

# 52 **Headline Hacks**

A “Cheat Sheet” for Writing Blog Posts  
That Go Viral

by Jon Morrow

Copyright© 2010-2012

# In Defense of Stealing

## An Introduction

In college, an English professor said something that changed my life.

"The best writers are the best thieves," he said. "Shakespeare stole his plots from Greek and Roman plays. Thomas Jefferson practically plagiarized the Declaration of Independence from John Locke. Oscar Wilde stole from... well... everyone. And so should you."

I was stunned. From kindergarten on up, we're all taught that stealing the ideas of others is wrong, and we are threatened with everything from failing grades to expulsion from school for doing it.

Yet, here was a college professor (with tenure, I'm sure), telling everyone that the key to great writing is blatant and unrepentant theft. And I had to admit, he had some pretty solid examples.

"Can it possibly be true?" I thought. "Could I really be hurting my writing by trying to be original?"

My answer, three years later, as a professional writer and Associate Editor of one of the most popular blogs in the world:

Yup.

## **The truth about being a "serious" writer**

One of the worst ways you can torture yourself as a writer is to believe everything you do has to be original. Yes, it's possible, but you'll get comparatively little done, and the continuous pressure will give you a nervous breakdown.

It's far, *far* better to steal. No, you shouldn't violate copyrights or willfully claim someone else's work as your own, but the writers who make it in this business -- and yes, writing *is* a business -- are the ones who watch what's working for everyone else and then creatively adapt it for their own.

It's not because they're lazy. It's because they're busy.

If you write for any serious purpose, you learn very quickly that you can't afford to spend months or years dreaming up a daring new approach for everything you write. No one has that kind of discipline. The only way to survive is to write quickly, and the only way to do that is to take a page from the playbook of guys like Shakespeare, Jefferson, and Wilde -- copying from others not because you lack genius, but because true genius is clothed in the ideas of others.

## **Headlines are no exception**

None of those irresistible headlines you see on the covers of *Cosmopolitan Magazine* and *The National Enquirer* are new. The majority of them are more than 50 years old, written by great direct response copywriters like Eugene Schwartz and Claude Hopkins. They might change the wording around or modernize the language, but the ideas are essentially the same, rehashed over and over again by every popular magazine, newspaper, and blog in the world.

And do their readers complain? No.

I've received a lot of complaint letters about the *content* of the articles I've written, but no one has criticized me for failing to develop an original headline. On the contrary, I've received hundreds of complements on my headlines from people who thought I created them from scratch. But I didn't. I "stole" them, just like every other popular writer.

If you look carefully at any great headline, you can distill it down to a fill-in-the-blank "template" that works for almost every topic in any niche. The best writers I know have thousands of them either saved to a file on their computers or floating around in their heads, where they can reference them at a moment's notice to develop a winning headline of their own.

### **A simple shortcut you can apply immediately**

It's a simple shortcut, and that's why I call these templates "Headline Hacks." Just as "life hacks" are shortcuts for dealing with the complexity of life, these Headline Hacks will allow you to bypass the years of study and failure required to write great headlines.

It's not because they're "magical." It's because they're based on headlines that have worked time and time again for some of the most popular publications in the world.

Use them.

Here's what I recommend:

1. Read through the whole report, stopping at every Headline Hack to write down a few examples of your own. By the time you're finished, you should have at least 52 headlines you can use in your articles or blog posts.
2. Write at least one article per week that uses one of your new headlines. You can use them in any order you like, but consciously commit yourself to at least one per week. With 52 headlines, your collection should last you an entire year.
3. At least once a month, scan through the Headline Hacks again. The point of doing this is to allow the examples to sink into your subconscious. Your brain will

internalize them, and you'll find great headlines popping into your head when you least expect it.

Of all the ways you can improve your blog, this one is by far the easiest. I mean, what could possibly be easier than filling in the blank?

No, it won't put you in the Technorati 100 (at least, not by itself), but you *will* see an increase in traffic. More importantly, you'll be learning one of the most important skills any blogger can master: making your readership curious.

The more curious your headlines make people, the more they'll read your posts. The more they read your posts, the better your chance of building a relationship with them. The more relationships you have, the more influential you become in your niche.

It's the same process, regardless of whether you have 100,000 subscribers or you started your blog yesterday. And it all begins with the headline.

So, what are you waiting for?

Scroll down, and check out the goods. :-)

Best regards,

Jon Morrow

PS: Don't miss the little bonus on the last page.

# Table of Contents

## Section 1: Threat Headlines - What Keeps Your Readers up at Night?

---

<i>How Safe Is Your [Valuable Person/Object] from [Threat]?</i> .....	10
<i>7 Warning Signs That [Blank]</i> .....	11
<i>Warning: [Blank]</i> .....	12
<i>Can We Really Trust [Person/Company/Product]?</i> .....	12
<i>The Shocking Truth about [Blank]</i> .....	13
<i>The Great [Blank] Hoax</i> .....	14
<i>How [Blank] Gamble with Your [Blank]: 7 Ways to Protect Yourself</i> .....	15
<i>9 Lies [Group of People] Like to Tell</i> .....	16
<i>13 Things Your [Trusted Person] Won't Tell You</i> .....	16
<i>5 Little-Known Factors That Could Affect Your [Blank]</i> .....	17
<i>[Your Audience] Alert: The New [Blank] Scam to Avoid</i> .....	17

## Section 2: Zen Headlines - Promising Your Readers a Simpler Life

---

<i>The Zen of [Blank]</i> .....	19
<i>Can't Keep up? 11 Ways to Simplify Your [Blank]</i> .....	20
<i>How to Take Charge of Your [Unruly Problem]</i> .....	21
<i>The Minimalist Guide to [Aggravation]</i> .....	21
<i>10 Shortcuts for [Completing Tedious Process] in Record Time</i> .....	22
<i>Get Rid of [Recurring Problem] Once and for All</i> .....	22
<i>How to End [Problem]</i> .....	23

<i>How to [Blank] in 5 Minutes.....</i>	23
<i>101 [Blank] Hacks: A Cheat Sheet for [Blank] .....</i>	24

### **Section 3: Piggyback Headlines - Riding on the Back of a Famous Brand**

---

<i>[Do Something] Like [Famous Person]: 20 Ways to [Blank].....</i>	27
<i>[Famous Person's] Top 10 Tips for [Blank] .....</i>	27
<i>The [World-Class Example] School of [Blank] .....</i>	28
<i>The [World-Class Example] Guide to [Blank] .....</i>	29
<i>Secrets of [Famous Group] .....</i>	29
<i>What [World-Class Example] Can Teach Us about [Blank] .....</i>	30

### **Section 4: Mistake Headlines - Irresistible Teasers from the Masters**

---

<i>Do You Make These 9 [Blank] Mistakes?.....</i>	33
<i>7 [Blank] Mistakes That Make You Look Dumb.....</i>	33
<i>5 [Blank] Mistakes That Make You [Look/Sound] Like a [Blank].....</i>	34
<i>11 [Blank] Mistakes You Don't Know You're Making.....</i>	35
<i>Don't Do These 12 Things When [Blank] .....</i>	35

