



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

Right now, we are gonna talk about how to put together a guide feature, and I'm gonna tell you in a lot of detail what I mean by that. But, first and foremost, what I wanted to talk about for a second is this "Article Nuts and Bolts" series that we're doing, and why we have embarked upon in the first place. One of the really big reasons that I'm talking about how to write different types of features or different types of articles, we're talking about different type of features at the moment, but one of the main reasons that we're talking about this is so that you feel confident pitching articles that you've never written before.

And this is really important because in the Travel Magazine Database, you've got 500 magazines that are looking for travel articles. And often, they are looking for upwards of 10 or more different articles from freelancers every month. So that means there's like 5,000 different opportunities on a monthly or sometimes bi-monthly basis to be published. But what I see happen a lot is that people who have been writing on the web, on their own blogs or for other places, doing content marketing, or maybe you're writing your own job. Before I was a freelance writer, I was a professional writer, but in a university setting. I ghostwrote for the chairman and the president of MIT and I did internal communications, and also outward-facing things. So I was a writer, but not for magazines. I don't have any journalism background. I just have a literature background, and Italian literature at that. So I basically didn't even go to college in English.

So it's very easy to feel like you are not qualified to write the types of pieces that you might see in magazines or in the Travel Magazine Database and think, "Oh, I totally have an idea for that." So that's why we're doing this series is to show that you can do it, that you do know, that it follows a structure that's repeatable, and that you don't need to think past that, that you don't need to gather more information. You don't need to know everything under the sun about a topic. In fact, that can actually be really detrimental to your writing process because if you gather too much information, it becomes hard to know what should go into your article.

And I'm saying that today in particular because...hold on one sec, someone's saying that they couldn't hear me. So I'm saying that in particular today because these guide features that we're gonna talk about are kind of the height of this concept. You might feel, on the superficial level, that you can definitely tell, you know, a friend over email or your aunt who's going to your favorite city for the first time, what to do in a place, but writing it for a magazine is inherently very, very different. And you can either then feel like, "Well, I don't know how to do it for a magazine. I can't do it," or, "This is just like what I would already write, and that's easy." But it is different, but it's not hard. You just need to know what the format is today.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

And for guide features, one of the most important things about that that we're gonna talk about today is how to view these guide features differently than in other pieces of writing that you might do, than other city guide or guide type things in other parts of the magazine, and other things of that variety that you've done online. Because people talk about often how print is dead, and hopefully those of you who've been listening to me, I know there are some of you who are just joining us for the first time, but hopefully if you've read any of our stuff, you've seen that magazine aren't dead. There's new magazines opening. Every time I check out the airline magazines, there's like three new ones. I can't believe that they are just blowing up. There are so many magazines and newspapers even.

Print is not dead, but print is having to change or focus or narrow or be more abrupt and obvious about what makes it different than what people are writing online. And as that happens, things like city guides, which are ubiquitous online, you find them on airline websites, you find them on credit card websites, you find them on people's blogs. This is a type of article that in print needs to just reek of journalism, it needs to reek of authority, it needs to just put off an undeniable scent that this is worth your time to read it here, that the things that we are telling you are "the" things. They are absolutely what you should do in that place, and it's a hard thing to do.

How many of you guys...let me know in the chat box, how many of you guys have read a "New York Times 36 Hours" piece about a city that you know? I'm not gonna look at a "New York Times: 36 Hours" piece today in our webinar, but I just wanna talk about this concept for a second because I think it's a type of article that a lot of you guys are familiar with.

So a friend of mine who's a very avid traveler, let's call her an AFAR-type traveler. She's a doctor, her husband's a professor, they have a good amount of money, they are both from other countries, they are not from the U.S. but they live in the U.S. and they are very avid travelers, they like experiential things, they are not afraid to go out the beaten path. She used to always tell me...well, Carol, hold on, you might not wanna read them after I tell you. She used to always tell me, "Oh, I went to this place. It's so cool. I read about it 'The New York Times: 36 Hours.'" She would always tell me she had done blah, blah, blah because she read about it in "The New York Times: 36 Hours."

And so for a little while, my husband and I, even though we both, you know, have lived in lots of countries, avid travelers, I work in travel, he travels a lot for work, even though we are very, you know, skilled travelers and researchers in our own right, we started using these "New York Times: 36 Hours" when we traveled as well. But I found something really interesting about them. They are useful for folks like us who travel a lot, who want to know that new thing that you can only get in this city that's really cool or want to know where to get the best third wave coffee or the best farm-to-table food or something like that in this city.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

But they are absolutely not for the first-time visitor to a place. Which meant that if I was going to a city and I actually wanted to see the things that made that place that place, that gave it a sense of place, you know, for instance, Chicago, you really have to go to the Cloud Bean. It's this just amazing thing to photograph, which is in a park and you stand under it and your reflection all these different ways. You just have to go there, like it would be sad to visit Chicago and not do that. "The New York Times: 36 Hours" won't mention that, they won't. They'll tell you the things to do as if you've gone there a thousand times, and that's really not for everyone.

