

On December 12, 1996 Nora Ephron told this story at The 92nd Street Y:

I had a great journalism teacher in high school. He was teaching us how to write a lead, the first sentence or paragraph of a news story.

Our assignment in class was to come up with a lead for a hypothetical article to appear in the school newspaper. He read us the following salient facts: "Kenneth L. Peters, the principal of Beverly Hills High School, announced today that the faculty of the high school will travel to Sacramento on Thursday for a colloquium in new teaching methods. Speaking there will be anthropologist Margaret Mead and Robert Maynard Hutchins, the president of the University of Chicago."

We all went to our typewriters and worked on writing some variation of a list including all those facts. Pretty easy, we thought.

Our teacher looked at all our answers, and said none of us had come up with the right one. The lead to this story, he said, is: "There will be no school on Thursday."

That is the point. Now, whenever I'm writing or directing a scene in a movie, I always ask myself, "What's the point?"

It's always a good idea to ask ourselves that question. Marshalling all the facts is easy. And often we're obligated to go into all kinds of details.

But sometimes the most important point has not been spelled out at all. It's up to us to connect the dots, to figure out what's relevant to our audience, and to tell them what they need to know.