



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

So this week, I am very excited...if this slide will go forward, there it goes...to talk to you guys about quest pieces. This is something that among journalists, among people who have worked for years for magazines or newspapers is very commonly discussed, it's very commonly done. It's almost, in fact, a bit of a default setting in terms of what type of article to write. But I very rarely see you guys coming to me with ideas or pitches for quest pieces.

So I'm really excited to talk to all of you guys about this, and it's interesting as always on our webinars and everything we do, there's definitely more female writers in the world, one could say, but also there seem to be more female travel writers. And I find, and I'm curious if any you guys feel like this as well, that a lot of the quest pieces that I see, that I see out there, a lot of people that I know right them, tend to be written by men.

This is really interesting and I was thinking a bit before the webinar if I could try to figure out some of the things that flow into this. But you'll notice that when I pull up the examples later, I pulled up a few different examples and they're quite long pieces, so I don't know how many of them were gonna get to. But there's two in particular that I wanna show you that are both by the same gentleman, and they're both for "AFAR." And I have another friend who writes for "AFAR" who writes this quest pieces a lot.

And I definitely found as I was going around at least the ones that know of off the top of my head, the ones that have been recommended to me by other editors that they use when they teach, they're often written by men. And I think that part of it might come down to a lot of the things that I see with a lot of the folks that I coach at the workshops who are female, in terms of things that they aren't sure that they're qualified enough around pitching. There's a stat out there that I'm sure many of you have seen that says that women will only apply for a job if they're qualified for 100% of the things listed in the job description. But men will apply when they're qualified for something like 30% or 60% of the things in the job description.

So how does that translate to quest pieces? Because the quest piece is inherently loaded with uncertainty. So it seems like we've got everybody in the room now, so I'm gonna dive into the slides.

So first and foremost, we're gonna talk about why this quest concept is so important. I mentioned at the top of the call that quests are something that are very commonly done, they're very commonly done in magazines and newspapers, and have been for a long time. And I wanna dig into a little bit of why that is. Why is it that this is something that resonates so much that you will see it in a lot of magazines and a lot of newspapers?



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

So after that, we're gonna talk about the structure, not just of our quest article, but also of the quest that we as a writer goes on in our research to get to the elements that will go in to that article. And you'll notice as we look at the examples, which is the third part of the call today, that the pieces that you're gonna look at might feel a little bit like what we're gonna talk about next week, which is a diary style piece.

It really seems in a way like the writer was just kinda telling you, "I went here, I did this, I did this, and then that, you know, this happened so then I did this." It really has this feeling almost if they're just narrating to you what happened in their day or in their journey. But these quest pieces are different than that more diary style piece because of what they don't include, because of the focus on the driving force of the piece, which is the quest. And then we're gonna talk a little bit about how to pitch these.

Yes, Jade has mentioned the piece where somebody retraced Odysseus's journey. And I've read a piece and I almost thought about using it today but it's extra, extra long, but I think that the one Jade is referring to is a different piece.

But there's a piece from "The New York Times" in a which Matt Gross who used to be Frugal Traveler went around the islands that Odysseus went to on his way back, but he did it slightly differently. He essentially started where Odysseus started, and tried to just kinda follow the boats, and follow the ferries and whatever schedule a way he could to get home. So that's the one "Odysseus" piece I know that's more recent.

Some of the folks have mentioned they see these pieces in the food writing as well. Someone typed A, but I'm not quite sure what means. So I'll take a second as we get into the webinar to expand on what I mean when I say quest since this seems like something that a lot of you guys aren't so familiar with what I mean when I say that piece.

So again, when I say quest...somebody had mentioned this idea of the Odysseus journey, of the mythological quest. That journey that Odysseus had is different than a lot of the quest pieces that we're gonna look at today because it's a return, right? He was trying to find his way home. He wasn't out looking for something.

So I wanna reframe a little bit when we say quest, however, this is idea of the search. So think rather than Odysseus, let's think a little bit more about the idea of "Jason and the Argonauts." And here is that other "Odysseus" piece that I mentioned, by the way, from the "The New York Times." So rather than Odysseus who's trying to figure out how to get home, instead of let's think about "Jason and the Argonauts" on his search for the Golden Fleece.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

So when we think about that, that brings to mind the idea that you set out for something, you think you know where it is, and you might have a hard time getting to where you think it is. And then when you get there it often isn't what you thought it was going to be in the first place, and then there's something else perhaps that's better, maybe that you're more interested in, or it becomes more important than the thing that you set out to find. And that's often what you come home with.

Now I mentioned "Jason and the Argonauts," but then I set this out in terms where I think you can even liken what I just talked about to going shopping for a dress. My sister is getting married this Sunday, and I remember when I went out looking for dresses for this wedding and another we had to go to. Just shopping for a dress to wear to an occasion like your sister's wedding, or taking your child to get their outfits for their first day of school, that is also a quest.

