

Summary Leads



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The first paragraph should summarize the events.

The summary lead answers the pertinent “W” and “H” questions in a logical manner without overwhelming the reader with details. Less important information and details can be presented in the body of the story.

The WHO lead: If the “who” is a person, place or thing well known, it is usually the feature of the lead. The name alone attracts attention. Unless one of the other Ws or H is particularly outstanding, the “big name” comes first.

Example: Former Mayor Bob Lanier returns to Houston today after suffering a mild heart attack Friday while vacationing with his wife in California.

The INDEFINITE WHO lead: Sometimes the “who” is not a well known person and using the name of someone not well known might lose more readers than it would attract, but the “who” still should be featured.

Example: A South Houston gas station attendant became an instant millionaire Saturday night when his \$1 ticket was the only one containing all six numbers drawn in the \$22 million Texas Lotto.

The WHAT lead: If the lead concerns a person of lesser importance, or if the situation overshadows the people involved, many leads feature the “what”.

Example: Warm air from Mexico blanketed the state Sunday, bringing the mercury to a mind-numbing 117 degrees in one community and past the 100-mark in Houston.

The WHEN lead: Rarely is the time of an event the most interesting or important feature. However, circumstances may make it significant.

Example: As Wade and Shalina Gibson watched their dream house materialize before their eyes Monday, they found it hard to put their emotions into words.

The WHERE lead: On rare occasions, the “where” is significant enough to overshadow the other Ws.

Example: In the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, President George Bush and Soviet Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev pledged to reduce nuclear and chemical warfare stockpiles.

The WHY lead: The motive or cause of an event is sometimes the most important feature.

Example: Worried that the job of bringing stability to Bosnia is unfinished, the Security Council approved a one-year extension Monday of the NATO-led peacekeeping force and the separate U.N. civilian mission in the Balkan nation.

The HOW lead: The method by which something is accomplished is sometimes significant enough to begin the lead.

Example: With an outpouring of prayers, tears and embraces, this small community tried to lay its pain to rest Monday night, even as it prepared for a visit from the Ku Klux Klan.