How to write a feature article – overview and roadmap

Summary:

1. Analyze what makes a feature article:
   - Look at the materials on OpenLab about what makes a feature article
     - Hook/introduction: story or question or quote…
     - Nut graf: an idea of what the article is about.
     - Initial research: a quote or bit of information to get us intrigued.
     - Body: more stories and information and visuals.
     - Conclusion: finish off the story from the Hook, or give advice or tips, or call us to action about something, or leave a great final quote or bit of information.
   - Read one of the examples in Perusall.
     - Use the mentor analysis worksheet to help you break the article down.
     - At the end of the article where you find the prompt, post your analysis of the article's structure
2. Decide what to write.
   - Use the questions in the Overview and Roadmap page to help you come up with ideas.
   - Create an OpenLab post with the answers to those questions.
3. Post on the Padlet what you want to write about. *If you have information or advice for someone else, please let them know in the Reply.*
4. Create your pitch:
   - Draft your pitch using the information in the Overview and Roadmap page
   - Post it to OpenLab
5. Do your research:
   - If you need help thinking of ideas to research, use the KWL+ activity to generate who, what, when, where, why and how questions.
   - You are *not* required to use library sources or peer-reviewed articles.
   - You are strongly encouraged to interview someone who knows a lot about the topic or who can give you a great story to use.
   - Do two short annotations of a couple of sources as outlined in the Overview and Roadmap page and post to the Google Drive (create a folder for yourself in the Unit 2 folder to put your stuff in).
6. Write your draft and upload it to your folder on the Google Drive.

Step by Step
Step One: *Analyzing feature articles*
1. Look at
   - Presentation about writing the feature
   - Chart of what goes in an article (introduction etc).
2. In Perusall, pick **one** of the features that are labeled "Mentor Texts" on Perusall. Follow the instructions to:
   - describe the type of introduction/hook,
   - identify the nut graf,
   - talk about what kind of research is in the article,
   - identify the visual elements and why they're included, and
   - describe the type of conclusion.

Step Two: *Deciding what to write*
Everybody always moans to me that they don't know what to write about. Well, no. We all have things we care about or are curious about. It's just that sometimes it's hard to pin those things down when somebody is making us do it.

So for your feature article, start with these questions (write down answers as fast as they come into your brain, don't censor yourself, just go nuts!):
- 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:

That should give you some things to think about.

Pick a couple and consider who might also be interested in them. More importantly, pick one that you would happily spend a couple of weeks learning more about and then letting other people in on what you've discovered.

Bottom line: this is all about curiosity – what you want to learn more about, and then share with other people.

Second bottom line: you're not writing an academic persuasive essay. Those are boring and you did them all the way through high school (and probably in some of your academic classes) so you know how to do them. This article is about sharing information… and if you do that, you'll be persuading people without getting really obvious about it. On the other hand, you could be writing to persuade people, but in a feature, you're doing it in a way that grabs and keeps their attention. Because, trust me – given half a chance (and a boring academic essay), a reader will stop reading!

So write to them, person to person, one to one. Which brings me to…

Step Three: *Targeting your audience*

There is no such thing as a general audience. Not really. There are upscale general audiences, like the readers of *The New York Times* who make a lot of money, usually have college degrees, are pretty liberal in their politics. There are gamers who might read *PC Gamer* and who have strong opinions about the good and the bad of specific games. There are high school/college students who might read their school paper or blog to get tips on careers or entertainment. If you have a topic, there's an audience waiting to hear about it.

An audience can be big, but it's always specific.

There's even more to it than that. An important part of figuring out your audience is thinking about what kinds of information it would take to intrigue (and even convince) that particular audience. Politicians like numbers and data. Most people like stories of and about real people. And a lot of times, you have to give them some history of the problem you're addressing just to get them up to speed before what you're saying can even make sense to them. We'll get back this in Step Five, but for now, just put it in your brain.

Step Four: *"Pitching" your article*

If this were the real world of feature articles, you would send the publisher what's called a pitch – a short document (no more than a page of up to 500 words). You could also call it a proposal, but we'll stick with pitch. Create a post in OpenLab where you put your pitch.

