

Feature Writing

By: Kavya Dashora

This reference book can be useful for
BBA, MBA, B.Com, BMS, M.Com, BCA, MCA
and many more courses for Various Universities



NEERAJ
PUBLICATIONS
www.neerajbooks.com

Published by:



NEERAJ PUBLICATIONS

(Publishers of Educational Books)

Sales Office : 1507, 1st Floor,

Nai Sarak, Delhi-110 006

E-mail: info@neerajbooks.com

Website: www.neerajbooks.com

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Typesetting by: Competent Computers

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Sample Preview of The Chapter

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FEATURE WRITING

PRINCIPLES OF FEATURE WRITING

1

What is Feature Writing?

INTRODUCTION

Expression of thoughts is the fundamental need of the present world. As we all know that the medium of expression is of two types: the print media and the electronic media. Print media includes newspapers and magazines i.e. the printed material through which the information can be circulated. The electronic media is also called as cabled media or wired media where the data transfer is done electronically as in television, radio and internet. Certainly the electronic media has an edge over the print media because it gives the information within seconds and also the live coverage of the incidence. The dependence on media for information has increased many folds because of its precision, speed and accuracy. In this chapter, we will deal with the print media and the significance of writing a good feature or article which appeals to the readers. No matter how fast the electronic data is transferred, the print media is still considered very reliable because of its reproducibility and preservation comfort.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA

The term media defines any interphase between the publisher and the reader or viewer whether electronic or print to convey a message, thought or news. The print media includes magazines, books, newspapers and all printed news and information

sources. Journalist is a person who collects the information from the sources and conveys it to the media for the readers. He has a vital role to be played in the print media. The feature is an article which differs from the news article by giving a background and the analysis, having a strong human interest and expresses the background of writer and publisher.

WHAT IS A FEATURE?

The feature should be in a form of story so that it is able to give a background and the analysis of the entire episode, it should have some human interest, the style of writing should be informal and it should be in an area in which the writer has an expertise. It can be understood as the main article in a magazine or new paper feature, mainly covering the cover or front page. It can be focused on one subject-say, a feature article on Amitabh Bacchan will cover the entire journey of his filmy and political career. It is an interesting way to present the coverage or any topic which public attention.

Definitions

One of the ways in which we can define a feature is to understand what a feature is not. Like we can say that the feature is not a news item

- (i) A feature is not a news report
- (ii) A feature is not an editorial
- (iii) A feature is not a regular column

A feature is an analysis of a situation where the writer introduces the subject, refers relevant literature,

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put forward his personal opinion and finally offers a meaningful solution to the problem.

Profitability: Financial and Social

Writing only for the academic or creative satisfaction is a separate issue all together. There is a cost incurred for all the material purchased, the postage paid, the correspondence done, the travel done to collect the data, charges for photographs, permissions, etc. If all these are borne by the writer with no hope of reimbursements then it is practically not possible for him to sustain. The finance is a major part about which the writer needs to worry about.

VARIOUS ASPECTS OF FEATURES

The feature can be understood as a subjective part of a periodical. This is the writer's discretion to choose a topic and express his views. He can choose any topic ranging from dowry to adult education to the labour class in villages. Whatever the writer wishes to write he should follow a general plan or format of writing keeping in mind the matter of the subject chosen. He should also understand the topic in social context and go through the basic material available. He should have his own point of view on the topic which he must express. The writer should use the language and style which is related to the publisher and also explains his own individual style. The feature writer should have an expertise on the subject, his work should be the result of deep research, and the work should have a clear objective, a personal viewpoint and precision in language. It can be concluded that the various aspects of feature writing are subject matter, social context, basic material available, personal perspective and language.

Source of Inspiration and Subject Matter

The writer can derive inspiration from any thing in and around the society. He can draw inspiration from a child studying under lamp post, a vegetable vendor very determined to send his daughter to school, an educated lady being the victim of dowry, child trafficking, etc. He should carry a small pocket diary with him so that he can note down small packets of information which are scattered in the world. These will help him later to elaborate and relate to the text he is writing. In addition to this if he even frames a short story or some lines in the context of the view he will be able to represent as a fresh picture to the readers. This way he will directly touch the lives of the people he is writing about and the people he is writing for.

