

# Improve Your Writing Skills

Arina Nikitina



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# Preface

When you start a new business, create your own blog or make a decision to build a list of subscribers and market your informational products to them, one skill you will have to learn is online communication.

In a world where communication is paramount to survival, you can not risk sending out ineffectively written communications to your customers, clients or your readers.

“Having a way with words” is no longer enough to have your message found, opened and read. To achieve your business and career goals, you will have to become a pro at communicating ONLINE.

And this is exactly what “Improve Your Writing Skills - A Step-by-Step Guide to Compelling Content Creation” will allow you to do.

**Here you will discover:**

- 5 significant differences between online and offline writing that will allow you to communicate more efficiently within the vast space of the World Wide Web
- The major Keys of Understanding your audience and establishing a strong connection with them
- How to find your voice and position yourself as an expert
- The Communication Triangle that will make any message that you put up there change from good to awesome
- How to optimize your content for Search Engines, without sacrificing the quality of your writing
- How to write a compelling headline, while allowing you to choose from one of 20 Eye-Catching headline formulas
- The Must-Follow Rules of Writing a Successful email that will get opened, read and acted on

Arina Nikitina is a self-help expert, psychologist, blogger, speaker and a founder of [www.goal-setting-guide.com](http://www.goal-setting-guide.com) – one of the largest self-improvement portals that covers a wide range of topics such as: goal setting, communication, leadership, productivity and success.

In 2010 she started her personal blog [www.arinanikitina.com](http://www.arinanikitina.com), which has become one of the top three self-help blogs.

She is also an author of the best-selling e-book “Real Goal Getting”.

For Copywriting, Email Marketing, Blog Promotion contact Arina Nikitina:

Online: [www.arinanikitina/contact-me](http://www.arinanikitina/contact-me)

Email: [nikitinaarina@gmail.com](mailto:nikitinaarina@gmail.com)

# 1 Introduction

*“It is not necessary to change. Survival is not mandatory.” - W. Edwards Deming*

There have been more changes in the way we do business, including writing, in the last few decades than in the past few centuries. With each passing year these changes become more evident and much harder to ignore. Improved technology, innovative research and marketplace competition require business leaders to upgrade their communication and online writing skills.

Here is the latest statistical data that may help to shed some light on this phenomenon:

- 49% of new employer establishments fail within the first five years. (Statistics published by the Small Business Administration (SBA)).
- 92% of consumers use websites to compare prices and 75% purchase at least 1 product or service per month via the internet
- Small businesses that are actively using internet technologies are 50% more likely to meet their income goals than those with minimal use of technologies. (A study conducted by Network Solutions and University of Maryland)

Businesses, both big and small, are not only constructing their own websites, but they are actively investing in online advertisement campaigns, article marketing and social media tools. Doing so allows them to raise their brand awareness, activate additional sources of income and spread their message across social network channels such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube.

Whether you are an offline company, whose primary objective is to reach more clients; an internet marketer set on selling your products online; or someone who has a great idea for a blog and wants to share it with the rest of the world – there is no doubt that you can greatly benefit from mastering the art of writing online.

**Enhancing your writing skills opens up a whole range of opportunities to:**

- start your online business without having to invest thousands of dollars
- promote your business
- raise your brand awareness
- position yourself as an expert
- test your business ideas and get immediate feedback
- build long-lasting relationships with your readers/prospects
- sell more products without being salesy
- activate additional sources of income
- ensure that your message is read and remembered
- achieve a competitive edge
- avoid losing time and money on online projects that are destined to fail

# 2 Reading Behaviors in the Real World vs Online

## 2.1 Introduction

The Internet has become a new medium and this new medium has challenged and changed the way we write and even the way we read.

Gone are the days when we would begin our morning with a cup of coffee and a fresh newspaper. Almost gone are the days when we read a few pages from a book before going to bed.

According to AOL/Beta Research Corporation over 500 million people worldwide are now starting their day by turning on their computer and checking their email. And even when we are away from our laptops we can easily access the World Wide Web from our smartphones and tablet PC's, to catch up on the latest news updates, check our social media accounts or simply browse the internet to pass the time.

The old world of print ; books, magazines, periodicals, newspapers and marketing brochures is quickly making space for the new online empire with its websites, blogs, newsletters, forums, e-books and sales letters.

Having a way with words is no longer enough to have your articles read online. Any person, writing something online has to take into consideration such things as: What type of content people are looking for? What is the route they take to get to the information? What can be done to make sure that people will not only read about products or services, but recommend them to their friends as well?

Before answering all these questions it is important to understand how our reading habits are changing and what can we do to adapt to them.

## 2.2 5 Major Differences Between Online Writing and Print

### Linear Reading vs. Non-Linear Reading

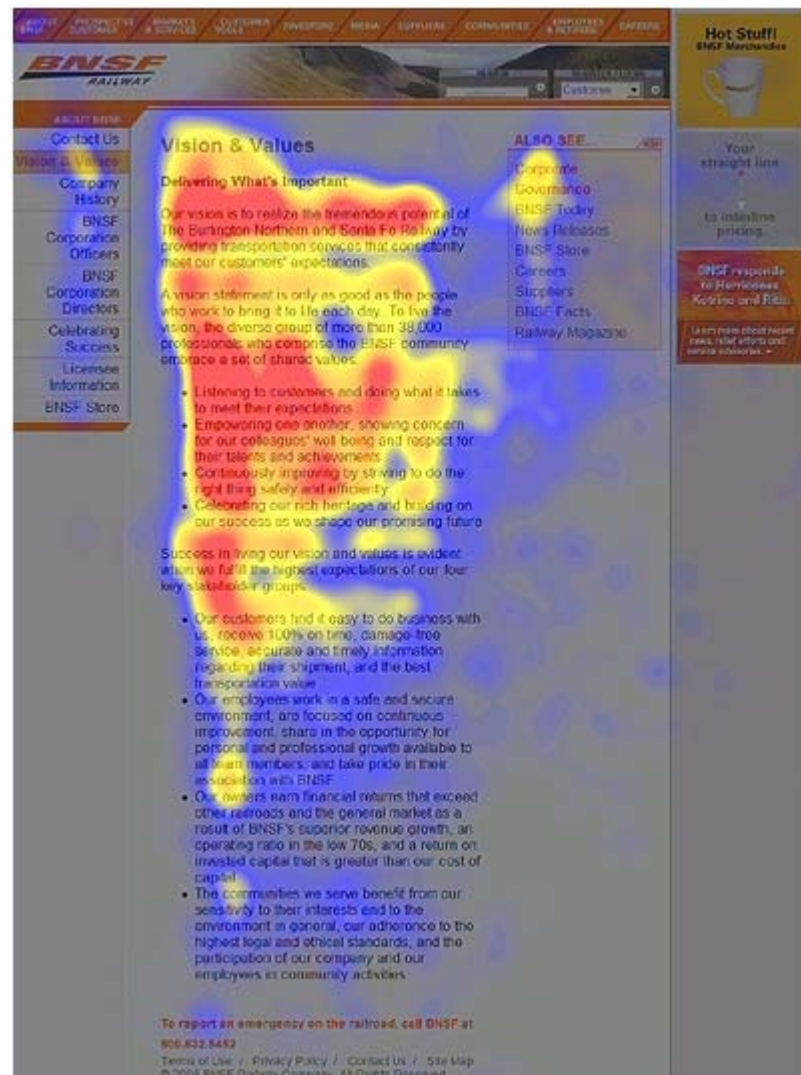
Reading a great book or a long article from our favorite magazine is often associated with relaxation and pleasure. When we read off line, we do not feel time restraints, savoring each word and sometimes going back and re-reading paragraphs and phrases that we particularly liked.

Online reading, on the other hand, is not about leisure or relaxation. It is about finding useful information in the shortest time possible.

Consequently, we consume online content a lot differently than if we read it in print and numerous eye-tracking studies confirm this phenomenon.



For example, the majority of online users will not read the text thoroughly in a word-by-word manner. They will scan an article in just a few seconds and go back to the detail later. In fact, 80% of “online reading time” is nothing more than skimming.



In multiple studies conducted by UseIt.com it has been shown that our eyes follow a sort of F-pattern. Instead of reading the whole article or blog post, we quickly read through the first two paragraphs, scan down the left side of the content and possibly pick a few paragraphs in the middle of an article.

If we do not immediately find the answer to our question or key phrases that we consider relevant, we simply close the page and move on to the next one. No regrets and no second thoughts.

### Author-Driven vs. Reader-Centered

Offline content often takes the form of a story that is supposed to take the reader on an emotional journey through other character's lives or through the “eyes” or the author.

Online writing is less about the author and more about the reader. People are not looking at the web for a detailed description of someone else's ideas, emotions or journeys.

They search for the topics that are relevant to them, their interests, their experiences and their struggles.

Any content that is published online will be found and read ONLY if:

It answers the reader's question or solves a concrete problem.

An article with the title "The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software" might pique curiosity when published in a regular magazine. It might even be packed with innovative ideas on how to improve the organizational structure within a business. But if the title remains as it is, the chances of someone reading it remain very slim.

