

Top 30 Headline Formulas That Get Results

How to write headlines that sell

In this eBook, we'll cover:

- The top 30 formulas for creating successful headlines
- Where and when to use headline formulas
- The 3 basic guidelines for all headlines
- How to use the formulas to write headlines for any business

Here's a quick quiz!

Which headline will get more clicks, likes, and shares?

A) How a strange experience saved me from bankruptcy

OR

B) A strange experience saved me from bankruptcy

Both can be headlines but one is guaranteed to outperform the other. I've conducted this survey with hundreds of participants in my copywriting workshops and the overwhelming response is "A" is more powerful.

What makes headline A so much more compelling? And most importantly what does this have to do with your business?

Headline 'A' follows a set of effective rules for headlines to entice the target audience to click. In this eBook, I'm going to show you what those rules are and give you real-world examples so you can see how they work.

But to kick off, here's the top 30 formulas you can use to write great headlines.

TYPE	FORMULA	EXAMPLE
1. How to	How to [achieve a desired outcome]	How to build a chicken coop
2. Ultimate list	[Large number] of ways to [achieve an outcome]	27 ways to entertain toddlers at the beach
3. Ultimate guide	The ultimate guide to [achieve a desired outcome]	The ultimate guide to making Tinder work for you
4. Fearmonger	Warning! Are you [something undesirable]?	Warning! Are you eating this food that could kill you?
5. Proven methods	[Number] proven [actions/ways] to [achieve desired result]	18 proven techniques to grow your email database
6. Mistakes	[Number] mistakes most people make when/with [common action]	11 mistakes most people make when buying a used car
7. Secrets	[Number] secrets to [achieve desired outcome]	7 secrets to becoming a digital nomad
8. Lessons learned	[Number] lessons I learned when/from [experience]	7 lessons Sia learned about song writing
9. Social proof	[Social proof] [desired outcome]	The tool over 283,000 websites use to grow their traffic
10. Testimonial	[A quote from/summary of a testimonial]	How F45 changed my body shape
11. Question	[Provocative question]	Are you still eating dairy? Really?

12. See what happened	[Person] did [unusual action] [timeframe]. Here's what happened	I ate fruit every day for 6 months. Here's what happened
13. How/result	How [a seemingly inconsequential action] can [undesirable result]	How your morning coffee can lead to heart disease
14. Silver platter	[Number or how to] simple/easy ways to [desired outcome]	14 easy ways to save \$200 per month on petrol
15. Explainer	Why [thing] [outcome]	Why mushrooms make you smarter
16. Quiz	Quiz: [which/what/how] [quiz topic]?	Quiz: are you cut out to be a copywriter?
17. News	Breaking: [story]	Breaking news: Whooping cough outbreak in your city
18. Reasons	[Number/here's why] [outcome]	17 reasons your second marriage is likely to fail
19. Ignorance avoidance	What you should know about [topic]	What you should know about joining the Army (before joining)
20. Snackable	[4 words or fewer summarising topic]	1. You aren't that special 2. Bad news... 3. My apologies...
21. Pattern interruption	Claim that goes against what most people think is true	How fruit will make you fat
22. Solutions	Why [problem] (and what to do about it)	Why you're not getting traffic to your website (and what to do about it)
23. Expert roundup	[Number] [expert] share [what]	10 maths teachers share their top memorisation strategies

24. Reminder	Reminder: [claim or truth]	Reminder: your BMI is not a reflection of your health
25. Trivia	Can you [find/spot/answer/etc]	Spot the error - can you find the problem with this photo?
26. Keyword	[Keyword]: [supporting keywords]	Healthy eating 101: how to eat healthy on a budget
27. Promise	[Promise of what your business/content will do]	We can help you boost your traffic by 20%
28. Teaser	These/find out which [thing] could/will [desired outcome]	These 3 weird foods could help you lose 15 pounds
29. Sidenote	[Headline] [sidenote to tease one of the points]	7 lessons we learned from Brene Brown (#2 is our favourite)
30. Audience	[Audience]! Are you [undesirable/desirable outcome]?	Smokers – did you know vaping can help you quit?

Source: Adapted from Sumo.com

11 places to use headline formulas for more traffic, shares and conversions

Even though we're calling them *headline* formulas, they work brilliantly for a range of other mediums.

1. Email subject lines
2. Speech titles
3. Book titles
4. Search engine meta data
5. Blog titles
6. Sales pages
7. Subheads
8. Opt-in opportunities

- 9. Magazine covers
- 10. Testimonials
- 11. Product names

What does a headline do?

We are bombarded with thousands of messages every day, so it's vital that your advertisement (or any marketing collateral) gets noticed.

Readers tend to skip or tune out any marketing message that looks like it will take too much time or be too much trouble to figure out.

