

10 Ways to Write Captions

Adapted from an article written by Pam Bunka, who retired as newspaper and yearbook teacher at Fenton High School in 2019.

Varying your lead is the key to good caption and feature writing. Note the many ways to write the same facts in the examples below. As you become more confident in caption writing, experiment with these different styles.

1. **An Adjective Lead:** begins with an adjective describing the subject of the copy. Adjective leads provide color and descriptive appeal. *Example: Sweets. M&Ms and appreciative looks leave sophomore John Marsh as he sells another box of candy to Julie Jones, a junior in his trigonometry class.*
2. **An Adverb Lead:** begins with an adverb. Adverb leads provide active description in the first few words. *Example: Rarely seen without his M&Ms, sophomore John Marsh, trumpet player, sells junior Julie Jones candy to munch on in her fourth period English class. Band members raised \$3,000 selling candy to finance their February trip to New Orleans to march in the Mardi Gras parade.*
3. **A Casual Lead:** emphasizes the reason or cause of the action and begins with such words as “because” or “since.” *Example: Because money was scarce and buses were expensive, band members sold 4,200 boxes of M&Ms to finance their February trip to Mardi Gras. Contributing to the cause, junior Julie Jones buys her seventh box of chocolate-covered peanuts from top salesman John Marsh.*
4. **A Gerund Lead:** begins with a verb ending in “ing” in a noun-like form. Use gerund leads sparingly. *Example: Raising money for the band trip to New Orleans was a between-class activity for the 175 band members. Sophomore John Marsh, high salesman in the campaign and first chair trumpet player, sells M&Ms to junior Julie Jones, who readily identified herself as a high buyer.*
5. **An Infinitive Lead:** uses a verb form along with “to.” Infinitive leads provide action at the beginning of the copy. *Example: To charter buses to New Orleans, band members sold M Ms. Trumpet player sophomore John Marsh sells Julie Jones one of the 4,2000 boxes of candy that helped send the 175-member band to the February Mardi Gras parades.*
6. **A Participle Lead:** begins with a verb ending in “ing” or “ed” in an adjective phrase. It can incorporate both action and description in the first word. Use participle leads sparingly. *Example: Selling another box of M&Ms, sophomore John Marsh, first chair trumpet player, reaches his goal of high salesman in the band’s candy campaign. Junior Julie Jones buys her seventh box.*
7. **A Prepositional Lead:** begins with a prepositional phrase and provides description. *Example: With M&Ms in hand and New Orleans in mind, sophomore John Marsh, first chair trumpet player, sells a sweet treat to Julie Jones, a junior in his trigonometry class. Candy sales financed the band’s February trip to Mardi Gras.*

8. **A Proper Noun Lead:** begins with a proper noun or name when that person or thing is the most important part of the story. Because proper noun leads don't imply action; use them sparingly. *Example: Sophomore John Marsh, three-year band member, sells the seventh box of M&Ms to Julie Jones, a junior in his trigonometry class. The class sale of candy was one of the most popular ways of raising money as 32 different groups sold 11 kinds of candy during the year.*
9. **A Temporal Lead:** features a time element and often begins with "while," "where," "as" or "since." *Example: While some band members work hard to sell their M&Ms, top salesman sophomore John Marsh makes it look easy with over 300 sold. Junior Julie Jones buys her seventh box, one of 4,200 sold to finance the band's trip to march in the Mardi Gras parade.*
10. **A Quotation Lead:** begins with a quote from the subject of the picture. It is good only if WHAT is said is more important than anything else. *Example: I may get zits and a stomach ache before I go, but the trip to New Orleans will be worth it," sophomore John Marsh, first chair trumpet player, said. The band's trip to Mardi Gras was funded by the sale of 4,200 boxes of M&Ms. A favorite customer, Julie Jones, buys her seventh box.*

Caption contents defined:

1. **Lead-in:** Serves as a mini headline for the caption.
2. **First Sentence:** Identifies and describes the action or reaction of the photo showcasing the most important 5Ws and the H details.
3. **Second Sentence:** Adds information and insights featuring the outcome or consequences of the action not obvious in the photo.
4. **Quote:** First person account from someone in the picture or close to the activity.
5. **Random Facts:** Little known facts that enhance the photo/caption story.