

copyblogger

How to Write Magnetic Headlines



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Your headline is the first, and perhaps only, impression you make on a prospective reader.

Without a compelling promise that turns a browser of your content into a reader of your content, the rest of your words may as well not even exist. So, from a copywriting and content marketing standpoint, writing great headlines is a critical skill.

Here are some interesting statistics.

On average, 8 out of 10 people will read your headline copy, but only 2 out of 10 will read the rest.

This is the secret to the power of your headline, and why it so highly determines the effectiveness of the entire piece.

Remember, every element of compelling copy has just one purpose — to get the next sentence read. And then the sentence after that, and so on, all the way down to your call to action. So it's fairly obvious that if people stop at the headline, you're already dead in the water.

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

This ebook will provide you with concrete guidance that'll have you writing better headlines in no time.

Let's begin.

Why You Should Always Write Your Headline First

by *Brian Clark*

Want to write great headlines, and even better content? Start with the headline first.

Of course, you'll need to 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 a single word of the body content.

Why?

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

Promises 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 you haven't made yet 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're saying.

No worries. That's what this **Magnetic Headlines** ebook is all about.

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 moneytested 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, let's examine keywords, 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?

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 or shares 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 retweets, more social bookmarks, and yes... more relevant search traffic. Both camps are right, for different reasons.

Now that we've negotiated a temporary peace in the blogosphere, let's look at one of the most effective headline types in the world — the "how-to" headline.

How to Write a Killer “How-to” Post That Gets Attention

Picture your blog post being retweeted thousands of times on Twitter, and shared all over Facebook. 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, 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 has pointed out. 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 light up Hacker News for a week.

How about this?

- How One Easy Tweak Makes Windows 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 retweet your article.

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 types 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.

Now let's look at the characteristics of writers who consistently write great headlines. What do those writers have in common?

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 chapter 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 chapter 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 section, 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 highestpaid 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 marketing their content via Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking sites up the ante with headlines that strain credibility, their results will diminish, while you’ll 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 get your content embraced and shared.

Now that you understand what it takes to consistently write great headlines, let’s give you some top-notch formulas for making your writing life just a little bit easier.

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 WordPress Theme?
- 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 which 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]

This 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 Mobile-Responsive Design
- What Everybody Ought to Know About Adjustable Rate Mortgages
- What Everybody Ought to Know About Writing Great Headlines

Find these headline templates useful? We've got even more for you!

Read on to discover 21 more proven headline formulas in our next three sections...

9 Proven Headline Formulas That Sell Like Crazy

by *Dean Rieck*

You can write a headline in an infinite number of ways. However, certain types of headlines have proven themselves repeatedly for many years. By following the “formula” of these headlines, you can give yourself an edge when you are serious about persuading someone to read and respond to your copy.

The following 9 headline formulas are some of the easiest to write and the most powerful. When it comes time to write a headline, try one of these first. At the very least, this can give you a creative jumping off point to write a headline that works.

1. Say it simply and directly.

The direct headline should be used far more often than it is. No cleverness. No jokes. No wordplay.

The direct headline gets right to the point. It works particularly well with strong offers, recognized brand names, and product or service types with which the reader is familiar.

- Pure silk blouses ... 30% off
- The Ultimate Tax Shelter
- FREE subscription to Entreprenuer

2. State the big benefit.

One of the first techniques you should always explore is transforming your major benefit into a headline. After all, your number one selling point should be up front. It stands the best chance of selecting the right audience and preparing them to respond. Plus, if they read nothing else, they have at least seen the best selling point you have to offer. If you have trouble writing this kind of headline, it's a sure sign you need to think a bit more about your product or service.

- Now! Moonlight Your Way to a Million Dollars.
- Create your own cards, posters and banners in minutes!
- Get a FREE vase when you buy a dozen roses.

3. Announce exciting news.

People read newspapers and magazines because they love news. It's just basic human nature. We're curious. We not only want to know, we need to know. Casting your headline in a way that suggests news, rather than advertising, can have the same powerful appeal of a feature story in the morning paper. An important note: the product or service doesn't necessarily have to be newly created to qualify as news. It merely has to be news to your reader.

