



A Simple Guide to Everything

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I. CONTENT IQ

We are a digital publisher that uses data and analytics tools to help push our content to the widest audiences possible. Our stories are performance-based.

What does that mean?

Performance-Based Content

For the most part, a successful performance-based story at Content IQ does the following:

1. Attracts Readers

The story uses tantalizing headlines to attract a lot of readers. This can be measured by viewing the **Click Through Rate** (CTR).

CTR, in other words, shows what percentage of readers saw one of our stories on Facebook, AOL, Yahoo! or any of our content delivery platforms, and “clicked through” into the story itself.

2. Delivers a Good Story

After the headline brings readers into the story, it’s the job of the writer to pull those readers through as many captions as possible with stellar written and visual storytelling.

While there are many ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a story, the editorial department looks mostly at **Page Views per Session** (PVS). On AOL, our content appears in the form of a slideshow, where readers must click “next” after each card (which consists of one photo, one caption, and one subheader). PVS, then, measures how many times the average reader clicked “next” on a story.

The more well-written and engaging the story, the higher the PVS will be, as readers will be compelled to read on, clicking next, next, next, next, etc.

If the headline attracts a lot of readers (therefore earning a high CTR), and the story engages those readers (therefore earning a high PVS), we will likely see a high **Revenue Per Session** (RPS). That’s the amount of money we make from each unique viewer.

...vs Standard Journalism

There are many similarities between performance-based content and articles you might read in any reputable newspaper. There are also many differences. Here’s a brief comparison.

Similarities

Both content types ensure readers come away with a factual understanding of a topic. Like any news article, performance-based content is rigorously fact checked and well-researched. The writer must immerse themselves in the content and become a mini expert on the subject matter.

Differences

These mediums have different goals. At CIQ, a writer wants readers to stay with his or her article for as long as possible; at a newspaper, a writer wants to deliver important information as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Newspapers don’t “Bury the Lede.” The most important information is typically the first sentence, and the information decreases in importance from there.

Performance-based content reveals the most sought-after information via a well-told story, often revealing “the lede” as the climax to the article.

This is because performance-based content wants to generate a high PVS (remember, a high PVS leads to high RPS). Giving away the most important information right away ensures readers won’t read too many captions.

News informs. Performance-based content entertains *and* informs. It is closer in form to creative non-fiction or a podcast.

This wiki will share the Content IQ Editorial Department's tricks for creating the most compelling and engaging content possible

II. BOLT

Bolt is Content IQ's proprietary content management system (CMS). Writers create stories and quizzes entirely through this platform, which is designed specifically for our performance-based content needs.

Bolt Functions

See how each of Bolt's features functions below.

List

"List" is Bolt's homepage. Here, users can see a paginated collection of all content, starting with the most recently created. This list can be sorted by author, [content type](#), [primary domain](#), date posts were last modified, and date posts were published. Users can also see view the status of a post — published or unpublished

Using The options directly below the search bar at the top of the page allow users to filter posts by:

- Author: Who wrote the post.
- [Category](#)
- [Primary domain](#)
- Sync status: A tool for the development team.
- Status: Is a post published or unpublished
- Origin: Was the post originated on Bolt or our previous CMS (WordPress)
- Content type: Quizzes, stories, or search feed

Create Post

To create new content, Bolt users should click the link 'Create Post' located directly under 'List' on the left-oriented menu. A menu will pop up presenting users with an option of three different post types:

- [Story](#): Any article from the pipeline uses this template. Stories will take the form of narratives, listicles, or a hybrid of the two.
- [Quiz](#): Quizzes use this template.

Story

Users create narratives and listicles with this template. All of the tools and features of this post type are as follows.

Edit / Done

For a user to work on a post, this button must be toggled to “edit mode.” Edit mode allows a user to make changes to a document. Only one writer may edit a post at one time. Clicking “edit” while another user is writing a post will kick that user out, and all of their un-saved content will be lost. Don’t worry: you’ll receive a warning if another user is in the post!

Clicking “Done” locks a post, **saving** all content and ensuring no edits can be made unless another user unlocks the story.

Save

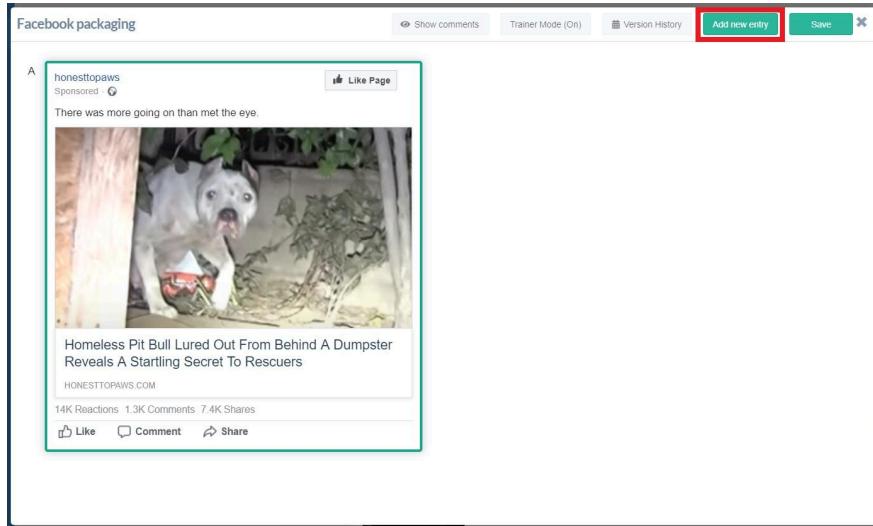
This option only appears when a post is in Edit mode. Clicking the button saves a story. Posts autosave every two minutes, but users should manually save frequently.

Packaging

Packaging allows users to generate, organize, and tweak how stories are posted to Facebook. Each option contains a headline, a caption, and an eye-catching, intriguing photo. Writers are responsible for creating 2 unique packaging options; however, 1-4 are usually provided for you in the pipeline.

Click the packaging link to open Bolt’s unique packaging interface.

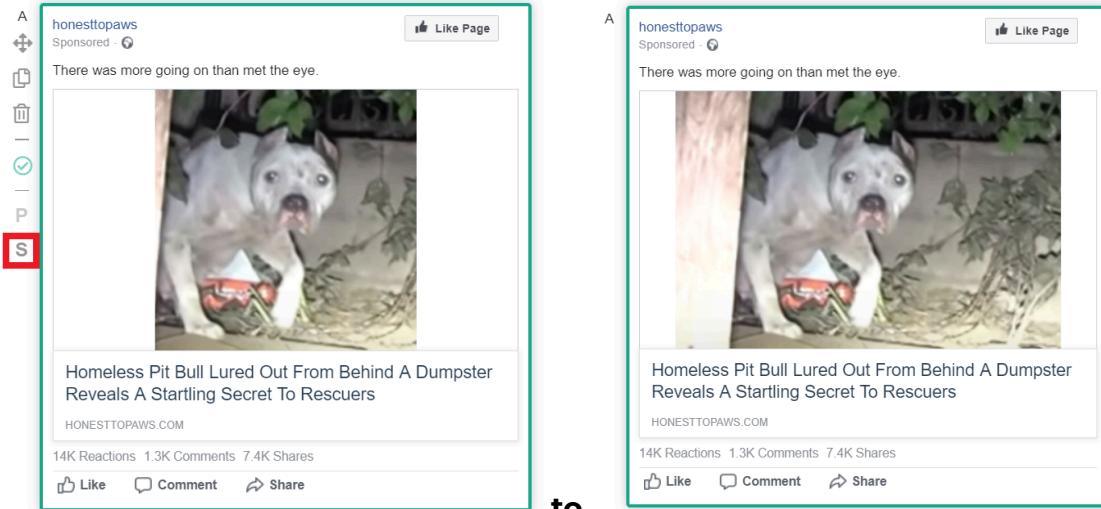
To add entries, click the “Add New Entry” button in the top left corner of the packaging module (the metadata image will be set as the default image for all new entries).



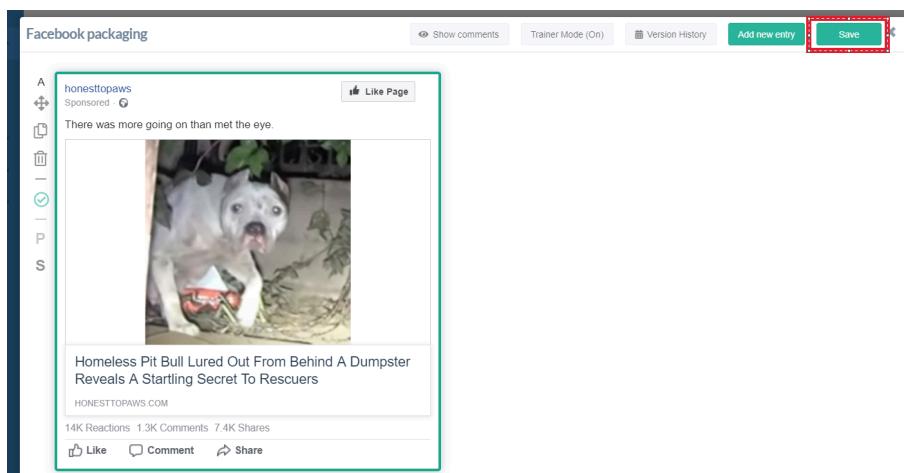
Each packaging option needs a primary image and secondary image. The primary image should be sized 660x660 (a large square) and is set by clicking the “P” button on the left-hand side of entry or on the default image itself, then choosing the image from the media library.

to

The secondary image should be sized 660x640 (a large rectangle) and is set by clicking the “S” button on the left-hand side. NOTE: You can set multiple secondary images but most of the time only one is necessary.



Add a headline and caption and you're all set! Posts typically have 5-6 options, and it's advisable to save your work after creating each one.



Import Cards

Bolt users can import cards from one post to another. The main function of this is to aid with [STITCHING](#), or the act of seamlessly blending a post that's already been written with the end of a newly-created post (allowing 20 caption posts to easily become 40+ caption posts).

