



Shawn Can Write

# Headline Writing Guide

Free guide from:  
[ShawnCanWrite.com](http://ShawnCanWrite.com)



by Shawn Forsythe

# What Is This Guide?

*This* guide contains 90% of what copywriting experts understand about headline writing – in a condensed, easy-to-refer-to form. *This* document is a companion to 3 writing guides that are available on Shawn's website:

- [Mini Writing Guide](#)
- [Tiny Writing Guide](#)
- [1-Page Writing Guide](#)

The valuable insights presented here are a supplement to Shawn's proprietary 19-page content article writing guide. He created that guide in 2009 and has continually updated and revised it since then.

*This* guide is meant to be used with 3 other documents: Piece Prep Notes, Piece Writing Elements, and Key Copywriting Rules. These free documents can be found on [www.ShawnCanWrite.com](http://www.ShawnCanWrite.com).

Shawn is the creator of **Shawn Solutions** group of websites. Currently he focuses on content writing for websites and professional social media accounts.

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## FACTORS TO DECIDE

- **Research-based** piece or **Personal** piece.
- **Topic** – target keyword.
- **Informational** piece or **Transactional** piece?
- **Audience**.
- **Human drive** to target. (See Piece Writing Elements)
- **Topic Question** – problem, benefit, or stimulator
- **Promise** to deliver something in the content.

## PRINCIPLES

- Capture attention and create anticipation.
- Be direct, clear, & specific. (Don't use curiosity-based headlines; they don't work well.)
- Add detail to show usefulness (e.g. "illustrated")
- Evoke emotion, as long as the headline remains clear.
- The title can be evergreen or current. (Non-evergreen components can be put in the meta title.)

## CONSTRUCTION – ALL HEADLINES

- **Promise** something related to the **Topic Question**, while focusing on the **human drive** – can mention a specific **Deliverable**.
- **Informational vs Transactional**
  - Transactional Headlines
    - Often use 'best', 'fast/quick', 'new/est', a number, a date
    - Good formulas:
      - 5 Best + keyword + motivation to read
      - 5 Best Non-toxic Household Cleaners of 2022 (Reviewed by Experts)
      - Best [Thing/s]: 5 [Adjective] [Keyphrase] in 2022
      - 5 Best [Adjective] [Keyphrase] in 2022
  - Information Headlines
    - How To
    - Keyword: xxxx
- **Direct vs Gripping**
  - Direct – for clear answers to concrete information questions. ► [Best Coffee Cup for Elderly People](#), [5 Best Coffee Cups](#), [5 Step Process for making Low-Acidic Coffee](#), [Beginner's Guide to Coffee Brewing](#), [A500 Coffee Brewer Manual \(Helpful Guide With Photos\)](#), [Surprising Results From Our 2022 Coffee Study](#).
  - Gripping – for dives into content for a deeper internal reasons: plain enjoyment, fascination, learning something new, or being entertained. ► [Smartphones that Don't Blow Up In Your Hand](#), [This Coffee Cup Serves as a Handy Weapon](#), [5 Fun Apps For 80s Math Nerds](#).
- Types that work well:
  - How to.
  - Question.
  - Number-of-steps.
  - Number-of-ways.
  - Audience reference.
  - A negative thing to turn positive.
  - Surprise.

- 6-7 words usually; never more than 10 words – 59-70 characters maximum.
- Word order:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> word is most important, 2<sup>nd</sup> word next important.
  - Put the keyword as close to the beginning as possible – first 1-3 words.
- Words to use:
  - Skip leading articles, usually.
  - Specific number, especially an odd number.
  - Data/Statistic.
  - Current year.
  - Use words from Power Words document.
  - Best words for social sharing: you, your, easy, best.
  - Words at the end to indicate content included, e.g. [Video], [Free Report]
- Use a colon or hyphen sometimes.

## SALES HEADLINE CREATION

- The promise – explicit or implicit – must be related to the biggest pain point or benefit of the product/service to promote.
- 5-7 words is best.
- Types that work well:
  - Question that can be answered by the product/service.
  - Scarcity and urgency.
- Useful sales words:
  - *Best, Top*
  - Product name or brand name.
  - *Affordable, cheap, cheapest, comparison, review, discount, deal, free, coupon*
- Useful endings:
  - *In Under [Time]*
  - *For Under [Money]*
  - *For Less Than [Money]*
  - *Without X. (take away pain)*
- Exclamation marks and Question marks are good.

**If a headline works well, recycle it: email subject line, post heading, landing page heading, text link in email, etc.**

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## ANALYZERS

Emotional Value of at least 30, and usually 40+: <http://www.aminstitute.com/headline/>  
 General: <http://coschedule.com/headline-analyzer>

## FINDING GOOD HEADLINES

- Popular blogs.
- Popular writers.
- Headlines of top SERP results.
- Popular social media posts.
- Popular social media users.

- BuzzFeed formulas.
- Wikihow formulas.
- Commission Junction ads.
- Other ads.



## Let's Connect!

I like to connect with, and learn from, all kinds of interesting people.

Find me on **LinkedIn**:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dsforsythe>

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I want to help as many people as possible with my free no-nonsense materials.

Get more **free materials**:

[www.ShawnCanWrite.com/secret-guides](http://www.ShawnCanWrite.com/secret-guides)