

Magazine and Feature Writing

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Recommended Citation

Hays, Robert G. (1993) "Magazine and Feature Writing," *Journal of Applied Communications*: Vol. 77: Iss. 2. <https://doi.org/10.4148/1051-0834.1453>

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Abstract

A book review of *Magazine and Feature Writing* by Hiley H. Ward.

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Magazine and Feature Writing. Hiley H. Ward.
Hays: Magazine and Feature Writing
Mayfield Publishing Co., Mountain View CA, 1993.
\$35.95. 367 pages.

This book is intended as a basic college text. Ward describes it as "a comprehensive, practical and positive approach to writing newspaper features and magazines articles." It proves to be exactly that.

Ward claims that in his 18 years of teaching he never found a text that adequately covered both the essential basic skills and the trends and current practical issues critical to excellent magazine and feature writing. This book was designed to remedy that situation; that is an ambitious undertaking, but on the whole *Magazine and Feature Writing* accomplishes the author's goal.

Fortunately, "basic skills" in this context does not mean the rules of grammar and sentence structure. Rather, Ward had the good sense to cover such things as query letters, library reference sources, interviewing techniques, and basic formats for personality profiles, how-to pieces, investigative articles, and other types of generally marketable writing.

Ward deals at a very practical level with each genre: writing about science, about travel, about history and religion, and writing for children. He devotes a full chapter to business and trade publications.

Other chapters deal with ethics and legal matters libel, privacy, copyright, contracts, and agents. As is the case with the entire book, these chapters are peppered with useful authentic examples. Sample model releases and consent forms complement his section on privacy, for example, and sample permission forms accompany the text on copyright.

Even though this book succeeds in demonstrating that most types of magazine articles and longer newspaper features can be defined by common characteristics (if not outright formulas), Ward pays appropriate attention to individual style. He explains style as the flow of words, but admits that, like charisma, it defies definition. And, bless him, he insists that rewriting "and rewriting and rewriting" almost always is essential to a good writing style.

Magazine and Feature Writing is fully indexed. That index includes more than 300 publications, most of them magazines, that are mentioned in the text. The majority of these mentions are in some form of example, clear evidence of the scope of this book.

My favorite characteristic of Ward's work is its optimism. He begins, "Why not write for publication?" In a postscript he

urges, "Consider a Book." I found a great deal in his book that I learned the hard way over years of writing and wish I had known much earlier.

For competent writers who want to enter the magazine field as freelancers, but do not know

how, Ward offers a good place to start. His book contains just enough basic information to help such people get a foot in the door.

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