When you go out and you have a goal but you know, or find out along the way, that that goal isn't gonna work how you thought it was gonna work. That the thing you were looking for maybe isn't as important as you thought it was, maybe it doesn't matter as much, maybe that's not really the thing that you want. What you really need or what you really want is something else, but you have to go on that quest to figure out that what you want is different. If you don't leave your house, if you don't leave the door, if you don't start fact-finding, if you don't try some examples, then you never realize what it is that you actually need.

And I know it's a little meta that I was just talking about our one-on-one coaching and that's kind of what we also do on our one-on-one coaching, but that's the whole idea, right, that these quests exist in so many different contexts. And that's one of the reasons why there's such fantastically easy pieces to pitch and to conceive rather before you even write the pitch, just to come up with.

In the conference that I'm at here, Spud Hilton, who's the editor of "The San Francisco Chronicle," mentioned this really funny thing what happened on Twitter was that he...I don't know if he had just gotten a pitch about Pamplona and the bulls, but he went on Twitter kind of ranting about "Why did everybody wanna do stories about Pamplona about the running of the bulls? Can somebody please pitch me a story about Pamplona that doesn't have bulls in it?"

And everybody was like "Oh that's so funny. Oh, that's a good idea." And you know what he said? Nobody ever sent him that pitch. He's still waiting. Well, he can't publish that stuff anymore because they don't cover international in the "Chronicle" anymore. But he said



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

nobody ever sent him a single pitch on finding what there is to do that is interesting in Pamplona besides the running of the bulls.

It's so basic and a lot of these quest pieces are very basic types of things that we are all doing already when we travel. You know, you might go to Venice and be looking for the place that served the original spritz, this is now a very common cocktail drink but originated in Venice where they had their own special type of aperitivo where they drink the spritz. You might be in Venice looking for how to take a boat trip that's not a gondola, how do you get on one of these luxury sort of private boats that go around the city, they go on the outside places where the gondolas can't go because the water is choppy?

You might be looking to find who's the oldest family that makes the gondolas? Making the gondola is a very sort of specialized profession, they can only make a certain number every year, they have to use a certain type of wood, just in one city there's innumerable quest that you can do. Sometimes the quest is even something as simple, and you know, every man as you stayed somewhere that place didn't work out, and now you're in the middle of the city during a big holiday and you need to find somebody else to take you in. And you ask around and you end up staying with the brother of the bartender in the bar that you went to and so on and so forth.

So these quests can have so many different avenues, and that is part of why they matter as stories. Because universality in specificity, so something that everyone can relate to and something that only you experienced, is necessary for any type of first-person and really any narrative piece and really any piece where you're exercising an opinion. Which quite honestly is every travel piece you write, because you are the curator of what information you include. So you need to have universality, you need to take what you experienced, what you saw, what you think is interesting, and make that matter to a wider audience. And quests makes that so easy because everyone has had a quest. Most people have even had some kind of quest that they've gone on the same day that they read your story.

I have talked before, maybe not on this webinar but in some conference talks that I do, about how one of my favorite things to do in a foreign country is errands. I love to run errands in foreign countries because they never work like you think they're gonna work, they never work like they work at home. But as you try to find, you know, a package of tissues, as you try to find something really random you need for your apartment like a stapler or something like this, or as you try to find a place to print a copy of your passport for the customs people, you learn things about how the culture that you're in works that you never would have had the occasion to know otherwise just going about your normal business.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

So even something as simple as trying to find toothpaste in Italy can turn into a process because there is no CVS, there's no central place where all those things are sold. They might have toothpaste in a grocery store, they might have toothpaste in the pharmacy, they might have toothpaste in the erborista, which is a type of pharmacy that specializes in herbal remedies, but you don't know which one it is, and it depends which town you are in. And maybe they don't even have it in any of those places, and they only have it in the tobacco area, which is where they sell tobacco and lottery tickets and things like that.

So when you travel, you can find quest stories in the smallest experiences, absolutely smallest experiences, but part of it is knowing what look for. And so one of the reasons...like I said, quest stories matters because they're universal, but one of the reasons they matter to us as travel writers is because we encounter them all the time. Trying to buy a train ticket in France, right, these are things that happen to us and we learn a lesson from them, and we think, okay, I should write a story about this, but we automatically think of writing a service article.

We think of telling people how to do it, we don't think of telling them the story of how we learn how to do it. So if we need to present these experiences that we have in a way that's not just service, it's not how to, it's not a blog post of five ways to do this, or five things I learned in this place, we have to do it with effective storytelling. So I've done a whole webinar on storytelling before, especially in the feature format, and I just pulled a couple slides from that, because I wanna remind those of you who are there, because this webinar was sometime last fall, and also catch up those of you who weren't on what storytelling consists of.

