

# Feature Writing

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# Feature Writing ...

A feature tells a story. It has a beginning (lead), middle and end. Features are the strongest part of a student publication because a great feature showcases a person.

# Transition/Quote Formula

Linked

**Lead:** Most interesting information. Something that will grab the reader's attention and drag them into the story.

**News Peg:** A summary of what the story is going to be about. Why the story is important.

**Direct Quote:** Connects to the nut graph. Use more than one sentence. Direct quotes should show the emotion of the story.

Linked

**Transition:** Next important fact. Use transition words to help the story flow. They can be facts, indirect quotes or partial quotes.

**Direct Quote:** Connects to the first transition. Do not repeat the transition in the quote. DQ should elaborate on the transition.

Linked

**Transition:** Next important fact. Use transition words to help the story flow. They can be facts, indirect quotes or partial quotes.

**Direct Quote:** Connects to the second transition. Do not repeat the transition in the quote. DQ should elaborate on the transition.

And so on... until the story is complete

# Leads

**Must grab the reader's attention.  
There is no such thing as a great  
story with a boring lead.**

# Leads

**The lead must catch the spirit of the story and create the proper tone: serious, sarcastic, ironic, flippant, melancholy.**

# Leads

- **Length does not matter. Some great leads are five to six sentences. Some are two or three paragraphs. Some are even one sentence.**
- **Should be specific to your story**
- **Should not be filled with cliches**
- **Should be in third person**
- **Should never ask questions**
- **Must fit the mood or tone of the story**

# A Few Types of Leads

- Narrative - tells a story
- Descriptive - describes a scene, person or subject
- Direct Quote - use sparingly. Must be very powerful quote.
- Startling statement
- Contrast and Compare (then and now)
- Twist

# Narrative - tells a story

She thought he was going to kill her. He had been angry before, even punched his hand through a window once, but he had never threatened her, never scared her like this.

Now he was out of control. He pushed her into a corner and then shoved her back down when she tried to escape.

“All I could think was ‘I have to get out of here.’ I just started crying,” Julie, a senior, said.



## Descriptive - describes a scene

It's 11 o'clock after a long day at the office. She sneaks in to her 7-year-old son's bedroom and watches him roll over. She notices he's sleeping with his baseball glove, and his baseball bat is by his bedside. She gently kisses his forehead and goes to her room to get ready for bed. On her door is post-it note above the handle. Her eyes begin to water as she reads the hand written note.

“Mom we won! I wish you were there.”

# Descriptive - person

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Standing in the lunch line, the boy turned to April Haler and asked, “Will you be my girlfriend?”

Then he turned to his buddy and started laughing. Just another cruel joke on the fat kid.

April, who once weighed almost 300 pounds, is used to them. Since elementary school she has been teased and taunted about her weight.

“I remember being called horrible names in elementary school every time we went to the playground,” the sophomore said.

But life is changing.

## **Direct Quote - use sparingly.**

**Must be very powerful quote**

“Don’t be mad. I took some pills,”  
Karen Keaton told her mom as she stooped  
over the toilet.

A few hours later, the 14-year-old  
freshman died after a series of coronary  
arrests as her mother watched.

# Startling Statement - creates drama

She never knew she had it.

Minutes before the meeting began, Bill Farney got the bad news.

# Twist - sets reader up for one mood and then twists it, surprises the reader

A group of candystripers stand around the nursery, holding incubator babies. It's "loving time." Another young girl steps in with her mother and picks up a baby, too. She is not in a uniform, but in a hospital gown, for the baby she holds is her own — and it's her "loving time."

It's also time to say good-bye.

"I sat in that rocker and held him and rocked him and I cried and cried and cried," Amber, a senior, said. "I wanted that moment to last forever so I could always hold him and always be there for him."

"But I knew I couldn't. That's what hurt."

# Another Twist

After tension-filled hours of last-minute primping, the time had come for the contestants to walk into the arena and strut their stuff in front of the three judges and an appreciative crowd.

Some walked briskly with an air of confidence. Others, distracted by the lights and cameras, shuffled along slowly. A few, overcome by the pressure, foamed at the mouth and moaned.

Even though Saturday's market steer competition at the Austin-Travis County Livestock Show and Rodeo was like many other beauty pageants, there were some obvious differences.

The contestants — steers weighing more than half a ton — were being judged on the type of T-bones and rump roasts they would turn into instead of their appearance in an evening gown or bathing suit.

The **lead** should open  
with the specific,  
then go to the general.



# Rather than:

With America engaged in a war in Iraq, many students know U.S. military men who have lost their lives.

Leaguetown lost one of its own last month when Nicolas Barrera was killed in Iraq.

