



58 Copywriting Tips

Even though a copywriter is a small cost, relative to the overall costs of a campaign, a lot of people still insist on writing their own copy. If you want to do this, here are 58 copywriting tips you can use to make your copy more persuasive. This is about the most comprehensive list of copywriting tips on the web...

1. **Review your copy.** Do it over and over. Six or seven times or more.
2. **Use short, punchy Anglo-Saxon words** instead of pompous Latin words. E.g. "*show*" instead of "*indicate*"; "*rules*" instead of "*regulations*"; "*book*" instead of "*publication*". Avoid "posh" words: they impress no one except your own ego.
3. **Avoid being clever and cryptic.** Sometimes I see ads that take me weeks to work out what they mean. We are all too busy to be bothering with the clever stuff. If it can be understood by a half-wit with a two second attention span you may have a winner.
4. **Do not be handicapped by thinking everything has to be "grammatically correct"**. When you are copywriting all that stuff goes out the window. Say it in the simplest way possible.
5. **Get to the point.** An awful lot of copy waffles on before talking about anything of any relevance.
6. **Try deleting your first paragraph** - this has an amazing effect.
7. **Use colour to underline important bits of text.** You can either do this with a blue handwritten underline or a yellow text background or print the text in a different colour.
8. **Use interesting sub-heads.** Most people's are pretty boring. Eg. instead of "*Important new cost-saving ideas*" say, "*How one shopkeeper saved £238*".
9. **Relate your story to your reader.** Eg. Instead of "*Many people must have wondered*" say, "*I am sure you have wondered*".
10. **Use short sentences.** The easiest sentence to read is eight words. The average length for easy reading is 16 words. Any sentence longer than 32 words is hard to read.
11. **And use short paragraphs.** Make sure each paragraph contains only one thought.
12. **Use buckets and chains to link paragraphs.** Eg. *On the other hand..., But there is something else..., That is just one example, but..., In addition..., Now let me explain..., ...and this is how it works, ...now let me tell you the whole story.*
13. **Turn negatives into positives.** Eg. Instead of, "*If your hearing isn't improved, we'll refund your money*" say, "*You'll hear whispered conversations or we'll refund your money*".
14. **Avoid humour...unless you are a very good writer (indeed).**

15. **Repeat the offer several times** in the text.

16. **Use the reader's name.** Use it throughout the text not just in the address block and salutation.
17. **Give authority.** Eg. instead of *"widely used by major corporations"* say, *"proved in use by IBM and Microsoft"*
18. **Increase the typesize of your letter.** People over 50 often have difficulty reading anything less than about 12-14pt type.
19. **Do not be too tasteful.** Sad but true, but tacky design generally beats tasteful.
20. **DO NOT USE CAPITAL LETTERS TO HIGHLIGHT YOUR IMPORTANT THOUGHTS.** CAPITAL LETTERS ARE MUCH HARDER TO READ BECAUSE READERS RECOGNISE WORD SHAPES NOT INDIVIDUAL LETTERS.
21. **Number all your significant points.** Or use a., b., c., etc.
22. **Do not use PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL on the envelope unless it really is.**
23. **Be specific,** state real figures, avoid things like *"up to 5%"* or *"over 1,000"*. Avoid percentages, state real sums of money instead.
24. **State the facts.** Often you can increase the power of your copy by removing comparative and superlative adjectives.
25. **Use vivid picture words,** eg. *"diamond-hard"* instead of *"tough"*; *"cash"* instead of *"money"*.
26. **Don't use three words when one will do.** *"Now"* is better than *"At this point in time"*.
27. **Focus on the benefits the customer will get** when he buys the product. When you are talking about a product feature try to think, *"which means that..."*. For example, *"my car has 500bhp, which means that I can burn off just about anyone at the traffic lights"*.
28. **Do not waffle.** Every word needs to earn its place in your copy.
29. **Do not worry about the length of copy.** Testing shows long copy sells more than short, and long headlines sell more than short. Your copy should be as long or as short as it needs to be to sell the product. See tip 28 too.
30. **Do not overclaim.** If you overinflate even one claim you destroy your credibility.
31. **Speak the reader's language.** The language you use when you write to a school teacher is going to be different to how you write to a builder.
32. **Think what a salesman would do.** Think about how you would sell the product to someone. The best copy often has a kind of speech type you-and-me-talking quality about it. Sometimes I work on my copy by actually selling the product in question to people.
33. **Count the number of times you use the word "you"**. The more I talk about "you" the more interested you are in what I am selling. Ideally "you" should occur two to three times more frequently than "we" or "I".

34. **Repeat if necessary.** Your audience will not mind you saying the same thing several times in a different way.
35. **Think FAB (Features, Advantages, Benefits).** Eg. *"ACME product contains new ingredient DG45 which cleans clothes without creasing so you never need to do the ironing ever again"*. (It's a great product, my wife swears by it.)
36. **If you don't know the audience, find out about them.** For example if you are writing business to business read all the trade magazines - this will soon give you a feel for what's on your audience's mind.
37. **Visualise a person and write to them.** Better still write as if you are writing to someone you already know who fits the target audience: Your Mum, a friend, whoever.
38. **Use guile to keep 'em reading.** End a column or page half way through a sentence so people have to keep going. Eg. *"this week we are offering a special discount of..."* (next page).
39. **Be mysterious.** Promise to reveal some special benefit or piece of information but keep the reader in suspense until the end of the letter.
40. **Use indented paragraphs.** These make the letter easier to read.
41. With direct mail, **remember your envelope is part of the letter.** In fact it is the piece your prospect sees first.
42. **Create visual interest.** Break up long chunks of text by using: *Italics*; box rules around paragraphs; tables & bar charts; numbered paragraphs; underlining; bullet points; capital letters - but SPARINGLY.
43. **Use captions to sell the product.** Captions get high readability, make them interesting.
44. **Use your Ps and Qs.** Be polite. If you want something say please. Eg. *"to take advantage of this special offer please call our customer service team on..."*
45. **Edit ruthlessly.** It is easier to over-write and cut down than to under-write and expand.
46. **Read your copy from end to start.** Reading copy backwards is a great way to spot spelling errors.
47. **Try reading it out loud.** This is a great way to spot blocks in the flow of the copy.
48. **Consider handwriting for visual interest.** Either in the margin of a letter or I have even seen handwritten adverts.
49. **Don't make the reader out to be an idiot.** Eg. Instead of, *"you probably don't know we publish a Russian edition"* say, *"Many people still have not heard we publish a Russian edition"*.
50. **Space your benefits through the letter.** Don't bunch them up.

51. **If you are running a last minute bargain offer, make it look that way.** Often something photocopied that looks like it was produced in the mailroom works wonders.
52. **Use a PS.** Use it to make a big, powerful point or use it to sum up the sales argument in a compelling way.
53. **Use a penalty for not acting now.** Eg. *"This offer applies only to the first 100 products we sell..."*
54. **If it is NEW, say so.** People like new things. New is news. And say why it is important.
55. **Try a postcard.** Unlike mailings, postcards are nearly always read.
56. **Use simple words that everyone understands then everyone will understand.** Good copy is often criticised for having a child-like quality. This is deliberate; if a simple person can understand it, everyone can understand it.
57. **And finally:** read books on the subject. Study the work of the great men of advertising. **And remember:** good copy is like a river; you should be able to jump in at any point and be carried along by the flow.
58. **Ask a copywriter to write your copy for you.** He is generally worth the meager investment. It really is a lot easier to simply use a good copywriter.