So what I'm going to tell you this five Cs is a way to think of storytelling. There's a lot of different frameworks people have that they apply in storytelling. I'm gonna show you a few different ones, because sometimes one of them makes sense to you and another one doesn't. I wanna make sure that we all get on the same page with this. So this idea of the five Cs though...take a screenshot of this or jot this down or something if you can.

This is the really, really easy simplistic way that I like to teach people because it's easy to remember. I learned this from a friend of mine who is a documentary filmmaker. So he talked of the five Cs as the current state, the conflict, the climax, the consequences, and the conclusion. Now, I'll tell you something interesting about this, which you're gonna see play out in the slides we're gonna look at in a second, that in the most stories that most of us would ever write, the consequences and the conclusion are very, brief. Often they're so brief people just forget to put them in there, but they need to be there, but they're very brief, this is usually like the last paragraph.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

So in a session that I was in yesterday at the conference that I'm at, there was a not complete enough to really make sense to people who hadn't covered this before, attempt to look at how to use fiction techniques in your travel writing. And one of the issues with the session, in my estimation, was that the examples that she was using were not narrative stories. She was using these essays to teach this class about fiction techniques and narrative. So what happened was that nobody could find the climax, and there was almost no conflict. So these are two things that happen really frequently in travel writing, especially for folks who are writing online, or they're writing, you know, essays, or they've asked for their own blog, or maybe for some type of print publication, or perhaps you're writing more of a piece that's, let's call it, like a Wikipedia nature. It's more of an explainer piece.

It seems like some of you have some fiction background so that's great. So what I wanted to say is about this kind of watch out for issue is that it's very common in a lot of the types of writing that travel writers gravitate to or that a lot of people are already doing to miss out on this conflict and climax. And this is why I am so excited to talk to you about quest pieces today, because quest pieces automatically built in, you cannot miss them, have conflicts and climax.

So what's the climax of the quest piece? Is when you find the thing, or you realize you're never gonna find the thing, it's one of those two. Whatever you've set out to find either you do it or you don't, and there's that moment where you succeed or you have the horrifying realization that it's just never gonna happen right. So that is the automatic climax, it's built in. You cannot write a quest piece and fail to have a climax. It's just not possible. That moment of success or abject failure, it is part of the piece, okay. Now, the nice thing about quest pieces is that they also have automatic conflict. So what I mean by that...we'll talk a bit more about what conflict means a little later in the webinar today.

But when I say they have automatic conflict, what I mean is those step that I mentioned along the way where you think you're looking for one thing and maybe you realize that's not the thing that you need to find to achieve your greater overall objective, or you start looking in one place for that thing, and realize that it's absolutely not the place to look for the thing you're trying to find and, you need to go somewhere else entirely. Maybe you even need to get on another.

Kirsten had an interesting comment over here that related to the webinar and the newsletter that I did before today's call. Which is that the hardest part is finding markets for these more essay-like than service-y pieces. It's really important as I'm talking about these quest pieces to not think of these as essay type pieces, okay. An essay is a very specific writing style, it's a very specific piece, there's some really, really great instructional texts out there on how to



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

write essays, and there's anthologies of essays. And essays are both tricky pieces to write, and tricky pieces to place. We did a whole webinar on this in the fall.

But what I'm talking about right now is a narrative feature, and narrative features have so many homes I can't even tell you. I'm always surprised when we put magazines into the Travel Magazine Database, and the only thing that they accept from freelancers is features, and all of their features are open to freelancers. So there are just hundreds, thousands of places where you can place narrative features. You just never run out of them. And a lot of them happen to be in airline magazines that take all of their features from freelancers, and they pay a dollar a word. So there's tons and tons of homes for these stories, and we'll talk about that a little bit later when we talk about pitching them.

So again, the five Cs: current state, conflict, climax, consequences, conclusion. With quest pieces, you have these ones automatically built in. Now, this current state, you can think of it as the background information. But what I'm gonna show you is that that setup portion of your story, also known as the lead, more typical journalistic parlance, but more in a narrative way we can call this setup or the background. In quest pieces that's also much easier than in a lot of other types of articles, particularly a lot of narrative articles.

So I just wanna zoom through them quickly, a couple of these diagrams of what stories look like. And I told you these are pulled from another webinar that I did, which is explicitly on story structure that we have in the webinar library. But I do love these because they show you how complicated stories can be, as well as how easy they can be. So this one is great because it just says every single thing that happens in the story. And this level of detail, you can do this even with a story that takes place over 400 words. We did one of these breakdowns in the class yesterday. Even with a really short story, you can find all of these different things. And the person who taught that class said something really interesting and I wanted to share with you guys.

She said, "The more of these elements..." and I'm gonna tell you more about the elements in a bit. But it's like action, dialogue, conflict, things like this. She said, "Your story only gets better the more of these elements you throw into it." And that seems weird, right, because you've probably heard me say, "Oh my God, do not clutter your pitches." Spud Hilton was complaining yesterday, "Do not send me 900-word pitches, I don't know what to do with that."

