of writing talents required of the professional print journalist, particularly now, when broadcast news also is focusing more and more on such popular stories.

A feature story is a journalistic article that is typically both original and descriptive. Some feature stories are geared toward entertainment with little information. Other features inform, but entertain little. The best combine both aspects.

### **The Newspaper Feature story idea**

Newspapers try to perform five roles. There are lovely formal names for these roles—names such as the commercial, information, opinion, public forum and entertainment functions. But readers, who are not at all interested in the functions’ fancy formal names, call the various parts of the newspaper package “advertising, news, editorials, letters to the editor,” and “the comics.”

The basic secret to writing features that readers will like is to recall that although features come in both news and timeless varieties, they are, more importantly, also thing- or people-oriented. A feature about how tombstones are manufactured would be a “thing” story, of course, but an article about the woman and her wondrous bird would be essentially a “people” story.

### **Magazine Feature versus Dailies**

A feature is a dramatised description of the basic facts of news in interesting manner; whereas a column is that form and shape of writing, which is allotted a special place in the paper under a permanent title. Both feature and column draw their material and data from the news-stories, which in turn originate in the society.

A Column aims to laugh off a serious matter in light vein. It may contain the germs of criticism, sarcasm, humour or similar elements; whereas a feature may be written on any subject under the sun and on the earth, in informative, instructive, guiding, educative and in entertaining form in simple language and with dramatised elements. A feature may consist of more than one headline, highlight and with abundant pictorial material, whereas a column is a personal type of composition with no scope of pictorial supplement and material besides of headline and highlight.

### **Writing the Specialised Feature Story**

It’s 12 am, and the deadline for the late edition of your newspaper is 12:45 am. You don’t have much on your mind except late dinner when the city editor beckons you over. He is talking on the phone, but he puts his hand over the mouthpiece and tells you, “Ali that kid who got bitten by the rabid dog just died. Give me a piece on the rabies epidemic we had one or two years ago, will you?”

The city editor means that another reporter is writing the straight-news story of the child’s death and that you are to write a backgrounder on a previous rabies outbreak as an accompanying story. He means now. He means in time for the late edition.

You know enough to trot to the hospitals and look under ‘R’ for rabies (provided record is maintained). With old news clips in hand, the lazy writer—and there are many such—would be content to rehash old facts and hand the city editor a short review of the earlier news event.

### **Modern Feature and its treatment**

The modern feature is definitely marginalised by the time constraints of its readers. No doubt, with the media boom, a lot of information is pouring in for the readers, who also the viewers of the television channels, both local and international. Hence this ‘double dose’ of the print and the electronic media is considered to be pretty heavy on the minds of the people. However, both the media are providing them with a lot of information as well.

It is also a point of concern for the print media men that the readers are facing time constraints besides lack of interest on the part of the readers. On one hand, the media men are fighting on the front of keeping the readers’ interest intact, and on the other, due to the time constraints people are facing due to divergent reasons; it is making the media men take some measures to keep their readership cling to newspaper reading.

## **Modern Feature Writing Technique**

### **The Blundell Technique**

First attempt at feature writing can be a total mess coming back with all kinds of interesting nuggets of information. And resultantly included all of them in the essay. One can thought it might have been great.

Story can be too long, no structure and basically can go nowhere. There are bits and pieces of interesting stuff you have in there but after reading the first few paragraphs, one is totally lost. One doesn't know where the story is heading.

Showing it to a senior definitely helps.

### **Advice to Feature Writers**

Usually, when you're good at something, you don't bother to analyse or think about the mechanics of the technique. You just do it either because it comes naturally to you or because you've been doing it for so long that it's become ingrained in you.

Now, are good writers born or taught? This imponderable is probably asked in all professions, especially ones involving artistic endeavors. It's that old nature versus nurture debate. How much of what you are as a person is a result of your genes and how much is influenced by your environment? No one really knows for sure.

But trying to figure this out is not just an academic exercise. As a writer, an editor or a writing coach, one must know what produces great writing. Is the ability to write well something latent in someone – who, perhaps, was born with the right mix of intelligence, language capabilities and imagination? Or is good writing something that anyone, with the right amount of determination and training, is capable of producing?

One can tilt a little bit towards the nature side of things. You can teach someone to be a capable writer, but the really good ones are born with that special blend of creativity that allows them to rise above the rest.

### **Column Writing**

Column has been described as an editorial with a by-line by the journalists. There are many phases of similarities between a column and an editorial, which makes their distinction and difference, really matter for experts' opinions. They bear close similarities as far as their form, style and material are concerned. However all the columns cannot be said to have close similarities with an editorial. It has been rightly said that column-writing is one -of the most satisfying and rewarding journalistic exercise or assignment which is equal to personalised journalism. It is the field where a column writer is invested with ample independence and liberty to write on any topic or subject, with a clear flair of creative approach.

