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# WRITING LEADS AND CONCLUSIONS



*A publication of Magazine Training International.*

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## Chapter 1

# What's the big deal?



The lead and the conclusion are among the most important elements of an article.

A weak lead which doesn't attract readers can ruin an otherwise promising article. A strong lead which draws readers into the article ensures that the author will be given a fair chance to engage the reader.

The conclusion is important because it is the last thought with which the reader leaves the article. It is a last opportunity for the author to reinforce the main point or leave a strong impression.

## Chapter 2

# Checklist for an effective lead



### The lead

The lead is the reader's first impression of the article. It not only reveals what the article is about, it gives the reader an idea of the writer's skill. If it isn't attractive, the reader may not go on to read the rest of the article.

### Questions to ask

- 1. Does it arouse the reader's curiosity or show a benefit of reading the article?**
- 2. Is the writing compelling?**
- 3. Does it tell the reader what the article will be about?**

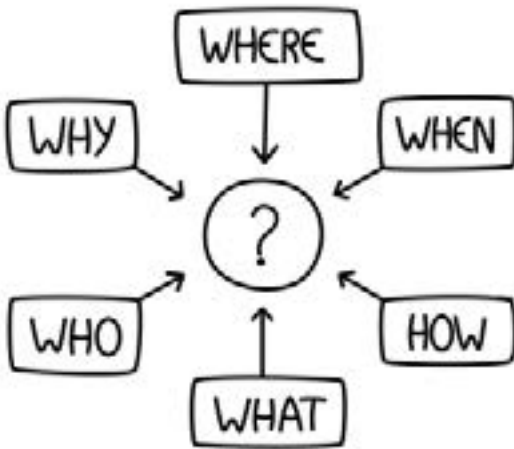


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- 4. Does it accurately reflect the tone of the article?**
  
- 5. Does it provide a good bridge into the rest of the article?**

# Chapter 3

## Types of leads



Some leads may be a combination of a couple of types, though they can usually be identified as one specific type. The following are some types of leads you might want to try to write. (See examples of most of these leads in Chapter 7.)

### 1. State the facts.

- Simply tell what the article is about.
- Summarize the main point.

### 2. Repeat a quote that is well said or especially interesting or amazing. The quote should meet at least one of these criteria:

- Be intriguing .
- Summarize the problem situation.

- Preview what the article is going to be about.

### **3. Ask a question.**

- Ask a question that the reader will want to know the answer to or that the reader can identify with.
- Relate the question to the topic of the article.
- Don't ask a question to which the answer is: "Who cares?"

### **4. Relate an anecdote.**

- Tell a short story that will illustrate your main point.
- Beware of letting it get too long, so that it doesn't take over the article.

### **5. Create an analogy.**

**6. Make a surprising or interesting statement.**

- Get the reader's attention.
- Make the reader wonder what will happen next.

**7. Show a person affected by the problem.**

Reading about a person is more interesting than reading statistics or generalities.

**8. Describe a scene.**

- Give a picture of the situation you are writing about.
- Keep your description short.

**9. Give multiple examples of a problem situation.**

**10. Make a paradoxical or contrasting statement.**

## **11. Create suspense.**

- Make the reader want to see what happens next.
- Make sure you don't deceive the reader by building fake suspense.

**12. News lead.** Answer the important questions about the event—who, what, when, where and sometimes how and why.

## **13. Dialogue lead.**

- Create a conversation between two or more individuals.
- Make sure it is clear who is speaking, so that there is no confusion as to which individual is saying what.



# Chapter 4

## Editing the lead



**1. Tighten a wordy lead.** This is often where writers tend to get into too much explanation. Help readers get to the point.

**2. If the lead is weak,** look for a better lead within the article. Sometimes an anecdote or quote “buried” later in the article can be moved to the front for an effective lead.

### 3. If the lead just isn’t fixable:

- Ask the writer to rewrite—if you think he or she can do better. Be sure to suggest several different ways the writer could start the article.
- Rewrite it yourself—if there’s no time to go back to the author or if you don’t think he or she can write a good lead.

## Chapter 5

# Checklist for an effective conclusion



### The conclusion

The conclusion is your last chance to make an impact on your reader and to reinforce your main point. It is the idea with which you want the reader to leave the article. For this reason, it is one of the most important elements of the article.

### Tips to consider

- 1. A good conclusion isn't simply the last line the author writes.**
- 2. Try for the punchline;** leave a strong impression. Make your conclusion strong and important, rather than simply drifting off at the end.

