



# Writeability of Amateur Campus Journalists in A Rural State University

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## ABSTRACT

More than a training ground for future journalists, campus journalism is partner for student development. As a communication channel to whatever information that affects the greater majority of student populace, the published articles should carry the mechanical and substantive ideals and standards. Hence, this study, explored the write ability – the “ability to write” of the amateur campus journalists in the University of Eastern Philippines. Data suggests that these campus journalists are capable to write news stories and accomplished to write opinion pages and feature articles. They find no need for clinical interventions on opinion pages but need to go through its process for news stories and feature articles.

**Key Words:** *writeability, ability to write, amateur, campus journalists, campus journalism, rural state university*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Campus journalism is in itself watchdog journalism as student journalists are expected to ensure a common good and welfare of their fellow students by keeping them informed on matters that affect them. Campus press has been deemed important because of its significant influence on the thoughts and actions of the students (Asperga, 2017). It is vital not just because it exposes budding journalists to what goes on in the newsroom but also through it, students are honed to have good interpersonal skills (Hayes, 1994). Laya, et. al. (2013) said journalism functions as a way of strengthening the ethical values and of emboldening the creative and critical thinking of the young students.

Kanigel (2006) identifies four (4) functions of the student press in universities – as chronicle of campus life; a forum of which the members of the university, community, especially students can share their viewpoint on campus, local, national and international issues; the duty to be the watchdog of society; and

training grounds for future journalists, advertisers, and media managers.

In the Philippines, the role of campus journalism was made possible through the enactment of Republic Act 7079, otherwise known as the Campus Journalism Act of 1991. As defined by the act, student publication material should be independently published by, and which meets the needs and interests of, the studentry. As a social fabric which would make or unmake the school community, of which the students are part of, the content, quality, and impact of the published articles should be of greater quality. It is in this context, that the present study explored the writeability (ability to write) of the first time campus journalists in a rural state university in Northern Samar, Philippines. This study leveraged their writing abilities in news stories, feature articles, and opinion pages.

The researcher found limited related literature and studies, determining the “ability to write” of campus journalists in news stories, opinion pages, and feature articles. Hence, this study.

## 2. Objectives

The study sought to:

1. determine the ability of the amateur campus journalists to write articles, in terms of:
  - 1.1. news;
  - 1.2. opinion; and
  - 1.3. feature.
2. identify which type of the campus paper the amateur journalists would need clinical interventions;
3. draw out recommendations to enhance the writing abilities of the amateur journalists.

## 3. Review of Literature

### Ability to Write Campus Paper Articles

Campus journalism is essential as it harnesses the student journalists’ skills and passion for writing. It

also encourages these writers to be critical in expressing their thoughts on emerging issues that greatly affect the students and the community they serve. Udlap (2008) explained that the staffers of the campus paper viewed that school paper's real essence is to be a "watchdog" of whatever issues in the campus. To be a watchdog is to be vigilant enough to uncover the scandalous, the lies, the hidden and the unknown. However, as a watchdog, campus journalists should carry with them enough knowledge and skills in writing for news stories, editorial, opinion pages, feature articles, sports columns, and other sections of the paper.

Lustri, Tabing, & Osalla (2001) emphasized in their book *Dean Spencer of the Syracuse University* definition of news as any account of a person, idea or event which interests a large number of people and is capable of being understood by them. They mentioned that a news story may play up any of elements singly or in combination, i.e. timeliness, prominence, proximity (physical proximity and psychological proximity), oddity or novelty, conflict, suspense, human interest, progress, and humor. Moreover, they stressed that a good news story is one that is authentic, accurate, done in good taste, balanced, objective, clear and concise, timely, and has mass appeal.

Feature stories, on the other hand, according to Curtis (2011) are human-interest articles that focus on particular people, places and events. He also disclosed that these type of stories are journalistic, researched, descriptive, colorful, thoughtful, reflective, thorough writing about original ideas and cover topics in depth, going further than mere hard news coverage by amplifying and explaining the most interesting and important elements of a situation or occurrence.

