

Writing about Science

Special Forms and Techniques

October 3, 2011 Class – STS.034

Forms

- Feature article
 - Tells us about something intriguing or important
 - Aim can be to illuminate, entertain, raise concern
 - Audience is broad – general public
- Op-Ed
 - Asserts an opinion, aims to convince
 - Often reacts to or reflects current events
 - Audience is broad, but often aimed at leaders and changemakers
- Excerpt from educational Book
 - Describes phenomena
 - Aims to instruct and break down primarily
 - Audience is general public, but already interested enough to pick it up

“The Vanishing”

- **Themes**
 - Science as a mystery to be solved
 - Unveiling the scientific process
- **Narrative Approach**
 - Use of characters, description
 - Plot & scene-driven, use of suspense
- **Stylistic Techniques**
 - Structure: sentence variation and “signposts”
 - Punchy & colorful quotes
 - Humor

“A Real Science of the Mind”

- **Classic op-ed approach**
 - Setting context, defining problem
 - Outlining argument, then supporting argument
 - Clearly asserts and repeats main points in intro & conclusion
- **Possible flaws**
 - Terminology and reliance on shifting us to his paradigm
 - Does it convince or just make an argument clear?

“This Essay Breaks the Law”

- **Non-traditional op-ed**
 - Unique structure: obvious statements followed by provocative and surprising fact
 - Point not immediately clear but unraveled
- **Techniques**
 - Exemplary case makes broader point, supported by other examples
 - Use of absurd to persuade
 - Rhetorical questions
 - Self-reflective & self-conscious – personal

Excerpt from *The Canon*

- **Theme:**
 - Science as exciting, intriguing, and decipherable
- **Approach:**
 - Instructive but personal, use of humor
 - Writer as learner
 - Voice – personality on the page
- **Stylistic techniques:**
 - Long sentences, many references
 - Provocative ideas & questions
 - Succinct descriptions of the complex

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STS.034 Science Communication: A Practical Guide
Fall 2011

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