Feature Articles

About Feature Articles

Most people turn to newspapers for current information about recent events. Daily papers include news articles on local and world events, but they also include a variety of other types of information. For example, **feature articles** showcase various topics of interest and are written to inform and entertain the public. Unlike news articles that present information formally and objectively, features can be written in a more informal style. In addition, feature articles often include the opinion of the writer.

Because they are meant to entertain, feature articles usually present the lighter side of life, and they address topics that are less time-sensitive than those found in straightforward news articles. Here are some common topics for feature writers:

- The Arts
- Fashion
- Health
- Entertainment
- Unusual occurrences
- Family
- Leisure
- People

"Leonardo: The Eye, The Hand, The Mind" is a feature on an exhibit of the works of Leonardo da Vinci, one of the great masters of art in Renaissance Italy.

Reading Strategy

Evaluating Support

In addition to the information they showcase, feature articles often present a writer's opinion or evaluation of a topic. These opinions must be supported with evidence such as facts, statistics, observations, and examples. To determine whether you agree with the writer's opinions, **evaluate the support,** deciding whether or not the evidence is persuasive and valid. Use a chart like the one shown to list each opinion in the following feature. For each one, identify the details that support that opinion. Then, evaluate the support to decide whether the writer's opinion is valid.

Opinion	Support	Evaluation of Support
Cotter says Leonardo's strengths lie in art, science, engineering, and aesthetic theory.	Cotter lists Leonardo's accomplishments in hydrodynamics, anatomy, physics, astronomy, invention, and art.	The list of accomplishments supports Cotter's opinion that Leonardo's strengths lie in many areas.

January 24, 2003

The New York Times

Leonardo: The Eye, the Hand, the Mind

By Holland Cotter

LEONARDO DA VINCI (1452–1519) is the Great Oz of European art. At least that's the way he sometimes seems, glimpsed through the fogs and fumes of history: a cultural force more than a man, a colossal brain and a sovereign hand at the controls of a multidisciplinary universe.

In the opening sentence, the writer expresses an opinion, an element that is often found in a feature article.

Where did his supreme gift lie? In art? Science? Engineering? Aesthetic theory? All of the above. We all have our strengths; I have mastered MetroCard dispensers and a home computer. Yet Leonardo understood, described and illustrated the principles of hydrodynamics, gross anatomy, physics and astronomy. He invented the helicopter, the armored tank and the submarine. He painted like an angel and despite being phobic about deadlines, wrote often and well. In addition, according to Vasari, he was drop-dead gorgeous.

This paragraph introduces an opinion about Leonardo da Vinci's accomplishments and supports it with examples.

And, perhaps most confounding, he generated all this near-magical accomplishment from behind a curtain of personal discretion so dense and insulating that no historian or psychologist—and dozens, maybe hundreds, have tried—has been able to pull it aside to reveal the person behind the personage.

"Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art also tries, and manages to part the curtain just a crack. We may not learn exactly what made this artist tick, but we can see him ticking away, at length and in some depth.

Naturally, the show had blockbuster written all over it from the word go. With 118 Leonardo drawings, it is the largest gathering of his work in America. The lending institutions are a super-

A Rider on a Rearing Horse in a Profile View, Leonardo da Vinci, Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, England

starry lot: the Uffizi, the Louvre, the Vatican, the Royal Library at Windsor Castle. And the Met has given it the imperial treatment: crimson walls, acres of space, a catalog as thick as *The Physician's Desk Reference.*

Are the drawings worth the fuss? In a word, totally. Individually, many are glorious; some are workmanlike; a few are just weird, so weird you find yourself wondering: what planet was this guy from? As a package, though, as the datastream output of a single sensibility, they're huge. They are also very alive. People always say that you can't know painting from a book, that you have to experience it. This is at least as true of drawing, a profoundly physical medium, where a smudge or erasure can be a heart-catching event, and a pen stroke can leap like a solar flare.

The language the writer uses makes this article both informative and entertaining.

The show comes with some fresh scholarship, not blindingly revealing, but solid and worthwhile. The curators Carmen C. Bambach and George R. Goldner, both of the Met's department of drawings and prints, have avoided a hit parade approach in their some less familiar material. They've also brought related drawings—10 studies for the Florentine mural "The Battle of Anghiari" alone—together, in some cases for the first time. Finally, by arranging the work chronologically, they've created something like an organic picture of the history of one man's polymathic life.

The informal language in this paragraph is characteristic of feature articles.

Leonardo was born in 1452 and started life with certain disadvantages. He was a small-town kid, . . . indifferently educated and—a liability for an artist, you would think—left-handed. But he also had luck. His supportive father took him to Florence, by then a major node on the information highway of Renaissance Europe. There he was apprenticed to Andrea del Verrocchio, a leading sculptor but also a painter (five gorgeous drawings of his open the show) from whom Leonardo learned much.

