

HEADLINES



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Questions From Students And Answers From A Copywriting Expert

- I have writers block. What tips can you give me to inspire an idea in the first place...

Here's how you can eliminate writer's block forever. From this point forward, it will cease to be a problem for you. How? The simple answer is to have a plan or outline. Most projects don't require a complex plan. A simple 5-minute outline will make your article much easier to write.

With a plan you have direction and purpose. You know exactly what you're going to talk about and you simply go from one point to the next. You do your thinking ahead of time... before you put pen to paper, or fingers to the keyboard.

Writer's block occurs when you get stuck, unsure of what to say next. But thinking things through upfront virtually eliminates the problem.

Choose your topic – something you know well. Most importantly, your topic should be about something your audience desires to know. Having the inside edge on information your readers want gives you an advantage from the very start. Your article will attract a lot more attention when it reveals specific information your audience hungers for.

Decide what it is you're going to write – a report, article, or a book. For an article, you might only have three or four key points you want to make, so creating an outline is quick and painless.

Simply list your topic. Identify the 3 (or more) key points about this topic you want to discuss in your article. Next to each key point, list 3 significant ideas or supporting points. That's all it takes.

- What is the best type of introduction to grab the readers attention.

The best way to get through to readers and pull them into your copy is to hit their hot-button immediately, in a way they simply cannot ignore. When you address a predominant worry or deep desire, you grab readers where they "live".

By doing so, you're going for the jugular. That's a surefire way to grab attention. If you fail to accomplish this critical task, what you've written will never see the light of day.

It's the age of information, where maintaining any semblance of productivity, even sanity means ignoring 99.7% of the messages unleashed upon us. Only a tiny fraction of all messages get through. The rest is just noise. It's the same thing for your prospect. To get through, your message needs to resonate with the reader's own thoughts.

- What common mistakes should I avoid when writing my article?

One mistake is to discuss things that matter to you, instead of your reader. Don't just spew words for the sake of seeing them in print. Make your message important to your readers. It's not what you want to tell the world that's important... it's what your reader's want to discover or obtain.

Along the same lines, it does you absolutely no good to conceal information, rather than reveal it. Some writers lure readers to their "free" article with the promise of a benefit. But the "article" is only a front, designed to draw your attention to the sales page. Not good. People are smarter than that. Trick them once and they'll never forget.

Another mistake is an article that lacks appeal. To attract readers, you have to make your point right away, without the laborious wind-up. Get the heart of the matter, quickly and smoothly. But your article must also look like it's easy to read and understand.

You want your piece to be inviting – not intimidating. The best way to ensure this result and a high readership is to keep your sentences and paragraphs short, with plenty of "white space" to give the eye a visual break.

- It always takes me hours to write an article. Do you have any tips to help me get it done quicker?

I once ran an ad for my copywriting services that began this way: "If writing sales copy is painful work, imagine what it's like to read it!" The point is... if you're struggling, it will show. Conversely, the best writing is when your words just flow naturally — uninterrupted by "proper" written English.

You'll get better results when you write fast. That may seem strange to you... but it's certainly true in my experience. Write as you speak and your message is clearly understood. Hit those letters on your keyboard as quickly as the thoughts come to mind and you'll astonish yourself with your newfound writing ability.

To write your article in 15 minutes, allow 5 minutes of solid writing time for each key point. Set your stopwatch and just keep writing. Jot down whatever comes to mind for each of the 3 significant ideas relating to that particular point. These three details under each major point help keep you on track. The continuous writing in five minute segments forces you to express your thoughts clearly, succinctly, and interestingly.

Another way to reduce the actual time it takes you to write is to use a cassette player or voice recognition program such as Naturally Speaking to record your article. With a

regular recorder, you'll have to manually transcribe the text. Voice recognition software simplifies the transcription process, though it does take time to train the software to your voice.

- I have too many ideas in my head but never get round to writing them. What do you advise?

Ideas by themselves are a dime a dozen. But ideas put into action can transform lives. Generating lots of ideas is only an advantage when you make use of them. Getting the idea is only the first step. Anyone can come up with a great idea... but few follow through to see their idea come to life.

If you're working on too many ideas at once you'll get bogged down. Choose one idea. Take the idea that has the greatest potential or promise. This is possibly the most difficult step for a creative "idea" person. But to move forward, you need to channel your energy and focus.

If there's an eager market ready to scoop up your product as soon as it's launched, that's the product you want to put your effort into. See it through, first. Doing so will give you a new frame of reference, regardless of the outcome.

Stack the odds in your favor. Give it your best shot. Most importantly, don't go to your grave with the music still in you. Decide on one idea and act on it. With your new experience, you'll be better prepared to make the next decision.

- I don't enjoy writing articles. Do you have any tips that could help me to get more satisfaction?