Publishing opinion editorial, or op-ed for 'opposite the editorial page' is important because it enables experts to communicate evidence directly to the public (Marchildon, Verma, & Roos, 2012). Khan (2016) clarified that an opinion piece has three (3) basic parts, the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. Further, she disclosed that it simply ends with the least important data, a column that ends with a punch line, a call to action, or a quick summary of arguments.

### **Campus Paper Parts where Amateur Journalists Need Clinical Interventions**

In the paper of dela Rosa, Lucero, & Vargas (2017), it was found out that some problems occurring among

the campus journalists include late releasing of issues, losing of the readers' interests and so on.

Takashi & Parks (2018) explored the educational and post-graduation experiences of graduates of a master's program with a focus on environmental journalism. The study used the framework of knowledge-based journalism to qualitatively examine how the competencies of journalistic skills, general and content-specific knowledge, learning communication theory, and developing journalistic values allowed graduates to develop a niche in their professional careers. Results showed that respondents placed disproportionate emphasis on the importance of journalistic skills and were ambivalent about the value of theory courses. The responses suggest scholars' idealistic conception of knowledge-based journalism is problematic when applied to the changing realities of journalism and the media industry in the U.S.

### **Recommendations**

Ladia (2015) analyzed and evaluated the practices on campus journalism so as to come up with using purposive samplings, 26 campus-wide publication faculty-advisers, 78 student-journalists, and 140 students were given questionnaires and were interviewed from the 26 higher education institutions (HEI) in the region out of the 66 HEI's with an existing student publication. Findings reveal that many of the provisions of the R.A. 7079 of the Campus Journalism Act are not yet fully implemented. There is a need to increase faculty and students' support and to strengthen administrative collaboration. Campus journalism in the region served as the voice of the students, gave out information, helped to form public opinion, discussed issues and safeguarded the HEIs from their own inadequacies. In order for the student publication services become more responsive to the present changes, it is recommended that an upgrading and streamlining of the student services based on the needs and goals of the students should be initiated so as to make the campus journalism proactive and student-focused.

### **4. Methodology**

A descriptive research design was used in this study. This involved 25 campus journalists, identified as first time student writers in various college-based student publications at the University of Eastern Philippines in Catarman, Northern Samar Philippines.

To determine the "ability to write" of the research participants, they were instructed to write news stories, feature articles, and opinion pieces. Rubrics

were used to score their written outputs which were later on tallied and computed through weighted means.

Purposive sampling was employed to determine the participants. They should be first time writers for a

college-based paper, had at least one (1) semester residency in the university, and had not previously won writing-related competitions.

The study was undertaken during the Second Semester of Academic Year 2017-2018.

## 5. Results and Discussion

Ability of the Amateur Campus Journalists to Write (Writeability) Articles

### News Stories

**Table 1.a: Ability to Write News Stories**

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Effective and appropriate lead	4.40	Expert
Grammar and spelling	3.80	Accomplished
Effective organization (flow deals with structure)	3.00	Capable
Journalistic style	3.00	Capable
Format	3.00	Capable
Headline writing	3.00	Capable
Interesting and effective writing style	2.80	Capable
Adequate use of primary sources; mainly interview	2.00	Developing
Quotes showing evidence of careful reporting	1.80	Developing
Objectivity and accuracy	1.80	Developing
<b>Total Weighted Mean</b>	<b>2.86</b>	<b>Capable</b>

Table 1.a shows the ability to write news stories of the amateur campus journalists. There is a 2.86 weighted mean which means, they are “capable.”

It can be gleaned from the data that they are “expert” in effective and appropriate lead, (4.40) and accomplished in grammar and spelling, (3.80). After incurring a common weighted mean of 3.00, they are “capable” in effective organization (flow deals with structure), journalistic style, format, and headline writing. Although with a weighted mean which is lesser than point 20 (2.80) in the previous indicators, they are also capable in interesting and effective writing style. Lastly, they are “developing” inadequate use of primary sources, mainly interview, (2.00) and incurred a shared weighted mean of 1.80 in quotes showing evidence of careful reporting and objectivity and accuracy.

