

# Structure of a news story

# The Lede

- Must grab the reader
- It should demand that you read the story because it presents something that is cool, or provocative, or fascinating, or outrageous, critically important, or all of the above

# Direct Lede

- Usually (but not always) for “hard news”
- Presents the news (what happened) in a way that grabs the reader
- In character, it is simple, concise, direct, vivid

A direct, hard news lede about a hurricane:

“Hurricane Georges lumbered ashore in Mississippi yesterday and dumped over two feet of rain in places, causing rivers to overflow their banks and beach houses to tumble into the Gulf of Mexico.”

# Nutgraf or Billboard

- The next paragraph or two in a story
- May elaborate on the lede to explain it
- May provide a bigger context
- May develop some of the ideas brought up in the lede
- May 'billboard' what the story is about

## Example of a nutgraf or billboard:

“No deaths have been recorded along the Gulf Coast so far. But the slow-moving hurricane has devastated more than 200 miles of coastline from Biloxi in the west to Pensacola in the east.

An estimated 2,000 people have been left homeless by Georges in Mississippi alone, and 1 million people are without power or phone service.”

# Indirect Lede

- Delays saying what the story is about (which will come in the nutgraf)
- Teases the reader, perhaps with a description, anecdote or storytelling approach

## Example of a delayed lede:

“Thirty years after it was founded by President Jimmy Carter, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory at the edge of the Rockies here still does not have a cafeteria.

Evaporation chambers for new solar energy systems look like they belong in an H.G.Wells movie. Technicians had to knock out a giant door from a testing facility to fit modern wind turbine blades, which now stick out like a bare toe from an old sock.”

That lede continued. (I told you it was delayed...)

“The hopes for this neglected lab brightened a bit just over a year ago when President Bush made the first presidential call on the lab since Mr. Carter spelled out a vision for the not-too-distant future in which solar and wind power would help run every American home and cars would operate on biofuels made from residues of plants.”

Now to the news, as described in the nutgraf :

“But one year after the president's visit, the money flowing into the nation's primary laboratory for developing renewable fuels is actually less than it was at the beginning of the Bush administration. The lab's fitful history reflects a basic truth: Americans may have a growing love affair with renewables and the idea of cutting oil imports and conserving energy, but it is a fickle one.”

# What comes next?

- Usually a quotation to drive home the main point of the story, as described in the nutgraf
- Then, the “body” of the story, which develops in detail the points that you made in the lede and nutgraf
- The body of the story **MUST** support the lede and nutgraf. Otherwise you’ve written the wrong lede and nutgraf.

# The Body of the Story

- Might pick up right where the lede and nut left off, developing the information in detail
- Or it might present some contextual material needed for readers to understand the significance or meaning of what comes next
- Sprinkle in quotations to keep the story lively
- Quote feelings, not facts

# The ending

- Called a “kicker”
- Think of it as a clincher
- Often gives a summary feeling to your story without repeating information you’ve already stated

# Kickers

- A “quotation kicker” is the most common in hard news stories. Look for a quotation that sums up the mood or main idea of the story.
- Example from NREL story: “Our budget is nothing compared to the price of a B2 bomber or an aircraft carrier,” said Rob Farrington.”
- A “circle kicker” returns to an idea expressed in the lede

“Mayor Lindsay listed facilities for public safety yesterday as his top spending priority for next year, shifting from his pledge of a year ago to make clean streets his first objective in capital expenditures.”

The New York Times

“Mayor Lindsay dropped his broom and picked up the nightstick yesterday, setting law enforcement facilities as the top priority in the city’s construction plans for the coming years.”

The New York Daily News

“A late morning fire in the upper floors of an 18-story apartment building in the Lefrak city project in Elmhurst, Queens, killed three people Thursday, the Fire Department said.”

The Associated Press

“Strong winds combined lethally with a fire in a Queens high-rise building yesterday, creating a ‘blowtorch’ that roared through an apartment building and into a hallway, killing three people and injuring 22.”

The New York Daily News

“She was arrested in garters and black lingerie, but yesterday a 66-year-old grandmother was arraigned on prostitution charges in Queens Criminal Court wearing blue jeans and a pair of sensible, gumsoled shoes.”

Newsday

“Jack Loizeaux is a dentist of urban decay, a Mozart of dynamite, a guru of gravity. Like Joshua, he blows and the walls coming tumbling down.”

AP News Features

“If researchers can perfect a new laser detection technique, doctors may start spotting cancerous breast tumors not much bigger than the period at the end of this sentence.”

The Toronto Star

“A University of Colorado professor studying the Arctic gave a talk to an attentive group of students on campus yesterday, describing his recent research.”

I hope not you...