



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

Let's go ahead and dig in. This week, we are continuing our "Article Nuts and Bolts" series with a basket of kittens. Now, some of you guys may have heard me talk about the concept of the basket of kittens before. We're gonna elaborate on it today. And I mentioned it earlier in the "Article Nuts and Bolts" series and we had the first batch of these in February. We talked about front of book roundups. This week, both in the webinar I'm doing now which is rescheduled from last week and the webinar that we're gonna have after this, we're gonna be talking about roundups that are more feature-length. So we're looking at not even just, you know, a 700-word or a 1,000-word, but we're looking more at 1500-word long baskets of kittens.

So for the purposes of today's webinar, we're really looking at longer pieces and how those are different than roundups that you might do in the front of the book. So I just threw out a lot of terms there. I'll define some of those for those of you who haven't, you know, done a lot of digging into magazines and how they're put together. So I mentioned roundup. Roundup is something that you might also be familiar with from doing blogs or other work like that, but a roundup is where you have an article that consists of several almost mini articles. Sometimes, they're just a paragraph, sometimes they're multiple paragraphs, but you have rounded up the usual suspects, so to say. You've rounded up several different facets of the same type of concept.

So we're going to look at how you put those together, but that's what a roundup is and it has different iterations. Today, we're gonna be looking, in this webinar, at roundups that are composed of several different paragraphs or sections, as the case may be, on individual items, and you'll see more in practice what I mean when we get into the examples, but we're looking at a roundup where you have, for instance, five sections and each of those sections focuses on one thing as opposed to a different type of roundup where you have five different sections and each of those sections talks about a lot of different things.

So what I mean by that is that a roundup where you've got five different sections talking about a lot of different things might be a city guide for Portland, Oregon, for instance, where I am now, and it might say, in each of different sections, one section might be places to eat. One might be cocktail bars. One might be festivals. One might be shopping, and one might be food tours or something like that. And in the food tour section, they're gonna



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

mention very quickly anywhere from, you know, 2 to 5 to 15 different food tours. Whereas in the type of roundup that we're gonna look at in this webinar, when they say food tours, they would just talk about one food tour, or you might have a whole article about food tours and it'll talk about five different food tours but each of those food tours has one section.

So like I said, the difference will be a little more clear when we get into looking at the individual articles themselves, but I just wanted to make sure that you guys knew that right now, and we're talking about these articles where you dig in deep into a handful of things. And later, we're gonna talk about features where you talk about a lot, a lot, a lot of different stuff in one space and how you make that contiguous, how you make that not just be kind of a boring list for your readers.

So as I mentioned, we're talking about the basket of kittens type feature today, but I want to elaborate quite a bit on what basket of kittens means and where that concept came from and why you should care because this is one of those things where it's a term that editors use or even if they have a different word for it, it's a concept that editors think of that a lot of writers don't think of their roundups in this particular vein. And you have to start thinking not just of your roundups, but of all of your articles like editors do, if you want to have success with your pitches and with your eventual pieces.

Something that I mentioned in the blog post and the news that are going out about today's webinars was that we really started this "Article Nuts and Bolts" series because of several different instances that I see happening really commonly with people and their articles. And some of those have to do with being afraid to pitch an article in the first place because you're not sure how you'll write it when you get assigned, or taking a very, very, very, very long amount of time to put your article together and then wondering if it's even the right way before you submit it to your editor, but a much bigger issue to me because it really sucks when it happens is when people take a lot of time to work on their article, and then they file it, and then one of three things happens.

There's either absolute radio silence from the editor, like, in perpetuity. They've just ghosted you. Or they kill the article. As in, you turn it in and they say, "Oh,



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

we can't use this." Or they send it back to you with an amount of edits that's essentially causing you to rewrite the piece from scratch. So these instances always stem from the same thing. They stem from a gross, like huge disconnect, not gross as in disgusting, between what you've conceptualized the piece to be and what your editor needs, wants, imagined the piece to be.

Now, these things happen when you pitch the piece, of course, but they're much worse when they happen after you've filed the article for two reasons. One, because you've already written it so you have a sunk cost thing or you feel like you put a lot of time into it, but secondly, because when you pitch something and it's not exactly in line with what the editor is looking for, they expect that. But when you've already written a whole piece, they expect that you have written the piece in line with what you imagine the editor publishes, in line with what you see in the magazine.

And so when you file a story that's very different than what the editor would expect, it's showing them that you don't do your homework, that you don't do your research. And it's very easy to feel like you have copied exactly what's in the magazine. You've copied their style. You've copied their format. You know, you've done it exactly like what you saw, but there's all sorts of issues you can run into there. It might be that the particular article that you copied, the format that you copied, was one that the editor didn't like or one that was written by the editorial assistant that wasn't very good, or one that was done by a different editor and now there's a new editor and she doesn't want it that way. There's all these different ways that you can go wrong.

