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SIXTH EDITION

Writing and Reporting News

A COACHING METHOD

Carole Rich

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Storytelling and Feature Techniques

Coaching Tips

Gather details and take notes of your observations.

Use show-in-action techniques. Describe what people are doing.

Use vivid action verbs.

For narrative writing, try to envision yourself at the scene.

Get a chronology to reconstruct events as they occurred.

Think of your story as a plot with a beginning, middle and climax. Envision your sources as characters in a book; make your reader see, hear and care about them.

To write well, read well. Read as much fiction and nonfiction as you can, and study the writing styles.



We're supposed to be tellers of tales as well as purveyors of facts. When we don't live up to that responsibility, we don't get read.

Bill Blundell, *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing*

Tom French was fascinated by Karen Gregory's case. He wrote a 10-part series about her murder and the man on trial for it. It was called "A Cry in the Night."

Something very unusual happened when the series began. Readers ran out to greet the newspaper delivery trucks each day to get the next chapter in the series. Why were they so eager to read these stories? You decide.

The victim wasn't rich. She wasn't the daughter of anyone powerful. She was simply a 36-year-old woman trying to make a life for herself. Her name was Karen Gregory. The night she died, Karen became part of a numbing statistic. . . . It was what people sometimes casually refer to as "a little murder."

—Tom French, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*

This passage was the introduction to the series. The first story began with a description of the trial of George Lewis, a firefighter who lived across the street from Karen Gregory and the person who was charged with her murder:

His lawyer called out his name. He stood up, put his hand on a Bible and swore to tell the truth and nothing but. He sat down in the witness box and looked toward the jurors so they could see his face and study it and decide for themselves what kind of man he was.

"Did you rape Karen Gregory?" asked his lawyer.

"No sir, I did not." "Did you murder Karen Gregory?"

"No sir."

He heard a scream that night, he said. He heard it, and he went out to the street to look around. He saw a man he

did not know, standing over in Karen's yard. The man said to go away, to not tell anyone what he'd seen. He waited for the man to leave—watched him walk away into the darkness—and then he went up to Karen's house. There was broken glass on the front walk. He knocked on the front door. There was no answer. He found an open window. He called out to ask whether anyone needed help. There was still no answer. He looked through the window and saw someone lying on the floor. He decided he had to go in. He climbed inside, and there was Karen. Blood was everywhere.

He was afraid. He ran to the bathroom and threw up. He knew no one would believe how he had ended up standing inside that house with her body. He had to get out of there. He was running toward the window to climb out when he saw something moving in the dark. He thought someone was

jumping toward him. Then he realized he was looking at a mirror, and the only person moving was him. It was his own reflection that had startled him. It was George.

—Tom French, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*

The entire series was written like a mystery novel. But it was all true, based on interviews with more than 50 people and 6,000 pages of court documents. The writing style, called narrative writing, is a form of dramatic storytelling that reconstructs the events as though the reader were witnessing them as they happened. French later turned the series into a book called *Unanswered Cries*.

French says he never believed his series would be so popular. “The way the readers responded was so gratifying,” he says.

French relied heavily on dialogue throughout the series, even from the dead woman. Although most of the dialogue and description are based on interviews and his own observations, Karen’s dialogue was second-hand information, based on recollections about her.

“After I wrote it, I spent three weeks checking everything with all the participants,” French says. “I read it to them word for word to make sure it was accurate.”

In 1998 French won the Pulitzer Prize for another narrative series about murder. This time he researched 4,000 pages of police reports and court documents and conducted scores of interviews to reconstruct the chilling story of an Ohio woman and her two daughters. They were on vacation in Florida when they were raped, killed and dumped into Tampa Bay. Once again, French wrote a gripping account of their murders, the three-year search for their killer and his trial. The killer was convicted and sentenced to death.



Tom French

Tom French

Narrative Writing

“Narrative writing” is a dramatic account of a fiction or nonfiction story. Newswriting in this style requires thorough reporting and descriptive detail. Dialogue also enhances the storytelling. Narrative writing is more like a novel or a play than a hard-news story, and the sources are like characters who relive the events in their lives. The story still must include the basic factual elements of news, but the presentation differs.

Jeff Klinkenberg, a *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times* writer, views the five W’s this way: *Who* is character, *what* is plot, *when* is chronology, *why* is motive and *where* is place.

French uses all these elements in his stories by weaving facts with description and dramatic tension. In this section from his Pulitzer Prize-winning series, “Angels and Demons,” French uses descriptive detail to reveal how the bodies of the women were found.

It was a female, floating face down, with her hands tied behind her back and her feet bound and a thin yellow rope around her neck. She was naked from the waist down.

A man from the *Amber Waves* (sailboat) radioed the Coast Guard, and a rescue boat was dispatched from the station at Bayboro Harbor in St. Petersburg. The Coast Guard crew quickly found the body, but recovering it from the water was difficult. The rope around the neck was attached to something heavy below the surface that could not be lifted. Noting the coordinates where the body had been found, the Coast Guard crew cut the line, placed the female in a body bag, pulled the bag onto the boat and headed back

toward the station. The crew members had not yet reached the shore when they received another radio message: A second female body had just been sighted by two people on a sailboat.

This one was floating to the north of where the first body had been sighted. It was 2 miles off The Pier in St. Petersburg. Like the first, this body was face down, bound, with a rope around the neck and naked below the waist. The same Coast Guard crew was sent to recover it, and while the crew was doing so, a call came in of yet a third female, seen floating only a couple of hundred yards to the east.

—Tom French, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*

In the following section, French uses dialogue to reconstruct the scene when Hal Rogers, the husband and father of the dead women, tells the boyfriend of his daughter Michelle that his wife and daughters won’t be coming home:

That day, Jeff Feasby phoned the Rogers house again, hoping Michelle would be back.

Hal picked up. His voice was strange. He sounded furious.

“Who is this?” he demanded.

Jeff told him who it was and asked if he’d heard anything. With that, Hal broke down.

“They’re not coming home,” he said, his voice trembling.

Jeff paused for a second. He didn’t understand.

So Hal told him. They were gone, he said. All of them.

—Tom French, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*

Reading to Write

French did not become a compelling storyteller without effort. Good writers are good readers, and French said he was inspired to do narrative writing after he read a book by the great Latin American writer Gabriel García Márquez. *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* is a riveting story about a man who survived 10 days at sea without food and water.