I always tell you to keep your pitches really short, to be really focused on what your story is. And then we get the assignment you have a word count that you need to follow then. So how can you be stuffing all of this different stuff in there? Because what folks often try to stuff



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

their pieces and their pitches with is actually...let's go back a second. It's actually current state, it's actually background information, it's actually explaining what is going on with something.

It's not conflicts, problems, risks, dangers, crises, uncertainty, resolution, climax...it's not all of these things, okay. But the more of these that you can put in, the more small scenes that you have going on the better. I'm gonna use an example that's used a lot, but I'm using it only for a specific reason. So the book "Eat Pray Love," which I'm sure most of you if not have not read are familiar with at least in concept. The book "Eat Pray Love" was mentioned by somebody who I really, really respect who has, in fact, written literally the book on how to plot your work of fiction. She said, "Eat Pray Love," to her, is the [inaudible 00:26:00] ultra example of plotting. And part of that is because at the very beginning Elizabeth Gilbert outlines that she has separated her story into something like 133 different scenes or chapters to line up with the number of prayer beads on a necklace. I suppose from India, because that's.

And Paula Munier...I'm gonna write that name because her name is spelled a little weird. It's Paula Munier, I think it's actually spelled like that. She wrote a book, I believe, called "Plot Perfect." She said, "That division, that focus on forcing oneself into having that many scenes is the way you need to go about a book." And it's also the way we need to go about our narrative stories, and we also need to have a lot of scenes, but they just become shorter. So let's look at some more simplified versions of this. So I talked about the current state, here they call it setting your background, then the conflict, people also call that rising action. The climax, we talked about that. Falling action, that's another word for this consequences that I talked about, and then resolution that's another word for conclusion.

So this is a very simple idea looking at how tension changes in your story. Every time you see these things that move up, what the line is really measuring is tension. And this is something that when people write travel stories there tend to be very little of, and some of that, like I said early on we were talking about the kind of division between men and women writing quest pieces, some of that happens because people don't want to depict themselves as failing, they don't want to depict negative aspects of the destination.

There's a lot of reasons that people don't introduce tension into their travel stories, but stories must have a rise and fall of tension, that is paramount. But like I said, this very metronomic split between the different parts of the story isn't very accurate. Things tend to be more built on this front end with the climax and just a little bit at the end. I actually think, like I said, that it's pushed even further over. So some other examples like this one I like, it shows you how the "third act" or the end is really where all of these things happen: the climax, the consequences, and the conclusion. And you've got that setup over here and all this conflict in



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

the middle. So for those of you who are more familiar with this three-act structure, that's what this looks at.

We're going to talk about having three different portions of your story later, and I wanna make it clear that I'm not...when I talk about this three different portions of the story, I'm not talking about those as the three different acts. The three portions of your story that we're gonna talk about are these three dots that you see on here, there's three different things that happen in the middle. So I've just got a couple more graphics for those of you who haven't quite found the one that fits you.

This one, we may or may not all be familiar with. This is Harry Potter, and this over here shows the tension as it goes up and down throughout the book. And I wanted to show you this because it's really important to see that every scene can also take the tension up and down, okay. It's not something that just happens like the one that we saw over here. It's not something that just happens on a constant rise. The tension will go up and down within each scene itself as well. Here's another way to see that, and I think I've got one more.

So this shows that again, so really we have a basic incident, we start somewhere and then everything changes, there's an obstacle. I wanted to show you this one because when you are plotting out your stories that you're gonna write as quest pieces or that you might think about pitching as quest pieces, as the case may be, those points that we're gonna talk about you need to focus on the obstacle. That's how you choose what to include when you're looking at, okay, I went here, I did this, I did that. Which one of those stops do I include? They're the ones where there was an issue, where it wasn't necessarily clear if you were gonna get what you wanted, because that is what makes the tension rise, the tension fall, the tension rise, tension fall. That's how you pick the stops that you include.

So let's back up from the specifics of story structure to talk about the types of quests that you can embark on. So I mentioned a couple of these different varieties earlier, and some other folks also mentioned some. That there's quests that might not take you out explicitly in search of something new, but might be something like trying to get home, like the classic "Odysseus" quest. Where it seems like it should be just a simple journey...nothing is ever as it seems, right? So that is a type of quest but it's a very specific type of quest.

A much more common quest that you'll see, is actually the second one that I put on the here, that I've called the search for excellence. So I'm trying to remember who it was exactly but someone mentioned earlier...I wanna say it was Stephanie. I'm not sure if she's on the call today. But somebody mentioned earlier that they see...Stacy said she sees these types of pieces frequently in food writing. And with food writing I see that there almost too are men,



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

they're almost always this search for excellence type. So this is like the classic Anthony Bourdain or Andrew Zimmern that does "Bizarre Foods."

