

7 Sure-Fire Ways to Write a Great Headline

By Kathy Jentz

Have you ever finished an article and then been stumped as to how to title it? Whether you are writing a headline for a new blog post or your company newsletter, the basic principles of good headline writing will help you capture and pull-in readers.

1. **Don't mislead.** Sure the Internet is filled with companies that make their living off of click-bait headlines such as "You Won't Believe Miley Cyrus's Youthful Secret" only to be sucked into watching a diaper commercial, don't be tempted to join them. People are growing weary of these game players and will soon tire of them and stop clicking on this garbage. They are the online equivalent of the *Weekly World News* and you don't want to be associated with that.
2. **Use lists and numbers.** Everyone is time-crunched these days -- especially those of us in the horticultural fields! A headline giving a numbered list tells the reader you are going to get right to the point and your story will be quick and easy to read. Who doesn't love that these days? Almost anything can be broken down into a list with just a little thought from: "Top 3 Ways to Bale and Store Hay" to "Our Staff's 8 Favorite Ways to Help You Grow Better Plants."
3. **Make it a how-to.** Everyone loves to learn a simple DIY process. Chances are any online story you write can be reframed as a how-to. Instead of: "Growing Drought-Tolerant Herbs" try: "How to Grow Drought-Tolerant Herbs" or "How to be a Save Water and Still Grow Great Herbs."
4. **Ask a question.** A provocative question is always attention-getting; be sure your article actually answers it well. Some good examples include, "Who are the Green Industry Leaders Worth Knowing?" or "Do You Still Use the Same Old Propagation Techniques?"
5. **Give a testimonial.** This is a declarative statement that describes what you are going to let the readers know from your own experience. For example, "I Used to Waste Hours Every Day with Inventory Software. No More!" or "This is the First Thing I Check on Every Morning."
6. **Command your reader.** These are the most basic of headlines and they have their place. Anything from "Don't Miss Out on this Limited-Time Offer" to "Trust Us with Your Seedling Plugs." You are putting it right out there and the reader knows exactly whether your blog post or newsletter article is something they want to read or not.
7. **Share a secret.** Everyone loves to be in-the-know. Promise them a secret in the headline. For example, "Little Known Ways to Save on Greenhouse Energy Bills" or "The Secret of Success with Heirloom Roses." Heck, I want to read those articles right now, don't you?

Headline writing skills only get better with practice and it always helps to brainstorm with some staff members or friends to try a few different ones to get your creative juices flowing. Next time you post to Facebook or write a Tweet, think about shaping it as a headline using one of the above techniques and I bet you see increased engagement and response for your efforts.

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CAPTIVATING CAPTIONS

GWA Buffalo - 2017

with Mary-Kate Mackey



**A picture's worth a thousand words.
So why do we need captions?**

Captions:

Hook readers – Entryway into text

Provide information – Plant names, combinations, design rules, etc.

Identify 5 w's + h

Illustrate story points

Show details readers might overlook

Add to the narrative

Examples:

Hook – Random Acts of Flowers delivers

Information – When daffodils finish blooming, don't cut back their leaves. Bulb plants need the foliage to build new flowers for next spring. (Beth Botts)

5 w's + h – A colorized postcard c. 1945 depicts a profusion of blooms in the rose garden at Gervin Gardens, in Fernandina Beach, Florida (Archives of American Gardens, Garden Club of America Collection)

Illustration – Not dead yet. A banana shrub (*Michelia figo*) returns after a devastating ice storm.

Details – A unique method of hanging pots (Roger Marshall)

Additional narrative – Evan and Suzie make time for a board game with Elliot at a small square table—the most versatile piece of furniture in their garden. It provides extra space for Elliot's Lego constructions or as a sideboard buffet. It's also the mate to the family's rectangular dining table. Placed at the end of that table, the additional square extends dinner party seating to a generous 12.

Exercise – Cap This!

Questions? Observations? Contact me: marykatemackey@gmail.com

Check out my newest book—*Write Better Right Now-A reluctant writer's guide to confident communication and self-assured style* (Career Press)