French was also influenced by the literary journalists, a group of writers who, in the 1960s and 1970s, used the storytelling techniques of fiction for nonfiction newspaper and magazine stories. These journalists—Joan Didion, John McPhee, Tracy Kidder and Tom Wolfe—were influenced by Truman Capote’s nonfiction book *In Cold Blood*. The literary journalists immersed themselves in a subject and wrote their

stories with characters, scene, dialogue and plot. These were factual stories written like fiction.

Journalists often think storytelling techniques are limited to feature stories, but as you will see, you can apply this kind of writing to news about crime and courts and many other daily news stories.

Reporting Tools

Mary Ann Lickteig has a storyteller's instincts. A former feature writer for *The Des Moines (Iowa) Register*, she knows how to find extraordinary angles in ordinary events.

It is summer, and Lickteig is covering the annual Iowa State Fair. She is strolling from one booth to another in search of a good feature story. A pitchman is hawking a Robo-Cut slicing machine. Space-age plastic, he bellows. Lickteig laughs. Great angle for a story, she thinks.

Backstage at the pageant to choose the state fair queen, 77 girls are primping and practicing to compete for the crown. Lickteig decides that will be a good angle for another story. Now it is midnight. The fairgoers have gone home. Lickteig has not. In the center of the midway, a Catholic priest is baptizing four children. Lickteig listens. She can hear pool balls cracking in the background, where carnival workers may be playing.

The next day *Des Moines Register* readers will hear them, too, when Lickteig writes about the baptism and describes the empty paths in the midway—quiet “except for the hum of a giant generator and the occasional crack of pool balls.” Or when she describes the sights and smells of the fair in this excerpt:

The day before the fair opened to the public, hot dogs spit as they turned on roasters; tattooed midway workers smeared with grease hauled pieces of steel out of the back of trucks and turned them into carnival rides; brand new pig feeders stood waiting to be admired under a sign that pronounced them non-rusting, non-caking and non-corrosive.

Odors emanating from the horse barn indicated the exhibits had arrived.

—Mary Ann Lickteig, *The Des Moines Register*

Lickteig, now a freelance writer in Vermont, always looks for a good angle or theme for her stories. The focus is the reason for the story, which should be stated in a nut graph, but the theme is a literary device of an angle or unifying approach.

“You hope the theme will present itself,” Lickteig says. “Usually, if you see something that fascinates you, it probably will fascinate the readers.”

That's one way to find either the theme or just an idea for a story, she says. “I don't think about covering the whole Iowa State Fair. You need to break it down—show



Mary Ann Lickteig

Mary Ann Lickteig, feature writer

the fair through one family, one idea, one theme.” The key to good feature writing is gathering good details and then selecting the ones that will work in your story.

“You want people to be able to see your story,” Lickteig says. “Choose the details that stick out in your mind, the ones you remember when you run back to the office and tell somebody what you've found.”

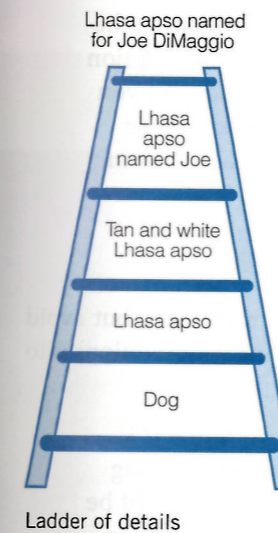
Like the last 83 steps of a man's life. Lickteig was writing a story about a man who had murdered three women and had spent 17 years on death row. He was scheduled to be executed. Lickteig wanted to convey what steps were involved in execution—figuratively and literally. So she walked from the inmate's cell to the electric chair, in 83 steps.

These kinds of observation techniques are crucial tools for a storyteller.

William Ruehlmann, author of *Stalking the Feature Story*, says writers must concentrate when they observe and then analyze what they observe. He gives this example: “Flies take off backward. So in order to swat one, you must strike slightly behind him. An interesting detail, and certainly one a writer would be able to pick up on. Other people see flies; a writer sees how they move.”

During the reporting process, you don't always know what details you will need when you write your story. So gather all the details you can—from how many steps to the electric chair to what the inmate had for his last meal. Ask what were people thinking, saying, hearing, smelling, wearing and feeling. Be precise.

To help you gather specific details, envision a ladder with rungs leading from general to specific. Start with the broadest noun, and take it to the most specific level, as in the adjacent diagram. Then use those details to write. For example:



A tan and white Lhasa Apso named Joe ran onto the baseball field and interrupted the game when he stole the ball. It was only natural. After all, his name-sake was Joe DiMaggio.

Writing Tools

Once you've gathered all those details, what do you do with them? The better you are as a reporter, the more you will struggle as a writer deciding what information to use. The three basic tools of storytelling are theme, descriptive writing techniques and narrative writing techniques.

Theme

Before you begin writing a feature story, develop a theme—a concept that gives the story meaning.

David Maraniss, a *Washington Post* writer who won a Pulitzer Prize, describes it this way:

The theme is why readers want to read the story, not the nut graph required by many editors. To write something universal . . . death, life, fear, joy . . . that every person can connect to in some way is what I look for in every story.

Descriptive Techniques

Too much description will clutter a story. Too little will leave the reader blank. How much is enough? First decide if the story lends itself to description of the scene or person. Then take the advice of Bruce DeSilva, a writing coach for The Associated Press:

Description, like every element in either fiction or nonfiction, should advance the meaning of your story. It would be a good idea to describe the brown house in more detail only if those details are important. Description never should be there for decoration. It never should be there because you are showing off. And when you do describe, you should never use more words than you need to trigger that mental image readers already have in their minds.

Techniques for good descriptive writing include the following:

Avoid Adjectives Write specific detail with vivid nouns and verbs, but avoid modifiers. When you use adjectives, you run the risk of inserting your opinions into the story. Author Norman Mailer put it this way:

The adjective is the author's opinion of what is going on, no more. If I write, "A strong man came into the room," that only means he is strong in relation to me. Unless I've established myself for the reader, I might be the only fellow in the bar who is impressed by the guy who just came in. It is better to say: "A man entered. He was holding a walking stick, and for some reason, he now broke it in two like a twig." Of course, this takes more time to narrate. So adjectives bring on quick tell-you-how-to-live writing. Advertising thrives on it. "A super-efficient, silent, sensuous, five-speed shift." Put 20 adjectives before a noun and no one will know you are describing a turd.

Use Analogies A good analogy compares a vague concept to something familiar to readers. For example, what is a "fat" man? David Finkel leaves no doubt in his story about a circus performer. How do you visualize the "World's Biggest Man" at 891 pounds? Finkel uses familiar items to help the reader see.

