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Simple Articles that Sell

By Harvey Watson

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Contents

Please Read This First	2
<i>Terms of Use</i>	2
<i>Disclaimer</i>	2
Contents	3
About the Author	5
Introduction	6
Where to Start	7
Are Good Writers Born That Way?	8
Don’t Write a Word	11
Checking the Market	11
How Fiction can Help Your Articles	14
Short but Powerful – Your Title	15
<i>Sub-headings</i>	15
Popular Types of Articles	16
Where to Find Great Article Ideas	18
<i>Book and Magazine Sites</i>	20
Don’t Make These Mistakes	22
Timing	22
Copyright	22
<i>Government Sites are not Copyright free.</i>	23
<i>Is the Information Accurate?</i>	23
<i>Keep Records</i>	24
<i>Use Appropriate Language.</i>	24
Planning Your Article	26
<i>Using an Outline</i>	26

<i>Mind Maps</i>	27
Writing Your Article	29
<i>Tell it to a Friend</i>	29
<i>Hooks</i>	29
Editing your Articles	30
Formatting For Print and the Internet	31
Writer's Block and other Problems	32
<i>Writer's Block</i>	32
<i>Interruptions</i>	33
Interviewing	35
Tell them "What's in it for me?"	38
Feedback	39
An Article, Step by Step	41
Important Terms	43
Resources	44
Afterword	45

About the Author

Harvey Watson has been writing articles for many small magazines for several years.

He has helped many people develop their own writing skills.

The feedback which he got and the growing number of questions and requests for help encouraged Harvey to write this book.

"I don't have the time to answer all the questions I get but I want to help the people who ask for my help."

"A lot of the questions are similar and I've answered many of them over and over. This book will provide answers for my readers which will save them time, stress and money over time."

"The book contains tips and strategies which have worked for me and many other writers that I know."

"This book is one that I wish I had when I started writing articles. I made a lot of mistakes and some were serious. This book would have helped me avoid them.

Of course, the Internet wasn't around then. That's a great thing for new writers to learn and earn from."

I've found that opportunities with print magazines are reduced and competition is much greater. But, there are successes every day for writers that keep focused and don't let some rejections stop them.

I am really excited at the many ways that article writers can use the Internet. It's a much faster way to get name recognition and make some money.

Introduction

The pressure which the Internet has put on printed media means that there are fewer opportunities to sell articles to magazines and newspapers.

Since there are more people than ever trying to make a living in this area, competition is fierce. But, you can do it if you follow these suggestions and are prepared to adapt to the changing conditions.

The suggestions and tips I've included here are not just theory. They are based on what I've learned over several years of writing articles.

Experienced writers will benefit by seeing the particular ways I have developed to deal with common problems which most writers face and the shortcuts I've found to speed my writing and reduce the time I have to devote to keeping records.

But, the greatest value will be for readers with limited or no writing experience.

When they have read and started to use my suggestions, they will be much better equipped for success with their articles in print and on the Internet.

I believe that all my readers will find things here which will help you to write better articles. This will ensure that you make a better connection with your readers.

Where to Start

You must decide before you start to write your article what you want your readers to do when they have finished reading it?

Once you have decided that, you can focus everything in the article taking them toward that outcome.

You always start your article with a brief coverage of the most important information which you want your readers to get from it. You need to put this right at the beginning so your readers will know the importance of this article to them.

This is a standard technique with journalists. They start with a brief review of the main points, then cover each in more detail and finish with a short summary that is designed to encourage some action from their readers.

This format makes it easier for the sub editors to trim the article to fit the available space with out losing any of the main points which the reporter wants to give the reader.

Are Good Writers Born That Way?

You do NOT need formal qualifications unless you are looking for a job.

If you write good articles that people want to read, it is unlikely that you would ever be asked to show an editor your Diploma in Journalism.

I don't believe that you need to be born with a talent for expressing your self well.

There are some writers who are blessed with talent way above the average. But, I don't think having that talent is particularly important for someone that wants to write.

It may sometimes even work against someone who has the gift but does not put in the effort to polish their writing so it has maximum appeal to current markets.

