



10 Tips for Writing Copy that Converts!

Writing web copy might be one of the most deceptively difficult jobs out there. After all, anybody can throw together the words and phrases needed to flesh out a call to action (CTA) or landing page. But it takes a special combination of time, effort, practice and inspiration to deliver the kind of copy that drives conversions for your website.

So if you've got a sneaking suspicion that the language used on your site could be contributing to low conversion rates, take a look at the following ten tactical tips for writing copy that converts. Apply at least 2-3 of them to your website and watch your bottom line soar!

Tip #1 – Know your subject

How can you expect to write compelling copy if you don't know who you're trying to reach?

Suppose you're on the singles market and are invited to plan a blind date for a friend of a friend. Sure, you might get a few clues to go off of, but if you don't know much about the person's thoughts, preferences, interests and hobbies, your odds of planning the perfect date are slim.

Now, imagine instead that you're planning a romantic getaway for your spouse of ten years. Knowing him or her intimately means that you've got all the information you need to tailor every single element of the trip for maximum enjoyment. That's the difference in knowing your intended subject.

Of course, in the latter scenario, you've had ten years to get to know your partner. If you're relatively new to your target market, how can you develop this needed insight as quickly as possible? The answer is well-researched [buyer personas](#). Basically, a buyer persona is a fictitious example of a member of your audience that you build using demographics research, consumer studies and more. For more on creating these powerful tools and how to integrate them into your copywriting, check out our post on "[The Complete Guide to Developing and Using Buyer Personas](#)."

Tip #2 – Know your medium and channel

Once you know who you're writing for and the types of messages they're most likely to respond to, take a few minutes to assess the medium and channel through which you'll be delivering your marketing copy.

- Your **medium** is the pipe through which your message passes. Online, print and radio are all examples of "mediums."
- Your **channel** is the environment in which your audience receives your message. Mobile devices, social media networks and websites are all examples of "channels."

Recognizing these definitions makes it obvious why it's important to understand the medium and channel you're using before you begin writing copy, as the language you'd use for a print ad will almost definitely be different than what you'd write for a Facebook status update.

But even if we're only addressing website copy in order to improve on-site conversions, you'll still want to consider the specific type of copy you're writing. Take the difference between a call to action button that will reside on your product description page compared to all the copy you'd need for a long-form landing page. Your CTA must convey a benefits statement using brief, to-the-point language, while your landing page will likely take more of a storytelling approach to draw visitors through paragraph after paragraph of descriptive text.

Only after you've identified the specific type of copy you plan to write can you determine the correct approach to use to make it as effective as possible.

Tip #3 – Nail your headlines

If you're writing a type of copy that requires the use of a headline, know that these 5-20 words are the most important you'll write. In fact, Copyblogger [estimates](#) that while eight out of ten people will read your headline, only two out of ten will read the rest of your copy. The better your headlines are, the better your odds are of getting even more people to stay on board.

Of course, writing great headlines is as much an art as it is a science. If you want to get better at writing headlines quickly, you can always cheat the system and base your work off of headline templates that have performed well in the past:

- [10 Sure-Fire Headline Formulas That Work](#)
- [41 Classic Copywriting Headline Templates](#)
- [9 Classic Headline Templates That Consistently Get More Clicks](#)

But if you really want to transform the way you write headlines, take a cue from Upworthy. It's no secret that Upworthy is one of the fastest growing media companies in recent history, due in large part to their ability to craft the kinds of compelling headlines that practically guarantee reader attention. So how do they do it?

The secret is that Upworthy writers are all required to write at least [25 headlines](#) for every content piece they deploy:

Upworthy's Editorial Process



1. You **HAVE** to crap out 25 headlines for every piece of content.
2. You **WILL** write some really stinky headlines.
3. Once you start getting desperate, you start thinking outside the box.
4. So you **HAVE TO WRITE 25 HEADLINES.**
5. #24 will suck. Then #25 will be a gift from the headline gods and will make you a legend.
6. Accept that not every headline will be perfect.
7. Then write 25 headlines.
8. With practice, you'll be writing 25 in 15 minutes. Then I will give you permission to lower your limit.

