

## Feature Leads

A feature lead is designed to capture the eye of the reader, telling them that the story is worth reading. A good feature writer will at one time use all of the five leads.

**Question** — The lead can be an interesting question to get the reader to wonder. *Ex.) Have you ever seen horses running the hurdles*

**A shocking statement or statistic** — Your lead can be a very unusual statistic. *Ex.) The elephant was found chasing a cheetah at 40 miles an hour.*

**Quote** — A lead could be started as a quote. *Ex.) "The game was so close, and I can't believe he made the shot."*

**Narrative** — Sound like the beginning of a story. *Ex.) One chilly afternoon when the teacher was out of the classroom the kids had a spitwad fight.*

**Descriptive** — Describe a scene or a place *Ex.) On the back of Fourth Street a gloom hung over the road in the early morning sun.*

## Feature Endings

There are six basic feature endings:

**Lead replay** — Refers back to the feature angle used in the lead.

**Proximity ending** — Uses info from the paragraph right before it.

**Restatement** — Reminds the reader of the story's purpose by restating it.

**Word play** — Uses a play on words, alliteration, or a catchy phrase that leaves a lasting impression in the readers mind.

**Quote** — Uses a striking or memorable quote.

**Surprise ending** — Startle the reader with your conclusion.

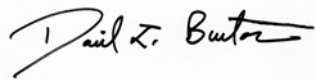
## Feature writing DO's and DONT's

### DO

- Write in the past tense, third person.
- Use a feature format (introduction, elaboration, conclusion).
- Name all people (first and last names), places and events relevant to the story.
- Write in a natural and informal style.
- Use clear, logical transitions.
- Interview to capture feelings and personal reactions relevant to the story.
- Use clear, crisp and strong action verbs.
- Ask yourself, "What's the point of the story" and write logically toward the conclusion.
- Use quotes. Quotes provide a personal touch to your story—a kind of verbal snapshot.
- Use gentle humor whenever possible (aimed at situations, not individuals).
- Vary your sentence structure.

### DO NOT

- Editorialize or apologize
- Use words or phrases with double meaning.
- Use "and," "so," "thus," "therefore," excessively.
- Use nicknames or unfamiliar abbreviations.
- Use superlatives excessively. Everything can't be "incredible".
- State the obvious or overuse well-known facts.
- Use the name of the school. It is implied.
- Write "this year" - the newspaper is for this year so it is implied.
- Repeat the headline in the first sentence.



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# Feature writing



Drawing  
readers in with  
feature writing

UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI  
OUTREACH AND EXTENSION

## What is a feature?

It differs from straight news in one respect — its intent. A news story provides information about an event, idea or situation. The feature does a bit more. It also may (1) interpret or add depth and color to the news, (2) instruct or (3) entertain.

## How to write it

The feature story usually does not follow the inverted pyramid style of the news story. The hard news story lead based on one of the five "Ws" (who, what, when, where, why) or the H (how) is seldom appropriate for a feature. A feature lead sets the stage for the story and generally cannot stand alone.

**Before you write, think.** Who is the audience? Do they care about this? How do I get their attention? How do I appeal to them? A feature lead must interest the reader. It's the "grabber."

Many rules for news writing also apply to feature writing: short sentences, easy words, personal words and active verbs. But with feature stories you can be more creative.

## What makes a feature work?

"Easy" writing makes for easy reading. That means short sentences, simple words, active verbs, personal words and transitions to keep the article moving forward, interest-building devices, and a "kicker" that ends the feature with some punch.

**Short sentences.** For today's mass audiences, news stories averaging between 15 and 20 words per sentence are easy reading. Sentences longer than 30 words are hard to understand.

**Short paragraphs.** Keep paragraphs short. And vary them — from one word to five average sentences. Remember, a 100-word paragraph looks mighty long in a narrow newspaper column. Editors don't like them. Neither do readers.

**Easy words.** Use short, simple words in place of longer, multi-syllable words with the same meaning. When a technical or difficult word must be used, explain it as simply as possible.

**Personal words.** Words like "you," "we," a person's name, direct quote, etc., give your copy more human interest. Admittedly, this kind of personalization is more often used in "feature" rather than in "hard news" stories. But it is still a good technique for holding reader interest.

**Active verbs.** Action verbs keep a story moving and grab the reader more than "to be" verbs that show little action.

**Transitions** are used to add to, illustrate or extend a point., summarize, link cause and effect, refer back, or restrict and qualify.

**Interest building.** Personalize the people you are writing about and what they are doing; provide quotes, human interest.

**"Kicker."** While the lead or grabber at the beginning gets the reader into a story, the kicker at the end of a feature should have a punch line that helps the reader remember the story.

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## Homemaker Has Hot Time

Lois Deneke had a hot time in her kitchen last week.

She was pretty "smoked up" at what happened then. But now she's cool and ready to share her experience with housewives who suddenly find themselves in a spot too hot to handle.

You see, Lois is a state housing and interior design specialist with Lincoln University. One of her jobs is to design homes to be safe and convenient.

So she got a firsthand lesson in safety last Thursday when she experienced her first kitchen fire.

"The fire was small and easily extinguished," said Deneke. "But I was amazed at the amount of smoke from three strips of bacon! I made the error of removing the lid and, believe me, the smoke was awful! I ended up having a coughing siege and a sore throat."

Because of what happened, Lois contacted Dave E. Baker, extension agricultural engineer and safety specialist at the University of Missouri-Columbia, to find out the best way to handle fires.

"I was interested to learn that there was no good method of putting out a fire such as mine," said Deneke. "But had I carried the skillet with the lid on out-of-doors, I could have had less of a smoke problem."

She said Dave Baker's advice is:

- Keep a multi-purpose, dry chemical fire extinguisher handy (or at least a good supply of baking soda).
- If fire starts in a pan, put the lid on if you can.
- If the fire is in the oven, shut the door and shut off the gas or electricity.

"To take care of the smoke you will just have to fan it out," said Baker. "You can do that by opening a door or window and using a fan to draw the smoke out of the house. The vent fan above the stove can help remove smoke, too."

Dave said it's important to act fast and not to panic. In other words: In case of fire, stay cool!