

300-word features

kansas journalism institute
storytelling

leads from Brady Dennis' 300-word features

"The few drivers on this dark, lonely stretch of the Suncoast Parkway in Pasco County pull up to the toll booth, hand their dollars to Lloyd Blair and then speed away. None of them knows why the old man sits here, night after night, working the graveyard shift."

"He's standing there in front of the mirror, dressed in more pink than he's ever worn in his life. He's 17, a senior at Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg."

"He's already cleared out his office, attended the farewell party, listened to the speeches, said his goodbyes"

"Sometimes the words are hard to understand. Accordion Joe sings in German. And Croatian. And Polish. And sometimes Italian"

"The sun is setting, spilling its crazy gold and orange and purple light across Fort Lonesome."

"At the ticket counter, at the Starbucks, at the gate, on the plane - the travelers barely speak. They rarely make eye contact."

"It's noon in the potter's field. Time for the second funeral of the day."

300-word feature writing tips

1. Begin with the end in mind
2. Write it all and then edit it down
3. Use a delayed lead
4. Use short sentences and paragraphs
5. Use repetition and parallelism to create rhythmic sentence patterns
6. Find an interesting angle
7. Use direct quotes sparingly
8. Use the three D's: dialogue, description, detail
9. Look for the story behind the person: "Everyone has a story to tell."
10. Show don't tell
11. Report, write, edit, report, write, edit, report, write, edit etc.
12. Check out http://www.sptimes.com/2005/01/28/Tampabay/After_the_sky_fell.shtml for an example of Brady Dennis' award-winning 300-word feature stories. (Other examples are available by clicking at the top of this page.)