

Elements of a Hard News Article

Leads

Elements of a hard-news lead (also called a “lede”)

- Who, what, when, where, why, how?
- The lead is crucial for any news article, especially in a time where people get information from social media, print, broadcast, and online sources. Ask yourself, how can your lead entice readers?
- Formulate your lead by writing a subject-verb-object order.

Examples:

A.) CNN — Just 11 weeks after new New York Jets quarterback Aaron Rodgers had surgery to repair his torn left Achilles tendon, the soon-to-be 40-year-old has now returned to practice.

CNN, November 30, 2023, “Aaron Rodgers returns to practice but he says he’s still unsure whether he can play in a game again this season.”

B.) Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken met in Israel on Thursday with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as part of a diplomatic push by the Biden administration to extend a tenuous truce in Gaza and try to exert some influence over the next phase of Israel’s military offensive.

NYT, November 30, 2023, “Blinken Returns to Middle East as U.S. Tries to Shape Next Phase of War.”

Exercise:

Write a 25 word hard-news lead for your assignment topic and workshop it with the group.

Tip: think about how you would write a tweet about the news you are breaking.

Optional exercise:

Write a hard-news lede of 25 words or less using these facts:

1. The Champaign City Council met Tuesday night at its usual place, the city hall at Neil and University downtown.
2. Among the items on the agenda was a proposal to increase property taxes.
3. The resolution called for the city to receive \$5,229,000 from property taxes in the next fiscal year.
4. That’s an increase of \$248,000 or about 4.8 percent.
5. The increase was approved by a 9-0 vote.
6. The new tax rate will cost the owner of a home valued at \$75,000 about \$345.

(Taken from a list of exercises in [The Scoop.](#))

Nut Graphs

The Nut Graph (also known as the “nut graf”):

- What does the reader need to know to understand the story?
- This graph is the necessary context of the story. Whatever questions you did not answer in the lead should be answered here.

Examples:

A.) In September, head coach Robert Saleh said Rodgers would be “out for the year” after the four-time NFL Most Valuable Player was carted off the field after just his fourth snap in the team’s season-opener against the Buffalo Bills.

CNN, November 30, 2023, “Aaron Rodgers returns to practice but he says he’s still unsure whether he can play in a game again this season.”

B.) On his third swing through the Middle East since the Oct. 7 Hamas-led attacks in southern Israel, Mr. Blinken planned to see other senior Israeli officials and visited the Israeli-occupied West Bank to meet with the president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. He was later expected to travel on to Dubai for a climate conference and meetings with Arab leaders.

NYT, November 30, 2023, “Blinken Returns to Middle East as U.S. Tries to Shape Next Phase of War.”

Exercise:

Write a nut graph for your story and read it out loud to the group. Have your group provide feedback: do they feel like they have a general understanding of the situation you are reporting on? Are there any necessary questions that went unanswered? What else would be useful to know for the reader?

Optional Exercise:

With the information from the lead writing exercise, write a nut graph with the most vital information and share with the group.

Other Elements of a News Story

<p>Structure</p>	<p>Use the Inverted Pyramid Method:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads and nut graphs should contain the most vital information of the story. All the rest should be supporting information. Put your least important information last. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Spoil the ending. An article is not an essay that includes a traditional build-up. • The idea of this story structure is for readers to get the most crucial information. Make your judgment by asking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What will affect the reader most? ○ What questions does the lead raise that need to be answered immediately? ○ What supporting quotes are strongest? ○ What further factual information would be helpful, and in what order of priority?
<p>Language/AP Style</p>	<p>Stay neutral and objective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not editorialize by using words that could reveal the author's emotions and sway readers to feel a certain way. • Writing for print differs from academic writing in that it stays in active voice, avoids jargon, and keeps an informative tone. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Make your news piece accessible to a middle schooler. News needs to be accessible to the average reader.
<p>Supporting information</p>	<p>What facts, studies, quotes, etc. will help shape the story but are not needed in the lead or nut graph?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gather this information, then put each piece in its own graph. It's okay if there are some one-sentence graphs, as long as they are well structured. ○ Elements you may search for: Defining terms, referencing past events, answering in details of why it's newsworthy.
<p>Quotes and Attribution</p>	<p>Whenever you quote someone directly, indirectly or partially, you need to attribute the statement. Examples below:</p> <p>Paraphrase: Jeb Jones, a resident of the trailer park, said the sound of the tornado was terrifying.</p> <p>Direct quote: "It sounded like a giant locomotive train coming through. I've never heard anything like it," said Jeb Jones, who lives in the trailer park.</p> <p>Data reference: According to a 2017 study, 1 in 5 Americans hate coffee.</p>

How to End

Stop when the information stops. Journalistic writing does not need a conclusion or a “wrapping up” graph. Don’t repeat information. When in doubt, kicker quotes are a great way to end a story. You can also use a call to action: if you’re writing about a movie production, note when the movie is scheduled to premiere. If you’re writing about a coffee shop that holds pop-up events for students, make note of the next pop-up event.

Quote kickers:

- The most common type of ending. Look for a quote that sums up the mood or main idea of the story.
- When you end with a quote, make sure attribution is included in the beginning of the kicker, because you don’t want readers to remember “he said” as the last words in the article.

Ex. “And that’s why I think Dunkin is the best place to buy coffee,” said Mr. Jones. “There’s no other coffee shop that provides quality drinks for cheap.”

Future-Action kickers:

- When you want to end the story with a “next step” in the development of an issue, this technique would work.
- It can be in the form of a statement or a quote

Extra Tips from the Writing Center:

- Be sure to always attribute or cite your sources. Follow your professor’s guidelines for in-text or post-text citations.
- Be sure to spell out acronyms when you use them the first time. For instance, write “Boston University” instead of “BU” when first referencing the university.
- Properly format other publications. If you are attributing your sources or referencing news reported by another media outlet in text, you should italicize print and web publications and leave TV and radio stations capitalized in regular font.
- It can be easy to add too many quotes. Make sure your writing is your own: consider paraphrasing any quote that does not show character or offer expertise. And if your source phrases something in a confusing way, rephrase it.
- Be sure to bump out quotes into a graph of their own.
- If you end on a kicker quote, be sure to put the “said XX” within the quote. Refer back to the quotes section for an example.