Why?

The reason is simple – when our goal is to find information about ways to boost productivity and improve the effectiveness of our business, we are hardly likely to link it with the organizational structure within an ant community (even if there are some valuable lessons that can be learned from it).

A reader can find it.

"*Build Your Case for a Raise*" is another great example of a 'witty' title that would catch interest and curiosity, as many readers can probably relate to the discomfort and nervousness of facing their employer and asking for a raise.

However, in the online world an article with a simple and less original title "How to ask for a Raise" would do much better.

Why?

Because it is EXACTLY how an average internet user would describe their problem!

And this is EXACTLY what the title, sub headers and the rest of the article should communicate to them.

### Narrative vs. Actionable

In print, you can spice up the content with storytelling, personal examples, and detailed literary descriptions that are meant to captivate the reader and help them to imagine the scene.

Unfortunately, on the Web, such content with its well-crafted, exhaustive sentences is often perceived as a filler. Its main downside being that it prevents the reader from getting to the point quickly, as Web users are often on a specific mission of finding a concise answer to their question or identifying clear guidelines that will help them to accomplish their current goals.

In 98% of cases, past time browsing aside, online readers search for condensed, actionable content. They do not want to fritter their time on otherwise enjoyable narrative stories that are not relevant to their current objectives.

This is the main reason why successful online writers focus on the user's personal story, elaborating vast amounts of generic information into something that specifically meets reader's immediate needs.

### Enriched with Storytelling vs. Benefits from Comprehensive Data

While witty remarks, subtle word play, and an author's personal comments and attitudes make printed articles more enjoyable and interesting to read, the same writing approach does not always work for the Web.

The online world encourages narrow, just-in-time learning of information nuggets and comprehensive data presented in a clear, interesting way.

This is particularly true for commercial B-to-C and B-to-B sites – where users cherry-pick the information that answers three questions, “Who are you?”, “What is your product?” and “What is in it for them?”

If you want to catch your reader's attention write accordingly: addressing all three questions, while focusing on user's needs and benefits.

And keep in mind that in our high-speed business world Direct equals Beautiful.

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## Distributed Through Publishing Houses and Advertisement Agencies vs. Distributed Through Search Engines and Social Networks

The old paradigm in communication, where so-called mainstream media such as TV, print and advertisement agencies controlled much of the consumer's attention, is quickly losing its influence.

Thanks to social media, internet users have turned into a powerful driving force that shapes public opinion.

Twitter has allowed regular people and small companies to have millions of followers, Facebook Pages have the power to attract hundreds of thousands of fans, and YouTube videos can get millions of views when they go viral. Besides these social media channels, other sites such as Stumbleupon, Delicious and Quora also provide ways to share the content with large audiences.

And an amazing trend is that most of this content is coming from regular people, rather than big, corporate-owned media organizations.

As a writer or a business owner you no longer need to rely on big, corporate-owned media organizations, huge publishing houses or advertisement agencies to reach millions of people and get your content or your business out there in the world.

All you need is a laptop, internet access and the knowledge on how to write online to have your message read.

To sum up:

### 5 Characteristics of Print vs. Online Writing

<b>"Classical" Offline Writing</b>	<b>Online Writing</b>
Linear	Non - linear
Author - driven	Reader - centered
Narrative	Actionable
Enriched with storytelling, anecdotal examples, word play	Benefits from comprehensive data
Distributed through publishing houses and advertisement agencies	Distributed through social networks and search engines

# 3 The Keys to Understanding Your Audience

## 3.1 3 Questions to Address with Your Writing

*“A book is like a piece of rope; it takes on meaning only in connection with the things it holds together.”* - Norman Cousins

Many great stories go unread, promising businesses unnoticed and talented writers undiscovered for the single reason – they fail to get to know their audience.

How will you know what to write about if you do not have a clear idea who are you writing for?

Understanding your readers is the first and most important step to successful content creation. Knowing your audience will help you determine your business writing style, tone of your document, the content you choose to include or omit and the medium you select (paper report, Website, e-mail, PDF file, and so on) to convey your message.

Therefore, before you begin writing anything, be it a blog post or an email to your client, make sure that you are clear about three things:

- Who you are writing to?
- For what purpose?
- What you want to communicate about yourself?

These questions seem obvious, yet only a small percent of writers and business leaders manage to consistently and effectively reach their readers, get their message across and accomplish the results they were hoping for, simply because they address all three questions.

Becoming consistent with reaching an audience with your writing is not always an easy task, as a written message does not transmit vocal and non-verbal cues as spoken words do. This is the main reason why our writing is often interpreted, based on the circumstances, individual beliefs, perceptions and even the reader's mood, which may not always work to our advantage.

## 3.2 Communication Triangle

According to a recent study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, people are convinced that they have accurately understood the tone of an email message, when in reality their odds are no better than a 50- 50 chance.

Applied to the corporate and online world these findings suggest that every second email, memo, business concept, statement or idea is misunderstood, misinterpreted or miscommunicated.

One way of improving the statistics is to make sure that the context of your message covers all three areas:

- Your Reader
- Purpose
- The Author – i.e. YOU



Here is how it looks graphically:

The context of your message should touch all three planes of the so-called “*Communication Triangle*”: the author, the purpose and the audience. In cases when the context of the message is ‘separated’ or ‘shifted away’ from one of the planes, communication problems and misunderstandings inevitably arise.

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I am sure that you have encountered this kind of communication-disorientation as well.

Just think of the times when you have received a memo from your superior and wondered what it had to do with you. Or when you had to read a scientific paper and felt confused and overwhelmed by all the terminology thrown at you in just the few first paragraphs. Or maybe when you stumbled upon a website, whose purpose you could not immediately grasp.

These are all examples of a separation between context and message which you, as a writer, need and want to avoid.

How?

Start by asking yourself a few very important questions...

### 3.3 Who Are You Writing To? Creating Reader's "Avatar"

Your readers are not some faceless mass of people that are ready to consume and digest whatever you are willing to offer them. With over 7.5 billion webpages, more than 35 hours of videos being uploaded on YouTube every minute and hundreds of unread emails in our mailbox, we are constantly bombarded with tons of raw bits of information.

To make your message heard in the buzz of email pop-ups, phone calls, friend's suggestions and Facebook messages, you have to deliver top-quality content that is both relevant and interesting to your readers. And to do so, having only theoretical knowledge about your audience will not suffice.

You will have to take the time to get to know your audience and develop your customer "avatar" – a crystal clear image of your ideal prospect, client or your reader.

Here is a great example of what I mean when I say "being specific about your audience" offered by the creator of The Corporate Writing Pro, Michelle Baker:

*"I write to Bill. Bill is a managing partner at an accounting firm where I used to work. He makes between \$300-\$400K a year. He's wicked smart, extremely well educated, and very good at his job. He's married, has two kids, and works far too many hours a week. Sound familiar?"*

*Bill grew up in a rural area in Pennsylvania, and he still prefers the outdoors to the office. He's now based in Northern Virginia, and while he does work with the banks, investment firms, and corporations that his partners specialize in, his accounts also include retailers, manufacturers, and farmers. He's very comfortable speaking with these more down-to-earth clients. But he's equally comfortable in a business meeting with a IRS representative.*

*His difficulty comes when he has to write a letter explaining a tax ruling to his non-business clients. He finds it hard trying to bridge the two worlds, especially in writing.*

*Also, Bill is responsible for staff development. And several of his junior and senior accountants are fairly poor writers. His impulse is to rewrite their work instead of to provide feedback, and he's not sure how to coach them to become better writers.*

*Bill is my perfect client. I can help him. I have the tools he needs to become a better writer himself and to offer productive feedback that will develop his staff, so I picture him when I write."*

Bill is not a random person Michelle came up with. His description is based on hours of audience analysis that includes surveys, statistical data and ongoing and organic research.

Similar, if your goal is to create a strong connection with your audience, gain their interest and trust, initiate the dialogue, begin creating your own description of your perfect prospect or reader. Then write to that person and that person only.

### Why Get So Specific?

When people first start to write online often their natural desire is to reach as many readers as possible. When you ask them *"What is your perfect reader's description?"* or *"Who do you write to?"* they usually say, *"My readers are so different. It is hard to come up with a description. I try to reach everyone with my writing"* or *"Most people can benefit from using my product, so I have to write a sales letter that will work for a vast market, not just a small group of Internet users."*

Big mistake! Because when we aim at reaching a generalized group of people, our writing style changes and comes over as indecisive and uninformative.

People do not want to read something that addresses no one in particular. This is not the strategy that will get people excited about your product or your message. In fact, it is a sure-fire strategy to instantly turn off 98% of your potential customers or readers and have them looking for the "x" or "delete" button.

Just as in real life we speak to people differently depending on such things as their:

- age
- relationship to us
- previous interactions
- their attitude to us and the subject you are writing about
- education and level of understanding
- sex
- cultural background
- recent events

We should make decisions about what material to include, which communication tone to choose, how to organize our ideas, and how best to support our argument based on what we know about our online readers.

