

WRITING THAT ARTICLE

Magazines are always short of material for publication yet many people have the germ of an idea for one within them and only lack the discipline to put it onto paper. The biggest problem always seems to be how to assemble enough thoughts and to present them in a logical order.

The traditional method taught in schools works from the top down. The title suggests headings which can be broken down into paragraphs and then supporting ideas. The balance within the article and the credibility of the arguments can be seen continuously. The technique implies that you start with it sorted out in your mind. The more practical alternative is to find out what you have to say and then structure it.

Choose your topic - something that has been recently on your mind or perhaps has been building up over some time rather than something which requires correlation of book found information. Have a few initially blank A4 sized lined sheets as used by students - scraps of paper and backs of envelopes are only for emergencies. Thoughts will not come in a logical order so capture the ideas by writing them in the random order that they occur to you or arise in some discussion. Do it as it happens, do not imagine you can recollect everything at some later time. Odd sentences, phrases or even just key words will do - the ^{only} criterion is that you can read them later. This activity can be spread over several periods - it might even be worth carrying a jotting notebook with you during this time. You will want about 3 or 4 handwritten sides for a convenient sized article.

Look at what you have & breakdown the ideas into a number of headings that fit the material. Then allocate the rough notes to the headings and number them into some sort of order. Now write them out again, but in sentences and with some of the links put in, so that you can check the balance of ideas and headings and can see what you are actually trying to say. It is now not a bad time to talk it over with somebody else who may have different insights.

The real work is in the final stage. Insert anything else that needs to be said. Look hard to eliminate the bits that do not say much, the long phrases that can be shortened, the involved sentences that can be clarified. Prune, slim and hone till what you want to say is clear to the reader. Put it aside for a few days and come back to it with a fresh look. Do not strive too much for style but aim for flow and readability.

Two pages of A4 typed at double spacing fits a magazine quite nicely - about the equivalent of four handwritten sides. If it is up to twice that length then it would have to be a major feature in the magazine and so would have to be a major contribution, and the editor's assessment of the topic's worth in column inches may not be yours.