



Get unlimited access

Open in app



Published in Creators Hub



Nadia Rawls

Follow

Dec 1, 2020 · 4 min read · Listen



Save



RESOURCES

23 Examples of Effective Headlines

Plus some quick tips and a note on coining terms



Illustration: Kawandeep Virdee

If you want to draw readers to a story, you need to make them want to choose it from a sea of other options. A strong headline is your best shot to do that. You want your headline to entice the reader and clearly communicate what the story is about — all without sounding too cookie cutter and without veering into clickbait. That can be a fine line to walk, but it's important to find the balance.



all have in common is that they are clear, direct, assertive, and focused on what is most interesting.

Analysis

Best when you're giving a fresh lens to a current trend, moment, or interest. This construction often takes the form of what/why/how because it's about offering an explanation.

- What Everyone's Getting Wrong About the Toilet Paper Shortage
- This Looks Like a Depression, Not a Recession
- Why All the Warby Parker Clones Are Now Imploding
- How the Black Death Radically Changed the Course of History

Note: The article on the Black Death came out during the coronavirus pandemic when the parallels to previous pandemics were high interest and the connection was already on readers' minds. Because the connection was known, we didn't need to spell it out in the headline. But if you're looking back at history and the relevance is less obvious, you might need to make that connection for the reader. Just make sure they can see why your story is relevant to them now.

Bold declaration

Best when you have a strong, possibly controversial thesis. The key here is to go all the way and make the bold claim without hedging, as long as your article backs up that claim.

- The Office Is Dead
- The End of the Girlboss Is Here
- Gen X Will Not Go Quietly
- The Parents Are Not Alright
- Meghan Markle Defeated the British Monarchy
- You Haven't Earned the Right to Be a Basic B*tch Just Yet
- Your Inability to Do Pullups Is All In Your Head



interesting core of the story, and don't get bogged down in details. This can also be a personal story, and in those cases, focus on what makes your story noteworthy or different.

- [How a Hot \\$100 Million Home Design Startup Collapsed Overnight](#)
- [The Absurd Story Behind China's Biggest Bank Robbery](#)
- [The Privileged Have Entered Their Escape Pods](#)
- [I Had to Leave My Home Because of the KKK](#)

Note: 'The Absurd Story Behind China's Biggest Bank Robbery' was originally titled 'Jackpot' and still has that title onsite. For broader online distribution, that wasn't clear enough for people to understand what the story was about, so we changed the display hed to tease the story itself.

Instruction

Best when you are giving direct advice or information. These are popular but common, so giving your headline a little voice (without sacrificing clarity) can help differentiate your story. These often use a "how to" or list construction since that's an easy way to clearly show what people will learn.

- [All Your Most Paranoid Transfer of Power Questions, Answered](#)
- [How to Avoid Going Insane as a Writer](#)
- [How to Become Popular Without Being Charming, Funny, or Outgoing](#)
- [3 Ways to Rescue a Conversation That's Going Nowhere](#)

Quote

Best when there's a short, clear quote that hits right at the emotional core of the article and tells you exactly what it's about. It's rare that you get the perfect quote, so use sparingly, but it's powerful when you do.

- ['Mom, Why Don't You Have Any Black Friends?'](#)

A note on coining terms

If you're identifying a feeling or phenomenon that hasn't been identified before, then sometimes



Get unlimited access

Open in app

to make it clear. For example:

- When Black Women Go From Office Pet to Office Threat
- Nazi Hippies: When the New Age and Far Right Overlap

Some quick tips

- If you're unsure if the headline is clear, share only the headline with someone who hasn't read the story and ask what they think it's about.
- Look at what people are saying when they share the article if you're not sure you've captured what your audience thinks is most interesting.
- This headline capitalization tool is an easy way to make sure you're using proper headline caps.

Whenever an editor gets stuck on a headline, I pause the brainstorming process and ask them to just describe to me, as themselves: What is this story about?

Coming back to that question and answering it aloud is especially helpful if the headline is unclear or jargony, or if it's bloated with too many details. You wrote the story about something, and you had a reason for writing it, so those are your anchors if you're ever unsure of the headline.