### Questions to Ask About Your Audience

If you are still unsure who your perfect reader is, here are a few questions that will help you to gain some valuable insights:

- Who is my average reader (name, gender, age, marital status, number of children)?
- What is their social and economic condition?



- What is their cultural background and level of education?
- What are their biggest frustrations and fears?
- What are their greatest aspirations and dreams?
- What topics, skills, information are they interested in?
- What do they come looking for on my website?
- Why do they leave my website, ignore my emails or resist buying my products or services?
- What are their biggest resistance blocks? How can I address and overcome them?
- What values and beliefs about similar topics or products do my readers hold?

Take time to reflect upon these questions and create your perfect reader/prospect 'avatar'. Doing this exercise alone will not only noticeably improve your communication skills, but will increase your chances of reaching your goals.

What are your goals, by the way?

### 3.4 Writing With Purpose

*"What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure."* - Samuel Johnson

Each piece of communication, especially in our fast-paced, "informationally-overloaded" world, has to have a clearly defined objective. Your readers should not be guessing "Why did they write this?" because this question will quickly transform into "Why am I reading this?" followed by the soft sound of your closed webpage.

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It is crucial to know not only who to write to, but for what purpose. A well-defined purpose helps to bridge the gap between audience and content, linking them inextricably to you, the writer.

Describing and analyzing the concept that interests your audience is not, by itself, very meaningful or informative. But analyzing the same concept to make new connections and gain new insights into what it means, combines both - strength of purpose and meaning for the reader.

Now before you start asking yourself, “What is the purpose of my writing?” stop, because this is not the right question that you want to be asking. At least not the only question.

You see, there are two ways of looking at the purpose of any message – from the author’s point of view and from the reader’s point of view.

### Two Different Approaches to the Purpose of Writing

Author-centered purpose describes the number of objectives an author is trying to achieve with their writing. On an organizational level it can be anything from reaching more customers to building excitement about the upcoming launch of a new product, to communicating a company’s long-term goals to its members. On the personal level it could be; attracting more readers to your website, creating a strong sense of community, positioning yourself as an authority or bringing attention to certain problems.

However, the fact that you, as an author, have clear objectives in mind, does not mean that these objectives will be relevant, beneficial and aligned with your audience’s purpose for reading your information. You have to think what is in it for them?

For example, an internet marketing company that creates a free pdf report called “The Blueprint of Massive Online Traffic” is addressing the need of their customers (probably internet marketers as well) to increase the number of visits to their website and potentially provide greater opportunities to generate profit. The company’s purpose in releasing a free pdf report could be to expand their base of subscribers to whom they could market other products in the future.

But if the same company released a free pdf report called “The Blueprint of Generating Massive Offline Sales”, they would miss the mark, as the biggest part of their audience would not be interested in selling physical products.

Ideally, your message should give the reader’s compelling reason to consume your content, while serving your personal objectives as well!

### Combining Author and Audience-Centered Approach

When you know enough about your readers, their needs, the difficulties that they might be facing, their fears and aspiration you can begin thinking about the primary purpose of your online content.

What would you like to accomplish with your writing?



Here are a few questions that will help you to make sure that your purpose for writing does not obscure or come into conflict with your reader's expectations:

- What is my main goal for writing this particular piece of information?
- What is the essence of the story I am trying to tell?
- What is the best way to present my idea (for example, through audio, video, clickable graphics, text, links, etc.)
- What effect do I want to have on my readers?
- How do I want my readers to use this information?
- What purpose will this writing serve for my readers? How will they use it?
- What will be my audience's attitude toward and probable reaction to this writing?
- Will they expect certain patterns of thought in my writing?
- Will they need statistical data to be convinced?
- What do I want to do?

When you are looking for an answer to the question "For what purpose am I writing this?" keep in mind the big picture as well as micro-objectives, because the purpose of various forms of communication may vary greatly.

For example, in the field of internet marketing the purpose of an email's subject line is not to sell a product, but to get an email opened. The purpose of an email is not to make a sale, but to have readers' click on the link that leads to the webpage or a sales letter.

The objective of each step of communication should be thought through, carefully planned and clearly presented to your readers. Only then will they take action!

### 3.5 Who Are You? - Finding Your Voice

It is worth taking time to think about how you want your audience to perceive you? After all, you are the Author!

This does not mean that you should pretend being somebody else or alter the truth to impress your readers. This is even more so if we are talking about your company's brand. Online users have become more experienced and more skeptic.

Marketing hype, empty promises, get-rich-quick schemes and inauthenticity will be spotted in a heartbeat and might cost you your credibility.

On the other hand, radical honesty and absolute transparency might turn off a lot of potential readers and prospects as well.

Even if your life is excitingly wonderful and your professional achievements are highly notable, it does not mean that you should share every little detail with your readers. Focus only on the part that is relevant to your audience and that will help you to establish a connection with people reading your content or visiting your website.

As mentioned earlier you should put your audience in the spotlight, not your persona, not even your business. And as you do – an amazing thing will happen. People will want to know more about you!

What should you tell them? Let's figure it out!

- Who are you? What is your brand?
- What makes you, your business or your writing different from your competition?
- What are the three main values that you want to base your communication on? (it could be anything from luxury, to freedom, to a sense of humor)
- What experiences, aspirations, interests, past setbacks do you have in common with your readers? Keep in mind that:

People like people, who are like them.

Think of your image and an improved Photoshop version of yourself. There is no need to alter who you are, but it helps to enhance colors, mute the shadows and choose surroundings that make your strong side stand out.

Every person, every business, every corporation, every non-profit organization has a story to tell. The quality that distinguishes a successful writer from a dilettante is how they choose to tell this story.

## 4 How to Create Connection with Your Readers

There is no doubt that one of the best and most effective online writing skill that ever existed is the author's ability to create a deep connection with their audience.

You can offer statistical data to your readers. You can give them social proof that your product is the best one out there. You can even try to appeal to their common sense, explaining to them why they should listen to you. But none of these strategies are going to work unless you build a deep emotional connection with your audience first.

### 4.1 Reasons to Connect with Your Readers

Developing a connection with online users allows the individual blogger, business leaders and companies to:

- Draw repeat visitors
- Build a community around their website
- Generate bigger sales
- Turn possible prospects into loyal customers
- Have their content shared virally
- Reinforce their authority and their brand
- Promote collaboration

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All you have to do is create a connection with your readers, start the dialogue and then simply sit back and listen!

Here are a few crucial steps that will help you to break through your first-time visitors’ initial skepticism and establish yourself or your website as a trustworthy “source”.

## 4.2 3 Infallible Steps to Creating Instant Connection

Even when your goal for writing does not include selling something, your purpose is still to make your reader take some kind of action – check out your website, leave a comment, send you some information, accept your point of view, approve your request, or actively support your cause.

And to do this you will have to take 4 main steps that will let you create a bridge between you and your website visitors: capture attention, maintain interest, and motivate action.

### Step #1: Capture attention

This one is a no-brainer, as people can not be persuaded, inspired or educated by a message they ignore. According to study results, the average time between opening a new tab and closing it is 55-60 seconds. This is all the time a person will spend clicking through your site, watching your animation, reading your copy and looking at your content. You will either capture their attention quickly or they will move on to the next tab.

One thing that you can do to make sure that your content is read (watched or listened to) attentively is to give your audience the reason or purpose of your writing early on. Do not leave them guessing as to why they got an email from you or what your reasons was for posting this particular content on your website.

Another strategy for getting your readers’ attention is describing a problem they might be facing and letting them know that you have the solution.

This is not as easy as most online writers, leaders or business owners may think. Usually they tend to make one of the two most serious communication mistakes that almost always create dissonance between the author and the reader.

The first mistake is assuming every person thinks differently.  
The second - assuming that everyone thinks the same.

Whether you are writing a sales letter for your new information product or are trying to convince people to click on a link, you will have to remember that your readers will not necessarily think the same way you do and might not be interested and motivated by the same things that interest and motivate you.



On the other hand, believing that your experiences, your thoughts and your ideas are absolutely unique might turn into a stumbling block that will quickly turn potential subscribers or clients off.

The truth is that while every person is unique, there will always be certain experiences, interests and beliefs that most of us will have in common. Your task as a writer is to identify those similarities and take them into consideration when creating your online content.

For example, if you start your article with the question, “*Have you ever regretted not acting on your idea and letting the opportunity go by?*” or “*Do you know that feeling of trying to fall asleep with another person snoring in the dark?*” 90% of your readers will know exactly what you are talking about.

On the other hand, if you begin your post by sharing the story of the hardship of doing the accounting in a small bakery shop, you will get confused looks and lose your audience before they get to the second sentence.

As obvious as it may seem, a lot of writers get carried away by sharing too many details or talking too often about their personal experiences that their readers can not fully relate to and as a result they eventually get bored.

Whatever you are writing about, your audience should have a feeling that you are talking directly to THEM, understand THEIR problems, share THEIR values, have had experiences that are similar to ones THEY have had.

In a nutshell if you are able to describe people’s problem or aspiration better than they could do it (using the same words they would use), they will automatically assume you have the solution.

And this will get their attention. Guaranteed!

