
Monday, March 10th

— Day 12: Finding Your Beat —

Check In

1. Have you turned in your Project 1 assignment?
2. Have you turned in your Unit 1 Reflection?
3. Have you caught up on your missing work? If you want to know what you are missing, go to OpenLab and check your Grade Book, you can see which assignments I have not marked for you.

If you have NOT turned in your Project 1 to me. Stay after class to discuss.

Overview

1. Introduction to Unit 2: Finding Your Beat: Writing a Feature Article
2. Introduction to Project 2: Feature Article
3. Read [“Freewriting Exercises”](#) by Peter Elbow and discuss
4. Begin [Project 2: Brainstorming Handout](#)

Unit 2: Finding Your Beat: Writing a Feature Article

Journalists don't write about everything under the sun, they usually develop a "beat," meaning they focus on a specific topic that they are uniquely qualified to write about. This is their "beat." Then, when magazines need someone to write about coffee or hip-hop or the Bronx, they will look for writers who have expertise on those subjects.

Project 2

How does a person find their beat? Your beat is something you either know a lot about or you have a lot of connections to (meaning, if you need to, you could get good interviews.) For example, if you're a skateboarder, your beat might be the skate community. You could write stories for skate magazines, but you could also write stories *explaining* skateboarding for an audience of non-skateboarders. Your beat doesn't have to be a community you are a part of, though. It can also be something you know a lot about. You might read a lot of history books— and your beat might be putting current events in an historical perspective. We'll work together as a class to find YOUR beat. This will be fun for you to write, and engaging for your readers to read.

Project 2

Your beat is a subject that fits *you*, something that makes *you* shine. But your feature article also needs a specific subject that will be interesting to your audience. That is to say, every beat has a million stories in it! There are people whose whole career is writing articles about coffee (What's the best coffee shop in Brooklyn? Queens? What's the best way to make coffee at home? And on and on!) Once you've found your beat, you'll need to figure out what specific story you want to tell about it. You can't tell us the whole history of skateboarding, but you can talk about how 13-year-old girls are suddenly winning gold medals in the Olympics, which could lead into an interesting article about the changing role of gender in sports like these.

Project 2

An important note: **You will be doing research in this article.** That is, you may know a lot about music or coffee or skateboarding, but your expertise here means that you have a good “in” to find out more, not that you are the final authority! This is not a place for you just to write what you know, but a place for you to **build** on what you know and what you are interested in!

Project 2 In a NUTSHELL

In this unit, you will find your own specific beat, a subject where you can showcase your unique experience and knowledge.

You will write a *well-researched* feature article with 3 credible sources for a magazine or newspaper that narrows in on some specific aspect of this subject that is at least 1400 and 1600 words.

You'll tell your audience something they didn't know before and make them think about the subject in a whole new way!

Project 2

[Here](#) is a link to the assignment description document.

What Is a Feature Article?

From “Master Class”:

A feature article blends hard facts with rigorously sourced details to paint a thorough picture and give a complete story. Learn how to write a feature story with these tips.

A feature article is a news story that goes beyond the facts to weave in a narrative and tell a compelling story. A feature article differs from a hard news story as it offers an in-depth look at a particular subject, current event, or location to audiences. A good feature article will keep the reader’s attention until the end, delivering a fleshed-out narrative and creating a lasting impression.

What Is a Feature Article?

Feature articles are the longer, more in-depth articles in magazines and newspapers, the articles you spend more time with. You may hear a little bit about the writer's life and experience, but you also get a lot of information: one person's experience with home schooling, for example, may lead to a feature article about the best practices for teaching children at home. We saw an example of a feature article when we read [Hanif Abdurraqib](#)'s story about his own name; he began with a personal anecdote, but went into detailed research about Zayn Malik and the way his relationship with Islam has been portrayed in the media.

What Is a Feature Article?

Feature articles do not always have personal anecdotes about the writer, but they do always go in-depth, have a human angle, and really try to grab the attention of the reader. They also always try to give the reader new, timely, well-researched information they can use. We'll look at some examples in class.

What Is a Feature Article?

Often, the more specific we get, the more interesting stories are! For instance: a student once came to us saying he wanted to write about his recent diagnosis with something called “middle insomnia,” but felt nobody else might be interested, since it was so specific to him. The whole class disagreed: we wanted to know what “middle insomnia” meant! His personal diagnosis was also a great way into an article into sleep health: something of interest to almost every audience.