But I mention this for two reasons, because that is the type of city guide that the people that "New York Times" editors think are reading their newspaper are gonna want, okay. So city guides begin, they are pegged inherently, not to the concept of what are the must-dos in a place, but they are pegged very strictly to the concept of what the editors of the magazine think the experience of the travelers who read their magazine will be. This is incredibly important. If you go out there and you pitch a guide feature to easyJet... easyJet is, for those of you who aren't familiar, a low-cost although increasingly mainstream carrier in Europe that focuses on going to all the cool vacation destinations. So they fly from London to all the beaches, all the islands, all the cool cities everywhere that a cool kind of, you know, urban, experiential, maybe millennial, interested in food-type traveler would want to go to. If you were to write a piece for them about Paris' like 10 top museums, that wouldn't fly as a city guide for them. They would wanna know the unique undiscovered museums or the ones where you're gonna learn something you never realized about Paris because those are the types of things for their readers.

So as we talk today about city guides, we're gonna look at a couple different formats that city's guides can take. They can be itinerary-styled pieces. They can be these 10 museum-type pieces. They can be every type of thing that you would ever wanna do in a city pieces. They are inherently service-oriented. Service means telling you how to do, what to do, giving you advice, but they take the narrow slant of what matters specifically or what the editor think matters to the readers of that magazine. Okay, so we're gonna talk much more about how this plays out, but it's incredibly important to remember that magazines are not looking for, explicitly not looking for, would be pissed off to have a piece that looks like a city guide that you would see on Mastercard or on Priceline or on WowAir's website. They are not looking for something that appeals to everyone. They're explicitly not looking for that, okay. So that's something that I want you to keep in mind that we're gonna go through today, okay. And so, we're gonna look at some of these in practice and we're also gonna talk about how to pitch these.

With these guide features that I wanna talk about...in the last webinar, I spent a lot of time talking about how to put together a basket of kittens, and I've talked a lot about what that



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

meant so check out the other webinar if you're interested. But I spent a lot of time talking about the positioning of it, about how you choose what is going to go in there. But in this webinar because writing these guide pieces, like I said, is quite different than what you might expect, I'm gonna spend a lot of time looking at the actual words on the page.

So I've got an article pulled up that I want to show you because this is the kind of thing where it really, like I said earlier, is different than you might expect is gonna be there, but also that it really is helpful to see how this works out in reality more so than to have me talk about it. So we're gonna spend more of this webinar looking at the words on the page rather than having me talk to you. But first, I wanna talk about this concept of what makes a guide feature different than a narrative feature. So first and foremost, I'd love to have you guys tell me what you think I mean when I say a narrative feature. I'm gonna explain this a little bit more but there's like...in Italian we call this **[foreign language]**. There's a shade of difference between a guide feature, even that's in first person, and a narrative feature.

So let me know in the chat box what you think of when you hear me say narrative feature. And Carol, in response to your question, the webinar last week was cancelled and rescheduled to be today, but it is recorded and if you had registered for the webinar then you'll get an email with the link to check out the recording, which is available to watch for the rest of the day today. So let me know, you guys, in the chat box when I say narrative feature, what does that make you think of? Cool, so these are great answers. So we've got, "A narrative is about inspiring people through storytelling." I love that, and it's kind of a great overall answer, but in terms of a narrative feature, I like what Catherine said here. She said, "A first or third-person story about someone's personal experiences." That's one way to look at it. We've got a first-person point of view versus third person. Somebody said experiential. So Carol says, "A narrative, telling a story about my visit. Guide about how somebody else can go visit."

So I'm gonna pull over to look at a magazine here for a second so that we can look at what I mean when I say narrative feature. So this is from this month's EasyJet magazine. Their feature well is called "The Stories." So this one talks about, "The hottest young pizza chef in Naples is cooking for London's foodies, what could possibly go wrong?" So we already here have a sense of what the narrative is. We've got a chef from Naples, he's gone to London, something happens. So what that initially sets up for you is that there's a beginning, a middle, and an end, right. The beginning is there's a chef from Naples. The middle is that he goes to London and cooks for London's foodies. And the end is that there was a result, right. They loved it, they hated it, he couldn't cook in London, he was complaining about the tomatoes and the oven. Something has happened, right.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

So inherently we know that this is gonna be a third-person story, right, because the writer is not the chef, but the writer is gonna be talking about the chef. And they begin by talking about pizza, and then they get into the chef, okay. And so, they say, “At 1:00 p.m. there’s already a queue.” So there’s a bit of chronology here. So somebody said timeline, right. So timeline is definitely part of it, but the inherent point of a narrative is that it starts somewhere, there’s some sort of change, and then we end up somewhere different.

So you’ll see this feature here goes on for about, I think we’ve got about eight pages, and it ends, “His immaculately round creations fly out of the oven as gloriously messy as Naples originals, and leave the lucky punters with big smiles and sticky chins. ‘My God, it’s the best pizza I’ve ever had,’ says one,” right. So that’s the end is that he goes from Naples to London, you know, there’s some things that happened in the middle, it’s hard, there’s problems with the oven, what have you. And then in the end, the people in London who are like this, you know, super foodies who, you know, can’t anything anywhere, they’re very picky say, “This is the best the food I’ve ever had.” So that’s the end. So there is a bit of a timeline.

But what’s important here is that it’s not just that somebody has gone somewhere, that it’s first person, that it’s about “a” trip, or “your” trip, or “an” experience, okay. It’s not a description. Narrative inherently means that something has changed from the beginning point to the endpoint, okay. So this is really important to remember. We’re gonna talk more about narrative pieces in some of the future webinars, but it’s really important to remember that with a narrative, there is a transformation, a changed action, a result between the beginning of the piece and the end, okay. Now with these guide features, that does not happen. This is really weird, but also important.