## Step #2: Maintain Interest

Capturing attention is a good start to making sure that an online user does not close your webpage or delete your email right away. However, if your content fails to maintain your audience’s interest, people will stop reading (viewing or listening to) it.

So the ultimate question in this case is how do you hold your reader’s interest?

One of the strategies that I found helpful is to show interest in your readers’ point of view and life experience. A great way to do this is by asking questions. Not the kind of questions that get them talking about their corporate, or company or consumer selves. But their real self.

There is a difference between asking, “*What is the turnover rate in your company?*” and saying “*Are you worried that some of your key staff members may resign this year or might be looking for another job?*”

Read through the comments and address any questions and concerns that your readers may have. Relate to their experiences. Talk about the point they have made and ask more about it.

Get a dialogue going!

This strategy is not only great for learning more about your readers, but it also works wonders in the corporate world. Only a very few people will not warm to someone who is genuinely interested in their opinion, their achievements and their life. And when you show your interest towards others, they often become more interested in you and your message as well.

In addition listening to your audience allows you to pick up on those small nuances and feelings that will later enable you to write a brilliant, successful piece of copy or content.

### Strategy #3: Motivate action

Holding your readers' attention without making them feel as if they have gotten something out of your writing is purposeless. Online readers do not passively consume your content. They participate in the discussions, leave comments, share links with their friends and are looking for quick solutions to their problems.

Ideally, any piece of content that you put together should change or influence people's attitude, create a valuable insight, reframe the way they look at a situation and, consequently, motivate them to take action.

One of the great ways to make your content more actionable and more appealing for the readers is to give them very specific instructions about what has to be done, when, where and, possibly, how. Of course, if your proposition is accompanied with an incentive or a sound reason to listen to your suggestion – even better.

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Remember the questions you have answered about your ideal reader, their dreams, inspirations and worries? Well, these insights can be very helpful in finding the most effective way to boost people's motivation to act.

For example, if you have to convince your team to welcome changes in the marketing department you may write something such as, *"By implementing the new marketing strategy, we will boost sales by 18% while only increasing costs by 3%".* Or if your goal is to motivate your readers to sign up for your newsletter, you can ask them to leave their email in exchange for a top -quality report on a topic, that you know, will interest them.

### 4.3 Golden Ratio of Trust: Give First

Times change, and today it is not as easy to gain readers' trust as it once was. Over the last decade internet users have become more skeptical about marketing hype, 'Secret Formulas', quick fixes and 'Magic Bullets' promising instant results in exchange for their money or email address.

The ultimate question many bloggers, copywriters and internet-based companies are asking themselves is – How to gain reader's trust with so much "too-good-to-be-true" information that is out there online? And how can you build your brand and get your message across without falling into this category?

The answer to these questions is counter-intuitively simple –

Give Before You Ask

Be consistent in providing top-quality content. Answer emails, reply to comments and offer your expertise and advice with the single objective – to help people. Leave comments on other websites and build relationships with other bloggers. And finally, give your best and most powerful techniques for free!

This may be hard to grasp at first, as our competitive business environment has taught us to keep the best stuff only for those who are willing to pay for it.

The problem with this approach is that your online readers will never discover how much your information is worth until they try it out for themselves and see actual results. If you do not let them test-drive it, they will most likely perceive your product just as another "magic bullet" that does not work.

Keep in mind that before asking your readers anything, be it to leave you an email, take a survey, buy your product, share your website link on Twitter or Facebook, you have to think about what you can give them. Even when you are promoting your own or other people's products, make sure that your articles, posts, videos and emails are coming from the point of "giving" and not "taking"! Your readers will sense that and your level of credibility will grow very fast.

# 5 Writing for Web

## 5.1 9 Guidelines for Effective Online Communication

For business owners, internet marketers and bloggers the main (and sometimes only) communication channel is via on-line means. Therefore, it is important for them to ensure that their message gets across clearly and effectively to their readers, work team or customers.

To the readers, on the other hand, what you say or don't say can determine whether they:

- trust you
- act upon your suggestions
- buy the recommended products
- become your loyal fans
- share your message through their favorite online tools
- or close your webpage, unsubscribe from your RSS feed and ignore your emails

If you want to improve the effectiveness on your online communication here are 9 Important

**Guidelines that will help you to achieve this goal:**

**Limit your word count when making a point**

As the web has become more crowded and people have joined more email lists, attention rates have dropped. Web Usability Research shows that the optimal text length for a post, or article is between 400 and 1200 words (and even shorter for emails). For longer pages, reading becomes quite erratic. While common sense suggests that people spend more time on pages with more information, studies demonstrate that after 1200-1300 words online users will only read 18% of additional text (unless it is something either very relevant or very entertaining).

A major mistake many web writers make, is burying their core idea in surplus information that is either unnecessary or is only marginally related.

This brings us to the next point...

**Focus On One Key Message**

As a writer and an expert in a certain area you probably have an abundance of knowledge, case studies, and examples on the topic that you are writing about. This, however, does not mean that you should include everything you know in your article, email, video presentation or your sales letter.

Mark Twain once wrote to his friend, "I did not have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead". Writing high quality content takes time. Mainly because you have to sort through your information, determine the key message

that you want to convey, think about what your audience wants to know and what it does not want to read and then mercilessly eliminate everything else that is either irrelevant or unnecessary.

If you do not give yourself enough time to identify your core idea, you might end up throwing in too many facts, statistics, observations and details that will only confuse your readers. Just because “it’s all there somewhere” and the writing is grammatically correct does not mean that the message is clear, compelling or persuasive.

### Use Short Sentences

Of course, your writing style will be largely influenced by your audience and the purpose of your writing. However, if you want your writing to be easy to read, use short sentences. There is a reason why so many students fall asleep when reading academic papers. It is not the content that has such a “calming” effect on their mind, it is the style.

Therefore, if you want to hold your readers attention, do not be afraid to use paragraphs made up of just one sentence. Even one word.

Short sentences do not intimidate. They add power to the message. And they help the reader to quickly grasp the point.

How can you tell if your sentences are not too long? Read them out loud!

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If you can not finish the phrase, without pausing for a breath –  
it has to be broken down!

## Put Some Thought into Your Titles and Headings

We will talk more about this in the next chapters, but for now I just want to stress that the title of your post, headings and sub-headings are what online users first pay attention to when scanning your page. As the title compels them to click on the link and go to your webpage, the headings serve as sign-posts that grab attention and pique curiosity. The same principle is true for the subject lines and the first 3-5 words of an email.

## Break Your Text into Smaller Blocks

Just the site of a large paragraph in an email or a webpage could be enough to turn away the majority of people. Large blocks of text not only look intimidating, they also make reading on the screen difficult. Using more subheadings, bullet points and quotes help to break content monotony and hold the reader's attention longer.

Another great trick to make your information more appealing and easier to understand is to present facts, statistical data and survey questions in the form of charts, tables and even interactive graphics. Even a simple box with a core idea, original thought or summary can help break up the text and convey information in an easy-to-read format.

## Eliminate the Guesswork

Online readers are very proactive in their research for information. They will not click on something unless they know what they are getting. However, it is even worse if your title or email subject line promises one thing, but your content doesn't deliver it.

For instance, if your title says "*Guidelines for effective online communication*" but when people click on the link they find a 600-word story on why you decided to create your own blog, they will leave your page. What's more, the credibility of your website will be questioned. Therefore, make sure that your headlines are not only catchy, but also relevant to the content of your post or email.

## Include Links

Without overdoing it and only when it makes sense, it could be a good idea to include a few internal or external links in your content. Internal links will allow online users to discover other posts that you have written in the past and become familiar with your website. External links, leading to other websites, will allow your audience to expand and deepen their knowledge on the subject, while turning your website into valuable and informative resource. Do not worry that your readers will surf away and never return. If your site or newsletter does a good job at compiling click-worthy links, people will come back for more!

## Interact

Online writing is not a one-way street, where an author provides content and users passively consume it. Your readers should feel that they are interacting with you, that their comments are read, questions answered, their suggestions taken into consideration.

Even if you want to position yourself as an expert, you still have to be ‘personable’ and ‘likable’ to create a strong community around your website, brand or your product. In addition to people coming to your website, you also want to reach out to them through social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and other socializing platforms.

Millions of dollars are spent by big companies every year to animate social media networks and attract more fans to their brand. The great thing is that you can do it for free and it will only take you 10-15 minutes a day.

## Put All The Previous Points Together

The final piece of your writing, be it a blog post and email or copy, should bring all the previous points or key ideas together, leaving people with a clear action step that they need to take.

For example, when communicating online keep your writing short, but sweet. Build your content around one key message and use short sentences to express your thoughts. Put some thought into your title and subject lines so that they will not leave your readers’ guessing what they will find if they click on the link. Break big chunks of text into smaller paragraphs, provide valuable links and sum up the information at the end of the post or an email.

Oh, yes, and do not forget to connect with your audience through your blog, newsletter and social media channels!

It is as easy as that!

These communication guidelines can be applied to any piece of online content that you produce. The medium that you choose, will partly dictate how you use, combine or modify these concepts, but you should still keep them in mind as you write.