Chances are, you are your own worst critic. Allow yourself the freedom to write a few articles without judging them. Get them down on paper first. If you try to edit as you go, you'll only frustrate yourself to no end. Silence that little voice inside that questions every sentence.

You're not writing to meet the requirements of your high school English teacher. You're writing to share information – to communicate.

Do it quickly and it won't be such a laborious task. And as you've already discovered, the key to fast writing is to first map out a point-form outline. Write regularly. Practice can only improve your writing skills.

Write about a topic you know well. Interview experts on your chosen subject. When their

thinking is in alignment with your own, you'll have the confidence to continue sharing your ideas and concepts because you know it's been validated.

My articles always appear to me too formal. How can I lighten them up?

Stuffy writing is often the result of trying to “write” rather than communicate. All those rules that were driven home from an early age actually inhibit many people from expressing their thoughts through the written word. Sure, the basics like spelling and simple sentence structure are definitely important. But focusing too much on “proper” delivery — rather than the information itself — will only frustrate you and weaken your message.

Simply rewrite your article as though you're sharing important ideas with a friend or a workshop audience. “Speak” it rather than write it. Express your ideas as you would in an engaging conversation. That's all there is to it.

Often a simple revision of the opening few paragraphs can radically improve readability. Many people begin writing their articles, reports, and letters in a formal and somewhat stilted manner. However, once they get into sharing the exciting information, they often relax and allow for more creative expression. Get to the heart of the information and move it forward. Don't make your reader wait for the good stuff.

- What vital tips would you give to somebody just starting out writing articles?

Model others. Find short articles you admire. Review those from the same publications you plan to submit your original articles to. Take those that have already been published and write them out by hand. Imagine yourself as the writer. Seize ownership of the ideas and concepts as you scribble out the words. Then write your own article about your chosen topic using the same approach.

Follow a similar length, style, and format. Take your topic and fashion it to suit. Choosing a topic for your first article can be a challenging proposition. Ultimately, you have to choose one topic and run with it. Don't let indecision stifle your creative expression.

Simply make a list of 5-7 topics you're considering writing about. Choose the one that enthralls you most. Prepare a 5-minute outline. Do you have enough information to share with your audience? If so... you're ready to start writing. If not, you may need to do some more digging to fill in the blanks on your outline. If you still come up short, move on to another topic. Writing articles (or anything else for that matter) is quickest and easiest

when you have lots of information to draw upon and when you know you have information to share that your reader will value.

- Is there a simple format (e.g. 10 Simple....) you could suggest for the person who is writing their first article?

Once you have a topic you want to write about, prepare an outline. The more extensive the topic, the more detailed your outline should be. But you also need to be cognizant of the length of your finished piece. If your chosen subject is too broad in scope, consider breaking it down further and writing your article about one part of the larger topic.

To create a simple outline, start with a blank sheet of paper. At the top, list your topic and any working title you're considering using at this time. This helps keep your outline moving in the direction you want to go.

Next, take each of your main points and list them. This may be 1-3, 1-5, 1-11 – whatever the case may be. The number of major points you have depends on the subject, your specific angle, and the approximate length of the proposed article. For example, if you wanted to write a one-page article as your first effort, you probably shouldn't include more than a few major points.

Under each main point, list in point form, 3 significant facts about it. State the 3 most important ideas you want to get across to your reader. If you're stuck, ask any of the journalists 6 basic questions – WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and HOW.

When you have an outline in place, you're ready to write. Set your timer and get writing. Give each main topic five minutes of concentrated writing.

Once you've done this, you simply need to polish up your article. Add a brief introduction and conclusion. Make it flow from one point to the next. Edit your article by reading it aloud. This makes it easy to spot any stumbling blocks. Simply correct obvious spelling errors and smooth out any rough areas of your copy.

Keep your articles short – particularly the first few. It's a somewhat less daunting task when you do so. Know what kind of information your readers would like to discover and provide it in your own words.

- What is the optimum length for effective sales copy?

Whatever it takes to get the job done... that's the right length to make your sales copy.

Since every product, service, strategy, and offer is different, there's no "one-size-fits-all" answer.

With print ads and direct mail sales letters, cost plays a significant role in the amount of space marketers can use to promote their products. Online, there are no such limitations. That's not to say you should make your sales letters unnecessarily lengthy, nor should you limit any element of benefit, uniqueness, or advantage to your prospect.

Copy length should also take into account the product, the company offering it and the audience to which it is directed. For example... a low-cost product offered by a reputable firm to its own in-house list of previous buyers would likely require very little in terms of persuasive sales copy.

The low cost would make it an attractive offer. The company's stellar reputation would increase desire while diminishing sales resistance. Previous experience would only trigger good feelings. With a wanted product, sales to this audience wouldn't require nearly the effort that an unknown firm would face marketing a higher-priced product to an unfamiliar audience.

If you can effectively persuade prospects with less copy, by all means – do so. But never withhold a benefit — for that one benefit could be the key generating substantially more sales.