### **Column writing and columnist in present times**

The present day columnists are very important part of the journalism. With the passage, they are being given more and more importance. See at the newspapers, where the editors are giving more space to the columnists on the Op-Ed pages especially. They are considered to be part and parcel of the political journalism.

Besides, news and analysis by the article writers, columnists have been able to carve out an important niche for themselves. Resultantly, people follow their favourite columnist whenever they switch over from one newspaper to another; hence goes the readership with them to that particular newspaper. This also substantiates the reason that the editors give a lot of importance to the established columnists, as they are not fetching their own readership with them, rather big names among the columnist, also bring better reputation to the newspapers.

Succinctly, columnists have become an important ingredient of the political journalism. Nevertheless, it does not mean that they do not write on other issues.

### **English and Urdu Columnists**

There are certain differences between Urdu and English columns and columnists.

Urdu columnists are addressing the popular readership, as the Urdu newspapers reach every literate reader of the country. Besides this mass appeal, these dailies are also read by the elite also. Hence their

readership varies from the local vendor to the decision makers of the country. With this, wide range of readers; it becomes easy for the columnists to choose subjects of their choice because every subject will be read across the country, which makes the Urdu columnists more popular among the masses.

The Urdu columnists are always coming up with popular ideas, as they find readership of varied senses and tastes. However, they try to discuss the popular ideas, that is, what is being discussed or considered to be a hot subject.

If the English columnists are treating popular ideas, but they are always doing differently through comparisons, contrasts and arguments. Pragmatism is the basic line, which they following all the time.

### **Types of Columns**

There are divergent types of columns owing to the subject variation.

It is said “Columns, like news stories, may fit into several pigeonholes at the same time.”

Different types of columns were discussed in this lecture.

### **Characteristics of columns**

The feature, the column and the editorial are sometimes hard to distinguish; qualities of each cross over and intermingle. But columns offer an opportunity for variety in content that no feature or editorial can approach.

The column always carries the writer’s by-line and, in some cases, the writer’s photograph. Columns appear at regular intervals and usually in the same location in the publication; so loyal readers will know where to find them. Columns may be subject oriented, such as those in hobbies or crafts. Or the columns can be reflection of the writer’s personality, offering humour, opinion, anecdotes.

Unlike feature or editorial, which usually require considerable background and experience, columns can be written by the newest member of the staff.

### **What are the essentials and basic points that go in to the forming of a Column?**

From the foregoing study and examination of the nature and definition of the column-writing, we can analyse the following essentials and basic points which go into the forming of a column.

The column-writing can cater to the needs of the newspapers, periodicals with equal significance.

Column-writing can be equated with the concept and practice of personal journalism of the past.

Columns are written on a multitude of subjects, with a natural flair of conversation and a direct address to the readers without any intermediary. There are syndicated and non-syndicated columns on diverse topics.

It can be said that any subject is an apt subject for the columnist.

Under a column, different news, announcements, and information can be gathered. Columns are really the concise and precise rather pointed comments on the news of the day. Column may include in its range the humour, criticism, wisecracks, judgements, observations, philosophies, apologies etc.

### **Style**

The successful columnist is one who has developed a personal style, but there are some general principles that can be followed.

In this lecture, different styles of writing were discussed.

### **General Style of the Column**

#### **Five General Styles**

There are five general styles, employed in the column-writing. It now depends on the columnist to choose and select the style of a column according to his aptitude, personality and attitude in close consonance with the type of his column. The selection of an appropriate style also depends on the nature of material a columnist desires to employ.

#### **Structure of a Column**

Different structures, both technical and structure, were discussed in this lecture.

**Column Writing Tips**

Many young writers prefer to write columns rather than straight news or features. Straight news is deemed to be boring – covering press conferences and reporting who said what. Feature stories involve too much reporting and require discipline to follow a set structure. Columns, which are essentially opinion pieces, are much looser – and therefore easier. Or so it seems.

Anybody can be trained to write straight news because it's very mechanical. Feature articles, though also somewhat formulaic, are harder because they require good writing. But column writing is the hardest type of writing of all because it requires good thinking.

To write a good column requires more than just the ability to articulate an opinion. Your opinions must make sense, provide insight and be convincing. And you must do all this in an entertaining way.

**Selection of a topic**

There are certain things, which must be kept in mind. However, it is always considered – 'how readers will react to it' – prior to selecting the topic.

Selection of a topic is though a difficult task, but it plays an important role in the success of a columnist. So a lot of thought must be put before writing a column. In certain, even brainstorm with others is also a good idea because besides giving you new ideas, they add something to your arguments. Plus it also helps in seeing both sides of the same picture. However, it must never be taken for granted.

Finding a new topic or subject every day or every alternative day is definitely difficult, and usually regular columnists can fall prey to this. Sometimes they are looking for subjects.

