

# BASIC NEWS LEADS

## CHAPTER 7

A story—whether fiction or nonfiction—has to begin somewhere. The opening of a story needs to grab a reader's attention and hold it. The rest of the story has to flow logically to its conclusion. The easiest thing for any reader to do is stop reading, and if the story fails to attract the reader's attention at the beginning, he or she may never even begin reading. And just as a story needs a beginning, the process of writing must have a beginning as well. Few writers can sit at a keyboard and tap out a story without first planning it.

“Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice; journalism what will be grasped at once.”

Cyril Connolly,  
writer and literary critic

### PREWRITING

#### Identifying the Central Point

Writing requires preparation and organization. The preparation begins before the reporter starts gathering information, when the story is just an idea in the mind of the reporter, editor or producer. When reporters have gathered all the information they think they need for a story, they still face the task of organizing. The best way to do this is to write a central point and a brief outline.

A central point for a news story is a one- or two-sentence summary of what the story is about and why it is newsworthy. It is a statement of the topic—and more. Several stories may have the same topic, but the central point of each of those stories should be unique.

When two bombs exploded along the route of the Boston Marathon in April 2013, killing three people and injuring more than 200 others, different audiences, whether newspaper, online media, television or social media, wanted to find out as much as they could about the bombing. Audiences wanted to know who was responsible and if there was the possibility of more bombings in other cities. They wanted to know the status of the manhunt for the suspects. They wanted to know

what government officials were doing to protect the nation. Almost all audiences were angry and wanted to know how it happened, and what could be done to prevent it from happening again. Every story about the bombing, whether from the view of the police, government officials, witnesses or victims and their families, had its unusual, if not unique, central point to distinguish it from all other stories on the same subject.

Every well-written news story contains a clear statement of its central point. It may be in the first paragraph, called the “lead.” Or it may be in a later paragraph, called a “nut graf,” that follows an anecdote, describes a scene or uses some other storytelling device to entice the reader into the story. By including the central point, writers clearly tell readers what they will learn from reading the entire story.

## Story Outlines

Reporters usually have a good idea what the central point of their stories will be even as they begin gathering the information necessary to write it. However, unexpected information may emerge that forces them to rethink the central point of the story. Therefore, reporters always review their notes and other materials they have gathered before they start writing. Reviewing assures reporters they have identified the most newsworthy central point and have the information they need to develop it. It also helps them decide what the major sections of their stories will be. A reporter covering a shooting and robbery at a local convenience store might draft this central-point statement: “A convenience store clerk was shot by a robber who escaped with only \$15.” The reporter’s outline might have these major sections:

Victim and injuries.

Police identify suspect.

Witnesses’ descriptions of robber.

The central point and this brief outline of the major sections form the skeleton of the story. The reporter needs only to develop each section. Reporters who fail to

identify a central point or who lose sight of that central point risk writing stories that are incoherent and incomplete.

Once reporters select a central point and write a brief outline, they go through their notes again to decide what information belongs where. Some reporters number passages, and others use colored pens, markers or highlighters to indicate where to put particular facts, quotes or anecdotes. They omit information that does not fit in any of the sections.

Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele, investigative reporters who have produced a number of long investigative stories for The Philadelphia Inquirer, Time magazine, and

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Donald L. Barlett and James B. Steele are one of the most widely acclaimed investigative reporting teams in American journalism. They have worked together for more than four decades, first at The Philadelphia Inquirer, (1971-1997) where they won two Pulitzer Prizes and scores of other national journalism awards, then at Time magazine, (1997-2006) where they earned two National Magazine Awards, becoming the first journalists in history to win both the Pulitzer Prize for newspaper work and its magazine equivalent for magazine reporting, and now at Vanity Fair as contributing editors. They also have written eight books.

**Barlett & Steele Blog**

**Our new book: The Betrayal of the American Dream**

More than three years in the research and writing, our new book is the distillation of our work chronicling the plight of the American middle class for more than three decades. The Betrayal of the American Dream is available in bookstores and can be ordered in hardcover and as an e-book from Amazon.com, BarnesandNoble.com, and Indiebound.org. Twenty years ago, we warned in America: What Went Wrong? that federal policies were dismantling the middle class. But as we describe in The Betrayal, we vastly underestimated how quickly the nation's economic elite would consolidate their ...

By Don and Jim on 7.31.12 Continue Reading | Comments (2)

*"If only all journalists demonstrated the expertise of Barlett and Steele, the world would be a better place."*  
—*Baltimore Sun*

Vanity Fair, as well as eight books, say one of the keys to their success is organizing information. They spend months gathering documents and conducting interviews, all of which are filed by topic or name of individual, agency or corporation. Then they read the material several times because important issues and ideas often become clear only after time. Once they have an outline of the story's major sections, they start drafting it section by section. Finally, they polish sections and spend most of their time working on leads and transitions between sections. Barlett and Steele's description of how they work confirms what most writers say: No one sits down and writes great stories. Writers must plan their work.

## THE NEWS LEAD

The first paragraph or two in a news story is called the "lead." The lead (some people spell it "lede") is the most important part of a story—and the most difficult part to write. Like the opening paragraphs of a short story or novel, the lead of a news story is the part that attracts the reader and, if it is well written, arouses a reader's interest. It should tell the reader the central point of the story, not hide the subject with unnecessary or misleading words and phrases.

### The Summary News Lead

Every news story must answer six questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? The lead, however, is not the place to answer all of them. The lead should answer only the one or two questions that are most interesting, newsworthy and unusual. For example, few readers in large cities know the ordinary citizens involved in news stories, so the names of those people—the "who"—rarely appear in leads. The exact time and place at which a story occurred may also be unimportant.

When writers try to answer all these questions in one paragraph, they create complicated and confusing leads. Here's an example of an overloaded lead and a possible revision:

Charles E. Vickers, 47, of 1521 Yarmouth Drive, died and John Aston Walters, 39, of 1867 Colonial Ave., was severely injured Sunday afternoon when the bicycles they were riding were struck near the intersection of Weston and Falmouth roads by a car driven by a man police said had a blood alcohol count of nearly .23 percent and was driving without a license because it had been revoked last year after his fourth conviction for driving under the influence of alcohol.

REVISED: One Mechanicsburg man is dead and another severely injured after the bicycles they were riding were struck by a drunken driver Sunday afternoon near the intersection of Weston and Falmouth roads.

Because people and what they do are central to many news stories, some journalists recognize two variations on the summary news lead: the immediate-identification lead and the delayed-identification lead. Reporters use the



Each of the following leads emphasizes the answer to only one of the six basic questions, the question that seems most important for that particular story

## how

Asheville, N.C.—Evangelist Billy Graham was in fair condition Saturday and resting comfortably in a hospital near his home after he was admitted for evaluation and treatment of an intestinal bleed, hospital officials said.

(The Associated Press)

A nearby resident pulled an Antrim Township milk truck driver from his crumpled tanker Tuesday morning after a Norfolk Southern train crashed into the rig at the Milnor Road railroad crossing.

(The [Waynesboro, Pennsylvania] Record Herald)

Tehran, Iran—Iran has resumed small-scale enrichment of uranium, a senior Iranian nuclear negotiator said today, showing the country is determined to proceed with atomic development despite international moves to restrict it.

(The Associated Press)

## why

Consumers, energized by unusually warm weather and the tame heating bills that went with it, hit the malls with gusto last month, sending retail sales soaring by 2.2 percent—the biggest jump in six years.

