

BEFORE WE GET STARTED

Remember to register your attendance and
complete session evaluations.

Session numbers are in your program.



Attendance



Online Handouts



Session Evaluations



**“Feature Creature”
Alyssa Boehringer**

UIL Journalism Director
aboehringer@uiltexas.org

Feature Writing

Tells the reader a story. It has a beginning (lead), middle and end. It uses quotes liberally and allows the reader to see the story through detailed description and vivid writing.

Transition/Quote Formula

Lead: Most interesting information. Something that will grab the reader's attention and drag them into the story.

Nut Graph: A summary of what the story is going to be about. Why the story is important.

Linked

Direct Quote: Connects to the nut graph. Use more than one sentence. Direct quotes should show the emotion of the story.

Transition: Next important fact. Use transition words to help the story flow. They can be facts, indirect quotes or partial quotes.

Linked

Direct Quote: Connects to the first transition. Do not repeat the transition in the quote. DQ should elaborate on the transition.

Transition: Next important fact. Use transition words to help the story flow. They can be facts, indirect quotes or partial quotes.

Linked

Direct Quote: Connects to the second transition. Do not repeat the transition in the quote. DQ should elaborate on the transition.

And so on until the story is complete. End with a kicker quote that connects to the lead or takes us into the future.

**Let's talk
about leads.**

Leads...

The opening paragraph(s) must grab and hold the reader's attention by using specific, interest-arousing words. Focus on action verbs and specific nouns. Limit the use of adverbs and adjectives.



The most important sentence in any article is the first one. If it doesn't induce the reader to proceed to the second sentence, your article is dead.

– William Zinsser
On Writing Well

Leads

- Can be and often are longer than one sentence
- Your chance to grab the reader's attention
- Should be specific to your story
- Should not be filled with clichés
- Should be in third person
- Must fit the mood or tone of the story

Types of Leads

- Narrative - tells a story
- Descriptive - describes a scene, person or subject
- Startling statement
- Compare and contrast
- Twist

Narrative - tells a story

On New Year's Eve, Charles Curzio stayed later than planned at his small TV repair shop to make sure his customers would have their sets in time to watch the King Orange Jamboree Parade.

His kindness cost his life.

For 27 minutes, sophomore Kate Tiedke lay on the floor, her gray Nike sweatshirt cut in pieces at her side.

For 27 minutes last December, it didn't matter that the sophomore was ranked first in her class or that she was one of the best soccer midfielders in Texas. It didn't matter that she was funny and kind.

All that mattered was that her heart wasn't beating.

On senior Alicia Brigg's two-hour trip with her parents to church, she turned around and noticed that in the back of the Suburban all her bags were packed.

"All of a sudden, I realized I wasn't going to church," she said. "I was on my way to the airport. I started screaming, crying and swearing at my dad, trying to figure out what was happening."

That's when her dad told his 17-year-old daughter he had put her up for adoption.

The man she loved slapped her face. Furious, she told him never, ever to do that again.

“What are you going to do, kill me?” he asked, and handed her a gun.

“Here, kill me,” he challenged.

She did.

Davy Macias, 37, was intubated and dying of complications from COVID-19 when doctors heled her give birth to her daughter.

She would never see her baby.

At 14, Ashlee Thomas was in the grips of anorexia.

She weighed 85 pounds. She was hospitalized. Her heart stopped twice. Doctors thought she would not survive.

But she did. And now the resident of New South Wales, Australia, is dedicating her life to helping other girls. Her first warning to parents and children is about the dangers of Instagram, where, Thomas says, her journey to near death began.

Descriptive - of a scene/person

It's 2 a.m. and junior Carter Wade stumbles through his front door. He's hours past his curfew, and 20 milligrams of Xanax past what his body can sustain.

Wade doesn't remember being driven to a rehab center in a cop car. He wasn't aware his body was being loaded into an ambulance after he became unconscious in the backseat. He couldn't process that his heart was about to stop.

Startling Statement

His last meal was worth \$30,000, and it killed him.

Junior Josh Duckworth has a fetish.