### **Section 5: How to Headlines - The Oldie but Goodie That Never Fails**

---

<i>How to [Blank] .....</i>	37
<i>How to Be [Desirable Quality] .....</i>	38
<i>How to [Blank] (Even If [Common Obstacle]) .....</i>	39
<i>How to [Blank] Without [Objectionable Action] .....</i>	39
<i>How to [Do Something] While You [Do Something Else] .....</i>	40

<i>How to [Blank] and [Blank]</i> .....	41
<i>How to [Do Something] That Your [Target Audience] Will Love</i> .....	42
<i>How to Use [Blank] to [Blank]</i> .....	42
<i>How to [Blank] in [Year]</i> .....	43
<i>How to [Blank] -- The Ultimate Guide</i> .....	44
<i>How to Be Smart in a World of Dumb [Group]</i> .....	44

## **Section 6: List Headlines - Bite-Sized Content That Readers Adore**

---

<i>7 Ways to [Do Something]</i> .....	47
<i>101 [Blank] for [Event/Cause/Process]</i> .....	48
<i>72 Killer Resources for [Audience/Process]</i> .....	48
<i>The Top 10 [Blank]</i> .....	49
<i>7 [Blank] Secrets Every [Audience] Should Know</i> .....	50
<i>7 Surprising Reasons [Blank]</i> .....	50
<i>The 5 Laws for [Blank]</i> .....	51
<i>7 Steps to [Blank]</i> .....	52
<i>Get [Blank]! 10 Ideas That Really Work</i> .....	52
<i>7 Things Your [Target Audience] Needs to Hear You Say</i> .....	53





# Threat Headlines

## What Keeps Your Readers up at Night?

We are all afraid of an unexpected attack.

Whether it's a person, an asset, or a personal keepsake, none of us wants to lose something we value. What's more, we worry about whether we're really doing enough to protect it. Are we missing something that could come back to bite us?

There's no way to know, and that's why these headline hacks work. If you can pinpoint something your audience is afraid of losing and the person they are afraid of taking it, you can get inside of their head and craft a headline that's impossible to ignore.

The key is to be *specific*. You want the reader to think, "How on earth did they guess that I'm afraid of that? Are they psychic?" Like many headline hacks, your power to use it will grow in proportion to how well you know your audience.

### **How Safe Is Your [Valuable Person/Object] from [Threat]?**

---

Oh, this one is evil.

It sounds so innocent. It sounds so concerned. It sounds so understanding. And all the while, it's subtly directing your subconscious to imagine an attack.

Questions have always made powerful headlines because... well... our minds want to answer them. It's almost like a reflex reaction. Even if you're not consciously aware of it, your subconscious will work on it in the background, until it comes up with an answer.

In this case, the question *forces* anxiety. Not only does it ask you to imagine an attack on something you value, but it implies there might be new threats you're not aware of. You could've taken great pains to protect yourself, but you'll find yourself thinking, "Is it really as safe as I thought? Maybe I'd better read this, just to be sure."

Examples:

- How Safe Is Your Husband from the Secretary Sitting Right outside His Office?
- How Safe Is Your Family's Land from Developers with Powerful Friends?
- How Safe Are Your Shoes from These 10 Types of Dogs?

## **7 Warning Signs That [Blank]**

---

Secretly, I think we are all closet hypochondriacs.

We hear an expert describe the symptoms of a certain problem, and we think, "Yes! That describes me perfectly!" Then we hang on their every word, desperate to find out what is wrong with us.

This headline hack takes advantage of that tendency. It promises to describe the symptoms of a problem or threat, implying that you can avoid it if you know what to look for.

Examples:

- 5 Warning Signs That You're about to Get Audited by the IRS
- 10 Warning Signs That You Chose the Wrong Blog Topic
- [7 Warning Signs That You're Drunk on Your Own Words](#)

## Warning: [Blank]

---

"Warning: Shark Infested Waters!"

"Warning: Hurricane Approaching!"

"Warning: Coffee Is Hot!"

Chances are, you've seen lots of signs like the above, and the one thing they all have in common is that you *don't* want to ignore them. If you do, you could be eaten, drowned, burned, or God knows what else. As a result, most people pay attention to anything with the word "Warning" as if their lives depended on it.

This headline hack takes advantage of that conditioning. The word "Warning" is so powerful that it almost doesn't matter what you put after it. People will read it, and if it seems halfway important, they'll read your article too.

Examples:

- [Warning: Use These 5 Surefire Headline Formulas at Your Own Risk](#)
- Warning: These Over-The-Counter Medications Can Kill Your Dog
- Warning: Testimonials without Proof Can Land You in Jail

## Can We Really Trust [Person/Company/Product]?

---

Microsoft, Wal-Mart, the US Government -- they're big, they're powerful, and most of us distrust almost *everything* they do.

Why? Because, subconsciously or not, we recognize that we as individuals have almost no influence over them, and they can turn on us at any moment. In fact, you might say we're *waiting* for it to happen.

So, what happens when a smart writer (such as yourself) decides to write a headline that addresses our fear?

We read the article, that's what. We believe it's going to confirm what we've thought all along, and we are itching to share it with all of our friends and relatives and say, "See! I was right! Here it is IN PRINT!"

It doesn't matter if it's true. You could end the article by concluding that everything the company/person/product does is on the up and up. Just by posing the question though, you'll immediately have everyone's attention.

Examples:

- Can We Really Trust Barack Obama?
- Can We Really Trust PayPal?
- Can We Really Trust Tylenol? 7 Things You Should Know

### **The Shocking Truth about [Blank]**

---

The traditional media uses this one a lot.

It suggests a scandal without telling you anything about what it is. If you want to know, you have to watch at 10 o'clock, or turn to page 32, or click the headline.

It also sets *you* up as a truth teller. You've just discovered a shocking secret, and now you're going to expose that secret "exclusively" to your audience.

Is it often an exaggeration?

Yes.

Does it continue to work anyway?

Yes.

Unlike the news and some magazines, however, I recommend you use this headline only when you have a shocking truth to expose. It doesn't necessarily have to be something bad. You can expose something they're doing shockingly *well* and make it into a good article, too.

Just don't overdo it. There's a reason why journalists are some of the least trusted professionals in the world, and you don't want to join them.

Examples:

- The Shocking Truth about Twitter
- The Shocking Truth about Bank Of America
- The Shocking Truth about Tiger Woods

### **The Great [Blank] Hoax**

---

Where the last few headlines make you curious by employing scandal, this one comes right out and calls it "Hoax." It's much more direct, but it's no less potent.

Here's why: people love conspiracy theories. If you doubt it, just look at the circulation numbers for publications like the National Enquirer. It was *built* on conspiracy.

If you can find some concrete data that suggests a well-known brand is deliberately deceiving people, and you use this headline as a lead, it might be one of the most popular articles you've ever written. These stories spread like wildfire.

Note: You can also use a sub headline to further push the story, if need be.

- The Great Google Hoax

- The Great 9/11 Hoax: What Is Congress Really Hiding?
- The Great Income Tax Hoax: Proof That Taxes Are Unconstitutional!

## **How [Blank] Gamble with Your [Blank]: 7 Ways to Protect Yourself**

---

Three years ago, a man was running late to work. Instead of stopping at red lights, he decided to take a chance and run them, actually speeding up as he went because he thought it would improve his chances of not hitting anyone.

