



JLS 624

**FEATURE
WRITING**

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CONTENTS		PAGES
Module 1	General Overview of Features.....	1
Unit 1	Features: A Starting Point.....	1-11
Unit 2	Another Look at Feature Story Ideas	12-16
Unit 3	Special Features and Profiles I	17-28 10
Unit 4	Interview Feature and Profiles II.....	29-39
Unit 5	The Feature Sidebar and Feature Series....	40-52
Module 2	Writing Columns.....	53
Unit 1	Opinion Columns.....	53-61
Unit 2	Personal Columns	62-69
Unit 3	Service Columns I.....	70-75
Unit 4	Service Columns II: Travel Guide	76-81
Module 3	Reviews and Language of Features.....	
Unit 1	Arts Reviews	82-90
Unit 2	Special Correspondents	91-93
Unit 3	Language of Features	94-106
Module 4	Writing Tasks.....	107
Unit 1	Writing the Feature Story	107-116
Unit 2	Writing the Feature: The Intro.....	117-121
Unit 3	The Features Sub-editor.....	122-135
Unit 4	Writing Tasks.....	136-138

MODULE 1 GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FEATURES

GENERA OVERVIEW OF FEATURE

Unit 1	Features: A Starting Point
Unit 2	Another Look at Feature Story Ideas
Unit 3	Special Features and Profiles I
Unit 4	Interview Features and Profiles II
Unit 5	The Feature Sidebar and Feature Series

UNIT 1 FEATURES - A STARTING POINT

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Features: A Starting Point
3.2	The Nature of Feature Articles
3.3	Characteristics of Features
3.4	The Nature of Feature Stories
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit briefly explains the nature of feature stories, picks one definition out of several and examines it as well as looks at the various types of feature stories. The idea is to refresh your memory (for those who are not media workers and those who have not been engaged in any form of journalistic writing).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the Nature of Feature Stories.
- Identify some feature story types.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 A Starting Point

Imagine the great tragedy that befell the country when bombs exploded at the Ikeja Military Cantonment in Lagos early this year. If you were not an eye-witness, try and recollect what you saw on the television, the stories and pictures you saw in newspapers and magazines and eyewitness accounts. Clearly, you would not restate what has been said in the media. You would look for your own unusual angle if you were to write on this tragedy.

As a starting point, especially at this level, features are people, ideas and event-oriented as they are usually written about interesting people, ideas or events depending on the unusual perspective from which the writer looks at it. Therefore, let us look at the professional definition of “features”.

Definition of Course Title

Feature Writing is a course in mass communication which involves and explores the creative abilities of the journalist to its fullest; and uses the journalist’s literary skills maximally. It is a creative effort based on facts and figures.

The feature writer writes articles or stories that break out as news or that creep up from his personal imaginations or his true life experiences. These stories or articles are therefore not fictitious; rather, they are factual and so are more in-depth than fiction

What is feature writing?

A feature story is a colourful story about people, events, places and life. It is an in-depthly researched and creative piece of writing with information drawn from eye witnesses and experts on the subject. Features could be occasionally subjective, but often factual in nature. They are primarily designed to entertain and inform readers of an event, a situation or an aspect of life. These attributes of features may have been responsible for Okoye’s definition of features as:

“An in-depth and factual write up on a topical issue which seeks to give comprehensive information in a more captivating and relaxed style than straight news”.

Feature writing is a crucial part of the news papering business especially

in this age when cable transmissions are discouraging a lot of people from reading newspapers. The broadcast media, especially the television, is capitalizing on its strength of immediacy, impact, price and credibility. This means that you can get the information live, immediately it happens and this makes an impact on you especially if it comes with vivid and colorful pictures. The credibility is also not in doubt because it becomes a matter of “what you see is what it is”.

3.2 The Nature of Feature Articles

A feature story must be unusual i.e. it should not be about something that usually happens, e.g. car crash (except if it involves a prominent personality). It must have the human interest dimension as this gives the reader or listener a sense of personal relationship with the subject. When human interest feelings or suffering is narrowed down to a particular human being, then the reader readily identifies with the subject.

Usually, a conflict (serious or trivial) gets resolved either way i.e. negatively or positively in a feature story. Thus, a feature story has universal appeal to its readers.

Features are not restricted to only the print media. There are features on radio and television also. A radio feature may take up three minutes while a television feature can run for 10 15 minutes. Berger (1990) distinguishes between mini documentaries (these are not longer than 15 minutes) and standard documentaries that run for one hour or more.

3.3 Characteristics of features

A feature article is not fiction, neither is it a one-sided account of an interested party. Rather, it is a balanced report reflecting all the angles of the story. This is why Okenwa in distinguishing a feature from a story states that:

While a news writer will normally stick to facts and report them as a matter of fact, without embellishment or comments of any kind, the feature writer offers more than bare facts. He can add flavour to his story. He can embellish the facts, background them, entertain comments... and interpret them. He uses anecdotes, descriptions and humour. He uses more factual and imaginative language. And his story can be more subjective; maybe, even more entertaining. (okenwa,)

From the above assertion, it becomes obvious that a feature story takes on additional values which make it quite unique and distinct from

straight news. Certain things equally make features stand out clearly against straight news. These can be regarded as their characteristics which every regular reader of features can easily identify. A few of these characteristics are discussed below just to refresh our memories.

1. Imperishable

This is a very important **feature** of feature articles. This simply means that a feature article does not perish, unlike the story which becomes stale the next day. This is because there is usually a time-frame on the news story which makes the story lose value if not published within the time-frame. The feature story is not attached to such time-frames since it is usually carefully selected and created at the feature writer's convenience.

2. Cannot be scooped

This means that someone's particular feature article cannot be published in its originality before hand, by another writer. This is simply because the choice of topics for future stories is simply is the prerogative of the feature writer.

3. Can be created from mundane ideas or issues

There is actually no rigidity in the selection of a feature topic. Hence, any topic or issue can be featured. In the past, certain topics or issues were considered too trivial to be published. However, with the development of the press, ideas and topics which previously would have been considered inconsequential became the toast of feature writer. In other words, the choice of topics for features includes both the serious and trivial.

4. Give in-depth information on topical issues

Feature articles give in depth information to the audience about a particular topic. This is because the writer must have investigated the topic before presenting the different angles to the audience. Hence, features are written under very relaxed atmosphere. This gives room for adequate survey of facts and information on the topic to be "featurised"

5. Selection of topic is rigorous

Feature articles are rigorously selected because the feature writer has to present something (topic) that is usually captivating; colourfully and stylishly presented in a unique manner.

6. Delayed and more complete

Feature stories are not as timely as straight news because time is required for the indepth investigation of the topic. Hence, delay in feature is pardonable, moreso, when it is justified with a balanced report. Features are complete because they give all the sides to the story and present a rounded perspective of it, thereby satisfying the curiosity built up by the skeletal nature of straight news.

7. Fleshy and Colourful

The feature writer adds more flesh to the straight news to make it a feature story. However, “fleshiness” does not mean undue padding and stuffing of the material. The language of the feature is supposed to be colourful, having been written in figurative and in flowery constructions. This colourful language appeals to the sensory aspects of readers. This kind of language is quite different from the formal language of straight news. It is really more picturesque, informal and humorous. Hence, it is more attractive to read. Suggestively, good feature articles are read for pleasure. So it is a major challenge of feature writers to make their stories pleasurable to the reader.

8. Stylish

This means a unique or peculiar way of doing something which is equally attractive in nature. Stylistic therefore, permits the feature writer to use his own peculiar approach to writing which could be in form of his own word-coinages, romantic expressions, captivating images or use of language. Style differentiates one writer from another and it professionally allows the writer to shift his mode of writing. The stylistic language of feature entrenches the readers and thus distracts the attention of the readers from the bulkiness of the piece which naturally, would have made the story boring.

3.3 Types of Feature Stories

Here, caution should be applied to the categorization of the different feature types as instances of overlaps cannot be ruled out in some cases. We would briefly identify the types of feature stories before we focus our attention on the ones that are relevant to us in this programme:

1. Process “how to do it” feature
2. Personal Experience in First Person Stories.
3. The News or Current Situation Feature
4. Personality Profiles

5. Commemorative Features.
6. The Historical
7. The Hobbyist
8. The Invention or Medical story
9. The Number
10. The odd occupation
11. The participatory
12. The capsule features.
13. The Travelogue
14. The Expose or Alarme
15. The Big Read
16. Human Interest features
17. Seasonal features
18. Specialised features

Process “how-to-do-it” feature

This kind of feature is educational because it teaches readers how to do things. In a simple playful and funny manner, the audience is informed and educated on certain issues. A lot of readers want to learn certain skills e.g. how to cook certain dishes, keep a garden, drive cars etc. A good example of this type of feature is “Ten ways to drive a car”.

Personal Experience Stories

This type of feature is based on the personal experience or eye witness account of the reporter. A reporter on duty may suddenly find himself in an unexpected circumstance; e.g. beaten up by a mob. He may want to narrate his ordeal to the public. He may want to recreate this gory experience. Some newspapers have columns called the “Reporters Notebook” where journalists recount their personal experiences in form of features. Personal experience stories could also be a form of features based on participant observation.

Personality Profiles

This is a kind of human interest feature. It is actually a close look at the personality of a prominent person in the society. It involves achievers i.e., people who have made name and are newsworthy. The space allotted to a person’s profile depends on his prominence. For instance, an obituary profile could take the whole of a paper’s front page, depending on the person’s prominence.

General profiles could be written also on organizations and places. After reading a profile, one feels that one has got an intimate knowledge

about the subject matter discussed

Commemorative Features.

These are features written to commemorate important events in a nation or in the world. For instance, a beautiful piece can be written on the Nigeria's Armed Forces Remembrance Day. Equally, a beautiful feature can be done on the commemoration of the 60 years of World War II.

Historical, Hobbyist and Odd Occupation

Feature stories can equally be written on:

- a. Historical events such as; "the Ikeja Cantoment Bomb blast or the Nigeria civil war.
- b. Hobby: A person's unique hobby could be quite newsworthy and so be featured.
- c. Odd Occupation: Odd Occupations such as "reverse driving" can make very interesting feature stories.

All these depend on the feature writer's ability to embellish and present the stylistically.

Participatory feature

This is quite similar to experience feature. It involves a recount of one's experience on an event he participated in.

The Capsule feature or features

This is a short snappy, compact feature about people in the news. Some magazines call it newsmakers e.g. **Newsweek**. Some call it "in the news" as in Newswatch. The focus is usually on celebrities and newsworthy people making news in light-hearted manner.

The Travelogue

This is an account of a trip to a place of interest. It informs the readers about life in other places and draws lessons by comparing life in those places with the situation at home. Travelogues are written by journalists who travel to far places in the course of official duties or holidays. Examples of travelogues are profiles of these places visited by the journalist blended with anecdotes of his experiences while there.

The Exposee or Alarmer

Is the type of feature that exposes or identifies something wrong in the society. Examples are: Certificate Racketeering in Nigerian Universities, Female Genital mutilation (FGM), Advanced Fee Fraud (419), Child-Trafficking, Brain -Drain

To obtain authentic information for this kind of features, Okoye (1998), recommends the following:-

Participant observation

Find a participant who is ready to “spill all the beans”

Use records of tribunals and/or investigative panels.

Human Interest Features

This is the type of features that shed light on issues in that are of general interest to people. Essentially, the features are about human beings. So, they quickly appeal to the emotions of the readers by stimulating and captivating the readers to put themselves into the character’s position. Features on children and old people are very effective world- wide because people sympathize with these two categories of people since they are considered helpless.

Seasonal Features

Are those features that are tied to the calendar. They deal with different seasons such as Easter, Christmas, Ramadan, Valentine, Children’s day, Worker’s day Independence etc. These are regular features and so, have to be very entertaining. Examples are:- “A Devotion to Nigeria’s Golden Jubilee Independence”

Specialized Features

These are features that focus on special areas such as: Science, Farming, Leisure Traveling, Botany etc. Example: A feature on the use of bamboo for furniture and crafts.

The list is indeed inexhaustible. Knowing which one you want to write helps to give your writing a focus. The areas of commonality among all the identified feature types include the fact that all of these types are features, no matter the type of tag it carries. Once a story has universal appeal or attraction for the reader, then it is a good subject for feature stories.

Go over this list again and identify the most common. Of course, it is the news or current situation feature story. Since feature stories are factual and non-fictional, it follows that any feature story idea would be based on a news report or idea or event. There are no hard and fast rules about where features can be found in newspapers as there are several sections that can carry feature stories such as “business”, “economy” “people” “entertainment”, “fashion” etc.

Having brushed through the different types of feature stories because it is assumed here that you have come across them either at the diploma or undergraduate level, we will concentrate on the different segments of the specialist feature columns.

Perhaps, the most difficult type of feature is the “**medical story**” classified under the “Invention feature story. This is because it really involves the writer’s emotions which sometimes colors the story, in most cases, negatively. This type involves death and finally, the resolution of the conflict either positively or negatively.

In most cases, such illnesses are rare and unusual and the patient is in most cases either indigent or a destitute. A terminal illness is enough emotional trauma for most people. Thus, such stories are difficult to write. Sometimes the feature is written after the death of the subject. Certain things the subject said or did are given prominence in order to comfort those who are most touched by his death. For instance, Tyna Onwudiwe aka “Her Royal Punkness” was a musician and a fashion designer. She glamourised weird dressing along with Charles Oputa aka “Charley Boy”. She died of cancer in a South African hospital in year 2001. All the things she said when she discovered she was battling a terminal illness were reconstructed and featured. Her organization, Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria (PMAN) organised funds raising shows, walks, etc for her but before these funds could be realized, she had died.

Several feature stories now told us how she put up a fight, how she so much wanted to live, how her father and her children flew to South Africa to be with her during this trying period, what she would have wanted, her last words, what she looked like on her sick bed, etc.

One needs a lot of restraint in order not to get too emotional in the course of writing such a feature story.

There is a category of feature story we have not mentioned here. This is what is called a “**big read**” feature story, because it is not presented to the reader in the normal half a page of newspaper features or the usual

magazine feature format of one to several pages. This type of feature story is serialized because it is very long. Sometimes, as long as a short novel. Because it would take up virtually all the space, the features sub editor who is responsible for “making a story the right size for the space allocated to it” on the features page decides that the best thing is to serialize the story. This type of story has the added advantage of suspense as it whets the appetite of the reader and leaves him guessing and anxious for the remaining part of the story.

This kind of feature is educational because feature writing involves, essentially two main activities: information gathering and writing. A feature story should be readable, appropriate for its readers; the content must tally with the topic, appropriate in its choice of words and convincing in tone.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has briefly looked at the nature and characteristics of feature stories as well as the different types of Features. The list is inexhaustive.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Which is the most common type feature story? Go over the ones identified and point out the most common.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has identified and briefly explained the nature of feature stories as well as the different types of feature stories. It has stressed the fact that any story presented from an unusual angle and having universal appeal will make a good feature story. It has also identified the “big read i.e. serialized feature story as well as given an example of an inventory / medical feature story. We have also mentioned the fact that later units will concentrate on specialist feature stories.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Think of a feature story that can fall into the category of the “big read”. Before your story gets to the sub editor who examine it like a surgeon an incision, you should be satisfied that you have a good serialized feature. Because it is very long, almost like a novel, it needs to be well planned.
2. Develop a topic on which you can write a serialized feature story in any area of your choice.
3. Now, make an outline for the topic showing what you will write about. But do not go into the actual writing.

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UNIT 2 ANOTHER LOOK AT FEATURE STORY IDEAS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Another Look at Feature Story Ideas
 - 3.2 Revisiting Feature Story Ideas
 - 3.3 Function of features
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we take another look at feature story ideas. It is assumed that we already know where and how to get feature story ideas.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Give reasons why some feature ideas will not work;
- Illustrate how to focus on specific people, places, events and things in features

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Revisiting Feature Story Ideas

Here, let us start by being realistic. Put your self in the position of the newspaper reader.

As a reader, what would you like to read in a feature story? Let me give you some choices as in feature story on:

- a) Pornography in Nigerian home videos;
- b) Horses living in air conditioned stables;
- c) A mechanic turned university lecturer.

Which one would you rather read? Let's assume that you picked 'b', what is unusual about it? In a country like ours where more than 50%

of the population are illiterate, and by extension are poor, ignorant and malnourished, it becomes unusual and even immoral for animals (horses) to live in such opulence where they are washed, cleaned, given prompt medical attention, well-fed and are even kept in air conditioned stables when the stable boy is poverty stricken and lives in squalor in a nearby shed. How many Nigerians feed three times a day let alone get adequate medical attention not to talk of the unimaginable living in an air conditioned house?

Thus, the story has some qualities, it is unusual and of human interest, given the situation in the country where people die daily because they cannot afford to pay medical bills.

So how do you get feature story ideas? Ideas can come from a variety of sources.

These are some of the ways in which you could get feature story ideas:

1. Through your editor
2. From writing off the news/spin offs/follow ups.
3. Odd occupations angle
4. Good listener and avid reader
5. Sociological approach
6. Topical or controversial issues
7. Diaries and calendars
8. Cable satellite stations
9. Internet
10. Inspiration
11. Interviews

First, as a cub reporter, you could get ideas from the editor who occasionally sends you out on feature story assignments. It is then left to you to turn this idea into an exciting and stimulating story. You could also scout round for news items that could be features. For instance, you could talk about the stigma of childlessness in our society based on the regular NTA network news features “Newslines” Story on Mary, the girl three women claimed as their child but which was resolved through DNA. This is called “writing off the news” or “Spin offs” or “follow ups.”

You could also consider odd occupations such as a woman running a funeral parlour. It is also interesting to find out who changes the bulb on NITEL transmitting mast? First of all, identify the occupation and then go in search of the subjects.

Then you should be a good listener as well as an avid reader. This enables you to keep your eyes and ears open by listening to news, reading news and gossip columns, watching television, reading bill boards, advertisements, obituaries, cartoons, tit bits, encyclopedias, Guinness Book etc.

3.2 Functions of Features

From the on-going, it is clear that features and straight news play complementary roles. While the straight news informs the audience about the occurrences of the day, the feature helps the readers to understand better, what happened. There are various other functions of features which include:

1. They **summarize** the important news of the week. For instance, on Sunday, 22nd October 2005, Channels TV broke the sad news of the death of the first lady- Mrs. Stella Obasanjo. Later in the week up to 2 months afterwards, features were written on her tragic death giving further information on the cause, date and circumstances surrounding her death, as well as the glamorous life she lived.
2. They **break the boredom** of the formal and rigid nature of straight news. Because features are written in a more relaxed atmosphere, they are more detailed and so provide enough information for those who read for pleasure. So, features can be substituted for novels. After all, the only difference between novels and features is that while novels are **fiction**, features are **factual**.
3. They educate, inform and entertain. In this way, they perform the basic functions of communication to mankind.
4. Features **enrich** the hard (straight) news and they beautify the newspaper or magazines that use them. The pictures, illustrate, charts, diagrams etc. used to embellish the features stories enhance the entire make up of the newspaper and magazines.

Using the sociological approach according to Awoyinfa and Igwe (1990), involves bringing together or grouping people with a common social denominator(s) such as ethnic group, religion, occupation, birth, etc. For instance, you could write a feature on "Lone twins" i.e. a set of twins where only one has survived out of the two. This is very common among fraternal twins. You could ask them how they felt when the other twin was alive, how they feel now, if they feel they are missing

anything, etc. Also, story ideas could be generated from controversial or topical issues such as privatization of university education in Nigeria. What are the implications for students, parents, lecturers, the society at large, etc?

Another area where you can get stories is through diaries and calendars as most of these are graphically and colourfully presented and holidays, festivals, etc are clearly indicated.

More recent and advanced sources of stories are the cable network transmissions such as CNN, BBC News, Sky News, etc. These stations are in the fore-front as far as immediate, concise and colourful update on news and events, they flash news updates, breaking news and also do follow ups on news items already aired. A news items that could be written from the local (Nigerian) angle could be here.

The internet is like the king on the cake, so to say, as far as the previous ways of getting ideas are concerned. It capitalizes on the disadvantage of the news stations. These include people asking questions, receiving answers, visiting web sites, it enables you to make friends, make purchases without leaving your house, etc. It is a house for materials and information especially when you are conducting researches on specific subjects.

Friedlander & Lee (1993) argue that “invariably the ideas are worth investigating others not but all requiring focus”. Now what do we mean by focus. It means you do not pick mega topics such as university undergraduates or global economy or ill-health. You need to turn the search light on to a particular undergraduate who has done something unusual or who something unusual has happened to. In this regard, you focus your attention on what you want to highlight and direct your research towards that angle.

Now, some feature story ideas will just not work. The ideas are good but are lacking in focus. So, what does the writer do? You first identify the type of feature story you want to write. Having done this, you then decide from which unusual angle(s) you want to look at it. Then, you conduct your research based on the type of feature and the angle(s). This will guide your writing giving it a sharper focus. An unfocused feature story is wider in scope and is often full of irrelevant details, illustrations and information (Keeble, 1994: 244).

The last way in which you can get feature story ideas is through inspiration. Inspiration comes at different times to different people. Once the idea strikes you, get the proverbial reporter’s handbook and

write it down as quickly as possible before you forget. The fine-tuning comes later. This is particularly helpful especially if the writer is suffering from the infamous writers block.

In addition, you could start a conversation with a taxi driver, the man behind the counter in the Post Office, at a football match, at the school's inter-house sports, the newspaper vendor, etc. Whatever information you get from them need to be authenticated in order not to be seen as Janet Cooke, the Pulitzer Price Feature Fraud.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have briefly examined how to get feature story ideas. We have also taken another look at more innovative feature ideas.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

In what other ways do you think you could get story ideas apart from the ones enumerated here? Give at least 3 ways.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has identified how to get feature story ideas as ranging from follow ups to being a good listener at occasions, an avid reader, to cable transmissions and the internet.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) a) If a feature story is dull and un-interesting, then something is wrong with its focus. Pick any topic of your choice and explain how you are going to focus your research, unusual angle and feature type on this topic.
- b) Make an outline showing what you will write and how it will be arranged.

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UNIT 3 SPECIAL FEATURES AND PROFILES I

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Qualities of a good features writing
 - 3.2 Special features
 - 3.3 Profiles: People Profiles
 - 3.4 Types of People Profiles
 - 3.5 Radio/T.V/Film Features
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit goes beyond the level of ordinary features to the specialist feature stories. It focuses on each area of specialty and gives samples of each one for practical and theoretical experience.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the concept of special features;
- Outline the qualities of a good quality writer.
- describe the characteristics of profiles; and
- Illustrate this by analyzing the personality profile included in this unit

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Qualities of a Good Feature Writer

To successfully, pursue his career as a feature writer or reporter, the journalist must possess these essential qualifications of a good journalist plus an analytical and creative capability which should be above of what is required for reporting straight news. Hence, he must be a distinct journalist with the ability to:

1) **Nose for News**

This, according to Mac Dougall is the first among the several “qualifications” a reporter needs. This means the ability to recognize the news possibilities. He explains that this involves:

- a. The ability to recognize that the information can be made of interest to readers.
- b. The ability to recognize clues which may be very casual but which may lead to the discovery of important news.
- c. The ability to recognize the possibility of other stories related to the particular information at hand.

These of course, imply that the feature writer must be inquisitive, perspective and positively skeptical.

The reporter with a cultivated nose for news realizes that although the same elements may be present in similar stories, they invariably are there in different proportions as to importance.

To get a good feature story from a newsworthy event, the writer must be constantly on his toes. He has to think and think and he has to ask and ask. Good reporting consists in getting all the pertinent facts and then some more. In the other words, when working on a feature story, get more information than necessary. A good feature writer must learn to do a through job of delving into all the potential angles of a straight news story.

Smelling a rat attitude is also an attribute of the feature writer as well as the straight news reporter. In simple terms, this means looking beyond the ordinary to get the big story behind the news. MacDougall points out that this *smelling a rat* attitude should be the most valuable attribute of any kind of research, whether journalistic or academic.

The truth seeking reporter employs every possible avenue for information.

2. **Be Resourceful**

Being resourceful means that the feature writer or news gatherer must be able to go the extra mile to reach the heart of news irrespective of the obstacles he will face in the process. Without this quality, the feature writer may just make do with the periphery of the story Successful

journalists are essentially those who make the extra effort to expose the facts.

3. Be Curious

Awoyinfra and Igwe rightly observe that “curiosity gives birth to a good feature writer”. Curiosity means having an eye for new things and striking things that are unusual. That is, an eye for seeing the extraordinary in ordinary things. In fact, a feature writer must be curious about everything around him especially **oddities**.

4. Be Observant

A curious writer also needs to be observant so that he can notice striking things that stick to the mind. He must equally have a strong selective mind which helps him to sieve the shaft from the grain. Ray Ekpu rightly points out that the observant journalist observes things that are going on which other people are not observing; and listens to things that are being said which others are not listening to”.

5. Be Analytical

A feature writer must have analytical mind. This means he must understand and interpret developments in the light of their relevance to the society and of course, anchor the report on people. The ability to understand developments in the society is the important qualities of a feature writer.

6. Posses Reportorial Skills

To Ted Iwere, a good feature writer is a “reporter who can report “. He has to have the nose of a reporter and the heart of a novelist. He must be able to do both because his job as a feature writer goes beyond the use of the 5 (five) honest men (WH).

He should combine his reportorial abilities with imaginative and literary abilities, to achieve this; he must be an avid reader who reads out-of-habit.

7. Love for Public Service

A good journalist must have interest in the public. The basic duties of the journalist are hinged on being socially responsible to the society with a view of correcting them. This is the function of expose features or alarmers.

These are the key qualities that must be found in a feature writer if he must be considered a good one.

3.2 Special features

Special features are usually written by specialist writers who have graduated from the level of “general” reporter or even a general feature writer. This means that they write on different topics and in different areas. But the specialist writer becomes a specialist by virtue of his background, qualifications or area of special interest. Freelancers are in this category. Because they write well and are authorities in the different areas they write about and they are usually in high demand by media houses. From the broad areas they used to write on, they now narrow their scope. This makes the focus of their writing sharper and clearer. The story is deeper in depth and more detailed. A specialist feature writer soon becomes an authority in the area in which he writes.

