

Sports Journalism Skill Module

Leads

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Understand different types of leads and their function in a sports story
- Use a variety of leads in your stories

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

- *You Try It!* Student Worksheet – Leads: Your Best Chance to Grab Readers

Additional Online Support:

- www.holtmcdougal.hmhco.com
- www.BlueNoseEd.com

Teach the Skill

1. Introduce Leads: The *lead* is the term used in journalism for the opening of any type of story. Tell students that writing good leads is important, because readers of newspapers are notoriously impatient. They decide in seconds whether to read a story, or to move on to something else. By knowing the different types of lead, and becoming skilled at using all of them, the students can write leads that grab readers, and pull them into their stories.

2. Teach Leads:

- Tell the students that there are five main types of leads. These are:
 1. *The Direct Lead.* This is also known as the summary lead. It's the standard way to report informative stories. It's a one or two sentence opening paragraph that answers the questions, Who?, What?, Where?, When?, Why?, and How? Most leads can't answer all these questions, but a good direct lead will answer several of them.
 2. *The Impact Lead.* Impact leads emphasize the questions How? and Why? Instead of telling the reader the details of a story, it tells a reader why he or she should care about a story. What is important or remarkable about this story? An impact lead puts that information right up front.
 3. *The Quote Lead.* As its name suggests, the quote lead starts with a direct quotation that puts the story in a nutshell.
 4. *The Question Lead.* The question lead starts with a question. This should be used sparingly, because the reader may already have an answer in mind, and not bother to read beyond the question.
 5. *The Indirect Lead.* Also called the soft lead, feature lead, or delayed lead, the indirect lead adopts a story-telling tone. It sets a scene, introduces a dramatic situation, introduces a character, or tells a humorous or revealing anecdote.
- Different leads have different tones. To demonstrate this, take the class through the following exercise. Copy the table below on the board. Working as a class, work up this information into each of five different kinds of lead.

EXAMPLE

| Basic Information | Direct Lead | Impact Lead | Quote Lead | Question Lead | Indirect Lead |
|---|-------------|-------------|------------|---------------|---------------|
| The Steelville Pirates beat the Sandville Gophers in football, 40-2. Game was held | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Friday, Nov. 1, in Steelville.</p> <p>The victory gave Steelville the championship of the I-AAA conference.</p> <p>Troy Berghoff, QB of Stee ville, had 5 TD passes.</p> <p>On Nov. 8, the Pirates travel to Capetown to take on the Giants in the first round of the state play-offs.</p> | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|

- Which type of lead should one use? Tell the students that, as a rule, the three leads most commonly used are the direct lead, the impact lead, and the indirect lead. The question lead and the quote lead tend to have a back-porch chattiness to them that can get old fast. Tell them that, for the most part, the direct lead is best for informative reporting, the impact lead is best for a big story, and the indirect lead is best for feature writing. To help them recognize and classify leads, take the class through the following exercise.

EXAMPLE

Name That Lead!

As an exercise, pass out in class copies of the sports page of the local newspaper. Have the students read the opening paragraph or two of each story, and call upon students to name the leads. Is it a direct, impact, quote, question, or indirect lead? By learning to recognize the different types of leads, the students can make informed choices about which kind of lead to use for their sports stories.

3. Apply the Skill: Hand out copies of the You Try It! Worksheet, “Leads: Your Best Chance to Grab Readers.” After reading the directions, have the students get in small groups to work through the exercise. When they are done, have volunteers from each group report on their work.

QUICK SKILLS CHECK Ask students to tell you the five main types of leads, and how each type of lead should be used.

YOU TRY IT!

Leads: Your Best Chance to Grab Readers

GOAL

There is no part of any sports story that is half as important as your lead. It's where you make your first impression. In your leads, you give your readers the chance either to be interested in what you have to say, or to move on. As you compete in the Blue Nose Sportswriting Contest, polish your leads, and you'll have a great chance at success.

DIRECTIONS

The only way to make sure you have the best lead for your story is to write as many as you can, and then choose the one that grabs you most. Experienced journalists will sometimes write dozens and dozens of leads for a major article, before they decide which one they want. In this exercise, get into small groups. Choose a sports story from the newspaper. Read the story. Then, based upon the information in the story, write *at least three* examples of all five types of lead for the same story.

| Title of Story: _____. | | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Direct Lead</i> | <i>Impact Lead</i> | <i>Quote Lead</i> | <i>Question Lead</i> | <i>Indirect Lead</i> |
| 1. | 1. | 1. | 1. | 1. |
| 2. | 2. | 2. | 2. | 2. |
| 3. | 3. | 3. | 3. | 3. |

Self-Check

Look back at all the leads you and your group have written for the same story. Which ones do you think are best? Are you surprised that some of them are as good as they are? As you write your own stories, remember to take the time and work through all the possibilities for your lead. By keeping an open mind, you might surprise yourself by writing a better lead than you originally had in mind.