

# Elements of the Sports Feature

Second course, Third grading period, Weeks 4-5

Beyond the day-to-day grind of games, matches and showdowns, there are the hidden stories. These are the stories that go beyond scores and statistics and are more than news and play-by-play. These stories capture the emotions that flow through sports: passion and pain, desire and dedication. Capturing these emotions, these feelings and these stories will take audiences beyond just listening for the score of last night's game.



## Enduring Understanding

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The sports feature is an essential aspect of sports coverage, meant to complement and add human interest and meaning to day-to-day coverage of sporting events.



## Essential Questions

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What are the principles needed to put together an effective and compelling sports feature? How important are reportorial, explanatory, narrative and descriptive modes to sports features?



## Objectives and Outcome

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Students will gain an understanding of the elements of a compelling sports feature and, by the end of the term, conceptualize and produce their own sports feature pieces.



## Suggested Time

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Two weeks



## Resources and Materials

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Teachers should compile several compelling sports features – broadcast, print and radio – for use and demonstration in class. An excellent example of a print feature story can be found in the July 5, 2005, edition of The Washington Post sports section, entitled “A Legendary Career That Speaks for Itself” at [www.washpost.com/nie](http://www.washpost.com/nie). In ‘Lessons’ select “From Print to Air.”

“Former President Had A Passion for Sports; He Played Football, Announced Baseball” by William Gildea, The Washington Post, June 6, 2004 at [www.washpost.com/nie](http://www.washpost.com/nie). In ‘Lessons’ select “From Print to Air.”

RTNDA, Edward R. Murrow national and regional awards in Sports Reporting ([www.rtna.org](http://www.rtna.org))  
Professional models for sports features include NPR’s John Feinstein, Frank Deford (commentary) and Tom Goldman (reporter).

State press association competition winners

“Features,” Radio Production, page 180.

“Features and Documentaries,” Writing for Television, Radio and New Media, pages 181-186.



## Procedure

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1. Review with students the “What is News?” handout from the “All That’s News” lesson (First course, First grading period). Discuss the news elements and how they apply to sports and especially sports features. Have students identify news and a feature story ideas for each news element. Examples:
  - A. Proximity: News — U.S. Olympics teams have been formed. Human Interest — A hometown athlete qualifies for the Olympics or
  - B. Emotions/Determination: News — Increase in high school sports injuries reported. Human Interest — A local football player struggles to overcome a life-threatening injury and return to the field.
2. Discuss the various modes or approaches available for feature writing such as explanatory, narrative, descriptive, and reportorial. Give students a copy of “Sports Talk.” Discuss the examples and give students the homework assignment.

Don Hewitt, producer of 60 Minutes, is quoted in *Writing for Television, Radio and New Media*: “The key to 60 Minute’s success is a combination of good old reporting and recognizing people who have an ability to tell stories rather than simply reporting an event.”

Share with students a radio feature in which the modes of explanation, narration, description and reporting are included or listen to excerpts of sports features from various sources and discuss the advantages and benefits of each example:

- When does the feature need information from reporting?
- When does the person, place or event need to be described so the listener can visualize what the reporter sees?
- When do actions or statistics need explanation?
- When is the feature writer primarily a storyteller?

The following recipients of RTNDA 2006 regional recognition might be used as well as examples of your state’s press association contests and recently aired features:

- 2006 Edward R. Murrow, Sports Reporting — Region 5  
Carrying Her Weight ([www.kbia.org/news/murrow.htm](http://www.kbia.org/news/murrow.htm))  
A Columbia, Mo., teenage girl joins a weightlifting class out of summer boredom. If heard in the previous lesson to deconstruct its structure, listen now for the modes that are used.
- 2006 Edward R. Murrow, Sports Reporting — Region 6  
Beep Baseball ([www.kuhf.org/site/News2?id=12978](http://www.kuhf.org/site/News2?id=12978))  
Baseball played by 12 vision-impaired players
- 2006 Edward R. Murrow, Best Sports Reporting — Region 1  
Stitch and Pitch ([www.kiro710.com/Article.asp?id=234213&spid=9623](http://www.kiro710.com/Article.asp?id=234213&spid=9623))  
Don’t forget the fans. We hear the Mariners game as backdrop for this delightful feature that balances word play with actualities. Although it may appear to be unstructured, this feature has a carefully orchestrated order that covers the topic one stitch at a time.

