

Some criteria for thinking about headlines/lead sentences:

The headline and lead sentences are often the ONLY chance you get with most readers - especially in the mobile news age. It is not uncommon to write and revise those multiple times to get those right. Moreover, the headline and lead of a SciComm piece will differ from what is considered interesting to a scientist. For a scientist, we might think about a general statement of the unsolved questions of the field. For example, one of the scientist summary pieces we will read is titled: "How the human brain segments continuous experience." While this is a GREAT headline for memory scientists (summarizing research into how each memory becomes its own distinct event), it is not tuned to catch the public eye; it uses language more oriented to a scientist (segment, continuous experience), and leads with the unsolved question rather than what the paper it covers MEANS to a general reader.

- A.) Does the headline capture the “so what” or meaning to a general reader? Does it capture the bottom line of the article/science (accurately)?
  - a. Accuracy is important for scientific integrity. Similarly, headlines need to be short, simple, direct, and eye-catching.
- B.) Does the lead sentence expand off the headline, or does it merely repeat what the headline has already told you?
- C.) Are the headline and lead sentences accessible to a wide audience (i.e., is there jargon? If so, is it necessary jargon, like ‘AI’ from Ed Yong?)?
  - a. Similarly, is the language generally appropriate? The language could be accessible to a wide audience, but seem less serious or professional.
  - b. The language (tone, style) should match the outlet for which it is directed. For example, if it were a SciComm piece on a Psych Society’s website vs. a piece in the Atlantic or NYT, the latter would be more “general” audience oriented.
  - c. The headline or lead sentence should somehow indicate the validity of the research (make it clear an article is actually being covered, not just a personal opinion being stated).
- D.) Are the headline and lead sentences concise (~50-100 characters)?
- E.) Do the headline and lead sentence make you want to read more?

Remember that one good example we went over was Ed Yong’s 2019 article:

- Headline: “AI Evolved These Creepy Images to Please a Monkey’s Brain”
  - 10 words, 57 characters with spaces
- Lead: “What happens when an algorithm can ask neurons what they want to see?”
  - 13 words, 69 characters with spaces