The most effective method of learning how to write very good leads is through practice. This seems like a cliché, but it is, never the less, very true. The first thing that you should do, if you haven't done so already, is to read the Learning Lab handout 5.17, “News Writing: Lead Paragraphs”, which contains a complete explanation of the basic principles for effective lead writing. If you feel that you need a refresher on the fundamentals of writing effective leads, go back over that handout before you start on the exercises in this handout. You will get a lot more out of these exercises if you have an understanding of the basic theories behind lead writing before you start.

This handout contains six lead exercises. Each of these exercises contains one long paragraph of scrambled, fictionalized facts for a potential news story. In other words, the events and names in these exercises were made-up for the purpose of providing facts for these exercises. Your instructions are to read through these facts and then decide which facts are important enough to include in a lead paragraph. You should keep in mind while you are doing these exercises that the facts are not listed in their order of importance and, as a matter of fact, some of the facts are irrelevant and need to be eliminated. Understanding what should be eliminated and what should be retained is a good part of effective lead writing. After you have decided which facts are important enough to be included in a lead, you should write a lead paragraph with your selected facts.
On the last page of this handout there are very good lead paragraph answer examples for each of these exercises. Compare the leads you write for the lead exercises with the answer examples on the last page. Most beginning news writers write too much when they write a lead and, as a result, they surround the main point of the story with facts that really should be stated later in the story, if they should be stated at all. Just remember SIS when you write a lead (short, interesting and simple).

An important part of this handout is to give you practical experience in correct lead writing. If your lead is significantly different than the example on the last page of this handout, make sure that you understand why your lead is different before you continue. And, if you still cannot see the reasons for any differences after comparing the two, go back over the previous handout, “News Writing: Lead Paragraphs”, Learning Lab handout number 5.17, and make sure that you understand the principles behind good lead writing.

Lead Paragraph Exercises:

1. According to Officer Symth of the Pittsville Police Department, a young woman, Judy Voss, who said that she lives nearby, stated that she heard screams coming from Fox Wood Apartments at midnight. Officer Smyth also stated that he has been working for the department for over 25 years and has never seen anything like what was found in that apartment parking lot. “This is under investigation so I am not gonna say a lot,” said Smyth. “But I can say that this was no average killing.” According to Judy Voss, “I heard lots of screaming, but I thought that it was just another one of those college parties. I called the police before about those parties and they never showed any interest in breaking them up. I never knew that this time it was something different. But all the same I would have called if I thought that the police would have come out here.” Another person who refused to state her name said that there had been very open drug traffic at Fox Wood Apartments for years and that the police had known about it. Symth said that the body of a male, who appears to have been in his twenties, was found early this morning by a young man delivering morning newspapers. He also said that the cause of death is under investigation and he refused to give any more information.
Michigan Avenue, in Dearborn, was closed for over six hours this morning because of a raging fire. "It was one of worst traffic problems we have had in a long time," stated Officer Reynolds of the Dearborn Police Department. "The morning traffic rush was really a mess." And according to one local resident, Todd Rankin, snakes escaping from the burning store caused a panic among people who thought that they were dangerous. Dearborn Fire Chief Nicholas Baker, stated, "The fire apparently started in George's Food Mart and then quickly spread to the bank next door. By the time we got to the scene, the bank and part of Fred's Pets were already in flames. We worked as hard as we could to get those animals out, but I know we didn't get all of them. We could hear some of the animals screeching and making just horrible sounds as we tried to get inside the building. It was bad." The fire was declared under control by 9:30 Monday morning, but fire fighters remained on the scene for several more hours. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

