



YOUR GUIDE TO...

GOOD WRITING

INSIDE THIS GUIDE:



Introduction	3
How we read	4
Writing for the web	5
Structuring writing for maximum impact	6
Putting pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard)	8

INTRODUCTION

Why good writing is important.


In our fast-paced world, we're constantly bombarded with information, so it's more important than ever to get your company message across quickly and effectively.

If it's the first time a potential customer has come across you, the impression you make will be pivotal in their decision to buy. Or not! Getting the simple things (like spelling and grammar) right will help build the trust needed to attract – and keep – customers.

This is especially important if you're trading online where concerns around fraud and security heighten customers' need for reassurance.

Beyond that, good writing will actively contribute to your brand's reputation. The good news is, just a little help can turn an average writer into a pretty good one.

Read on to find out how...



***“Good words
are worth much
and cost little.”***

George Herbert

HOW WE READ

Whether you're writing an email, a brochure or content for your website, a real person is at the other end so to understand how to write well, we need to understand how people read.

Children quickly learn to read common words like **day, was, the** and **play**. Eventually, they create a bank of around 5,000 frequently used words and by age nine, no longer read them but recognise their shape instead, which allows them to read much faster.

In adulthood, our vocabulary continues to grow, but this skill for recognising words stays with us. It means we don't need to read every word to understand what is written.

In fact, **your brain can drop up to 30% of text and still understand its meaning.**

'Capital letters are 13 - 18% harder for users to read and it looks like you're SHOUTING!'
'Ampersands '&' are harder to read than 'and''

That's why keeping things simple is the golden rule of good writing.

This idea is at the heart of some basic rules which can turn average writing into good:

- **Use plain language**
- **Use short punchy sentences**
Try www.hemminwayapp.com to help you write clearer copy
- **Use bulleted lists to break up copy**
- **Split long text up into paragraphs of 4-5 sentences**
- **Check spelling and grammar**
Try online tools like www.grammarly.com which offer free proof reading and grammar checks
- **Read what you've written aloud for sense and digestibility**
- **Ask someone else to proof read and sense check what you've written**

Don't gobblefunk around with words.

Roald Dahl

WRITING FOR THE WEB

How we read online

People read online content in a different way to hard copy print – scanning for information rather than reading in the traditional sense.

In a study of online reading behaviour, web usability consultant Jakob Nielsen found that “on the average webpage, users have time to read at most 28% of the words during an average visit; 20% is more likely”.

On average, browsers spend three seconds on a page so focus on the information people want to see first.

Positioning

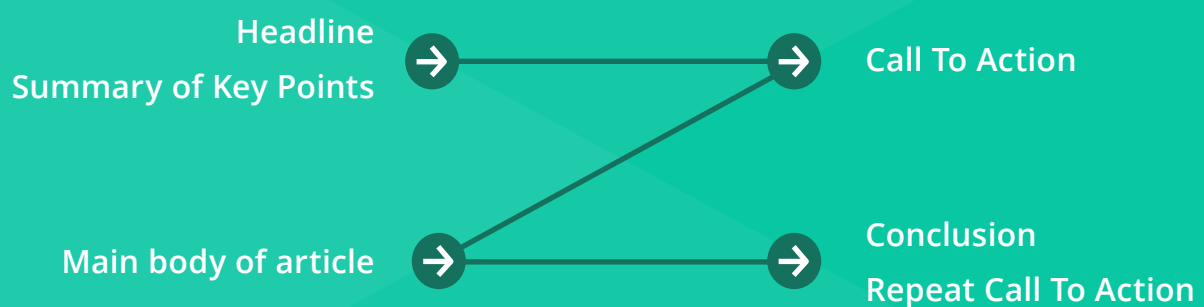
The design of a web page or online article is just as important as what you say, because if the important information isn't in the right place, no one will read it anyway.

Web pages

Web-user eye-tracking studies show that people tend to read a web page in an F shape pattern.

Online articles

However, when we're reading an online article we tend to read in a Z shape pattern, so plan your content accordingly.