This is when somebody has gone somewhere and wants to find, you know, the best green chili enchilada or whatever it is. They're on the hunt for the most quintessential Kalua pig that speaks to, you know, the Hawaiian culture of doing the whole pig roast. They wanna find the one exemplar that stands for the whole, the one that is just the absolute best. And if you think about it, you're often already doing this because you're probably going somewhere trying to figure out what you wanna write about, what story you wanna do specifically, or maybe you're just doing a food piece and you need to talk about X, Y, and Z. So you can have a piece where you're doing a round-up of the best five blah, blah, in a place and then also do five different quest pieces talking about the different things you tried to figure out what you were gonna finally include for that one. So that's this search for excellence style.

But there's often this search of discovery as well, and that's why I put this first because it's kind of like a wishy one, but it's something that we all do and we can all write about it. So another way to frame the search for discovery or familiarity is to say that it's a search for as a sense of place. So we've all gone somewhere for the first time, or we don't know about that place, or we don't necessarily know what story we're writing, but we're there just trying to figure out what is this place about. What stories can or should I even be writing about that destination? And that's this search of discovery, and so you can think of it like search of discovery, you can also think of it as searching for a sense of place, that's another way to caption it, okay.

Now, the other one, like we said, this Odysseus type is this "in a bind, need a solution," so this can also be, you know, when your passport's gotten stolen and you're in a country where you don't speak the language, that's the kind of thing that can be a quest. And that flows right into, is something possible? So sometimes these guys, you know, go together, or sometimes the, "Can I get out of the country?" is a something possible one, but you're also in a bind and you need a solution. But sometimes "is something possible" can be a search for excellence. Is it possible to find a cocktail bar where the baristas create every single ingredient by hand on site? You know, that place would probably be very excellent, but your search for is it possible.

Okay, so these are for main types of quests, and something that I wanted to tell you that I didn't have in the slides because I just found out about this in the session that I was in yesterday on elements of fiction and nonfiction, is that there are seven main plot types. This comes from a book called "The Seven Basic Plots" by Christopher Booker. And in order of the oldest in time, like the ones that you see in the oldest stories from thousands and



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

thousands of years ago, they were in the oral tradition or that were painted on the sides of caves.

Here's the order of the oldest stories. So the first one, the oldest story, is overcoming the monster. This is, you know, a "Harry Potter," a "Star Wars," always "James Bond," any sort of a hero against a force of evil. And the second oldest story in the world is rags to riches." And the third oldest is the quest." But you know what I found really interesting about this, is that if you think about it, overcoming the monster, that inherently is also a quest. And rags to riches where, you know, the example of "Aladdin" or "Cinderella," "Great Expectations," "Jane Eyre," things like that, it's also somebody who sets out to have a better life for themselves.

So basically, all the oldest type of stories in the world, they always come back to this quest element of a journey where the protagonist... which if it's a first-person story is gonna be you guys, where the protagonist sets out for something encounters obstacles along the way, maybe gets it, maybe doesn't, but has learned a lot about themselves along that journey.

So how does that play out into what we actually see on the page of the specific structure of the piece? So first and foremost, I told you that the leads in these pieces tend to be quite different. So even though this is a narrative piece that has a story arc and you think ah, well, I can do an in medias res lead, and I'm gonna write that down for those of you who don't know what I mean by in medias res. That is Latin for something along lines of starting in the middle of things, and that's where you take a scene from later on in the piece and you put it in the beginning of your piece. And then you stop right before you get to the interesting part, and you tell the reader how you got there.

So Tim Cahill who's written many, many books, he's a Founding Editor of "Outside Magazine," and a fabulous teacher of writing if you even the opportunity to take one of his courses, he says it like this, he says, "Think of a climax, back up 10 minutes, and start your story there." So that is a very common framework for writing narratives, but in quest pieces, you very rarely see that. If you think about "Jason and the Argonauts" or if you think about "Odysseus," they never start there. And it's because, like I said, often that climax is not what you expected in the process.

So quest pieces pretty much always... I didn't see any exceptions when I was looking at these pieces. Start with why the person is on a quest and what that quest is, they get right to the point. Which is another thing that makes these things so easy for us to write. And then what happens is that we nut graph, which I've put on here for those of you who aren't familiar with that term. That means that usually second paragraph in a story that explains what the



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

story is gonna be about. You have the same thing in your pitch, you put a bit of a lead in your pitch, and then you have a second paragraph where you flesh out what it is you're gonna include in your piece.

So in the nut graph of the quest pieces, they don't tell you what the quest is, because they just told you that in the lead. Instead, they tell you why the quest matters, and they usually tell you this on two levels. They tell you both on the outer level, one of the pieces I'm gonna show you for instance. The gentleman goes to Naples in search of a hand-tailored suit. So a suit that's stitched entirely by hand. So that is his obvious quest, but his deeper quest is to explore this dying Artisanal tradition. But he also tells you why...this isn't something that anybody can do...why this quest will have conflict, why it's challenging. And that's because these people are only advertised by word of mouth, you cannot find them online, you can even find a buzzer with their name on it. There's no normal way for him to find out about these places, so he has to just go and ask around. And we're gonna look at that in a second.