John X. Hughes was suspended from Green Hills College for plagiarism today. According to Hughes, "All I was doing was using the Internet. Everyone uses it. It wasn't right that they just happened to pick me. It just isn't fair and I am suing for 600,000 dollars because of what this has done to me." But according to Dean Houston, "The college's Judicial Board made the decision after fully considering all aspects of the case. It was also a decision without bias." The college's Judicial Board was established in 1959 to handle problems of academic honesty. Attorney Janet Fillmore, who represents Hughes, stated, "We just don't think John Hughes did anything wrong by using information from the Internet. And we don't feel that he was properly informed of the Judicial Board's definition of plagiarism before he was accused of doing something wrong." But Professor Jason Kellerman, the person who reported Hughes to the Judicial Board, stated, "John Hughes was not suspended for using the Internet. Hughes was suspended for taking information from the Internet and then submitting it to a class as his own work."
“The holiday season has been a lot busier than usual and a lot of people have really been stressed out,” said Jason Strussel, store manager of Sadler's Department Store. Timothy Rucker, a customer who was shopping in the mall at the time the incident happened, said, “I saw about three huge guys jump all over that little guy. No one was wearing a uniform. I thought that man was being mugged. I started to call for the police and then one of those big guys said, 'We are the police.' That totally shocked me. I mean like totally.” According to Sheriff John Boyd, “The shoplifting suspect, who has been identified as Jamie Hind, was pronounced dead on arrival at Plain View Hospital at 4:30 this afternoon.” Store Manager Strussel also stated, “The security guards at Sadler's never use excessive force. That guy must of had a medical condition of some kind that caused him to die like that.” Sheriff John Boyd also stated that, “We will have to wait for the medical examiner's report to determine the exact cause of death. We also want to talk to anyone who saw this happen.” Mike Summers, one of the security guards at Sadler's, said, “We only did what we had to do to stop that guy. He was stealing a leather coat from the store.” But according to Ben Hind, who said he is Jamie Hind's brother, “My brother never would have done something like that. He had lots of money from being in real estate for years. Why would he steal a coat?”

Three people died in a horribly fatal car accident today. The accident occurred at 2 p.m., according to witnesses, when a blue Taurus traveling south on Telegraph Road hit the side of a bus full of tourists traveling east on Ford Road. After hitting the bus, the Taurus rolled over several times before bursting into flames. According to Officer Carter of the Dearborn Heights Police Department, “Because of the fire we don't know who the people in the car were. Everything was badly burned. We do know that there were three people in the car, and that they were all killed. But we can't even read the license number of the Taurus. That's how bad the fire was.” No one in the bus was seriously hurt and the driver of the bus refused to comment publicly about the accident. But who caused the accident seems to be a mystery. Reports from witnesses differ wildly concerning which vehicle ran a red light. “I wasn't surprised,” said a man who wouldn't
give his name. “They say that this is the most dangerous intersection in the state.” But all the witnesses do seem to agree that there was an intense thunderstorm and a lot of rain at the time of the accident. “It was a complete washout for about 10 minutes,” said Mary Wilson, a person who works at a flower shop near the intersection and who was one of the witnesses to the accident. “But I happened to be looking out my window watching the storm when that car hit the bus.”

There was a fight last night in the 1600 block of Field Street on the city’s south side. According to local resident, Timothy Anders, “Murphy and Soblanski never did seem to get along.” And according to Officer Mike Preston, “From what we have been able to conclude at this point, the conflict seems to have started over the location of a new fence and then things just escalated from there.” According to Dearborn Hospital spokesperson Cindy Evers, “Mr. Patrick Murphy and Mr. Frank Soblanski, both residents of Field Street, were admitted for severe head injuries last night. Both persons are currently undergoing tests to determine the extent of their injuries.” Field Street resident Paula Stanton said, “I saw Frank (Soblanski) squirting Pat Murphy in the face with a garden hose as Murphy worked on his fence. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Pat yelled at Frank to stop, but Frank wouldn't stop, so Murphy threw a hammer at Frank hitting him in the head. Frank shouted something, I am not going to repeat, and went to his garage to get a baseball bat. Things really got crazy after that. This was really a very quite street before those two moved in.” Officer Preston did confirm that police had been called because of problems between the two men in the past. He also stated that the incident is under investigation. Dearborn City Zoning and Ordinance Manager Lynn Blackman said, “We always tell residents to have a licenced surveyor mark their propriety lines before they build a fence. I don't know whether that was done in this case or not.”
Answers To Lead Paragraph Exercises

Please compare the lead sentences that you have written to the following answer examples. If there are major differences between what you have written and the exercise examples, please go back over the Learning Lab handout, "News Writing: Lead Paragraphs", handout 5.17, to review the principles of good lead writing. And, if you still have questions, talk to your journalism instructor.

The death of a man whose body was found early this morning at Fox Wood Apartments is being investigated by police.

The screeches of animals in pain pierced the early morning air today as fire destroyed Fred's Pets on Dearborn's west side.

A student is suing Green Hills College for $600,000 after being suspended for plagiarism.

A suspected shoplifter died this afternoon after a struggle with security guards at Sadler's Department Store.

Three people died in a fiery car accident this afternoon at the intersection of Ford Road and Telegraph Road.

A dispute over the location of a fence sent two south side neighbors to Dearborn Hospital last night with severe head injuries.