The data show the potential of the participants in writing news, given that they show exemplary skills in writing an effective and appropriate lead. Khan (2017) highlighted that the lead is deemed important as it guides the writers in writing the headline and allows them to easily shorten the story if there is not enough space in the newspaper. On the other hand, they lacked proper training on the adequate use of primary sources and quotes showing evidence of careful reporting. These two indicators would help enhance the objectivity and accuracy of the news stories which at the same time constitute the credibility of news articles. Janes and Rosenfield (1996) emphasized that an information accessed by the many should be based on a variety of systems and up to date resources, complete, properly organized, and accurate. In addition, Fragale & Heath (2004) disclosed that credible sources are seen as likely to produce credible messages and credible messages are seen as likely to have originated from credible sources. These sources, according to Gans (1979) may include “actors whom journalists observe or interview, including. . . those who are quoted. . . and those who only supply background information or story suggestions.” In theory, as posted by Conrad (1999), journalists and sources have a symbiotic relationship: sources require journalists to get their views or ideas into the news, while journalists require sources for direction, clarification, context, perspective, and commentary.

## Opinion Articles

**Table 1.b: Ability to Write Opinion Articles**

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Convention	4.40	Expert
Statement of purpose	3.75	Accomplished
Language and vocabulary	3.55	Accomplished
Organization	3.40	Accomplished
Elaboration	3.15	Capable
<b>Total Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>

Table 1.b presents the ability to write opinion articles of the amateur campus journalists. With a total weighted mean of 3.65, the latter are “accomplished.”

It can be deduced from the data that as regards convention for opinion articles, with a weighted mean of 4.40 the research participants are “expert.” They are “accomplished” in statement of purpose, language and vocabulary, and organization, after incurring a weighted mean of 3.75, 3.55, and 3.40, respectively. On the downside, they are “capable” as regards elaboration, with a weighted mean of 3.15. The findings of this study are incongruent with the results in the findings of Marchildon, Verma, & Roos (2012) that emphasis on statement of purpose as the topmost priority in writing for an opinion page followed by organization, elaboration, and convention.

It can be inferred from the data that the participants demonstrate a strong command of conventions of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. Their errors are minor and do not interfere with understanding of the text. On the other hand, they provide minimal support and or evidence on their opinion that includes little or no use of sources, facts, or details.

## Feature Articles

**Table 1.c: Ability to Write Feature Articles**

Indicator	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Effective organization and flow (deals with structure)	4.58	Expert
Clear focus and unity (deals with content)	4.29	Expert
Grammar and spelling	4.13	Accomplished
Paragraphing	4.13	Accomplished
Journalistic writing style	3.75	Accomplished
Interesting and effective writing style	3.63	Accomplished
Effective and Appropriate lead	3.00	Capable
Infusing quotes that show evidence of careful reporting	2.42	Developing
Adequate use of primary sources, mainly interviews	1.63	Beginner
<b>Total Weighted Mean</b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>Accomplished</b>

Table 1.c exemplifies the data on the ability to write feature articles of amateur campus journalists. With a total weighted mean of 3.51, the research participants are “accomplished.”

As gleaned in the table, the participants are “expert” in effective organization and flow (structure of the articles) and clear focus and unity (structure of the contents), with a weighted mean of 4.58 and 4.29, respectively. They are “accomplished” on grammar and spelling and paragraphing with shared weighted mean of 4.13 as well as in journalistic writing style and interesting and effective writing style, with a respective weighted means of 3.75 and 3.63. Meanwhile, with a weighted mean of 3.00, they are capable in writing effective and appropriate lead. It can be noted however that they are “developing” in infusing quotes that show evidence of careful reporting, with a weighted mean of 2.42; and “beginner” in the adequate use of primary sources (mainly interviews) after incurring a weighted mean of 1.63.

It can be inferred from the data that the amateur campus journalists show proficiency on matters related to the structure and content for a feature article. They know exactly what to write and how to write on this section of the campus paper. What is striking however is that their strength in writing news stories, particularly on

effective and appropriate lead becomes one of their weakest points in writing feature articles. Curtis (2011) accentuated that while news writers follow the traditions of an inverted pyramid style feature writers can choose to tell the story out of order to engage the reader's interest and may develop storylines in a variety of ways and choose to postpone the main point until later in the copy or even the end. Hence, writing the lead for a feature article would require hard-earned experience. Lastly, the indicators in writing news stories of which they acquire lowermost weighted means are the same indicators which turned out to be their lowest in writing feature articles.

