The English Compendium

Volumes 3 & 4

- Introduction to English Linguistics
- Introduction to English Phonology
- English Phonology: Segments
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- Creative Writing

Plus:
Several commissioned articles relevant to English studies

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The English Compendium
Vols. 3 & 4

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INTRODUCTION

Writing as with all arts requires the mastery of skills and techniques. It is doubtful if any art can be taught in the real sense of the word, what is not in doubt however is that art can be mastered. Ironically, the mastery of anything in life requires some form of basic instruction whether formally or informally. But beyond instruction, the main prerequisite for success in the mastery of the skills of any art is practice, which is made easier where there is Talent that is nurtured and guided, where there is zeal, interest and a profound sense of vocation. This chapter is the first of a two-part manual for budding creative writers. It could also be useful to those who teach creative writing.

This chapter attempts to define creative writing and examine basic writing skills and how to acquire and develop them, then a critical survey is made of the common and special areas of readers’ interest which writers should exploit. Also, the writing process is considered and the broad types of writing are examined such as essay writing, news writing, articles and features writing including the methods of conducting interviews. The in-depth study of the techniques of writing in the three main genres of literature namely Drama, Poetry and Fiction is however deferred to the second part of this manual.

WHAT IS CREATIVE WRITING?
Creativity, according to the Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary involves skillful and imaginative production of something original e.g. a work of art. Creative writing would then simply mean any piece of writing either in prose, poetry or drama involving creative and imaginative thinking using either fact or fiction to produce an original literary material for a readership.

Marjorie Boulton (1980) in her book, Anatomy of Literary Studies distinguishes factual and imaginative literature. She states that Drama, Poetry, the novel, the
short story—all constitute what we might call "imaginative literature" and submit that the writer of this is not tied to facts in quite the same way as the historian, the economist or the scientist whose studies are based absolutely on what actually happened:

For imaginative literature or creative writing we have fictive creations of various kinds, attempts to communicate emotions, wit, humor, fantasy, and speculation as opposed to factual information.

It is important to note that creative writers being less tied to fact than historians or the scientist, have more scope to comment on facts or challenge them, arrange them in unusual ways and to speculate not only what is, but what ought to be or what might be. For this reason, writers of creative literature are sometimes regarded as people with visionary insights, prophetic instincts on the nature and future of human life.

William Freeman (1967) says "writing of any literary nature is an art linked like other arts with craftsmanship" and submits that the work of the writer is the ability to select the most essential material; the strongest words, the most useful facts etc, because it is the careful selection and effective application of all these that create a gripping picture or otherwise in the reader's mind. The writer's mind's eye must do the work of his physical vision. Before he begins to write, he must clearly and in detail sketch out what he is going to describe, for unless he can conjure up his creations what hope is there for his using words that will conjure them up for his readers? And the greatest danger is that if the readers don't believe what they are reading, they will lose all interest.

WHY DO WE WRITE?

1. COMMUNICATION OF IDEAS:
One reason for learning to write is to transmit ideas to people especially those distant in time and space. If we write well, we can make a person thousands of miles away or perhaps not yet born see and read what we mean and what we feel. The writing process according to William West (1973:2) helps us to sort out and organise random thought, clarify what we think and develop our ideas. Speaking he continues, is very important and often a spoken idea is more appropriate than a written one, but most speech is off the cuff he concludes. That is, the ideas are expressed as they come, the speaker does not have the chance to plan and organise first and to revise and polish later (p.3). Whereas, in writing, the writer can plan first, and then, can polish afterwards. This helps him to crystallise his ideas and present them in the most effective form.
2. **DOCUMENTATION**
We write to keep records of past events and learn about things which otherwise might not have been known or which account might have been given inaccurately through oral information. Written and published literature provide materials for references and research apart from the function of providing pleasure and entertainment to readers. For example, we learn about ancient cultures and traditions and achievements, failures and aspirations of the extinct generations in order to shape present and future generations. Writing is creation asset to be coveted by humanity right from the recordings in Biblical Genesis, for example and even those oriental works that predate the Bible.

