

10 BEST PRACTICES

FOR WRITING EFFECTIVE
WHITEPAPER TITLES

No matter how strong the content, the success of a marketing asset often depends on the title.

Crafting a headline that attracts and captures readers' attention is crucial: headlines have an effect on conversions as well as leads. In this whitepaper, we will examine some of the most popular and successful headline practices for capturing your audience's attention.

While there are many systematic ways to compose titles, the three most common methodologies are as follows:

- The **psychological approach** employs words and expressions that appeal to readers' desires or needs, their intelligence, and their curiosity.
- The **formulaic approach** presents a handy way of crafting headlines that follow a specific formula, which is easily recognized by readers and carries a practical message.
- The **scientific approach** to creating good titles is based on research. This approach analyzes which words capture and attract readers' attention based on data and statistics.

Often, these three methodologies overlap and support each other: the formulaic approach can utilize psychological triggers, or it can make use of certain words that have shown to be successful in captivating readers.

Still, the rules remain the same: test, analyze, draw conclusions, then try again. Let's go into more detail.



1 SURPRISE

Surprise is an essential component of a headline that draws attention. It works by creating a break in the norm. When readers expect something to read one way, it can be advantageous to surprise them by inserting words that create a dissonance between their expectations and what is offered.

For example, we could have titled this piece, *“Use These 10 Best Practices on Titles for Whitepapers—Or Risk Failure”* with the hopes of stirring people’s interest. (The negative twist at the end is something we’ll explore later.)

FOR EXAMPLE:

Be the Shakespeare of Facebook: The Enormous Guide to Writing Spectacular Social Media Updates

Written by Kevan Lee

One important distinction to draw in titles with elements of surprise is using catchy versus clickbait language. Although clickbait may be effective for catching readers’ attention, misleading titles can lead to a drop in readership overtime as your readers will lose trust that the content behind the title is worth their attention. Titles can still be catchy, punchy, or even cheeky, but there’s a fine line between catchy and clickbait. The point is, good content delivers on the promise, sustains interest, and most importantly, offers value.



2 ASK QUESTIONS

Good content communicates with its audience. A title that strikes up a conversation by asking a question is, therefore, a great way to attract readers' attention. Questions pique curiosity by challenging what readers know and understand. A question urges them to continue reading until they find out the answer or discover a deeper meaning of the story.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Hate this Headline? You'll Probably Share the Story.

Written by Neil Patel

When formulating headlines as questions, be careful not to fall into the clickbait hole. Some writers are turned off by negative titles that ask questions because they often come across as merely attention-seeking. Furthermore, if you can answer any "question-headline" with a "no", it's probably not particularly useful or informative. To avoid this pitfall, provide readers with a solution to your challenge.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Want to Know How to Craft the Best Whitepaper Headlines? Here are 10 Tried and Tested Approaches.

or

9 Engaging Examples of the Best Headlines to Rally Your Audience.

Written by The Daily Egg



3 ENGAGE CURIOSITY

Curiosity and surprise go hand-in-hand. One way to trigger readers' curiosity is by inferring that there's something valuable within your content that they may not already know.

For example, you could test their knowledge directly: *"So You Think You Know How to Create Great whitepaper Titles? Let's Find Out!"* This title promises to either appeal to the reader's ego by affirming what they already know or to give them new information altogether—in other words, it sparks curiosity with the implicit promise of widening their understanding.

4 BE NEGATIVE

Being positive can work, but sometimes being negative drives better results. Titles with negative superlatives like "never" or "worst" generally perform better than positive superlatives.

FOR EXAMPLE:

I Found the Most Boring Headline on the Internet.

Written by Jonny Diamond

Whether it's "10 Tips for Crafting Whitepaper Headlines You Can't Do Without" or "10 Whitepaper Title Tips That Will Kill It", make sure you try out a number of options before deciding on whatever title feels most engaging, yet also intriguing.



5 TELL THEM “HOW TO”

A “How to” headline promises that the forthcoming content will provide clear, structured steps in order to achieve something. It speaks to the audience’s desire to have clarity, and even predictability at times. Human beings have often been described as “cognitive misers,” which simply means that we usually prefer clear directions that help us navigate the world and perform our job easier, without the added effort of having to figure it all out by ourselves. Appeal to this innate desire by formulating whitepaper titles aimed at helping us to simplify our job.

