

Making words work for you

## The Pippin A-Z of Copywriting



Pippin Copywriting specialises in enjoyable B2B copy and content that engages your audience and builds your brand.

It was founded in 2012 by Catherine Every, a B2B copywriter with over 20 years' experience. Catherine wrote this A-Z.

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## Introduction

In 2017, I set myself a challenge: 26 weeks and 26 blog posts to create the Pippin A-Z of Copywriting.

As is so often the case with these things, I successfully completed the challenge and then promptly forgot about it.

Looking back at the entries in 2021, I felt a belated moment of pride at what I'd written. Across the 26 entries there is useful copywriting tips, hard-earned wisdom and practical advice.

It's why I've pulled them all together into this single document.

Thank you for downloading it - I hope you enjoy browsing through the following pages and find something helpful in them. If you'd like to let me know what you thought, I'd love to hear from you - you can email me at [catherine@hellopippin.co.uk](mailto:catherine@hellopippin.co.uk).

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## Audience

It seems somehow apt that the first entry in the Pippin A-Z of Copywriting should be such an important one.

Knowing the type of people who'll be reading what you've written is essential. It will mean you'll be able to write copy that will appeal to them and make sense to them.

One of the best ways to understand your audience is to create an avatar – a virtual person who embodies a typical (or ideal) customer. You need to build up a picture of them in their working life and more generally.

In terms of their working life you should know:

- their job title
- the size of the company they work for
- the industry they're in
- their responsibilities
- the challenges they face
- what motivates them

More generally you should know:

- their gender
- their age
- their location
- their education
- their shopping habits
- their interests

If you're writing marketing copy, you'll be able to create your avatar using what you know about your customers. If you're writing an article for a magazine or journal, its media pack will have all sorts of useful insights you can use to create your avatar.

Once you've created your avatar, give him/her a name and write your copy as if you are writing directly to them. Doing this will give your copy much more personality and life (not to mention make the process easier) because you'll be talking to an individual rather than broadcasting to thousands.

I delve into more depth about customer avatars in my [How to write better copy e-course](#).

## Brief

When you work with a copywriter, they'll need a brief that covers everything they need to know about the project you've asked them to work on. Even if you're writing copy yourself rather than working with a copywriter, it's a good idea to pull together a brief to help guide your thinking as you get to work. It's a good discipline that will give you focus and save you time in the long run.

So what does a brief need to contain? Here are the essentials...

### The format

What do you need writing? Leaflet, article, website, blog? If there are size constraints or word limits, share these too (it's a four page A4 leaflet or a 750 word article, for example).

### The deadline

Does this need to be written for tomorrow or is the deadline in a couple of weeks? (A word to the wise: "a couple of weeks" [or more] is better than "tomorrow". Your copywriter won't thank you if you always need things in a rush - and you'll get a better result when they've had time to get a proper grasp of what's required.)

### The target market

Who is the leaflet / article / website / blog aimed at? Be as specific as you can. "People in the public sector" is good. "People in the communications department of county councils who tend to be female, 30+ and concerned with finding enough hours in the day" is better. (See [Audience.](#))

Your copywriter needs to know this so they can use an appropriate tone of voice. (If you've got examples of things written for the same or similar target audience, it's a good idea to share these too.)

### The aim(s)

What do you need the leaflet / article / website / blog to achieve? Raise awareness? Inform? Entertain? Celebrate? Manage expectations? Highlight an achievement?

And what do you want people to do after reading it? Call? Download something? Buy something?

Your copywriter needs to know all this so they know the approach to take.

### The facts

You can divide the facts into two areas:

#### The background

What does your business or organisation do? How big is it? Who are its customers?

#### The foreground

What information do you need to get across in this specific piece?



Include background information, even if you think it's not directly relevant. The better the understanding your copywriter has of your business and what it offers, the better the result they'll give.

### The competitors

Who are your competitors? What are their web addresses? What are their strengths and weaknesses? This will help your copywriter to understand your market and your place in it better.

### How do you share this information?

However you feel comfortable doing it. If it's easiest to chat things over while your copywriter makes notes, then do that. If you want to put together a formal written brief, then do that instead. Copywriters are great listeners and love reading, so however you want to do it is fine. And if you're writing it yourself you can create a briefing document for yourself or simply mull it over for a few minutes. The most important thing is that you do do it!

