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Kinds of Media Writing  
The ABCD of Media Writing

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## **Essentials of Good Writing**

### **Is writing an art or a craft?**

Arts and crafts describes a wide variety of activities involving making things with one's own hands. Arts and crafts is usually a hobby.

Some craft (art skills) have been practised for centuries, others are more recent inventions.

A lot of articles and discussions in the writing field focus on whether writing is more an art or a craft. Opinions differ widely on the subject. My view is that the “craft” of writing is the learning or apprentice stage of writing and that the “art” of writing is the more freed and advanced stage of expression. In this sense, creative writing – in its higher or optimal state – is an art. Let’s think about this in a progressive sense. First, writing or creative writing, like any of the arts, must begin in the crafting stage. The crafting stage is the stage in which the budding artisan learns the tools of the trade. In the apprentice stage, one studies and gains the skills, abilities, and devices needed in the area of artistry. For example, in the early craft stages, a young painter first masters skills of drawing, shading, and perspective. Next, studies in color begin. The artist experiments with coloured chalks and paints, working with different mediums, learning to mix and use color effectively.

Some elementary aspects of writing are learned in school. The basics of grammar, composition, and, often, the earliest experiences in writing are cultivated in these years. However, the writer-to-be is

often going a step further from his or her peers from the early school years on – fascinated with words and print, taking an especial pleasure in writing and expression. Also, in reading the biographies and autobiographies of famous writers, it is a rare author who has not been – and continues to be – an avid reader.

Newsletter that documents his continual journey of learning and his continual ongoing artistic discoveries as a painter.

It is in this stage, where writing moves from being craft to art, that individual style and voice emerge. An artist's work begins to become more distinctive, less formulated and emulative. This is usually a more confident, productive, and focused stage for an artist. It is also a decidedly nonconformist stage.

## **Kinds of Media Writing**

### **1. News**

News writing is a particular style of prose that is used to report on the basic facts of a particular event. Whether for newspaper publication or broadcasting, it answers the five Ws in the first few sentences or lines. This structure, which focuses on the who, what, when, where, why and how, is also known as the inverted pyramid (the most important information is communicated first).

News writing is both precise and direct, so it's rare you'll find any jargon — it's a very formal style. As a rule of thumb, news writers won't use

long words or phrases when short ones will do, nor will they use the same word more than once in a sentence or paragraph if it can be avoided.

## **2. Feature**

Feature writing presents newsworthy events through a narrative, but it differs from news writing in the respect that it relies on creativity and an element of subjectivity to emotionally connect with readers. Its purpose is to entertain, which is why it covers a lot of ‘soft’ news — think art, entertainment, sport and lifestyle.

Feature stories also build on news that has already been reported, aiming to humanise the person behind the story while offering more depth and insight. Examples of features include profiles, spot features and live-in stories. Spot features run alongside breaking news events, so are often produced to a tight deadline, whereas live-in stories are more in-depth, providing a closer look at a particular place that readers wouldn’t usually experience. Reporters spend a lot of time at the places they’re writing about, which can include A&E departments, hospices, police stations and homeless shelters.

## **3. Reviews**

Reviews are a staple of media and journalism, and the aim is to offer an opinion or recommendation to readers. Unlike news writing, you can be subjective and adopt a more informal tone; creating a good rapport with your audience is essential if they’re going to take your views into consideration.

More specifically, the role of a reviewer is to inform, describe, analyse and advise, covering almost any topic, product or event. Some common

examples include TV shows, films, restaurants, concerts, books and products.

#### **4. Columns**

A column is a recurring article or piece most commonly found in newspapers and magazines, and the writer is free to express their own opinion in the space allocated to them. What separates a column from news pieces and reviews is that it is typically written by the same journalist on the same theme or subject each time, making it a regular feature in popular tabloids and broadsheets.

There are many different types of columns, including advice, fashion, food, gossip, sport and music. Good columnists write the way they talk without sacrificing good grammar and English usage. While it's important to be informal and friendly, columnists don't have a lot of space to communicate what they want to say, so it's best to avoid jargon and including too much material or detail.

#### **5. Investigative**

Investigative writing often uncovers political corruption, serious crimes or corporate wrongdoing, so it requires a writer to spend many months researching and planning their story before publication. Due to the sensitive nature of investigative journalism, it's important for writers to maintain high standards of accuracy at all times, with any claims backed up by evidence they have verified themselves.

Investigative writers will usually receive tips about stories, and will spend time developing hypotheses and planning additional research before deciding to investigate them fully.