(The Washington Times)

Early Monday morning, shortly after NCAA president Mark Emmert unloaded a series of heavy, life-draining sanctions on Penn State University and its football program, the irony was impossible to ignore.

Part of Penn State football's past, long celebrated and admired nationally, was the catalyst for all of the penalties—including a lengthy bowl ban, drastic scholarship cuts and a \$60 million fine—that will tax the program and the university in the present and the foreseeable future.

The bill came due for all of it Monday in Indianapolis.

(The [Harrisburg, Pennsylvania] Patriot-News)

## what

The natural gas boom gripping parts of the U.S. has a nasty by-product: wastewater so salty, and so polluted with metals such as barium and strontium, most states require drillers to get rid of the stuff by injecting it down shafts thousands of feet deep.

(The Associated Press)

immediate-identification lead when the identities of the major subjects in the story are important or are well known:



Martha Stewart walks out of federal prison in Alderson, W.Va., today to launch an audacious comeback campaign that might be tougher than anything she faced during her five months behind penitentiary walls.

(The Washington Post)

A judge sentenced former Harris County Sheriff's Deputy John Lawrence, 28, to four years in prison Friday for using and buying drugs while on duty.

In many stories, the names of the main subjects are not as important as what those people did or what happened to them. For those stories, reporters use leads that withhold complete identification of the people involved until the second or third paragraph. The following leads are examples of delayed-identification leads:

An east Philadelphia man held his girlfriend's baby at knife point for more than two hours Saturday night before police officers captured him after shooting him with a stun gun.

An 82-year-old Dallas woman is slowly recovering from a gunshot wound to the head, and police say they may be on the verge of charging a suspect with attempted murder.

Leads that hold back details so the reporter can get to the central point of the article more quickly are called "blind leads." Beginners should not misinterpret the terminology. A blind lead does not hide the central point of the story, only information that the reader does not need immediately. Blind leads let the reporter tell readers what the story is about to pique their interest and get them into the story.

A "catchall graf" usually follows the blind lead to identify sources and answers questions created by the lead. Missing details can be placed in subsequent paragraphs. Here's an example of a blind lead:

It was an Altoona company that lost its appeal to Commonwealth Court, but it's the state agency charged with overseeing construction matters that's feeling the pain.

*(The [Harrisburg, Pennsylvania] Patriot-News)*

In its second paragraph, the article identified the company and what the case involved. In the third paragraph, the article identified the state agency involved and what it had done wrong.

Before reporters can write effective leads, however, they must learn to recognize what is news. After selecting the most newsworthy facts, reporters must summarize those facts in sharp, clear sentences, giving a simple, straightforward account of what happened. Examine these leads, which provide clear, concise summaries of momentous events in the nation's history:

WASHINGTON—Supreme Court justices revealed sharp and passionately held differences Tuesday as they confronted California's Proposition 8 ban on gay marriages.

*(McClatchy Newspapers)*

DENVER—Timothy McVeigh, the decorated soldier who turned his killing skills against the people of Oklahoma City, was condemned Friday to die.

*(The Dallas Morning News)*

DALLAS, Nov. 22—A sniper armed with a high-powered rifle assassinated President Kennedy today. Barely two hours after Mr. Kennedy's death, Vice President Johnson took the oath of office as the thirty-sixth President of the United States.

*(The Associated Press)*

Leads that fail to emphasize the news—the most interesting and important details—are sometimes described as burying the news. Here's an example of a lead that fails to give readers the news:

Wentworth County is required to give inmates the same level of medical treatment the general public receives, Corrections Director Maria Sanchez said.

The news in the story, however, was not the level of medical care the county provides jail inmates. The news was the financial problems the county was facing because of the requirement that it provide medical care to inmates. Here's a rewritten lead that makes the significance of the story clearer:

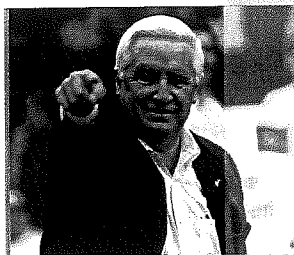
Wentworth County's costs for medical care for jail inmates doubled—from \$50,000 to \$100,000—last year because of a new state regulation.

Friday morning, county and state officials gathered to find a way to pay the bill.

## SENTENCE STRUCTURE IN LEADS

Most leads are a single sentence, and that sentence must follow all the normal rules for punctuation, grammar, word usage and verb tense. If an event occurred in the past, the lead must use the past tense, not the present. Leads must be complete sentences and should include all the necessary articles.

Some problems with sentence structure arise because beginners confuse a story's lead with its headline. The lead is the first paragraph of a news story. The headline is a brief summary that appears in larger type above the story. To save space, editors use only a few key words in each headline. However, that style of writing is not appropriate for leads.



HEADLINE: Deficit tops big list for Corbett

LEAD: HARRISBURG—Tom Corbett takes the oath of office Tuesday as Pennsylvania's 46th governor with an ambitious agenda on his plate and a daunting deficit on the horizon.

(*The Philadelphia Inquirer*)

Most leads use subject, verb, object word order. They begin with the subject, which is closely followed by an active verb and then by the object of the verb. Reporters deviate from that style only in the rare case that a different sentence structure better tells the news. Leads that begin with long qualifying clauses and phrases lack the clarity of simpler, more direct sentences. Long introductory clauses also clutter leads, burying the news amid a jumble of less significant details. Writing coach Paula LaRocque calls these "backed-into leads." She describes them as "one of the most pervasive and uninviting habits a writer can fall into":

WASHINGTON—In the most significant court case dealing with money and politics since 1976, a special three-judge panel today upheld several major provisions of a sweeping new law limiting political donations but found that some of its measures were unconstitutional.

(The New York Times)

REVISED: WASHINGTON—A special three-judge panel today upheld major portions of a new federal law limiting political campaign contributions, but it also found some parts of the law unconstitutional.

## the writing COACH

### Oh Where, Oh Where Does the Time Element Go?

By Joe Hight Colorado Springs (Colorado) Gazette

You've just finished your lead and something is missing: the day. Oh, the dreaded time element. Where to place the day so it doesn't tarnish your fine lead or be criticized by your editor?

In his column "Writers Workshop," which formerly appeared in Editor & Publisher magazine, Jack Hart wrote, "Faulty time element placement produces much of the strange syntax that often taints newspaper writing. We regularly come up with oddities such as 'A federal judge Monday approved' or 'Secretary of State Warren Christopher threatened Monday. . . .'"

If you have problems, and most of us do, with the time element trap, here are six tips from Hart, the AP Stylebook and others:

1. The most natural place to put the day is immediately after the verb or the main clause. Thus, you follow the basic formula for writing a lead, especially in a hard news story: who, what, time, day or date and place. The robber was killed Friday at the convenience store.

2. Avoid placing the time element so it appears that it's the object of a transitive verb. If this occurs, use "on" before the time element.

AWKWARD: The city council postponed Thursday a resolution. . . . (This makes it seem that the council postponed Thursday. The better way would be: The city council postponed on Thursday a resolution. . . .)

AWKWARD: Deputies arrested Thursday a man wanted. . . . (The better way to write it would be: Deputies arrested on Thursday a man wanted. . . .)

3. Use "on" before the principal verb if it seems awkward after the verb or main clause.

AWKWARD: The embassy Friday expelled several diplomats. (The better way would be: The embassy on Friday expelled several diplomats.)

