



## A copywriting guide for beginners

First things first: copywriting is not an art form, it is a skill. For marketing copywriters, every project has an objective – it takes a structured approach to achieve one.

Ensuring your marketing materials speak a thousand words (whilst using only a select few) requires logical thought and careful planning; not to mention a thorough fact find. And that's all before a single word is written!

The content and style are usually defined by the company and its brand values – so make sure you understand them. Copywriters have a job to do, and need to adapt to suit different audiences and mediums. You may work for one company, but you'll still need to reflect their house style. One thing is for certain, copywriting is a lot like work. Unlike creative writers, your aim is simple – to make every word sell.

The brief is vital. Encapsulating USPs and marketing messages on paper can be difficult, if not impossible, without a complete brief up front. One misunderstood jargon filled phrase and the copy is destined to fail. A copywriter needs to get to the heart of the message; to really understand the detail, before they can write the all important words. No jargon. No technical tongue twisters. Just simple, *compelling* sales messages.

Got the brief nailed? Hey presto! Writing is easy with a clear brief, however clients invariably have comments – and as the old saying goes, 'the customer is always right'. If your client doesn't like it, get rid. If you don't, they will; or worse, they'll find another (less sensitive) copywriter for the job.

So stay cool, go back to your brief and write something else instead. If you're struggling, pick out a few key words from your brief and spend two minutes writing down everything you associate with them. You'll be surprised how many great phrases you'll come up with.

Writing clear marketing copy isn't usually about intricate language, or flowing complex and compound sentences; but it *is* about listening. Copywriters need to be able to follow a brief and approach it in a logical manner. And, it can be rewarding and (believe it or not) fun too if you follow these few simple rules:



## The copywriter's commandments

1. Your duty is to the client you write for.
2. Find out as much as possible about the subject and the target audience – *before* writing a word.
3. Listen to the brief: not just to what is being said, but to what isn't being said too.
4. Probe and question right down to the nitty gritty.
5. Know the distinctions between each medium – web pages, brochures, direct mail etc. – and adapt accordingly.
6. Write with the reader in mind.
7. Focus on benefits, what's in it for them (the reader).
8. Be consistent – there is nothing more distracting (to some) than text containing grammatical or spelling inconsistencies.
9. Keep it focused. Keep it punchy. No one wants to trawl through four sides of A4 to find the point.
10. Proofread everything. Diligently.