3.3 Profiles: People Profiles

The profile is the most common aspect of a feature story. The writer discovers that he writes more profiles than sidebars and series. Fridlander & Lee (1993) argue that “profiles are in depth studies of miscellaneous people of whom nothing is required except that they be interesting....a true profile, whether short or long, must enable readers to see and get to know the subject”.. (p237).

The profile involves the writer painting pictures with his careful choice of words. The profile could be about organizations such as ASUU, buildings like the Presidential Villa in Aso Rock, Schools, Personalities, etc although personality or people profiles are the most common.

The relevance of profiles are many. For instance, people enjoy being profiled as this, they believe, helps improve / increase their public rating. Public figures, celebrities, artistes, etc are fussy about being profiled by writers who are either not well known or who are not on the payroll of a media outfit.

Also writers enjoy writing profiles as they see it as a challenge and at the same time an opportunity for them to widen their circle of friends and acquaintances. It is believed that some journalists made names on the strength of the profiles they wrote. It is alleged that a former Ambassador to Spain got his posting because he did a very good profile on former President Ibrahim Babangida when the former was a journalist.

For readers, profiles are very interesting and as such, most welcome. Profiles satisfy the curiosity of readers concerning the person being profiled. The reader is allowed to peep into the private recesses of the life of the subject.

Business wise, profiles help promote business both for the publishers who spend money on getting stories as well as for the writer who will likely sell more copies of his book and for the man who pays PR companies to promote and market him.

3.4 Types of People Profiles

There is no hard and fast rule concerning profiles. There is also no standard format.

A person may be profiled for any of the following reasons:

1. His views on certain topical issues whether negative or positive.
2. Because he has done something unusual probably having a stable full of horses or a public figure for his humility.
3. If he has recently been married or divorced or ended a relationship.
4. If the newspaper presents the person in its “opinion” or “op-ed” column. This type of profile is seen as “authoritative” because it carries the stamp of authority.
5. If he dies, in which case an obituary profile is written.
6. If the subject has a prized possession, a hobby or something unusual and outstanding.

Alake: The Regicide That Failed

Next Saturday, being the first Saturday of the month of November, the Alake of Egbaland, Oba Samuel Mofolorunsho Oyebade Lipede is expected, as he has done since 1987, to lead Egba sons and daughters on pilgrimage to Igbo Lisabi (the Lisabi grove) on the outskirts of Oba in Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area of the Egba Kingdom. This annual ritual, which is a symbolic celebration of the heroism of the Egbas and, in the fashion of ancient rites, an admixture of religion and secular display, will however assume a different character this year. It will not only be history that the Egbas will be celebrating in the presence of Lisabi, Agbongbo Akala, their primordial warrior-spirit, nor will they only be remembering Madam Tinubu, Sodeke, and all such heroes from the past. Rather, the Gbedu drums will resonate with a different frequency.

The celebration will be more trenchant, and the Egbas, known for their confidence will pat themselves on the back and thank the spirits. For, if

matters had gone differently, indeed if the conspirators who had schemed to poison Oba Oyebade Lipede on October 5 had succeeded, Lisabi Day would have been different, this year. But the gods had said no to that plot, taken straight from the pages of Shakespeare's Macbeth.

Oba Lipede's spirit had also resisted such a clumsy manner of departure, since that royal triumph over evil, the average Egbaman has been beating his chest at home and abroad that the theatrics apart, it would not have been possible, one way or another, to poison their Alake. Not only would it have been a taboo, but also a big disgrace to the Egbas. Well, it is celebration all the way.

And perhaps, that is as it should be. Moreso as the murder plot has been happily resolved, complete with the arithmetic affective divisions of the melodramatic forms. As told, a Beninois steward in the Oba's palace had been contracted by an undisclosed and unidentified Egba High Chief, to make a local fetish and poison the king. With an advance fee of N10,000.00, the steward truly procured the deadly instruments (a red horn, an effigy of the Alake, a wooden comb, an animal skull, assorted birds' feathers, black soap, a gourd, and an animal's tail) through a Lagos based driver commuting between Lagos and Benin Republic.

But the plotters of this palace coup over-estimated their own ingenuity and took for granted the office of their target. As it happened, the plot turned full blast in their face as they rejoiced too early, attracted attention and suspicion, and were duly found out. Both the driver and the steward (both non-indigenes) are now in police net. The alleged Egba Chief is yet to be identified. The motives are shrouded in mystery. But Kabiyesi is safe.

The matter is as puzzling as it is torrid. The question that is to be asked is: Who wants Oba Lipede dead? Born on January 26, 1915, Oba Oyebade Lipede is the nineteenth Alake in the history of the Egbas, and the ninth Alake since the establishment of the Egba Federation in 1830s. A product of what Saburi Biobaku, the Baapitan of Egbaland, calls an enlightened and influential section of the historic Jibodu dynasty of the Alake Ruling Houses, Oba Lipede ascended the throne of his ancestors on August 5, 1972, after a career in the customs service spanning about three decades.

His was a reign foretold. Palace sources had indicated that long before Oba Lipede's ascension to the throne, the original three sections of Egbaland (Egba Alake, Egba Oke-Ona and Gbagura (they were later joined by Owu) which had left the Egba Forest, following a protracted, internecine war with the Oyo Empire to come and settle in Abeokuta,

had out of anxiety and concern consulted the oracle about the future of the new settlement. And the oracle has spoken unambiguously, that during the reign of the ninth Alake in the new settlement, Abeokuta will witness unprecedented growth, economically and politically and come to be reckoned with, far and near.

And as predicted, Oba Oyebade Lipede has fulfilled this promise. Barely four years after his coronation, Abeokuta was named the capital of Ogun State: an achievement which not only opened up the town to the outside community, but also brought a great many infrastructures. That same year, an Egba son, General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Bobajiro of Egbaland, whose wife, Chief (Mrs) Stella Obasanjo is the Iyameto of Egbaland, became the Head of State of Nigera, the first Yoruba man to occupy such an exalted office. In later years, commentators will remark further that under the reign of Oba Oyebade Lipede, Abeokuta not only produced the first Yoruba Head of State, the town also produced a second one in the person of Chief Ernest Shogunle Shonekan, the Abese of Egbaland who was the Head of Government under General Ibrahim Babangida, and later Head of the controversial Interim National Government (ING) in 1994.

The town equally has the distinction of having produced Chief M.K.O Abiola, the Bobagunwa of Egbaland, who if the events of June 12, 1993 had been more politically correct, would have become president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. All three, instructively, are chiefs in the Alake's palace. Under Oba Lipede, Abeokuta and its environs have further become truly modern and industrialized. Between 1972-1995, Abeokuta alone has witnessed the establishment of more federal schools and a university, and with the Oba's spiritual guidance, there has been relative peace in the domain.

Oba Oyebade Lipede became king at a time when Obas were no longer allowed to play prominent political roles. With the introduction of the 1952 local government law of the former Western Region, power in traditional settings became vested in the Local Government councils. By 1966, when the military took over, and with the 1952 Local Government law still effective, traditional rulers had lost their political power. This had made not a few traditional rulers to lose their respect and glamour as in a bid for relevance, they scramble for opportunities and favours that are beneath their stature. But not Oba Oyebade Lipede. In the face of the changing fortunes of the traditional institution, he has remained dignified, leading the Egbas with a sense of purpose.

In his 23 years on the throne, (he has the distinction of being the third longest reigning monarch in Egba history since 1898), Oba Lipede's

concerns have been the maintenance of traditional institutions and the development of Egbaland.

In the first instance, he is the spiritual head and royal father of all Egbas, and ensuring that the festivals which link the community with their past continue to be observed in an ageless fashion. In this task, he is assisted by four other Obas in charge of the four sections of Egbaland: Oba Adedayo Olajoke, Shobekun II, the Agura of Gbagura; Oba (Dr) Adedapo Tejuso, Karunwi II, the Osile of Oke Ona Egba, Oba(Dr) Olawale Adisa Odeleye, Lagbedu I, the Olowu of Owu, and Oba Jacob Olufemi Omolade, Lafa II, the Olubara of Ibara. Each of these obas, like the Alake, is educated and each in his own style reflects and encourages the growing cosmopolitan character of Egbaland.

Oba Oyebade Lipede has, in addition, always paid great attention to the development of Egbaland. This, in two ways, by continuously appealing to Egba sons and daughters to return home to set up industries and build houses, and by pleading with the Federal Government to focus more attention on Egbaland for development projects. On both counts, Oba Lipede has been successful. Between 1972- and 1982 alone, about 70 companies and small scale industries were incorporated in Abeokuta according to the records of the State Ministry of Trade, Co-operatives and Industries, and between then and now, the number has since tripled.

New settlements marked by modern houses of refined architecture have also sprung up in several parts of the town. For many years, the Alake almost single-handedly pleaded with the Federal Government to dualise the Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway. When he succeeded in getting approval from the Federal Government, it was a cause for celebration in 1992 during his 20th coronation anniversary, although work is yet to start.

There is a common saying that the Egbas are difficult to serve, “Egba Soro sin”. This is perhaps because of the independent mindedness of the average Egba man, a fact which makes it impossible for the Egbas to exhibit a herd mentality. And this is not without reason. The Egbas came in contact with Western education and civilization, very early in their history. The first newspaper in Nigeria “Iwe Iroyin” was published in Abeokuta in 1859, and the earliest missionaries including Henry Townsed and Bishop Ajayi Crowther had lived in the town. As early as 1900, Egba obas communicated directly with the Queen of England, and the people were well educated, demonstrating at all times, a refusal to be dominated as exemplified by the rebellion of the Egba women under the leadership of the inimitable Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti in 1944. But with Oba Lipede on the throne, there has been calm in the land;

even if there has been one or two controversial issues, which Oba Lipede has handled, with accustomed refinement.

The first had to do with ascension to the throne of the Osile of Oke-Ona, Oba(Dr) Adedapo Tejuoso, a medical doctor. He sought to re-define the limits of the Alake's authority calling him the Alake of Ake, rather than the Alake of Egbaland. But this unusual rebellion from one of the original quarters was handled maturedly, by the palace, without a word from the Alake. Again, during the June 12 political crisis, the principal players in the crisis had turned out to be mainly Egbas. Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola the disputed winner of the election, and Chief Ernest Shonekan who had been appointed to head the ING, were both Alake's Chiefs, and there had been much anxiety in the land over whom the Alake should or will support. The Alake, as in all other matters, chose to stand on the side of his people, by continuously insisting up till this moment that the Federal Government should go back to June 12 and not divide his people.

In spite of his commitment to the Egbas however, the Alake has also played an active role in the nation, building in the process, goodwill for the Egbas. Although a well meaning intervention in the chairmanship tussle in the Oyo State Council of Chiefs between the Ooni of Ife and the Alaafin of Oyo had earned him a rebuke, and an allegation of prejudice from the Oyo Mesi in 1987. The Alake in his interventions in national issues is generally known and regarded as a man of peace. A biography, published in September 1992, was titled "Lipede: A Dove of Destiny". The brochure for his 20th coronation anniversary was also titled: "The King of Peace".

Oba Oyebade Lipede has served as the Chancellor of both the University of Uyo, and the Federal University of Yola, Adamawa State. In May 1995, he was invited by the Kaduna State Government to commission the N20 million Saminaka Water Supply Dam. A Commander of the Federal Republic (CFR), he attended St. Peter's Primary School, Ake, and later Abeokuta Grammar School, where he was classmate of the exemplary late Chief Simeon Adebo, Nigeria's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations. After 23 years on the throne, Oba Lipede continues to attract nothing but praises. And hence, every January, August and November, it is with unaffected enthusiasm that people troop to the Ake palace to mark his birthday, his coronation anniversary and the annual Lisabi Day celebration.

In 1994, he suspended his 22nd coronation anniversary due to the political crisis ravaging the country, but next Saturday, November 4 will be another Lisabi Day when the sons and daughters of Egbaland will

gather together to celebrate and thank their ancestors for sparing the life of their beloved king Oba Oyebade Lipede who turned 80 in August. They will be able to dance, more royally to the Gbedu drum from Oba to Itoku. It is correct poetic justice that the regicide failed.

3.5 Radio, T.V & Film Features

We have read a lot about feature writing in the print media but little or nothing has been said about features in the electronic media. We will briefly discuss this aspect here.

Features in the radio, TV and Film features once again, are not News reports. They are often about events. One such features is the anniversary feature which reminds us about an event in the past, which puts a story in perspective. Also, features are usually stories (based on factual events) that listeners/viewers will find interesting. Thus, the entertaining quality must be there too. This means that creativity and inventiveness are hallmarks of the feature story. Radio features are always short, and generally last between 2-3 minutes, whereas the print media features will be about, 1,000 words for it to make any meaning.

A documentary is a representation of the reality of certain experiences or the creative production of real life experiences. This means that a documentary contains factual production or representation of real life experiences. Some documentaries are based on cause and effect logic and others examine subjects from different perspectives using the stream of consciousness device.

Berger (1990) argues that documentaries are research reports made using sound and images. This is important because it suggests that scripts for documentaries might be used, in certain cases, as alternatives to the traditional research papers assigned in courses. Documentaries are always based on research. It is only the method of presentation of one's findings in the form of a script rather than long essay that is different.

The camera records what it is pointed at. This means that documentaries can be subjective depending on who is handling the camera. The problem of selection and interpretation exist.

Some of the devices that can be used in producing a documentary include narrators, dialogue, stage scenarios, voice over or tracks, etc.

Clearly, the newspaper feature story writer is different from the radio, TV or film feature writer. In the print, they are either called columnists, commentators, reporters, writers or correspondents. What they write is

called “copy”. Whereas, the radio, TV, film feature writer calls his own “Script” because he writes using dialogue, the way playwrights write theirs.

Thus, there is no comparison between the “copy” of the newspaper feature writer and the “script” of the documentary maker.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have examined special features, personality profiles and types of personality profiles. A sample was equally provided.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Apart from profiles on personalities, what other types of profiles do you know?

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined specialized feature stories, how writers get to become specialist writers, profiles, personality profiles as well as types of personality profiles.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Answer the following questions on the personality profile you have read:
2. What is the basic story line?
3. Why is the profile worth reading?
4. What purpose does it serve?
5.
 - a. Is it unusual?
 - b. Is it of human interest?
 - c. Is it about prominent people/places/events?
 - d. Does it have conflict?
 - e. Is there close proximity between readers and the subject?
6. Deduce from the profile, how the writer gathered his information.
7. Is there additional information you wish to add?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS.

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown

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UNIT 4 INTERVIEW FEATURES AND PROFILES II

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Interview Features & Profiles
 - 3.1.1 Interview Features
 - 3.1.2 Relevance of interviews
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit is a continuation of unit 3 where we discussed profiles in general and people profiles, specifically. Here we go further by looking at interview features as well as some other aspects of profiles such as focus, background research, relevance of interviews, etc.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the relevance of interviews in feature stories.
- Conduct your own interviews for any feature story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Interview Features and Profiles

3.1.1 Interview Features

The interview feature story is the writer's way of disseminating information. While we recognize the fact that editors are more interested in interviews with public figures and celebrities, they are equally on the look out for relatively unknown persons who have rational and unique ideas.

As mentioned earlier, a person is interviewed either because he is a recognized authority on the subject about which he is interviewed, or he is a prominent figure in that field. Having established that the person is either a recognized authority or is prominent in that field, the interview requires a lot of time, planning and concentration.

The questions should be sent ahead of the interview to enable the subject to think about the answers. This is in an ideal situation. It is important to study the interviewee's background before the interview. Knowing his biography, characteristics, traits, habits, past experiences etc will go a long way in helping the writer form his opinion. Also, talking to his friends, school mates, neighbours, colleagues etc will help. One major problem the writer may face is if he is not so well known and if he happens to work for the journal that is perceived as antagonistic towards the interviewee.

3.1.2 Relevance of Interviews

Having background knowledge of the interviewee has its advantages. First, it will help save precious time. It will also give you a sharper focus since you already know what you want to ask. It gives you the opportunity of starting and channeling the interview in the direction that suits you most. Your rating will grow as you will be seen as serious, confident, dedicated and adequately informed.

The interview could be one-off or a series of interviews. It is important that all the responses, observations, etc are well written.

Attached here is an interview feature on Adams Oshiomhole, the leader of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). Read it and make sure you understand it.

This Job is Interesting - Oshiomhole

The man of the moment is Nigeria Labour Congress' Adams Oshiomhole who just came out of the heat of intense fuel price negotiations literally victorious by keeping a litre of petrol at ₦22 with corresponding reductions for diesel and kerosene. But by far more engaging has been the labour activist's rising profile which following the June 13 solution, Labour provided a new kind of leadership direction capable of charting a new course for government people relations. Oshiomhole here recounts the manoeuvres leading to the compromise and admits that this job of standing to be counted on the side of the people is something he enjoys doing because the only way to confront a bad policy is to resist it.

Question:

Until yesterday Labour maintained its position of a total reversal to the old prices of ₦20, ₦19 and ₦17 per litre of petrol, diesel and kerosene, what informed your decision to concede to the Federal Government's offer of ₦22, ₦21 and 17 per litre of fuel, diesel and kerosene which had been in the offing since last week?

Oshiomole:

No, the last part of your statement is not correct, that it was in the offing, if you know these decisions are arrived at. We had to maintain a very strong position because we were dealing with very powerful forces, both internal and external, and once you show any sign of weakness then you are not going to expect them to take you seriously. So we had to maintain a very strong position and it was very appropriate tactic that we had to employ.

But of course, it was also a position we were prepared to defend and stick to, but we tried not to wreck the country and the economy. It was especially to put pressure on the government to appreciate that Nigerians are even united in their opposition and since we were convinced that we had exhausted all the possibilities of dialogue without result, we had to resort to an industrial action. But we also did not want to wreck the economy. When we got to that level, the government had moved to ₦25, ₦24 and ₦17 per litre of fuel, diesel and kerosene. We refused. They published their figures uni-laterally and they called us back to negotiation. It was important that at that point we take a final decision.

So, in line with our democratic tradition, we called a meeting of our highest decision-making organ, the National Executive Council (NEC) and the decision of NEC you know, is a message in the interest of the country as we noticed that they realized they were wrong,. But they had a problem of not wanting to be seen to have completely given up and then we knew that the concern of the public was not so much that they are against their government but they cannot afford the kind of increases the government had imposed on them. So what then was required was to take a critical look at the issues and take a figure which to the ordinary man may not regard as too much, he does not really want it but he can live with it and for the government, it does not address their revenue concern which they expected from the increase. However, it gave government a leeway to save its face.

Now, we did that to show a measure of maturity and to ensure that Nigerians do not go through unnecessary punishment because as you know, in this strike, we had the support of market women and the road transport people, self employed people whose businesses at the end of the day we would not want to wreck. So we had to do a critical balance and what we did was quite appropriate when dealing with issues that are involved in prices of petroleum products, particularly when the prices have already been announced.

Labour has just agreed to a two Naira increase in prices of petroleum products, but the sector is still facing a lot of fundamental problems, including the unending Turn Around Maintenance of our refineries.

Question:

Was there an ultimatum from labour as to when the refineries should be put in shape?

Oshiomole:

You do not do things based on ultimatum. Ultimatum is not a magic that is used to cure all ailments and as far as we are concerned, you do not manage a country through ultimatum. Our idea is a joint committee to address all the issues in the sector including the politics of maintenance processes of contract award, the choice of contractors and who NNPC imports from and how those are determined because in a globalized world, people can access these information.

So, I will expect the committee to deal with these and several other issues so that before the tax payer is called upon to pay a naira more, we must be convinced that we are not just subsidizing some insatiable appetite somewhere in the NNPC. I know that the new managing director is committed to turning the place around, but he has to place more focus on eliminating wastages within than attracting more funds into the system. I commend him but he should be ready to do much more than is currently the case.

In the near future, government will not be able to blame its predecessors because after a year or more than a year in office, people will expect that the problem of non maintenance of our refineries can no longer be blamed in the past. It must be the responsibility of the present government.

Question:

Talking about Nigeria importing fuel, did the NLC try to get the Federal Government's commitment as to when Nigeria, which is rated as the sixth oil producing nation in the world, will stop importing fuel?

Oshiomole:

Well, this is related to when the refineries will work. What we had was a statement from the management of the NNPC, to the effect that the Port Harcourt Refinery is likely to come on stream by August when they should be through with the maintenance going on. I am not sure we have a very definite position on the Warri refinery but in the case of Warri refinery, we were told that it is much better than the Kaduna refinery which appears completely hopeless. They also agreed that there are people who are sabotaging these refineries, wanting to make sure that they do not work so that the country can continue to depend on import.

It is a question of vested interests which means that the system of importation is such that unearned rent is accruing to certain people. And one will expect the committee to deal with those by looking at what way people profit from importation and block those loopholes, for as long as the incentive is there for people to make money, if the country depends on import, some people will continue to have the resources that they employ to sabotage the system. And I think that Nigerians cannot understand that the government has not got what it takes to put saboteurs out of work, given the goodwill that the government enjoys and the resolve Nigerians have made to make democracy work. I think that government can draw on this support and find the necessary political will to deal with those vested interests that are frustrating the efforts of the nation.

I find it embarrassing that we keep blaming faceless saboteurs for our inability to deliver and I think the committee should address these and several other issues because Nigerians are entitled to get results for their taxes.

Question:

Having agreed to a two Naira increase after so much sacrifice, was Labour able to reach an agreement with the Federal Government that the proceeds accruing from the increment should go into maintaining and updating facilities at our refineries to make distribution more effective?

Oshiomole:

No, I mean, given the time pressure we were working on, the emphasis was to get the issues resolved and get the country back to work so that Nigeria can return to stability. We have not discussed how they want to use that two naira. I think it is an issue that we can afford to discuss later because the emphasis was to get out of the mess we found ourselves arising from the very unpopular decision. So, we have not addressed all the issues there are to be addressed. What we addressed was just one item: How do we get the country back to work? How do we get the government to back down on its price hike?

Question:

According to popular opinion, the suspended strike which, according to you, recorded 97 percent compliance was unprecedented in terms of efficiency since the June 12, 1993 crisis. What factors were responsible for this level of success?

Oshiomole:

Well, it just shows two things. First, if a government takes a decision that is clearly unpopular, the people can unite and resist it. And to me that is what I find very interesting, fighting for the people is what I enjoy doing. In this struggle, Nigerians irrespective of tribe or religion were united and that to me was very encouraging and was the functional aspect of the crisis.

Secondly, I think it shows that Nigerians are very much prepared to exploit the window of opportunity that a democratic setting provides to ensure that our own elected government does not degenerate and begin to conduct the affairs of state as if they were military. And people clearly are determined to defend democracy and this was seen as the first test, whether all we have as a people in a democratic setting is the right to vote and then for the rulers to rule as they deem fit, or it involves a process in which people must continue to be consulted and to be involved in the whole nature of participatory democracy.

I think that all of that was involved and the government was not sure whether it can be compelled by the people and I think after waiting for two, three days, the evidence was increasingly obvious that the people say that they are supreme and the government is there only because the people are there, and I see this as helping us to lay a foundation for the more participatory approach, to public policy formulation. I think the government has learnt a lot of lessons in this particular case and the people have also learnt to realize that through the power of mobilization and organization and working together without recourse to violence, we can if we are consistent, get government to reverse itself if the government is wrong. I think the foundation for that has been very well laid.

What I think also accounted for this, is the fact that our performance over the past one year has given sufficient indication to the Nigerian people that we have a Labour leadership that would not commit itself to a project if it is not sure that the project is doable and sustainable. I think it is also a vote of confidence in the leadership of the NLC and the benefit that accrues from our modest attempt to network with the rest of the civil society, the students, the human rights groups and other concerned professionals. We saw people such as Gani Fawehinmi taking decisive positions. We saw students on the streets identifying with organised labour. We saw market women saying yes, we are all working together. I think all of these helped to reinforce the confidence of those of us who are at the leadership level to say yes, the people are with us and so we have no reason to be afraid.

The only thing that worried us is that when you have that level of support, you have to manage it in a way that at the end of the day, people would feel that the confidence placed in you was well justified. And I thank God that we came out of that without compromising that objective.

Question:

What were the specific steps or actions of the Federal Government during the crisis which could indicate that it has learnt its lessons?

Oshiomole:

Well, it is only time that will tell what they have learnt. All I can say is that when you see the way in which the government defended NNPC when they first announced the policy and the fact that the government ignored our rejection when we rejected the first attempt to change the price to N25 per litre and we said to government it is not acceptable; they clearly did not quite appreciate that what we were saying reflected the views of Nigerians. They wanted to test it out and they went to the market place and dumped the N25 and the N25 could not extinguish the flame of bitterness and the government had to come back painfully. They tried to play divided and rule, involving some other groups they had ignored before, hoping they can break the strike, getting the Head of Service to issue a circular that was neither a reflection of our convention nor the reality on the ground.

The fact that they took all those measures suggest that government was still either in doubt about the fact of their being wrong or that although they knew they were wrong, they felt all the same that it was better to suppress the people and impose the power of the state. But I think the fact that ultimately they backed down from that again to where we are now must mean that they have convinced themselves that in a democratic setting, the people must have their way ultimately.

Question:

It took a meeting of almost nine hours before the NEC could give your leadership the mandate to concede to N22. What were the major arguments and factors responsible for this decision?

Oshiomole:

I think what the NEC did was first, because we were determined to allow for a very robust and open debate, some of us in the leadership decided we would just allow the State Council to speak their mind because coming from the states and having been responsible for the management of the strike in the respective state capitals, they were

better placed to tell us the feelings of the people. Our commitment was that whatever way it was going to go, it must go according to the will of the people. We were not prepared to go and sign an agreement in Abuja which we cannot sell at Oshodi or Port Harcourt or in Sokoto. To allow everybody to contribute to such debates, it is obviously time consuming particularly when you do not want to unduly influence the outcome.

We got to a point the NEC felt that okay, the leadership of congress was strong enough and they could trust it enough to give it an open hand to go and negotiate a passage that will bring the crisis to an end. But we said no, because we think we want to lay a foundation for a tradition that will put less discretion, because the more discretion you give to leadership, the more the pressure on the leadership and the higher the possibility of error of judgment. So we decided that the NEC must take decisions about figures. If you concede that concessions are necessary but only concessions to allow for a passage, then we must determine the level of that passage and they resolved that okay, do not give them more than N2 and we were convinced that anything more than that will not justify the efforts that went into it. We believe also that it was a sufficient passage.