It's been said that your copy can never be too long, only too boring. You'll never bore a single prospect into buying. But keep them intensely interested and they will read page after page of your sales copy and follow through to the order form.

Look, a serious prospect wants to know everything about a new, unfamiliar product, offer, or company. They want to know what others just like them say about it, before forking over their hard-earned cash.

No one ever complains about being given too much helpful information before making a buying decision. After all, a serious prospect truly desires the promised benefits, but they're scared to death about making a bad decision.

- Are there any particular words that are more effective and so should be included?

There are a number of words proven to be effective in sales copy. Many such lists exist and although they vary somewhat in content and length – certain key words appear time and time again.

Here are some of those words:

Discover, Announcing, How or How To, New, Free, Now, Secrets, Introducing, Breakthrough, Results, Improved, Guarantee, Easy, Save, No-Risk, Quick, Proven, Money, Health, Startling, Shocking, Remarkable, Special, Discount, You, Magic, Exciting, Facts, Instantly, Reveals, Winning, Hot, Amazing.

The problem with supplying such a list is the attention it receives. The more often each of these words is used with a particular audience, the less effective they become. But when used correctly by a credible source, these words still pack a strong punch.

Are there any words that should be omitted?

The words I tend to omit are those that have powerful negative anchors associated to them. These words may vary for each audience. Keep in mind that your purpose is to persuade and to sell. In order to meet your objective, you need to inspire the reader on to action. In order to take action, your reader needs to “feel” good about doing so.

Prospects are biologically driven by either the desire to avoid pain... or by the promise of pleasure. Negative words only stir up the wrong kind of painful images. Tread carefully here. Too much negative input and your prospect will simply flee – in search of a more comfortable feeling.

Another group of words to be avoided in all sale copy are swear words. This should be a ‘no-brainer’ but I’ve seen a few very high-priced copywriters use language in their copy that would surely offend some people. In my view, there’s always another way to express strong feelings without resorting to vulgarity. Such words might resonate with some people... but chances are, you’ll also offend others. To maximize response, eliminate any word you wouldn’t use in a conversation with your mother.

- What are the top six headline words or phrases? The all-time, never-fail trigger words that work in headlines.

My all-time top headline word is “you”. This word makes an instant connection with the reader. It speaks directly to the reader. Combine it with something of crucial and timely importance to the reader and you’re sure to capture attention. Any of the other words listed above might also be a good choice for use in headlines... but in my view, there is no panacea.

Each headline needs to make an instant connection with its target audience. Specifically, your headline should: 1. Attract attention, 2. Identify the individual reader your message was written for, 3. Deliver a complete, benefit-packed statement, and 4. Pull the reader inside where all the benefits can be realized. Targeted attention and enticement are what headlines are all about.

- Which one is more effective, long sales letter vs short sales copy?

Most customers and prospects will likely tell you they prefer short copy. But I suspect this is more of a general aversion to advertising, rather than a preference to not wanting to know all the details upfront.

On the other hand, most copywriters who’ve been in the trenches for a while will tell you

long copy out-pulls short copy almost all the time. Fact is, there is no rule that applies all the time. But here's something you should keep in mind: Your sales presentation should include as many words as necessary to maximize immediate sales – and absolutely nothing more.

Never omit what could be crucial information for your prospect. To do so is to leave money on the table. You wouldn't suddenly stop a sales presentation in midstream without first presenting your best case, would you? Not without good reason, at least. So why would you arbitrarily limit the length of your sales letter?

Obviously, your ad format is an important consideration too. A classified ad may consist of nothing more than a dozen words. A letter could easily be a dozen pages, two dozen – or more.

- Where should the testimonial to be put?

Testimonials are valuable tools of persuasion. They add believability and credibility to any ad. But not every testimonial is a good one. As you gather more customer feedback, you quickly realize that some comments are pure gold... while others don't really give you much of an advantage in the marketplace.

The better the quality of the testimonial, the more prominently it should be placed in your sales copy. Some testimonials – or a small segment of a testimonial – is strong enough to use in your main headline or sub-heading.

Generally, you have two choices when it comes to testimonials: you can group them together, or scatter them throughout your sales copy. Both techniques can be effective.

A major grouping of testimonials helps present a “preponderance of proof”. One strong voice of support after another can make quite an impact. The idea is to keep it interesting. The way you do this is by adding a good mix of positive commentary. You don't want each testimonial to sound the same as the next.

Testimonial scattered throughout can work too. Each should stand out visually from the rest of the text, signaling to the reader that it's something significant – something that should be read. As a stand-alone segment, each testimonial has the potential power to pull in the scanning reader, much the same way a sub-heading does.

- How do we convert the features into benefit?

Features are about products. Benefits are about customers.

Features are the physical characteristics of a product – the color, size, shape, ingredients, speed, processes used, etc. Features are the facts that support the benefits.

