

Let's write a feature story!

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A feature story is NOT:

- * **written in the inverted pyramid style**
 - **advantages of the inverted pyramid**
 - **disadvantages of the inverted pyramid**

- * **A feature story is not fiction**
 - **sticks to the facts**
 - **never makes up things**
 - **doesn't manufacture direct quotations**

- * **A feature story is not necessarily "objective"**
 - **allows for viewpoint and voice – the personal voice of the narrator rather than of an institution**
 - **allows writers to get inside people's heads**
 - **does not immediately tell readers the outcome; keeps readers curious; foreshadows what's coming**
 - **uses characters rather than sources; characters in some kind of situation or conflict**
 - **can be chronological (narrative)**
 - **can be 1st or 2nd person**
 - **grabs you immediately, keeps you through the middle, ends with impact**

- * **Tools for writing the feature**
 - **immersion**
 - **being there**
 - **personal interviews**
 - **keen observation**
 - **documentation, verification**

- * **The five senses: Gerald M. Carbone of *The Providence Journal* writes these words in his notebook:**
 - **Sight**
 - **Sound**
 - **Taste**
 - **Touch**
 - **Scent**

- * **Other "senses" (Chip Scanlon, Poynter Institute)**
 - **sense of people**
 - **sense of place**
 - **sense of time**
 - **sense of drama (most important)**

- * **Stringing it all together**
 - **Columnist Tom Boswell: "These pearls – anecdotes, quotes, details – need a thread to string them on, to weave a narrative instead of a patchwork of facts."**

-- A good story needs a theme to hold it together.

* Show -- don't tell:

-- Telling: "He was overweight."

-- Showing: "He weighed 379 pounds."

-- Telling: "She ignored politics."

-- Showing: "She hadn't voted for at least 10 years."

* Using the senses

"Below the treeline, the White Mountains in winter are a vision of heaven. Deep snow gives them the texture of whipping cream. Boulders become soft pillows. Sounds are muted by the snow. Wind in the frosted pines is a whisper, a caress."

-- Gerald M. Carbone

* Using similes, metaphors

"Over time, the fortunes of Snowden and his School Sisters have become intertwined. Like strands of a church bell rope. Like two hands clasped in prayer."

-- Tom Dunkel, *Baltimore Sun*, about David

Snowden's study of the longevity of the School Sisters of Notre Dame

Column by David Casstevens, *The Dallas Morning News*

As quoted in *The Book of Writing* by Paula LaRocque

Bubba Busceme had big plans for his sweetheart. After he won the world lightweight title, he and Kim were going to spend a week in Acapulco. His \$50,000 paycheck – the biggest of his life – was just the beginning. As the new champion, he could make seven or eight times that amount every time he defended his title.

“I’ll be able to give Kim everything,” Bubba said the other day. “I’ll finally be able to make it so good for me and her, for the rest of our lives.”

Bubba and wife Kim are very much in love, which made the thought of waking up Sunday morning on top of the world just all that much sweeter. This was going to be a very special Valentine’s Day.

So when her husband, the hometown hero, climbed into the ring Saturday and waved to 6,500 fans who chanted “Bubba! Bubba!” Kim Busceme flushed with the mixed emotions of a bride-to-be. She was giddy with excitement and pride. She was nervous. And she was scared to death,

She’d met her husband three years ago when she was working at a men’s clothing store in Beaumont. They married two months later. Since their wedding, she’d never seen her husband lose a fight. He’d won 11 in a row. As he liked to say, Kim brought out the best in him.

She sat in a folding chair at ringside, not more than five feet from Bubba’s corner. A slender, demure woman with long blond hair, 21-year-old Kim clutched a red heart-shaped satin pillow trimmed with lace her mother had made for her as a Valentine’s Day gift. She looked out of place at a prizefight. This was a boisterous, beer-drinking crowd. A cigar-smoking crowd. Ringsiders were placing bets. Some were giving odds on how long Bubba would last. She was blood-splattering close to the ring, where her Bubba and Champion Alexis Arguello stood face to face. One man would fight for honor, the other for a dream.

Kim Busceme will remember the 24 minutes that followed as the longest of her life. As everyone had feared, Arguello stalked Busceme from the opening bell. He repeatedly backed his opponent into a corner. A master craftsman of his trade, Arguello never lost his poise. He never showed a trace of emotion. His face was as blank as an unaddressed envelope. He was a machine, patient but relentless.

Arguello used his 7-inch reach advantage well. For the first five rounds, the tall, lean champion stalked the 10-to-1 underdog and

stockpiled points with a salvo of snake-licking left jabs and left hooks. He kept his right hand cocked near his ear. This was the fearsome right that had scored 59 KOs in his 73 pro victories. The same right that broke Roberto Eliondo's jaw and rib in Arguello's last title defense in November.

Busceme, a southpaw, is a crafty fighter. He fights in flurries. He dodges punches well. He sniffs danger like a woods animal. But except for the opening round, when he was pumped sky-high with emotion, Bubba was no match for the 29-year-old champ, who turned pro at 14.

Perhaps Kim sensed the end was near going into the sixth round. She probably saw it on the face of Hugh Benbow, Busceme's manager. Between each round, the old man, aided by a cane, slowly climbed the steps and stuck his head between the ropes to offer words of instruction and encouragement to his fighter.

Bubba was still ahead on courage and heart, but he was badly behind on points.

Finally, the end came. Late in round six. Arguello caught Bubba's jaw with a brutal left hook. The crowd groaned like an old mattress. Shaken, his defenses down. Busceme didn't have time to react as the champ moved in with a right, and then with a left-right combination.

