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# Article Types

 0 Comments

ARTICLE  
TYPES

MAGAZINE



So, you've made up your mind to earn money writing magazine articles. You've taken the time to study the life of a freelancer. You've spent time searching for relevant ideas that meet felt needs. And you're nearly ready to learn the basic components of an article.

Now that you're ready to roll, you face yet another question: What type of article will I write? Oh, I know, I know. . .you probably didn't realize there were different types. When I started writing articles, I had no idea! In fact, I was sure the informative/inspirational article was the only way to go. Boy, was I limiting myself.

So, let's break this down. I've put together a top ten list of article types, breaking down the components of each. No longer will you be limited to writing one type of article. Now the world is your oyster.

## **Motivational/Inspirational**

I'm a strong believer in changing the world with the power of my writing. If a story or article can move a reader or cause her to take action in some way, what a victory for both of us! The motivational/inspirational article gives you an opportunity to make the world a better place. Your heartfelt thoughts on the page make you a benefactor of kindness to the reader.

Inspirational articles boost your reader and encourage you as you're writing, as well. As a rule, they describe how to feel good. . .or do good things. Doesn't matter what occupation you're in—you could be a ditch-digger or a model. The inspirational article offers you hope, along with a nice moral message. And, in the end, the takeaway value of the piece has the ability to lift spirits and change the reader's life for the better.

## **Expose/Tell-All**

We live in a day and age where everyone wants to know the gory details. We want to know who's hurting who, what famous people are like behind the scenes, and what really brought down the CEO of that major corporation. Exposes are a form of feature article. Their primary purpose is to shock or surprise the readers. And lest you think they're all profiles of famous people, think again.

Many exposes are about products that can bring potential harm to your children, or environmental issues that could (in theory) make life harder on the next generation. Many expose or tell-all articles include statistics, quotes or anecdotes. Again, the

purpose is to stun the reader—to tell him something he didn't already know.

## Profile/Interview

The profile (or interview) piece requires additional work on our end. Not only do we have to write the piece, we have to interview the person to get the information we need. I live in Texas, not far from the George Bush family. What if I had the opportunity to interview George Bush Sr. I might title the article "Presidential Free-Falling" capitalizing on the incident where he jumped out of an airplane. Or, better yet, I might title my piece, "Secrets from the Oval Office—George Bush Shares Private Thoughts From His Years in the White House." You're intrigued already, aren't you!

If you're working on a profile piece, you can use additional sources, like friends, colleagues, neighbors and family members of the person you're profiling. In a true interview, you go straight to the source. It's not enough for me to ask George Bush's neighbors about the struggles he faced as president. I want to hear it directly from him. And so does your editor. And your readers. Profiles and interviews are often done as Q&A's (Questions and Answers). This is, by far, the quickest and easiest way to go. But, writer beware! You want to engage the reader, and folks don't always stick around for a full Q&A. They get bored easily.

With that in mind, you might consider giving your piece a theme or a focus. As we close out this section, I want to give you a little advice for interviewing. To obtain the best/strongest information, use the GMC approach—something quite common in fiction writing. Goals, motivation and conflict. What were the interviewee's goals? What motivated him to do what he did? What conflicts did he encounter along the way? One more tip: Become a great listener, but know when enough is enough. End interviews effectively, take the information, and offer a fair profile of the person

who's given of their time to be interviewed. It's also a nice gesture to follow up with a thank-you email or card.

## **Human Interest (similar to profile/interview)**

The human interest story is a feature story that focuses on a person or group of people in a compelling and/or emotional way. These articles often start with an anecdote and are presented in chronological order. In a human interest story, a person's story is shared, along with his or her concerns, problems, conflicts or accomplishment.

The purpose? The bring interest or sympathy from the reader. Many human interest pieces offer a "story behind the story" approach. For example, you might do an interview with a family member who lived through the 9-1-1 attack or a Hurricane Katrina evacuee. The article would tug at the heartstrings of the reader and offer hope.

These types are articles are also used for local people with specific career achievements. Editors refer to human interest stories as soft news. Some would even call it sensationalistic writing. However, it can be done effectively. As I've said many times, I'm a strong believer in the power of story to change lives. So if I have the opportunity to cover a human interest story that could potentially change the lives of others, I'll take it!

## **Roundup/Informative**

The round-up article is one of the most popular articles around. It's basically a list, where each topic is fleshed out. (Side note: Many of the lessons in this course are laid out in a round-up style.) Titles such as "Ten Ways to Keep Your Computer Running Smoothly from Computer Experts" or "12 Writing Tips from Top-Selling

Fiction Authors" are all the rage. They're less complicated than profiles or interviews, in that they don't require a lot of one-on-one time.

Round-up articles gather information from many, many sources. You can use the web, books, personal interviews. . .whatever you like. Just merge the information into one informative article, being careful to only use the most important information. No rabbit trailing. There simply isn't time in a list-driven piece. It's helpful to focus on one theme. You can also offer quotations, opinions, statistics, research studies, anecdotes, recipes and so on. The key is to engage the reader and offer helpful, interesting information.