But *benefits* are why people buy.

Benefits are the helpful advantages they get in exchange for their money. That's the key – a benefit is what the customer obtains from the deal. To uncover the benefit, simply start with the words “You Get”. The feature is the cold, hard fact. What “You get” from it is the appealing benefit.

Without clearly defined benefits, there's no excitement, no sales sizzle, no enthusiasm for the product. But with an emphasis on real, attainable benefits, you'll have many anxious prospects hungry to get their hands on your hot new product.

To convert a feature into a benefit, state how that feature gives the buyer an advantage – how it adds to the buyer's life in some way.

Here's an example. Lets take a simple push broom.

One FEATURE of this broom is that it's 32 inches wide – 8 inches wider than it's major competitor's product. The BENEFIT to the building maintenance industry is that it covers more floor area in a single swipe (25% more), saving extra time and labor that would otherwise be burned up using competing products.

- How long the money back period is sufficient to convince the visitor to place order, 3 months, 6 months, 1 year or more?

The ideal length for a money-back guarantee is something that can only be determined through testing. It really depends on the product. With the Vita-Mix Blender I purchased recently, I received a 7-year guarantee. That's an exceptionally long guarantee.

The most common length of guarantee is thirty days. But the best guarantees have few restrictions and extend over a longer period of time. A short guarantee can make buyers feel uneasy. Conversely, longer guarantees help put your prospects mind at ease while building your credibility. You want to give your customers a long enough timeframe to adequately put your product through the paces.

The lesser known you are, the more important it is that you have a strong guarantee. With an established clientele and a great reputation for quality products, your guarantee may be a less significant purchasing factor.

The purpose of a guarantee is to reverse the risk for prospects. You want to project a level of confidence in your product and you want them to feel secure that should they have any problem there is a way out.

Make your guarantee much longer and more encompassing than anything offered by your competitors. It's likely to carry a lot of weight with your prospects.

- How should the sales letter start with? Should it like Dear Friends or etc?

“Dear Friend” is a common opener. It's an informal and friendly way to address the reader. But to the recipient, it's almost as though these words don't exist. They're invisible. The prospect knows you're not really a “friend” ... but that you wish to communicate in a congenial, one-on-one manner. It sets up a different dynamic – one that's up close and more personal, rather than a typical advertisement that attempts to communicate with many.

Another way to use the salutation is to specifically target your audience. “Dear writer who wants success NOW” clearly defines a niche market or target recipient. This approach works best when the main headline and sub-heading haven't clearly identified the ideal target prospect.

- Is there any difference between writing an offline sales copy and online sales letter?

The best model for online sales letters is direct mail. The way to get results both online and off is to seek a direct response — every time. Success is measured in sales and profits and these are produced only through action. It's action you want to promote – not your image.

Many direct response techniques are transferable to online marketing. Hungry prospects can be reached and moved to action both ways. Sales letters, order forms, and Frequently Asked Question pages are common formats with direct mail and selling on the Web.

With both methods of marketing, action is the desired result and that action is always directed towards the order form or page. The order form is the ultimate destination and your success is relative to the number of readers you lead there.

Online, you don't have the benefit of a carrier envelope, nor the teaser copy on the

outside to entice prospects to open the package. Prospects have the choice – they can read right on the screen, or they can print it off and read it on paper. You might want to make provisions for both methods. The online prospect has little time for off-target marketing messages, unsubstantiated hype and anything else that wastes time. They're in control of their domain, and they know it. To succeed, you need to cater accordingly to the realities of the marketplace.

- How to test your sales copy?

Testing is crucial to optimizing the performance of your sales efforts. You can do everything by the book and still come up short. There's no guarantee that your sales piece will perform well for you. The only way to maximize your results is to test and test continuously. But remember to test only one variable at a time. To do otherwise will skew your results giving you data, but no accurate analysis.

Create your very best marketing piece. Adjust the offer to suit each specific market you're targeting. Different prospects reply to different stimuli.

Test headlines first. The headline is the easiest element to test, and is often responsible for the most dramatic difference in response. Next, test the offer. Sometimes adding an additional bonus does the trick. Another key element to test is the postscript, or P.S. It's one of the first — and last — things prospects read, making it a key area for testing.

Part Two

1. Should an article be written directly to the reader in much the same way as sales copy so that the person reading it feels as though you are speaking only to them?

Yes and no. First of all, there's no point in writing anything if it doesn't win readers. So yes, you want to do everything in your power to ensure a readership and that means getting to the point quickly.

But writing sales copy and articles are two different things. The purpose of hard-hitting sales copy is to incite an action to buy. With an article, your purpose is to convey useful, valuable, or important information.

With all writing, you certainly can't be wishy-washy, or readers will quickly abandon your piece and move on. Being direct and staying on course is important to keeping the audience interested and involved.

