

THE NON-WRITERS WRITING GUIDE

# HEADLINES, SUBHEADS, AND EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

7 Ways to Write a Turn of Phrase That Turns Heads

When writing an article or an email newsletter or a social post, capping off the content with a killer headline is often the last step. But at that point, it can feel daunting to write a single line or two that will pique interest and accurately speak to the subject matter without being wordy and grandiose. The following tips and proven literary devices will help you craft a nice headline or subject line so you can feel good about hitting ‘publish.’

## 1 Alliteration and assonance

Alliteration is repetition of the same consonants in a word phrase. Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds. Both techniques create a rhythm to a series of words that is pleasing to the ear. Because consonants typically have crisper and more distinct sounds than vowels, alliteration often works better. Alliteration and assonance can be good ways to tie together two separate ideas into a single headline.

### EXAMPLES

#### From the Hearts of Harvesters

*The alliteration comes from repeated ‘h,’ ‘r’ and ‘t’ in “hearts” and “harvesters” and the repeated “-ahr” sound in the same two words create assonance.*

#### Wake Up to the Smell of Pine and Sunshine

*The assonance comes from the “ine” in “pine” and “sunshine.” These words also happen to rhyme, a bonus.*

## 2 Mirroring

Mirroring is pairing the same word with two different words to denote a similar meaning. Repeating a word can help to reinforce the idea. Mirroring can work well for the action word(s) in your headline.

### EXAMPLES

#### A Turn of Phrase That Turns Heads

*“Turn” is the mirror word.*

#### A Mash-up of the Top 5 Blended Learning Programs

*Though not literally the same word, “mash-up” and “blended” still work as mirror words in this headline.*

## 3 Contrast

Like mirroring, the contrast technique uses two words that play off each other, in this case as opposites. This creates a “swing” in the rhythm of the headline and can serve to highlight an extreme difference in two concepts. Sometimes you can have several words that contribute to the contrast effect. Adverbs and adjectives make good candidates for creating contrast. Think of how you might modify a subject in your headline and what the opposite meaning of that modifier could imply.

### EXAMPLES

#### Unsolicited Cold Calls Puts Company In Hot Water With Customers

*“Cold” is the contrast to “hot.”*

#### The Small Fish That’s Causing a Big Stir

*“Small” is the contrast to “big.”*

## 4 Word play

Try rearranging words or phrases into new and interesting combinations. Though sometimes trickier to implement, rhyming, onomatopoeia, and puns can really help make a headline sizzle.

### EXAMPLES

#### Write Headlines That Turn Heads

*or “Write Head-turning Headlines”*

#### Put the Cool Back into School

*rhyming and audible play on words*

## 5 Question (and answer)

Most likely the piece or post you’ve written is in response to a question, one that you had, one of your customers had, or one that’s been buzzing around your industry. Make this question your headline. A question headline is open-ended, hanging out there, and people feel compelled to read to find out the answer. This works particularly well for email subject lines and social posts. For articles, collateral, and web pages, question headlines work best when paired with a subhead that answers the question.

### EXAMPLES

#### Can You Really Save Money on Your Insurance? 4 Ways to Avoid Extra Charges and Qualify for Discounts

*Even with the answer provided by the subhead, you still want to find out how to save money, right?*

#### Want to Improve Your Sleep?

*With no answer given in the headline, the reader must click to find out—perfect for an email subject line or a social post when paired with the link to the article that contains the answer.*

## 6 Number/trigger word formula

5 Ways to Get... 7 Secrets to... 10 Things to Try When... Love 'em or hate 'em, listicles are widespread for good reason. People can't resist the allure of a number. Numbers tend to make things concrete, organized, tidy, complete. There's an end in sight before you've even begun reading. Common trigger words are words like "what, why, how, or when." Other trigger words include "new, improved, updated." Combine a number with a trigger word and you're well on your way to great headline. Top off that phrase with the promise of what the reader will learn and you're certain to pull in readers. The formula looks like this:

**number and/or trigger word  
+ adjective + keyword + promise**

EXAMPLE

*number* → **5 Unique Ways to Make Your Social Post Go Viral**

*adjective* → **Unique**

*keyword* → **Social Post**

*promise* → **Go Viral**

## 7 Outcomes and benefits

When writing about a product or service, it's hard to go wrong with using one of its benefits as the headline. This can work especially well as a teaser for one-sheets, web pages, or social campaigns that might promote the full service or product description.

EXAMPLE

### Minimize, If Not Completely Resolve, the Symptoms of Your Autoimmune Disorder

*"Minimize, if not completely resolve, the symptoms" is the benefit here.*

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We believe that effective communication is the ability to use words and images to help people understand, process, and share information, and communication is the key to living in a world that is happy, healthy, and safe.

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