



## The Complete Article Writer - Workshop 3 Handout

### STRUCTURES

Here are a few of the common article structures you may come across:

- **Chronology** - Popular with history articles, but also useful for real-life reader stories. Discussing your topic in the order that the events happened can be a way of ensuring a complicated story is easy to follow. Start at the beginning and explain what happened until you reach the end.
- **Journey** - Popular with travel features - take the reader on a tour: a five-mile walk, an afternoon driving tour, or explore a popular city (in such a way that the reader can follow it on a map). Be creative with your journeys too - pick a theme: Norman Castles of Wales - it's not a physical journey, but you can still guide readers around Wales focusing in on Norman Castles.
- **Time** - 48 Hours in ..., A day in the life of ....., A week in the life of ... The Lake District Through the Seasons.
- **Numbers** - Ten Ways To Drop A Dress Size, Seven Successful Slimming Suggestions, Eight Ways To Cut Your Household Bills. These can be some of the easiest articles to write - especially if you have an outline with one bullet point per idea.
- **Letters** - An A to Z of ... Not as popular these days, mainly because articles are getting shorter and a full A to Z takes up a lot of space. (If you have a great A to Z idea - try flogging it as a series!)
- **Q&A** - This works in a variety of ways: standard interview - interviewer asks questions, interviewee answers them. What about more than one interviewee -

opposing sides? (Are Wind Turbines A Good Thing? The Council for the Protection of Rural England argues 'no', whilst the Green Party representative answers 'yes'.)

- **A without the Q** - Logical Sequence / Reader Interest - The article conveys general information to a reader, but the structure is often dictated by the facts being revealed to the reader - one thing leads automatically to another. For example, if writing an article about the new current account switching process, you might begin by explaining what happened in the old system, the problems that arose, which have resulted in the need for the new system. The new system automatically transfers standing orders and direct debits, so you might then go on to explain what standing orders and direct debits are ... and so on. (Also, when writing the article, a good tip is to write a list of all the questions a reader might ask - then answer them, but delete the questions, so you're left with just the answers. Read it and you'll find your piece has a natural flow to it.)

- A **Voxpop** piece - is a collection of views from several people on one topic. Works well at giving readers different ideas on a set topic.

### **More Structures = More Articles**

Writing up the same article with different structures can give you completely different articles, because you're presenting the information in a different way. For example, the history of your local town could be presented in strict chronological order, or you could write about it in a journey format as you took the reader on a tour of the town.

### **Structure/Style**

Analyse an article's structure and you'll see it often influences the style of writing:

- Chronology = factual and authoritative,
- Journey = chatty, light-hearted, funny or descriptive and emotional, first-person viewpoint
- Time = Light-hearted, nostalgic, humorous, first person viewpoint, short and punchy
- Numbers = short and snappy, occasionally second person viewpoint (you)
- Letters = as above, with numbers
- Q&A = light-hearted/chatty, or serious and authoritative ... depending upon the subject matter. Can be a mixture of first person and third person - it depends upon

how much of the writer (the interviewer) is in the article (for those sections would be in first person).

- A without the Q = can be serious and authoritative, or light-hearted and humorous. Could be any viewpoint.
- Voxpop = as above - depending upon the subject matter. (*Is fracking environmentally friendly?* will have a different tone to *What can you not go on holiday without?*)

## **BEGINNINGS**

Beginnings have several jobs to do:

- Sometimes they have to help explain a quirky title.
- They **MUST** engage an editor's interest enough to make them want to read the rest of the article.
- Which means they **MUST** also engage a reader's interest.
- It needs to explain what the article is going to be about. (Which is why it can be useful to write the main part of the article first - because you now know what it's about!)

There are several ways you can start your articles, and again, you may spot a style, or trend in your market analysis.

### **Startling Fact**

Hit the reader with a startling fact or statement, and immediately the reader wants to know more.

*The first time an English archer fought against a fellow English archer in battle was on 21st July 1403, in a field outside Shrewsbury. (BBC Countryfile)*

*It is said that shipping magnate Henry Flounder built his 18th century Shropshire hill-top folly so he could watch his ships coming into dock at Liverpool and Bristol from the same vantage point. (BBC Countryfile)*

### **An Anecdote**

Anecdotes can help to set a scene, or a theme to an article.

*“Earthquake!” shouts a young lad to his geology classmates. Paying for laughs, he falls off a small rock and collapses into fits of laughter. His friends join in with their own mock-tremors, but soon get back to their lesson, standing beside the crisp, cool waters of the stream. As classrooms go, Carding Mill Valley, with its rugged hills and beautiful beck, beats any I was ever schooled in. (Country Walking)*

### **Ask A Question**

Asking a question can draw the reader in straight away - either because they answer it and then want to know how their answer fairs with what’s argued in the article, or because they don’t know what the answer is and want to read on, hoping the article will help them.