## 5.2 Writing for People and Search Engines

The skills of an accomplished online writer do not stop at being able to provide high quality content in an interesting, concise and easy-to-read manner. After all, the fact that you have written an amazing piece of writing or a brilliant post does not necessarily mean that online readers will find it.

There are a lot of talented authors who still wonder why no one visits their website, when their information is exceptional and their writing is good enough to win a Pulitzer Prize. The truth is that while writing a superb and witty content for other people, they completely ignore the search engines’ mechanisms. And in turn, the search engines ignore them.

This is the reason why their posts end up at the bottom of search results. This is why no one ever visits their websites. This is why they struggle to turn their passion for writing into a stable source of income.

If you do not want to find yourself in a similar situation, it pays to master the technical aspects of online writing.

Let's start from the basics...

### 5.3 What is SEO?

SEO stands for "Search Engine Optimization", and describes a process of "optimizing" your content so that engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing can properly analyze, categorize and decide how relevant your information is to other readers.

To get a better understanding about how it works, think of a book store. You have books divided by sections, organized by author and strategically placed on different shelves (more popular books at eye level; less popular on the bottom shelves). There will also be special sections with featured, most-popular best-seller books typically placed where readers can easily spot them as soon as they walk into the store.

It is the same in the online world. When an internet user enters a query (called a "key word") and hits "enter" the best websites appear on the first page. These are the websites that will get the most quality viewers, especially the ones that take the top three organic (not advertised) positions.

According to a recent study from Optify, websites ranked number one on Google, receive on average 36.4% of all clicks from users; number two receive 12.5%; number three 9.5%. After this the traffic flow decreases proportionally to the position search engines have assigned to each particular website.

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Needless to mention, that if your content appears on page 18, very few users will actually see and click on it. And your message, no matter how innovational or great it may be, will get swallowed up by the faceless mass of similar web pages and lost in the noise of informational buzz.

## 5.4 Why SEO Techniques are Making Writing Profitable?

If you are still unconvinced about the importance of making your online content SEO friendly, here are a few noticeable benefits that you might want to consider as an online writer, an internet marketer or a small business owner:

- Larger web presence and opportunities to market your products globally
- Greater flow of visitors, fans, and customers to your website
- Higher brand awareness and popularity of your website
- Increase in highly targeted traffic and, consequently, more sales
- Greater opportunities to collaborate with other top-ranked websites and cross-promote each other's products
- Less or no expenses on advertising as there is no need to pay for traffic if your website ranks high in Google or Yahoo
- Positive returns on investment (ROI) compared to other marketing options

## 5.5 How to Optimize Your Content for Search Engines?

Search engines approach, analyze and evaluate content differently from how a regular person would do it. They are deprived of emotions, artistic taste and sense of humor. Their task is to sort through millions of pages of content and look for specific “indicators” which allow them to judge the quality of each web page, each blog post and each comment quickly and efficiently.

Now let's get clear about the criteria on which the best content is chosen. For search engines it is not your grammar, your wit, your style or your captivating pictures that makes a difference. It is the relevance of the content.

Mind you, the definition of relevant content that you may have in mind could be very different from the “**relevance**” indicators that search engines take into consideration when ranking your web pages.

So let's look at what it is that makes your content great from a search engine's standpoint and still attractive to the readers:

### Well-Chosen Keyword

It is important that the term or keyword you choose for your article, sales page or guest post is broad enough that many people will search for it, yet narrow enough that it will have a decent chance of getting a high search rank. For example, the term “Dog Training”, while searched for by a lot of people is too broad and too difficult to rank high for. On the other hand, “best dog training advice” is a much better alternative as it is more specific and, consequently, there are fewer websites competing for it.

**Note:** If you are not sure how good the keyword you have chosen for your post is, Google Keyword Tool allows you to check both, keyword popularity (how many people are looking for this particular query) and your competition (how many websites are already using it)



## Good Title

Quickly communicating what your post is about remains the first law of writing a SEO friendly content. It also helps your readers decide whether they want to read it or not. Your title should include the keyword; be relatively short (maximum 12 words) and be appealing enough for the user to start reading it. We will talk more about how to choose a great title in the next chapter.

## Content length

An average search engine “optimized” article should have an average word count of 500 to 1500 words. Anything shorter than this will find it hard to get readers from the search engines. Anything longer can make it more difficult to keep readers’ attention and interest.

## Keyword Density

Keyword density is another “indicator” that search engines are looking for, to understand how relevant the title of the article is to its content.

Therefore, try including your keyword within the first sentence or two. The earlier you mention it, the better. As a rule for a regular article, you should use your keyword in URL, a few times in your headings, once in the tag, once in the conclusion and 3-4 times in the main body.

Just make sure that “optimization” of the post does not negatively affect its quality. The text has to flow naturally and the readers should not have a feeling that the author is continuously repeating them self.

For example, here is how you do NOT want your content to sound:

*“Nowadays more and more people are searching for online jobs and online money making techniques, to make money in their free time or to make their living, all of us are realizing that doing a job 50 to 60 hours a week for 50 years has become boring and is not the ideal way to live.*

*So we came up with an idea of putting all the money making ways and ideas together so that you can choose one of them and start making money online. Here we include the latest money making ways that help you earn online from home.”*

This piece of text was obviously written for search engines, not human beings. However, even SEO will punish it with low search ranks as it is heavily loaded with keywords and provides no information value.

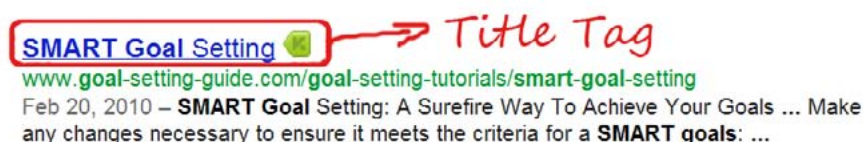
Therefore, when writing online instead of fixating on how to use the same keyword over and over again, think of what is relevant to your readers?



## Correct Title Tags

All these technical terms, such as “SEO”, “keywords”, “Url” and now “Title tags” may be a little overwhelming for people who are just getting into online writing, but bear with me. It is not as difficult as it may seem. A title tag is simply an accurate and concise (maximum 70 characters) description of an online document content that appears in search engine results.

Here is what it looks like:



## Uniqueness

Search engines continuously follow links around the Web to find new pages. When a new page is found, it is compared to other pages that have been indexed earlier. If the wording of the new page is very similar to a page on another website, there is a high chance that the new page will not get ranked very high. Why? Because if users are looking for a particular topic there is no sense in showing them two, almost identical pages. And search engines will do everything in their power to stop it from happening, punishing websites with duplicated content with lower rankings.

## Trust and responsibility

NNE and Pharmaplan have joined forces to create NNE Pharmaplan, the world's leading engineering and consultancy company focused entirely on the pharma and biotech industries.

Inés Aréizaga Esteva (Spain), 25 years old  
Education: Chemical Engineer

– You have to be proactive and open-minded as a newcomer and make it clear to your colleagues what you are able to cope. The pharmaceutical field is new to me. But busy as they are, most of my colleagues find the time to teach me, and they also trust me. Even though it was a bit hard at first, I can feel over time that I am beginning to be taken seriously and that my contribution is appreciated.



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## Frequency

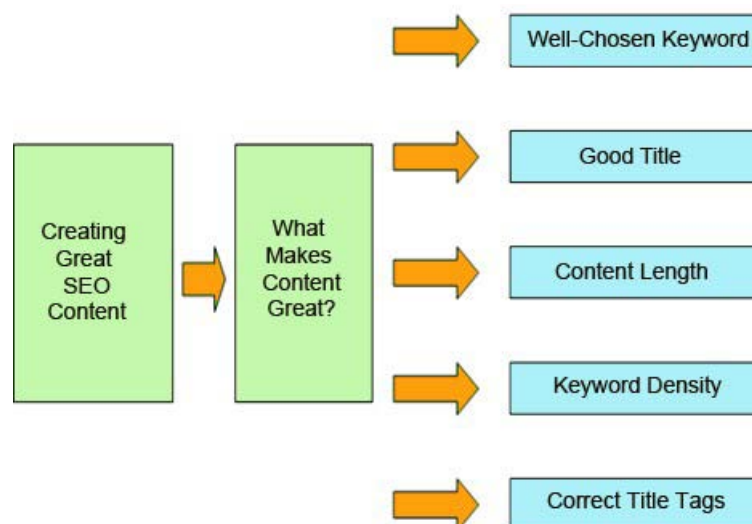
According to many web specialists SEO favors the frequency with which you write about a certain topic. For example, if you are just planning to write about “travelling” once, your article is most likely not going to make it to the top of a search engine’s list. Therefore, it helps to choose topics that you would like to write about frequently, and concentrate on them. For instance, if you write a post on “*The 5 Most Romantic Countries to visit in Europe*” you might want to write another one about “*The Top 10 Honeymoon destinations in Europe*”. While these two posts will not have the same keywords, they will still be related by the same category “travelling in Europe”.

Take a look at some categories, article titles and other content that you have written about. Are there any common topics that you could expand on or cover from a different perspective?

