

The Components of an Article

Building Your Article · By Simon Townsend · 2 min read

This Is Just One Example Of A Well-Structured Article

This MAP of an article shows three components: narrative, direct quotes and indirect quotes. Narrative is you the writer telling the story. Narrative usually makes up most of a well-structured article, interspersed with direct and indirect quotes. Narrative might contain anecdotes, research, examples, happenings, facts you gathered, plus your observations (what you saw during or around the interview) and maybe your opinions. Direct quotes are a person's almost-exact words as spoken to you and written inside "???" (quote marks). Direct quotes are best when they are about opinions and feelings, rather than about facts. Indirect quotes (without quote marks) are what the person said, but translated into the writer's words, usually to compress facts and other information. Don't write huge slabs of quotes. Don't be a human recorder simply regurgitating spoken words. Almost no talent is involved in transcribing a recording.

Your lively (say) 15-word heading

By (your name) Wordcount:??

Opening Narrative

Maybe a HAPPENING to grab your readers' attention.

Direct Quote

Narrative

Fact

Narrative

Your observations

Narrative

Direct Quote

Indirect Quotes

Narrative

Your opinion

Direct Quote

Narrative

Direct Quote

Narrative

Indirect Quotes

Narrative

Facts you gathered

Direct Quote

Narrative

Description, perhaps a pen

picture of the interviewee.

Narrative

Researched facts maybe

Indirect Quote

Direct Quotes

Indirect Quote

Direct Quote

Indirect Quote

Narrative

Direct Quote

Narrative

Your observations

Indirect Quotes

Narrative

Direct Quotes

Narrative

Advice articles

For advice or informational articles, consider this advice.

When writing a fact-and-advice article, you might consider using a writing technique I learned in 1970, working for publishers McGraw Hill in New York. The technique is called PSR.

It means problem, solution, result. Introduce a real person, say, Margaret Smith, 45, a lab technician and mother of three from Dubbo in NSW. You need details like this to "flesh out" the person.

First, explain what this actual person's problem was.

Second, explain the solution.

Third, give details of what the result meant to this living, breathing human being.

That is, always relate information and advice to PEOPLE. Don't give endless information in a vacuum. If what you're writing about relates to human beings, then tell your readers about human beings.

People (your readers) care about what happens to people in stories, particularly in a well-researched, fact-filled, advice-filled stories. For instance, here in short form, you state first the Problem, then the Solution and then the Result:

Margaret couldn't sleep at night. [PROBLEM]

It was affecting her marriage.

She followed advice from Dr Smith

and drank a glass of warm milk

half an hour before bedtime. [SOLUTION]

She had no more trouble falling

asleep, woke in a better mood

and her marriage was saved. [RESULT]

In other words, tell a problem-solving, successful anecdote about a HUMAN BEING. Tell it in that order: P...S...R (much longer of course).

Or, place your ideas in a logical list. Draw up an A4 page like this:

In the two columns, make lists in note form of all matters you would include in the short beginning, in the longer middle and in the short ending. As long as nothing looks illogical in its order of appearance, it is therefore probably logical. Don't let a "fear of order" stop you from writing. Some beginning writers give themselves an excuse to delay writing: they haven't yet thought out "the order of things". Don't worry. Just do the above lists, and then start writing. Write anything! But please. Start writing. END

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