

Types of News Leads

The lead, or opening paragraph, is the most important part of a news story. With so many sources of information – newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and the internet – audiences simply are not willing to read beyond the first paragraph (and even sentence) of a story unless it grabs their interest. A good lead does just that. It gives readers the most important information in a clear, concise and interesting manner. It also establishes the voice and direction of an article.

Switching between the 5W's Lead

Depending on which W is the most important will affect which one you start your sentence with. After you have figured out your 5W'S and your H you will have to decide which one makes the most sense to start with.

Examples:

Original: For the fourth night in a row, protesters gathered at the Brooklyn Center police station to demonstrate over the killing of [20-year-old Daunte Wright, a Black man](#), during a traffic stop in the Minneapolis suburb, hours after former police officer Kim Potter was arrested and charged in his death.

Who: Kim Potter was arrested and charged in the death of 20-year-old Daunte Wright, a Black man in the fourth night in a row as protesters gathered at Brooklyn Center police station.

Where: At Brooklyn Center police station protesters gathered for the fourth night in a row as former police officer Kim Potter was arrested and charged in the death of 20-year-old Daunte Wright a Black man.

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/14/us/daunte-wright-minnesota-shooting-wednesday/index.html>

Straight news lead

Just the facts, please, and even better if interesting details and context are packed in. This kind of lead works well for hard news and breaking news.

Examples:

“After mass street protests in Poland, legislators with the country’s ruling party have abruptly reversed their positions and voted against a proposal to completely ban guns.” (By [NPR’s Camila Domonoske](#))

“The European Parliament voted Tuesday to ratify the landmark Paris climate accord, paving the way for the international plan to curb greenhouse gas emissions to become binding as soon as the end of this week.” (By [NPR’s Rebecca Hersher](#))

“The United States announced it is suspending efforts to revive a cease-fire in Syria, blaming Russia’s support for a new round of airstrikes in the city of Aleppo.” (By [NPR’s Richard Gonzales](#))

Commentary:

All three leads sum up the news in a straightforward, clear way — in a single sentence. They also hint at the broader context in which the news occurred.

Anecdotal lead:

Sometimes, beginning a story with a quick anecdote can draw in readers. The anecdote must be interesting and must closely illustrate the article’s broader point. If you use this approach, be specific and use the most important details.

Example:

Tri-staters tell stories of the devastating tsunami

By Tony Cook for The Cincinnati Post, Jan. 8, 2005

From Dan’s sun-warmed beach chair in Thailand, the Indian Ocean began to look, oddly, not so much like waves but bread dough.

Commentary: This article is a local angle on the devastating tsunami that struck Southeast Asia in 2005. As a result of the massive death toll and worldwide impact, most readers would have been inundated with basic information about the tsunami. Given that context, this lead uses an unexpected image to capture the reader's attention and prepare them for a new take on the tsunami. Again, it is brief (23 words).

Now your turn to practice writing more leads: