Writing a News Feature Story

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Article Word Count: 704

When writing a feature story, one of the first things you must consider is the target audience. Is it for the general public or is it for a specific group of readers? If you are writing for the readers of a lifestyle magazine or for the 'Life' section in the newspaper, for example, you would need to consider whether you should write from the view of a third person or second?

Most feature stories are written from the third person. Exceptions where the second person is used instead is when the story is about 'what you should get', say, for an occasion or a festive season. Seldom is the first person used for feature writing except when the author is the narrating his or her own experience.

Take for example the first paragraph of a feature story on entrepreneurship written in the third person:

John lost his job two years ago due to the economy downturn. Believing it to be only temporary, he actively seeks employment while upgrading his skills through short-term courses. Today, he is still unemployed. Now at the age of 41, he is forced to consider self-employment and entrepreneurship but is hesitant because he has been an employee his entire working life.

If this first paragraph is written in the second person, it would read:

You have been an employee your entire working life. Two years ago, you lost your job due to the economy downturn. Believing the downturn to be only temporary, you actively seek employment while upgrading your skills through short-term courses. Today, you are still unemployed.

As you can read from the two approaches, the third person's voice draws the readers into the story better than the second person because there is no need for personal involvement in the story unless it is a call to action, for example, to buy a gift for Christmas. It works fine to use the second person if you are writing for a lifestyle magazine showcasing shopping goods, but not quite fine for a news feature story that aims to convey a message containing facts and advices.

When writing for a news feature story, therefore, four components should be considered: anecdotes, quotes, facts, and statements of theme.

An anecdote in a news feature story should be written from a third person as the narrator. The purpose of this is to use content 'pull' to attract readers to a sense of reading a novel or a storybook. For a feature story to be successful, at least one anecdote should be included to help readers visualize the 'reality' of a situation or the life of the person being told in the anecdote.

A feature should also include facts and quotes for angles of human interest. Facts may be research finding that quantify the content of the story, official statistical figures, or actual events witnessed by people:

According to official figures from the manpower department, unemployment is now at 4.5 percent.

Quotes are actual account of events by witnesses or spoken comments of people interviewed. Quotes can be direct or indirect. For a feature story to be credible and interesting, both direct and indirect quotes are necessary.

A direct quote is the actual spoken words by persons interviewed:

"I have been an employee my entire working life," said Sam Doe, 41, a retrenched worker.

An indirect quote is a paraphrased or rephrased writing of actual words spoken by persons interviewed:

John Doe, 41, said he has been an employee his entire working life.

Statements of theme are sentences that links original theme of the story to various parts of the feature. This is especially useful when there are multiple sections or story points that need to be expanded in different areas of the feature. The objective of statements of theme is to draw the readers back to the main theme of the story.

The feature story is usually written with each paragraph pulling the readers forward to read on to the point of closure or a conclusion or instructions to proceed further. It is usual to end the story by drawing the readers' attention back to the points being told at the lead paragraph, but with added knowledge on the subject.

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