So the reason that we're doing this whole "Article Nuts and Bolts" series in the first place is so that you have a really firm grounding in the expectations of different types of articles. Obviously, different magazines will have different tone and different things like that, but various types of articles in terms of their structure and their format always come out the same. This is the kind of stuff that they teach you in journalism school, that you can, you know, learn yourself by reading a lot of articles and comparing them to each other and dissecting the structure like you would do if you were in school. But it's the kind of thing that a lot of people don't know before they go into pitching pieces. And so they either will just put off pitching those pieces, or like I said, they'll get into an



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

issue where they've written it in the way that they think it should be written but it's not what the editor is expecting.

So this “basket of kittens” term and concept is something that's really specific to the way that editors think that I want you guys to start thinking about as well because it makes all the difference in your roundups. And roundups are something that editors get a lot of pitches for, like really a lot. And it's because roundups are very prevalent in blog posts. You know, seven things you need to know before you rent a villa in Italy, or, you know, five stops to consider on your personal Portland food cart tour. Roundups are all over the internet because they're very clickbaity. They're very, you know, the type of things that people want to look at and see, “Oh, do I know all of these already?” Or like, “Oh, great. This will give me a lot of different options for what I'm trying to figure out.”

So editors get a lot of pitches for these from people who aren't used to writing for magazines, but the pitches that they tend to get, the way that the roundups are put together for the web is very different and less rigorous than what a magazine means. And what that comes down to is the fact that for it to be in a magazine instead of on a blog, it needs to come up to a different standard of reporting, and that's really what we're gonna talk about with this whole basket-of-kittens concept today.

So we're gonna go in-depth into how to create the perfect basket of kittens because, like I said, there's a big difference between the ones that you would write whether for your own blog or another blog or that you might see on Huffington Post and the type of basket of kittens that appears in print. And a lot of that comes down to the very simple fact of how you choose the items that go into that basket of kittens in the first place way before you even get to the writing or the research, but just which topics you choose.

So I can tell you, because I ridiculously track all of my time, that when I used to do a lot of these basket of kittens types features, that in terms of the hours that I spent on the piece, it would probably be about, let's say, 15% to 25% of that time was just choosing and going back and forth with my editor about which things would be in there. And then another 25% was doing interviews, and then



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

the remaining 50% was writing the piece, but that's a huge chunk of time that's just on what goes in there, and there's a reason for that. We're gonna spend a lot of time looking at why that is.

Now, then we're gonna talk about where these types of features appear and how that's different than what we talked about early on in this "Article Nuts and Bolts" series which was the front of the book. And again, front of book, for those of you guys who aren't familiar, front of book is the part of the magazine that comes before the features. So today, we're talking about features. And like I said, those are gonna be around 1,500 words usually for this type of article, but we looked in the past at front of book roundups and those can be as short as 200, 300, sometimes 500 words. And those are written very differently than the type of roundups that we're gonna look at today because when you have front of book roundups, those, like I said, have so few words available and you need to cover so many different things that you end up sharing very little information and you have to be very diligent about what you choose to share in terms of the information you share in the front of book roundups.

Whereas in these feature-length basket of kitten roundups, you have a lot more latitude to share information, but you still have to be very choosy, and that involves being very closely tied into the whole purpose, the unifying factor of the items in your basket of kittens. Lee has a great question here about, is this the same as a listicle? So I don't think people use the listicle term for magazine articles quite so much as they do for web articles, but that being said, I do think that you would call this perhaps a listicle. The thing is that in magazines, another thing that we, as writers, don't often think about is that the editor never thinks of an article just as your words. We think just of the words because that's what we're responsible for, but when an editor is commissioning an article, they think of how it looks on the page.

So actually, as I'm talking about this, let me open up a different magazine, not a magazine that I was gonna use today, but just a different magazine to give you guys a sense of what I'm talking about here. So like I was saying, editors think about how an article is gonna look on the page rather than just the content which is the kind of thing that we think about. And so that means that for the editor, when they think of a listicle, they're thinking of an article that when you



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

look at it, appears as a numbered list. It appears as like one, two, three, four, five, blah, blah, blah.

But with the type of roundups that we're talking about right now, it's much more common to think of it like a type of article where there are subheads. Like a lot of articles on the web have subheads, of course, like blog posts and things like that, but articles online don't tend to have subheads in quite the same way in terms of features. Features often will just go and go and go and go, and maybe they'll have little breaks and things like that in between, but they won't have separate subheads where the focus of the article changes completely every time there's a subhead. But you do sometimes have longer features which are, you know, 52 places to go in 2018 or something like that.

So that is the type of magazine feature that would be more of a listicle, and that's actually more the kind of thing that we're gonna talk about in the webinar after this, but I did find something here in Hemispheres which is an example, kind of, of what I mean in answer to Lee's question. So let me just change the screen over quickly and look at that. So the difference here...okay, this is the opening page of this article here. Sorry, it's a little hard to read. So this is the "Three Perfect Days in London."

So here in this "Three Perfect Days in London," "Three Perfect Days," if you're not familiar, Hemispheres is the United Airlines magazine, and every issue, they do this "Three Perfect Days" type story. So here, they've got day one. And then on day one, they go through all of the different things to do, but see, there's no break up in here where it says, you know, "9:00, do this, 10:00 do this." It's very narrative style. And so it goes through day one. It keeps going through day one. Keeps going through day one. And then we get to day two. And then, again, a narrative style.

