

TRUTHFULLY

- on Literary Journalism and Narrative Nonfiction

BEFORE YOU READ



01

In your own words, what is journalism, and what is its purpose?

02

What words do you think of when you think of 'nonfiction'? Make a list. Share it with your partner or group.

03

Look at the words below. Look up the words you do not know and write down the translation and the word class. Then discuss the differences with your partner or group.

true truth fact truthiness factual narrative literary subjective objective participatory

Literary Journalism - an introduction

Journalism is the reporting of recent events. This is also called "the news". This chapter explores the form of journalism often referred to as "literary journalism" or "narrative journalism". The idea is that this is a form of writing that goes beyond reporting and takes on qualities that can be compared to fiction while still being true to the facts of the event. This form of journalism is seen in many magazines and publications, and sometimes these longform articles are even developed into books. In literary journalism, the writer's own humanity and personality are more evident, and the events described focus more on subjective details and not getting a quick overview of events. Narrative journalism often begins with a so-called "hook" that catches the reader's attention like in fiction. Some might begin in medias res, with a short shocking first sentence, a surprising take on a topic, and/or an interesting statement.

explore udforske; undersøge

quality egenskaber

humanity menneskelighed

7-10-02

15

In traditional news reports or articles, the important facts are laid out in the very beginning, so that the audience might quickly know what is going on. The focus here is on delivering information in a precise and efficient manner. In contrast, literary journalism often plays with devices seen in fiction like flashbacks, flash-forwards, framing devices, suspense, subjective viewpoints, etc. Although both traditional reporting and literary journalism have to deal with factual events, literary journalism might try to find a different approach and focus. Generally speaking, reporting might be about *what* happened, and literary journalism might focus more on *why* or *how* it happened.

MADE THE GENES

New Journalism

emerge se dagens lys; dukke op

immersed fordybet

SKOLE TYPER
SKOLEHVERDENE

• <https://www.britannica.com/topic/New-Journalism>

blur sløre; udviske

In 1960s America, a new form of journalism emerged. It was different from the traditional style of journalist writings in that it combined the reporting of actual events with traits from literature. The writer would often spend weeks or months immersed in the culture of the subject - be it spending time with exclusive eccentrics, drug dealers, or minority murderers. As in fiction, the writers "constructed well-developed characters, sustained dialogue, vivid scenes, and strong plotlines marked with dramatic tension. They also wrote in voices that were distinctly their own." This 'new journalism' was made famous by people like Tom Wolfe and Truman Capote. These writers also began writing so-called 'nonfiction novels' which blurred the lines between fact and fiction.

Here is a list of characteristics which are often found in new journalism:

albeit omend; skont

somewhat i nogen grad

DALSØRDE

emphasize lægge vægt på; fremhæve

NESTEN DET SAMME
SOM METAFORER

- the writer is present in the report (almost like a 1st person narrator) and might play a role in the piece, albeit mostly a small one
- it is somewhat subjective, but nothing in the story is made up
- we are often led into the story by a 'donkey' (see the interview with Lawrence Wright on pp. 18-20), a scene, or a narrative hook. Thus, this kind of journalism does not necessarily begin with the who, what, when, where, and how as a regular news article does
- it is investigative journalism; often a social critique or with a political agenda
- this kind of (news) story emphasizes the human interest angle
- the language uses some of the stylistic elements used in fiction such as metaphors, similes, and loaded adjectives as to discreetly (or sometimes not so discreetly) let the reader know what the opinion of the writer is

pretense forstillelse

frenetic hektisk; kaotisk

Gonzo Journalism

From new journalism sprang the even more controversial 'gonzo journalism', where all pretense of objectivity is gone. This type of writing is often associated with the American journalist Hunter S. Thompson (1937-2005) who wrote articles that seemed more like frenetic descriptions of extreme events than ordinary reporting. The emphasis here was not on reporting the facts about a certain event but on presenting the reporter's very subjective experience. And in Thompson's case, the experience was often filtered through various drugs. In new journalism, the reader senses how the writer reacts to the events unfolding, but with gonzo journalism you could argue that the reaction of the reporter is at the very center of the text, and it can feel like - and often is - new journalism on drugs. A classic example

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1 would be Thompson's article "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and
Depraved" (1970), where the actual events at the derby are left vague
while Thompson's feverish experiences and the people attending the
5 getting an overview. Writer Joe Hagan describes the style of writing as
a "delirious, quasi-fictional hallucination starring Hunter S. Thompson
and Welsh illustrator Ralph Steadman whose ghoulish ink splatter
grotesques were unlike anything in American magazines at the time.
10 Instead of polite reportage on a hallowed sporting event, Thompson and
Steadman would down bourbon at the club and paint the whole Grand
Guignol from bar stools."*

ghoulish dæmonisk; makaber

Grand Guignol uhyggelige og
bloddryppende teaterfore-
stilling grundlagt af Oscar
Méténier i Paris 1895

* *Sticky Fingers: The Life and Times
of Jonn Weiner and Rolling Stone
Magazine* by Joe Hagan, p. 178

Here is a list of characteristics which are often found in gonzo journalism:

- 15 o the writer is present in the report (almost like a 1st person
narrator), but unlike new journalism the writer does not just
cover the story but *becomes* the story.
- o highly subjective
- o the language is filled with sarcasm, humor, and exaggeration
- 20 o the language uses some of the stylistic elements used in
fiction such as metaphors, similes and highly loaded adjectives
giving the reader a visceral experience; almost a participatory
experience
- o often a social critique or with a political agenda
- 25 o in spite of the almost rambling, stream of consciousness style
of writing, this reporting still has standards of accuracy and
grammar
- o the piece can play with chronology and create scenes that may
be compiled of several situations which makes this style of
30 writing a mix of fact and fiction

stream of consciousness
bevidsthedsstrøm. En
modernistisk fortælleteknik,
der er en strøm af tanker eller
associationer

Longform Journalism

Today, we no longer call it new journalism (because it is no longer
new), and gonzo has for the most part also changed from the drug-
35 induced frantic writings of Hunter S. Thompson to the intriguing and
perhaps more structured writings of Jon Ronson, Hannah Dreier,
George Saunders, Lizzie Johnson, Leslie Jamison, Lawrence Wright,
Hanna Rosin, and many more. In many current longform pieces, you
will find characteristics of both new journalism and gonzo. Some write
40 engagingly about a subject without a strong author presence; others
put themselves in the center and write more experiential/participatory
journalism. Now, there is no need for you to wait: dive right into the
many captivating topics explored by longform writers of both past and
present.

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