## Calls to Action

When you're writing marketing or sales copy, your call to action is right up there amongst the most important things you need to think about. It is the purpose of your writing - what do you want people to do as a result of having read your piece?

- Buy something?
- Download something?
- Sign up for something?
- Sponsor you for something?
- Call you?
- Email you?
- Make an appointment with you?
- Book a place at an event?
- You get the idea...

Some tips about calls to action:

You need to know your call to action before you start writing so you can keep focused on it throughout and lessen the risk of deviating from the subject in hand.

You certainly need to include your call to action at the end of your piece, but you can also include it as many times as you feel it's necessary throughout the copy. This makes it easy for people to stop reading when they've read enough to be convinced about what you're saying.

Your call to action needs to be an imperative - an order. Say 'Make your appointment by calling 01531 248874' rather than 'If you'd like to make an appointment, call 01531 248874.'

You can give it even more strength by saying 'Make your appointment today by calling 01531 248874' or 'Make your appointment now by calling 01531 248874.'

But most important of all, make sure you have one!

## Desire

There's a copywriting acronym: AIDA. It stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action and it covers the four things you need to make sure your writing evokes. We'll cover Attention when we get to H (headlines) and Interest when we get to I. We covered Action in [Calls to Action](#). And we'll cover Desire now.

Desire is all about making your reader want what it is you want to sell. Because when people want something, they're much more likely to go out and get it willingly. Note here that want and need are two different things.

For example, people don't need to get a cat but they do want to get one.

On the other hand, no one wants to get car insurance but everyone needs to get it.

If your product or service is one that people want rather than need, your job is in some senses slightly easier. You need to build on your reader's sense that they can't live without what you're selling and paint a picture of how much their life will be enhanced. This is why cat adoption centres feature plenty of photos of gorgeous cats to remind you how much you want one in your life.

If your product is one that people need rather than want, your copy needs to paint a picture of how you can solve their problem and how much easier their life will be once they've invested in what you're selling. This is why car insurance companies stress how you'll have peace of mind in the event of a problem rather than simply telling you it's illegal not to have it.

The other way to create desire is to give what you're selling scarcity - no one wants to feel as if they might be missing out. Give a deadline for a special offer. Offer a free extra for the first people to place an order. Tell people the price is going up after a certain date (and then put it up, of course). Remind people your product or service is the best on the market. You get the idea.

Once you've created desire, you're much more likely to secure a sale.

## Erudition

Every so often I see someone post a graphic on Facebook / Twitter / Instagram that gives flowery alternatives to commonly used words to help jazz up your writing. You've probably seen something similar - [there's an example here](#).

**erudite** ► adjective LEARNED, scholarly, educated, knowledgeable, well read, well informed, intellectual; intelligent, clever, academic, literary; bookish, highbrow, cerebral; *informal* brainy; *dated* lettered.  
-OPPOSITES ignorant.

Now, I love words as much as the next copywriter so I love seeing the richness of the English language displayed like this. But - and it's a big but - I do wonder whether those lists do more harm than good.

The job of a copywriter is to get the message across simply and clearly. Sometimes, flowery language is too distracting and just gets in the way. And if you're worrying about whether your individual words are interesting enough you may be forgetting to worry about the bigger picture - whether your overall message is interesting enough

The simple truth is that effectiveness is more important than erudition in copywriting. Don't feel the need to use fancy language just for the sake of it. And if in doubt, follow George Orwell's advice: never use a long word where a short one will do.

## Features

Or to be more precise, features and benefits.

Think of features as the essential but essentially dull facts about your product or service and the benefit as the thing that makes the features interesting or useful.

Featuring features alone is unlikely to help you make a sale because it's the benefits that bring them to life and persuades your audience they want to buy whatever it is you have.

Here are some examples of features:

*We were established in 1975*  
*We have our own fleet of trucks*  
*We use innovative production processes*

And here are the benefits that could sit alongside them to bring them to life

*We were established in 1975 so you can trust us to know what we're doing*  
*We have our own fleet of trucks so you can be sure your order will arrive on time not be subject to the whims of a third party delivery company*  
*We use innovative production processes to cut down production times and make savings we can pass on to you*

Let's take some real life examples. Here's an extract from some copy selling an HD television on the Currys website (it's no longer on the website, unfortunately, otherwise I'd give you the link so you could see it in context):

*With Full HD 1920 x 1080p resolution ...*

Now, if the writer had stopped there, your response would probably be, "So what?". But they didn't. The sentence carries on:

*... you'll be able to catch your favourite programmes in crisp detail and vivid colours for a completely immersive televisual experience.*

And so you think, "Wow - that sounds cool - I want one of those."