So we went to the government and after debating till 4 a.m, we said okay take it or leave it, this is it. We will not go beyond this and we also believe you are wrong but you have a face to save; this is enough to achieve that and if you will not take the advantage, you have the right to ask your machinery to try and break the strike and we also will mobilize our people and resist.

So I think what was responsible for the NEC's decision was the collective realization that we must not subject the economy to undue disruption that could be counter productive. Secondly, that the economic interests of the self employed people who had been our allies in this struggle must be protected. The ordinary market woman who has abstained from commerce as a mark of solidarity, her interest must be taken into account and we think that when you are organizing a general strike, particularly if you do not have a political motive, you have to be careful so that you do not create a window of opportunity for anti-democratic forces. So, in the final analysis, we were all conscious of the fact that democracy is one year old and we should not subject it to too much stress. In fact we would not have embarked on the strike if the government was as sensitive as we were on the need to avoid situations that would lead us to creating conditions that might just undermine the present democratic project.

All of these, one way or another, were some of the specifics different people considered before we arrived at the decision. For me it was the

very first time the NLC leadership said the organs must make the decisions for the leadership to enforce. The beauty of this is that we shielded ourselves from undue pressure and gave everybody that sense of collective responsibility and this is mutually reinforcing and tends to service the confidence that exists between the leadership and the followership.

Question:

One minister was reported to have said that the mandate given to the NLC leadership has been compromised by ministers who stormed the venue of the NEC to lobby Labour leaders from their states/zones. What is your reaction?

Oshiomole:

Obviously that is a possibility although I do not have any clear evidence of that. It is a possibility in the sense that we have made it clear that the leadership was not going to make the decision and the organs must be made to function. And once you have taken that kind of position, the government has put, we will not compromise our mandate. They were aware that the NEC was going to meet and you know, we cannot hold NEC meeting in secret. So if they decided to lobby NEC members that are preferable to a situation where all those ministers would have been lobbying my person or a few of us in the leadership to make the decision.

So, if they have to also for once go through the rigor of persuading their people, I think this is functional provided of course that the means they employed are means we can talk about in the market place. If of course they decide to employ means that are inconsistent with the government's much heralded anti-corruption commitment, then to that extent they should feel ashamed but you used the lobby and lobbying itself is not necessarily a bad thing if it is done on the basis of principle. We should be able to influence people on the basis of persuasion. I do not see anything wrong in that.

But I think having the privilege to preside over the meeting, I did not see people who were contributing talking as if they were under the influence of anybody. Of course, officials do not love the country more than the labour leaders.

Speculations are rife that in an attempt to break the strike, government, apart from lobbying, tried to infiltrate labour's rank and file by making some mouth watering offers to certain Labour leaders. To what extent is this true?

I have made this point elsewhere. President Obasanjo, from my assessment is committed to the anti-corruption project. But you know,

to run a government is not a one-man business. You have other actors within the system some of whom, under pressure, may think that the end justifies the means and you know, we have people in this country who live on crisis. Having seen that there was a serious national strike and it was clear government was in difficulty, I cannot rule out the fact that either some people who wanted to cash in on the crisis and enrich themselves thought that this was an opportunity.

I think one or two individuals we discovered who were involved in this kind of thing were made known to the NEC members and they were duly censored. But the important thing is that we had conducted the affairs in a very open manner so that even if there were individuals who had certain intentions to compromise themselves, we created a condition that made it impossible for them to, like fifth columnists, compromise the action. And the important thing is that we as the spokesmen, if you go and compromise yourself, then you cannot deliver and I think once the head is not rotten the body cannot be rotten.

I think we managed to put those guys in check because in Nigeria we have people who see every strike as an opportunity to make money. And in the case of the guys in question, in their own case, they were the ones who went out of their way to negotiate with some government officials about how to compromise the strike. But all efforts to do this were rebuffed by government and the guys involved, when summoned before the NEC, they made a hell of noise but the truth is that I have them on tape and if care is not taken, we can decide to make them feel uncomfortable.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have examined interview features, their relevance as well as some other aspects of profiles not mentioned in the previous unit.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

If you have been asked to interview somebody in order to write a profile on that person but the person is “unavailable”, what would you do, seeing you have a deadline to beat?

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined features that involve interviews, the relevance of interviews, how important it is to spend time planning this interview as well as the need to concentrate. It has also provided a sample of an

interview feature which will serve as a yardstick.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Go through the interview feature once more. Then answer these questions:
 - a. Write an “intro” for this interview
 - b. List the type of people who would be interested in this article.
 - c. Indicate which other angle an interview could be conducted with the NLC leader.

7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 THE FEATURE SIDEBAR AND FEATURE SERIES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Feature Sidebar & Feature Series
 - 3.2 The Feature Sidebar
 - 3.3 A Feature Sidebar Story
 - 3.4 The Feature Series
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References /Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will look at the sidebar, one of the most commonly assigned features by the editor. We will also examine the feature series.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Write a newspaper feature sidebar;
- Write a serialized newspaper feature story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Feature Sidebar and Feature Series

3.2 The Feature Sidebar

A sidebar could be at the instance of a writer but usually, editors assign writers to get “something”. A sidebar is a story that accompanies a main story. It could be statistics linked with a story but they are usually ‘colour’ stories.

Characteristics of Sidebar

1. The sidebar can just be facts but usually it is a human interest story.

2. The straight news story that goes with the sidebar is usually breaking news
3. The sidebar is very mobile. It could run on the same page, the jump page or another page entirely.
4. It should be meaningful on its own. There must be a link between the main story and the sidebar of enough facts to enable readers to understand even if they missed the main story.
5. The sidebar is usually tied to a deadline nevertheless, it is still well-written.
6. The news item dictates the colour of the story; bright, if the main news is a happy one and gray, if the event is tragic.

Read the Pulitzer Prize feature story, “Ashes to Dust”. Note all the details the writer includes about their lives. Note the appropriate lead, the towel of the story, the skilful way she went about recollecting details etc.

SAMPLE 1: Ashes to Dust

Gail Varner stood alone, with his head bowed, and stared at his daughter’s closed casket for the last time.

A tall, proud man, he did not cry.

When he finally glanced up, two men in work clothes, which were covered with a fine, gray volcanic ash, were waiting to take the casket to its grave.

Varner turned and walked away.

The men carefully lifted the steel-blue box and rolled it outside into the blowing ash. Each step kicked up a small cloud of dust in Longview Memory Park, still adorned with Memorial Day flowers.

They lowered the casket into the ground and returned for the second coffin, that of Terry Crall.

What had begun 12 days earlier as a weekend camping trip for Karen Verner, Terry Crall and four friends was finally over.

At 8.32 A.M Sunday, May 18, Mount St. Helens had ended it for them. The mountain heaved and exploded and killed.

The four friends survived, but Terry and Karen’s bodies weren’t dug from under the fallen trees until five days later. Of the 18 identified victim of the mountain, Terry and Karen, both 21, are so far the only

ones from Longview. Emmanuel Lutheran Church on the banks of Lake Sacajawea was packed for their joint funeral Wednesday.

The families filed into the sanctuary and took their places on the front pews. Terry's mother, dressed in pants "because that's the way Terry would have wanted it", clung to her husband, her hand resting on his knee.

A song floated down from the choir loft: "The Lord wants me to sing you a love song. A song about the good times and the bad."

Terry's brother sat with his head down. Madelin Varner looked straight ahead.

Many cried.

"We must somehow pull it together," the Rev Daniel Dowling comforted the bereaved, many of them in jeans and T-shirts. "We will never understand. We will never understand the disaster, the hurt. All we can do is ache."

Terry and Karen had been inseparable for almost three years.

Both were tall and lithe with sandy blond hair. Friends say they looked so much alike they were often mistaken for twins.

"Say something about Terry and you say something about Karen," said Sue Ruff, one of the four campers who survived.

Their trademark was identical T-shirts usually picked up at a rock concert and they were known for being the first couple out on the dance floor.

They were small-town kids who didn't ask for much, content to live in the town where they grew up.

Karen Marie Varner was born Dec. 19, 1958, in Ellensburg where her parents, Gail and Madelin Varner, lived in a married students housing complex while her father finished college.

In 1961, the Varner family moved to Los Angeles, but managed to spend every summer camping on the Toutle River. In 1971, the family, which included Steve, Mike and Sheryl, moved to Longview and Karen attended Cascade Junior High and Mark Morris High School where her dad coaches girls' basketball and teaches the metals' class.

Her parents said Karen was a "serious child and always on the honour roll in junior high and high school.

“With her own age group she was pretty outgoing; around home she was quite a bit more reserved,” her father said. She was hurt when her parents got divorced a trifle over a year ago.

Karen picked strawberries every summer since she was 12 and when she turned 16 she worked at Sambo’s to support her new Datsun.

What she really wanted was to be a nurse. She had completed a year at Lower Columba College and was to be a nurse. She had completed a year at Vink. She was thinking about returning to LCC this fall.

Karen’s scrapbook is like every other kid’s. A sentimental girl, she saved everything: school report cards, restaurant matchbooks, valentines, cards for a dear daughter on her birthday and soap wrappers from vacation hotel rooms.

In 1965, she won \$2 in a school art show for a picture of a tree and her photograph made the local paper. She made the paper again when she ran the hurdles in 12.6 seconds and broke a school record Aug. 23, 1975.

Karen made scrapbook notes to herself in blue ink. “Tom, Sandra, Stacy, Curt, Lori, Sue and I ate dinner here,” is jotted next to a pizza order number from Me-n-Ed’s Pizza.

“Sweet 16, Sue, me, mom and dad. Best present ever!” is neatly written next to a card from Henri’s Restaurant.

Karen’s photo album is full of pictures of Terry. There are pictures of Karen and Terry hamming it up on the beach during their eight day trip to Hawaii, of Karen and Terry skiing and of Karen hiking and swimming.

The last pictures entered in the album are a series of aerial photographs of Mount St. Helens erupting in March. The rest of the album is empty.

Terry Crall was born Aug. 10, 1958, and raised in Longview. His mother and stepfather, Fred and Sallie Nicholas both work for Weyerhaeuser and so did Terry although he dreamed of getting a job as a game warden.

Terry was the type of kid you had to forgive for everything ’his mother said. **“He was kind of outgoing and kind of nervous and high - strung like me.”**

“Terry parents were divorced 11 years ago and his mother raised him on her own until she remarried three years ago. Terry was close to his family which includes Cyndi, 18, and Tony 15 and he always introduced his step father as Dad.

He was always an outdoor boy and his mother encouraged it. He played Little League, went fishing with his mom and learned to camp and hunt.

“Me and him used to go out on the river and fish new Willow Grove when he was 9 and 10, his mother said with tears in her eyes. “He used to love that”.

Terry graduated from Broadway Elementary, Monticello Junior School and B.A. Long High School. He was an average student.

“I remember one time in ninth grade he came home and said he was flunking and I rushed down and signed him up for summer school,” his mother said. “Later I found out he wasn’t flunking, but I made him take in anyway because I had already paid for it. He kind of liked it.”

When he was about 15, Terry got into his one and only fight. His mother said Terry and a neighbor boy had it out one day over “some dumb thing and Terry came home afterward and told her he would never do it again. He kept his word.

When he was a sophomore in high school, Terry spent free weekend visiting his grandparents Papa and Granny at Silver Lake.

“He was devoted to his grandfather and didn’t miss more than one or two weekends in five or six months,” his mother said.

“It wasn’t until after my dad died that kids started showing up around the house,” she said. “Terry had lots of friends - every place he went he me people but he was kind of a homeboy. His friends always came over to our house because we had a pool table in the basement.”

Terry didn’t have girlfriends until he was in high school, but when he started dating he always picked quiet girls.

Karen and Terry met at a party. Karen walked up and asked Terry for a dance. They were together from then on.

They lived in an old house on Hillcrest Avenue in Longview, which they called their “grandpa and grandma house” because it looked so old from the outside.

They talked about getting married and even mentioned August but they wanted to wait until they were financially secure. Terry was laid off from his job on the green chain in the Weyerhaeuser paper mill about a month ago.

“They were always looking at rings in the Jafco catalog”, Terry’s mother said. “They had all sorts of plans”.

Karen and Terry spent most of their time either outdoors or hanging around with a Portland-based rock band called Alost.

“There is not one gig in the last two and a half years that they haven’t been to,” said Mike Leak, the band’s lead guitar. “We’d go play a prom and they’d be there.”

Terry and Karen heard the band for the first time more than two years ago. “They were the kind of people who came right up and introduced themselves,” said drummer Chris Carter.

Eventually Terry joined the group as the light technician and Karen would take tickets at the door. The band only had seven lights but Terry could really make them jump.

“Instead of doing switches, he’d sit there and pull the plugs in and out,” Mike said. “He’d always be sitting down there smiling with Karen sitting right next to him. He knew every word to every song. If I forgot the words, I just looked down at him.”

Terry and Karen’s favorite songs were The Cretin Hop and Rockaway Beach by the Ramones.

“They were always yelling for one more song, one more song, when it was over,” Mike said. Because they liked the outdoors so much, Terry and Karen introduced most of the band to camping. They had wanted the band to come up from Portland and go camping with them that fateful Sunday but the band couldn’t make it.

Instead Terry, Karen and two Kelson Friends, Sue Ruff, 21, and Bruce Nelson, 22, hiked in at night with a lantern to the 2500 Road on Green River below Miners Creek Friday, May 16. They were well outside the Mount St. Helens restricted area.

The next morning Dan Balch, 20, and Bryan Thomas, 22, both of Longview, joined the group, but camped some distance away. The six spent the day hiking. The guys teased the girls about being lost in a mine shaft after their lantern went out while they were exploring an old mine.

“That night we cooked ourselves an outrageous dinner,” Bruce said. “We had elk roast which we packed in, corn on the cob, baked potatoes and potato salad.”

On Sunday morning, Bruce and Sue were the first out of bed and were making Irish coffee for the others when Terry came dragging out of his tent.

Bruce said: “Sue and I were standing in front of his tent and Terry looked up and said, Wow! Look at the sky.” We all knew that it was right at the same time.

The last thing I remember was Terry calling Karen’s name and flying into tent,” Bruce said. “I grabbed Sue and it was over in a snap of a finger.” Bruce and Sue were buried alive in eight feet of fallen timber and ash so they could barely touch it. They dug themselves out and screamed for their friends. But Terry and Karen’s tent was buried by logs. Breathing through their sweatshirts, Bruce and Sue started hiking on while mountain continued to rumble and pelt them with rocks and chunks.

Finally they heard noises and found Bryan and Dan and Sue’s dog. Bryan had a broken hip and Dan was badly burned. “From the tip of his fingers to elbows there was no skin, Sue said.

Together they tried to carry Bryan out. But it proved to be too much for them and they had to leave him in a makeshift lean to.

“The whole time we were building the lean-to he screamed and cried don’t leave me here, ”” Bruce said. ”It was a hard thing to do.”

Bruce, Sue and Dan, who was without shoes, hiked on. They slogged through knee-deep hot ash on the road.

“Dan ran through it barefoot letting out a scream you wouldn’t believe,” he said.

Eventually Dan was also left behind to wait.

Bruce and Sue hiked on. They joined a 60 year old man whose car had been disabled as he was trying to outrun the ash.

But it wasn't until almost dusk that they were able to signal rescue helicopters by beating their clothes on the dust. The helicopter flew back to pick up Bryan and he learned that Dan had already, been flown to a hospital.

But the ordeal was not over. The Varners and the Nicholas had to wait until last Thursday before an NTA Television crew convinced the National Guard and the Army Reserves to take and look for Terry and Karen. Bruce flew in with them and dug Terry and Karen out with a chainsaw.

They were found in each other's arms.

And at a little after noon on a warm and dusty May 28 Karen and Terry's bodies, in matching gold and blue caskets, were lowered into the ground.

They were buried the way they would have wanted it, side by side.

Visit Us Again, Lord!

ALMIGHTY GOD, with the dawning of the year 2002, it is to you I address my prayer for Nigeria once again. You know how often in the past I have celebrated your love for this country and its people. You placed us in a land with rich mineral and agricultural resources, and blessed the land with a wonderful climate, and an all year round mild weather. We do not need air conditioners or heaters for our very survival. We never experience earthquakes, landslides or cyclones. Such natural disasters as the recent massive floods in Bangladesh or Mozambique are not our lot. Most of our delta region is sitting on black gold, and new deposits are now and again being discovered. With over one hundred million people, split between 250 ethnic groups, our country presents a rich ethnological, linguistic and cultural mosaic that is the pride of the black race.

Indeed, overwhelmed by the enormous resources you bestowed on this land, some of my friends actually believe that you have a preferential love for our people, enough to make our poorly endowed neighbours jealous, and sometimes even resentful of you. True, we have messed up ourselves now and again and often misused your gifts. We have sometimes courted the angel of death, and programmed ourselves on a course of national suicide. But you have always pulled us out and set us afloat. My friends and I have not finished and I am thanking you for that timely intervention on June 8, 1998 by which you miraculously delivered our country from the precipice.

However, with the recent events in our country, I have begun to wonder whether you have not decided to abandon us to our wickedness, selfishness, corruption and decay. Yes, Lord, with the recent orgy of killings that have spread from north to south, and from east to west, I have begun to wonder whether you are not looking the other way while our country is on fire. With the atrocities in Taraba and Benue, the massacre in Kano and Jos, the carnage in Nasarawa, and lately, the abominable killing of Chief Bola Ige in Oyo and some other politicians in Osun, I am afraid that you may have washed your hands off our national affairs, Lord, my people have all run mad! They are eating each other's flesh. Don't you care? How can you turn your face away? How can you lead us thus far and abandon us mid-stream?

Lord, won't you visit us once again and intervene in our national affairs as you did in June 1998, and bring back sanity to the people and restoration to the land? Why don't you rend, the heavens open and come to heal us of our maddening blindness? Why don't you descend from on high and calm the violent storm? Millions of people in this country certainly do not know you. Many more millions claim to know you. They shout your name. They sing your praises. They troop to the churches and to the mosques. They do all sorts of rituals and delight in being called religious. But what is the difference anyway? What is the point in being religious and having no regard for human life? What is the point in knowing you, Lord, if we are still capable of slaughtering our brothers and sisters and setting their bodies aflame? What is the point in worshipping you if we cannot recognize that all those created in your image are sacred and inviolable? What is the point in our dancing around your altar when our hearts are pulsating with hate? What is the point in offering you sacrifices of peace when we have blood in our hands? Yes, what is the point in going to church or frequenting the mosque when our lives are not touched? Tell me, Lord, you are seeing all these empty rituals and do you keep silent? Are you giving up on us? Are you despairing of your people?

Visit us again just one more time, Lord! Intervene in our national affairs, and deliver us from this theatre of death that our country has become. You know that we have no other place to call home, and many of us cannot relocate. You know that it is easier for the camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a poor Nigerian to obtain entry visas to any of the greener pastures around the world. Do you pretend not to know that it is easier for us to get to heaven than to attempt to relocate to Britain or America? So we are condemned to these turbulent climes, to sink or swim in these messy waters, and yet you abandon us to our toil and tears? Ah, why must we witness in our own life time a

people's collective death-wish? Why does our generation have to contend with civil war, ethnic skirmishes, religious bigotry and political banditry? Why are we alive to witness this aberrant order where hell is constantly let loose on the populace? Why must we experience the most extreme demonstration of human depravity in our short life? Why do you abandon us in this house of horror, where men and women are roasting each other's bodies and leaving the carcasses for pigs to feed on? Lord, why keep us alive to witness the highest possible expression of sadism among a people that we call our own? Why abandon us to a chaotic Nigeria?

Visit Us Again, Lord! 2

Lord, you know what a stupendously high price we have to pay to live in Nigeria at this time, and yet you are leaving us to our own resources? Can't you see that one half of our people are already drowned and the other half are swimming in the wrong direction? Can't you see that the majority of our people are mad, while the rest have reached an advanced stage of depression? Can't you see that the adults are a lost generation, and the children are groping in the dark? Can't you feel the tense vibrations everywhere in the land? Can't you see that all the people exist in constant fear of death, which may descend on them anytime and from any direction? So why abandon us to our own resources when you know that at any moment a gang of armed robbers or a conspiracy of assassins, may subject one to summary execution in the presence of one's whimpering wife and children?

Why abandon us to our own resources when you know that an ethnic bigot with an axe in the hand may cut off head for daring to live and earn a living outside one's ancestral home? Why don't you visit us again to intervene quickly when you know that at any time a dutiful fanatic with a revolver in his hand may drag one out of sleep and blow one's brains off for professing the wrong religion?

How can you remain silent when you know that a trigger happy police constable with an AK 47 riffle may spray the contents of his instrument of death upon one and paste trumped up charges on the charred remains, and then call the press to help celebrate his victory? Why do you sit there in heaven and pretend that all is well when you know that at any time an angry mob in the city may lynch one, make a bonfire of the body, and parade the roasted but still smoking remains before the nation via national television? Why don't you come down to remove one's vital parts and abandon the decapitated body on the road for fast moving vehicles to level down with the tar? You know all these Lord, so why leave us to our own resources? Why don't you intervene now for the love of your people? What quality of life do you expect us to live? Why

keep us alive when life is cheap, and worthless? Tell me Lord, why abandon us to chaotic Nigeria?

You hear the leaders preach patriotism and pride in one's country. But what is there to be proud of today in this land? Is it the kleptomania that characterizes our governance or is it the mutual acrimony, manipulation and subterfuge, that define our polity? Is it internecine greed and callous exploitation that make up our economic relations, or is it the massive decay that is the lot of our social infrastructure? Tell me Lord, what is there to be proud of today in this land?

When I see the army of unemployed youths and uneducated children parading our highways, I am filled with shame for Nigeria. When I see the multitude of young professionals who are seeking entry visas to foreign countries and who are being abused and humiliated by arrogant officials of the various embassies, I am filled with disgust for Nigeria. When I see fine children rummaging through garbage dumps and scavenging for food around those mountains of refuse that pollute the urban environments with stench, I am filled with indignation for Nigeria. When I see a Tiv man being killed by a Jukun ethnic warlord, I am filled with shame, when I see an Igbo man being slaughtered by a Hausa zealot for whatever reason, I am filled with contempt for Nigeria. When I see a Hausa man butchered by a Yoruba bigot for whatever reason, I am filled with ignominy for Nigeria. And when I see an Arewa descendant being killed by an Igbo nationalist for whatever reason, I am filled with abashment for Nigeria.

Lord, when I see a human being like myself, who is created in your image being brutally hacked to death or being savagely set on fire for whatever reason, I am filled with revulsion for Nigeria. Yes Lord, the feeling of defilement is the same whether the violence is at the hands of the aggressive Sharia protagonist of the vengeful Christian apologist. The sense of indignation is the same whether the atrocities are at the hands of the militant Jukun warrior or Tiv zealot. The feeling of outrage is the same, whether the crime is at the instance of the drunken AD thug or the overzealous PDP knight. My reaction to each one is the same, for it is all an ignominious spectacle. Tell me then Lord, what is there to be proud of in this country?

Almighty Father we worship you as the God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger and abounding in love, you delivered Israel out of slavery, and with a mighty hand, you led them through the Red Sea dry-shod. You drove their enemies before them and settled them in the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. You promised ultimate salvation through the death and resurrection of your son Jesus Christ. He told us

that he has come that we may have life and have it to the full. He said he is the Prince of Peace and that he leaves us the peace, which the world cannot give.

He promised to give us the power to drive out devils and to trample on snakes and scorpions. He said that he is the Light of the world, and that no one follows him will ever walk in darkness. He indicated that in the world, we shall face all sorts of trouble. He did say that there will be wars and disasters, wickedness and corruption. He did say that brothers will hate brothers, and children will betray parents. But he assured us of his abiding presence. He said “do not be afraid, for I have overcome the world”.

Now Lord, visit us once again. Intervene in our affairs. Come into our boat and calm the storm. Rebuke the whirlwind of death in our land and let there be calm once again. Chase out the demons of violence and crime and let peace reign once again. Open our eyes and deliver us from the darkness that leads to destruction. We have acted as if we have nothing in common, as if there are real walls between Christians and Muslims and between the Igbo, the Hausa and Yoruba. That is why we kill and roast one another’s bodies.

Visit us again Lord and impress it upon my countrymen and women that to have peace in our country, we must first nurture peace in our hearts. Impress it upon my people the fact that we cannot shake hands, with clenched fists, yes, that just as we cannot harvest a rose flower through planting a noxious weed, we cannot have peace while Harboursing hate in our hearts. Intervene in our hearts. Intervene in our affairs, and let those who claim to know you in this country realize that those who use religious justification to slaughter their Neighbours are damned liars, and that the God of peace is never glorified by human violence. Come down today Lord and heal my people of their blindness. Let them see that violence is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy, and destroying the very thing it claims to defend.

As we begin a new year, grant all aggrieved Nigerians the grace to forgive all past hurts, whether real or imagine, and to declare a general amnesty for perceived offenders and transgressors. Visit us today Lord, and intervene in our affairs, that there may be a moratorium on all anger and vengeance. Look upon us with favour, that there may be a cessation to all oppression and exploitation. Come down to us, that there may be a ceasefire between warring parties, and they may sheathe their swords and bury their dead along with their hatchets. Visit us again Lord, intervene in our national affairs, that many more of us may spend our lives proclaiming forgiveness, healing and restoration, AMEN.

3.2 The Feature Series/Serial Story

The feature series usually focuses on important subjects. A serial feature requires a lot of time spent as well as a lot of news space. In this case, the unusual angle is usually told in terms of people and not in terms of numbers or statistics. A complex part of the serial feature is that each installment is expected to be read as a one-shot i.e. complete story where each one is independent. The lead must catch the attention of the reader. The hall mark of the newspaper feature serial lies in the ability to be divided into comprehensible and satisfying segments which culminate into a showcase piece. The challenge to the feature serial writer is in handling the technicalities of structuring a well-written story that is interesting and compact.

The feature series used as sample here is written by Rev Fr George Ehusani. The feature is a two part serial and is titled “Visit Us Again, Lord! 1 & 2. It makes very interesting reading.

