

# Feature Writing

Region Meet • 2022



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown High School is located in Central Texas and has 800 students enrolled in grades 9-12. In the fall, sophomore Kent Roy's father, Bill, was diagnosed with constrictive bronchiolitis, a lung disease where the small airways are destroyed, making it difficult and eventually impossible to breathe. Bill Roy is a decorated U.S. Army captain who served in Afghanistan for five years and served his country for 25 years. Capt. Roy's doctor believes his illness stems from inhaling toxic fumes during his tours. In Afghanistan, the military used burn pits to dispose of everything from tires to batteries to Styrofoam. All were burned near where soldiers lived and worked. The fumes from those items can be toxic. This illness is rare among U.S. civilians, but more than 300,000 Iraq and Afghan war veterans have been diagnosed with some type of lung disease.

Capt. Roy was not diagnosed at the local Veterans Affairs hospital. In fact, the VA hospital administrators have denied his diagnosis. Without the VA acknowledging Capt. Roy's illness, he cannot get approved for disability payments. He has not been able to work for two years, and the medicine that slows down the illness costs \$500 a month.

After watching his father's frustrations grow and his health decline, Kent started a letter-writing campaign to Texas U.S. senators and representatives. In less than two months, more than 2,000 people have written letters and emails in support of Capt. Roy. Several local media outlets produced stories about Kent's letter-writing campaign.

On March 15, U.S. Rep. Lloyd Beard called Kent to talk about his dad's situation. Rep. Beard pledged he would help Kent's father get his disability approved, and he invited Kent and his father to Washington, D.C., to meet with the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. Beard told Kent he would pay for the travel expenses for the three-day trip. Kent and his father will leave for Washington, D.C., on May 1.

You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed this Tuesday, April 26.

## ■ KENT ROY, sophomore

"When my dad first started having breathing issues two years ago, he went to a VA [Veterans Affairs] hospital. The VA doctors told him he was having anxiety attacks and sent him home. He kept having problems, so he kept going back to the VA. The VA never diagnosed any medical issues, other than panic attacks. Then, in December my dad could hardly breathe. He was gasping for breaths and couldn't say more than a word or two. My mom rushed him to the emergency room. The ER doctor started asking him a lot of questions about his tours in Afghanistan. After several days of testing with no diagnosis and

## ■ KENT ROY (cont.)

no improvement, the doctor performed a lung biopsy. The biopsy showed that my dad has constrictive bronchiolitis. There's no cure for it. Most people who have this disease die within three to five years, but the doctor thinks my dad has had it for several years already.

"In January, my dad told the VA hospital what he was diagnosed with, but the VA doctors rejected it. I started my letter-writing campaign when the VA dismissed my dad's diagnosis. I wanted to do something for my dad and other soldiers. I wrote our senator a letter. Then, I told my friends about it, and they wrote letters. Then, I told my pastor about it, and he asked the church members to write letters. And it took off from there. Every time someone wrote a letter for my dad, they sent me an email. I can't believe how many people have written letters.

"My dad is sick because of his tours in Afghanistan. When people hear my dad served in the Army, they always say, 'Thanks for your service.' That's great to hear, but it makes it even harder to accept what's happening to him. Strangers are thankful, but our own government ignores him.

"When Rep. Beard called my house, he had to say his name three times before I finally believed it was him. Rep. Beard started with an apology and then promised he would help my dad. He also asked us to share our story with the Veterans Affairs committee. I know the fix won't be quick, but at least someone is finally listening to us.

"No matter what happens in D.C., the government can't save my dad's life, but it can save others. And it would dramatically change my family's life if my dad could get his disability. I've always been proud of my dad for fighting for our country, and I always expected to follow in his footsteps. Now, I probably won't because of the way the government has treated him."

## ■ KEELIE ROY, Kent's mom

"Bill and I have always been proud of Kent, but that is especially true now. Finding out we would lose Bill much too soon has been hard on all of us. Kent has always worshipped his father. But, instead of walking around feeling helpless, Kent is trying to change things.

"Bill has complained about the VA, but he's never complained about serving his country. He always felt it was his duty, and Kent learned that from him. Bill never had to tell Kent to do the right thing. He showed him. And that can be seen with what Kent is doing now. This is his way of serving his country."

## ■ BILL ROY, Kent's dad

"It's hard for me to talk for long periods, so I will be brief. I can't wait to go to D.C. Kent will be my voice. My son is my hero. When my country failed me, my son stepped in. His actions will do more than help our family."

