

Unit 3

Leads

What Is a Lead?

A lead is the gist, main idea or summary of a news story.

Where Is the Lead Located in a News Story?

The lead is in the **first** paragraph of a news story, and is below the headline. Sometimes it is preceded by the names of a state, city, news agency and by-line.

The Significance of Leads

Among the three parts of a news story, namely the headline, lead and body, the lead is the most important part because it is the summary of the news story. That is why it is *called the summary lead* which constitutes a terse opening paragraph that provides the gist of the story that invites reader inside.' It tells the audience the most important of the six primary elements of an event, namely the **five** Ws and H. Unlike novels, short stories and plays whose climax is gradually developed somewhere toward the end, the climax of a news story is at the beginning of the lead.' The lead

¹ Itule Bruce D. and Douglas A. Anderson, News **Writing and Reporting** for *Today's Media*, 3rd ed., New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 1994, p. 58.

² Itule, p. 58.

helps the reader get the most important information at the very beginning without spending time skimming the whole story.

The Types of Leads

Leads are classified into two main types:

- 1. Summary leads** are leads for hard news because they summarize the main elements of a news event.
- 2. Special leads** include such leads as Narrative Leads, Contrast Leads, Staccato Leads, Direct-Address Leads, Question Leads, Quote Leads and “None of the above” Leads.

Compared with the special leads, summary leads are easy to write and handle and they are ideal for hard news events because they are terse. Reading a summary lead, the reader know exactly what is going on. Accordingly, this unit will focus only on summary leads.

Principles of Summary Leads

The principles of a summary lead are as follows:

1. It must be written in one single sentence of no more than 35 words.

Examples:

Move to save wild elephants

The Forestry Department is organizing a 10-day workshop designed to conserve and propagate wild elephants which are facing extinction. (20 words)

(From *The Bangkok Post*, Wednesday October 2, 1991)

Gun kills boy

Noblesville, Ind.-A 12-year-old Noblesville boy was killed yesterday morning when a rifle he took to his room after watching a horror movie accidentally discharge (25 words)

(From *The Indiana Police Star*)

2. It must bear some of the 5 Ws and H, for instance:

- Who the event happened or will happen to, who acted on whom
- **What** happened or will happen
- **Where** the action occurred or will occur
- **When** it happened or will happen
- **Why** the action took place or will take place, the reason behind it
- **How** it happened or will happen³

³ Itule, p. 59.

The story of ‘Move to save wild elephants’ answers 3 Ws.

They are:

Who: the Forestry Department

What: a 10-day workshop was organized to conserve and propagate wild elephant

Why: because wild elephants are facing extinction

The story of ‘‘Gun kills boy’’ answers 5 Ws. They are:

Who: a 12-year-old boy

What: a rifle killed a boy

Where: the boy’s own room

When: Saturday morning after he watched a horror movie

Why: the gun accidentally discharged

3. It usually includes the source of news which may come from a place, a person, a press conference and a news agency as in the story of ‘‘Gun kills boy,’’ the source of news is from **Noblesville, Indiana, USA**. The sources of news help add more accuracy to the news being reported because it indicates that the news came from the source of news, not the reporter himself. Normally, a source of news is attached to the end of a lead whereas a news agency appears at the beginning. The well-known news agencies are, for instance, **AP- Associated Press (US)**, **AFP- Agence France Press (France)**, **UPI- United Press International, (US)**, **Reuters**

(England), Tass (USSR), Xinhua (China), Kyodo (Japan), Thai News Agency (Thailand)⁴

Examples of sources of news are as follows:

Us stand on N-free zone

The United States has reconsidered its position on ASEAN's attempt to form a Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ), Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas confirmed yesterday. (27 words)

(From *The Bangkok Post*, June 28, 1995)

The source of news is from a person “Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas” and it is put at the end of the lead.

New Zealand airline faces Thai suspension

Wellington (AFP)—Air New Zealand is likely to have its landing rights in Bangkok suspended next week because of a row between Thai and New Zealand civil aviation authorities, the National Business Review (NBR) weekly reported yesterday. (37 words)

The source of news in this story is from a publication “National Business Review (NBR).”

⁴ สวัสดิ์ พรรณา, *วิธีอ่านและแปลข่าวหนังสือพิมพ์ภาษาอังกฤษ* กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักพิมพ์ โอเดียนสโตร์, 2534 หน้า 18-19.

