

The Copywriter's Crucible

Presents

**Writing Persuasively - The Art of Using
Words to Convince, Compel and Sell**





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1 - Do You Want to Communicate or Confuse?



The power of the written word is often undervalued in the business world.

Whether clouded in technical jargon, marketing hype or corporate claptrap, writing fails to communicate when it's trying too hard to sound clever or impressive.

Because when readers are bogged down in clichés and hyperbole they aren't going to respond in the way you want: they've either given up reading or can't understand what you're trying to say.

Indeed, business writing often fails to communicate. But merely confuses.

Writing that focuses on the reader, on the other hand, is the style every business should adopt.

Because writing has the power to influence how people think, feel and behave.

Words can be powerful.

Particularly when you know how to write them persuasively.

"Our business is infested with idiots who try to impress by using pretentious jargon." - David Ogilvy



What is persuasive writing?

Persuasive writing presents a clear, logical argument that seduces readers with style and conviction.

It dispenses with ambiguous, vacuous words and phrases used to sound important. Instead it adopts structure, concise language and psychology to lead readers along a clear path of thought towards taking action.

Whether it's convincing them to agree with your point of view or buy your product, persuasive writing is powerful because it connects with readers on an emotional and logical level.

Why is it appealing?

People make decisions based on how something benefits them personally.

So persuasive writing seduces readers by explaining why your product will solve their problem, enrich their lives and help them sleep better at night.

Words are powerful when you know which ones to use to spellbind readers into raising their hands to say 'Yes! I want the benefits of what you're offering!'

In this eBook I'll be sharing tried and tested copywriting techniques for composing persuasive emails, landing pages and sales letters that captivate readers and sell more of your products.



2 - Why You're Writing, Who to And What Action You Want Them to Take



"The more informative your advertising, the more persuasive it will be."

- David Ogilvy

As any lawyer knows, it's not the strength of your words but the strength of your argument that wins the day.

The same rule applies to persuasive writing.

Attempting to dazzle readers with long words, or bullying them with a pushy tone, isn't the most effective way of convincing them that buying your product is the smart thing to do.



Planning to succeed

Persuasive writing is thinking on paper and salesmanship in print, rather than clever wordsmithing.

The aim isn't to impress the reader with stylish prose, but to present your case as clearly and logically as possible.

And this takes planning.

Before you go near the keyboard to pen your persuasive argument, you need to understand why someone would buy your product.

You then need to structure your writing so it takes the reader along a clear path of thought before leaving them enlightened and pulling out their credit card at the end.

Trust me, taking the time to plan your writing before you start saves a lot of time in the long run.

Before you start writing, you need to assess:

- Why am I writing?
- Who am I writing to?
- What action do I want the reader to take?



Why am I writing?

Why should someone agree with what you say and buy your product?

If you don't already know then you've got some work to do, because tenacious research is the only way you'll find out.

Read everything you can about your product and those of your competitors. And scribble out more notes than you can use.

It's only through knowing your product inside out that you'll understand why your reader should be rushing to the front of the queue waving their money in the air.

To start with, you'll need to know:

- What does my product do?
- Why is it better than other solutions available (including other products and not buying it at all)?
- What problems does it solve?
- How can I prove its benefits?

After compiling your notes, write an ordered list of the reasons why someone should buy your product.

This list will form the spine of your writing and provide a seductive sequence of emotional and logical reasons why your readers should say 'yes!'



Who am I writing to?

To gauge how to pitch your words you need to form an impression of your target reader.

Different types of people will respond to your words in different ways depending on their motives.

You need to understand your target's aims in life, what makes them happy and what aspects of their life they want to improve.

Consider:

- What motivates them?
- What are they afraid of?
- What do they want to gain?
- What do they want to avoid?
- How can you offer to make their lives easier?
- What style of language appeals to them?
- What counter arguments would they have to buying your product?