**3. Don't introduce a new thought in the conclusion.** If you bring in a new thought or subject at the end you leave a question in the reader's mind. So instead of leaving the author with a clear thought or idea, there is a sense of doubt or confusion.

## Chapter 6

# Types of conclusions



There is no one right way to conclude an article. Most articles lend themselves to at least two or three different treatments. Here are some typical types of conclusions. (See examples of most of these conclusions in Chapter 8.)

- 1. Summarize your message**—But say it in a fresh way.
- 2. Restate your main points.**
- 3. Project the future.**
  - What will happen next?

- Or, what could happen if the reader does what the writer wants him to do? Be careful not to make promises that might not come true, however.

#### **4. Challenge the reader to act.**

**5. Show how to take action.** Give examples of ways to apply what the reader has learned.

#### **6. Reinforce your point with a quote.**

**7. Give evidence that it works.** Use an anecdote about someone who has done what you advise and what the results were.

#### **8. Echo the lead.**

- Use the same kind of story or language or analogy you used in the lead.
- This kind of conclusion and the next type work best for short articles, where the reader is likely to remember the lead.

## 9. Complete the story in the lead.

- If you began the article by telling a story, end it by telling the end of the story.
- This is also called a split anecdote.

**10. Combination.** Many conclusions combine two or more of the elements above.

**11. Make your last point and quit.** This is how a news article normally ends. It gives the last item of information and stops.

## Chapter 7

# Examples of different kinds of leads



### State the facts

*From an article on “easy” Bible translations*

Millions of Americans are frustrated in their attempts to understand the Bible.

R.C. Sproul has found that 80 percent of evangelicals have never read the Bible all the way through. In a survey of 6,000 people, only 56 percent said they read the Bible on a somewhat regular basis.

### Repeat a quote

*From an article on hell*

“The idea of hell was born of revenge and brutality. I have no respect for any human being who believes in it ... I dislike this doctrine, I hate it, I despise it, I defy this doctrine ...” So said Colonel Robert Ingersoll, one of the 19th century’s most fervent opponents of Christ, Christianity, and hell.

## Ask a question

Reason and faith—are they enemies or allies? Is the Christian faith reasonable, or is it simply a blind leap that is ultimately irrational?

## Relate an anecdote

Whenever Marian Wright Edelman gives a speech, she tells “the flea story”. It seems that in the 1800s, a well-known black woman preacher was speaking to a crowd when a white man shouted at her. “You’re nothing but a flea on a dog’s back,” he sneered. “That’s all right,” she said. “I’m going to keep you scratching.”

Marian likes to think of herself, and those with whom she works at the Children’s Defense Fund in Washington, D.C., as “fleas of justice.” For 17 years they have kept legislators scratching to come up with better ways to care for our nation’s children—20 percent of whom live below the poverty line.



## Create an analogy

Imagine you are walking through a garden and you notice a butterfly struggling to leave its cocoon. What would happen if, in an effort to help it, you took some scissors and cut the cocoon away? In a few hours you would witness a tragedy. The wings, small and shriveled, would not fill out with all their potential beauty. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the butterfly would drag a broken body through its short life. The cocoon and the struggle necessary to be free from it are God's way of forcing fluid into the butterfly's wings. The "merciful" snip would have been in reality quite cruel.

Similarly, in our efforts to help others grow spiritually, we may interfere with what God is doing in their lives.

## **Make a surprising statement**

Every disabled person I knew, I disliked. The activist who chained his wheelchair to the bumper of a city bus without a ramp. The small group of wheelchair students at the university who complained at the smallest injustice. Not one had my sympathy. The odd thing was, I was in a wheelchair, too.

## **Show a person affected by the problem**

Two women stood in the fellowship hall after our Sunday morning service. I guessed that they were newcomers, as I hadn't seen them before. While I visited with the same friends I always talked with, I watched the women out of the corner of my eye. Neither seemed comfortable.

I really should go over and introduce myself, I thought. But I needed to see Connie about an announcement in the church newsletter. When I had taken care of that, my husband came over and said that we'd better get along.

“OK,” I said. “I’ll meet you in the car, but first I want to say hello to... Oh, never mind—they’re gone.”

## Describe a scene

*From an article on demonstrating our love for Jesus.*

The room is filled with the pleasant smells of the banquet. Glowing lamps cast yellow images against the wall, and there is a murmur of quiet conversation.