- At Last, American Scientists Have Created the Perfect Alternative to a Mined Diamond!
- Introducing the newest idea in cross-training. From NordicTrack.
- Now program your DVR by simply speaking to the revolutionary DVR VOICE programmer.

4. Appeal to the "how-to" instinct.

The how-to headline appeals to the need most of us have to improve ourselves or our lives in some way. The secret here is to focus on a need or want and promise to fulfill that need or want.

Be careful, though. The how-to must highlight the benefit or final result, not the process itself.

Look at this example:

- How to make money working from home with your PC.

Suppose instead it read, "How to start a full-time computer business in your home." This misses the point, doesn't it? It sounds like a lot of work. It says nothing about the real motivator, which is using a computer you already own to make money easily. To write a how-to headline, begin with the words "How to" or "How" then immediately fill in the benefit.

- How to stop smoking in 30 days...or your money back.
- How You Can Profit From the 3 Greatest Service Businesses of the Decade!
- How to do Central America on \$17 a day."

5. Pose a provocative question.

Asking a question directly involves your reader. However, your question cannot be random or clever. It must relate directly and clearly to the major benefit of the product.

It must also prod the reader to answer “yes” or at least “I’m not sure, but I want to know more.”

- Do You Make These Six Common Mistakes On Your Taxes?
- Gotten a speeding ticket lately? Read this.
- How do I know which mutual funds may be right for me?

6. Bark a command.

Sales copy often falls flat because it fails to tell the reader what to do. This headline type allows you to be direct, provide a benefit, and take a commanding posture simultaneously. It’s not conversational, it’s dictatorial — but in an acceptable way that readers have come to expect in clear writing.

- Become a famous blogger in 60 days.
- Call anyone, anywhere, without a phone line for FREE!
- Stop wasting money on Web design. Use StudioPress to create your own Web site in minutes.

7. Offer useful information.

Let me clue you in on a little secret: most people don't want information. I know you've always been taught otherwise, but it's true.

People are drowning in facts. What people really want is a sense of order and predictability in their lives. We want to feel a sense of power over our world. Therefore, we seek out the secrets, tips, hints, laws, rules, and systems that promise to help us gain control and make sense of things. Notice how these headlines promise information that does just this.

- THE 20 MOST IMPORTANT STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO LIVE LONGER.
- FREE. The best kept secrets in America.
- Free brochure shows you how to end your money worries for good.

8. Relay an honest, enthusiastic testimonial.

A testimonial headline can do two things for you. First, it presents your reader with a third party endorsement of your product or service. Second, it capitalizes on the fact that people like to know what other people say.

- “Quite simply, the finest design software ever released.”
- “This diet program worked for me. It can work for you, too!”
- “It’s the first book on personal finance that really made sense to me.”

A variation of this strategy is to write a headline in the first person and put quotation marks around it. This “virtual testimonial” gives you a more interesting headline and improves readership.

9. Authenticate your proposition with a little something extra.

People distrust sales copy. And for good reason. A lot of it proves inaccurate or downright dishonest. To cut through this distrust, you can add a little something extra to your headline that seems out of place, yet rings true. Look at the following headlines and notice how the words “Ohio man,” “Obsolete,” and “Frustrated bartender” stand out. Their specificity or quirkiness adds a truthful aura that traditional copy could never achieve.

- Ohio man has 21-year tested formula to create multimillion dollar business from scratch, without bank loans, venture capitalists or selling stock.
- Small Company’s New Golf Ball Flies Too Far; Could Obsolete Many Golf Courses.
- Frustrated bartender develops incredible device to clean and disinfect your entire home...

There are many, many other ways to write a headline.

Whatever strategy you choose, don't make a decision too quickly. Take time to brainstorm. Write dozens or even hundreds of headlines.

You never know exactly what you want to say before you say it, so giving yourself plenty of choices is the surest way to arrive at the best, most powerful headline.

7 More Sure-Fire Headline Templates That Work

by *Brian Clark*

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 2014, 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]?

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 Internet 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 HTML Coding Mistakes?
- Do You Make These Mistakes With Your Blog?

Find these headline templates useful? *Warning:* the next chapter of this ebook will take you even *further* down the rabbit hole...