He talks about what he did on his second day here. So this is the type of article where even though there's a numeric basis for it, it still goes as if there's miniature articles on day one, day two, and day three, about what he's doing in London. So this is more the type of thing that we're looking at now. Whereas what Lee was asking about is the type of thing where you might have 177 islands in the Mediterranean to visit this summer. And each of those islands is



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

gonna have like one sentence, maybe two sentences, something very short about that thing. And so that's more the type of thing that we're gonna talk in the webinar after this, which I called sort of city guide articles, but that also applies to those more listicle type things that Lee was talking about.

Okay, so let me get back over to the slides. So then at the end of the webinar today, the last thing that we're gonna talk about is just how to pitch these types of pieces.

First of all, a basket of kittens. What a weird concept. This is my favorite basket of kittens picture, not because the kittens are particularly adorable or because it's actually a basket underneath, but because this really shows the ideal components of a basket of kittens. So the concept of the basket of kittens, the name for it, came from an editor and former freelance writer, she kind of goes back and forth between editing and freelance writing, who I know and respect and she's just a really lovely person in addition to a highly skilled writer and editor.

And she first taught it to me. She, at the time, was working at "Every Day with Rachael Ray." Her name is Abbie Kozolchyk. She's not with "Every Day with Rachael Ray" anymore, but she was in a position there that actually had been created for her specifically around her. This is the type of person who is so good at what she does that very, very major newsstand magazines will create a position for her.

So she told me or she actually told a number of people, this was at a workshop, that editors like the New York type editors who are really intimidating, who, you know, will respond to your emails in all lowercase and constantly seem upset with you, those type of editors are always, always looking for baskets of kittens. The reason is, as she put it, and if you're a dog person, please imagine this as a basket of puppies. I know some people have a very averse reaction to cats, I'm not sure why. But if you prefer dogs, imagine it as a basket of puppies.

So the way that she put it is, "Who can refuse a basket of kittens? Because, well, one kitten is cute..." You know, and if you have ever seen various cat photos or videos online, you know that they catch cats in their most adorable



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

moments, but cats are...you know, they're not always the cutest. You know, they're perfectly adorable, but they're not always doing cute things. So like one cat, one kitten, one puppy, whatever animal you need for this comparison, can be ignored. Like, you know, if there's a cat or a baby or a puppy or whatever in front of you doing adorable things, it's possible to ignore that and go back to what you're working on. But if there's a whole basket, if there's a whole bunch of them sitting there doing adorable things and looking at you with their kitten or puppy or baby eyes or whatever, how can you ignore a basket of kittens?

So that's the idea, that editors love baskets of kittens because there's just so much good stuff in there that you can't ignore them. And it's not that the editor can't ignore them, it's that their readers, their audience also can't ignore them. So to go back to what Lee said about listicles, this is why you very often see on the cover of newsstand magazines things like, you know, the classic Cosmo, 72 ways to fire up your sex life or something like that. That's why these numbers, these roundup type things, tend to be mentioned on the cover of the magazine because just like online, they're the type of things that people really want to look at. People want to look at them because even if they know about a topic, they want to see if there's something that they don't already know. People want to look at them because it seems like they could learn a lot about a topic in one place. And most importantly, people want to look at it because if there's that many options, it seems like even if some of them won't apply to the individual reader, some of them will. So they're likely to get something out of it even if there's other things in there that they're not interested in.

Now, this is really important in terms of features because if you think about it, and especially for those of you who've joined us for the earlier webinars in this series, in the front of the book, in the beginning of the magazine, and all of the things before the features, there's a lot of really short articles that cover a very diverse range of topics. And the idea of this is to catch the attention of a lot of different readers. That's the whole goal of having that front of book, lots of short pieces that cover lots of different things. It's so that there is something for everyone.

But then what happens is that in the feature section, there tend to be, depending on the magazine, let's say, you know, two or three to five to seven long articles, and we think of them in terms of word count. We think of a feature as being





# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

somewhere, these days, between say 1,200 and 3,000 words or something like that, but in terms of pages, these articles are going anywhere from 6 to sometimes 12 or 15 pages. They take up a lot of pages. So if you are an editor or a reader and you have something that takes up that many pages that is very narrow and not necessarily going to be interesting to every reader, that's a gamble. So if you are sitting on an airplane and, you know, the plane is taking off. You really need to work on your laptop. You don't have anything you want to do on your phone. Can't take your laptop out yet. So you take out the airline magazine and you start flipping. If you get to the features and there's 5, 7, 12 pages of something you're totally not interested in, then you might just put that magazine away if you have to flip for that many pages and you just don't see anything that's interesting to you.

So having a basket-of-kittens as a feature, not just in the front of the book, is very appealing to an editor because it means that in that feature area where there's a lot of pages in a row that might be too specific in some features for most readers, you can instead have something where it's gonna appeal to different people. Even if they don't like something on one page, they'll turn the page and they're still in the same feature article. There's something else that might grab their attention.

