



## Big thanks to Brian Clark from Copyblogger.com

The content in this report is genius and will do amazing things for your blogging if you study **and implement** the lessons.

This report was compiled from articles at [Copyblogger.com](http://Copyblogger.com), written by Brian Clark. Brian gave special permission to release this document to Blog Mastermind students.

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# copyblogger

# Copywriting 101: An Introduction to Copywriting

## What is Copywriting?



**Copywriting** is one of the most essential elements of effective online marketing. The art and science of copywriting involves strategically writing words that promote a person, product, business, opinion, or idea, with the ultimate intention of having the reader take some form of action. So, whether you're looking to sell something or to build traffic by earning links from others, you'll need to tell compelling stories that grab attention and connect with people so that they'll respond the way you want.

## Don't Read This (or the Kitty Gets It)!

Poor Fluffy. I asked you not to do this, and you've gone and broken the rules.

Things don't look good for this cute little kitten I've taken hostage in case my demands were not met. She is *awfully* sweet, though.

We'll just have to wait until later on in the article to decide the fate of Fluffy. But first, we really do need to discuss the ultimate goal of good copywriting.

Stick with me and I'll go easy on the cat, deal?

Let's get started. What is the primary purpose of any piece of writing that you put out online — whether a blog post, a networking email, a sales letter or a tutorial?

For starters, to get what you've written read, right?

Makes sense.

So, what's the primary purpose of your headline, your graphics, your fonts, and every other part of the content?

The simple, surprising answer is...

**To get the first sentence read.**

This may seem somewhat simplistic to you. Or maybe even confusing.

For me, I came across this way of looking at copywriting later in my studies. I had spent plenty of time trying to master the art of writing a perfect headline, or properly conveying product benefits, or learning how to craft a compelling call to action.

But it all came together for me when legendary copywriter and direct marketer Joe Sugarman shared his secret for becoming a great copywriter:

**Every element of copy has just one purpose — to get the first sentence read.**

In his seminars, Sugarman would quiz his students on the purpose of various copy elements: the headline, the graphics, the sub-headlines, etc. Why are they important?

“What is the purpose of a headline?” Sugarman would ask.

Every time the student started with some complicated, jargon-filled explanation, he would cut them off.

“The purpose is to get the first sentence read,” he would counter.

“And the purpose of the first sentence is to get the second sentence read,” he continued.

And so on, down a slippery slide that leads to your offer and the sale.

This is an extremely valuable way to go about structuring *any* writing, and it’s crucial to writing intended to persuade or sell. Many times we find ourselves so eager to arrive at our conclusion that we forget that the essence of making a persuasive point (or causing *any* action) is *how we get there*.

Step by step.

**Now... how *do* we get there?**

With this simple framework in mind, the stage is set for drilling down deeper into the nitty gritty of the “step by step.” We’re now in a better position to more fully appreciate the specific techniques that apply to all of the various elements of strong copy.

For example, we can now see:

- why a strong, compelling headline is critical;
- why immediately focusing on the benefit to the reader is so crucial;
- why you must make a promise to the reader that you later fulfill; and
- why you must back up everything you’ve said with very specific proof.

**If no one reads, all is lost.**

And the key to getting someone to read is one sentence at a time, so compelled by that sentence that they want to read the next. In other words, how you say it is how you get there.

From here, I'll be starting a series called "[Copywriting 101](#)." We'll examine the core principles and elements that take a reader from the first sentence to the sale, subscription, download or other action.

And while I did get you to read this entire article, I wouldn't exactly recommend the strategy employed here. It worked, but pulling cheap stunts like this won't help you in the long run.

Besides... my four year old daughter staged a daring rescue of the kitten when I wasn't looking.

Kids!

## To Be or Not to Be?

Now *that's* a question.

The first six words of Hamlet's Act III, Scene 1 soliloquy are without doubt the most famous line William Shakespeare ever wrote. It's also one of the most recognizable quotes in the English-speaking world.

And not a single word over three letters long.

The lesson? Keep it simple. Good copy is written in clear, concise, simple words that get your point across. It's conversational.

You can fracture the occasional rule of grammar too, if it helps to make your writing more digestible. Sentence fragments, one-sentence paragraphs, beginning with conjunctions and ending in prepositions are all fine, even desirable.

And don't forget to use plenty of bullets and numbered lists.

Think your audience is too sophisticated for this? Don't be so sure.

[A study released today](#) shows that more than 50 percent of students at four-year schools and more than 75 percent at two-year colleges in the United States could not:

- interpret a table about exercise and blood pressure;
- understand the arguments of newspaper editorials; or
- compare credit card offers with different interest rates and annual fees.

The *bad news* is that these kids are more literate than the average US adult, which is not that surprising considering that the vast majority of US adults have less education.

So... keep it simple and clear. No one will ever complain that your writing is too easy to understand.

## How to Write Headlines That Work

Your headline is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective reader. Without a headline or post title that turns a browser into a reader, the rest of your words may as well not even exist.

But a headline can do more than simply grab attention. A *great* headline can also communicate a full message to its intended audience, and it absolutely must lure the reader into your body text.

At its essence, a compelling headline must promise some kind of benefit or reward for the reader, in trade for the valuable time it takes to read more.

In [The Copywriter's Handbook](#), copywriter extraordinaire [Bob Bly](#) sets forth eight time-tested headline categories that compel action and rake in sales:

*Direct Headlines* go straight to the heart of the matter, without any attempt at cleverness. Bly gives the example of **Pure Silk Blouses – 30 Percent Off** as a headline that states the selling proposition directly. A direct blog post title might read **Free SEO E-book**.

An *Indirect Headline* takes a more subtle approach. It uses curiosity to raise a question in the reader's mind, which the body copy answers. Often a double meaning is utilized, which is useful online. An article might have the headline **Fresh Bait Works Best** and yet have nothing to do with fishing, because it's actually about writing timely content that acts as **link bait**.

A *News Headline* is pretty self-explanatory, as long as the news itself is actually, well... news. A product announcement, an improved version, or even a content scoop can be the basis of a compelling news headline. Think **Introducing Flickr 2.0** or **My Exclusive Interview With Steve Jobs**.

The *How to Headline* is everywhere, online and off, for one reason only – it works like a charm. Bly says that “Many advertising writers claim if you begin with the words *how to*, you can't write a bad headline.” An example would be, umm... oh yes... the title of this post.

A *Question Headline* must do more than simply ask a question, it must be a question that, according to Bly, the reader can empathize with or would like to see answered. He gives this example from *Psychology Today*: **Do You Close the Bathroom Door Even When You're the Only One Home?** Another example used *way too much* in Internet marketing guru-ville is **Who Else Wants to Get Rich Online?**

The *Command Headline* boldly tells the prospect what he needs to do, such as Exxon's old **Put a Tiger in Your Tank** campaign. Bly indicates that the first word should be a strong verb demanding action, such as **Subscribe to Copyblogger Today!**

Another effective technique is called the *Reason Why Headline*. Your body text consists of a numbered list of product features or tips, which you then incorporate into the headline, such as **Two Hundred Reasons Why Open Source Software Beats Microsoft**. It's not even necessary to include the words "reasons why." This technique is actually the underlying strategy behind the ubiquitous blogger "list" posts, such as **8 Ways to Build Blog Traffic**.

Finally, we have the *Testimonial Headline*, which is highly effective because it presents outside proof that you offer great value. This entails taking what someone else has said about you, your product or service, and using their actual words in your headline. Quotation marks let the reader know that they are reading a testimonial, which will continue in the body copy. An example might be **"I Read Copyblogger First Thing Each Morning," admits Seth Godin.**

Hey, I can dream, can't I?

## Writing Headlines That Get Results

It's no surprise to discover that one of the most popular posts I've written for Copyblogger was [How to Write Headlines That Work](#). Every copywriter and every journalist knows the importance of a powerful headline, and that awareness has spilled into the business blogosphere, where everyone is a bit of a copywriter and a bit of a journalist.

Despite that, many still underestimate just how important headlines are. So here are some anecdotes, facts, and guidelines that can help you write even better headlines (and also let you know how much you should focus on them).



## The 50/50 Rule of Headlines

According to some of the best copywriters of all time, you should spend **half** of the entire time it takes to write a piece of persuasive content on the headline. So if you have a blog post that is really important to you or your business, one that you *really* want people to read, you should downright obsess over your post title.

Advertising legend David Ogilvy knew the power of headlines, and how the headline literally determined whether the advertisement would get read. He rewrote this famous headline for an automobile advertisement **104 times**:

“At 60 miles an hour, the only thing you hear in the new Rolls Royce is the ticking of the dashboard clock ...”

Master copywriter Gene Schwartz often spent an *entire week* on the first 50 words of a sales piece — the headline and the opening paragraph. Those 50 words are the most important part of any persuasive writing, and writing them well takes time.

Even for the masters.