Fun Twist Lead

When they heard screams, not one suspected the rooster.

Dechardonae Gaines, 2, was toddling down the sidewalk Monday lugging her Easy Bake Oven when she became the victim in one of the weirder animal attack cases police can recall.

In the cluster of beige houses at Lime Street and Safford Avenue where Dechardonae lives, man and chicken have coexisted peacefully for years in quiet defiance of city ordinance.

That ended Monday afternoon, when authorities apprehended the offending rooster, named Rockadoodle Two, and its sister, named Hen.

At 21, he is a grizzled thing. Sparse black hair barely covers his liver spots and flaking skin. Glaucoma and cataracts plague his eyes. Flattened hooves slow his gait to an almost crawl.

But in just two days, Potsie will be ready to party.

On Tuesday, assuming he survives that long, Potsie will win the Guinness World Record title as the oldest Vietnamese potbellied pig.

Show, don't tell.



Writing devices

- Repetition
- Short, punchy sentences
- Using dialogue
- Mixing sentence length to set a rhythm
- Breaking the rules
 - Starting with “And”
 - One word sentence

Tip: Use dialogue

The end of a simple phrase changed the 13-year-old boy forever.

“Yes it does last the rest of your life,” the doctor said.

On the day of his diagnosis, James Mapes was in the waiting room, grasping his mother’s hand tight, hoping and praying the blood test results would be in his favor.

The physician then broke the news that James had been fearing. He would be stuck with his condition for life. Immediately, questions rushed through his head.

“Why did this happen? What will people think? What will people say?”

The lead should open
with the **specific**, then
go to the general.

Rather than this...

With America engaged in a war in Iraq, many students know U.S. military men who have lost their lives.

Leaguetown lost one of its own last month when Nicolas Barrera was killed in Iraq.

Try this...

When Briana Barrera didn't hear from her son, Nicolas, for a week she knew something was wrong. Maybe it was mother's intuition, but she knew.

And when she saw two officers walking toward her door, her worst fear was confirmed.

“The officers said they were sorry to deliver the news, but Nicolas died with honor,” she said. “Dying with honor? How does that help? My heart was breaking. My boy was gone.”

Basic Info

- When senior Patrick Manubay was 10 years old, his mother was diagnosed with Stage 4 pancreatic cancer. She died four months later.
- Patrick didn't talk about his mother's death and was a quiet and withdrawn child. When Patrick was a sophomore, his aunt gave him a letter from his mother. In the letter, she wrote how she knew he would change the world for the better one day.
- Motivated by the letter, Patrick designed a website for a fundraiser project — Five for Life asking people to donate \$5 for the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund.
- To promote the fundraiser, Patrick made a video — using old videos of his mother and interviewing his sisters and dad. The video went viral with more than 1 million views. So far, Patrick has raised \$500,000.

Death is a tragic event — especially when you lose someone close to you. Patrick Manubay understands this better than most. He lost his mother to cancer several years ago.

What went wrong?

Everyone can imagine what it would be like to lose a parent to cancer. You would be lost, sad and withdrawn. You would probably be jealous of your friends who have both parents. You might cry yourself to sleep every night. You might shut down completely.

That is what Patrick Manubay did until he got a letter from his mother that she wrote before she died.

What went wrong?

Better

After his mother's death from pancreatic cancer, senior Patrick Manubay was lost.

"I was sad," he said. "I was angry. I was jealous of my peers who had moms."

So he lived his life withdrawn, speaking only when he had to. Then, when he was 15, his aunt gave him a letter from his mother, and "everything changed."

"Her words woke me up," he said. "I knew I was wasting my life, and that she would have been disappointed in me."

Disappointing his mother was the last thing Patrick ever wanted to do, so after talking with his father, he jumped into action. Patrick created a website and started a fundraiser project — Five for Life — with a goal that 5,000 people donate \$5 each to the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund (PCRF).

Things to avoid

- News or editorial leads
- First and second person
- Stating the obvious
- Using clichés
- Imagine ...
- Description that is not relevant. Too much drama.
- Rambling

Patrick Manubay raised \$500,000 for the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund.

