



7 GOLDEN WRITING RULES

A No-Fluff, Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Epic
Blog Posts Every Time

by Mel Wicks

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Welcome Aboard!

The chapters in this report run to a digestible 13 pages.

They summarise the stuff I have learned from some of the best blog writers in the world. I'm sure there is more I could have added, and possibly bits I could have left out. But I hope you'll find it a useful tool on your own blogging journey.

Blogging has been the hardest thing I have ever done. Genuinely, the hardest.

But it has also been one of the most rewarding. And I'm not talking financially. I'm talking about the rewards of taking on a challenge, conquering fears, learning new skills, and meeting some of the coolest people I know.

I am hoping the financial rewards will follow.

In the meantime, this is my gift to all my fellow bloggers. You may just be starting out. Or you may, like me, have started a while ago and taken a few wrong turns,

This report is not supposed to be the shortcut guide to blogging glory, because short cuts don't exist.

(And that's probably one of the best lessons I've learned about blogging).

It's supposed to be a practical, easy-to-use guide for writing perfectly formed posts, every time.

Stay on course. Stay strong, and send me the odd postcard, I'd love to hear how your blogging journey is progressing.

Cheers, Mel

PS. Don't forget to sign up for my blog at thecraftofcopywriting.com if you haven't already. You'll get instant access to actionable writing and marketing tips for bloggers and business owners.

001.

Rule#1: Write Eye-Popping, Traffic Stopping Headlines

Never underestimate the power of a headline



On average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent 80 cents out of your dollar.

David Ogilvy,
the 'Father of Advertising'

Headlines are the most important part of your post. They are the pushy salesman at the door of your retail outlet, tantalizing passers-by with irresistible enticements to come into your store.

But unlike a pushy salesman on the sidewalk, a post headline only has **one second** to draw readers in. Just one. Maybe less.

If you don't have an eye-popping, traffic-stopping headline, pack up your bat and ball and go home. There's no point in writing the rest of your post. Seriously. Never, ever underestimate the power of your headline. Here are a few more rules about headlines:

- **Rule#1A: Don't bullshit your reader.** Don't write "How to Lose 20 pounds in 20 days (and Still Eat Chocolate)". It's not going to happen, is it. Make sure you can deliver what you promise.
- **Rule #1B: Be clear and specific.** Don't say 'How to Be A Successful Blogger', say "How to Build a Money-Making Blog in 6 months". See the difference? Make sure your readers really know what to expect, and the benefit or outcome is clear.
- **Rule#1C: Don't stray too far from the tried and tested formulas.** Yes, I know you're bored of seeing list posts, but they work. As do 'How to' posts. So before you decide to break all the rules and write brilliantly clever headlines that have never been done before, do your research and find out why these tried and tested formulas have been around for over a century.
- **Rule #1D. Use strong language.** No, not profanities, unless that's the edge you're going for. Use words like 'warning', 'secret', 'powerful', 'trust', 'shocking', 'brutal'. Use words that capture your readers' imagination and speak to their most pressing problems. You want your headline to instantly connect with your readers on an emotional level.
- **Rule #1E: Be surprising and unique.** Here's the thing. There are no more new ideas left in the world. Truly. They've all been used up, several times over. However, there is ALWAYS a way polish up an old idea, twist it in surprising ways, and apply your own unique voice.

The Best Headline Secret You Can Steal Right Now

Find well crafted, professional headlines and steal them. Not literally, but there's nothing wrong with taking a published headline and adapting it to suit your topic.

Go to magazines.com where you will find hundreds of covers. These publications spend huge amounts of time and money on their headlines, because that's what makes people buy them.

Here's my attempt at adapting three headlines from one cover alone.

Great Headline Examples in 2018

Down below three of the top posts published in 2018 on SmartBlogger.com (ranked by total post shares - and I'm talking around 1,000).

One is a list post, one is a 'How To' post, and one is a 'How To' and list post combined. All of them are clear and specific, and all of them tap into readers' desires and use power words to grab their attention.

1. [How to Start a Blog in 2018: New Method That's 20x Faster](#)
2. [The "Quit Your Job" Checklist: 8 Boxes You Must Tick Before Flipping Off Your Boss](#)
3. [5 Things Nobody Tells You About Making Money in Your Underwear](#)

Here are three of the top posts published on Copyblogger.com in 2018, all of which attracted a minimum of 1,000 shares. One is a 'How To' posts, and two are list posts. All are very clear and specific (recognise a pattern here?)

