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B.A. (HONS.) Mass Communication V Semester

Sub. – Feature Writing

## SYLLABUS

**Class – B.A. (HONS.) MASS COMMUNICATION**

**V Semester**

**Subject – Feature Writing**

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Unit-I</b>  | Definition of a feature.<br>Features vis-a-vis fiction and Literature.<br>Types of features: Descriptive, Historical, personality |
| <b>Unit-II</b> | Distinction between a featurised news story and a feature article.<br>Search for topics and material that can sell.               |
|                | Leads and Slant<br>Planning a feature<br>Importance   |
|                | Books, Film, stage  |
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### **UNIT I**

**DEFINITION:** Feature is a story that is longer than a standard news story and written in a different style. Features can vary widely, so you can have a news-feature or an arts feature. Although the term feature implies softer news, a feature is often defined by its length and style, which differs from a straight-up news story. Features also often appear in magazines though newspapers and websites also run features. The middle section of a magazine is also where you usually find the features; this section is known as the feature well. In writing a feature, one has to depend on the eye and the ear, sentiments, feelings, emotions and observation. The difference between news writing and feature writing lies in approach rather than in subject matter.

#### **Feature vis-à-vis fiction and literature:**

Fiction is the form of any work that deals, in part or in whole, with information or events that are not real, but rather, imaginary and theoretical—that is, invented by the author. Although fiction describes a major branch of literary work, it may also refer to theatrical, cinematic, or musical work. Fiction contrasts with non-fiction, which deals exclusively with factual (or, at least, assumed factual) events, descriptions, observations etc.

**Literature:** literature is the art of written work. The word literature literally means: "things made from letters". Literature is commonly classified as having two major forms—fiction and non-fiction—and two major techniques—poetry and prose.

Literature may consist of texts based on factual information (journalistic or non-fiction), a category that may also include polemical works, biography, and reflective essays, or it may consist of texts based on imagination (such as fiction, poetry, or drama). Literature written in poetry emphasizes the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of language—such as sound, symbolism, and meter—to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, ordinary meanings, while literature written in prose applies ordinary grammatical structure and the natural flow of speech. Literature can also be classified according to historical periods, genres, and political influences. While the concept of genre has broadened over the centuries, in general, a genre consists of artistic works that fall within a certain central theme; examples of genre include romance, mystery, crime, fantasy, erotica, and adventure, among others.

Important historical periods in English literature include Old English, Middle English, the Renaissance, the Elizabethan era of the 16th century (which includes the Shakespearean era), the 17th Century Restoration period, the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, the Romanticism of the early 19th century, the later 19th Century Victorian, and 20th Century Modernism and Post-modernism. Important intellectual movements that have influenced the study of literature include feminism, post-colonialism, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, post-modernism, romanticism, and Marxism.

#### **Feature Writing Techniques:**

While writing a feature one should try to write a striking introduction which may arouse the reader's curiosity and interest. How to end a feature is as important as how to begin it. Sometimes the technique of short story writing may be successfully employed to write a feature.

Figurative language helps recreate scenes or sensations. It is how a writer tells the story. Devices include:



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- **Metaphor** -- An implied comparison between two unlike things. It is a word or phrase applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Metaphors are used in poetry, literature & anytime someone wants to add some color to their language.  
**Eg.:** 1) Love is a battlefield.  
2) You are a firework.  
3) The test was murder.
- **Simile** -- A stated comparison between two unlike things. A simile is a figure of speech that compares two different things in an interesting way. This comparison is usually used to make the description more emphatic or vivid.  
**Eg.:** 1) She is like a rose.  
2) As black as a coal.  
3) As busy as a bee.  
4) As brave as a lion.
- **Personification**-- Giving life-like characteristics to something lifeless. It can also be said as representation of an abstract quality in human form.
- **Hyperbole** -- Emphasizing something by deliberately overstating or understating it. Good feature stories contain anecdotes, description, attributive verbs and direct.

