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Narrative Writing

Draft Revision Tricks

Revising Leads

Directions: The lead in any piece of writing can either attract or repel the reader.

Remember that writers carefully choose their beginning to hook their readers and make them want to read more. Writers focus on both language choice and style when constructing the lead.

Take a look at the following lead and compare and contrast them.

**Example 1**

Last year was a complete waste of my time in school. Once or twice a week I usually got in some kind of trouble. People don't understand that some people have bad days once in a while. I think teachers should be more understanding about student's personal problems even though our problems are none of their business.

**Example 2**

Attending school last year was often a real struggle for me. My parents had lost their jobs the previous year and we had somehow managed to lose our house. So although we managed for a time to stay with friends and relatives there came a time when we were forced to live in a homeless shelter. This period of our lives became one of desperation. Although we were given food and shelter, there was never any privacy and the potential for my parents to find a decent job looked very grim. I missed a lot of school because I was embarrassed and angry all the time. No one seemed to care much about me or my situation.

Which lead to you consider stronger? Why do you feel that way? Record your observations below.

Examples of Leads

There are a number of different ways you can begin your memoir. Take a look at these examples as you consider how you will revise the lead to your memoir.

Source: *The Middle Place* by Kelly Corrigan (pg. 9)

August is a terrible time to be born.

I aspire to be the self-actualized person who no longer needs or even wants her birthday to be noticed. I fight the urge to plan something. *It’s so self serving*, I tell myself. But this one – thirty-seven – this one is shaping up to be the most mundane, uninspired birthday to date and I am not sure I can leave it alone.

Source: *The King of the Mild Frontier* by Chris Crutcher (pg. 35)

“Wanna do something neat?” are four words that strike terror in my heart to this day. My answer was always yes when the question came from my brother. Then he’d tell me what the neat thing was, and it would always seem not so neat until he explained how what *seemed* like something that could get you in trouble was, in fact, neat. Then I’d get in trouble.

Source: *Hole in my Life* by Jack Gantos (pg. 3)

The prisoner in the photograph is me. The ID number is mine. The photo was taken in 1972 at the medium-security Federal Correctional Institution in Ashland, Kantucky. I was twenty-one years old and had been locked up for a year already – the bleakest year of my life – and I had more time ahead of me.

Source: *My Life in Dog Years* by Gary Paulsen (pg. 8)

Mother stood looking down at the puppy I was holding.

“This one,” I said. “I want this one.”

It was the little black female with a perfect white circle on its side and I clutched it close to my chest and saw only the puppy, me, and endless possibilities.

I did not realize how impossible the situation happened to be.

Source: *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom (pg. 5)

His death sentence came in the summer of 1994. Looking back, Morrie knew something bad was coming long before that. He knew it the day he gave up dancing.

Source: *Knucklehead* by Jon Scieszka (pg. 11)

I grew up in Flint, Michigan, with my five brothers – Jim, Tom, Gregg, Brian, and What’s-His-Name. The youngest one. Oh yeah – Jeff.

I’m the second oldest. And the nicest. And the smartest. And the best looking. And the most humble.

We didn’t have any sisters. All boys. Even our dogs and cats and fish were boys. I’m not sure how that happened. That’s just how it was.