Now: 891 and climbing. That's more than twice as much as Sears' best refrigerator-freezer—a 26-cubic-footer with automatic ice and water dispensers on side-by-side doors. That's almost as much as a Steinway grand piano.

—David Finkel, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*

Limit Physical Descriptions Use physical descriptions only when they are relevant to the content. They work well in profiles; in stories about crime, courts,

and disasters; and whenever they fit with the context. They don't work when they are tacked onto impersonal quotes.

Avoid stage directions—descriptions of people's gestures, facial expressions and physical characteristics inserted artificially as though you were directing a play. You don't need to describe what city commissioners are wearing at a meeting or how they gesture unless their clothing and movements enhance what they are saying and doing.

Effective The 50-year-old airline pilot—who prosecutors say killed his wife by unknown means, cut up her body with a chain saw, and disposed of it with a wood chipper—testified with a voice and manner that was so calm it bordered at times on nonchalance.

—Lynne Tuohy, *The Hartford (Conn.) Courant*

Ineffective The study shows college students are becoming more conservative, the researcher said, blinking her blue eyes and clasping her carefully manicured hands.

The color of the researcher's eyes and her hand motions have nothing to do with her comments about the study.

Avoid Sexist/Racist Descriptions When you decide to include descriptions of people, beware of sexism, racism or other biased writing. Writers often describe men with action verbs showing what they are doing and women with adjectives showing what they are wearing and how they look. One way to avoid bias is to ask yourself if you would use a similar description for both men and women or equal treatment for all racial and ethnic groups.

Consider this example:

Ineffective Even Chandra Smith, busy being adorable in her perky non-runner's running outfit, actually looked at the track. A minute later, she was jumping around and yelling, along with most of the other 41,600 people on the old wooden benches at Franklin Field.

—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

The story about the Penn Relay Carnival, a track meet in Philadelphia, also mentions a few men among those 41,600 people, including some volunteers who wear gray trousers and red caps. But they aren't adorable or perky.

Show People in Action One of the most effective ways to describe people or places is to show action. For example, Tom French doesn't write only about murder. In a series about life in a Florida high school, he used the show-in-action technique

extensively, as in this passage about a history teacher's first day on the job. The teacher, Mr. Samsel, has given his homeroom students some forms to fill out:

The future leaders of America sit silently, some of them slumped forward, staring into space through half-closed eyes. Over to the side sits a boy. He is wearing a crucifix, blue jeans and a T-shirt. On the front of the shirt is a big smiley face. In the center of the face's forehead is a bullet hole, dripping blood. . . .

Around the room, students begin writing.

"Isn't this great?" says Samsel. "Just like real life—forms and everything."

Smiley Face looks at one of the sheets in front of him. He reads aloud as he fills it out.

"Please list medical problems."

He stops.

"Brain dead," he says.

—Tom French, *St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times*

Use Lively Verbs News is action, says Jack Hart, *The (Portland) Oregonian's* writing coach and managing editor. But writers often "squeeze the life out of an action-filled world," he says. "We write that thousands of bullet holes were in the hotel, instead of noting that the holes pocked the hotel. We report that a jumper died Monday when his parachute failed, instead of turning to action verbs such as *plummeted* or *plunged* or *streamed*."

Mitch Albom, a sportswriter and author of three best-selling books, knows the value of action verbs. Notice the ones he uses in this story about the day Detroit Tigers baseball player Cecil Fielder hit his 50th home run. Also notice the analogies and the show-in-action description.

He swung the bat and he heard that smack! and the ball screamed into the dark blue sky, higher, higher, until it threatened to bring a few stars down with it. His teammates knew; they leaped off the bench. The fans knew; they roared like animals. And finally, the man who all year refused to watch his home runs, the man who said this 50 thing was "no big deal"—finally even he couldn't help himself. He stopped halfway to first base and watched the ball bang into the facing of the upper deck in

Yankee Stadium, waking up the ghosts of Maris and Ruth and Gehrig.

And then, for the first time in this miraculous season, Cecil Fielder jumped. He jumped like a man sprung from prison, he jumped like a kid on the last day of school, he jumped, all 250 pounds of Detroit Bambino, his arms over his head, his huge smile a beacon of celebration and relief.

The Big Five-O.

—Mitch Albom, *Detroit Free Press*

Set the Scene You need to set the scene by establishing where and when. Although it is common to establish the time and weather, often in a lead, beware of using that technique unless time and weather factors are relevant to your story. "It was 2 a.m. and the wind was blowing" is akin to the cliché "It was a dark and stormy night." In this story from a California State University student newspaper, the time and weather conditions are relevant to the story:

TIJUANA, Mexico—Shivering in the mud under a 2-foot high chaparral, Jose carefully lifts his head into the cold night mist to monitor the movements of the U.S. Border Patrol.

On a ridge above a small ravine, patrol trucks scurry back and forth while a helicopter above provides the only light, turning spots of the nighttime terrain into day. In the distance, guard dogs growl, bark and yelp.

At one point a patrol truck speeds toward Jose and his group of six Mexican farm laborers. Squatting in the brush, they quickly slide flat into the mud like reptiles seeking shelter.

Within seconds the helicopter hovers above them as its searchlight passes nearby, then at once directly over them. All their faces are turned downward to avoid detection by the brightness of the light that illuminates every detail of the soil, roots and insects that lie inches under them.

Soon, the truck and helicopter make a slow retreat. Jose and his group, safe for the moment, will remain motionless in that same muddy spot for the next three hours as the mist turns to rain and the rain turns back to mist.

To those who have never passed this way before, the sights and sounds are of another world. But to the expert scouts called "coyotes," this alien land between Mexico and the United States is home.

Every weekday evening, approximately 2,000 people attempt to illegally cross the border from Mexico to the United States. On weekends the numbers can climb to between 5,000 and 10,000, said Victor Clark, director of the Binational Center for Human Rights in Tijuana, Mexico.

—Brett C. Sporich, (Long Beach, Calif.)
Daily Forty Niner

Nut graphs

In the next example, the story is about a reading program. Although the lead about the weather is backed up by a quote, the weather has nothing to do with the focus or the rest of the story.

It was a beautiful spring-like Sunday, and the heat on the first floor of the Kansas City Public Library Downtown was on full-blast. But that didn't stop about 400 people from crowding inside to read and hear their favorite selections from African-American authors.

The crowd, people of all ages and races, was there to take part in the national Read-In sponsored by the Black Caucus of the National Teachers of English.

"That is true commitment," said Mamie Isler, program director for Genesis School, which helped coordinate the event in Kansas City.

The second annual Kansas City Read-In opened with a performance by 30 students from the Genesis School choir.