3. **DEVELOPMENT OF TALENT AND SKILLS**
In every art, there are people who possess natural gifts to create and communicate their ideas and there are people who acquire the skills and techniques of the craft through training and practice. It is gracious to discover that we have natural talent and could display skills in a particular thing. What is sad, however, is that many of us do not really know who we are or what we have ability to do. The sheer discovery of ourselves and our talents can open for us doors of achievement and success. And when are privileged to apply our talents and skills in any field of human endeavour, it gives us fulfillment and we feel a sense of inner joy. The practice of writing helps us to develop literary and creative skills. All that is needed is to discover that we have the ability and to seek to develop the ability through the acquisition of required skills and techniques. Perhaps that is why Stephen Covey (1990) reflects that “what lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters, compared with what lies within us”.

4. **VOCATION**
Writing has become a professionalised art. In the past, many people write just because they have an interest in writing or they wish to put their ideas down with a belief that some readers would like to read them. These days, writers carefully select and determine in what genre they want to write, what audience they want to reach and how much it will cost to make the work a finished product. Because of these implications and more, writing has become a job and a business. It has become a career with which many earn a living either as novelists, dramatists, writers for children, newspapers and in the broadcasting industry etc.

**BASIC WRITING SKILLS**
The ability to write correct English, free from errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling is only the beginning of learning to write. The following are the elementary rules of the game, but in themselves they will not make a writer any more than a mere knowledge of the rules of any game e.g. football will make a first class footballer.
Some of the surest ways of achieving success in the art of writing are:

1. **Acquisition of a rich command of words**
   Any serious writer must endeavour first of all to acquire a wide variety and accurate vocabulary. Words are the tools of his trade and the more words he knows and can use correctly and effectively, the better workman he will be. These two points should be noted:
   a. the number of words known
   b. exact and appropriate use.

   Therefore, the man or woman who seeks to put his ideas across to others by means of words must make a conscious effort to widen his stock of words. Ironically, the man who has a wide command of words is he who can express his ideas and thoughts most briefly without beating about the bush.

2. **Through wide and constant reading:** This way we come in contact with new words gathering their meaning from the context which they are used. Victor Jones (1978) has advised that a writer should always have two, three, four books on his bedside table, in his pocket etc. perhaps a factual work on physics, anthropology, history or a novel, a play or a book of short stories. He strongly feels that contemporary writers need to read a lot of classical literature as they have ultimately been the best sellers where literary quality and skills of how to create character, how to narrate, produce tension, atmosphere, climax etc. all abound (p18).

3. **The use of the dictionary:** The dictionary is the writer’s best friend. Every serious writer must make deliberate effort to look up new words as he comes in contact with them in reading, in conversation or while watching television or listening to the radio. Never let a word pass you by. Apart from this, make a habit of browsing through a dictionary now and then, turning the pages at random and gathering anything of interest that catches your eye.

4. **Making attempts to use new words:** It is not sufficient to know a large number of words in a vague and general way. Words, according to Frank Cadinlin (1970) are precision instruments to be used with exactness. You may lose the exact meaning of your thought or idea if your words are used loosely and thus, the purpose of your speech or essay may be defeated. It is not until you have actually used a word that you really make it your own. So you not only have to grab the meaning of words, you must make them come to life by seeking every opportunity to make use of them in speech or writing. That is why the Oxford English Dictionary provides examples of how words could be used apart from defining them.
You will find that many apparent synonyms (words of similar meaning) are not always interchangeable; you use one or the other according to the contextual setting. For instance, friendly and amicable both have the same meaning but their usage is very different.

5. BEING BRIEF
The quality of brevity is a most cherished one in the art of writing. As a general rule, what is said most briefly is said most effectively. So you must master the art of using words with the maximum effect. Candin advises that words must be selected, weighed against each other. Some words have deeper and richer meaning and associations than others. Compare house and home, maternal and motherly, infant and baby, affection and love etc. You can evoke or conjure up all the store of latent emotion by the use of a word in just the right place especially if it is allowed to stand out without being smothered under a heap of dead words.

6. BEING ORDERLY
Besides taking care with the choice of words, a writer must also give thought to their order and arrangement. This gives form and emphasis to the speech or writing. Every piece of writing whether an 800-page novel or short three point news story must have a unity of its own. It must have one central theme to which everything in the particular piece of writing is directly connected. It should be possible to summarise this theme in one sentence. There should be unity too in each chapter, each paragraph and each sentence.

