



6

Basic News Leads

Exercise 1: Evaluating Good and Bad Leads

In-Class Exercises

Critically evaluate the following leads. Select the best leads, and explain why they are effective. In addition, point out the flaws in the remaining leads. As you evaluate the leads, look for lessons—dos and don'ts—that you can apply to your own work.

1. A 24-year-old Toronto man was charged with multiple counts of first-degree murder and arson in the deaths of his wife and three children who died in an early morning fire in their home.
2. City Council has to return a grant it received last year to fix deteriorating road conditions on Main Street.
3. People are jumping into swimming pools and switching buttons to high on air conditioners as temperatures in the province soared to record numbers over the past three days.
4. University administrators say they are considering imposing the largest tuition and fee increases in a decade because of provincial budget cuts.
5. A petition filed by City Council member William Bellmonte to force the council into a special session to reduce local property taxes was thrown out in court Monday after it was discovered that half the names listed on the petition were dead people.
6. An 85-year-old woman stepped off the curb and into the path of a moving car. She was struck by the car and tossed 16 metres into the air. She died instantly.
7. Ray's Mini-Mart at S. Alderman St. was the location of a burglary sometime Friday night.

8. RCMP Constable Jeer Singh is concerned that crime is rising in the city.
9. This weekend will offer the best chance yet to see a brilliant performance of *My Fair Lady* at the Fairwood Community Theatre, so reserve your tickets now.
10. Loans become a popular way to cut university costs.
11. The right of students to freely express themselves may soon be cast aside if the board of governors votes to restrict access to campus public areas.
12. The tree-lined campus is home to many wild and stray animals.
13. Two men suspected of burglarizing five churches, two homes, and a pet store all in one night were captured Wednesday during another burglary attempt.
14. The union representing university secretaries and maintenance workers reached a tentative agreement Friday that will give members a 6.5 per cent raise over three years.
15. Distance education classes offer alternative to classroom.
16. Fingerprints on a candle led the RCMP to a man accused of blowing up the building he worked in to hide the shooting deaths of the man's boss and three co-workers.
17. Around 10 a.m. Wednesday a bank at the intersection of McGill and Hillside Streets was the scene of a daring daylight robbery by three armed gunmen.
18. A teenage driver lost control of his car Wednesday night killing himself and a female passenger, while a 14-year-old friend who was riding in the back seat walked away with only scratches and bruises.

Exercise 2: Writing Leads

In-Class Exercises

Section I: Condensing Lengthy Leads

Condense each of these leads to no more than two typed lines, or about 20 words.

1. Christina Shattuck, 43, and Dennis Shattuck, 45, and their three children, ages 7, 3, and 9 months, all of Third St., returned home from a shopping trip Saturday night and found their two-storey frame house on fire and called firefighters, who responded to the scene within five minutes, but were unable to save the house and its contents, which were totally destroyed.
2. The local school board held a special meeting Tuesday night so Schools Superintendent Greg Hubbard could address a group of angry parents who were demanding to know why they were never informed that a student had brought a gun to school and may have been targeting their children during an incident on school grounds last Friday.

Section II: Using Proper Sentence Structure

Rewrite the following leads, using the normal word order: subject-verb-object. Avoid starting the leads with a long clause or phrase. You may want to divide some of the leads into several sentences or paragraphs. Correct all errors.

1. In an effort to curb what city officials are calling an epidemic of obesity among young people in the city, which mirrors national data on overall obesity of the population, your local city council voted 7–0 to offer free memberships at its meeting Monday night to local youth centres and health clubs in the city for children ages 8 to 15 whose parents do not have the financial wherewithal to purchase the memberships.
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Section III: Emphasizing the News

Rewrite the following leads, emphasizing the news, not the attribution. Limit the attributions to a few words, and place them at the end, not the beginning, of the leads.

1. Health Canada released a report today indicating that more than 90 per cent of all heart attack victims have one or more classic risk factors: smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure.
2. Police reported Monday that Stephanie Sessions, 16, daughter of Jeffrey D. and Michelle A. Sessions, of Vale Drive, had just gotten her driver's licence two days before she was involved in an accident in which she rolled the Jeep Wrangler she was driving, injuring herself and two other passengers.

Section IV: Combining Multi-sentence Leads

Rewrite each of the following leads in a single sentence, correcting all errors.