The newspaper serializes stories into parts that are easily understood by readers. The series is more general term for such stories/events.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The feature sidebar and the feature series are two different sides of the same coin. While the former is bound to a story and is meant to throw more light on this story, the latter is independent and is not tied to anyone.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Differentiate between the feature sidebar and the feature serial story

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined the feature sidebar and the feature series. The difference is clear in their purposes and focus.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a feature sidebar on an interesting feature story.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown.

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*,
Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

MODULE 2 WRITING COLUMNS

Unit 1	Opinion Columns
Unit 2	Personal Columns
Unit 3	Service Columns I
Unit 4	Service Columns II: Travel Guide
Unit 5	Arts Reviews

UNIT 1 OPINION COLUMNS

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objective
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Opinion Columns
3.2	Editorial Opinion
3.3	Personal (Opinion) Column
3.4	Readers Opinion
3.5	Critics
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Opinion Columns usually appear in newspapers and magazines. In this unit, opinion columns have been further divided into four. We will take a look at each one, noting the similarities and differences.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Differentiate among the four types of opinion columns.
- Illustrate this by writing any of four types.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Opinion Columns

Opinion columns express either an individual or a joint opinion in newspapers and magazines. Opinion columns comment on contemporary issues and ideas ranging from the simple to the complex; and controversial to the straight forward. It does not matter whether an opinion is negative or positive, what matters is that the commentator is an expert or because of his position as he expresses his opinion. There are four types of opinion columns namely:

1. The editorial opinion (op-ed)
2. Personal Opinion Columns
3. Reader's Opinion
4. Critics.

3.2 The Editorial Opinion

According to Udofia (1996:73), an editorial usually comments on or explains the significance of the news. Through editorials, a newspaper expresses its opinion on current issues, events or public figures and tries to stimulate the thinking of its readers. But sometimes, editorials only seek to entertain.

Editorials are known to influence, condemn, commend, advocate, inform, educate, plead, entertain and even pay tributes to deserving individuals. The editorial must command attention, as it is an institutional and authoritative expression of opinion. The editorial is the primary focus of any paper. It is the “nerve-centre” as well as the “voice” of that journal because it represents the opinions of that paper, which may translate as that of a community, a group of people, region or even a nation.

Krogh (1999:8) insists that: ...to be a journalist or a media worker is a privilege.... Also, we are entrusted with the task of informing the public. And by that, potentially, not only informing but forming public opinion.

The bottom line for any opinion column is to express opinion as well as help people to form their own opinion.

Through editorial opinion, the journal interprets the thoughts and views of the group or community it serves. The editorial generally, is, a

reflection of the taste and character of a newspaper. A vibrant editorial opinion would equally attract vibrant lively and intellectually conscious rejoinders which are published on the editorial page. Because of the relevance of editorials in a newspaper, young reporters are usually not given the privilege of writing editorials. Rather, editorial writers are seasoned writers who have been “tried and tested” and who are entrusted with the difficult task of helping people form opinions.

Editorials consist of facts and figures usually vigorously researched and logically presented in order to arrive at the expected conclusion through critical analysis. Thus, editorials discuss topical issues that affect most people in the society. Because the editorial is a collective opinion, it carries no by-line.

Here is a sample of an editorial.

Nitel and the Rip Off of Telephone Users

The Nigeria Telecommunications PLC (NITEL), the nation’s fixed wire telecommunications monopoly, recently increased its tariffs by an average of 300%. Access charges, increased from N50 to N500. Intra-city calls increased from N1.90 to N19.00 per minute, calls over a radial distance 700km attract N42. 90 per minute, while rates on international traffic terminating outside Nigeria dropped from N165 to N99 per minute. For good reasons, the public has been distressed by this development. On its part, the House of Representatives has instructed its committee on communications to investigate the “circumstances leading to the arbitrary increase in tariffs by the corporation. In the face of NITEL’s initial reduction of its installation charges, and the impending privatization of the parastatal, these increases in truth, cry for some explanation.

However, held up against the company’s service delivery levels, they are clearly beggar belief. NITEL might well be the only commercial organization which charges its market for access to its service, the equivalent of a shopping mall charging entrance fees. Calls via the corporation’s local network cannot be terminated successfully all the time; crossed wires guarantee that successful calls cannot be conducted with any degree of privacy. Under investment by the corporation over the years has left teledensity-number of telephone lines per capital at some of the worst levels globally, and its cradle of copper wire has limited both the speed, quality, and quantity of the contents that NITEL’s network can carry. This was why a marked sense of ease welcomed President Obasanjo’s inaugural address to the nation, on 29 May 1999. That address was an exemplar of the new administration’s commitment to tackling the extant problems with which the country had

been contending, at the twin levels of failed human/social infrastructure (administrative processes and methods), and physical infrastructure (roads, energy, telecommunications etc.). Beyond the pledge to do fierce, unforgiving battle with corrupt practices, the president's concern with the nation's collapsed infrastructure finally held out the possibility of the restoration of a semblance of normality to every day living in the country. Even better, the proposed reforms to the structural problems besetting the nation were not going to be resolved by recourse to time-honoured methods.

Rather than throw more resources at the problems at the several levels at which they manifest, the state owned enterprises sector was to be privatized. The subsequent auction of licenses for operators of the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) phones was further evidence of the regime's steadfastness in this wise. The auction exercise, simple, transparent, and fair, was acclaimed as the precursor to a novel way of doing official government business in the country. More than this however, the selection of three service providers, did indeed promise competition in one of the reaches of government business in the country. The expectation then, was that with the state of the art technology, better management savvy, and improved financial engineering know-how available to the new entrants into this industry, prices would drop, service quality improve, and delivery rates shorten to minutes instead of the decades with which we have become familiar. In the face of all this, the question arises: *Why should a corporation about to be privatized go about increasing its tariffs in this way?* Put differently: *What new cost elements has NITEL come into the knowledge of, which it is now minded to recoup through these rate increase?* In addition, *why should it seek to front load such costs unto its customers?* The simple answer is that in order to fund its bid for a GSM licence, NITEL had recourse to a syndicated loan facility, managed by First Bank of Nigeria PLC, of some US\$785million. This facility had a moratorium of six (6) months, during which, no interest was to be paid on it.

The facility was structured in this way, in the understanding that it will take as long for the corporation to carry out the rollout and transmission network expansion required to make the GSM work. At the end of the grace period, the interest element of this loan was to set NITEL back by upwards of N13billion annually. NITEL's business plan envisaged that the service charge was to be supplied from the projected revenue stream from providing GSM based cell phones. However, it now looks increasingly probable that the installation of primary switch centres microwave links and the laying of fibre optics cables, all of which are essential elements of the rollout and transmission network expansion

project will not be carried out within schedule. NITEL has tried, with little luck so far, to reschedule/reconfigure this loan, in order to compensate for this development. The tariff increases therefore, are a precautionary move, ensuring that the corporation's cash flow will be such that it will not default on its loan obligations when due. Is the corporation justified in trying to front load the costs of a failed business plan unto its customers?

In a normal business environment, this question ought not to matter. Any business whose plans fail will encounter difficulty trying to pass on the costs of its failure to its market. It might well squeeze its competitors to the bone. But so long as substitutes exist, its clients will switch patronage, rather than settle higher bills, especially when service quality delivery rates are in free fall. The management of such organizations, end up picking up the related bills. Unfortunately, NITEL is far from being a normal business. Because it is a monopoly, long used to abusing its market, the dynamics of the problem is radically altered. Add to this, the current face off between the National Union of Postal and Telecommunications Employees (NUPTE), and the Senior Staff Association of Statutory Corporations and Government Owned Companies (SSACGOC) on the one hand, and the Bureau for Public Enterprises (BPE) on the other, and the picture is cloudier still. The former has accused the BPE of trying to take over NITEL and rushing to private it. It has blamed the tariff increases on the Bureau, while threatening a strike in protest at the Bureau's failure to value the corporation property before proceeding with its sale.

Of course the Bureau is responsible for inviting and superintending over the process of tendering for the rollout and transmission network expansion projects, which are so dear to the corporation's earning stream, and consequently to its ability to meet its financing obligations. Of course, the Bureau is only now reviewing the various bids put in. Whether the Bureau was tardy in getting off its marks, whether this tardiness was studied to produce the effect of incompetence at NITEL or whether the Bureau is acting in the interest of partisan power brokers, is immaterial. The point is that the public squabbling between these apparatuses of the Nigerian state, indicates that once again, after taking one tentative step forward, this administration is poised to leap back into our past. That it should want to take the hopes and aspirations of the people back with it is the most horrendous part of it all. _

Problem of Education in the North

Sometime ago, I wrote an article on the topic "Mining the Mind to Mine the Earth" because this was what Japan did, and the country now leads the world in advanced technology. It is however very sad that Muslims

fail to heed the advice of Prophet Muhammed when he said “Seek knowledge even into China.” The Islamic world lags behind in technology and we have no excuse for this.

After reading an article by Agaju Madugba entitled “Problem with Education in the North” my blood ran cold, I developed goose bumps with uncontrollable tears gushing out from my eyes. Indeed the greatest injustice that could be given to all these children is to deprive them of education. A mind is a terrible thing to waste, and so these innocent children should be educated. One wise man once said “I hold it as an indisputable fact that the first duty of a state is to see that every child born therein shall be well fed, housed, clothed and educated till he attains the years of discretion.” These are the basic rights of our children but we have failed in all these areas as Muslims in the North. The failure of education is the root of vandalism, terrorism, lawlessness, poverty and acts of irresponsibility being witnessed in Nigeria today. Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive, easy to govern, but impossible to enslave. Chief Obafemi Awolowo knew this when he introduced free primary education in 1955 in the defunct Western Region. Improved quality of life can be achieved through education for all.

I am still perturbed that some Muslims still fear Western education saying that it is against the principle of Islam. Does acquisition of Western education negate the tenets and teachings of Islam? If you had told me this 60 years ago when my brothers and sisters were forced to change their names to John or Victoria, the excuse might have been admissible. We had no schools of our own then and the curriculum was drawn to convert the Muslims. On the other hand, the use of whip and other bad methods by crude teachers to teach Arabic drove many people away from school. It later resulted in double jeopardy as Muslims became complete illiterate persons. For years we would not read than the four or five short chapters of the Holy Quran. This was what we did until we dropped out to learn a trade or go back to farm while our counterparts led in politics and white collar jobs. It was so serious that even those that did well in the Arabic schools could not function well in academic world where English is predominantly used.

The quest for knowledge should be paramount in the hierarchy of needs for all Muslims. There is no doubt that the teachings of the Holy Quran and Hadith are of importance in the acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge means understanding all kinds of scientific, technical, social and political information. It is not only the religious knowledge, then the Prophet would not have advised his followers to travel to China to seek knowledge. China is not a Muslim country. Mohammed stressed

the importance of seeking other disciplines of knowledge. Why the present day Muslims are still afraid of Western education is still a mystery to me. I find true Islam in America and I am a Muslim because of my conviction in the Quran as a book of guidance. If our prophet was concerned with Islamic Knowledge only, he would have asked his followers to stay back in Mecca and Medina and master the details of Islam. The earlier Muslims, up to the 15th Century, understood the true message of Islam and advanced the knowledge acquired from it. This was the era when Muslims excelled in mathematics, arts and science. Muslims slipped into a deep slumber and the Europeans translated the works of Muslim scholars and scientists and started the process of renaissance. Gradually, Europe and other Western countries continued to advance and Muslims stopped learning further. Muslims continued to believe that anything discovered by Europeans or knowledge gained by Western people should not be learned or assimilated to avoid cultural influences that will come with it. The gradual decline, starting from the 16th century, continues till today. I have been out of Nigeria for almost two decades and when I performed the Hajj in 1999, I seized the opportunity to quench my state of nostalgia. I talked freely with my brothers from the South in English. I met a lot of friendly brothers from the North and all I could do was just to sit in their midst speechless after saying how are you in Hausa. In Zamfara, I spoke to a young man who I even got his card. I asked him why is it that a 20 years old man cannot speak English? The response was very discouraging. Education will bring out the beauty of Islam. Most people see Muslims as terrorists, blood-thirsty, war mongers, uncivilized fundamentalists.

The media continue to portray Islam negatively to people; thus many young elites are being converted to other faiths. We misuse and abuse the verse that says we can marry more than one wife. We have too many children beyond our capacity and guidance and no wonder why some Muslim children act like thugs and hooligans at the motor parks. Our leaders lack tactical ways of approaching issues. Prophet Mohammed did not thrust anything on the people but presented his way and invited them to accept or reject them on the basis of arguments and knowledge and not by sheer force of prejudice or guess work. Learning in Islam was obligatory both for man and woman. Women participated in educational activities with the same freedom and enthusiasm as men. Investigation had shown that women were lecturers as well as students. Nowadays, culture has been mixed with Islam and women have been restricted and some even feel they should not be educated at all. The first revelation to the Prophet encouraged him to read and acquire knowledge. Read! In the name of your Lord Who created man out of a mere clot of congealed blood: Read! And your Lord is most beautiful. This shows the importance of knowledge in the life of man. The Quran

is full of revolutionary ideas which fire the spirit of enquiry, study, research and investigation into every field of human activity. The Quran encourages man to verify the truth and correctness of every idea by examination before accepting it.

My brothers and sisters in the North should listen to the alarm bell and wake up to compulsory education for all. The biggest tragedy in Nigeria is not the great waste of natural resources or the looting of the treasury by the soulless politicians and military men. The biggest tragedy is the waste of human resources and the continual closure of schools. Our children should stop begging in the streets but be educated for the advancement of Nigeria tomorrow.

3.3 The next category is the personal opinion column. This type examines variety of issues ranging from personal, general, official, and even global issues. It is a reflection of the views of the columnist. This category will be discussed in unit 7.

3.4 Readers who feel strongly about issues write to the editor of a journal and if the editor decides to publish, it would be published under the “opinion” category. Letters to the editor are published on the op-ed page while features are published in the opinion section. As usual, the subject may be anything under the sun provided it is well written and logically presented. Indeed, some opinion features are serialized if they are found to be longer than the available space. Unlike the editorial, this is not a collective opinion as such, it usually carries a by-line (see sample 2 “Opinion”).

3.5 A writer/journalist/commentator is one who points out social ills in his writing and then suggests remedies for same.

A critic is one who expresses strong dislike for certain rules, policies, persons, ideas, etc. A critic does not write for the fun of writing. He writes because there is something to criticize. Social critics are always criticizing what they perceive to be improper or irregular.

Prominent social critics include radical lawyer and human rights activist, Chief Gani Fawehinmi (SAN), Late Dr Tai Solarin, Nobel Laureate Prof. Wole Soyinka, Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, Balarabe Musa, Col. Abubakar Umar (Rtd) Yusuf Bala Usman and a host of others.

Unfortunately, it has not been rosy for these critics. They have suffered set backs, some tragic, in the course of criticizing. Some have even argued that each critic criticizes at his own peril.

Thus, whether a journalist, critic, writer, commentator of the newspaper reader, all these are sharing their opinion with others in the market place of ideas, and these should be put in the easiest way for readers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Opinion columns are in different categories and each one was examined here. It was observed that no matter the category one falls into, the primary concern of the writer is to ensure that his readers do not find it difficult to penetrate his mind.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Without reference to your notes, what is the difference between personal opinion column and reader's opinion?

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined the totality of opinion columns starting from the highly influential editorial opinion to the personal, readers and even critics. Thus, the editorial must be authoritative; the critic's language must be critical, etc.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Having read through this unit, you should be able to differentiate between the four opinion columns. Illustrate this by writing a story/column on any of the four types identified here

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown.

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 2 PERSONAL COLUMNS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Personal
 - 3.2 Personal Columns
 - 3.3 Practical Examples
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit examines personal columns as part of specialized feature writing. Examples are given to show that personal columns could focus on personal, general, official and even global issues.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate between personal and opinion columns;
- Write your own column based on what has been discussed.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Personal Columns

3.2 Personal Columns

Personal Columns are written by individual writers based on:

1. Who the writer is e.g. a seasoned journalist;
2. The individuality of opinion of the writer or even his style

Such columns comment on topical events, advice columns, such as “Baby watch; your regular guide to Baby Care by Ronke Odusanya in *Saturday Punch*; Saturday with Azu ... Witty and down to earth; also in *Saturday Punch* where the writer comments on different issues ranging from the significant and sublime to the sensational and spurious”. Dare, (1990:13) commenting In his column in *The Guardian*, observed that:

“the entire spectrum of human activity has been its preview as it has examined issues on religion, politics, education, language, sex, economics, women societies, justice, human rights”, etc.

The late May Ellen Ezekiel (MEE) Mofe-Damijo, journalist, publisher and television talk show presenter, had a column in her magazine, *Classique*, which she simply called “MEE”. She wrote mostly about her personal, intimate secrets.

Late Dele Giwa, former Editor-in-Chief of Newswatch magazine had a column in *The Sunday Concord*, called “Parallax snaps”, where he took swipes at individuals, organization, and government for any action that did not seem to agree with societal needs.

There are a host of Nigerian personal Columnists in each newspaper. These include, in *The Guardian*: G.G. Darah, Reuben Abati, Banji Adisa, John Oseze Langley; In Saturday Punch we have Azubuike Ishiekwene (Saturday with Azu) Segun Odegbami, In Tempo, there is Funmi Iyanda, an opinionated female “jisting” in her column, etc.

The important, indeed crucial role the columnist plays is to keep his readers interested and entertained. Hennessy & Hodgson (1995) point out however the danger in having so many personal columns. They observe that the columnist can run out of ideas since he is not investigating or interviewing people. There is no new item of information to comment upon except the one reported by other writers.

Some columns require that the writer be witty, humorous or sometimes assertive, provocative. The topic will determine the style .

MEE’S COLUMN

Necessary Evils (Bloody Devils)

Can’t live with them, can’t live without them. *You know who I’m talking about, don’t you girls?* Guys, that’s who. The ones we go out with, and the one we marry. They can be such a pain. But how come we feel so “alone” and empty *when one of them is not around us, thoroughly making a nuisance of himself?*

Take mine for instance. He chooses the day I fall ill to plays squash, leaves wet towels on my freshly made bed, refuses to take a bath on nights I choose to take a bath and dab on my perfumed talc to seduce him (*and so spoils the effect, and scent, of my exotic perfume*), refuses to flush the toilet after a *particularly “loaded” outing there*, prefers boring beans and dodo on the days I’m at my most culinary creative, and horror of horrors, chooses the days I feel like sulking and self

pitying myself to want to go dancing and gossiping and telling bawdy jokes at the club.

C'mon May Ellen, it's not all that bad, you say? You must be blessed with an angel. Actually, guys can be angelic sometimes. Like when mine surprises me with a thoughtful gesture like a towel bath when I'm too tired to have a night bath. (*But then, you know why he's doing that, don't you?* He hates the smell of stale sweat. So it's not really for me, is it?) Or when he comes down from his high, macho male egoistic horse to make a curry dish (which he's good at, and I'm not), to appease me for something really rotten he's done.

Guys. They do have a way of doing the things you'd rather not do at a particular time. Like watch T.V or a movie at 11 p.m. When all you want to do is sleep, like bothering you at 2 a.m. when all you want to say is "*Get your hands off me so I can get some sleep*" and waking you up at 7 am to get the breakfast and the piping bath water ready while they again, cause a din with the radio. Like reading far into the night with the lights on when he knows you can't possibly sleep with those lights boring into your eyes.

But wait another minute, May Ellen, what about the good times? Like when he spends time to think up a joke line to lift you out of your oft sour mood. Like when he drives halfway across town to buy you that special ice-cream and hot dog (so you can get fatter?).

Like when he returns from a trip laden with all sorts of special gifts? Like when he says *such nice things about you to anyone who'll listen?* Like when he calls you wife with such pride, it's obvious to everyone he's mighty glad to be married to you.... Na, it's sour puss time today, no remembering the good things, just the lousy ones about being married.

Heek, you don't even get chased anymore. But he still does get chased, I mean, don't know if he chases, doesn't count.

But boy, being married does dry up the creative juices. *Remember when I had such sizzling tales to tell you about my escapades as a single girl?* Now, these are no sizzling tales to tell. Just boring married ones and you don't want to know.

Actually what is bothering me is simple. I've always told you about the things that happen to me that I know you can relate to. It was okay to talk about being lonely and heartbroken and single with a kid, and divorced, I reached you because these were things most people did not write about concerning themselves.

But now, I'm married, in love with the guy, and living a normal life.

And I don't bloody have much to write about, because I think you don't want to know, that I'm happy, loved, that I cook, clean, say yes sir to the guy sometimes. *So what do you want to know?* Please help me out of this bloc.

More questions than answers

The debate over the propriety of deregulation in the oil industry is about the pocket. But I suspect quite strongly that it's also about trust. We've seen fuel prices raised eight times in 14 years with a promise each time that the proceeds will be used to improve infrastructure, but nothing was ever done. Instead, the money was brazenly stolen. We've seen government earn N200 billion from crude oil sales in 20 years (1970-1990), but government prosperity has turned out to be the citizen's wretchedness. We've heard government argue that we must pay more for fuel because it can no longer afford to provide subsidy but we know that the truth is that we subsidize a lousy federal structure that allows government to reap where it has not sown.

Deregulation, beginning with the right laws, is a hard choice we must make. If we have found government's preaching about deregulation annoying and somewhat insulting, it's because there are questions that have not been answered. *What does a government that is truly interested in cutting waste need 49 cabinet ministers for? And to think that each of them has a swat of personal aides, a fleet of cars to crash and hirelings to do their manicure for them? Why should a government interested in cutting waste shell out N38 billion to build a stadium when it cannot maintain the grass in the existing ones?*

Look around and you'll find an area of official waste, graft and corruption that'll leave you asking, why? It just might be easier to endure the days ahead if someone can answer some of these questions.

The Long Sleepless Night at Rutam House by Azu

It would be quite silly of me to pretend that I'm constrained to write this article. For that could mean that I'd rather be doing something else like counting Kema Chikwe's headscarves or whining about the next spell of fuel scarcity.

I've never subscribed to the code among journalists that dogs should not eat dogs. That's why I've enjoyed every bit of the attack on PUNCH in the last couple of weeks by two Guardian writers- Reuben Abati and John Osaze-Langley. The immediate provocation, I suspect was the award of the Newspaper of the Year 99/2000 won by PUNCH at the National Media Merit Award held last December 3.

At that ceremony, PUNCH also won two other awards-reporter of the year and print journalist of the year. The last award (journalist of the year), was won by Seth Akintoye, who I understand has not been forgiven for leaving The Guardian where he gave his bloody best for nine and half years and left as a correspondent on a salary of N10,000 per month.

But that's only a digression. In two of the categories where PUNCH emerged winner newspaper of the year and reporter of the year The Guardian was short listed but it lost. In its citation, the NMMA, which has the respected Babatunde Jose as its chairman, said PUNCH was being honoured among other reasons for its consistency, wide readership and high aesthetic quality.

The Guardian was not the only loser at the NMMA, but for some reasons that I shall deal with presently, a few of its writers have found it rather insufferable to live with the newspaper's poor showing. They can't seem to get used to the idea that the newspaper is anything other than the flagship, it might have been so when the newspaper market was sharply divided and Guardian was preening in its class of its own. It might have been so when the best high tech newspapers were published only in black and white. It might even have been so when Guardian treated its staff decently and its cover price was within reach. But *in my reckoning, the flagship lost its sail at least five years ago.*

This is not about tit-for-tat, or some kind of "roforofu" fight. It's about house cleaning and home truth and I'm sure the profession could still do with some humour. Shortly after The PUNCH award was announced, my good friend Abati was the first to snigger at the prize, wondering why This Day and PUNCH were claiming the same title. In that article, he also despised the idea of newspaper of the year, wondering what it means.

I guess it means exactly the same thing that it meant six years ago when Guardian was still the flagship and surely it means the same thing it would have meant if Guardian had won the last one, NMMA is still journalism's main prize. The meaning hasn't changed.

At the time Abati wrote the first piece last December 10, he was just getting pregnant with bad belle. By the time he picked on PUNCH again on January 14, the pregnancy was fully formed. His article was an ungracious response to a story published in The PUNCH of December 19, listing six Nigerians among the world's richest.

It was a terrible goof and everyone here felt badly let down by the story. The reporter was fired, those who processed the story severally punished and a retraction followed. If the retraction came a bit late it was because the editors were aware of the gravity of the error and the judgment that would follow.

He started his article by saying PUNCH “advertises itself as Newspaper of the Year” which is untrue. PUNCH didn’t appoint itself Newspaper of the year, it was adjudged worthy of the prize by a committee of professionals headed by veteran journalist, Tony Momoh. Abati may not agree with Momoh’s panel but he’ll have to live with the fact this year. And I’m afraid, for a long, long time.

Since he has found the chink in the armour he so desperately longed for, I might as well remind him that The Guardian published at least 47 retractions of various sizes and gravity between January and December 2000, it published six retractions and the last one in favour of Senator Onyeabo was a quarter page, run in two consecutive editions.

If these retractions were published in the true tradition of editorial humility, then Abati ought to have been more charitable in his article.

Those who accuse PUNCH of sensationalism beyond the point size of its headlines need to prove it. The information at my disposal shows that between 1995 and 2000, whereas PUNCH recorded seven suits in the Ikeja and Lagos judicial divisions (Lagos being the main area of operations of PUNCH and Guardian). Guardian recorded 12 within the same period.

But if you think Abati was unsparing in casting stones, then you should have read Osaze-Langley in The Guardian on Saturday of January 27, 2001. In his article titled “Newspapers of the year and credibility”, he joined This Day and PUNCH in a fit of hatchery. He claimed to have a stockpile of over 100 sensational headlines published in the newspapers in the last three year, yet, failed to provide even one as evidence. He disparaged the quality and content of the two newspapers and was pitifully bitter about PUNCH but failed to justify his anger and bitterness by any sensible presentation of facts. He despised the organizers of the award but failed to show that PUNCH had induced them in anyway to obtain the award.

After reading Osaze-Langley, I fully understood why it was absolutely impossible for any journalist of standing to notice that he’s been in the profession for 18 years. If his article of January 27 and another virulent attack on This Day publisher, Nduka Obiagbena, on February 10 were

his best form. I'll advise parents who care about their children's grammatical well being, to avoid the fellow's column as much as they can. But that's another digression.