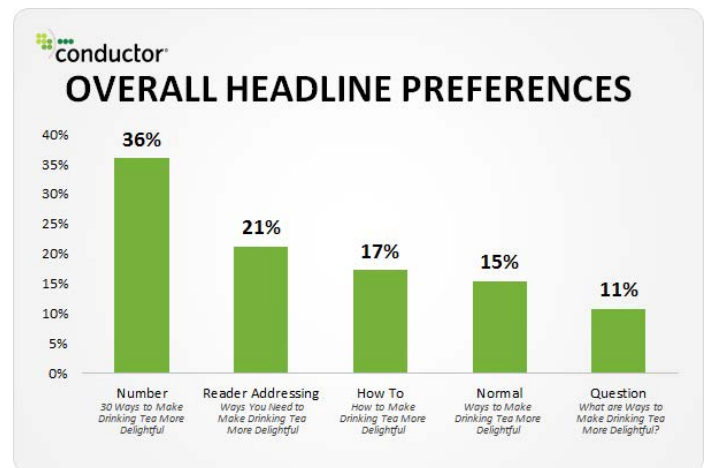


STRUCTURING WRITING FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

Given the limited amount of time you have to get your reader's attention – especially if you're writing online content – how you structure a piece will determine if people read it, how long they'll read it for and what action they'll take as a result.

Headlines matter

If you've gone to the trouble of writing a fantastic piece, you really want people to read it and the best way to make sure they do is to write a great headline.



5 tips for writing eye catching headlines

→ 1. Create interest

Think about your reader's need or problem and address it head on.

→ 2. Keep it brief

Your main headline should be short and punchy – use sub-headings to communicate more detailed information. (Online articles getting the highest click through rates for headlines contain between 81 and 100 characters).

→ 3. Use a number

By quantifying what's coming next, readers know exactly what to expect. And we all like a list!

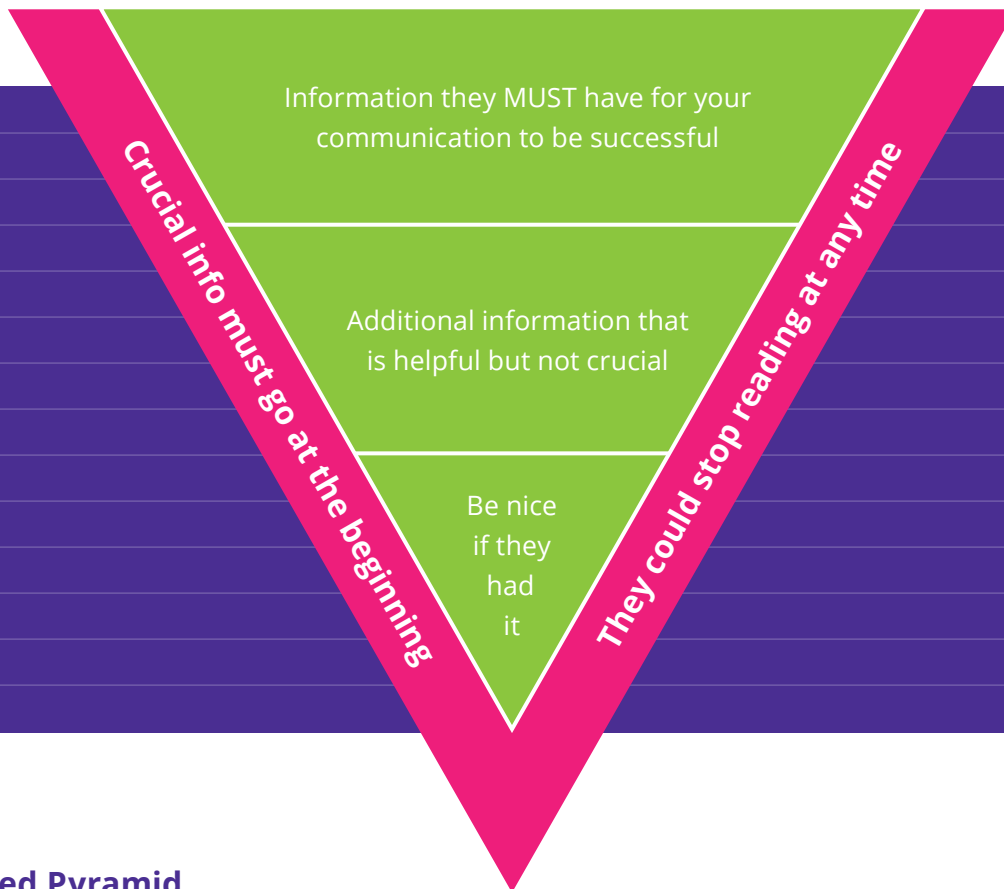
→ 4. Don't use acronyms

Unless they're widely used and accepted e.g. EU or CEO. Real words are much more effective.