7. STYLE
Finally, a serious writer must evolve a style for himself. He must not be lazy and complacent; he must be adventurous and experimental and avoid falling back on stereotyped phrases or hackneyed expression. Personal styles are not born in a day or are they achieved without labour. R.L. Stevenson who evolved for himself an admirably perfect style for his particular purpose has recorded that as a young man, he set himself to be a “sedulous ape”, imitating first the style of one great master, then another until he could throw away his crutches and match forward on his own.

DETERMINING AREAS OF READER'S INTEREST
If man would write to gain a reader's interest, he must do it through an interest already there. Man was made with similar mental and emotional sensibilities and as such is prone to responding almost the same way to certain things. Hugh Cunningham (1986) identifies seven common areas of interest of man:

a. Personal appeal
b. Sympathy
c. Oddity
PERSONAL APPEAL
Because man naturally likes to preserve himself, he is more interested in himself than anything else. A reader is, therefore, most interested in those things he can relate directly to himself, those things about him, things he may have participated in, things he saw or he has learned about through other means. A reader would be interested in those things that are going to affect his life as an individual, those things, which affect other men, so that he can relate himself to the other man through the similarity of experience. Consider this advertisement:

DO YOU HAVE TROUBLE SLEEPING?
SOME PEOPLE CAN FALL ASLEEP ANYWHERE
IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE SLEEPING, SCIENCE HAS FOUND A NON-HABIT FORMING WAY OF INDUCING NATURAL SLEEP.
IF YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE WHO FALL ASLEEP EASILY, ALMOST ANYWHERE, YOU ARE TRULY BLESSED. BUT IF YOU TOSS AND TURN AT NIGHT UNABLE TO SLEEP BECAUSE OF SIMPLE NERVOUS TENSION OR DAILY PROBLEM. GOOD NEWS FOR YOU...

This advertisement capitalizes on personal appeal because it knows, everybody sleeps and so everybody can read some of himself in this. As concerned with himself as man is and thus being interested in himself more than anything else, man is not totally a selfish creature. Because of this, he is interested in things outside himself, though, his interest is heightened when he can relate those things outside himself to himself.

SYMPATHY
Though man likes to preserve himself, he cannot resist the basic urge to reproduce himself. This makes man to develop interest in those things that bear upon his emotion. The things that can evoke sympathy in a man include stories about children, tragic news, poverty, loneliness, religion, old people etc.

ODDITY
Since people are essentially of the same physical, mental and emotional make up, they carry out more or less the same routines in life such as eating 3 times a day, sleeping at night, working in the day, getting married, raising children etc. However, all or some of us aspire to be different and like to see ourselves as individualistic or non-conformist. For this reason, a writer could gain the interest of his readers when he writes about things that are out-of-the ordinary and unusual. They attract instant appeal.
CONFLICT

Everyone likes to witness a good fight, if for nothing, at least for the fun of it. As human beings, we find competition built into our very nature - from birth until death - for attention from our parents in competition with our brothers and sisters, for grades in school in competition with our classmates, and for greater attention in one hand with our lovers in competition with our rivals - confronted with competition continually, readers are interested in almost anything that has an element of conflict.

Competition in football and sporting activities are other examples. Man likes to read about men in conflict with other men, with nature, with ideas and ideals. As writers, especially of literature and drama, we must devise and make use of conflicting situations in our works in order to attract the interest of our readers. Robert Meredith (1982) informs us that the means for creating complications that can produce conflicts in a piece of writing are unlimited. Human beings are in conflict with themselves, with nature, floods, storms, mountains, the sea, deserts, diseases, the unknown, such as ghosts, outer space, against the mores of society, laws, traditions, moral codes, accepted beliefs, governments etc. (p37).

PROGRESS

Human beings are attracted by growth and development of new things. People who cannot think or come up with something different, something better are generally regarded as failures. So, when we come across news about people breaking new grounds, celebrities, stars, unique people, high people, we are interested to read and know about them perhaps because we admire their success story or because we aspire to be like them and more, so reading about them may provide some inspiration for us too.

SUSPENSE

Though man likes to know more about things he already knew or has heard about, he is also fascinated by the unknown. Cunningham believes that everyone can be kept in suspense because we all like our curiosity about things satisfied. For this reason, a writer should not only find new things to write about, he should release the information such that his readers' interest will be heightened as they wonder what will be in the next paragraph or chapter.