So this is different from features that might be a profile feature. They might be a narrative first-person feature. This is different from features that really take place in one location and only talk about one type of thing. So for instance, it could be, you know...I think of the classic Condé Nast style feature where, you know, the writer goes and rents a villa in Tuscany or Spain or France or whatever for the week and talks about what they did there. Or there was one recently that we looked at in another webinar where the writer had gone to Japan to figure out if the new Hyatt hotels was interesting as a stay as the old-fashioned ryokan style hospitality.

If you're never gonna go to Japan and you don't care a ton about what type of hotel you stay in, if you're somebody who's more of an experiential traveler, you like food tours and you like getting out and meeting with locals, that whole feature might just not appeal to you. So this is where the basket-of-kittens concept really comes in, but I told you when we first went to this slide, and



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

again, for those of you who prefer puppies to kittens, I apologize that these kittens have been staring at you for several minutes.

For the reason I, at the beginning of this slide, said I love this picture. I was so happy when I found it because it's the perfect display of the basket-of-kittens concept. So tell me, you guys, look at this basket. And I know that we've used this on a past webinar, so some of you might already know the answer, but look at this basket of kittens and tell me what strikes you about this picture when you look at these kittens? And please, no obvious kitten answers, but when you look at these kittens, what do you notice about the particular kittens that have been chosen to be included in this picture?

Okay, great. We've got a couple different answers here that are about their eyes, different focuses, different colors. I'm just blowing my nose in the background. So if you don't have sound for a second, don't freak out. There's about a 17 second delay between me and you guys. So I'm just blowing my nose while I'm waiting to hear from you guys. So let us know again, what differences you see. Some people have mentioned color, markings. That's a great one. What else do you notice about these kittens?

Great, super interesting answers here, and I love that some people talked about where the kittens' eyes are looking. Can you imagine this poor photographer trying to get all the kittens to look at the same place at once? So a lot of people had mentioned the differences and some people had mentioned the similarities, and that is really what I wanted you guys to notice here. So if you'll actually...I don't think anybody mentioned this, but if you...I'm glad some people like it. So I was really worried you guys might be like a dog crowd and then you'd be upset to have kittens staring at you for so long.

So something that I'm not sure anybody quite mentioned is that if you actually look and almost make like a little ruler in your mind, the kittens' faces are almost all exactly the same size even when we account for the fact that the ones in the back will automatically be a little bit smaller because of perspective. So I love this picture because it's so perfect in terms of, I'm just gonna flip to the next slide and flip back, this idea of the Set game. We're gonna look at this in a minute and we're gonna talk about it, but the idea with the basket of kittens is



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

that you want to have, for each possible variable, you want everyone in your basket to be either the same or different. So this idea of the game of Set, let me know in the chat box, you guys, whoever has played this game before so I know how much detail I need to go into.

So the game of Set, you have these different cards and they have four different variables. The variables are color. So you'll see on the first example here, there's purple, red, and green. That's one variable. The second variable is shape. You'll see in the second example here that there's diamonds, there's a squiggle, and then there's these cylinders. The third variable is filling. You'll see also in this second one here that there is...the middle one is completely filled in. The first one has sort of like a strike-through shading, and the third one is completely empty. And then the fourth variable is number. So you'll see here in the second as well as the third example here that you've got one, two, or three different items on here. So there's four different variables.

So let's go back to our kittens and let's look at how this plays out. So first of all, we've got a basket of small animals and they're all kittens. Right? Check. They're all the same, they're all kittens. Secondly, the kittens are all...Marilyn said that game is like Uno. Uno has different directions on different cards. Set is about looking at the cards in front of you and finding a match. I'll go back to the Set in a second and show you how it works, but I wanted to just go back to these kittens for a second.

So they're all in the basket. None of these kittens are outside the basket, all of the kittens are in the basket. So they're all located in the same place. So they're all the same general type of thing. They're all located in the same place. Next, they're all the same size like I mentioned. See, the kittens' head width is almost...the gray one here in the front is a little bit bigger, but otherwise, they're all basically the exact same size. They've all got their ears perked exactly the same way. And then some people mentioned they're all kind of at least trying for the best that the photographer can do to look at us. So there's all these different ways where they're exactly the same.

And what happens is the fact that all of these elements have been kept consistent, allows us to better focus on, understand, and appreciate their



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

differences. Okay? So what that means is some people had mentioned different colors, somebody else had mentioned different markings. I really like that as well. So you'll see here that, obviously, this one in the front lower right is dark gray. And then we've got...it actually goes around in a color palette. Nobody mentioned this, but this is another thing that I love about this photo. Is that we've got the very dark gray, and then next to that one, we've got the one that's the gray with a little bit of brown and a little bit of white, but it carries over the gray. And then we go from this little bit of brown kind of...I'm not quite sure what you would call that color, like ginger color, I guess, that's in the nose and around the eyes of the front left side kitten. And then in the back, we've got this full ginger kitten. And then that one goes into the one that's like part ginger with a little bit of white.