4. Usually, each lead is written in one single complex sentence with more than one modified clause and rarely contains particular adjectives rather than evaluative adjectives, although there are times it is suggested that leads be written either in a simple or compound sentence. Examples of a lead in a complex sentence are below:

*A **firefighter** was critically injured Sunday when a wall fell on him as he fought a **poolhall** blaze three blocks from the station where he had worked for 17 years.* (30 words)

(From *The Dallas Morning News*)

The main clause is: A firefighter was critically injured Sunday,

The adverb clauses are:

(1) when a wall fell on him

(2) as he fought a **poolhall** blaze three blocks from the station

The adjective clause which modifies the station is: where he had worked for 17 years.

*Teenager **launches** AIDS **assaults***

*A long-haired teenager said to be stricken with AIDS has gone berserk at the Pathumwan intersection, stabbing passers- by with **a** blood- strained needle which is believed to be infected with the AIDS virus.* (35 words)

The main clause is: A long-haired teenager has gone berserk at the Pathumwan intersection stabbing passers- by with a blood-strained needle.

The adjective clause modifies the word teenager is: said to be stricken with AIDS which is reduced from: who is said to be stricken with AIDS.

The adjective clause modifies the word needle is: which is believed to be infected with the AIDS virus.

5. The lead writer should use action or strong verbs and avoid using weak verbs such as verb to be and verb to have and verbs of senses like verb to feel, smell, taste, hear, etc. as well as avoid the passive voice if possible because the active voice is **more** direct and vigorous than the passive voice.' However, it does not mean that the passive voice cannot be used. It should be used only when the person or thing receiving the action is more important than the person or thing doing the **acting**.⁶ It is the writer's consideration, then, to judge whether the active voice should be rewritten into the passive voice, or vice versa. For example:

Passive voice:

*A downtown jewelry store **was** robbed on Saturday of \$50,000 to \$100,000 by a "well- dressed" gunman, police said*

⁵ Itule, p. 71.

⁶ Itule, p. 72.

Active voice:

A **“well-dressed” gunman** stole \$50,000 to **\$100,000** from a downtown jewelry store Saturday, police said

6. It is essential that the lead writer should decide which of the 5 Ws or H to emphasize so as to provide the focal point immediately in the lead paragraph, not somewhere else in the same paragraph or next paragraphs.

For example:

Emphasis on the element of **who**: a well-known name or person
as in:

*Nkosia, Cyprus (AP)—Danielle Mitterrand, wife of French President Francois Mitterrand, narrowly escaped a car bomb **attack today that killed** four people in northern Iraq. (Associated Press)*

The well-known person here is Danielle Mitterrand.

With a person who is not well-known, the focal point should shift to the what element as in:

*A **security guard** at the **Japanese Embassy** was arrested yesterday by the Crime Suppression **Division** police **while he was selling visa application forms** to **people seeking entry visa to Japan***

The not well-known person here is a man who is a security guard.

Sometimes the elements of where, when, **why**, and how may be the focal point to emphasize. The first example is the focal point of **where**:

Harrisburg— Ten state and federal investigators funned out yesterday across south-central Pennsylvania searching poultry farms for signs that an outbreak of potentially devastating avian influenza in Maryland had come from or spread to this state.

Here, the focus is on south-central Pennsylvania and Maryland

(From *The Philadelphia Inquirer*)

Next is the example of the emphasis on **when**:

From December to February, the Earth's frigid underbelly, Antarctica, makes itself habitable.

The reader know that in December Antarctica will be habitable.

(From *The Dallas Morning News*)

The focal point of the following lead is on **why**:

Because of students' urgent need of more food shops, Ramkhamhaeng University on Monday allowed McDonald's to open its branch on RU campus so as to be another food choice for faculties and students, Ms. Duangchai Imporn, RU Public Relations chief said

The reason why McDonald's will be opened on RU campus is given.

In case how is the focal point, the lead will be like the following:

Arson was blamed for a fire at the Flatbush Ave. Station of the Long Island Rail Road yesterday that spread heavy smoke into nearby subway lines, delaying hundreds of thousands of commuters and straphangers.

The reader learns how heavy smoke caused by a fire spread to the nearby subway lines.

(From New *York Daily News*)

7. It is not necessary to cram all the 5Ws and H into one lead as some can be saved for the other paragraphs. An example of putting a lot of information in one lead can be seen in the following lead:

A 11-year-old boy who has less than a year to live is doing “remarkably well” after doctors implanted radioactive “seeds” on his cancerous brain tumor last week, the first time such a treatment has been used, a University Medical Centers spokesman said

The above lead is too crowded with information. It can be trimmed this way:

An 11-year-old boy who has less than a year to live is doing “remarkably well” after doctors implanted radioactive “seeds” on his cancerous brain tumor, a University Medical Centers spokesman said

The element of time as in “The first time such a treatment has been used” should be saved for the second paragraph. It is not necessary either to tell the reader of the “last week” time element.’