Are you truly doing everything you can to bring traffic to your site?

## To Sum up:

The chart below highlights some of the main areas that make the content ‘great’. Remember this is from an SEO perspective with a view to ranking higher in search engines and to get your writing out there in the world.



# 6 Intelligent Creation of Micro-Content

## 6.1 6 Rules for Creating Eye-Catching Headlines

*“Your first 15 words count more than the 15,000 words that follow!” - Bob Stone*

Here is a strange question – Why do so many online writers spend hours in creating high quality content and then put so little thought into writing a good headline? After all, if the headline is not compelling enough, no one will ever get to the rest of an article or a copy.

However, a well-written headline can do more than simply grab attention and lure the readers into the body of the text. Like a movie trailer, it can build excitement, pique curiosity and give readers a taste of what is to come. Or it can bore your audience, turn them away and even diminish your credibility, by making your message sound “spammy”.

To prevent the latter from happening, make sure that you keep to a few helpful Rules when writing your headlines.

### Make it Short

You do not have to be a good writer to explain what the text is about. But you have to be a great writer to do it in 5 words. It is possible and online news magazines are great examples of headlines that are both short and rich in informational scent. Here are just a few examples from the BBC and US News:

“Experts find ‘possible’ Da Vinci”

“Online comments are ‘a joke?’”

“Exercise Might Boost Kids’ Academic Ability”

Think of how you can communicate precisely what your copy or blog post is about, in just a handful of words? Make every word work hard for its living. Headlines that are longer than 10-12 words are simply ineffective.

### Make It Clear, Not Clever

Too many authors create elaborate turns of phrase, puns and play on words, hoping to pull people into their sales copy. Then they are left wondering why their witty headlines do not work.

The reason is simple:

“Clever” headlines create ambiguity and leave people guessing about the relevancy of the topic to their current search query.

Generally, clear, direct and un inventive headlines have proved to be more effective on the web than intriguing, witty headlines so frequently used in print.

The Golden rule of writing a great headline for the online world can be summed up in just one phrase:

*“Tell your readers exactly what your piece of content is poised to deliver and save your sense of humor and word play for the body of the article.”*

### Think SEO

As The Atlantic magazine, in its article “Google Doesn’t Laugh: Saving Witty Headlines in the Age of SEO,” has put it “headlines that stray off the ‘literalness’ line” will not do well on the web.

If your goal is to attract more views to your website, your business, your product or your writing, then your headlines should be optimized for search engines.

Do not over-think it! Speak the user’s language, or more precisely, use likely search terms and front-load your headlines with the most important keywords. Doing so will make it easier for your readers to find your content quickly and appreciate your writing even more.

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## Make it Relevant

Online users are busy, proactive people, who do not have time to study an article or a sales copy to understand if it is relevant for them. They expect you do the work for them. Therefore, each of your headlines should convey the main message, letting your audience judge with a high degree of confidence, whether they will be interested in reading the full text or not.

## Add the Benefit

Compelling headlines, just as any piece of content, should always strive to speak to the reader's immediate needs, desires and emotional triggers. Often, communicating the relevancy of your content is not enough to have online users click on the link and read the full article.

Keep in mind that your readers are not looking for the product or service. They are either looking for beneficial outcomes or are trying to avoid unpleasant experiences and pain. In order to motivate people to choose your website or your piece of content out of the tens of other online pages, you have to attach a powerful, mouth-watering result to your headline.

A few great examples of such headlines are:

“How to Lose Unwanted Pounds without Dieting”

“5 Ways to Write for Fun and Profit”

“10 Good Ways NOT to Lose Customers”

## Dress It Up With Emotionally Stirring Words

Frequently, when two headlines are relevant, clear and SEO friendly, the headline that gets more clicks is the one that uses emotionally stirring words aimed at capturing readers' attention. You too, can really 'dress up' your headline by adding a few compelling words to it.

For example, in this chapter I added the adjective “eye-catching” to the word “headlines”, which made the title sound less dry and text-book-like. I could have just as well added a word “sizzling”, “compelling” or “magnetic” and it would have had the desired result – well-written headlines – sound even more appealing and attainable. If you are not sure which power words to choose – a variation of “fast”, “simple”, and “easy” are your safest bet.

## 6.2 Do's and Don'ts of Headlines

Besides the **6 Main Rules of Writing Compelling Headlines**, there are a few minor things that can make a huge difference in your click-through rates and the popularity of your content:

### Do Use Numbers Instead of Words

As much as offline writers chafe against the list posts, the fact remains that people love to see numbers in headlines. First, numbers catch the users' eyes, as they scan web pages for facts and data.

Second, they add a promise of not just a lump of information, but a very specific series of insights.

Third, digits take less space than their representation in a flowery verbiage. For example, the headline “37 Inspirational Quotes for Any Day” is a lot more appealing to the eye than “Thirty Seven Inspirational Quotes for Any Day”.

### Don't Use Teasers

In print, curiosity can start people writing an article. Online, it will make them ignore it. Trying to entice people into clicking on the link to find out what the story is about is a lost game. Online users simply will not wait for a page to load unless they know exactly what they are going to get.

### Don't Make All Headlines Start With the Same Word

Let's look at a simple example - “How to” posts are very effective in catching reader's attention, but if every second post starts with “How to”, it will make it very hard for your readers to scan through your articles.

### Don't Make It Sound Promotional

Users got burned on headlines that promised “quick fixes”, “free bonuses” and “make money schemes”. They believe that if something sounds too good to be true it is a scam. Therefore, be careful about using headlines that sound “spammy”. Match your titles not only to your audience, but also to the medium in which you are writing. For example, a headline that may work well in a post, may be perceived as a far-fetched claim in a sales letter and vice versa.

### Don't Promise More Than You Can Deliver

Whatever benefits or claims you state in your headline, should be 100% backed up by the high-quality, relevant content. You can not promise your readers “*The Biggest Secret to Generating Income Online*” and then dedicate two-thirds of your post to starting an online business. This is not what your readers came looking for and this is not what you should be writing about. A great headline is the first and crucial step to getting your article or sales copy read. But it is nothing without a stellar content to follow.

## 6.3 20 Best Headline Formulas That Work

*“On the average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. It follows that, if you don't sell the product (or your content) in your headline, you have wasted 80% of your money.”* - David Ogilvy

Have you ever wondered what popular teenager magazines, news portals and a great piece of copy have in common? The answer is Captivating Headlines that people respond too.

You can learn from these media and modify their best time-tested headline formulas to promote your business, sell informational products or gain loyal readers who will regularly turn to your website looking for more juicy knowledge-bites.

Here are some of the sure-fire headline templates that work every time:



### How to [desired result] without [downside]

How to Triple your Sales Without Selling

How to Lose 20 Pounds Without Sweaty Workouts

### Do You Make These Mistakes?

Do You Make These Dating Mistakes?

Do You Make These Mistakes in English?

### Do You Recognize the [number] Early Warning Signs of [blank]?

Do You Recognize the 7 Early Warning Signs of Burnout?

Do You Recognize the 10 Early Warning Signs of Facebook Addiction?

[Do something] like [world-class example]

Kiss like a Movie Star

Think like Rockefeller and Get Rich

### You Don't Have to Be [something challenging] to [desired result].

You Don't Have to Be Rich to Retire Early.

You Don't Have to Be a Geek to Master SEO

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### **The Secret of [blank]**

The Secret of Eating and Losing Weight

The Secret of Protecting your Mailbox from Spammers

### **[number] Little-Known Ways to [blank]**

5 Little-Known Ways to Get Traffic to Your Blog

12 Little-Known Ways to Save on International Travel

### **What Everybody Ought to Know About [blank]**

What Everybody Ought to Know About Their Children

What Everybody Ought to Know About Social Networks

### **[Blank] – Your Question Answered**

Shopping on a Budget – Your Question Answered

Do Bloggers Make Money? – Your Question Answered

### **SOLVED: How to [problem]**

SOLVED: How to Stick To Your New Year's Resolutions

SOLVED: How to Stop Your Dog From Barking

### **What [blank] is Not Telling About [blank]/ Don't Want You to Know**

What the Marketing Gurus are Not Telling You About Google Ad words

What Men Think and Don't Want You to Know About

### **Top [number][blank] for [blank]**

Top 25 Gadgets for Stay-at-Home Moms

Top 10 Tips for Hassle Free Living

### **Who Else Wants [benefit]?**

Who Else Wants a Great Word Press Theme?

Who Else Wants to Sell More ebooks?

Here's a Quick Way to [solve a problem]

Here's a Quick Way to Get Over a Cold

Here's a Quick Way to Convert Audio to Text



**[Do something] in Half the Time**

Developing Online Products in Half the Time

Speak Fluent Spanish in Half the Time

**[number] Ways to Screw Up [blank]**

21 Ways to Screw Up Your Relationships

Ways to Screw Up Your Sales Copy

**[number] Reasons to/NOT to [blank]**

10 Reasons To Delete Your Facebook Account

5 Powerful Reasons to Eat Slower

**[number ] Myths about [blank]**

6 Popular Myths About Acne

10 Myths About Social Networking for Business

**[Do something] You Can Be Proud Of**

Build A Physique You Can Be Proud Of

Build a CV You Can Be Proud Of

**The Right Way to [blank]**

The Right Way to Praise Your Employees

The Right Way to Build a Profitable Email List

The beauty of these Headline Formulas is their Universality. They can be applied to any online niche and still capture reader's attention and curiosity. However, you might want to test a few different headlines to see which ones work best for your business or your website.