Not only that infusion of quotes that show evidence of careful reporting and adequate use of primary sources will enhance the credibility of the feature article as individual readers tend to pay more attention to and are influenced more by the vivid examples often used in quotations than by the more pallid base-rate or statistical data (Bar-Hillel & Fischhoff, 1981; Manis, Dovalina, Avis, & Cardoze, 1980; Newhagen & Reeves, 1992; Paivio, 1971).

### General Writing Ability of Amateur Campus Journalists

**Table 1.d: General Writing Ability**

Type of Write-up	Weighted Mean	Interpretation
Opinion pages	3.65	Accomplished
Feature articles	3.51	Accomplished
News stories	2.86	Capable
<b>Grand Mean</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>Capable</b>

Table 1.d illustrates the data on the general writing ability of the amateur campus journalists. The grand mean of 3.34 means that they are “capable.”

As disclosed by the data, it is “opinion pages” which emerged as the write-up where the participants incurred a higher weighted mean of 3.65 “accomplished.” Likewise, they are “accomplished” in writing feature articles with a weighted mean 3.51. Conversely, writing news stories with a weighted mean of 2.86 “capable” is their lowest. The data finds support from the book of Roberts (2016), “writing for the media can be difficult, especially for beginners.”

News is a very delicate type of writing. Lustris, Tabing, & Osalla (2001) indicated that news is never a fiction and should not be the figment of anyone’s imagination. They added that news reporters have to be very careful that the facts they provide in their news stories are free of errors and should guard against presenting false data especially about important details that can easily be checked like names, addresses, occupations or titles, numbers, or statistics. And that, news should be balanced and objective, which to them, as argued by others, is somewhat impossible to achieve and maintain. Given the soft-style characteristics of feature articles and opinion pages, they being under the category of creative journalism are somewhat easier to write than the structure-oriented news stories. Roberts (2016) contend that are several important differences between feature articles and traditional news stories. She stressed that features typically are longer while traditional stories use a summary lead, feature stories use delayed leads or begin with an anecdote. She added that the writing style is different – traditional news articles tend to paraphrase information rather than state it verbatim, on one hand, feature articles use many quotes and emotional cues, focusing more on showing the reader what’s going on instead of telling. Readability of articles would also be a contributing factor as the participants could be more exposed to non-structured creative non-fiction articles in the present. Brett & Holmes (2008) posited that newspapers have one through a dramatic transformation, abandoning to a certain degree their hard news rationale and adopting the ways of magazines. In addition, Gans (2004) argued that the greatest change in the newspaper industry since his classic study is the replacement of hard news with an increase in soft (or feature) news.

### Campus Paper Parts where Amateur Journalists Need Clinical Interventions

Table elucidates parts of campus paper where the amateur journalists need clinical interventions. It can be construed from the data that it is in news stories where the participants would be needing clinical interventions the most, followed by feature stories, and none in opinion page.

From the table, it can be deduced that as regards news stories, that the participants make use of one or fewer sources used in story. Their sources are improperly identified and much information is given without proper attribution. Information relayed are inaccurate or vague. Also, quotes used are short, weak or ineffective; no evidence of follow-up questions being asked. And, that the facts are missing or unclear, the opinion statements are made by them, and they use first person in spots which is big mistake in news writing.

On feature articles, the participants infused quotes which are short, weak, and ineffective. They have no evidence of follow-up questions being asked. Likewise, they only have one or fewer sources used in their article. In addition, their sources are improperly identified and or much information are given without attribution. They also have inaccurate or vague information.

For opinion pages, the participants need no clinical interventions.

It can be noted that in the three (3) types of write-ups, the participant need no clinical interventions on language, as regards grammar and spelling. It goes against the data of Jordan Institute (2016) where the study highlighted 18% of its respondents need language skills as a training needs.

**Table 2: Campus Paper Parts where Amateur Journalists Need Clinical Interventions**

Type of Write-up	Specific Needs for Clinical Interventions
News stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Adequate use of primary sources, mainly interview</li> <li>➤ Quotes showing evidence of careful reporting</li> <li>➤ Objectivity and accuracy</li> </ul>
Feature articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Infusing quotes that show evidence of careful reporting</li> <li>➤ Adequate use of primary sources, mainly interviews</li> </ul>
Opinion pages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ None</li> </ul>

### Recommendations to enhance the writing abilities of the amateur journalists

On the basis of the identified specific needs for clinical interventions of the amateur campus journalists, some recommendations are forwarded by the researcher.