SO PLEASE WRITE 25 HEADLINES

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It might sound extreme, but it's a great exercise to try yourself. Start out with the worst possible headline you can think of, and then let your mind wander until you've come up with 25 alternatives. Pick your favorite and test them out by running different options in your social media updates. With time and practice, you'll find it much easier to get to 25 options and to hit on the exact combinations that will win with your audience.

Tip #4 – Write to the reader

Which of the two copy samples do you find more compelling?

“Get a special discount now on Martin’s Shoes now by filling out this form...”

versus

“We’ve saved you a special discount on your next pair of Martin’s Shoes. Unlace your old sneakers, rest your tired feet and find relief by filling out this form...”

Obviously, the second option is more engaging. What makes it more engaging is that it speaks directly to the readers and demonstrates an understanding of their situation. Everybody wants to feel special – it's why we respond more positively to “mom and pop” stores that remember our names and preferences than big box chains. And it's why the [Aberdeen Group](#) found that personalizing email messages improve click-through rates by 14% and conversion rates by 10%.

To take advantage of this effect, look at your web copy with a new set of eyes and highlight instances that sound vague or that don't seem to be addressing any one person in particular. Get rid of them as

soon as possible and replace them with phrases that speak more directly to the target reader you've identified using your buyer personas.

Tip #5 – Use power words

Anyone who's ever heard the expression "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me" knows that it's an outright lie. The words we use have an incredible amount of power, and it's important to be aware of that every time you sit down to work on your copy.

Think about the difference between the word "noteworthy" versus "innovative." Or between "sad" and "devastated." While both sets of words have similar meanings as their partners, the feelings they manage to convey and their relative power are quite different.

According to [Copyblogger](#), the following are the five most powerful words in the English language:

- You
- Free
- Because
- Instantly
- New

But while their reasoning is sound, these aren't the only power words you should pay attention to. Once you have a first draft of your copy, go back and identify any phrases or sentences that lack punch or excitement. Revise them to add excitement by including at least one power word from the following lists:

- [58 Online Copywriting Power Words & Phrases](#)
- [The Big List of 189 Words That Convert](#)
- [317 Power Words That'll Instantly Make You a Better Writer](#)

Tip #6 – Don't use two words where one will do

In 2013, digital content powerhouse [Salon](#) paired up with traffic analysis firm Chartbeat to measure how far into their articles readers were actually reaching. It probably won't surprise you to hear that most readers only made it to about the halfway mark, and a sizable number never scrolled at all.

The bottom line is that visitors are notoriously bad at reading online copy. So don't waste their time with excessively wordy content! To avoid this, get in the habit of beating up each sentence until it conveys its main point(s) in as few words as possible. Let's try this with the following example:

"You should consider buying Martin's Shoes' latest trail running shoes because not only do they the best arch support on the market, they come in fun color combinations and have special safety treads that keep you from slipping on wet trails."

Pretty long-winded, right? Here's a paired down version:

"Martin's Shoes are a safe, stylish and supportive alternative for trail runners."

Sure, it's not going to win points for eloquence, but the variation above does a much cleaner job of conveying key features to potential customers in an efficient manner. Practice this technique yourself by taking your copy and chopping it down to the smallest number of words you can use and still get your point across. You can always add things back in, but starting from this pared down structure ensures your final draft will be both efficient and effective.

Tip #7 – Remove redundant words



When it comes to copy, every word matters. Every word you choose to include has to play a valuable role in moving readers from their current state to the one you want – and any word that doesn’t serve this overarching purpose is one that needs to be deleted.

One quick way to pare down your copy is to run it against a list of redundant words. These phrases – like “added bonus” or “close proximity” – slow down readers and give you easy opportunities to improve the effectiveness of your copy. Check out the following lists and remove any instances that appear in your text:

- [50 Redundant Phrases to Avoid](#)
- [200 Common Redundancies](#)
- [Redundant Words & Phrases](#)

Tip #8 – Tell them why

Up in Tip #5, we talked about five of the most powerful words in the English language. But now, let’s look closer at one of them in particular – “because.”