1. Gary Hubard, superintendent of schools, announced a new program for your local school district. It is called the "Tattle-Tale Program." The program involves paying students to tell on classmates who bring guns or drugs to school or violate other school rules. The program is in response to an incident last month in which a high school student was caught carrying a loaded handgun on school property.
2. Statistics Canada released a report Monday on the number of people in Canada who have spent time in prison. Last year, about one in every 120 adult Canadians was imprisoned or had been in prison at one time. The 861,000 people who were either serving or had served time in prison represented 0.82 per cent of the adult population of 32 million people, according to the report. The figures represent people who served time in federal and provincial prisons after being sentenced for a crime, not those temporarily held in jail.

Section V: Stressing the Unusual

Write only the lead for each of the following stories, correcting errors if necessary.

1. The city is sweltering under a heat wave. Temperatures have hit 40-plus degrees for the past week and humidity levels have hovered between 75 and 90 per cent each day. Authorities have been cautioning people, especially the very young and the elderly to stay inside in air conditioning and avoid exerting themselves outside in the sun. Interior Health Authority officials held a press conference this morning to announce that three people had died over the past two days because of the heat. All three were elderly people who lived in the downtown area. Two of the three were a married couple. The one victim was identified as Betsy Aaron, 86, of Hillcrest St, Apartment 302. Aaron was a retired teacher who had taught elementary school for more than 30 years. The other two victims were Jeffrey Ahsonn, 84, and his wife, Teresa Ahson, 79, both of Groveland Ave. Ahsonn was a retired mechanical engineer who had worked for the city for many years. Police and health department officials were alerted to the deaths in each case by relatives who discovered the bodies. When they entered the dwellings, police told officials that they found a pair of fans and an air conditioner in each dwelling. The fans and air conditioners had been delivered by city workers to disabled elderly people to help them cope with the heat wave. But authorities found the fans and air conditioners still in their boxes. They had never been installed.
2. Destiny Schfini is a vice president with SunBank. Schifini is divorced and the mother of two children—a 10-year-old girl and an eight-year-old boy. The children visit her once a month. Schifinis son, Ronald, was visiting this weekend. Schfini is 36 years old and lives at Timber Terrace. Ronald was injured in an accident Saturday afternoon around 2 p.m. The boy was struck by a train. Police said Schifini and her son were riding bikes along Fremont Avenue when the mother decided to take a shortcut across the railroad tracks that run along Fremont Avenue. The boy is on life support in Mercy Hospital and listed in critical condition. He was struck by a train. Witnesses said the mother saw the train coming and crossed anyway and encouraged her son to cross. The boy's bike got caught on the tracks and as he tried to free it, the train struck him. Ronald was thrown through the air and sustained broken ribs, a broken pelvis, and a bruised heart. Police charged Destiny Schifini with aggravated assault, reckless endangerment, endangering the welfare of a child, and failure to obey a train signal. Police said they charged Schfini after they learned from witnesses that Schifini did not help the boy, but taunted him as the train approached.
3. Julius Povacz is a paramedic in your community who serves with the rescue squad in the fire department. The 34-year-old Povaz lives at East King Avenue, Apartment 4. Eight years ago he was tested for human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and told that the test was positive. Povacz never told his superiors that he had tested positive. A routine check of his medical records last month by fire department officials found the notation that the test was positive. Povacz was relieved of his duties. Povacz said at the time he may have been infected with the virus accidentally by coming in contact with an infected patient at the scene of an emergency. When he learned that he lost his job, Povaz said it was worse than learning that he had tested positive for HIV. Being a paramedic was all he ever wanted to do. He said for eight years he has feared that his medical condition would be discovered or that he would develop AIDS and die. The regional Health Authority computer system tracks HIV patients and

periodically reviews cases. An official at the Health Authority informed Povacz and his superiors yesterday that Povacz is not and never was HIV positive. A second test that was performed eight years ago to confirm the first test indicated no presence of HIV, but the information was never placed in Povacz's medical records by his physician, Dr Nadine Caspinwall, and Caspinwall never informed Povacz. Povacz is now fighting to get his job back.

4. The RCMP in your community are investigating a two-vehicle accident. The accident occurred at 5:38 p.m. Thursday during rush hour. The accident occurred at the busy intersection of Huron Avenue and Timber Trail Road. An RCMP spokesperson said a blue Toyota Camry driven by Cheryl Nicholls, 25, of Belgard Avenue, ran into the rear of a pickup truck driven by Ronald Dawkins, 44, of Stratmore Drive. Dawkins is a bricklayer. Nichols Toyota suffered severe damage, but she sustained only bruises and a laceration on her leg. RCMP said the car was a total loss. RCMP charged Nicholls with inattentive driving and operating a cell phone while driving. The cell phone law was passed last year by the provincial legislature and banned the operation of a cell phone while driving. Nicholls was talking to her car insurance company about an error on a car insurance bill when she struck the rear of Dawkins pickup truck.

