

What to Avoid in Leads

1. **Avoid putting too much information in the lead.** Not everything needs to be in the first paragraph. If the lead is longer than 45 words, split it into two paragraphs.
2. **Don't begin with a general statement.** Use specific, detailed words. The audience must have their attention captured within eight words.
3. **Be wary of using numbers.** This slows the reader's pace and can bog them down. Also, most statistics need explanation.
4. **Don't bury the news at the end of the lead.** News comes first, then any attribution. "What" is usually more important than "who," "when," or "where."
5. **Don't leave the news out of the lead.** The end result of the story is often the true news. Don't try to write in the order the news took place.
6. **Avoid using questions for the lead.** There is no news in asking a question. Use the answer to start your lead.
7. **Don't write negative leads.** Don't tell the reader what didn't or won't happen, but rather what did happen.
8. **Don't use quotation leads.** The main news is what happened, not what was said.
9. **Beware of using leads beginning with a prepositional phrase.** This lead slows the reader down trying to get to the lead.
10. **Don't begin the lead with the name of your school.** You write for a school newspaper. It is obvious, unless stated otherwise, the story is about your school.