

Writing a Library Newspaper Column:

Tips and Titles

Tips

1. Getting started

The best way to get comfortable writing is to write, write, write! The next best thing is to read – something you already do. If you aren't in the habit of reading non-fiction, though, try to include that, too. Read essays, editorials, opinion pieces – and read excellent ones. As you read, consider how the piece tells you the story, what makes you keep reading, what questions you want answered, what you are feeling. Does it move you? Infuriate you? Amuse you? And how does it do that?

2. Be personal, use your voice, talk about the topic

Writing a newspaper column about libraries is a personal experience. It gives your readers a glimpse into the library world in general and your role in particular. It gives you the wonderful opportunity to share your thoughts, ideas, musings, issues, passions and experiences. Because it is so personal, it is important to tread lightly. Remain personal and personable, but keep the focus on the topic and not on you. What you offer your readers is the chance to learn more about some aspect of libraries or books through your eyes – with all the facts correct and your personal bias as suppressed as possible. This is not the same as suppressing your voice, however. Above all, keep your voice – that stream of words inside your head. If you listen to it and trust it, you will have faithful readers who read your column not just for the information, but also because *you* wrote it.

3. Write long and edit

You will probably have a word limit. Write longer than your limit – at least 100 words more. Then, go back and ask yourself which words are essential and which words or sentences are expendable. This can be difficult – in fact, it *should* be difficult. Nevertheless, it will make

your piece stronger and more vibrant. And while you are removing words, watch out for the word “that” – most of the time it is unnecessary.

4. The final steps

When you are all finished, let your piece sit - for a day if possible or at least a few hours. Then, read it aloud. Listen to the words: Do they say what you want them to say? Are they clear? Have you made your point? Can you sum up your point in one sentence? Are you proud of the piece? When your answers are all yes, the column is complete.

5. Most of all

Enjoy yourself. Choose topics of interest to you or find an appealing aspect of the topic and start with that. Your readers can tell when you aren't engaged – and so can you.

Books

Here are a few recommended titles. The starred one is included because it is a great example of personal and low-key yet excellent writing.

Note: Books on writing can be useful but nothing is better than practice!

- ❖ Franklin, J. (1986). *Writing for Story*. New York: Atheneum Publishers.
- ❖ Gordon, R.S. (2004). *The Librarian's Guide to Writing for Publication*. Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- ❖ *Jackson, S. (1966). *The Magic of Shirley Jackson*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (*Life Among the Savages* and *Raising the Demons* in particular).
- ❖ Kipfer, B.A., editor (2001). *Roget's International Thesaurus, 6th Edition*. New York: HarperCollins, Publishers.
- ❖ Merriam-Webster (1991). *The Merriam-Webster Concise Handbook for Writers*. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster, Inc.
- ❖ Rankin, E. (2001). *The Work of Writing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, a Wiley Company.
- ❖ A good and current dictionary