



LEAD WRITING

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The key to good leads

The key to writing good copy lies in the first paragraph — the lead. It needs to capture your readers' interest so they'll read on. Objectives of the lead are:

1. To get the reader's attention.
2. To introduce the subject of the copy.
3. To lead the reader into the body of the copy.

Therefore, begin the copy in the most attention-getting, striking way possible. As one adviser wrote, "Begin the copy with a lead that will tease, tickle or tempt the reader." To do just that, consider using different types of featurized leads throughout a section, remembering as well to vary the opening words as you would with captions, and to avoid beginning with names or the name of the group or event.

Summary Lead

- Summarizes the event by reporting the who, what when, where, why, and how — or at least the most important of the 5W's and H
- Gives the gist of the story

"With a change from previous years, spectators came alive with spirit, making athletic events rock with noise and enthusiasm of the '50s and '60s."

"Money wasn't everything, even to perpetually broke students, as they gave their time and energy to volunteer in the community."

"Using their own ideas to promote healthy thinking, Students Against Drunk Driving found creative and fun ways to show the importance of not using drugs and intoxicants."

"At a time when technology and computers were bywords, students still flocked to learn sewing, cooking, child psychology and financing through home economics classes."

Narrative Lead

- tells a story
- creates a situation and draws the reader in
- the reader can often identify with the characters or situation
- usually includes description

"It was hot. It was Friday. It was unexpected. The kids were unprepared. The teachers only had two hours to get ready to be normal again. Everyone was shocked...the strike was over."

"The Axemen inbounded the ball and passed to senior Karen Freeman in the corner. Freeman lobbed the ball inside to senior Sonia Wagoner less than five feet from the basket. Wagoner's shot, virtually uncontested, gave South its first women's state basketball title and also a first for District 5AAA, which had not advanced a team as far as the semifinals before."

"On a cold, dry Saturday evening, the team sized up its opponent. Excitement mounted as the first and last game of the season was about to be played. The opposing team started the game with the kickoff. As the ball sailed through the air, everyone paused for a split second, waiting to see what

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would happen. Both spirit and hopes ran high. The only difference was that the girls were wearing the purple football jerseys.”

“Nervous and tense, trying hard to concentrate on the directions being given, you maneuver the monstrous bright yellow machine into the school parking lot. There, you see people you know walking by and your beet red face shows the extra stress of trying to melt into the floor — an all too familiar scenario for some students learning to drive.” (Note use of “you.” On occasion, if used appropriately and sparingly, it works.)

Descriptive Lead

- conjures up a mental picture of a subject or event
- helps portray the mood and setting
- allows the reader to hear, see, smell, feel the situation
- one of the most effective leads for yearbook copy

“Meeting in an unused Industrial Arts room and an abandoned nursery school area with large fairy tale figures painted on the walls, International High School students learned about cultures the world over in its initial year.”

“The fragrance of chicken filled the air. Yellow broth trickled down from a stained white table onto a candy wrapper covered floor. The custodian scoffed at the mess, then wiped it away into an already full garbage can. Just another day in the cafeteria.”

“They golfed through the rain, they golfed through the sun, they even golfed through the strike, coming back to pick up first place at district and fourth place at state.”

“Invading classrooms with the zeal of six year olds on the first day of school, parents came to school in place of their students on Swap Day.”

“Cars, scooters and motorcycles, the preferred wheels for those with licenses, jockeyed for positions in the east and west end asphalt jungles.”

Quotation Lead

- a direct quotation that stands out as an important element of the story
- the quote must set the stage for the copy or give the focus or theme of the copy
- one of the most overused leads because it’s an easy solution; use sparingly

“I wish I could get more money for less work,” confessed senior Amanda Weller about her position at Safeway. It was a feeling expressed by many, with students expenses rising and limited working time available.”

“‘Sorry for the interruption. We have just one small announcement,’ blares the public address system. The teacher glares at the noisy box and class is disrupted one more time.”

“When I was in high school, everyone attended the baccalaureate,” remarked counselor Barbara Craig. “It was a serious, somber occasion. Now there’s so little information and understanding, you find only 20 kids attending.”

Question Lead

- effective if it challenges the reader's knowledge or curiosity
- should be used only when the question is central to the story
- it is too often used when the reporter can't think of another
- it's easy to write, but use it rarely; it's the lazy man's lead

"Rating albums 'R' or 'PG'? A practice unheard of, yet it almost became a reality when 25 recording companies agreed to comply — to a limited extent — with the wishes of the Parent Music Resource Center."

"Homework? Why spend time learning about the Korean war when M*A*S*H is on in the next room? Why waste precious hours studying the functions of a city police force when Hill Street Blues is right at your fingertips?"

Exclamatory Lead

- consists of a short, exclamatory sentence
- usually it is a striking or startling statement that demands attention

"Life just kept getting more and more expensive."

"State. A popular word among many South athletes, no matter what sport."

Contrast Lead

- used when there is a comparison to be made
- points out opposites and extremes

"There were no chemicals, but there certainly was chemistry. There were no test tubes, but for sure there was experimenting. And a lot of mixing — and learning — took place in these labs. Jazz labs, that is."

"The district cellar in 1987. State champs in 1988."

Suspended Interest Lead

- arouses the reader's curiosity because it doesn't tell all
- tempts the reader to read on to find out; sometimes teases
- usually presents the point near the end of the lead
- direct opposite of the summary lead

"Tradition proved a powerful mainstay, to the dismay of wrestling coach Henry Hosfield."

"Working during school. Working after school. Spending free periods working. Doesn't sound like a very fun club, does it?"

It's called publishing a newspaper, a job that is challenging, ongoing and not always fun, but rewarding when the final product is distributed."

"Business was more than just business, and just as in the real world, it meant competition."

"A purple principal, a hallway close to a quarter of a mile long, new workloads and new peers." (Copy on new freshman class.)

"The Hult Center got a facelift, one that people didn't see unless their eyes were on their feet."



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Allusion Lead

- referring to someone or something well known
- can be reference to a motto, a quote, a familiar line in a song or book, the name of a movie, a poem, etc.
- make sure the reference is suitable to the subject of the copy

“The old saying, ‘It’s not whether you win or lose but how you play the game,’ was a lesson quickly learned by the JV volleyball team.”

“The eyes had it in 1987. The focus ranged from dazzling makeup to colored contacts.”
