

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## How to Write a Lead Paragraph

from 'Writing with Writers'  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/index.htm>

How does one write a lead paragraph? Let's say your editor has asked you to cover a debate between the candidates for Prime Minister. That means you need to write a news story. A news story gives readers key information about a recent event.

### Before You Begin

Using the information you gathered in the research and interview phase, answer these six questions: **Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?**

#### EXAMPLE:

- **WHO:** Stephen Harper and Michael Ignatieff
- **WHAT:** participated in a debate about Defence reform
- **WHEN:** last night
- **WHERE:** Aurora, Ontario
- **WHY:** to win votes in the election
- **HOW:** by arguing about the issues

Can you answer all six questions for your news story? If not, you're not ready to write!

Put the information in paragraph form, adding details and quotes.

#### EXAMPLE:

Stephen Harper, the leader of the Conservative party, and Michael Ignatieff, his Liberal Party counterpart (**who**), debated the merits of their Defence reform package (**what**) last night (**when**) in Aurora, Ontario (**where**).

### Writing Your Lead

Most news stories are told in the inverted pyramid form. An inverted pyramid story begins with the most important news in the first paragraph and ends with the least important.

Before computers, newspaper copy was cut with scissors to fit a space on the news page. Editors cut the copy from the bottom up, chopping off the least important information that reporters put on the ends of their stories.

These days, with so much competition from TV, radio, and the Internet, reporters tend to cover their pyramids with cake frosting. They want to hook even the most distracted readers.

So they write a lead, or "wow" statement, before the main details. A good lead gives readers the feeling that they have a front seat for the action and provides a reason to keep reading.

**EXAMPLE:**

The election debate drew a packed audience of local farmers, high school students, and Internet billionaires.

Your readers will want to find out why so many people came to the event and what those different groups have in common. Be sure that the rest of your story delivers!

**Improve your writing style with the following tips. Look at the options after each tip. Decide which one is best and why.**

**BE CLEAR AND CONCISE**

Say things clearly and simply. Don't try to use fancy words or complicated language.

**Option 1**

Stephen Harper ignored Michael Ignatieff's proposal.

**Option 2**

Michael Ignatieff's proposal was not considered by Stephen Harper.

**BE SPECIFIC**

The more specific you are, the better.

**Option 1**

Ignatieff promised to allot \$20 billion to defence over the next 10 years.

**Option 2**

Ignatieff wants to spend a lot of money on defence reform over the next several years.

**BE FAIR**

Present opinions from both sides, but not your own. When you express your own opinion, you're writing an editorial, not a news story.

**Option 1**

I think the Michael Ignatieff's Defence Plan is too vague.

**Option 2**

Stephen Harper rejected the Michael Ignatieff's Defence Plan as "too vague."