

## **SUPPLEMENTAL NOTES: Writing (and Editing) News Leads**

### **Definition**

A **lead** is the beginning of a news story. Its purpose is to grab the reader's attention. It should contain one idea and follow the subject-verb-object sentence structure for clarity. It should not exceed 30 words.

### **Types**

**Direct or Summary Lead** – This type of lead tells the reader or listener the most important aspect of the story at once. It is usually used on breaking news events.

**Delayed-Identification Lead** – This is a type of summary lead that is used when the “who” in your lead is not a well-known person in your community or in the nation. Age, location, occupation or another modifier is used in the first paragraph. The person is identified by name in the second paragraph.

**Impact Lead** – This type of lead explains to readers and viewers how they will be affected by an issue. Can be written in summary form or in a delayed (not delayed-ID) form, like a soft lead.

**Soft Lead**- This lead entices the reader or listener into the story by hinting at its contents in a brief narrative or descriptive form. It is usually used with feature stories or longer news stories with a focus on the human aspect of a news issue. It is almost always followed by a **nut graph** –a paragraph similar to a summary lead that states the news focus of the story.

### **Guidelines for Writing DIRECT or SUMMARY Leads:**

- Try to keep the length of the lead to around 17-30 words. Edit out unnecessary words.
- In general, make sure the lead begins with the single most important fact. **Never** begin with the date.
- Make sure the lead includes the most important of the five W's and H, particularly the **who (person or thing), (did) what, and when.**

## Make the lead to conform to this structure:

WHO + (did) WHAT + <WHEN> + /WHERE/ + [WHY] + {HOW}\*

*\*Where, why and how are news questions that are not always included in the lead but are dealt with in the body of the story.*

## Examples:

A.     SPRINGFIELD, Va. - **A four-vehicle accident** injured 17 people <Sunday> {in a wreck that involved a Canadian tour bus, a truck and two cars, and shut down the Capital Beltway and the heavily traveled I-95 corridor for several hours.}

B.     **Lloyd Anyone, a former hitting coach for Pioneer City's minor league baseball team,** was hired <Monday> as the head baseball coach at Blue Ridge University.

## Using Attribution in Leads

- When attribution is used in a lead, put it at the end.
- Use *according to* when referring to inanimate objects such as a report or a study. Use *said or say* when you attribute to people.
- Separate the attribution from the quoted material with a comma.

## Example:

AIDS among infants, which only a decade ago took the lives of hundreds of babies a year and left doctors in despair, may be on the verge of being eliminated in the United States, **public health officials say.** (NYT-January 30, 2005)

## Example:

MIAMI - Tropical Storm Nadine, the 14th named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, was expected to break up quickly without reaching hurricane strength, **the National Weather Service said** Saturday.

## Example:

Strolling to the bus stop, fidgeting during a meeting, standing up to stretch, jumping off the couch to change channels, and engaging in other minor physical activities can make the difference between being lean and obese, **researchers said yesterday.**

### **Delayed-Identification Leads –**

**A delayed-identification lead** is a type of summary lead that is used when the “who” in your lead **is not a well-known person** in your community or in the nation. Use **age, location, occupation** or **another modifier** is used in the first paragraph. In the **second paragraph**, the person is identified by name.

#### **Example:**

RALEIGH -- **A Cuban immigrant** pleaded guilty Friday to second-degree murder for committing one of Raleigh's grisliest killings, prosecutors say.

Carlos Leon Sanchez, 46, was sentenced to 12 years, seven months to 15 years, 11 months in prison for the July 2003 slaying of his roommate Alfredo Sandoval Rodriguez, Wake Assistant District Attorney Teresa Postell said.

#### **Example:**

GALVESTON, Texas – **An unemployed shrimper who lived with his parents' corpses for months** has been charged with murder.

A grand jury returned the one-count indictment Friday against David Sidney Hisey, Assistant District Attorney Mo Ibrahim said.

#### **Example:**

OXFORD -- A Granville County man is free on bond after sheriff's deputies found 143 marijuana plants in a storage building behind his Gela Road home.

Horace Askew, 37, was charged Wednesday with possession of drug paraphernalia, possession with intent to deliver, sell and manufacture marijuana and maintaining a dwelling with the intent to sell marijuana.

**Impact Lead – This type of lead explains to readers and viewers how they will be affected by an issue. Can be written in summary form or in a delayed (not delayed-ID) form, like a soft lead.**

#### **Example:**

Homeowners whose roofs were damaged during the recent hurricane have five more days to apply for free repairs provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

## Writing Summary Leads

1. **To begin writing a summary lead**, first sort through your notes (or information given) to get the 5 W's and H. For a story about a report, **never begin with** the statement "A report was issued by...."
2. Next write your lead. Present the most important information in the lead, incorporating as many of the 5 W's and H as appropriate. Keep the lead to 17-30 words.
3. **If you are writing a delayed-identification lead**, choose an identifier (age, location, occupation, or other identifier). Present it in your lead. In the second paragraph, identify the person.
4. **For an impact lead**, the **who** of the lead will be the persons impacted by news being reported. (For example, "Students who own cars will have to pay more to park on campus.")
5. **To continue the story**, present the rest of your collected facts—**in order of decreasing importance**—as a mixture of quotes (direct and indirect) elaboration, and background.