—*The Kansas City (Mo.) Star*

Narrative Techniques Narrative writing combines show-in-action description, dialogue, plot and reconstruction of an event as it occurred. This type of writing requires a bond of faith with the reader because attribution is limited. You need to make it clear where you got the information, but you don't need to attribute repeatedly. You can also use an overview attribution for portions of the story and then attribute periodically, especially when you are quoting sources.

Before you can do narrative writing, you need to do thorough reporting. It takes a different kind of questioning to gather the information you will need to reconstruct a scene with dialogue and detail. Narrative writing is not fiction. You must stick to the facts even though the story may read like a novel. You need to ask questions like these: What were you thinking at the time? What were you feeling? What did you say? What were you wearing? What were you doing? You need to get details about colors, sounds, sights, smells, sizes, shapes, times, places.

If you were witnessing the event, you would see, hear, smell and feel—perhaps even taste—the experiences of your subject. Because you are reconstructing the event, you need to ask the questions that will evoke all those images.

Those are the kinds of questions Jane Schorer asked when she wrote this Pulitzer Prize-winning story about a woman who had been raped. The woman had agreed to use her name. In this opening part of her series, Schorer sets the scene (with relevant weather and time references) and reconstructs the woman's experience so the reader is a witness to the event:

She would have to allow extra driving time because of the fog.

A heavy gray veil had enveloped Grinnell overnight, and Nancy Ziegenmeyer—always methodical, always in control—decided to leave home early for her 7:30 a.m. appointment at Grand View College in Des Moines.

It was Nov. 19, a day Ziegenmeyer had awaited eagerly, because she knew that whatever happened during those morning hours in Des Moines would determine her future. If she passed the state real-estate licensing exam that Saturday morning, she would begin a new career. If she failed the test, she would continue the child-care service she provided in her home.

At 6 a.m. Ziegenmeyer unlocked the door of her Pontiac Grand Am and tossed her long denim jacket in the back seat. The weather was mild for mid-November, and her Gloria Vanderbilt denim jumper, red turtleneck sweater and red wool tights would keep her warm enough without a coat.

The fog lifted as Ziegenmeyer drove west on Interstate Highway 80 and she made good time after all. The digital clock on the dashboard read 7:05 as she pulled into a parking lot near Grand View's Science Building. She had

25 minutes to sit in the car and review her notes before test time.

Suddenly the driver's door opened. She turned to see a man, probably in his late 20s, wearing a navy pin-striped suit. He smelled of alcohol.

"Move over," the man ordered, grabbing her neck. She instinctively reached up to scratch him, but he was stronger than she was. He pushed a white dish towel into her face and shoved her into the front passenger seat, reclining it to a nearly horizontal position. Then he took her denim jacket from the back seat and covered her head.

He wasn't going to hurt her, the man said; he wanted money. She reached toward the console for the only cash she had with her—\$3 or \$4—and gave it to him. He slid the driver's seat back to make room for his long legs, started the car and drove out of the parking lot.

"Is this guy going to kill me?" Ziegenmeyer wondered. "Is he going to rape me? Does he just want my money? Does he want my car?" She thought about her three children—ages 4, 5, and 7—and realized she might never see them again.

—Jane Schorer, *The Des Moines (Iowa) Register*

Use Foreshadowing When you give a clue about something that will happen later in the story, you are using foreshadowing. It is a way of providing mystery and teasing the reader to continue. In this example, the writer teases the reader by indicating that more ghostly experiences are coming:

SULLIVAN HARBOR, Maine—Gail Stamp was doing the dishes when she heard a noise in the hall stairway. Her husband was away, and she thought she was alone in the living quarters over the store here.

Stamp doesn't scare easily, so she went to investigate. She entered the hallway, and there, at the top of the stairs, she saw the gray form of a man.

"I stopped dead in my tracks," she said. "We both kind of froze for a second." Then the form turned and went down the stairs.

"It shook me up a little bit," she said. "But I knew right away who he was." It

was the ghost of Cling Clang, she said, a man whose life, marred by tragedy, ended about 130 years ago, next to the building the Stamps now own.

That was the first encounter she had with a ghost.

But it wouldn't be the last.

Now she and Jim, her husband, are convinced they are not alone. They believe the ghost of Cling Clang inhabits their home with them.

And therein begins this story of spirits of the dead.

—Tom Shields, *Bangor (Maine) Daily News*

Foreshadowing

Create Tone Hard-news stories often have an objective, factual tone, mostly an absence of mood. But in storytelling, you should create a "tone," or "mood," such as happiness, sadness, mystery, excitement or some other emotion.

You don't need to tell the reader that the mood of the place was festive or mournful. You can show it by the images you select for your story.

Another way of creating tone is by your writing style. Mary Ann Lickteig creates a lighthearted tone by writing this profile of a hypnotist as though the reader were undergoing hypnosis:

You will read this story.

You will hang on its every word, and you will not get sleepy.

As you proceed, you will learn about hypnosis and a Clive hypnotherapist whose work has led her to the International Hypnosis Hall of Fame.

You are ready to begin. Shari Patton is sitting on the couch in her home telling you that she first went for hypnosis "like a doubting Thomas." She was a student at the University of Minnesota when a friend was going to be hypnotized and wanted Patton to come along.

Listen, now, to what she has to say:

"My friend had said, 'Go with me.' And I had said no, and after several requests begging me, I said 'All right. I'll go.' And I went to stop smoking, not believing that it would work, but very much wanting to stop smoking, and I was so amazed and delighted that it worked for me that I went back and started using hypnosis for weight control and lost 90 pounds." That's how she got started.

—Mary Ann Lickteig,
The Des Moines (Iowa) Register

In contrast, Saul Pett wanted to create a somber tone to reflect the mood of the nation when President Kennedy was killed. Pett chose vivid details that showed what people were feeling, and he did something else that was quite unusual. He established the reverent tone of his story by emulating biblical style.

Another way Pett created the mournful tone of his story was through the length of his sentences. Short, choppy sentences can reflect fear, excitement, anxiety or stabbing pain. Long sentences can project suffering, thoughtfulness or a quiet mood.

Pett broke many traditional journalistic rules in his article describing the four days after Kennedy was shot: His sentences were long, he used the first-person *we* and he made no attempt to write objectively. Yet his story is one of the great feature articles of the 20th century. Here is an excerpt:

And the word went out from that time and place and cut the heart of a nation. In streets and offices and homes and stores, in lunchrooms and showrooms and schoolrooms and board rooms, on highways and prairies and beaches and mountaintops, in endless places crowded and sparse, near and far, white and black, Republican and Democrat, management and labor, the word went out and cut the heart of a nation.