The first few times, it worked, but the last time it didn't. The last time, he ran into my van. Going 85 mph.

Ever since then, I've always been a little nervous on the road. It's not because I'm afraid of getting hurt again but because I realized that, on the road, other people make lots of decisions that affect me, and they're not always good ones. They're gambling with my life, and really, there's nothing I can do about it.

At some time or another, I think we've all felt this way. We realize that a doctor, a mechanic, the government -- they're all taking chances, and we have to pay the price when things go wrong.

It's disturbing, and that's why headline hacks like this one are so hard to ignore. They delve into the fear that comes from a loss of control, and they promise to give it back.

Examples:

- How Doctors Gamble with Your Life: 7 Ways to Protect Yourself
- How Clients Gamble with Your Reputation: 5 Ways to Protect Yourself
- How Your Host Gambles with Your Blog: 11 Ways to Protect Yourself

## 9 Lies [Group of People] Like to Tell

---

"Lies" is another one of those threatening words that's hard to ignore.

Politicians, journalists, NASA, historians -- we suspect that almost everyone is lying to us. The problem is, we can't discern the lies from the truth. We're never as informed as we'd need to be to argue with an expert, and it bothers us. What we need is *another* expert to tell us who is lying and how.

That's why this headline hack works so well. It promises to expose the lies of a certain group of people, making us one of the enlightened few who know the *real* truth.

Examples:

- 9 Lies Telephone Con Artists Like to Tell
- 14 Lies Playboys Like to Tell Their Dates
- 7 Lies the Media Likes to Tell about the Conflict in Israel

## 13 Things Your [Trusted Person] Won't Tell You

---

Have you ever worried that someone you're *supposed* to trust might not be telling you the whole truth?

Like your accountant? Or your spouse? Or, God forbid, your *child*?

Society says that you're supposed to trust them, and you probably want to... but what if they're not telling you something? And if they are, what if it's really, really bad, and they don't want you to know?

It's a worrisome threat, and this headline hack plays on it beautifully. You can use it effectively for almost any subject, and it'll get the attention of your audience.

Examples:



- 13 Things Your Financial Advisor Won't Tell You
- 21 Things Your Website Designer Won't Tell You
- 7 Things the School Principal Won't Tell You about Your Child

## **5 Little-Known Factors That Could Affect Your [Blank]**

---

The beauty of the words "little-known" is that they imply the reader doesn't know something without calling them ignorant. After all, how could they know, if no one else does?"

But it's no less enticing.

Just as we all have a tendency to believe in hoaxes, scandals, and lies, we also believe there are factors controlling things from behind the scenes that no one knows about. What's scary is we have no idea what those factors are, and they might hurt us at any moment.

Typically, this headline hack works best for subjects where your reader knows they are uninformed. Pick the right one, and you'll have no trouble getting their attention.

Examples:

- 5 Little-Known Factors That Could Affect Your Divorce Settlement
- 7 Little-Known Factors That Could Affect Your Search Engine Rankings
- 9 Little-Known Factors That Could Affect Your Baby's Intelligence

## **[Your Audience] Alert: The New [Blank] Scam to Avoid**

---

We've been through a lot of very subtle headlines in this section, so I thought it might be nice to conclude with one that's as straightforward as possible.

Sometimes, the most powerful headline is one that identifies the audience, and then gives them a reason to read. This headline hack is a brilliantly simple example of how to do exactly that. It's so simple, in fact, that it's hard to see the allure until you see it in action.

Examples:

- Mom Alert: The New Daycare Scam to Avoid
- Homebuyer Alert: The New Financing Scam to Avoid
- Traveler Alert: The New Mexico Scam to Avoid

# Zen Headlines

## Promising Your Readers a Simpler Life

These days, most people are in a tough spot.

They have too many responsibilities, but they can't do anything about it. No matter how much they would like to, they can't stop being a parent or quit their job or refuse to pay the bills. That would be unconscionable.

So, the only solution is to simplify. They search for ways to get the same results in less time. Granted, it's not a very *methodical* search -- they tend to look for answers one day, and then forget about it the next -- but that sense of being overwhelmed stays with them.

It's a powerful emotion, and these headlines tap into it.

### **The Zen of [Blank]**

---

On the surface, this is just another "how to" headline, but there's one important difference.

With this headline hack, you're showing them how to do it in a Zen-like way. Given the increasing popularity of Buddhist teachings, most people automatically think of anything with the word "Zen" as easy, masterful, and calming -- all things overwhelmed people are desperate to experience.

Of course, the headline works best when you pair Zen teachings with something your audience would normally consider hectic. Writing a post with the headline "The Zen of Meditation" wouldn't get much attention because people expect it to be Zen-like. There's not enough contrast.

Also, feel free to follow this headline with a how-to or list-style headline.

Examples:

- The Zen of Rush-Hour Traffic
- The Zen of Writing with Kids around: 11 Ways to Quiet Your Mind
- The Zen of Team Meetings: How to Never Lose Control Again

### **Can't Keep up? 11 Ways to Simplify Your [Blank]**

---

Once upon a time, everyone wanted to "get ahead." They worked as quickly and efficiently as possible, so they could finish early and still have time or money left over to do extra. They wanted to do *more* at work, enjoy *more* time with their family, and have *more* time to relax.

Not anymore.

Now, all we can focus on is "keeping up." We have more to do than we could possibly accomplish, and we are terrified of one-day running out of energy and falling behind. We worry that, if that happens, we might never catch up again.

It's a common thought process, and this headline jumps directly into it by using the phrase ("Can't Keep up?") that's already going through their heads. It then promises multiple strategies for simplifying the problem.

Examples:

- Can't Keep up? 11 Ways to Simplify Your Gmail Inbox
- Can't Keep up? 21 Ways to Simplify Your Search for New Clients
- Can't Keep up? 7 Ways to Simplify Your Wardrobe for Tonight's Date

## **How to Take Charge of Your [Unruly Problem]**

---

Mental rehearsal is a great technique for improving your performance in sports, giving speeches, or just about anything else, but it can also backfire.

Sometimes, we rehearse *bad* things happening in the future, not just positive ones. We imagine little problems growing into big problems, and we worry about whether or not we'll be able to handle them. Some psychologists even say that much of our anxiety centers around problems that don't even *exist* yet.

So why not write a post, targeting those worries? Figure out what problem your audience is worried about spinning out of control, and then tell them how to take charge of it.

Examples:

- How to Take Charge of Your Husband's Gambling Problem
- How to Take Charge of Your Junk Mail Folder in Microsoft Outlook
- How to Take Charge of Your Blog's Comment Section

## **The Minimalist Guide to [Aggravation]**

---

This headline is similar to the previous ones, except with one small but important difference: it focuses on topics your audience perceives as unimportant or annoying.

People who enjoy minimalist decor usually feel that extravagant interior design is a waste, just as those who want a minimalist website design feel like most flashy designs get in the way of usability. It's all about minimizing something they dislike.

In turn, it's usually not a good idea to use this headline for topics your audience finds important. Focus on a topic your audience wants to avoid.