There are a variety of ways to write interesting, informative articles. You can lead by telling a story, delivering a surprise statement, quoting an expert or authority figure, or simply by making a direct address that propels the reader right into the experience. With sales copy, your mission is to 1. Attract attention of prospects, 2. Fuel their interest, 3. Ignite their desire to acquire the promised benefits, and... 4. Encourage positive (buying) action.

Article writing is about sharing key information of relative importance to an audience. Copywriting is about benefits, persuasion, getting action, and making sales.

2. Is there a certain order or flow that an article should be written in?

The right order is the order that makes the most sense to your reader.

Ideally, your article should be written so that it's instantly understood. It needs to make sense on the surface, without forcing the reader to study or re-read the article and piece it all together. Your article isn't a jigsaw puzzle, it's a document designed to reveal worthwhile information. When planning your article, think of your readers and how they can glean the most information from it.

How can readers grasp your ideas quickly and easily?

That's what you have to take into account when you formulate an article. When readers can clearly understand the sequence, you'll have a much more effective piece.

Think logically. If you're topic is the 7 Steps To Reaching Your Financial Dreams, begin with step 1, then go to step 2, and so on. This is simple, clear and logical. You wouldn't begin with step number 3 then move on to step number 5, and back to step number 1. Start at the most logical point and follow through in a practical and orderly sequence.

Another format is to follow in chronological order. If you're writing about a marketing system you created, begin with what you did in the very beginning. Follow that with the next step in the process, then the next one after that. Again, it's very easy for the reader to follow along and understand this kind of presentation.

You could also present your material from the most important to least. By working in descending order, you're prioritizing the information for your readers and giving them the most critical information in the very beginning.

Another common article format is the inverted pyramid. Here you start with the most

general information on your topic, and narrow it down to the most specific.

No matter what format you chose, your objective should be to deliver your information in as smooth a manner as possible. Take the time to arrange your key-point presentation before you begin writing. It will help keep you right on target.

3. How do you know you have an interesting enough idea?

The way to know with 100% certainty is to ask your audience. When you know what your audience wants, it's easy to give it to them.

One method to determine what people want is to offer a survey. Give your market a few simple choices and make it easy to respond. Multiple-choice questions are the easiest and quickest to answer. This makes a basic survey less daunting and increases the chances of a response. The feedback you get is straight from the horse's mouth. It's directly from the people you want to reach.

Question your customers and prospects in your newsletter or ezine. You could set up a special survey page on your website. Without having your own sizable mailing list, try monitoring the questions posted on various discussion boards that cater to your general subject area.

Don't overlook the obvious. Sometimes the best articles deal with foundational principles – the basics. What is well known or boring to you might very well be new, interesting and worth its weight in gold to your audience.

Add a new twist to an old idea. Take a concept that works in one area and apply it to your industry. Tap into current events and help your readers benefit from them in some way. Spot the trends that will impact your business and your industry and write about these. Find a unique angle and always have fresh new, and interesting content to offer your readers.

Creating winning article topics is really no different from creating winning product ideas. If you can appeal to one or more basic human desires, you'll have a hot article idea, one your readership is most likely interested in.

4. I see sales letters with three or four different colored fonts within the body. Other's written pretty much all in black. Do you think one of these is normally more effective and why?

You can't beat simple black text, on a plain white background. This has been proven time and time again to enhance readability and clarity. The simple reason for this is the stark contrast between black and white. These two colors are at opposite ends of the spectrum.

In a printed direct mail letter, you're not likely to see more than 2 or 3 different colors of type. Chances are, most sales letters you receive in the mail are done in black ink on white or off white paper, with perhaps a secondary color such as blue. In the most effective Direct mail pieces, those secondary colors are only used sparingly. I don't see how sales letter on the web should be much different in their use of color.

Color is most effective as an enhancement, to highlight a key point or idea. But use these secondary colors with caution. Use additional color in the signature of your letters – a nice medium to dark blue works well here and gives the illusion of a hand-signed letter.

A touch of color can certainly add vibrancy and interest to your marketing materials. But never let color overwhelm your message.

Less emphasis is more. Using color excessively defeats the purpose. If you emphasize too much or highlight too many different areas in color, you're doing much more harm than good.

Too many colors used in the text is a sure sign of amateur marketing. Color can be an effective tool when used with restraint. One strong attention-getter is to highlight a segment of text with yellow. It's as though took a Yellow highlighter and scribbled over a few key words. This approach stands out — it really grabs the eye.

5. What is your opinion of swipe files and how can one be set up?

The purpose of developing a swipe file is to help you generate ideas. It's not about stealing someone else's work. Unfortunately, many people hear the words "swipe file" and think the concept is to take a winning ad or sales letter and simply fit it to their own product or offer. Not only is this unethical... but it's also illegal.