And husbands called wives and wives called friends and teachers told students and motorists stopped to listen on car radios and stranger told stranger. Oh, no! we cried from hearts stopped by shock, from minds fighting the word, but the word came roaring back, true, true, true, and disbelief dissolved in tears.

Incredibly, in a time of great numbers, in a time of repeated reminders that millions would die in a nuclear war, in a time when experts feared we were being numbed by numbers and immunized against tragedy, the death of a single man crowded into our souls and flooded our hearts and filled all the paths of our lives.

A great shadow fell on the land and the farmer summoned to the house did not find the will to return to the field, nor the secretary to the typewriter, nor the machinist to the lathe.

There was a great slowing down and a great stopping and the big bronze gong sounded as a man shouted the market is closed and the New York Stock Exchange stopped, just stopped. The Boston Symphony Orchestra stopped a Handel concerto and started a Beethoven funeral march and the Canadian House of Commons stopped and a dramatic play in Berlin stopped and the United Nations in New York stopped and Congress and courts and schools and race tracks stopped, just stopped. And football games were canceled and theaters were closed and in Dallas a nightclub called the Carousel was closed by a mourner named Jack Ruby.

In Washington, along Pennsylvania Avenue, they had waited all that Friday night outside the iron picket fence, their eyes scarcely leaving the lovely old house. Early in the morning the guards had kept them moving and so they walked slowly down the street, eyes right, and at the corner they turned and came back on the street side of the sidewalk, eyes left. They looked like a strange silent group of mournful pickets demonstrating love, not protest.

In the chill darkness before dawn they were still there, now motionless, standing, staring across the broad lawn and through the bare elms at the house,

at the softly lighted windows in the family quarters, at the black crepe lately hung over the door under the north portico.

They saw the blinking red lights of the police cars up Pennsylvania Avenue and they knew this was the moment. The president was coming home. No sirens, no police whistles, no barking of orders that usually accompanied his return. At 4:22 a.m., Saturday, Nov. 23, 1963, there seemed to be no sound on the street or in the land.

The gray Navy ambulance and the six black cars behind it paused at the northwest gate and turned in. And along the fence, men removed their hats and teenagers removed their hands from the pockets of their jeans and women tightened their fingers around the pickets of the fence. Tears stained their faces, their young and their old faces, their white and their black faces.

At the gate the procession was met by a squad of Marines and led in along the gracefully curving drive between the elms. In days to come there would be larger and more majestic processions, but none so slow, none so geared to the rhythm of tears, as the cadence of the Marines this Saturday morning. In two straight lines, glistening bayoneted rifles held across their chests at port arms, they marched oh so slowly up the drive and all that could be heard was the sound of their shoes sliding on the macadam.

Under the portico, under the handsome hanging lantern, they stopped and divided and lined up with the soldiers and sailors and airmen on the sides of the steps, at the stiffest, straightest attention of their lives.

Jacqueline Kennedy emerged first from the ambulance, still wearing the same pink suit stained through eternity the afternoon before.

With her husband's brother, the attorney general of the United States, with his other brother, the youngest member of the United States Senate, with his sisters and his friends and aides whom he had led to this house, this far and now no farther, Jacqueline Kennedy waited in motionless silence while the flag-covered casket was removed from the ambulance. Then she and they turned in behind it and walked up the steps and through the glass doors and into the lobby and down the long corridor lined with stiff, silent men in uniform and finally came to a stop in the East Room.

There the casket was laid gently onto the black catafalque that held Mr. Lincoln on another dark incredible night almost 100 years ago. There, the kneeling priests began praying as they and others would through the long day and night by the flickering light of the candles, which silhouetted the honor guard riveted to the floor.

It was now 10 o'clock in the morning of a Saturday and Jacqueline Kennedy, still sleepless, returned to the silent East Room. She kissed her husband for the last time and the casket was sealed. A few moments later, she returned with her children and spoke to them quietly, trying to tell them something of the fact and the meaning of death. A fact and a meaning for which millions groped that day.

—Saul Pett, *The Associated Press*

Human-Interest Feature The next example is the type of human interest story that Charles Kuralt would have enjoyed reporting. It is also the type of story you might do if you work in a small community for a newspaper or TV station.

Convergence Coach

Charles Kuralt was a consummate storyteller who wrote human-interest features for "On the Road," a series for CBS-TV's "Sunday Morning" show. Long before convergence became a buzzword for a type of journalism merging print, broadcast and the Web, Kuralt epitomized a multimedia journalist. He began his career as a print reporter for the *Charlotte News* in North Carolina, where he won the Ernie Pyle Memorial Award in 1956 for his offbeat human-interest columns. When he joined CBS in 1957, he continued producing human-interest features and later wrote several books about his adventures on the road and the people he met. He loved storytelling about people in newspapers, television and books, but he was a bit baffled by the Web.

"For most of my career I didn't do stories about things that go wrong," he once said. "I did stories about unexpected encounters, back roads, small towns and ordinary folk, sometimes doing something a little extraordinary. I would not argue that it was important to society at large; it was just fun," according to the Web site Annenberg/CPB learner.org (www.learner.org/catalog/extras/interviews/ckuralt/ck02.html).

Kuralt always found something extraordinary in the people and places he visited. "I don't know what makes a good feature story," he said. "I've always assumed that if it was a story that interested or amused me, that it would have the same impact on other people."

Kuralt learned early in his career at CBS that a good feature story for television was dependent on

visuals. He said a CBS writer told him that "you must never write a sentence that fights the picture."

"If you're conveying some information that is not in tune with the picture that's on the screen, the viewer's going to be watching the picture and miss entirely what you're saying," Kuralt said. "It's always possible to fashion a sentence, it seems to me, so that it complements rather than struggles with the picture."

Whether you are writing feature stories for print, broadcast or the Web, take Kuralt's advice and find a story that interests you. Seek universal qualities of human interest such as people's hopes, fears, dreams, love, hate, the ability to triumph over adversity or the ability to achieve something special—like a story Kuralt did about the fellow in Indiana who could hold more eggs in his hand than anybody else.

Then, if you want to become a good feature writer for print or broadcast, take some tips from Kuralt, as he related in an interview with the Web site of Academy of Achievement: "I think good writing comes from good reading. And I think that writers, when they sit down to write, hear in their heads the rhythms of good writers they have read. Sometimes I could even tell you which writer's rhythms I am imitating. It's not exactly plagiarism, but it's just experience. It's falling in love with good language and trying to imitate it."