So I wanna go back to what Brit said about storytelling. Narrative is about inspiring people through storytelling, okay. So people tell stories for so many reasons, right. To inform, to entertain, to educate, those are some the main three reasons why people tell stories, right. But guide features don’t do a lot of those things. They inform and they can educate, but they don’t necessarily entertain. There’s not a sense necessarily that you are traveling along with a person, okay. So a guide feature is much more about that inform and educate side. So this is really important to remember because we have a struggle here, which is that we aren’t telling a story, we don’t have a narrative, we don’t necessarily even have action, and that can be boring. So this is the struggle in writing a guide-style feature that you are for a long number of word just educating somebody and it has to keep from having a sense of that it’s Wikipedia or that it’s a lecture or something like that without necessarily incorporating action. So this is the weird in-between place that these guide features operate in.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

So first, I wanna give you a short example to look at. So how many of you were with us for the first iteration of the “Article Nuts and Bolts” series? In February, we did an “Article Nuts and Bolts” series the part one, so to say, where we looked at all sorts of different short articles, we looked at how to do news pieces, we looked at how to do front-of-book round-ups, we looked at how to be trend pieces, we looked at how to be business profiles. So let me know in the chat box if you were with us for the first part of the “Article Nuts and Bolts” series because I’m gonna pull up an article that we looked at in one of those webinars because this is also a city guide, but it’s not a city guide feature. Okay? So that’s why I wanna look at this. It’s gonna be a little small. So I’m gonna pop over to my other screen and read it for you.

So the thing with a short city guide is that here you don’t run that same risk that I was just talking about of boring your reader because you’re just educating them for too long. You’re very much getting in and out with the information, it’s very skimmable. You can see even though you can’t read it here that on the side there’s a lot bolding in here, okay. So what it says here on the side, by the way, because I know it’s hard for you guys to read, is that so this is a piece about Mexico City. Like I said, it’s a city guide. And the top part is about shopping. It says, “Buy Mexican,” and then there’s “Eat,” that’s about food, and then there’s “Drink,” and the bottom section is called “Explore a Neighborhood.” And in each of these sections that you see here, all of the things that are bolded are different individual locations that they talk about visiting.

So you can see here in the first one, they talk about four different locations. Here they talk about five different locations. Here they talk about one, two, three, four, five, six locations, seven, eight...four locations down here, right. So they’ve had nearly 20 different locations over here in the sidebar that can’t itself be more than 150 words. So that’s barely 10 words per place that they’re telling you about including the title of the place. That’s super quick. It’s almost like a list in it of itself, but a list in paragraph form, right. So with these front-of-book guides, the power, the usage to the reader of these pieces is that list, is that Rolodex element of it, okay. And that’s totally fine because it’s short. They’re just skimming it. But when we take that same idea, when we take the idea that we’re just giving somebody a Rolodex, but we stretch it over 1,500 words, that’s when things get really tricky, okay.

So I talked about this in the beginning, and I know some of you joined us a little later, but one of the really central struggles of this guide-type piece apart from just keeping people entertained or with you for 1,500 words of Rolodex is to focus. And I talked a lot of it in the beginning about how you have to focus on exactly the type of experiences that speak to the exact type of reader of this publication, but you also have to focus with a lens.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

So I mentioned in the beginning, I mentioned “The New York Times: 36 Hours” type pieces, and I know I said that I wasn’t gonna pull one up, but since we talked about it for a while, and some people aren’t familiar with them, I’m just gonna pull one up. So in “The New York Times: 36 Hours” type pieces, they do not cover the basic what to do in a city. They don’t cover that at all. They talk about what’s new, they talk about things that have just opened, they talk about things that, you know, you might call them hipster-type travel or something like that, but they don’t just talk about the basic things to do, and if they do, it’s always with an angle. So I usually really hate this word, angle, but I think it’s really appropriate in this context.

So I’m gonna flip over this “New York Times: 36 Hours” piece to show you this. So this is “36 Hours in Reykjavik.” This is kind of an older piece. It came out in 2013, so about 5 years back. Now what is the focal point here? What is the angle? They begin, “The major news of Iceland in recent years has not been good. First, a banking collapse crippled the economy in 2008, and then a year-and-a-half later, the volcanic eruption,” I’m not gonna try to say the name of the volcano, “halted air travel across the Atlantic and Europe, frustrating millions. But signs of an upswing, economic and otherwise, can be spotted in Reykjavik, where this year the capital’s impressive new concert hall won the prestigious Mies van de Rohe award, the European Union’s top prize for contemporary architecture. In other parts of town new restaurants embracing fresh local fare and the bacchanalian nightlife is thumping with crop of new bars and clubs. This winter has been predicted to be a particularly favorable time to observe aurora borealis dancing across the night sky, but already Reykjavik is shining.”

So what’s happened here is that they’ve told you how they’re gonna focus this piece. They’ve given you some time pegs and they’ve given you some background, and you can think about it like they’ve given your reasons why you should go to Reykjavik now, but they’ve also told you what this piece is gonna be about. This piece is gonna be about what they said right here. This idea that, “Reykjavik is shining,” right. They talked about this architectural award, this impressive new concert hall. They’re talking about restaurants embracing fresh local flare, a new crop of bars and clubs. They are going to tell you about what’s new, they’re going to tell you not about the things that already exist, and they are not necessarily gonna tell you every single thing that’s new.