4. And use "on" to avoid an awkward juxtaposition of the day and a proper name.

AWKWARD: Police told Smith Tuesday. . . . (This makes it seem that the name of the person is Smith Tuesday. The better way would be, Police told Smith on Tuesday. (Please remember, however, that you do not use "on" if the time element would not confuse the reader: The council meeting will be Wednesday.)

5. Hart recommends breaking the tradition of always putting the day or time element at the beginning of the sentence. However, he adds that it's occasionally the best place, especially when considering the example he provided: Richard "Joe" Mallon received the phone call this week he had dreaded for 19 years. The day or time element can be used properly as a transitional expression, but probably should not be used in your lead.

6. Place your time element in a different sentence. Don't think that the time element must be in the lead, especially when you're writing a profile or issue, trend or feature story. In many cases, the time element can be effectively delayed for later paragraphs.

As always, the best advice is that you read your sentence out loud or to another person to ensure that the time element doesn't sound or seem awkward. This will ensure that your Mondays, Tuesdays and so on are in their proper place today.

Before it was revised, the lead delayed the news—information about the court's decision—until after a 13-word introductory phrase containing information that probably could have been delayed until the second or third paragraph.

## GUIDELINES FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE LEADS

### Be Concise

The concise style of writing found in newspapers makes it easy for the public to read and understand leads but difficult for reporters to write them.

Two- or three-sentence leads often become wordy, repetitious and choppy, particularly when all the sentences are very short. Like most multisentence leads, the following example can be made more concise as a single sentence:

Two women robbed a shopper in a local supermarket Tuesday. One woman distracted the shopper, and the second woman grabbed her purse, which contained about \$50.

REVISED: Two women stole a purse containing \$50 from a shopper in a local supermarket Tuesday.

The original lead was redundant. It reported two women robbed a shopper, and then described the robbery. Reporters use two-sentence leads only when the need to do so is compelling. Often, the second sentence emphasizes an interesting or unusual fact of secondary importance. Other times, the second sentence is necessary because it is impossible to summarize all the necessary information about a complex topic in a single sentence.

The lead in the accompanying photo on brain trauma uses a second sentence to illustrate and explain the first. Sometimes professionals fail to keep their leads concise. Many readers find a 25-word lead "difficult" to read and a 29-word lead "very difficult." A better average would be 18 to 20 words. Reporters should examine their leads critically to determine whether they are wordy or repetitious or contain facts that could be shifted to later paragraphs.

Reporters shorten leads by eliminating unnecessary background information—dates, names, locations—or the description of routine procedures. Leads should omit many names, particularly those readers are unlikely to recognize or those of people who played minor or routine roles in a story. If a lead includes someone's name, it also may have to identify that person, and the identification will require even more words. Descriptive phrases can substitute for names. Similarly, a story's precise time and location could be reported in a later paragraph. A lead should report a story's highlights, not all its minor details, as concisely as possible:

#### Key Iraq wound: Brain trauma

By Gregg Zoroya, USA TODAY

A growing number of U.S. troops whose body armor helped them survive bomb and rocket attacks are suffering brain damage as a result of the blasts. It's a type of injury some military doctors say has become the signature wound of the Iraq war.

A former Roxbury woman, who has eluded federal law enforcement authorities since she allegedly hijacked a flight from San Juan to Cuba using a plastic flare gun in 1983, was arrested Wednesday as she stood alone on Union Street in Boston, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

REVISED: The FBI on Wednesday arrested a former Roxbury woman who has eluded authorities since 1983, when she was accused of hijacking an airplane.



Although leads can be too long, they cannot be too short. An effective lead may contain only four, five or six words: "The president is dead," "Americans landed on the moon" or "There's new hope for couch potatoes."

## Be Specific

Good leads contain interesting details and are so specific that readers can visualize the events they describe. As you read the following lead from The Tampa (Florida) Tribune, you should be able to imagine the dramatic scene it describes:

At 59, she'd never touched a gun—until someone held one to her head.

Reporters can easily transform vague, dull leads into interesting ones by adding more specific details:

The City Council passed an ordinance that will affect all parents and teenagers living within city limits.

REVISED: The City Council ignored the objections of the mayor and numerous parents and voted 6-1 Monday to enact a dusk-to-dawn curfew to keep youngsters off city streets.

Some leads use worn-out clichés—a lazy way of summarizing a story. Avoid saying that "a step has been taken" or that someone has moved "one step closer" to a goal. Present specific details:

University officials moved one step closer to increasing tuition and fees for the upcoming school year, leaving students up in the air.

REVISED: The university's Board of Governors voted Tuesday to increase tuition and fees 10 percent next year to offset cuts in state funding.

Avoid "iffy" leads that say one thing may happen if another happens. In addition to being too vague, "iffy" leads are too abstract, tentative and qualified. Report the story's more immediate and concrete details.

## Use Strong, Active Verbs

A single descriptive verb can transform a routine lead into a dramatic one. As you read the following lead, for example, you may be able to picture what happened:

DELAND—After rushing her 7-year-old daughter to safety, Ann Murray raced back to the docks and pounded on her friends' boats while flames and explosions tore through Boat Show Marina early Friday morning.

(The Orlando [Florida] Sentinel)

Strong, active verbs, such as “rushing,” “raced,” “pounded” and “tore,” paint a vivid picture of the scene in readers’ minds. They capture the drama and emotion of a news event and help the reader understand the impact of the story. The following lead uses several colorful verbs to describe the capture of a wayward Angus steer that escaped his handlers:

The suspect tore through a homeowner’s fence, ripped the wires from a satellite dish with his teeth, slammed head-on into a travel trailer, then bolted down the street on his way to a weird encounter with a canoe.

(*The Orlando [Florida] Sentinel*)

Avoid passive-voice constructions, which combine the past participle of a verb with some form of the verb “to be,” such as “is,” “are,” “was” and “were.” In the following two sentences, the passive verbs are italicized. Compare the passive verbs in the first sentence with the active ones italicized in the second:

PASSIVE VERBS: One person *was killed* and four others *were injured* Sunday morning when their car, which *was traveling* west on Interstate 80, hit a concrete bridge pillar and *was engulfed* in flames.

ACTIVE VERBS: A car traveling west on Interstate 80 *swerved* across two eastbound lanes, *slammed* into a concrete bridge pillar and *burst* into flames, killing one person and injuring four others Sunday morning.

Writers can easily convert passive voice to the active voice. Simply rearrange the words so the sentence reports who did what to whom. Instead of reporting “Rocks and bottles were thrown at firefighters,” report “Rioters threw rocks and bottles at firefighters.”

## Emphasize the Magnitude of the Story

If a story is important, reporters emphasize its magnitude in the lead. Most good leads emphasize the impact stories have on people. When describing natural disasters or man-made catastrophes, such as airplane crashes, tornadoes or major fires, reporters emphasize the number of people killed, injured and left homeless. They also emphasize the dollar cost of the damage to buildings or other objects. When describing a storm, reporters may emphasize the amount of rain or snow that fell. The following lead from an Associated Press story does not deal with a disaster or catastrophe, but it shows how magnitude can be emphasized in a story:

NEW YORK (AP)—Secondhand cigarette smoke will cause an estimated 47,000 deaths and about 150,000 nonfatal heart attacks in U.S. nonsmokers this year, a study says. That’s as much as 50 percent higher than previous estimates.

## Stress the Unusual

Leads also emphasize the unusual. By definition, news involves deviations from the norm. Consider this lead from a story about two men who were arrested for stealing a man's clothes:

OELWEIN, IOWA—Two men have been arrested for stealing a man's clothes and leaving him to wander around naked, officials said.