Examples:

- The Minimalist Guide to Twitter
- The Minimalist Guide to Cooking a Nutritious Dinner
- The Minimalist Guide to Homework (Keep Your Good Grades!)

## **10 Shortcuts for [Completing Tedious Process] in Record Time**

---

Who isn't interested in a shortcut these days?

Not only does this headline hack promise to make our lives simpler, but it implies you'll have an unfair advantage. While your competitors are working blithely along, doing things the old-fashioned way, you'll take a shortcut and skip ahead, achieving the same results in a fraction of the time. All the while giggling gleefully, of course.

Examples:

- 10 Shortcuts for Becoming an Authority in Your Field in Record Time
- 7 Shortcuts for Building a Company Website in Record Time
- 21 Perfectly Legal Shortcuts for Finishing Your Taxes in Record Time

## **Get Rid of [Recurring Problem] Once and for All**

---

Simplifying or taking charge of a problem is great, but what if you can get rid of it once and for all? Wouldn't that be better?

This headline hack promises to show your readers how. You can use it for almost any nuisance, but it works best if the problem is *recurring*. Find a problem where your reader is thinking, "I'm so tired of dealing with this! I wish I could handle it once and for all!"

Also, it's best if your audience believes a permanent solution is possible, but they don't know what the solution is. You're telling them something they wish they knew, not trying to convince them to believe in a miracle.

Examples:

- Get Rid of Your Yellow Toenails Once and for All
- Get Rid of That Squirrel in Your Attic Once and for All
- Get Rid of Comment Spammers Once and for All

## How to End [Problem]

---

This headline hack is just a slight variation on the last one.

The main difference is it works for problems that are not necessarily recurring. It's also more conducive to sub headlines, allowing you to add more benefits, overcome objections, etc.

- How to End Your Fight with the IRS
- [How to End Writer's Block Forever \(And Make Readers Fall in Love with You\)](#)
- How to End a Dating Disaster *Without* Being Rude or Losing Your Cool

## How to [Blank] in 5 Minutes

---

When I first started writing, I thought this headline hack was sleazy.

5 minutes? You can't do hardly anything worthwhile in 5 minutes. By making that promise, I felt like writers were lying to their readers.

Then I realized something. Most people are totally overwhelmed with the complicated, long-term advice that writers like to dispense, and they are looking for simple little tips

they can implement in just a few minutes. They're not looking to change their lives, just make a small improvement.

And there's nothing wrong with that. For the most part, change is a combination of hundreds of little actions, made 5 minutes at a time. If you can help your readers take just one of those actions, you've achieved a huge victory. Instead of overwhelming them, you'll give them the confidence to come back to you again, and take the next action.

That's what this headline hack is all about.

Some writers also use it to create curiosity, using headlines like "How to Make \$1,000 in 5 Minutes." And while I understand the allure, I don't recommend it, unless it's actually something 90% of your readers can do in five minutes. If it's not, they're going to realize that as soon as they read it, and you're going to lose a small amount of trust.

It's far better to give them real advice they can implement in five minutes (or whatever length of time). That way, you're delivering on your promise.

Examples:

- How to Reduce Your Junk Mail in 5 Minutes
- [How to Write an Article in 20 Minutes](#)
- How to Knock \$127 Off Your Phone Bill in 15 Minutes or Less

## **101 [Blank] Hacks: A Cheat Sheet for [Blank]**

---

Hmm. This headline looks familiar, does it not?

Somewhat of a nefarious member of the Zen family, the "hacks" headline is nevertheless increasingly popular. One of the most popular blogs in the world, Lifehacker.com, is based on it. You're also starting to see it grace the cover of national magazines.



And why not? All of us have a diabolical side, and the idea of discovering a "hacks" that allows us to "cheat" and get the same results with less effort is irresistible.

Note: The "cheat sheet" subheadline works well with the hacks theme, but it's optional. If you find another subheadline works better, by all means use it.

Examples:

- 101 Headline Hacks: A Cheat Sheet for Writing Headlines That Explode Traffic
- 21 Homework Hacks: A Cheat Sheet for Doing Your Homework in One Hour or Less
- 37 Income Tax Hacks: An Insider's Guide to Beating the IRS at Their Own Game

# Piggyback Headlines

## Riding on the Back of a Famous Brand

It's scary to realize how much power marketers have over how we think. For example:

- If you want to rent a movie for your kids, what movie studio comes to mind?  
Probably Disney or Pixar.
- If you want to build an efficient business, what company might you emulate?  
Probably McDonald's or Southwest Airlines.
- If you want to become a better poker player, who immediately comes to mind?  
Probably Phil Ivey, Daniel Negreanu, or Doyle Brunson.

Of course, it's no accident. Companies and celebrities spend billions of dollars to make sure their name comes to mind first. It's called branding.

No surprise, right? Well, here's an interesting idea:

What if you can use all of those billion-dollar brands to your advantage?

What if you can construct headlines that "ride piggyback" on existing brands, immediately connecting with your audience in a powerful way?

Because you can. These headline hacks help you do it.

Note: Since you are benefiting from someone else's brand, there is potential for lawsuits with this strategy. We've never had any problems at Copyblogger, and I doubt we ever will, but use these headlines at your own risk.

## **[Do Something] Like [Famous Person]: 20 Ways to [Blank]**

---

Tiger Woods, Warren Buffett, Steve Jobs, Jack Nicholson, Barack Obama.

We all recognize these names, not just because they are famous, but because they are among the best in their field. Their performance is so far above average that it mesmerizes us, and we can't help wondering if they have some secret that enables them to beat everyone else.

You can leverage that curiosity to make your posts irresistible. Just take the person who your audience is most fascinated with, and insert their name into your headline.

Note: Feel free to change everything after the colon to suit your post. List and "How to" headlines tend to work well.

- Launch like Steve Jobs: 7 Ways to Build Buzz for Your Next Product Launch
- Do Your Taxes like Donald Trump: 20 Ways the Rich Cheat the IRS
- Run like Adrian Peterson: 10 Ways to Be the Back They'll Never Bring down

## **[Famous Person's] Top 10 Tips for [Blank]**

---

This is a shorter version of the last headline hack.

In addition to leveraging the name of a famous person, it has some nice alliteration with "Top 10 Tips," making it even more memorable. Of course, that advantage is also a disadvantage. The word "top" implies there are only a few tips. Offering your "Top 157 Tips" would be kind of weird.

So, this one works best with 5-10 tips. If you have more, use one of the other headline hacks in this section.

Examples:

- Tiger's Top 10 Tips for Improving Your Golf Swing
- [Ernest Hemingway's Top 5 Tips for Writing Well](#)
- David Bach's Top 10 Tips for Saving for Retirement After Age 50

## **The [World-Class Example] School of [Blank]**

---

This headline hack is a variation of the last one, but with one important difference: the word "School."

Normally, we expect anything having to do with school to be academic and... well... boring. The best way to use this headline is to intentionally violate that expectation, either using a bizarre teacher or a topic you would never associate with school.

For example, "The Jack Welsh School of Leadership" is a fine headline, but it doesn't compel you to click. "The Tony Soprano School of Leadership" is much more interesting.

Similarly, "The House M.D. School of Medicine" is decent, especially since Dr. House is such an interesting television figure, but it lacks punch because we associate medicine with school. A better headline would be, "The House M.D. School of Torturing Your Employees."