Through answering these questions you should be able to glimpse the world through your reader's eyes and understand what triggers will propel them into clicking on 'Buy'.



The psychological triggers that make people buy

People make buying decisions based on:

1. Logical motivations e.g. saving time, money or improving how they perform a task
2. Emotional feelings e.g. being more successful, popular or wealthy

When structuring your writing you need to identify how you can appeal to both.

How can you make the reader **feel** that buying your product will make them more popular or successful?

What are the practical reasons why it will be money well spent?

If you're able to satisfy both triggers your writing will be able to tap into the powerful mental process that motivates people into buying products and services.

What action do I want the reader to take?

Whether you want them to visit your website, sign up for your newsletter or buy that instant, you need to be clear on what it is you're ultimately asking your reader to do.

Because the action you want the reader to take gives you an indication of how much you'll need to write.

The higher the cost of taking action the more you'll need to convince them of the benefits of doing so.

And it's crucial that you're writing about benefits rather than features, allow me to explain why...



3 - Features Tell, Benefits Sell

“In our factory, we make lipstick. In our advertising, we sell hope.” - Charles Revson

Whenever someone reads your website’s landing page or sales letter they’re not thinking about how clever the wordplay is, but ‘what’s in it for me?’

They want to know how your product can solve their problem and benefit them personally, not how great your company.

And as mentioned in the previous chapter, people make decisions based on emotional and logical triggers.

So your writing needs to make readers emotionally feel the benefits of buying your product, as well as understand the practical reasons for doing so.

Writing is at its most powerful when it’s able to trigger the reader’s emotions.

And the best way of achieving this is to ensure you’re writing in the emotionally charged language of benefits, rather than features.



Features or benefits? What's the difference?

Features are the things a product does. Benefits are the advantages customers gain.

An electric drill's features might be its multiple speed settings and four drill sizes.

What customers gain are smoothly drilled holes in a wall so they can put up shelves and proudly display their fishing trophies or reminisce after hanging their wedding photo.

Features are a product's practical info and specs.

Benefits are the emotional rewards people will gain.

It's a product's benefits you can use to entice readers by painting them an emotionally charged picture of what their lives could be like if they just say 'yes'.

So, when you're writing about benefits you can appeal to your reader's personal emotional triggers.

But first you need to identify what the benefits are...

[I should mention that there's an exception to writing about benefits rather than features: if you're writing for experts in your industry, the technically minded or no nonsense business people then stick to features. These personality types are more interested in what you're product actually does and how it's better than your competitor's, rather than reading emotionally driven prose.

Give them hard data, facts and the bottom line if you want to earn their trust]



What are my product's benefits?

To discover what benefits you can use to spark your reader's emotions and desires, compile lists of the following:

- The features - what the product actually does
- Why each feature is included and what problem it solves
- Why it solves the problem better than the other products available
- What the customer gains from the problem being solved
- What customer motives does the product appeal to
- How will the benefit make the customer feel

From doing this you'll be able to compile a list of the problems your product solves and the benefits buyers gain (like gratitude for finally hanging the wedding photos).

When you get to the writing stage you'll then have a list ready of all the benefits you can use to explain in personal and emotional terms why your product can improve the reader's life.

So whilst your competitors' bland corporate copy continues to waffle on about cold features and their 'paradigm shift in forward thinking solutions', make sure you're talking about benefits and the emotional rewards readers will gain from buying your product.



4 – Structure



I know your fingers are itching to get typing. But before you do you'll need to plan your writing's structure.

Your writing needs to be able to lead your reader along a clear, logical path of thought that ends in them taking action.

Just like how a seasoned debater or lawyer prepares to argue their case, you need to assess how to communicate your points so they resonate with the reader and seduce them into buying your product.

Remember that people make buying decisions based on logic and emotion. So your writing needs to trigger both if you're going to succeed in persuading the reader to pull out their credit card.