Suddenly the sound of breaking glass turns all heads. There, kneeling beside the honored guest, is a woman known to them all. Her trembling hands clutch an alabaster jar, broken at the top. From its rough opening she pours the contents onto the guest’s head and then His feet. Glancing hurriedly around the room, the woman lets down her hair and with it wipes the fragrant liquid from His feet.

## Give multiple examples of a problem situation

Take a minute to imagine how you might feel in the following situations: A woman shows up Sunday morning in a beautiful new dress. Friends buy a new house you couldn't afford. Another woman's husband surprises her with a romantic weekend away and you know your husband would never think of such a thing.

If any of these situations causes you to feel a slight bit of jealousy—you're not alone!

## Paradoxical statement

Christians everywhere sing the words he wrote—"O' for a closer walk with God"—but few know that the author of those words suffered deep depressions and even periods of madness.

## Create suspense

*From an article on leadership, using King Saul’s mistake as an example*

I would have done exactly the same thing. I could almost feel myself shudder inside because I realized that my reaction could have been the same.

## News lead

Nearly 5,000 pastors, lay preachers, and other church workers came from across the 11 time zones of the Soviet Union to attend a Billy Graham School of Evangelism conducted last month in Moscow.

## Dialogue lead

“Julie?” Her mother’s voice sounds nervous. “Julie, I need to tell you something—Gunther is here again.” Julie, who has just come home, turns sharply. “Gunther, Mario’s brother? Here, in town?” “Yes, he got a job at court, as a junior lawyer.” “Oh, well...” She sees her mother’s worried look and pulls herself together. “Don’t be afraid, I’ll manage. Now, leave me alone, okay?” She disappears into her room.

*Chapter 8*

# Examples of different kinds of conclusions



## Summarize your message

My fears often try to take control and stop me from sharing. But as I learn to lean on God and act in spite of my fears, I’m finding that it does become easier. And now I’m experiencing the special joy of telling others that Jesus loves them.

## Restate your main points

So what can we learn? First, when we truly love Christ we will be compelled to demonstrate that love. Second, when we choose to do so we can expect criticism from others. Finally, when our hearts and motives are pure, the Lord sees what we do and accepts it. Let love and obedience—not pride and conformity—determine your actions. And let Him deal with the critics.

## Project the future

As you begin to see ministry to those around you as an important purpose in your life, and to plan and pray accordingly, you will be a true missionary—without quitting your job and moving halfway around the world. Like missionaries overseas, you can experience the joy of seeing God use your life to bring friends, neighbors, and co-workers to Himself.

## Challenge the reader to act

The fiery grace that ignited these believers' hearts has been offered to us as well. Will we kindle our own hearts in its flame—so that our lives, too, will blaze with a passion for God?

## Suggest how to take action

If you feel God tugging at your heart, challenging you to minister to the needy world beyond your church's walls, consider the following steps:

- Pray about becoming involved in an outreach.

- Ask God to put a specific person or need on your heart.
- Find out about the needs of your town or city.
- Discover what is already being done through your church or community organizations.
- Discover your talents and spiritual gifts and how they could be used in the situation.
- Decide how much time per week or month you can serve.

Ministry within the church is important, but I challenge you to take a risk. Step out of your comfort zone and discover the excitement of serving God in a creative new way.

## Reinforce your point with a quote

*From a profile:*

“We can get so bogged down in our own needs and wanting to be big dogs,” she says. “But God uses little people and little things. The jawbone. The slingshot. I



believe we just need to lay our little loaves and fishes out there and leave the rest to faith. Let those little loaves and fishes feed however many as they can.”

My resolution this new year is to turn to Jesus immediately when I feel like running away so that the words of St. Paul may be my own: “I can do all things in him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

## **Give evidence that your solutions works**

- I felt good about our approach the other night when Paul reacted to a TV scene. “Mike shouldn’t kiss a girl like that unless he really likes her,” he said. Even at eight, he’s learning that what society calls love may be something quite different.
- Last week we had colds, and I was inclined to go home after Sunday school, put on slippers, eat a hot breakfast, and read the paper. I was surprised when her face fell. “Can’t we stay for church, Mommy? Please? I love it so much!”

## Echo the lead

**1. Lead:** I stared at my piece of paper in disbelief. After months of anticipation, I had finally received my secret Indian name from the visiting spiritual master. “He gave me a man’s name,” I complained. “I thought he knew everything. How could he make a mistake like that?”

**Conclusion:** As a follower of Jesus, I know that my name is written in His “book of life” (Rev. 21:27). God is no longer a distant stranger. Through Jesus, He is my loving Father and He knows me by name.

