**Types of Leads**

**Summary lead:** This is perhaps the most traditional lead in news writing. It is often used for breaking news. A story about a city council vote might use this “just the facts” approach. Straight news leads tend to provide answers to the most important three or four of the Five W’s and H. Historically this type of lead has been used to convey who, what, when and where. But in today’s fast-paced media atmosphere, a straightforward recitation of who, what, when and where can sound stale by the time a newspaper hits the stands. Some newspapers are adjusting to this reality by posting breaking news online as it happens and filling the print edition with more evaluative and analytical stories focused on why and how. Leads should reflect this.

**Anecdotal lead:** Sometimes, beginning a story with a quick anecdote can draw in readers. The anecdote must be interesting and must closely illustrate the article’s broader point. If you use this approach, specificity and concrete detail are essential and the broader significance of the anecdote should be explained within the first few sentences following the lead.

These include leads that begin with a question or direct quotation and those that make a direct appeal using the word you.

**Examples**

**Summary lead:**

**County administrator faces ouster**

By Tony Cook for The Cincinnati Post, Jan. 14, 2005

Two Hamilton County Commissioners plan to force the county’s top administrator out of office today.

**Commentary:** This lead addresses the traditional who, what and when. If this information had been reported on TV or radio the day before, this lead might not be a good one for the print edition of the newspaper; however, if the reporter had an exclusive or posted this information online as soon as it became available, then this lead would make sense. Note that it is brief (15 words) and uses an active sentence construction.

**Summary lead:**

**Lobbyists flout disclosure rules in talks with commissioners**

By Tony Cook and Michael Mishak for the Las Vegas Sun, July 13, 2008

On more than 170 occasions this year, lobbyists failed to file disclosure forms when they visited Clark County commissioners, leaving the public in the dark about what issues they were pushing and on whose behalf.

**Commentary:** This lead is more representative of the less timely, more analytical approach that some newspapers are taking in their print editions. It covers who, what and when, but also why it matters to readers. Again, it uses active verbs, it is specific (170 occasions) and it is brief (35 words).

**Anecdotal lead:**

**Tri-staters tell stories of the devastating tsunami**

By Tony Cook for The Cincinnati Post, Jan. 8, 2005

From Dan Ralescu’s sun-warmed beach chair in Thailand, the Indian Ocean began to look, oddly, not so much like waves but bread dough.

**Commentary:** This article is a local angle on the devastating tsunami that struck Southeast Asia in 2005. As a result of the massive death toll and worldwide impact, most readers would have been inundated with basic information about the tsunami. Given that context, this lead uses an unexpected image to capture the reader’s attention and prepare them for a new take on the tsunami. Again, it is brief (23 words).

**Question lead:**

**Same lobbyist for courts, shorter term, more money**

By Tony Cook for the Las Vegas Sun, June 29, 2008

What’s increasing faster than the price of gasoline? Apparently, the cost of court lobbyists.

District and Justice Court Judges want to hire lobbyist Rick Loop for $150,000 to represent the court system in Carson City through the 2009 legislative session. During the past session, Loop’s price tag was $80,000.

**Commentary:** Question leads can be useful in grabbing attention, but they are rarely as effective as other types of leads in terms of clearly and concisely providing the main point of a story. In this case, the second paragraph must carry a lot of the weight that would normally be handled in the lead.