

Leads

Whatever type of lead you choose for a piece, it must:

- Capture the reader's interest.
- Introduce your subject or problem.
- Move smoothly into the body of your piece.

Here are some ways you can write leads.

For Nonfiction

- State a problem.
- Use an interesting quotation.
- Ask the reader a direct question.
- Offer an interesting or unusual fact.
- Offer an alarming or surprising statistic.
- Relate a compelling anecdote, or a joke.
- Offer an exaggeration of a common situation.

For Fiction

- Show a problem or conflict characters have.
- Show action (in which a character is performing a task) that is related to a problem.
- Start with dialogue in which characters are talking about a problem.
- Create a sense of foreboding; something important (the problem) is about to happen.
- Depict a humorous situation.

Non-example:

This is a scary story about two kids who go into a spooky house on Halloween.

Example:

Jerry and Karyn's sneakers crunched the dry leaves on the path. "I don't know, Karyn," said Jerry, pushing his mask higher on his nose in order to see better. "It looks scary." Bare tree limbs cast shadows on the gray boards of the rickety old house. Its door, slightly ajar, creaked eerily on rusty hinges.

"Oh, come on Jerry. Don't be such a scairdy-cat," taunted Karyn. "Let's go in. After all, what could possibly happen?"

That's exactly what I'm worried about, thought Jerry.

Non-example:

Once our family went camping out west. It was a real adventure.

Example:

Mom and I unpacked the gear while Dad and Pete put up the tent. A sudden gust of cold wind sent shivers over my bare arms.

Mom tossed me a sweatshirt saying, "Even though it's August, it still gets cold this high in the mountains."

I smiled happily thinking to myself, "Our Rocky Mountain adventure has begun!"

Little did I know.

Exciting Leads Mini-lesson 10

Non-example:

Once there was a Greek boy who wanted to come to America.

Example:

The setting sun spread a golden glow over the deserted market place. Twelve year old Tasso snatched his red flannel cap from his head as he darted down the cobblestone street. His legs, like pumping pistons, set the tassels of his loose knee-length trousers dancing. Suddenly Tasso stopped short. Loud excited voices from inside the coffeehouse drew him as a flame draws a moth.

From *Tasso of Tarpon Springs*

Non-example:

Omri got a weird birthday present.

Example:

It was not that Omri didn't appreciate Patrick's birthday present to him. Far from it. He was really very grateful — sort of. It was, without a doubt, very kind of Patrick to give Omri anything at all, let alone a secondhand plastic Indian that he himself had finished with.

From *The Indian in the Cupboard*. Lynne Reid Banks

MINI-LESSON #1

Create an Opening that Grabs Attention

1. Present a model.

Read to your students the two passages below, written by James, grade 2:

DRAFT #1

I went to a cave last summer. It was awesome. I went with my family to a cave. When we came to a mouse sticking on the cavern wall, I thought it was a bat. Soon I saw a bat in a hole. Soon we went underground boating. So we went out of the cave.

DRAFT #2

“Yikes, what’s that?” screamed Marie. Something had swooped down near my sister’s head.

I went to a cave last summer. I went with my family. We kept on walking further into the cave. I was looking up. I saw this hole above. “What’s that thing up there?” I asked. “It’s kind of like a piece of stone, but I just saw it move. Maybe it’s alive!” I saw it hanging upside down by its feet.

“That has to be a bat,” said one of the kids on the tour.

The tour guide told us a story. A boy had a mouse in his pocket. The mouse jumped out and fell into the water. It bounced off the water and landed on the wall and froze.

Bats are not exactly like mice. Bats have wings and mice don’t. Mice stay on the ground and bats hang from the cave.

This is one trip I will never forget. It was awesome!

2. Get kids to connect.

Ask students questions about the two drafts:

- ⊗ What is the same and what is different about the two stories that I have just read to you?
- ⊗ What did the second story have that the first one didn’t?
- ⊗ How were the first sentences different?
- ⊗ Which story did you like better? Why?