They’re not gonna tell you about a new hotel necessarily unless it falls into this concept of Reykjavik on the rise after these bad things that have happened, right. There was the volcano that halted air travel. There was economic collapse. They are going to show you the vibrancy. They are gonna show the parts of Reykjavik that have a tone of everything is okay, all right. So that’s the scene that they’ve set here. Was there a question? Okay, right. So the scene that they’ve set here is that they’re gonna mention the concert hall, which is a guide book as opposed to guide feature, which is a guide book-type item, right. It’s like a to-do, it’s like one



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

of those landmarks, it's like going to the Empire State Building, but they're gonna mention it because it's symbolic of resurgence in Iceland. So I hope that makes sense.

Let me flip back to the slides now because I'm not gonna look at the "36 Hours" piece in part because it's not a good example of the guide-type feature. And let me just tell you why for a second, actually. So this "New York Times: 36 Hours" piece is actually...see how it goes through 3:30 p.m., Hallowed Halls, 5:30, Records and Reels, 8:00 p.m., Icelandic Tapas. Each of these portions of the "36 Hours" piece does not do what we saw on that previous slide, right, where they had, you know, "What to See in Mexico City," and they had seven things. Each of these is a tiny article, almost like a news brief just about one place. And this is actually the type of article that we spoke about in the last webinar. So if you didn't catch that webinar, like I said, it's available for free to be the replay for the rest of the day. So I recommend checking out that one, which is called the basket of kittens-type feature.

Okay, so that's why we're not gonna look at this "36 Hours" today. We're gonna look at a different type of...here we go, back to the slides. We're gonna look at a different type. We're gonna look at the "Hemispheres" piece, which does more of what I was talking about before, this kind of thing in a feature format, but still with a focus. Okay? Now, that focus is tied to three different elements. I talked about the audience, it has to be tied to what is interesting to that audience. It also has to be tied to the time, to this time peg, right, that's what we just talked with the "New York Times" piece. But it also tends to have a focus that is more thematic or topical. So if we were to think about that "New York Times" piece that we just looked at, what's the time bit? The time bit is they kind of looped in a little about the aurora borealis. It talked about this architectural award that it's won. But they talked about this resurgence post, the recession. So it was really the idea that Reykjavik has moved past a sort of dark time.

But what would be the thematic thing there? The thematic thing there, can you say that new as a thematic thing? In this case, yeah, right, like new here is the theme, as they are only presenting you with new things. What if, however, they were showing you a piece which was about Charleston, and they were talking about they had a time peg about why you should go to Charleston. Perhaps the time peg is that, you know, this new museum has opened, or it's the anniversary of Fort Sumter or something like that, but the focus is actually about food and they're showing you all sorts of different food experiences, okay.

So sometimes the time peg becomes the theme as well, but not always. So we are looking at what is interesting to the audience, what is timely, and what ties into the theme. Okay, so those are three focal points of these guide pieces that make them a magazine-worthy guide rather than something that you would see on a website. And part of that, like I said, is that...remember I talked about how the timeliness is one of those big things for a magazine guide.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

On the web, you don't want things to expire, you don't want them to be as timely, you want your piece to be evergreen, you want it to build that SEO juice over years and years and years and continue to be relevant. So on the web the exact opposite is needed. You want things that are more permanent. Whereas in print, they want things that not necessarily are going to be closed tomorrow, but that have an air of "you need to know about this right now" about them. Now, how do we get that?

One of the really important things when you're writing a guide piece for a magazine or a newspaper, as the case may be, is sources. This is a thing that I see happen a lot when I'm working either with folks in our IdeaFest or Pitchapalooza programs or perhaps in one-on-one coaching is that people tell me, "Well, I don't know enough about blah." We, in our recent Freelance Travel Writing Boot Camp, we were working on a pitch together. We were gonna write a pitch, and then write a small piece for a certain section of a certain magazine, and somebody had an idea for that same Mexico City thing that I showed you earlier. Someone had an idea for that section about a certain area, and as he started to work on the pitch he realized he didn't know enough of those specific things, enough of those things to go in the shopping section or the eating section. He had an idea for the theme, but he didn't know the individual items to include.

Now, in that case, we were pressed for time so he picked something else, but usually that wouldn't be a problem, and it wouldn't be a problem because you can go online and see what other people who are influential or who know the area well think fit. And you can write your piece, your pitch rather. And then once you get the assignment, you call people up and you get that up to the minute information from people who are experts and you write your piece. This is the huge dividing line between writing for your own website and writing for magazines. It's not just the concept of interviews being necessary, it's the idea that you are not and should not be the ultimate authority on your topic. Which is weird because you need to show that you are an authority to get the piece assigned, right, but you aren't and shouldn't be the ultimate authority, the ultimate arbitrator of what is good or what is good enough about the topic. So let me know if that differentiation doesn't quite make sense.