And here's another example from Dulux:

*Dulux Trade Flat Matt Light & Space uses revolutionary Lumitec technology...*

To which you think, "OK, whatever." But then you read the rest of the sentence:

*...Dulux Trade Flat Matt Light & Space uses revolutionary Lumitec technology that helps reflect up to twice as much light around the room, making even the smallest rooms look and feel more spacious compared to our conventional emulsion paints...*

And you think - "Great - that sounds amazing - that would be perfect for my dark downstairs loo."

The simple rule of thumb is if you've written anything to which the reader's response could reasonably be, "So what?" you've just written a feature. If the response is "Ooh - I need that" you've got the benefit.

And if you'd like a formula to help you construct the benefit, try this one:

*[feature], which means that [benefit]*

Focusing on the feature means your reader has to work hard to understand why something is important (and, let's be honest, they probably can't be bothered to work hard). Focusing on the benefit makes it easy for your reader to understand why they need what you're selling (meaning you're more likely to make the sale).

## Grammar

Now, when it comes to grammar, there are two types of rule: good rules and bad rules.

The good rules are the basics: it really does matter where you put the apostrophe, the comma, the bracket and so on. For example, “We value our customer’s opinions” means something completely different to “We value our customers’ opinions”. (The first refers to a single customer and therefore implies you only have one customer; the second refers to multiple customers, which is an infinitely preferable state of affairs.)

If you’d like to get a better grip on the basics I highly recommend Lynn Truss’s [Eats Shoots and Leaves](#).

But there are lots of rules we were often taught at school that aren’t actually rules - these are bad rules.

For example, it’s perfectly OK to start a sentence with ‘and’, despite what some people might think. Similarly, many people believe you can’t split an infinitive (although ‘to boldly go’ proves them wrong). It’s also true that grammar fashions change over time ([there’s more on this here](#)).

Now, you can take two approaches to bad rules and fashion rules when you’re writing copy. The first approach is to proceed with right on your side and cheerfully start sentences with ‘and’ and split infinitives all over the place.

However, you need to bear in mind that your writing will make certain types of reader shudder.

And if you think the bulk of your readers will be people like this it’s ultimately unhelpful to alarm them, even if you know right is on your side. The last thing you want is for your readers to be tutting about what they perceive to be your slack use of the English language because it means they won’t be focusing on the thing you want them to focus on.

My advice - get the basics right, it’s vital. But when it comes to matters of style, let your readers be your guide. If they wouldn’t do it, neither should you.

## Headlines

The headline is the single most important line of text in your entire piece of copy. Why? Because if it doesn't make people want to read on, they won't. And then the rest of your lovingly-crafted copy will go to waste.

So, what does a good headline look like?

Well, if you're selling something, invariably the best headline captures the biggest benefit of what you're selling. You can phrase it in several ways:

- As an invitation: Find out how I can help you get more sales
- As a closed (yes or no) question: Would you like to get more sales?
- As a solution to a problem: Here's how to get better results from your marketing

Other ideas for headlines you might like to consider are:

- an update to a product
- a special offer
- a piece of news (although it needs to be of genuine interest and relevance to your readers)
- a shocking or surprising fact
- a request for help
- a testimonial

Some people like to write their headline first. Others prefer to wait until the end and they've immersed themselves in what they're saying. Neither way is better than the other, it's simply which works better for you. (I come up with a headline first and then invariably rework it once I've finished writing the rest of the piece.)

## Interest

There's a copywriting acronym: AIDA. It stands for Attention, Interest, Desire and Action and it covers the four things you need to make sure your writing evokes. We covered Attention with H ([Headlines](#)), [Desire with D](#) and Action in [Calls to Action](#). And we'll cover Interest now.

Interest goes hand in hand with Desire. Interest is what makes what you're selling relevant to your reader and therefore keeps them reading while Desire is what tips them from being merely interested to being ready to buy. Together, they form the main body of whatever you're writing.

So how do you evoke interest?