After clicking this tool, users can simply click the story they would like to import into their post. The search feature only searches for exact phrases, so users should only search by [Permalink](#) or headline.

Users may also filter their search by:

- [Category](#)

- [Primary Domain](#)
- Status: Is a post published or unpublished
- Content Origin: Was the post originated on Bolt or our previous CMS (WordPress)

Expand / Collapse All

[Cards](#) — or, a story unit made of a caption, a photo, and an image credit — appear in two different formats: expanded or collapsed.

When a card is collapsed: Bolt users can see — but not edit — text, photos, and the card number. The consolidated form lets writers get a visual feel for their post.

When a card is expanded: Bolt users can edit text and upload photos, see image resolution and photo credits, and track card numbers. To be edited, cards must be **expanded**.

This button toggles every card into one format or the other.

Delete Cards

An individual card can be deleted by clicking on the trash can icon next to any slide.

To delete multiple cards at once, you can click the box in the bottom right-hand corner of any slide and then click the green “Delete Cards” button up top. **As a faster solution:** click the first slide in a sequence that you want to delete, hold down shift, and then click the last slide in that sequence. Every slide in between will be automatically selected, and you can then delete them using the green button.

Three Dots

Within the toolbar at the top of the screen are three vertical dots. Clicking that icon gives writers two relevant options:

Preview (Beta)

This allows Bolt users to see what the story will look like in its completed form on the webpages. Previewing a post lets writers see what online readers will see when a post is published.

Revision History

Bolt logs every iteration of a post (any time a post is saved). This feature allows users to compare two different versions of a story side by side. Bolt users can also see which author made what changes to a specific article.

Headline

This is the title that appears on the website. In most cases, this will be the winning Facebook packaging angle with any unnecessary adjectives removed. For example:

- *Idyllic Island Was Completely Abandoned For The Darkest Purpose Imaginable*
becomes...
Idyllic Island Was Abandoned For A Dark Purpose

Titles should be visually appealing to those visiting the website. Preview your post (See, [Three Dots](#) > [Preview](#) (beta)) to ensure the headline does not reach the third line and that there are no widows.

Cards

There are three components that make up the content appearing on a card: 1 clear, rectangular photo, the photo credit, and a 45-60 word caption.

Photos

Photos must adhere to our [image usage guidelines](#). Please don't use pictures that are owned by photographers and licensed through agencies. Writers should select large, high-quality photos that are interesting and feel authentic — NO STOCK PHOTOS!

Additionally, pictures **must** be rectangular, proportioned at a roughly 3:2(width:height) ratio, and no smaller than 800x533 resolution, unless absolutely necessary.

For more information, see the [storytelling guide](#).

Uploading a photo

To upload a photo, save the image to your computer with a unique file name.

Click Select Media > Upload Image and choose the file you want to upload from your computer. Before hitting the select button (on the upper left of the select media pop out) be sure to credit your photo.

Photo credits

All photos must be credited following the guidelines in the crediting section.

Captions

Captions are the body text of a post. Each should be between 30-45 words and should never exceed 55. Each caption should be interesting in its own right, contain a meaningful piece of information, and carry readers to the next caption. Captions should compliment photos and vice versa.

For more information on what makes a meaningful caption, see the [IVF section](#). For information on how to spread out information across multiple captions, see the [stitching guide](#).

Subheaders

Subheaders are mini-headlines that capture the attention of people skimming through a story. They create a hierarchy within a story and create a feeling of organization.

In listicles, subheaders feature a number (where the item is on the list) and a brief preview of the card's content. Subheaders should be less than one line long, preferably on the shorter side.

Tools

There are four tools available for each expanded card.

Move Cards

Bolt users can rearrange cards by dragging and dropping them. Multiple cards can be moved at once by simply clicking the selection box in the bottom right corner of each card.

Duplicate Cards

This inserts a duplicated version of a card right beneath the original. Writers use this option to preserve a photo when deleting a card, for instance.

Delete Cards

This deletes a card, including all text, photos, and photo credits.

Add New Card

This creates a blank card right beneath the original card.

Metadata

This is all the key internal information that tells us and our colleagues on the back end what we need to know about any given post.

Metadata also appears in a Google search.

Title

Without any misdirecting packaging angles, this is a clear and concise summary of what a story is about. It is usually the same as the site title and appears in Google.

hermoments.com › dean-daughter-talks ▾

Dean Martin's Daughter Talks About Her Father's Time With ...

By Emma Patterson. Her Moments Staff ... Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Sammy Davis, Jr. were the slicked-back head honchos of the Rat Pack. They were ...

Description

A one-sentence summary of the story, often taken directly from the intro, that contains at least one likely-to-be-Googled phrase or noun. Think SEO.

The description appears below the article title on Google.

Metadata Image

This is the image that is paired with the headline on any one of our websites. It also shows up as a thumbnail in the posts list in Bolt. Every story needs one.

First, pick a high-quality image that preferably has its subject centered in the frame. Next, crop and/or resize it to exactly 1400x740 pixels. Make sure to save it under a single-word name before uploading to Bolt.

Facebook Share Image

This is similar to the metadata image, but specific to Facebook.

Settings

Make sure to adjust these before marking a story as finished.

Primary Domain

This controls the primary site that a story will be published under. Match the domain here to whatever vertical it was assigned under in the Story Pipeline.

Secondary Domains

Select all available options as Secondary Domains, except for MostInterestingThings.com (for now at least).

Canonical Overwrite

By default the Canonical URL is the URL of the Primary Domain.

However, if for some reason you want the Canonical URL to be different, you can enter an option into the canonical overwrite. Canonical URL is used by Google for search stuff; Google will know in a search that two pages are really the same page and only show one, for example.

Writers typically leave this blank.

Permalink

These are keywords that make up the URI — or those words in a link after the “dot com” part. Every story needs a unique permalink, usually with words taken from the site title. Take whichever title words best sum up the story and put a hyphen between each one. Avoid using words that are not important (articles, prepositions) or overly negative (terms relating to death, injury, and abandonment can give us problems on various platforms).

These should be 2-4 words max.

Example: In the story “Huge Celebrities That Are Actually Twins,” the writer entered in “celebs-actually-twins” in the permalink. As a result, the URL shows up as <https://hermoments.com/celebs-actually-twins/>.

Source URL

In this box, paste the source link (the one provided in the pipeline) so writers and editors have it for future reference. If you draw heavily from an additional source, you can include this as well.

Viewability

For each story, writers should toggle on the buttons for “Homepage, Content Rec, Pages” and “RSS” so that the adjacent bar appears green. Leave “Test Post” as it is.

Content

Author

When a user generates a new post, their name will be listed here. This controls who is listed as the author on the front end of the website.

Language

For our purposes, everything should be set to “English.”

Primary Domain

Based on the primary domain users chose in “Settings,” this option provides the four categories that go along with that site. Pick the option that best matches the subject of the story.

Secondary Domains

Writers usually don’t touch this option, but it can publish a post across multiple home pages.

Domain Categories

Each domain has four primary categories. Choose only one category that best fits the story’s subject matter.

General Information

Comments

Writers used to paste the source URL here, but now we put it in the Source URL box above. You can leave the comments box blank.

Purge

This button adds updates to an already published story. Writers do not need to press this unless making changes to a post that is live.

The button is important for one major reason: When updating a live story, we don’t want every change to be reflected on the front end because then anyone reading the story would see edits happening live; you’d have to finish any update, including major overhauls, in between autosaves.

So, when a story is live, edits don't reflect until the writer hits purge.

Note: This is not the technical explanation for a system purge, but it's a helpful explanation geared towards the editorial department.

Publish

This button finalizes the post by publishing it on one or more of our sites. Writers should **NOT** press this.

III. CONTENT

Narratives

A story with a beginning, middle, and end. We introduce characters — people, groups, businesses etc — and follow their specific journey.

Think: movie, tv episode, novel. For more information, see the [IVF section](#) below.

IVF

Intro-Visuals-Flow (IVF) are the three components of a successful story, so we pay extra close attention to them while writing or editing. While there's no guarantee a story finds success on the internet, following the criteria established below ensures your content has a good chance of "making it" — and performing — in the world.

Introductions

One paragraph and about 90 words, intros are the first part of the story a reader encounters. Not only must they capture the attention of an audience, but they must: connect with the story packaging so that readers who clicked a headline (upping our CTR numbers) are not confused by the story in front of them.

Effective Intros: This is our chance to make a positive first impression. We want to introduce the topic at hand, demonstrate why it's important, and give a little preview of the intrigue to come. Here are a few mini-strategies to make that happen

- Pose a central question or foreshadow a conflict. Establish the stakes!
- Avoid platitudes and truisms that hurt momentum (e.g. "History has a lot to teach us" or "Money can be a stressful matter for any family").
- Include some basic information (who, when, where) without getting too bogged down in details.
- Make sure every sentence is clear, on-topic, and free of grammatical errors.
- Get creative when the topic allows — open with a moving quotation, crack a joke, or put on your writer hat and structure the intro as a small scene (e.g. "On a cold January afternoon, the Content IQ writers basked in the light of their laptop screens. Then, without warning, an unusual email popped into their inboxes. It was the weekly newsletter!").

Introductions Tips and Tricks

For narratives, a good way to add high stakes to your introduction is by hinting at the story's climax. You don't want to reveal everything, but you should compel the audience to find out more.

Here's an example:

*17-year-old Belgian teenager Josephine Boel was living a relatively low-key life in 2020: quarantining, watching shows, and doing standard teenage things. She had a comfier home situation than most, having been born in a well-to-do family; unbeknownst to her, though, it was all about to change. **In an explosive international event, aided by the global media, Josephine was about to find out the truth about her identity — and nearly two decades of lies.***

The red sentence above is the hint at the climax. Note that you should never set up anything in the introduction that you won't be able to realistically pay off somewhere in the story. Don't lie to your readers.

Visuals

Creating a pleasant visual journey can be the toughest part of generating quality performance-based content. Every caption needs a photo, meaning there will be, at a minimum, 20 images in every story.

