

UNIT

3

Writing Formats

WRITING FORMATS

STRUCTURE

- Letter, Essay, Article, Column and Feature

• LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After this chapter students will be able to understand about:

- What are letter, essay, article, column and features
- Importance of letter, essay, article, column and features
- How to write letter, essay, article, column and features

• SENTENCE AND SEQUENCE

Letter, Essay and Article

Letter

Letter writing is the exchange of written or printed messages. Distinctions are commonly drawn between personal letters (sent between family members, friends, or acquaintances) and business letters (formal exchanges with businesses or government organizations).

Before the advent of modern technology made communication so easy, the art of writing a letter was considered an important requirement. Even today a letter is an important means of communication in both the workspace as well as our personal lives. So let us educate ourselves with the nuances of letter writing.

In this age of digital communication, writing letters is becoming something of a lost art. Emails and text messages can be sent instantly and for a fraction of the cost that good old fashioned snail mail can offer. So, why bother teaching letter-writing at all? Well, though electronic 'letters' are often freer in terms of formatting and language than physical letters, we can also apply the rules of letter-writing to electronic media too. However, physical letters do offer some distinct benefits of their own too.

A well written letter can change the world.

Whilst we pride ourselves here on how to write a great essay, information report or other text type that is primarily used in an educational setting, the ability to craft a powerful letter or email has literally changed people's lives, altered the course of history and been the difference between life and death in some cases.

It can be the one opportunity we have to remove all the noise and confusion on any subject area and truly tell someone how you feel straight from the heart. Pen to paper.

For whatever reason a thousand, emails, tweets, likes will never have the same impact as a well crafted hand written letter. Its very creation and existence shows your reader how passionate and genuine about what it contains.

Letters fall under the category of transactional writing, and if you would like to know more about transactional texts be sure to check out our in-depth article [here](#).

Those of us who grew up in an age before the internet really got going will well remember the excitement of waiting for and receiving a letter. Many of us will have had childhood pen pals we never met, or received love letters from our teenage sweethearts. Maybe some of those treasured letters are still securely stored in a bedside drawer. There is something extremely personal and intimate about the letter that email is incapable of capturing. Letters are a physical thing and their increasing rarity make them seem even more intimate today.

Receiving a personally written letter in this day and age is something a unicorn in communication terms. Students who know how to produce a well-crafted letter can use it to their advantage. For example, any business hiring manager will undoubtedly be numbed by the constant torrent of emails applications flooding into their Gmail or Hotmail inbox. That mailed resume accompanied by a handwritten letter that waits for them on their desk in the morning is sure to stand out and secure an attentive read. The letter, in its various forms, is guaranteed to stand out and make an impact in an age where the vast majority of communication is digital.

Essay

Essay writing is one of the most common forms of scholarly communication. In the course of studying 'media and communication' the student learns various modes of communication applicable to various media. However, as with all scholarly activity, he/she will be expected, more often than not, to express himself/herself in the essay format, and thereby follow the usual scholarly standards and criteria. As a rule, the media student is expected to produce high standard media essays and writing skills.

The starting point to a good essay is finding a focus. If the subject matter is engaging to start off with, then the focus is already there, but it is still necessary to settle on a thesis. To start writing an essay without a thesis is to squander the focus, because the mind begins to wander in various directions, and so does the essay. A

thesis comes from having thought the matter through, considered the various opinions, analysed the concrete findings, and then having settled on a position regarding the whole matter. The thesis is what the entire piece will revolve around. The introduction will contain the statement of the thesis, the body will then subject the thesis to various objections, or add to it various support, while the conclusion will restate the thesis in light of the foregone analysis.

Needless to say, a certain amount of research is required before one can take a position on the matter. It doesn't always need to be extensive or thorough. If we study a handful of view strategically chosen from a spectrum of opinions, it is enough to come to a native point of view. It is important to take notes, and frequently review them. The notes represent the grasp on the subject matter, and from which the thesis springs.

It is not always possible to arrive at a clear-cut thesis. Sometimes the subject matter is not very engaging, and the research and note taking has been done in a routine manner, only to meet exam requirements. In this case one can still take a position on the matter, even though one is not sure how to use the supporting material to arrive at it. The bad approach here is catalogue all the supporting material in a haphazard manner, and tying it all up with a strong statement of the thesis in the conclusion. It is better to rummage through the notes to find a more logical order of presentation. This would involve grouping items by relevancy, and finding a narrative progression among it all. It is not a good idea to try to include everything. A few points well considered is enough.

A certain structure is expected of a scholarly essay, and the most basic structural requirement is for an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. And it has also been described now all three parts revolve around the thesis. This is not as limiting as it seems at first sight, and there is much creative scope in how the body is presented. The sloppiest use would be to cram all the notes in the body, with bland statements of the thesis at the beginning and end. But being too systematic is also likely to produce boring essays, for example, the listing three points in favour, followed by three more against. How the thesis is presented in the introduction is important in this regard. It is a tentative statement that requires support, so the body naturally picks up on the loose ends, and gradually works its way through the analysis.

