**How to Write a Great Lede for Your News Story**

The First and Most Important Sentence of Your News Story

**What Is the Lede?**

The lede (that’s how journalists spell it) is the first paragraph of any news story. It’s also the most important. The lede must accomplish several things:

* give readers the main points of the story
* get readers interested in reading the story
* accomplish both “a” and “b” in as few words as possible

Typically editors want ledes to be no longer than 35-40 words. Why so short? Readers want

**What Goes in the Lede?**

Journalists use the five “W’s and the H” – Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.

* Who – who is the story about?
* What – what is the story about?
* Where – where did the event you’re writing about occur?
* When – when did it occur?
* Why – why did this happen?
* How – how did this happen?

Example:

Let’s say you’re writing a story about a man who was injured when he fell off a ladder. Here are your five W’s and H:

* Who – the man
* What – he fell off a ladder while painting
* Where – at his house
* When – yesterday
* Why – the ladder was rickety
* How – the rickety ladder broke

Your lede might go something like this:

A man was injured yesterday when he fell off a rickety ladder that collapsed while he was painting his house.

You've done a ton of reporting and dug up a great story. But all your work will be wasted if you write a boring lede that won't grab your readers' attention. Follow these tips and you'll be writing knock-their-socks-off ledes that will leave your readers wanting more.

**Writing a Lede - The Basics**

The lede is the first paragraph of any news story. It’s also the most important. The lede must give readers the main points of the story, get readers interested in reading the story and accomplish both “a” and “b” in as few words as possible. Typically editors want ledes to be no longer than 35-40 words. Readers want their news delivered quickly, and a short lede does just that

**Know What To Put In And What To Leave Out**

One of the first questions journalism students have when learning to write a lede is what to put in, and what to leave out. Experienced reporters instinctively know what should be included in a lede. But while crafting a lede can be confusing for the beginner, rest assured that with practice, it will eventually come easily. Generally, the lede should convey the main point of the story without getting bogged down in a lot of small details

**When Writing a Lede, Listen to Your Gut**

Beginners learning to craft a lede often worry about cramming the five W's and the H into that all-important first sentence. But writing a great lede is really about listening to what your gut tells you about what makes a story interesting

**Emphasize What's Newsworthy**

Sometimes, one particular aspect of a story – the who, what, where, when, why or how - will be especially interesting or newsworthy. Celebrity stories are an example. People die of drug overdoses all the time, but when it happens to a celebrity it’s big news. The “who” aspect of the story – who died – must be emphasized.

**Add Context**

Ledes must be short, but that doesn’t mean they can’t include context and perspective that add meaning to a story. Adding just a little context gives the reader a much greater understanding of what the story is about.

*This article has been edited from About.News, a division of About.com.*