Each image must be engaging and employ smart composition techniques. Each image must be credited properly. Each image must contribute to the greater visual journey, giving a sense of the story's tone and era.

This is a tall and admittedly very tough task. But you can do it!

Creating the Image Journey

Check out this [Canva Presentation](#) for the ultimate CIQ guide to all things photo.

Here are the Cliff Notes. In any CIQ story, we want:

High-quality visuals

These photos are cropped well and authentic — real people doing real things (not posed on a red carpet or sound stage). These photos complement the caption.

Use fewer “stock” images:

What do we mean by stock images? Well, these are pictures that look very **generic** and are clearly not specifically related to the content. They can look **overly staged**, too.

Why don't we want stock images? These types of pictures don't really add much to the story. They're not very engaging, either, which means our readers could get bored!

This doesn't mean that we don't want to use *any* generic images from sites like Getty, Unsplash and Pexels, but we should only pick the most interesting and engaging ones. This is especially important when it comes to Getty – because we pay for every download!

Take a look at some examples of the kinds of stock images we **don't** want to see.



Pretty dull, right?

Use more user-generated photos

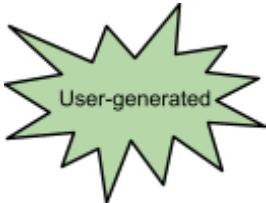
When we say user-generated photos, we mean pictures taken by **your average person** – rather than by professional agencies or brands.

Why do we like them so much? Unlike most stock images, user-generated pictures can make an article look more **authentic, unique** and **relevant**. And that means readers are going to stay engaged for longer.

Say you're scrolling through a list of life hacks. Isn't it way more interesting to see a real person actually demonstrating the hack – rather than a generic, overly staged picture of something vaguely related? Take a look at the following examples. Which is more engaging?



vs.



So, finding great user-generated images means searching [social media](#), [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#).

Handy tip: Go to Google Images, type “**site:**” and then the website you want to find images from followed by some keywords, and Google will bring up lots of relevant images from that website only. It's a great way to narrow your search to user-generated content:

```
site:youtube.com coca-cola hacks  
site:facebook.com potatoes
```

If you want to eliminate a certain site from your results, type “**-site:**” and then the name of the website you want to skip:

```
-site:pinterest.com bad wedding dresses  
-site:yandex.ru cute dogs
```

Get creative!

Yes, we want to have fun sourcing images! It should go without saying, but the visuals are there to make articles more interesting. We want our readers to *enjoy* reading our content, after all! So, here are a few ways we can get creative with our image choices:

Include funny pictures:

Humorous images are a great way of mixing things up and keeping readers interested.

Obviously, this doesn't work for every article. If we're talking about a really serious or sad topic, we don't exactly want our readers to laugh... That said, even History and Science articles can benefit from a few lighter visuals.

Imagine you're working on an article about the effects of sleep deprivation. Generic stock pictures of people yawning like the one below are probably going to send our readers to sleep...



So, why not include a few funny options like these?



Include relevant references:

pop culture

Everyone watches movies and TV, right? Including shots from recognisable films and shows that are relevant to the copy is a fun and clever way to mix things up.

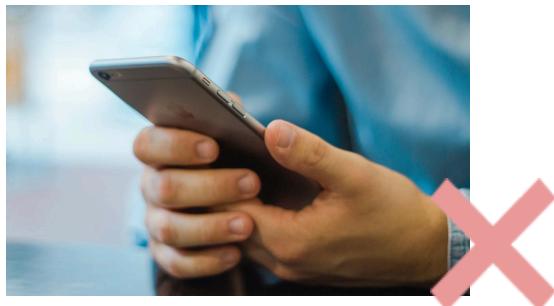
Returning to the sleep deprivation concept, here are a couple of ideas:



Think outside the box!

This means not always going for the obvious choice...

Imagine a paragraph is talking about the use of mobile phones. We too often see pictures like the one below, which is pretty generic and dull:



But what about something that clearly says “phone” – without just saying phone?
Look at the examples below:



Avoid too
carpet

Yes, Getty is
for celebrity



many red
photos

a great source
photos, but

articles will look pretty boring if almost every photo is a posed picture of a celebrity on the red carpet.

It's way more interesting to mix things up and include celebrity pictures from different sources:

- **Social media:** these are more **candid, varied** and **engaging**. An article that includes photos actually taken by the celebrity is going to feel more **personal** and **relevant**, too.
- **YouTube:** including stills from **interviews** is a great way to convey the **emotion** of a celebrity (e.g. if they're opening up about sad news, we can include images of them looking upset). They're also more candid and less widely seen than Getty shots.
- **IMDb:** stills from **movies** and **TV shows** are another great way to get pictures of celebrities showing emotions. They also mix things up nicely. And of course, if the article is talking about a particular film or show, even more of a reason to include IMDb pictures!

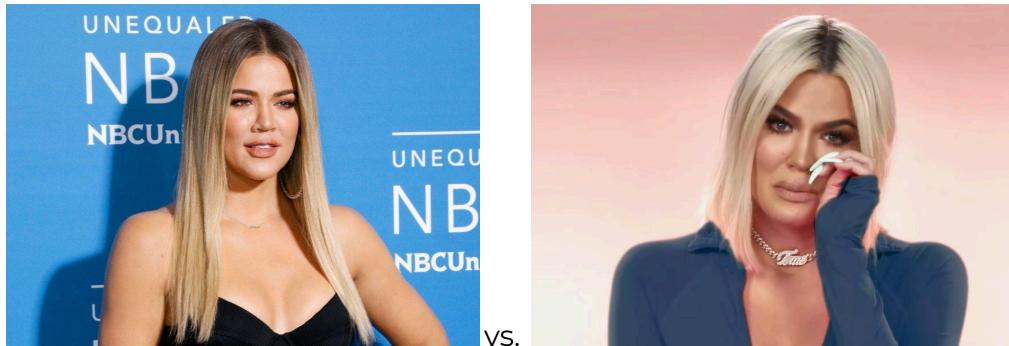
Here's what we're talking about:



vs.



vs.



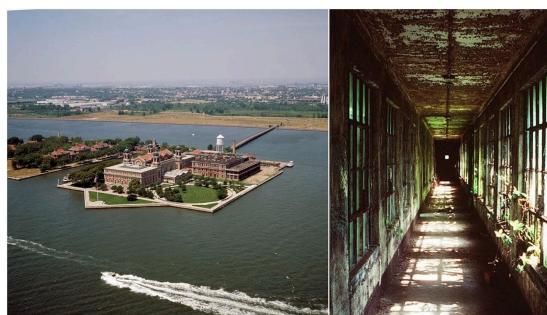
Use composite leads as a tool to pique readers' interest

Granted, this won't work for every article, but [joining two photos together](#) can be a great way to give readers a taste of what's to come.

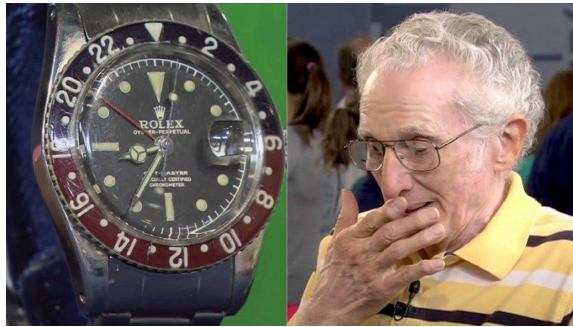
Take a look at the following examples:



This is the lead in a piece called "When Ellen Asked Blake Shelton A Personal Question, Their Conversation Took An Awkward Turn." The composite gives readers a glimpse of BOTH celebrities involved in the story. Readers see a snippet of the stars' facial expressions and reactions, too, which hopefully makes them want to see more.



This is a great example of how composites can be used in History pieces. It gives readers a taste of what it's like inside the structures on this abandoned island – without giving too much away.



This is the lead in a piece called “50 Years After This Veteran Bought An Old Rolex, He Was Blown Away To Discover Its True Value.” The composite means readers get a glimpse at the old rolex AND the veteran’s reaction – and makes them want to see more.

Diverse visuals

Visual diversity means creating a “world” of good images that subvert the subconscious expectations of readers at regular intervals. We do this by examining six aspects of our visual journey:

- **Color palette** -- are there too many photos of green trees in a row?
- **Black and white vs color** -- can we space color photos throughout by using colorized content or a split image?
- **Number of subjects** -- are there too many photos of just 1 person? Four photos straight of two people?
- **The subject** -- Are we looking at 20 photos of Nic Cage? Can we get some photos without him?
- **There are subjects** -- Do we see people doing things with enough regularity? Twelve landscape photos only works on calendars!
- **Diversity** -- Are we making an effort to depict people of different ages, races, and genders?

Storytelling visuals

If a reader looked at the photos in a story without any accompanying captions, could he or she get the gist of the narrative? Do the visuals truly complement the whole story?

Images help us tell a story just as much as words do. Visual diversity is key, but the pictures must take the reader on a **journey**. Just like well-crafted copy, strong images can create...

Atmosphere and tone: Ask yourself, what's the **mood** of the piece? What do we want the reader to **feel**?

Scenes and characters: Think of the story like a movie. Who are my characters? Where does my story take place? In what time period?

Suspense: Just like great copy, cleverly placed images can lay "breadcrumbs" and keep the reader hooked.

All of these elements combine to create an engaging visual experience for our readers. Here are some additional tips for finding compelling images:

Usage Rights

Image rights: Copyright vs. Creative Commons, Public Domain, and Fair Use

Copyrighted images are owned by their creator. These images may not be used without express written permission.

Creative Commons: Non-profit organization Creative Commons created an expansive gallery of photos that are available to use with some restrictions:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

NOTE: Prior to usage, it is necessary to ensure all listed requirements are followed.

Public Domain: Any materials on which the copyright has expired enter the public domain. Copyrights expire **70 years** after the death of the author. Creators may also voluntarily enter works into the public domain. Images in the public domain can be used without a license.



