

Literacy at Work

Writing a Personality Feature



TEACHER GUIDE WITH ESTHER WOJCICKI GRADES 6–12

"I want students to be independent thinkers. I want them to have these basic skills—the four C's: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity." – Esther Wojcicki

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will

- Interview and take notes effectively
- Write a personality feature

MATERIALS

- Paper, journal, or laptop for notes
- Phone or recording device

VOCABULARY

Open Question

A question that has an open-ended answer and cannot be answered using yes or no.

Lead

The introduction in a personality feature. The lead paragraph(s) grab the reader's attention with an interesting hook.

Closed Question

A yes or no question that does not require elaboration.

Nutgraf

The paragraph that contains the "nut" or focus of the story. This paragraph comes right after the lead paragraph.

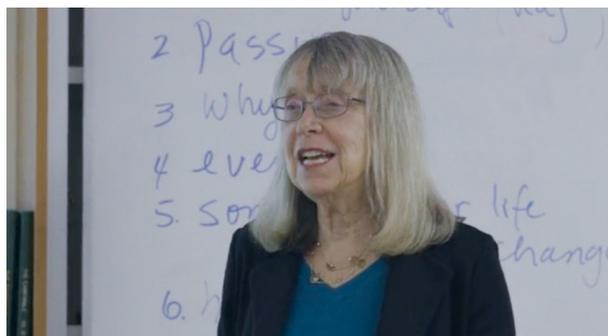
SET-UP

10 minutes

Share the "How to Write a Personality Feature" video.

Have students discuss what they learned about journalism and interviews from the video. If students are using the student worksheet, they can write their answers in the corresponding section.

- Why is journalism important in the digital age?
- What is a personality feature? Why would you want to write one?
- Share a question that you heard being asked that was a strong open question.
- What surprised the students in this activity? How did you notice them using what Esther Wojcicki (wu-JITS-kee) had explained?



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LEARN

10 minutes

Have students use the lesson vocabulary to develop questions they could ask during their interviews. Brainstorm together and write students' examples on the board. Be sure to ask for questions and follow-up questions. If possible, students can write their ideas on the student worksheet to refer back to later.

Open Question and Closed Question

Have students clarify the difference between open and closed questions.

Interview Etiquette

Share strategies that students can use to make their interviews more successful:

- Record the interview on a phone or recording device.
- Take notes to refer back to during the writing activity.
- Listen actively so no important information is missed.
- Ask follow-up questions to get more details.

BRAINSTORM

What are your passions?

- FOLLOW-UP: Why are you passionate about that?

What is an important event that happened to you?

- FOLLOW-UP: How has your life changed since?

Who are your heroes?

- FOLLOW-UP: How have they impacted your life?

INTERVIEWING

30 minutes

Have students find someone to interview. Ideally, students should pair up with their classmates, but they may also interview friends or family members.

Write Interview Questions

Instruct students to take about five minutes to silently prepare their interview questions. Remind students that they are free to use the examples generated as inspiration.

Pair

If possible, pair students up with classmates they don't know well. Have students switch halfway through so each student gets a turn as the interviewer and the interviewee.

Conduct the Interviews

If interviews are conducted in the classroom, listen in and guide students who are stuck by having them delve into detail and ask follow-up questions. Model for students as needed. If students are unable to interview classmates in person, help them find alternate ways to interview each other (e.g., using video chatting, phone calls, or email). Otherwise, students can interview whomever is available to them, but remind them that the interviews should reveal new information.

REFLECTION

15 minutes

Remind Students of the Activity's Purpose

Everybody thinks differently, and everybody has a story. By interviewing other people, students discover each person is unique and learn how to work with anybody.

Students Share What They Learned

Ask students to share what they learned about their interviewee. If students worked in pairs, make sure each partner shares an answer. Model asking follow-up questions. Ask students what they would make the focus of their personality feature based on what they learned.

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WRITE

Guide Students to Decide on the Focus of Their Features

Prepare an example of a lead and a nutgraf to support students who may need further guidance. Remind students to reference the rubric prior to starting the writing process. Encourage students to begin writing their personality feature and explain that they may find it beneficial to check-in with a classmate for feedback. Remind students that they will work through the writing process, including editing and revising their feature.

Explain that a personality feature has one focus. The feature should not be a series of unconnected facts; it should center on one aspect of a person, like a passion or unique characteristic. Once students define their focus, they can begin writing the **lead** and **nutgraf**.

Lead

The lead is the most important part of the story because it acts as a hook, pulling the reader into the feature. The lead can be one to four paragraphs long. Students should make sure the lead relates to the focus. There are two primary ways to write a lead:

TWO TYPES OF LEADS

Anecdotal Lead

A story that relates to the focus of the feature.

Example: "When Kelly was ten years old, she spent hours every day playing video games. Now, she's a video game producer..."

Focus of the Story: Kelly's video game interest

Descriptive Lead

A description of the person, a setting, or a place that relates to the focus of the feature.

Example: "Bradley Smith could pass for any ninth grader by the way he walked and dressed, but what set him apart was the way he ran..."

Focus of the Story: Bradley's running skills

Nutgraf

This paragraph comes right after the lead and explains what the story is all about and how the lead relates to the focus.

EXTEND

Continue the lesson by creating an online personality newspaper. Choose a blog or forum that you or your school has access to. Have students post their personality features so everyone can read about their classmates.

Add multimedia. Have students create videos, podcasts, collages, or illustrations to go with their features. Ask students how the new element enhances or changes the story.

Research interview styles of famous celebrity or political reporters. Compare styles of at least two reports. Using one as a model, have students revisit their personality feature and rewrite to include a new technique learned from the analysis.