



BOOM!Headline **WORKBOOK**



INTRODUCTION

When I sat down to prepare this workbook, I did what every great copywriter does: I started looking for something to steal.

A little frantic googling yielded a lot of resources that advertised themselves as help with writing headlines, but nothing I found under under had any practical advice about how to actually *write* headlines.

There were no exercises, procedures or conceptual tools to make generating ideas and crafting lines easier.

Most of what's out there are lists of the kind of headlines that you *could* write. I found these lists interesting, but hardly necessary. I have made my living as a copywriter since 1993 and until I sat down to write this workbook, I was unaware that such things existed.

So I'm going to take a different approach. This workbook will help you generate a lot of ideas, craft them in to lines and discard the ones that don't work. And most of all, it's going to help you do this with speed. Anybody can write a great line. A pro does it fast under pressure.

WRITE A HEADLINE RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW.

Who ever you are, whatever you do, you've got something you need to communicate. But everybody you want to reach is out of time and attention.

You need to be able to condense meaning into a terse, powerful line. It doesn't have to rhyme. It doesn't have to use fancy words. But it needs to be clear, fast and interesting.

It doesn't even have to be a headline. By far, some of the most important things I have ever written have been email subject lines.

But no matter what kind of line you are writing – headline, subject line, tag line– it needs to be fast and interesting.

Try one right now. Try to make it great, but don't worry if it's not. It's just a starting place.

Example: *Buy an Umbrella for \$9.95.*



IDENTIFY THE BENEFIT

The most important question you can ask and answer about any headline is “What’s in it for them?” It’s not that people only care about themselves. It’s that people only care about what is important to them. What you think is important to them isn’t only irrelevant, it’s also rude. It’s very difficult to get anywhere by attempting to reform people. It’s much easier to give them what they want.

So, extract a benefit from the line you just wrote. Don’t worry about making this snappy or cute, just put something down. If it’s wrong, you can always change it later.

Example:

*An umbrella
keeps the rain
off your head.*

(benefit goes here)



IF YOU WANT MORE GOOD IDEAS, YOU NEED TO HAVE MORE BAD IDEAS.

“Quantity produces quality. If you only write a few things, you’re doomed.”

Ray Bradbury

I think that Babe Ruth was the greatest hitter to ever play baseball. In 8,399 times up at bat he hit 714 home runs. That’s 8%. The only person to have a better at bat/home run ratio was Mark McGuire, but he was ‘roided to the gills when he did it.

Not only did the Babe not have steroids, but it’s a good bet he hit many of his home runs hung over.

But it begs a question. If he only knocked out of the park 8% of the time, what’s the world’s greatest copywriter’s home run percentage?

I think it’s about the same. The difference is, when a copywriter only strikes out if he or she pushes out a crappy line. Or gets run over by a deadline.

This 8% barrier means that, if you want one great line, you need to write twelve bad ones. It’s the inverted Baker’s Dozen.

A baker would make thirteen loaves of bread and throw out the worst one, leaving twelve for sale. A copywriter tries thirteen lines and discards twelve.

Harsh math, but that’s the way it works.

THIRTEEN HEADLINES FOR AN UMBRELLA



1. Umbrella – \$9.95
2. Weather mitigation device.
3. Portable Overhang.
4. Can't stand the Rain?
5. How to keep 13 kinds of rain off your head.
6. Impress your boss with your prudent preparedness.
7. For the price of your fancy latte drink, you can stay dry.
8. Because being soaked to the skin is only sexy in the movies.
9. When there is no sunny side of the street.
10. Take the weather with you.
11. The strongest umbrella money can buy.
12. Sheds more raindrops per dollar than the leading brand.
13. Free galoshes with every umbrella purchase.