Social Context

The feature which is being written by the writer should have a social reference. His work should make the reader think and work in that direction. He should act as an eye opener through his work to the problems of the society, topics which are ignored and need to think about or anything which is related to the mutual concern in the society. It is well understood that everyone cannot go to all places and experience the similar things. It is only through the writings the world appears much smaller and the message can be conveyed to a larger number of people through one attempt. The social issues require immediate attention and that can be achieved through impact making feature writing. To make the feature more impressive, the pictures, location, interviews with the local people or victims can be added. This will give the personal touch to the readers and will form the desired picture in front of their eyes.

Basic Material

The feature writer should have the basic materials or essential parts of a feature in his writing else the feature appears incomplete and do not leave the desired mark on the society. His feature should include instances he or we face in day-to-day life. When he sees something whatever the first reaction or first thing comes to mind when he looks at situation is his initial response. The writer should carry a notepad to jot down all the different situations and his reactions to each one of them. Many writers pick up a common topic and leave it on a point where personal or individual thinking needs to be done. These issues result from some pre- thinking. Thorough research must be done by reading books, articles, interviews etc., many a times the required help can be taken from research institutes or government organisations, The interviews added to a feature gives it a authentic touch altogether. It expresses the people's view about the problem which you want to bring before the society. To collect the information, fact, figures, data etc., the writer has to travel at various places to get authenticated data. The interview of the local population enhances the addition of facts and attracts the readers. An interview of the people who feel attached to or affected by the cause in the society will help to present your feature in a more powerful way. Another inclusion in the feature to make

it interesting is that it should be well supported with picture and figures, illustrations and even cartoon or funny pictures. This not only gives a fresh approach to the report which makes the reader more enthusiastic about reading. The writer should remember that Photographs always add to the excitement of the illustration. They help to show the real picture to the readers which you try to say in words. The pictures always leave a greater impact. He can also give the reference of the books, dictionaries and journals he had referred.

Perspective of Writer

Perspective is a way you look at the problem entirely by your angle. It is only your personal touch to the feature which will make the reader feel that one among him is writing and he will also realize the problem. Adding your own opinion to the feature will also help you to be the virtual part of the society or problem you are writing about.

Language and Style

The language for writing a feature is very important and should be taken proper care. The previous versions of the publication can help the writer to follow the pattern of language the publication is following. Starting from the beginning, middle and the end should not much deviate from the language style a magazine uses and is specially known for. Depending upon the type of publication you are writing for you have to decide your own language to express your feature. If the publication is following a different pattern and the writer is going in a different way than it appears a complete disaster. The writer should remember that each magazine is known for their distinctive styles of language. It is better if the writer do not give straight conclusions instead put forward his opinion in the form of a discussion for the reader to ponder upon. Since people travel for different purpose yet many a times basic situation are faced by all of them like, place to stay, local shopping, good eating joints and travel trade offices. These helps can be rendered in your feature and make an effort to ease the journey and stay.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A FEATURE

The writer should write a feature that is immediately acceptable in the society, selected by the

periodical and establishes him as a writer. For this, he has to follow certain unsaid rules in the field of feature writing.

Sincerity

You should decide what should be your topic of feature and then very committedly pursue it for writing. He should do all the initial research about the topic and must not adopt short cut policy. Many a times a topic goes around and becomes the most discussed topic then .The writers should strictly avoid rumours and any independent opinion without any proof. This not only reduces his credibility but also generates confusion among the readers. Suppose your topic for writing is the children working at hotels or roadside dhabbas. Go to the library and collect the relevant information including the statistics, previous measure to uplift them, their developing into illiterate, unemployed, anti social, etc., which disturb our society. How far the measures have been successful to uplift them socially can also be included?