A Public Domain photo of the 1910 Clemson Football team

Fair Use: America's fair use laws allow for the repurposing of small excerpts from copyrighted works for the sake of criticism, research, news reporting, teaching, and other various artistic endeavors without having to request permission from the content's creator.

NOTE: As far as images go, the more significantly an image has been altered (zoomed in, cropped, creative tweaks, etc), the more likely that the resulting work may be used under fair use rules.

How to choose which image to use - the Do's and Don'ts

Do not use images from photo agencies without paid license:

Agencies such as Associated Press, Reuters, and others make their revenue by selling licenses to use the images in their databases. Never use their images without first making sure a paid license has been obtained (spoiler alert: it probably has not been).

For GETTY: To use Getty Images, you MUST license the photos through the website and credit the text properly within the post.

Do not use images with watermarks or copyright notices:

Watermarks or other notices embedded in the image are a clear sign the owner of the picture does not want it circulated without their permission. Do not use. Never crop out a watermark.



Avoid images being sold on a professional photographers website

Photographers that make their living from selling their photos are more likely to not want their photos commercially distributed as compared to their amateur peers. Don't take money out of someone's pocket.

Always prefer creative commons or public domain images

Examples:

- The Federal Government: Materials published by any federal agency are free to use, provided a proper citation is added. This includes photos released by the White House, branches of the military, NASA, and more.



Nasa

- Flickr: A photo-sharing application, Flickr allows anyone to make their photos available to the public. Make sure to follow any citation requirements listed by the creator.

- Google image search: Under "Tools" --> "Usage Rights", look for photos under the "Labeled for Reuse" category. Images in the "Labeled for reuse with modification" category may be used if sufficiently altered.

Images posted in their creator's public social media feed may be used with judgement

Photos posted by their creator for the world to see, especially if the creator is a public figure, may be used while exercising judgement (in particular, consider whether the poster may reasonably have wanted the photos to remain private. If in doubt, do not use).

These images should be properly cited as so: Account Name / Social Platform

Examples:

George Clooney / Facebook

@ThePaulGiamatti / Twitter



Jennifer Aniston / Instagram

Use video screencaps

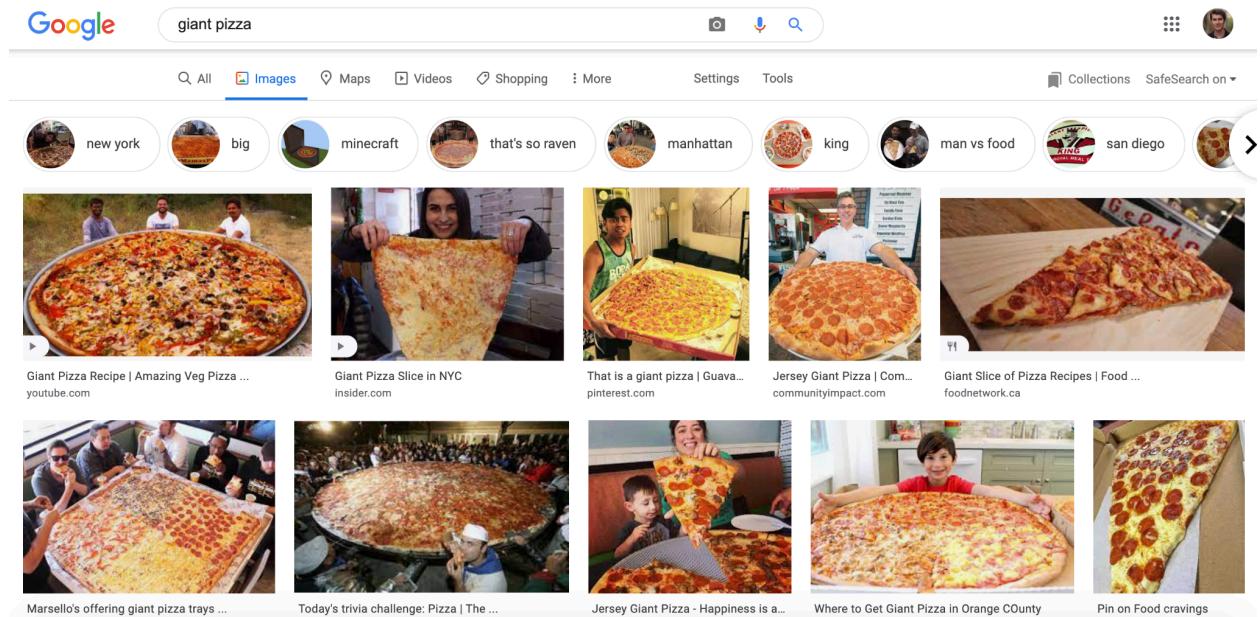
Taking a screencap (or Gif) from a television show or film is acceptable. The same goes for screencaps from user generated videos on video sharing platforms such as Youtube.



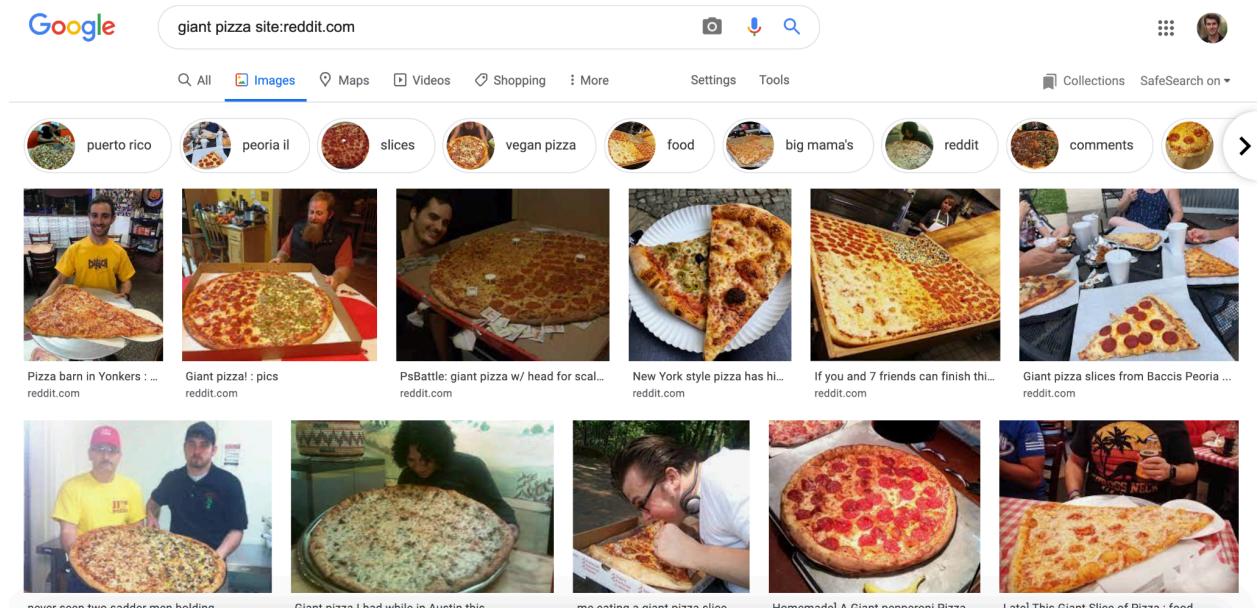
Searching for Images from a Specific Website:

Here's a handy trick you can use in Google Images to make sure that you only get results from a single website. Along with your search terms, you can enter "site" followed by a colon

and the desired domain to only get photos from that source. Observe what happens when we just search for "giant pizza":



Those photos are from all over the place — including some sites we may not be able to pull from. Here's what happens when we search for "giant pizza site:[reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com)"



That's great! All usable pics from Reddit. And we can do that with other sites as well, like YouTube or Wikimedia Commons.

Flow

Flow refers to the written story — the words, the captions, the copy. Everything after the introduction falls under the *FLOW* umbrella. Think:

- **Storytelling** — [See section below](#)
- **Waiting to Reveal** — are we making an effort to ensure the reveal comes at the latest possible time? Can we add any content or information early on to stretch the story? Can we make the reveal at caption 15+?
- **Don't give away answers** — Can you buy 1 PVS by just putting a final sentence on to the next slide?
- **Captions work together** — If you copy-pasted each caption into a word document, would it read well? Transitions. Cliffhangers.
- **Captions begin with varying sentence structures** — does every caption start with a noun verb?

Storytelling

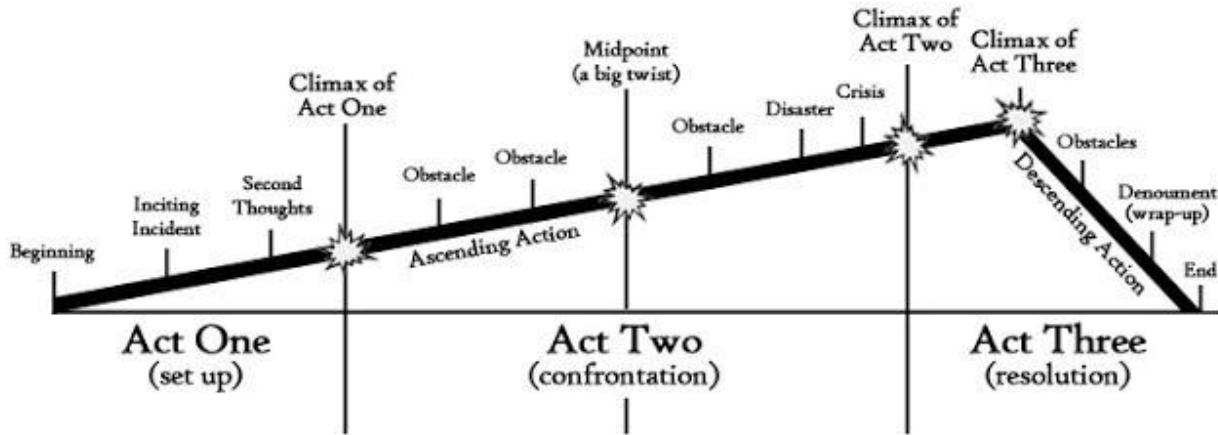
Pacing performance-based content can be tricky. We don't want to burn through too much of the story right at the start or cram too much in at the end — this does not make for an engaging reading experience. Imagine if everything that happened in your favorite movie took place in the last half hour, and the previous 90 minutes was all fluff and filler.