**TYPES OF FEATURE:** Journalists disagree about whether all features entertain and inform. Most agree that feature can be categorized into these general types, each with a special purpose:

1. **News feature:** a story that offers a human-interest view on a hard news event.
2. **Informative feature:** a story that present practical on interesting information.
3. **Personality profile:** a story that reveals the personality of someone through incidents, anecdotes, and quote (not through a list of accomplishments, favorite things, or biographical facts)
4. **Human interest feature:** The best-known kind of feature story is the human-interest story that discusses issues through the experiences of another. A short piece (about 100 words), told in a unique or clever way, that concentrates on an unusual and emotionally appealing subject (person, place, object, or animal)
5. **Historical feature:** A story is about an interesting aspect of a historical subject, gathered from research and interviews. These features commemorate important dates in history or turning points in our social, political and cultural development. They offer a useful just a position of then and now. Historical features take the reader back to revisit an event and issues surrounding it. A variation is this date in history short feature, which reminds people of significant events on a particular date.
6. **Personal- accomplishment feature:** a story that focuses on an individual who accomplished something amazing or who has over –come a particular life struggle.
7. **Shared –experience feature:** a story that shares information gained from the writer's firsthand experience in doing something.
8. **Hoe-to feature:** a story that explains how to do something.
9. **Profiles:** A very common type of feature is the profile that reveals an individual's character and lifestyle. The profile exposes different facets of the subject so readers will feel they know the person.



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- 10. Seasonal Themes:** Stories about holidays and the change of seasons address matters at specific times of a year. For instance, they cover life milestones, social, political and cultural cycles, and business cycles.
- 11. Behind the Scenes:** Inside views of unusual occupations, issues, and events give readers a feeling of penetrating the inner circle or being a mouse in a corner. Readers like feeling privy to unusual details and well kept secrets about procedures or activities they might not ordinarily be exposed to or allowed to participate in.



## UNIT-II

### **DISTINCTION BETWEEN A FEATURISED NEWS STORY AND FEATURISED ARTICLES**

Feature stories are human-interest articles that focus on particular people, places and events.

- Feature stories are journalistic, researched, descriptive, colorful, thoughtful, reflective, thorough writing about original ideas.
- Feature stories cover topics in depth, going further than mere hard news coverage by amplifying and explaining the most interesting and important elements of a situation or occurrence.
- Feature stories are popular content elements of newspapers, magazines, blogs, websites, newsletters, television broadcasts and other mass media.
- A feature story is not meant to report the latest breaking news, but rather an in-depth look at a subject.
- Feature articles range from the news feature that provides sidebar background to a current event hard news story, to a relatively timeless story that has natural human interest.
- Features generally are longer than hard-news articles because the feature penetrates deeper into its subject, expanding on the details rather than trying to concentrate on a few important key points.
- In hard news stories, often referred to as *inverted pyramid* style, the reporter makes the point, sets the tone, and frames the issue in the first paragraph or two.
- In a feature story, on the other hand, the writer has the time and space to develop the theme, but sometimes postpones the main point until the end. The whole story does not have to be encapsulated in the lead.

### **Non-fiction stories**

Feature stories are journalistic reports. They are not opinion essays or editorials. They should not be confused with creative writing or works of fiction.

- The writer's opinions and attitudes are not important to the story.
- The writer keeps herself or himself out of the story.
- Writing in the third person helps maintain the necessary distance.

### **Telling stories**

*Hard news* stories report very timely events that have just occurred. Feature stories, on the other hand, are *soft news* because they are not as timely, not as swiftly reported. Feature writers have the extra time to complete background research, interviews and observation for their stories.

Here are some suggestions for polishing feature writing skills and developing an eye for feature story ideas.

- Feature stories give readers information in a pleasing, entertaining format that highlights an issue by describing the people, places, events and ideas that shape it.
- Feature stories are really more like nonfiction short stories than hard news stories.





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- While there should be a *news peg* for the existence of a story at a particular time, the immediacy of the event is secondary in a feature story. In fact, sometimes there is no immediate event.
- The power of a feature story lies in its ability to amplify the focus on an issue through first-rate storytelling, irony, humor, human appeal, atmosphere and colorful details.
- Features have a clear beginning, middle and end and are longer than hard-news stories.

**Gathering data**

Journalists use three tools to gather information for stories: observation, interview and background research.

After completing these, the writer brings the story to life through colorful description, meaningful anecdotes and significant quotes.

- These elements are obtained when interviewing and observing by jotting down everything encountered – smells, noises, colors, textures, emotions, details seen and heard in the surroundings.
- The journalist keeps an open mind while interviewing subjects and researching sources.
- The writer avoids steering the story or imposing personal ideas on the sources.
- The writer avoids deciding on the theme of the story until sufficient information has been gathered to show a direction or point of view.

**Story format**

The information in a feature is organized differently from hard news stories. Sometimes a writer uses several paragraphs of copy at the outset to engage the reader before getting on with the main elements of the story.