Exercise 3: Writing Basic News Leads

Pro Challenge

Write only a lead for each of the following stories. As you write your leads, consult the checklist on page 129. As you write the leads, correct any errors of spelling, diction, possessives, and style.

1. Researchers from Statistics Canada conducted a major study of Canadian marriages and announced their results at a press conference today. Of couples that marry, the researchers found that 43% break up within fifteen years, according to their study of 50,000 women. It helps if women are wealthy, religious, college-educated, and at least 20 years old when they marry. They are less likely to divorce. StatsCan found that half of Canadian women had lived with a partner by age 30. And 70% of those couples that lived together for at least five years eventually walked down the aisle. But their marriages were most likely to break up. After 10 years 40% of the couples that had lived together before marriage had broken up, compared with 31% of those couples that did not live together. That's because people who choose to live together tend to be younger and less religious and have other traits that put them at a greater risk for divorce, the researchers concluded.
2. Your city's downtown businessmen want something done immediately about the problem of panhandling and vagrants, especially on downtown city streets. Some vagrants sleep at night in parking lots or on doorsteps. Passersby they approach for money find them scary, and business leaders don't like them in front of their stores, saying they scare away good customers and give the downtown a seedy image. Businessmen say vagrants also eat, urinate, and sleep in parks, in unlocked vehicles, and elsewhere. So mayor Datolli said today she will introduce a new panhandling ordinance to the city council at its regular meeting at 8:00 pm next Tuesday night. The ordinance calls for the establishment of a program to offer homeless people one-way bus tickets to a town where they have family. A critic, Sandra Gandolf, says it is heartless, since many of the homeless have long-lasting problems including mental illness and/or drug or alcohol

addiction and need real help. She favours providing programs to feed and house the homeless and to guide them toward mental health treatment, substance abuse counseling, and job assistance. However, the mayor said today the RCMP now charge vagrants with minor crimes such as indecent exposure and shoplifting, that vagrants clog the jails and the court system, and that they end up right back on the streets. Downtown businessmen have promised to raise all the money needed for bus tickets.

3. Erik Barsh is the son of Margaret and Michael Barsh of Hazel Lane. He was hit by lightning at a municipal swimming pool last summer. A friend was killed and Erik was injured. Now, Erik is suing the city for his injuries: for the cost of his mounting medical bills that total thousands of dollars each and every month. He says the city's lifeguards knew a storm was coming and were gathering their own equipment but failed to warn swimmers of the danger. He is 17 years old, has dropped out of high school where he was to be a senior this school year, and now takes pain medication daily and says he cannot work or even muster the strength to go to church or to a mall or to a movie theater with friends. He says he can't stand for more than ten minutes at a time. He says his body was set in a slow, painful decline of lightning-induced brain and nerve injuries that he and his lawyers contend may eventually leave him in a wheelchair and destroy his sight and memory. He adds that before the unfortunate incident he was his high schools top male tennis player, earned As in all his classes, and planned to begin playing tennis and studying engineering next year at Carleton University. Alan Farci, your City Attorney, said, "Our position on this is that we didn't have any greater knowledge than he did. The problem was obvious. It had started raining, and we've got a dozen witnesses who heard the thunder approaching and said the lifeguards had, in fact, ordered everyone to immediately get out of the pool, but this kid was horse playing with his friend. It's tragic, but they just didn't listen, and lightning hit before the lifeguards could do anything else."
4. Cynthia Lowrie of Hillside Drive, was arrested today by RCMP. She was charged by them with theft and with defrauding an adoption agency. She had said she was pregnant. She received \$12,000 from the Hope Agency to pay all her medical and other expenses while pregnant and had signed a contract to give her unborn child up for adoption. Medical tests given her today showed she isn't pregnant and never has been. She admits submitting at one point to the adoption agency test results from a friend who was pregnant. After all the money, the entire amount, was spent, she cut off contact with the agency and the prospective adoptive parents. A private detective hired by the couple tracked her down. She then said at first that her baby was born dead. Based on the results of today's tests, medical doctors concluded she was not recently pregnant, and she was arrested.
5. Construction workers for a new apartment complex were digging a trench for some underground utilities today. They hit by accident a major water main, shattering it, leaving major parts of the city with low or no water pressure. It may not be fully restored for 24 hours, authorities say. Now, water officials warn everyone living North of Hanson Avenue to boil their cooking and drinking water for the next three days. All water used for drinking and food preparation should be boiled vigorously for at least 3 minutes. The boil-water notice affects about 25,000 customers. The break occurred in a 65-centimetre pipe, a major line running from the city's main water plant. The area was flooded as a fountain of water gushed an estimated sixteen metres upward, flooding the entire construction site near the intersection of Colonial Ave. and Chapman Rd., and the intersection also had to be closed due to being under a metre or

more of water. During the repair process dirt is likely to get into the lines and will have to be flushed out.