**Examples:**

- The Tony Soprano School of Leadership
- The House M.D. School of Torturing Your Employees
- [The Yogi Berra School of Persuasive Writing](#)

## The [World-Class Example] Guide to [Blank]

---

What if you want to use a famous company in your headline? Or a well-known band?

The last few headline hacks can work, but they are a little awkward. For example, companies don't really offer tips; individuals *within* the company do. Also, you're more likely to want to "Dunk like Michael Jordan" than you are to "Dunk like the Chicago Bulls."

That's where this headline hack comes in handy. You can still use it for individuals, but it works especially well for examples involving companies or other groups of people.

On a side note, this headline hack can also work well when the topic has no apparent connection with the world-class example being cited. It creates curiosity. How could you not click the Winnie the Pooh headline below?

Examples:

- The Pixar Guide to Storytelling
- [The Winnie The Pooh Guide to Blogging](#)
- [The Ramons' Guide to Killer Content](#)

## Secrets of [Famous Group]

---

Copywriters have long known that one of the most proven ways to make an audience curious is to put "Secrets" in the headline. It works almost like magic.

Here's why: we all have a tendency to believe others are deliberately withholding success secrets from us. Why wouldn't they? If you had a secret that gave you a competitive edge, you would do everything in your power to keep it quiet.

Use that suspicion to your advantage. If you find a group of well-known and well-respected people following a common practice they never speak about, then this headline works wonderfully to arouse the curiosity of your audience.

Note: This headline works well when used with a how-to or list-style headline. Examples below.

Examples:

- Secrets of NFL Hall of Famers
- Secrets of the Fortune 500: 22 Tactics That Keep Them on Top
- Secrets of Hollywood A-Listers: How to Look like a Movie Star

## **What [World-Class Example] Can Teach Us about [Blank]**

---

Of all the headline hacks in this section, this one is the most versatile. Not only can you use it for piggybacking on celebrities, groups and companies, but it works for events too.

It's a bit tricky, however. You'd think people would be interested in learning and that learning lessons from a world-class example would interest them, but the wording of this headline hack can actually turn readers off. The words "teach us" can sound a little... academic, and so it's important to prop up the headline in other ways.

For example, you might use an emotional appeal like, "What 9/11 Can Teach Us about Sticking Together and Surviving a Crisis." Or you can break expectations with something like, "What Tiger Woods Can Teach Us about Fidelity."

Usually, I like to use this headline whenever I want to bond with the audience. The word "Us" implies that you're in the same boat, and you have something to learn together. It's much less preachy than "What [Blank] Can Teach You about [Blank]," although you'll certainly see that one a lot too.

Examples:

- What 9/11 Can Teach Us about Sticking Together and Surviving a Crisis
- What Tiger Woods Can Teach Us about Fidelity
- [What the Horizon Realty Fail Can Teach You about Social Media](#)

# Mistake Headlines

## Irresistible Teasers from the Masters

"Do You Make These Mistakes in English?" doesn't *look* like a blockbuster headline.

It's intriguing, but it doesn't exactly grab you by the throat. The sentence structure is also a bit odd, so you'd think maybe an amateur wrote it. Plus, it's about English, of all things -- not exactly the sexiest of all topics.

But it doesn't matter. Written by Maxwell Sackheim, this advertisement made enormous amounts of money for over *40 years*, unbeaten by anyone that tried to challenge it. It's one of the most successful headlines in the history of advertising.

What's so powerful about it is how it alludes to mistakes, but it doesn't tell you what they are. You wonder, "Hmm... could I be making any of these mistakes?" And then you end up reading the whole article to find out.

It works phenomenally well. When Brian Clark started Copyblogger, many of his first blockbuster posts used mistake headlines, drawing thousands of readers to the blog.

You might, in fact, say these headline hacks are *designed* for the beginning blogger. By describing common mistakes, you subtly position yourself as an expert by proving you know what they're going through. You also set the stage for future, more instructional posts that'll serve as your foundation content.



Not to say they can't work for a popular blog, because they do. Just find a way to work them in as quickly as possible, because they're some of the most powerful headline hacks in this report.

## **Do You Make These 9 [Blank] Mistakes?**

---

This headline hack is the great, great grandchild of the "Do You Make These Mistakes in English" headline I mentioned at the beginning of this section.

The major difference is it includes the *number* of mistakes. It's a small change, but the reason why it's important is because it increases the perceived possibility that you're making one of them. The reader will see it and think, "Oh God, there are nine mistakes I can make with that? I *must* be making one of them."

But the core is the same. Really, what makes this headline hack tick isn't the number, but the word "these." To find out what "these" are, you are forced to read the article. It's almost like an embedded command -- a principle from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). You have no choice but to be curious.

The examples below will show you what I mean. Notice how you can add a context or even slightly change the wording of the headline, and it's still the same overall template.

Examples:

- Do You Make These 9 Parenting Mistakes?
- [Do You Make These 7 Mistakes When You Write?](#)
- [Do You Recognize These 10 Mental Blocks to Creative Thinking?](#)

## **7 [Blank] Mistakes That Make You Look Dumb**

---

No one likes to look dumb. You might even say we obsess over it.

We practice dancing in front of the mirror. We get a friend to rehearse common interview questions with us. We watch a TV show, not because we like it, but because everyone at work likes it, and they'll be talking about it tomorrow. The list could go on and on.

As a writer, it's your God-given responsibility to use that obsession to your advantage. Figure out what makes your audience feel dumb, and then insert it into a headline.

Just don't forget to make fun of yourself too.

Examples:

- 7 Email Mistakes That Make You Look Dumb
- [Five Grammatical Errors That Make You Look Dumb](#)
- 9 Silverware Mistakes That Make You Look Dumb at a Fancy Restaurant

## **5 [Blank] Mistakes That Make You [Look/Sound] Like a [Blank]**

---

Ever worry about sounding like a jerk? Or a wannabe? Or a tyrant?

Yeah, we all do. Not only do we worry about making mistakes, but we also personify those mistakes with a mental image of a certain type of person. It's the whole "Don't be that guy" concept.

And you can use it in this headline hack. Instead of just mentioning the type of mistakes your readers make, include a mental image of what they'll look like.

Be funny, shocking, whatever you want. Just make sure the comparison grabs attention.

Examples:

- [5 Grammar Mistakes That Make You Sound like a Chimp](#)
- 7 Resume Mistakes That Make You Look like a Loser

- 10 Overreactions That Make Moms Look like Maniacs

## 11 [Blank] Mistakes You Don't Know You're Making

---

What's scarier than making a mistake?

Easy: Making a mistake that you *don't know about*.

It's the toilet paper on your heel. It's the rice stuck between your teeth. It's thinking "biweekly" means twice a week, instead of every two weeks, and saying it wrong in public like twenty times.

When you find out, you're mortified. It's not just because you made a mistake; it's because you were oblivious to it, and now everyone thinks you're clueless (in addition to being dumb).

We've all been there, and that's why this headline hack works. It promises to help you avoid all of the pain and embarrassment by telling you what no one else will.