1. [How to Outsmart Writer's Block With Neuroscience](#)
2. [5 Things Only Serious Writers Do](#)
3. [7 Ways to Bring More Artistry to Your Writing](#)

The fundamental purpose of a headline is to get people to read the first sentence of your post because they want to know more.

From there, if you follow all seven rules in this guide, it should be plain sailing on a well-charted course.

Which brings us nicely to Rule #2.



Blogging for Money Special: Top 10 Money Making Secrets

Your Winter Blogging Guide. 12 brilliant ideas for Festive Season posts

10 Simple Blogging Changes That Pay Off Big

Rule#2: Chart Your Course

If you don't know the way, how will you get to your destination?

Write a three-step outline: 1) Tell them what you're going to tell them. 2) Tell them. 3) Tell them what you've just told them.

I know, it's boring advice. You've got your next post brilliantly mapped out in your head, haven't you. All you need to do is sit down and write.

Wrong. Those ideas in your head are just ideas. Once you start to explore them in detail, some of them will start to crumble, others will crack, and some will take you down paths you didn't know existed. A rambling mess.

Think of your outline as an advance party, preparing the way for your main blog post to follow. It should result in a clear map of how to get from your starting point to your destination, with all the stops along the way.

Step 1: Opening: Tell Them What You're going to Tell Them.

So, you've nailed your headline. You know your destination. The first section of your post needs to set the scene by explaining what the journey is all about, what you're going to explore on the way, and how your readers are going to benefit by coming along for the ride. (More about the opening in Rule #4).

Step 2: The Body of Your Post: Tell Them.

This is where you need to flesh out those ideas in your head. Write them all down. A bullet point list of headings or topics will do to start with.

Now take each of those points and write a really brief summary of what you are going to cover under each heading. This is where you'll start to discover some of the flaws and cracks in your ideas.

Keep asking yourself these questions as you go: Does this bullet point deliver on the promise of my headline? Will my readers benefit from the information I'm giving them? Have they heard it all before, or have I found a new and surprising approach to an existing idea.

By now you should have a solid list of summary points you want to expand on in your post, each one adding value to the promise in the headline.

There's just one more step.

Take a look at the order of your points. Do they flow in a logical sequence from one to the other? You wouldn't backtrack or zigzag on a journey, so why do it in a blog post?

Will the transition from these points in your journey be smooth, or will you lose readers as they bump from one disconnected concept to another?

Remember. You need to keep your readers with you as willing travelling companions, so the more you pre-plan for their comfort and enjoyment, the better.

Step 3: The Ending: Tell Them What You've Just Told Them

Your destination is in sight and you've covered your points along the way. Your readers are going to leave enlightened, inspired and educated. There's just time for a farewell wrap up before the journey ends. (More about this in Rule #6)

Your headline is pointing the way to your destination, and your outline is charting your course, with all the stops along the way planned out in a logical sequence. You're almost ready to start writing.

Almost.

First you have to provide a few more incentives for them to stay on track.

Rule#3: Write Cliff-Hanger Subheads To Build Suspense

Keep your readers glued to your post

Think of your favourite book.

You devoured it, didn't you? Until, reluctantly, you reached the last page.

You didn't want it to end. The writer had you hooked from the opening line. You were spellbound. The ending of each chapter delivered such a punch, you just had to keep reading.

You had to know what happened next.

That's exactly what you should be aiming for with your posts. Your readers' undivided attention from beginning to end.

Why Brilliant Writing Just Isn't Enough

Unlike your favourite book, your post is fighting for attention with millions of others at the click of a mouse. Your headline might have hooked your reader, but you want them to last the distance. To stay focused and glued to the page.

Brilliant content is certainly going to help. But even the most compelling writing will fight a losing battle if it's one long chunk of unbroken text.

It's visually overwhelming.

You'll start to lose your reader. Their attention will wander. They'll start scanning, And this is what they're thinking as they're scanning "It looks boring, therefore it is boring."

And then. *Phiff*. They're gone. In a puff of virtual smoke.

You need the equivalent of the cliff-hanger chapter endings from your favourite book. In a post, this job is done by writing killer subheads every five or six paragraphs to re-spark their curiosity and keep them on track.

The Best Subheads Grab Them By The Throat (and Won't Let Go)

Your subheads need to pull your readers along with you - by the throat if necessary - and give them every reason to stay on the page. Make them curious, surprise them, shock them.

Don't use your subhead as a label, don't be boring. Don't write 'Why You Should Use subheads' if your paragraph is about why you should use subheads.

Yawn. *Phiff*.