See? So there's actually a gradient of colors going on here, and then of course, as people had mentioned, they also have different markings. So the fact that they're all the same size, all posed the same way, allows us to really appreciate this color gradient that's going on here. If the kittens were all over the place in this photo, if the kittens were different sizes, different ages, looking in different places, there would be so much going on in the photo that our attention wouldn't be drawn to this nice gradient here. So that's really what you want to make sure to do in that selection process.

Remember, I talked about how with a basket of kittens article, it's really like 25% of your time, maybe less than that, 15% to 25% of your time is on the selection because the selection, the balance between the different items in your basket is so important. So here, again, is those key components that, first and foremost, the concept of the basket of kittens. The reason editors love it is that all of the things in it are just as adorable and just as interesting, but then they have to be united in certain ways in order for the differences to be noticed and important but not overwhelming. But the next thing here is why we're gonna get into the Set example, that the balance is important. It's the mix of diversity and similarity, but you notice how they're all diverse here. None of these cats, kittens, are the same colors. Each of them is an absolutely different color. Each of them have different markings. There's not two gray cats and then two that are different because that would upset the balance. Okay?



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

So let's pop over for a second. I know only a couple of you are familiar with the Set game. So I want to pop over and show you how it works so that you can understand because this is really the key, the fundamental aspect of understanding how to put together a really proper basket, your correct balance of kittens. And the thing is, like I said, this idea of the balance of the basket is really what is gonna set you apart to an editor in terms of understanding how she thinks about this because she has to think about this diversity. She has to think about bringing in different readers, but she also has to think about not overwhelming them. She has to think about making sure that what the article is about is very clear to them.

One of the main things the editors complain about in their pitches is they don't think that the editor knows what the...sorry, that the writer who has sent the pitch understands what her piece is about. So editors look at your pitches, and from those, you know, 150, 300 words that you send them, and especially if you send them more words, they think this writer doesn't know what they're pitching me. So by making a perfect balance in the things that you include in your basket of kittens roundup pitch, the editor understands that you have authority over this subject. You have authority over the concept of writing, of putting together a piece and it creates instant trust.

So again, this is the rules of Set. Like I told you, you want to match the color, the number, the shading, but let's look at the actual game. So somebody had mentioned, "Is this like Uno?" And I said no because the thing is that you need to create the perfect set. So what you'll see here is that we've got a green that's got three and four. A green that's shaded of, again, three, and a green that's empty three, and those create a set. This one has three that are all the same shape, all the same shading, but different number. That's a set. Same for this one.

So these are all sets that are like those kittens. They're very, very similar, but here, I want to show you the type of set that's a little more like what you're gonna do in your pieces. We've got a diamond which is a single diamond and shaded, and then we've got these squiggles that are empty, and then we've got these three bars that are full. So these are ones that are all totally different. This is more similar to what you're gonna be doing with your articles. I know it's kind of a weird concept, so bear with me, but the idea is that as you are doing



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

your articles, you need to be 100% balanced on making sure that each of the things you've included in your basket of kittens is actually different in that characteristic, in that variable.

So here, we said there's four variables. So what might that mean for an article? It might mean that you're doing a roundup, and I'm gonna take an example that's kind of like the one that I'm gonna show you in a minute. But it might mean that you're doing a roundup feature where all of the things that you're showing have to be in a certain geographic area. Okay? So they all have to be in the United States. So that's one variable. But then another variable is their more specific location, what state they're in. Okay? Then another variable might be what the topic is, generally. So let's say that they're gonna be food tours, but then the next variable which is related to that might be what type of food. It could be coffee, it could be beer, it could be sweets, it could be, you know, fine dining. So those can be four variables for a random feature that you're doing which is on food tours.

So again, so this has four variables. We've got the color and the shading. So that could be that they're all food tours, but that they're different types of food tours. And then we've got the number and the shape, and that could be that they're all in the United States, but that they're all gonna be in different locations. So let me know if that makes sense. Okay, I took another sneeze break. It seems like at least one of you has got it. So hopefully, this is making sense to most of you.

So again, the reason I'm harping so much on this is that with these basket of kittens pieces, both in your pitch and in writing the article, the writing is almost secondary to making sure you have a really solid creation in the first place. But that doesn't mean the writing doesn't matter. So hold on, Jade's got a question here. It makes sense but it seems like it's not easy to come up with the right terms, i.e., it's easy to mess this up with other type of pitches. That's very interesting. So with all of these types of articles, how do you know what you're pitching?

I see very often that pitches the editors get have, you know, a topic, but they don't outline what the type of piece is that they're pitching. You know, so somebody might have gone to... I think I've been using this example a lot lately,



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

but I'll just use it again. Somebody might have gone to Rwanda and done a very special experience with gorillas in Rwanda where they have hiked, you know, perhaps eight hours to get to see the gorillas. The slide before this one is the components. I hope that's the one you want, Lee. So somebody might have gone to Rwanda to see these different gorillas.