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, psychologist Ellen Langer published a series of fascinating studies, the most famous of which has come to be known as “[The Copy Machine](#).” In the experiment, Dr. Langer sent a plant to interrupt a person currently making copies at the copy machine and give a different reason for butting in based on the experimental condition being tested.

If the plant used the phrase, “May I use the copy machine?” the interruption was granted about 60% of the time. If the interruption was reworded as “May I use the copy machine because I’m in a rush?” that rate jumped to 95%. But what’s most fascinating is that plants who used the phrase “Can I use the copy machine because I have to make copies?” were still allowed access 95% of the time.

Think about that for a second... Everybody in line needed to make copies, rendering the plants' phrasing virtually meaningless. But because they used that magic word – "because" – they were granted access as often as those that gave a legitimate reason.

That's powerful stuff, and it's a lesson that's easy to apply to your website's copy. Don't overdo it (and certainly don't use it unless you can pair it with a meaningful, legitimate justification), but if your content doesn't already include the word "because," try adding it at least once to improve your conversions.

Tip #9 – Provide a clear, immediate call to action

So you've researched your buyers, cleaned up the wording of your copy and given readers a reason to convert. But what do you do if they don't take you up on that offer?

One of the biggest issues plaguing web copy today is that marketers lay out a brilliant case for buying their products... and then never ask for the sale. Unfortunately, you can't count on readers to take action on their own. You've got to prompt them into it by providing clear, immediate calls to action (CTAs) at key points in your site's content.

What makes a good call to action? Keep all of the following best practices in mind as you craft yours:

- **Be brief** – Calls to action with five or fewer words tend to perform best. If you must go over that limit, be sure every word you add is essential.
- **Focus on actions** – At its heart, your call to action is inviting others to do something. To encourage this, begin your CTA with an action-oriented verb, like "Register" or "Download."
- **Be clear** – Your readers should immediately understand what they'll get when they follow through on your CTA. If there's anything unclear about your statement, refine your statement until it's crystal clear.
- **Design for action** – Your CTA doesn't need to be restricted to text alone. Whenever possible, incorporate design elements like contrasting colors and larger font sizes to help set it apart.

Experimenting with these best practices is important, but bear in mind that what you think sounds clear and compelling might fall flat with your readers. The only way to know if your CTA is truly effective is to test it...

Tip #10 – Test everything

At the end of the day, copywriting is both a creative exercise and a data-driven one. You can write the most beautiful words in the world, but what matters most is how these selections contribute to your website's conversion rate. And the only way to truly determine how effective your copy is is to test it.

As far as testing goes, you've got plenty of different options, depending on how much you want to invest in the process. For a quick test, consider the process alluded to in Tip #3 above, involving testing headline variations on your social profiles. To do this, choose 2-4 of your favorite headlines and run them as Twitter updates linking back to your page. Try to post the updates at the same time every day for a few days and see which one generates the most clicks. Use the winner on your website, but be sure to enter it into another test to keep improving it over time.

Clearly, this loose testing protocol isn't perfect, as variations in different days could contribute to variances in the clicks you receive, and your Twitter audience may not be a perfect mirror of your broader website visitors. If you want to be more precise, consider A/B or multivariate testing protocol. Complete instructions on running these types of experiments can be found at the following links:

- [The Ultimate Guide to A/B Testing](#)
- [The ABCs of A/B Testing](#)
- [Multivariate Testing 101: A Scientific Method of Optimizing Design](#)

Ultimately, copywriting isn't a "once and done" process. While you need to hit a "good enough" finished point to get something up and live on your website, your copy is something that you should be testing and tweaking as long as your site is running. Give a few of the techniques above a try now, but then come back every few months to find a new way to improve your copy and your overall conversion rate.

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Thanks for being part of the Freeman Nation,

Jonathan Freeman, Sr.
President and Co-Founder