## ■ LLOYD BEARD, U.S. representative

"My office alone received hundreds of letters about Capt. Roy, and every letter asked for the same thing — help. And it's about time we offered that family some help. Capt. Roy served his country, and it's time for his country to serve him and his family. It's not enough that we can help that family. The House Veterans Affairs committee needs to hear Capt. Roy's story so that we can help all military families caught in this situation. I am proud that Capt. Roy and his son will accompany me at the Capitol."

**DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!**

## REGION • 2022

### FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

*Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.*

1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about a student who started a letter-writing campaign for his father.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay as close to the prompt as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

It started with one letter. Then another. Then another.

Within two months, 2,000 people had written letters to Congress asking for help for sophomore Kent Roy's father, Capt. Bill Roy, who is dying of a lung disease that, according to his doctors, he got while serving his country in Afghanistan.

Finally, someone listened.

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story is going to be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

#### **nut graph**

In mid-March, U.S. Rep. Lloyd Beard called Kent and pledged that he would help Kent's father secure his disability, something the military has denied him. Rep. Beard also invited Kent and his father to Washington, D.C., on May 1, to share their story with the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

#### **direct quote**

"No matter what happens in D.C., the government can't save my dad's life, but it can save others," Kent said. "And it would dramatically change my family's life if my dad could get his disability."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the transition/quote formula.

Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Kent said," not "said Kent"). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing some kind of transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and that the quote does not repeat information in the transition.

**transition/story-telling**

Two years ago after returning from Afghanistan, Capt. Roy started having respiratory issues, so he went to the Veterans Affairs hospital.

**direct quote**

“The VA doctors told him he was having anxiety attacks and sent him home,” Kent said. “He kept having problems, so he kept going back to the VA. The VA never diagnosed any medical issues, other than panic attacks.”

**transition/story-telling**

In December, Kent’s mom rushed Capt. Roy to the emergency room rather than the VA hospital because he was gasping for air and could barely speak.

**direct quote**

“After several days of testing with no diagnosis and no improvement, the doctor performed a lung biopsy,” Kent said. “The biopsy showed that my dad has constrictive bronchiolitis. There’s no cure for it.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Kent Roy.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Kent is the best.” These statements are personal opinions and should not be made in a feature story.

6. Always use the verb “said” as the verb of attribution. Don’t say “says,” “stated,” “feels” or any other synonym for “said.”

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement or a statement that will bring the reader back to the beginning of the story. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

Capt. Roy, who is barely able to talk, said he is looking forward to going to D.C. where his son will be his voice.

“My son is my hero,” he said. “When my country failed me, my son stepped in. His actions will do more than help our family.”

## SAMPLE STORY

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Finally, someone listened.

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In December, Kent's mom rushed Capt. Roy to the emergency room rather the VA hospital because he was gasping for air and could barely speak.

"After several days of testing with no diagnosis and no improvement, the doctor performed a lung biopsy," Kent said. "The biopsy showed that my dad has constrictive bronchiolitis. There's no cure for it."

Capt. Roy's doctor believes his illness stems from inhaling toxic fumes during his tours in Afghanistan, where the military uses burn pits to dispose of pretty much everything, from tires to batteries to Styrofoam. This illness is rare among U.S. civilians, but more than 300,000 Iraq and Afghan war veterans have been diagnosed with some type of lung disease.

"Most people who have this disease die within three to five years, but the doctor thinks my dad has had it for several years already," Kent said.

The VA doctors refused to accept the diagnosis, which meant Capt. Roy couldn't get approved for disability. He hasn't been able to work for two years.

"I started my letter-writing campaign when the VA dismissed my dad's diagnosis," Kent said. "I wanted to do something for my dad and other soldiers."

Kent wrote a letter to his senator and told a few friends and his pastor. The letter-writing campaign quickly snowballed.

"Every time someone writes a letter for my dad, they send me an email," Kent said. "I can't believe how many people have written letters."

Keelie Roy, Kent's mother, said getting the diagnosis has been hard on the family.

"Kent has always worshiped his father," Keelie Roy said. "But, instead of walking around feeling helpless, Kent is doing something to try to make a positive change."

When Rep. Beard called Kent to discuss his father's situation, Beard had to say his name three times for Kent to believe it was him.

"Rep. Beard started with an apology and then promised he would help my dad," he said. "I know the fix won't be quick, but at least someone is finally listening to us."

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