# Try this:

When Briana Barrera didn't hear from her son, Nicolas, for a week she knew something was wrong. Maybe it was mother's intuition, but she knew.

And when she saw two officers walking toward her door, her worst fear was confirmed.

"The officers said they were sorry to deliver the news, but Nicolas died with honor," she said.

"Dying with honor? How does that help? My heart was breaking. My boy was gone."

# Lead writing pitfalls:

- News or editorials leads. Avoid first and second person.
- Stating the obvious.
- Using cliches.
- “Imagine this...” leads

# Bad Writers will ...

- Chat with the reader
- Use opinion
- Ask questions
- Use first or second person (I, we, you)

Bubba O'Connell is one cool dude and a chance to rap with him every day, and he really did some heavy thoughts on it. He's just about the smartest, sexiest, and most attractive guy in our school. Any girl who absolutely needs to be talked to

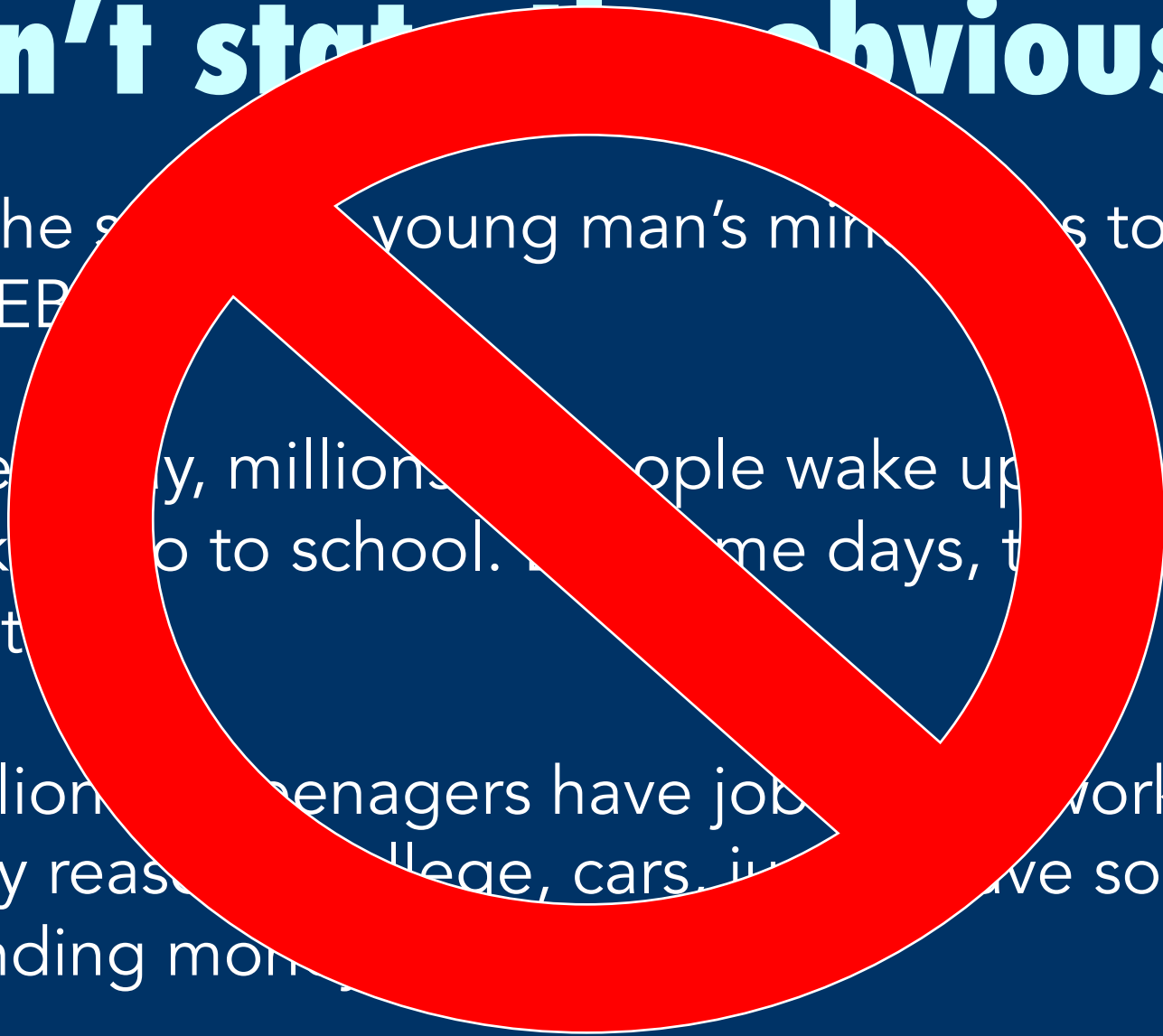
Bubba is also a national champion gymnast with the bluest eyes you ever saw and a whole lot of personality. No pun intended.

