

J202

Culver

Tip Sheet: Writing Effective Leads

Week 3

Lead = the introduction to a story

Straight Leads

- begin inverted pyramid structure
- who, what, where, when, why, how
- goal of 30 to 35 words maximum

Feature Leads

- begin narrative structure or stand on their own (ad copy)
- engage reader

While we cannot dictate which lead will work in all cases, below are the **most common** lead approaches for the different story types we encounter

Story Type	Most Common Lead
print/online hard news	straight lead, often summary
print/online feature	feature lead
print/online interpretive	feature lead
broadcast hard news	straight lead, Rule of 20 (often with cue-in)
press release	straight lead, often summary
newsletter story	straight lead (if an announcement) or feature lead (if other)
strategy memo/executive summary	straight lead, often summary
direct mail letter	straight or feature lead
print ad/direct mail flier	feature lead
critique	straight or feature lead

Leads to Avoid:

- question
- quote
- topic
- buried
- forced wordplay
- they say/cliché
- one- or two-word paragraphs