Since 1998 when the Research and Marketing Services (RMS) reported that PUNCH was the most widely read newspaper, it has been one long sleepless night at Rutam House. They began by throwing oranges and apples; now, they are slinging dirt and mud. But that's perfectly okay; it's all about the market sting.

Three years ago when the RMS first reported that PUNCH had upset the market, the gap in print-run then between PUNCH and Guardian was marginal. In advert sales Guardian probably had 60 per cent of the market while the other major newspaper shared the remaining 40. But that has changed remarkably.

Today, PUNCH is not only ahead in print-run. It prints and sells almost double its nearest rival, has the widest reach and a vastly improved advert sales record. The Audit Bureau of Circulation or the AAPN should feel free to demand the records from both companies, if they choose. A combination of reasonable pricing and a strong appetite for technology and innovation has put PUNCH squarely in front. You can put copies of the newspapers side by side every day of the week for one week and find out yourself.

We feel good about the huff in Rutam House and are quite happy that the market is astir. We know that our work is not done. We thank God and you folks out there that we've reached our initial goals. Now, we're setting new ones and we shall attain them, despite the mudslingers.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have looked at personal columns and we have come to the conclusion that personal columns comment on almost all aspects of life.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

Personal columns can be very interesting and lively. However, the column stands the danger of several things. Identify these problems.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has looked at personal columns and two samples were examined in order to further highlight the relevant aspects of this type of column.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Now, having gone through the two sample columns, take Azu's article and read it again. Then write your own version of that column. Make it breezy and chatty too and it should not be more than 800 words.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*. Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown.

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 3 SERVICE COLUMNS I

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Service Columns
 - 3.2 Service Columns
 - 3.3 Some Samples
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit examines service columns which are reader based features offering specific services or information on how to do some things, solve some problems. Some of these columns base their themes on the letters received from readers.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- write a service column on “A campus market survey” based on the discussion here;
- compare two different service columns and identify the similarities and differences.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Service Columns

These are columns created to assist readers in performing certain tasks and providing information on a lot of things such as health “Family Doctor” and Health News; Fashion “In Vogue” Economy Money And Personal Finance; Love, Friendships And Agony “Dear Kemi; real estate “Homes and Property” (all in Saturday Punch). The service column gives advice on how to sort out legal matters, how to plan for a holiday, where to get the best bargain, how to give great parties, and a host of others. Many of these columns get letters from readers in response to their advice and most often, papers actually solicit for reader’s opinion. Thus, because of the specialty of these columns, experts are often consulted to give readers adequate information and

necessary advice. Thus, letters to the editor and or such service columns are indicative of the relationship between that paper and its reader.

Service Columnists should try as much as possible to protect their readers who are also consumers by giving sound advice and they should avoid partiality as this might lead to the column sounding as an advertorial for manufacturers/marketers. The interest of the readers is of primary concern to you, and readers have confidence in your credibility as the expert. They have put their trust in you and as such, they see you as their representative. They have no cause to doubt your views. Do not try to promote what is substandard or what does not favour your “Primary Constituency”.

However, where some manufacturers and marketers give free samples, you are free to collect sample and give your candid opinion since such companies are doing it in return for publicity.

3.2 Some Samples

Here are two samples of service columns. One is by Ronke Odusanya, it is called “Baby Watch: your regular guide to baby care. The first part “It was not me: lies our kids tell us” and the second part “The first tooth”, are different. Read them carefully. There is also “Baby watch Helpline” where baby problems are shared with the paper and experts are consulted for advice. All the reader does is to write and share these problems.

‘It Wasn’t Me’

Lies Our Kids Tell Us

Children can be smart. Yes, they can be real smart. And the funny part is that they think they are so smart that we do not know when they are being smart.

For instance, your two year old likes to play with the television and you have told him countless times not to do so. This particular day, you walk into the sitting room unannounced and actually catch him fiddling with the knobs.

But instead of starting him, you say gently, “what are you doing there? Surely many of you parents that have gone through similar circumstances know the next reaction: Your toddler turns sharply towards you with “Nothing, Mummy Right on his lips.

He has his hands behind his back and you know that right in his hands is that loosened knob he had been trying to fix back unsuccessfully.

Whether you like it or not your child has just lied to you and you have to do something about it to make him realize that what he has done is bad. However, very often many parents will not admit that their children lie and may just want to pass off such behaviour.

The truth is that lying is an emotive subject and if you have to be truthful to yourself, you have lied in front of your children a number of times, thereby sending the wrong message to them.

It is true that every parent will have their own ideas and standards about what is acceptable and what they expect from their children. But, all parents want their children to grow up to respect the truth.

Solape Ebiye is a mother of three. “One day, I went to the market, leaving the children at home. The eldest, a girl, is eight years old, so I felt a bit comfortable leaving her siblings in her care.

When I returned, I noticed that the orange juice I left on the dining table had reduced considerably. I called the three of them and demanded to know which of them drank part of the juice. To my amazement, they all denied ever touching it. I looked at the three of them one after the other and could not believe they were my children. They were actually lying to me! At least, one of them had to be the culprit here. So, I said a few words like Jesus not being a friend to someone who lied and how such liars will be caught one day and asked them to go.

“Before long, my youngest child, Timmy came to me with tears in his eyes and told the whole story of how their sister had noticed the juice on the table and drank part of it. “She did not give us before but when we begged her, she gave us small and told us not to tell you we drank it. Mummy, I’m sorry I will not take anything from her again. I want Jesus to be my friend, my son sobered.

Solape’s story is just one of the very many, various kinds of occurrences we experience with our children. While some are on the funny side, others are quite serious that drastic actions may have to be taken.

How to help:

Although over the years, children will develop a moral sense of what is right and wrong and will therefore begin to experience some sense of guilt when they lie, it is possible to help a child to be truthful at all times.

In trying to address this problem the first thing to do is likely to tell lies to avoid punishment. You will be amazed to learn that some parents simply refuse to believe when they are told that their children told a lie.

The next time of action is to discuss such lies with your child. Give him a chance to explain why he lied, if he can, and then forget about it. Avoid interrogating your child as this might make him more determined to stick to his lie.

Explain to your child simple terms why lying is wrong. For older children, you can include an explanation of how people stop trusting those who frequently lie.

Ensure you praise your child if he does own up, both when you confront him or later if he owns up without being prompted.

Lastly, set a good example to your children by making sure they do not hear you telling lies. Let your motto be, do as I do and not do as I say.

This is an Agony column where readers with no one to turn to, write to "Dear Kemi". The letters are answered on the same page. Enjoy it.

Sample B

In Love with My Boss

I am a guy of 35 years. I am not yet married and I am interested in an officer in the same establishment where I work though she is still single.

I do not have any idea of who she is going out with. She looks innocent like a mummy's pet. In this establishment, I am a newly recruited staff. She is new too. This last valentine, I gave her a card and I inscribed some love words to portray my feelings and she received it delightedly without going through the text in it because we were in the office then. The following day, I wanted to know how she felt but she appeared indifferent. Now, we have been moved to different departments after which I met her and she gave me her extension number. She said I should call her in case I have anything to tell her. Now I am confused whether to express my feeling or suspend it. She knows I am in love with her but how do I say it?.

That is where the problem lies because I would not have her say no. Should I display my masculinity over her?

At 35, you should know when a woman is interested in you or not. In fact, the lady you are talking about is making it easy for you by giving you her phone number and telling you to call if there is anything you want to say!

Do you need a crystal ball to know that she is falling in love with you? You'd better forget about this my boss syndrome and go after whom you love! What if she turns out to be your wife?

I don't think there is any specified way wherein a man gets a wife. Your wife could be any woman, the required elements are love and compatibility. Please, go for her. Let her know how you feel. Which one is displaying your masculinity over her? Stop that masculinity trash and go for her.

Help! Hormonal Imbalance

I will be 21 next year and I'm in my third year in the university. My problem is that I menstruate once in two months. In fact, there was a time I did not have my period for six months!

Not that I was pregnant, I've never slept with a man. I've gone to see a doctor and he said it has to do with my hormones and gave me some drugs. That has not done anything.

My friends even said it is a blessing in disguise. That if I sleep with any man now, I won't be pregnant. I'm too disciplined for that kind of life. What if I get pregnant?

I have a boyfriend but I've not told him I will sleep with him soon. What do I do? I can't even think of sleeping with a man I'm not married to.

Well, that you actually thought of not sleeping with a man is laudable enough.

Never mind your friends, what you are doing is right. What if you get infected with AIDS or other STDs? I think you have to see a specialist, a gynecologist to be precise.

There is nothing abnormal with this medical problem. Just have faith, be at rest, pray and all will be well.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has explored service columns, what services they provide and the extent to which readers rely on them. In effect, service columns are reader-friendly columns.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 8

Write a service column on the use of cell phones. Now that you know the characteristics of a service column, does your column meet these criteria? What does a paper gain from a service column?

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have examined service columns and the different services they render to their readers. Writers have also been seen as credible sources who should not betray their readers in whose interest the column was written. Service columns/features are also known as utility articles because of their usefulness to readers.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have gone through the samples of service columns here, note the similarities and differences in both columns.

We suspect that students pay more for items purchased on the campus than when they go to the markets. You are expected to make a market survey and write a story on this, using facts, figures, etc.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*. Dubuque, Iowa: WmC
Brow

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark:
Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 4 SERVICE COLUMNS II TRAVEL GUIDE

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Service Columns
 - 3.2 Tourism/Travel Guide
 - 3.3 Some Samples
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Service Columns offer essential services to its readers on a regular basis. This unit focuses on a specific aspect of services rendered to readers i.e. the travel guide. We will look at the requirements and see if it actually helps in the way it is meant to.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify the advantages of a Travel Guide; and
- compile your own comprehensive Travel Guide

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Service Columns

3.2 Tourism/Travel Guide

Writing regularly on the same subject sharpens a writer's focus as well as broaden his scope of experience, that one does not draw conclusions through scanty evidence, rather the evidence gathered should form the basis of the conclusion i.e. if the evidence is idea, then he should be prepared to admit this (Keeble, 1994).

Writing a Travel Guide is a serious business and it should be taken as such. Your credibility as an expert will not be questioned if readers discover that you are knowledgeable in that area.

The column may be witty, culturally eclectic, etc. The saying that the style is the man himself should apply here as your personality should shine through your story.

Now, let us assume that you have been asked to write a Tourist Guide for people going on holidays. I believe what should attract your attention should include accommodation, transportation, economic advantage to both tourist and the country/nation, entertainment, places of historical relevance, geographical location as well as weather at that time of the year, your welfare, security, and access to communication.

3.2 Some Samples

Now go through the attached sheets and note the difference between the two. Sample 1, although it is tagged “Travel Guide”, only covers the transportation aspect. It reproduces flight schedules of some airlines, for rail, it has the passenger train timetable for Nigeria Railway Corporation and finally, the most popular means of transport for long distances, the luxury bus.

An Empire of History

Those who think that the legendary Oyo empire never existed, should endeavour to visit old Oyo National Park. This park located in the present Oyo State of Nigeria, harbours sufficient ancient Oyo empire relics that confirm the traditional military might of the Oyo Kingdom. For instance, some of the traditional industries for weaponry, household utensils and clothing still operate today.

Location: The park is located in Oyo State, south-west of Nigeria. It lies between north latitudes 8° 10' and 9°05' and east longitudes 3° and 420'. The nearest national park is Kainji Lake National Park, which is about 250km to the south east. Old Oyo National Park is about 300km from Lagos, 160 km from Ibadan, 60 km from Ilorin and 660 km from Abuja. The newly refurbished Ibadan Airport creates an easy route to the park, which is about 160 km from the Oyo State capital.

Road network: A good network of roads makes entry to the park easy. Except for the Cotonou-Ibadan-Ilorin road, all the roads leading into the park are motorable. Visitors from the eastern part of the country and also those from Lagos axis can come through Ibadan-Iseyin Sepeteri to enter through Ajaku Gate. Those from Abuja, Kaduna axis should come in through Ilorin-Igbeti, using the Jokoro Gate. And from the Republic of Benin, visitors can access the park through Yashikira-Kosubosu

Igboho using the Alaguntan Gate.

Climate-when to visit: The annual rain-fall within the park ranges between 900 mm and 500 mm with temperature between 12 degree centigrade/31 degree centigrade. The best time to visit the park is during the dry season which begins in October through to April. The park experiences heavy harmattan in November to February each year.

What to see: The fauna resources here are daily on the increase. Mammal species sighted here daily include: the roan antelope, western hartebeest, “grimm’s duker and western kob. Buffalo and river hog and hyena also abound. The park authority has put in place a strong protective cover against poachers.

Archeology: The park is a combination of ecological cultural / historical endowment. The ruins of Oyo-Ile, located in the north east corner of the park was the capital and the hub of the ancient Oyo Empire. This empire was one of the first states to emerge in the forest and coastal region of West Africa and was also the most culturally advanced. It reached its zenith around 17th and 18th centuries. Some old sites within and outside the park are associated with Oyo-Ile. These are Igbolowo, Ipapo-Ile and Koso. At a point during that era, those sites served as capital of the empire. Koso still remains a place of significance because it was here the Alafin Sango committed suicide. There is also the royal cemetery at Igboho and Bara and the Antete shrine at Ikoyi-Ile. There is a strange swam of honeybees which fight for the people of Ikoyi-Ile by stinging enemies to death. Ibuya pool where the goddess of Ibuya live and River Ogun where the goddess of Ogun and wife of Okere live.

Mejiro grinding site at Oyo-Ile. This site harbours the largest concentration of cultural and geological relics in Oyo-Ile. Some of the twenty relics identified include the four concentric defence walls around the ancient city, Mejiro industrial sites which consists of blacksmith, and iron forgery sites, and grain milling site, a water reservoir, Esu and Ogun shrines and the palace (Aafin) of the Alaafin along side the town hall and Akesan market. Other features of interest are the present palace of the Alaafin of Oyo, at Oyo and an ageless tortoise and a tree more than 300 years old at Ogbomoso.

Festivals. The people of the old Oyo Empire are noted for this rich cultural festivals. Today, these same people are noted for the best colourful festivals in Nigeria. The notable festivals include Egungun, Sango, Ogun, Oya, Obatala, Oyo Asabari and Antete. Geological spots, Strange and beautiful rock formations is another feature of this historical park. As warriors, the Oyo people in those days of war,

always found refuge during enemy attacks in those solid rock formations of Oke Agbele, Abaku, Idi Ara and Mejiro.

Accommodation. Sparse but neat accommodation facilities can be found at Akoto, near Sepeteri and Ibuya camp on the banks of River Ogun. However, the most adventurous visitor could make do with open camping or some guest houses in major towns near the park.

ABUJA

Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, is definitely a place full of promise and potential. From a virgin savannah habitat some 10 years ago, the city has grown into a bustling mega polis. Though Abuja is yet to match the vibrancy of Lagos, the former capital city of Nigeria, what however beats most observers is the fast pace of stupendous development within the city.

From the on-going construction of a national stadium to emerging new hospitality outfits, this city, which originally harboured the Gwaris, paints a picture of a place just about to rediscover itself.

Though available records suggest that the city development design was not strictly adhered to during the regimes of military rulers, structures that dot the city are an extravagance of choice buildings and mansions that may have many first time visitors wondering if they are in Europe.

Business: Attempts in the past were made to sell the city as a conference hub but the democratic dispensation has brought more life and business into the city, once considered a civil service kingdom. A drive round the city throws up both organized and unorganized business concerns which are beginning to give authorities a lot of concern, particularly in the maintenance of the beauty and sanitation.

In 1992, during a trip to the rocky city, the virgin ambience and wildness experience of this Gwari kingdom left impressions that are yet to be forgotten. Though, Abuja bursts at the seams these days, most people who come here cannot but wonder at the sheer beauty of the territory.

Dwellers here may explain that the city is expensive even compared to a commercial hub like Lagos; what they may not tell you is that they will not give up the place for another city, even if expenses get out of hand.

Abuja lovers would tell you that the roads are good, traffic within the city centre is free flowing, electricity supply is on average and other good things of life in abundance.

And talking about good things of life, hospitality outfits in the city showcase world class service standards that may give New Yorkers pleasant goose pimples. Though Abuja parades countless hotels and guest houses, for any category of visitor, Sheraton Abuja and Transcorp Hotels are still the top two to beat.

The two foreign-managed hotels attract about 80 per cent lodging and conference business in the city. For shoppers, Wuse district is the place to be. Here shopping malls of various sizes compete for space and this once quiet area is gradually showing signs of growing into a shopping wonderland.

Where to go: Areas to visit in Abuja are legion, but notable places such as National Assembly Complex, Aso Rock, villa (with special permission), the Jabi Dam and Lower Usman Dam. Other areas of leisure interest are IBB golf course, writers village, Ushaffa village, National War College and National Park headquarters office along airport road. The National Stadium when completed, would also be another monument that shall be worth a visit.

The National Mosque and Christian Ecumenical Centre are also places of interest.

The ministers' quarters at Mabuchi is another place to see. The beautiful architecture and environment of the Asokoro district gives more than a passing glance opulence.

Transport; Organised city transport business here is in private hands. Taxis are easily found and a charter is the best way to move round the city fast. A drop, depending on distance, could cost as much as N50 to N200.00 but the cheapest means if you cannot afford a charter, is to take a drop. If you love to bike, okada operators can also give the best for you, particularly to destinations which taxi operators cannot locate.

Security is however the key major selling point for Abuja. Here, it is rare to see policemen at checkpoints and the dreaded robbery attacks are not a common occurrence. No doubt this development, in spite of the growing population of the city has placed Abuja as a place worthy of key investments both internationally and locally.

And for the foreign visitors, the days of double shuttle is over as the Nnamdi Azikwe International Airport now accommodates carriers such as British Airways, Air France, and Virgin Atlantic. The domestic scene is also vibrant with over ten local airlines offering flight service between Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin, Maiduguri, Enugu, Port

Harcourt and Calabar.

The ground transport network is also perfect as traveling under six hours in a luxury coach can get you to Abuja either during daybreak or at dawn.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have gone through some samples of travel guide found in the papers, and the important areas on which you need to focus your attention.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 9

Identify the advantages and disadvantages of a travel guide. Go through the samples provided in the unit. How come there are no prices/fares listed?

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has reviewed services rendered by the Travel Guide and has noted that if all these important areas are taken into consideration, the tourist would hardly suffer any inconveniences. But how come there are no fares/prices listed?

Please find out.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Compare your own tourist guide on any one of the following places:

- a. The Annual Fishing Festival in Argungu, Kebbi State.
- b. The Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi
- c. The Ikogosi Hotsprings festivals, etc

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown.

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

MODULE 3 REVIEWS AND LANGUAGE OF FEATURES

Unit 1	Arts Reviews
Unit 2	Special Correspondents
Unit 3	Language of Features

UNIT 1 ARTS REVIEWS

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	Arts Reviews
3.2	Arts: Books
3.3	Films, Plays
3.4	Samples
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we will examine reviews of works of art such as books, films, plays, exhibitions, music, etc. We will look at one or two examples of reviews.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Apply the criteria for reviews to any work of art; and
- Write any review when called upon to do so.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Arts Reviews: Books

Perhaps the most subjective aspect of feature writing is writing reviews. According to Berger (1990: 143), “reviews are similar to editorials in that they are statements of opinion, but they are made by a particular reviewer....”

A reviewer must be really interested in the subject, for him to take special interest in it. This is because he has to delve into the author's or composer's mind for him to decipher the underlying intentions and try to determine the effect these have on the audience.

3.2 Books

Book reviews are more often written by academics, writers, specialists, journalists etc. This keeps them informed and up-to date concerning the subject/area. The book reviewer needs to review the book from any angle anyone chooses thus there is no hard and fast rule about reviews. You either place the work alongside previous ones written by the author or compare it with similar ones written by other authors.

Hennessy and Hodgson (1995) argue that fiction is more difficult to review than non-fiction. In book reviews there is a relationship between you, the author and the reader. Areas of interest to the reviewer include resolution of conflict, structure of the books, style of presentation, logical sequence, etc.

3.3 Films, Plays, Radio

Film reviews should be lively and interesting. The audience relies a lot on the strength and correctness of the reviewers comments. In film reviews, you need to identify the type of film, is it a comedy, a tragedy, is the dialogue appropriate? Etc. Reviews are a sort of report on the style of the director as well as the quality of the acting involved. As earlier mentioned, a review is opinionated. The reviewer must express his own opinion and tell his audience what he feels about the film. Since a review depends on the taste, style, expertise, background and experience of the reviewer, it is imperative that the reviewer is knowledgeable in the area he is reviewing. If the film is a documentary, does it serve its purpose? Is it interesting, does the dialogue tally with the actions?

3.4 Samples

Here, we have three different samples of reviews. .

“The Spirit Behind the Rock” is on a female gospel music star, while the last is on a book: The writings of Dele Giwa, written by Nyako Oso and reviewed by Peter Ishaka.

The Spirit Behind the Rock

She'll rather go unnoticed. Her quiet disposition makes it easy. She has

no assumptions. She could just pass for the woman next door. Someone picked her up out of the crowd and discovered that she's not the unsung type. Something about her aura lingers on when you come a bit close. Wunmi Owolabi's name would not ring any bell until the musical woman on the inside begins to give its expression. She is a prolific songwriter and composer yet she hesitates to write the script of her life. She tells you respectfully that she's not the one that matters, but the one inside of her.

Her first gospel album went unsung but she was undaunted. In pursuit of excellence, she proceeded to produce her second album in England.

Owolabi would rather just sing than be heard talking. She sings with such passion about the love millions have never known. With compassionate zeal, she sings about God's love that heals, and restores hope—a tangible force that has become so real to her. In writing her songs you could feel her literally drawing attention away from her person to the one who lives inside her.

This trip to London last year brought her to a closer encounter with God. Her pursuit of excellence in the production of her second album *THE ROCK* brought her closer to her dreams. She entered London unannounced, unknown, unsure of what was ahead, but she left a celebrity, every song in her gospel album *THE ROCK* was an instant hit!

“One of my mentors in the Ministry, reiterates the fact that if it's for God it's got to be the best so I put in the very best. My first album which sold about 10,000 was not anywhere near my expectation, so I took a giant step and went in search of an excellent production and that's exactly what I got!

Just recently returning from London, the album which was produced at the World Vision Studios by J.J. Adamson and mastered in Cambridge by Nick Waston hit the London in December 2000. Christians were calling in the British Premiere Radio's worship request to have some of the tracks played for their listening pleasure.

It's not just the voice, it's her message. She sings about the real life and God. She easily relates to this real world by emphasizing on what God's word says: “Somehow (.....) I can't hold on it (.....) She's just different (.....) She's deep (.....) commented a listener (.....) “There's something about her disposition that makes you want to sing her songs over and over again I guess it's her emphasis on the word.

The thirteen track CD has songs such as Under the Rock, In His Presence, Been Young, Leftover, Lift Up your Heads, 10,000 More (remix), When I sing, Broken Hearts, Take All the Glory, John 17 and High Praises.

She was hosted by the Grace Outreach Church in South East London by the Nigeria born Pastor Fadeyi. From here, with the financial support of the church, she reached out to many other churches in London where demands were made on her to sing.

When Wunmi was asked what her vision was in the gospel music, she was quick to correct that she was in the Word ministry. Her strength in ministry is predicated on the Bible passage Isaiah 43:21 which states that this people I have made for myself, they will show forth my praise”.

The Bible states clearly that a time would come when there would be a famine of God’s Word, people would search for it in the North, South, East and West but they would not find it”. But I have been equipped to carry the Word around nations in songs that cannot be ignored.” She further, said.

“After my seventh month in London, I got invitation to come to Austria, specifically to Hohenems in Voivalberg which is a predominantly Catholic domain. They are not 100 percent Catholics. And majority of them do not speak English language. I sang eight of my tracks in one service all in English to this non-English speaking audience but music transcends language, the Word of God in songs touched them. I was again invited to sing in a bigger church in Hohenems and then it dawned on me that these were strange doors being opened so that God’s word could gain entrance.

“I am just a willing vessel to take His Word in songs to where He leads me. When asked what programme she had in store for her Nigerian audience, she stated categorically that she wanted to erase the dryness and mediocrity that had become synonymous with gospel music on an international pedestal. She would also love to raise up a younger generation of Christian children who would be professionally trained in the art of music so that their generation would be trained musically and able to meet up with international standard. That, is the only way to erase the mediocrity in the church music ministry.

“I would want to catch them young” and with the support of churches and parents, bring out the latent inside of them. I see the dire need to help the oncoming generation discover the musical gifts of God in their

lives and give expression to it. There's something inside of them all crying for expression. We must help them bring it out to God's praise and glory.

The new 13-track gospel album THE ROCK released recently in London by Wunmi Owolabi is not just another attempt at gospel recording. It is positioned to erase the mediocrity that is fast becoming synonymous with gospel music in Nigeria. Released under her Isaiah 43.21 label, the album is quietly making its entrance into Nigeria's gospel music industry.

Owolabi's first album, 10,000 MORE released in 1998 was nowhere near her ideal as she also confess but instead of being daunted, she took it as a challenge proceeded to do an excellent work that would compare favorably with gospel music in the international scene. She ventured on a journey of faith to London where she spent five to six months in the World Vision Studios, producing, this time around, a worthy product that obviously glorifies the name of Jesus Christ.

"I feel so thankful to the Christians and Churches in London, especially the Grace Outreach Church, who rallied round and said the album must be completed as it would 'go places'. Pastor Paul Fadeyi's large heart took me in and all the members of his church contributed generously to the project. He is an exemplary servant of God and I thank God for his life and his wife's.

Apart from Pastor Paul, my mentors back home also contributed in so many ways to keeping me focused and not giving up when things seemed so hard. 'Bishop David Oyedepo's tenacity and exploits in ministry ignited me to pursue my destiny, and Pastor Kris Okotie gave a lot of technical advice on the production. Producing an album of this standard in the UK is just God's ways of honouring my desire to glorify His name. Asked what her future plans were, Wunmi said that she would love to take the message of the songs to every home and every church.

"Every song in the album is inspired by God's word, and I would want to share it with everyone". It's the message of hope and assurance it brings. She tells and sings so assuredly of God's love and faithfulness. There's warmth about the mood of her songs....