What's in a pitch? Usually three to four paragraphs:

> *Title/Subject Line:* use this to create a headline or name your topic.
>
> *Paragraph 1:* Hook (something to catch the editor's attention, it can be funny or straightforward). 2-3 sentences.
>
> *Paragraph 2:* More discussion of the problem and possible solutions. 2-5 sentences.
>
> *Paragraph 3:* Why this article will appeal to the market's readers/audience. 2-3 sentences
>
> *Paragraph 4:* Why you're the best person to write this. What sources you plan to research/use in your article. 2-5 sentences.
>
> *Example (this one's pretty silly, but…):* This is targeted to a gardening magazine *or* an upscale publication like *The New York Times* or *The New Yorker*.

> **[Subject Line]** Climate Change May Mean No More Guacamole
>
> **[Paragraph 1/Hook]** Climate change means certain foods may completely disappear from our shelves. And not just odd organic ones. I mean things like avocados and tomatoes. So much for guacamole. But just as there are ways to address climate change on a global scale, there are things we can do as urban gardeners to deal with food shortages.
>
> **[Paragraph 2/Problem & possible solutions]** We all know the problems that are looming in terms of climate change, but not a lot of people are aware of how it might affect the kinds and quantities of the foods we take for granted. Food scarcity is a very real possibility, but it's one we can take individual action on to help reduce some of the pressure.

> **[Paragraph 3/Audience appeal]** Your upscale urban readers are already interested in the issues of climate change. I intend this article to give them background information on possible food shortages because of climate change as well as some tips on things they can do at home… like becoming an urban gardener in their kitchens.
>
> **[Why I'm the best person to write this]** My family started growing herbs in our front window, which got me started thinking about whether that kind of small gardening could actually make a difference in the coming food crises. I'll gather data from science sources about climate change and food shortages, talk to some urban farmers, and tell the story of my own family's window garden.

Step Five: *Researching for background information*

This one is important for establishing your credibility as an author/knowledgeable source. Besides, this is a research-based informative article, so…

Remember Step Three? You had to consider what kind of evidence you would need to intrigue or convince your target audience. Now get specific and go find it. You can use the library to find some expert "peer review" professional data. Or you can Google to find popular articles. Wikipedia is fine for gathering your own background information and giving you links to some articles (just don't use the Wiki page as a source). Maybe you need to set up an interview with someone you know well who might be willing to share their knowledge or expertise. Or find some good videos on YouTube or Vox. (And by "good" I mean "credible.")

You may have done a more in-depth annotated bib in 1101. Here, we will be using this less as a finished product, and more as a note-taking mechanism, though I will be reading it, and factoring it into your grade! One good way of thinking about it is that the audience of an annotated bibliography is your future self.

*You'll need to find at least **two sources*** (most articles have at least that and usually more). Each entry should be at least 150 words and should include:

1. Bibliographic information. Here's a tip – hang onto the url of the source, and use that as a link inside your article. That way, you don't need to have any kind of Works Cited page (question: did you see any Works Cited pages in the mentor articles on Perusall? Nope. But they do have in-text links, or maybe a "for more information" list!).
2. A one-sentence summary of the source: what was the point? What in particular stood out to you?
3. A commentary on why the source is useful for your article
4. A few sentences on the author's craft. *How* is the writer getting their message across (language, data, visuals, etc.)?
5. At least one pertinent quote. This does NOT count toward your word count but make it something you could possibly use in your own article.
6. Post these in a folder of your own that you create inside the Unit 2 – Feature Article folder in the Google Drive.

So how do you know what to go looking for? Play the KWL+ game:

- write down what you already know,
- ask questions to tease out what you want to know (who, what, when, where, why, how),
- do some quick research,
- take five minutes to make notes on what you learned,
- write down new questions that you still have…

Step Six: *writing your first draft*

1. Review the structure of a feature – what you used to analyze those articles on Perusall:
   - Hook
   - Nut graf
   - Initial research
   - Use of research throughout
   - Use of visuals
   - Conclusion
2. Write the text of your article.
3. Turn that text into a feature article in one of two ways:
   - Use Canva: it's free to sign up and use unless you want to add one of their Pro images (which has a crown on it and will cost you money). To get around that, pick the free ones OR upload any images you want. With Canva, you can replace the text that's already in the template with what you wrote, and also replace any images or add new ones.
   - Use Word or Adobe or some other program, but be sure you have visuals and not just text.
4. Upload the article into your folder in the Unit 2 folder in the Google Drive.