(To read the entire interview with Kuralt, access the Academy of Achievement Web site at www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/kur0int-1.)

Chances are you will seek stories about people who are doing interesting or unusual things in your community. Compare the print and broadcast versions of this story:

Print version

Cooper Landing man revels in clover collection

KENAI—Some people believe the Kenai Peninsula is the luckiest place on Earth. Cooper Landing resident Ed Martin Sr. said he believes it is time somebody proved it.

Martin has been finding four-leaf clovers since his childhood and started to save them only two years ago. Since then he has rounded up more than 76,000 clovers.

Some people likely would ask why a person would be so concentrated on how many mutated clovers they found,

especially a collection well into five figures. The answer is it has to do with a little competition, and a little bit of pride.

Martin has surpassed the previously largest known four-leaf clover collection held by George J. Kaminski, who collected 72,927 clovers within prison grounds in Pennsylvania (Guinness World Records). Kaminski has held the record since April of 1995.

Although Martin's world record-breaking application still is being completed, he is confident it will stand officially. The city of Soldotna, where many of the clovers were found, is handling the paperwork.

Kathy Dawson, assistant to Mayor David Carey, is making sure the project stays within the Guinness office record guidelines. This includes clear documentation in multiple forms.

"This is just amazing. I've got file cabinets full of clovers," Dawson said. "The mayor had kids from the schools counting all these clovers, and there are still more to be counted."

Actually finding 76,000 clovers, let alone a handful, is a difficult task, so Martin shared his secret:

"I look for mutated clovers, ones with four clovers and above. Now, you're not

going to believe this, but once I found 880 in one day. I found 90 percent in the Soldotna-Kenai Borough area."

It's a knack, Martin said. "People just don't see what I see," he said.

Martin expects to break a world record, but he says the accomplishment goes beyond that.

"I'm interested in the good that will come out of this," he said. "We have a wonderful country, a wonderful state and community. We are all lucky to be living here. It's just a fact of life. I really think this is the luckiest place in the world, and this will prove it. Maybe this is why the fishing is so good here."

Martin, a former member of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly, said he hasn't been as involved as he used to be—although competing for a world record in the name of your homeland seems to be a good contribution.

"When you're meeting a challenge, when you do your best in anything, there is a feeling of pride that goes with it," Martin said. "I'm going to keep looking for clovers."

—Layton Ehmke, *The Associated Press*

Broadcast version:

Note that the reporter's comments in the broadcast version are written around the images and sound bites. The text is written in capital letters and sound bites and the technical crew instructions are in lowercase. A TV script is normally printed in two columns with the directions on the left and text on the right. However, computer programs in broadcast newsrooms automatically format the script into two columns so the reporter just writes the text and directions above it in one column. The reporter's text is double-spaced in capital letters and the sound bites are in upper- and lowercase in this example:

Anchor introduction:

THE CHANCES OF FINDING A FOUR-LEAF CLOVER ON A PATCH OF GROUND ARE SLIM.

BUT ONE ALASKAN HAS BEATEN THOSE ODDS. . . MORE THAN 100-THOUSAND TIMES.

IN TONIGHT'S ASSIGNMENT ALASKA, CHANNEL TWO'S SEAN DOOGAN TAKES US TO COOPER LANDING TO MEET THE LUCKIEST MAN ON EARTH.

The package opens with a scene setter; shot of ground and the image of Ed Martin bending over looking for clover on the side of the road.

Reporter Sean Doogan:
WHEN YOU FIRST MEET COOPER
LANDING'S ED MARTIN, SENIOR
... CHANCES ARE YOU WON'T BE
SEEING HIS BEST SIDE.

Ed Martin, Sr. (laughs and says): That
crazy guy with his rear-end in the air...
There's a nice one... I got another one.

More natural sound and image of scene

Reporter Doogan:
SURROUNDED BY A NATURAL
CATHEDRAL... ED PREFERS
THE VIEW UNDER HIS FEET...
HUNTING FOR WHAT MOST PEOPLE
WOULD CALL ELUSIVE QUARRY.
BUT NOT SO ELUSIVE FOR ED.

*Ed Martin sound bite and image of
him picking clover:* That's a four-leaf...
I got another one.

*Image of Martin's home and Martin
holding Guinness World Record:*

Martin sound bite: I have the largest
collection of four-leaf clovers in the world.
It's real... I didn't print it.

Reporter: MARTIN'S RECORD
COLLECTION OF 111-THOUSAND
AND 60 CLOVERS WOULD BE MUCH
BIGGER... IF HE WASN'T SO
DETERMINED TO SHARE HIS LUCK.

Martin sound bite: Why count them,
I am going to give them away.

Reporter: MARTIN SAYS HE HAS
GOTTEN MUCH MORE FROM HIS
CLOVER COLLECTION... THAN A
WORLD RECORD.

Martin sound bite: It seems when
I give a four-leaf clover to anyone, I
always get a smile. What's wrong with
getting a smile from somebody.

*Scene of town store with clover on the
wall:*

Reporter: CLOVER DECORATES
THE TOWN STORE.

*Sound bite: Glenda Mitchell, co-owner
of Cooper Landing General store:*

We have some on the wall here; I also
have some in my wallet. I would say he's
kind of like the good luck guy because
when he sees you, he'll always give you

one of the four leaf clovers and wish you
the best of luck.

Reporter: AS LONG AS MARTIN
IS AROUND, IT SEEMS... YOU
CAN'T TRAVEL THROUGH COOPER
LANDING... WITHOUT ENDING
UP WITH SOME FRESH CLOVER.

*Scene: Martin gives girl a four-leaf
clover:*

Martin sound bite: See... how many
guys get to see pretty girls all the time...
see I'm lucky... how lucky can a guy get?

Reporter: MARTIN CLAIMS THE
CLOVER ITSELF ISN'T WHAT BRINGS
GOOD FORTUNE.

Martin sound bite: I've got as many
as 1000 in one day... It's an attitude
change... When you have a four-leaf
clover, you believe in luck, you believe
in things happening. That's what luck is
all about.

Reporter: EVEN WITH THE RECORD
FIRMLY IN HAND... MARTIN
SAYS HIS SEARCH FOR LUCK ISN'T
OVER.

(Video of Martin picking clovers)

Martin sound bite: I will go 'til the
good Lord pulls the chain and says, I
want you up there.

Reporter:
MARTIN SAYS HE CURRENTLY
HAS 165-THOUSAND FOUR-LEAF
CLOVERS.

AND WITH THE ODDS OF
FINDING A LUCKY PLANT AT 10-
THOUSAND TO ONE...