OTHER PEOPLE

Every man has a relationship with other people, that is inescapable. So man's interest in himself is rivaling his interest in other people. We are interested in a piece of writing because other people are involved particularly people we know either through our personal contact with them or merely by their names. That is why even a list of names on the back of a choir programme in a newspaper can be interesting to some readers. Cunningham writes that someone has calculated that every person has at least 25 other people who are directly interested in that person no matter what he has done, this means that every name in a piece of
writing produces at least 25 readers. Writers could explore writing biographies, history of a people, critical essays on people, etc.

FOUR PILLARS OF GOOD WRITING
Ordinary thinking is often fragmentary, but good writing is a product of careful thinking and according to Fred White (1992), it incorporates the following 4 characteristics.

a. An appeal to a target audience
b. A coherent structure
c. A smooth, detailed development
d. An appropriate style

The writer has identified a problem or has seen it in a new light and feels that it is worth sharing with others or worth publishing. If one discovers a technique to extend the life of flowers prepared for indoor display, one might want to publish an article on the subject as many people would want to read it. Consider also such topics as: "The secrets of keeping it," "How to get the attention of your lover," "How to live long," "Making money without tears," etc.

It is important to note that audience awareness is one of the most crucial aspects of learning to write well and one of the easiest to overlook because any kind of writing except perhaps private notebook jottings is public communication. When you put word on paper, you are writing for a readership of some kind, large or small, general or specialised. The larger the audience, the more public communication needs to be i.e. the writing must be presented in such a way that it would be acceptable and comprehensible to most readers regardless of their backgrounds.

When we write for a general audience, we must adopt a standard of correctness which compels us to use and spell words according to established dictionary definitions and spelling conventions. Any writer who wants to bypass the standard rules must have a good reason, which the audience should share with him.

For any writing to work, it has to have some kind of organisational scheme. Everybody is probably familiar with the 5-paragraph essay scheme.

1 paragraph to introduce the topic - INTRO
3 to discuss the different aspects of it - BODY
1 to summarise - SUMMARY

For instance, you want to write on "How to improve your reading habits".
INTRO (Pgh 1) - Many people have become frustrated with learning because they have poor reading habits. But it is surprisingly easy to get rid of these poor habits by practising these 3 techniques.

BODY – (Pghs 2–4)
Description of technique 1
Description of technique 2
Description of technique 3

CONCLUDING (Pgh 5) Stress the importance of practising regularly so that the good habits can become ingrained.

There is no hard and fast rule about this formula, but it is a scheme that can give one a quick sense of how an essay might be structured in terms of beginning, middle and end.

c. Not only does a piece of writing have a framework, it has meat on the bone as well. To build on to the framework, you need to expand upon an idea by raising the general points and discussing them in detail, you will need to analyse complex matters, provide vivid examples, perhaps refute opposing ideas and name names. For instance, in writing about improving reading efficiency, you should not be contented with merely repeating the technique, but should go further to describe in detail how learners can apply the technique.

d. The language you use should be as accurate and appropriate as possible. This means being able to choose the right words, to find the most suitable level of usage, and to use no more words than are necessary to convey the intended idea. It also means constructing sentences that allow the idea to be transmitted in a crisp readable manner devoid of uneven, ambiguous wording.

WRITING, THINKING AND COMMUNICATING
A special quality of writing, says Fred White, is its capacity to extend the range of human consciousness. Usually, a writer is engaged in several acts of consciousness, not just one. Imagine, for instance that you are writing an article on PHOTOGRAPHY. Many different types of thoughts will be spinning around your head including the following:

1. **Content thoughts** – What should I say about the topic at hand? What are the best examples to give? How specific should I be? etc.
2. **Organisation thoughts** – How should I begin, with a quotation? With pep talk on the joys of taking and keeping photographs? Should I use a step by step format? What step should I present first? Should I divide each section with subhead? With a numbering system etc.?
3. Style thoughts – Should I use a technical language? Should I adopt a formal level of word usage or a witty and informal one? Should I be esoteric and high sounding or simplistic?