FOR EXAMPLE:

How to Increase CTR: A Simple and Practical Guide

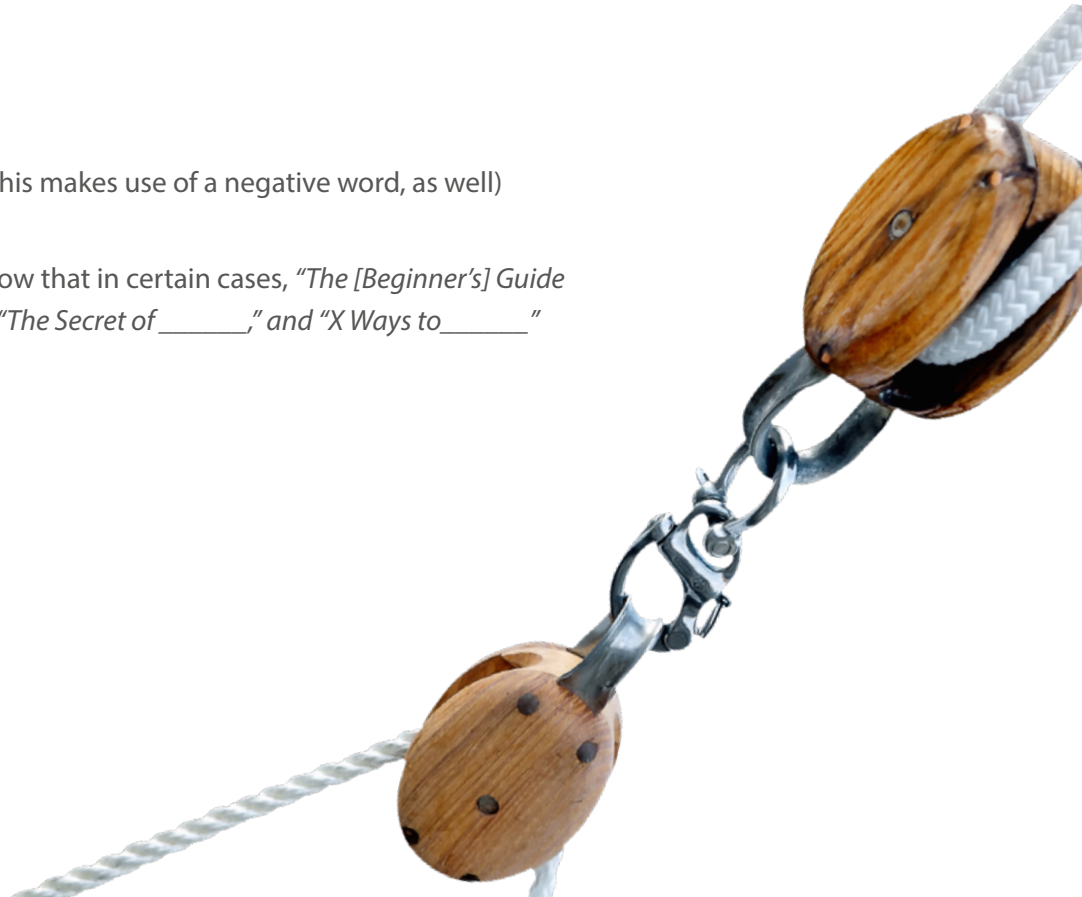
Written by Ian Matthews

The “How to _____” formula is always a good call whenever you have tips or advice to offer that are both practical and specific. Variations of this formula allow you to supply further details or specify the target audience. For instance, “How to Create whitepaper Titles Like a True Marketing Expert” is one such example.

Other examples include:

- ▶ “How to _____ for Beginners”
- ▶ “How to _____ in _____ Steps”
- ▶ “How to _____ Without _____” (this makes use of a negative word, as well)

Furthermore, testing your titles may show that in certain cases, “The [Beginner’s] Guide to _____,” “An Introduction to _____,” “The Secret of _____,” and “X Ways to _____” may work just as well.