# Don't start with the obvious

In the story, a young man's mind goes to  
BASEBALL.

Every day, millions of people wake up to  
work or go to school. Some days, they  
don't.

Millions of managers have jobs to work for  
many reasons: college, cars, just to have some  
spending money.



No did

your Get set. GO!!!

ady? Okay! ah. Siss! Bo Bah!

the winner is . .

We's dictionary defin

It's here.

# Do not "Imagine this..."

Imagine what it would like to win a gold medal at the Olympics.

All right, President Obama Patterson doesn't have to. She won a gold medal.

Imagine what it would be like to get shot in the face with a .57-automatic.

Jeb Sasser doesn't have to imagine that. He was shot by his little brother by accident last year.





# Try this instead...

He heard the shot and then felt the pain, but only for a moment. Within seconds, junior Jeb Smith blacked out and went into shock.

“I don’t remember much of the shooting,” he said. “I remember it felt like someone punched their fist right through my face, but then I went black.”

What's next?

2

After a strong lead...

You need a **News Peg**

# What is a news peg?

Basically, it is a summary of what the story is going to be about. It's the 5 Ws and H that you didn't answer in the lead.

It's the thesis sentence of your story.

He heard the shot and then felt the pain, but only for a moment. Within seconds, junior Jeb Smith blacked out and went into shock.

“I don’t remember much of the shooting,” he said. “I remember it felt like someone punched their fist right through my face, but then I went black.”

Last summer, Jeb’s five-year-old brother accidentally shot him in the face with his father’s loaded 57-magnum. Jeb lost his right eye and part of his right ear in the accident, but suffered no permanent brain damage.

“I was extremely lucky,” Jeb said. “The doctor said the bullet missed my brain by an inch. I still have a long way to go with my reconstructive surgery, but I am just glad I am alive.”



**The News  
Peg**

**What's next?**

**3**

Use the Transition/Quote  
formula.

1<sup>st</sup> quote and last should be  
your two best quotes or  
**POWER QUOTES**

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**transition**

Jeb still needs four more surgeries, but none of them will help him regain his sight.

**direct quote**

“I am glad that they are going to make me look more like my old self,” Jeb said. “But I am upset about my eye. I wanted to be a pilot and now that dream is shattered.”

**transition**

Jeb’s said his little brother, Shane, found the gun in his father dresser bureau on that summer day.

**direct quote**

“I think he was just curious,” Jeb said. “I didn’t think the gun was loaded so I just told him to put it away. And then, bam, my life changed forever.”

**transition**

Right after the gun went off, Shane ran to the neighbor’s house to get help, Jeb said.

**direct quote**

“My little brother was scared, but he was also smart,” Jeb said. “He knew I needed help and he knew Lucy, our neighbor, was home. She came over and immediately called for an ambulance.”

**So how do you end a  
feature story?**

**3**

# End your story with ...

- A powerful quote

Or

- Tie the ending back to the lead

# For example:

(Lead) “Don’t be mad. I took some pills,” Karen Keaton cried as she stooped over the toilet.

A few hours later, the 14-year-old freshman died after a series of coronary arrests with her mom **watching** by her side.

(Ending) Since the death of her oldest daughter, the Keatons have found themselves becoming more protective. “I find myself watching for things,” Mrs. Keaton said. “I’m not sure for what. I’m just **watching.**”

# For example:

(Lead) A group of candystripers stand around the nursery, holding incubator babies. It's "loving time." Another young girl steps in with her mother and picks up a baby, too. She is not in a uniform, but in a hospital gown, for the baby she holds is her own — and it's her "loving time."

It's also time to say good-bye.

"I sat in that rocker and held him and rocked him and I cried and cried and cried," Amber, a senior, said. "I wanted that moment to last forever so I could always hold him and always be there for him."

"But I knew I couldn't. That's what **hurt**."

(Ending) This was evident as she stated the one word that described the whole ordeal:

“**Pain**,” she said, tears streaming down her cheeks and falling onto her sweater.

“True **pain**.”

For a Strong Feature Story  
remember this ...

**GQ STUDD**

**G** Great

**Q** Quotes

**S** Strong Lead

**T** Transition/Quote Formula

**U** Unique Angle

**D** Description - Show Don't Tell

**D** Detail



# Pitfalls to avoid in feature writing ...

- Using a news lead
- Writing in the passive voice
- Messy handwriting
- Story doesn't flow - doesn't use T/Q formula
- Lack of strong quotes

Good luck!