4. Purpose thoughts – This would determine the focus. Who is my audience? Begging photographers, adults, or young people? What points do I want to emphasise? Do I want the article to be purely informational or do I want to argue for or against a specific issue?

THE WRITING PROCESS
Writing as with all serious study requires intense concentration. It is essential therefore, to create an appropriate and conducive environment for yourself. Choose a quiet location, noise – even music – may seem tolerable, but tends to lower your level of concentration, no matter how subtle the sound may seem. Next, make sure the room has adequate lighting and ventilation so you can avoid headaches or eye fatigue. Be mindful of your posture, slouching can wear you out.

Fred White in his book *The Writer's Art* (1992) submits that the manner in which a writer proceeds from the initial spark to finished manuscript depends a great deal on his/her mental habits, he however suggests the following composing stages as useful hints to the process of writing.

a. Invent
b. Organise and outline
c. Write first draft
d. Revise

INVENTION
Any activity has its preparation stage, actors rehearse for a show, artists make preliminary sketches for paintings or sculptures, business people set up committees to report on the feasibility of a proposed project. Writers need to prepare for their projects too, this is called the stage of invention.

Fred White advises the writer to engage in mind play brainstorming to discover a topic, the important details about the topic and what he mainly wants to say about it. Brainstorming could be done individually or in groups, although it seems to work much better as group activity. One effective process of brainstorming is known as Clustering – this is the free association of words with a nucleus word placed in the middle of the subject to be treated. e.g.:
Clustering encourages people to use their mental capacities more fully. It stimulates the brain. To cluster is to use language in a visual way. Also, you could use the method of talk writing. Naturally, when we talk, we generate language so spontaneously, but when we want to write, we freeze up. This is partly because talking has become part and parcel of our life; we talk so much hour after hour everyday, ever since we first learned to speak. When we talk, we seldom bother to explore the subject matter with the same degree of complexity as we do when we write about them and we usually speak at the speed of thought. Talk writing can be used as technique to be accustomed to the slower speed of thought needed for composition. Eventually, the fluency of your oral responses will be transferred to your written responses.

GATHERING AND PLANNING
Once you have invented your topic, the next step is to gather together as much as you need to know about the topic as possible. This involves retrieving detail about the topic from your memory or form background reading. In doing this, you may consider using the 5ws and the H device. Ask yourself what, where, when, why, who and how to go about the topic.

Supposing you want to write about insurance
What - type of insurance (specific or general)
Where - Nigeria or abroad
When - all year round or specific risk periods
Why - the advantages/benefits of ins
Who - are the operators - insurance experts etc. who is it for?
How - how does it work, how could people be introduced to it.

You retrieve information about a topic by reading about it. In doing this, you may consult encyclopedias, the library, card catalogue, book cited in the bibliography at the end of many encyclopedia entries, unabridged and specialised dictionaries to clarify terms and spellings etc.

ORGANISING AND OUTLINING
Organising does not differ too much from inventing and information gathering. Basically, to organise something means to arrange its components in a sensible and pleasing manner. Often when we are thinking about what to include in an essay, we are simultaneously deciding where to include it. But the more involved the writing task, the more involved you will want to organise as a separate step. Some writers compose like blue blazes without ever stopping to organise. For them, main points, supporting points and examples just fall into place, however, organising in advance will help you retain large chunks of information.

Outlining a scheme for an essay follows a natural human tendency to structure our ideas once we conjure them up; a general sequence is laid out to be followed step by step and it should be structured logically such that it forms into sections of introduction, body and conclusion.

WRITING FIRST DRAFT
First drafts can be intimidating, as many writers will spend excessive amount of time taking notes or doing other kinds of pre writing to avoid taking the plunge. Begin your first draft when you feel the need to do so even when you have not brainstormed and outlined. If you are arguing a highly debatable point, then you must include you oppositions point of view.

Whenever you reach a momentary stall in the first draft stage, consult your free writing, your brainstorming clusters, your library notes etc. These materials will spur you on and reinforce your sense of purpose.

REVISIGN
Unlike informal conversation where nobody would dream of revising what was uttered off the cuff, essays do require reworking, they are written to last and to be referred to at anytime. Revising is more art than craft. Check the following during revising and proofreading:
- mechanical errors - check punctuation, grammar and spelling
- look for any passages you could make clearer and easier to read
- look for sentences you may need to rearrange or word you may need to change.
You must not be discouraged if your find yourself revising two, three or even four times before the essay seems to be good enough to hand in. The more demanding you are, the better your ability for self criticism will be which is crucial for anyone who wants to master the art of writing.

