Understanding Leads and Nut Graphs

**Government Stories:**

Texas Tribune:  
[https://www.texastribune.org/2017/05/30/brief-scuffle-house-calm-senate-last-day-session/](https://www.texastribune.org/2017/05/30/brief-scuffle-house-calm-senate-last-day-session/)

**Lead:** The last day of a Texas Legislative session is usually a quiet one. Not this time.

*This lead is a bit untraditional, but it pulls the reader in. The reader immediately begins to wonder why this session was different from previous ones.*

**Nut Graph:** Tensions soared in the House on the final day of the 85th Texas Legislative session after a massive protest against the state’s new sanctuary cities law sparked a scuffle between state representatives. Hundreds of protesters disrupted the lower chamber’s proceedings until they were escorted out of the House gallery by the Department of Public Safety. Rep. Matt Rinaldi, R-Irving, said he called the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement on them.

*Although the lead doesn’t provide as much information, this nut graph adds more context and explains why this session wasn’t a quiet one. Also, notice the descriptive language used in this nut graph. The writer doesn’t say something as simple as “The protest disrupted the proceedings.” The detailed language adds to the strength of this nut graph.*

Texas Tribune:  

**Lead:** Texas House and Senate education leaders came to a compromise on how to tweak a plan for grading schools and districts, which the House and Senate each passed without dissent Sunday evening.
This is more of a direct lead, it gives information about exactly what will be in the story. This lead is strong because it is concise and does not use passive voice.

**Nut Graph:** The Senate voted 31-0 and the House voted 140-0 to approve a conference committee report on House Bill 22, editing a plan lawmakers approved in 2015 to start giving Texas schools grades of A-F. The two chambers had struggled to see eye-to-eye on how much weight to give students' standardized test scores when grading a school or district, and on how much flexibility educators should have in determining how they are assessed. On Saturday, members from both chambers spent hours hashing out the differences.

While the lead gave us some detail, the nut graph elaborates on the main points established in the lead. It gives us the exact number of votes, so we can see what the writer meant when he or she said the bill passed without dissent. This nut graph also goes into detail about the issues the House and Senate needed to compromise on, which was mentioned in the lead, as well.

**Crime Stories:**

Houston Chronicle:  

**Lead:** Two hours after a hit-and-run driver struck a bicyclist on Houston's northeast side, sending his body into a roadside ditch, Tawana Atkins sent an eerie text message to her sister, authorities said.

This is a traditional lead with a twist. It has the straightforward facts that one would expect of a typical crime story ("a hit-and-run driver struck a bicyclist on Houston's northeast side), but it adds the interesting detail about the “eerie text message,” which engages the reader.

**Nut Graph:** Authorities say Atkins' text messages tell a different story than the one she initially provided to a hit-and-run investigator who visited her single-story townhome near Cullinan Park in southeast Houston last month. After the police investigator noted a Chevy Tahoe out front with a damaged front grill, Atkins, a 32-year-old mother of four, told the officer she had damaged her vehicle the previous day after hitting a telephone pole while driving intoxicated, police said.

This nut graph focuses on why the “eerie text message” mentioned in the lead is important, which shows that the majority of the story will be about the contents of the message Atkins sent, and how it doesn’t match the story she initially provided to police.
Austin American-Statesman:

**Lead:** Austin police arrested 164 people suspected of driving while intoxicated during a roughly two-week period that included Memorial Day weekend and the Republic of Texas biker rally.

*This is a typical, straightforward crime story lead. It uses active voice and gives the main detail about the story: 164 people were charged with DWIs during a two-week period.*

**Nut Graph:** Police stepped up DWI enforcement with a “no-refusal” initiative that gave officers a greater ability to obtain search warrants for drunken drivers who refused to submit blood alcohol tests.

The initiative was in effect every night between the hours of 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. from May 26 through June 12.

Of the 164 arrests, 52 were charged with Class A misdemeanor DWI because of a previous conviction or blood alcohol content of 0.15 or higher. Ten people were charged with felony DWI, and one person was charged with boating while intoxicated.

*This story's nut graph is more than a paragraph because it requires more context about the arrest. It tells us why 164 people arrested for DWIs is significant/newsworthy: It's part of a new police initiative. This nut graph also breaks down each of the 164 arrests, which is important for context.*

**Education Stories:**

Austin American-Statesman:

**Lead:** The Legislature advanced a bill to Gov. Greg Abbott that would crack down on cyberbullying in Texas schools.

*This is a typical, straightforward lead. It’s concise, one sentence, to the point, and uses active voice.*

**Nut Graph:** Senate Bill 179, filed by Sen. José Menéndez, D-San Antonio, would require public schools to create cyberbullying policies and establish methods for students to anonymously report cyberbullying. School administrators would have up to three business days to tell an
alleged victim’s parents about reports of bullying, and they also would be required to inform a bully’s parents if an investigation confirms a violation.

*This story’s nut graph is also straightforward and gives context to information provided in the lead. It gives a brief summary who filed the bill and what the bill is about.*

**Austin American-Statesman:**


**Lead:** The Texas House reluctantly agreed on Tuesday to a $1.5 billion cut to one of its bills that would now inject $351 million into the public education system over the next two years.

*While this lead may seem typical and straightforward, the writer’s word choice makes sets a creates a mood that subtly pulls the reader. For example, the word “reluctantly” implies that there was a conflict that both sides eventually had to agree. Also, the word “inject” is a strong way of saying “added” or “put.”*

**Nut Graph:** After Tuesday’s 94-46 vote, the bill now goes to Gov. Greg Abbott, who Huberty said will sign the bill. Both Democrats and Republicans denounced the Senate’s version of HB 21 Tuesday afternoon.

*This nut graph is pretty straightforward. It gives the exact number of votes and hints at the reluctance touched on in the lead (both Democrats and Republicans dislike the bill).*

**Business Stories:**

**Reuters:** http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-stocks-idUSKBN1AP1AB

**Lead:** U.S. stocks clawed back losses late on Wednesday as investors appeared to brush off geopolitical concerns after falling in the wake of U.S. President Donald Trump's “fire and fury” warning to North Korea.

*This lead uses great active language, like the phrase “clawed back.” It’s also strong because it’s concise.*

**Nut Graph:** Bargain-seeking investors instead turned their focus to strength in the global economy and earnings toward the end of an active trading day. Investors had rushed to safe-haven assets after strongly worded exchanges between Washington and nuclear-armed North Korea late on Tuesday. U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said he did not believe there was an imminent threat.
This nut graph elaborates on issues mentioned in the lede. It talks why the market was able to claw back losses: investors turned their attention to the global economy and were assured that there was not an imminent threat.

Austin360: 

Lead: You don’t have to be a kid to partake in the wonders of what might well be the largest bounce house ever, and you also won’t just be bouncing in it.

This is playful lead that pulls the reader in. It’s short, but it does hint at what the story will be about: a bounce house with special features that isn’t only for children.

Nut Graph: This traveling inflatable haven called the Big Bounce — 10,000 sq. ft. and a full 32 feet high — has DJs playing music, basketball hoops, an inflatable obstacle course for “all you budding ninja warriors,” a giant slide that leads into a foam pit, even an inflatable forest and jungle animals, according to the Big Bounce website.

The nut graph elaborates on what makes this bounce house interesting/newsworthy, and also properly cites its source.