So I see people pitch editors where they just talk about this experience, but the editor doesn't know what the piece is. Is it a narrative piece where they talk in first person about their experience in a chronological way? Is it a profile piece on the company? Is it a piece where they're rounding up the different types of companies that can take you there and comparing them to different pieces or comparing them to each other? Is it a story where they are talking about, perhaps for a bit, in first person, about this Rwandan gorilla experience, but then they also have a component where they're comparing it to other gorilla hikes in other countries?

So not specifying very clearly in your pitch the format that you're pitching is one of these things that makes editors say, "I don't think this writer knows what they're pitching me." Or, "I don't think this writer knows what the piece is about." So this is one of those things that can be very confusing to you as a writer, is that you're like, "Well, I know what this piece is about. It's about these Rwandan gorillas." But what the editor is really saying is, "How does this look on the page? Like what article are you really pitching me?"

So singing very clearly in your pitch, "I am pitching you a roundup with five sections each covering a different type of food tour," that is crucial to have in your pitch. And what if you don't know what type of story that editor wants? Well, that's why we have the Travel Magazine Database. That's really why we started it, so that you don't have to think about, you know, what type of shape should the story be? What type of story might this editor want? You just look at the database or you look at the magazine and you see what type of stories is the editor already publishing in this section?

Yeah, Marissa, so we're gonna look at a piece, in just one second, I'm gonna talk about how the components of the piece are put together. And then you'll have a better sense of this. So I hopefully answered Jade's question, and



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

Marissa's question, we're getting into now. So like I said, in an earlier webinar, we looked really in-depth at how these pieces work in a front of book format. So in those short pieces that come early on in the magazine, but what about in a feature? How are they different? So I spent a lot of time talking about Set and about the basket of kittens and these things, but as I mentioned, in a feature, the selection of your basket is really one of the paramount things. And part of it is so that you can show, in your pitch and in the eventual piece, authority, so that you can show the editor and the reader that you really understand this topic and that you're giving them the best information, but also so that you can give them different options.

So a couple of things on this. Once you've been assigned a piece, it's always useful to ask your editor what parts of this balance? So Jade was saying, how do you figure out what characteristics to take in account? Ask your editor because your editor knows what's important to them. And if they don't, then they should think about it, or they'll just give you a piece that they've done in the past that they like. And this is something that I really like to always ask an editor that I'm working with for the first time, first section that has repeating formats. I like to always ask them, you know, to say like, "I've looked at a couple back issues, but is there a specific article in this department in this section that you really like that I should use as an example for myself?" Because you don't want to get into a situation where you are copying an article that you've seen in the magazine, but it's one that the editor didn't like. You don't want to do that.

So it's always great to ask the editor. They might, you know, say anyone or something like that, but you need to preface it by saying, you know, "I've looked at some back issues, but is there one you really like?" Because you don't want them to just think that you're asking them to do the work for you. You want them to see it as you really value their opinion and their insights. Okay? So then as you're doing the mix, as you're choosing the characteristics for your basket, here are a couple different ones to take into account: geography, type of business, diversity of characters.

So this might mean that as you were covering in each section of your roundup different businesses, that you want to choose ones that have been started in different ways. So maybe one was started by a couple as a passion project. Maybe one was started by the city government. Maybe one is an offshoot of a





# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

large corporation. This is another different type of variable that you can look at. Okay? So in each of those sections, you almost have a mini-article in and of itself.

So I'm actually gonna go now to a piece, to show you a piece, and then we'll come back and go through each of these things here because I feel like I've been talking at you for a really long time and I want to show you an example so you can see the type of thing that we are talking about here. Okay? So I've got two that are actually by me that are in this format that I've pulled up for you guys, and one of the reasons that I'm using some pieces that I wrote today is that I used to write so many of these. I would write like not a hundred a year, but I would write dozens and dozens of these pieces every year. So I really spent a lot of time writing this particular type of piece, so that's why I'm showing you guys some articles that I've done today.

So let's switch screens, and we'll have a look at some of those. So I've actually got two different food-focused pieces for you today. So I'm not gonna read through the whole article like we usually do because, as I mentioned, and what we're gonna really dig into right now is that each of these mini-sections in these roundup features is like an article in and of itself. So what I want to show you in these two articles that we're gonna break down today is how that basket-of-kittens concept translates over, and then how I put together a single section in each of these articles.

So this one is called "Taste the Heartland." So this is part of a package. So a package means several different articles that are related. It's very common to have roundup features that are part of a package. So that listicle type thing that Lee had asked about earlier or where you see, you know, like on Cosmo, 77 ways to spice up your sex life, if you've ever opened an article on the newsstand or a magazine on the newsstand to find that article, you're usually disappointed because it's not one article with 77 ways. The magazine has 10 articles on each of them say a different number of ways. That's usually how these packages of many, many, many roundups are created.