These songs bless the heart, enrich the soul and revive the spirit.

"Personally" remarked a fan of hers "I believe every heart should receive these songs they vibrate with the love of God.

Wunmi is back in Nigeria where she has been receiving invitations to sing in churches and concerts. She says of herself... “I am just a willing and available vessel ready to go where God would have me go. I have a heart that desires to see God rightfully praised and placed in our lives. The album has been going places not because of my voice, it’s got nothing to do with my voice. I believe it’s got everything to do with the heart”.

Wunmi Owolabi is a graduate of Communication Arts from University of Ibadan, with specialty in “Writing for the Media”. She developed the interest in writing for the scripts for TV Radio and the Press. She graduated in 1984 and subsequently picked up a job in a leading Advertising Agency as a copywriter and then rose to the position of Corporate Affairs Manager. She resigned in 1991 to devote herself to her new family life when she had her first child.

A family woman of some sort, she finds more fulfillment in excelling in her God given calling which is songwriting and composition. She writes all her songs and works closely with her producer on the song arrangement. She produced her first album in 1978 under the Decross label. But proceeded to produce the second one almost immediately in England in July 2000.

The songwriter has been the music leader in many churches. She was the praise and worship leader at Christ Chapel in the late 80’s and thereafter.

She proceeded to Glory Bible Church where she groomed the choir of the church. After this she served in the Redeemed Christian Church of God as choir leader in many of the then newly set up model parishes where her husband occupied a leadership role in 1996. She admires the humility and tenacity of Pastor Stet Adeboye. She moved to the Winner Chapel where she was ignited with the conviction to go full-time in the music ministry. Bishop Oyedepo would always cry at the top of his voice that vision is for runners not for complacent”. He sparked the zeal to pursue my calling in the ministry of the word in songs each time he screamed ... “You don’t sit down with a vision... you run with”.

Mentor in the ministry from whom she draws a lot of inspiration is Pastor Kris Okotie of the Household of God.” This man of God taught me to be focused and not to compromise excellence in things pertaining to the Kingdom. Pastor Kris is not just a teacher of the word, he is a teacher of songs”.

Wunmi has ministered in songs in many other churches - TREM,

Foursquare Gospel Church and used by God to establish his praise in all nations. She just returned from a European tour and would be attending some concerts in the US later in the year.

The quintessential prose stylist

“There are men who need three score and ten years to fulfill their life’s mission. And there those for whom only half that time is sufficient. Dele Giwa needed only half that time, and yet the testimony of his brief life haunts and taunts us with unanswerable questions over what more he might have done in another ten years”. Dr. Stanley Macebuh, celebrated columnist, wrote in *The Guardian* of October 26, 1986, in a piece titled “Memorializing Dele Giwa.”

Today, Mr. Giwa would have been dead for 12 years! Even so there are still many unanswered questions about him; Who killed him? Why? Why have the police stopped investigations into his murder via parcel bomb on October 19, 1986?

What happens to the pledge made by Rear Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, Ibrahim Babangida’s vice president while in office that no stone would be left unturned to get the killers? Why have the stones been left prostrate? But there is something that many Nigerians will value more than perhaps just finding the killers and punishing them as justice demands. *The Writings of Dele Giwa*. It is not a critique of the works of the bright and prose stylist who died at age 39 but a compilation of his articles that were published in all media houses that he worked. “*The Sunday/Daily Times*, *The National/Sunday Concord* and of course, *Newswatch* which he founded with three other journalists, Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese and Yakubu Mohammed. Starting with “Golden Fleece I think I got it! Which appeared in *The Sunday Times* of April 8, 1979, the book is a collection of his column under his *Press Snaps* and *Parallax World* (later fused into *Parallax Snaps*). But the 79 articles published in the 304-page book were those that had to do with what Giwa liked most and for which he died: journalism or the practice of it. Thus, pieces like “*The Problem of Living by the Pen*,” “*How Western Media Cover Africa*,” “*Nobody Likes the Journalist*,” “*Lade Bonuola: Mr. Caught Out*,” “*Reporting Politics: Analysis of Strategy*,” “*Like Going to War*” and “*Hazards of Writing a Column*” were given prominence. The book also contains two interviews that Giwa granted to the late and highly entertaining writer, Ely Obasi, first published in *Vanguard* newspaper and to Mr. Kelvin Ejiofor in *Just A Chat*, a *Radio Nigeria 2* personality programme. The interviews like the columns that he wrote, are quite revealing. Said he of how he got a job at *The New York Times*, perhaps the most respected newspaper in the world: “I was

arguing with a couple of Nigerian students in a library one day in New York. I was looking at the first page of The New York Times when I saw an error and I said, even Dele Giwa would not commit this kind of error. And they said, there you go again! Then I replied: How do you mean, there you go again? I can go get a job in that paper. It was a Friday afternoon. They said no way! So on Monday, I got dressed, went to New York Times and got a job". For balance, some selected feedback to this columns like "We are Servant to Our Master," Dr. See Ess Momoh rejoinder to Giwa's "Recklessness of Dr. See Ess Momoh" and "Andy Akporugo Is a Guru," a reply to Giwa's column by Mike Edemeyer, were also featured in the publication. The book opened with a foreword, "Memorializing Dele Giwa," by Macebuh who claims a spiritual bond with Giwa, "as one who, in a certain sense, must share the guilt of his death." Macebuh brought Giwa back to Nigeria on the instruction of Dr. Patrick Dele Cole, then Managing Director of Daily Times. Other contributions featured came after the death of the reporter who would not call a spade by another name. "Man Without Can" a funeral oration by Ekpu; "Death of a Typewriter" by Eddie Iroh, Reminiscences on Dele Giwa" by Olatunji Dare, "Asking Questions" by Amma Ogan and "A Son Remembers" by Billy Giwa.

Those who value good reportage will find The Writings of Dele Giwa irresistible. Besides picking one or two things they will discover, through reading the book, why the talented craftsman was highly regarded. He was an extraordinary reporter who had a keen eye in capturing the nuances of his subject and of the Nigerian scene. Frank, ironic and incisive, the collection will make you to simply laugh or cry at our folly as a nation. The packaging makes reading the book even more pleasurable. At the end of the book, there is a bibliography and innovative and detailed section summarizing every Giwa's work, beyond the ones published in the book. There is also a comprehensive index, another good guide to reading the book. Some of the headlines are recast to add more punch. The typographical errors that crept in because of deadline pressure were corrected. Even if in so doing some more typing errors were committed, The Writing of Dele Giwa has achieved what Mr. Osso, in his introduction, intended it to be: to immortalize Giwa and preserve his journalistic legacy. The book is an invaluable tool to students of journalism, reporters and editors, researchers and social historians. Indeed, the book has accomplished the wish of Chinua Achebe's three year-old-son who on hearing of the death of that remarkable poet. Christopher Okigbo, exclaimed: "Don't Let Him Die! _

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has examined reviews of books, film, plays, television

programmes.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 10

What are the advantages of a book review? Identify these in an order of priority.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have looked at the most subjective aspect of feature writing i.e. reviews. We have examined book reviews, film/play reviews, etc. We have found that all reviews are a form of entertainment and they require the reviewer's opinion.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

With the experience you have acquired from reading the practical examples above, answer the following questions:

1. What is the purpose of the review?
2. Does the review serve its purpose?
3. Is it interesting? If so, what aspects of the reviewer's style make it so? If not, what aspects should the reviewer improve on?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed) *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 2 SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Special Correspondents
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit highlights the concept of special correspondents, their duties, responsibilities, the need for this category of journalists.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- justify the need for special correspondents; and
- write a story as the special correspondent in a special area.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Special Correspondents

There are specialist writers who restrict themselves to certain areas such as arts, reviews, service or utility columns etc. This group of people concentrates their skills, knowledge and experience on a specific subject that is exclusive to them. Some are staff writers on the pay roll of the media outlet while others are freelancers. Some of these are resident in specific places. Sometimes, the journal requires that a correspondent's expertise is required elsewhere. In such cases he moves and integrates himself into the field.

The criteria required include a sound background in experience, creativity in use of language, correct choice of words and phrases and a high level of interest in the subject. Also, more attention is paid to substance which discriminates between valuable and trivial information that is clearly and logically presented. Facts, arguments, discussion and analysis are rationally presented too. In addition to a purposeful style aimed at expressing the idea, rather than impressing with difficult syntax. Then you need to use your discretion to know where humor and

light hearted expressions are in order.

The special correspondent is a specialist in the area he is reporting and as such, he is knowledgeable in that area. The idea is that his column will enrich readers/listeners/viewers by providing more information on the subject. Such areas where specialist writers are invaluable include education, consumer affairs, medical matters, science and technology, legal matters, social services, etc. Indeed some specialist writers become so dedicated to their areas that they become crusading journalists who cannot be separated from the cause they are reporting.

A good example of a special correspondent is Christiane Amanpour of the CNN. She has won the hearts of viewers by her selfless service in the sense that there is nowhere she cannot go to get news. When the war was fierce in Afghanistan, she was there wearing a “hijab” and a headscarf and dodging bullets & bombs. You could see her as well as the battle ground (in the background). I believe she is exceptional.

Others are Sola Odunfa and Bilikisu Labaran of the BBC, Sele Eradiri of NTA, Tajudeen Akanbi of FRCN.

In the print media, for example, The Week, the special correspondents are located in specific places such as: Samuel Jinge (Kano); Edem (Calabar); Christian Nwokocha (Owerri); in The News, they are Ben Adayi (Yola/Jalingo); Tony Orilade (Abuja); Sunday Orinya (Makurdi); Innocent Alabo(Jos).

Special correspondents are seen as authorities. The paper they write for should however be careful not to take everything the correspondent writes at face value. This is because some writers in this category have compromised their positions by accepting bribes, “brown envelopes”, etc.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has looked at some aspects of the special correspondent column.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 11

Can you identify more responsibilities for the special correspondent?
Please, do

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined the criteria required in order for a writer to become a special correspondent. The implication is that not everybody can be a special correspondent. Having gone through this unit, I believe you should be able to write as a special correspondent.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Make a list of at least 10 special correspondents that you know.
2. Identify their areas of specialization.
3. Describe the way this correspondent reports or writes etc that has created impressions on you.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown.

Udofia, C. 1991 (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 3 LANGUAGE OF FEATURES

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Language of Features
 - 3.2 Vogue Words, Journalese, Clichés, Wrong Usage
 - 3.3 How Meaning is Conveyed
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

“Language is the vehicle of thought”. What ever you want to say, language plays a big part in saying that thing. In this unit we look at the language of features. This involves looking at the different tones of language and several stylists devices. We would also look at how meaning is conveyed.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- combine these devices to form a unified whole;
- Explain how meaning is conveyed.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Language of Features

Because the feature story is meant to entertain, the language must be seen as not too serious. According to Rasheed (1990:2), newspaper language varies according to the paper’s ideological orientations.

Thus, human interest dictates the impact of the news, making differences appear in the tone of the story. The language of features is usually affected by the perspective of the writer.

The language of features is replete with jargon, clichés, euphemisms, wit and humour, etc. For instance, the stuffiness of some feature stories is clearly depicted when they use words that are hard to understand.

Euphemism is a case in point. You hear words such as “rationalization” or “restructuring” when what they actually mean is that someone has been sacked. Nothing ever “ends” it can only be terminated. Also, few things ever “change” as what happens is that they undergo modification. When something is thrown out, it means it goes through a process of elimination. And nothing is ever used as it is utilized, etc.

Kallan (2000) extols the virtue of simple expression for journalists. The writer’s aim is to assist journalism students manage language and build efficient structures. He argues that short sentences need not sound abrupt, choppy, irritatingly monotonous, discrete and isolated.

3.2 Journalese, Clichés, Wrong Usage Vogue Words

Vogue words can have false meanings thereby giving a negative hue/colour to the story. For instance, saying:

- a) Someone addressed the issue” instead of discussed, stated, mentioned.
- b) Which is the acceptable meaning of problematic? Is it the ‘old’ meaning (uncertain) or the new and confusing one of “beset with problems?”

The level of linguistic competence in the newspapers show that students now use language at below competence level. It is argued that even the word “journalese” is a pejorative word for the way newspaper writers write.

Journalese is seen as newspaper jargon because such words as probe, axe, boost, jibe, hit etc all have meanings in journalism that bear no relation to their use in daily conversations.

Clichés are meaningless, over dramatic adjectives such as “sudden death” “heated argument”, “exclusive”.

Wrong usages abound especially because most of us speak English as our second language. If someone dies in a crash, it is reported that he died in a “ghastly motor accident”. We read things like book stores being called stationary stores, a restaurant is called. Food Hotel, etc check out Adidi Uyo’s “Our nascent democracy”.

3.2 How Meaning is Conveyed

The feature writer must ensure that reading his stories becomes an exciting and pleasurable exercise. This is because language has an

impact on the reader, as the meaning conveyed is determined by how a message is sent/presented as well as what the writer says. Someone once reported that people were shown a film of a car crashing into another car. After viewing the film, viewers were grouped and asked the same question though with slight alternative for each group:

Group A: How fast was car A going when it **smashed** into car B?

Group B: How fast was car A going when it **collided** with car B?

Group C: How fast was car A going when it **hit** car B?

Group D: How fast was car A going when it **bumped** into car B?

Not surprisingly, they all gave different answers as each of the underlined words seriously affected the interpretation of the situation.

Thus, language may dull your abilities and induce you to accept what is not right. It may also put you off reading the well-researched and potentially valuable information in the story. Language can be used as a smoke screen to hide from public view. Try to avoid emotion-laden words, try to stay alert when writing becomes pedantic.

Our Nascent Catchphrase

A news story tucked inside page four of The Guardian on Thursday, July 13, 2000 was headlined: “NYSC: Zamfara alleges threat to democracy as more states withdraw.” And the lead, story reads: “Just as Ogun and Ebonyi swelled the ranks of states directing their indigenes serving in the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme to shun posting to Sharia states, Zamfara has accused states giving such directives of threatening Nigeria’s nascent democracy”.

“Yet Another Truce” was the title of an opinion piece in The Post Express of June 15. In it, Mma Agbagha discussed, among other things, the purported attempts by the government of President Obasanjo to change the leadership of the National Assembly, culminating in the “invasion” of the Senate President’s home. As Agbagha sees it, this act by the Nigeria Police “portends grave danger to our nascent democracy.”

On Saturday, June 17, 2000, former Speaker of the House of Representatives was the subject in one of the segments of Sunrise, an early morning current affairs discussion programme on Channels television, Lagos. And from one of the programme’s moderators, Patrick Oke, came the question: “If he does come back, what are the implications for Nigeria’s nascent democracy?”

Can you see it? Like dressing language has fads. They are called catchphrases.

Right now, a fad in Nigeria's political language is NASCENT DEMOCRACY. To indulge in a hyperbole, on every page that you turn to in our newspaper and newsmagazines these days, you are likely to encounter our current catchphrase: nascent democracy.

"Nigeria, our country" is the title of a terse letter - to - the editor in The Guardian of June 13, written by Fred Agbaje, Laments the Lagos lawyer: "It is only in Nigeria where we claim to be fighting corruption, that the like of Salisu Buhari, a once convicted celebrated cheat, can be granted state pardon less than a year after conviction. Question: Is such pardon not a mockery of our collective sense of pride, war against corruption, judicial process and national interest?"

Not at all, my dear legal luminary. This is Nigeria! Indeed, I have my own question for the Lagos lawyer: Whoever told you that there was a "war against corruption" in Nigeria? Did you ever hear the word "war" from the horse's mouth, I mean, from the lips of the chief crusader against corruption himself, President Obasanjo? I have never heard the retired General proclaiming that what he has embarked upon is a social equivalent of war. Never! Such bellicose epithets are reserved for the like of late General Idiagbon, may his soul rest in perfect peace! Only dictators fight wars against social vices; democrats don't: They just pass bills, set up commissions, and everything falls in place.

The last place I had expected to find our nascent catchphrase was in an advertiser's announcement in This Day of June 25, 2000 that was titled: THE BUHARI SAGA AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: The Position of The Igbo Community Assembly, Abuja.

"But there it was in the seventh and concluding paragraph of the announcement. It reads "The Igbo Community Assembly condemns unequivocally any attempt to foist the tainted Salisu Buhari on the House of Representatives and hereby affirms its support for the independence of the National Assembly as exemplified in Chuba Okadigbo as Senate President and Ghali Na'Abba as Speaker of the House of Representatives. Our nascent democracy must be allowed to grow in peace and harmony and not be stifled by the excesses of any unbridled autocracy."

And can you beat this? Even from the mouth of the roundly vilified erstwhile House Speaker flows the catchphrase. The News, the magazine that made the man meet his Waterloo, carried, in its edition of June 19, a letter from Salisu Buhari, with the title: I'm Grateful." The letter opens thus: "I must, first of all, thank God and the President and Commander in- Chief of the Armed Forces, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo

for granting me state pardon in the exercise of the powers conferred on him by the Constitution.”

Can you blame Buhari for that wanton effusion? The friend who drew my attention to the letter, however, wondered what God had to do with this matter, quipping

“I beg, leave God out of dis one o!”

Anyway, it is the penultimate paragraph of Buhari’s letter of gratitude that really interests us. It reads: “Finally, as we start the second year of our new democracy, it is my fervent prayer that the Almighty God in His infinite mercies will protect and guide our nascent democracy to a full blown one, where as brothers and sisters only peace and love will reign supreme.”

Buhari has every reason to thank God and President Obasanjo for saving him from jail. The Comet consolidated the impressions of millions across the land in its editorial of June 13, 2000 which was titled: “Untenable pardon.” Said the paper: “If the truth must be told, a lot of Nigerians believe there must be more to the decision that has been so far stated if events unfolding are anything to go by.”

To convince you that our “nascent” catchphrase is on everybody’s lips, let me indulge you in the editorial’s second paragraph. “The former Speaker of the House insisted on bamboozling Nigerians into believing him. He even employed lawyers, ostensibly to put up a case he did not possess. When he saw that the game was up, he owned up. He was charged, tried and convicted. He lost his office to a wave of leadership scrutiny which might have been the beginning of a cleansing exercise for, “here we go, “our nascent democracy. Somewhere along the line, we lost that initiative.”

Well, well, well, on page 2 of This Day, July 22, was a headline that sounded like an anticlimax: “Presidency Withdraws Support for Buhari.” According to the report, “Top administration sources said during the week that the Obasanjo administration was forced to abandon the project when it discovered it was unworkable and that pursuing it further would only create an image problem for the government.” The paper gathered that the nail on the coffin of Buhari’s comeback campaign was hammered by the Emir of Kano Alhaji Ado Bayero, who visited President Obasanjo and told him of the Kano people’s resolve to resist any attempt to bring back the mendacious ex-Speaker. Incredible!

It’s really amazing when you come to think of the whole Salisu saga and the role of the Presidency in it. I had the opportunity in Jos,

sometime in June this year, to ask the Senior Special Assistant to the President on National Orientation, as well as the Director General of the National Orientation Agency whether their agency was consulted before decisions, such as the pardoning of Buhari, were taken. The occasion was the launching of the National Rebirth campaign at the Plateau State Capital. You won't hear from me the responses of Chief Onyeama Ugochukwu and Prof. Aloy Ejiogu, the two National Orientation Musketeers, but I can tell you that I did see their predicament!

The National Orientation train arrived in Lagos about two weeks ago, with Vice President Atiku launching the National Rebirth campaign at the Tafawa Balewa Square on Thursday, July 20, and of course, the two musketeers were in too. The following day, The Guardian carried a news story with the headline: "NOA, The Guardian MD urge media to sustain democracy," and voila, there it was in the very first sentence of the story "our nascent" catchphrase! "Media practitioners (sic)," reads the lead, "have been implored to continuously seek a better understanding of the institutions and systems they report to sustain Nigeria's nascent democracy." The advice, the next sentence states, came from Mr. Emeka Izeze, the MD of The Guardian and the two National Orientation musketeers.

To say that the two musketeers and the agency they lead have an up till task must be the greatest understatement of this new millennium! Only in Nigeria can you have a government that is propagating National Rebirth with one hand, and embracing a symbol of National Malaise with the other.

Lest the language train be derailed, it must be said that our nascent catchphrase is one that traverses every terrain. Here is one from the socio-cultural front. "Watch your utterances, Yoruba group warns Nigerians" was the headline of a news story in The Guardian of June 13. The lead reads: "The Yoruba Community Council (YCC) in the 19 northern states has cautioned Nigerians against destabilizing utterances that could tear the country apart."

You do not have to wait for too long before it hits our nascent catchphrase. It's there in the story's second sentence: "President-General of YCC, Chief Abdul-Ganiyu Oguntinyinbo, warned that if such utterances are not stopped, the country's nascent democracy is (sic) under threat."

And for the whipping boys of politicians comes this: "Na'Abba Slams Journalists." That's in The Examiner of June 14.

“Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Ghali Na’Abba has chided the press for tilting stories in favour of the executive, warning that such a development may weaken the nascent democracy.” If journalists had really titled stories against the legislative branch of government, and in favour of the executive, that would be a case of biased reporting.

What I really do not know is whether such biased reporting can weaken our so called nascent democracy, all by itself. An alarm like this presupposes that members of the reading public cannot discern news reports damage the credibility of the press more than they hurt the reputation of those individuals or institutions that are unfairly reported, if that were really the case. You reported, if that were really the case. You can bet on that!

If any single event has shaken our nascent democracy to its very root, since May 29, 1999, that event must be the fuel crisis of June 2000. “The increase in the pump price of petroleum products by President Olusegun Obasanjo has predictably jolted the nation,” opened *The Examiner* in its editorial of June 12, 2002, one irreverently titled: “The President Must Bow.”

That opening sentence, however is certainly of no interest to us at all. Check out our interest in the opening sentence of the editorial’s third paragraph. “Weighing the excuses offered our impression that there may well be fifth columnists within the Obasanjo government, relentlessly working to destroy Nigeria’s nascent democracy.”

Hey, what do they call this in dramaturgy: denouement? “Obasanjo Apologizes to NLC” was the headline of the lead story in *The Examiner* of June 13, as if the President had obeyed the paper’s editorial of the previous day. Well, if you believe that headline, you can believe anything! According to *The News* story. “Information Minister, Professor Jerry Gana, tendered the apology at the opening session of the National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting of the NLC in Abuja.” But when the President himself addressed the nation on television a few days later, he tendered no apology. His address as a whole betrayed no contrition. President self-righteousness to boot!

Anyway let’s favour our ubiquitous catch-phrase as found in that news story’s second sentence: “Prof. Gana said that the government was willing to listen to Labour in the interest of Nigeria’s nascent democracy.” No kidding! Does it mean that if our democracy were not nascent, the government and the President would not have listened to the voice of the people? This line of reasoning makes you wonder

whether some screws are not missing, if you catch my drift!

The President's party also caught the "nascent" bug! In an advertorial published in *The Punch* of June 14, after the President's rather reluctant capitulation, the People Democratic Party (PDP) said: "The party also salutes the Nigerian masses who displayed a deep sense of understanding and commitment to protecting our nascent democracy." Well, the people might be protecting our nascent democracy. But are their representatives equally doing so? "Threats to Nascent Democracy Identified" was the headline of a little story on page three of *The Post Express* of July 25. The lead of the story reads: "The Third Republic Senate Leader, Professor Wande Abimbola, yesterday in Ibadan identified the current monetisation of the polity as one of the greatest threats to the country's nascent democracy as he decried in strong terms the huge sum of money the political functionaries have been appropriating for themselves".

The erstwhile Senate Leader was right on the money! For on that same day, the front-page lead story of the same paper read: "Senate Probe Unveils Can of Worms. "But that headline itself failed to unveil the monstrosity of the worms, compared with that of *The Guardian's* front-page lead story: "Okadigbo, Deputy got N39m for Christmas, says Clerk," There goes our nascent democracy!

RIDDLED WITH ERRORS

"Saying it Over And Over" was our last excursion on this language. That was on June 11. If I, the writer could be thoroughly exasperated reading that piece, I do not know the word I can use to describe your own experience. There were 25 errors in all, 24 of which were introduced by the proverbial you-know-who: the printer's devil! Enough errors to warrant repeating the piece all over. Indeed, but for the fact that a regular traveler on this train would find it awkward, if not boring, it would have been republished. Ironically, on parade there was the rhetorical device: repetition! Sincerest apologies!

Beware of Wrong Relatives

Many writers of various mass media messages have a common problem with one kind of pronoun: the RELATIVE pronoun. Oftentimes, writers use the wrong relative pronoun. The evidence is overwhelming, if only you can open your eyes and ears very wide as you read our newspaper and magazines, and listen to radio and television yes, listen to television, since you can only hear the use of wrong relatives, or see it on the screen!

In the National Concord of April 29, 1996, was a news story with this headline: “Make objectivity your by-word, pressmen advised. And right there in the third paragraph of the news story was the beast: “According to Chief Duyile, journalism is a noble profession WHICH rules must be observed, saying that it is very dangerous to play a game without set rules. “Can you see the word in capitals? That’s the handwork of a writer who is playing the game of writing without observing the rules of grammar. The rule which the writer of the news story has violated is one which, ironically pertains to COP-acronym for Case of Pronoun! The capitalized word, WHICH is the nominative case, but the right case for that sentence is the possessive, of which or preferably, its “human” counterpart which is grammatically accepted as correct, that is whose.

Accordingly, the sentence, in its right form, should read:

“According to Chief Duyile, journalism is a noble profession WHOSE rules must be observed..... “The remaining part of the sentence has yet its flaw, but that is not of interest in this essay. Our concern here is the use of wrong relative pronouns, and as we have deposed initially, the error abounds in the Nigerian mass media.

On March 8, 1995 the Vanguard carried an advertorial by The Guardian in which the newspaper’s management was responding to a publication by Tempo, a story with the headline, “Sinking The Flagship: Ibru Sacks The Guardian. “ One of the claims which The Guardian sought to debunk, as stated in the rejoinder of the advertorial, was: “That there was a meeting at Sheraton Hotel, Ikeja, on Monday, January 23, WHICH agenda was to discuss general well-being of the companies and modalities for re-opening.”