6. An RCMP constable yesterday arrested an 8 year old boy. Today RCMP are conducting an internal investigation. The charges have been dropped but the boy's mother is upset, saying const. Roger Temple who arrested her son should have simply separated the 2 children who were squabbling on a playground. The boy's mother, Audrey W. VanPelt, said the girl's mother was out of control and hysterical, insisting that she wanted to press charges. The boy's mother said, "That dumb cop that gave my son a ticket reacted to the woman's feelings instead of acting as an officer of the law and trying to calm her down." The incident happened at about 4 p.m. at Riverview Park. The boy's mother had taken him there to play with several friends. A girl was trying to use a swing when the children began squabbling, and the boy slapped her on the face leaving a red mark. The girl's mom immediately called police and insisted that charges be filed, so officer Tempel took the boy to a juvenile detention facility on an assault charge. An internal investigation will be done to examine the decision to take the boy to the juvenile lockup says the RCMP. The name of the boy was not released because he is a juvenile.
7. Elizabeth Anne Daigel was 102 years old and apparently in perfect health. She never used her health benefits. Investigators called at her home yesterday to find out her secret for good health and longevity. They found she had been dead twenty years. She apparently died of natural causes and her body had been wrapped in blankets and hidden in a trunk in a locked room in the basement of her home on Central Boulevard. Her granddaughter, Annette, told police her grandmother died in her sleep and she hid the body in order to keep collecting her monthly social insurance cheque which Annette said she desperately needs as a divorced mother with four children to support. The government routinely compares the names of those receiving social insurance cheques to the rolls of eligible persons. Today police charged Annette with theft. She could not be charged with improper burial or failure to report a death because the crimes are beyond the statute of limitations. If convicted she could be sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to make full restitution for all the money she collected after her grandmothers death, a total well in excess of 200,000.00, plus interest.
8. Your city needs more money to eliminate a 6 million dollar deficit. So mayor Datolli at a press conference today proposed a fire tax. The tax would put the financial bite on all property owners, without exception, including churches, schools, and non-profits as well as residences and businesses. Under the proposal by mayor Datoli, the city would charge homeowners a \$134.00 fee each year regardless of a property's value. Apartment owners would pay \$89.00 per unit. Churches, businesses, and schools would have various rates based on square footage. Datolli noted that for the past seven years there has been no tax rate increase in the city. Council member Nyad called the idea "bizarre." Nyad said, "We already pay for fire protection through our property taxes. This would tax citizens twice for the same thing. It's the dumbest thing I've ever heard of. You don't tax schools. Where would they get the money from?" But the mayor on the other hand stated, "Its painful but ultimately a good thing. We have to be fiscally responsible. We have to solve our financial problems and provide essential services. I don't want to cut back on them."
9. There's a new program to help your city's teachers. They aren't paid much. Many can't afford a down payment for a house. So local school officials today unveiled a new program that will offer mortgages with below-market interest rates to teachers and administrators in public schools. It's

designed for first-time buyers and would offer eligible educators up to 10,000 dollars to help cover down payments and closing costs. They will not have to repay any of that amount provided they both continue to teach and remain in the home for a minimum of the next five consecutive years. Helping teachers buy or rent is becoming a popular incentive across the nation as teacher shortages and attrition continue to plague schools. Cash for the down payments will come from funds already used to help low to moderate income residents buy homes. Program rules have been tweaked so teachers qualify, said school supt. Gary Hubard. There are limits on applicants' income and on a homes' purchase price, mostly depending on exactly where a home is located.

10. Your city's Fire Chief announced today that the fire department is ending a tradition at least a hundred years old. It's the tradition of sliding down a pole to get to a fire engine. The city, he explained, is phasing poles out as it builds new one-story stations to replace older multistory firehouses. Going down the pole too fast and hitting a concrete floor can cause injuries and was therefore never a good tradition, he said. He explained that fire department records show over the past 20 years at least 12 firemen suffered injuries, especially sprained or broken ankles or legs. Still, crews improved their response time to fires by bypassing staircases from their upstairs living quarters, by cutting holes in the floors of fire-houses, and by installing and using the brass or steel poles. The last multi-storey firehouse with a pole is slated for demolition sometime early next year.