The content and the structure having been accounted for, one must next concentrate on the nuts and bolts of the composition. The first rule here is to avoid waffling and padding. This occurs when one does not have enough ideas to fill in the required number of pages, and therefore tries to say in 50 words what can be said in 10. In fact, superfluous words can easily crop up when not on guard, and these words take the edge of writing. It helps to be a merciless editor in the revision process, and to try to make the writing as tight as possible.

- **Organize :** Arrange the information and the facts in a logical way

Once you've taken care of all the above steps you move forward to the final step- Writing.

- While writing an article, always use proper grammar, spelling, and proper punctuations
- Use vocabulary skill
- Keep the introduction of the topic catching, interesting, and short
- Discuss the opinion and the matter in an organized and descriptive manner

Common Mistakes in the Article Writing Format

Now that you know the steps of article writing and the article writing format, the occurrence of mistakes becomes obvious. Some of the common mistakes are:

- Not using facts or quotes or similar cases
- The language should not be too formal
- The article must be in easy language for better understanding
- The title of the article must be catchy and clearly understandable
- No use of paragraphs
- Expressing personal views is fine but the author must never talk about himself/herself

Points to Keep in Mind for the Article Writing Format

- The topics of the articles should be unique and relevant
- The article has to get attention
- It has to be interesting
- It has to be easy to read
- The reader is identified
- Find the main goal of writing an article. The goal can be anything from providing information, entertainment, and advice or for comparing, etc.
- The title must be eye-catching, clear, and interesting
- The introduction or the starting paragraph must be highly attentive. Use your vocabulary skills or try to use some interrogative words for the start
- Use clear statements and make assertions

- Avoid repetition and over the top logic and reasons
- Use the style of paragraph writing and write the contents uniquely and unambiguously
- Avoid using the points which interest you only and not for the general public
- Write a good and logical ending

Solved Example on Steps of Article Writing

Problem: Classify the following into Do's and Don'ts in article writing.

- Write very lengthy articles
- Add the writer's name
- The title should be lengthy and clear
- The heading of the article should be short, clear and informative
- Only the introduction and the conclusion should be attractive and attention seeking
- Target the audience
- One can advise, suggest and give the solutions to a problem in any paragraph other than the starting one
- The language and the style of writing should be according to the concerning readers
- There must be only three paragraphs in an article – introduction, middle one, and conclusion
- Use proper punctuations
- Use any tense, person, voice, as many abbreviations, and self-made words while writing an article

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• COLUMN AND FEATURES

Column is the creative expression covering all fields of journalism. It also contains personal opinion of the writer, which is not welcomed in other form of news story writing.

A column may pass the projected judgements, make recommendations and may write freely without following the accepted boundaries of news writing.

The style as well approach of column writing is neither serious nor compulsive. A column can be written on any aspect of human interest, it can be humorous, entertaining, sport, talking about people's life, politics, good governance and may also deal with socio-economic issues such as finance, industry etc.

Qualities of a column, editorial and sometime a feature are intermingled, however, column offer an opportunity for variety in content that no feature or editorial can approach.

A Column should always carry the writer's by-line and where necessary photographs may also be used. Columns appear at regular intervals and usually in the same location in the publication in order to facilitate the readers.

Columns may be subject oriented such as those in hobbies or crafts and project the writer's personal opinion and personality, offering humor, opinion and anecdotes.

Types of Columns:

Columns are considered very useful piece of material, which is flexible enough to fit in at various placed. Columns can be divided in the following major types and classifications:

(a) Reporting-in-Depth Columns : In this category background info, perspective and interpretation are given to any happening as a follow-up of any hard news. The current news events are presented by relating to the past information and projecting future perspective.

(b) “I Think” or Opinionated Columns : Seasoned/experienced columnists usually write this type of columns. The writer put himself at the driving seat and gives his opinion/observation as a specialist on the topic under discussion.

(c) Gossip Columns : The reader is attracted to this type of columns because it contains a juicy bit of gossip. Column contain little expect its titillating value which may not be the writer’s exclusive domain.

(d) Humorous Columns : This type of column is considered light weight. The writer tries to find the humorous aspect in life and write an article that will amuse reader. These columns also spotlight on an event more clearly than thousands of words of explanation.

(e) Essay Columns : This require a perceptiveness or possible just and cover powering interesting in people that all authors do not possess.

(f) Personality Diary Columns : Diary columns come from public figures and usually written by writers who claim to be close with the concerned personality. Such columns also may emanate from those who have special place in public like politician, super stars etc. Most writers occasionally attempt this kind of wring.

(g) How-to-do or Advice Columns : This kind of column is intended to educate the readers through gentle instructions and usually appear on editorial pages.