Thankfully, there's a tried and tested structure used by generations of copywriters to convince their readers that buying their products is the smart thing to do.

Abbreviated to **AIDA**, applying this structure will help you to maintain the reader's attention, present your points in an appealing manner and trigger them into taking action.



“If you spend your advertising budget entertaining the consumer, you’re a bloody fool. Homemakers don’t buy a new detergent because the manufacturer told a joke on televisions last night. They buy the new detergent because it promises a benefit.” – David Ogilvy

Attention – the headline

The most important element of persuasive writing is the headline.

If you can’t pull the reader into your first paragraph then the sweat and tears you’ve poured into the rest of your writing will be wasted.

Writing attention pulling headlines is a complex psychological puzzle (and I offer some tips in chapter 5).

In basic terms, your headline should clearly promise a benefit the reader will gain. This could be the promise of valuable info, how your product can solve a problem or how you can enrich the reader’s life.

Whilst it’s tempting to show off your creativity with a droll pun, using subtle humour in headlines risks alienating readers. Some might be confused by your ‘witty’ wordplay, whilst most will fail to understand what the benefit is of reading further.

Instead, your headline should focus on making a clear, compelling promise that sparks the reader’s interest into hearing what you have to say.



“A copywriter should have ‘an understanding of people, an insight into them, a sympathy toward them.’”

- George Gribbin

Interest – the problem

After you’ve pulled the reader into your writing, you need to continue building interest in the promise you’ve already made.

This means stirring up the reader’s emotions, and poking at the pain you’ve offered to cure.

Start by using emotive language to describe the reader’s problem. Create an image in the reader’s mind of the annoyances, inconveniences and sheer pain the problem causes them in daily life.

You could open with stats and figures to show how the problem is more common than the reader might think. This can also help to create a sense of inclusion and to build the reader’s confidence that you know what you’re writing about.

Describe how you or someone you know has had to cope with the problem . This will help to build a bond with them and a sense of empathy for their plight.

After you’ve finished stirring up the reader’s emotions, make a compelling promise of the tonic you have to sooth their pain and to entice their curiosity into reading further.



Desire – the solution

Now that you've created interest, you need to make good on your promises by explaining why your product is the answer to the reader's problem.

Work through the list of benefits you composed in chapter 3, Describe the emotional and logical rewards the reader can gain from your product.

Use the power of storytelling to describe how your product has improved someone's life, such as saving them time, money or making them more successful.

Heap benefit onto benefit, and provide logical **reasons why** they should buy what you're selling, and why it's superior to the other options available.

Explain the reasons why they need your product in a logical, rational sequence. And provide evidence, whenever possible, to add concrete to your claims. Remember that readers need logic to backup their emotional impulses.

When you've finished explaining all the benefits, provide the social proof of your offer with testimonials, stats and real world examples.

And when you think your reader is wavering, throw a guarantee onto the pile to tip their indecisiveness in your favour.

A limited time offer or money back guarantee might seem like cutting your profits. But guarantees are a powerful way of removing the sense of risk the reader might have that's stopping them clicking on 'buy'.

Whilst you might receive a few refund requests, the number of additional sales you can attract with a guarantee should keep the bean counter weighed in your favour.



“The only way to influence someone is to find out what they want, and show them how to get it.” – Dale Carnegie

Action – telling the reader what to do next

After you’ve built the reader’s excitement about the rewards to be gained if they just say ‘yes’, you need to clearly tell them **exactly** what to do next.

Whether it’s entering their email address, calling your sales team or buying that instant, make sure you tell your readers what to do if they want to reap the benefits you’ve promised.

Finally, you could end your sales letter or web page with a postscript (abbreviated to P.S.), thought to be the most read part of a sales letter after the headline.

You can use the postscript to restate your offer, remind the reader you’re on their side and to add an additional benefit if they respond today (such as a discount or free eBook).