Examples:

- 11 Fashion Mistakes You Don't Know You're Making
- 21 Accounting Mistakes You Don't Know You're Making
- 5 Cholesterol Mistakes You Don't Know You're Making

## Don't Do These 12 Things When [Blank]

---

I like this headline because it's a little more... colloquial... than the others. Rather than threatening the reader with "mistakes," it sounds like something your friend would write to warn you about things NOT to do.

But it's essentially the same thing.

The only real difference is it pinpoints a situation, rather than a topic, and sometimes that's better. It tells your audience *when* the article is useful. I don't have any marketing data to back me up, but I would guess the context makes the article more memorable, which is great for getting readers to come back.

Examples:

- [Don't Do These 12 Things When Writing Headlines](#)
- Don't Do These 5 Things When Passing through Airport Security
- Don't Do These 7 Things When You're with a Guy You Just Met

# How to Headlines

## The Oldie but Goodie That Never Fails

Talk to any successful writer or publisher, and they'll all tell you the same thing:

How-to headlines almost never fail.

In fact, many top writers start every article or letter they write with a how-to headline. While they might end up with something totally different, the words "How to" force them to communicate the *value* they are offering the reader -- a crucial ingredient for any headline.

It's a technique I recommend to everyone, especially beginning writers. If you're struggling to find a powerful headline for your post, type the words "How to" on your screen and then fill in the blank. No, the resulting headlines might not be sexy or surprising, but they *will* be effective.

There are dozens of variations on the how-to headline, but we'll only go over the most popular ones here. All of them have proven to work well, regardless of the niche or topic.

### **How to [Blank]**

---

Called the "Granddaddy of All Headlines," this headline hack has been used for almost 100 years for countless winning ads and articles, and with good reason:

We, as readers, are naturally biased toward articles that help us *do* something. Ideas and opinions are great, but for most people, they have no practical value. To really get our attention, we need an expert to show us how to *apply* those ideas in a practical way.

That's what this headline does, and it works surprisingly well. I've often been surprised by how a simple "How to" headline that took me five minutes to write outperforms an original headline I worked on for days. Sometimes, I wonder why I bother writing anything else.

Examples:

- [How to Read](#)
- [How to Write Headlines That Work](#)
- [How to Increase Your Blog Subscription Rate by 254%](#)

## How to Be [Desirable Quality]

---

Thanks to modern psychology and neuroscience, most of us aren't just interested in what to do. We're also concerned with what to *be*. Science now us we can transform ourselves in almost any way we can imagine, and we're aching to know *how*.

That's the question this headline answers. By figuring out which traits your audience most desires and then putting it into this headline, you can harness the natural curiosity people have in transforming themselves into something more.

Examples:

- [How to Be Interesting](#)
- [How to Be Creative](#)
- How to Be the Life of the Party (Even If You're a Closet Introvert)

## How to [Blank] (Even If [Common Obstacle])

---

Have you ever been reading a headline and thought, "That'll never work for me because...?"

For instance, you see an article about How to Lose Weight, and you think, "That'll never work for me because I can't stick to a diet." Or you see an article about How to Make Money Online, and you think, "That'll never work for me because I'm no good with computers." Or you see an article about How to Save \$10,000 on Your Taxes, and you think, "That'll never work for me because I can't figure out tax forms."

Regardless of the situation, everyone believes their circumstances are unique, and they *look* for ways to prove that advice for other people won't work for them. And that puts you, the writer, in a tough situation. Somehow, you have to write a headline for an audience that is already convinced you can't help them.

Fortunately, some smart copywriter (I have no idea who) came up with this headline hack. It acknowledges the reader's perceived differences at the end of the headline, giving them the impression it was written for a person in their *exact* situation. Simple solution, but it works like gangbusters.

Examples:

- How to Lose Weight (Even If You Can't Stick to a Diet)
- How to Make Money Online (Even If You're No Good with Computers)
- How to Save \$10,000 on Your Taxes (Even If You're a Tax Dummy)

## How to [Blank] *Without* [Objectionable Action]

---

Where the last headline hack is about self-doubt, this one is about a concept psychologists call cognitive dissonance.

Lots of times, we want something, but we don't want to do what it takes to get it. For instance, a woman might want to get a date, but she feels the only way to make men notice her is to dress like a slut, and she doesn't want to do that.

Just because she believes it's impossible doesn't mean the desire goes away, either. In fact, the tension between two conflicting desires probably makes her pay *more* attention to it.

This tension is called "cognitive dissonance," and everyone experiences it, not just women who are looking for dates. Consciously or not, everyone is also looking for a way to get rid of it. It's almost like your mind gets stuck in a loop, wanting to get rid of it.

That's where this headline hack comes in handy. It relieves the cognitive dissonance by showing you how to do one thing without doing the other.

### **Examples:**

- How to Get a Guy's Attention *Without* Dressing like a Slut
- How to Take Your Family to Disney World *Without* Spending a Fortune
- How to Work at Home *Without* Quitting Your Job

### **How to [Do Something] While You [Do Something Else]**

---

Can you start a small business while holding down a job? Can you get married while going to college? Can you travel while raising small children?

Whenever I'm doing a webinar or a speaking engagement, these are the most common types of questions people ask. Everyone wants to know whether or not it's *really* possible to do X and Y at the same time. They think maybe it is, but they're not sure how. So they wonder.

And where people wonder, writers answer. This headline hack jumps in and explains how to do two seemingly contradictory tasks at the same time. Not only does it resolve the



mystery of whether or not it's really possible, but it also tells them *how* to do it, which is what readers really want to know.

Examples:

- How to Get Smarter While You Watch Television
- How to Be Productive While You're Waiting in Line
- [How to Create Dreamy Content While You Sleep](#)

## How to [Blank] and [Blank]

---

Ever heard of the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie?

Who hasn't, right?

Yes, it's a classic book, but its title is also one of the most famous "How to" headlines ever. It's a perfect illustration of a headline hack that lets you offer two benefits, instead of just one, while also allowing you to play with the relationship between the two benefits.

The most popular structure is to hint at a connection between the two benefits. For example, Carnegie's headline implies winning friends will *lead* to influencing people. It's subtle, but readers pick up on it subconsciously.

You can also setup an intriguing contrast. "How to Read Less and Learn More," for example, would probably be popular in any student magazine. It sounds impossible, and the idea of an article telling you how to do it is irresistible.

Examples:

- How to Work from Home and Get Twice As Much Done
- [How to Do Less and Get More](#)
- How to Eat Junk Food and Still Lose Weight

## How to [Do Something] That Your [Target Audience] Will Love

---

These days, everything is social.

It's not just the Internet and the proliferation of websites like Twitter, Facebook, and Digg. Our offline lives are social too. Psychology has proven again and again that people with strong connections to their family, coworkers, clients, bosses, and friends are not just "more successful;" they're happier, live longer, and make more money.

"How can I make so-and-so like me?" used to be a question of idle curiosity, but not anymore. Now it's a question of necessity, and we're all playing to win.

This headline promises to show your readers how. You can't use it often, but if you pick the right target audience at the right time, it works well.

