

Ledes - Hard News

Foundations of Journalism
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Lede

- The first part of your story.
 - Should be in the first graf or graf.
 - In the hard news story, should not be beyond 2nd graf.
- Sets up what your story is about.

Lede

- The single most important part of your story.
 - If you can't get people to read your story/get them into you piece, it doesn't matter what comes next.

News Judgment

- Ledes require news judgment.
 - What is the most newsworthy part of your story?
 - Use the same concepts from news judgment when deciding what to lead with in your story.

Angle

- Your lede is going to set the direction of your story.
 - The rest of your reporting should flesh out what you have established in your lede.

Hard News v. Soft News

- Hard news: Coverage of an event/story while it is occurring.
- Soft news: “News that you’ve chosen to do/pursue”
 - Doesn’t mean it’s not tied to hard news,
 - Goes beyond the coverage of just this is what happened.
- Don’t confuse hard/soft news with hard/soft ledes.

Hard vs. Soft

- As a general rule,
 - Hard news stories almost always have hard ledes.
 - Soft news stories tend to use soft ledes.
 - But occasionally hard news stories may use soft ledes and vice versa.

Hard Ledes

- Hard ledes are very straightforward.
- Hard ledes basically the same as nut graf.
- Can be referred to as
 - Hard lede
 - Hard news lede
 - News lede
 - Traditional lede

Hard Ledes

- Should be direct and to the point.
- Aim for 35 words or fewer.
- Should be tight.
 - Hard ledes should not contain any unnecessary information.

Length

- Hard ledes are rarely more than a sentence.
- They're almost never longer than two sentences.
 - Do not “stuff” your sentences to make them one or two when really they should be four.

5 Ws (& H)

- Ledes should look to answer:
 - Who
 - What
 - Where
 - When
 - Why
 - How

5 Ws (& H)

- Examples:
 - Two men were arrested outside of Paris on Wednesday for allegedly plotting to steal more than \$100 million worth of art from the Louvre.
 - Seven U.S. Marines were killed after a roadside bomb detonated outside of Kandahar on Thursday.

5 Ws (& H)

- Examples:
 - The Los Angeles Lakers acquired forward Dwight Howard on Monday as part of a four-team trade.
 - President Barack Obama leads Mitt Romney in three key swing states, according to a poll conducted by the CBS News. The findings, released on Wednesday, showed Obama benefited from a post-convention bump as many political analysts had been projecting.

Details

- Because ledes should be tight, they should not be heavy on details.
 - There is room to get into detail in the body of the story.
- Names
 - Leave out a proper name unless it belongs to someone well known.

Things to Avoid in Ledes

- Addresses
 - Never put an address in a lede.
- Ages
 - Similar to using ages in copy, only use if relevant.
 - To use in a lede, the age should be extra relevant.
 - Example: A 6-year-old boy dove in and saved his infant sister after she fell into the family's pool on Monday night.

Things to Avoid in Ledes

- Time
 - Similar to an address time of the event is generally not that relevant.
 - Often you can estimate.
 - Shortly after 8 p.m. vs. 8:12 p.m.
 - This is often because you won't be able to nail do the exact time.
 - Exceptions
 - Exact start times
 - When necessary for reference

Context

- Include context in the lede only when **necessary** to give you reader an understanding of why this story is significant/timely.
- If it's not necessary for the lede, that doesn't mean your story doesn't need context. It just goes lower.

Context

- Example:
 - Police are searching for a man they believe to be a serial mugger following the eighth attack on a woman running along the Esplanade in as many days.
 - The temperature topped triple digits in Atlanta for the 11th straight day on Wednesday, setting a new record for consecutive 100-plus degree days.

Points

- As a general rule, try to stick to one point per lede.
 - Remember, ledes should be tight.
- The simpler, the better.
 - Often this will result in more focused ledes.
 - More focused ledes more likely to equal more focused stories.

Points

- Some ledes include independent, but related points.
 - Only have two points in your lede if
 - They complement each other.
 - Summarize a series of events.

Label Ledes

- Ledes that simply “label an event instead of reporting on it.”
 - Example: The city council met on Tuesday afternoon...
 - That’s not what is actually newsworthy about the meeting.
 - The Los Angeles Dodgers and Boston Red Sox played a doubleheader...
- Label ledes should not be used.
 - What is the newsworthy part of the story?

News Judgment

- Ledes should be structured with the most important information first.
 - Get directly into the most significant information first.
 - Use news judgment to determine what that most important part is.
 - Usually What
 - Occasionally Who
 - Sometimes Why
 - Almost never When or Where

Clauses

- Avoid starting hard news ledes with a clause.
 - Occasionally, a clause will be necessary for context/establishing the main idea.
 - EXCEPTION, not a rule.
 - See if you can rework the sentence so that the clause is at the end.
 - The vast majority of the time you can.