The publication adviser, along with the editorial board may push for a series of seminar-training workshops on writing news stories and feature articles with emphasis on objectivity and accuracy (for news) and the importance of infusing quotes as an evidence of careful reporting. There should also be a highlight on the proper decorum in verifying data and information gathering skills. Tutored marks on the articles submitted by the campus journalists may be pondered upon. The editors and adviser may also consider interpersonal consultation with the concerned writers each time the latter's output is checked.

The recommendations forwarded correspond to the training needs as cited by the Jordan Media Institute (2016) more specifically on verifying information and news and research and information gathering skills for Jordanian journalists and media leaders. Khan (2016) believes in the power of newsgathering as to her, it is the secret to good journalism. Seminar-training workshops can create opportunities for experience in which students interact, form and reflect on their

knowledge with the help of teachers working as facilitators and guides,

which in turn supports students' active engagement (Weber, Gabbert, & Patrick, 2007). Additionally, they promote critical reading and writing skills as participants read a wide range of sources and synthesize data that serves the purpose of the seminar (Padgett, Keup, & Pascarella, 2013; Plymouth, 2011).

One of the important tasks of an editor and the publication adviser is the good practice of marking and commenting on the submitted articles of the campus journalists. It is through the comprehensive feedback by the tutors on the journalists' articles that they are being taught (Muyengwa & Bukaliya, 2016).

An application of the concept of consultation was originally formulated by Caplan (Caplan, 1959). As supposed by McGehearty (1968) it is in consultation that the development of the individual person is achieved as it is where he or she learns more effectively, becomes more self-actualized, and more competent within the limits of his/her capacity to operate effectively.

Lastly, Ladia (2015) divulged that in order for the student publication services become more responsive to the present changes, it is recommended that an

upgrading and streamlining of the student services based on the needs and goals of the students should be initiated so as to make the campus journalism proactive and student-focused. Hence, these recommendations.

## 6. Conclusions

On the basis of the findings of the study, it is concluded that campus journalists are capable to write news stories and accomplished to write opinion pages and feature articles. Speaking of generalizability, they are capable to write for a campus paper. It can be implied that the mechanics of writing, as regards grammar and spelling, is not a problem to them. However, they are not yet experts on matters related to specific standards per article write-up, i.e. objectivity and accuracy for news and inadequate use of primary sources and quotes showing evidence of careful reporting for both news stories and feature articles.

It is only between news stories and feature articles that the amateur campus journalists need clinical interventions. Indeed, writing is in itself a skill and it needs more time and practice to finally get through with what is demanded for a write-up specifically for a structure-driven news story and a literary journalism-inspired feature article.

As regards recommendations, a series of seminar-training workshops on writing news stories and feature articles, more specifically on objectivity and accuracy (for news) and the importance of infusing quotes as an evidence of careful reporting and use of primary sources (for both news stories and feature articles) may be instituted. Proper decorum in verifying data and information gathering skills shall take part in the program. Tutored marks on the articles submitted along with interpersonal consultation with the concerned campus journalists may be considered. It can be implied that these practices, if taken into consideration and be acted upon, will shed light and bring more glory to the amateur writers as dignified expert campus journalists in the field of news and features.

## 7. Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions of the study, the hereunder recommendations are set forth.

1. The amateur campus journalists need upgrading of their skills, more specifically in the field of writing news stories. Although, accomplished, but there is still room for improvement on their writing abilities for opinion pages and feature

articles. The campus paper adviser along with the editorial board may launch a series of seminar-workshops for the purpose.

2. The research participants are found to be “in need” of clinical interventions, more specifically in writing news stories and feature articles. Tutored markings on submitted articles and person-to-person consultation may be considered for this matter.
3. The recommended interventions can be deliberated and/or be a point of reference by the publication adviser and the editorial board.
4. This study can be re-explored using a qualitative type of inquiry.

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