CRANK OUT THIRTEEN LINES

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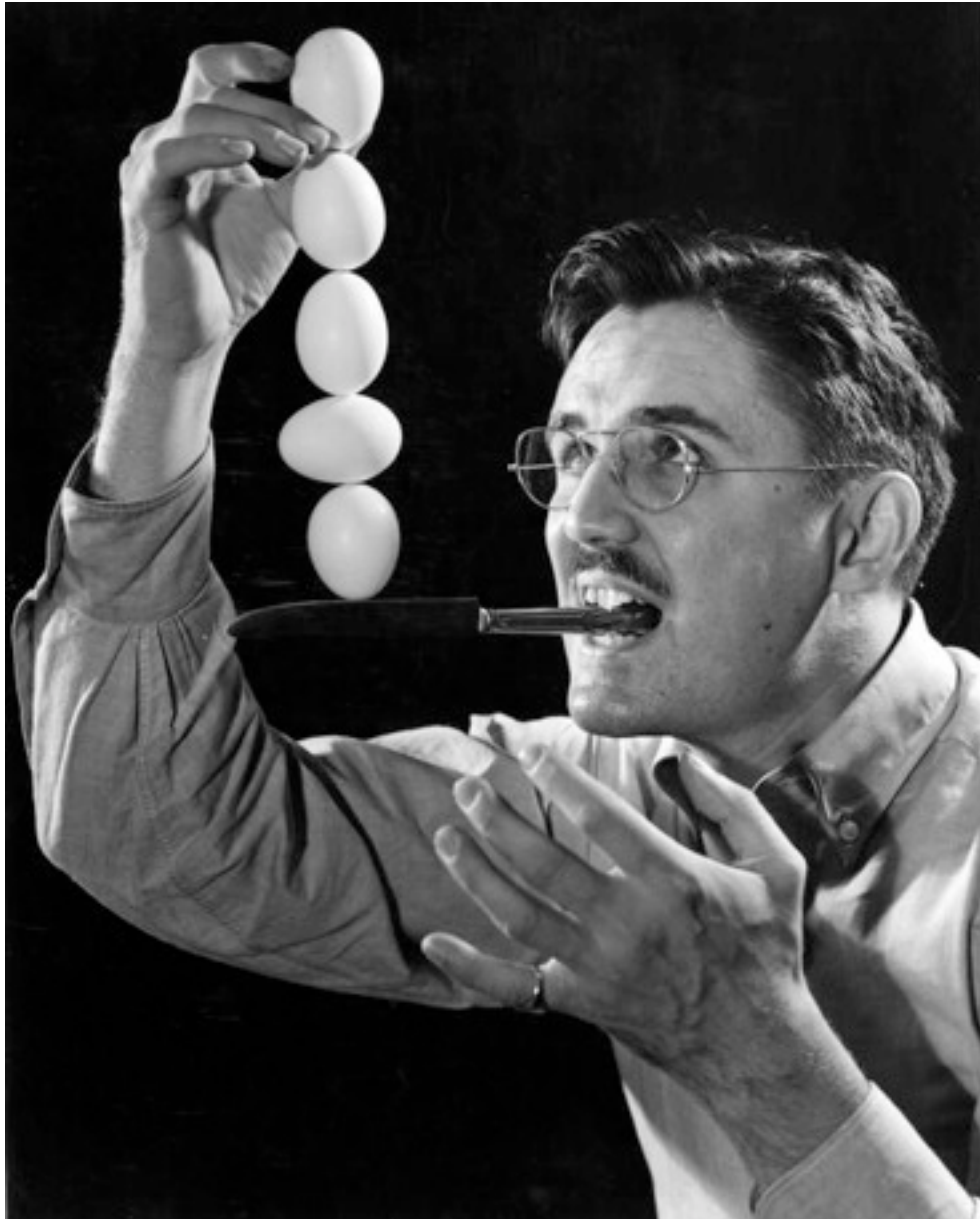
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**THE FEELING OF
HOPELESSNESS AND
INADEQUACY YOU FELT
AROUND LINE #7 ISN'T
A SIGN THAT YOU ARE
DOING IT WRONG.**

**IT'S THE SIGN THAT
YOU ARE DOING IT RIGHT.**


IF YOU CHEAT, THE MAGIC WON'T WORK



You can't just phone it in. You need to try as hard as you can to write thirteen lines you are excited about. You will fail. But this is the point.

To write a really great line requires building new connections in your brain. In some small way you are either learning something or bringing something new into the world.

Human beings only do this through failure. Learning, after all, is creating your understanding. So, the bad news is, you have to deal with the pain of failure before you revel in the glory of success.



“Don’t fear mistakes.
There are none.”

Miles Davis

THE LINES YOU DON'T USE ARE MORE IMPORTANT TO THE PROCESS THAN THE ONES YOU DO.



There are very few *real* quick-fix solutions in the world. Look closely at any overnight success and you will find that it is powered by years of hard, patient work. But I promise you, if you get this next idea, you will become a better writer, almost instantaneously.

Writing is “*the entire process by which we figure out what we are trying to say.*” Of each line that’s not good enough, you get the chance to ask why. When you understand why that line fails to meet the mark, you learn something very important about what else *might* work.

TAKE YOUR BEST LINE AND WRITE IT TEN DIFFERENT WAYS

This is even good to do with a crappy line. Try and keep to the same concept, but if you get pulled away, that's okay. You'll just have another line to throw in the mix. Here, I'll go first.