Entertainment

Every writing piece is like a mirror which reflects the individual writer's style, background and selection of words. He should understand that unlike a book, a newspaper and periodical magazine is read till the next issue comes up may be the next day or the next week. He has only one chance to shoot his article and make a mark in the reader's mind. Adding many emotions make a confused article but instead the writer can add one or two emotions to bring about the modulation in his writing style. He can start in a friendly tone, making middle a serious one and finally the conclusion can be humorous so ease up the reader.

Social Objectives

Writer has a huge responsibility towards the public because public relies a lot on print media. Understanding his responsibility towards the society he should avoid writing anything which incites violence terrorism, obscenity etc. In this writing he should not criticise or mock the weaker section, handicaps under privileged. He should make use of his social skill by raising those topics which need a thorough involvement of the society and formulate an amicable solution to the problem. He should realize that he is the one who can bind various sections of the society in one single chord.

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Informative and Educative

Any feature submitted to the publisher must have some information conveyed to the society. This will help the world to bring required small changes for which no leader or political party will have time. The language used should be very guarded, simple and relevant. It helps to spread awareness and knowledge regarding current happening in the society, country and world. They also bring in news those area or aspects which require immediate attention. Apart from the serious information, many advertisement features, information bureau and counsellor can be spotted well in this column.

Clarity

The feature written should be very clear to the publisher and the readers. The content should have clarity starting from the topic, moving to the main body of the feature and finally in the end the conclusion, motive of writing the feature and the suggestions offered should be clear to anyone who sees it. Clarity also depends upon the adequate research done on the topic. If you keep on scrutinizing your own written material then chances of error reduced and clarity of thoughts increases.

The Personal Touch

The information regarding the topic can be collected from the library books journals, etc., but what makes an impact is the personal participation of the writer. He should also quote his experiences while writing the feature so that his involvement is also seen and the readers feel as if the writer is a part of the suffering or joy or pleasure or excitement. His suggestion for a solution also helps the reader to start thinking about it. It is obvious that the first hand stories or narrations always raise an interest and inquisitiveness among the readers. When the writer writes a feature taking care of his personal touch in all the aspects, he generates more interest in the reader and makes his feature the preferred article to read.

Authenticity

Since the people follow the environmental features related to their lives with lot of interest and on regular basis, the writer should work hard for collecting genuine material. His work should have authenticity of work, emotions and expressions. In the temptation

of getting more returns in monetary terms he should not write those facts or incidences which do not hold good to the truth, make any controversies or do not exist. His writing should depict his view but not his preference. He should not write in a biased way or to please some big social figure. If he tries to make small term benefits by deviating from his responsibility as a feature writer, he will lose a mark in the academic world. His data and instances should be true and authenticated. For collecting the genuine data he should go to the library and collect the relevant information including the statistics, previous measure to conserve a culture and how far the measures have been successful to conserving and promoting them in modern society. His data should be well studied and incorporated with facts. While writing the feature he should not brush the controversies or sensitive issues if is not equipped with the proper facts and figures data.

TYPES OF FEATURES

Features can be of many types and can be classified by subject, publication, etc. The writer should be aware of the type of publication he is writing for. The writer should first realise the type of publication and the type of feature they usually publish. If he has the topic for the available publisher then he can pursue the work further else he would be wasting his time and money both along with the publisher's. It should be very clear that a filmy magazine or a Sunday travel column should not include thorough financial or a trade tourism article as the readers will get disappointed to read it. A business magazine should not have a light travel article as it will not serve its purpose of being published there. The periodicity of the journal can also be considered as the fortnightly magazines will not publish the daily happening and features related to it. The subject written has to be with a contemporary relevance. The outdated subject will be published by no publisher as it does not attract the readers and sale of the printed material gets affected.

Subject Based

The topic which the writer chooses to write on classifies his subject. It is very important that he submit the appropriate subject feature to the appropriate publisher. Ideally, the subject based features are