Examples:

- How to Pick a Movie Your Date Will Love
- How to Give a Toast Your Boss Will Love
- How to Build a Treehouse Your Kids Will Love

## How to Use [Blank] to [Blank]

---

Remember 2001, A Space Odyssey, where the monkey-thing looks down and sees a bone? Then the dramatic music starts playing? Then he picks it up, realizing he can use it as a club to beat other monkey-things to death with?

It's funny to watch this simpleminded discovery, but what's even funnier is realizing the point of the scene: it was only the beginning. Sure, our technology is more advanced, but innovation is still basically the same process.

We come across an amazing tool, and then we go out looking for something to do with it. It's the story of every man wandering the aisles of Home Depot.

It's also the power of this headline. Show your readers how to use one of their tools in a new and amazing way, and they'll love you for it.

Examples:

- [How to Use Twitter to Grow Your Business](#)
- How to Use Food from Your Freezer to Create Napalm
- [How to Use the "Rule of Three" to Create Engaging Content](#)

## **How to [Blank] in [Year]**

---

Once upon a time, wisdom used to last. If you picked up a book from 20 years ago, chances were that the advice was still good. It wasn't because the wisdom was timeless, necessarily, but because the world hadn't changed very much.

Not anymore. Now, the world changes lickety-split, and the wisdom of today is the stupidity of tomorrow. Sure, the book's advice might still hold true, but there's a better chance it's a bit outdated. The world is changing too fast for publishers to keep up.

For readers, this is a problem, because they want the most up-to-date wisdom the world has to offer. The newer it is, the more we trust it.

So, why not give them exactly what they're looking for?

Write an article with the year in the headline. It's a subtle way of telling your readers that your article is packed with the newest and greatest advice, and they need to check it out ASAP. Otherwise, it might expire.

Examples:

- [How to Write an Ebook That Sells in 2009](#)
- How to Meet Your Soul Mate in 2010
- How to Dress like a Rock Star in 2010

## How to [Blank] -- The Ultimate Guide

---

Who could resist this one?

Sure, an article with a few, quick tidbits of information might be nice when we're mildly curious about the subject, but where are we going to turn when our ass is really on the line? An "Ultimate Guide" sounds more reassuring. It promises to tell you *everything*.

If you can live up to that promise, as the author, and really put together a resource-rich article for your readers, this headline hack can be a blockbuster. People will bookmark it, tell their friends about it, and retweet it. You can get traffic from it for *years*.

It's a lot of work, yes, but it's well worth it, especially if you're trying to grab attention in a competitive space. The links it draws are perfect for SEO.

By and large, it's one of my favorite headline hacks, as evidenced by the links below.

Examples:

- [How to Attract Links and Increase Web Traffic -- The Ultimate Guide](#)
- How to Conquer Writer's Block -- The Ultimate Guide
- [Speech Recognition for Bloggers -- The Ultimate Guide](#)

## How to Be Smart in a World of Dumb [Group]

---

Okay, this one takes some guts.

Not only are you saying the majority of people in a certain group are dumb, but you're implying your audience is dumb, unless they read your article. It has *great* shock value. It also fits into the worldview many people have, which is "Everyone else is an idiot, but not me."

Still, it's hard to pull off. The writers who use this headline most effectively take a conspiratorial tone, almost like they're pulling you aside to show you how things *really* work behind the scenes. You're not like everyone else, and they want to see you succeed, so they're going to fill you in on the details most of the morons in your niche will never realize.

Top marketers call this "Us Versus Them," and it's one of the most persuasive strategies in existence. If you do it right, you can establish an emotional bond with your audience that gives you enormous influence. If you do it wrong though, you might insult your audience and destroy your bond with them.

Is it worth it? You decide.

- How to Be Smart in a World of Dumb Drivers
- How to Be Smart in a World of Dumb Shoppers
- How to Be Smart in a World of Dumb Investors

# List Headlines

Bite-Sized Content That Readers Adore

It's easy to get sick of list headlines.

Everywhere you turn, there's a "7 Ways to Do This" or "141 Ideas to Help You with That." They crowd the covers of magazines, the posts in your RSS reader, and even nationally acclaimed newspapers like the New York Times.

Why are they so popular? Well, it's simple, really:

They work.

Of all the popular posts we have published at Copyblogger, more of them have list headlines than any other format. The same is true for social bookmarking sites. Just glance at the front pages of Digg and Delicious, and you'll see they are dominated by list headlines.

The truth is, if you're not writing at least one list post per week, you are missing out on traffic. They are *that* powerful.

The only challenge is making sure you don't repeat the same headline too often. There are many variations of the list headline, and most bloggers deliberately cycle between them, so the headlines stay fresh.

Here are some of the most popular ones, as well as notes on when and how to use them.

## 7 Ways to [Do Something]

---

Nothing exciting here, right? You've probably seen this headline a million times.

But have you ever stopped to consider how it works?

If you'd never seen a headline before, you'd think this one would turn people off. Most of us aren't looking for *seven* ways to do anything. We're looking for the *one* way that's going to work.

So why promise 5 or 7 or 51 ways to do something?

It's all about perception. Subconsciously, I think we all have the tendency to believe most of the ideas in an article won't work for us, but maybe we'll find one idea that will. The more ideas the article offers, the better our chance to find one that applies specifically to our situation.

Based on that line of thinking, this headline hack usually works best when your readers are searching for a range of options or ideas, and they plan to decide for themselves which idea is best. It does NOT work as well when your readers are searching for the best solution, and they don't want to be bothered with the rest.

For instance, "7 Ways to Buy an Engagement Ring" would probably flop because guys don't want options. What they *want* is to get a good deal on a ring they've already picked out. A Headline like "7 Ways to Negotiate Your Local Diamond Dealer into the Ground" would probably be much more popular.

Examples:

- [73 Ways to Become a Better Writer](#)
- [10 Effective Ways to Get More Blog Subscribers](#)
- [5 Simple Ways to Open Your Blog Post with a Bang](#)

## 101 [Blank] for [Event/Cause/Process]

---

You see this one a lot on the covers of magazines.

It works best when you have a long list of bullet points on a topic, and you don't have to offer a lot of explanation. It also works best when it's a big number for a fairly narrow subject, and the reader is like, "How the hell did they come up with so many ideas for that?" The curiosity will get them to read.

Examples:

- 101 Hors D'oeuvre Ideas for Your Next Dinner Party
- [21 Traffic Triggers for Social Media Marketing](#)
- 72 Home Remedies for Curing Insomnia

## 72 Killer Resources for [Audience/Process]

---

The web is chock-full of information on every imaginable topic, but the problem is *finding* it. Sure, we have search engines and directories and social bookmarking, which are great if you know what keyword to look under, but what if you don't? What if you're a beginner who knows next to nothing?

In that case, what you need is an expert on the subject to compile links to all of the most useful webpages. You need a resource list -- an article you can bookmark and come back to over and over again, slowly learning everything you need to know from one central depository of information.

That's what this headline hack promises.

Resource lists are a lot of work to put together, but it's worth it. If you pick the right topic, you can often pick up big bursts of traffic from social bookmarking sites, as well as long-



term residual traffic from search engines. Plus, let's not forget that your readers will love you for gathering so much useful information into one place for them.

