

Writing a "Student Profile"

A "profile feature" is a newspaper article that explores the background and character of a particular person (or group). The focus should be on a news angle and/or key aspects of the subject's personal or professional/academic life. **Based on information gleaned during your interview, try to think about what really stands out that defines your subject.**

The profile should begin with the reason the subject is newsworthy at this time, and should be based on an extensive interview with the subject (see sample questions below). Biographical material is important but should not be overemphasized: the biography is background to the news. Readers should be allowed to better understand the subject by seeing this person in the context of his or her interests and career, educational and family background.

When reporting a profile feature article, pay close attention to your subject's habits and mannerisms. Subtle clues like posture, tone of voice and word choice can all, when presented to readers, contribute to a fuller and more accurate presentation of the interview subject.

When interviewing, encourage your subject to open up and express significant thoughts, feelings or opinions. Do so by asking open-ended questions that are well-planned. Make sure to research the subject of your profile before beginning your interview. This will help you to maintain focus during the conversation and to ask questions that will elicit compelling responses.

The profile should open with an overall picture of the subject's achievements, aims, and personal qualities. Consider interviewing other people (friends/family members), representing a variety of perspectives, about the subject of your profile. Ask them for telling anecdotes. You don't have to quote, or even mention, all of these people in your article.

A profile feature lede can take one of many forms. One is a "delayed lede," in which a person is introduced before his or her relevance is revealed. An example: *As a young girl growing up on the South Side of Chicago, Mae C. Jemison watched telecasts of the Gemini and Apollo spaceflights and knew that that was her destiny. No matter that all the astronauts were male and white and that she was female and black. She simply knew she would be a space traveler. Now a 35-year-old doctor and engineer, Dr. Jemison has realized her dream, launching into orbit yesterday as one of the shuttle Endeavor's sever-member crew. In the process she has become the first African-American woman to go into space. ...*

Review the sample profile I provide as well as the profile on Ebony editor Eden Bridgeman Sklenar, from last week's readings. Like these two samples, begin with an introduction of your subject (your "lede"), followed by a Question and Answer sequence.

Here are some questions to ask but feel free to add your own. It might be helpful to upload these questions into your own google.docs document (which you can upload to our class googledrive).

1. Who's someone you admire, and why?
2. Tell me three pet peeves.
3. What's a typical day like for you?
4. Do you have any skills or talents that most people don't know about?

5. If you could be anywhere other than here, right this minute, where would you be? (Don't overthink it!)
6. Flashback to when you were 10 years old. What do you want to be when you grow up?
7. If we went to your favorite restaurant, what would you order?
8. Finish this sentence. On Sunday mornings, you can usually find me...
9. How do you want people to remember you?
10. What do you think are the best skills that you bring to a job?
11. Name three words that you describe you.
12. How do you think your friends would describe you?
13. What do you want to make sure you do before you die?
14. What's a goal you have for yourself that you want to accomplish in the next year?
16. What publications do you regularly read?
17. What are you happiest doing, when you're not studying or working?
18. What are some causes or issues you care about?
19. What is your current college major? What is your desired future career?
20. What would be your personal motto?