**Types Of Lead**

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A lead (or an intro) is the beginning paragraph for a story. It is the hardest part to write as it sets the tone and introduces the reader to the rest of the story. A good lead paints a vivid picture of the story with a few words. Not many reporters can produce sharp, original leads. Writers of little talent and scant judgment load their leads with official sources, official titles, official phrases, even official quotes, and produce long-winding, cumbersome and dull leads. If the lead is not effective, the reader may skip the story. It should be appropriate for the story. The lead must be accurate, short and crisp. The lead should reflect the mood of the story. A routine lead is a short summary of an event. But if the story is interesting, a wide varieties of lead can be tried out. This chapter cites several examples from *The Professional Journalist* and *The AP Writing Handbook*.

Suppose a crowd has collected about a wrecked automobile at a street corner outside a park. A passerby stops and taps a truck driver on the arm.  
*`` Hey, Mac. What happened?''  
``Two kids got killed. Car jumped the curb.''*  
The truck driver here has done the same job of a reporter in summarising a news event. But a traditional reporter would write like this:

*Police Chief J.W. Carmichael announced today that two children were killed outside Prospect Park, at Jackson Ave. and 16th St., N.W., when a ``recklessly driven'' automobile jumped the curb near where they were playing at 2 p.m. and ran them down.*

This 40-word horror could have been avoided by eliminating the name of the police chief, a partial quotation and overloading the lead with too many information.

Such routine events and spot events are normally written in straight or summary leads.

**Straight lead (or Summary lead)**

A good lead incorporates the inverted pyramid style with the most important facts first. It tells readers what they want to know in a creative manner. If the reader only read the lead, he or she would have a solid grasp of the story. The above accident report can be written in a straight lead. Journalists often resort to summary leads pressed for time.

*Two children at play were killed today when a sports car jumped the curb outside Prospect Park and ran them down. Twelve in the group were injured.*

*Police Chief J.W. Carmichael attributed the tragedy to reckless driving. The driver, slightly injured, was . . .*

Compared to news reports, magazines and newspaper features have a great scope for varied leads which appeal to the reader. A capable journalist can always use a variety of leads when situations permit. We shall discuss different types of leads.

Punch lead is a variation of summary lead. Here attention is attracted by concentrating with a brief, to-the-point lead sentence and developing details later in the story.

*An attractive 35-year-old woman executive was arrested today on charges of being the "queen" ruling a multi-million-dollar narcotics ring.*

*Unfolding a bizarre story, police said . . .*

Cartridge lead is another variation of summary lead. This lead is brief and contains one single news incident, to be expanded later in the story. Its impact makes it a lead to reserve for important stories.

*President Kennedy was slain by an assassin today in a burst of gunfire in downtown Dallas.  
(UPI, Nov. 22, 1963)*

Besides being a straight lead, this lead brings in action and colour, and makes the lead on a spot story fast moving. Not always a lead has to a straight lead. Despite its usefulness, the inverted pyramid lead is not suitable or desirable for all news situations.

**Descriptive lead**

A descriptive lead describes how an event happened rather than simply telling what the event is about.

*BRIGHTON, England (UPI) -- Mrs. Pamela Bransden slowly counted five, snapped into a hypnotic trance, and gave birth to an eight-pound baby. It was as easy as that.*

*Today she relaxed at her home here, delighted that she has become Britain's first self-hypnosis mother.*

Eyewitness accounts can provide the background for writing lucid descriptions which help the reader to visualise a news situation.

*An ominous silence, broken only by the call of a faraway bird, hung over the battle-scarred hills when suddenly an explosion followed by the yells of charging troops smashed the stillness.*

*The loyalist offensive, launched to clear roving guerrillas . . .*

**Quotation lead**

Quotes frequently are the essential documentation for a lead and should be used immediately after a paraphrase that summarises them. Here paraphrasing the verbatim quotation permits the removal of unnecessary words. But if a verbatim quotation itself is very important or interesting, it can be the lead itself. This lead would add an element of interest such as drama, pathos, humour, astonishment, or some other factor that will reach out to the reader. The brief statement by U.S. President Johnson in 1968 that he would not be a candidate for reelection was widely used as a lead.

Here, however, is a quote lead that takes a lot of explaining.

*``I was furious that that disreputable young man had the audacity to sit in my antique rosewood chair.''*

*That's how tiny, 82-year-old Louise Freeland today described her brush with a gun-toting escaped convict whom she talked into surrendering to Sheriff's officers.*

Here goes a report on the increase in juvenile crime:

*"I'd like to jail parents themselves who are so lax their kids are boosting the crime rate!"*

*This statement came from Juvenile Court Judge Warren Jones, in releasing a report on the rapid rise in juvenile crime rate in this city.*

When a fellow engineering student was murdered by John David in his hostel room in a ragging rage, the lead for a follow-up story was a Biblical quotation found on the door of the culprit.

*"Peace unto those who enter here."*

*These are the words seen on the door of John David's room. The irony is that David gave eternal peace to Navukarasu, a fresher.*

When Neil Armstrong landed on the moon, most newspapers led with the first words he spoke:

*"A small step for man, but a giant leap for mankind."*

**Question lead**

Many editors dislike question lead on the basis that people read newspapers to get answers, and not to be asked questions. But if the question is provocative, it may be used as a lead.

*What is the first thing that a woman buys when she is advised that she won $2,50,000 in a jingle contest?*

*Mrs. Jane Roe, informed by XYZ Soaps that her entry took top prize in the nationwide contest, said that she will buy a rhyming dictionary that . . .*

**Personal lead**

It involves the use of the first person singular in the lead. Normally such a use is discouraged except for a columnist or such privileged writers.