Be absolutely clear. For example, you could write 'How Killer subheads Can Make or Break Your Post'. See? The intention is clear, but it's still intriguing. You're promising a tangible benefit if your reader sticks with you.

On the flip side, don't try to be so clever no-one understands what you're saying. If your reader can't instantly recognise a benefit. . . .*phiff*. They're gone.

The Simple Guide to Instant Subhead Success

Subheads should form part of your outline. Go back to the last chapter and read Step 2 again. This is where you wrote a list of your ideas as topics with a really brief summary under each.

Think of that summary as a mini post. What is the core message or benefit you're trying to get across in those few paragraphs? Now write a (sub)headline to create curiosity about your mini post.

For example, take this classic Smart Blogger post by Über-blogger, Jon Morrow: [An Open Letter to Bloggers Struggling to Get More Traffic](#). Its subheads are:

1. The Single Most Important Question for Beginning Bloggers
2. The Brutal Truth About Building a Popular Blog
3. The 7 Tests Every Blog Must Pass
4. Are You Depressed Yet?
5. The Good News. . .

Like the examples above, your subheads need to arouse curiosity without being too 'clever' or obscure.

You should aim to make each of them stand-alone, mini-post headlines. Combined, they should act as powerful enticements at the beginning of each 'chapter' and compel your audience to read on.

To go deeper into their journey through your post.

Rule#4: Make Your Audience Putty in Your Hands

Be an empathetic mind-reader

Have you ever read the first few lines of a blog post and said “OMG. This person is a frickin’ mind reader!”

One of my favourite bloggers, [Henneke Duistermaat](#) is a master of this technique, with every one of her posts. Like this one:



Has it happened to you, too?

In your mind, you’ve composed your next article. Perhaps while walking your dog or on your commute. You feel excited, because you know exactly what you want to write, and you think your readers will love it. Yay!

Brimming with enthusiasm, you arrive home. But it’s your turn to cook, and when, after dinner, you finally sit down to write ...

You can’t put your thoughts into words anymore. *Where have your words gone?*

Go on, admit it. You know exactly what she’s talking about, don’t you? It’s called empathy, and when you get it right, your audience will be like putty in your hands.

Why Empathy is the Secret Weapon of the World’s Greatest Bloggers

The definition of empathy is “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another”. And it’s easier said than done. But here’s why you need to persevere and make empathy your #1 priority as a blogger. When you are *genuinely* empathetic, you are able to:

- Motivate and inspire your audience
- Understand their needs, and therefore be better placed to fulfil them
- Predict their actions and reactions
- Build trust and friendships
- Be convincing and persuasive
- Build credibility through relevant and engaging content

And that, in a nutshell, is the core purpose of a blog.

How to Make Your Introduction Ooze with Empathy (and Have Your Audience Begging to Come Along for The Ride)

Rule#4A: Get Your Reader to Nod in Agreement. Imagine you’re chatting with a friend. You’re telling her about a recent experience or encounter. “Oooh, I know!” she exclaims, “That’s exactly how I feel.” You’re both nodding and laughing in that shared moment of familiarity.

And as she’s nodding at you, she says “Go on. . .what happened next?”

That’s what you want to do with your reader. Make them nod in agreement and beg for more.

One of the best ways to do this is to ask them a question that directly targets their biggest struggle. Like this:

“A troubling thought, isn’t it? You’re slaving away at your blog, but you can’t help wondering if you have a shot in hell of getting anyone to read it.”

Once they start nodding, you know they're interested. You've hit a nerve. Expand on the topic a little. Throw in a couple more sentences to show you really know how they feel. Talk to them honestly. Like this:

["What makes you any different from the millions of other bloggers hoping for attention? You're all doing the same stuff. Cranking out posts, messing around on Twitter and Facebook, leaving comments on popular blogs — you know, the usual. But nobody gives a crap. Readers have seen it all before. You're not offering anything new, so why should they hang around?"](#)

Rule#4B: Promise to Show Them The Solution. By now your readers are intrigued. You've summarised their deepest fears like a mind-reader and they want to know what happens next. So tell them.

Tell them about the journey you're about to take, and promise them a solution by the time they reach their destination. Give them the reassurance they are craving, and make them believe you have the answers.

BUT...

Always be authentic and deliver what you promise. Empathy cannot be faked and broken promises are not forgotten.

If you want to win the hearts and minds of your audience and persuade them to come on your blogging journey, you must first convince them you are their best possible travelling companion.

They must be confident that you will guide them with compassion and care, and deliver them safely and happily to their destination.

