

# [Such a strong man or a compromise](https://assignbuster.com/such-a-strong-man-or-a-compromise/)

Such feature articles are valuable when they answer the questions that readers are likely to be asking, and one or two more that they won’t have thought of. How has the new head of state come to power? Why has he been chosen, and who is backing him? Has he any experience of government or administration? Is he a strong man or a compromise candidate? Is he likely to favour one power-block or another? Has he travelled or lived outside his own country, or is he narrowly nationalistic figure? Is he likely to change the social and economic structure of his own country, and his country’s place in world affairs? And basically—in his arrival likely to have any impact, in the short term or the long term, on the life of the ordinary reader of the paper? 2. Human interest feature: The second type of feature article is the ‘ human interest’ article, a never-failing source of fillers for the popular press. Such articles are based on the timeless subjects of sex, money and the battle between the generations. The sex features, in recent years an expanding business in the British and American press, are often initiated by comment on court cases, divorces, or the public—private lives of ‘ personalities’ in show business, television or sport.

A doctor was brought before the General Medical Council charged with breaking a professional confidence by telling the parents of one of his girl patients that she taking a contraceptive pill at the age of sixteen. This story combined two important factors—sex and the generation gap—and stimulated many thousands of words on these subjects. If you were the girl’s parents, would you want to know whether she was on the pill? Should a girl of sixteen be allowed to take the pill? Should doctors tell? Such features represent an expression of public view and debate that is a valid function of newspapers, particularly at times of rapid social change. They may well help, by airing conflicting views, to establish a new platform of social convention. There is often a dreadful predictability about such features. When a woman gets divorce complaining that her husband snores, it can be guaranteed that many thousands of words will be written and published answering such that profound questions as: How do you stop your husband snoring? Would you move into separate beds if your husband snored? Features of this sort in the popular press are probably a distillation of the conversation held over a million breakfast tables, in a million train compartments and through a million coffee-breaks. They are vital constituent of what I have called the ‘ familiarity factor.

’ 3. Personality profile: The third type of feature is the personality profile. Based on an interview with some important or interesting (on important and interesting) figure in the news, the profile is sometimes used as an exercise in revealing the character of the subject through the established and recognisable character of the interviewer. 4.

Personality column: The fourth type of feature is the personality column. Most newspapers have two or three of these, usually weekly, written by men and women who filter the news through the mesh (finer or thicker) of their own personalities to give it an individual and often idiosyncratic slant. Because of the local character of the American press, many of its personality columns—such as those of Walter Lippman—are concerned with the hard material of politics. In Britain, most personality columns tend to be the expression of one vivid offbeat mind.

The most successful columnist of the recent past was ‘ Cassandra’ (Sir William Connor) who wrote a daily column for the London Daily Mirror from 1935 to 1967. ‘ Cassandra’ was a former advertising copywriter who day after day gave passions and prejudices free rein to the delight of Mirror readers. His style was tough and astringent, softening only when he wrote about cats, gardens or bad puns. He was never self-indulgent as a writer and his genius lay in the sharpness of his vision and the precision of his use of words.