

from Barry Lane's *The Reviser's Toolbox* ~ printed in the October 1999 MCTE News File Folder with permission. Located at <http://www.mcte.org/resources/laneleads.html>.

Leads in Expository Writing

- **Start with a Snapshot.** *When you paint a picture, you draw the reader in. Notice the difference between these two leads to a report about ice-skating.*

Boring

Ice-skating is my favorite sport.

Better

It's ten degrees below zero and the river is frozen a foot thick. It makes snapping sounds like the limbs of trees cracking. A long figure glides along the black ice, moving toward the city. The only sound is the scraping of each blade as it bites into the river. That's me doing my favorite sport, ice-skating.

- **Start with an important observation.** *Don't start in the general. Put your most surprising or important observation into you opening.*

General

The human brain is a complex and amazing organ.

Better

Seeing stars, it dreams of eternity. Hearing birds, it makes music. Smelling flowers, it is enraptured. Touching tools, it transforms the earth. But deprived of these sensory experiences, the human brain withers and dies. (**Inside the Brain** --- Ronald Kotulak)

- **Start with a strongly stated question your readers might have.** *In some ways all writing is about trying to answer our best questions. A strong question is one we all want to know the answer to.*

Weakly-stated

In this paper I will attempt to answer the question why history is important.

Better

What's the point of studying history? Who cares what happened long ago? After all, aren't the people in history books dead?

• **Put your connection with the subject in the lead.** *Why are you attracted to the subject? Do you have a personal reason for writing about this subject? What specific memories of the subject come to mind?*

General

The problem of longitude was one of the greatest scientific challenges of its day.

Better

Once on a Wednesday excursion when I was a little girl, my father bought me a beaded wire ball that I loved. At a touch, I could collapse the toy into a flat coil between my palms, or pop it open to make a hollow sphere. Rounded out it resembled a tiny Earth, because its hinged wires traced the same pattern intersecting circles that I had seen on the globe in my school room -- the thin black lines of latitude and longitude. (**Longitude** --- Dava Sobel)

• **Flaunt your favorite fact in the lead.** *Start with the facts that made you smile, laugh, go "ahaaa" or just plain grossed you out.*

General

Did you ever wonder why God created flies?

Better

Though we've been killing them for years now, I have never tested the folklore that with a little cream and sugar, flies taste very much like black raspberries.