So, that’s my whistle stop tour of the AIDA principle used by generations of copywriters to structure their sales letters and web pages. The way in which it uses psychology to appeal to people’s personal motives makes it a powerful tool indeed.

So use it wisely and responsibly.

Now for the headline writing tips I promised you...



5 – How to Write Headlines that Reel in Readers

“On the average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy. It follows that, unless your headline sells your product, you have wasted 90 percent of your money.” – David Ogilvy

You might be a copywriting genius, and composed a sales letter that can sell carpets to Egyptians. But if you can't pull the reader into your writing then your compelling copy will merely be a waste of words.

Whether on the cover of a magazine, in a sales letter or on a web page, headlines are the most important element of persuasive writing.

It's your headline's job to hook readers with the promise of a tasty reward that will reel them into devouring your copy.

So let's be clear: your headline **must** be able to attract the reader's interest if your writing is going to have a chance of selling your product.





“If you can come up with a good headline, you are almost sure to have a good ad. But even the greatest writer can’t save an ad with a poor headline.” – John Caples

Interest = benefit + curiosity

People are, by nature, motivated by pursuing their own objectives in life and what can benefit them personally. So they’ll only read your copy if they think there’s something in it for them.

This means your headline needs to offer the promise of a benefit the reader will gain from reading what you have to say.

People are also curious. And headlines should feed on people’s curiosity by hinting at the benefits your writing offers.

So whether it’s the promise of valuable info, solving a problem or a full proof money making scheme, your headline needs to offer the promise of a benefit and build curiosity if you’re going to reel in readers.

Add sweat, tears and a full paper bin to the above equation

Finding the magic combination of words that will hook readers into your writing is tricky.

So you’ll need to write as many benefit and curiosity laden headlines as you can. Some copywriters will write out over 100 before they settle on one they’re happy to use to bait their sales letter.

After you’ve settled on a winner, you can use your second and third choices as subheads to break up your copy and highlight your argument’s key points.



A few headline ideas to get you started

Here are a few tried and tested headline formulas you can adapt:

- Make a bold promise with a guarantee e.g. ‘Play the Piano in Seven Days or Your Money Back’
- Provoke curiosity with a question e.g. ‘Do You Make These Mistakes in English?’ (Maxwell Sackheim)
- Explain clearly what benefit you’re offering e.g. ‘How to Win Friends and Influence People’ (Dale Carnegie)
- Use a strong verb and a commanding tone of voice to suggest what action the reader can take e.g. ‘Win At Poker With These Strategies Used By The Pros’
- Make a bold attention grabbing statement e.g. ‘Amazing Secret Discovered By One-Legged Golfer Adds 50 Yards To Your Drives, Eliminates Hooks And Slices...And Can Slash Up To 10 Strokes From Your Game Almost Overnight!’ (John Carlton)
- Make a no frills news announcement e.g. ‘New Dimoxnyl Hair Tonic Grows Back Your Hair and Youthful Looks Overnight!’

Writing headlines is a tricky business for even the most experienced and talented copywriters.

But working on creating a headline baited with the promise of a benefit and curiosity should get your pen scribbling towards creating headlines that hook more readers and reel them into your words.



6 - Punchy Writing Tips

It's often said that copy can't be too long, just too boring.

And sales writing is often only tolerated at the best of times. So if your copy is to weave its magic it needs to be light, easy to read and captivating.

Here are 15 tips for making your sales writing punchy and compelling for readers:

1. Aim for an average sentence length of around 16 words.
2. Vary between short and long sentences to give your writing rhythm.
3. Split long sentences into two if they'll survive on their own. Use connecting words such as 'so', 'and' or 'because'.
4. Wield an axe to flabby language and unnecessary words. As Anton Chekhov put it, 'Brevity is the sister of talent.'
5. Sales writing isn't blessed with a reader's patience. So ensure every word and sentence means something to the reader and adds to your argument. Don't waffle or descend into a longwinded diatribe that's of little interest to anybody but you.
6. Leave long paragraphs to novelists, and limit yours to a single thought. Two or three sentences is adequate.
7. Showy writing isn't sales writing. Don't use words just because they sound impressive. And leave jargon and corporate claptrap for the brochure (if you must use them at all).