So in that nut graph, they are telling you what the obvious outer journey is and the deeper journey, and then they're also explaining why a journey is required. Why is it even difficult to do this in the first place? Then that the story will go through three key stops and sometimes those can be physical locations, sometimes they can be different attempts. But each of those stops inherently has some uncertainty in the beginning, is this actually gonna be what the person means? And then at the end of that they move on, there's some sort of transition, either they failed in that stop and they need to try different approach or they've gotten something from that stop and they move on to something different. And then, of course, there's the climax where, like I said before, either they succeed spectacularly or fail miserably and learn from that failure. And then the quest resolves, and then often the hero goes on to another quest, right. All us travels, we're onto our next piece or next quest.

So what happens though within each of those three stops that I mentioned? Within each stop, there's background on that stop, just like how in the beginning of the piece itself we don't kinda pander around with too much artistry or setting the scene, they tell you why this stop is important, why is this a necessary step in achieving the greater goal, okay? And as they say that they're inherently saying you know, this is the oldest this, or this other guy told me that this is the really the person who knows how to get the best Kalua pig, and so on and so forth. And as I just said, introducing characters is a key part of that introduction to the stop, because what happens is that, like I said, this quest piece automatically includes all of those delightful elements of fiction.

And sadly, I'm looking and I had a slide on the elements of fiction and it looks like I accidentally deleted when I uploaded these. So I'll recap those in a second before we go into the URL of the story itself. But characters, tension, dialogue, action, suspense,



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

foreshadowing, these are all elements of fiction that are automatically created by this quest. At the beginning of your piece, you say you're trying to find something, so throughout the piece there's a suspense, will you find it or not, will you achieve your goal?

And every time there's an obstacle the reader feels the tension they feel, oh my God, this is not gonna work out. And then you can drop these little hints like, "While this didn't work, little did I know that tomorrow I would have to face an even tougher challenge." There's such easy foreshadowing suspense and tension that you create within these quests. But the second and equally important element or set of elements of fiction that you need to introduce is characters, dialogue, and action. And you introduce each of those within the specific stops. But then, you also need to transition into the next stage.

So let's break in...and let me make sure this is the other slide. Let's break in and take a look at these, I'm going to pull it up on my screen in Firefox, but I'm also going to give you some links. So here is the first one that I want to look at, this is the one I was telling you about, about making the suit in Naples. I'm gonna switch over to screen share that, but you guys can pull it up as well, the link is there in the chat box. All right, great, so let's look at this. So this is from Tom Downey, and as I was mentioning I'm not sure if you could hear me before or it's the...somebody said they are not seeing the article. I can't tell if people are seeing the article or not. I'm gonna include the link again so you can pull it if you're not seeing on the screen, I see it on my screen so you should see it as well. There you go.

All right, so as I was saying, this article I believe won the Lowell Thomas Award for one of the top travel articles of the year that it came out. It's a very long piece, so I'm not gonna read all of it to you in the same way that I usually do when I do these "Article Nuts and Bolts" courses because I wanna say it's probably more than 2,500 words. It's quite long. So what I wanna do, I've given you the link, and I'm going to highlight some of the different elements that we talked about, about the story structure here on the page, okay. So this up here, "What Can Style Say About a Place," this is the depth so this is kind of the subhead of the story. But the story itself, like I said, it completely hits the ground running.

"I started my hunt for Naples' artisanal tailors by talking to the city's taxi drivers. They were so acutely focused on fleecing me. I thought they might unconsciously reveal some local secrets. A working knowledge of strip joints and after-hours clubs is, of course, essential for any self-respecting taxi driver, but why would they know anything about bespoke suiting? Because, I learned after a few rides, many of them hail from the same place such suits are made, the back alleys of the Quartieri Spagnoli. It's what Neapolitans call a popular, that is working class, district, situated right in the heart of the city."



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

Okay, so he gets right into it in the beginning, there's kind of a little bit of action in terms of him describing the taxi drivers and kind of what they are there like, and the fact that he took a lot of different taxi rides. But he zooms through many taxi rides very quickly to get his first nugget of information. Why is it so hard for him to get this one nugget of information? He explains it's because, "The tailors don't solicit customers on the street, or even advertise their wares. Everything is by word of mouth."

And so his first few taxi conversations yielded nothing, but finally...so there's a little tension here, right. He says it's difficult. He tells you he had a little trouble "And finally, he landed a driver who thought of one thing, but..." suspense..."they only make pants." Where is he gonna get the rest? So then he gives a little more background about why this is so hard. He says, "It's simple to find stylish international brands but these craftspeople who just makes suits, just makes shirts, or just make ties, their wares are coveted worldwide and you need to get an introduction."