The first impression can mean the difference between success and failure. If the copy offers news or helpful information or promises a reward for paying attention, it is well on its way to persuading the reader to buy your product. A good headline tells readers what a story is about. It induces them to read the story. It's the ad for the ad!

But successful headlines do more than tell the story. They capture the readers' interest and make them want to read on.

Headlines simplify the learning curve. A reader should be able to scan down your page, quickly digest your headlines, and figure out what you're offering.

Once the prospect knows you have something she is interested in, she will take more time to read your entire letter, ad, or web page.

Most people read headlines first, so concentrate on getting the headline right and everything else will follow.

Here are 3 basic guidelines on how to write headlines:

1. Headlines don't have to be short

One of the misunderstandings many people seem to hold about headlines is the notion they must be short. This is not always true. Lots of great headlines are long. They work because they solve an important problem for the reader. Short is probably better in most cases, but it's not essential.

2. Don't make your headlines cute

Many people make the mistake of getting too cute in their headlines. Unless you're trying to win awards, this can be a mistake. The reader doesn't have time to decipher your cute message so get to the point quickly and get selling.

When people read a headline, they are mentally saying to themselves: "So what? Who cares? What does that mean to me?" You need to make sure that your headline answers one of those questions.

3. Speak directly to your audience

You should use your headline to define your audience and to filter out those who aren't in your target market. For instance, if you are selling home insurance to people older than 50, there is no point in writing an ad that generates inquiries from younger people. The headline can narrow in on the ideal audience for your ad and screen out those readers who are not your potential customers.

For example, Australian Pensioners Insurance Agency (APIA) list the following in all their ads: "For those aged over 55 and not working full time". That's very direct and clear and certainly screens out a vast number of people.

A quick word about using upper and lower case for headlines:

You don't have to use upper and lower case when writing headlines. Do what suits the client in terms of their style guide, or what looks visually appealing on the page. The rationale for using both upper and lower case is that it makes the words look easier to read. You be the judge.

How to use the formulas to write great headlines:

I've fleshed out 15 of the Top 30 Headlines here so you can see exactly how they work. There are many ways to come up with headlines. If ever you get stuck and can't come up with a great headline, refer back to this section for some idea generators.

1. The "How To"

The simple "How To" headline is still popular for its simplicity and effectiveness.

They work very well because people love information that shows them 'How To' do something.

Just think of the thousands of book titles beginning with “How to...”.

Think of the benefits your product/service offers and then try creating some “How To” headlines.

The benefit must be reflected in the headline. In fact, using the “How To” formula is one of the best places to start when writing headlines because it forces you to think of what your product/service actually does for the person.

It also works for reports or letters that provide helpful information. Even just adding the word “how” in front of a headline gives it an additional appeal.

(By the way, always use an odd number or number ending in zero when quoting numbers in headlines. They’re more credible and believable. Seven seems to be the magic number when it comes to headlines, and book titles too.)

Here are some real examples of book titles available from Amazon:

- 7 habits of highly effective people
- 7 secrets of effective fathers
- 7 secrets of a healthy dating relationship
- 7 secrets of great business names
- 7 secrets of highly successful people
- 7 secrets of effective business networking

Here are some more ‘How To’ examples:

- How to choose the right solar panels for your home
- How to set up your website...in one day.
- How to avoid the biggest mistake when buying off the plan units

‘How to’ headline templates

Here are a few ‘How to’ headlines you can plug-in and use right away when brainstorming:

How to get _____

How to have _____

How to keep _____

How to start _____

How to begin _____

How to become _____
How to improve your _____
How to get the most out of _____
How to avoid _____
How to end _____
How to get rid of _____
How to conquer _____

2. Ask a question

A question headline gets the reader to answer the question in their mind. This style of headline automatically gets the prospect involved in your message.

Many people will read further into your letter, ad, or web site copy just to find out what answer or solution you provide.

This headline taps into the prospect's problems. Your headline is the 'magic pill' that fixes that problem. Again, make sure the question focuses on the reader's interest, not yours.

Examples:

- Are you worried about falling house prices?
- Are you sick of being exhausted?
- Do you make these mistakes in English?

3. The secret of...

This one is used quite a bit, but that's because it works.

This works on the principle that an expert has some information or insider knowledge that will translate into a benefit for the reader.

Everybody wants the inside running on how to solve a problem. It's even more effective when the message is coming from an expert.

- Secrets of online entrepreneurs
- Secrets of getting babies to sleep
- Secrets to getting a gig on breakfast TV

4. Here is a method that is helping...to...

This style of headline is instructional and feeds upon people's desire to have more information to help them in their lives.

All you have to do is identify your target audience and the benefit you can provide them, and then fill in the blanks.

- Here is a method that is helping homeowners save hundreds on insurance
- Here is a method that is helping children learn to read sooner
- Here is a method that is helping small businesses save money on websites

5. Little known ways to...

This is a more intriguing (and less common) way of accomplishing the same thing as "The Secret of..." headline.