And so what happens is that I used to have to do these packages where I would have, for instance, the Heartland, which is like central part of the U.S. that's a



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

bit west of the Midwest, weirdly, and I would have all the states in the Heartland and I would have three articles. And I would have two have each state mentioned twice among these three articles and cover, you know, five to seven different locations on these five to tell them different topics. So I would do all this research to figure out, how do I balance these different things among these articles? And then once that's set, I start to do the interviews. And then I start to do the writing.

So what that means is that this piece that you see here, this "Taste the Heartlands," this has five things that have been selected and it hasn't just been balanced within this piece, but it's actually also been balanced to two or maybe even three other pieces in this whole package. So we've got here, I'm gonna open the second page in another tab so we can switch over easily. So we've got here for this Heartland's piece and then I've also got one pulled up which is "Culinary Experiences in the Carolinas." So this is a smaller area, this is just in one state.

But what we've got in both of these pieces is an automatic geographic distribution. They all have to be in the Heartlands, but they all have to be in different states. So you'll see here, the first one is in Wisconsin. We've got something in Michigan. I've got something in Missouri, something in Iowa, and something in Minneapolis, Minnesota. But then beyond that, we know that they're all food experiences, but they're all gonna be different. So this one is a barbecue tour. This one is a French Icarian Village. What does that mean? It's like one of these historic settlements, and it has a food-focused experience.

This one is another food tour, but unlike the barbecue tours, this one is a general food tour about the whole city. Here, another food blog, but this one, rather than being about a city or a specific type of food, this one is about agriculture, agritourism, and it goes into a large area of the lakefront. And then this one here, again, is a place, but this one is a cheesemaking center. So I do have three things in here, like I said, that are food tours, but they're all quite different. So what's unified these is that they're all in experience, they're all something that you can do in a couple hours or an afternoon, but they're cheese, they're agriculture, they're barbecue, they're ethnic heritage of a city, they are... what's the last one? Oh, they're historic food heritage of an area.



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

So that's the way that these different characteristics balance in this piece. And then in this Carolina piece that I've got, they're all in the Carolinas, but we've got both North and South Carolinas. So we've got Charlotte, North Carolina, Asheville, North Carolina. In this second one, whenever it gets to us, we've got Greenville, South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina. So we've got two for each Carolina, so that's perfectly balanced. And then we've got different major cities in each Carolina as well. This one, we've got...it's a fine dining food tour. This one is a culinary tour of Charleston. So it's like a celebrity chef tour. This one we've got is a cooking class with a chef. Oh sorry, this one is cooking class with a chef, and this one is a foraging tour. So again, they're all food experiences. They're all something that you can do in a couple hours, but they all have a different take on what a food experience is.

So for instance, I wouldn't have two foraging tours, or I wouldn't have two cooking classes unless there was something quite different about them. Okay? So let's look at one individual piece here. So in the background for this magazine that I want to give you just so you can understand what's in here, is that this is a magazine which is for group tour operators. So it's people who, for various reasons, are organizing a tour for a group of people and they would be reading this magazine to get ideas either about maybe where to take their tours, maybe different things to include in their tours, maybe advice on how to run their tours.

So when we do a piece like this, so right now, we have the Heartlands package, right? This might be read by people who are doing tours in that area or thinking about doing tours in that area and they're saying, "Oh, okay. So let me see if I can find some new food experiences to include on my tours." Or, "I hadn't thought about having food experiences before." But the end result is that this is for an audience of people who is not just looking to take a tour, but is looking to include a tour, include a food experience, on a larger itinerary that they're already doing.

So let's take a look at one specific thing here, but for a second, I want to go back at the slides. Jade says she's written about that Asheville foraging tour. Yeah, it's really cool and I was really bummed. I was supposed to go on it one time and my...the person I was traveling with kind of screwed up our schedule



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

and I missed the foraging tour and I was very bummed. So I think I've been like blacklisted from them, but he's a very interesting guy.

So each of the sections, in each kitten, let's say, each individual element of these pieces, has its own mini-article. It's got a lead. We say why the editor cares. We give the background on how it was created. We flesh out the offerings, and we give service information. Okay? So how does that work for these pieces? So let's look at this guy. I'm highlighting him because I haven't taken his story yet, but he's really great. So I'm giving him a little publicity here. So this is a really kind of interesting, slightly...you know, the type of person who runs a food tour that just has a lot of character. So he has been leading wine food and history tours in Europe. And then he moved his base of operations from Detroit to west Michigan to take advantage of the lakefront's natural beauty, but he realized how unique the area's offerings were, not only in the United States but the world, and began offering food and farm tours of his area.

So this is a great establishment of why this reader cares. You might be like, "West Michigan." Like these people are coming to see Chicago, like, why would I take them there? He explains very clearly that this guy has been leading tours in like the top areas in Europe. And when he moved to this area, he was so struck that it was on par, not only with what's in the United States, but also on what he sees when he's in Europe, and he had to start leading tourists there. So that's the lead and that's also the why the reader cares.

And then we go into a little more background from him about why that matters. Well, also expanding on what it is that he does. So the arts present makes it a really idyllic place. Geen said of the lakefront that he promotes, is the second-most agriculturally diverse region in the country due to its diverse mix of orchards, farms, wineries, and cheese producers. His goal is to provide "the hands-on personalized experience of meeting niche producers and winery owners, so visitors get the impact of the whole region being the food center of Lake Michigan."