## **Personal Experience Piece**

The personal experience piece is my favorite type of article to write. In fact, I care so much about it, that I've devoted an entire lesson to the topic. Because I've given it so much time in that lesson, I will simply say here that a personal experience piece is meant to change lives. In a story like this, I share my own personal experience (one story per article), in the hopes that you will learn from my journey.

## **Travel**

I have a good friend who works as a travel writer. The few times I see her in person, she's just jetting in or jetting out from some spectacular place I'll probably never get to visit in my life time. What a great gig! If you're interested in being a travel writer, start locally. Cover the hot spots in your town. Then branch out to your county. Then your state. Then across the country. If you're fortunate enough to travel abroad, keep a detailed journal of your travels, along with great photographs.

Once you've sold a few travel pieces and have forged a relationship with your editor, ask to work on assignment. If you're lucky enough to be paid to write travel features,

keep the writing strong and witty. Best of all, surprise the reader. Tell him something that he doesn't already know about the place you're covering. Get quotes from the locals and/or ex-pats. Tap into the senses. You want your reader to feel, taste, see, hear and smell that places you go.

Add your own personality to the story. After all, you're the one traveling. Tell what you were thinking/feeling when you stayed in the tent with no bathroom. Share the fear of having the tarantula crawl across your arm as you made that trek across the Sahara. Explain the thoughts going through your mind as you walked the Via De La Rosa. Remember, the reader needs to feel like he's traveling with you. You're roomies. . .in this together.

## How-To

Ah, the how-to article! What fun we have with these! "How to Make Money on E-Bay," "How to Transform a Room for Less than \$100," "How to Overcome Writer's Block," "How to Bring the Romance Back to Your Marriage." All of these titles promise one thing that all readers are looking for: quick, easy instruction. In a nutshell, you're telling the reader how to do something. (And don't we all love telling people what to do!)

How-to articles make rousing promises of success for the person who follows our advice. They describe what the reader needs in just a few simple instructions. In these pieces you give step-by-step instructions, in much the same way a recipe is laid out. Basically, that's what you're giving readers: a recipe for success. A how-to article will include warnings and often make referrals. Mostly, though, a how-to piece is all about the benefits.

Let me ask you a question. When you watch a how-to show on the Home and Garden

Channel, are you really going to take the information you've gleaned and use it to turn your house into a showcase? Probably not. And when you watch Paula Dean on the Food Network, are you really going to cook the meals she's preparing? Likely not. Why then, do we as readers, enjoy how-to's so much?

Truth is, we don't really want to learn how to do all of those things. We've got enough to do. We're insanely busy, in fact. But that's the very thing that drives us to how-to articles. We want people to show us how to do it quicker, faster and easier. And these words (quicker, faster, easier, happier, stronger) are key words that can appear in your how-to article title.

Consider the title to Dale Carnegie's book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People." Wow. What a hook! Several promises have been implied in that title, haven't they! The book went on to become a bestseller, based in part on the fantastic title. You don't want to go overboard in making promises to the reader. Keep it real. And give practical instructions that can be easily followed.

## Quizzes

Many writers never think to add "quizzes" to the types of articles they write, but why not? I put together a fun quiz for PMS sufferers. I also did a quiz on procrastination that was picked up by the Sylvan Learning Centers. (I earned \$400 for that one, by the way.) I did a fun quiz on King David, which sold to a Sunday School take-home paper for kids. If you've got a great subject, but you're stumped and don't know how to proceed, break it down into the same sort of multiple-choice questions you answered in school. Only, make it fun!

## Essay/Opinion

Essay or opinion articles will always be in style. An example of a essay title might be



something like, "What I Think of Obama's Healthcare Plan" or "Hollywood's Biggest Flops This Season." Essay or opinion articles usually revolve around an important or timely subject (if they're to be published in a newspaper or reputable magazine).

For example, as we draw near to the 100 year anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, you might consider writing an article titled "Fatal Flaws in The Ocean's Queen." Essays and opinion pieces are a tough sell if you're an unknown or unpublished author. However, if you're just looking to get your opinion out there, you can always write one of these articles and place it on your blog.

## **BONUS: Journalism 101**

As we close out this lesson on article types, I thought it would be helpful to focus on one more type of article: the journalistic piece. Maybe you're longing to work for the newspaper, but don't know how to get your foot in the door. Go back to that Who, What, When, Where, Why approach you learned in school. Newspaper articles are formulaic in structure and are always meant to educate or entertain.

You must start with a "lead" (usually the opening paragraph), where you lay out the point of the piece. (Here's where the who, what, when, where and why come into play.) You want the reader to know what he's going to get before he gets it, basically. Then you write the article, remaining completely unbiased and professional. No slants. No angle. Nothing personal. Just the facts, Ma'am. Plain and simple. In understandable language. Start with the important facts first and work your way down through the article.

One more bit of advice in closing: whether your writing for magazines or newspapers, ask to write on assignment. This can be done by getting into relationship with your editor and earning his trust. Study the publication and the

guidelines, then give him exactly what he's looking for. That's it for now, freelancers. I hope this lesson has opened up a whole new world of possibilities for you. Try your hand at several different article types to up your chances at getting better assignments, then give those editors exactly what they're looking for—a beautifully crafted article!

**By JThompson**

**Published: March 15, 2024 - Last updated: February 28, 2025**

**Magazine Article Lessons**

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