

Features Tutorial

What is a feature?

The main differences between a feature and a news story are style and length.

Whereas news is straight-up factual and strictly structured, features are longer, more analytical and softer focused.

Features can vary widely, from fashion to diet fads, celebrity profiles to human interest stories. They can accompany a news story, or in most cases they have their own section in newspapers and magazines.



Headline

Catchy headlines help grab the attention

THE IRISH TIMES | irishtimes.com
Weekend Review
Saturday, January 12, 2013 | Editor: Michael Lynch | Phone: 01700 251111 | Email: letters@irishtimes.com

INSIDE Home & Design

Optimism paradox
Global survey shows Irish people remain upbeat despite many setbacks Page 5

'RESCUES ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO CRASH'

Rosita Boland
Freelance Writer

The fog at Tralee on July 2nd, 1999, was the densest locals had seen before or since when an Air Corps helicopter, Rescue 111, struck a sand dune and all four crew died: Dave O'Flaherty, Mick Baker, Pat Mooney and Niall Byrne. This is their story

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"Dublin here, we have a job for you: rescue Niall O'Flaherty's cousin. Very good. I had a feeling you'd call us out on our first night"

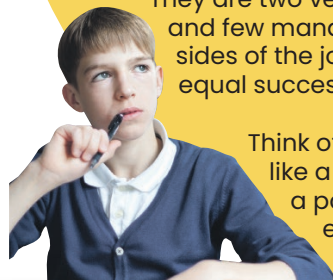
“ Of the hundreds of essays we trawled through across the four categories the Features winner was easily one of the stand out entries.

– Young Journalist Ireland Judging Panel

Before you begin

Many news reporters struggle with the freedom of the feature article, and vice versa with feature writers who are asked to report on a news story.

They are two very different disciplines, and few manage to straddle both sides of the journalism divide with equal success.



Think of the feature article like a short story mixed with a parable – it should be entertaining, colourful but with important

Check list

- ✓ How much space do I have? ✓ them off as you write them.
 - ✓ What exactly do I want to include/exclude? Always read over your article at least twice, do a spell check, and make sure all unusual words, names, website addresses, phone numbers and place names are correct.
 - ✓ What is my deadline? ✓ Don't vary from the word count suggested, ...
- Make notes on the structure of the article – the main points of the story you wish to get across, and in what order. And cross

Tips to writing features:

- Look at your chosen theme carefully. Consider the questions suggested and attempt to answer some of them.
- Start with the important – get all the essential details in the opening paragraphs.
- As with news, include all the essential details
- the who, what, where, when and why.
- Always try to find an original angle, or hook, for your feature. Because features allow you more freedom, you have an opportunity to be more adventurous.
- Use plenty of quotes. If they are not quotes you gathered yourself, make sure you detail

A feature should be entertaining, colourful but important

It's an addictive, gamified process, with a reward system that has been proven to chemically alter our brains and bring out the gambler in us, so how can we learn to live better with – or even without – social media, asks **Andrea Cleary**

When I deleted my Facebook account earlier this year I felt free. A little usage, admittedly, but generally as though I had made the right decision. Like millions of others, I searched in horror at the Cambridge Analytica scandal that led to the 2016 US presidential election. Most of all, I wanted to opt out of what I viewed as a manipulation tool and spyglass machine. But my thoughts were somewhat premature. After leaving Facebook, I began to spend more time on Instagram and Twitter, scrolling through endless timelines and posting into various updates that gave the impression I was connected to something meaningful.

Time spent away from social media started to feel like time spent missing out, but missing out on what? I wasn't enjoying the anxiety-inducing updates about Covid-19, nor the almost constant self-comparison with my peers. Whenever I made a post, I would feel a wave of anxiety that would be judged, harshly for whatever it was. The little red notifications would flash on the screen: likes, comments, shares, retweets, followers. The more that came, the better I felt.

An engagement with each post went wild. It was time to think about the next bit. I've been through waves of both hyper-engagement and cold turkey shutdowns, but the urge to log back in almost always wins. A small digital reminder that I'm here, that I'm contributing.

When Covid-19 forced the country into lockdown back in March, our lives shifted online and on-air. Whether we were sitting up watching our favourite TV shows or scrolling through quizzes with friends, our screens became our windows into the world. Social media's hold on our communication has never been starker than it is now. Staying in touch with friends and family is easy through video calls and private chats.

On the surface, it's difficult to imagine that anything meaningful is happening.

But then people, social media has been a major driver of Covid-19. Naomi Mehlman, digital educator and social media expert, says "But we need to be aware of the reality of what it is. We spend so much time scrolling on these platforms, but we have such a hard time when we're not looking at them."

Social media has become so ingrained with our lives that it's difficult to imagine that anything meaningful is happening. It's not just about the dopamine hit of a 'like' or a 'share', it's about the constant comparison and the fear of missing out. It's about the way we've become so dependent on these platforms that we can't imagine life without them. It's about the way we've become so used to the constant stream of updates that we can't imagine life without them. It's about the way we've become so used to the constant stream of updates that we can't imagine life without them.

And with 2.1 billion users worldwide, it's working. The process is simple: we post a photograph, message or update to our followers, who then decide whether or not to like or engage with that post. It's a gamified process, with a reward system that has been proven to chemically alter our brains. It encourages dopamine to pass through a reward pathway, similar to how we react to gambling, sex and drugs.

Mark Blain, marketing strategist and digital marketer, says "The success in the virtual world. Tracking the progress of a post because social norms, making you feel good about time on the app or website, perpetually searching for the hit that engages every time. It's not just notifications popping up on our screens. We see you, it tells us. You are liked."

"Social media is a psychological trap," Amanda Cullen, digital marketing specialist and researcher, says. "It's tied in with the notion of branding yourself, of selling an image of yourself in exchange for like and engagement – social media currency. There are certain practices of self-promotion that are integral to everyday life, but they are heightened online. Everyone is thinking about their audience, but in most cases, it's family and friends who are actually engaging. Inexpensive, people still present themselves in a really defined, curated way."

Our desire for engagement and instant likes is become an aspect of social media's draw. We are not, despite what we might believe, social media's customers, gaining access to a free platform. There are themselves the product, their data collected and packaged and sold to advertisers – the real, money-making customer of the platforms. Social media is their marketplace and we are the product.

"While on the surface it's a platform for sharing snippets of your life with friends and family, it's primarily an advertisement marketplace," Cullen says. "The reward system is in place to keep you using the platform, sharing content, ultimately allowing advertisers to target you about our behaviour so that they can sell to us more effectively."

Influencer culture, Cullen says, is the most recent iteration of this trend. Rather than selling a product you might have little interest in like ads on television or a halfhearted, influence marketing campaign, it's about the carefully targeted content. "It's not just about the idea that you're being seen, it's about the idea that you're being seen by the right people."

"There's an ambivalence for everything and everything. These small acts don't seem to have a negative effect on their own, but the constant comparison, and how it's subtly reinforcing, creates the idea that whatever you do is not enough."

But the need for a digital validation is not necessarily tied to the platform. It's about the way we've become so dependent on these platforms that we can't imagine life without them. It's about the way we've become so used to the constant stream of updates that we can't imagine life without them. It's about the way we've become so used to the constant stream of updates that we can't imagine life without them.