After the title and opening paragraph grab a reader, narrative hooks are used to persuade the reader to continue reading. These hooks are attractive story elements such as action, mystery, drama or appealing characters intended to pull the reader forward through the story. They are complex narratives that come to life through colorful description, meaningful anecdotes and significant quotes.

- In hard news stories, the reporter makes the point, sets the tone, and frames the issue in the first paragraph or two.
- In feature stories, the whole story does not have to be encapsulated in an inverted pyramid lead. The writer can develop the storyline in a variety of ways and choose to postpone the main point until later in the copy or even the end.
- A writer can choose to tell the story out of order to engage the reader's interest.
- A story could begin with a dramatic moment and, once the reader is curious, the story could flash back to the history needed to understand it.
- A story-within-a-story could be used with a narrator in the outer story telling the inner story to satisfy the curiosity of readers.
- A storyline could alert readers that the story began in a way that seemed ordinary, but they must follow it to understand what happened eventually.
- As with any news reporting, feature stories are subject to the journalistic standards of accuracy, fairness and precision. The quality of a story is judged on its content, organization and mechanics.
- Features writers use *The Associated Press Stylebook* for correct journalistic style.



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**How long are these articles?**

- Newspaper features often are 500 to 2500 words in length.
- Magazine features usually are 500 to 5,000 words.
- Features on websites and blogs generally range from 250–2500 words, but hard drive space is relatively inexpensive so the length could vary dramatically through the use of non-linear hyperlinking of content.
- Any medium might use a shorter or longer story than usual, depending on its perceived value.
- Attention spans seem to grow ever shorter so brevity is valued. More than ever, all writing today needs to be clear and concise.

**Illustrations**

Every story is illustrated, usually with one or more photographs, but the art can be drawings, paintings, sketches, video or machinima, colorful graphs and charts, or other creative expressions depending on the medium for which the feature is packaged for dissemination.

**Is this just for print journalists?**

As newspapers and other print media face stiffer competition today from Internet news media, more feature stories are published because they can be more engaging to read. Wire services, such as the Associated Press and Reuters, which once distributed mostly hard news, now send feature stories to members.

Public relations professionals frequently write feature articles. For instance, a company newsletter story profiling employees voluntarily helping the local community could benefit employees and their families as well as the firm's stockholders. Or a profile of a corporate CEO could be released to media when the firm makes news.

Broadcast journalists use human interest stories, profiles, historical pieces, seasonal packages, behind the scenes revelations and even how-to descriptions. These can be seen and heard everywhere in television and radio news.

A typical television news package includes an edited set of video clips for a story narrated by a reporter following a written script. Unlike a magazine article, for example, the TV feature story also will have audio, video, graphics and video effects. A news anchor with an over-the-shoulder graphic will be seen reading a lead-in introduction before the package is aired and concluding the story with additional information called a tag.

**SEARCH FOR TOPICS AND MATERIAL THAT CAN SELL**

**People:** These articles are among the most common and popular to write and read. You could write about someone with an interesting hobby, job or business; someone who is active in the community who is retiring or moving away; a unique child, senior citizen, or disabled person; an artist; or a famous person who has some link to your area. For example, you could write about an antique car collector, costume designer, or a glassblower.

**Events:** These features are about public gatherings, such as festivals, exhibits, concerts, or shows. You could even preview them, interviewing the people involved in organizing them. You could also write about uncommon happenings, such as the birth of a second set of twins to a mother.

**Lifestyle:** You could write about people who live in houseboats or log cabins. You could also write about people who operate successful home businesses.

**Seasonal:** You could write holiday features, such as how a certain ethnic group celebrates a major holiday. Other ideas are: fashion, food, and sports, pertaining to the current season.



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**Trends of the Decade:** Why not write about men and women entering certain fields that were traditionally limited to a certain gender? You could also write about new types of businesses that are becoming popular.

**Anachronisms:** What about businesses that are becoming extinct? For example, I recently read a feature article about the only person left in my area who repairs typewriters.

**Interesting Places to Visit/Travel to:** These articles could be about local or regional towns or even organizations, such as the local historical society. Or, they could be more general features about foreign countries that are becoming popular to tourists.

**Informational:** These could be about services offered to the public by the government and by social service agencies, such as food banks.

**How-to:** These cover a range of topics, such as self-help: improving your physical and emotional health, and staying fit. They could also deal with home improvements, such as interior decorating. Or, they could be about car maintenance for particular seasons of the year.

**First Person Experience:** The most effective features of this kind are the ones where the writer has participated in some different or unusual activity or job, and shared his/her perspectives. Do you know someone who owns a farm? Be a farmer for a day and then report on it.