

## Discussion about Exercise Three – JRN 2201

Here are three major principles to keep in mind when writing ledes:

1. **Begin with the news.** Be careful not to begin your story with attribution nor by "backing in" with the "where" and "when" elements, which, although important for establishing the timeliness and proximity of the story, are the least important elements of the news lede.

2. **Be objective, and attribute opinions.** Almost everyone has an opinion on almost everything. But reporters are expected to gather and convey facts to their readers, not to comment, interpret or advocate. To avoid infuriating or offending your readers -- not to mention your editors and teachers -- never express your opinions in stories. The key: Stay out of the way! Be a disinterested, detached, third-person observer and recorder of facts. Only when readers can be sure you are giving an objective, fair and balanced account of the events of the day will they find your story credible and you trustworthy. Don't report on yourself or issues, events or groups that involve you in their news. Obviously, someone has to report on abortion, and someone has to report on the environment and someone has to report on baseball. But that someone must NOT be an abortion activist, pro or con; a tree hugger or lumberjack; or a player, coach or umpire.

3. **Avoid a "label" or "program" lede:** a paragraph that introduces a topic or event but fails to report the news. The lede reporting on an event MUST tell what was said or done about the topic. Give the substance of what happened. Don't merely write that something happened, that an event -- a speech or lecture or meeting -- took place.

You want to make sure that your lede is really a lede and not a headline. "Disaster at sea" is a headline, not a lede. "One hundred people are dead and 46 are still missing this afternoon after a Danish-operated ferry caught fire in the North Sea this morning" is clearly a lede and not a headline.

Make sure that you follow AP style in your ledes and your stories.

Always ask yourself whether your lede answers some of the basic questions of: who, what, when, where and why. You cannot answer all of these questions, but you should cover a minimum of three.

While you may understand the event the story covers, your readers may not. Make sure that your ledes are simple, clear statements telling your readers the important information that helps them recognize the importance of the story. This helps answer the "other" question that is important in your stories: "Who cares?" or "So what?"

You always start writing a lede by looking over your notes. Make sure YOU know the who, what, when, where and why. We can also throw in how, so what and who cares as questions you need to think about before writing your story.

Most editors demand that ledes be held to 25 or fewer words unless you use more than one sentence for your lede. The bottom line is that ledes should not be too long.

Here are some lessons you will learn in this class during the term:

- \* Always check names.
- \* Always verify facts.
- \* Keep the lede short, usually fewer than 25 words, unless you use two sentences.
- \* Attribute opinion.
- \* Find out the who, what, when, where, why and how. Also ask the so what and who cares questions. However, if any of these elements have no bearing on the story, they might not be included

in your story.

- \* Always write a sentence or paragraph in your stories telling the readers what the news means to them.
- \* Report information basic to the story even if it is routine. Not everything you learn is important enough to be reported, but you'll never know unless you gather the information.
- \* Don't bog down on writing the lede. Focus on the impact of the story to your readers in the lede, and provide details later in the story.

#### SPECIFIC COMMENTS ABOUT THESE LEDES:

##### 1. The counterfeit money story:

- a. Too many people are trying to force the timeline into this lede. Remember that chronological approach is rarely the path to follow for ledes.
- b. What is the most recent information concerning this event and what has the biggest impact from information you were given for this story? The recent info is that the U.S. Secret service is on campus now and conducting an investigation. The counterfeit money was passed a day or two ago, and that was probably covered as a news story then.
- c. Don't forget to follow AP style. If you don't know a particular element of style, check it out in the AP Stylebook.
- d. If you used the "opinion" that a student was passing the counterfeit money, you need to attribute that to an official. You don't want to be the one saying this, but "authorities" can.
- e. Use active voice!
- f. Make it clear that the Secret Service is investigating the origin of the counterfeit money and not investigating the entire university.

##### 2. The arrests on charges of identity theft.

- a. Stay away from using the name of an unknown person in your ledes.
- b. You need to keep the time perspective in focus when writing this lede. The Jassinglinn family was arrested today. That doesn't mean that they were caught in the act. In fact, the act took place earlier.
- c. Don't use courtesy titles. While it is polite to call people "Mr. and Mrs." in normal conversation, it isn't AP Style. You need to check your Stylebook on the use of titles.

##### 3. The drowning story.

- a. We have a somewhat stale story here because the person drowned yesterday. It also appears that there isn't any new information to "freshen" the story. You are stuck with having to work around the only fact you have—someone drowned in the Natatorium yesterday evening.
- b. Once again, AP Style is an issue with this lede. The AP says you cannot start a lede with

numbers. Actually, it says don't start sentences with numbers.

c. While we don't have the drowned person's name yet, we do have details that will help readers narrow the possibilities. Police said the victim was a graduate student in the MBA program from the Birmingham area. Include some or all of these details in your lede, but don't let the lede get too long.