

## Communication 4312 – Leads

The great question in journalism is what constitutes a good lead.

In the beginning we need to evaluate the background of the people making the decisions. What's their education background? For whom have they worked? Who were their mentors?

If they are teachers, what has been the result of their teaching efforts?

In the end, it's up to the students to decide for themselves what and whom to believe. Getting various opinions on this isn't bad. In the work situation you are pretty much affected by your supervisors have to say.

In addition to all this, read a lot of leads. Look at story organization. Begin to develop your own ideas about these things based on the instruction you have been given.

A key in this is the recognition of what's good and bad. To use an analogy (which I'm fond of doing, as you know), we don't start out in life liking caviar and fine wines. We usually start out liking hot dogs and Coca-Colas. How then do we progress from the hot dogs to the caviar?

By experience and by testing all the ideas available to us. Reading and writing are critical. Putting yourself in situations where you write under the supervision of others is vital.

All that said, let me make some general statements about leads:

The lead must draw the reader into the story. The lead must reach down into the story and tell the reader what the story is about. The lead must have a sense of rhythm to it. The lead should be readable – that is, you should be able to read it aloud and have it sound good.

You don't want to put too much into the lead, and you definitely don't want to put too little into it. Stay away from approaches and techniques that mark you as an amateur.

The lead ought to set up the rest of the story – the organization. Because of the lead, the rest of the story ought to fall into place naturally.

If all this happens, you're going to have a pretty good lead.

■ David McHam