"They were easier to read than ignore"

- Victor Schwab



8. Use positive inspiring language on what the reader 'can' achieve and 'will' be able to do. Avoid negative terms that might dampen their spirits.
9. Break up your page with subheads and bullets to aid skim reading.
10. Use power words to charge up your writing's impact, such as 'revealed', 'proven', 'scientific' and 'breakthrough'.
11. Write in your reader's language and the style they're comfortable with. Read your target market's magazines and newspapers to gauge the pitch.
12. People are hardwired to respond to stories. Use storytelling on how your product has solved someone's problem to trigger the reader's imagination and emotions.
13. Use facts or personal history to build rapport, empathy and to show the reader that you feel their pain.
14. Ask the reader a simple question early on they'll say 'yes' to. This will precondition them to be more likely to agree with you and say 'yes' to your offer later on.
15. Sales writing is often compared to a conversation with a pal in a bar. So it should be conversational and sound similar to how you'd speak. Read it aloud to hear whether it flows smoothly.

Another tip I'd add is to keep a swipe file of the best sales writing you find. Study it, highlight key phrases and copy it out by hand to understand how punchy copywriting generates sales.

Next I'm going to discuss one of a copywriter's most powerful tools for adding visual imagery to your writing, and how you can become a master of metaphor...



“Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space.” – Orson Scott Card

7 – Using Metaphors to Spark Imagination



Whether in Shakespeare’s plays or Grisham’s latest thriller, fictional writing is packed with metaphors because they’re so powerful at stimulating the reader’s imagination.

Metaphors transfer the qualities of one object onto another to draw on the reader’s preconceptions and to enhance your writing’s emotional impact.

Metaphors can simplify complex principles into imagery the reader understands. And they can also help the reader picture themselves in the scenario you’re describing.

The power of metaphors at triggering the reader’s imagination makes them one of a copywriter’s most powerful persuasive devices.



Metaphors reflect everyday speech

A popular metaphor for copywriting is that of an everyday conversation with a pal in a bar about a great new product you've discovered and why someone should buy it.

In everyday conversation you wouldn't describe a product's benefits using the descriptive language found in a brochure. Instead, you'd use figurative speech to make your points clearer, and to help the listener visualise the benefits for themselves.

Using metaphors in your writing mirrors the way people speak. By comparing an object or scenario to something the reader already holds to be true you can help it resonate emotionally, and add flair to your writing.

Consider how the impact of the following benefits from metaphors:

- *“After reading this guide on improving your swing you'll be firing golf balls down the fairway and landing them with laser guided accuracy.”*
- *“These words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still waters of peace. Yet, every so often the oath is taken amidst gathering clouds and raging storms.”*



Metaphors persuade using imagination

People make decisions based on emotion and logic. And metaphors can be powerful in giving emotional impact to the seemingly mundane.

For example, describing global challenges as ‘gathering clouds and raging storms’ is far more evocative and visual than ‘economic recession and wars in the Middle East’.

When used creatively and with imagination, metaphors can colour your writing with feeling and paint pictures in your reader’s mind.

Just remember to avoid mixing two metaphors in one sentence because otherwise you’ll blur their meaning.

And try to be original rather than rely on tired old clichés (although occasionally well worn metaphors can be effective). Thinking up metaphors that haven’t been used before can be difficult. But it will help your writing sound imaginative and vibrant.

Metaphors are indeed one of the most powerful ingredients in persuasive writing.

They can add spice to your words, and motivate, inspire and seduce readers with emotionally charged imagery.



8 - Editing Your Writing

It's believed that procrastination (a.k.a. writer's block) occurs because of the writer's desire to achieve perfection.