To combat this, writers are encouraged to use proven story structures to make their content really sing to the reader. Here are three “templates” that can contribute to a high PVS.

Three Act Structure

Typically, movie scripts (and some TV scripts) follow a three-act structure. This format delivers the story in a way readers are internally familiar with (even if they don't always realize it). Here's an overview:

Three-Act Structure



While this applies most strictly to film, the form works perfectly in the digital publishing space, too. Take a look:

Act One [Captions 1-5]:

Your character is in a normal world.

Something happens that's out of the ordinary.

The character must confront the problem.

Act Two, Pt. 1 [Captions 6-10]:

Your character reacts to the problem from act 1

Your character fails to solve the big problem

Midpoint [Caption 11]:

Your character makes a vital realization or finds a helpful clue.

Act Two Pt. 2 [Captions 12-16]:

Your character pursues a solution; now he or she is on the right trail.

Act 3 [Captions 17-20]:

Your character solves the problem.

Your character's life is different.

See how that works? Each act translates to a section of cards; and, if you're writing a 20-caption story, each section contains 4-5 cards. Before writing, break the story up into four interesting parts. Five captions about for each is a great start to a compelling narrative.

The Pixar Method

Movie giant Pixar has its own story template. It looks like this:

- 1: Once upon a time there was a person, and every day they did THIS
- 2: One day, something changed
- 3: Because of that...
- 4: Because of that...
- 5: Because of that...
- 6: Because of that...
- 7: Because of that...
- 8: Because of that...
- 9: Because of that...
- 10: Until finally...

Obviously, a story doesn't need seven "Because of thats" to be successful. For a shorter, performance-based story, only two or three because of thats might be necessary.

The beautiful thing about this structure, though, is that it encourages writers to think in terms of cause and effect. Something happened that made something else happen and things kept happening until the problem was resolved.

Goal Post Method

The goal post method utilizes a more "fill in the blanks" approach. It asks the writer to find the 4-5 most important parts of their story and spread them evenly throughout the article.

With "goal posts" set, the writer then fills in the rest of the story with research, context, and cliffhangers

Cliffhangers

Remember that many of our readers access our content in a gallery format. If we don't give them a good reason to click onward, they'll probably leave the site, which is why mini cliffhangers are so effective.

There's no hard-and-fast rule about what these cliffhangers should look like and how often they should occur. But adding a bit of stylistic flair and pacing how your reveals can make all the difference. Here are a few different types of cliffhangers.

- Informational Reveal - If a piece of information is a turning point in a story, don't just spell it out as if you're writing a Wikipedia entry. Split it across the beginning and end of two captions! It'll keep readers engaged and signal to them that this is an important moment. Here's an example:
 - Boring version: John Lennon and Paul McCartney met when John's skiffle group performed at a church picnic in 1957. Then they became friends and partners.
 - First cliffhanger caption: In June of 1957, John Lennon was thrilled that his skiffle group, The Quarrymen, were set to perform at a church picnic. He didn't know it, but there was a stranger in the crowd who would change his life forever.
 - Second cliffhanger caption: While setting up equipment, one of John's bandmates introduced him to a friend of his, a younger boy who was brimming with musical potential. His name was Paul McCartney.
- Emotional Stakes - We've talked about creating nonfiction "characters" in our stories, and this cliffhanger involves fleshing out their emotions and the tension of the situation to create drama. Observe the italicized section below.
 - The Beatles put their all into a 1962 audition with Decca, but the record label curtly informed the lads that they weren't interested. *Devastated, Lennon couldn't help but feel that they'd blown their big chance.*
- Misdirection - Who doesn't love some good twists and turns? Stay a step ahead of your readers by signaling that you're headed one way, but actually going another.
 - First cliffhanger caption: In 1966, Lennon gave what he believed was an honest, open interview about social trends and rock music. He quipped, "We're more popular than Jesus now," and soon forgot about the conversation.
 - Second cliffhanger caption: Months later, however, American publications got a hold of Lennon's quote and published it out of context. It sparked a wave of backlash against The Beatles, including organized bonfires of records and memorabilia in particularly religious areas.
- Foreshadowing - You remember this one from high school English class. Best used sparingly, this gives readers a taste of what is to come.
 - In 1969, The Beatles played their famous rooftop concert atop their Apple headquarters, where they ran through 42 minutes of music before police halted the impromptu performance. Some fans wondered if this would mark the start of a new tour, but the sad truth was that the Fab Four would never play in public together again.

Tone

Remember that as a writer, you have the power to establish tone with your words alone. Establishing the right kind of tone for the right story probably comes naturally to you, but you'd be surprised how easy it is to shift into a tone that isn't appropriate for the story. The last thing you want to do is confuse the reader with shifting tones! For example, if you're writing about a famous true crime event from history, you probably wouldn't want it to sound like this:

- The killer lunged forward and stabbed his victim repeatedly. Ouch! That had to hurt.

Since we're telling the story of a murder victim, establishing a lighthearted, conversational tone probably isn't best here. We always strive to be both respectful and captivating writers! Here's a better version of that sentence:

- The killer lunged forward, his knife raised. Jane Smith tried to outmaneuver him, but he was too quick. Before she even knew what was happening, the knife struck.

This is the story of the worst day of someone's life, so it's important to be respectful while still telling an interesting, captivating story. Basically, you don't want to start cracking jokes at a funeral, and the same applies whenever you write about crime, death, or trauma of some sort.

However, that doesn't mean you can't be lighthearted at other times! Most of the time, in fact, your stories will strike a balance between serious and lighthearted, especially when you're writing about topics like animal rescues, celebrity life stories, certain historical events, and real-world human interest stories.

Tone can even be helpful if you're having trouble establishing a cliffhanger or creating suspense. For example:

- Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip embarked on their fairytale honeymoon, snapping photos of elephants by day and relaxing into the night. Though Elizabeth wrote letters to her beloved father, home was far away. She tried not to think about home at all, if she could help it.

This caption starts out slowly, detailing the relaxing honeymoon of then-Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip. By the end, though, there's a shift. Just with tone alone, the reader knows that this couple won't be happy for much longer. They're too happy, and something from back home will arrive to interrupt their happiness.

Basically, establishing a fitting tone is essential if we want our stories to pack a punch. Most writers naturally set the right tone for a story, but it's worth thinking about the next time you sit down to write. Ask yourself: Does the tone match the content of the story? Is the reader feeling what I want them to feel?

Suspense

Suspense keeps the reader flying through a narrative. If we can keep them hooked, they won't want to click away...which means more ad revenue for us.

Think realistically about suspense. If you manufacture it, your story will feel choppy.

Remember to build lulls into the action, too; don't rush past big moments to get to the next big moment. If a reader sees "He found the treasure chest, but he totally wasn't ready for this horrible thing that would soon happen," they'll get frustrated.

Instead, try "Finally, he had found the treasure chest, and for a moment, life seemed perfect." Give us some time to marinate with the treasure chest...or whatever it may be.

Humor

We love humor here at ContentIQ! Using humor in a story is almost always an asset -- emphasis on *almost*.

There are many benefits to humor: It can inject some life into an otherwise-standard listicle about tupperware, for example, and it can be an effective way to make a story more interesting. And of course, it's so important that readers feel like they're reading something written by a human, and not a robot.

So, the key to using humor is knowing when to strike (see "Tone" above). You don't want to put humor into a story where it would be inappropriate, such as in a true crime narrative. As with many elements of storytelling, you have to use your best judgement.

Connectivity / Transitions

Using quotes

When writing narratives, try to find and use quotes from people involved in the story.

A quote does several things: it shows our readers we're not making this up, and it breathes life into the characters. Moreover, if we're writing about a public figure who said something controversial, people are going to want to know exactly what they said...no paraphrasing.

Punctuation on quotes can be tricky. For the sake of consistency, keep commas and periods **inside** quotation marks; semicolons, em-dashes, and colons go **outside**

quotes. For question marks, it depends if the question is part of the quote or part of your own construction. For example:

- *"That's impossible," Dan said.*
- *Dan said, "I can't believe you've done this."*
- *Dan listed two reasons why Matt's ascension to godhood was "impossible": he was constantly getting robbed and he lived off the 6 train.*
- *Was Dan wrong to think Matt's ascension to the eternal spiritual plane was "impossible"? Yes.*

Stitching

Stitching is the act of adding an old post that's already been written and published to the end of a new post that has not been published.

We will use these terms throughout this document to better understand stitching:

The new post: this is the post you have just finished. It has not yet been published.

The old post: this is a post that is finished and, typically, already published. This is the post you will be *stitching* — or adding — to the end of your new post.

An organic post: a new post that reaches 35 - 40 captions without stitching.

Why do we stitch?:

People are reading our content all the way through. By ending our posts at 20 captions, we are sending away readers who would've spent more time on the website. Stitching gives them more content without directly saying “goodbye.”

More specifically, stitching allows you to extend the number of captions on a post without creating a ton of additional work for you; it also means you won't have to stretch stories beyond their breaking points. If a story warrants just 20 captions, it warrants just 20. Stitching allows you easily to make the new post 40 captions with the help of an old post.

When do we stitch?

Any narrative new post under 35 captions should be stitched with an old post. Any listicle new post under 40 captions should be stitched with an old post.

Note: If creating a 35-caption new story will take you 1.5 - 2 hours longer than just making the story 20 captions and adding an old post, stitch. Don't exhaust yourself trying to extend stories organically.

In a perfect world, a story won't require stitching. This is not a perfect world:) Anyhow, you can maximize the potential and length of a story by reaching 35 - 40 captions organically. How you do that varies on whether you're writing a narrative or a listicle.

For best practices regarding how to create an organic 35-40 slide new story, **See Appendix A.**

What do we stitch?

A good stitch is one you don't see. It ends a story and starts a story, naturally, all in one breath.