**2. Lead:** “We’re sorry. This number has been disconnected,” the recorded voice said. I hung up the phone. Wouldn’t my co-workers be surprised? I had just tried to find comfort through “Dial-a-Prayer.”

**Conclusion:** “Dial-a-Prayer?” I know I’ll never get a “disconnected” message again; I have my own direct line now.

## Split anecdote

**Lead:** It was a bitter January evening in 1992 when the phone rang and my 15-year-old son, Tajin, hollered, “Mom, it’s for you!”

“Who is it?” I asked. I was tired. It had been a long day. There seemed to be a cloud of despair hanging over my heart.

“It’s Bob Thompson,” Tajin answered.

The name didn’t register. As I walked over to pick up the phone, the last name seemed vaguely familiar. Thompson? Like a computer searching for the right path, my mind finally made the connection. Beverly Thompson. In the brief time it took me to reach the phone, my mind replayed the last nine months.

**Conclusion:** I took the phone from my son’s hand and immediately my hand went clammy. I know why

he's calling. He's calling to tell me to stop bothering his wife. They probably think I'm a religious kook....  
*[Description of conversation.]*

As Bob Thompson continued to share his wife's story with me, the drab landscape of my own life was transformed. As insignificant as my life appeared to be to me, God used it to shine his love upon another life, resulting in a gift that no one could take away.

The experience increased my faith significantly. God took one of the lowest points in my life and added glints of his glory. It made me realize that when we're willing to be obedient, God works in profound ways.

## Combination

I'll never forget the day I decided to weed the garden. The peppers had just started growing. I wasn't very far down the row when Sharol raced from the house to find me pulling up as many peppers as weeds. You see, seedlings all look alike to me. I wanted a neat

Anecdote

garden, but I wasn't carefully valuing each pepper plant. In my eagerness to get rid of weeds, I nearly destroyed our garden.

We are not called to judge whether one person will grow more than another as a result of our investment in them. The issue is rather how we should invest in each one God has given us. As Peter reminds us, lead eagerly and gently. Adopt a style that guards, teaches, empowers and trusts, rather than scolding, blaming, controlling or manipulating. And remember, your sheep are really God's: As you know them, nourish them and value them, you'll be a partner with God in building them up and watching them grow.

Summary

Project the future

# Beyond the book

Take a short article from your magazine and cut off the conclusion. Write two or three new conclusions for the article.

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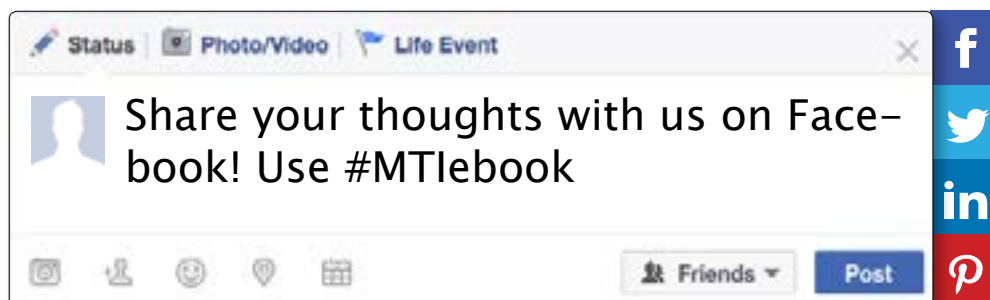
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More information on the editing of magazines can be found in the “Editing the Magazine” training manual. To purchase the complete manual, visit: [www.magazinetraining.com](http://www.magazinetraining.com).



## About the author



Susan Maycinik Nikaido served as editor and senior editor of the award-winning *Discipleship Journal* for over 15 years. She has published articles in magazines such as *Today's Christian Woman*, *Decision*, *Leadership*, *Campus Life*, *New Man*, and *Christian History*. She has written for a daily newspaper and has worked as an editor at Purdue University, editing books and promotional materials, and at Indiana University, editing study guides for correspondence courses. She is the author of the Bible study guides *Growing Deeper with God* and *Building Better Relationships*. She served on the board of the Evangelical Press Association and drafted that organization's guidelines for working with freelance writers. Susan holds a B.A. in journalism from Indiana University and an M.A. in communications from Wheaton College Graduate School. She has taught writing and editing seminars in the U.S. and internationally, and has also written a manual on magazine editing for Magazine Training International.



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