*(The Associated Press)*

A lead about a board of education meeting or other governmental agency should not report "The board met at 8 p.m. at a local school and began its meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance." Those facts are routine and not newsworthy. Most school boards meet every couple of weeks, usually at the same time and place, and many begin their meetings with the Pledge of Allegiance. Leads should emphasize the unique—the action that follows those routine formalities.

Bank robberies are so common in big cities that newspapers normally devote only a few paragraphs to them. Yet a robbery at the Burlington National Bank in Columbus, Ohio, became a front-page story, published by newspapers throughout the United States. A story transmitted by The Associated Press explained:

A 61-year-old man says he robbed an Ohio bank with a toy gun—he even told the FBI ahead of time when and where—because he wants to spend his golden years in federal prison.

After his arrest, the bank robber insisted he did not want a lawyer. Instead, he wanted to immediately "plead guilty to anything." The man explained he recently was divorced, had no family ties and was disabled with arthritis. He had spent time in at least three federal prisons and wanted to return to one of them. "I knew what I was doing," he insisted. "I wanted to get arrested, and I proceeded about it the best way I knew how."

Reporters must learn to recognize and emphasize a story's unusual details.

## Localize and Update

Reporters localize their leads whenever possible by emphasizing their communities' involvement in stories. Readers are most interested in stories affecting their own lives and the lives of people they know.

Reporters also try to localize stories from other parts of the world. When a bomb exploded in a Pan Am plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, newspapers across the United States not only ran the story of the bombing but localized the story on the basis of where the passengers had

## Powerful quake, tsunami kills hundreds in Japan

2:03 AM 03/11/2011



ADMIN  
Contributor

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TOKYO (AP) — For more than two terrifying, seemingly endless minutes Friday, the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Japan shook apart homes and buildings, cracked open highways and unnerved even those who have learned to live with swaying skyscrapers. Then came a devastating tsunami that slammed into northeastern Japan and killed hundreds of people.

lived. The Gazette in Delaware, Ohio, focused on the death of a student from Ohio Wesleyan University, which is located in the town. Similarly, when the FBI reports on the number of violent crimes committed in the United States, reporters stress the statistics for their communities:

The FBI reported Tuesday that the number of violent crimes in the United States rose 8.3 percent during the last year.

LOCALIZED: The number of violent crimes committed in the city last year rose 5.4 percent, compared to a national average of 8.3 percent, the FBI reported Tuesday.



Reporters update a lead by stressing the latest developments in the story. If a breaking story appears in an early edition of a newspaper, a reporter will gather new information and rewrite the story for later editions. The same thing happens with a television news broadcast. Instead of saying a fire destroyed a store the previous day, reporters may stress that authorities have since learned the fire's cause, identified the victims, arrested an arsonist or estimated the monetary loss. Stories are updated so they offer the public something new—facts not already reported by other newspapers or by local radio or television stations. Major stories about such topics as economic trends, natural disasters, wars and political upheavals often remain in the news for months and must be updated regularly.

Not every lead can be updated or localized. If a story has no new or local angles, report it in a simple, straightforward manner. Do not distort the story in any way or fabricate any new or local angles.

## Be Objective and Attribute Opinions

The lead of a news story, like the rest of the story, must be objective. Reporters are expected to gather and convey to their readers facts, not commentary, interpretation or advocacy. Reporters may anger or offend readers when they insert their opinions in stories.

Calling the people involved in news stories “alert,” “heroic” or “quick-thinking,” or describing facts as “interesting” or “startling” is never justified. These comments, when they are accurate, usually state the obvious. Leads that include opinion or interpretation must be rewritten to provide more factual accounts of the news:

Speaking to the Downtown Rotary Club last night, Emil Plambeck, superintendent of the City Park Commission, discussed a topic of concern to all of us—the city’s park system.

REVISED: Emil Plambeck, superintendent of the City Park Commission, wants developers to set aside 5 percent of the land in new subdivisions for parks.

The original lead is weak because it refers to “a topic of concern to all of us.” The reporter does not identify “us” and is wrong to assert that any topic concerns everyone.

Here are other examples of leads that state an opinion or conclusion:

Adult entertainment establishments have fallen victim to another attempt at censorship.

Recycling does not pay, at least not economically. However, the environmental benefits make the city’s new recycling program worthwhile at any cost.



To demonstrate that both leads are statements of opinion, ask your friends and classmates about them:

Do all your friends and classmates agree that the regulation of adult entertainment establishments is “censorship”?

Do all your friends and classmates agree that recycling programs are “worthwhile at any cost”?

Although reporters cannot express their own opinions in stories, they often include the opinions of people involved in the news. A lead containing a statement of opinion must be attributed so readers clearly understand the opinion is not the reporter’s.

A lead containing an obvious fact or a fact the reporter has witnessed or verified by other means generally does not require attribution. An editor at The New York Times, instructing reporters to “make the lead of a story as brief and clear as possible,” noted, “One thing that obstructs that aim is the inclusion of an unnecessary source of attribution. . . . If the lead is controversial, an attribution is imperative. But if the lead is innocuous, forget it.” Thus, if a lead states undisputed facts, the attribution can be placed in a later paragraph:

WASHINGTON—Cars and motorcycles crash into deer more than 4,000 times a day, and it’s taking an increasingly deadly toll—on people.

*(The Associated Press)*

## Strive for Simplicity

Every lead should be clear, simple and to the point. Here is an example:

A party-crasher shot a 26-year-old woman to death at a surprise birthday bash in Queens early Sunday, police and witnesses said.

*(New York Daily News)*

Here is an example of a lead that suffers from far too much detail:

Officials of the city and the Gladstone School District are breathing sighs of relief following the Clackamas County Housing Authority’s decision to pull out of a plan to build an apartment complex for moderate-income people on 11 acres of land between Southeast Oatfield and Webster roads.

The lead could be rewritten any number of ways. The reporter must decide what the important point is. Here are two versions of a simple blind lead for the same story:

Several city and school district officials applauded the county's decision to scrap plans for a subsidized housing complex.

A new subsidized housing complex will not be built, and city and school district officials are relieved.

## AVOIDING SOME COMMON ERRORS

### Begin with the News

Avoid beginning a lead with the attribution. Names and titles are dull and seldom important. Moreover, if every lead begins with the attribution, all leads will sound too much alike. Place an attribution at the beginning of a lead only when it is unusual, significant or deserving of that emphasis:



At a press conference in Washington, D.C., today, Neil A. Schuster, spokesperson for the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, announced that last month the cost of living rose 2.83 percent, a record high.

REVISED: The cost of living rose 2.83 percent last month, a record high, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics officials said Friday.

Originally, the lead devoted more space to the attribution than to the news. As revised, it emphasizes the news—the information the Bureau of Labor Statistics released. The attribution has been condensed and can be reported more fully in a later paragraph.

### Emphasize the News

Chronological order rarely works in a news story. By definition, news is what just happened. The first events in a sequence rarely are the most newsworthy. Decide which facts are most interesting and important, then write a lead that emphasizes these facts regardless of whether they occurred first, last or in the middle of a sequence of events.

Here are two leads. The first begins with actions taken at the start of a city council meeting. The revised lead begins with an action likely to affect a large number of city residents. Which do you think would attract more readers?

The City Council began its meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance, then approved the minutes from its last meeting, approved paying omnibus budget bills and examined a list of proposed ordinances.