We stitch posts that are very closely related in either theme, content, or people. Take a look at these examples and theoretical suggestions:

Stitching for Narratives:

When you're looking for an old narrative post to stitch to the end of your new narrative post...

- First, think through your library of stories. Do you have the perfect story that connects the new post in a meaningful way? (Or, ask a co-writer for one of their stories.)
 - If you don't have the perfect fit in your arsenal, move to step 2.
- Next, ask your editor if he or she has a suggestion for a post to stitch.
- Last, in a google search bar type, "**site:boredomtherapy.com [and a few keywords]**" that might turn up something similar. For instance "**site:boredomtherapy.com hungry dog.**"
 - If you do a new story on Jim Carrey's interesting past, stitch it to an old article about Robin Williams or Mariska Hargitay or another celebrity who overcame similar troubles.
 - If you do a story about an elephant rescued from a mudhole, try and stitch it with a story about a dog rescued from a supermarket.
 - If you do a story where someone discovers a lost relative through a DNA kit, find another DNA kit story
 - If you do a story about a treasure found in someone's attic, pair it with a story about a treasure found in the backyard. (You define what qualifies as a treasure).
 - If your story is inspirational, pair it with another inspirational story.

Stitching for Listicles:

When you're looking for an old listicle post to stitch to the end of your new listicle post...

- **To reiterate:** Only create a 40-caption organic listicle if it covers topics with enough *compelling* facts and visuals, like:
 - Examples: 40 Rare Woodstock Photos That Tell A Different Story / 40 Celebrities Who Fell In Love With Another Celebrity / 40 Facts About A Very Popular TV Show.
 - Most listicles are not like that and are more likely to be stitched.
- **This means: Most listicles, like those that require commentary on set viral photos, probably should be stitched —** it'll save you time and mental energy!
- To stitch, first look through your own library for an old listicle post that *closely relates* to the angle of your new listicle post.
 - Stitch DIY tricks to another DIY tricks article; stitch 20 Facts About *Married... With Children* with a listicle about facts from another popular sitcom.
 - Pair a listicle on Christmas movies with a listicle on Halloween movies; Michael Jackson facts with Madonna facts, 20 Facts About JK Rowling with Where are Harry Potter stars now.
- **Do: Pick an old post that audiences reading your new post would probably be interested in!!!**
- When stitching - don't touch the photos or change their order, unless there is a very good reason to do so. If that's the case, writers should consult editors before they make the change.

How do we stitch?:

Remember, a good stitch is one you don't see... This means that, in the best case scenario, the new post and the old post should compliment each other; the reader can seamlessly transition from the former to the latter without being explicitly told the new post is done or the old post is starting.

To do that, see these examples:

Example 1 - DIY Listicle

<http://headcramp.com/thailand-photo-hc/>

This stitched story doesn't *feel* like the writer simply stuck two articles together because the ending to the story and the start of the next doesn't call attention to itself. This caption served as the transition from new to old:

As wild as this couple's story was, it wasn't totally uncommon.(we reveal that the original story is over. Not good). If you plan on traveling abroad, do yourself a favor and prepare ahead of time. This doesn't just mean packing, either—it means researching the areas you'll be visiting to find out just how safe they really are...

Do:

If you plan on traveling abroad like this couple, do yourself a favor and prepare ahead of time. This doesn't just mean packing, either — it means researching the areas you'll be visiting to find out just how safe they really are...

The second story was so closely connected to story one in terms of theme and topic, its presence actually *enhanced* the original story. The first article sets up the *problem* — traveling abroad can come with complications for novices — and the second article gives readers ways to address and solve that problem.

Note: *the transition caption provides new information that sets up the next article. It's not a throwaway caption. If a reader gets to a caption that clearly sets up another article and nothing else, they'll run — guide them into the next one!*

Example 2 - Listicle

<http://headcramp.com/salt-sock-for-earache-relief-hc/>

The stitch:

The salt stays warm, which helps soothe any aches as it draws out the fluid that's causing pressure in the middle ear. If you don't feel like going through the trouble of a "sock skillet" remedy, there's an even simpler and much faster solution...

Like example 1, the caption both ends the first article *and* starts the second. This way, by the time the reader realizes the article they clicked into is "over," they've already got a new burning question compelling them to click on: what's this other technique, and why is this kid pressing an onion to his ear?

Also like example 1, the second article perfectly compliments article two — the writer didn't even have to tweak the introduction.

Example 3 - Listicle:

<http://boredomtherapy.com/facts-lord-rings/?as=799>

This stitch is a once-in-a-lifetime connection. The stitched caption:

25. Inspired by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, George R.R. Martin started writing his critically acclaimed *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. Martin, in turn, has now inspired a new generation of fantasy writers — and a show with some neat facts of its own...

Even the image merged the two topics. In this case, the writer continued numbering the list as the topics were closely enough related — facts about a wildly popular fantasy franchise — and the stitch was done seamlessly.

Example 4 - Listicle:

<https://moneyversed.com/celebrity-private-islands/>

The stitch:

When she's not on her private island, North West has to live somewhere; that somewhere is just as luxurious, too. In fact, all these island-owning celebs — and a handful of other A-listers — have some seriously awesome homes on continents.

While this stitch is a bit more obvious, it does a good job merging two lists that are *kinda, sorta* related. It's a nice transitional caption that ends one list and sets the reader up for another, like a mini introduction. The lynchpin? You can connect the article with a person who is on both lists.

Notice, the numbering restarts — the content's too different to just make a merge.

Example 5 - Narrative

Try and find where the first article ends and the second begins.

<http://headcramp.com/man-bigfoot-search-hc/>

It is:

One believer, Dave Shealey, also took several photos and videos of the skunk ape. He even runs a “headquarters” and museum in Florida dedicated to the mysterious creature. He considers himself the “Jane Goodall of skunk apes.”

This caption doesn't do a lot of the things we mentioned in the past two examples. It's an isolated caption — it doesn't end one article and start another, it just flat out starts the second article. But because the topics are more than related — the second actually *builds upon* and underscores the first — you don't even need that transition. The second story just seems like a logical progression of the first.

The first story sets up a conflict: there's possibly a creature out there. It's called the Skunk Ape. Some evidence supports its existence.

The second story explores the conflict: This creature that may or may not exist? This guy wants to find it.

Example 6 - Narrative

This is an example of how you would stitch together *more than one* story:

<http://headcramp.com/contact-juggler-subway-hc/>

The *stitches*:

The response to Gregory's talent online reveals just how passionate the world can get with top-notch juggling. That's why the art attracts so many passersby. People like Joelene Seckold, below, always draw a crowd.

And...

But, Joelene said, “You never forget it and it never leaves you; it's always there in your heart.” That passion for juggling was echoed by Vladimir Vasilievich Galchenko, the show-stealing juggler below.

And...

Still, the fear of falling short of perfection — a fear likely shared by jugglers like Joelene and Gregory — shows just how dedicated these guys are to the art of juggling. It's dedication you won't see from a birthday party clown!

There isn't one transitional caption because there are three stories used in this one.

Still, notice because each story is a “portrait of a juggler,” the transition captions guide the reader into the next story, ending one portrait and starting another in one breath. If your topics don’t build on each other and merely relate to each other, try employing captions that don’t ever neatly wrap up the story until the end: **End a story and start a new one all in one caption.**

When the writer finished examining one juggler, they immediately gave readers another juggler to focus on!

Another strategy this writer employed was to reference the first article once more at the end; this hammers home the *relatability* of all the stories.

Example 7 - Narrative

<http://headcramp.com/maatsuyker-island-hc/>

The “stitched” caption in this post has a red flag:

The offer to stay on the Maatsuyker Island in Tasmania is truly unique, but it's not the only place in the world that offers guests an opportunity to get paid to live there. Albinen, a Swiss mountain town, also has a very enticing proposal...

Try this instead:

Maatsuyker Island in Tasmania isn't the only place that offers guests an opportunity to get paid to live there. Albinen, a Swiss mountain town, also has a very enticing proposal...

Because the stories don’t *build* upon each other — they merely relate, albeit very closely — the writer used a beautiful transitional caption. In it, the writer wrapped up the story about Maatsuyker Island *and* started a story on the very similar Swiss city, Albinen.

Before readers fully realize the story on Maatsuyker is wrapped up, the writer has already put another question in their heads: what is Albinen, and how is it like this incredibly bizarre place we already learned about?

Narratives: Try these strategies to reach 35 captions:

- **Do:** Split long captions (any caption that goes on to a fourth line can be made into two. For example, see Appendix A:

"If she's finished growing, then all she's doing is stretching her skin or putting the bones into traction by pulling them apart," said orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jonathan Nissanoff in a 2014 interview. "The rings aren't going to make her bones longer. Once she removes them, her neck will come back to size."

Becomes:

"If she's finished growing, then all she's doing is stretching her skin or putting the bones into traction by pulling them apart," said orthopedic surgeon Dr. Jonathan Nissanoff in a 2014 interview.

The doctor continued: "The rings aren't going to make her bones longer. Once she removes them, her neck will come back to size."

- **Do:** Break up captions that contain more than one or two pieces of concrete details. For example, this long caption has four separate pieces of information in it.
 - To understand how to split a caption, we have to examine what *makes* a complete, satisfying caption. Each caption might contain one or more of the following elements:
 - An action
 - A reaction
 - A description of character
 - An expression of a character's want in life.
 - Sets up expectations
 - A relevant, *interesting* fact pertinent to the topic.
 - A piece of information that gives the reader a greater understanding of a character, conflict, or emotion, or provides modern / historical context.
 - A "guess" as to what a mystery item might be / an evaluation of suspects and evidence.
 - A moment of suspense that highlights the importance of a moment.

Some captions might include one of these; others might include three. **Wherever you use more than one of these elements in a single caption, consider breaking that caption into two or more.**

Take a look:

But it turned out the Facebook message Peter the actor received was not from a spambot, but a legitimate person: Rachel White, a 24-year-old musician from Malibu. In her message, she explained she was raised by a single mother and was on a quest to track down her biological father.