But the idea is that you use sources to get authority, and to get a diversity of inputs, and to get information that you wouldn't have access to because you're in the place or you're not in the place all the time, or maybe you haven't visited for a little bit. Or maybe you just aren't an expert on music even if you live in a place, like maybe you're just not a person who goes to clubs or goes to concerts or whatever. So you get that information from someone who knows that really well. And the boon for us as the writer is that not only does getting that information from other people make our pieces better because we get better information, but secretly it saves us tons of time.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

There's this interesting step that I see happen with writers where if you haven't been writing for magazines when you first start doing interviews, you feel like you need to be on the phone for like half an hour, an hour. If you're in person, you just wanna ask them everything you possibly can. And then slowly over time, the interviews start getting shorter because you realize what you need to ask to get the information that you need for your piece.

So what happens is that when you do a really, really long interview, you might be collecting all sorts of different information, but it's not necessarily relevant for the piece at hand. So what I encourage you to do if you're doing a city guide-type piece is not to talk to one person for an hour, but to talk to seven people for five minutes to get more viewpoints from people who are experts in different things so you have more expertise and you have the distillation of the best advice, the best tip from each of those people. That's why I said sources, and I said it three times, because you don't wanna have just one, sometimes your editors will need you to have more than one, but because you want to take advantage of the collected knowledge of the most people. That's how you save yourself the most time and you get the best information for your pieces, okay.

Now, the next big difference between guides that you might see online and guides that you'll see in a magazine is the compression. So let me just look back at this one just for a second because it's so distilled, I just love to show you this. Like I said, there's like 20 things and barely 150, maybe 170 words over here. It's so compressed. Now, obviously, in a guide feature, things aren't going to be as compressed, but there is still an incredible amount of advice for the space at hand, okay. So how does that play out?

Now, in a guide feature, now the one I'm gonna show you is a type of a guide feature where everything is split up by day. So remember I had told you we were gonna look at not the "New York Times: 36 Hours" piece, but we're gonna look at the "Hemispheres," which is the United Airways magazine. We're gonna look at their section, which is called "Three Perfect Days," and this is a guide-type feature where they are trying to show everything to do in a city using the lens of the author spending three days there, but it's actually gonna be first person, which is a little unusual, okay, which is why I'm showing you this, but I wanna tell you about some other options, okay.

So with this first-person guide-type piece, you're going to have a little bit more information than you might in a more third-person reported guide just because the author is telling you how they got from point A to point B, okay. Does that make sense? So it's gonna be a little bulkier, for a lack of a better word, okay, and they might perhaps include fewer things than you might see and something that's more of a third-person guide. So I wanna make sure to make that distinction clear. So in this "Three Perfect Days" style piece, however, you're



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

going to see that there's three sections, they're very obvious, they're the days, but what happens in these more third-person type pieces?

I'm gonna pop over for a second to show you an example. This a very, very weird one, but also very long, and that's why I wanna show it to you because this is a type of guide piece that happens a lot, but you're not gonna necessarily pitch it. So I'm gonna talk to you more about how to pitch these front pieces and when you can pitch them and when they need to be assigned in a minute. But I wanna expose you to this type of piece so that you know that it's out there, and you know how approach it, and you see how it compares to this "Three Perfect Days" piece that we're gonna go into it a little more in-depth. But I want you to know that this is type of piece that's usually assigned, and I'm gonna talk more about that difference in a second.

But first, let's pop over and look at it. So this magazine that we're gonna look at right now is "easyJet Traveler," and this is a feature called "The Ten Best Street Food Stalls in Europe," okay. So it's a big area that they're looking at, they're looking at all of Europe. Now, this has been compiled. See here, they say compiled by four different people, and they say, "We asked 73 top chefs, food bloggers, food writers, bloggers, Instagrammers, and other experts to name their favorite street food spot in town." Now, what's really important about this, like I said, it's compiled. They said they asked all these different people. This is the type of thing that magazine editors in their editorial meetings say. "We wanna do this thing," and then they say, "Okay, we're gonna need to do this many countries. We're gonna need to get in touch with this type of person," and they split up the list and they say, "Okay, editor one, you do this piece. Editor two, don't you have that freelancer that lives in blah, blah, blah, that knows really well, blah, blah? Why don't you give them this batch of the story?"

So stories like this that have a big almost listicle-style roundup tend to be written by a number of people together, okay. So this is not something that you would pitch, but it's something that you can write, okay. So they're talking about the 10 best street food stalls and the way that they do it, if you look here, is each one of these, here's number 10, here's number 9, each one of these is 1 page about 1 place, and it itself is a roundup. So it's a roundup composed of roundups, oh my God, how meta, right? So here it's called "yum bun" and they've got all the service information in a roundup style. So they've got who, where, what, need to know, and then this recommended by. So there's different sections that are very clearly delineated. It is not a narrative that goes through. They've separated out these different sections. First, they talk about who, then they about where, then they about what. Then there's another page, which does the same thing: who, where, what, need to know, recommended by. Okay.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

So again, I wanted to show you this because it's out there, because you'll see these in magazines and you'll often say, I see people do this all the time, "Oh, I could totally write, let me pitch that." No, you can't pitch this, but you can't get assigned to write this, and you can work on it with an editor, but it's not something that you would pitch. So when you see a piece like this in a magazine, in the feature well, double-check who it's written by, and look out for written by four people, or edited by somebody, or compiled by, or with contributions from. That means it's something that's been assigned in-house. So, like I said, this is a very common iteration of this guide-style article, but it's not one that you can write.

