

Specifications for Article Assignment

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Journalism 3173: Magazine Writing

This is a set of specifications for the written article assignments in my Journalism 3173 (Magazine Writing) course. My students use it to guide their own work and also to evaluate that of their peers (in critique sessions). It was developed by Journalism Professors Jean Ward (now retired) and Nancy Roberts.

1. Theme or Angle

Stated or implied near the beginning of the article?

Consistently applied throughout the article?

Clear?

2. Evidence of Search Strategy, Sources

Evaluate the information base of the story: completeness of the information, variety of sources.

Identify the number and type of sources used in the story. Assess source credibility and credentials. How effectively are sources used? Are sources sufficient?

3. The Lead and the Closing

Strategy, style, vocabulary.

Storytelling elements: characters, settings, conflict, suspense, resolution.

How does the lead work with the rest of the story?

Can you identify other good possibilities for an attention-getting lead?

4. The Flow of the Story

Transition links and devices; repetition and key words; change of pace.

Mark any spots in the story where you wanted to quit reading.

5. Elements of Audience Interest

Attention-getting, focus, perspective.

Identify ways that the story developed audience interest. Underline the significant elements and state why interest is developed. Identify areas in which audience interest needs improvement.

6. Conciseness

Examine the story for conciseness failures. Show the grammatical patterns that lead to these conciseness problems. Some possibilities:

Phrases and clauses where simple modifiers can be used

Redundancy

Passive voice

Meaningless modifiers (actually, generally, etc.)

7. Simplicity

Identify what you take to be two or three good examples of complex ideas that are stated simply. Identify some material that needs to be simplified. Try to simplify effectively and accurately.

8. Theme

What is the tone of the article throughout? Is the tone suitable for the subject treated? Are some words, phrases, passages at odds with the tone?

9. Language

Vocabulary choice; vocabulary level; symbolic language; metaphor; embellishment; word play

10. Use of Literary Techniques

Does the author use scene-setting, description, dialogue, etc. appropriately, creatively, and effectively?

Rate effectiveness of: examples and anecdotes, dialogue.

Quotations: analyze indirect and direct quotes. Would some material be more effectively presented as direct quote or indirect quote?

11. Audience/Market Analysis

Is proposed audience appropriate?

Will audience understand:

Information?

Diction?

Syntax?

Examples?

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