*(By Reg Murphy, while editor of the Atlanta Constitution, after being released by a kidnapper)*

*When the tall, heavy, garishly dressed stranger appeared at the door, it was clear this was trouble.*

*He said, ``I'm Lamont Woods,'' in a Southern accent quickened by exposure to speech patterns elsewhere.*

*I let him into my living room for a moment but hustled him out quickly because of the anxiety within him. My wife, Virginia, stayed out of sight but went to the window as we left and noted that he was driving a dark green Ford Torino. She tried for the licence plate but couldn't see it.*

*And so I went driving into the Wednesday dusk with a man we both knew was trouble. Neither of us guessed then that it would amount to 49 hours of terror at the hands of a kidnapper telling a bizarre political tale and demanding $7,00,000 ransom . . . .*

**'You' lead (or Direct Address lead)**

The `You' lead is intended to make a personal appeal to the reader involved in a complicated situation. The second-person approach reaches out to involve the reader and capture his/her attention. Here is an example, fairly typical of a trend toward consumerism in the news:

*WASHINGTON (UPI) -- If you are one of 30 million Americans working for a company with a private pension plan, Congress has given you a new bill of rights. It is the Employment Retirement Income Security Act and it promises that if you have worked long enough to earn a pension, you will receive one at retirement age. Nothing -- including bankruptcy, plant closings, dismissal or resignation -- can stand in the way.*

Let us look at one more example:

*Ski fans, here's your opportunity!*

*The recent storm deposited five inches of powder snow on Pleasure Mountain and the public ski lift is being operated . . .*

**Contrast lead**

To vary monotony, a saga can be split into two sentences -- the first of which refers to the humble beginning and the second to the hero's latest triumph. When Van Cliburn, the pianist, returned from a musical triumph in Moscow, one reporter wrote:

*Harvey Lavan (Van) Cilburn Jr. of Kilgore, Tex., came home from Russia today with 17 pieces of luggage. They bespoke his triumph as pianist in Moscow. He had three when he went over.*

Here goes another example:

*Richard Roe, who started 47 years ago as a $10-a-week janitor for Consolidated Corporation, today took office as the firm's $2,63,000-a-year chairman and chief executive officer.*

**Delayed lead (or suspended interest lead)**

A situation can be exploited in an interesting way so that an ordinary item stands out. The reporter delves in several paragraphs to find out what had happened. The reader must get the story by reading to the end of the story.

*Dwight David Eisenhower once said he would rather win the Medal of Honour than be president. Dwight Harold Johnson -- who was named for Dwight Eisenhower -- said once to a friend that ``winning the medal has changed my life so much I don't know if I'll ever get my head straight again. But I know this. Nobody's hero forever.''*

*Friday, April 30, in the drizzle of a Detroit dawn, Dwight Johnson died but not as a hero. He died in the emergency room of a Detroit hospital with three bullet wounds in his side and one in his head. He was shot, according to police, by a store owner he had tried to rob.*

Here goes another example:

*Bill Turner, 8, received a red coaster wagon for Christmas and it led to problems.*

*This morning, while leaving for school, he noticed that it was missing from his front yard.*

*Two hours later his mother, Mrs. John Turner, received a call from school officials asking why Bill was absent.*

*Shocked and fearing that his son was hurt, she called police, who contacted hospitals and searched the banks of the Red River. They prepared to drag the waters.*

*At that moment, they say a boy pulling a red wagon through a nearby field.*

*Bill explained to his mother and police that a friend told him other boys had taken the wagon to a field two miles from his house. He planned to get it on his way to school.*

*The youngster said he went to the wrong field and lost track of time because he was so intent on finding the wagon.*

**Blind identification lead**

If the person concerned is not well known in the community, his/her name is less important than other salient facts that identify the person. eg. "a 80-year-old woman" instead of her name.

*A police inspector's son was attacked with a knife by some miscreants on Mount Road this evening.*

*The victim Pratap Daniel, 20, has been admitted to a private hospital and his condition is critical.*

**Anecdotal lead**

The anecdotal lead is used when the anecdote is bright and applicable and not too wasteful of space. It brings the reader quickly into a news situation that might not attract his attention if it were routinely written. Here is one that began a series on divorce in the U.S.

*David and Kay Craig's two-year-old marriage is a second one for both and their story is one that is being repeated with increasing frequency across the country.*

*Each was married for the first time at 18. David's marriage lasted through five years and two children. Kay's first marriage ended in divorce after a year and eight months.*

*The Craigs (not their real name) are among the 13 million Americans who, according to the Census Bureau, at one time or another have been through a divorce. More than four million Americans currently list their marital status as divorced. The rate of divorces in this country has been and still is steadily increasing.*

**Gag (or funny) lead**

A journalist who writes a funny story put up the saddest face in a newsroom. Journalistic homour requires the skilled and practice. Here is how an AP reporter wrote when a woman broke her leg trying to climb out of a locked London public toilet:

*LONDON -- What's a lady do when trapped in a loo?*

**Literary allusion lead**

Parallelling the construction of a nursery rhyme or part of a well-known literary creation can add to variety.

*Mary had a little camera, and everywhere that Mary went the camera was sure to go.*

*Mary Richards' perseverance in carrying her camera on every trip with her anthropologist husband has resulted in the publication of her first book, a collection of photographs of natives in seldom-visited areas of South America.*

***Reference***

Hohenberg, John. *The Professional Journalist.* New Delhi: Oxford, 1978.

*Writing for the AP: The Second AP Writing Handbook.*The Associated Press, New York, 1959, p. 4.