6 MAKE A LIST

Much like “How to” titles, lists help us manage our expectations by creating clear objectives about what we will receive from the content. The occasional “+” after a number may engage readers further, as offering “more” of something by simulating a sense of limitlessness. Interestingly, some experts claim that bigger numbers as well as odd-numbered lists have been found to generate more attention than even-numbered ones. Who knew humans liked the numbers 5 and 7 more than 6 and 8!

Here at INFUSEmedia, we also like the number 10 because it embraces our inner sense of simple alignment. See section 5 above.

7 ADDRESS YOUR READERS

Directly addressing your target audience (also called “audience referencing”) is useful because it clearly specifies who the content is speaking to. Much like asking a question in the title, audience referencing strikes up a conversation with your intended audience or buyer persona. Generally, human beings prefer to be named and identified, and specifically addressing them could mean they will be more likely to respond. This can be done by using the second-person personal pronoun “you,” or by addressing them with a title they identify with—marketer, CEO, chef, blogger, banker, and so on. Be careful, though, not to have your whitepaper sound too colloquial or informal—unless, of course, that is part of your brand image.

FOR EXAMPLE:

Marketers, Here’s How to Succeed as Change Leaders

Written by Jim Heininger

or

10 Killer Whitepaper Headline Techniques for B2B Marketers

The latter combines the technique of using a list, a fairly strong and even negative identifier (“killer”), plus it addresses the audience directly by calling out B2B marketers.

8 MAKE YOUR TITLE S.H.I.N.E.

A terrific way to craft your headline is to use the S.H.I.N.E. formula developed by Kissmetrics, which stands for **S**pecificity, **H**elpfulness, **I**mmediacy, **N**ewsworthiness, and **E**ntertainment. value.

Although this formula doesn't enforce a particular set of words or a specific structure, it does offer a set of components which, when brought together, supply both the necessary information and incentive that readers look for in a title.

FOR EXAMPLE:

How to Increase Conversion Rates Without Touching a Landing Page

Written by Larry Kim

Of course, S.H.I.N.E. can be combined with other techniques we've previously mentioned. Here's how we could revamp the title of this whitepaper using the S.H.I.N.E. formula: "10+ (specificity) Great Practices for Whitepaper Titles (newsworthy) You Can Learn Now (immediacy) That Will Help You (helpfulness) Rock It (entertainment)."

9 USE PARENTHESES

The use of bracketed clarifications in titles, such as [Infographic], [Template], [Free eBook], or [Free Download], significantly increases click through rates (CTR) as well as page views and conversion rates (CR), since brackets specifically detail the type of content readers can expect to get. Among these, infographics and templates fare particularly well.

10 USE “PHOTO,” “WHO,” “AMAZING,” AND “NEED”

Words like “photo” and “who” show a consistent and significant increase in CTR.

The word “amazing,” on the other hand, can be risky. While some audiences do very well with it—sometimes driving a notable increase in page views and conversion rates—others are turned off by the word “amazing,” perhaps linking it with titles of a clickbait nature. If you do decide to use it, careful testing can be extremely important.

The word “heed” is similar in performance to the word “amazing” in that it can sometimes drive an increase in CR and page views, yet comes across as pushy and too urgent for some readers.

Words such as “magic,” “trick,” “always,” and “best” have low and even negative performance with respect to CTR, page views, and conversion rates. They sound clickbait and are best to be avoided in professional writing. Unless, of course, you are writing about magic.

CONCLUSION:

Marketers understand that writing can be a little bit of science and whole lot of art. In the end, effective copy should be guided by brand voice, analytics and internal and external feedback so that it remains true to its context, audience, and industry.

This should also help reduce or eliminate the confusion surrounding what the “ideal” headline is—that it’s only part of a greater whole and is not a guarantor for success. Headlines simply increase the likelihood of your content being noticed but do not drive all of engagement. Your content must still deliver on what you promise.

In the end, “10 Best Practices for Writing Effective Whitepaper Titles” offers a perfect combination of specificity, simplicity, and curiosity.

ALEXANDER KESLER BIO:



Alexander Kesler is a visionary B2B digital marketer with over 20 years of experience. Focusing on solutions for B2B demand generation, digital marketing, ABM, intent, and AI-driven lead generation, among others, Alexander embraces innovation and turns concepts and methodologies into products and marketing programs that drive ROI.

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