Identifying the 5 Ws and H

It is necessary for the lead writer to recognize the important elements of 5 Ws and H, namely, who, what, where, when, why and how, and be able to emphasize them in the lead bearing in mind that not all the 5Ws and H should be crammed together.

The following is the information of a news story:

- Who:** Mayor Kathy Riedy.
- What:** Downtown sidewalks will be rebuilt this year, without an increase in property taxes and even though federal funds are being cut
- Where:** City Hall press conference.
- When:** Monday.
- Why:** Cuts in federal funds or increase sales tax.
- The decision is which element should be the focal point of the lead. If what and why are emphasized, the lead is written like this:

⁷ Itule, p. 67.

The city will not increase property taxes this year but will still rebuild downtown side walks, even if it loses \$3 million in federal community development funds, Mayor Kathy Reidy said Monday.

The elements of *how* and *where* are in the second paragraph:

However, the mayor said that the city sales tax may need to be increased to pay for the project, “if we cannot find alternative federal funds, we will attempt to raise the city sales taxes, at least for a year,” Reidy said in a City Hall press conference.

The element of *who* can be emphasized in the lead as follows:

Mayor Kathy Reidy said Monday that the city will not increase property taxes this year to pay for federal funding cuts, but it may have to increase sales taxes.

If *how* should be the focal point, the lead is like this:

The city sales tax may be increased this year if the city cannot find alternative funding sources for a project to rebuild sidewalks, Mayor Kathy said Monday.

If *why* is the focal point, this is the new lead:

A \$3 million cut in federal community block grants will not stop the city from rebuilding downtown sidewalks this year, Mayor Kathy Reidy said Monday.

What and *where* can also be the focal point:

Downtown sidewalks will be rebuilt this year without an increase in property taxes, Mayor Kathy Reidy said Monday during a city Hall press conference.’

Activities

Exercise 1

Supply the subordinate clauses such as adjective clause, adverb clauses to the following leads.

1. Mohandas K., an extremist, whose....., plunged India into sorrow and fear when he shot Gandhi at close range while.....
2. The Forestry Department is organizing a-10-day workshop designed to conserve and **popagate** wild elephants which.....
3. A long-haired teenager, who....., has gone berserk at Pathumwan intersection, stabbing passers-by with a blood-strained needle which.....

⁸ Itule, p. 62-3.

4. Filipino fishermen have rescued nine emaciated sailors who
after.....
the Coast Guard said
 yesterday.
5. An &year-old West Phoenix girl was killed Monday morning when
as she stopped to pick up a
 schoolbook from the sidewalk.
6. Miss Suthida Yodlak, who,,
 was crowned Miss University because..,, Mr.
 Somchai Jaidee, one of the judges said on Monday.
7. Around 600 private buses which.....**are**to
 be allowed to raise their fares by one baht after

8. More than 100 policewomen who
 will help their male counterparts direct traffic on Bangkok streets
 where. **because**.....

9. The epithet “woman driver” should no longer be a term of derision,
 Britain’s Royal Automobile Club (RAC) said yesterday after

10. Mother Teresa, the compassionate Christian who.. was
 laid to rest yesterday with the pomp of a state funeral, the tears of the
 down-trodden and the prayers of a half-dozen faiths.

Exercise 2

Fill in the following leads with phrases such as prepositional, adjective, infinitive or participle phrases.

1. A total of 351 video game machines were seized and 17 persons were arrested by Crime Suppression Division police during
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2. A pet Bengali tigress, assisted by.. , gave birth yesterday to three cubs after..
3. A gas bomb choked hundreds of passers-by, killed at least 20 drivers and burnt up a lot of brand-new cars on Petchburi Road near
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4. Two Burmese civilians hijacked a Thai airlines plane by threatening the crew with..and forced the pilot by gunpoint to head the plane to Rangoon 15 minutes after..
5. Eleven workers travelling..... were killed in a head-on collision with another truck, police said yesterday.
6. Customs officials seized about 45 kilogrammes of high-grade heroin worth 9.4 million baht at local wholesale price and arrested a Zairean woman on charge of..at Don Muang Airport last night.
7. In an innovative program sponsored by.. , thousands of Thai students, graduated from are learning to read The Bangkok Post.