TYPES OF WRITING

ESSAYS
An essay is a piece of literary writing in prose form on any subject. Success in every kind of writing including poetry and drama hinges upon the realisation on the part of the writer that assuming he really has something worth telling his readers, it must be told both convincingly and interestingly.

William West informs us that people write for many different purposes and every individual piece of writing develops its own unique structure and style. Although, there are four major generally accepted types of essays, we should not think of any mode as absolutely distinct and separate from one another in all types of writing and we should not try to write in only one mode at a time. they are:

a. Expository
b. Narrative
c. Descriptive
d. Persuasive/Argumentative

EXPOSITORY
Exposition is probably the most common and the most useful kind of writing. It attempts to explain or clarify a subject or as the word suggests to expose it. Exposition aims primarily at reason rather than at emotion or imagination. It simply presents facts as they are. The words and terms used must be free from double meaning and interpretations. Every piece of exposition differs from every other piece. Any writer who understands the techniques of expository writing will write better answers to essay questions, clearer reports, more readable criticism, and precise accounts of matters.

If you write and you want other people to choose to read what you have to say, you must quickly lead them to expect a high reward and assure them that your writing will not be too difficult. Communication is possible only when people can identify experiences or information they all share. If you refer to a “proscenium arch” and your reader has no experience with the theatre, he probably will not know that you are referring to the stage. Whenever you are using a word or concept that your reader may not know, it is a good idea to provide either a definition or an example. Your first task in writing an expository composition is to choose a general subject e.g. Ecology and then narrow it down to a specific topic (preserving marine life).
b. **NARRATIVE**

The first step in preparing your personal narrative according to William West is either to recall or to invent some situation, which excites you emotionally. It is better to recall an event if you can, but you can also invent a situation provided you can put yourself into it realistically enough to feel the action and to communicate the emotions generated.

To write a good narrative, you must learn to be aware of sensory experiences. Doing so will train you to take in more of life around you.

Writing a good narrative involves a number of specific techniques and problems. You have probably been with friends who could hold a group enthralled with any tale and you may have been with others who could ruin even the best story. The writer should note the following:

i. **A good narrative must mean something** – it must have a point, a purpose, a reason for being. Otherwise the reader demands so what?

ii. **It must have a meaningful structure and order.** Events can not happen helter-skelter. Each one must come in a definite place for a definite reason.

iii. **The details must be carefully selected.** Details that will appeal to the reader’s senses so that he feels he is actually experiencing the events described.

iv. **The narrative must be emotion laden.** One should not write something with which he is not personally emotionally involved. At least, he should feign to be involved.

v. **It is better to use first person narrator, “I” or “we” such that your readers would not know whether you are telling a story you actually experienced or that you assumed the person of someone who lived the events.

vi. **Provide concrete details that create images or pictures in the readers’ mind and make him feel and experience the events in the narrative.**

vii. **Create suspense by making each passage suggest that something is going to happen so that the reader eagerly anticipates the outcome of the events.** To build suspense you plant seeds that hint at conflicts, problems, or mysteries.

viii. **Every good narrative must have a beginning, a middle and an end.** The beginning hints at why the narrative is worth reading. It suggests the significance of the event. It then goes further to reveal the backgrounds for the events. The middle narrates selected events, explains, interprets the events with twists and turns suspense, and intrigues while the end brings the sequence of events to an interesting close.
NEWS
What is news?
The dictionary defines news as findings, new information, fresh events reported.
To qualify as news, what is reported must be:
   a. current
   b. topical
   c. up to date
   d. important
   e. significant
   f. unusual

Frank Candlin classifies news types into two – the expected and the unexpected.

EXPECTED NEWS
Expected news includes the results of sporting events, reports of public functions, theatrical and other performances – anyth’n’ which has been arranged to take place beforehand.

It must be remembered, however, that the expected may also contain the unexpected. Thus, a politician may be shot while making a speech or an accident may occur during a sporting event e.g. (Tyson biting Holyfield’s ear in a normal boxing bout).

