

Leads in Narrative Writing

1. Talking Lead: This lead begins with dialogue. Make sure to format it correctly!



Boring: There was a bat in our house last summer.

NOOooOO! Let me tell you a story about the time we found a bat in our house.



Better:

“Quick, hit the floor,” my dad yelled.

“Whatever you do, don’t look up!” my mother added as I dropped on my belly and slid myself under the bed. It was a terrifying night for my family when we discovered a bat in our house.

“Mother?”

There was no reply. She hadn’t expected one. Her mother had been dead now for four days, and Kira could tell the last of the spirit was drifting away.

“Mother.” She said it again, quietly to whatever was leaving. She thought that she could feel its leave taking, the way one could feel a small whisper of breeze at night. **Gathering Blue** Lois Lowry

Your Turn:

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2. Sound Effect Lead: This lead gets the reader quickly involved in the story by starting with an event or some kind of action....

Boring: A really loud thunderstorm crashed into my house.

NOOooOO! Here is the story about a time there was a huge storm.



Better:

SMASH! The window pane cracked, the wind howled, and the door flung open. Rain poured in through the screen, drenching the welcome mat inside our house. I will never forget the fierce storm that invaded my house last night.

T.S. Eliot was wrong. My world ended with a bang the minute we entered the Compound and that silver door closed behind us.

The sound was brutal.

Final.

An echoing, resounding boom that slashed my nine-year-old-heart in two. My fists beat on the door. I bawled. The screaming left me hoarse and my feet hurt. **The Compound** S.A. Bodeen

Your Turn:

3. **Action Lead:** You can get the reader quickly involved in the story by starting with an exciting event or some kind of action.



Boring: I was excited for my birthday party.

NOOOOO! Hi, my name is _____. Let me tell you about a time I was so excited for my birthday party!

Better:

I am running.

That's the first thing I remember. Running. I carry something, my arm curled around it, hugging it to my chest. Bread, of course. Someone is chasing me. "Stop! Thief!" I run.

People.

Shoulders. Shoes. "Stop! Thief!"

Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli

Your Turn:

4. **Snapshot Lead:** When you paint a picture in a reader's mind, you draw them into your story!



Boring: Abraham Lincoln was our 16th president and he was very tall.

NOOOOO! Abraham Lincoln was a tall, skinny man. He wore a big, black hat which made him even taller.

Better:

Abraham Lincoln wasn't the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood 6 foot 4 inches tall, and to top it off; he wore a high silk hat. His height was mostly in his long bony legs, yet when he sat in a chair he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered above other men.

Lincoln: A Photo-biography by Russel Freedman

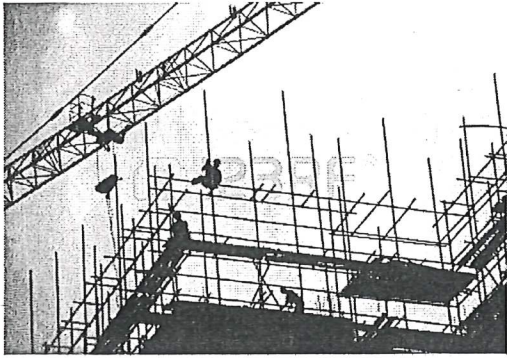
The heels of military boots, striking marble floors, made a sound like thrown stones. The old man knew that agents were hunting for him. He capped the inkwell and shook his pen. In his haste, he splatted the pale French wallpaper around his desk. That will look like spots of dried blood, he thought, my blood.

Egg & Spoon Gregory Maguire

Your Turn:

5. Set-Up Lead: The writer sets up the action for the whole story in a few sentences.

Boring: I'm going to tell you about the time when I caught a big fish.



OR:

Hello, my name is _____. Today you are going to be reading about my trip to California.

Better:

In the early days of America, when men wore ruffles on their shirts and buckles on their shoes, when they rode horseback and swore allegiance to the king of England, there lived in a Boston a man who cared for none of these things. His name was Samuel Adams. His clothes were shabby and plain, he refused to get on a horse, and he hated the King of England.

Why Don't You Get a Horse, Sam Adams? by Jean Fritz

"You made me feel like a zero, like a nothing," she says in Spanish, un cero, nada. She is trembling, an angry little old woman lost in a heavy winter coat that belongs to my mother. And I end up being sent to my room, like I was a child, to think about my grandmother's idea of math.

"Abuela Invents the Zero" by Judith Ortiz Cofer

Your Turn:

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6. Big Potato Lead: Jump into the middle of your story and leave the reader wanting more.

Boring: The power outage was very inconvenient.

Better: In the pitch black of the power outage, I heard screams and yelps. I bumped into someone on my left, and accidentally stomped on an unknown foot. Our classroom was as black as night, and I couldn't see my teacher as her voice floated through the room, "Kids, remain calm. Everything will be okay."

Better:

He began his new life standing up, surrounded by cold darkness and stale, dusty air.

Metal ground against metal; a lurching shudder shook the floor beneath him. He fell down at the sudden movement and shuffled backward on his hands and feet, drops of sweat beading on his forehead despite the cool air. His back struck a hard metal wall; he slid along it until he hit the corner of the room. ***The Maze Runner*** James Dashner



Your Turn:

7. **Thinking Lead:** Start your story with a thought inside a character, narrator, or you! Think of this as a “thought shot” lead.

Boring: I thought about how I hated school.

Better: *Even if you paid me a million dollars a day, gave me a free pass on homework for all of eternity, and made me the principal, I would still despise school I thought bitterly to myself, as I pulled out my math text book.*



Better:

March 5, 1973, Daly City, California—

I'm late. I've got to finish the dishes on time, otherwise no breakfast; and since I didn't have dinner last night, I have to make sure I get something to eat. Mother's running around yelling at my brothers. I can hear her stomping down the hallway towards the kitchen. I dip my hands back into the scalding rinse water. It's too late. She catches me with my hands out of the water. SMACK!

A Child Called It Dave Pelzer

Your Turn:
