

Intro to Online Appendix F: An Example of a Feature Story About a Visiting Playwright

Here again, with the exception of a few modifications to fictionalize the dates and locations, the following release was printed in its entirety by the local paper.

Notice the differences between this feature story and the two sample news releases. The news releases are more “newsy”: they concentrate on the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. The feature takes more of a human interest approach, going further into depth about who the playwright is and what his writing is like.

Unlike a news release, a feature has no particular formula to follow. Just keep in mind one rule: Hook the reader’s interest. The rest of the story will depend on the subject matter, the playwright, and the writer. Have fun with it. If it’s interesting to the writer, it’ll be interesting to the reader.

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Make sure you give an editor a heads-up that a feature story is coming. The release date is the 13th, to give an editor flexibility in scheduling when the story will run. However, this sort of release is most effective if it runs the week of the performance.

Use the same format as you would for a regular news release.



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For Immediate Release

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ACT's Visiting Playwright Encourages Audiences to Explore "Quiet Places"

ALBEEVILLE, NY—Playwright R.G. Rader has spent his writing career thus far taking his characters, and his audiences, into "the quiet places." Fitting, then, that he escapes the hustle and bustle of New York City during the start of the holiday shopping season to come to Albeeville. Rader will be in town, courtesy of Albeeville Community Theatre (ACT), for the staged reading of his newest work, "Heart-Beat."

"It's important to get out of the city once in a while," he laughs. "Particularly at this time of year!"

Rader will be on hand for the reading, which will be held on Friday, November 21 at 7:30 p.m. in the Albeeville Public Library. Admission is \$1 for the general public and free for ACT subscribers. A reception will follow.

Also following the reading, Rader will take questions and gather feedback from the audience about the play. "I'm very interested in hearing what people have to say about my work," he says. "Everything sounds perfect in my head while I'm writing it, but I can't really tell if they work until I hear those words come out of the mouths of actors and I hear where and how the audience responds."

(more)

For a feature story, it's okay to have the writer's by-line appear if the writer wants credit for the story. Check with the newspaper's editor to find out their policy. Usually, the writer will get a credit like "By Chris Mackowski Special to The Times."

You need an angle for a feature that can hook them quickly. However, Features tell stories, so once you hook your reader you can then unfold the story over the course of a couple paragraphs. The angle here is the peace and quiet of the community and its parallel to the quiet places the writer explores in his writing.

Good features use descriptive verbs. In a straight news release, a verb like this might be more intrusive than a simple "says." In a feature, it adds color. It also helps you avoid adverbs, which are intrusive.

One of the main differences between a news release and a feature is that news releases get sent to all media outlets. With a feature release, send it to *one* paper only. It's a professional courtesy. Papers don't like to run feature stories their competitors also have. If you want a feature in more than one paper, write different features, with different angles, for each paper.

Online Appendix F: An Example of a Feature Story About a Visiting Playwright (*cont.*)

Here's the necessary plot synopsis. Notice how different it is from the one included in the news release?

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"Heart-Beat" is about a man in a coma. "The audience quickly comes to realize the man can hear and see things going on around him, although, to the man's daughter and son-in-law in his room, he's unresponsive," Rader says. "The man's soul eventually enters into a dialogue with the audience, and during the course of this dialogue, the soul of a young woman walks in, and she is also in a coma."

The play, then, he says, "is about finding love, honesty, sincerity, and especially hope in those silent places where we cannot allow others, or don't want to allow others. These two people, in their comas, find each other in a very real way and ultimately, hopefully, find hope."

Rader says the focus of much of his work aims at getting into those silent places. "I like to find ways to get to places where we, as individuals, don't allow others, or if we do allow others, we need to trust them very much," Rader explains. Those spaces exist, he says, "in the depths of our thought, in memory, in places where we go internally, dealing with our soul and our faith. I look for ways, metaphorically, to get into those places. So, this play is not so much about comas as it is about being in a place where you only allow a few in. Certainly a coma is one of those places."

While doing research for the play, Rader discovered that the nature of comas is somewhat controversial. "Questions exist: 'What does it mean being in a coma?' I had to devise my own definition. The man senses life around him," he says.

The play, while about the old man, actually started from the daughter's point of view. "I know what's it like being next to someone you love and not being able to communicate in that special way you'd like to," says Rader, who went through similar situations with his sister-in-law, a grandfather, and a close family friend. "I think holding vigil next to the bedside of someone who you really care about and love, and seeing them incapacitated, is a widely shared experience. A lot of people can identify with it."

(more)

This quote adds context to the production and develops the story's angle.

We learn a lot about his creative process and "what goes into writing a play." General audiences may find this interesting, and it certainly should be of interest to one of the event's target audiences: writers in the community.

This quote offers an extra reason for audiences to attend the show: there's a commonality of experience that many people can relate to.

Something that might strengthen this piece would be a few quotes from the director or someone else affiliated with the theatre.

Online Appendix F: An Example of a Feature Story About a Visiting playwright (cont.)

Remember to keep the header up-to-date.

This quote helps fulfill the theatre's educational mission. Readers learn something about theatre.

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Rader sees irony in the fact that he explores these private places through the public medium of playwriting. "When you're talking about theatre, you're really talking about a community," he says. "I write poetry, too, and when you do, you're alone, you're stuck in your office, you write your words, and you let them go out into the world. Playwriting is communal, and if anyone goes into it without that attitude, they lose something."

Rader will share that sense of community not only with the audience Friday night, but also with writing and theatre students at Albeeville Area High School on Friday morning and students at Mt. Dew University on Friday afternoon. He will conduct workshops at both places as part of ACT's playwright-in-residence program.

"I'm looking forward to a wonderful trip to Albeeville," Rader says. "It's further proof that the quiet places offer the opportunity for some of the most fertile insights."

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Now celebrating its seventh season, Albeeville Community Theatre promotes, encourages, and produces community-based theater in the greater Albeeville area. By making theatre available and accessible to the public, ACT provides opportunities for community participation, appreciation and education, thus enriching the community and increasing interest in the arts.

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Don't pass up the chance to highlight the community service aspects of what you do, especially if it lets you blow your horn (subtly, of course) with a nontraditional audience.

If you can do it without sounding too gratuitous, slip in a warm-and-fuzzy to make readers feel good about themselves and their hometown. It also makes Rader sound like a gracious guest.

The writer finishes where he started, providing a nice tie-up. He finishes with a feel-good quote—like a strong curtain line.

Don't forget that standard paragraph, even on a feature release. It's one way to demonstrate your professionalism to the editors.

If you didn't send a mug shot of the playwright when you sent the news release, then send one with the feature. If you did send it already, then arrange to have the paper take a photo of rehearsals (or provide such a photo yourself) to run with the feature. A feature story with a photo to go with it is always preferable—because it's more effective—than a feature alone.