ALL THE CLOVER MARTIN HAS
LOOKED THROUGH OVER THE
YEARS... IF LAID END-TO-END...
WOULD STRETCH MORE THAN 13-
THOUSAND MILES: MORE THAN
ENOUGH TO GO FROM THE NORTH
POLE TO THE SOUTH POLE.

SEAN DOOGAN, CHANNEL TWO
NEWS.

—Channel 2 News, KTUU-TV,
Anchorage, Alaska

Storytelling Structure

Up to this point in the book, even though you have had many story structures from which to choose, you probably have been organizing your stories by focus and supporting topics or in chronological order. Even with a storytelling approach, you still need to get the focus first. A narrative story can then be arranged topically or chronologically, or it can follow a literary plot form—with a beginning, a middle and an ending called a “climax.”

“Most news stories are endings without beginnings attached,” says Jon Franklin, a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and author of *Writing for Story*. Reporters miss the dramatic point of view when they concentrate only on the result instead of on the actions leading up to the event. Franklin says stories should be built around a complication and a resolution. In the middle is the development, how the central character gets from the problem to the solution.

If you have a story that lends itself to this kind of plot, your focus would be the complication that the main character has to overcome. The organization could be chronological, starting with the inception of the problem. The middle would be how the character wrestles with the problem, and the climax would be the resolution of the problem.

Bruce DeSilva, writing coach for The Associated Press, says the writer must determine a resolution to do narrative writing. “That’s one of the most important things for people to understand about narrative storytelling: picking the problem,” DeSilva said at a Neiman Conference on narrative writing. “When you get to the resolution, the story’s over.”

DeSilva says that in narrative writing you should write the ending first. “So many people write the lead first. They slave away at the lead and spend lots of time on it before they write the rest of the story. Don’t do that. It’s almost always a bad idea... When I write narratives, I always write the ending first. Try it. Try it. When you write the ending first, then when you go back to the top of the story and start to write it, you know what your destination is. You know where you’re going.”

The technique of developing the story in sections, perhaps arranged by points of view, can also work in a narrative story. You can start the story in the middle of the action, as long as you explain to the reader why you are telling this story now (the “so what” factor). This approach is somewhat like using the time frame organization—starting with the present, going to the past, back to the present and on to the future. Regardless of the technique you choose, you should plan your order before you write.

William Blundell, who spent years writing features and profiles for *The Wall Street Journal*, suggests in his book *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing* that features should be organized around “The Laws of Progressive Reader Involvement”:

Stage one: Tease me, you devil. (Give the reader a reason to continue reading.)

Stage two: Tell me what you’re up to. What is the story really about?

Stage three: Oh yeah? Prove what you said. (Include the evidence to support your theme.)

Stage four: Help me remember it. (Make it clear and forceful, and give it a memorable ending.)

Blundell says features should include the following elements, but not necessarily in this order:

- Focus:** What is the central theme?
- Lead and nut graph:** What is the point of the story? (Often, it is introduced anecdotally or descriptively.)
- History:** How did the problem develop?
- Scope:** How widespread is the development?
- Reasons:** Why is this problem or conflict happening now?
- Impacts:** Who is affected and how?
- Moves and countermoves:** Who is acting to promote or oppose the development, and what are they doing?
- Future:** What could happen as a result of the situation and developments?

Blundell also suggests blocking material from any one source in one place in the story, especially if the story has many sources. The organization is not as rigid as the list implies. If the material lends itself to narrative storytelling, it can be told in chronological order or natural story order: beginning, middle, climax, and ending. Here are some reminders of good storytelling techniques:

- Use concrete details rather than vague adjectives.
- Use dialogue when possible and appropriate.
- Set a scene.
- Use action verbs.
- Observe or ask questions involving all your senses.
- Use show-in-action description.
- Tell a story like a plot, with a beginning, middle and climax. Get a chronology or sequence of events. You may want to use the chronology in all or part of your story. Even if you don't use chronological order, you need to understand the sequence of events.
- Follow Mark Twain's advice: "Don't say the old lady screamed—bring her on and let her scream."

ETHICS

Ethical dilemma: Is it OK to make up quotes? Is it OK to reconstruct scenes in feature stories?

Tom French reconstructed scenes, quotes and dialogue in his story about the murdered woman in one story and the other women

in "Angels and Demons" based on court documents and interviews with sources who knew the women. How does that differ from cases of Jayson Blair, a former reporter for *The New York Times*, and Stephen Glass, a former reporter for *The*

New Republic, who were both fired in disgrace for fabricating information in their stories?

Ethical values: Credibility, truth, accuracy, fairness

Narrative Storytelling

Martha Miller interviewed Vietnam veteran Dan Vickroy several times before she wrote this story about his injuries in the war. Each time he remembered more. She asked him to recall what he was thinking, feeling, saying and experiencing when he was injured, 25 years earlier.

Miller also reconstructed dialogue, based on Vickroy's recollections as he related them to her. The technique is acceptable if you are basing your information on documents and sources, but it is not preferable. If you can't confirm the dialogue with the original source, you can attribute it to the source who related it. If it is not controversial and you are sure it is accurate, you can reconstruct it as Miller has done.

After she finished all her interviews and filled several notebooks, Miller sat down to write the story. She was overwhelmed. She planned the story and organized it by different periods of Vickroy's life. Then she tried free-writing, just writing what she remembered to get it out of her head. After that she began refining the story, and before she revised her final draft, she read the story aloud.

The part of the story included here, the second section, contains almost no direct attribution. It is all based on Vickroy's recollections. Do you as the reader need attribution? Is the story believable without it?

A soldier's story

By Martha Miller

Iowa City Press-Citizen

Descriptive beginning for section: sets scene

Two hands lifted the sheet that covered what was left of Dan Vickroy's body.

"You're one tough son of a bitch," the surgeon said from behind a green mask.

"I'm a Vickroy," Dan said. "Take me in and sew me up." They did.

Reconstructed dialogue Narrative chronological storytelling through Vickroy

Vickroy regained consciousness. He figured he was in the base hospital at Cam Ranh Bay. He could see nothing through the bandages over his eyes, but he could hear the squeaks of rubber soles in the hallway and hushed conversations between doctors as they hurried from bed to bed. It sounded like a busy place.

He was scared, scared to death he was blind.

His ears wanted to believe what he heard, but his eyes would believe what they saw.

The nurses told him they were bandages and that he was strapped down.

They told him he had been in bed for almost two weeks. And they told him he had a 104-degree temperature. He knew that. He couldn't stop shivering.