## The 80/20 Rule of Headlines

Here are some interesting statistics.

On average, 8 out of 10 people will read headline copy, but only 2 out of 10 will read the rest. This is the secret to the power of the headline, and why it so highly determines the effectiveness of the entire piece.

The better the headline, the better your odds of beating the averages and getting what you’ve written read by a larger percentage of people.

Writing a great headline doesn’t guarantee the success of your writing. The benefit conveyed in the headline still needs to be properly satisfied in the body copy, either with your content or your offer.

But great body content with a bad or even marginal headline is doomed to go largely unread.

## How to Write a Great Headline

Last time, we looked at the [different categories of headlines that work](#). This time, we’ll look at analytical techniques for producing great headlines.



The copywriting trainers at [American Writers & Artists](#) teach **The Four U's** approach to writing headlines:

Headlines, subheads and bullets should:

1. Be **USEFUL** to the reader,
2. Provide him with a sense of **URGENCY**,
3. Convey the idea that the main benefit is somehow **UNIQUE**; and
4. Do all of the above in an **ULTRA-SPECIFIC** way.

In a recent issue of the [Early to Rise](#) ezine, superstar copywriter Clayton Makepeace says to ask yourself six questions before you start to write your headline:

- Does your headline offer the reader a reward for reading?
- What specifics could you add to make your headline more intriguing and believable?
- Does your headline trigger a strong, actionable emotion the reader already has about the subject at hand?
- Does your headline present a proposition that will instantly get your prospect nodding his or her head?
- Could your headline benefit from the inclusion of a proposed transaction?
- Could you add an element of intrigue to drive the prospect into your opening copy?

Makepeace's six questions combined with the basic structure of The Four U's provide an excellent framework for writing spectacular headlines. And you'll note that just about any headline that satisfies the framework will fall into one of the eight categories you learned last time.

It takes work and focus, but the effort will make you a more popular blogger and a more profitable businessperson.

## The Structure of Persuasive Copy

We've seen that the purpose of each element of copy is designed to get the first sentence read, and from there keep the reader [engaged step by step to the conclusion](#).





We know to keep things [clear, concise and simple](#) so that our writing communicates with ease.

And we definitely understand the make-or-break importance of an [attention-grabbing headline](#).

So... how do we then structure our content to be persuasive?

Good content structure is never written in stone, but persuasive copy will do certain things and contain certain elements time and time again. Whether you're writing a sales page, long blog post or promotional ebook, the flow will determine effectiveness.

Here are some guidelines:

First of all, focus on the reader – make an important promise early on (with your headline and opening paragraphs) that tells the reader what's in it for her. Never allow readers to question why they are bothering to pay attention.

Each separate part of your narrative should have a main idea (something compelling) and a main purpose (to rile up the reader, to counter an opposing view, etc) that supports your bigger point and promise. Don't digress, and don't ramble. Stay laser focused.

Be ultra-specific in your assertions, and always make sure to give "reasons why." General statements that are unsupported by specific facts cause a reader's BS detector to go on high alert.

Demonstrate large amounts of credibility, using statistics, expert references and testimonials as appropriate. You must be authoritative – if you're not an existing expert on a subject, you had better have done your research.

After building your credibility and authority, make sure you get back to the most important person around – the reader. What's STILL in it for him? Restate the hook and the promise that got readers engaged in the first place.

Make an offer. Whether you're selling a product or selling an idea, you've got to explicitly present it for acceptance by the reader. Be bold and firm when you present your offer, and relieve the reader's risk of acceptance by standing behind what you say.

Sum everything up, returning full circle to your original promise and demonstrate how you've fulfilled it.

These are some of the key elements of persuasive copy. Use them to provide a "roadmap" to your writing, and you'll achieve better results.

## Now Featuring Benefits!

One of the most repeated rules of compelling copy is to stress benefits, not features. In other words, identify the underlying benefit that each feature of a product or service provides to the prospect, because that's what will prompt the purchase.

This is one rule that *always* applies, except when it doesn't. We'll look at the exceptions in a bit.

### Fake Benefits

The idea of highlighting benefits over features seems simple. But it's often tough to do in practice.

Writers often end up with *fake benefits* instead.

Top copywriter Clayton Makepeace asserts that fake benefits will kill sales copy, so you have to be on the lookout for them in your writing. He uses this headline as an example:

*Balance Blood Sugar Levels Naturally!*

That sounds pretty beneficial, doesn't it? In reality, there's not a single *real* benefit in the headline.

### True Benefits

Makepeace advises to apply his patented "forehead slap" test to see if your copy truly contains a benefit to the reader. In other words, have you ever woken up from a deep sleep, slapped yourself in the forehead, and exclaimed "Man... I need to balance my blood sugar levels naturally!"

I think not. So getting someone to pull out their wallet to buy that so-called "benefit" will be difficult at best.

Here's how Makepeace identifies the *real* benefit hidden in that headline:

Nobody really wants to balance their blood sugar levels. But anyone in his or her right mind DOES want to avoid the misery of blindness ... cold, numb, painful limbs ... amputation ... and premature death that go along with diabetes.

A high risk person will want to avoid the terrible effects of diabetes. That is the *true* benefit that the example product offers.



## How to Extract True Benefits

So, how do you successfully extract true benefits from features? Here's a four-step process that works:

First, make a list of every feature of your product or service.

Second, ask yourself why each feature is included in the first place.

Third, take the "why" and ask "how" does this connect with the prospect's desires?

Fourth, get to the absolute root of what's in it for the prospect at an emotional level.

Let's look at a product feature for a fictional RSS Feed Reader:

*Feature:*

"Contains an artificial intelligence algorithm."

*Why it's there:*

"Adds greater utility by adapting and customizing the user's information experience."

*What's in it for them:*

"Keeps the things you read the most at the forefront when you're in a hurry."

*Emotional Root:*

"Stay up to date on the things that add value to your life and career, without getting stressed out from information overload."

Getting to the emotional root is crucial for effective consumer sales. But what about business prospects?

## When Features Work

When selling to business or highly technical people, features alone can sometimes do the trick. Pandering to emotions will only annoy them. Besides, unlike consumers (who mostly "want" things rather than "need" them), business and tech buyers often truly *need* a solution to a problem or a tool to complete a task. When a feature is fairly well known and expected from your audience, you don't need to sell it.

However, with innovative features, you still need to move the prospect down the four-step path. While the phrase "contains an artificial intelligence algorithm" may be enough

to get the [Slashdot](#) reader salivating, he'll still want to know how it works and what it does for him. The *What's in it for me?* aspect remains crucial.

For business buyers, you're stressing "bottom line" benefits from innovative features. If you can demonstrate that the prospect will be a hero because your CRM product will save her company \$120,000 a year compared to the current choice, you've got a good shot.

While that may seem like a no-brainer purchase *to you*, you'll still need to strongly support the promised benefit with a detailed explanation of how the features actually deliver. Remember, change scares the business buyer, because it's their job or small business on the line if the product disappoints.

## Sell With Benefits, Support With Features

We're not as logical as we'd like to think we are. Most of our decisions are based on deep-rooted emotional motivations, which we then justify with logical processes. So, first help the right brain create desire, then satisfy the left brain with features and hard data so that the wallet actually emerges.

## "Kids Eat Free" and Other Irresistible Offers

The sign says it all – "Kids Eat Free Every Monday and Tuesday." It's out in front of a Mexican food restaurant on my way home.

That's called an offer. It's not the restaurant's main offering (which is trading Mexican food for money). As far as that goes, this is probably the third best (out of four) Mexican food joints in my hometown.

But every Monday and Tuesday night, the place is packed. They've made an appealing offer that caused people to take action.

"Offer" is a contractual term. It's an invitation to enter into an economic relationship, or any relationship really. The relationship is based on mutual promises. *I'll do this for you if you give me money or attention or sex or friendship...*

If there's no acceptance of the invitation, there's no contract and no relationship.

Uber-marketer Mark Joyner devotes [an entire book](#) to the subject of offers. He demonstrates that hugely successful businesses are built upon an *Irresistible Offer*.

Joyner's work makes great companion reading to Seth Godin's [All Marketers Are Liars](#), because both books say the same thing in different ways. Formulating an irresistible offer means telling a story that people want to hear, so they naturally respond.

You must then *live the story* and fulfill the offer.

It's helpful to think about offers as coming in two varieties – primary and promotional. I'll highlight a couple of Joyner's favorite irresistible offers to demonstrate one of each type.

## Primary Offers: Federal Express

FedEx is a \$27 billion company so essential that corporate commerce might grind to a halt if they and their progeny ceased business. The company originated with an idea expressed in a Yale undergraduate term paper authored by founder Fred Smith, which according to popular lore received a C from his skeptical professor.

The company filled a huge need at the time, because the monopolistic United States Postal Service provided unacceptable results to really important people, mainly on Wall Street. So Fred took Wall Street's money and became essential by providing an offer that couldn't be refused – guaranteed overnight delivery.