Warning: Use These 5 Headline Formulas at Your Own Risk

There's no doubt that our previous advice on headline formulas was extremely popular on Copyblogger.com. Unfortunately, it also caused us to take a fair amount of flak.

First off, you still have the doubters who wonder if 80-year-old headline structures can possibly work in the modern social media environment. Truth is, Brian Clark used one such structure for a post that made an appearance on just about every social media news site, and brought in over 70,000 unique visitors.

And he never had a doubt that it would work. Why?

Because [Do You Make These Mistakes When You Write?](#) and the original Do You Make These Mistakes in English? are literally about the same thing—grammar.

It was an absolute no-brainer, because Maxwell Sackheim did the work for this post over 80 years ago, and his ad ran successfully for 40 years. But keep in mind that Brian and plenty of others have successfully used the “these mistakes” template in many other

contexts as well, because the specific promise contained in the headline makes it irresistible if used properly.

That brings me to the other complaint we're hearing—too many people are using the same formulas over and over, badly. This is likely because people did not heed the warning about headline templates that you'll hear from any copywriter, which is to understand *why they work* before trying to use them.

When you understand why the original headlines worked, you'll be able to select an appropriate structure, and you'll be a better headline writer in general. If you don't, you might not only write a bad headline, you might come off looking bad in general.

So, here are 5 more headline templates that work, but use them at your own risk. If you don't match up an appropriate headline

structure with your content, you might crash and burn worse than if you just came up with a headline off the top of your head.

1. Warning: [blank].

If you've read this far, I guess it still works. Starting a headline with the word *warning* will almost always catch attention, but it's what you say next that will determine how well it works for your particular content.

- Warning: If You Depend on Google for Both Traffic and Advertising, You Pretty Much Work for Google
- Warning: Two Out of Every Three People in Your Industry Will be Out of Work in 5 Years—Will You Be One of Them?
- Warning: Do You Recognize These 7 Early Warning Signs of Blogger Burnout?

2. How [blank] Made Me [blank].

Use this structure when relating a personal story. The key to the most effective use of this template is for the two blanks to dramatically contrast, so that the curiosity factor goes way up and people feel compelled to read more.

- How a “Fool Stunt” Made Me a Star Salesman
- How an Obvious Idea Made Me \$3.5 Million
- How Moving to Iowa Improved My Sex Life

3. Are You [blank]?

A nice use of the question headline, designed to catch attention with curiosity or a challenge to the reader. Don't be afraid to be bold with this one.

- Are You Ashamed of Smells in Your House?
- Are You Ready to Learn Chinese for Your Next Job?
- Are You a Courageous Blogger?

4. [Blank] Ways to [blank].

One of the best list structures, because it's really a "how to..." headline enhanced by specificity that either impresses the prospective reader with how many tips you've got, or at minimum lets them know exactly what to expect.

- 101 Ways to Cope With Stress
- 21 Ways to Live a Better Life With Less
- 5 Ways to Write Killer Headlines

5. If You're [blank], You Can [blank].

Another great use of specificity, this headline addresses a particular type of person with the first blank, and the beneficial promise to that person in the content or body copy with the second.

- If You're a Non-Smoker, You Can Save 33% on Life Insurance.
- If You're an Accountant, Our Frequent Flyer Program Really Adds Up
- If You Love Scuba, You Can Dive Belize This Week Only for a Song!

Wrapping up our headline templates

Whew. We've given you a slew of headline templates to work with—and hopefully helped you understand *why* these templates work. Now we've got one last piece of advice for you, and it's all focused around one of the social networking sites where headlines matter the most — and that's Twitter.

Read on to get tips on writing Twitter-friendly headlines that will get you more clicks, more retweets, and more followers.

The Art of Writing Great Twitter Headlines

Twitter has become *the place* for sharing content links. If your content catches attention on Twitter and spreads, suddenly you're getting significant traffic from people who may have never visited your site before.

But don't forget to share other people's quality content on Twitter. This helps you build up a Twitter audience that values your editorial judgment, which in turns helps you when you have something of your own to share.

In both cases, what you share on Twitter is not just about the actual value of the content. It's also about whether the content gets viewed and appreciated in the first place.