The correct way is to adapt an idea, concept, or technique and package it your own way. Shape it in your own words. Add your own unique twist. Don't just copy someone else's words... use your own. There's another good reason for this: copying seldom works. Tests have shown that "stolen" copy usually underachieves in the marketplace. Results are seldom as good to those achieved by the original copy.

How do you begin building a swipe file? Start by paying closer attention to the mail that arrives in your mailbox. Collect the direct mail offers you receive. Look for sales letters, brochures, order forms, postcards, and other formats. Clip out display ads that capture your eye in magazines, trade publications, yellow pages, and your community newspaper. Finally, watch your email. As you peruse your favorite newsletters, click on the links that offer interesting or intriguing information. When you arrive at the sales page, print it out and add it to your swipe file.

Gather sales letters from successful marketers – those whose names you keep hearing again and again. Pay particular attention to the appeals that capture your attention and pull you in to buy.

Look for marketers that have a reputation for selling quality products. Notice the runaway bestsellers and the copy used to get those sales. Start building a swipe file on your computer as well as in print of letters from these people. You will find in no time and tall you have quite a collection of effective sales pieces.

Remember, the idea is not to take these copy samples and use them word for word. You'll get much more out of your swipe file when you take the time to go below the surface and discover what it is that makes that piece work.

Eventually, you'll want to build individual files of specific components such as headlines, descriptive words and phrases, offers, postscripts and guarantees. Discovering many different techniques of persuasion – that's the real value of swipe file.

6. Should the sales copy be written in the third person, or as though talking directly to an individual, in the first person?

The most effective sale copy is written in the second person – me to you. It's all about you the prospect and what you want to gain, acquire, or experience... and how my solution (product or service) can help you get there.

Communicating in the first person (me about me) is nothing more than selfish marketing and is sure to turn off prospects quickly. They don't really care much about you. Prospects are pre-occupied with their own problems, anxieties, worries, and fears and have their radar set to possible solutions to their particular symptoms. When you speak in the first person, the prospect shuts down as he or she sees it as irrelevant to their particular situation.

Similarly, when you communicate in the third person, it's more difficult to fully engage the prospect. Writing in the third person means your referring to something or someone other than yourself and individual you're addressing. It's not about you and it's not about

your prospect. It's about something outside of the prospect's life, something in the distance. But it may be too far away to have any meaning or relevance to the prospect.

7. Is it better to present it in bullet point type of format, or full, properly grammatical sentences?

The optimum format is that which produces the best results. Sales copy can be presented in regular sentences and paragraphs, as one long list of bullets, or as a combination of both. Personally, I prefer to use both.

I've seen bullet-point only copy work well to sell books and manuals. In each case, the bullet point referenced a specific page from the book and each bullet was pure dynamite. That's the key to a bullet-only approach; each individual point must be loaded with sensory appeal, unique benefits, or enough intrigue to make the reader want more.

It does take some skill and practice to craft compelling and intriguing bullet points. But to use this approach extensively would be challenging for less experienced entrepreneurs. This technique is not without risk too. When you place too many bullets in a row, page after page, there's no rest for the eye, nothing to break up the page visually. Reading through a lengthy list may appear too challenging or intimidating. When that's the case, your prospect simply moves on without buying.

Solid paragraph copy is easy to read. It can also be made more appealing to the eye with such simple techniques like indented, italicized, or bolded text. Writing sentences is easier and more natural too – particularly when you write as you speak. This means speaking from the heart, one-on-one, and forgetting about “proper” sentence structure and grammar. Be real... and you'll be more successful selling from your messages.

Adding bullet points to regular paragraph format places greater significance on the bulleted sections. Placed among the text, bullets stand out from the rest of the page. They become a highlighted section – a part of the piece that jumps out at the reader. It catches the eye and provides visual relief for the reader. In addition, carefully crafted benefits add impact to your message.

8. Is it good to have lots of white space, or better to keep it short, snappy and to the point?

Readability is the key. White space can help break up the page making it much more inviting to read. Your objective is to make it remarkably easy for the prospect to sail through your copy on route to the order page.

But “white space” by itself doesn't sell anything. When you place a display ad, you're

paying for the space, whether you pack it full of benefit-laden copy or plain white space that doesn't even require ink. Either way, your expenses are the same.

Your website is a different story. Space is dirt cheap, so from a cost point of view, you can pretty much use as much as you want. The simple key is to use what you have to communicate more effectively.

The quicker and easier it is for prospects to read your copy, the better they'll feel about the experience and the more likely it is they'll continue, as long as their interest is maintained. This means shorter words, sentences and paragraphs. Even one-word paragraphs should be used on occasion for impact.

9. Should I offer something free as well as the almost obligatory newsletter or does that tend to detract from my sales offer.

What's the objective? On your sales page, the ultimate goal is to win over the prospect and get the sale immediately. On the main page on your content-rich site, collecting names and email addresses of prospects and building your own in-house list, should also be a priority.