Another evidence: The September 24, 1995 edition of The Meridian news magazine had this cover story: “Fresh Crisis Rocks Guardian. “One sentence in the cover story reads: “The editorial brief was to found an institutional public trust, WHICH cardinal philosophy will derive from the traditional libertarian spirit and practices.” Anywhere you see the nominative case of the pronoun, WHICH, in capital letters, you can call a COP, I mean, substitute the possessive case of the pronoun. Because” of which” is rather awkward, you can use “whose”, and you’ll be right.

“Ndigbo started marginalisation in Nigeria” was the title of an opinion piece in the Vanguard of April 19, 1996. Somewhere down the line, the writer dives into the pitfall of COP, thus: “Throughout the daylight of 16th January, Major Odumegwu Ojukwu who was the Battalion Commander at Kano, was on the line with General Ironsi and they were

mapping out strategies on how to consolidate on the new found power WHICH planning nor execution they were party to. “Cop-p! Wrong relative, WHICH, to its cousin, WHO.

The relative pronoun, WHO, may be used wrongly in two ways. The first case is what we may call WRONG IDENTITY, the second, WRONGCASE. The following two extracts exemplify the two cases. “The Third Eleven” was the headline of an article in the Tell magazine of April 3, 1995. Catch the error. “Going by his (Dr. Walter Ofonagoro’s) records at NTA and his recent pronouncement (after being sworn in as Information Minister) to deal with ‘miscreants’ in the Nigerian press WHO he said ‘misinform the country, he promised to be a good tool against the critical press. “This is an error of case: Instead of the nominative case, WHO, what the sentence requires is the objective case, WHOM.

Before Walter was Jerry, as you must know. In an answer to a question in the TV Guide of January March 1995, Professor Jerry Gana, former Minister of Information was quoted to have said: “We have technical support programme with Japan. They have selected a Canadian firm WHO are now installing equipment in Kaduna, Minna, Akure, Port Harcourt and Jalingo in Taraba State.” Mistake of identity: The Canadian firm cannot take on the relative pronoun, “who”, since the firm is not a human being. The correct relative pronoun for this sentence must be WHICH. Whether it is speech or writing, the rule of grammar has to be obeyed, except the user of language has obtained a poetic license, of sorts.

A letter to the editor of the Sunday Vanguard of February 26, 1995, was entitled: “Release Abiola to Satisfy FIFA”. The third paragraph reads: At first FIFA was talking of poor facilities in our stadia. But when Jack Warner, FIFA’s Vice-President, came around the second time, he was impressed and he talked of the ‘eighth wonder of the world’ and our officials got carried away. That was just Jack Warner’s view. Not that of the whole of FIFA and the International Community WHO have imposed various sanctions against us and whose countries are reluctant to come to Nigeria.” The problem is simple: Both FIFA and the International Community may be made up of human beings, but they are human beings parse. So, the right relative pronoun to use is WHICH, not “Who”. The same error can be found in the news story with the headline, “Shell imports arms to equip police, “The Guardian, January 29, 1999. The story quotes the company’s spokesman as saying: “Shell has purchased some arms - hand guns on behalf of the Nigeria Police Force WHO guard Shell’s facilities”. Journalists have no license to correct the errors in messages which they quote, but they must always

watch out for, and beware of, the beast called WRP: Wrong Relative Pronoun. It comes in various shapes.

A Vice Called Verbosity

Verbosity, aptly defined by Thornton and Baron as “the vice of using more words than necessary to express our meaning”, is a term used interchangeably with wordiness, prolixity and redundancy. This vice which is common to writers and speakers has various forms whose nomenclature remains moot. But for our purposes, let us say that verbosity is spelled, APT: A for Image, P for Pleonasm, and T for Tautology. Of the three varieties of verbosity, tautology is the most common, more so since many authorities consider pleonasm as a variant of tautology.

Essentially, tautology is pointless or needless repetition of words, whereas pleonasm is the addition of words which convey nothing new. On the other hand, image is the twisting and turning of words, a circumlocution. The varieties of verbosity can be readily detected in mass media messages. The more we know them by their peculiar names, the more we understand their nature, and the less prone we are to the vice of verbosity. To that end, let me present, for starters, three sentences that have a common thread.

Peruse them, then name the type of verbosity they contain. In other words, state whether the error to be corrected is one of image, pleonasm, or tautology.

On November 24, 1992, a reporter on NTA Network News, whose identity I’ll give just as ML, uttered this line: “.... the Vice President observed that Nigeria and Jamaica shared a lot in common.” Three years later, a sentence that has a lot in common with ML’s utterance was emitted on Ray Power News at 10.00 am, precisely, on December 5, 1995. The sentence read: “The United States says it shares a lot in common with South Africa.” Interestingly, the verbosity news story also had something to do with a Vice President, that of the United States, Al Gore, who was visiting South Africa at the time the newscast was aired. Still in 1995, but now in cold print, this sentence appeared in the AM News of November 6: “The people of the Republic of Benin which is our next door western neighbour shares many things in common with the Yoruba people of South Western Nigeria.”

All the three sentences are verbose because of the phrase, ‘share in common’. Since to share is to have something in common, the word, share, in three sentences is a disguised repetition. Thus, the sentence is tautological.

We can correct any sentence with that phrase by substituting “have” for “share” or by substituting “the same” for in common, and specifying what is shared, for example, language, political system, etc. “Sharing in common”. We must underline, is a rather subtle tautology, obviously less subtle than what you find in this editorial by the Sunday Concord, of July 12, 1987, entitled, “Managing the transition: “the successful transfer of power from a military administration to elected officials is always and everywhere an arduous task and will only be accomplished if both civilians and the government join together in united action for a common goal.”

As they say, verbosity is a kind of obesity, hence you can make trim that sentence by removing the following phrases or words:” and everywhere”, both, and “for a common goal. “Better still, brevity, the opposite of verbosity, would be achieved by reducing “join together in united action for a common goal” to just one or two words, viz “unite” or work together.” Even more obvious that the one in the Sunday Concord’s editorial is the tautology in the news story with the headline, “UN Sec-General cancels visit to Nigeria,” This Day, November 27, 1995. The lead reads: “The United Nations Secretary General, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, may have cancelled a planned visit to Nigeria this week as part of a five African nation-tour, apparently as a result of the fallouts resulting from the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists for alleged murder.” The tautology here leaps right at you: “as a result of the fallouts resulting from.” The last four words are needless, and the first four can be reduced to two words, “because of”.

You: “as a result of the fallouts resulting from.” The last four words are needless, and the first four can be reduced to two words, “because of”.

That sentence in This Day is identical to this one that was radiated via NTA Network News on July 9, 1988: “One of the measures introduced by state governments to ease transportation is the introduction of mass transit.” Yet another in that fold is this sentence in an opinion piece with the title, “When the press goofed”, This Day, February 6, 1996: “These and a thousand other indices seemed to indicate, seemingly unambiguously, that the closer one gets to Rivers, the ‘theatre’ of the war, the hotter it would be, and the greater the possibility of one being caught in the crossfire of verbal, written and even (God forbid) real bullets and shrapnel.” Well, since we have brought Him into this matter, let us say that God knows it is tautological to write, “indices indicate.” And He also knows that once you have said” verbal” the word includes “written”, hence the phrase initiated by crossfire is equally tautological. The sentence will be improved if we further trim off “seem” and

“seemingly unambiguously,” for what these words do is to becloud our meaning. Tautology, as we noted earlier, is considered by many authorities to include pleonasm. When we meet next in this clinic, we shall try to do a Caesarean operation on these intricate varieties of verbosity, as well as examine the third variety known as ambage.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined the language of features as well as how meaning is conveyed. The aim is to encourage writers to improve on their feature stories so that readers will enjoy and understand more of these stories.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 12

Can you write without the types of errors pointed out in the sample texts? Go through what you have written in this programme so far, and see how well you write.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has looked at the language of features, some things that should be avoided such as clichés, vogue words, journalese, etc.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Take a feature article from any of the dailies, and analyse it (for language use).

Make sure you read the 3 samples first.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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MODULE 4 WRITING TASKS

Unit 1	Writing the Feature Story
Unit 2	Writing the Feature: The Intro
Unit 3	The Features Sub-Editor
Unit 4	Writing Tasks

UNIT 1 WRITING THE FEATURE STORY

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Writing the Feature Story
 - 3.2 Structure of Feature Stories
 - 3.3 Style in Feature Writing
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will point out why it is necessary indeed, crucial, for the writer to write well. This is because no matter how factual and interesting your story is, how you put it to your readers will determine whether they will read it or not. You will observe that writing an interesting and entertaining story depends largely on the adequate writing talent/skills of the writer.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- Identify some of the techniques involved in feature writing; and
- Explain the differences in style among each of the samples.
- Analyze sample 1

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Writing the Feature Story

Here is an opportunity for you to display your talent. According to Awoyunifa & Igwe (1991), the language of features “speaks to everybody at the same time without losing out in literary merit”. The feature writer is basically a story-teller. The difference between the two is that the former dwells only on fiction. Both paint pictures with words, creating different images in the minds of readers thus involving the reader in the story. It is the duty of the feature writer to catch and hold the reader’s attention until the story is told. We now look at some of the writing techniques involved in producing an effective feature story.

3.2 Structure of Feature Stories

Some of the writing techniques the feature writer needs for good structure include:

1. **Chronological Order / format:** This can be used in either of the two ways. The first is using a summary lead in a chronological order while the second is just a chronological account of the story in the first person with a few words chipped in here and there by the writer. Stories that involve a sequence of event should follow a chronological order. This gives eye-witness to what has happened. Usually, stories reporting action fall into this category.
2. **The suspended interest format:** keeps the reader in suspense using a partial summary of the story. The chronological order of presentation is also used but here, the punch line is withheld until the last sentence. It makes more impact then.
3. **The feature story must not be too long.** Ideally it should be between $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 page. But if it is going to be serialized, then the longer one is in order.
4. **One effective device a good feature story needs is a good structure.** In a conventional newspaper feature, an interesting subject and a couple of good quotes strategically thrown in may be enough. But in a longer feature story, such as the serialized one, this is not good enough. How you go about your writing is not as important as getting a good story. For instance, you could make an outline that serves as a map to where you are going. You could also use subheads at the beginning. These would be removed later. The idea is that the outline will guide you to

formulating the correct subheads and the subheads, in turn, will help tailor your flow of ideas. For example, are the subheads logically presented? Do they tally with your ideas? This helps to identify a detective structure and you could quickly correct this.

5. Avoid a cluttered lead. Make it as simple and as interesting as possible.
6. The important parts of a feature story are the leads or intro, the body and the conclusion.

3.3 Style in Feature Writing

The style of any feature story must be casual and relaxed. The idea is to entertain readers and provide relief from the grind of day-to day living. Your sentences should be delivered with precision and economy. Avoid clichés, archaic words, journalese or even editorial jargons. Write simply and beautifully in a breezy lively, colourful, and dramatic style. Use images, allusions, sarcasm, irony, satire, etc.

Williams (1986) in “Advertisement for My Style”, argues that:

“When you read Wole Soyinka’s prose, you come away with the impression of a man of immense vitality: a human Mississippi; tempestuous, charging and laying waste acres of lies and deception.

He goes on to describe Achebe’s style, as well as Paul Sartre and Charles De Gaulle’s styles too. He observes that “there is a bit of these gentlemen in me”, hence readers have accused him of using inaccessible vocabulary and difficult syntax.

He concludes that he is guilty of intellectual tyranny and that his column “...must be seen as a child of its time, an attempt to enhance our political and literary culture....”

The article is enclosed here for your reading pleasure.

Also, Adidi Uyo, media worker and Mass Communication lecturer, keeps a column Media Review called “Rite it right”, where he painstakingly points out errors in newspapers. These errors are either grammatical, structural, typographical or spelling errors. He points these out in flowery, lively language, injecting humour, irony and even satire into it.

Olatunji Dare, at different times described as “master rhetorician and

master satirist in the Nigerian print media”, a profound thinker and exotic encoder”. Dare, a journalism lecturer and media worker is still probably the most consistent satirist in the Nigerian print media. His satirical features formed points of debate every Tuesday in *The Guardian* then. Late Dele Giwa was said to have an aggressive and powerful style.

Advertisement for My Style

The style says Comte Buffon, an 18th Century French biologist and popular writer, ..is the man himself..” In my much younger and disrespect. I had then, this unrelenting hostility towards all maxims. This was because of what I considered their premature arrival at the “truth” Well, I used to console myself, what else do you really expect from a buffoon?

It does appear, in retrospect, as if Monsieur Buffon was right, that the joke was probably on me. When you read Wole Soyinka’s prose, you come away with the impression of a man of immense vitality: a human Mississippi; tempestuous, charging and laying waste acres of lies and deception. The urbane lucidity of Chinua Achebe’s works speaks of immense self possession of a man of considerable charm and reticence. Charles De Gaulle, another master wrote the French language with the same authoritarian elegance, the same oracular conviction and irritation with small men and minds, which is a projection of his towering personality. And Paul Sartre’s often clumsy syntax and deliberate refusal to write “Well” bear eloquent testimony to his everlasting contempt for the virtues of the French middle-class.

I must confess that there is a bit of all of these gentlemen in me, which makes matters even more tricky. Having conceded this, I must also submit that there is a sense in which a writer’s style itself might serve as an index of the social unease of his generation. For the truly creative mind, style is a question of infinite possibilities and endless permutations. A particular stylistic tendency, then, may be nothing but a particular response to grave social pressures.

When I was invited to write this column, I promised myself that I would review the reactions to it after a year. Before the advent of this column, one thing that had been sadly lacking in Nigerian journalism, despite its enviable strides in the past decade, is the direct and sustained involvement of people within the ivory-tower in journalism. This has been the case in several western and oriental societies. It is, indeed, a tribute to the vision of News watch editors that the floodgate has since opened with several people within the ivory-tower writing for several magazines on a regular basis.

The reactions to this column have been varied and quite interesting. One accusation that keeps dropping up is that the writer's syntax is often difficult and his vocabulary invariably inaccessible. D.A. Olaosun fired the first salvo, attacking the writer for polysyllabic madness. It is interesting however, to observe that a few months later when this column wrote a rather friendly piece on Awo, the same Olaosun of Surulere wrote to say that he found the piece very illuminating.

In a fit of anger, another reader wrote *to* ask whether I was the Wole Soyinka of News watch a development which effectively ruined my lunch that day. And after writing a particular devastating and irreverent piece on Jesus Christ and our church leaders, somebody wrote from a Seminary near Ijebu-Ode telling me about how "truly impressive" a writer I was.

But perhaps, the most touching reaction of all came in the form of a full length rejoinder from somebody who is a chief typist in a ministry in Kaduna State. titled: Squandering of Opportunity, the letter bears quoting at length. It charges: "By speaking in a language which only the privileged few, who have benefited from an chits form of education, can understand, you are, perhaps unknown to you and by implication, entering into negotiations with the oppressor... and squandering out chances of dealing devastating blows to the present unjust order."

Several important issues are raised in these rejoinders and they speak for the social and intellectual ferment in the country today. I must admit right away that this column is not modeled on the cannons of "lucidity" and "simplicity" which are taught in Fleet and American night schools of journalism. It is indeed such "simplicity" which is ironically opened to misappropriation by our dominant culture. This column confesses to intellectual tyranny. It is not one that is designed to be run over with a bottle or beer or read over a bare of suya in our country clubs, I believe that the ruling class already has enough circus-clowns court-iesters and intellectual acrobats attending to its needs.

The intellectual intransigence of this column must then be located within the context of a society overtaken by mindless materialism, a society in which sub sized illiteracy *is part of an elaborate power game*. Only a style that is at once tempestuous and tyrannical, I believe can match the dynamics of these tempestuous and tyrannical times.

It might of course, be legitimately objected that such an authoritarian style risks massive alienation, that the "message" might be lost in a jungle of inaccessibility. Such an objection ignores the seductive power of tyranny. A badly digested idea is like a huge piece of bone lodged in

the throat, you can neither swallow nor easily throw it up. Only a style imbued with such suffocating alienation can come to terms with the massive alienation of this terrible age.

As for the “message” being lost, this particular issue of whether the “masses” can and must be taught has been one source of my constant irritation with the left in this country. This talking down to the masses in all its arrogant condescension and we-know-it-all bravura would have been laughable in its astonishing innocence but for the fact it contains the seeds of left-wing fascism. The greatest teachers of this age are hunger and misery. No amount of simplistic prose and simplistic analysis of our condition can supplant the hard teachers of these modern masters.

This column, then, must be seen as a child of its time, an attempt to enhance our political and literary culture and its desperate intervention against the philistine culture that has been foisted on it by our elites. Perhaps, future generations in a Nigeria rid of toil, misery and feudal chicanery will stumble across it and glimpse behind the style and the man the ugly scars of these unhappy times.

SAMPLE 2

No, I Didn't Meet DG

I never had the privilege of meeting Dele Giwa, that 39 year old super journalist from Ugekpe-Ekperi who was bombed off, assassinated, one blue morning at his breakfast table on October 19, 1986. Dele Giwa, according to those who knew him personally, was a disarming, affable, and witty young man who took life on as if it was inevitably going to slip away at short notice. He had emerged on the scene at 32, armed with an American University degree, some experience with the New York Times, a voracious appetite for the future, and the Friendship of Stanley Macebuh and Dele Cole. Within seven years, he had worked in at least three newspaper houses: Daily Times, National Concord, and New swatch magazine.

With a combination of hard work, transparent competence, and a determination to excel, he wrote himself into relevance and significance. Col. A. K. Togun, who was sued by no less a personality than Gani Fawehinmi over Dele Giwa's death, recently told the Sunday Concord that Dele Giwa talked too much, revealed too much about himself, and that he did not quite have as many friends as he thought he did. That is Togun's opinion but it is not the only opinion about Dele Giwa. The late May Ellen Ezekiel Damijo, an equally gifted journalist, described Dele

as her hero, the man who lifted her up whenever she was down. Only this week, during the 12th anniversary of Dele Giwa's death, several positive testimonies have also been given. The thing about post humour tributes and portraits, however, is that the dead are in no position to speak for themselves. Death forecloses the right of reply.

Although there are many journalist, dead and alive, who may never be canonized but whose careers have been equally exceptional and a ready source of inspiration for the younger generation, it is Dele Giwa who has become the martyr of Nigerian journalism. What matters in the final analysis is not Dele Giwa's person, not what those who knew him say or do not say, but the manner in which his life and career now define the practice of journalism in Nigeria today. In the last 12 years, Dele Giwa has become the main reference point. He is the guardian angel of the profession, the hero, indeed the patron saint, of our trade. The failure, the inability of the state and the gods of Ugekpe Ekperi who were commissioned to track down his killers only further foregrounds the risks involved in journalism, and the potency of the word. It is instructive that there is total agreement on the cause of Dele Giwa's death. He didn't die because of a sexual dalliance that went awry. Not because of a shady deal. Not suicide. He was a committed writer, all else was subordinate to his art.

If he was a politician, he could not have been a temporizer, he would have been a man of action. If he was a bricklayer, he would have built castles. If he was an academic, he would have become a professor. If he was a priest, he would have been a favourite father-confessor. But Dele Giwa was none of these. He was a journalist. His tools were words and the typewriter. That was before computers became commonplace. He imbued words with action. He made them leap off the pages. Those of us who knew him by reading him often wondered how he did it. He could make his sentences behave like a Venus Williams on the lawn tennis court. And he could make them function like a Ben Johnson on the race tracks. He built images that stretched his readers' imagination. His writings exuded power. Like an academic, his discourse was researched, rehearsed and properly articulated. And he delivered his thoughts with the piety of a priest. Nyannkno Osso has done us useful service by putting his writings together in a collection. Hopefully, some day, another good Nigerian will also compile the journalism of Sad Sam Amuka Pemu, Andy Akporugo, Lade Bonuola, Tunji Oseni, Mokuwugo Okoye, Labanji Bolaji, Peter Pan, Ray Ekpu, Dan Agbese, Stanley Macebuh, Gab Idigo, etc.

At the time we mourned Dele Giwa's death, particularly the manner of it, no one could imagine that things would get worse in the future. For

example, no one could anticipate the creation, existence and emergence of 5 feet 5 inches tall General Sani Abacha. Abacha was in many ways like Stalin, the Georgian who became a ruler of the Soviet Union. Stalin, according to Trotsky, his confirmed foe, lacked any intellectual equipment. His sole ambition was to deal with people ruthlessly and demonstrate his naked will for power. Stalin was cunning, mean, avaricious. Pathologically envious of Lenin, a more complete man, Stalin sought relevance by messing up all good things. Stalin once boasted that what he liked best in life is “to choose your victim, to prepare everything, to revenge yourself ruthlessly and then to go to sleep”. Abacha was like that: perhaps he was Stalin’s reincarnate in another land, another time. Abacha may not have been responsible for Dele Giwa’s death but he demystified it. Today, if a bomb were to explode suddenly in front of Senator Abraham Adesanya’s house, we would no longer be surprised. In the last five years, so many bombs have exploded across the country. Bombs have become part of the popular vocabulary. A bomb is now a tool of social existence in Nigeria. “I’ll bomb you off” is a standard expression.

The events of the last five years alone have showed us that Dele Giwa’s death was a message and a warning from God. About the future. It was a heavenly word of caution enjoining journalists and all Nigerians to beware of unexpected accidents in their lives. It was a message we could neither understand nor heed because we lived in another Nigeria where the naira was still strong; people could sleep in their homes, and employers were not deliberately plotting to sabotage their employees. Babangida toyed with our innocence. Dare wrote not only using the satirical style but he used virtually all the styles, with satire topping the list. Niyi Osundare, another critic, better known as “Poet of the Marketplace” is also an acclaimed writer/poet in the print media.

Bayo Oguntuase and Samson Dare, along with Adidi Uyo, are all striving to see that writers write it well.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have looked at the structure and style of feature stories as well as some good feature writers in the print media.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 13

Look at the style of writing in the two samples in this unit. Now, compare both styles based on discussions in the unit.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined how to write the feature story, the structure it must have and the style of writing features. It has also identified writers whose styles are like a stamp of identity.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Now, having read the 3 samples enclosed, it is time to analyse one of the samples. Use these criteria to assess the article.

A. Assessing Content

Has the feature got?

1. Content that accords with editorial policy.
2. Content appropriate to the target readership
3. Content in accordance with legal and ethical constraints.
4. Examples, anecdotes and quotes appropriate to the theme or subject.
5. Accurate figures and statistics.
6. A text that makes good use of the gathered material.

B. Assessing Structure

Has the feature got?

1. The appropriate balance (for the subject) of description, narration, exposition and argument.
2. A pace correctly judged for the circumstances that make for impact and readability.
3. An intro that grabs the reader's attention.
4. A body that provides the necessary evidence for the thesis or viewpoint.
5. A conclusion that summarizes the points made draws together the threads of the argument and follows convincingly from the body.
6. Analysis and argument that are clearly and convincingly organised.
7. Opinions properly backed by facts and evidence.

C. Assessing the Style

Is It?

1. Readable
2. Appropriate for the target readership
3. Appropriate for the topic
4. Accurate and convincing in the choice of language
5. As clear, direct and concise as possible, taking into consideration space and target readership.
6. Free of grammatical error, word misuse, cliché and jargon.
7. Regardful of house style and editorial policy.

Culled from Hennessy & Hodgson, 1995: 157 159

7.0 REFERENCES/ FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed) *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 2 WRITING THE FEATURE: THE INTRO

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Writing the Feature: The Intro
 - 3.2 Guidelines for “Intro” / Lead Writing
 - 3.3 Different Styles for Feature “Intros”
 - 3.4 An Analysis of Each Intro Type
 - 3.5 The Body and Conclusion
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will specifically look at the feature intro, “where the overall tone of the piece is set “. The intro can make or break a feature. The feature story is deeper in depth, has more sources than the news story and is more detailed.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify some of the intro angles that could be used in a feature story; and
- Rewrite either intro type (b) or (c) stories using a different intro type from what was used earlier.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Writing the Feature: The Intro

The intro which is also called the lead, is the key to other parts of the story. It sets the pace of what will happen later in the story. The intro is also known as the “lead” or the “rose” whether a story is a personal column story, service stories, personality profile or an opinion, the lead dictates the tempo and it is the deciding factor about whether the story will be read or not.

The feature lead serves two important purposes. It:

- a) Attracts (draws the reader into the story by acting as a beaco);
- b) Prepares the reader for the information that would follow.

Different types of lead / intro's include:

The narrative lead
The descriptive lead
The Question lead
The summary lead
The Direct Address lead
The Quotation lead
The surprise lead
The Teaser lead
The flashback / contrast lead
The reference / allusion lead
The Anecdotal lead
The combination lead

All these types of lead could be used in isolation or two or more are combined. The idea is to grab the attention of your reader (and hold it) until he finishes reading the story. We shall examine the steps to follow in writing good intros

3.2 Guidelines for Feature Lead Writing

1. Make your paragraph short. A short paragraph appears less cumbersome and more inviting in addition to its being less woody. It is easier to read, the words stand out better and it gives it a dramatic shade. Many sub-editors try to break off chunks when a paragraph is too long.
2. Don't waste words: make sure all the required basic information is there. Each word has its own meaning as well as its own impact. Pick your words carefully so that they would be effective without being wordy. A wordy lead reduces the effectiveness of an intro.
3. Use action words: The active voice (action verbs) is shorter, more effective and more exciting. It gives life to your lead. Also, use bright, colourful adjectives as these will enhance your descriptive skills.
4. Entice the reader in the first few words. Make sure there is "action" in the first few words otherwise your readers will turn to another story. Remember, this is the supersonic age where few have time to read.

3.3 Different Styles for Feature Intros.

There are several different styles used in writing effective feature intros. Here, we will pick a few, identify these and give examples. But first, time for self-assessment. How much do you remember about the different types of lead? The answer should be “all” because the answer is embedded in the names each one gives you an idea of what to expect.

Examples:

a) The Eye-Witness Description

At most encounters, she would either manage to nod her head or whisper reluctantly, few words in response to greetings from sympathizers. Yet, human traffic in and out of the Festac home of the late trumpeter, Zeal Onyia continued to increase by every passing Minute. Like her children who were busy assisting relations and friends in the organization of the evening wake-keeping, Dr(mrs) Yinka Onyia, did not find receiving visitors a pleasant exercise.

