



# Start Your Story Right

HEADLINES AND INTRODUCTIONS

# The Importance of the Theme

Your **theme** drives everything else in your story!

The first step of finding the main theme of a story can be hard due to the wealth of information you have gathered.

It's your job as a writer to pick out the most useful and interesting facts without being too dense.

# How to Find Your Theme

1. Review all of your notes
  - What interests you the most?
  - What's **the** most important fact you want readers to know?
  - Identify a second important fact of interest
  - Identify one or two more important or interesting facts
2. List the important or interesting facts
3. Write out a preliminary theme and 2 to 3 key points
4. Simplify/clarify your theme

# Test Out Your Theme

What would you say if your parent asks what you are writing about?

Hint: You should describe your theme... The essence of your story

What would you say if a 10-year old asks what you are writing about?

Hint: Simplify your theme without losing its essence

What would you say if a friend asks you what you are writing about?

Hint: Shorten your theme even more without losing its essence

**REMEMBER:**

Share your proposed theme and key points with your **Comms Mentor**

# Magnetic Heads

Headlines are the *magnet* that *pulls readers in*.

Regardless of story format, headlines should:

- ▶ Capture the theme (be *informative*)
- ▶ Capture attention (be *interesting*)
- ▶ Contain key words (be *searchable*)

# Magnetic Heads cont'd

## Headlines can also:

- ▶ Indicate genre or audience  
(title might be different depending on publication)
- ▶ Reveal the “voice” or “tone” of the story  
(serious, spunky, funny, etc.)

“Before” or “After,” that is the question!

Some writers come up with a headline first; others wait until their draft is done.  
Most create a “working title” that can be changed later.

# Sample Headlines

- ▶ *Feces-Filled Pill Stops Gut Infection* (Scientific American)
- ▶ *Frozen Poop Pills Can Cure Intestinal Infections* (Discover Blog)
- ▶ *Fecal Transplant Helps Fight Off Dangerous Gut Infection* (Health Day)
- ▶ *Poop Pills May Offer a Better Way to Eradicate This Deadly Infection* (Huffington Post)
- ▶ *Fecal Transplants Are On the Rise – Meet 2 Guys Who Make Poop Their Lives* (Prevention)

## **ALL** these examples:

- Capture the theme (poop pills fight gut infection)
- Capture attention (the topic is a natural attention-getter)
- Contain keywords that people will search if they are looking for more info

# Title Tips

Read through your draft (or notes) and quickly write down words/phrases that capture your attention

**HINT:** This is a “gut” exercise, so don’t think too much; be alert for keywords.

- ▶ Tell it like it is – (*Worms Eat My Garbage: Compost Made Easy*)
- ▶ Make a promise or fill a need – (*Your Best Garden Yet: Compos for Beginners*)
- ▶ Play on words – (*Get Down and Dirty: Rewards of Composting*)
- ▶ Ask an intriguing question – (*Are You Poisoning Your Garden with Pesticides? Choose Composting!*)
- ▶ Use a metaphor or verbal image – (*Gardener’s Goldmine: Compost Your Way to Rich Soil*)



# Test Out Your Headline

- ▶ Is the headline accurate?
- ▶ Does the headline capture what the story is about?
- ▶ Does the headline work out of context?  
(If it can't stand alone, then you need to rework it)
- ▶ Are all the words necessary?  
(Shorter is better)

# Engaging Intros

## *“If it bleeds, it leads”*

- ▶ In journalism, the introduction is called a **lead**, **lede**, or **hook**.
- ▶ If the headline is the **magnet**, the first lines are the **door** – they entice readers to come inside and read the full story.
- ▶ Introductions set the **tone**, establish the **voice**, and quickly shout **“wow!”**
- ▶ The intro contains your **theme** and **key points** so even if someone doesn't read the whole story, he or she knows what it is about.

# Some Opening Techniques

- ▶ Begin with an engaging quote:  
Something powerful or memorable from your *Science Star* that sums up or captures the power of the story
- ▶ Start with action:  
“Show” your *Science Star* in the throes of research or other action relevant to your story
- ▶ Use an iconic quote, song lyric, or universal phrase:  
Chinese proverb, Springsteen lyric, President Kennedy iconic saying

# Some Opening Techniques cont'd

- ▶ Try using onomatopoeias, or “sound words”:  
“Crash!” “Buzz,” “Clink,” etc.
- ▶ Flesh back or forward:  
Use an interesting and relevant tidbit from your *Science Star*'s background, or talk about your *Science Star*'s overall vision
- ▶ Ask questions:  
Rhetorical questions aimed at the reader can be a powerful way to pull them in