The fear of composing an awkward sentence or weak turn of phrase can be so paralyzing that many writers simply can't face the simple act of typing words into their keyboard.

But it's also believed that writer's block is a myth, because you can always write something and edit it later on.

First drafts can sometimes be a clumsy, repetitive and turgid mass of unrefined words.

But the beauty of a word processor is that you can go over your writing as many times as you like, sculpting and moulding it, until you're left with a concisely crafted piece of writing, which is why editing is so crucial in the writing process.

Here are my tips for editing your writing until it emerges clean, crisp and able to clearly communicate what you're trying to say.





Read with fresh eyes

After you've finished your first draft, stand up and walk away from your keyboard.

Go for a walk, read a book or clean the dishes if you want to.

Just give yourself a break so you can go back later on and read through your writing with more objectivity.

It's amazing what glaring mistakes or awkwardly worded sentences you'll miss if you don't give your brain a chance to refresh.

Read from the viewpoint of your target reader

Sometimes you might get carried away when you're writing and use a style and tone that appeals to you. But you mustn't forget the reader.

You need to assess whether your writing achieves its objective of projecting an idea, feeling or image onto the target reader's mind.

Does the tone match their personality type? Does it risk confusing them with too much technical jargon? Is it too Corporate? Or too conversational?

Imagine you're reading your writing for the first time and assess whether it makes sense, holds your interest and presents a convincing argument.



Shape and sculpt

Clear, concise writing comes from brevity and adopting short words and sentences.

So replace long winded language (used to sound impressive) with shorter, punchier words to instantly make your writing more readable.

You should also consider cutting sentences of over 25 words into two if they can survive on their own.

Remember that one of your writing's key aims is to maintain the reader's attention. So consider the relevance of every single word and phrase. Wield an axe to flabby, verbose language and refine the remainder with a scalpel until you're left with a lean, toned and agile piece of writing.

Print it out, read it out

You might feel confident enough in your analytical ability to dissect your writing on screen.

However, printing it out and reading it aloud in its physical form can provide you with a clearer perspective.

When you're reading words on the screen your mind can play tricks on you, such as missing out words or letters it feels are unnecessary to understanding a sentence's meaning.

Reading your writing aloud, however, slows your brain down and enables you to register and verbalise every word.



Don't trust Word's spell check, and use the active voice

Ensure names are spelt correctly, commas are in the right place and you've scoured it relentlessly for typos. Read sentences backwards if you really want to make sure.

Also check you're using the right contractions (e.g. 'you're' when you mean 'you are'), and where appropriate write in the active voice.

The active voice helps your writing to be concise, punchy and easy to read. When writing in the active voice the subject performs the action expressed by a verb.

For example:

Active - Matt has finally joined Twitter

Passive – Twitter was finally joined by Matt

Active – Matt will post more messages on Twitter

Passive – There will be more messages on Twitter posted by Matt

A common warning sign of a passive sentence is when 'by' is used to link to the subject after the verb.

However, the passive voice does have its fans, particularly in the scientific and technical writing community, because it helps sentences sound objective and fact based (but at the risk of being flat and dry).



Walk away again before you hit publish

When you think you've finished get up out of your seat again and take another break.

After allowing your brain to refresh give it another read through, taking into consideration points 1-5.

The beauty of writing is you can keep editing and refining your words until you can literally feel whether they'll resonate, engage and persuade readers with your finely sculpted collection of words.

And that's all folks...

I hope you've found this eBook useful and will be able to apply some of the copywriting tips into your own persuasive writing.

Remember that words have the power to inspire, motivate and sell products. So write them for the benefit of the reader because showy writing isn't sales writing, and is more likely to switch off today's weary consumer than impress them with your literary prowess.

You can find more copywriting tips on my blog, The Copywriter's Crucible - a melting pot of news, insight and words for hire:

<http://copywriterscrucible.com>