*When it absolutely, positively has to be there overnight.*

About the only thing this offer doesn't communicate is price. If the price wasn't right, FedEx would not have blasted off; but in the early days, price wasn't the first question you asked if it *really, absolutely, positively* had to be there the next morning.

## Promotional Offers: Domino's Pizza

Tom Monaghan entered the world of pizza with a single location he bought in 1960. Pizza is a tough business – it's the only food item that has its own category in the Yellow Pages, and there's always several shops to choose from in any reasonably populated area.

While trying to expand the business, Monaghan faced near bankruptcy and franchise disputes that almost buried Domino's. But one single promotional idea changed everything and put Domino's in an overwhelmingly dominant position in this ultra-competitive field:

*30 minutes or less... or it's free.*

That simple guarantee was explosive. The secret to the offer's success resides in the nature of your average tired, hungry, time-strapped citizen. What seems like the safer bet – the tastiest pizza in town with unpredictable timing, or the pizza that arrives in a half-an-hour or else ends up a free meal?

The irony is, back before Domino's had to discontinue the offer in 1993 due to an auto injury lawsuit, *the pizza sucked*. Some think it still does.

Each day, more than 1 million people in more than 50 countries eat Domino's.

## Make an Offer

It's troubling to see so many companies and solos trying to gain business online, yet without ever making a compelling offer. There's no apparent reason why someone should select you from the overcrowded field, because often you've made no express offer *at all*.

So many websites assume that a visitor will *get* the obvious value that the owner knows he provides. Value is communicated through offers, however, and those offers must be communicated quickly and explicitly. Consider your own surfing habits for a second, and ask yourself – why would my target audience be any different?

In the lingo of direct-response copywriting, an offer is a *call to action*. For bloggers, desired actions include having a reader subscribe, bookmark you, make comments, respond to surveys, and utilize your information resources that double as sales tools.

Start making offers if you want some action.

## This Article Rocks... I Guarantee It!

There you have it. You just can't go wrong reading this article.

I've guaranteed your satisfaction. Those are powerful words, right?

But what does my guarantee really mean? What if you think this article is actually marginal at best? There's no money to return. And I can't give you back your valuable time if you feel it was wasted.

Boy... I'd better make this good.

## No Power Without Proof

Advertisements that proclaim "satisfaction guaranteed" are fairly common – and that's the problem. The statement can come across as just another hollow promise, because it often is.

Every promise you make to a prospect should be both fulfilled and guaranteed. When you sell something in exchange for someone's hard-earned money, the *promise* is that the product or service will meet, or exceed, expectations. The *guarantee* means you will give the money back if the buyer feels that's not actually the case.

The word *guarantee* is extremely powerful, but only coupled with evidence of substance. The *proof* behind the guarantee accomplishes two things – it demonstrates confidence in your offering, and relieves the risk to the buyer.

## Confidence and Risk

Every contemplated purchase carries risk to the buyer. Before consumer protection laws, the rule was *caveat emptor* (let the buyer beware), and these days buyers are still cautious, even leery – especially of unknown vendors. Even when already emotionally and logically committed to what you have to offer, buyers don't want to make a mistake. It's up to you to help them get over the hump.

The way to get past the buyer's uncertainty is to first demonstrate confidence in your offering. Not through boasts or sales prattle, but with a good-old-fashioned, no-questions-asked, "money-where-my-mouth-is" cash-back guarantee.

Return periods of 30, 60 or 90 days work great. Some direct marketers go as far as 6 months, a year, or even a lifetime money back guarantee. The longer the better.

Other techniques involve a "return premium." The seller allows you to keep all or part of the materials delivered even after the refund, or promises to pay you double your money back (or some other multiple).

Now *that's* confidence. And it speaks directly to the buyer's lingering reservations.

You've now created a risk-free buying environment. Your conversion of prospects to customers / clients will skyrocket compared to the same offer sans guarantee.

## Guaranteed Higher Profits

"Whoa there, Brian," many of you are saying. "I can't do that kind of thing. It's way too risky **for me.**"

My first response might be to ask you how much faith you have in your offering. If your faith is lacking, improve your product or service. As we've seen with [Domino's Pizza](#) and [Federal Express](#), the guarantee was the key that made the offers irresistible.

But you've spotted the essence of the technique – you're taking the buyer's risk and shifting it over to yourself. Assuming the faith in your offering is there, here's why you shouldn't be concerned:

First of all, you *will* get some returns, no matter how much value you deliver. The reason is that your guarantee will generate a much higher number of sales. By taking the risk away from the buyer, invariably you'll sell to someone who the product wasn't suited for. That's OK; the numbers are working for you.

Your returns will be lower than you think, even among those that experience buyer's remorse. We like to remain *consistent* on a psychological basis, and our brains work hard to validate our earlier decisions. Couple that with the *ambivalence* people experience when faced with initiating the return process (especially for physical products), and the sale remains in place.

When it comes to information products, some people **will** rip you off. They'll happily consume the knowledge you offer, and still demand a refund. If your product is digital, some will share your hard work with other people, and you won't make a dime. *Don't worry about it.* Believe it or not, most people are honest. Don't lose sleep over those that are not. Your sales (and profits) are up, perhaps dramatically, because of your guarantee. That was the goal, right?

We'll explore other methods to keep customers happy and minimize returns in future Copyblogger articles ([subscribe here for updates](#)). But the general rule is to always make a strong, substantive guarantee that actually transfers the reader's risk back over to you.

My headline above violates this rule. Hopefully, you don't feel like I've wasted your time.

## The Long and Short of Copywriting

They're some of the most often-asked questions about copywriting.

Long or short copy, which works best? What about headlines?

The correct answer usually drives people crazy, which is...

Whatever *works*.

Before you start throwing things at me, I'll elaborate.

### Headlines: 8 Words or Less, Except ...

The traditional wisdom about headlines is that they should be short. There are plenty of exceptions to this rule (including a big one we'll discuss below). However, reviewing [The 100 Greatest Advertisements](#) by Julian Lewis Watkins shows that 95% of the most effective headlines from the early years of magazine copywriting were less than eight words.

But magazine copywriters had to worry about brevity due to space concerns. Studies done from the direct mail industry show that about 50% to 60% of the most effective headlines are eight words or less, leaving ample indication that longer headlines work, too.



Now, here's an exception that applies online. Perhaps you've seen web sales letters or landing pages that have a headline that looks like a short paragraph. These long headlines can't possibly be working, right?

Well, according to the [eye-tracking study](#) released by user-interface expert [Jakob Nielsen](#), webpage visitors read in a "F" pattern, scrolling intently across the top of the page where the headline should be, then making their way back again across the first subhead, then down the left hand side of the page to see if anything else is of interest.

This study verifies the [80/20 rules of headlines](#). But it also demonstrates that you might want to include more information in your headline than 8 words can usually get across, in an effort to get the rest of the page read.

All in all though, short headlines are easier to scan, and cannot be missed. My general rule of thumb is to write the shortest headline possible that also convincingly conveys a unique benefit to the reader so they'll read the body.

It's not always easy, but it's extremely important.

## Long Copy vs. Short Copy

Does anyone read those long sales letters that go on and on?

Yes they do, and for many products, long copy outsells short copy by a large margin. The basic rule of copy length is the same as headlines – as long as necessary, but no longer.

The key is writing copy that is interesting and informative to someone who actually cares. But beyond that, there are some guidelines that can help, so let's see what the experts say.

[Bob Bly](#) says that the length of your copy will depend on three things:

**The Product:** the more features and benefits a product has, the longer the copy.

**The Audience:** Certain people want as much information as they can get before making a purchase. This is especially true of people on the Internet, and especially true with information products.

**The Purpose:** What's the goal? Generating a lead for a service business requires less detail, but an ad that aims to make a sale must overcome every objection the potential buyer may have.

[Joe Sugarman](#) says two factors increase the need for more copy:



**Price point:** The higher the price, the more copy required to justify or create the need.

**Unusual Item:** The more unusual the product, the more you need to relate that product to the user by clearly demonstrating the benefits.

[Michael Fortin](#) sets forth four categories of products, with each successive category requiring longer copy:

**Convenience products:** Fills an immediate need, low price, low thought, short copy.

**Shopping products:** A little higher priced, more thought and opportunity to “shop around,” a little longer copy.

**Specialty products:** With exotic goods, luxury cars, expensive jewelry, art, etcetera, longer copy is definitely needed.

**Unsought products:** When people have never realized that their lives were incomplete without your product, get ready to write some lengthy copy.

Read Michael’s [blog post here](#) for an elaboration of his ideas about the long copy vs. short copy debate. Great stuff.

## Whatever Works

So, we come full circle. The guidelines set forth by these copywriting pros can help, but the answer remains the same:

The length of your headline and your copy will depend on *whatever works* for whatever you are selling.

