

the art and craft of feature writing based on wall street journal guide william e blundell

The art and craft of feature writing is a nuanced and captivating aspect of journalism that blends storytelling with in-depth reporting. William E. Blundell, in his seminal work "The Wall Street Journal Guide to Feature Writing," provides valuable insights into the techniques and principles that underpin this genre. Feature writing stands apart from hard news reporting, allowing journalists to explore subjects in greater depth, employ creative narrative techniques, and engage readers on an emotional level. In this article, we will explore the essential elements of feature writing as articulated by Blundell, including the structure, style, research, and the importance of voice.

Understanding Feature Writing

Feature writing is not merely about presenting facts; it is about weaving those facts into a compelling narrative. This genre often dives into the human experience, capturing the essence of people, places, and events in a way that resonates with readers. Blundell emphasizes that a good feature article should evoke emotion, provoke thought, and provide insight.

Key Characteristics of Feature Writing

1. **Narrative Structure:** Unlike traditional news articles that adhere to the inverted pyramid style, feature stories often follow a narrative arc, complete with a beginning, middle, and end.
2. **Descriptive Language:** Feature writing relies heavily on vivid descriptions and sensory details, painting a picture in the reader's mind.
3. **Character Development:** Effective feature stories often center around individuals whose experiences reveal broader themes or issues.
4. **Emotional Engagement:** The best feature articles connect with readers on an emotional level, making them care about the subjects being discussed.
5. **In-depth Research:** Feature writing requires thorough research, often involving interviews, background checks, and a deep dive into the subject matter.

The Structure of Feature Articles

Blundell outlines a flexible structure for feature stories that can vary based on the subject and style, but certain elements are often present.

1. The Lead

The lead is critical in capturing the reader's attention. Blundell suggests various techniques for writing effective leads:

- Anecdotal Leads: Start with a personal story or anecdote that ties into the main theme.
- Descriptive Leads: Use vivid descriptions to set the scene.
- Quotation Leads: Begin with a compelling quote that encapsulates the article's essence.

2. The Nut Graph

The nut graph answers the “so what?” question. It is typically placed after the lead and explains the main point of the article, providing context and relevance to the reader.

3. Body Paragraphs

The body of the feature should be organized thematically or chronologically, depending on the story. Each paragraph should build upon the previous one, providing more depth and detail. Blundell emphasizes the importance of pacing and flow, ensuring that readers remain engaged throughout.

4. The Conclusion

A strong conclusion ties together the themes presented in the article. It may revisit the lead or offer a reflective thought that leaves the reader pondering long after they finish the piece.

Research and Interviews

In feature writing, thorough research is paramount. Blundell stresses that successful feature writers must:

1. Conduct Comprehensive Research: This involves gathering background information, statistics, and expert opinions that support the narrative.
2. Engage in Meaningful Interviews: Interviews with subjects or experts are crucial. Effective interviewing techniques include:
 - Asking Open-Ended Questions: Encourage subjects to share their thoughts and feelings.
 - Listening Actively: Pay attention and respond to cues to elicit deeper responses.
 - Building Rapport: Establish trust to make subjects feel comfortable sharing personal stories.
3. Verify Information: Ensure that all facts are checked and sources are credible, maintaining journalistic integrity.

The Importance of Style and Voice

Blundell emphasizes that style and voice are critical components of feature writing. A writer's unique voice can set a feature apart from others, making it more engaging and memorable.

1. Developing a Unique Style

Writers should strive to develop a style that reflects their personality while remaining appropriate for the subject matter. This can include choices in sentence structure, word choice, and tone.

2. Finding Your Voice

Finding one's voice involves a deep understanding of the topic and the audience. Blundell encourages writers to:

- Be Authentic: Write in a way that feels natural and true to oneself.
- Adapt to the Audience: Consider the interests and expectations of the readership to tailor the voice accordingly.

Ethical Considerations in Feature Writing

Ethics play a vital role in feature writing. Blundell highlights the importance of:

1. Accuracy: Ensuring all information presented is factual and well-researched.
2. Fairness: Representing all sides of a story, especially in controversial topics.
3. Sensitivity: Being mindful of the impact of the story on subjects and communities involved.
4. Transparency: Disclosing any potential conflicts of interest and being honest about the writing process.

The Role of Editing and Revising

Editing is an essential part of the feature writing process. Blundell advises writers to:

1. Take a Break: After completing a draft, step away for a short time to gain perspective before revising.
2. Read Aloud: Hearing the words can help identify awkward phrases and improve flow.
3. Seek Feedback: Sharing the piece with trusted colleagues can provide valuable insights and

suggestions.

4. Revise Ruthlessly: Be prepared to cut unnecessary sections and refine the narrative for clarity and impact.

Conclusion

The art and craft of feature writing, as illustrated by William E. Blundell in "The Wall Street Journal Guide to Feature Writing," is a blend of creativity, research, and ethical journalism. By mastering the structure, style, and voice, writers can create compelling narratives that resonate with readers. As the journalism landscape continues to evolve, the need for well-crafted feature stories remains vital, offering depth and insight in a world often dominated by brevity and immediacy. Aspiring feature writers should embrace the principles laid out by Blundell, allowing their passion for storytelling to shine through in every piece they create.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the key elements of effective feature writing as outlined in William E. Blundell's guide?

Blundell emphasizes the importance of storytelling, character development, and a strong narrative arc, along with thorough research and vivid descriptions to engage readers.

How does Blundell suggest writers find compelling story ideas for features?

He advises writers to observe their surroundings, engage with people, and look for unique angles on everyday events, as well as to stay curious and open to inspiration from various sources.

What role does structure play in feature writing according to the Wall Street Journal guide?

Blundell highlights that structure is crucial for guiding the reader through the piece; he suggests using a clear beginning, middle, and end, along with strategic pacing to maintain interest.

Can you explain Blundell's perspective on interviewing for feature writing?

Blundell believes that effective interviewing is central to feature writing; he recommends preparing open-ended questions, actively listening, and building rapport with subjects to elicit rich, detailed responses.

What techniques does Blundell recommend for crafting compelling leads in feature articles?

He suggests using hooks that draw readers in immediately, such as intriguing anecdotes, provocative questions, or vivid imagery, to capture attention right from the start.

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