What went wrong?

We are proud of Patrick Manubay for raising \$500,000 for the Pancreatic Cancer Research Fund. Way to go, Patrick!

What went wrong?

Every day, millions of people wake up, go to work or go to school. But some days, they don't.

What went wrong?

Before the sun even rises, 17-year-old senior Raymond Buster pushes back the his checkered comforter on his twin bed and drags himself to the shower. He quickly washes his light brown hair and puts on his shorts, black running shirt and neon green running shoes.

As he walks out the door to head to his cross country practice, he grabs a strawberry Pop Tart and waves goodbye to his mother.

What went wrong?

Better

5 a.m. The alarm blares and senior Raymond Buster drags himself out of bed after only a five-hour slumber.

The mornings come early for this 17-year-old cross country competitor, but he says it's worth it.

“I want to get to the State Meet this year,” he said. “And that means, I run early and I run often.”

Imagine what it would be like to own a pet pig. Junior Kamela Gopalan doesn't have to. She has one.

What went wrong?

Better

Marge and Maggie will do anything for their treats. Sit. Roll over. Play dead.

Not too unusual for dogs, but Marge and Maggie are micro-pot-bellied pigs.

And those tricks may just help junior Kamela Gopalan pay for her college tuition.

“Every day the girls amaze me,” Kamela said.
“They are so smart.”

What's next?

A strong nut graph.

Nut graph

Basically, it is a summary of what the story is going to be about. It's the 5 W's and H that you didn't answer in the lead.

It's the thesis sentence of your story.

The news peg!

Marge and Maggie will do anything for their treats. Sit. Roll over. Play dead.

Not too unusual for dogs, but Marge and Maggie are micro-pot-bellied pigs. And those tricks may just help junior Kamela Gopalan pay for her college tuition.

“Every day the girls amaze me,” Kamela said. “They are so smart.”

After adopting the “girls” in January, Kamela started making daily TikTok videos of the pigs doing tricks and interacting with her and her family. Now, Kamela has 20,000 followers, and last week, two pet food companies said they are interested in sponsoring her videos.

What's next?

**Transition/Quote
Formula**

Marge and Maggie joined Kamela's family after a man dropped the pigs off at the local animal shelter where Kamela volunteers.

“When the pigs were dropped off, the manager was freaking out a little,” she said. “She had no idea what to do with them. I offered to take them home just for the night.”

Kamela didn't think her parents, who have dog and cat allergies, would let her keep the pigs, but it was instant love.

“I mean, it would be kind of hard not to fall in love with them,” she said. “They are the sweetest little girls. They are all pink and fuzzy. They snuggle — just like a puppy — and squeal in delight when you rub their bellies.”

Where did those transitions come from?

Kamela Gopalan

“I didn’t think my parents would let me keep the pigs, but they fell in love immediately. I mean, it would be kind of hard not to fall in love with them. They are the sweetest little girls. They are all pink and fuzzy. They snuggle — just like a puppy — and squeal in delight when you rub their bellies. **The first night my mom let them inside after I went to bed and slept with them in the living room.** By the time I woke up the next morning, my parents had already researched how to house train them. Every day the girls amaze me. They are so smart. **They never have accidents in the house. When they need to go outside, they ring the bells we have hanging by our backyard door.** I started teaching them little tricks like sit, roll over and play dead. They caught on immediately. They will do anything for their treats.

Where did those transitions come from?

On the first night with the pigs, Kamela's mother let the pigs into the house and slept with them in the living room.

“By the time I woke up the next morning, my parents had already researched how to house train them,” she said. “They never have accidents in the house. When they need to go outside, they ring the bells we have hanging by our backyard door.”

Story flow

So often after the lead and nut graph, students don't master the art of flow within the story. It jumps. It disconnects. It loses the reader. Using the transition/quote formula helps, but you also need to connect your paragraphs.

It only took a moment for 10-year-old Lauren Gillies to find the words to describe her mother. "Loving. Funny. Pretty. Wonderful," the blue-eyed blonde beamed. "She was the coolest mom ever."

