

# Leadership & Communications

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Writing  
Project



Saskatchewan

## Writing a feature story

To write a feature you will use many of the same skills you used to write a news story: research, finding and interviewing sources.

A news story is about something that happened recently, and is called "hard news." A feature is called "soft news," and can be about almost anything. It can be about issues such as global warming, the increase in home-schooling or trends in teen clothing. A feature can be a profile of a celebrity or any person who has done something unusual or who has an unusual job or hobby. It can be an account of a real-life event, such as how a community banded together to harvest the crop of a neighbour who was in the hospital.

Unlike a news story, a feature has a beginning, middle and an end. It is not written to the inverted pyramid form. But it must be just as accurate, fair and balanced as a news story.

Although a feature can be written in several ways, there is one form that is widely used because it allows a writer to tell a story in an organized way that catches the interest of the reader. The story is arranged into five parts. They are:

1. Title or Headline
2. Lead or Anecdote
3. Nut paragraph
4. Body or Who? What? When? Where? Why? And How?
5. Ending or Conclusion

An anecdote is a little story that shows the main point of the story. It is usually about a real person or persons that the reader can identify with and wants to know more about.

In the sample story, *Night Feeding for Daytime Calving* is the title or headline. The next two paragraphs form the **anecdote**. They tell a little story and, hopefully, make the reader wonder why Ken's cattle all calve during the day.

Prairie winters are harsh and cold and even colder at night. No one wants to be out in that kind of weather but if you're a cattle farmer chances are you will be. Wet and vulnerable calves have a way of arriving in the darkest, coldest and most dangerous time of the night.

But not at Ken Lindholm's farm. In 2009-2010, every one of his 145 cows gave birth during the day. It was, he admits, a pretty good year but it wasn't all that unusual for the Lintlaw, Saskatchewan farmer. Most of his calves arrive during the day. What's his secret?

The **nut paragraph** is the paragraph that tells the reader what this feature will be about. It's usually not very long, but this one is exceptionally short:

|| It's all down to when the cattle are fed, he says.

Now the reader knows this is a story that will tell him/her how feeding cows at night will somehow cause them to give birth to their calves during the day. This is something cattle farmers might want to know, so there's a good chance they will continue reading.

The following paragraphs form the **body** of the feature. They supply the Who? What? When? Where? and How? Two more examples of farmers who feed at night are given. Results from six studies on night feeding are included. Four showed positive results for night feeding. Two showed no benefit to night feeding. It was very important to include these last two in order for the story to be fair and balanced.

Next, we hear from a beef cow/calf specialist, Nancy Noeker. She gives an explanation as to **Why** night feeding is more likely to produce daytime births. Now that we have explained why night feeding is linked to daytime calving, it's time to end the feature.

This was done by answering a question Ken Lindholm had posed earlier in the story when he wondered why better quality feed seemed to make a difference in when the cows calved. Answering this question tidied up the last of the loose ends and ended the story neatly. It's usually a good idea to bring the person or persons in the anecdote back into the story at the end.

### **Tips for feature writing**

- Choose your story idea carefully. Think about what you need to find out, who your sources will be, where you will find the information you need. Try to choose an idea that you're curious about, that you want to find out about. Then it will be even more fun to report and write.
- Don't be afraid to over research. The more information you have, even if you don't use it all, the better you will know your subject and the better your story will be.
- Don't forget to use direct quotes from your sources. A sentence such as *"I'm not a scientist. I can't explain it, but it seems the better the hay the better it works,"* reminds the reader that this is a story about people, not just dry directions. Other direct quotes in the feature serve the same purpose and also help to make the story more believable.
- Use strong verbs. Adjectives and adverbs have their place, but don't overuse them.