As he lay there, his memory returned. He knew the mine had exploded and that he was badly hurt. He remembered waking up twice in surgery. The last time, he felt a surge of pain. He saw a surgeon cutting off his leg with a bone saw.

The days and nights came and went. All the same. Dark.

This time, it was night. Someone shut off all the lights in his hospital room. The doctors were back. Slowly, they unraveled the gauze around his eyes.

Vickroy held his breath. He opened his eyes and saw a faint light. It burned, but this time it was a good sign. Doctors had worked through the night cleaning his eyes. What he saw made him want to put the bandages back on.

There were wire stitches in his stomach and his right hip. There were tubes in his nose and left arm. Instead of legs, he saw blood-soaked gauze wrapped around two stumps.

Clues of attribution without direct attribution (he remembered)

Scene

The doctors told him what happened: His right leg was blown away by the explosion and his left leg was amputated in surgery; his right arm was amputated below the elbow; and he had lost part of his stomach. Being so close to the mine saved his life; the blast threw him up and out of the way.

His face was intact, saved by that last glance back to camp. Vickroy took the news better than most.

“Psychologically, I was pretty positive.” He had no legs, but he did have a wife and new baby. He had married Sharon Kay in 1968 in Tulsa. She was 8½ months pregnant when he left for Vietnam. Danny Ray was born March 28, 1969.

Baby pictures were taped, one under the other, on the side of his bed so Vickroy could look at Danny Ray while lying on his back.

Those pictures and thoughts of heading back to the United States kept Vickroy’s hopes up. But back home, his family wasn’t so positive.

Dan’s mother, Louise, was waiting tables in a Cedar Rapids restaurant when an Army officer handed her a telegram. She cried.

Louise had never wanted her youngest to join the service. She wouldn’t sign his enlistment papers and couldn’t see him off.

Vickroy had started to believe he could live without legs until the day a nurse read him a letter. It had arrived at Cam Ranh Bay several days earlier, but nobody wanted to read it to him.

It was from his wife. She wanted a divorce.

“She told me she didn’t want half a man.”

Short sentences and pacing

Punch ending to this section: short sentences

Direct quote with no attribution: speaker understood

Reporting Techniques: Establishing chronology, gathering detail, asking questions to get source to reconstruct specific events using all senses.

Writing Techniques: Organized by sections technique in time sequences; although most of the story takes place in the past, each section deals with a different part of the character’s life. Primarily follows chronological order, with cliffhanger endings for each section. Other techniques: short sentences, pacing, dialogue, definitions, description, narration.

Serial Narratives

Stories written like novels in chapter form are called “serial narratives.” The form is related to the sections technique, but each part is a separate story in a continuing saga. Tom French has been writing his stories in this form for many years.

This style of storytelling has become very popular for long stories presented in a series, with each part published on a separate day. If the story is compelling enough, readers will come back for the next part. The format is well-suited for the Web, where each chapter can be presented on separate Web pages.

A serial narrative needs a compelling plot with these elements:

- A character coping with a problem
- Development of the situation
- Resolution

Narrative writing puts the reader on the scene by recreating the events. The story often includes dialogue, suspense and chronological order of the plot rising to a climax just as in a fiction story. But all the information must be true, based on interviews and documents. Cliffhangers at the end of each chapter entice the reader to seek the next part of the serial.

Roy Peter Clark, a senior scholar at The Poynter Institute, experimented with a short form of the serial narrative called “Three Little Words.” Each chapter of this story about a woman coping with her husband’s death from AIDS was limited to about 1,000 words, approximately three screens on the Web. He likened it to a “breakfast serial,” where readers could read each part while having their morning coffee.

To write a story in this form, you need to start with a good plot. Organize the story by dividing it into parts with logical breaks, just as in the sections technique. One organization technique is time frames:

- Past and present—what led to the situation and the current status to explain why you are telling the reader this story now
- Past—development of the situation
- Present—return to present
- Future—what lies ahead

Web Storytelling

The Web is an ideal medium for storytelling in many forms. Short segments are preferable to long stories that span several screens. But the Web is a perfect place to experiment with new forms of storytelling, especially nonlinear treatment with links to elements of the story. We’ll discuss more about writing for the Web in Chapter 13.

No single form is right for all stories on the Web or in any other medium. Consumer journalism with helpful tips is another storytelling form that works well on the Web.

But innovative story forms abound on the Web. Storytelling on the Web can be in multimedia format, photo essays, short chunks or serial narratives. Most of all, storytelling can be interactive on the Web. Stories can involve readers by asking them to participate in polls, answer questions, write their own endings or opinions, or submit their own experiences. For an example of innovative storytelling, access Musarium (www.musarium.com), a site that offers stories in several creative forms.

What Do You Think

Do you think it is OK to reconstruct dialogue as shown by Tom French and Martha Miller in this chapter?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe—explain
- Not sure—explain

Exercises

1 Scene: Go to a busy place on campus or to the cafeteria and listen to people talking. Gather information about the scene. Then write a few paragraphs setting the scene and weaving in dialogue.

2 Analogies: Study some objects on your campus. Write similes and metaphors to describe the objects.

3 Narrative writing exercise: Interview a classmate about any experience he has had, preferably a traumatic or

emotional one. If your subject can't think of one, ask him to describe the morning routine from today or yesterday. Imagine that the nut graph is "And then (your subject) disappeared and hasn't been seen since." You will need to ask specific questions, such as what was the person wearing, what color and kind of car was he driving (if a car is involved), what time of day did the events occur, what was he thinking, feeling, doing, saying. Get the person to reconstruct the event exactly as it happened by asking questions about the sequence of events and details. Then write the information in narrative style in a few paragraphs or a brief story.

4 Timed free-writing: This exercise, borrowed from Lucille deView, a former writing coach for *The Orange County (Calif.) Register*, requires you to write very quickly—in 10 to 15 minutes. Write a story about a personal experience and let your mind ramble, or

write your thoughts about a topic. Remember that you are just getting your thoughts on paper. You can take any words that trigger thoughts—*soup, pizza, cars*—or a topic the instructor gives the class. Some topic suggestions from deView:

The happiest day of my childhood


My favorite assignment

My worst assignment

The most interesting person I interviewed (or know)

A turning point in my life

5 Read well to write well: Copy the leads or some excerpts from three news stories you read this week or copy excerpts from other fiction or nonfiction stories that you consider examples of great writing. Try to find examples of the kind of writing you wish you could write.

 **Featured Online Activity** Log on to the book Web site for Chapter 11 and access the exercises to practice storytelling forms of writing at

academic.cengage.com/masscomm/rich/writingandreportingnews6e