Rule#5: Make Your Writing Readable

Don't be pretentious or try to sound smart.

The most expeditious manner in which to deter people from your blog is to adopt a euphuistic writing voice in order to appear more insightful than other writers of the same genre.

(*Phiff.* And they're gone. In a puff of virtual smoke.)

Let me put it another way.

The fastest way to make your audience run for the hills is to write like a pompous twat who thinks he's smarter than the average bear.

It's pretentious and stodgy. So don't do it.

What I'm talking about here, my friend, is the *readability* of your blog post.

Don't Use Big Words (But Do Use the Flesch Kincaid Reading Score)

If you've never heard of the Flesch Kincaid Reading Score, you're in for a treat. In its simplest form, it measures the length of your sentences and the syllables in your words, and applies a reading 'ease' score, usually between 0 and 100.

The higher the score, the more readable your content. A score of 60-80 is probably the desirable range for an average blog post.

It then applies the 'grade level' score, which indicates how many years of education someone will need to understand your writing.

Again, there is no absolute right or wrong - and obviously it depends on your niche and audience - but aiming for high school level education (around Grades 8 to 12) is a good benchmark.

The beauty of the Flesch Kincaid Reading Score is that it's built into Word, (or various online sites if you're a Mac user). Here's a great [post](#) that tells you how to use it.

Keep your balance.

If you dumb down your writing too much, you're likely to sound patronizing and boring. On the other hand, if you aim for a highly intellectual audience you're going to be misunderstood and boring.

So you need to find that perfect middle ground where you're an empathetic, engaging, enlightening and entertaining straight-shooter. The 4Es.

No problem, right?

Here's how:

How to keep your writing clear, readable and on track

If you follow these rules, your readers will stay the course, thank you for such an enjoyable journey and look forward to doing it all again:

- **Rule#5A: Use examples to make your meaning even clearer.** Use analogies and real-life examples, and leave no room for confusion. When your writing paints a powerful mental picture, your readers will grasp your meaning faster and retain it more effectively.

- **Rule#5B: Write short sentences. And short paragraphs.** Brevity is a blog writer's friend. Most readers will scan your post, not read it word for word. So long sentences and drawn-out paragraphs force them to slow down and work harder. But they won't. They'll just leave. Aim for 15-20 words per sentence, or less. Cover only one subject in each paragraph. Use lots of bullet points to simplify and summarise your ideas.
- **Rule#5C: Stay active at all times.** Always write in the active voice. You will deliver your message in a clearer and more confident way. Don't say 'For clarity, the blog post was edited by Sam.' Say 'Sam edited the blog post, making it easier to understand.'
- **Rule#5D: Be relevant.** Your reader has come on this journey because you have promised them an outcome they desire. They are trusting you with their time and attention. So respect that trust and stay on point. Deliver your message in a logical sequence, use your subheads as signposts and make sure every sentence adds value to the promise in your headline. This will keep you focused and keep your writing clear.
- **Rule#5E: Be direct.** Imagine your reader as a real person and write as though you are sitting across a table from them. Be conversational and empathetic. Direct your comments to them. Sprinkle your writing with the word 'you', and make their needs the focus of the story. This will help you to stay relevant (see Rule #5D), provide your reader with the answers they are looking for, and present your ideas with clarity and purpose.

So in summary, make your writing readable. Avoid 'big words', complex explanations, bulky paragraphs and hefty sentences.

If you want your reader to travel with you again, their journey should be unforgettable, educational and enjoyable.

Rule#6: Wrap it All up With a Power Packed Ending

Leave your readers wanting to take action

You're on the home run. You've delivered the goods and your readers have enjoyed the journey. Well done!

Now it's time to leave them with a farewell wrap-up, and remind them it's their turn to take the reins.

- **Rule#6A: Summarise your key points.** Remind them why they started this journey with you, and what they hoped to get from it. Summarise the highlights by tapping back in to the fears and desires you identified in your headline and opening, but show them how the journey has resolved some of their questions and anxieties. Leave them feeling inspired and courageous.
- **Rule#6B: Link to Useful Resources.** If you've written another post related to this one, link to it in your wrap-up. Or link to external resources and articles which will add another dimension to your ideas. Give them some added value, and other paths to explore in their quest for knowledge and answers. Be helpful and generous.
- **Rule#6C: Tease them with future enticements.** You want them to join you again, so give them a reason to return to your blog. Think of your favorite TV show. At the end, doesn't it always tell you what's coming up in the next episode? It teases you with cliff-hanging scenes and unmissable action. Give your readers the same enticements to revisit your blog, with the promise of greater knowledge, value and inspiration.
- **Rule#6D: Give them clear directions to take action.** Your reader is about to leave you. Don't let your journey end on a whimper. Give them clear cut instructions on what you expect them to do next. It might be a prompt to subscribe to your blog, share the post, purchase your course, or leave a comment. Or you might simply invite them to take bold steps of their own with the knowledge they have gained along the way.

