

## Communication 4312 – Every Story Must Be Written Differently

Every story must be written differently. Perhaps you already know that. But, perhaps you aren't exactly sure how to go about writing stories differently.

To start with, the question is why are different stories written differently?

To answer that we must ask related questions: What's the purpose of the story? Where is it going to appear? Who's going to be reading it? How much depth will you be expected to get into in the story? What's the writing style in the publication where the story will appear?

In work situations, these questions become part of who you are. You naturally begin to figure out those things. And you adapt to them.

Eventually, over time you will have the opportunity to write a great many different kinds of stories. This is because in a career you'll be working in various situations. You'll be doing news releases, stories for company publications, annual reports, advertising copy, speeches, notes for the monthly publication, entries on web sites, etc. I'm sure you have the idea of how that works.

Sometimes you may be asked to do the kind of speech/interview story that is a staple of the writing business. At other times you may need to do what might be called a backgrounder with information about a specific situation. Someone new is coming to work at your company and you are chosen to write about them. And on and on and on.

A word of caution before going on: be extremely careful of going out on a limb. That is, don't take unnecessary chances. Chances are, something off the wall will appear that way to everyone – especially your supervisor.

### What's the Story About?

After you have figured out why, the next question is: What's the story about? From the moment the story is assigned to you, you need to keep asking yourself that question. You will need to do research for the story. You'll need to find out everything you can about the subject and the personalities involved. With luck, the answer will emerge.

If the story is about a person, it should deal with the person and the situation she or he is in at this particular time. That's the context of the story. Concentrate on that. Who is this person? What do they have to say? What are the circumstances? How does that fit into a possible story I might write about them? Sometimes deciding what to leave out is as important as deciding what to put in a story.

## How Are Stories Written Differently?

Then comes the question of how. The answer to how lies in the organization of the story. If every story must be written differently, then every story must be organized differently. We keep coming back to organization.

How involves leads, use of quotes, background, the need for additional information, how the paragraphs are constructed, how long the piece will be, whether you ought to talk with one person, two or more.

If you are going to use quotes, you need to have a good quote up high. And you need to place quotes throughout – that is, not just one quote but several. Are you going to have more than one person talking? If so, when will you introduce the other person or persons and how much will they say?

Perhaps the whole story is background. How do you arrange the background? Do you use chronological order (probably not)? What do you put in and what do you leave out? How long should this piece be?

But – and here is the most important thing to consider – the story must match the person you are writing about in every conceivable way. That includes the language you use, the rhythm of the story, the content of the story, the direction of the story and even the kind of things you leave out of the story.

And, most of all, that includes the emphasis and organization of the story.

Writing is a thinking process. The writing process involves answering a series of questions about the nature and purpose of the very writing itself. In time you will be able to do all of that naturally. What we are doing in this class is designed to help you think about making decisions that will enhance your writing.

■ David McHam