Yep ... the difference is in the headline. You've heard this before, right?

Same as it Ever Was ... But Worse

Every time I tell people about the [80/20 Rule of Headlines](#), they seem shocked. Remember that one?

On average, 8 out of 10 people will read a headline, but only 2 out of 10 will go on to read the content.

This is in a typical headline environment, such as a newspaper, magazine, or web page.

In a news feed app or an email inbox, the percentages are likely worse. The battle for attention intensifies due to the nature of the environment.

Now, think about a Twitter stream.

People are scanning more ruthlessly than ever, looking for interesting tidbits. Your content link is competing with conversations, quips, and tantalizing revelations related to this morning's breakfast cereal.

Time to up your headline game. But first, let's review the foundational elements of solid headline writing.

What's the Reward for Reading?

The first thing to keep in mind is that a headline is a *promise*. It promises some kind of benefit or reward in exchange for attention. That reward could range from an amusing diversion to the solution to a pressing problem.

A good way to make sure your headlines always offer a compelling reward is to refer back to the 4-U approach taught by AWAI (The American Writers & Artists).

Your headlines must:

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

Make sure to review the previous lessons in this ebook for more information on creating great headlines.

The Triumphant Return of the Short Headline

Some people will tell you that a good Twitter headline is *as short as possible*.

This is due not only to the 140-character limit that Twitter imposes, but also because in order for your headline to spread, people need room to retweet it. Twitter culture dictates that you give credit to the person who originally exposed you to a tweet when you retweet, so extra space is needed for the hat tip.

Too many people, however, focus on “short” and forget about “as possible.” A better way to think about it is *as long as necessary, but no longer*.

Luckily, history provides us with some strong encouragement in the short headline department.

A quick review of [The 100 Greatest Advertisements](#) by Julian Lewis Watkins shows that 95% of the most effective headlines from the early years of magazine advertising were eight words or less. This is because magazine copywriters had to write tight headlines due to space concerns, just like Twitter users.

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.

On a webpage, there are no space concerns, so web copywriters found that longer headlines communicated more benefit right at the top of the page where eye-tracking studies show people focus, and therefore worked better.

So, Twitter brings us back full-circle at a time when [content is the new advertising](#). But it's clear that a well-written short headline has power, especially when in a level-playing-field environment where everyone has the same constraints.

Rewrite for Retweets

For the most part, you should write your article and blog post headlines pursuant to the same guidelines given above. There are certain cases where we will modify our own content headline for Twitter, but those are rare.

The real value in headline rewriting comes when tweeting other people's content. Let's face it, many people write pretty crappy headlines, even when the content is solid.

Doing the editorial work can help you build a loyal Twitter following, because you're finding content that might otherwise be lost in the noise, and then rewriting the headline to better entice people to pay attention.

This can be easier than it sounds. Too many writers love to use obtuse or clever headlines that fail to do justice to their content.

Simply apply the 4 U approach after reading the content and before you tweet. Over time, this will become second nature to you, and your reputation on Twitter will thrive while you send traffic to people who need to learn what you know.

Valuable Content Rules

It's clear from observation that people will retweet based on the headline alone, before even clicking through to the content.

But keep in mind, your followers may retweet based on a headline alone, but only because they *trust you*. Your past performance and editorial judgment in selecting (and producing) quality content is what leads to that trust.

Quality content is still the essential ingredient, but make sure people actually appreciate the content you share. Becoming a better headline writer will make that happen for you.

Practice, practice, practice

Learning how to write great headlines is an absolutely critical part of your success as a content marketer and copywriter. So make sure you read (and reread) this book several times, and absorb its critical lessons.

And your next move, of course, is to practice writing headlines. Spending lots of time working on your headlines is a critical step in getting better at this particular skill.

When you write your next post, make sure you leave plenty of time for writing and experimenting with headlines.

Study the formulas above, start your own swipe file, and make sure you continue to practice every time you create a new piece of content — whether it's a blog post, free ebook, tutorial video, or sales letter.

Now it's your turn — go out there and create some spectacular headlines.

The better you get at writing them, the more your content (and your business) will improve!