Feature Writing:

Feature is a non-news article giving background information on certain prominent events or personality in the news.

Features cover all the underlying causes as well as the background of the news story. It provides guidance as well as entertainment to all the readers including those who are already well aware of the facts and figures of the subject.

The task of writing is usually much easier if you create a set of notes which outline the points you are going to make. Using this approach, you will create a basic structure on which your ideas can be built.

Plans get used to the idea of shaping and re-shaping your ideas before you start writing, editing and rearranging your arguments as you give them more thought.

Analyze the question. Make sure you understand what the question is asking for. What is it giving you the chance to write about? What is its central issue? Analyze any of its key terms and any instructions. If you are in any doubt, ask your tutor to explain what is required.

Generate ideas

You need to assemble ideas. Make a note of anything, which might be relevant to your answer. These might be topics, ideas, observations, or instances from your study materials. Put down anything you think of at this stage.

Choosing topics

Extract from your brainstorm listings those topics and points of argument, which are of greatest relevance to the question and its central issue?

Put topics in order

Put these chosen topics in some logical sequence. At this stage you should be formulating a basic response to the question, even if it is provisional and may later be changed. Try to arrange the points so that they form a persuasive and coherent argument.

Arrange your evidence

All the major points in your argument need to be supported by some sort of evidence. Compile a list of brief quotations from other sources which will be offered as your evidence.

Make necessary changes

Whilst you have been engaged in the first stages of planning, new ideas may have come to mind. Alternate evidence may have occurred to you, or the line of your argument may have shifted somewhat.

Finalize essay plan

The structure of most features plans can be summarized as Introduction – Arguments – Conclusion. State your case as briefly and rapidly as possible, present the evidence for this case in the body, then sum up and try to ‘lift’ the argument to a higher level in your conclusion.

What's the difference between a column and feature?

In a nutshell, a magazine feature is almost always presented as the magazine's view on a subject, whereas a column is specifically presented as the individual column writer's view on a subject.

Columns are intended to be the writer's personal viewpoint on something. They are regular opinion pieces by an individual. (If they're not regular then they're still opinion pieces but they're not columns. If they're by different writers at different times then they're not columns in the traditional sense either.)

A column is generally something of a Soapbox for a writer to say what they want, with the editorial provisos that it isn't libellous or defamatory and is about

something relevant to that magazine's audience. They are always presented as being by the specific author; there's no ambiguity over who wrote it, let alone actual anonymity.

Features are expected to be properly researched, presenting facts on a topic to inform the reader in some way. It is normal for them to be considered more factually reliable than a column. (While columnists are expected to be authorities in some sense, they're more free to simply write what they feel. Feature writing should have a more verifiable basis for what's said.)

A feature may be written by one or more people, and the author attribution for a feature may be tucked away or even left unstated; the editorial 'voice' is that of the magazine.

• SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

- Letter writing is the exchange of written or printed messages. Distinctions are commonly drawn between personal letters (sent between family members, friends, or acquaintances) and business letters (formal exchanges with businesses or government organizations).
- Essay writing is one of the most common forms of scholarly communication. In the course of studying 'media and communication' the student learns various modes of communication applicable to various media.
- An article is a piece of writing written for a large audience. The main motive behind writing an article is that it should be published in either newspapers or magazines or journals so as to make some difference to the world. It may be the topics of interest of the writer or it may be related to some current issues.
- Column is the creative expression covering all fields of journalism. It also contains personal opinion of the writer, which is not welcomed in other form of news story writing.
- Feature is a non-news article giving background information on certain prominent events or personality in the news. Features cover all the underlying causes as well as the background of the news story. It provides guidance as well as entertainment to all the readers including those who are already well aware of the facts and figures of the subject.

• EXERCISES

Short questions

1. What is a letter?

Ans. Letter writing is the exchange of written or printed messages. Distinctions are commonly drawn between personal letters (sent between family members, friends,

or acquaintances) and business letters (formal exchanges with businesses or government organizations).

2. What is essay?

Ans. Essay writing is one of the most common forms of scholarly communication. In the course of studying 'media and communication' the student learns various modes of communication applicable to various media.

3. What is meant by article?

Ans. An article is a piece of writing written for a large audience. The main motive behind writing an article is that it should be published in either newspapers or magazines or journals so as to make some difference to the world. It may be the topics of interest of the writer or it may be related to some current issues.

4. What is meant by Column writing?

Ans. Column is the creative expression covering all fields of journalism. It also contains personal opinion of the writer, which is not welcomed in other form of news story writing.

5. What is meant by Feature writing?

Ans. Feature is a non-news article giving background information on certain prominent events or personality in the news.

• ANSWER IN BRIEF

1. Define Letter, Essay and Article in your own words and importance of these in media writing.
2. Differentiate between column and feature writing.