3. Discuss with students the importance of grabbing the reader in the first part of the feature, and how the news lede plays into that concept. How do the ledes from newspaper sports stories draw in the reader? How does the first minute of a television or radio feature pull in a viewer or listener? Which of the features just heard had the most captivating opening 30 seconds?

4. Statistics are a vital part of features as well as game stories. Sports revolve around statistics — the score, points scored by individuals, minutes played and career records. How can statistics be used effectively in the sports feature? Some stories revolve solely around statistics, such as a player breaking a statistical record (most home runs, most touchdowns, most rebounds). Some combine personality, talent, statistics, and comparisons (Features about Tiger Woods, Barry Bonds and Ron-aldinho might be used as examples).

5. Read with students “Former President Had A Passion for Sports; He Played Football, Announced Baseball,” the Ronald Reagan story from The Washington Post. Discuss all of the feature elements that exist in the story. What type of lede does the author use? What tone does the story use? Discuss the background of the article and why it was written (news peg). (In the days following the death of Ronald Reagan, section editors of newspapers around the country were featuring stories from various angles presenting the former president and the different roles he played in his long life.) How does the author use numbers and figures to strengthen the story for the reader? (The author uses a “time-line,” using dates to develop the sports angle of Reagan’s life.) Discuss how numbers and statistics play into the sports feature.

How would this newspaper story be told on radio? What are the essential quotations of Ronald Reagan (actualities) archived on tape that you would hope to use? What parts could easily be paraphrased?

6. Discuss with students pace and tone and how they affect a feature. What tone and pace should be used for a feature about a famous, beloved athlete who has passed away? How would that tone differ from that of a feature about the first woman racecar driver winning a major event?

7. Interviews, quotations (audio, actualities) and personal anecdotes by sports figures also play a central role in the sports feature. Any good story needs solid quotations. How would interviewing an athlete, a coach or any other sports figure for a feature differ from interviewing the same person for a game story? Using the feature examples, examine the quotations in the story. For example, in the Vin Scully story, a quotation begins, “I listened to him every night, fell asleep to that voice.” What question might the author have asked to generate that comment? How does the mood and feeling of that quote play into the mood that the author is trying to create in the feature?

Examine actualities in radio stories to drive home this concept to students. Teachers should collect examples from current sports features from local stations, national broadcasts and organizations recognizing sports broadcasting excellence.

2006 Edward R. Murrow, Best Sports Reporting — Region 3 and

2006 Edward R. Murrow, Feature Reporting — Region 3

**The Hyzdu Diaries: The Life and Times of a Career Minor Leaguer**

([www.kjzz.org/news/arizona/archives/200604/murrowawards](http://www.kjzz.org/news/arizona/archives/200604/murrowawards))

This RTNDA-recognized piece has at its core Hyzdu reading from his diary, but its power and strong human-interest appeal comes from the interviews with members of his family.

8. Discuss the order in which actualities, facts and background information influence the impact of a piece. The “Carrying Her Weight” handout in this lesson could be used to illustrate this concept. Form groups of four to five students. Duplicate copies of “Carrying Her Weight” (one per group) and cut into strips. Students move the strips around to put the feature in order. Groups then reveal and discuss the order they would recommend. Play the selection ([www.kbia.org/news/murrow.htm](http://www.kbia.org/news/murrow.htm)). Students could be given “‘Carrying Her Weight’ Discussion Questions” as homework or class discussion.