So let's instead pop over... let me go back to the slides for a second. Let's instead pop over and look at what type of thing you can write, that you would be writing. So remember I talked about how in that street food one we looked, there were 10 different sections, there were 10 different street food stalls that they looked at, and each of them is a type of mini article, okay. They talk about why you need to experience this type of thing, and then they give you details why it's noteworthy, special features, service information, what you really need to order, what time of day you should go, if it's hard to get to. So for each thing in the city guide article, they're gonna tell you each of these things. Now, I'm gonna go back for one second, in this one that we looked at with the street food, they're really clearly delineated, right. It's like a mini roundup in here, but that's not always gonna be the case.

So let's go back to this piece in "Hemispheres," okay. It's not always gonna be the case because some of these guide-style articles are actually masquerading as first-person features. And that is the case with this "Three Perfect Days" in "Hemispheres." Now, when these guide-style pieces are masquerading as first-person features, how do you know that it's not a narrative? I know there's a delay, so I'm just gonna say it for you. But you know because there's not a beginning, middle, and end, okay. You know because there's no transformation, there's no change in the author, you know because there is not a thesis. There's a theme, but there is not a thesis, okay. All right.

So let's pop over to the piece that I wanna have us look at. And again, because it is a feature which is very long, we're gonna look at it more from the perspective of an overview and I'm gonna read you a couple of different pieces, but I'm not gonna read the whole piece and comment on the whole piece, okay. So hopefully everyone is still with me. We are now on "Three Perfect Days in London." This is from the current issue of "Hemispheres" magazine. So I am gonna be on the PDF scrolling through, so if you have any questions, drop them in the chat box, but I won't be able to see the chat box for a little bit but I'll come back to it after I'm done going to the article, all right.

So let's look at how this plays out. So I talked about how in each section, they're gonna tell you why you need to do this certain thing, they're gonna tell you the service information that



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

you need to know, but there's gonna be like 20 things every days. They're gonna tell you tons and tons of stuff and cram it in this small space. So as with any type of roundup, we begin with an introduction. Usually one paragraph, it gives you this why now information, a bit of overview, and like that "New York Times" piece, it tells you the theme. So what do they say here? "Every city has its intriguing juxtapositions. London, however, has always been a bit different. There's always been a mix-and-match quality to the place, but not so much as a city that's a patchwork of villages."

So they're trying to set it up for you that London is a bit different, but what's the point here really, right? "While Londoners do value their traditions and institutions, they're also restless, preoccupied with novelty and change. As a result, the city is constantly sticking new bits onto the old, very often without any discernible logic, creating a jumble of styles and sensibilities that could leave visitors feeling utterly confused." I have to say, this intro is making me feel confused about London and kind of about where this article is going. So then they say, "How do you make sense of the chaos? You don't. Rather you adopt the organizing principle of the city as a whole. Get out there, give it a go, and see what happens."

So this is a really weird intro, you guys, right. But that's the idea, they're trying to tell you that London is a weird city, and then it's a jumble. So what we can expect in here is that things will seem a bit random, okay. So what a weird theme is that, right. They're telling you that their theme as if they don't have a theme, right. Themes can be so weird in articles, but there's always one. And I love...I wanted to just pull back up and show you...this image that they used to show it, right. Like I know London and I know the perspective of this image, but it gives you a sense almost that there's different photos cut together, like here and here, like it looks like there's a cut line. It's a photo that encapsulates what they're saying here. They've got the new bridge against the old building, right. You know, they've got all sorts of diverse people. They're trying to show you exactly what the weird thing is that they're trying to tell you here in the intro. And then they go into something that's got that idea. It looks old but new at the same time.

And then they go into day one, okay. So the theme for day one is "Skipping and Sipping Around Stylish Soho." Okay, so even though they don't have a theme for the whole thing, at least they're giving us themes for different days. So let's see what's the theme for day two. This is a really long piece so you'll see how it just scrolls for a lot of days. Day two is "Perusing the Posh Shops and Restaurants of Chelsea and Notting Hill." I'm not gonna scroll down all the way to day three, but you can imagine day three has a similar theme. So they're theming the days, right.

So let me just go back to the slides for a second. So as I told you, in these roundup pieces, there we go, each thing, each section is going to have its own theme. So in this case, they are



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

days, right, which seems like, “Okay, well, you know, like, it’s a day, I can do any sort of things in a day,” no. In a magazine setting, they’re gonna give that day a theme and they’re only going to include things on that day that fit into that theme. Why? It seems weird. In life, do you have to do that? Do you have to do all the things in Chelsea in one day? No, but they do it for editorial consistency because, like we talked about before, these guide pieces don’t have a story, they don’t have a beginning, middle, and end. It’s really too easy to bore or just lose your reader, so they create these artificial themes, okay. So that’s why each of these days has a theme.

So let’s go back. Let’s go to this day two in Chelsea. So like I said, this is a first-person piece with a sort of narrative, but that’s masquerading, okay. It’s not actually a narrative piece. It’s actually a guide piece. So you’ll see that they start with a strong first person here, but that’s only to create a little bit of sense of action against the guide setting. I know it’s like a bit meta and it’s a little hard, but that’s one the reasons that people shy away from these pieces because it seems like they don’t know how to put together, but it’s really not that hard. So let’s get into it.