Bubba didn't know if he was in Beaumont or on Bourbon Street. "I hardly remember anything after that," he would say later. In a stumbling half-trot, he weaved drunkenly toward his corner. His mouth was open. His eyes were glass. The slightest push and he'd have fallen over like a storefront mannequin.

Kim put her hand to her lips. Then, as the referee stepped in to stop the fight, she laid her head on the table in front of her and began to cry softly. Sobbing, her shoulders shaking, she never saw Bubba's cornermen rush into the ring to rescue their fallen fighter. She refused to look up. Hands trembling, she peeled from the table a 3-by-5 card with "Kim Busceme" printed on it. ...

Later, Busceme forced a smile when asked about his future. "I'd like to box some more," said Bubba, who turns 30, on Valentine's Day. "There's only one Alexis Arguello. But I feel I can box with any of the other guys."

Kim looked at the floor. She still held her heart-shaped pillow. "I wish he'd quit" she murmured, her eyes welled with tears. "I love him so much. But I don't think I can go through this again."

Recommended Writing Books Don Ranly, Ph.D.

Bonime, Andrew, and Pohlmann, Ken C. *Writing for New Media*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998.

Brooks, Brian, George Kennedy, Daryl Moen and Don Ranly. *News Reporting and Writing*, 8th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2005.

Brooks, Brian, George Kennedy, Daryl Moen and Don Ranly. *Telling The Story: The Convergence of Print, Television and Online Media*. 2nd ed. Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2004.

Brooks, Brian and James Pinson. *Working With Words*, 6th ed. New York. Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2006.

Caples, John, *How to Make Your Advertising Make Money*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1983.

Flesch, Rudolf. *The Art of Readable Writing*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.

Franklin, Jon. *Writing for Story*. New York: Plume Publications, 1994. A wonderful book by a great writer.

Handbook of Magazine Article Writing. 2nd ed. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2005. Practical stuff.

Harrington, Walt. *Intimate Journalism: The Art & Craft of Reporting on Everyday Life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. Hard to top this one.

Kennedy, George, Daryl Moen and Don Ranly. *Beyond the Inverted Pyramid*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. And I especially like this book.

Kilpatrick, James. *The Writer's Art*. Kansas City: Andrews, McMell & Parker, 1984. Just beautiful.

LaRocque, Paula. *The Book on Writing*. Oak Park, IL: Marion Street Press, Inc., 2003. Paula is a real pro.

Literary Journalism. Edited by Norman Sims. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995. Get inspired!

Ogilvy, David. *Ogilvy on Advertising*. Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, Canada Limited, 1985. Must reading.

Osborn, Patricia. *How Grammar Works: A Self-Teaching Guide*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1989.

Ranly, Don. *Publication Editing*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1999.

Strunk, William and White, E.B. *Elements of Style*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1999.

The Associated Press Stylebook And Briefing on Media Law. Perseus Publishing, 2004.

The Best American Magazine Writing 2004. The American Society of Magazine Editors. New York: Public Affairs, 2005. I think this comes out every year.

The New New Journalism. Edited by Robert Boynton. New York: Vintage Books, 2005. Get super inspired.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. 2nd ed., New York: Harper & Row, 1980. A real classic.

Don Ranly

Don Ranly, Ph.D., is professor emeritus of the Missouri School of Journalism where he taught for 32 years and headed the magazine department for 28 years. He has an M.A. in journalism and an M.A. in speech from Marquette University, a certificate in film, radio and television from New York University and a doctorate in journalism from the University of Missouri.

Dr. Ranly worked as a newspaper reporter, a magazine editor, a weekly columnist, a radio host and a television producer, director and host. An author of articles and books on writing and editing, he has conducted more than 1,000 seminars for individual newspapers and magazines, corporations, associations and organizations of all kinds.

He is co-author of *News Reporting and Writing* (8th ed.), *Telling the Story: The Convergence of Print, Broadcast and Online Media* (2nd ed.) and *Beyond the Inverted Pyramid* (all with Bedford/St. Martin's) and author of *Publication Editing* (Kendall/Hunt). He has compiled a book of readings *The Principles of American Journalism* (Kendall/Hunt).

In addition to teaching writing, editing and publishing courses at the Missouri School of Journalism, his academic areas included the principles and ethics of American journalism and general-semantics.

In 1995, Dr. Ranly received a University of Missouri-Columbia Faculty-Alumni Award and was named the O.O. McIntyre Distinguished Professor of Journalism for 1995-1996. In 1998 he won a University of Missouri Gold Chalk award in honor of outstanding service in the training and mentoring of the professional students in his charge. In 1994, 1997 and 1998, the journalism faculty nominated Dr. Ranly for the Presidential Award for Outstanding Teaching, in 1996 and 1997, for the Byler Distinguished Professor Award, in 1999, for the Thomas Jefferson Award and in 2001, for the William T. Kemper Fellow for Excellence in Teaching award. In 2002, he was elected a Fellow of the International Association of Business Communicators. In 2003, he became a William T. Kemper Fellow for Excellence in Teaching. In 2005, Ranly won a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Society of Business Publications

Editors. He is a member of the University of Missouri Jefferson Club.

Dr. Ranly conducts communication seminars on a large variety of topics, from basic grammar and effective writing to his innovative and popular courses in Refrigerator Journalism and Reinventing Print. He has helped plan new publications as well as re-tool and refuel existing ones.

He has prepared critiques for dozens of publications, first by marking the copy and then by discussing the publication on audiotape.

Dr. Ranly currently serves as Executive Director Emeritus and Board Member of the Missouri Association of Publications, which he founded in 2004.

On his website, www.ranly.com, you can find all of his programs and services, his complete vita, a list of his past clients and testimony from past clients.

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