- Little known ways to save on your mobile phone bill
- Little known ways to get free video software
- Little known ways to access royalty-free images

6. Get rid of...once and for all

This is a classic formula that identifies either a painful problem or an unfulfilled desire that the reader wants to remedy.

- Get rid of ugly bitten nails once and for all
- Get rid of that carpet stain once and for all
- Get rid of acne once and for all

7. Here's a quick way to ...

People love 'quick' when it comes to solving a nagging problem.

- Here's a quick way to get over a head cold
- Here's a quick way to potty train your baby
- Here's a quick way to backup your hard drive

It's even more effective when you add 'easy' to the formula.

- Here's a quick and easy way to lose weight

- Here's a quick and easy way to cook dinner for 10
- Here's a quick and easy way to save for a home deposit

8. Who else wants...

Starting a headline with "Who else wants..." is a classic social proof strategy that implies an already existing consensus desire.

While overused in the internet marketing arena, it still works like gangbusters for other subject matter.

- Who else wants to earn \$150,000 working from home?
- Who else wants to eat what they like when they like?
- Who else wants to have a home like this?

9. What everybody ought to know about...

There is a big curiosity draw with this type of headline, and it acts almost as a challenge to the reader to go ahead and see if they are missing something. No one likes to miss out on information which means people can't stop themselves from reading it.

- What everybody ought to know about self-managed super funds
- What everybody ought to know about Botox
- What everybody ought to know about low GI diets

10. The news

Caution: This only works if you truly have something big to announce that is of interest to the reader; something that will make her life or business better. Don't try to make news out of something that's not.

Once your readers know you have something they're interested in, they'll take the time to read your entire article, brochure, letter, ad, ezine, or web page.

Here are some examples:

- Introducing our new 7-day tax service
- Introducing our zero interest rate credit card
- Introducing the no-fat chocolate-flavoured ice cream

11. Headline a deadline for a special offer

Most of us are busy and tend to put off taking action. If you don't get the prospect to act now, you may never get the sale. Sometimes a simple headline compelling the reader to take action now can be very effective.

Here are some examples:

- Save up to \$2000 on an Apple Mac computer before the end of May
- Buy now and pay no interest for 5 years
- Register now for your free mobile phone

12. Free offers often pull the best response

There is a myth that affluent or professional customers are turned off by free offers. Not true.

They love a bargain as much as the next person. (How do you think they got rich?) Simply tailor your free offer to match the style of your customers or industry.

Examples:

- Complimentary 30-minute strategy session
- Bonus lipstick with purchase
- Free installation
- Free home delivery
- Free main meal with every meal purchased
- Free upgrade
- Free window tinting

13. Headlines that alert your target market

These headlines are very straightforward in their message.

They work on the principle that you are busy, are scanning the page for something of interest, and will only be stopped by something that is directly relevant to you.

They work best when they are specifically targeted at a particular group of people.

These headlines stop people in their tracks and force them to read. We are all motivated by self-interest after all.

Some examples include:

- Attention teachers! Are you tired of being a teacher?
- Property owners – 5 things to know before you buy inner city apartments
- Tennis court owners – do you hate mowing your court?

14. The “Fear of Loss” Headline

For many people, the fear of losing something is greater than the desire for gain.

The idea of losing money or missing out on something is too powerful for them to resist checking out your offer.

Examples:

- Early bird offer ends tomorrow – act now!
- Just how much money are you losing?
- How much are bank fees really costing you?

15. The Intrigue Headline

This headline lets you flex your creative muscle yet does the important job of pulling the reader into your copy.

The idea is to intrigue your prospect sufficiently to read the next paragraph.

Examples:

- Can you pass the cholesterol test?
- Are you cut out to be a paramedic?
- Do you know what colour best suits red-heads? Find out here.

Use the headline formulas to create sample headlines

Take a few moments to practice writing headlines using the formulas. You can use these prompts to get you going and then use your own business as the subject.

1. Your client is a beautician. She offers waxing, facials, pedicures, manicures, and other standard beauty treatments. Write 5 ‘How to’ headlines for this business:

1. _____



- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

2. Your client sells swimming pools, swimming pool accessories (slippery dips, pool covers, etc.) and pool cleaning supplies. Write 5 'Here's a quick way to...' headlines for this business:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

3. Your client runs an accountancy firm specialising in financial planning, tax minimisation and investment property. Write 5 'Ask a question' headlines for this business:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

4. Nominate your own client. It could be someone you know or a business you'd like to target as a potential client. Choose your headline formula. Write 5 headlines for this business:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

So, there you have it! The ultimate guide to writing headlines that work. Try using some of the formulas when you need to write a headline and discover how quick and easy it is to write a headline without even trying.

Good luck!

Kind regards

Bernadette Schwerdt

The Copywriting Coach

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