It could be:

But something about the message convinced Peter the actor to open it up instead of relegating it to the Facebook trash bin. And he was lucky he did: upon further inspection, he saw it was not from a spambot, but a living, breathing woman.

Her name was Rachel White. In her message, the 24 year old told Peter a little bit about herself, about her life. She, like Peter, had followed her creative impulses, and that was how she ended up as a musician in Malibu, California.

Earlier in his life, the aspiring actor might've asked her about her music; he might've asked about her trials and tribulations navigating the California performance business. But in his old age, another part of the message drew his attention.

See, Rachel also mentioned in her message that she'd been raised her whole life by a single mother. Now, she had a new mission in life, one that extended beyond her music.

More than anything, Rachel wanted to find her biological dad, and, much to Peter's shock, she had a theory as to who it could be. If this news didn't make him sweat, the man had nerves of steel.

Another example:

Despite making every field goal she attempted, Becca Longo's classmates never saw her as anything more than the girl in the hall "wearing her boyfriend's jersey." So, feeling like just "the girl on the team," Becca left Queen Creek High, taking her talents to Basha High School instead. She just wanted to play football in peace.

This is a well-written caption — but could we get more captions out of it? Of course we can! Let's again break down the individual nodes of information in this caption:

1. A piece of information that sets up expectations: **Despite making every field goal she attempted,**
2. A piece of information that gives the reader a greater understanding of the conflict: **Becca Longo's classmates never saw her as anything more than the girl in the hall "wearing her boyfriend's jersey."**
3. A piece of information that gives the reader a greater understanding of a character: **So, feeling like just "the girl on the team,"**
4. A reaction: **Becca left Queen Creek High, taking her talents to Basha High School instead.**
5. An expression of a character's want in life: **She just wanted to play football in peace.**

There are five caption-worthy elements in one caption! So let's re-write this, shall we?

That year, Becca nailed every field goal she attempted, which, you would think, would make her revered within the hallways of Queen Creek High School. Unfortunately, bullies don't take field goal percentage into consideration.

Becca couldn't walk through the hallways without hearing snide whispers. When she wore her jersey to school, hushed voices referred to her as the "the girl wearing her boyfriend's jersey."

Yep, despite being a wildly successful kicker, jealous students chose to treat her like a charity case — someone who was on the team because she was a girl, not because she was an elite kicker with a powerful leg.

Even for thick-skinned Becca, this was too much. She wasn't playing football because she wanted to make a point; her efforts weren't a social commentary. She just loved football, and she wanted to play. She needed a change.

After consulting with her parents, Becca left the halls of Queen Creek High School behind, transferring twenty minutes south to Basha High School instead. There, she hoped, she could make a mark as a football player.

- **Do:** Check social media for images, screenshots, and public reactions to an event. Did the world outside this story have anything entertaining to add? Did this event inspire a movement?
- **Do:** Zoom out from the specific story to something more general: is this problem connected to something more global / cultural? Can you easily provide other examples? Similar stories?

- **Do:** Check for any “aftermath” to the story you might have missed. Has something happened after the publication date of the source material? Has someone gone to jail? Has someone respond to a video in the source?
- **Don't:** Fluff up captions. This includes personal commentary that only functions to hit a word count. All that's in orange is fluff; it could be cut and no one would notice.

Finally the rescuers pulled the stuck turtle off the train tracks. And thankfully they did! Sweet innocent turtles, or any animal, really, don't deserve to be hit by a train.

- **Don't:** Go overboard with personal commentary. We want our writers to bring a bit of themselves to every piece, but we also want *the story to do the talking*. If someone's bad, show they're bad, but commenting on the quality of a person or a group can turn readers off. For instance:

Matthew McConaughey, who became governor of Texas in 2029, proved time and time again that he was a failure. Actors don't make good politicians and should be kept away from office.

Even the overly-positive can be too much:

Aaron Rodgers proved that exceptionally talented quarterbacks can bring peace and prosperity to small towns. He should earn a medal for his contributions to the world. He's done far more for humans than the governor of Texas.

Note: If this opinion is delivered via quote by someone involved in the story, all's well.

If these strategies get you to 35 captions, congratulations. You don't need to stitch. If you fall short of 35 — which is totally fine — it's stitching time. See the **How do we stitch?** section below.

Extending Listicles

- **Do:** Add more facts or items on the list, but only if there are *compelling* facts and *compelling* visuals.
- **Do:** Consider splitting the items on the list into two or more separate captions. For some listicles about interesting places, for instance, there are a lot of good visuals and usually plenty of facts to boot. Consider:

Think absurdly: Sometimes to memorize something you have to reach outside of conventional thought, towards the absurd. Picturing something ridiculous like a

singing dog or a vibrantly colored elephant and linking it to a memory can help immensely.

The elements:

1. A piece of information that gives the reader a greater understanding of the modern context: **Sometimes to memorize something you have to reach outside of conventional thought, towards the absurd.**
2. A relevant, *interesting* fact pertinent to the topic: **Picturing something ridiculous like a singing dog or a vibrantly colored elephant and linking it to a memory can help immensely.**

Of course, with listicles, we don't want to overstretch. But this single caption can be two, easily:

Think absurdly: Sometimes to memorize something, you have to do the counterintuitive and reach outside of conventional thought — you must focus your mind on the absurd.

First, think about the piece of information you don't want to forget. Then, picture something ridiculous — like a singing dog or a bright pink elephant. Now, link 'em together in your mind! Need an example?

Say you don't want to forget your new partner's birthday, January 15th. Concentrate *really* hard on that date *and* a penguin in a party hat. If all goes well, by thinking of a penguin in a party hat — a hard thing to forget — you should recall the date, too.

- **Don't:** Fill a list with duds just to hit 40. If you genuinely can't find 40 cool facts about something, don't include stinkers just to hit the mark. You'll exhaust yourself when you could've saved your energy — and sanity — with a nice stitch.
- **Don't:** Complete an organic, 40-caption new post on a topic we've covered dozens of times — DIYs, money-saving home repair tips. Save your energy. Find a similar old post and stitch it.

Listicles

A list. Several bite-sized pieces of information that all relate to one central topic.

Think: BuzzFeed. Numbers.

Arranging Listicles

Listicles must be organized from *most interesting* to *least interesting*. Since there is no objective scale for interest, writers must trust their guts and give the reader a satisfying and unexpected journey through the cards.

Listicles may be ordered as a countdown / count-up, as long as the items in the list are of measurable quantities.

Quizzes

Forty questions.

How to Write a Quiz

(Last updated: Feb 2021)

1. In the Story Pipeline, go to the **Quiz** tab and select an available quiz from the list. Please work from top to bottom so that the highest CTR quizzes get launched first. Drag and drop the row(s) by clicking and dragging the row number on the left side of the spreadsheet. Be sure to use Shift+click to include any rows with additional packaging options for the quiz you selected (highlighted in gray). Place it in the Assigned Content tab under your name while working on it.

1	CTR	Source Link	Angle	Caption	Image	OG Image	Notes
AVAILABLE QUIZZES (drag to content tab under your name)							
3	31.40%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name These Things That Start With 'R'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://upload.wikimedia.org			
4	28.57%		Can You Name These Things That Start With 'R'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://cdn.pixabay.com			
5	31.29%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name The Bands Whose Names Start With 'The'?	We still rock out to tf https://i.imgur.co https://cdn.musecdn.com			
6	25.07%		Can You Name The Bands Whose Names Start With 'The'?	We still rock out to tf https://i.imgur.co https://netstoragedrive.com			
7	30.70%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name These Things That Start With 'Y'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://cdn.pixabay.com			
8	23.80%		Can You Name These Things That Start With 'Y'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://cdn.pixabay.com			
9	30.17%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name These Things That Start With 'J'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://p0.pikist.com			
10	30.11%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name These Things That Start With 'G'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://upload.wikimedia.org			
11	25.58%		Can You Name These Things That Start With 'G'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://storage.net			
12	29.85%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name These Things That Start With 'E'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://storage.net			
13	29.50%		Can You Name These Things That Start With 'E'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://upload.wikimedia.org			
14	29.54%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name The Famous Historical Kings And Queens?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://i.pinimg.com			
15	28.20%		Can You Name The Famous Historical Kings And Queens?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://upload.wikimedia.org			
16	29.51%	https://www.nme.com	Quiz: Can You Correct These Commonly-Misheard Song Lyrics?	"See that girl, watch https://i.imgur.co https://www.ft.com			
17	28.89%	https://www.sporcle.com	Can You Name These Things That Start With 'I'?	Most people can't ge https://i.imgur.co https://upload.wikimedia.org			

2. In **Bolt**, select **Create Post**, then **Quiz**.
3. Under **Headline**, copy and paste the Angle from the Story Pipeline. For **Introductory Text**, write a brief 3-4 line introduction. You can check where you're at on the frontend

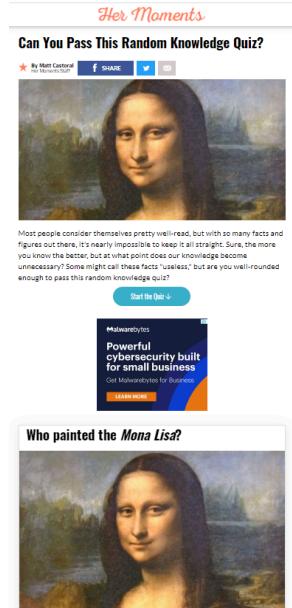
by hitting those three dots on the top right in Bolt and selecting Preview - Infinite Scroll.

4. In the **Main Text** box, write the question (max. 15 words), then fill in each **Answer** box with potential answers. Select the button for the correct answer. Leave the **Sub Header** and **Answer Text** boxes empty. UPDATE: You can now leave the **Main Text** box blank if your quiz is solely image-based, i.e. *Identify The Iconic '60s Show From Just One Image*. Lastly, be sure to use the same symbol at the end of each question for better visual consistency, i.e. ":" or "..." (obviously it's fine to end in "?" for actual questions). Quizzes are required to have 40 slides, minimum.