What Is a Feature Article?

Together, we will work to look at how feature articles are structured and how to build that structure. You will learn how to write:

- An introduction that hooks your reader
- A nutshell paragraph (also known as a “nut graf”) that explains to your readers early in the article what it is about and why they should care
- The body of the article— multiple paragraphs with well-researched evidence and analysis.
- A conclusion

The Assignment STEPS

— Don't Worry! We Will Work
Together On EACH Step! —

Step 1: Find Your Beat

Find a topic/beat or an area of interest to YOU! What's an area that you have a unique interest or knowledge in? It's crucial that you choose something that matters to you as you'll be spending weeks on this assignment. Brainstorm a few ideas rather than just going with the first topic that pops into your head. We'll work together on this in class.

Step 2: Gather Research

Find **at least 3 sources** on your beat/ topic. While you might be knowledgeable on this topic, we want to find sources that really reflect your understanding of the topic. They must be credible and relevant sources.

Step 3: Analyze and Present Your Research

- Write a brief summary of each of your 3 sources (what are the main ideas/ key points)? What is the genre? Who is the intended audience? What is the purpose? What examples of rhetorical appeals do you see?
- Is the source credible? How do you know? Is there bias in the piece?
- Prepare a short oral presentation on one of the research pieces you found and share it with the class. The focus should be on the Rhetorical Situation (audience, purpose), how the author presents the information, and a brief summary of the piece. Explain why you chose the piece and what the information teaches you about your topic.

Step 4: Mentor Articles and Publications

Together, we will each look for a **mentor article/ publication**, which is basically a published article (about something else) that you can use as an effective model for writing your own article. That is, you will be looking for an article in the publication of your choice that you admire. You do not have to copy the style of writing, but you can turn to it for tips on style, word choice, tone, structure, and so on.

Step 5: Write Your Feature Article

You have completed the research, chosen a mentor article/ publication and now it is time to write your article in the genre/ style you have selected! Make sure to keep your audience and purpose in mind.

Step 6: Peer Review / Article Due

Engage in online peer review sessions. Following the comments you received, you will revise and edit your article!

Grading Criteria

AUDIENCE AWARENESS: Who are you trying to reach with this article? Are you using the right diction, publication, sources and arguments to reach this audience?

PURPOSE: Is it clear to your readers what your main point is? Why is it important? Why is it important NOW?

RESEARCH: Even though your beat is your specialty, there is always more to learn— through reading, interviews, walking around the neighborhood, watching YouTube Videos, making phone calls and so on. Having a beat means you know where to look for that research. It means you have connections. It does not mean you just write about your own experience. So, did you dig deep in your research and find relevant and credible sources? Does your research reflect a thorough understanding of the problem you are trying to impact? How were you able to integrate this research into your own article and argument? You must do research in this assignment!

ORGANIZATION AND ANALYSIS: Is the piece well-organized, with clear, thought-out points that are backed up by information and explanation?

SENTENCE-LEVEL: Can your reader understand what you are saying without distraction? Is the writing enjoyable to read?

WORD COUNT: Is your piece between 1400 and 1600 words

Let's Brainstorm

- What I know a lot about is:
- What I'm passionate about is :
- What I start Googling when I have nothing better to do is :
- I would go crazy if someone told me I had to stop doing:
- What makes me really angry is:

Brainstorming

Using your answers to these questions, you can now narrow down your “beat.” What, out of these answers, leads you to a topic you might be able to write about?

Write a free write about your first thoughts about what you might want to write about for Unit 2. Why do you think it’s a good topic– and what worries or questions do you have about this paper?

“Freewriting Exercises” by Peter Elbow

Let’s read [this essay](#) together.

What is freewriting?

Have you ever tried freewriting before in a class? If so, what was your experience?

How does he describe the process? What steps would you take?

Let’s start [Project 2: Brainstorming](#) together!

Homework!

1. Brainstorm your possible TOPIC for Project 2. Complete the [Project 2: Brainstorming](#)
2. Free write on your topic ideas. Write a 100-250 word free write. You do not have to do any research, just write what comes to mind! Using your answers to the questions we asked, you can now narrow down your “beat.” What, out of these answers, leads you to a topic you might be able to write about?
3. Write a free write about your first thoughts about what you might want to write about for Unit 2. Why do you think it’s a good topic– and what worries or questions do you have about this paper?