CRAPPY LINE: Impress your boss with your prudent preparedness.

1. If you carry an umbrella it says you are responsible.
2. An umbrella is the Swiss army knife of outerware.
3. Who would you promote, the guy with the umbrella, or a damp slacker who showed up late to work?
4. You know who's attractive? the person with an umbrella in the middle of rainstorm.
5. What good is busting your ass to make it to the top if you die of a cold on the way there?
6. Serious people are prepared for bad weather.
7. It rains on the just and the unjust alike. But not on the people who own umbrellas.
8. It's hard to respect a damp employee.
9. Insure your dignity.

OOPS, # 9 DIDN'T COMPLETELY SUCK

No problem. I can pull that one out and run it ten ways as well.

1. It's not an umbrella, it's dignity insurance.
2. An umbrella big enough to insure your dignity.
3. Shelter your self-respect from the elements.
4. Your dignity deserves an insurance policy.
5. Because you never get a second chance to make a first impression.
6. Protect your chance to make a good first impression.
7. Insure your first impression
8. Buy some walker's insurance?
9. Golf may be a good walk spoiled, but it doesn't have to be a damp one.
10. Every umbrella comes with free job insurance.

TAKE YOUR BEST LINE AND WRITE IT 10 DIFFERENT WAYS

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FIND ANOTHER BENEFIT

So what's really going on here? Well, as we write, we naturally redefine the benefit. Great copywriting redefines the benefit of a product or service in a customer's mind so that they decide it is worth buying.

This works because benefit of any product or service is disconcertingly subjective.

A heart transplant can save somebody's life. But the benefit of an extended life is going to be different for each patient. For one person it will be a chance to patch things up with his kids. Another person will finally take that trip to Nepal she's always wanted to take. A third person will just go back to work as if nothing happened.

The biggest breakthroughs aren't a trick of the language, they are a redefinition of the *benefit*.



TEN BENEFITS OF AN UMBRELLA

1. You will stay dry.
2. Your clothes won't be ruined.
3. You won't catch cold.
4. You'll feel better about yourself because you are prepared.
5. You can pretend you are John Steed from the Avengers.
6. It can double as a weapon.
7. It can protect your skin from the sun.
8. It shows people that you think ahead.
9. You can use it to keep other people dry.
10. You can walk through the rain, rather than run in an attempt to stay dry.

TEN BENEFITS OF A SHOVEL

1. Will make a hole.
2. Whole body workout.
3. Be proud that you made a hole.
4. Preparedness.
5. Improvised weapon for the zombie apocalypse.
6. This shovel is easier on your hands.
7. This shovel will make your employees more effective.
8. This shovel is ideal for snow.
9. This shovel is perfect for planting bulbs.
10. This shovel is good for digging ditches.

TEN BENEFITS OF YOUR THING

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**HEY SISYPHUS,
YOU KNOW WHAT
COMES NEXT, RIGHT?**



THIRTEEN MORE LINES

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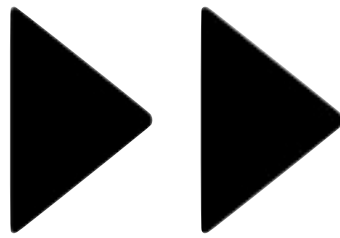
HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU ARE DONE?

This used to be an easy question to answer. You were done when the deadline rolled around. But now it's not so simple.

Deadlines, like typos, are really by-products of a print production process. In print, there is a time when a work must be printed. And after it is printed, it takes on an immutability and life of its own. A typo on a website is merely a bug. A typo in a book is a *sin*.

The sad truth of our time is that we are never done. In the fluid, fast-moving medium of the web, you can change your writing for little or no money and for little or no reason.

Ideally, you work like this: 1. Write a line. 2. You see how it works. 3. Based on feedback/data, you write another line. This is why it's important to be *fast*.



HOW TO BE FAST

My favorite copywriter, Howard Gossage, suggested that copywriting, by its very nature, was a limited art. He described it like this, “copywriting is like building concert quality pianos for people who are only ever going to use them to play chopsticks.”

But limited doesn't mean easy. So if you want to be fast and good, you need to put in 10,000 + hours.

Even then, the fastest way to write lines is to have a good partner. That's the whole idea behind Boom! Headline. If you don't have a good partner, (and if you're not going to put in 10,000 hours) Boom! Headline is a way to get some great writing help without all the hassle.

You can try it for free by signing up for our email list. Otherwise, set your teeth and wade in. Remember, it's good to struggle. That's how we learn and grow.

But if you are really up against it, we're happy to help.



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