REVISED: The City Council voted 6-1 Monday night to increase the city's police department budget by 15 percent to hire more officers and buy new weapons.

Look for a story's action or consequences. That's what the lead should emphasize. The following lead, as revised, stresses the consequences of the accident:

A 15-year-old boy learning to drive his family's new car struck a gasoline pump in a service station on Hall Road late Tuesday afternoon.

REVISED: A 15-year-old boy learning to drive created a fireball Tuesday. The family car he was driving struck a gasoline pump at a Hall Road service station, blocking traffic for three hours while firefighters extinguished the blaze.

## Avoid "Agenda" Leads

An opening paragraph that places too much emphasis on the time and place at which a story occurred is called an "agenda" lead. Although agenda leads are used to announce an upcoming event—public relations news releases use them to promote an organization's product or event—they should never appear in a news story about something that occurred the previous day. A lead should focus on the news, as the following lead, after revision, does:

James Matthews, president of International Biotech Inc., a company that manufactures recycling and composting machinery, was the keynote speaker at Monday night's opening ceremony of the Earth Preservation Society's annual conference at the Lyceum Center.

REVISED: There's gold in the garbage society discards, the president of a company that manufactures recycling and composting machinery said, staking his claim on the future of recycling.

The revised lead focuses on what the speaker said, something the original lead failed to do.

Other leads place too much emphasis on the time at which stories occurred:

Last weekend the women's volleyball team participated in the regional playoffs.

REVISED: The women's volleyball team won five of its seven games and placed second in the regional playoffs last weekend.

## Avoid "Label" Leads

"Label" leads mention a topic but fail to reveal what was said or done about that topic. Leads should report the substance of a story, not just its topic. A good lead does more than report that a group met, held a press conference or issued a report. The lead reveals what the group did at its meeting, what was said at the press conference or what was written in the report.

Label leads are easy to recognize and avoid because they use similar words and phrases, such as "was the subject of," "the main topic of discussion," "spoke about,"

“delivered a speech about” or “interviewed about.” Here are two examples and how they might be improved:

The City Council Tuesday night discussed ways of regulating a new topless club in the city.

REVISED: An additional fee for business licenses is one way the City Council is considering regulating a new topless club.

Faculty and staff members and other experts Thursday proposed strategies to recruit more minority students.

REVISED: College faculty and staff said Thursday they favor a new scholarship program as a way of recruiting more minority students.

## Avoid Lists

Most lists, like names, are dull. If a list must be used in a lead, place an explanation before it, never after it. Readers can more quickly grasp a list's meaning if an explanation precedes it, as the following lead and its revision illustrate:

The company that made it, the store that sold it and the friend who lent it to him are being sued by a 24-year-old man whose spine was severed when a motorcycle overturned.

REVISED: A 24-year-old man whose spine was severed when a motorcycle overturned is suing the company that made the motorcycle, the store that sold it and the friend who lent it to him.

## Avoid Stating the Obvious

Avoid stating the obvious or emphasizing routine procedures in leads. For a story about a crime, do not begin by reporting police “were called to the scene” or ambulances “rushed” the victims to a hospital “for treatment of their injuries.” This problem is particularly common on sports pages, where many leads have become clichés. For example, news stories that say most coaches and players express optimism at the beginning of a season report the obvious: The coaches and players want to win most of their games.

The following lead, before its revision, is ineffective for the same reason:

The Colonial Park school board has decided to spend the additional funds it will receive from the state.

REVISED: The Colonial Park school board voted Monday night to rescind the 5 percent spending cut it approved last month after learning the district will receive more money from the state.



## Avoid the Negative

When writing a lead, report what happened, not what failed to happen or what does not exist:

Americans over the age of 65 say that crime is not their greatest fear, two sociologists reported Friday.

REVISED: Americans over the age of 65 say their greatest fears are poor health and poverty, two sociologists reported Friday.

## Avoid Exaggeration

Never exaggerate in a lead. If a story is weak, exaggeration is likely to make it weaker, not stronger. A simple summary of the facts can be more interesting (and shocking) than anything that might be contrived:

A 78-year-old woman left \$3.2 million to the Salvation Army and 2 cents to her son.

A restaurant did not serve a dead rat in a loaf of bread to an out-of-town couple, a jury decided Tuesday.

## Avoid Misleading Readers

Every lead must be accurate and truthful. Never sensationalize, belittle or mislead. A lead must also set a story's tone—accurately revealing, for example, whether the story that follows will be serious or whimsical:

The party went to the dogs early—as it should have.

Parents who host parties for their children can understand the chill going up Susan Ulroy's spine. She was determined guests wouldn't be racing over her clean carpeting with their wet feet. "This could be a real free-for-all," she said.

Even though only seven guests were invited, eight counting the host, that made 32 feet to worry about.

This was a birthday party for Sandi, the Ulroys' dog.

*(The Ann Arbor [Michigan] News)*

## Break the Rules

Reporters who use their imagination and try something different sometimes can report the facts more cleverly than the competition.

Edna Buchanan, who won a Pulitzer Prize for her police reporting at The Miami Herald, consistently made routine stories interesting. Here's a lead she

wrote with some imagination. Notice the active verbs and description she incorporates into her writing:



Gary Robinson died hungry.

He wanted fried chicken, the three-piece box for \$2.19. Drunk, loud and obnoxious, he pushed ahead of seven customers in line at a fast-food chicken outlet. The counter girl told him that his behavior was impolite. She calmed him down with sweet talk, and he agreed to step to the end of the line. His turn came just before closing time, just after the fried chicken ran out.

He punched the counter girl so hard her ears rang, and a security guard shot him—three times.

## Remember Your Readers

While writing every lead, remember the people who will read it. Leads must be clear and interesting to attract and keep readers. The following lead, until revised, fails both tests:

Two policy resolutions will come before the Student Senate this week.

REVISED: Two proposals before the Student Senate this week would raise student parking and athletic fees by more than \$100 a year.

Is the first lead interesting? Why not? It emphasized the number of resolutions the student senate was scheduled to consider. Yet almost no one would care about the number of resolutions or, from the lead, would understand their significance: the fact that they would affect every student at the school.

## Rewrite Leads

Critically examine all leads and rewrite them as often as necessary. First drafts are rarely so well written that they cannot be improved. Even experienced professionals often rewrite their leads three or more times.

# *the reporter's* GUIDE

## to writing leads

1. Be specific rather than vague and abstract.
2. Avoid stating the obvious or the negative.
3. Emphasize the story's most unusual or unexpected developments.
4. Emphasize the story's most interesting and important developments.
5. Emphasize the story's magnitude and its impact on its participants and readers.
6. Use complete sentences, the proper tense and all the necessary articles—"a," "an" and "the."
7. Be concise. If a lead exceeds three typed lines, examine it for wordiness, repetition or unnecessary details and rewrite it to eliminate the problems.
8. Avoid writing a label lead that reports the story's topic but not what was said or done about it.
9. Begin leads with the news—the main point of the story—not the attribution or the time and place the events occurred.
10. Use relatively simple sentences and avoid beginning leads with a long phrase or clause.
11. Use strong, active and descriptive verbs rather than passive ones.
12. Avoid using unfamiliar names. Any names that require lengthy identification should be reported in a later paragraph.
13. Attribute any quotation or statement of opinion appearing in the lead.
14. Localize the lead, and emphasize the latest developments, preferably what happened today or yesterday.
15. Eliminate statements of opinion, including one-word labels such as "interesting" and "alert."
16. Remember the readers. Write a lead that is clear, concise and interesting and that emphasizes the details most likely to affect and interest readers.
17. Read the lead aloud to be certain that it is clear, concise and easy to understand.