9. Having provided a foundation in sports features, give students their assignment. They are to begin to produce a sports feature piece — three to four minutes in length including actualities from three interviews, copy using the modes discussed, and a scene description. Students should develop their story idea, angle and list of interviewees and review them with the instructor. Teachers might ask students questions to help with conceptualization of the features and development of a unique angles in each story. The tone and length of each feature should reflect its subject.

Teachers may modify this assignment by inviting one guest to be interviewed by the class. This may be a former star athlete or retired coach from your school, a current scholar-athlete, or the spouse of one of your coaches — someone whose story lends itself to a feature approach or is connected to a larger news/sports event that students will cover. All students will prepare questions for the 20-minute interview and will select actualities from the same tape. Students still have to define the focus of their pieces and each student will determine two more people to interview.

10. At the end of this two-week period, students will be introduced to the public affairs feature in a two-week period. At the end of both two-week introductory lessons, students will have conceptualized features, conducted three interviews and done some research on the focus of their features.

The final project will take time and effort for students to produce. Teachers will need to decide which of the following approaches (or a variation) they want to take:

- Students will be pushed to complete the sports feature assignment. It will be produced in this two-week period. Teachers will have two weeks to evaluate and return to students before the end of the public affairs lesson.
- Students will prepare to produce a sports feature through research, interviewing and conceptualization steps. Then there will be a break while teachers present the public affairs feature lesson.
- Students will be pushed to complete public affairs features in the two-week period.
- Teachers will follow the “Facing Public Affairs” lesson suggestions, which include three edits of interviews to hone students’ skills in hearing the hot tape and editing to meet time requirements. At the end of the lesson, students decide whether to continue with the public affairs features or return to the sports features to produce them.
- If students have two “first draft” features, they will decide which of the two to re-edit and refine for the end-of-term project.
- For the end-of-term project, each student will produce either a sports feature or a public affairs feature.



## Homework

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Complete the “writing for ear” exercise in “Sports Talk” and listen to sports features for examples of each mode. “‘Carrying Her Weight’ Discussion Questions” could be completed as homework.

Arranging interviews and composing interview questions could be homework. Through this project, students will be asked to apply skills they have gained so far: interviewing, recording, writing a script and editing.

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## Assessment

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At this stage, students should have written interview questions, conducted three interviews and conceptualized sports features. In the final project, students should be expected to effectively incorporate all of the essential elements of a good feature, such as an appealing lede, effective use of statistics and figures, appropriate pace and tone and engaging writing and choice of audio. All of these elements should match the intent of the story. Do students have a sense of the elements of a good feature and do they demonstrate it in their stories? An ideal way to assess the understanding and proficiency of each feature would be to use a rubric in evaluating each student's performance.

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## Academic Content Standards

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Knowledge: Journalism teachers understand: 7. The writing process as it relates to journalism (brainstorming, questioning, reporting, gathering and synthesizing information, writing, editing, and evaluating the final media product) (Standards for Journalism Educators, Provided by the Journalism Education Association and the Scholastic Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication)

Recognize and apply mathematics in contexts outside of mathematics (Connections, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics)

Formulate original, open-ended questions to explore a topic of interest; design and carry-out research (DCPS English Language Arts, 11.R.1)

Develop the narrative elements with concrete sensory details and language (e.g., visual details of scenes; descriptions of sounds, smells, specific actions; movements and gestures; interior monologue or feelings of characters), and effectively pace the presentation of actions to accommodate time/mood changes (DCPS English Language Arts, 12.W.1)

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## Industry Standards and Expectations

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Distinguish between different forms of media and their specific applications. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Explore career opportunities in Journalism and Broadcasting, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Define the terminology associated with journalism. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Demonstrate writing processes used for various journalism media. States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Demonstrate writing audio scripts for various types of programs. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Apply Knowledge of equipment and skills related to audio production, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)