Newsletters and ezines are great tools for keeping in touch with your customer and prospect base. But this is something that should be kept separate from your direct sales page. Free newsletters are something that is pretty well expected these days, so it won't add much to your product offer.

Stick to selling on your sales page. Anything that competes with your objective should be removed. Don't offer a free trial membership on the same page in which you're attempting to sell a 1-year package. Keep it straightforward and simple. If you confuse them, you'll lose them.

Bonuses, free offers, and add-ons are proven tools for boosting the perceived value of a product. The right combination of free-with-purchase bonuses can significantly boost sales. When you pile on the bonuses and each bonus is unique, valuable, and highly desirable to the prospect, you make it extremely difficult to turn down the offer. The more irresistible you make your offer, the more you'll improve your response rate.

10. Should I concentrate on one product per page?

Again, you want to keep your prospect moving in a single direction. That means one product (or package) and one ultimate destination (order form) per page. Even with a

catalogue site and hundreds of products, it's best to give the complete details on a separate page for each item.

With major products, you'll want to set up individual websites, rather than just pages. That way you can capitalize on a specific domain name for better search engine exposure.

The destination you want to guide prospects to is the order page and the ultimate action is to get the order. All roads must lead there. You simply lead the way from point A, to point B, to point C. Simple and direct. Additional choices only complicate things and disrupt what should be a natural and direct flow that leads to the sale.

11. How important are testimonials ...
- a. from well known people
 - b. from real but unknown people.

Testimonials are definitely valuable tools to use in your copy. Coming from a well-known name in your field or industry, a solid testimonial carries additional marketing firepower. Known experts with solid reputations add credibility and believability to the claims made in your copy. The perception is... if this expert says all these positive things, they must be true. After all, why would a perceived authority risk his or her reputation by endorsing an inferior product?

There's also the recognition factor. A well-known name had the ability to captivate prospects and pull them inside to get the full story.

Testimonials from real but unknown names can also add clout to any sales message. The advantage here is that prospects can more easily relate to the experiences of someone much like themselves. It's easier to put themselves in the shoes of an actual buyer and to visualize achieving the same kind of benefit.

An important key to using testimonials effectively is to use the exact, raw, unedited verbal expressions as they were originally relayed to you. Actual words, specific results obtained, real names and addresses — all increase the believability and power of the testimonial.

12. What is the best practical way to learn to write a good sales copy?

If you want to write your own copy, make an investment in yourself. Read books and manuals. Listen to audio tapes and CD's. Take courses and seminars. An investment in self-education will pay you for the rest of your life.

First, get a handle on the basics and then put your knowledge into action. Don't wait. Test your skills early and continue to learn from every piece of copy you create.

Thanks to the Internet, putting your skills into practice is fast and affordable for anyone. No other medium gives you such a wide reach for so little. Test different offers, headlines and sales letter formats. Learn what works and what doesn't by experience. Adapt your approach to what the marketplace tells you – that's the only way to know with certainty what works in your particular niche.

Continue to learn and absorb all you can from the many information-rich resources available on the subject of copywriting. You can begin your search at your local library and online. Never stop learning and you'll always be on top of your game.

13. How do we select the best headline from the benefits list?

Put yourself in your prospect's shoes. Develop a strong sense of empathy for those you wish to serve. Discover what these people are thinking about and what they'd like to do, have, acquire, or achieve. What problem would your prospect most like to solve? If the answer is something your product provides, you've just discovered the biggest benefit – something to base your promotional piece on.

When seeking out an angle to use in your headline, review your entire benefits list, then place them in order, from most important to least. Do this from your prospect's point of view – not your own.

Next, take the top benefit and write a headline. Try a few different versions. The easiest headline to write is the "how to" headline. Simply begin with "how to" and then fill in your #1 benefit.

Here are a few examples:

How To Prepare Healthy Gourmet Meals In Just 15 Minutes
How To Boost Your Profits By 100% — With Just 5% More Customers
How To Read More In One Week Than Most People Read All Year

Another approach is to take your top three benefits and shape them into one powerful headline. This allows you to reveal 3 strong weapons instead of one. You could also combine a single benefit with a powerful offer or guarantee.

When reviewing your benefits list, look for benefits that are unique to your product. Find out what it is that your product offers that competing products lack... then emphasize this

distinguishing advantage. Another approach is to seize an unexploited benefit. Others may offer it too... but your emphasis on this advantage can give you a marketplace advantage.

14. Should the sales copy offer bonus on top of the product?

Writing persuasive sales copy is about inducing action. Bonuses are incentives to buy and the more perceived value placed on a bonus item, the stronger the incentive to acquire it. Bonus items should add to the irresistibility of the package being offered.