Well, in essence it's by answering the only question they're interested in - what's in it for me - by building up a picture that shows how well you understand their specific problem and why you're best placed to solve it. It means giving them factual information, scenarios they can relate to, concerns they may not yet have considered, your experience and anything else you can think of to build your argument and your reader's faith in your ability to solve the specific problem in question.

## Jargon

Firstly, a quick definition of jargon: it's the words / phrases / abbreviations / acronyms we all use when we're talking about our work. I'd extend it to include words and phrases designed to make the simple seem more complicated and fancy than it is (think words like leverage, learnings and low hanging fruit).

Does jargon have a place in copywriting?

As with all things, it depends on the audience.

If you're writing to fellow staff members in your company update, it's fine to use the acronym for a particular process - you'll all understand it. On the other hand, if you're writing a guide for new starters, you'll need to explain it.

If you're writing a piece for an industry journal you want to avoid the in-house acronym but using the industry-wide shorthand for something is fine - readers will understand. On the other hand, if you're writing a piece for people thinking about entering the industry, you'll want to avoid it.

If you're writing for the general public, you'll need to avoid - or explain - all the jargon you'd usually use.

I think it also depends on the setting. Is your use of jargon or overly formal language getting in the way of getting your message across?

For example, in your company's energy efficiency action plan you might say you 'encourage staff to undertake small energy efficiency measures in order to minimise the company's energy usage and environmental footprint.' But the notice on the kitchen might say 'Get your cup of tea faster and save the planet at the same time - only boil as much water as you need!'

The takeaway message: as always, take a moment to think about your readers.

## Keywords

The holy grail of every website page is to be at the top of the Google rankings. Lots of factors go to make up Google's decision about where a page ranks. But one of the most important is keywords. These are the words that people use when they're searching for something and you need to make sure you're using them in your content. (After all, how will Google know that your page is about red balloons if you don't mention red balloons?)

If you'd like to know how to find your keywords, you might like [this blog I wrote for Rigorous Digital](#) a little while ago.

But perhaps the most important thing to remember when it comes to keywords is quality not quantity.

This means you should focus on 'long tail' keywords and phrases. That is, key phrases that are longer and more specific. There are two reasons for this.

The first is competition - the more specific your key phrase is, the fewer people will be trying to rank on it. This means there's less competition and you're more likely to be number one. (Think 'red flower shaped balloons for weddings' rather than 'balloons'.)

The second is quality. If you put an enormous amount of effort into getting to number one for 'balloons' you'll get lots and lots of traffic but most of those people won't end up buying from you because they are looking for hot air balloons, chimney balloons and a thousand and one other types of balloon. On the other hand, if you put in an awful lot less effort to rank number one for 'red flower shaped balloons for weddings' you won't get anywhere near as much traffic but the people who do come are absolutely looking for what it is you sell.

## Listening

When I get to the end of a discussion with a client, I consider it to have been successful if I've finished my coffee while my client has barely touched theirs.

Why?

Because it means that my client has done most of the talking and that's a good thing.

It's a good thing because I've made them feel comfortable enough to share insights into their business. And while I've steered the conversation to make sure I've got what I need and asked relevant questions when necessary, I've also avoided putting words into their mouth or attempting to second guess anything. By the end of the conversation I have unfiltered, unbiased insights into:

- their business, what it's all about and why it's different to their competitors'
- what the copy needs to achieve or the problem it needs to solve
- the way they speak and phrase things so that, where appropriate, I can reflect this in the copy I write.

The same thing applies in a discussion with a client's customer. When they've done most of the talking it means they've shared lots of valuable information about the real reasons for choosing my client's product or service and given me plenty in interesting insights I would never have got from a conversation with my client alone.

So the next time you're writing a piece of copy, remember that being a good listener is one of the most important skills a copywriter can have.



## Maslen

There are thousands of books on copywriting out there. Every copywriter will have their favourite copywriting book or copywriting author - the one they'd recommend above all others.

For me, it's Andy Maslen.

His [books on copywriting](#) are masterclasses in the skill.

His training is practical and punchy (I know this from first-hand experience because I attended a workshop of his earlier this year).

His [copywriting agency](#) writes for some of the country's biggest names.

In other words, he's my copywriting hero and if you want to take your copywriting knowledge further, he'd be my number one recommendation.

## Natural

My definition of natural touches on what copywriters call 'tone of voice'. It's an elusive thing to describe but in essence it's about sounding natural – sounding like you or your business. When you sound like you, people are more likely to trust you, interact with you and – ultimately – buy from you.