Okay, so he explains his quest. He's after a totally new outfit, "Dress pants, a suit, a soft-colored shirt, and a delicately contoured neck tie." But he's also in search of a disappearing culture that once animated Naples, a culture of aging artisans who learned their craft as children, long before labor laws made such a thing impossible. A culture in which generations of a single family patronized the same tailor for their suits."

So then begins at the first address that he had, and again we've got some action, and it's got some tension in it. He went there, he asked somebody, the first guy knew and nothing about a pants-making family. But somebody else shouted from the window above, "The Mola family. Go here and look for the sign." Now then he goes in and...sorry. I lost the page for a second. Then he goes in, and I can't tell from this if he's talking in English with the guy or not. A little bit later he uses a translator. But then he's interacting with the gentleman who's going to cut his pants. So he describes what he sees.

So we're firmly now in the first stage, right? We know what he's after, we've gone there, and now he's telling us about this person that he's visiting, why they are the one to go. He talks about how they are known for making their suits. He's got a quote from the gentleman that talks about his craft. He explains how the curve at the opening for the legs needs to be a certain way, "You need to see the light, you need to see the shape," okay.

And more tension, he says, "When he asked Pasquale about making him a pair of pants at first he said it would take weeks, maybe even a month." Is he gonna get his suit? We don't know. So that's how he wraps that up. There's a little bit of tension there at the end. And then his next objective, so now we move down the second part. The first part was pants. Next part



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

is suit. His next objective is a full suit but if he just walked in nobody would help him right now. He's got an obstacle. He needs to look like he deserves to get a hand-tailored suit. So first he goes off and gets his haircut at a shave in a traditional Neapolitan barber, and then prepared, he's ready to go out to his suit place. So he goes to the suit place and this time he's got a translator. He's got somebody who's taking him along, introducing him to this place where they have been making these suits for more than 50 years.

So again, we explain why this particular suit place is important, and then he gets into the character, so he gets into the dialogue. After he's got his suit, which he outlines both how the guy measured him in the first place and also he says, "Come back on this afternoon, it will ready for its first fitting." So then what does he do while he's waiting for his suit? He tells you some other things about Naples, which don't technically have to do with suits. So it seems like why do these things matter here? Why does he need to tell us what he's doing while he's waiting to come back in the afternoon? Why can't we just go back with him in the afternoon?

Because he's talking to us about other artisan traditions here in Naples. He's talking about the people who sell goods pizza fritte, who sell little fritters on the side of the street. He explains to you what the street looks like. He's creating a picture of what might be thought of as a kind of run-down neighborhood that most tourists would ignore. And the jewels besides just suits that you find in that neighborhood.

Then we get back into the action, back into the scene from that background. So he's back in the studio. He's got dialogue with Gennaro. He's talking about how Gennaro, "Has measured all sorts of different part of the fit on him and then he takes it off and he rips apart the seams, flattens the fabric back on the table and redraws all the check lines just from memory." So this is the second stop, and then it's gonna be ready, he's got that box checked. So now he's out for the shirt maker.

And like I said, this piece is really quite long, so I'm not gonna go through all of the next steps with it, but I just wanna go on down to the end. So this one, the climax, of course, is when he not just finishes his suit, but when he puts on his suit and he goes out and eats. And he says, "A large part of the magic of these clothes, I realize, is they make you comfortable and that profoundly affects your appearance, your carriage, and your elegance."

So that is the consequences, the climax is that he got the suit, but by explaining the consequences he's showing us why this matters, right, why did it even matter for him to get this suit? Because it's not just a suit, it's a whole style of life that he has put on, that he is then able to embrace. So he talks about having his pasta, going out for his coffee, he's got a



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

picture of him here on the street with, I assume that's his translator but it doesn't have a quote here. He's showing how a suit is never just a suit.

This is like if I did a piece like this about going to the pharmacy because I needed something, it would be how it's not toothpaste, it's about how in Italy they think about organizing and what is proper. That these places are only open on a certain time of day because at this point everyone goes home for lunch or they eat...can't get this at the erborista because they don't carry an herbal toothpaste so they simply wouldn't have toothpaste in that store rather than carrying another toothpaste. It's the things that you learn along the way that create this lesson, that create that conclusion that he's able to come to at the end.

So I just wanna show you one more piece really quickly, which is also by the same guy, Tom Downey, and this one takes place in Japan. And because we're at the end of our time, I'm gonna put that here in the chat box for you guys so you can pull it up and look at it more later. But there's a couple things about the structure here that I wanna pull your guys' attention to. So again, he gets right to the point, "I'm on the hunt for perfection, Japanese style. Years ago, that would have meant sipping matcha at a tea ceremony, watching Noh in a storied old theater, and learning the delicate art of ikebana or flower arranging. But in today's Japan, no matter what the tourist brochures might tell you, those pursuits are about as relevant to the younger generation as animal husbandry, archery, and taxidermy are to most Americans. But that doesn't mean that the Japanese have forsaken the resolute devotion to quality. In the last decade, though, they've applied them to other endeavors."