So at the beginning, we get the introduction to why do you care? Why? Right, like it’s a day, why do they have to tell you why you care about what to do on your second day of London? No, they’re telling you why do you care about the theme for the day? So the theme is “posh shops and restaurant of Chelsea and Notting Hill.” And they say, “Forty-odd years ago, not far from where I’m standing now, a rabble of proto-punks started milling around in a tiny boutique run by a designer named Vivian Westwood. The World’s End Shop is still there, its storefront clock spinning backward, but little else remains to remind us that the swanky Kings Road was the birthplace of the Sex Pistols.” So this is a little bit of a lead to introduce you to this area that also ties back to that overarching theme, right, of the old and the new, but things quite not making sense, okay.

Now, they get into what I told you, which is that there’s little bits of something that they describe throughout this day, which is themed, and each of those things then say why that thing is important, some background on that thing, then some service about that thing. So here, they say, “Certainly, there was nothing like Chel-ski back then.” So then they tell us, what is Chel-ski? Why do we care? What do we need to do there? Then they tell us about the Ivy Chelsea Garden. What is Ivy Chelsea Garden? What do we need to do there? Okay, and then it keeps going in that same way with each of these things. Okay, they talk about Saatchi Gallery. What is Saatchi Gallery? What do we need to see there? They talk about the Map House. What is this thing? What do we need to see here? Let’s look at a couple of these to see how he puts this together.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

So you'll see he's got a pretty clear one paragraph per thing, and in a guide feature that's very common to have one paragraph per item that you're talking about. Sometimes they'll have more than one and sometimes those paragraphs will be shorter, but this is pretty normal. So he says, "Wandering towards Kensington, I come across the Map House, a treasure trove that has counted Winston Churchill and Ernest Shackleton among its customers." So here's the what is it and why do we care? Okay, so it's a shop because they said customers, right. And we care because Winston Churchill shopped here. Okay, then what it is? Tell us more, a little more information. "One wall contains a 19th-century poverty map of London with a color-coded index ranging from yellow for wealthy to black for vicious, semi-criminal." Great detail here, okay.

So they don't start by telling you that this store includes things like this, this, this, and this. No, that's the type of thing that you would see online. Here, in a print setting, they give you extreme detail. This is called reporting, okay. And these are details that they've gotten by visiting, it looks like, but the guy who wrote this piece, or the girl who wrote this piece, didn't need to visit this place to get this information. They could have called up the Map House and said, "Hey, could you tell me a couple of the more interesting things that you have in your store?" All right, so you don't need for a guide piece to have done all of this research on the ground. You can go and pop around and see some different things, and take some notes, and then call them back later, all right.

So then he continues, or she continues, "Nearby is a 17th-century map of the world, which the dignified store clerk informs me is valued at 950,000 pounds. I asked how long he's been hanging there, and he gives me a thin smile, "A while." So this gives you character, it gives you sense of place, right. He says that the store clerk is dignified. He gives him a thin smile. He's creating a scene with just this little one tiny paragraph, okay. And like I said, it's done by giving specific details about what is there, about the setting, about the characters, about the visuals rather than by giving a laundry list of vague overview, okay. So one of the main things that I do when I'm editing people's pitches, especially for these roundup style or guide-style pieces, is that X out the too many vague things they have in there and I ask them for super specific details like this.

Let's look at another example, okay. "So I leave the Newman-Young at Sloan's Garden, head into the Saatchi Gallery, which is housed in a grand 19th-century building and puts on exhibitions that skew heavily toward the inscrutable." Okay, so they've told us what it is, it's a gallery. They've given us a sort of sense of setting and, "Skews heavily towards the inscrutable." But do you notice what's missing? Maybe not, but they don't say why you should go here. I don't know if anybody noticed that, but that "why" is missing. And in part this is because the Saatchi Gallery is very famous just like this Harry's over here, which I'll go to in a second. They don't mention why you should go to Saatchi Gallery because this is



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

essentially one of those guide book-style, Empire State-style things that if you are in Chelsea you must do is go to Saatchi Gallery. Okay, that's why that's not here, but they do tell you a little bit about what it is. It's got this old-style setting with the new modern thing. So that's why they've included this guide book-style here because it fits in the theme of the article, okay.

And then detail is, "The first thing I see upon entering is a huge canvas by Los Angeles-based English painter Danny Fox, a naïve depiction of two seated women titled 'Planned Parenthood Waiting Room.' It has a touch of Gauguin to it, but also a touch of off-kilter Dilettante, very Saatchi." Okay, so even the sentences here have more of a spoken quality to them, right, because they're giving description, but with a service element. He is explaining to you what to expect here.

Now, let's look at this one for Harry's Dolce Vita, which again, is kind of a landmark-type thing here. Harry's is a very famous bar. "Next, I head to the new Harry's Dolce Vita, which looks like a bar from a 1930s rail station and has a staff that greets you like a long-lost friend." So this is a very short description with two intense details that create a picture for you of what this place is like. And then he goes into more detail, "As I scan the menu, a white-collared..." hold on... "a white-collared bartender suggests I try an Infinite Negroni explaining that the ingredients are determined by rolling three dice, one for the type of gin, one for the vermouth, and one for the aperitivo. "It's a gamble," the bartender says deadpan. I roll the dice, he explains what he gets, raise my glass to a photo of Sophia Loren, and take a sip. We have a winner."