Examples:

- 72 Killer Resources for Modernizing Your Kitchen
- 87 Killer Resources for Incoming Freshmen
- 101 Killer Resources for Making Money As a Stay-At-Home Mom

## **The Top 10 [Blank]**

---

Ahh, how could we possibly talk about headlines without mentioning the illustrious Top 10?

Sometimes, people don't want 73 techniques, 101 resources, or 21 ideas. Their head is already spinning, and they want you to *reduce* their options, not increase them. They want you to give them the best and exclude everything else.

And what better way to do it than a Top 10 List?

It has alliteration, making it more appealing to our phonological loop. It's also a short headline, giving you ample room to expound on what your top 10 list is about. Then there is the number 10 -- a nice, round figure that's not too high and not too low.

Overall, it's one of the most effective headlines we have, which is probably why you see it so often. You can use it for almost anything.

Examples:

- The Top 10 Beaches in South America
- [Top 10 Blogs for Writers 2009](#)
- The Top 10 Anniversary Gifts Your Wife Will Adore

## 7 [Blank] Secrets Every [Audience] Should Know

---

You can't see this headline without wondering what secrets you're missing. It's instant curiosity. Plus, it implies they are secrets other insiders already know, and you're woefully ignorant for not knowing them.

Wrap all of that allure and social proof up in a list, and you can't help but have an irresistible headline. No wonder it's so popular in Cosmo magazine.

Examples:

- 7 Sex Secrets Every Cosmo Girl Should Know
- 14 Bedtime Secrets Every Parent Should Know
- 5 Secretarial Secrets Every Salesperson Should Know

## 7 Surprising Reasons [Blank]

---

Most of the headline hacks in this report are designed to *make* the reader curious. They use power words or easy-sounding lists or hints of threat to "trick" the reader into checking out the article.

But sometimes, the smartest thing you can do as a writer isn't to manufacture curiosity; it's to harness the curiosity that's already there. All of us have, at one time or another, wondered why the sky is blue or why we have to pay taxes or why a customer refuses to buy from us. No, it might not be *urgent* for us to find an answer, but we are curious, and we'd happily read an article promising us "surprising" answers.

This headline hack is all about helping your readers scratch that itch. It promises to satisfy their curiosity by giving them a few unexpected reasons why such and such happens. And who knows? It might just give them something interesting to talk about around the water cooler tomorrow.

Examples:

- 7 Surprising Reasons Why You Feel Depressed during the Winter
- 11 Surprising Reasons Cops Pull *You* Over (and Not the Guy beside You)
- 21 Surprising Reasons Why Your Teenage Son Won't Talk to You

## **The 5 Laws for [Blank]**

---

"Laws" is one of those emotionally charged words, isn't it?

Some people *love* laws, going out of their way to learn and follow them. Whenever they see this headline hack, their first reaction is, "Goody! Someone is going to tell me how to play the game." On some level, they might also wonder if they are breaking some of the laws, and that worry will compel them to read.

Other people *hate* laws, intentionally subverting them at every opportunity just to prove how "stupid" they are. What's ironic is this headline hack still works on them. Almost like criminals study the law to figure out how best to flout it, rebels study it to find places where they can innovate and crush their competitors.

For both groups, the end result is the same: curiosity. Regardless of whether they want to obey the rules or break them, they need to know what those rules are, and so they read.

Another side benefit of this headline hack is that, if you're using it for a blog post, it can generate a lively argument in your comments section. Readers will agree and disagree with you about what the rules are, and your post can rack up quite a few comments.

Examples:

- The 10 Laws of Super Bowl Parties
- A Dad's 7 Laws for Dating His Daughter
- [The 5 Immutable Laws of Persuasive Blogging](#)

## 7 Steps to [Blank]

---

Another oldie but goodie.

Like the "7 Ways to" headline hack, this is essentially another "How to" headline, but with one important difference. It's finite. All you have to do is five or seven or however-many steps, and you'll achieve the promised result.

It makes it sound *easy*, and that's important. Sometimes, a reader might not read a traditional "How to" headline because they assume it's going to be too much work.

For instance, a certain percentage of readers will ignore an article titled "How to Build a Seven-Figure Restaurant Business" because they assume (probably correctly) it's going to take years of hard work. Changing the headline to "7 Steps to a Seven-Figure Restaurant Business" might work better because it *sounds* easier, and they'll be curious to see what the steps are.

Just as with many headlines, it's all about managing the perceptions of the reader.

Examples:

- 7 Steps to a Seven-Figure Restaurant Business
- [10 Steps to Becoming a Better Writer](#)
- [3 Surefire Steps for Beating the Boring Content Blues](#)

## Get [Blank]! 10 Ideas That Really Work

---

In crowded niches, writers will often "wear out" popular topics.

For instance, how many times have you seen articles promising to help you lose weight? Or make money by working at home? Or build a website that gets lots of traffic?

These topics are popular for a reason: audiences care about them. Eventually though, everyone stops believing another headline promising "How to Lose 20 Pounds in 30 Days" or "27 Profitable Businesses You Can Start from Home."

They've already read dozens of articles making the same promise, and it hasn't worked. They're still 20 pounds overweight and stuck in the same job, and they can't see the point in reading another one. Obviously, it's just an empty promise (or so they think).

That's where this headline comes in.

By offering "ideas that really work," you're subtly validating their skepticism and putting yourself on *their* side. You're saying, "Yeah, I know you've already read a dozen articles on this, but this is the one that will actually deliver." The more jaded your audience is, the better it works.

Examples:

- Get More Traffic! 10 Ideas That Really Work
- Get a Great Man! 10 Ideas That Really Work
- Get Rich from Home! 10 Ideas That Really Work

## **7 Things Your [Target Audience] Needs to Hear You Say**

---

Who doesn't wonder if they said the right thing?

We're never quite sure if we answered the questions correctly at an interview or if we said the right thing when our spouse was upset or took the right tact with a client. Maybe they didn't react the way we expected, or maybe it's just *really* important to get it right, and we find ourselves agonizing about it for hours, trying to figure out what to do.

This headline hack pokes at that insecurity. To use it, pick out the person most important to your audience and insert them into the blank. You can also include a context to make it even more powerful.

Examples:

- 7 Things Your Teenage Son Needs to Hear You Say
- Want a Promotion? 7 Things Your Boss Needs to Hear You Say
- 5 Things Your Wife Needs to Hear You Say on Your Anniversary

# What to Do Next

So, you successfully plowed your way through all 52 headlines, hmmm?

And now you're wondering what to do next?

My suggestion:

Keep writing headlines. When I started writing for Copyblogger, I wrote more than 50 headlines per day, and it was only after writing thousands of them that I really felt like I was getting good at it.

The same will most likely be true for you. The sooner you get started, the better.

If doing it for your own good isn't a powerful enough reason, I'll give you another one. I'm probably going to regret offering this, but if you write a blog post you're particularly proud of and you'd like me to read it, email it to me at [Jon@BoostBlogTraffic.com](mailto:Jon@BoostBlogTraffic.com), and I'll take a look.

I can't promise I'll leave a comment. I can't promise I'll link to it. I can't even promise I'll read the whole thing.

But if it has a good headline, I will glance at it. I promise.

Don't say I never did nothing for ya. :-)

Best,

Jon Morrow  
Associate Editor  
[Copyblogger.com](http://Copyblogger.com)