**Qualities of a column writer****Personal**

A columnist must possess some qualities at the personal level, as these are essential for him to be known as a better individual as well.

**Professional**

Someone with just personal qualities is never a successful professional, until he possesses certain qualities, which are a must for any professional.

Qualities of a column writer were discussed in this lecture.

**What must be practised by a columnist?**

It is a must for a columnist to do his job well. Besides some personal and professional capabilities, he must be practising a few steps.

He must have qualities, both at the personal level and at the professional as well. He should never let himself become stagnant, as he looks for constant improvement in all spheres.

A few are must qualities of a good writer, which he ought to possess.

**Sources of material of Columns**

Sources of material for columns depend on their types. For instance, if one wants to write a serious column, for background one has to look for book, magazines and newspapers, as usually such a matter is available. However, for an impressionistic, the columnist will use his creative powers.

However, various factors must be kept in mind as per types.

There are many sources of columns' materials. However the source of material usually is consistent with the nature and the structure of the column to be handled. In case the column relates to a simple matter, the sources shall be correspondingly easy to be handled or otherwise a complex one.

Sources of material for the specialised columns, as on health, stamps, books etc. are fairly easy and readily available. The specialist writer of the columns may be a doctor, a scientist, a sportsman, physician, a religious scholar, a scholar, for literary column etc. They disseminate their ideas and views with special reference to the modern research and various other references to refresh the readers with the learning in their specialized columns.

**Useful writing devices**

Let's look at some standard writing devices that can strengthen your material in the process of revision. Once you add these simple techniques to your personal writing kit and learn to incorporate them automatically into the first draft of anything you write, a lot of the pain will go out of the revising process.

**Common Writing Problems**

Mastering all the available techniques will take time. Excellence in writing, like excellence at any pursuit, takes practice and application. But once you learn to gather your research materials, structure your writing, and use all the literary tools efficiently and properly, you are well on your way.

Every award-winning writer whose material appears in this book has gone through the learning process. Each has learned from his or her errors and gone on to write better features. Some writers don't. The key is one of commitment. If you are serious about writing, don't let mental and literary lapses get you down. By all means, avoid them whenever possible. But if a mistake slips through, don't ignore it. Learn from it. Despite repeated attempts at developing good write-ups, there are numerous problems, which mar the writing capabilities of the writers – ultimately causing annoyance among the readers.

**Writing the column**

There are certain aspects, which must be kept in mind prior to proceeding for writing the Column. Besides this, there are a few thumb rules, which must be practised by the columnist, even after writing the column.

Certain thumb rules were mentioned in this lecture.

**Article writing**

Three aspects to be discussed under this title: Introduction, Aspects and Article writing in the present age. Article is an important element of magazine journalism, which is preferred by all, that is, both novices and experience writers. Interestingly, it has never seen a decline. However, there a new writers, who try their hands with changes in structure.

**How to write an article?**

A good article must entertain, which is dished out from a service of catchy facts, figures and formulations, and the fact should be not only accurate, but also plentiful. There should always be rule that collect always more information than we think we are going to use; so you choose the best and the most apropos in making the points.

**Types and subjects of article**

There are seven broad types of article, which are usually considered by editors, while the subjects are ranging from political to personal experiences. Besides this, there are certain factors behind the making of articles.

Seven broad types were discussed.

**How to successfully write?**

Article writing is an excellent way to get your message out, especially if it appeals to your readers because they expect and enjoy quality articles. Meet their needs and they will come back for more.

Writing your first article can be very challenging for some and not as challenging for others. Whether you feel challenged or not, you can become a skilled article writer by learning and practicing the following tips.

**Articles writing mistakes**

Making your articles available for reprints by publishers is the cornerstone strategy in building an avalanche of readers.

If you want your articles to be picked up and massively distributed by others, here are 16 common mistakes, which must be avoided by the article writers.

**Writing the article**

There are four elements of a good article – encompassing the write-up from the beginning to the end – which are primarily used for keeping readers’ attention intact, as these help in making your article interesting.

Various parts of the article were discussed in this lecture.

**What to do when you have written the article?**

Besides writing the first draft, there are certain steps, which must be actualised, after one has written the article

What to do? is the question answered in this lecture.

**Ten standard article formats**

These are classified as articles on the basis of the material, which were discussed in this lecture.

**Legal and ethical considerations for writers**

The press in this country these days is among the freest in the world. The brilliance of our forebears was in linking press freedoms with the other guaranteed freedoms — religion, right of assembly and speech and redress of grievances. This intertwining of revered freedoms has made it doubly difficult to tinker with the free status of the press, no matter how volatile public opinion may become. (And, unfortunately, in times of national unrest, there are always a few “public-spirited” individuals who would like to see one or another of the First Amendment freedoms curtailed.)

No government can afford to give blanket freedom to its press system.

