

Soft News Lead

Soft news leads are used most often for feature stories or interpretive "think" pieces. They are appropriate whenever you wish to emphasize the lasting value of a story or to play upon the universal human interest inherent in a story. This treatment lifts the event you are reporting out of the category of hard news and gives it a perspective that otherwise might be lost or overlooked in hard news stories.

Millions of today's Americans grew up in small towns, not knowing the stench of industrial smells or the hustle-bustle of big-city life. It's a memory more and more Americans would like to go home to.

Within the category of soft news leads fall several types of leads that can be used to "spice up" your newscast. These leads, although useful, are used less frequently than summary and hard news leads because of their obvious emphasis on the unusual.

Suspended Interest Lead

A suspended lead delays the climax, or the essence of the news, until the very end of the story:

A Cheyenne rabbit grower couldn't figure it out last weekend when somebody broke into his garage and stole eight dishes and all his rabbit food. But it all became clear last night when the thief returned and stole all his rabbits.

Question Lead

The question lead is dangerous if the question lacks substance and fails to elicit the interest of your audience. Again, it is to be used sparingly and only with issues that may lead to debate:

Would you go to the moon for ten-thousand dollars? A major airline is betting you would and may soon begin selling round-trip tickets to the moon. . . . against the day when public space flight becomes practical. The airline says if you buy tickets now, at ten-thousand dollars each, you'll be guaranteed passage on the airline's first flight to the moon . . . when and if such flights become practical.

Freak Events

The freak event is natural material for a lead that emphasizes the unusual nature of a story. The lead is constructed to give the unexpected event top billing:

A cemetery full of Canada Geese, from 50 to 60 thousand of them, seems to be Hinkley, Ohio's biggest headache tonight. Conservation officials say the geese are far from their normal migratory routes and have settled on the one lake in the area — in the heart of Hinkley's cemetery.