

## Writing Tips for NCM Feature Stories

### Story components

First and foremost, remember that a feature story\* is a story, with a beginning, middle and end. (*\*News stories typically follow a different structure – the “inverted triangle.” Please consult with your NCM editor.*)

#### I. The beginning, or lede

Your headline will attract readers but your lede is what entices them to read on. If you have a main source or “character” – someone who epitomizes the heart of your story – this is where you introduce them and their situation. This is typically between 1-3 grafs long.

#### II. Nut graf

The nut graf tells readers what your story is all about, but without giving it all away. It sums up your story focus in a few sentences, signalling the “conflict” or dilemma you’ll explore. It comes right after the lede. *When you submit your draft to NCM editors, please highlight your nut graf.*

#### III. The middle, or story development

This is where you expand on your nut graf and develop your story. You lay out and analyze the various facets of the issue at hand, drawing in other characters, expert sources, reports, studies etc.

#### IV. The ending

Don’t just stop your story – craft a meaningful ending. Wrap up your analysis. What does it all mean? What might happen next? If you introduced a main character in your lede, consider going full circle by returning to that person. Tell us what it all means and what might happen next from their perspective.

### Writing with style

It’s crucial to find your own voice – the unique style that reflects who you are as a writer and journalist. Even so, there are some basics to keep in mind:

- Aim for clarity. Know your material inside out. The only way you can clearly and simply explain the ins and outs of particular issues – from climate change to vaccine efficacy to immigration policy – is if you understand what you’re talking about.
- Use the active voice, direct and plain language, and power verbs. Minimize the use of adverbs and adjectives.
- Write for the eye – readers don’t like to be confronted by a solid wall of text. Use short grafs. Don’t use 20 words when five will do.
- Write for the ear – incorporate rhythm by using a combination of short and long sentences.
- Read your words out loud as you write. This helps you identify wordy sentences, repetition, absence of rhythm and lack of clarity.
- Follow CP style (see CP style tip sheet).
- Remember your first draft is a first draft. Be prepared to revise. And revise. And revise. Be ruthless when you copy-edit your own work. Be open to feedback from your editor.