
JN2000: INTRODUCTION TO JOURNALISM STORY ONE—PROFILE

You will write a 400-600 word profile on one of your JN2000 classmates.

The profile is based on the idea that “people are interested in people.” Profiles leave your readers feeling that they know the person being profiled. This **does not mean** writing the person’s life story or resume. There must be a reason that the person is deserving of the feature. And finding this reason holds to the key to a successful story.

You will interview the person you’re profiling at least once. Find out what makes this person unique. What is there about this person that makes him or her special? Often that can be a hobby, a career, a lifestyle, etc. This uniqueness or special quality becomes a theme that becomes the main focus of your story. You might find several qualities about your subject that you believe make the person interesting. This is fine and you can develop more than one theme. However, you should realize the theme(s) in your story are what hold the piece together, and if you try to develop too many, or cannot integrate the qualities in a thematic structure, your story loses focus.

As you work on your profiles, consider that one of the best ways to learn about your subject is to interview people who know the subject well. Friends, relatives, colleagues and even adversaries can tell you a lot about the person you’re profiling. You will **interview at least two other people** and ask these people to “characterize” your subject, describe their traits and give you some examples or real life stories or anecdotes about their experiences with the person you’re profiling. This approach often leads you to ideas you want to explore and possible themes for your profile.

Use your skills in observing, interviewing, newsgathering and creative writing to weave a “human interest” story that develops the special theme or themes about your source. Remember, people don’t have to be odd, famous or powerful to make good features. Some people just have ordinary jobs and careers, but have unique approaches to them that are interesting. The profile’s primary purpose is to entertain, and if you can find what is entertaining in your source, you’ve got a good start on an excellent story.

A few essentials for any profile:

- 1) Basic information** -- full name, age, professional title, occupation and usually marital status and children.
- 2) What the subject says** -- use lots of quotes and paraphrases so the subject can talk directly to the reader.
- 3) How the subject looks** – use your best judgment here, but consider not only routine facts about height, build and color of eyes and hair, but also the details that make the subject come to life: how he or she walks, talks, gestures and uses body language or facial expressions.
- 4) Background or history of the subject** -- although this is a story of who the subject is now, often a subject’s background tells a lot about how the subject has become who he or she is. This might include

education, upbringing, hobbies and interests. Note: it is usually a mistake to begin your profile with history -- use it as background.

5) What others think and say about the subject -- talk to the subject's friends, bosses, professors, even enemies or adversaries. Find out what they think makes the subject special. Often you can find out a great deal more talking to others about your subject than by talking to the subject. **(At least two additional interviews are necessary for this assignment.)**

6) Details - anecdotes, quotes, real-life examples or events that reveal the person's personality or unique attributes.

Structure and a few tips

Profiles are feature stories, and they employ creative writing concepts to “bring to life” the person you're profiling for your readers. Avoid starting your story with a straight news lead. Instead try to entice readers by opening with key details, anecdotes or real-life examples that “show” the theme(s) of your story and capture the essence of your subject.

Profiles attempt to dig beneath the surface and get at what makes the subject interesting, special and different. They are not promotion pieces, focusing only on the wonderful traits of your subject. Sometimes profiles can be serious or sad, depending on the person being profiled. Personality profiles are the ultimate human interest stories, and strive to bring forward the interesting elements of the person being profiled even if they are serious, sad, tragic, eccentric or funny.

Leave yourself out of the story. This is a profile about the person you interviewed, not about you. Avoid constructions such as “When asked about....” or “When I interviewed...”

Examples

For examples of award-winning profiles, go to: http://hearstfdn.org/hearst_journalism/championship.php Under each set of years, go to “Writing.” Each winner’s profile includes a personality/profile article.

Deadlines:



- **ON Tuesday, Sept. 13**, bring four copies of your story to class for peer reviews.
- **ON Thursday, Sept. 15**, bring your edited story to class to turn in (40 points).

Please submit your story on Blackboard. You should also staple and turn in the following documents in this order:

- Your story
- A list of the people you interviewed and their contact information
- Copies of your edited story from the workshop