CHECKLIST FOR WRITING LEADS

1. Be specific rather than vague and abstract.
2. Avoid stating the obvious or the negative.
3. Emphasize the story’s most unusual or unexpected developments.
4. Emphasize the story’s most interesting and important developments.
5. Emphasize the story’s magnitude and its impact on its participants and readers.
6. Use complete sentences, the proper tense and all the necessary articles—“a,” “an” and “the.”
7. Be concise. If a lead exceeds three typed lines, examine it for wordiness, repetition or unnecessary details and rewrite it to eliminate the problems.
8. Avoid writing a label lead that reports the story’s topic but not what was said or done about it.
9. Begin leads with the news—the main point of the story—not the attribution or the time and place the events occurred.
10. Use relatively simple sentences and avoid beginning leads with a long phrase or clause.
11. Use strong, active and descriptive verbs rather than passive ones.
12. Avoid using unfamiliar names. Any names that require lengthy identification should be reported in a later paragraph.
13. Attribute any quotation or statement of opinion appearing in the lead.
14. Localize the lead, and emphasize the latest developments, preferably what happened today or yesterday.
15. Eliminate statements of opinion, including one-word labels such as “interesting” and “alert.”
16. Remember the readers. Write a lead that is clear, concise and interesting and that emphasizes the details most likely to affect and interest readers.
17. Read the lead aloud to be certain that it is clear, concise and easy to understand.