Tone of voice is what makes [Innocent](#) sound like Innocent and [Ronseal](#) sound like Ronseal.

On the other hand, have you ever read a piece of copy and thought, that doesn't sound like I'd expect that business to sound? (I was uncomfortable about [TSB's tone of voice](#) back in 2014 and I'm still not happy about it now.)

So how do you find the tone of voice for your business?

It's a complex area that I won't try to do justice to in a single blog post, but in essence, it comes out of a combination of looking at your business and looking at your customers.

Ask yourself what makes your business unique, what it stands for (simplicity? excitement? service?) and the culture you have (friendly? formal? fun?).

Then [ask yourself about your customer](#) and work out how the way you see your business fits together with the way your customer and what they want to see your business. (For example, no one wants a courier company to be quirky and fun first and foremost, they want it to be reliable first and foremost and if it's quirky and fun too, then that's OK).

And somewhere in the middle of you and your customer is the tone of voice that's right for you.

If you're interested in finding out more about tone of voice, [this article is a great read](#).

## Online

When you are writing copy for the web, all the usual copywriting rules apply plus a few more. Here they are.

### Rule 1: make it easy to read

It's much harder to read something on a screen than it is on paper. This means you have to adapt your writing style to cater for this. So:

- Use short sentences and short paragraphs.
- Break up your content with headings.
- Use bulleted lists rather than listing things out in sentence form.

If you want to see how much difference reading on a screen makes to reading on paper, try this. [Read this page on the BBC News website](#). Now print it out and read it again. Can you see how different it feels? What seemed crisp and clear on the screen looks abrupt and jerky on the page. That's how different the experience is.

### Rule 2: remember what makes the web different

When you write a leaflet, an article or a letter, you expect your readers to read in a linear way. That is, they'll start at the beginning and read through to the end. It means you need to introduce ideas and information in a logical way otherwise your readers will get confused.

On the web, all bets are off. Readers might arrive at your homepage. Or they might not. This has advantages and disadvantages.

It means each page of your website needs to make sense as a standalone piece of text as well as a bigger whole, which can be a tricky thing to do. And you need to make sure the bigger whole is structured logically so people will be able to see easily where to go if they want to find something out.

But you can use the format to your advantage too. It means you can (and should) include links to other pages on your website whenever you can. This will encourage people to explore your website and engage with it for longer.

### Rule 3: the call to action is as important as ever

The aim of your website is to get people to get in touch with you. Once they've made contact you've got a valuable lead you can build a relationship with and turn into a client. Until they make contact with you, they're just a statistic.

Make sure you are encouraging your visitors to engage with you on every page by including a call to action. This might be as simple as just adding a link to your contact page or suggesting they get in touch to discuss their requirements. It might be to get them to sign up to your newsletter, download a



useful document (in exchange for their email address) or start to follow your blog. Or if you've got an online shop, it might be to get them to buy something.

If you'd like to find out more about the art of writing for the web, you might like my e-course, [How to write good web copy](#).

## Punctuation

Punctuation, like spelling, is a tool of the copywriting trade. It's important you pay attention to the rules if you want to get your message across. Why?

- Because it can radically change the meaning of what you're trying to say. For example, saying 'our customer's opinions are important to us' reveals your business isn't very successful (because the position of the apostrophe means you're talking about a single customer not many customers).
- Because people (like me) worry about punctuation errors. When a business puts out information that's poorly punctuated, the poor punctuation in itself won't affect their ability to do a good job - knowing how to use brackets is important for my work; it's less so for a florist, a plumber, a double glazing salesman etc. On the other hand, the fact they haven't checked (or had checked) what they're putting out there could suggest they don't really care - and that attitude does affect their ability to do a good job.

Having said all that, it's worth bearing in mind that:

- punctuation rules change over time, so what some people regard as wrong could simply be a matter of fashions changing. For example, commas used to be a lot more prevalent than they are now.
- and following on from that, while there are a few hard and fast rules about punctuation it's important to get right to avoid being judged, many are fluid, debatable and obscure to the point of not needing to be worried about in most instances.

My advice?

- If you'd like to brush up on your punctuation, [Eats Shoots and Leaves](#) is a great place to start.
- If you know punctuation isn't your strong point, ask someone else (who's better at it than you) to check over anything you write for publication, just to be on the safe side.