## LEADS

### Evaluating Good and Bad Leads

Critically evaluate the following leads. Select the best leads and explain why they are effective. In addition, point out the flaws in the remaining leads. As you evaluate the leads, look for lessons—"do's and don'ts"—that you can apply to your own work.

1. A 24-year-old Greeley man was charged with multiple counts of first-degree murder and arson in the deaths of his wife and three children who died in an early morning fire in their home.
2. City Council has to return a grant it received last year to fix deteriorating road conditions on Main Street.
3. People are jumping into swimming pools and switching buttons to high on air conditioners as temperatures in the Midwest soared to record numbers over the past three days.
4. University administrators say they are considering imposing the largest tuition and fee increases in a decade because of state budget cuts.
5. A petition filed by Councilman William Bellmonte to force the City Council into a special session to reduce local property taxes was thrown out in court Monday after it was discovered that half the names listed on the petition were dead people.
6. An 85-year-old woman stepped off the curb and into the path of a moving car. She was struck by the car and tossed 50 feet into the air. She died instantly.
7. Ray's Mini-Mart at 2357 S. Alderman St. was the location of a burglary sometime Friday night.
8. Police Chief Barry Kopperud is concerned that crime is rising in the city.
9. This weekend will offer the best chance yet to see a brilliant performance of "My Fair Lady" at the Fairwood Community Theater, so reserve your tickets now.
10. Loans become a popular way to cut college costs.
11. The right of students to freely express themselves may soon be cast aside if the Board of Governors votes to restrict access to campus public areas.
12. The tree-lined campus is home to many wild and stray animals.
13. Two men suspected of burglarizing five churches, two homes and a pet store all in one night were captured Wednesday during another burglary attempt.
14. The union representing university secretaries and maintenance workers reached a tentative agreement Friday that will give members a 6.5 percent raise over three years.
15. Distance education classes offer alternative to classroom.
16. Fingerprints on a candle led the FBI to a man accused of blowing up the building he worked in to hide the shooting deaths of the man's boss and three co-workers.
17. Around 10 a.m. Wednesday a savings and loan at the intersection of Marion and State streets was the scene of a daring daylight robbery by three armed gunmen.
18. A teenage driver lost control of his car Wednesday night killing himself and a female passenger, while a 14-year-old friend who was riding in the back seat walked away with only scratches and bruises.

## LEADS

### Writing Leads

#### Section I: Condensing Lengthy Leads

Condense each of these leads to no more than two typed lines, or about 20 words. Correct all errors.

1. Christina Shattuck, 43, and Dennis Shattuck, 45, and their three children, ages 7, 3 and 9 months, all of 532 3rd St., returned home from a shopping trip Saturday night and found their two-story frame house on fire and called firefighters, who responded to the scene within five minutes, but were unable to save the house and its contents, which were totally destroyed.

2. The local school board held a special meeting Tuesday night so Superintendent of Schools Greg Hubbard could address a group of angry parents who were demanding to know why they were never informed that a middle school student had brought a gun to school and may have been targeting their children during an incident on school grounds last Friday.

#### Section II: Using Proper Sentence Structure

Rewrite the following leads, using the normal word order: subject, verb, direct object. Avoid starting the leads with a long clause or phrase. You may want to divide some of the leads into several sentences or paragraphs. Correct all errors.

1. In an effort to curb what city officials are calling an epidemic of obesity among young people in the city, which mirrors national data on overall obesity of the population, your local city council voted 7-0 to offer free memberships at its meeting Monday night to local youth centers and health clubs in the city for children ages 8 to 15 whose parents do not have the financial wherewithal to purchase the memberships.

2. Despite the efforts of Karen Dees, 19, a student at your university who lives at 410 University Avenue, Apartment 52, and performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation for more than 20 minutes, she was not able to help sheriffs deputy William McGowen, 47, of 4224 N. 21st St., who died while directing traffic after being struck by lightning during an electrical storm.

#### Section III: Emphasizing the News

Rewrite the following leads, emphasizing the news, not the attribution. Limit the attributions to a few

words and place them at the end, not the beginning, of the leads. Correct all errors.

1. The National Institutes of Health in Washington, D.C., released a report today indicating that more than 90 percent of all heart attack victims have one or more classic risk factors: smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure.

2. According to a police report issued Monday, accident investigators concluded that Stephanie Sessions, 16, daughter of Jeffrey D. and Michelle A. Sessions, of 9303 Vale Drive, had just gotten her drivers license two days before she was involved in an accident in which she rolled the Jeep Wrangler she was driving, injuring herself and two other passengers.

#### Section IV: Combining Multisentence Leads

Rewrite each of the following leads in a single sentence, correcting all errors.

1. Gary Hubard, superintendent of schools, announced a new program for your local school district. It is called the "Tattle-Tale Program." The program involves paying students to tell on classmates who bring guns or drugs to school or violate other school rules. The program is in response to an incident last month in which a high school student was caught carrying a loaded handgun on school property.

2. The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice released a report Monday on the number of people in the United States who have spent time in prison. Last year, about one in every 37 adult Americans was imprisoned or had been in prison at one time. The 5.6 million people who were either serving or had served time in prison represented 2.7 percent of the adult population of 210 million people, according to the report. The figures represent people who served time in federal, state and county prisons after being sentenced for a crime, not those temporarily held in jail.

#### SECTION V: Stressing the Unusual

Write only the lead for each of the following stories, correcting all errors.

1. The city is sweltering under a heat wave. Temperatures have hit 100 degrees-plus for the past week and humidity levels have hovered between 75 and 90 percent

each day. Authorities have been cautioning people, especially the very young and the elderly to stay inside in air conditioning and avoid exerting themselves outside in the sun. City Health Department officials held a press conference this morning to announce that three people had died over the past two days because of the heat. All three were elderly people who lived in the downtown area. Two of the three were a married couple. The one victim was identified as Betsy Aaron, 86, of 410 Hillcrest Street, Apartment 302. Aaron was a retired teacher who had taught elementary school for more than 30 years. The other two victims were Jeffrey Ahsonn, 84, and his wife, Teresa Ahson, 79, both of 49 Groveland Avenue. Ahsonn was a retired mechanical engineer who had worked for the city for many years. Police and health department officials were alerted to the deaths in each case by relatives who discovered the bodies. When they entered the dwellings, police told officials that they found a pair of fans and an air conditioner in each dwelling. The fans and air conditioners had been delivered by city workers to disabled elderly people to help them cope with the heat wave. But authorities found the fans and air conditioners still in their boxes. They had never been installed.

2. Destiny Schfini is a vice president with SunBank. Schifini is divorced and the mother of two children—a 10-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy. The children visit her once a month. Schifinis son, Ronald, was visiting this weekend. Schfini is 36 years old and lives at 3260 Timber Ter. Ronald was injured in an accident Saturday afternoon around 2 p.m. The boy was struck by a train. Police said Schifini and her son were riding bikes along Fremont Avenue when the mother decided to take a shortcut across the railroad tracks that run along Fremont Avenue. The boy is on life support in Mercy Hospital and listed in critical condition. He was struck by a train. Witnesses said the mother saw the train coming and crossed anyway and encouraged her son to cross. The boys bike got caught on the tracks and as he tried to free it, the train struck him. Ronald was thrown through the air and sustained broken ribs, a broken pelvis and a bruised heart. Police charged Destiny Schifini with aggravated assault, reckless endangerment, endangering the welfare of a child and failure to obey a train signal. Police said they charged Schfini after they learned from witnesses that Schifini did not help the boy, but taunted him as the train approached.