For example, a few online studies suggest that the headline formula "The Secret of [blank]" while is widely used is still very effective, while headlines that use the word "Free" are getting less and less popular among readers.

# 7 The Ninja Tricks of Email Marketing

## 7.1 Is Email a Dying Species?

*"Email has had a good run as king of communications. But its reign is over."* – The Wall Street Journal ("Why Email No Longer Rules" 10/12/09)

Although inboxes are still filling up daily, many internet experts have been talking about emails dying out and losing their place as a powerful communication tool. For a while it seemed like emails would be forced out by other communication mediums such as Twitter, Facebook, Skype and FourSquare. Indeed, in March 2010 it was reported that time spent on social media networks surpassed emails for the first time in history.

However, the use of social networks has not affected email the way many experts expected. With consumers directing all social media notifications to their inbox, social network use has actually increased email activity instead of replacing it.

The fact remains that email is still a habitual activity used by 92% of adults – with 61% using email daily. As to both online and offline businesses, email still holds first place as an indispensable communication tool. It enables companies to quickly reach customers worldwide, market their products and services, and noticeably reduces time between the commencement of a marketing campaign and consumer purchases. As to internal communication, the use of email allows people within a company to skip "managerial layers", which noticeably decreases decision-making times.

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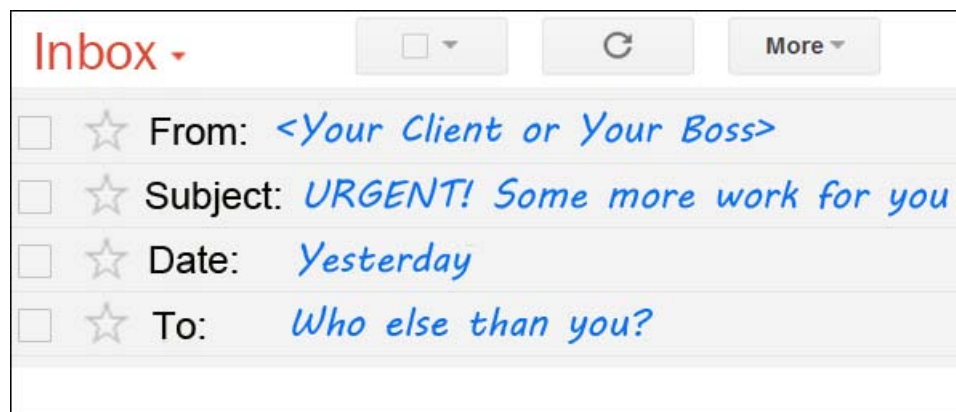
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However, this is only when email is used efficiently. Our own inbox is often a clear example of a very different picture.



Every day we find ourselves sorting through unnecessary email messages that are too long, too vague or simply irrelevant. I am sure that you can relate to the feeling of opening an email from your superior and wondering what does it have to do with you. Or how about the times when you had to decipher a convoluted message in a big block of text? Or when you deleted by accident an important email because the subject line sounded like a spam?

All these are clear examples or how, if used incorrectly, a powerful communication tool can turn into the biggest time waster.

Now, I want to ask you a question – What about the emails you are sending out? Do people respond to them in the way you want them to? Or do they seem to ignore them and miss important information?

Are you certain that you are making the best possible impression with your emails and that people actually take time to read them?

Even if you consider yourself a people person and have great communication skills, there are probably still a few things that you can improve when writing your emails. Often a few little tweaks can go a long way to having your emails opened, read and acted on.

## 7.2 Getting your Email Opened: Writing a Compelling Subject Line

If you are wondering why there is a whole chapter dedicated to the email subject line, than here is your answer:

The “Subject” line and the first 3-5 words of an email body are by far the biggest factor that will determine the success or failure of your marketing campaign or your online communication.

Based on your subject line people will make a decision to either open your email or hit the “DELETE” button without giving it a second thought. If the subject line is not alluring enough that your readers have no choice but to click on the message, your carefully crafted email will never get opened.

Even if you have treated your list of subscribers extremely well. Even if you know that they like and trust you. Even if you offer top-quality information.

In today's highly competitive online communication world, every email you send not only competes against dozens of other email messages at any given time, but the attention span of an average online user is getting shorter and shorter.

Most of your customers are now Skyping, Twittering, Facebooking, while they are jumping between 10 active browser tabs. If your subject line is not arresting enough to catch their attention in a fraction of a second, you might not have a second chance of getting your message across. Besides, if you regularly do any marketing via email (or intend to), ineffective subject lines can noticeably harm your open rates, and consequently your potential revenue.

Even if you are a professional writer or have great communication skills, you should still put a noticeable amount time and thought into crafting a subject line that gets people to stop doing everything else and concentrate on your message.

On the surface, this task may seem simple. In fact, many marketers and bloggers prefer to start with an email draft and then think of the best subject line to go along with it. Even experienced copywriters often compose the subject line as an afterthought to their body message – a mistake that often results in lower open rates.

To understand why the strategy of summarizing the contents of the message into a little subject line is so ineffective, you have to keep in mind one thing:

The role of a subject line is to get your email opened. It is not to sell. It is not to tell the story. It is not to explain.

It is ONLY to encourage a person to click on the email and start reading your message.

Let's take a look at few examples:

**Email subject: on LIVE tonight**

This subject line grabs attention, but what makes it ineffective is its resemblance to spam messages – which is a sure way to have it deleted unread.

**Email subject: How to stop getting burned...**

A slightly better subject line, as it combines an appealing “how to” phrase with the natural response to avoid pain (getting burned). However, this subject line is still too generic and does not give the recipient a clear idea about the message.

**Email subject: Marketing Takeaways From TEDx | Exploiting Customer Habits**

This is a good example of a subject line that is both specific and compelling. It starts with an information-carrying word, is backed up by a credible source (TEDx), includes benefit (learning about customer habits) and gives the reader a clear idea about what they are going to find in the body of the email.

**Email subject: Your invitation expires at 11:59 – don't miss out**

This is a different example of a compelling subject line from KCI Communications.

It piques curiosity, offers a benefit (invitation), creates a sense of urgency (expires at 11:59 tonight) and motivates the reader to take action and open it right away (don't miss out)!

If this subject line comes from a trustworthy and well-known source, there is no need to specify what kind of invitation it is. It will get opened in any case. However, this subject line might not be as effective when sent from an unfamiliar email address or a company whose name customers do not recognize.

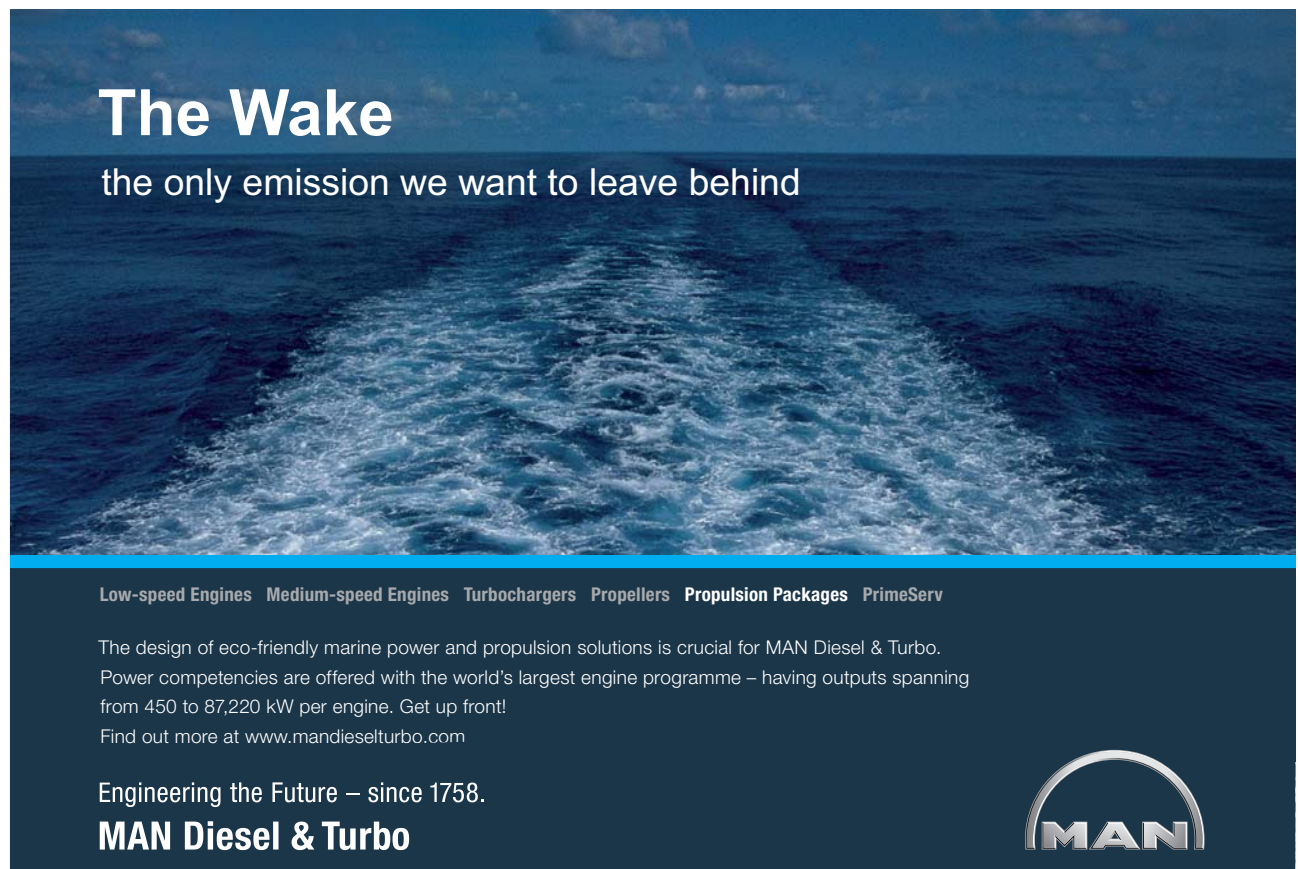
Another great lesson that you can take from this subject line example is the importance of creating sense of urgency, when it comes to communicating marketing offers or certain deadlines. People want to be reminded how much time they have left to act upon your offer. However, it is also vital not to take the whole urgency concept too far, because when most of your emails are marked "URGENT", none are.