## Questions

Questions are a great tool for copywriters. Why? Because they make your reader interact with what you've written rather than passively absorbing it. In doing so, they become an active participant and more engaged. It means they're more likely to read on and - ultimately - to buy from you.

Here are two types of question you can use in your copy.

Open questions that evoke curiosity

These are great for headlines because they're encouraging your reader to read on.

*[How does your Christmas compare to everyone else's?](#)*

*[What does your country eat on Christmas Day?](#)*

The only thing to bear in mind is that you must answer the question in your copy, otherwise you're open to accusations of [clickbait](#).

Closed questions you can only answer yes or no to

These are a great way to separate your readers into people who will be interested and will want to read on and people who won't and therefore don't need to.

*[Want to talk about it?](#)*

*[Fancy a job?](#)*

A word of warning: make sure the answer you want is obvious. You want there to be only two possible answers: yes or no. 'I don't know' or 'I'm not sure' will lead your reader down a completely different train of thought where they're more focused on thinking about their answer to your question than what you're trying to say to them.

## Relevancy

The worst thing for any piece of writing is for it to be boring. Why? Because readers will switch off and stop reading and you won't have succeeded in getting your point across.

So how do you avoid being boring?

One of the most important tricks is to make sure what you're writing is relevant to the topic you're covering.

And how do you avoid doing that?

Here's an extract from a blog I wrote a little while ago that talks you through writing an article. It gives you the tools you need to stay relevant no matter what you're writing.

### Brainstorm the content

Once you've got the subject matter sorted, brainstorm everything you could talk about in relation to it. Don't worry about filtering information at this stage, just make sure you've covered everything.

### Organise the content

Once you've brainstormed the content, now's the time to organise and filter it. You need to arrange your points in an order that:

- coherently cover the subject matter you're writing about
- will make sense to a reader who will be reading the article without all the background information about your business, your subject and your particular take on it that you have.

You're likely to find at this stage that some of your brainstormed ideas won't have a logical place in the final cut. That's fine. Leave them out.

### Do the maths if you need to

Next you need to do a bit of maths if you've got a word count to stick to or space considerations to take into account.

Divide the number of points you want to make by the number of words you're allowed in the article (don't forget to allow space for an introduction, a conclusion and some linking text between points). Are the numbers realistic? If yes, great. If not, then there are two things to ask yourself. Are you covering your chosen subject in too much detail? If so, then go back and cut down the number of points you want to make. If you aren't covering your chosen subject in too much detail then ask yourself if your subject matter is too broad or too complex to be suitable for this length of article. If that's the case, then it's time to go back to the drawing board to look at your subject matter.



### Write the content

Once you've sorted out the subject you want to write about, the points you want to make, the order you want to make them in and the approximate number of words you've got for each of them, you've basically cracked your article, so it's time to get writing.

Good luck!

## Speaking Aloud

Here's a good tip for finding out:

- if your writing is easy to read
- if your writing sounds like you
- if you've put together a coherent piece.

What do you need to do?

Simply read your writing aloud.

It will show you:

- if your sentences are too long and convoluted
- if your sentences are too samey - [this explains why it's important they're not](#)
- give you a sense of what you need to change if it doesn't sound like you
- any gaps in your logic and thinking
- any restructuring or re-ordering you need to do.

So it's a great thing to do. You might want to find an empty room first, though...

## Testimonials

A quick thought on testimonials: use them.

Some longer thoughts on testimonials...

Testimonials are important because they back up what your copy has told them about how good you are. (Equally, if you're naturally reticent, they're a great way to share how good you are without having to say so yourself.)

They provide valuable reassurance to potential clients that you've got credibility, whatever that means to them. Some clients might want the reassurance that you've worked with some big names. Other clients might want the reassurance that you've worked with businesses or people like them in the past so you're more likely to understand the challenges they face.

When you're using testimonials, I recommend using them alongside the rest of the copy rather than in a separate section or page. This is because they will be doing their work subliminally rather than requiring people to actively seek them out.

My other tip would be to use all the attribution you can. In the case of B2B testimonials, a person's name, job title and company name has real impact. Using their initials or simply leaving it anonymous much less so.

But in summary, when it comes to testimonials: use them.

## USP

USP can stand for a couple of things: Unique Selling Point or Unique Selling Proposition.

