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The basic components of a leader in the following sequence:

1. Introduction
2. Theme and news
3. Model of the leader
4. Stand back
5. Your arguments
6. Their arguments
7. What to do about it

Sometimes they leave things out, but most of the elements for the leader pieces published are there, in one form or another.

What is a leader? It is a device to tell their leaders what’s important, to help sharpen readers argument, and occasionally to change their minds.

Internally, it is said that some find leaders hard to write. Yet, the more one does it, the better one gets.

Journalists at the Economist report “if pieces are stories, leaders are arguments”. They exist fro two main reasons:

1. Importance and events: understand current important situation, and telling readers what the agenda is

2. When people aren’t thinking about something: Events and topics that mostly aren’t, but ought to be on people’s agenda. Its about to say that something matters, as much it is about how suspiring its conclusion is

There is a sense of importance. That is why many times, those leader arguments make it on the cover. Cover and leaders are connected.

The leader wants to help readers to make arguments themselves.

There are a number of ways those arguments are of importance. One of those argument types is often referenced as “mind caring”. This is mainly about untangling the mess of an event (for example, the leader on Trump is an example of those). It is also often the province of economic leaders, where many times contractioury arguments are called out. Those leaders help people to understand what’s important, and which of those matter most/or are likely to win a debate.

The second type of leader is the “missing the point leader”. Those will make the argument that the real problem around a topic is in fact lying somewhere else. Those leaders are fruitful. The leader on unintended consequences is a growing and rich theme (regulations that are supposed to make the words safer, but in fact have little or the opposite effect). Todd Frank, and the unintended consequences on the intent to kill the regulation, is an example. This is also the corner, where the best leaders on ethics are being written.

A leader on murder is wrong and boring. And being boring is a cardinal sin. The best leaders for example about ethics are surprising. Leaders on ethics, that have a counterintuitive or surprising conclusion (e.g. leader on legalizing prostitution).

**The Art of the Leader**

Decomposing the linguistic make-up of an iconic journalistic column: The Economist Leader story and how to configure one yourself.

Leader image photo

The Economist’s leader column is a fundamental and fascinating component of the paper’s print edition. It permits the media organization to ingest their stance on a specific ongoing topic and to gauge consequences of news items with a magnifying glass. It is also a formidable concept of journalism. A leader has two major goals: signaling what’s important and to sharpen readers’ arguments.

Each leader’s narrative usually accounts for one page (many times there are extended in other parts of the section). The US Election, Brexit, industries in transformation, all those are instances of topics leaders currently embrace. They are brazing and prevailing affairs in the present news-landscape. To a greater or lesser extent, a leader settles a score with a person, and even or a trend, which usually isn’t just going away tomorrow or next week. With the medium of those leaders, there is one of the company’s most important product: a exegesis of how to fathom the world. Many times a recommendation or advice to the leaders of the world fortifies. Atop, the paper delivers those in a single voice – there are no bylines in the paper, as an astute reader may have noticed.

In an age of increased acceleration of the news flow and alternative facts, *The Economist* delivers this product, unparalleled. It does so in two ways. First, there is the leader that helps readers through a pile of arguments, adds clarity and clearing one’s thoughts in regards to a complex topic. Brexit, the US president etcetera. The second type is to write about that readers are misinformed and why one might be missing the point.

Both have their eligibility. While for the first one, the problem is set and known and the arguments reformulated, the second sort tells about readers about a completely new problem emerges and what to do or think about it and why. The latter is well applicable for leaders about ethics. Amid those, the best ones can convince with a surprising conclusion, after carefully weighting up pro and cons ([how could legalizing prostitution be ethical?).](http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/08/economist-explains-13)

**Leader’s** **Compound**

Analyzing a batch of leaders allows one to see a pattern. While a certain structure with similar components in the same sequence emerges, there does not see to be fixed rules authors have to apply, and deviation from those components found, seem well possible.

Let us investigate an exemplar of a leader story, to learn about its peculiarities and mannerisms. ***“The litter of the law”*** in this weeks issue will suffice to elucidate structure and composition. Discussed is the Dodd-Frank act and the story weights up the appropriateness for the US administration to reassess the law.

The basic components of a leader in the following sequence:

1. Introduction: The start contains an enticing observation, and the theme
2. News/contemporary event
3. Model of the leader
4. Stand back
5. Your arguments
6. Their arguments
7. What to do about it

**The start**

Most leaders begin with an observation, almost never is the start a statement of the news peg. And those first thoughts are many times emotional. They can be moving, funny and are enticing. Many times they go against the conclusion, and correlate with the public assumption. Usually they are short, a little paragraph, both relevant and fitting to the core argument(s). The second sub-component is the start is stating the theme: what is this all about?

**The News Peg**

This item is a requisite. Failing its possession, could dilute its importance and to deserve its seat in the leader section. In our case, the president signed an executive order urging the treasury to conduct a 120-day review of America’s financial regulations. A page earlier, another leader - “Time to pick up the tab” – was pegged to Britain’s House of Commons vote to approve the process of withdrawal.

“Courting Russia” connects to the US president’s intentions to forge a totally new strategic alignment with Putin. Although, the news-pegs don’t seem to be requested in the very first paragraph, they usually pop up early in the piece.