And the only way to know what works is to test different approaches. Test various headlines to see which works best at capturing attention and communicating a benefit. Test the amount of information you provide. Does more or less work better at producing the desired action?

Ultimately, that’s the only answer that will ever matter to you.

## The #1 Secret to Writing Great Copy Is...

*Using words that have been proven to work.*



Don't reinvent the wheel. Study and draw inspiration from great copy *that works*.

I'm not talking about copy that *you personally* think is great. It's a mistake to judge advertising like regular people do – as entertainment. Madison Avenue has a great gig producing short entertainment pieces called commercials that often don't sell much of anything.

I'm talking about drawing inspiration from advertising copy that has demonstrated its effectiveness by actually *working* as intended. Like a direct mail piece that has raked in millions and millions of dollars in sales.

## Why Professional Copywriters Use Swipe Files

A copywriting "swipe file" is a collection of winning ads. Sales letters, space ads, headline collections, plus bits and pieces of copy that have been marketplace proven to make big money. A carefully collected swipe file is the essential starting point for most new copywriting campaigns.

It's a bit like why lawyers begin with a basic form when drafting a new legal document, or why web designers start with a basic code structure. Start with something that has proven efficacy, and customize from there.

The problem with the swipe file approach is context. Many new and inexperienced writers (and often many pros) will miss the mark when trying to adapt past copy to a new situation.

Yep... the winning formula becomes a bust when inappropriately applied. What's needed is a smarter approach that evaluates winning words within the *exact* context of your particular offer or content.

## Can Copywriting Software Help?

[Glyphius](#) is a simple-to-use piece of Windows software that allows you to statistically calibrate your writing against a huge database of successful ad copy. In other words, the software is like a *massive automated swipe file* that lets you see the effect (good or bad) of using certain words in the specific context you are writing about.

There are plenty of other software packages out there for copywriting, but they are mostly scams. In fact, I was extremely leery of Glyphius when I first came across it.

Why the strong reservations? Well, mostly because copywriting software typically promises to "instantly generate" a killer sales letter for you. That's just not true; no software can do that.



When I looked a bit closer though, Glyphius wasn't making those types of bogus claims. The software is promoted as exactly what it is—a tool for optimizing copy. Your own brain is still a crucial element of the equation.

I really started to get interested after reading [results published \(PDF\)](#) by ace copywriter Brian Keith Voiles. He wrote three headlines, scored them all with Glyphius, and then split-tested them to see if the software predicted correctly.

Glyphius nailed it, and other copywriting professionals have reported similar results. The software has since been endorsed by copywriters Michel Fortin, Roberta Rosenberg, Michael Humphreys, and scores of others.

I love what Brian Keith Voiles says about optimizing your headlines and copy with Glyphius being a bit like “playing a video game.” It's addictive to keep trying to beat your last score by better optimizing your copy, and rewarding to know that this type of “game” will make you more money.

Based on my own use of the software, I'm joining in on the chorus of praise. And that's why I've made Glyphius available for sale through this site.

If you're writing sales letters, landing pages, or doing any other type of copywriting that is designed to sell or prompt action, [buying Glyphius](#) is a no brainer. And of course your satisfaction is fully guaranteed for 60 days or your money back, so [pick up your copy here](#).

## How to Write Magnetic Headlines



Your headline is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective reader. Without a headline or post title that turns a browser into a reader, the rest of your words may as well not even exist.

Here are some interesting statistics.

On average, 8 out of 10 people will read headline copy, but only 2 out of 10 will read the rest. This is the secret to the power of the headline, and why it so highly determines the effectiveness of the entire piece.

The better the headline, the better your odds of beating the averages and getting what you've written read by a larger percentage of people. The Magnetic Headlines series will provide you with concrete guidance that will have you writing better headlines in no time.

## Why You Should Always Write Your Headline First

Want to write great headlines and even better content?

Start with the headline first.

You'll of course have a basic idea for the subject matter of your blog post, article, free report or sales letter. Then, simply take that basic idea and craft a killer headline before you write one single word of the body content.

Why?

Your headline is a promise to prospective readers. Its job is to clearly communicate the benefit that you will deliver to the reader in exchange for their valuable time.

The thing about promises is, they tend to be *made* before being *fulfilled*. Writing your content first puts you in the position of having to reverse-engineer your promise. Turn it around the other way and you have the benefit of expressly fulfilling the compelling promise you made with the headline, which ultimately helps to keep your content crisp and well-structured.

Trying to fulfill a promise that you haven't made yet made is tough, and often leads to a marginal headline. And a poorly-crafted headline allows good deeds to go unnoticed.

You know, like your content.

“But that still doesn’t tell me how to write a great headline,” you may be saying.

Stay tuned. That’s what the rest of this series is all about.

Make sure to [subscribe](#) if you’re not already on board.

P.S. As I was writing this post, I took a second to check out an incoming link to Copyblogger (I find a lot of great new blogs that way). It was from a post by Peter Cooper called [“Title First Writing” Gets You All the Chicks](#), and it’s about how he writes his blog post titles first, and credits his inspiration to a [previous post I wrote](#) in which advice to write the headline first was only implied. Gotta love serendipity. :)

## **The Cheater’s Guide to Writing Great Headlines**

Imagine the life of the copywriter . . . a solitary figure staring intently at a computer screen (or out the window), flexing those mental muscles to create a killer headline out of thin air that will result in millions of dollars in sales.

Well, maybe not.

A more likely scenario has the copywriter looking for inspiration in her collection of winning space ads, sales letters and even the latest issue of Cosmo. She’ll also consult books that consist of nothing more than collections of headlines proven to work.

These compilations are called swipe files, and they’re worth their weight in gold when it comes to crafting great headlines.

Why? Because great headlines are constructed in certain time and money-tested ways that can be adapted into different contexts and re-used over and over. Anytime a promotion rakes in big bucks, you can bet copywriters and direct marketers will be studying, and saving, that headline for future reference.

In fact, swipe files can’t even really be considered cheating. It’s just the way it’s done if you want to write effective copy, especially when starting out. Only once a copywriter has a true understanding of what works can they take a completely original approach, and even then it’s pretty rare to come up with a gangbuster headline that is 100% unique.

Thanks to the “do it yourself” nature of Internet marketing, you’ll find people selling headline swipe files and even software programs that promise a “fill-in-the-blank” solution based on the “greatest headlines” ever written. Don’t get suckered by this.

The problem with that approach should be obvious. If you don’t understand why a particular headline works, you’ll never be any good at writing them. Plus, without real



understanding, you'll likely choose the wrong "formula" for any given situation, which can cause even a well-written headline to fail.

Starting with these tested templates can improve your blog post titles immediately, which in turn should translate into more readership and traffic. I'll demonstrate several of these winning headline formulas that are well-suited for blogging, and explain why they work.

But first, the next post in this series will examine key words and why they are important in a headline. The answer may not be what you think.

## Do Keywords in Post Titles Really Matter?

It's an epic battle of biblical proportions in the blogosphere.

The search engine optimization camp says keywords are the most important aspect of a blog post title.

How else will you rank high in the results and get clicks by searchers, they say, if the right keywords are missing from the title? And right or wrong, don't even try to get an article republished out of an [article marketing](#) directory without some sweet keywords in your headline.

On the other hand, you've got the purist "write for humans" camp, who collectively scoff at the notion of keyword research for headline writing.

What's the point of search optimized post titles if no one reads (and links) in the first place? And search engine traffic isn't really all that important to most bloggers anyway, they vehemently maintain, especially compared to high-quality referral traffic from [links](#).

Well, here's the verdict.

Keywords matter. But not necessarily for the reasons the SEO folks think.

Doing keyword research is a magical thing. It's a free or low-cost window into the mind of your target audience.

Before search engines, there was no way to know the exact words that a large group of people would use when *thinking* about a certain topic. Oh sure, you could ask a *small* group of people, but anyone who has ever done focus groups will tell you that what people say in front of others is not the same as what they will *really* do.

So if you're writing any type of headline, online or off, you should be doing search engine keyword research. Because any great headline should speak in the language of the



audience, while wrapped up in a [time-tested structure](#) that catches attention and offers value.

But it gets better.

Any SEO pro worth listening to will tell you that you don't go after the most popular keywords. You target the niche phrases. They may result in less traffic individually, but there's a lot more of them, and less competition.

This is perfect for writing headlines for humans. The niche phrases are much more specific, and [specificity makes for a much better headline](#). Further, better headlines lead to better content when you [write the headline first](#).

Google and the other search engines *really do* want to reflect what's important to people. That's why they use links and anchor text as one of the primary determinations of relevancy.

Keywords matter, because when you speak the language of the audience, you attract more readers, more links, more Diggs, more social bookmarks, and yes... more relevant search traffic. Both camps are right, for different reasons.

So... let there be momentary peace in the blogosphere.

