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: Compost 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.