And she was.

Tracy Gillies lived her life for her two girls – Lauren and four-year-old Payton. She made it fun, colorful and most of all inspiring. Each year for the girls' birthday parties, Tracy crafted creative themes and executed elaborate plans to make for an "over the top birthday party." Lauren's favorite was her fifth birthday party. Tracy hosted a pool party for Lauren and created an "awesome" birthday cake with a blue jello pool right in the middle of it. Teddy grahams sporting tiny piped-on icing bikinis and little umbrellas topped off the cake.

For Payton's third birthday, Tracy picked a zoo theme and brought a petting zoo to their backyard.

"I thought... a bunny, a chicken and maybe a small goat...after the horses and a donkey were unloaded, I think I saw an alpaca in my backyard," Jerry, her husband, said. "It wasn't your **average** petting zoo."

But **average** wasn't how anyone would describe Tracy. She did nothing small. Nothing without inspiration. She was the planner. Huge, beautifully designed, spectacular **plans**.

Unfortunately, on Dec. 31, 2012, Tracy and her family were hit with an event she didn't **plan** and one she never truly understood. Her family, including her parents and brother, is still struggling to understand today.

“For six months, she wasn’t feeling well,” Jerry said. “We knew something was wrong, but we didn’t know **what**.”

On New Year’s Eve, the Gillies family got their “**what**” — an inoperable mass in Tracy’s brain. A few days later, a biopsy showed a Grade 4 Glioblastoma, one of the most aggressive and deadliest brain tumors.

“After the **biopsy**, everything went downhill fast,” Jerry said. “There was nothing good the doctors could tell us.”

Within a week of the **biopsy**, Tracy was transferred to a hospice facility. The doctors said the swelling was too intense and the growth of the tumor was too fast. Nothing could be done.

“At that point, she wasn’t aware of everything,” Jerry said. “The tumor took over. She slipped in and out. The tumor devastated her short-term memory.”

Towards the end, Jerry chose a night and spent it with Tracy at the hospice facility.

“I told her everything I wanted to,” he said, tears welling in his eyes. “I think she heard me, but she couldn’t retain things.”

Tracy passed away quietly on Jan. 31, 2013 – one month after the initial diagnosis.

“She never accepted any of it,” Jerry said. “It was **too fast**. She lost too much too quickly.”

That is one of the hardest things for Jerry to live with.

“She didn’t get to leave anything for the kids,” he said. “She would have written letters for the girls. She would have **planned** for them. She would have put every last energy into the girls.”

But this horrible disease didn’t allow for any **planning**. It robbed Jerry of his young wife, the mother of his children and his best friend of **25 years**.

Tracy and Jerry met in **high school**, but it wasn’t love at first sight.

“I don’t think she really liked me much,” he said. “She was a bowhead who wore Laura Ashley dresses, and I was a meathead who worked out all the time.”

What's next?

End your story with a powerful quote. Or tie your ending back to your lead.

Ending

Lauren knows her mother would be proud.

“One night, we were talking in bed and my mom said, ‘If I die, I would want something in memory of me, even it was something little,’” Lauren said. “This scholarship is something big.”

Just like Tracy.

Yes, you can...

- Use the first name on the second reference if the story is about a student
- Have a lead longer than one paragraph
- Put quotes and dialogue in your lead

No, you shouldn't...

- Use a news lead
- Write in passive voice
- Use too many adverbs and adjectives instead of specific nouns and powerful verbs
- Have messy handwriting
- Stack quotes
- Avoid using quotes
- Make things up that aren't in the prompt

On contest day

- Read the whole prompt
- See what stands out to you and use that for your lead
- Reread the prompt and highlight or underline powerful quotes
- Mark your nut graph (the news peg) in the prompt
- Cross out unnecessary quotes or people
- Write

Lead on.