## **How to Write a Killer “How To” Article That Gets Attention**

Picture your blog post sitting on the del.icio.us popular page, or the front page of Digg, for a day or so. By the time you finish reading this article, you'll be in a better position to make that scenario a reality.

It's no secret that “how to” articles and blog posts are some of the most sought after, linked to, and bookmarked content online. People want useful information, and they'll reward you by promoting it to others when you provide it.

The biggest battle is getting enough people to read in the first place. And that battle is won or lost at the headline. What's more, writing a killer “how to” headline will help you write even better “how to” content when you fulfill the [headline promise](#) you made to get people to read in the first place.

### **It's All About Benefits**

The crazy thing about the popularity of “how to” content is the fact that people don't really want to learn how to do anything else.



They've got plenty to do already, thank you.

But it's exactly due to the crazy busy lives we lead that prompts us to seek out tips, tricks, and methods to make things better, easier, and ultimately happier for ourselves. Focusing on the "better, easier, and happier" is the key to great "how to" headlines and content.

It's not that people aren't smart enough to understand the implied benefits of learning how to do something. It's quite the opposite, actually. It's just that implied benefits don't prompt action like [express benefits](#) do.

People smartly employ aggressive attention filters when scanning headlines, and you'll get through the filters of a lot more people if you spell out the benefits rather than relying on implication. Plus, body content that focuses on benefits as well as procedures is more emotionally engaging, which leaves the reader feeling better satisfied at the conclusion of the piece.

It's been said that it's almost impossible to write a bad "how to" headline. That may be true, but what comes after those two magical words can make all the difference in the amount of attention and readership your writing gets.

Let's take a look at the structure of a few famous "how to" headlines, and see if we can't figure out why they work and adapt them to new situations and content.

## Double the Benefits, Double the Power

This may be the most famous "how to" headline ever:

*How to Win Friends and Influence People*

Before Dale Carnegie's classic book "How to Win Friends and Influence People" was conventionally published, he sold it by mail order with that same title as the headline of the sales letter. Certainly Carnegie's content was compelling, but that headline is brilliant all by itself.

The headline structure is powerful. You've got benefit number one right after "How to," with another benefit following the word "and." Simple, right?

Deceptively so, as copywriter David Garfinkel pointed out in his book *Advertising Headlines That Make You Rich* (Amazon link below). There is a subtle relationship between the first benefit and the second that suggests if you can achieve the first, you can automatically achieve the second.

In this case, that implication doesn't make sense — lots of people have friends and yet are completely lacking in influence. But that cause-and-effect relationship still likely

helped Carnegie achieve greatness with his home-study course, and later with the ubiquitous book.

It's much smarter from a credibility standpoint to use this structure when benefit one and benefit two are actually related. Here's a few examples that Garfinkel gives in his book:

How to Save Time and Get Things Done (*Time Management Coach*)

How to Get a Better Job and Make More Money (*Recruiter*)

How to Save Money and Retire Rich (*Financial Planner*)

The dual benefit "how to" structure will always work if you logically link the two together and deliver relevant and substantive tips with your content. Give it a try.

## How to [*Mundane Task*] That [*Rewarding Benefit*]

It's often harder than you might think to extract the true benefits of learning how to do something. Often, you can simply take a normal "how to" title and make it better simply by using the transition word "that" immediately following the subject matter of the tutorial.

Once you add "that," just ask yourself what the top benefit of your tutorial is. Then figure out the best way to say it (which usually means being as specific as possible).

- How to Get a Mortgage That Saves You Money
- How to Get a Mortgage That Cuts your Monthly Payment in Half
- How to Get a Mortgage That Gets You in Your Dream Home While Saving You \$937 a Month

## Leaving Out the "To" Works, Too

Want to increase the curiosity factor of your headline, while just about guaranteeing that you'll nail the primary benefit of your tutorial? Start with "How" but leave out the "to." You'll still be making a beneficial promise to your reader that will be fulfilled in the content, but the intrigue factor will be higher and your results perhaps even better.

Let's look at these famous headlines:

- *How I Improved My Memory in One Evening*
- *How I Made a Fortune With a "Fool Idea"*
- *How a New Kind of Clay Improved My Complexion in 30 Minutes*

Those are pretty intriguing headlines, right? Likewise, let's say you're a brilliant techie who has just solved a problem that affects millions of computer users, and you're aiming to live on the Digg front page for a week.

How about this?

- How One Easy Tweak Makes Windows XP Crash Proof

Then again, that article faces the rather steep challenge of being impossible to write.

## In Summary

The more you focus on the benefits to the reader in your headline, the more readers you'll have. And by touching on the beneficial aspects while laying out the procedural content, you'll have more happy readers at the conclusion of the piece.

And then they just might bookmark that post on del.icio.us. :)

## 7 Reasons Why List Posts Will Always Work

It's a blogosphere favorite for good reason — "list" content works, in large part due to the attention-grabbing power of the headline.

What may be news to some bloggers is that the effectiveness of this type of headline and content is as old as the advertising hills. So you shouldn't worry about it dying out anytime soon.

Any headline that lists a number of reasons, secrets, types, or ways will work because, once again, it makes a very [specific promise](#) of what's in store for the reader. A nice quantifiable return on attention invested goes a long way toward prompting action, and as long as you deliver with quality content, you'll have a satisfied reader.

Plus, these type of posts and articles are perfect for building your authority and demonstrating a mastery of your area of expertise. If you're business blogging, that's key.

With that in mind, let's take a quick look at 7 classic "list" headlines that you can remix on your blog when you're looking to boost readership (and maybe even get a little link love).

### **1. Do You Recognize the 7 Early Warning Signs of High Blood Pressure?**

Use this type of headline to demonstrate the expertise that only comes from really knowing your business or niche. People love to get a "heads up" on potential problems.

### **2. 10 Ways to Beat the High Cost of Living**

A classic that can only flop if you fail to deliver. Concentrate on writing content that sparkles, and people will acknowledge that you not only know what you're talking about, but you also communicate it well.

### **3. Five Familiar Skin Troubles**

Commiserate with your readers by setting forth problems you know they are having, and they just might determine that you are the right solution.

### **4. Six Types of Investor — Which Group Are You In?**

Let the readers self-identify themselves by providing categories into which they will likely fall into. You know about the power of using the word “you” when addressing readers, but people love it even more when they can focus on themselves.

### **5. How to Give Your Children Extra Iron — These 3 Delicious Ways**

A [“how to” headline](#) mixed in with a list — it's almost not fair. Note that the word “these” plus the number of items, followed by “(adjective) ways,” is an extremely specific and powerful use of 4 simple words.

### **6. Free Book Tells You 12 Secrets of Better Lawn Care**

Use this style of headline and content structure with a free report or tutorial that you are promoting, and you should get wider circulation.

### **7. 76 Reasons Why It Would Have Paid You to Answer Our Ad a Few Months Ago**

An especially bold headline that worked wonders for a popular news magazine. The number of reasons given is so large it's almost absurd, and that's good from a value standpoint with free content. Plus, by referring back to previous ads, the piece points out the peril of not paying attention earlier.

Gutsy, but effective.

## **Why Some People Almost Always Write Great Post Titles**

What are some of the characteristics of people who crank out blog titles that work really well most of the time? Is it something anyone can learn?

Yes, and except in very rare cases, writing great post titles and other headlines can likely *only* be learned. Rather than relying on natural talent, people who consistently produce winning headlines have learned to do three basic things:

1. They understand that all compelling headlines make an [intriguing promise](#) that makes it almost irresistible to its target audience. Understanding the intended audience is key — a really great headline generally won't appeal to everyone, and watering it down for mass appeal will only hurt you.

2. They study [headlines that have been proven to work](#), and that usually means direct response advertising headlines. In that context, “proven to work” means people responded to that particular headline by pulling out their wallets and making a purchase. You can also learn by studying some of the top magazine headline writers, who work for *Cosmopolitan* and similar glossies, and even the tabloids you see at the supermarket checkout lane.

3. Most importantly, rather than simply mimicking great headlines, they understand *why* the headline works, and therefore can make an educated decision as to which type of headline structure is most appropriate, and how to tweak it within a certain context.

So what about the title of the blog post you're reading right now?

1. Starting off your post title with “why” at the beginning of a declarative statement (instead of a question) is one easy way to focus in on the benefit of reading your article. That's one of the reasons why the title of this post works, but the words that follow the “why” are what's most important.

You can do the same by starting with “here's why,” “what,” “when,” or “how,” or you can simply make a strong statement that clearly demonstrates that the elaborated answer will be provided in the body content. And of course a carefully worded question can magnetically draw in your intended readers as well.

2. The title is modeled after this famous advertising headline:

*Why Some People Almost Always Make Money in the Stock Market*

Within the context of what I wanted to convey with this post, the basic structure of this classic headline works perfectly.

Why?