→ 5. Don't over egg it

Words like 'magic', 'unbelievable', 'free' and 'secret' actually reduce click through rates as readers don't trust them.

INVERTED PYRAMID WRITING

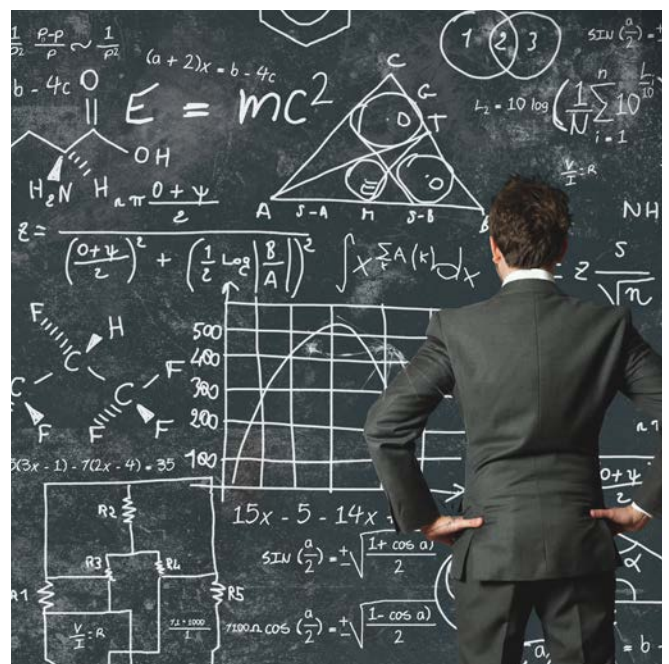


The Inverted Pyramid

As you'll face fierce competition for a reader's attention, use the inverted pyramid to help structure content for the greatest impact.

Specialist or technical content

Businesses that sell especially technical or specialist products or services commonly write about them in an over-complicated (often indecipherable) way. The fact is, although people can understand complex specialist language, they prefer to read plain English alternatives and this is especially true of highly literate readers. Why? Because they tend to have the most to read.



PUTTING PEN TO PAPER

Sometimes the idea of writing is more daunting than just getting on with it, so here's our step-by-step guide to help you along the way.

1. Think about your audience and what you want to achieve

Are you launching a new product, writing to shareholders or building brand awareness? Being clear at the outset will help tailor your content to the audience you're speaking to.

Tip: If you're trying to attract a specific type of customer it can help to create a persona including key traits like age, gender, interests, worries and hobbies.

2. Decide the key points you want to make

Use them for your initial summary and then as paragraph headings supported by more detailed information.

Before you move on, put yourself in your reader's shoes and ask 'So what?' – why would I be interested in this information? What's the benefit for me?

3. Just write

Very few people can write perfectly first time round so get your thoughts down in a loose structure before going on to write more detailed content. Taking a less prescriptive approach at the outset may help you think more creatively too.

4. Revise and refine

Once you know roughly what you're going to say you can start the process of revising and refining, taking into account the basic principles of good writing (see page 4) to create a piece that looks effortless. Even if it wasn't!

5. Write the headline last

Trying to write a headline or title first can be time-consuming and demoralising so leave it until the end if you're struggling. Once the piece is largely down the headline will come more naturally anyway.

6. Find a fresh pair of eyes

For some day-to-day communications, a quick spelling and grammar check is review enough but important communications or content going to print must be reviewed by at least one person – ideally more. As writers we become blind to what we've written and a fresh pair of eyes could save both money and professional embarrassment.





ABOUT FIG

Based in the foothills of the Peak District, FIG is an award-winning B2B agency providing value for our clients' businesses with creative, digital and PR services.

For over 20 years, our focus (and our success) has been to help our clients develop strategic business growth through consistent brand and marketing communications. We're not fluffy marketers, just a fairly down to earth bunch – a team made up of the best creative designers, web developers, strategic marketing and PR experts, intent on delivering tangible results for your business.

If your business is looking for growth and is interested in how FIG can help, get in touch with Martin today on 01457 857111.

CREATIVE • DIGITAL • PR

www.fig.agency

t: 01457 857111 e: contact@fig.agency 172 - 174 High Street West, Glossop, Derbyshire. SK13 8ER