**The point in the beginning when you state what’s wrong with the world**

Best practice encourages people who write leaders to include a statement at the end of the first section – after intro and news – which introduces the world to the claim you make, describing what’s wrong with the world, a topic, a person, or a development. It is the final point one makes in the introduction, that will set up everything else due to follow.

This is usually different from other stories run by the paper. Many times this claim comes much later in the story, after a careful process of evaluation of perspectives. The concept of the leader is to try to embrace this moment right in the beginning. It might be one of the key ingredients that makes the leader work in the way it does.

While the point you are making here is strong and important, it should give away the game completely. There should be enough gunpowder to suck the reader into the series of the sub-arguments or discussion, surprise them or making them run into disagreement, but room to accelerate.

**Stepping-back and giving context and background**

This is the point when authors explain the context, historical entanglement and the chance to elaborate how we got here. For politics, many times readers get a history lesson. For an economics and business leader such as “The litter of the law”, it explains the background and extend of the Dodd-Frank act.

**Dodd and buried**

*“When it was passed in 2010 Dodd-Frank was a monster of a law and was programmed to spawn more regulations. It imposed more than five times as many restrictions as any other law passed by the Obama administration. More constraints were added to the federal banking code between 2010 and 2014 than existed in 1980.”*

Those stand-backs are also many times introduced after a short sub-headline.

**Starting the argument engine**

**Make your own argument**

This is the part when the author begins to run arguments, usually in the form of paragraphs (each paragraph is a single perspective). This isn’t much different from other stories, except that many times, the arguments description is kept succinct (many times, there are then stories attached, later in the paper, that go much deeper into detail).

**Make opponents’ arguments**

This is probably the part I enjoy most about leaders. First the papers case is made, which is then followed by hearing the case of opponents – usually the other dark side. This is quite journalistically beautiful and democratic. Laying out the course of the leader in this way, can ultimately allow understanding the investigative process of research by the author.

Another component of this section is softness. It may allow to see the subject from the eyes of a benignant and soft grandmother, which usually begins with something like “nothing is perfect at its very first attempt”, or “In assurance of his willingness, he tried … but failed” – or something along those lines, to make people understand a softening of the judgment is possible, yet only to a certain extent.

To get this section right, an author has to acknowledge (and not miss) the most important arguments of the opposite party, whoever or whatever that may be. And because putting yourself in someone else’s shoes is so hard, it makes it so difficult to write a good leader and good journalism overall.

**End**

The end is when authors give those golden recommendations, and responding to the collection of both pro and contra arguments. It requires the author to pull the very best of argument, and usually a mentioning of the future.

**Rules that help to write a leader**

**The beginnings of those paragraphs are scaffolding**

“An Economist paper article should be decoded by simply reading the first or second sentence of each paragraph”, once a member of the editorial team shared. We find this patterns accredited. Post introduction – in our case, the first and second paragraph - each paragraph from here usually consists of either one of multiple of the following components:

… A leading claim

“;undoing Dodd-Frank would lead to the next disaster by letting bankers run riot again.”

… A history lesson (or explanation of background of the conflict)

“When it was passed in 2010 Dodd-Frank was a monster of a law”

… A change in perception (a different look at the topic/problem, or a view by a different party/company of people)

“Onerous though it is, however, the act also achieved a lot.”

… A rationalization or implication that stems from the pervious claim

“As the clauses multiplied, so did the compliance burden on banks.”

… and last - but least unimportant in my view in respect of bespoke journalism: A consultation – sometimes, written down as formal as in the form of a succession of listed items to take to heart

“[1] How, then, to keep the good and get rid of the bad? First and foremost, avoid backsliding on capital requirements ….

[2] Next, unravel the sprawl. Consolidating America’s overlapping financial agencies into fewer regulators would be a boon for everyone except their staff….

[3] Next, unravel the sprawl. Consolidating America’s overlapping financial agencies into fewer regulators would be a boon for everyone except their staff….

Those single sentences of claims, deductions and recommendation that begin those well-fed paragraphs of text, examples, statistics and quotes, are the starting point of an accomplished leader.

Those could be treated like scaffolding within the narrative, and may well make an authors starting points easier. Plainly written down as we just did, they could kick off a journalist’s workflow. In our case, those extrapolated parts above, could have filled a blank page for those author responsible for ***“The litter of the law”.***

**Data journalism**

The leader can be heavily stitched with data journalism jargon. Authors are very well trained to compare and gauge an argument in the form of figures and numbers. A facile example is presented in: “It imposed more than five times as many restrictions as any other law passed by the Obama administration”. Data journalism give those authors access to build context, that later will matter in the conclusion.

**An affluent ending**

To master a truly rich and rewarding ending for our *The Economist* leader narrative, there are a number of ingredients to heed to.

More frequently than not, a Leader seems to pillow the final paragraph onto a view of the future: What could happen from here? To tell readers how the world evolves is an important part of the product the paper wishes to deliver on.

It includes the second piece of the puzzle for an accomplished ending: weighting up those claims the leader made earlier.

“… and easy to be fearful. But a sensible approach to reform would look something like this: keep capital high and rules simple. Judge what comes from Mr Cohn’s assault on regulation by that standard.”

Humans ache for simplicity, even the most complex among us. The grading of those claims offers guidance in a complicated word and hopes to sooth the debate. Such a layout earlier made claims that matter to the future or a final judgment can bring the leader to a slick ending.