3. Credibility. The use of the word “some,” and having “almost” modify “always,” make the headline much more plausible. Not even the highest paid copywriters in the world *always* nail a headline that works, and some people *never* write great post titles, because they don't take the time to learn how.

Many people feel that a great headline is bombastic and full of hyperbole, but that's usually not the case. If people don't believe you can deliver on your promise, they won't bother reading further, and your over-the-top headline fails.

As the people aiming to land on the front pages of Digg, Delicious, and other social bookmarking sites up the ante with headlines that strain credibility, their results will diminish, while you will gain an advantage by becoming a true student of great headline writing. Understanding what type of headline is appropriate to a specific context is the real key to writing magnetic post titles that will get your writing read.

## 10 Sure-Fire Headline Formulas That Work

So, you're seeing too many of those "[how to](#)" and [list headlines](#), and want to try a few different angles?

Let's move beyond those common headline formulas you see over and over, and add some new blood to your attention-grabbing arsenal.

### 1. *Who Else Wants [blank]?*

Starting a headline with "Who Else Wants..." is a classic [social proof](#) strategy that implies an already existing consensus desire. While overused in the Internet marketing arena, it still works like gangbusters for other subject matter.

- Who Else Wants a Great Blog Template Design?
- Who Else Wants a Higher Paying Job?
- Who Else Wants More Fun and Less Stress When on Vacation?

### 2. *The Secret of [blank]*

This one is used quite a bit, but that's because it works. Share insider knowledge and translate it into a benefit for the reader.

- The Secret of Successful Podcasting
- The Secret of Protecting Your Assets in Litigation
- The Secret of Getting Your Home Loan Approved

### 3. *Here is a Method That is Helping [blank] to [blank]*

Simply identify your target audience and the benefit you can provide them, and fill in the blanks.

- Here is a Method That is Helping Homeowners Save Hundreds on Insurance
- Here is a Method That is Helping Children Learn to Read Sooner
- Here is a Method That is Helping Bloggers Write Better Post Titles

#### 4. *Little Known Ways to [blank]*

A more intriguing (and less common) way of accomplishing the same thing as “The Secret of...” headline.

- Little Known Ways to Save on Your Heating Bill
- Little Known Ways to Hack Google's Gmail
- Little Known Ways to Lose Weight Quickly and Safely

#### 5. *Get Rid of [problem] Once and For All*

A classic formula that identifies either a painful problem or an unfulfilled desire that the reader wants to remedy.

- Get Rid of Your Unproductive Work Habits Once and For All
- Get Rid of That Carpet Stain Once and For All
- Get Rid of That Lame Mullet Hairdo Once and For All

#### 6. *Here's a Quick Way to [solve a problem]*

People love quick and easy when it comes to solving a nagging problem.

- Here's a Quick Way to Get Over a Cold
- Here's a Quick Way to Potty Train Junior
- Here's a Quick Way to Backup Your Hard Drive

#### 7. *Now You Can Have [something desirable] [great circumstance]*

The is the classic “have your cake and eat it too” headline — and who doesn't like that?

- Now You Can Quit Your Job and Make Even More Money
- Now You Can Meet Sexy Singles Online Without Spending a Dime
- Now You Can Own a Cool Mac and Still Run Windows

#### 8. *[Do something] like [world-class example]*

Gatorade milked this one fully with the “Be Like Mike” campaign featuring Michael Jordan in the early 1990s.

- Speak Spanish Like a Diplomat
- Party Like Paris Hilton
- Blog Like an A-Lister

#### 9. *Have a [or] Build a [blank] You Can Be Proud Of*



Appeal to vanity, dissatisfaction, or shame. Enough said.

- Build a Body You Can Be Proud Of
- Have a Smile You Can Be Proud Of
- Build a Blog Network You Can Be Proud Of

#### 10. *What Everybody Ought to Know About [blank]*

Big curiosity draw with this type of headline, and it acts almost as a challenge to the reader to go ahead and see if they are missing something.

- What Everybody Ought to Know About ASP
- What Everybody Ought to Know About Adjustable Rate Mortgages
- What Everybody Ought to Know About Writing Great Headlines

Find these headline templates useful? [Bookmark this page at del.icio.us](http://del.icio.us) for future reference.

## 7 More Sure-Fire Headline Templates That Work

Since people truly seemed to find my [10 Sure-Fire Headline Templates That Work](#) useful for coming up with headlines and post titles that don't follow the typical "[how to](#)" and "[list](#)" conventions, I thought I'd share a few more.

So here are 7 *more* sure-fire headline templates that will work when you're aiming to score more readers:

#### 1. *Give Me [short time period] and I'll Give You [blank].*

This headline promises a strong benefit to the reader, like all good headlines do. But this one is especially effective because it promises to deliver in a very short time period.

- Give Me Five Days – And I'll Give You the Secret of Learning any Subject!
- Give Me Three Minutes a Day – and I'll Give You a Better Complexion.
- [Give Me 3 Minutes and I'll Make You a Better Blogger.](#)

#### 2. *If You Don't [blank] Now, You'll Hate Yourself Later.*

We love to belong, but feeling excluded is a real bummer. Whether it be a financial opportunity or the social event of the year, we simply hate it when we get left out.

- If You're Out of the Market Now, You'll Hate Yourself Later.
- If You're Not at SXSW 2007, You'll Hate Yourself Later.



- If You Don't Edit Your .htaccess Now, Google Will Hate You Later.

### *3. The Lazy [blank's] Way to [blank].*

This headline has always worked well with time-pressured people, and that's certainly true for most people today. No one likes to think of themselves as lazy, but everyone likes to save time and effort.

- The Lazy Man's Way to Riches.
- The Lazy Dad's Way to Quickly Getting Dinner on the Table.
- The Lazy Blogger's Way to Write Great Post Titles.

### *4. Do You Recognize the [number] Early Warning Signs of [blank]?*

OK, technically this is still a list, but it's wrapped up in a much more compelling structure than your typical "Top 10" article. People want to avoid problems, and this headline promises the critical tips before it's too late.

- Do You Recognize the 7 Early Warning Signs of High Blood Pressure?
- Do You Recognize the 7 Early Warning Signs of an Employee Meltdown?
- Do You Recognize the 7 Early Warning Signs of Digg Addiction?

### *5. See How Easily You Can [desirable result].*

We love quick and easy when it comes to learning something new or gaining some advantage.

- See How Easily You Can Learn to Dance This New Way.
- See How Easily You Can Own a Lamborghini Miura.
- See How Easily You Can Increase Traffic With Social Media.

### *6. You Don't Have to Be [something challenging] to be [desired result].*

People almost always have preconceived notions about things, and this can be a barrier to taking action. Remove the barrier that stands between them and the desired result with your headline, and people will flock to read what you have to say.

- You Don't Have to Be Rich to Retire on a Guaranteed Income for Life.
- You Don't Have to Be a Geek to Make Money Online.
- You Don't Have to Be an A-Lister to Be a Kick-Ass Blogger.

### *7. Do You Make These Mistakes?*



This is always a powerful attention grabber, since no one likes to make mistakes. If you've targeted your content well for your intended audience, helping people avoid common mistakes is a sure-fire winner with this type of headline.

- Do You Make These Mistakes in English?
- Do You Make These Ajax Coding Mistakes?
- [Do You Make These Mistakes With Your Blog?](#)

## SEO Copywriting 2.0



SEO ( search engine optimization ) copywriting has traditionally referred to writing web page copy that includes targeted keyword phrases in certain frequencies and densities. While keywords are still important, search engine algorithms have evolved to treat *what others think* about the content, and the *words they use* to describe it in **links**, as more of an indication of quality and relevance.

Thanks to blogging and Web 2.0 social media tools, more people than ever are able to cast their vote on what's relevant by linking to it, bookmarking it and Digging it. SEO copywriting today is all about crafting content *so compelling* that other people want to make note of it by linking back to you.

The *SEO Copywriting 2.0* tutorial is designed to provide you with a step-by-step strategy for creating content that scores links and ranks well in search engines in five easy lessons.

## How to Create Content That Ranks Well in Search Engines

Once upon a time, there was something called SEO copywriting.

These SEO copywriters seemed to have magical word skills that allowed them to place just the right keywords in just the right places and amounts, and even in the *densities* that were *just right* for miraculous top rankings. And that's all you needed... or at least that's what was (and still is) advertised.

There's no doubt that keywords still matter, especially [in titles](#). Search engines generally prefer to key in on the words people are looking for. But as SEO pro Rand Fishkin [will tell you](#), "measurements like keyword density are useless, although general frequency can help rankings."

Here's the deal... most of what determines the ranking position of any particular page is due to what happens *off the page*, in the form of links from other sites. Getting those links naturally has become the hardest part of SEO, which is why 2006 saw the strong emergence of [social media marketing](#) as a way to attract links with compelling content.

That's why any true SEO copywriter is simply a writer who has a knack for tuning in to the needs and desires of the target audience. And due to the pursuit of links, those needs and desires have to be nailed well before you'll ever show up in the search engines.

