
Leads and Conclusions

Marshall J. Cook, Writer's Digest Books, 1504 Dana Ave., Cincinnati, OH 1995. 164 pages.

Are you reading this issue of the JAC? Or are you "window shopping"—turning pages, glancing at headlines and sentences much like you glance at the windows as you walk through a shopping mall? It's your challenge as a writer to turn shoppers into buyers (or readers), says Mr. Cook.

"A good lead is extremely important. Now sit down and try to write one," Cook says. Then he offers ways to help slay writer's block, reduce stress, and save time. Among his tips:

- Collect beginnings before you begin. Look for leads as you gather your material, conduct interviews, and plan your approach.
- Play "How many ways?" Create several possible ways to start the story, then select the best one.
- Play "Beat the clock." See how many leads you can create in 10 to 15 minutes.
- Play "20 questions." What does the material mean to your readers? List all questions that come to mind, even if they seem ridiculous. Then look for common themes and important points.
- Start anywhere but at the beginning. Begin wherever you're comfortable. Often you'll write yourself into the lead early in the process. Or, your lead may be the last bit you write.

This readable and practical book has hundreds of good (and bad) examples to help improve leads and endings. I recommend it as a desk reference for anyone who is serious about communicating through writing.

John M. (Jack) Sperbeck
University of Minnesota