UNEXPECTED NEWS
It may appear remarkable that the newspapers obtain this unexpected news as quickly as they do. Papers carrying reports are often on the streets almost before a fire has burnt itself out or the crowd attracted by an accident has dispersed. This is largely accounted for in 2 ways:

   a. The Routine call
   b. The contact

   a. THE ROUTINE CALL
   Every newspaper office delegates one of its staff to ring up or visit at intervals those people, places or institutions likely to have early knowledge of any unusual or unexpected events. These include the police, the fire brigade, hospitals, some government offices, town hall, local clergy, doctors and so on. Some of these routine calls are made several times each day and even during the night. As a rule, reporters making such calls can rely on being “tipped off” when something likely to make news has happened.

   b. THE CONTACT
   Most newspapers build up a network of contacts throughout their area – men and women in many different walks of life who are ready to give the office timely information of anything happening in their vicinity.
GOING OUT ON A STORY

The young news writer would normally set him/herself an objective – to find out as quickly as possible what has happened and to get that information back to the office. He can be helped with the 5ws and H devise – what, where, when, who, why and how.

Candlin suggests the following as points the newswriter must bear in mind:

a. **Keeping in touch with the office**: Nothing infuriates a new editor more than to send a reporter out on a story and then have the reporter disappear into the blues for hours without a hint of his progress or whereabouts. Come through with your story as soon as you have got something worth turning in and if you have not been able to get the story, ring up and say so.

b. **Remembering that people make news not things**: Get the names and addresses, ages too if you can of the chief figures in the story and whenever you can, get a statement. Get people to tell you what they saw, what they thought, how they felt and get it down in their own words. Nothing gives more life and reality to a news story than eyewitness statement in quotes.

c. **Know your district**: To know exactly where a particular street shop warehouse or field is situated may be vitally important to you at a movement when reference books are not at hand. Get to know as many people in your district. Not only the obvious contacts such as the police, but people in all walks of life – shopkeepers, hotel servants, cinema workers, hawkers, barbers, drivers, students etc. in fact anyone whose job keeps him out and about and in touch with the ever moving ever changing life.

d. **Behave sensibly**: Newspaper reporting is a serious, painstaking affair of collecting information and whoever is involved should aim to be an accomplished professional, you are an ambassador not only to your organization but also to your family. Do not let it get to your head when people flatter you or even seem afraid of you. You will find that the more you forget yourself, the more you efface yourself and merge into the background, the more information you will collect and the better your stories will be.

e. **Develop a nose for news**: Know your own paper because each paper has its own news values. Be on the look out for news story in the apparently trivial or commonplace. Often, the news value will lie not in the event itself, but in some secondary attendant circumstance. Thus, in a case of robbery, the news may not lie in the theft in the thief, but in the identity of the person robbed or in the nature of the articles stolen. An extreme example of the inability to see the story behind the story is a reporter who returned to his news editor to complain as follows “sir, about the political speech you sent me to report there was nothing doing after all, someone shot the speaker”!
Follow up the news: Happenings, even the most prosaic and trivial are like stones dropped into a pool, they set up ever widening ripples and the after effects of events are often much wider and more far-reaching than the events themselves. Try to be one jump ahead of the news. Be prepared to follow up most unpromising leads you will often find yourself richly rewarded.

Be careful: If you say anything wrongly, it can possibly be corrected, but what is published in a newspaper is there for all to see and cannot be recalled. Check your facts and whenever you are in doubt of a piece of information leave it out. Never break a confidence. Watch out for the laws of libel. As a journalist or news writer, yours is a double trust—protecting the interest of the public and the good name of your organisation.

ARTICLES AND FEATURES

An article sometimes described as a feature is not fiction says Danne Doubtfire, although it might contain semi-fictional anecdotes or imaginary dialogue to illustrate certain points. It is a factual piece written usually to convey some information. For instance, “How to make a Deck chair”, “Better Health through Auto-suggestion”, “choosing music for a film”, “Holidays”, “opinions on the social ills of society” etc. Doubtfire warns that the writer of a feature who wants to be published must avoid a simple personal experience article reminiscent of a school composition. Most readers have little interest in our ordinary activities, but if you are a well known personality, that may change. A popular disc jockey or famous T.V star could write about what he had for breakfast last Tuesday and get away with it.