As I've [written](#), the same emotional forces that prompt us to *buy* can also cause us to link, bookmark, and Digg. The context is different, as are the nuances, but it's still a matter of providing compelling benefits in the form of content.

“Ask yourself what creates value for your users,” [sayeth Google](#). As those brainy engineers continue to diligently create better algorithms, combined with people-powered social media tagging and blog-driven links, copywriters with a flair for prompting link response *and* conversions will become vital members of any search engine marketing effort.

To me, optimization (at least of the [white hat](#) variety) is the page tweaking that can be done after you've managed to attract a healthy amount of quality links that demonstrate the value of the content. Little things can make a big difference when you're trying to move from the third page of the Google results to the first, or from position 7 to 3, 2 or 1.

Of course the [critical components of a search-friendly site](#) should be in place. But beyond that, tweaking a page for higher rankings before you've established that the content is compelling to people is a little like putting on your prom dress to stay home alone and watch *Desperate Housewives*.

This post is the first of a five-part series that sets forth a step-by-step strategy that I've had success with when trying to rank well for desired primary search terms. And since every step in the process is justified from a user-value standpoint, it should bring in traffic and enhance your site even if search engines were to disappear tomorrow.

## **The 5 Essential Elements of Search Engine Keyword Research**

Keyword research is cool.

It allows you to gaze directly into people's minds.

Being able to take a look at the words and phrases people use when looking for things online is invaluable. Rather than listening to people say what they think they *might* do, you get to observe what they *actually did*. And when aggregated, you get a nice view of the words people most often use when thinking about and searching for a certain topic.

Once armed with keyword intelligence that's relevant to your niche, you have the unique ability to create highly-relevant content that aids your site visitors and enhances your credibility. You're speaking the language of the audience after all, and satisfying their needs.

And if you get it right, you'll likely rank well in the search engines too, after promoting the content in a strategic way. It may seem strange to view search traffic as a secondary



benefit in a Google-driven world, but that's exactly how you should view it. Google won't treat you as relevant until someone else does first.

The counterintuitive rule of search engine keyword research is to try to forget that search engines can send you traffic. View the data as free or low-cost *market research* and you'll have the proper mindset to formulate a content strategy that has a shot at ranking well. People need to like your content before Google will.

Here are the five essential things to cover when it comes to keyword research:

## 1. Research Tools

Some will tell you that [Google's Keyword Tool](#) is all you need for research. Another free option is Aaron Wall's [SEO Book Keyword Suggestion Tool](#), which incorporates Yahoo! Search data and other useful metrics. Paid tools may be superior choices to those provided by search engines since the proprietors are not motivated to sell you search advertising, and include [Wordtracker](#) and [Keyword Discovery](#).

## 2. Get Specific

"Keyword" is the term that gets tossed around, but what you're really after in most cases are keyword *phrases*. For example, a real estate attorney in Austin, Texas would gain very little actual benefit from ranking highly for the single word "attorney" (and good luck anyway), but specific keyword phrases based on geography and specialty would yield highly targeted traffic ("Austin real estate lawyer"). And don't forget synonyms.

## 3. Strength in Numbers

Don't take as gospel truth the reported number of monthly searches provided by any particular tool. But do pay attention to relative popularity among search terms. You want to make sure enough people use that phrase when thinking of your niche to make it worth your while, especially if this is one of the primary search terms you want to target for your site overall. At the same time, be realistic. If you are trying to rank in a very competitive sector, aim for something attainable first, or make sure that a certain keyword combination can rank for an easier phrase if the more competitive term ends up out of reach.

## 4. Highly Relevant

Make sure that the search terms you are considering are highly relevant to your ultimate goal. If you are a service provider or selling specific products, keyword relevancy may be easier to determine—you ultimately want someone to purchase the product or service. Other goals may require more careful consideration, such as subscriptions to content publications and contributions to charities, for example.

## 5. Develop a Resource

Here's the key element. Can a particular keyword phrase support the development of content that is a valuable resource to readers? Something that:

- Satisfies the preliminary needs of the site visitor
- Acts as the first step in your sales or action cycle
- Is worth linking to

Steps 1-4 are basic operating procedure, at least in webmaster circles.

### How to Create Cornerstone Content That Google Loves

Imagine with me for a second... someone has just arrived at your website, and this person has *no idea* what you're talking about. And this is an *important* visitor.

Pretend further that this single visitor could make the difference between success and failure for your business. She has no time to waste poking around your site trying to figure out what you're all about, so she immediately picks up the phone and calls you, demanding an explanation.

What do you tell her?

You'd likely explain by giving her the essential information about how you can help, and why you perfectly meet her needs, right? And I'm betting you'd want to explain it in the most compelling fashion you could, given what's riding on the deal.

In a nutshell, that's what Google wants you to do with the content on your site.

When trying to rank well for the one or two topics that your entire site is built around, creating [flagship content](#) is your best bet. Whether it's a tutorial about [search engine optimization basics](#), [blogging for beginners](#), or [copywriting](#), a frequently asked questions page, or an inspirational mission statement, this content serves a vital function in creating a relevant, compelling, and *useful* cornerstone to build a site around.

A *cornerstone* is something that is basic, essential, indispensable, and the chief foundation upon which something is constructed or developed. It's what people *need to know* to make use of your website and do business with you.

And when approached in a strategic fashion, this content can rank very well in the search engines. The key is creating compelling content that's worth linking to, and then finding a way to get the word out.



Here's a 5-step strategy that I've found useful when developing cornerstone content and getting it to rank well.

## 1. Keywords

Taking into account the above, and what we know about [keyword research](#), choose the most appropriate keyword phrase for your content. In other words, what is the relevant *question* that searchers are asking that your content and business will answer?

Will answering that question aid a visitor to your site in getting the most out of the experience? Are enough people asking that question to make ambitiously answering it worthwhile?

## 2. Title Tags and Headline

There's a lot of debate among SEO practitioners about what works and what doesn't, but no one disputes the importance of using your targeted keyword phrase in your title tag. Search engines want to offer relevant results, so those results should prominently reflect the words the searcher is using in the title of the page.

But remember also, the title tag is a *headline*. You want to speak back to the prospective reader in their own chosen words. Plus, you want to wrap those words in a compelling headline structure that promises to answer the *exact question* the searcher is asking with the query.

And finally, writing the perfect headline makes it more likely that someone will simply use your title to link back to you. To the extent link anchor text is a component of a particular search algorithm, this can only help.

## 3. Content

Can a 500 word article rank well for a competitive search term all by itself? Absolutely, because a lot of what determines how well a page ranks depends on the overall authority and age of the website it appears on. And perhaps for some topics, a short explanation is all that's really required from a user-gratification standpoint.

But if you have a newer website trying to rank for a competitive search term, you'll need links from *other* authoritative sources to make it happen. That means your content must be impressive, both in quality and in scope.

Develop an awesome multi-part tutorial. Write an inspirational manifesto. *Answer the question* so much better and comprehensively than the competition does, and chances are better that your effort becomes worth linking to.

## 4. Landing Page

If you're going to be ambitious in scope with your content, it makes sense to make things easy on the reader from a usability standpoint. A landing page is designed to instantly communicate what's going on to the visitor as soon as they arrive, and also acts as a table of contents (via links to each part) that increases clarity.

Here are some of the benefits of the landing page approach:

**Retention:** Keeping a reader from hitting the back button is crucial to just about every aspect of successful cornerstone content. You can't score a reader, customer, or link if the benefit of the resource is not quickly communicated.

**Bookmarks:** When presented with a beneficial, if somewhat overwhelming, piece of content, the first impulse is often to bookmark the page for a return visit. When that book marking occurs at a social site like Delicious, it can lead to long-term traffic. And when a whole bunch of those bookmarks happen in a short period of time, you can enjoy a viral effect that leads to more bookmarks and lots of links due to being highlighted on the Delicious popular and home pages. Landing pages help you score the bookmark.

**Links:** Likewise, a visiting blogger or webmaster might be instantly impressed with your work, and link to you based on the benefits and scope communicated by the landing page itself. The quicker you can impress a potential link source, the easier you're making it for them to follow through.

**Optimization:** To the extent modifying on-page copy can boost your ranking after attracting links, a landing page is a key benefit. It's a lot easier to meaningfully tweak a landing page than your 5,000 word opus.

## 5. Related Content

You may have noticed that I've used the word "website" throughout this post, rather than blog. However, I would never try to undertake this strategy without having a blog involved.

Search engines favor websites that have a lot of relevant, frequently-updated content, and they also like a lot of general link authority. Given the ease-of-publishing blogging provides, it's smart to utilize blog software from a content-management standpoint. And given that active blogging allows for constant participation in the social media space, it's a critical way to build general site authority via links, delve into specific and related topics, and to reference your cornerstone content.





