**Outlines Help You Write Better, Faster**

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Would you build a house without blueprints? No, probably not. That would be a recipe for disaster. The same could be said for writing without an outline. An outline gives your writing structure and helps you organize your thoughts from start to finish, to ensure you get your point across or tell a good story.

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote about how the inverted pyramid style helps you write better press releases. Part of this approach is getting all the readers’ questions answered upfront (who, what, why, when, where and how), the other part is forcing you to outline before writing.

**Do People Still Outline?**

A lot of you are writers, so I’m sure you outline your writing from time to time. I’d guess that most people in the business world don’t. There are a couple of reasons I think most people don’t outline their writing anymore:

* **It’s too easy to change stuff –**you don’t need whiteout anymore and we’re not using typewriters. We used to write by hand or with a typewriter – you had to think about how your writing was going to flow from start to finish before you started, because it wasn’t possible to cut and paste or move copy around.
* **It takes too long –**I could finish my blog post in the time it might take me to outline my blog post, so why bother outlining? This is true, the pace of our writing has increased. We need to write more content in less time. I’d argue that even if it takes twice as long to outline *then*write, the article will be better.
* **There are less limits –**in the past, writers have been limited by column inches and word counts. Today, there are few limits on content length (outside of Twitter that is). If I want to add another 500 words to this post, I could. Outlining helped writers focus on what they would be able to communicate in the space allotted.
* **People have short attention spans –**a lot of writing these days consists of short bursts of information versus well-constructed storytelling. A lot of writers communicate in more of a stream of consciousness voice – or via bullet lists and rankings (guilty).

**Why Am I Blogging About Outlines?**

I think outlines will help you write better, faster. I think it will save you time and more people will want to read your stuff. I’m going to outline more of my posts to test the theory further, but figured I would share this thinking with you to get some more input.

Here are a couple of benefits I suspect come from using outlines:

* **Outlines help you think through your topic –**you might have a subject in mind, but you need to hone in on the topics you’d like to cover – by creating an outline, you can figure out how you’d like the piece to play out. You can also figure out which areas you might need to research information, get visuals or interview an expert for. Of course, you can figure out what information to omit as well.
* **Outlining can help you eliminate writer’s block-**if you’re having a hard time getting your writing kicked off, an outline can help you break down your subject into manageable chunks. Outlining can help you get over the hump and get your thoughts on paper (or your screen).
* **Outlines save you time –**it might seem counter intuitive, but taking time to outline your writing first could save time. If you just write from start to finish, there’s a good chance you’ll have to do some significant editing or revision – which takes a lot of time. From experience, if you start with a good flow and organization of information, the editing process will go much faster.
* **Outlines can make you a more effective communicator –**when I just write about a topic without planning my writing first, I find I don’t always communicate everything I had hoped to. I’ve also completely missed my point all together before. By creating an outline first, it’s easier to decide whether or not you’re clearly communicating your point. If your writing is in more of a story format, an outline can help you balance all the pieces – introduction, rising action, supporting facts, climax and conclusion – rather than figuring it out as you go along.
* **Outlines can help you plan future writing –**I’ll often create drafts of posts I’m going to write someday – in outline form – and add to the outline as I come across new information or think through the details more. Having a reservoir of writing ideas – in a working outline format – can help you write more content on a regular basis.