However, whichever option you choose, what we mean by USP is always the same thing. It's the thing that you do differently or better than your competitors. It's the thing that makes you stand out. In other words, it's the reason people should choose to work with your business rather than your competitor down the road.

You can use your USP as your strapline. You can use it to inform any business decision you make whether it's minor or major. You can use it to inform the culture in your business. You can bear it in mind in everything you write so you know you're always communicating what makes you different.

So how do you find your USP?

Here's a (very) quick guide.

- As always, start with your target customer (by which I mean your [perfect customer](#))
- Understand what your target customer needs from what you provide (you'll need to think not only about what you deliver but the way you deliver it)
- Look at how your competitors fulfil what your target customer needs
- Find the things you do that your target customer needs but your competitors don't deliver
- Decide which of these things is the most important to your target customer

For example...

My target customer is the person who makes marketing/copywriting decisions in a technical or professional business. The business is great at what it does but it struggles to convey this effectively.

My target market needs a copywriter who can:

- get the job done well (they recognise they don't have the skills they need to do justice to the quality of work their business provides)
- get the job done (they don't have time to write copy)
- grasp complicated concepts quickly (they're happy to support the copywriting process but on the other hand they don't want to spend hours explaining something)
- be easy to work with by delivering copy when they said they would, giving fixed prices for work and generally being nice to be around (no one likes working with divas or uncertainty)
- add more value by being able to liaise with designers to make sure copy and design work well together / speak to customers to get input for case studies / etc (a whole service that gets the copy working rather than lurking as an attachment in an inbox waiting for someone else to have time to take it to the next stage)

My assessment of the market is that my difference is, in descending order of importance and scarcity:



- my ability to make subjects that could be dry or technical sound interesting and understandable
- my enthusiasm and willingness to take on technical or professional subjects that other copywriters might find boring
- my general easiness to work with

So my USP can be variously expressed as:

- I make the words you use as good as the solution you sell
- I make the complex clear and the clunky compelling
- I specialise in working with professional and technical businesses and organisations that need to convey complex concepts clearly
- I write B2B content your audience wants to read

So there you have it.

## Value

Many people's view of copywriting as a service is bafflement. Why pay someone to write some sentences when you're perfectly capable of writing some sentences yourself? It's a view I have some sympathy with. After all, the overwhelming majority of people (99% of the UK population according to a quick check on Google) can indeed write some sentences.

But.

If you want to understand the value of copywriting, here are three disparate thoughts.

Yes, most people can write some sentences. But will those sentences do the job you want them to do? Whether it's to sell, to persuade, to influence, to encourage, to entertain, to inform or many of the other things good writing can do, surely it's better to leave it to someone who knows the words they use will get the desired reaction?

And yes, most people can write some sentences. But unless it's their job to write them, the very fact of doing so is taking them away from the work they're supposed to be doing, may well be better suited to their skills and will earn their company more money more quickly.

An oft-quoted anecdote about value. A vital machine in a factory breaks down and production grinds to a halt. The manager calls the engineer who duly arrives. She looks at the machine for a moment then replaces a washer. The machine judders back to life and production resumes. When the engineer's invoice arrives, it's for £5,001. The manager calls the engineer and sputters: "£5,001? You were only here five minutes! How can you justify that?" And she replies: "Well, it was £1.00 for the washer and £5,000 for the 20 years of training and experience that meant I knew exactly what to do to get you back up and running first time."

## Why?

The only question your copy needs to answer is the only question your reader really cares about: what's in it for me? In other words, why should your reader buy it, why should they do what you're asking them to do, why should they care?

You answer this question by focusing on the benefit not the feature. Think of the feature as the thing and the benefit as the thing that means the thing is good to have.

Here's an extract from some copy selling an HD television on the Currys website (it's no longer on the website, unfortunately, otherwise I'd give you the link so you could see it in context):

*With Full HD 1920 x 1080p resolution ...*

Now, if the writer had stopped there, your response would probably be, "So what?". But they didn't. The sentence carries on:

*... you'll be able to catch your favourite programmes in crisp detail and vivid colours for a completely immersive televisual experience.*

And so you think, "Wow - that sounds cool - I want one of those."