Describing the feature as opinion essay, Fred White says what determines its quality is the liveliness of the writing, it determines whether the writer’s anger, resentment or enthusiasm is vividly transmitted or whether the eloquence and cleverness of the piece is immediately apparent.

Successful articles writes Doubtfire fall under one of these three types:

1. A subject about which the writer has a specialized knowledge e.g. Teaching deaf children
2. An unusual start on an ordinary subject e.g. A ride on the Paris metro, London Underground or Lagos molue etc.
3. Humour – if you can write a really funny article almost any subject is suitable e.g. Don’t let your wife teach you to drive or The first time I babysat etc. (p10)

Victor Jones advises that the writer of a feature or an article should study thoroughly the newspaper, magazine or journal he wishes to write for until he is conversant with its requirements – the kind of technique, the slant that the editors favours. Doubtfire (p11) recounts the argument of a man who sent an article on Karate to a genteel magazine for ladies “They should all learn how to defend themselves” he said.
GOING OUT ON A STORY

The young news writer would normally set him/herself an objective – to find out as quickly as possible what has happened and to get that information back to the office. He can be helped with the 5ws and H devise – what, where, when, who, why and how.

Candlin suggests the following as points the newswriter must bear in mind:

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The length of an article should be anything from 300-3000 words. A good average of 1500. Articles of less than 500 words are usually classified as fillers and are used to occupy odd spaces at the bottom of the page.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

1. GETTING A DATE
   If you want to write a biographical article or a personality profile of somebody in a magazine, you will need to know something about the art of interviewing. Firstly, write or telephone the person asking if he/she would be willing to be interviewed and giving him/her 2 or 3 days choices. If he accepts, write or phone back thanking him/her for accepting and mentioning the agreed dates.

2. USING A TAPE
   Dianne Doubtfire (1997) suggests that before the interview begins, the writer should ask his guest if he is agreeable to the using of a tape recorder. Some people hate to think that their every word is captured for replay, don’t be surprised if the answer is no, if the request is refused, don’t betray the slightest disappointment. Just say that is alright and continue. Even when the interviewee does agree to be taped you should still be prepared to use a notebook and pencil, because there is a possibility of the machine breaking down during recording or at play back. It might generally be safer to use batteries because some people’s electric sockets or wiring may be faulty when jotting. Use abbreviations you will be able to decode.

3. HOMEWORK
   Do you homework, read everything you can about the person and plan your questions carefully, don’t make the questions too many or too long. Arrange them in a logical order paying attention to most important and that, which should be designed to put the interviewee at ease.

4. CONDUCT
   Don’t arrive at the venue late or too early. Assume a relaxed and confident manner even when you may feel a little nervous. Never apologise for your inexperience or belittle yourself in anyway. Do not be drawn into an argument with your guest, you are there to talk about his views not yours, you should, as a rule, say very little. If you feel your guest is evasive on some important points, be courteous and firm in pressing for a satisfactory reply, if you notice that your persistence is causing embarrassment, move on to the next question. Some writers send their questions in advance but the spontaneous approach usually elicits livelier replies.
ROUNDING UP
Don't stay too long. No matter how well things are going, an hour and a half is about much as anyone should be expected to take. Some people like to be interviewed, some don’t. If you use a tape, test it out before you start and before leaving. Your guest would appreciate the opportunity to check the typescript for errors before you offer it for publication. You might have made a factual mistake or mispelt a name, if you can send him a copy of the script, do so. Newspaper journalists have too tight a schedule to allow for this, but if you wish to write an article or biography, in which your account will be completely accurate, give allowance for time to check.

GETTING A PICTURE
It's the picture that makes the story "is a familiar saying in Journalism. Whenever any experienced reporter goes out for a job, he takes a photographer along with him. Frank Cundlin states that a photograph's appeal to the eye is still the strongest of all appeals, and while the public is often skeptical of what they read in the news columns, the belief that the camera cannot lie is still very widely held. Where a photographer is not available to go along with the reporter on the job, he should tactically request the personality being interviewed for his/her picture. Some persons would willingly release their photographs and some may be reluctant, the writer should fall back on patience and a degree of guile waiting for the most opportune time for getting the picture.