Feature Writing

Invitational A Meet • 2022



You are a reporter for the Leaguettown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguettown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct** or **indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguettown High School, located in Texas, has 1,500 students in grades 9-12. At the beginning of the school year, government teacher Rana Pandya challenged her students to create a city-wide project that would improve the lives of citizens in the town. Senior Pooja Turman decided to take the challenge and set out to make mobile libraries for students living in lower socioeconomic areas of the city. A mobile library is a mounted container that holds books that anyone in the area can access. The goal was three libraries on the south side of town with at least 30 books in each station for children under 10 years old.

With three other seniors, Pooja designed and constructed the library boxes and stands and also set up book donation boxes at all of the local schools and grocery stores. In mid-November, the library boxes were placed in three residential areas in the south part of town. Each mobile library was stocked with at least 30 children's books. Residents in the area loved the mobile libraries and asked Pooja for a few libraries for teens and adults, so Pooja and her friends built two more library boxes and again asked for book donations. Two weeks ago, they set up the two teen/adult library boxes in residential areas in the south part of town. Each box contains more than 30 books.

At the city council meeting Monday, Feb. 14, the mayor will honor Pooja and her friends with the Love Our Town award. You are writing for the issue of the Press to be distributed Friday, Feb. 11.

■ POOJA TURMAN, senior

"When I visited my cousin in Austin over the summer, I saw several mobile library boxes. I thought it was such a great idea to help kids have access to more books. It especially was good during the pandemic when many libraries were shut down. When Ms. Pandya threw out the challenge, I immediately thought of those library boxes.

"A few of my friends also liked the idea, so they helped with the donations and construction of the boxes. It would have been challenging to do it all by myself. I am not a very good carpenter, but luckily Alex [Martinez] loves to build. We jokingly called him 'Mr. Foreman' while we were building all of the boxes. Nina [Widmer], Sammie [Justice] and I painted all of the boxes. They are all super colorful with characters from books painted all over them. We also painted the words, 'Take a Book. Read a Book. Leave a Book.' What we hope is that once kids are done reading the books, they will return them to the box. We hope people will continue to make donations to the boxes. We want these boxes to thrive even after we've left town for college in the fall.

"Last week, Alex and I drove by all of the boxes to make sure they were holding up well, and we met several kids who were returning books and taking new books. This one little girl — her name was Alice — gave me the biggest hug. She

■ POOJA TURMAN, (cont.)

said 'Put Me in the Zoo' was her favorite book, but she loved all Dr. Seuss books. Her mom thanked me over and over again. She said Alice, who is 3 years old, visits the library at least twice a week. The cool thing was that all of the libraries had new books, and all of them still had plenty of books for kids to take. I think the community has really bought into the idea.

"It surprised me when the mayor called my house to tell us about the award. I'm so honored. This will be the best Valentine that I've ever received. I hope the award will bring more awareness about the need for books in all of our communities. The libraries will always need new donations."

■ ALEX MARTINEZ, senior

"When Pooja talked about her idea at lunch one day, I immediately volunteered to help. I love building things. I designed the library boxes to have glass doors so kids could see the books. Those doors were the hardest parts to build, but with a little help from my dad, we managed to get them all completed.

"This project has been the best thing about my senior year. Helping the community has been so rewarding."

■ RANA PANDYA, social studies teacher

"Every year, I challenge my students to create something to improve our world. I am so impressed with Pooja's project. It will have a lasting effect on this community. These students deserve the Love Our Town award. I couldn't think of better recipients. Plus, this award will bring even more awareness to the project. I hope the town creates a plan to ensure the libraries will continue to be monitored after the students leave for college."

■ SCOTT LIPPEN, mayor

"We started giving the Love Our Town award five years ago, but this is the first time that we are giving it to teenagers. The library boxes give children, and now adults and teens, in an under-served part of our town access to so many books. They are such a gift to our community. I also saw several kids bring back books and pick out new books."

■ VIOLET BAUER, parent of two young children

"Both of my kids, ages 3 and 4, love the library boxes. We go several times a week. I don't have a car, so it's not easy for us to go to the city library. My girls love books, but it wasn't always easy to get them access to new ones."

■ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Randy's Hardware Depot donated all of the building material for the boxes.



Alyssa Boehringer

UIL Journalism Director
aboehringer@uiltexas.org