

Understanding Feature Writing

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Key concepts, structure, and techniques for crafting compelling feature stories.

1. What Is a Feature?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A longer-form, narrative-driven article that explores a subject in depth, often with a human-interest angle.
Purpose	Inform, entertain, and engage readers; provide context, background, and nuance that straight news cannot.
Typical Length	800–3,000 words (print); 1,200–2,500 words (online, with multimedia).
Common Venues	Magazines, newspaper weekend sections, online long-form platforms, newsletters, podcasts.

2. Core Elements of a Feature

Element	What It Does	Tips
Hook / Lead	Captures attention in the first 1–3 sentences.	Use a vivid scene, startling fact, compelling quote, or a question that promises a story.
Nut Graf	Summarizes the story’s angle and why it matters (usually after the lead).	One concise paragraph; answer “who, what, why, how, and when.”
Narrative Arc	Gives the piece a story-like structure (setup ? conflict ? resolution).	Follow classic storytelling beats: inciting incident, rising action, climax, denouement.
Characters / Sources	Real people whose experiences illustrate the theme.	Provide background, voice, and stakes; use direct quotes to add authenticity.
Scene Setting	Descriptive details that place readers in the moment.	Use sensory language (sight, sound, smell) sparingly—enough to paint a picture without overloading.

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Element	What It Does	Tips
Data & Context	Facts, statistics, history that ground the story.	Integrate smoothly; avoid “info?dump.” Use charts/infographics when appropriate.
Conclusion / Takeaway	Leaves the reader with a lasting impression or call?to?action.	Echo the hook, broaden the perspective, or pose a reflective question.

3. Types of Features

Type	Focus	Typical Structure
Profile	A person’s life, work, or personality.	Chronological or thematic; interweave anecdotes and interview excerpts.
Trend / Trend? Spotting	Emerging cultural, technological, or social movements.	Explain origin, current impact, future implications; include expert commentary.
Human?Interest	Emotional, personal stories that illustrate larger issues.	Strong narrative arc; often start in the middle of action (“in?media?res”).
Explainer / How? To	Break down a complex topic for a general audience.	Clear headings, step?by?step flow, sidebars for definitions.
Investigative Feature	Deep dive into a problem, often with original research.	Heavy on data, documents, multiple sources; may include a timeline.
Travel / Place	Describes a location, culture, or experience.	Rich sensory detail, local voices, practical tips.

4. Research & Preparation

1. Identify the Angle

- What makes the story unique?
- Who is the audience and what will they care about?

2. Gather Sources

- Primary: interviews, observations, personal experience.
- Secondary: reports, academic studies, public records.

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3. Create a Beat Sheet

- List each “beat” (scene or point) you plan to cover, in order.