Here's another example from the same product:

*Boasting 100 Hz BLB technology ...*

To which you think, "OK, whatever." But then you read the rest of the sentence:

*...the [TV] will ensure smooth on-screen motion with reduced motion blur and great picture clarity, even if you are watching fast paced action movies or sport.*

And you think - "Great - that sounds amazing - I want one." (What's interesting, if you think back to the very first entry in this series - [Audience](#) - is to think about the sort of person Currys is aiming at with this text. Stereotypically, something makes me think they may think it's the male of the household who makes the tech purchase decisions...)

The simple rule of thumb is if you've written anything to which the reader's response could be, "So what?" you've just written a feature. If the response is "Ooh - I need that" you've got the benefit.

In short, focusing on the feature means your reader has to work hard to understand why something is important (and, let's be honest, they probably can't be bothered to work hard). Focusing on the benefit makes it easy for your reader to understand why they need what you're selling (meaning you're more likely to make the sale).

## Xanadu

(Have you any idea how hard it is to think of a copywriting term that begins with X? Well, let me tell you, it's impossible. Which is why in my A-Z it stands for Xanadu. But bear with me - I'll make it relevant, I promise.)

The OED describes Xanadu as 'an imaginary wonderful place'.

When it comes to copywriting, it's easy to get sucked into a vortex of self-doubt and insecurity trying to write perfect copy.

But, just like Xanadu, the concept of perfect copy is imaginary.

There's only good copy and bad copy. Good copy works. Bad copy doesn't.

So don't waste time trying to write perfect copy. If you find yourself tinkering endlessly in pursuit of perfection, remember this: it's better to get it out there doing something. Because I can tell you one thing for certain: when it's languishing on your computer it isn't doing anything and it's the very definition of bad copy.

## You

There's a very quick test you can carry out to find out whether your marketing copy is likely to appeal to your readers.

Count the number of times you say 'you' (or its variations) and how many times you say 'we' or 'I' (or their variations). You should be saying 'you' far more often than you say 'we'.

Why?

Because people aren't interested in you. They're interested in what you can do for them.

Think about it another way.

Imagine you're at a party talking to two people you haven't met before. The first person talks at you, telling you all about how amazing they are and what exciting things they get up to. You can hardly get a word in edgeways and they're not really interested in anything you have to say. The second person talks to you and is interested in what you have to say. Yes, they tell you about themselves, but only in a way that relevant to you and the conversation you're having.

Which person are you going to warm to, want to stay in touch with and comment to other people on how nice they seemed?

That's the difference between using 'we' and using 'you' in your marketing. When you use 'we' you're the person at the party who only talks about themselves and comes across as an insufferable bore. When you use 'you' you're the person at the party who's interested in the person they're talking to and comes across as much more engaging.

## Zip

There are two types of writing in the world: writing that's a pleasure to read and writing that's a chore. Writing that zips along and writing that makes you want to go zzzzzzz....

No matter what it is you're writing, you want it to be a pleasure to read. Because the more enjoyable it is to read, the better the reaction you'll get.

So how do you make your writing a pleasure to read?

Well, if you've been reading this A-Z guide, you already know a lot of them. Let's recap them here - and add some extra ideas just to keep you reading...

- Write as if you're speaking to an individual not broadcasting to a crowd
- Put yourself in your reader's shoes and tell them the things they'll want to know
- Ask questions to keep your reader engaged with what you're saying
- Focus on the benefits of anything you're selling so your reader can see why they need it.

These are all very much practical tips. There are also some style tools you can use.

Try varying the sentence length to keep things interesting. [Gary Provost](#) puts it best:

*This sentence has five words. Here are five more words. Five-word sentences are fine. But several together become monotonous. Listen to what is happening. The writing is getting boring. The sound of it drones. It's like a stuck record. The ear demands some variety. Now listen. I vary the sentence length, and I create music. Music. The writing sings. It has a pleasant rhythm, a lilt, a harmony. I use short sentences. And I use sentences of medium length. And sometimes when I am certain the reader is rested, I will engage him with a sentence of considerable length, a sentence that burns with energy and builds with all the impetus of a crescendo, the roll of the drums, the crash of the cymbals - sounds that say listen to this, it is important.*

*So write with a combination of short, medium, and long sentences. Create a sound that pleases the reader's ear. Don't just write words. Write music.*

And finally, remember that if you aren't excited by what you're writing, why should your reader be excited about reading it? So get excited about what you're writing - your excitement will transfer itself to the words you write.