For one thing, he learned to draw sculpturally. This meant drawing with a command of volume, as several early drapery studies demonstrate. It also meant executing fleet, notational sketches to capture the look of real things viewed from many angles in actual space, as seen in Leonardo's serial depictions of squirming babies and wide-awake cats. From Verrocchio he also learned to carry a notebook with him at all times and to use it, so that whatever went in through the eye came out through his hand.

In 1481, he landed a substantial job, an altarpiece painting of "The Adoration of the Magi." And at that point, he seemed to have settled on a work pattern that, for better or worse, he would follow thereafter. Basically, it entailed conceiving pictorial designs so complex and technically demanding that he would never complete them.

Here the writer offers an evaluation of da Vinci's work pattern.

For "The Adoration," for example, he planned to place more than 60 figures in an elaborate perspectival setting. He drew and drew; several well-known studies, one of them madly complicated, are in the

Head of the Virgin, Leonardo da Vinci, The Metropolitian Museum of Art

show. But the ideas never really gelled, and he eventually headed to Milan in search of different work, leaving an unfinished painting behind.

In this paragraph, the writer provides support for his evaluation of da Vinci's work pattern.

He stayed in Milan, employed by the city's ruler, Ludovico Sforza, for 15 years, which were among the most productive of his life. His first commission—he proposed it himself—was an outsize equestrian monument to Ludovico's father. Again, he produced studies galore, dashed off and spirited, fastidious and polished. But the monument never materialized, and the plans were abandoned.

In any case, Leonardo was, as usual, working on several other things. One was the unfinished painting, now owned by the Vatican, titled "St. Jerome in the Wilderness." It's at the Met and gives a stark, almost agonizing sense of how he carried his obsessive, draftsmanlike self-correction right into what should have been the final stages of a painting.

And there was "The Last Supper," painted from 1493 to 1498 in the refectory of Santa Maria della Grazie. One renowned sheet from Windsor carries what could be a preliminary sketch of that painting's composition, mixed in with geometric and architectural designs. And from the Albertina in Vienna comes a powerfully resolved drawing on blue paper of an old man who is sometimes identified as St. Peter. Whatever his identity, he is animated by the tense, urgent gravitas of the painting itself.

When French troops invaded Milan in 1499, Leonardo made his way back to Florence. There he whipped up a large-scale drawing titled "Virgin and Child With Saint Anne" and gave himself a one-man show. The drawing—now lost, though later versions on the same theme

exist—was rapturously received and resulted in a commission from the city government for the Battle of Anghiari mural, to be painted in the Palazzo della Signoria. Its subject was a Florentine military victory.

The assignment was a very big, very public deal; Michelangelo, the local reigning prince of art, was to paint the opposite wall. Once more, Leonardo feverishly poured out ideas on paper, and the studies in the show are fantastic, from an explosive drawing of a horse in motion (several legs, many heads) to a hyperrealistic depiction of a screaming soldier. As for the mural, Leonardo designed a cartoon and expensive scaffolding, then left town, heading back to Milan.

Details in this paragraph continue to support the writer's evaluation of da Vinci's work pattern.

Once there, he did what he had always done: many things simultaneously. He painted; he taught; he studied anatomy and geometry. He designed maps, architectural plans and stage sets. He conducted scientific experiments and recorded his findings in notebooks, writing from right to left and in mirror image, which, as a lefty, he had always done.

And he sketched. Small drawings of grotesque human heads flowed from his hand like telephone pad doodles. His famous "Deluge" pictures date to this time. Imaginary scenes of tidal waves overwhelming minute towns, they are both aquatic studies and apocalyptic visions. In 1516, the French king Francis I, who collected trophy artists as well as art, invited him to live at his court. Leonardo, old at 64, moved to France and died there three years later.

He left behind a godlike reputation, worshipful disciples, a scant handful of paintings—about 15 survive—and the 4,000 works on paper that are his primary visual legacy. Some of his drawings are art historical icons; the face of Mary in a study for the painting of "The Virgin and Child With St. Anne," now in the Louvre, is one. He invented this expressive type, with its interior smile and apparitional draftsmanship, and with it a Western ideal of human perfection.

My favorite drawings, though, are of a different kind. They're ones where everything is happening, nonlinearly, all at once, and anything goes: double-sided sheets filled with animals, armaments, allegorical scenes, geometrical diagrams, exploding buildings, . . . dissected muscles, wheels and bridges, flowing water, reminder notes, sums, scratches, spots and stains.

In these, for me, the curtain parts that little bit, to reveal an artist who always preferred to dream and draw rather than to do, who remained at some level a venturesome child controlling his world by taking it apart, piece by piece, to see how the whole thing worked. By thinking big, Leonardo became big; illusions sometimes work that way. And the neat thing is that in his company, we get to think big, too.

The language of this conclusion reflects the informal style of a feature article.