No one likes long goodbyes, so keep your ending short and sweet, but never final.

Aim for a sentiment that says 'Until next time, my friend. . . because there is so much more I'd love to share with you.'

Rule#7: Edit, Polish Refine and Tweak Be brutal (And Don't Fall in Love With Your Own Writing)

There's nothing worse than a blog post ~~sprinkled~~ sprinkled with spelling mistakes, grammatical errors that make ~~you're~~ your toes curl, and flabby prose filled with unnecessary words ~~that add nothing to the meaning of the sentence.~~

- It's like going on a journey in a car with bad suspension and sticky gears. You may finally get there, but it's an uncomfortable and jarring ride. And one you're unlikely to repeat.

So why would you put your readers through it?

Here's how to proofread and edit like a pro:

- **Rule#7A: Leave it alone for 24 hours.** Once you've finished your post, walk away from it for at least 24 hours. If that's not possible, even a coffee break is better than nothing. This will give you a fresh pair of eyes when you start editing, which will make it easier to spot the errors. Putting some time between the writing and editing process will also help you be more critical and objective. Like any good editor should be.
- **Rule#7B: Look at the big picture.** Before you get too caught up in the detail, review your post from a big picture perspective. Is your introduction too long? Have you over-explained your topic? Does the post deliver on the promise of your headline; or has it become a little lost along the way? Are the paragraphs and subheads in the right place. Does the ending fizzle out in a whimper, or with a solid punch? Does it flow in a persuasive and logical sequence? Does it tell a story with a beginning, middle and end? Try and read it from the perspective of your audience.
- **Rule#7C: Cut the fat!** This is where you start to look ~~more~~ more closely at the detail. Is every word ~~in your post~~ adding value? Are you giving your readers an easy ride ~~as they glide through the paragraphs,~~ or are they ~~constantly~~ wading through stodgy sentences ~~and stumbling over unnecessary words?~~ Be ruthless! Remember, if you make them work too hard. . . *Phiff.* They're gone.
- **Rule#7D: Stay active.** Aim to use an active voice in your writing. That's where the subject is performing the action. So, instead of 'This post was edited by Mark to give it more clarity', try 'Mark edited this post, making clearer to read'. See the difference? Passive sentences tend to be more rambling and awkward, causing your reader to hesitate and stumble over your words. It's not a good look for a blog post.
- **Rule#7E: Don't use spellcheck.** OK. Use spellcheck, but don't rely on it. Read it out loud, and slowly. This will help you to focus on every word and you trawl through looking for those inevitable errors. Here are a few common problems to watch out for:
 - **The same sound, different words:** These are the ones spellcheck won't pick up on. 'There', when you mean 'their', or worse still 'they're'. 'Reign' and 'rein' and so on.
 - **Inconsistencies.** Sometimes there's no right or wrong when it comes to hyphens, capital letters and other elements that make up a word. For example, 'Blogroll', 'blog roll' or 'Blog-roll'. The important thing is to pick one and be consistent. (The same applies to your formatting, fonts, use of bullet, indents image captions and so on.)
 - **Atrocious Apostrophes!** One of my pet hates. There are only two reasons to use an apostrophe: 1) when you need to indicate a possessive, as in '*Linda's* purse was red', or a plural possessive: 'The *girls'* bedroom was a mess', and 2) as a contraction. For example instead of 'here is' you say 'here's'. But you NEVER say '*It's* tongue was red', or '*Apostrophe's* are confusing'!

Editing is the final step in your writing process, and one of the most important. It helps to present your work in the best possible light, and make your readers' journey enjoyable.

It instantly tells people you are a professional writer who respects their audience's time and attention.

And it will make them want to read your next post.



And so, we have arrived at our destination.

Are you feeling entertained and enlightened? Did I manage to hold your attention as we cruised through the chapters? Have I delivered everything you anticipated from the outset?

I hope so. And I hope you'll join me again in future.

Please make sure you take all your personal belongings with you as you leave, and don't forget to sign up for free at thecraftofcopywriting.com for more hot tips and advice to help you on your writing journey.

Until next time, my blogging friend. . . because there is so much more I'd love to share with you.