

Writing For Media

Week 7 Features I

What is a Feature?

Hard News and Soft News

- People get up in the morning and want to know what happened since they went to bed; they read the morning papers, turn on the morning news, check the Internet, or turn their car or office radios to the news during the day to find out the latest happenings.
- A news story can be *hard*, chronicling as concisely as possible the *who, what, where, when, why* and *how* of an event.
- Or it can be *soft*, standing back to examine the people, places and things that shape the world, nation or community.

- Hard news events, such as a political party's annual general meeting, affect many people, and the primary job of the media is to report them as they happen.
- Soft news, such as the re-emerging popularity of soft-top automobiles or how people are coping with the hot, dry spell, is also reported by the media.
- Feature stories are often written on these soft news events.
- Professor Carol Schwalbe, AZ State Uni professor and former senior text editor for *National Geographic* said that while there is no formula to writing a good feature, the story must be “grounded in solid reporting and accuracy, with a strong sense of individual style”.

- A good feature gives readers a distinct sense of place and atmosphere.
- If appropriate, it contains some humour.

When is soft news appropriate?

- There is no firm line between a news story and a feature story, especially today, when many news events are “featurized”.
- Most media offer a mix—hard news stories that chronicle significant, time events, and features that:
 - Profile people who made the news
 - Explain events that moved or shook the news
 - Analyze what is happening in the world, nation or community
 - Teach an audience how to do something

- Suggest better ways to live in a complicated world
 - Examine trends in constantly changing societies
 - Take people some place or let them see something they haven't seen before
 - Entertain or humour an audience
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- Despite today's interest in feature stories, hard news still fills most of a newspaper's front page.
 - However, inside the newspaper and often on the lower half of the front page, the stories become softer.
 - Even in TV and radio news, after the anchors report the major news of they day, they turn to features.

- Today's daily media use many factors to determine what events they will report, including timeliness, proximity, consequence, the perceived interest of the audience, competition, editorial goals, and even the influence of advertisers.
- All these factors put pressure on reporters to give both news and features.
- Readers want hard news that tells them the *who, what, where, when, why* and *how* of events that are occurring but they also want to be entertained, to smile or cry, to learn and to sit back and truly enjoy a story.
- The difference however is not always clear cut.