

## THE LEAD EXPLAINED

### **The Basic or Summary Lead**

A basic or summary lead concisely tells the reader the main idea of the story or conveys its news value. Most journalists and editors believe that the lead should come in the first sentence or first few sentences of a hard news article. This is the type of lead we will use for every assignment, except for one.

Reporters use the term “burying the lead” or “delayed lead” to describe one placed later in an article. A buried lead may give the impression that the writer wasn’t able to determine what the real newsworthy material was, and can, therefore, reflect poorly on his or her journalistic judgment. In features or other soft news stories that use more dramatic storytelling techniques, the lead sometimes is buried in order to increase suspense or add an element of surprise.

A summary lead should address the following questions:

- *Who is the story about? or Who is involved?*
- *What is the story about? or What happened?*
- *When did the event take place?*
- *Where did the event take place?*
- *Why did the event take place?*
- *How did the event happen?*

Keeping the 5Ws and H in mind when writing a news story will help you organize the content and find a focus for the article. News judgment consists of figuring out the organization of these aspects of the content and prioritizing them in terms of their importance. It’s not necessary to cram the 5Ws and H into one sentence for the lead; however, the lead usually should contain information about the Who and What.

Now, let's look at this lead from The Washington Post and see how well it addresses the questions.

Aug. 7, 2019

Central banks in India, Thailand and New Zealand on Wednesday moved to shore up their economies amid fears that global growth will become the biggest casualty in the trade war between the United States and China.

**Who?** Central banks

**What?** They moved to shore up their economies

**When?** On Wednesday

**Where?** In India, Thailand and New Zealand

**Why?** For fear that global growth will suffer

**How?** This is not answered in this lead. It is common that the "how" can't be addressed within the basic lead word limitation. So it will be discussed in the next or third paragraph.