



Personality Profiles and Narrative Nonfiction

or

How in the World Can I Dig Deep in 1,000 Words or Less?

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Features: From Good to Great

- At their best, features about people have a beginning, middle, and end; they are closer to a short story than a news story.
- Good features entertain or inform. The GREATEST features both and inform—and inspire the readers to take action, whether it’s to start a similar venture, take a vacation or write a letter to a congressman.
- In the best features about people, interviewers dig deep and show how the subjects experienced some sort of change, internally or externally, that will resonate with the reader.
- The best include interviews with others so the reader gets a 360-degree view of the subject.
- Rather than use vague words such as “many,” “most” and “some,” great features use specifics such as \$5 million, 27 percent, 3,000 members.



Interviewing Techniques

- Do your research
- Advise the subject of the interview purpose and publication timeline
- Start with easy questions
- Ask “how” and “why” questions that cannot be answered “yes” or “no”
- Verify facts (including spelling of the name)
- Know a “money” quote when you hear it (and how to make sure you got it right)
- Ask who else you should speak with
- Ask what you should have asked



Interviewing Techniques

- Phone vs. in-person vs. e-mail: advantages and disadvantages?
- Do you let all subjects review the article before publication?





Nonfiction Narratives/ Personal Essays

- Most successful essays begin with the narrator having a problem, then explain how the problem was conquered/faced, then share the takeaway value with the reader.
- As in good fiction writing, these four words are crucial to good personal essays: Something happens, somebody changes.
- A reminiscence about how good or bad one's first day on the farm or agribusiness may be a great vignette... but it needs to flow seamlessly into the piece's larger purpose.
- Because this is a mini-story, the piece needs to come full circle; that is, the conclusion ideally will tie into the opening paragraph.



Make the Most of What You've Got

- Don't repeat within the main story information that appears in captions, charts, boxes, etc.
- Don't be afraid to truncate. Use the part of the quote that brings the subject to life. Eliminate throat clearing.
- Do show us the person's environment—office, vehicle, desktop, etc., if the photo doesn't.
- Do let us know early on what makes this person worth our reading time—a new process, award winner, etc.



Questions?

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