Already House 15, C Close, 712 Road, Festac Town, residence of the Onyia family is wearing a new look, having been repainted recently. In this “Tribute”, the focus is on the widow of the late trumpeter. (Guardian, see unit 11, sample Ozohia Uhakheme.

b) The Historical Background

Next Saturday, being the first Saturday of the month of November, the Alake of Egbaland, Oba Samuel Mofolorunsho Oyebade Lipede is expected as he has done since 1987, to lead Egba sons and daughters on pilgrimage to Igbo Lisabi (the Lisabi grove) on the outskirts of Oba in Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area of Egba Kingdom. This annual ritual which is a symbolic celebration of the heroism of the Egbas.....

This The Guardian on Sunday Profile focuses on the historical (Reuben Abati, October 29, 1995: pB10). See unit 4 sample 1.

c) The Direct Address Intro

Almighty God, with the dawning of the year 2002, it is to you I address my prayer for Nigeria once again. You know how often in the past I have celebrated your love for this country and its people. You placed us in a land with rich mineral and agricultural resources, and blessed the land with a wonderful climate, and an all year round weather.

In this opinion column, Rev Fr George Ehusani addresses God directly while imploring Him to “visit” us again. (The Punch, Tuesday, January 15, 2002. p.15).

d) The Narrative Intro

Lara Owoeye wise, in this health feature focus on when a doctor goofs (The News, April 22, 2002 p.64).

3.4 Analysis of Each Intro Type

- a) Eye-witness: In this case, the writer wants us to see Zeal Onyia’s widow through his own eyes. He beckons tours to come along with him to the deceased’s house where a number of activities are going on. The lead is captivating enough to entice the reader into reading about the late renowned trumpeter.
- b) The Historical background: Here, Abati subtly informs us that the Alake ascended the throne in 1987 and since then, has been performing this annual ritual but that this year, the tone would be different. The idea is to justify, in several ways why nobody in his right senses would wish to harm the king.
- c) The Direct Address intro: Here, Rev Fr Ehusani communicates directly with his readers. Thus, this lead includes the word “you” addressed to God from the first sentence. The idea is to involve the reader and make him part of the story. It is a personal challenge to the reader because he has been specifically invited and enticed by the word “you” The reader’s curiosity is aroused.
- d) The narrative intro: This type puts the reader in the middle of the action. The advantage here is that it captivates a reader better than any other lead. A situation is created where the reader has no choice but to identify with the people concerned.

3.5 The Body and Conclusion

With the above guidelines for writing feature intros, a word or two on the body and conclusion are in order. The most important factors in feature writing are facts, a nose for the unusual story with universal appeal, a high level of creativity in language use, and your reader is hooked, so to say. The build up of details should be structured around logical thematic blocks that cohere in the body of the story.

In a feature story, the last paragraph cannot just be chopped off, as it may be a quotation, a question, an argument or even a conclusion.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This unit has examined another aspect of writing feature intro. The conclusion we have reached here is that the intro/lead is the most important part of a feature story and as such, writers should pay more attention to it.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 14

Which intro type is more effective? Go through these again and note why it is important to be able to write different types of intros.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have looked at the different styles of writing feature intros, guide lines to follow in this process as well as an analysis of each intro type. We then commented on the body and conclusion of feature types.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Having gone through this unit, now rewrite either the story with:
 - a) intro **type a** or
 - b) intro **type b**using a different intro type from what was used by the first writers.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Mencher, M. (1983). *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC Brown.

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed). *African Journalism in Perspective*, Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 3 THE FEATURES SUB-EDITOR

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Sub-Editor
 - 3.2 Features Sub-Editor
 - 3.3 Criteria for Assessing Feature Stories
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the sub-editor the link between the writer's copy and the finished newspaper. The sub as he is also known, has several roles to play. Let us check these carefully.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the role of the sub-editor;
- analyse a feature based on given criteria.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Sub-Editor (Sub)

The sub-editor has passed through the reporter stage i.e. he was once a reporter and now, because he has "paid his dues", so to say, he has now moved to the sub-editors table. In big media outlets, there are different segments of the sub desk. This means that each department has its own sub-editors. For instance, news sub-editors and features sub-editors would all work under one "chief sub-editor".

From the paper's point of view, the most important role of the sub-editor is in checking the accuracy and grammar of a story and guard against legal problems such as libel. Thus, the sub checks for spelling and language use, mistakes as well as essential information on subjects.

The sub also writes the headline in the appropriate type and size that would draw/attract the readers' attention.

He makes a story the right size for the space allocated to it either by cutting off chunks or by collating sources used by the writer. He could re-nose the copy by rewriting part of the story in order to highlight some news points. He could also update the story by including the reporter's 'add' matter.

3.2 Features Sub-Editor

The sub-editor of the news department may find himself subbing for features department or vice versa. The areas of commonality between news and features subbing include:

1. Both require headlines in the right types and size, captions, etc to be provided when necessary.
2. Both demand accuracy of fact, quote and prevention of lawsuits. It is his duty to ensure that the copy is legally alright.
3. Both demand that the writers aims be highlighted (especially in the captioning, headlining and selection of pictures) when a story is being promoted over and above the others.
4. When a big story or a "big read" is to be published, it is usually signposted by a blurb (on page one) a stand first on the page where the special feature appears and by advertisements on radio, television, etc. The sub-editor is expected to justify the money, time and potential extra sales by his commitment and special skills to that promotion.

Thus, the areas where a features sub-editor comes in the production of copy are:

1. Promotions, blurbs and stand firsts
2. Reader participation
3. Writing headlines, planning and design
4. Watching out for legal loopholes
5. Check for spelling mistakes, wrong use of language, conformity to house style.

3.2 Criteria for Assessing Feature Stories to be used by the Features Sub-editor.

(1) Features Subbing

FEATURES subbing has its own problems. While there is usually little cutting or collating required, the text often requires a good deal more

display than a news story, with stand first, special quotes, perhaps a blurb for page one and a quite different, more subjective approach to headlines. The sub-editor is more involved in what is being written and is helping to project the writer's message or ideas.

There is still the same need for watchfulness over facts, dates and quotations and for faults in grammar and spelling. Beware the expert who thinks he has remembered a famous quotation correctly or is unaware that all his life he has been confusing 'disinterested' with 'uninterested' or has never knowingly got the date of an Act of Parliament right.

The following criteria could apply to some or all sub editing work and could be used selectively as a basis of assessment.

Accuracy

IN SUBBING your story to the briefing received, did you?

1. Check and correct the spelling as necessary.
2. Check and correct the grammar as necessary.
3. Check for misused words.
4. Put right any ambiguity or lack of clarity in the text.
5. Check the punctuation and simply for the reader where necessary (i.e., avoid long sentences with many clauses look out for misplaced commas leading to ambiguities).
6. Replace jargon, journalese and clichés
7. Check the spelling, meaning and accurate use of technical terms.
8. Spell out at first mention all but the most commonly used abbreviations.
9. Check any suspect facts (famous quotations, Acts of Parliament, titles of films, books, plays, songs, etc).
10. Verify place names and geographical references, using gazetteers.
11. Check the names, addresses (if necessary to the story), style and title of people involved.
12. Check that spellings, names etc. do not vary through the text.
13. Check dates and figures where possible
14. Ensure that any quotations used are properly and clearly attributed.
15. Ensure that house style is followed.

Cutting

IN CUTTING your story to the briefing received (mainly in news stories) did you?

1. If given a length in inches or centimeters, work out the number of words to aim at.
2. Shorten parts of the text where appropriate by rewriting more tightly.
3. Take out circumlocutions and long-winded phrasing.
4. Take out unnecessary adjectives.
5. Replace long words with shorter ones where appropriate.
6. Weigh up the facts of the story and reduce the length by progressively taking out the lesser important ones.
7. Ensure that remaining facts of lesser importance are at the end of the subbed story to make easy any last-minute cuts that might be needed.

Collating

IN COLLATING text for a story from several sources (mainly in news stories), did you?

1. Check for any byline or in-text attributions needed.
2. Ensure consistency of spelling of names and places in the reworked text.
3. Use the sources as a means of extending the story and for corroboration, while avoiding needless repetition.
4. Rewrite or paraphrase material to splice it together, where reasonable, to avoid excessive length, but keeping text and sources separate where appropriate.
5. Note and keep in any differences of geography, time or time scale that will be needed by the reader.

Legality

IN SUBBING the story to the briefing received did you?

1. Check the facts and quotations for any legal problems.
2. Check that you have not created new legal problems in text or headline as a result of your editing.

Headline Writing

IN WRITING the headline, check that:

1. You based it on the main fact(s) of the story.
2. In getting the words to fit you did not distort the facts of the story.
3. You avoided all but the most commonly accepted abbreviations (i.e., BBC, TUC, Nato, etc.).
4. You kept it active by giving it a verb.
5. You avoided, where possible, the use of sub's jargon: boss, rap, row, probe, axe, chop, quiz, drama.
6. You avoided, in using figures, multiple naught or odd numbers.
7. You kept punctuation to the minimum, or did without it.
8. You avoided asking the reader a question (he expects you to have the answers).
9. You avoided abstruse or foreign words (except where vital to the story).
10. You avoided ambiguous words, or words that could be taken equally for a noun or a verb or have more than one meaning.

To ensure that it has easy readability, did you?

1. Keep the wording uncomplicated.
2. Leave room for even spacing between the letters.
3. Avoid having wasteful or unwanted white around the type.
4. Achieve good balance of characters (i.e., avoiding lines of widely uneven width that can puzzle the eye).
5. Avoid having punctuation at the ends of lines (it is unsightly).

PLANNING AND DESIGN

SUCCESS in page design hinges on whether or not the page presents the chosen ingredients in a readable and attractive way within the format of the style used by the newspaper or magazine. This, in its turn, is determined by what is appropriate for the publication's readership. In terms of an overall mark this has to be a qualitative judgment based upon these considerations.

There are, nevertheless, in all cases general criteria for assessing the skills that have gone into planning and designing a page. The following list is offered as a basis of assessment either for the stimulated page assignments in Chapter 6 based on cup-up material and for actual design exercises developed from them.

In planning and designing the page, did you?

1. Understand and put into effect the use of focal points in the overall design.
2. Take into account (to avoid clash) the content and visual display of any advertising on the page.
3. Take into account (to avoid clash) the content, whether editorial or advertising, and the visual effect of the page opposite.
4. Achieve a proper balance of type paying regard both to the relative importance of the items and the needs of the reader.
5. Make use, where necessary, of different sizes and 'weights' of type, and permitted variants, in order to achieve variety within the typographical format being used.
6. Crop and scale pictures to get the best possible out of them to suit the purpose of the text accompanying them and their placing on the page.
7. Locate the picture(s) to give the best possible visual effect, taking into account the other considerations above.
8. Measure accurately (with a print rule), and indicate on the page, the required text setting and picture sizes where these differed from standard column width.
9. Ensure that the page 'furniture' any crossheads, bylines, stand-firs, panel rules, etc. were in keeping with the publication's type format.
10. In the case of colour ensure, from print-out, that the best possible colour balance has been achieved.

Forces behind Air Disasters, Same Old Game

For the fourth time in a decade, the entire nation was last Saturday thrown into great mourning following the crash in Kano of an aircraft, belonging to the Executive Air Services (EAS).

The aircraft with 59 passengers on board had crashed into a number of buildings in the Kano metropolis, killing not only the passengers but also inhabitants of the buildings, including a crowd that had gathered for the naming ceremony of a new born baby. At the last count, the death toll was put at between 150 and 160 people.

Not even the almighty Aso Rock was spared the horror as the Minister for Sports, Mr. Ishaya Mark Aku was numbered among the deceased.

He was said to be on his way to Lagos where the national football team, the Super Eagles were engaging their Kenyan counterparts in a friendly encounter. The minister had wanted to see members of the Nigerian

team to give them some words of encouragement as they prepare for the world cup fiesta that is billed for the end of this month. Aku, sadly, never made it to Lagos.

His wife and children have only sorrow to fill the vacuum which the amiable minister has left behind.

Aku's wife and children are not alone in the sorrowful world. Indeed, former minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Major-General Jeremiah Useni (rtd) would appear to have been worse hit with the loss of his wife and son.

Nigerians, certainly, could not have expected another air disaster of that magnitude barely two years after 100 of their compatriots perished in a Kenyan aircraft that crashed off the coast of Cote d'Ivoire on February 6, 2000.

The aircraft, an Airbus A 310 had departed Nairobi for Lagos enroute Abidjan. But its plan to drop its Nigerian passengers in Lagos before proceeding to Cote d'voire could not materialize because of a haze engendered by an odd harmattan season.

Still determined to drop the Nigerian passengers on board, the pilot diverted the aircraft to Port-Harcourt only to discover that the same weather condition obtained around the Garden City, thus making the transportation of Nigeria bound passengers to Abidjan inevitable.

Once in Abidjan, the airplane landed to the relief of everyone on board: a relief that turned out to be only momentary. Troubled times resurfaced as soon as the aircraft began its return journey to Lagos. It crashed into the Atlantic Ocean, killing no fewer than 169 passengers, most of them Nigerians.

A similar incident involving a Boeing 727 on the fleet of Aviation Development Company (ADC) led to the death of more than a hundred prominent Nigerians in 1996. The aircraft crashed into a swampy at Ejirin near Lagos about 40 minutes after it took off from Port Harcourt.

Four years earlier, a Hercules C 130 aircraft belonging to the Nigerian Air Force crashed into the ravenous Oke Afa canal which in January this year also swallowed close to a thousand Lagos residents who were trying to escape from the smoldering explosions at the military base in Ikeja. No fewer then 160 officers of the Nigerian Army were reckoned to have died in the crashed Air Force plane.

The foregoing are besides the scores of other plane crashes whose disastrous ends were less in magnitude. Since January 2000, there have been no fewer than seven mishaps in Nigeria's air space, raising fears of possible truth in global statistics four years ago to the effect that aviation accidents in Africa by year 2010 could assume a rate of one major disaster every week.

Expectedly, concern over recurring tragedies in the nation's air space has provoked a debate concerning the age of the aircraft in the fleet of aviation companies in Nigeria. This has been particularly so with the BAC 1-11 has since 1959 recorded an average of one accident every two years. The aircraft is believed to have recorded 22 accidents over the period bringing its contribution to disasters in the airspace worldwide to about 2.56 percent.

The foregoing perhaps account for the position that is being canvassed by the chairman of the Senate Committee on Aviation, Senator Idris Kuta who has called for a temporary ban on the aircraft. The Minister of Aviation Mrs Kema Chikwe also believes that any aircraft that is more than 22 years old could longer find a place in the Nigerian airspace.

The General Secretary of National Union of Air Transport Employees. Mr. E. D. Fidelis says the ban on aged aircraft would have been effected before now but for the powerful cartel which airline operators in Nigeria have formed in the past to frustrate such moves.

"Not long ago," he said the honourable minister was talking about whether it was safe to have an aircraft of more than 22 years dumped here. Of course the airline operators rose up in arms against her. They went to town saying it was not a matter of the age of the aircraft but whether there was proper maintenance.

"I live at Obalende where you can see the difference. You sit in the evening and see the British Airways or KLM. As soon as they enter the airspace, you hardly know that an aircraft is flying. But let it be the turn of our people you hear "pararararare" and everyone begins to panic.

However, Captain Gbenga Bankole, a pilot with 16 years experience says the age of an aircraft has nothing to do with its airworthiness. In fact, he rates the BAC I-II the strongest of all aircraft, saying, it is still in use all over the world.

Foremost Nigerian calibration pilot and Secretary-General, Nigerian Aviation Safety Initiative, Captain Jerry Agbeyegbe also says maintenance, rather than age, is what matters the most in an aircraft.

“The issue is not the age of any aircraft, it is ensuring that those aircraft are adequately maintained and that their operations are in compliance with the standard and recommended practices of the International Civil Aviation Organization. Unfortunately we seem to miss the whole point when we now focus on age,” he argued.

The immediate past president of National Association of Aircraft Pilots and Engineers (NAAPE) asked what would happen if after the nation had banned old aircraft new ones begin to crash. “Probably we will now say let’s peg the age at five years. Then when the five years old airplanes start crashing again, we will now peg them to one year and then we will have no airplanes to fly again.

“That to me makes no sense. We have to look at the issues that affect safety. The deficiencies are numerous.”

Indeed, the ability of the nation to overcome the ugly phenomenon of recurring crashes may lie more with the facilities in its airports than the condition of the aircraft that use them.

Investigations by Saturday Punch revealed the existence of airports across the country which elsewhere would not have been considered good enough as airstrips. The facilities are grossly deficient.

It was learnt, for instance, that only Lagos and Abuja airports, could boast of anything in the semblance of Instruments Landing System (ILS), an extremely vital instrument for safe landing of aircraft.

Agbeyegbe says the ILS is the landing aid with precision approach system which provides the pilot with both lateral and vertical guidance towards landing on the runway.

The ILS consists of three categories namely categories III, II and I in order of sophistication. But the Murtala Mohammed International Airport which is by far the most sophisticated of the 20 airports in Nigeria can only boast of categories I and II, lacking the most crucial and most modern category III.

According to Agbeyegbe “the category I ILS would be descend you to 200ft above the runway, more or less above your touchdown point. At 200ft, if you cannot see the runway, you will take a decision as to whether to go and try another approach or go to another airport.

“Category II will bring you down to 100ft above the touchdown point on the runway so that there is 100ft difference between categories I and II. At 100ft, you are much closer to the ground than 200ft.

“Category III is further divided to A,B, and C. Category 3A will bring you down to 50ft above touch-down. At 50ft, you will take a decision whether you can achieve safe landing or not. If you can’t, you will go around and take a new approach.

“Category 3B will bring you down to 25ft above the touchdown point on the runway, while category 3C will literally bring you to touchdown right over the runway. That is what people at times call the Zero-Zero visibility landing. At that point, you really do not need to look out for anything. It brings you right down on the runway. You will feel your tyres touch the ground, and you know you are already there”.

Not a few aviation experts believe that the nation would have been saved the horror of the Kenyan aircraft that crashed in 2000 if the Murtala Mohammed Airport had been equipped with ILS category III.

“If we had a very high precisionised equipment like category III, the Kenyan aircraft would have tried the approach here and would have made it. The catastrophe we had would perhaps not have existed,” said Captain James Nnadi, another pilot who says the importance of ILS III lies in visibility.

“We have to understand that such facilities are not made for fun. They are meant to take care of flight problems” Nnadi said.

The demands of category III perhaps accounts for its continuous absence from Nigerian airports. Whereas the supply of electricity remains epileptic at the nations airports, Agbeyegebe says there must be constant supply of electricity while the approach lighting must work constantly and consistently.

Beside the ILS, other navigational and landing aids in the nation’s airports remain obsolete. These include the Very High Frequency Omni-Directional Radio (VOR) and Distant Measuring Equipment (DME).

The International Federation of Airline Pilots (IFALPA) which represents the interest of about 100,000 pilots in about 90 countries subjected the safety of Nigeria’s airspace to scrutiny shortly before the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office and declared that out of the 80 airports reviewed from member countries, the three most prominent of the nation’s airports Lagos Kano and Port

Harcourt fall under the airports categorized as critically deficient in facilities. Still, Agbeyegbe says not much has changed in airport facilities since the current administration began.

“But that is not to say there have not been improved installation of navigational equipment. Some stations that did not have any serviceable aids are now serviceable. But what we are saying is beyond installation.

“The National Airspace Management Agency (NAMA) must also be able to authenticate the quality of the signals in space. That is where it matters, not just by doing ground checks.

“Those signals are not used on ground, they are used in the air. That is why we have what is called flight calibration”.

Saturday Punch indeed gathered that the nation cannot boast of a single calibration aircraft as the only one it had has broken down for close to ten years.

Successive governments are said to have given up on the broken down aircraft because it had become a drain pipe of sorts.

Reliable sources at Murtala Mohammed International Airport informed the reporter that close to N5 billion have been expended on the broken down plane without a cheering result.

Consequently, the nation has resorted to contracting her calibration works to

ASECNA, a West African based French company that has been eating deep into aviation budget.

Besides deficiency in equipment, Agbeyegbe alleges that the qualification and experience of the personnel in the calibration Unit of Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority is suspect.

“You have unqualified people edging to go out to calibrate navigational equipment they are not qualified to calibrate. What will happen is that they will pass equipment that will fail.

“It is more dangerous to get someone who is not qualified to do a job, because people will be under the false impression that all is well when indeed everything has gone wrong.

“It is funny that people just seem to ignore all these things until things begin to happen and you wonder if these accidents will ever stop.”

The NCAA as a regulatory body is not helping matters at all. If stories making the rounds are anything to go by, then officials of the authority should be held squarely responsible for the disaster that befell the nation last weekend, for their complacency and, in fact, complicity.

According to reports, the ill-fated EAS BAC 1-11-500 plane with registration number 5N-ESF was directed five months ago by the authority's airworthiness officials to stop flying on account of some mandatory maintenance that were already due.

The management of the airline was reported to have written back to NCAA pleading for an extension of time, to enable the company generate enough fund to carry out the mandatory checks.

It was also alleged that the management of the airline had argued that its engineers had examined the aircraft and certified it fit to operate for some months after which the maintenance would be carried out. And the aircraft continued to operate in spite of the NCAA directive until that fateful Saturday when it crashed, killing its passengers, crew members and other persons on the ground.

Reports also have it that just three weeks ago, the same 5N-ESF had problems taking off when, after running the engine, it started emitting balls of fire.

Although this was said to have caught the attention of a senior air traffic controller who promptly called the attention of the airline's mechanics, it was not enough to get the NCAA to sanction the airline for continuously flouting its directive and putting passengers lives at risk.

This attitude is typical of regulatory agencies in Nigeria, which would abandon their assigned duties only to set up investigation teams when apparently avoidable incidents occur eventually.

Anyim Pius Anyim, the senate President, while reacting to the incident said the latest fatal mishap "more than a poses a challenge to all of us, especially to the NCAA and the Nigerian Aerospace Management Agency (NAMA) on the state of aviation in the country.

Although investigations are yet to be completed, there are speculations that the mishap may have been caused by power failure and aviation ministry staff, according to reports, infer that the genesis of the crash may not be unconnected with the advance age of aircrafts used by the various private airlines in the country. They dismissed the argument of the airline operators body about the age issue, insisting that if it were a younger aircraft such would not have occurred. They also dismissed the

probability that the shorter runway used by the aircraft, because of the renovation work on the major runway, may have contributed to the mishap pointing out that other aircraft also used the same runway without any incident. “If an aircraft is healthy, such situations would not cause it to fail, “ministry staff insisted.

The various reports and speculations seem to corroborate the story of Mrs Elizabeth Owegie, elder sister of the late pilot of the ill-fated aircraft, Captain Peter Inneh, who said the brother had complained several times about the state of the aircrafts and that some of his colleagues had to leave because of the situation. It is most likely that such complaints must have filtered into the ears of the regulatory authorities.

Apparently worried by the state of affairs in the aviation industry, President Olusegun Obasanjo insisted that airline operators in the country must assure their passengers of safety as it was a global norm.

Also, the House of Representatives on Monday called for the implementation of the new safety law of the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICOA).

Ned Nwoko, the chairman of the House Sub-Committee on Civil Aviation, while briefing reporters in Abuja indicated that the law seeks to ban any aircraft that is more than 25 years old.

Former military president General Ibrahim Babangida while sympathizing with families of victims of the air disaster insisted that government should ensure adequate monitoring of aircraft plying Nigerian airspace to ensure that they are fit for both local and international operations.

Reacting to the situation, Wednesday, the Federal Government suspended all BAC 1-11 aircraft from Nigeria’s airspace pending the outcome of on-going investigation into the EAS mishap in Kano, Saturday.

It also indicated that any aircraft that is more than 22 years old will no longer be registered for use in the country while owners of already registered ones were given five days ultimatum to phase them.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, we have examined the duties of the feature sub-editor which may also be done by the news sub.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 15

In addition to the roles of the sub-editor, what else do you think the sub-editor does?

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has examined the crucial responsibilities carried out by the features sub. We have also briefly compared the duties of the news and the features sub. Then, we discussed the criteria identified by the Hennessy (1993) for analyzing a feature story.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have read the enclosed article, analyse the story based on Hennessy's criteria.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Hennessy, B. (1993). *Writing Feature Stories*, (2nd Edition)
Focal Press.

Mencher, M. (1983) *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC
Brown

Udofia, C. (1991) (ed) *African Journalism in Perspective*,
Abark: Itiaba Publishers.

UNIT 4 WRITING TASKS

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Objectives
 - 3.2 Writing Tasks
 - 3.3 Situationers
 - 3.4 Seminars
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit assesses what you have learnt in this course. It assigns writing tasks that you can carry out in order to reinforce learning.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- prepare and write situationers;
- hold seminars on some of the identified topics so that you can write on these later.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Writing Tasks

3.2 Situationers

A situationer is another type of background feature highlighting a particular news item/situation. Hennessy & Hodgson's (1995: 140-142) views on situationers are reproduced here. You can try your hand on any of them.

His views are reproduced in 1 & 2.

3.3 SEMINARS

Discussion of topics helps students to see that topic from a new dimension. Besides, it encourages individual research presented in

group seminars. Hennessy & Hodgson (op.cit.) express their views (reproduced) here.

Suggested Seminar Topics

1. What does the advertising in The Guardian tell you about its readers?
2. Television has more political influence than newspapers, these days. Do you agree.
3. Select three daily newspapers and consider to what extent they are fulfilling a worth while role in the community in which they circulate.
4. What disadvantages television has in its news coverage compared to the national dailies.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have examined some writing tasks which the media worker will invariably come across from time to time. Two of these situationers and seminars were discussed.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 16

What are those things you have learnt in the course of this programme.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit summarizes what we started in unit 1. It takes us, in a logical presentation, through feature ideas to writing and even having seminars on topics.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- 1) Go through the seminar topics presented to you in 3.1.2. Then, add at least 3 more topics to these.
- 2) Pick one of these topics after your discussions and write your own feature story on it.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

Hennessy, B. (1993). *Writing Feature Stories*, (2nd edition)
Focal Press.

Mencher, M. (1983) *Basic News Writing*, Dubuque, Iowa: WmC
Brown.

Udofia, C. (199) (ed) *African Journalism in Perspective*.
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