So again, it's really hard to introduce action into these pieces, but he's trying by incorporating the quote here, the roll of the dice, what he gets, the action of taking a sip, but it's all done through intense detail. He gives the name of the drink, he says how it's determined, he explains what goes into it, and he tells you the end result. Okay, so that's how these individual pieces in these guide features work out is that you have meta sections. In this case, day one, day two, day three. It could be where to say, where to eat, and what to do. Each of those has a bit of theme. And then they've got a few sentences or a paragraph for 20-odd different things that fall under that theme. In this case, this day, which is themed as Chelsea. All right, so that's how they play out.

Now, we're over time. So I wanna make sure that we have time to talk about how to pitch these because I know that I said earlier that there's a lot that you can't pitch. So many of these guide features are, as I mentioned, assigned. Assigned means that you get on the editor's radar either by pitching them and not receiving assignments or by pitching them and receiving assignments, either way. You can be assigned pieces by an editor even if you haven't written for them based on a pitch before, fascinating thing. This is one of the great



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

reasons why you should always pitch and keep pitching. I've heard it both from editors and writers. It is completely common these days for you to get assigned a piece by an editor even if you haven't written for that editor before, just based on the fact that you've been pitching them and they have become familiar with you by pitching, okay. So that one that I showed you from easyJet, that mega guide of guides to street food, that was one that's definitely assigned, there's no other way to get that besides being assigned.

This "Three Perfect Days" one that I showed you, you can pitch to that. They are more likely to assign it to you, but you can pitch. So the way to know if you can pitch it, like I said, is to check the byline of course to see if it says it's been contributed by a bunch of people, but also, the ones that have a very specific format, like they happen every month such as the "Three Perfect Days" that I showed you, those are ones that are open to pitches. Okay, so a good way to know if a guide feature is something that you could put together a pitch for is that if it's something that happens every month and has a very dependable format. But if you are pitching these pieces, you have to have a little bit more oomph than you might for other pieces. And why is that? On the one hand, it's because they're a feature, but on the other hand, it's because guides can always be written about any place. So to convince the editor that this guide needs to happen right now, that she needs to assign it, you need to have a pretty secure time peg.

Now, you'll notice though that this London one that we mentioned, that we looked at before, didn't have a time peg, right. It was really weird, the theme was kind of that things that are new and old and don't make sense. That probably means it was assigned. This is a really good way as you're looking through magazines to know if a piece was assigned or not if it's got like a crazy strong time peg at the top. It's not necessarily an indicator that the piece was pitched, but if there's no time peg whatsoever, that probably means the piece was assigned.

Now, a really good example of this that some of you may have seen me or heard me mentioned before is this Alcatraz feature. So during one of our retreats in the Catskills, we were analyzing magazine articles and somebody found a feature about Alcatraz and it really just seemed to be very much like an explainer-type piece profiling Alcatraz and what to do there, like a guide to Alcatraz, okay. And the writer who was analyzing it or analyzing that magazine said, "I don't understand what this piece is doing here," and that unfortunately happens with features because they need to assign them so far in advance that it can be hard to make them timely because often features are assigned, literally, like they are assigned at least a year if not two years in advance.

So if you are working on a guide feature, and you're working on it from a pitch, you need to know that that time peg needs to be a year in advance. You can't do a time peg for something for this fall for a guide feature, it's gonna need to be for next fall. So that means that as



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Guide Feature

you're looking through the magazine database, or as you're looking through magazines and you see these guide features, and you see that they're written by freelancers, and you see that you can pitch them, you wanna have a very strong time peg but you wanna have a time peg that's for next year sometime. Okay, so at least 12 months time peg on that. And I say at least because you wanna also factor the time for you to go back and forth with the other about the pitch. So you're really looking almost more at 16 months minimum timeframe on these, okay. So that's what I had to say about pitching these.

And that's everything I got for guide features. I know they're kind of like a weird category and I showed you a weird example, but that's because they are a little bit off. Not off, but like they're a little bit odd, right, like the guides that are in the front of the book of the magazine are super formulaic, they're to the point, they're really punchy. But a feature, which is a guide, like I said, it's not a narrative. It has to have something a little interesting to keep somebody reading, basically, like a Wikipedia article for that long. So this is what's important to keep in mind is that they aren't narrative, but you need to have the ability to pull the reader along through all of that information for that much time. This "Three Perfect Days" that we looked at, that piece goes on and on for like 16 pages. That's like 3,000 words, okay.

So we've got a question from Brit, "Would writing about a recurring festival or event be suited to the guide feature format?" That's a great question, Brit. Thank you so much. So I would say that writing about a festival, unless it's something really big like Burning Man or something, would probably be too narrow for a guide feature because like we saw with this London piece that we looked, on each of those days, he mentions like 20 things, right. So you would really need to have an event that had enough going on that you could have 3 different sections where you have 20 different things that you could spend the whole very detailed paragraph about. So that's why I would say that most festival or events wouldn't work for that.

But there are some that would. So like I said, Burning Man would be one, the Seville Feria, which takes place over the course of a month and really a lot going on in terms of service, that would be another one. So there certainly are festivals and things like that that could work for that, but I think that it might be too narrow for an editor to assign even within that because it would really need to be something that would be interesting to enough readers for the editor to wanna spend that many pages going in that much depth on it with the guide format. So that would be my answer for that.

So thank you guys so much and thanks for bearing with me while I still have this cold. Hopefully, next week I'll have shaken it and we'll have a normal sneeze and cough-free webinar. And I hope you guys have a great rest of your week. Bye-bye.