3. Julius Povacz is a paramedic in your community who serves with the rescue squad in the fire department. The 34-year-old Povaz lives at 210 East King Avenue, Apartment 4. Eight years ago he was tested for human

immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and told that the test was positive. Povacz never told his superiors that he had tested positive. A routine check of his medical records last month by fire department officials found the notation that the test was positive. Povacz was relieved of his duties. Povacz said at the time he may have been infected with the virus accidentally by coming in contact with an infected patient at the scene of an emergency. When he learned that he lost his job, Povaz said it was worse than learning that he had tested positive for HIV. Being a paramedic was all he ever wanted to do. He said for eight years he has feared that his medical condition would be discovered or that he would develop AIDS and die. The state Department of Health computer system tracks HIV patients and periodically reviews cases. An official at the state Health Department informed Povacz and his superiors yesterday that Povacz is not and never was HIV positive. A second test that was performed eight years ago to confirm the first test indicated no presence of HIV, but the information was never placed in Povacz's medical records by his physician, Dr. Nadine Caspinwall, and Caspinwall never informed Povacz. Povacz is now fighting to get his job back.

4. The police department in your community are investigating a two-vehicle accident. The accident occurred at 5:38 p.m. Thursday during rush hour. The accident occurred at the busy intersection of Huron Avenue and Timber Trail Road. Police said a blue Toyota Camry driven by Cheryl Nicholls, 25, of 1287 Belgard Avenue, ran into the rear of a pickup truck driven by Ronald Dawkins, 44, of 1005 Stratmore Drive. Dawkins is a bricklayer. Nichols Toyota suffered severe damage, but she sustained only bruises and a laceration on her leg. Police said the car was a total loss. Police charged Nicholls with inattentive driving and operating a cell phone while driving. The cell phone law was passed last year by the state legislature and banned the operation of a cell phone while driving. Nicholls was talking to her car insurance company about an error on a car insurance bill when she struck the rear of Dawkins pickup truck.

5. A home at 2481 Santana Avenue was burglarized between the hours of 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. yesterday afternoon. The owner of the home is Dorothy R. Elam, a sixth-grade teacher at Madison Elementary School. She said no one was home at the time. Neighbors said they saw a truck parked in the driveway but thought some repairmen were working at the home. The total loss is estimated at in excess of \$8,000. The items stolen from the home include a color television, a videocassette recorder, stereo, sewing machine, computer, 2 pistols and many small kitchen

appliances. Also, a stamp collection valued at about \$1,000, some clothes, silverware and lawn tools were taken. Roger A. Elam, Mrs. Elams husband, died 2 days ago. The robbery occurred while she was attending his funeral at 2:30 p.m. yesterday at the Powell Funeral Chapel, 620 North Park Avenue. Elam died of cancer after a long illness.

## Section VI: Localizing Your Lead

Write only the lead for each of the following stories, correcting errors if necessary. Emphasize the information that would have the greatest local interest.

1. The U.S. Department of Justice is calling identity theft the crime of the 21st century. Identity theft is the illegal appropriation of another persons personal information—Social Security card number, driver's license number, credit card numbers, etc.—and using them to drain bank accounts or go on a buying spree. Justice Department officials say it is the fastest-growing crime in the United States. Criminals can get access to peoples personal information by going through their trash or stealing their mail. The Federal Trade Commission estimated the dollar loss to businesses and individuals last year was in the billions. The number of victims nationally is running as high as 750,000 a year. The rate of identity theft complaints nationally is averaging 22 victims per 100,000 people. Justice Department officials say that is too high. But the rate of identity theft complaints in your city is 77 victims per 100,000 people. State Representative Constance P. Wei is sponsoring a bill that would establish a web site that would allow credit card holders to check to see if their numbers have been stolen. The bill also would increase the penalties for identity theft and raise the crime from a misdemeanor to a felony.

2. Your state's department of education announced that it is awarding more than 30 million dollars in federal grant money to 53 school districts throughout the state. The money is to be used to offset recent cutbacks in state funds given to school districts for educational programs and materials. Among the programs eligible for grant money are innovative programs to help identify and support at-risk youth who are not receiving the help they need. At-risk youth are more prone to failing in school and dropping out, becoming involved with drugs, becoming involved in crime or gang-related activity, and ending up in prison. The states Commission on Crime and Delinquency identified your local school district as a leader in the effort to help at-risk youth with its Community Helping Hands program. The program identifies at-risk youth at an early age and then engages teachers,

community members and other students to help at-risk youth through academic tutoring, social activities and counseling. The state Commission on Crime and Delinquency through the state department of education is providing \$1.2 million to your school districts at-risk program. The funds will help support the programs operation for at least three years.

## Section VII: Updating Your Lead

Write only the lead for each of the following stories, correcting errors if necessary.

1. Dorothy Heslin is the manager of the Mr. Grocer convenience store at 2015 North 11th Avenue. Heslin is a 48-year-old single mother with three children. She is seen as a hero by some and a villain by others. Yesterday, two masked men carrying guns barged into the Mr. Grocer and demanded money. As she reached for the cash drawer, Heslin pulled a .357-caliber Magnum pistol from beneath the counter and fired four shots, killing one robber and seriously wounding the second. Some in the community say it was justified because her life was in danger, but others say she used excessive force. Police today charged Heslin with aggravated assault with a handgun, attempted murder, second-degree murder and failure to properly register a handgun.

2. There was a grinding head-on collision on Cheney Road yesterday. Two persons were killed: Rosemary Brennan, 27, and her infant daughter, Kelley, age 2, both of 1775 Nairn Dr. The driver of the second car involved in the accident, Anthony Murray, 17, of 1748 North 3 Street, was seriously injured, with multiple fractures. Police today announced that laboratory tests have confirmed the fact that Brennan was legally drunk at the time of the accident.

3. The Steak & Ale restaurant is a popular restaurant and lounge in your community. It is especially popular with college students. The restaurant is located at 1284 University Boulevard. Last year, a group of students was celebrating at the restaurant after a football game. The five students became rowdy and were asked to leave by Sarah Kindstrom, a waitress at the Steak & Ale. The students left the restaurant, but one of them, James Ball, who was 20 at the time, of 1012 Cortez Avenue, Apartment 870, became separated from the group, wandered into the street and was struck by a car. He died at the scene. His parents sued the Steak & Ale for serving underage students alcohol and causing the death of their son. Monday the restaurants owners settled the suit for one million dollars.



## LEADS

### pro challenge

### Writing Basic News Leads

Write only a lead for each of the following stories. As you write your leads, consult the reporter's guide on page 151. A professional has been asked to write a lead for each of these stories, and the leads appear in a manual available to your instructor. You may find, however, that you like some of your own and your classmates' leads better. As you write the leads, correct stories' spelling, style and vocabulary errors. Also, none of the possessives have been formed for you.