*What’s the first thing you do in the morning? Get dressed? Make a cup of tea? Artist Julia Cameron suggests that if you want to increase your creativity and writing productivity, you should pick up a notebook and start writing ... three pages. (Writers’ Forum)*

*Will it? Or won’t it? Every time there’s a frisson of excitement as I twist the metal door handle and push. (The Simple Things)*

### **Scene Setting**

It depends upon the style of the publication, but sometimes magazines prefer an opening paragraph that paints a picture, or describes the atmosphere. This is where you draw upon several of your senses. You only want to give enough to tease your reader into wanting to know more. In some ways, you’re sketching an outline, and it’s this that forces the reader to continue, so that they can fill in the detail.

*A January mist swirls across the surface of the water, swallowing all that rises from its depths. The still, cold air is broken by the frantic call of a startled tufted duck and the occasional ‘plop’ is accompanied by a tiny ripple that floats towards us. Standing at the end of the jetty, our eyes try to penetrate the moisture molecules the wintry sun hasn’t yet gained the strength to evaporate. Llangorse Lake, it seems, wants to hold onto its secrets a little longer. (Country & Border Life)*

### **Dialogue / Interview Quote**

Dialogue is a great way to engage with a reader, because it makes them feel as though that person is speaking directly to them. It's hard to ignore people talking to you (although some people manage it), so if you've interviewed someone, and they've given you some great quotes, using one can produce a fantastic opening. (It's not dissimilar to opening with a startling fact.)

*"Marry my husband. Or at least kidnap him." That's Lorraine Mace's advice to writers looking to make more efficient use of their writing time. (Writers' Forum)*

### **Topical Hook/Peg**

Magazines like ways to make their articles and features feel up to date, despite many of them being written months previously. One way to do this is to give your article a topical hook - so the articles in the February issue will have a February theme to them.

*If February is the month of 'lurve' then Wales and its Borders is the loved up destination to head to. From passionate panoramas to loving landscapes, there's a romantic spot for everyone in the heart of this region for Valentine's Day. (Country & Border Life)*

## **ENDINGS**

Endings are just as important. They should:

- make the reader feel the writer has achieved what the opening set out to do.
- be fulfilling, and satisfying, rounding off a piece neatly. It should feel a natural conclusion.
- end on a positive, upbeat note. It's more satisfying!

There are several ways you can round off your piece:

### **Summarising the main point**

Sometimes your conclusion only needs to be a summary of the main points again.

*As you can see, Welsh coastal castles are some of the best to be found anywhere in the UK. They were built to withstand attacks and, as such, have stood the test of time too. Of course, getting inside them today is a little easier, and a far more enjoyable experience. (Country & Border Life)*

*So the next time you switch on the computer to do some writing, ask yourself if you're insured to write in the first place. (Writing magazine)*

## **Circular Ending**

A circular ending makes a reference to a point you made in your opening paragraph, which has the effect of taking your reader on a journey, and then returning to them the point where you first captured their imagination.

Opening: *Will it? Or won't it? Every time there's a frisson of excitement as I twist the metal door handle and push.*

Closing: *Nothing beats that sense of anticipation as our fingers curl around the door handle and twist. Will it? Or won't it? (The Simple Things)*

Closing (to the earlier Country Walking opening piece): *At the National Trust's Chalet Pavilion, the geology students pack up for the day. Thankfully, there were no seismic shifts to disrupt their studies today. In fact, underfoot, the Long Mynd feels pretty solid. I sense it'll be hanging around here a little while longer yet.*

## **A Call To Arms**

This is where you tell your reader to do something.

*If you're looking to keep your brain in gear, Morning Pages could be the way to start your day. What are you waiting for? (Writers' Forum)*

*The next time you're in Edinburgh, step aboard the Royal Yacht Britannia and discover its magic for yourself. (Scotland Magazine)*

## **A Quote**

Sometimes, an interviewee can sum up the essence of your article better than you can, so why not let them do it? Ending with a quote can also come across as you leaving the last comment to the experts.

*The next time your negative demons wake up, try to remain calm. It's possible to send them to sleep again. Think logically. Remind yourself that such doubts are part of the normal writing process. It means you care about your work and how readers will think about your creation. These crises form part of the everyday business life of a writer, and may never disappear, no matter how successful we become.*

*Glynis finds this reassuring. 'I've recently interviewed Venero Armanno, who heads the creative writing department of the University of Queensland and who has won awards for his novels. He still has crises in confidence. It's nice to know I'm in very good company.'*

### **Looking Forward**

Remember the basic idea of ending positively - sometimes looking forward to a point in the future can give a challenging topic a more upbeat conclusion.

*In multicultural Britain, fireworks are an all-year round annoyance to owners with nervous dogs. But by following the tips shown here, firework displays in the future should be less stressful for you and your faithful friend.*

### **Question Care**

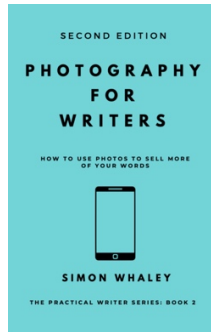
Be careful when ending with a question. (See Circular Ending above, and also A Call To Arms). The whole point of an ending is that it should be definitive, and concluding. If it's vague, or leaves uncertainties, then you'll leave the reader feeling unsatisfied. The question Who knows what the future may bring? could be a little unnerving! Remember - be positive!

## Books for Writers by Simon Whaley

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