## **6. Digital/online**

Online news consumption around the world is growing exponentially, and while the basic principles of writing apply, including accurate reporting, fact-checking, and proper grammar and spelling, it requires writers to craft copy that best suits this medium.

Concise and clear writing is particularly important in the digital space, mainly because internet users want information fast and in an easily-digestible manner. However, headlines also need to be considered carefully. Why? Because straightforward headlines work better online than indirect headlines, and they will not be picked up by search engines at all if they don't include any keywords.

## **7. Sports**

“Sports writing is a form of journalism or creative nonfiction in which a sporting event, individual athlete, or sports-related issue serves as the dominant subject.”

– Richard Nordquist

Described perfectly by Richard Nordquist, this type of writing has increased in importance as sport has grown in power, wealth and influence. Although sportswriters don't cover the 'serious' topics explored by investigative or news writers, they are an essential element of any media organisation. Some

Sports writers specialize in one particular sport, while others cover matches and events within any given area.

## **8. Editorial**

An editorial is an article, usually opinion-based, that is written by a senior member of a publication's editorial staff. Although it can be about any topic, it usually covers an issue within society and is backed up by evidence and facts to build credibility. Many writers find editorials difficult to master, but having passion or knowledge about a certain subject often makes it much easier.

### **The ABCD of Media Writing**

#### **1. Knowledge of grammar and punctuation**

Audiences hold media and strategic communication professionals to a high standard when it comes to knowledge of grammar and punctuation. To assist you in learning how to write for the media, here are a few basic grammar and punctuation rules:

- Use simple sentences that follow the subject, verb, object order (example: Maria attended the press conference).
- Use active, not passive voice. Active voice helps with clarity and concise writing. (Passive voice: The press release was completed by Brian. Active voice: Brian completed the press release.)
- Understand word choice and meaning:
  - affect, effect
  - its, it's
  - they're, their, there
  - accept, except

- Be aware of comma uses:
  - *Set off modifiers (words or clauses that provide further description)*  
The publicist, who works for Ogilvy, arrived late to the meeting.
  - *Separate an introductory phrase or word*  
while studying, I listened to music.
  - *Before a conjunction*  
I want to go, but I have to study.
  - *When writing a series of items (three or more)*  
She bought shoes, food, and a movie.

## **2. Ability to simplify information**

As a media or strategic communication professional, you will need to synthesize and make sense of a great deal of information for your audience, often under a strict deadline. This takes strategy, good storytelling skills, and the ability to focus on the essential information. Audiences respond better to information that is presented in a logical order that supports the overall narrative.

## **3. Focus on accuracy and details**

When you write for the media, you represent not only your personal brand but also the broader organization for which you're producing content. Precise writing and transparency give newsrooms credibility; misinformation can severely diminish the integrity of the media outlet. Selecting appropriate sources and verifying information obtained from those sources, referred to as fact checking, can help minimize inaccurate writing. Accuracy also means using proper grammar and language appropriate to the audience.

Ensuring accurate reporting and writing can be challenging. Fast-paced media environments make it tremendously difficult to thoroughly gather information and fact check it in a short amount of time. For example, in 2013, during coverage of the Boston Marathon bombings, reports of five

additional explosives found in the area were later found to be false. In addition, the *New York Post* ran a photo on its front page of two men that it alleged were the suspects that federal investigators were searching for at the time. The men were innocent, and while the *Post* apologized for the error, the men later sued the media outlet for defamation. Outstanding attention to detail is necessary in order to catch errors in content, grammar, and punctuation. Taking the time to slowly review your message will save you from the consequences of misinformation or careless errors. Similarly, a big part of the writing process involves editing and revising your work, either by you or by an editor. Few writers can produce material that cannot be improved or does not need to be altered for style or content reasons.

#### **4. Objectivity**

Objectivity is one of the principles of journalism, according to the code of ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (2014). Media writing should provide well-rounded analyses and stories that include all major perspectives. If you present one organization's point of view, you should also quote one of its competitors or discuss the contrarian perspective for balance. With the exception of opinion columns and blogs, writers should not express their personal opinions on a story or event. Instead, they should write objectively, presenting the facts and leaving it up to the audience to decide how to feel about the information.

Some professionals believe that objective journalism does not exist because humans are innately biased creatures. It is true that a writer's biases can become apparent in his or her writing. However, media professionals should aspire to absolute objectivity. To achieve this, it helps to have a third party read your article or message to minimize biased writing.

#### **5. Clarity**

Media professionals generally write for a large, mainstream audience. Clear and concise writing makes it easier for a wide variety of groups to

understand the core message. Complex sentence structures and jargon that you might find in traditional academic writing are not appropriate for diverse populations. Use simple sentences to get your point across.

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