5. Under the **MetaData** tab, copy and paste the Headline in the **Title** box. Make sure you put "Quiz:" in front if not already there for SEO purposes. Then write a brief, one-sentence description of the quiz under **Description** (this can usually be a sentence copied from the Introductory Text). Upload a **1400 x 740 Metadata Image**, which can usually be an eye-catching high-resolution image used in the quiz. Then fill out the **Facebook Share Image** at **700 x 370** with something different, but just as catchy.

* Be sure your metadata image is not within the first 10 cards of your quiz! We want to use that image as an invitation for what's to come, and avoid redundant display situations like this → → →

- Under **Settings**, select a **Primary Domain**. Do not select a Secondary Domain and leave Canonical Overwrite empty. Under **Permalink**, create a short URI for the quiz that generally describes what it is about. **Make sure the URI ends in -quiz**. Under **Source URL**, copy and paste the Source Link from the Story Pipeline. Under **Viewability**, select **Homepage, Content Rec, Pages** only.



Settings

Primary Domain

Secondary Domains

- HonestToPaws.cor X
- MoneyVersed.com X
- EternallySunny.con X
- HeadCramp.com X
- MentalFlare.com X
- SpiritedBliss.com X
- LikeSwifty.com X
- CuriosityWell.com X
- TheWonderFeed.co X
- TwentyDaily.com X
- CafeCrime.com X
- BoredomTherapy.c X

Canonical Overwrite

Permalink

+

Source URL

+

Viewability

HerMoments.com

TEST POST

Homepage, Content Rec, Pages

RSS

- Under **Content**, quickly make sure the Author and Language boxes are correct. Then select a category for the **Primary Domain**. Don't select categories for the Secondary Domains.

Content

Author
Emma Patterson

Language
English

Primary Domain
hermoments
Entertainment

Secondary Domains 48 >

- Under **Quiz**, write brief end-of-quiz messages for viewers. Make sure these messages are about as long and clever/enticing as the intro. The readers put in the time to finish the quiz, so let's give them something substantial and fun in return so they're most likely to come back and take another quiz. Leave **Quiz Summary Text** empty.

Quiz

Quiz Summary Text

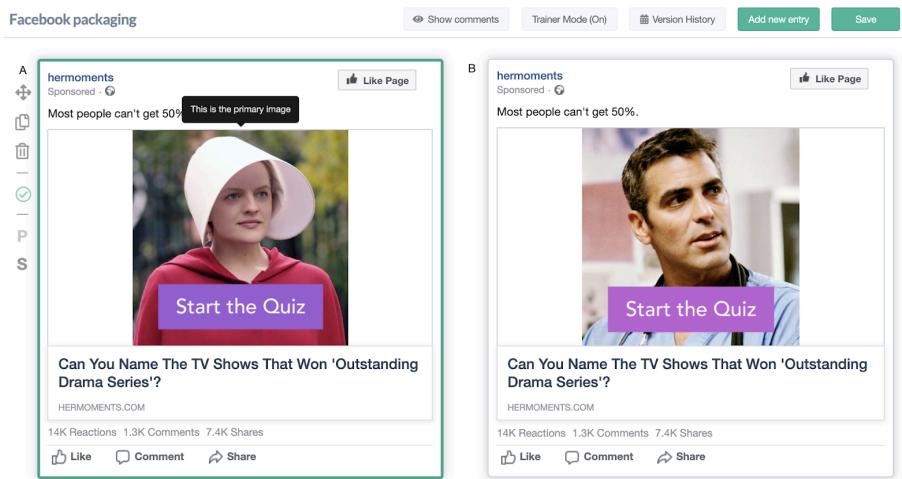
83-100%
And the Emmy goes to... you! From "Game of Thrones" to "Gunsmoke," you

62-82%
Nice work! From "Breaking Bad" to "Dragnet," you certainly know a lot about

41-61%
So close! Sure, you know the big names like "Game of Thrones," but some of the

0-40%
Whoops! Maybe you didn't own a TV growing up, because you haven't seen

9. In the top right of the page, select **Packaging**. Here, upload the required **Angle** (Title), **Caption** (Description), and **Image**. If there are two required packaging options, upload both. Click **Save**.



10. Click **Done**, and voila — you wrote a quiz!

Quiz Tips and Tricks

- ❖ The original source is just a jumping off point! Don't feel like you need to include all (or any) of the quiz questions from the original source — let your creativity run free.
- ❖ Try to keep the first 10-15 questions on the easy/medium level of difficulty. Leave the especially tricky ones toward the end once you've already hooked the reader.
- ❖ When selecting content for pop culture quizzes, remember that our FB audience currently skews older. They're more likely to recognize *Happy Days* and Aretha Franklin than *Riverdale* and Ariana Grande.
- ❖ Spice up your questions! If the quiz is "Can You Name These Common Fish?" avoid phrasing every question like, "What kind of fish is this?" Instead try:
 - Can you identify this dangerous saltwater fish?
 - This colorful swimmer is actually the most popular in pet stores:
 - You might spot one of these in someone's freshwater pond...

eCommerce

Sponsored content that drives sales for a client.

Unlike in standard performance-based marketing, eCommerce articles are designed to push readers off the page (and on to a client's website). CIQ gets a piece of the profit for every sale the company makes because of the article.

Structure and Template

Most eCommerce articles will follow a simple template. Posts should be about 350 words, feature an introduction, and include 1-4 body paragraphs, including a conclusion that hammers home the sale. See the structural elements below.

Customer Pain Points

Ideas for eCommerce articles are generated from a pain point: A real-world issue a person might have that would lead them to the client's product.

Introductions — From Pain Point to Product

eCommerce intros are 120-180 words. Text should be organized in a way that is visually appealing. Single sentences can be on lines of their own.

The first sentence establishes a connection to the audience via pain point.

The next sentences "walk" the reader from the pain point to the client's product or service. Essentially, through the first person point of view, the writer further explores the pain points.

Finally, the introduction brings awareness to the client's product, careful not to act as a cheerleader or salesman. At this point in the introduction, the writer simply confirms their awareness of the product/service, gives a brief description, and suggests it solved their initial pain point.

Body Text — Selling the Product

The body of eCommerce posts range from 100-500 words. Typically, 200 words will work. This is where the writer truly sells the product/service to the reader — but in a very specific way.

The writer must share only the specific aspects of the product that address the pain point established in the introduction.

Captions may contain as many — or few — words as they need to. Do what looks visually appealing.

Ending an eCommerce Post

Only here may writers allow themselves to become hard-hitting salespersons. Press on the gas and make readers feel as though not buying the product or using the service will ensure they miss out on something great, whether that be a deal or an opportunity.

Tips and Tricks

Avoid Overselling

Sometimes, less is more. Listing too many benefits of a product/service will overwhelm and possibly confuse the reader. Worse, the extra details could accidentally drive the reader away!

Writers must be careful to only address the pain point.

Visuals for eCommerce

“Authentic” does not apply to eCommerce. Download clear, crisp, Getty photos. The image should be placed as the “hero” image.

There are only two images per post: the hero image, and a photo attached to the very first caption.

Subheaders for eCommerce

In this medium, subheaders are sales tools. Use bold, eye-catching phrases that present the product in a way articles skimmers can’t miss.

“Burying the I”

A technique in first-person writing where the writer uses the self-reflective ‘I’ as little as possible. Because the single letter has such a personal meaning, reading it again and again can create a sense of exclusion and alienate readers.

Pitching

All of Content IQ's content comes from somewhere! Writers gather "source links" around the internet — articles and galleries they think CIQ's readers would enjoy — and "pitch" them to the editors and content strategists.

The editor and strategist team determine whether or not to reproduce a similar story, evaluating pitches based on the following criteria:

Story Length

- Is there enough to sustain 20 **captivating** slides of content?
- **Four points of interest:** Are there at least *four* interesting story elements in this pitch?
- Does the story have an easily identifiable hook/big reveal?

Image Quality/Quantity

- Are there 5+ **usable** photos within the article or a quick Google search away?
 - If the images from the original source are completely unusable (Getty, professional photographer, etc.), please include an additional source in the Writer Comments column.
- Are the photos big enough? Clear enough?
- Can the story be told without using videos or GIFs?

“Sensitive” Content

- Avoid stories about:
 - Politics/politicians.
 - Particularly gruesome crimes/dead bodies.
 - Nazis. Please don't let there be Nazis.
 - Especially nauseating imagery.
 - Making fun of a group of people.

Niche Topic

- Avoid stories that:
 - Aren't about something that will interest a broad group of older readers.
 - Are image-focused listicles about something too specific (ice sculptures, reimagined Disney Princesses, weird deep sea creatures).

- Revolve around the social media response to an event.

Evergreen-ness

- Will this story still be relevant in a week? A month? A year?

Already Published/Pitched

- Read each other's stories/pitches!
- That's all.

GLOSSARY

Here are terms you may come across at Content IQ.

Vertical: The different platforms we own and publish on, like MoneyVersed, HonestToPaws, and HerMoments. Each vertical has a different theme.

Packaging: The way our stories appear across the web and in sponsored posts on Facebook. Packaging is designed to make people want to click.

Evergreen: A story that is evergreen is not “trendy,” not tied down to current events, and will be relevant no matter when an audience reads it. For instance, a story about a woman finding buried treasure in her backyard is evergreen; a story about the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge is not. We prefer evergreen stories over non-evergreen ones.

IVF: Intro - Visuals - Flow. The three major components of a narrative.

CTR: Click through rate.

PVS: Page views per session.

Cards: Each section of information you see in a published CIQ story appears on the back end, in Bolt, as a card. There are three components that make up the content appearing on a card: 1) a clear, rectangular photo; 2) the photo credit; and 3) a 30-45 word caption.

PPP: Passion, Positivity, Professionalism. Sharon likes to use this acronym a lot.

Theme Fatigue: If you stitch a story about World War II soldiers writing letters to their loved ones to another story about World War II soldiers writing letters to their loved ones, you run the risk of giving your readers theme fatigue. Try to “level up” with your stitched stories: make the stitch relevant, but even more interesting than the first story.