Almost any offer can be enhanced with bonuses. The most effective bonus items are:

1. Highly targeted
2. Available exclusively with the package being offered
3. Have a perception of value attached to them
4. Enhance the product in some way

Just how important are bonuses? Take a look at the most successful infomercials today. All feature bonus items to add value to their offers. Even the home shopping networks do this repeatedly because they know that bonuses boost response rates. Often the bonus package offered is the clincher that closes the deal by presenting an offer of overwhelming value. Bonuses give you a distinct advantage and allow you to substantially increase the value of your offer, with only a slight increase in your costs.

15. Instead of having one long page of sales copy will it affect my sales to have the copy spread over numerous pages?

This is common question. Having your sales letter on a single page, gives prospects the information with a single click. They'll still have to scroll down the page to read it all and some sales letters are quite lengthy.

The reader gets all the information upfront. The entire message is there immediately and the prospect can choose to read it on screen, save it for later, or print it out for easier reading.

When you break you message up into multiple pages, you run an increased risk of losing your prospect along the way. Each click means a new page must be loaded. It also presents another opportunity to click away. With a multiple page letter, the reader is left guessing — not knowing how many clicks it will take to get to the end. Clicking to continue reading can be quite annoying. It creates a feeling that one is being lured in and set up for the sale.

With the multi-page approach, you have to count on the prospect reading and then clicking through to the next page.

On the plus side... each page has few words and is therefore easy to digest quickly. I tend to prefer a single page layout – even with a long sales letter. But testing will determine what works best for you.

16. What fonts should I use on my sales copy?

One again, there's no easy answer. Serif fonts make for easier reading on a printed page... but Sans Serif fonts are easier to read directly from the monitor.

What are your prospect preferences? Are they mostly reading on screen or do they print messages and read from paper? Chances are, you serve both types people, though hit may be overwhelmingly in favor of one method over the other. With this in mind, perhaps the optimum solution is to provide your sales letter in two different versions – one for reading on screen and one for reading in print.

For your print version, choose a common and clearly legible font such as Times New Roman, Courier, or Century Schoolbook. For your onscreen version, try Verdana, Arial, or Helvetica.

Whether you're formatting for the screen or print, it's best to stick to simple, easily readable fonts and avoid any fancy alternates. You want to keep the focus on your message without drawing unnecessary attention to the delivery.

17. I have heard of the phrase to pre-sell but don't know how what it is or how to do it.

Pre-selling helps set up the sale. In many cases, the actual act of filling out an order form and supplying credit card information is nothing more than a formality. The customer walks in the door, or surfs to your website with the intention to buy. They were already "pre-sold" by a friend or associate who recommended your product.

A third-party referral carries lots of weight. It's viewed as an honest voice of approval from someone who actually paid money to acquire the promised benefits and were delighted with their purchase.

Your best bet for turning customers into raving fans and active advocates is to deliver

quality products, exceptional service, and a comfortable and easy buying environment. You want customers to walk away with a feeling of absolute joy at having discovered you.

Personal referrals are great when they occur, but most entrepreneurs can't afford to sit back and wait for referral sales to happen. Another way to profit from a "pre-sell" approach is to give customers a taste of what you offer. Free trials, or sample sizes allow the prospect to experience your product's benefits on a limited basis.

18. Is it important to have sub-headings throughout the copy and if so what do I want them to say?

Sub-headings are like miniature billboards sprinkled throughout the body copy of a sales letter. Each has the potential to add fuel to the reader's desire. And each sub-heading has the opportunity to lure in the scanning reader and compel him to read the details inside.

Often the main headline and the various sub-headings alone will give the readers enough reasons to go back and get the full details. Sub-heads set in bold type stand out on the page in a visual sense, thus increasing readership. Many prospects quickly scan the page, reading only the headline and sub-heads – at least initially. That's why it's so important to make your headings powerful, provocative and arresting.

If you're using a multiple-page approach with your online copy, be sure to use a strong teaser at the end of each page, followed by a powerful subheading to launch the next.

19. Would you recommend using humor in a sales copy?

When you use humor, you're expecting readers to react in a certain way. The problem is... everyone reacts to humor differently. What you find to be hilarious might not be quite so funny to the next person.

Your intention isn't to entertain — it's to persuade prospects to action. To succeed, you need to get prospects emotionally involved and following your line of thinking. Injecting humor could be interruptive, causing them to shift gears midstream and get off the buying track. Why take that chance?

20. How soon in the sales letter do I ask for their order?

Ask for action only after you've made your case for a sale. To do otherwise is to

jeopardize your chances for success.

Your task is not an easy one. After all, you're asking someone who doesn't know you and has never heard of your product before to take a leap of faith and put money on the line. You have one chance to do it... so why not use every weapon in your arsenal? Seduce, entice, persuade. Then and only then should you ask for the order.

Give them all you've got — every advantage and benefit. Make them an irresistible offer and provide a risk-free guarantee. Make it so advantageous that not taking action would be a more painful choice. But don't try to close until you've done a solid selling job.