### 7.3 How to Make your Subject Line Spam-Filter-Proof?

Before worrying about whether or not people will actually open your messages, it is a good idea to verify that the email spam filters will let your message get through.

With the increasingly sophisticated email and ISP (Internet Service Provider) filters, many legitimate emails that contain "suspicious" words in the subject line get blocked or end up in the "spam" folder. Understanding how spam filters work will help you prevent non-delivery problems and being unfairly labeled as a "spammer".

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Without getting too deep into details, it is worth mentioning that many of the new email and ISP filters use a “point system” that identifies trigger phrases often used in spam emails. If an email exceeds a certain number of points it gets filtered out and is never delivered to a customer.

To make sure that this does not happen with your emails, use the following phrases in your subject line with caution:

Free!	Collect
50% off!	Amazing
Click Here	Cash Bonus
Call now!	Promise You
Subscribe	Credit
Earn \$	Loans
Discount!	Multi-level Marketing
Eliminate Debt	Million Dollars
Double your income	Opportunity
You're a Winner!	Compare
Reverses Aging	Satisfaction Guaranteed
"Hidden"	Serious Cash
"Stop" or "Stops"	Information you requested
Lose Weight	

Some other problematic phrases that can add “spam points” to the emails you send out include:

Act Now!	Offer
All New	One time
All Natural	Order Now
As Seen On...	Please Read
Buy Direct	Don't Delete
Special Promotion	Save up to
Easy Terms	Time limited
Get Paid	Visit our web site
Guaranteed	While Supplies last
Give it away	Winner
Join millions	Work at home
No cost	You've been selected

In addition, quotation marks, dollar signs and exclamation points and toll-free numbers in the subject lines will frequently trigger mail filters and increase your chances of non-delivery.

## 7.4 Having Your Email Read: 5 Must-Follow Rules of Email Writing

After you have picked something offbeat and unusual to make your subject line stand out, it is time to write an email that will capture your audience's interest and have them reading your every word.

There are a few very important rules that any brilliantly written email should follow.

### Make the first two sentences count

The first couple of sentences and, more specifically, the first 3-6 words are just as important as the subject line (as this is what people see in their mail box without having to open an email). Therefore, instead of writing the usual "Dear customer" or "Hello", begin your email with the sentence that is in line with the subject line and is captivating enough to have people read the rest. For example, if your subject line says "How to close clients in 16 SECONDS", it helps to talk about closing clients in the first two sentences (You may also want to mention where the 16 second estimate came from).

Never use a jazzy subject line to get people to open an email, and then write about something completely unrelated in the email body. Your subscribers, customers or team members will feel like they have been tricked and it will be really hard to convince them to read other emails from you in the future.

### Think "informality" and "brevity"

*"I try to leave out the parts that people skip."* - Elmore Leonard

Many people, especially in the business world, make the mistake of writing emails that sound too formal and hide the main message behind business jargon, big words and clever turns of phrases that are commonly defined as "corporate gibberish". If you notice yourself doing this, stop. Because no one is going to appreciate the lack of clarity.

Here is a good example of how NOT to write:

*"Due to the increased scope of the project vis-à-vis Tuesday's meeting, compounded with our afore-mentioned desire to maintain quality without increasing cost, an as-yet indeterminate amount of time will be allocated to our newest venture. You should be proud of the amount of effort and energy you have put forth thus far, and can be certain the project's conclusion will become more apparent as the tasks become increasingly more finite..."*

After you finish sorting through the cloud of meaningless generalities and bureaucratic nonsense, you might come to the same conclusion – the project manager is trying to communicate two things to his team: first, he has no idea when the new project will be completed; second, employees will not receive overtime pay.

What, however, does not need de-coding is the fact that the communication style of this particular email will annoy team members a lot more than the message itself.

No matter how difficult or unpleasant the topic that you are writing about may be, there is no need to make your email messages sound even more complicated and stand-offish.

Think "informality". Think "brevity".



Whether your email is directed to your co-worker, a client or a company, it will still be read by a person. And this person will definitely appreciate a message that is short, personal, sincere and to the point. This goes for all emails, even newsletters.

If you use clear language and focus on just one point per email, communicating your message in 2-3 paragraphs should not be a problem.

### Be Personal, But Do Not Beat Around The Bush

When people see an email that starts with the words “*Dear friends*”, “*Hello Everyone!*” or “*Most of you know*” they instantly get a feeling that this email has nothing to do with them. Why?

Because it is directed to a group of people, and no one in particular. As a result, your readers will not relate to it and you as an online communicator, will have a hard time establishing a connection with your audience.

Even if you have 100,000 people on your mailing list, especially if you have 100,000 people on your mailing list, your emails should be directed to ONE person and one person only. Each of your readers should feel as though you are only writing to them, talking about their interest and creating your products to help them achieve their goals.

Another point that is important to keep in mind when writing an email is, the response or action that you want to get in return to your email. Do not bury requests, questions, or relevant details in your message. Give people clear step-by-step instructions of what it is that you want them to do, be it respond to your email, watch a certain video, visit your website, buy an informational product or join you Fan page on Facebook.

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## Introduce Links Early

Any links that you want to include in your email should be visible without having to scroll down the page. It is also okay to mention the same link two or three times throughout your message, to offer your readers several opportunities to see your sales letter, your video, your blog or the product that you recommend. And don't forget to mention the benefit. What is in it for your audience?

## Use P.S.s To Stress Your Most Important Points

Eye-tracking studies show that people scan the first two paragraphs of an email and then scroll down to the end of email. What gets their attention are postscripts, abbreviated P.S. and P.P.S. The term postscript comes from the Latin post scriptum and means "written after".

Usually postscripts imply that there is something important that the author forgot to communicate in the body of the message. Involuntarily we always pay greater attention to the few phrases that follow a "P.S" than the message itself.

What does it mean for you?

It means that if you have to get an important point or idea across, you should probably strategically place it in your postscripts. Or if the idea is too long, you can at least give your readers specific directions about where they can find it.

For example, *"P.S. As I have mentioned in the second paragraph it really pays off to participate in this [link] online conference. Especially when you consider benefits #2 and #5."*

Even if a person has skimmed through your email, they will likely go back, find the second paragraph and re-read the benefits that you have off-handedly mentioned in your postscript.

## 7.5 Double-Check Your Message: the Three "U" Criteria

Whenever you are trying to get someone to use their valuable time and invest it in your email, you have to make sure that your message (just as your subject line) meets the Three "U" Criteria. Otherwise, you risk increasing your unsubscribe rate and minimizing your open rates.

- **Useful:** Is the promised message valuable to the reader?
- **Ultra-specific:** Is your message crystal clear to the recipient? Is it personal enough and easy to understand?
- **Urgent:** Does the reader feel the need to read it or act on it now? Can you add an urgency element?

Incorporating all three of these elements into the body of your message and its subject line, will ensure that it will stand out from the hundreds of other emails and will receive a positive response from the readers. Now this positive response can translate into new joint venture partnerships, greater visibility of your brand and even immediate annual profit increase!

However, simply knowing the psychology and techniques behind skillful online writing will not get you very far.

You have to use this knowledge, experiment with it, adjust it to your target market or your audience. But never, ever should you let what you know overpower who you are. Whether you write about time management, craft a marketing email for your new online campaign or simply share your thoughts with your readers, let your personality and your uniqueness shine through your writing!

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