1. It was nearly a tragedy on Monday. Police said it is amazing no one was killed. A train struck a sport utility vehicle at a crossing on Michigan Avenue near the intersection with Wayne Boulevard in your city. Police said the accident occurred at 5:48 p.m. in the evening. Abraham and Estelle Cohen were the passengers in the 2010 Ford Explorer that was struck by the eastbound train. Abraham is 35 years old, and he was driving the vehicle. Estelle is 33 years old and is five months pregnant. The couple's daughter Emily, who is three years old, was a passenger in the back seat. No one was seriously injured. Abraham works for the city school system. He is assistant director of computer services. Estelle is a public relations representative for Evans Public Relations Group. Abraham, Estelle and their daughter live at 1903 Conway Rd. All three were taken to the local hospital for observation. Abraham suffered contusions on his ribs. Estelle received a small laceration on her forehead that required six stitches. Their daughter, Emily, suffered minor bruises to her right arm and face. Two ambulances were called to the scene to take the family to the hospital. Police said Mr. Cohen was driving west on Michigan Avenue when he came to the train crossing. The crossing does not have warning lights or an automated barrier gate. There are warning signs and a stop sign that require motorists to stop and look for trains before crossing the tracks. Police say Mr. Cohen failed to stop at the stop sign and drove into the path of the train. The train was traveling at approximately 15 to 20 miles per hour when it struck the car. Emily was riding in a child safety seat, which police said saved her life. Police said the vehicle suffered extensive damage and had to be towed from the scene.

2. For the past five years, researchers at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, have been studying a sample of 4,000 adult males. The men range in age from 45 to 75. The research cost \$1,500,000 and was paid for through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The researchers announced the results

today. The researchers have been studying the effects of meditation on men suffering with heart disease. Many of the men involved in the study either had suffered one or more heart attacks and/or had heart valve or heart bypass surgery. The study attempted to determine what effects meditation had on the heart for those suffering from heart disease. Researchers found that the men who were involved in a regular program of meditation lowered their stress and had fewer occurrences of repeat heart attacks or other problems associated with coronary heart disease. Dr. William Smithson, one of the researchers at the NIH who participated in the study, said: "Not only did we find that 75 percent of the men who meditated for an hour to an hour and a half at least three times a week lowered their blood pressure significantly during the period of the study, but we also found that their cholesterol and triglyceride levels dropped significantly. And even the numbers for the other 25% of the men in the study who participated in the meditation group showed some improvement. On the other hand, nearly 80 percent of those who did not participate in the meditation program saw an increase in their episodes of heart attacks, angina or chest pain, shortness of breath and other coronary symptoms. The link between the effects of stress on the heart and coronary heart disease are well known, but this study attempted to find a link between reducing stress levels and the effect on the heart." Researchers plan to release more information as they analyze the data. Researchers said that meditation alone would not help all heart disease patients, but could be used in conjunction with a good diet and exercise.

3. People in the United States are concerned about the environment. Many are concerned about the waste that is generated by Americans each day and buried in landfills. The Environmental Policy Group, a non-partisan environmental research and lobbying organization based in Washington, D.C., released a report recently. According to the report, only about one-quarter of the country's paper, plastic, glass, aluminum and steel is recycled. That amount is only a slight increase from what it was 20 years ago. "This rate needs to be doubled or tripled in the next decade to have a positive impact on the environment. Steps must be taken to increase collection of recycled materials, increase public awareness, increase public participation, increase the development of new markets for recycled products and increase government support for recycling programs. Without these efforts, the planet's resources will be exhausted," the report said. Mayor Sabrina Datoli announced a new program at Tuesday nights city council meeting and council voted 6-1



to implement the new program. The new program will provide blue recycling bins throughout the city. Residents will be able to drop their recyclable items in any of the designated bins. In addition, the city will provide smaller blue recycling bins to keep in their homes for recyclable items. Residents will place the smaller household bins by the curb with their normal trash cans. The city will have special trucks that will pick up recyclable items on trash collection days. Datolli said residents will be able to use the larger recycling bins if they have a large quantity of items to recycle. Businesses also will be able to use the bins. Even if someone has only one item to place in a recycling container, it will be worth it, according to Datolli. "Too many times while I have been walking or driving around the city, I have seen someone finish drinking a bottle of water or soda and throw the plastic container in the trash because there is no convenient place to put the recyclable material. These public, recycling bins, placed in strategic places around the city, will address that problem," Datolli said. The program will cost around \$280,000 initially to purchase and distribute the recycling containers and another \$120,000 a year to gather and haul away the recycled items. City Council Member Roger Lo is opposed to the program because of the cost. He is in favor of turning the program over to a private contractor who would collect and sell recycled materials for a profit as a way to pay for the program.

4. It's another statistical study, one that surprised many sociologists around the country. The research was conducted by sociologists at the University of Florida. The \$1.5 million study was funded through grants provided by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Science Foundation. For years, sociologists thought that advanced education translated into greater marriage stability. Now, with new data from the study released Monday, researchers have discovered that marital disruption is greater among more highly educated women than any other group, except those who have not graduated from high school. The study found that many young women who do not graduate from high school cohabitate rather than get married. The sociologists who conducted the new study found some of the reasons why women with graduate degrees are more likely to divorce. The key factor seems to be timing. Women who married early, before they began graduate school, are more likely to have established traditional family roles which they find difficult to change. When the wife goes back to school and no longer wants to handle most of the housework, it causes resentment on the part of husbands. If the husband refuses to pitch in and do his share, it creates tension. Such unhappiness on both sides often leads to divorce. The study found that more than one-third of the

women who began graduate school after they were married ended up separated or divorced. By comparison, only 15.6% of those who married after they had finished an advanced degree ended up divorced or separated. This group of women seemed more likely to find husbands supportive of their educational goals, according to the study.

5. It was a sad tragedy. There was a fire Saturday evening in your city. Firefighters said the fire broke out around 9:15 p.m. Ann Capiello, a nineteen year old student at the local university, called 9-1-1 to report the fire. Firefighters arrived on the scene around 9:25. The fire occurred at the residence of Johnnie and Jacquelin Lewis, 1840 Maldren Avenue. Jonnie, is 29 years old and works as an inspector for Vallrath Industries. Jacquelin is 28 and is a stay-at-home mother who cares for their two children, Krista, age 5, and Jeremy, age 3. Jacquelin and Jonnie had gone out for the evening to go to dinner and a movie. They were celebrating their 10th wedding anniversary. Capiello was babysitting their two children. Capiello was watching television in the living room while the children were playing in Krista's bedroom. According to Tony Sullivan, the city's fire chief, the children apparently were playing with matches and attempting to light a candle. Capiello told Sullivan she smelled smoke and ran to the bedroom. She did not hear the smoke detectors go off. She heard the children crying and screaming for help, but she could not reach them because of the smoke and heat from the flames. She called 9-1-1 before returning to the bedroom to try to rescue the children. She suffered first- and second-degree burns on her hands, arms and face as she tried to get back into the bedroom. Firefighters were able to extinguish the blaze quickly, but not in time to save the children. They were found dead in a corner of the bedroom. Sullivan said the children most likely succumbed to the heat and smoke from the fire. Firefighters determined that the batteries in the smoke detectors were dead and were not working at the time of the fire. The fire caused an estimated \$39,000 in fire, water and smoke damage to the house. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis discovered the tragedy when they arrived home around 10:30 p.m. to find firefighters and ambulances at their house.

6. Vernon Sindelair is the treasurer for your county. He has served as county treasurer for 31 years. He is responsible for overseeing the economic and financial business of the county. He is responsible for generating revenue through tax collection and paying the bills for the county. He appeared in the county's Court of Common Pleas Wednesday morning to plead guilty to charges of embezzlement. State police investigators and County Attorney