8. **Ramkhamhaeng** University, in conjunction with....., has offered an English training program to the authorities and officials of the 13th Asian Games with an attempt to.....
9. Because of....., **the** number of moviegoers has dropped drastically, Supachai Chamsai, manager of the Planet Cineplex said yesterday.
10. The Education Ministry, known as....., announced yesterday it would extend compulsory education to the third year of secondary school.

Exercise 3

- 3.1 Following is the headline and the information of a news story. Write the lead with its focal point.

Embassy guard arrested for selling visa forms

who: Vichian Khanthu, 34, a security guard at the Japanese Embassy, Pol. Col. **Anant** Yupanon, the deputy commander of the Crime Suppression Division.

What: Vichian Khanthu sold visa application forms for 100 baht to people seeking entry visas to Japan.

Pol. Col. **Anant** Yupanon arrested Vichian Khanthu at about 10.30 a.m. while he was selling the visa application forms for 100 baht.

- Where:** In front of the Japanese Embassy
- When:** On Tuesday at 10.30 a.m.
- Why:** The arrest was part of the CSD crackdown on gangsters.
- How:** The Japanese Consulate called the police from CSD because members of the gang sending Thai women to Japan for prostitution with fake passports threatened them with bomb hoaxes.

(Write your lead in the space below.)

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3.2 Below is the headline of a news story and its information. Write the lead with the focal point.

Students keep environment clean

- Who:** Ramkhamhaeng University students, Ramkhamhaeng University's volunteers, Vice Rector for Student Affairs
- What:** Students volunteer to clean the university, get rid of garbage and dirt, dredge the ditches, repair the drainage system and campaign against littering around the campus

Where: In Ramkhamhaeng University
When: On Monday
Why: To make the university a clean and proper place for studying, to boost the university's good image and to co-operate with BMA (Bangkok Metropolitan Administration)'s campaign to improve the cleanliness of Bangkok, and to stimulate student's sense of responsibility toward their environment.

(Write your lead in the space below.)

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Exercise 4

Fill the following leads with the words given.

her husband's heavy drinking theft and fraud charges
caused a smoker's death Japan's three-year-old recession.

1. Amanwhoby kicking him after he lit up in a no-smoking area at a Japanese railway station has escaped a prison term, a court official said yesterday.

2. A 26-year-old American woman was arrested yesterday by Bang Phlad police on after cashing traveller's cheques allegedly stolen from a English woman.
3. In another sign of the big job hunt in, more than 2,800 people want to be weather predictors.
4. A woman said to be despondent over jumped into a canal with her 3 children Friday, police said.

Exercise 5

Use the information below each of the following headlines to write a lead. Do not use all of the 5 Ws and H.

RU student wins Miss/Mister University

who: An RU student (Indicate name, sex, age, major, etc.)

What: The winner of a contest was a student from Ramkhamhaeng University.

She or he won the contest because of her/his personality, self-confidence, good human relationship, leadership, etc.

Where: At the hotel (Give name, room number, floor number, etc.)

When: State the date.

Why: The contest was to seek university students who have good personality and intelligence and to encourage their self-expression and self confidence.

How: The contest was a pageant with ten judges who asked each contestant questions on different topics, such as culture, law, environment, society, drugs, etc.

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Police fine litterbugs all over Bangkok

who: Police from every police station in Bangkok.

What: Police will fine litterbugs 1,000 baht for not dropping garbage in trash cans.

Where: In every public place of Bangkok

When: Starting in January 1999.

why: To encourage Bangkokians to help keep Bangkok clean as well as to discipline them and to implement the law on Bangkok's cleanliness.

How: Signs prohibiting littering are put around Bangkok with warning and the punishment is a 1,000 baht fine for each offense.

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Students team up with police to Iron out traffic jams

Who: Students from Ramkhamhaeng University campaigned against traffic problem.

What: Students from RU and police from Hua Mark Police Station team up to ease traffic flows on Ramkhamhaeng Road, especially at Lum Salee intersection.

Where: On Ramkhamhaeng Road's heavily congested areas such as in front of Ramkhamhaeng University and at Lum Salee intersection.

When: They joined the program last week.

Why: To show the students' sense of public awareness and to help direct the traffic jams during the rush hours as well as to campaign against people's breaking the traffic regulations.

How: Students were trained by the police to help tackle the traffic jams. They were assigned to be on duty at each spot on Ramkhamhaeng Road where there was heavily congested traffic.

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