And he goes on this is really fascinating the way that he sets it up. He's only talking about his quest but it's a really nice lead that has background. So he says, "In Japan, a country with comparatively few immigrants, the people with the know-how to make an Italian eel pie or sew a perfect pair of blue jeans are almost all Japanese citizens who have ventured abroad, gained new skills, and then returned home to sharpen their craft." So he even comes out right and says, "My quest to seek out this modern spin on age-old perfection will lead me to a room full of classic American sewing machines in Okayama prefecture, to a Tokyo restaurant that serves specialties from provincial Italy, and to a four-seat café where it takes 20 minutes of intensely focused preparation to make a single cup of coffee."

So you'll see how here he's chosen three things and they actually illustrate kind of a play on what you'd expect people to go to Japan for. You expect them to go to Japan for kimonos, sushi, and green tea, right, but instead he's taken these globalized things and what he's gonna do throughout this is he's gonna have one section on each of these where at the beginning he says why he's there, why does this place matter on his quest? Why is this a good exemplar of what he's talking about, and he's gonna introduce a character. I'm trying to highlight, it's not working, Suwaki.



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

He's gonna introduce the character, have the dialogue, and get into the action as he shows you how this denim is made. More character, more action, more dialogue. And then, again this is a long piece, Tom Downey writes long pieces, that's why he gets to win awards. And then as he gets done that with the denim, he's gonna move on in to the Italian food, but somehow the page is not cooperating with us, so hopefully you guys can see that on your screen. So as this piece goes along he follows what I was talking about, about that structure, but then each one he wraps up, he says he, "Strolls around Tokyo in his new purchase." He, "likes how the cotton flexes as he moves." And then that takes him to the Italian food.

All right, so what is the greater picture, the greater lesson that he only could have achieved by taking this quest? So we're in the coffee place, he wraps it up within the coffee place, which is the last stop. He says, "As I watch Kiyota work, I think about the elaborate attention to detail I've seen at each stop on my search for perfection in Japan, the chain-stitched jeans, Koike's [SP] grilled tuna collar. At the café, all of the intricate steps are visible. Kiyota has turned coffee brewing into a kind of performance, each move flawlessly orchestrated, each stir and each drop precisely timed and executed. He's making coffee something obsessive, perfect, and entirely Japanese."

So the point of this story is that. "As globalization has happened, which was a party that Japan was a bit late to both in the 1800s and in the 1900s, Japan has taken all of the great things from around the world and made them its own. And not just in a way that only Japanese people can appreciate, but we can visually appreciate by watching or by going and experiencing and tasting Japanese perfection in how they have perfected our own traditions from our own country."

So let me pop back over to the slides, just to talk for a second about how to pitch these stories. So like I said, these stories are really long and that's why it's a little hard for me to show you the stories and read through them in the same way that we have done in the past with the other stories. But that's why I included the links so that you guy can look at them on your own. And thinking about how to pitch them, I don't have a lot to say about this, not because you shouldn't pitch them, they're hard to pitch, whatever, but because they're so easy. You tell your editor, "I wanna go to..." Let me see. This is a story I gave to somebody a few years ago. "I wanna go to New York and not spend any time in the city and only be on the beach. My quest is to find the beach experience in New York. It's an island, right, there must be beaches." So that could be a quest, okay.

Now it seems like, why wouldn't an editor assign that to me? I don't understand. The biggest issue with the quest pieces in terms of how you pitch them is the "why you" section because editors know quest pieces work really well. They're very easy to sell editors on. The harder thing is to get them to understand why you, and also why not, but particularly why you?



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: How to Put Together a Quest Piece

So what that means is that you need to make sure when you're pitching quest pieces, that it's something that you have a connection to in the beginning. Once you've got some quest pieces under your belt, especially if you have a good relationship with an editor and you've worked with them several times before, you can pitch them more broadly with your quest pieces. You can pitch them about places that you haven't gone before. But in the beginning it works much better when you pitch them quest pieces that are based on an area of expertise that you have, that you're known to have, maybe something you have a degree in, something you have previous work experience in. It's really the usual... sort of the most important thing to focus on would pitching quest pieces.

But the second question is do you pitch it before your trip or after? And the answer is it's kind of the same as I say about any question about whether you pitch before or after. Even though it seems like you need to pitch a quest piece before you go on a trip, that's actually not true. You can pitch a quest piece after as well, and kind of you know, keep the suspense for the editor about how it turned out. But if you aren't used to going on trips like this and knowing that you're gonna come home with a story, I wouldn't recommend pitching it beforehand. If you have pitched, in the past, stories and then written them and know you make up a story you know, you can get something, then it's totally fine to pitch before.

Thank you, guys, so much, and I'll talk to you guys next week about diary pieces. Bye-bye.