You will certainly feature a link to your essential content in the sidebar. And if you've done your job correctly when selecting the focus, it will be perfectly natural to continue to reference and link to your cornerstone piece from within future posts as well.

Don't go overboard, but do provide context when discussing advanced topics that require an understanding of the basics. Never assume that everyone is aware of your cornerstone resource or understands the basics. Periodic cross-reference to your cornerstone content allows for continued exposure and links, assuming it meets the needs of the audience.

## In Conclusion

The first goal of cornerstone content is usefulness and relevancy to the website visitor, no matter how they arrive. The second goal is to make that content so compelling and comprehensive that people are willing—no, make that *excited*—to link to it.

If you focus on these two goals in a strategic manner, the search engine thing has a good chance of working itself out. Since attracting links is so important, in the next installment of [SEO Copywriting 2.0](#) we'll look at ways to proactively get the word out about your cornerstone content.

## Five Link Building Strategies That Work

We've seen that the real secret to [SEO Copywriting 2.0](#) is creating compelling content that naturally attracts links, rather than *begging* for links to our keyword-stuffed "optimized" web page. In other words, SEO copywriting is now all about response-oriented copy—concepts and words that ultimately result in a favorable action from the reader.

Since the popularity of our content depends on the reaction to it *off-page*, it makes sense that we might also need to step outside the confines of the page itself to get the word out. Luckily, the same copywriting skills you use to conceive and create your content apply to promoting it as well.

The way to create compelling content is to focus on "what's in it for the reader." Likewise, no one is going to link to you unless doing so gives them a benefit as well.

The key is the same—understand who you're talking to and then figure out what will catch their attention and convince them to take action. Here are 5 ways to go about it.



## 1. Social Media Sites

The quickest way for an exceptional piece of content to get a lot of attention that results in secondary links is to make the home page of [Digg](#) or [Delicious Popular](#). There are scores of similar sites that can drive quality traffic as well, such as [Reddit](#), [TechMeme](#), and [Magnolia](#). For more offbeat content, [Fark](#) will shake your server. Plus there are dozens of aggregator sites such as [PopURLS](#) that also drive traffic based on your inclusion at the primary site.

If you've done a great job with your headline, it should magnetically draw people in. However, you need to understand the audience of each social media site. What works as a headline for Digg often won't work for Reddit. Tweak accordingly, but try to retain your [keywords](#) in the title if at all possible, because most of the resulting links will simply regurgitate that title.

Another key element for success on Digg is the summary description, because many people will vote for content based solely on the headline and the brief copy that describes it. Sometimes this may simply be your existing opening paragraph, but you might craft a specialized description that best appeals to the culture of the site.

Submitting your own content to social media sites is looked down upon (at least with your real name), so it makes sense to have a friend submit for you. When specifically targeting a social news site, you want to control the headline and summary copy, because the exact same content submitted with poor headline and description copy may go absolutely nowhere.

## 2. Linking Out

Linking *out* to attract links? Yep.

Engaging in dialogue with the relevant blogs in your niche is a great way to get noticed, and it can lead to links back. Bloggers definitely watch who is linking to them thanks to Technorati, and you can take the initiative by linking out *first* before looking for one in return.

Simply linking out for the sake of linking won't accomplish much, especially with bloggers who get lots of links. The key is to be strategic about how you link and what you say.

It's just like any other conversation. Join in and add your two cents, but make sure you've got something substantive to say that will reflect well on you. Use a [great headline](#) to make sure you are noticed, and then deliver the goods. And since your [cornerstone content](#) is the foundation of what the conversation is likely about, finding a way to mention it in the context of the dialogue will naturally bring it to the attention of influencers in your field.

### 3. Networking Emails

The days of flat out link begging are fading, but you can still reach out to other bloggers as a way to raise your own profile. Again, can you figure out what's in it for them?

More than one-off link requests, networking via email and instant messaging is about establishing and growing relationships with others in the social media space. These are the [linkerati](#)—prominent bloggers in your niche, top Digg users, web journalists, and prominent web forum contributors.

Write your introductory emails from a copywriting perspective. Catch attention, gain interest, and create a desire to help you in the future by offering something that benefits *them* first.

### 4. Guest Appearances

Another benefit of networking within your niche is that it creates opportunities to make a guest writing appearance. You can contribute content that not only allows you to raise your profile, but allows for links back to your own site. Once again, creating killer original content will open doors for you, especially when it's created for the benefit of someone else. And you can use that killer cornerstone content you've already produced as an example of the quality you can deliver.

Depending on your relationship with the site owner, you may be able to link to your cornerstone content from within the body of the content itself, but only if the citation is extremely relevant to the content and beneficial to the reader. Otherwise, your link will need to appear in your byline.

Most people tend to link to their site or blog URL in the byline of contributed content. Turn it around by focusing the byline on the reader instead of yourself, and feature your cornerstone content instead of your home page.

For example, if I were to guest blog somewhere about strategies for attracting links, which byline is more attractive to the reader when finishing my article?

**NO:** *Brian Clark writes about online copywriting at [Copyblogger](#).*

**YES:** *Check out Brian Clark's free [SEO Copywriting 2.0](#) tutorial, which is all about the new style of online writing that helps your web site rank well in search engines.*

### 5. Article Directories

At one point in time, submitting about 20 articles to a directory like [Ezine Articles](#) with the right anchor text would get you a really good ranking for some search terms, at least



in Yahoo and MSN. However, because the engines discount duplicate content, having dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of sites republish your article (and linked byline) no longer does the trick by itself.

However, a site like Ezine Articles is still excellent for creating exposure to your cornerstone content. Having a link to your multi-part tutorial displayed on hundreds of web pages drives direct traffic, and can lead to your content being referenced in other posts and articles that *do* pass on link authority.

The strategy is much the same as with guest posting on a blog. Write original content that *does not* appear on your site, and submit to one or more reputable directories. Repeat until you get results.

## Conclusion

The words you put on a web page have no life of their own until they get read. And those same words will not gain prominence in search engines until the words are linked to by relevant, authoritative sources.

Search engines can still be gamed, just like offline real-world systems can be exploited. However, the goals of the search engines are similar to society at large, and they are getting very good at finding rule breakers and dispensing punishment. Creating compelling content and beneficial relationships are strategies that won't get you banned or penalized, and add value to your overall goal of converting site visits into revenue.

## SEO Copywriting Techniques That Readers Love

While the [reaction to your content off-page](#) has become the critical determining factor when it comes to search engine rankings, your [targeted keyword phrase](#) should still appear on the page itself. And while there's little consensus in this area, having your keyword combinations appear throughout the page copy generally helps search engines further identify the relevancy of the page for those keywords.

The good news is, copywriting best practices can create [compelling, engaging content](#) that also contains repeated keywords and phrases. You never want to sacrifice readability in the pursuit of rankings, but given that [links](#) are more important than on-page keyword repetition, you should never have to.

Here are a few tips for keyword integration in your copy:

## 1. Titles

The most important place your keywords should appear is in the title tag of the page. The nice thing about blogging software is that your post or page title will be automatically transformed into both title tags and either an H1 or H2 heading tag as well. Remember, your headline should wrap your keywords in a pithy promise that perfectly communicates what the content has to offer.

## 2. Opening

I've always found it useful to repeat the targeted keywords in the opening sentence, as long as it can be done in a way that is appealing to a reader and reinforces relevancy. Since many search engines use this initial copy as the description of the content, you want to make sure you are accurately selling the searcher on clicking through as well.

## 3. Subheadings

Another important place that keywords can appear is in subheads that aid the reader in navigating down the page. A resource that matches up well with the targeted keyword phrase will find natural opportunities to restate keywords in subheads, as an introduction to the next topical section of the page. Subheads are typically created using the H3 tag.

## 4. Related Words and Synonyms

Good copy should naturally result in words that are related to, as well as synonyms for, the keyword phrases you are after. Rather than mindlessly repeating the same words ad nauseam, assume that search algorithms are advanced enough to look for proper contextually-related words that support your targeted keywords.

## 5. Specificity

One of the hallmarks of great copy is specific, descriptive words in lieu of bland general terminology. Specificity aids the reader by clearly demonstrating relevancy, allows for more dynamic copy, and provides opportunities to increase the general on-page keyword frequency. Make sure to employ your specific keywords when feasible within the context of the copy, rather than rely on generic wording.

## 6. Call to Action

Let us not forget that we want the reader to take some form of action that benefits us. Otherwise, what's the point? Once again, your copy should conclude with a call to action that prompts the reader to travel down the path you desire. Is it to purchase, contact,



subscribe or simply continue reading? Your primary keywords should naturally fit in with the next step you want the reader to take.

## Conclusion

The key to good on-page SEO copywriting is crafting content that seamlessly integrates keywords in a way that doesn't offend the reader. In fact, good keyword-rich copy should never even consciously alert the reader that keyword repetition is being employed for any reason other than his or her own benefit.