So you'll notice here that I use not one but two quotes. And when you do these roundups for magazines, one of the big things that makes them really different



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

from a roundup for the web is that you need to have an interview. And these interviews can take 10 or 15 minutes, but you need to get those quotes to include. And one of the big reasons is to say something like this. I, as the writer couldn't say this, that the arts present makes it an idyllic place. I could say this thing, you know, the hands-on personalized experience of meeting niche blah, blah, blah, but it's much better to have it coming from him.

Anything that has a subjective element, like, makes it really this or this is really great, you always want to have somebody else say that. It's also really great if you can have somebody else say the why, say why they are doing that. Okay? So in this part, I've expanded on why the reader cares while also giving some background on what he does and why he got into it. This is kind of the origin story, so to say. When you do these roundup type pieces, it tends to work out that the...you say either at the end of that first paragraph or at the beginning of the next paragraph why the reader cares, usually at the end of the first paragraph. And then in this next paragraph, you give that background. Why does this thing actually exist and what can you expect when you're there? Okay?

Let's finish up this "Hungry Village Tours." So then I get into more about what you can expect and the service information. So I say Geen offers custom itineraries of the lakefront's food producers based on a groups interests and available time, and has a signature three-hour walking tour and six-hour walking tour that he offers to the public. "Variety is key," he said." That's why we go to places that are different sizes. Every place we go to has a different story. Maybe at the goat place, there's a couple that moved from Chicago to produce artisan goat cheese, and on another one, an artist lives on the farm and grows her own food."

So you'll see I did something a little meta here. He's actually talking about how to create a great basket of kittens here in this piece that I'm showing you as well, but I'm not just ending this with service pieces. Okay? For those of you who have joined us for the earlier ones in this series, you always want to also have that little bit at the end, include that little oomph, a little bit of why this is important. So that's why I've got this quote from him there as well.



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

So let me just go back to the slide, and I see Stephanie's got a question here because we need quotes. Does the article have to have sources secured for interviews before we pitch them? Absolutely not. The rule of thumb on securing sources is that you only need to secure a source before you write a piece if the whole story hinges on that thing. So for instance, because this is a roundup, you could always substitute out something else in that roundup if you can't get a specific source, but usually, by virtue of having the assignment, you'll be able to get somebody to talk to you. And even if it feels like you can't get somebody, like, sometimes I'll just call and get the random customer service person who answers the phone somewhere and just ask them a couple questions, and then I can pull some quotes from there. So it's pretty much always possible to get quotes.

I've gotten quotes from super media shy places like casinos that really just hate talking to the press because they think everything's gonna be spun the wrong way. You can always get some kind of quote from somebody about something. So the only time you need to secure the interviews in advance is if it's a piece that hinges on one person, like it is an interview piece itself or it's a profile of a celebrity, somebody that it'll be hard for you to get.

So I'm gonna wrap this up so that we have...oops, actually, this is the slide from last week. So I'm gonna wrap this up so that we have a chance to have a little break before the next webinar. We already talked a bit about how to pitch these pieces, and I just want to elaborate a little more. So you want to not pitch a roundup feature unless you are sure that the magazine publishes roundup features. Like I said, these are lovely. A lot of magazines do them. Editors really love them. And often, there will be magazines where they might do narrative features and they will also do roundup features, but make sure before you pitch it that the editor does do them because otherwise, you will get in the editor's bad graces because she only publishes long-form narrative blah, blah, blah features, and why on earth would you deign to send her a roundup feature?

But some places do both. So in the Travel Magazine Database, when we talk about what type of features a magazine does, we will tell you, "Usually, they do this, but they're also available for roundup features." So this is something that I notice happens a lot, is that magazines will usually do narrative features or something like that. And sometimes, they also do roundup features, but there



# Dream of Travel Writing

## Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Basket of Kittens Feature

are some magazines that nearly always do roundup features like this group travel and that I was telling you. But there's a lot of other ones out there and they do that for the reason that I told you, which is that their readers have a lot of different interests and the editors want to make sure that they cater to all those interests and as many of their features as possible.

So when you pitch them, nobody's asked this yet that I've seen, but this is the usual question. Do you need to mention all of the kittens in your basket in your pitch? And the answer is no, absolutely not. But you should mention somewhere in the ratio of two out of five, two out of three, something like that. You want to mention more than one to show them that you've thought about what is in there, but you should not tell them all of the different things. Okay? Keep your pitch short, but show them that you've thought about what's gonna go in there, and more than tell them which things are gonna include, tell them how you're balancing your basket. What are the characteristics that you're balancing? That, in many ways, is more important. And with the two that you have decided to share with them, give them a little bit about why that thing is important, why that thing is interesting, why it belongs in your basket.

So thank you guys so much for joining me, and again, I'm so sorry that I had to postpone this webinar last week, but I'm glad that we got it in. Bye, guys.