Anyone that works to improve their writing and watches the constantly changing market conditions has a good chance of success.

It's the same in any field; writing, professional sport or any other. Even the most talented nurture their talent and practice the basics constantly.

These are the other qualities, natural or acquired, which I think are important for anyone that wants sustained success in writing.

Good communication skills: That is a vital factor for success in almost any field. When you start writing articles, you will also start to improve your powers of communication because you have to focus on getting your message across to editors and readers.

Patience: If you aren't a patient person, you will be at a disadvantage. You will need to be patient when you have submitted your articles because editors will not always respond promptly and some may never respond at all.

You can also expect to wait for payment. But, don't hesitate to follow up if you have not got a promised payment within a week after the agreed period.

There are, unfortunately, many people that will either delay payments or never intend to make them.

Your enquiries about the fate of your article or delay with your payment should always be tactful. There may be a genuine reason for the delay.

Endurance: Article writing can be profitable and enjoyable but it is not a path to overnight riches. You will need to do the necessary groundwork and keep writing despite rejections, disappointments and plain bad luck. Maintaining your physical and emotional health is very important. A strong, supportive family and network of friends can be a great help.



Able to recover quickly from disappointments: Disappointments are almost inevitable in this area. It may be that an article you had great expectations for is rejected, a series which forms a significant part of your income is suddenly cancelled without warning or clear explanation or your work is mis-used.

You should look for compensation where it is possible but sometimes you will not even get an explanation, let alone anything which seems fair.

If this happens to you, you need to keep working and continuing to produce and offer articles of the highest quality you can produce.

Realize that complaining about poor treatment to people that weren't involved and cannot directly help you find a remedy will not help.

The people you unload your unhappiness on may feel sympathetic but are also likely to feel that you have spoiled their day.

Worrying about poor treatment is counter-productive and may affect your health. That will stop you being able to continue to produce your best work.

Focused on their readers' needs: Many article ideas are rejected very quickly because the writer has not targeted the article to the needs of the magazines' readers.

They must be the focus from the title to the last line.

Reliable: You must do everything possible to never miss a deadline. There is no excuse good enough to be used. Even though an editor may seem to be understanding, they are less likely to use your next article.

Trustworthy: You have to make sure that you give your readers the facts as you know them and check them thoroughly.

You also need to keep your word to people you interview for your stories. It's rare for writers to be able to give these people the chance to read the final draft and be able to ask for changes. But, they need to be able to trust your word if you tell them that something will remain confidential and won't be part of the story.

Self-motivated: If you have a regular job, you have a support network around you. Each writer will have rough times when they must rely on their own inner resources to keep going and still produce quality work.

Good grasp of basic grammar and modern usage: All writers need the ability to be understood by the readers of their articles.

That does not mean you need a degree in English or Journalism.

You need to know enough that your writing is easy to understand.

Avoid technical terms which are not essential for an understanding of the topic.

Be sure to clearly explain any technical references which you use.

Make sure that your use and explanations of those terms are always accurate.

Don't use words which are not in common use unless the readers are likely to know their meaning and relevance to the article.

Don't make jokes unless they are relevant to the topic, likely to be understood by your readers and likely to get a good reaction. Unless you can write humor really well, it is usually better to avoid using it.

Don't Write a Word

Most people who are new to writing take one of two paths. They either just let the words tumble onto the paper or computer or they start planning how they are going to write their first story.

But, there is an important first step which should come before you write a word.

You need to ensure there is a market which needs your information and will pay for your work in producing them.

Unfortunately, there is so much free material available related to some topics that there is very little demand for paid content.

Checking the Market

Where to start? Check the titles of articles which you see on the magazines you or your family buy or see when you go shopping.

Visit Forums related to the subject: Just type something like, **forum: topic** into your favorite search engine.



That will get you a lot of places on the Internet where people who are interested in the topic gather.

It's a good idea to narrow down your search to find the best information on each very narrow sub-topic for each article. You might start with "forum: pet birds" and look at a few that seem most promising. Then, you could try "forum: parrots". Get some information there. You might also narrow your search to sub-topics again with, say, "forum: parrot health".

Almost any topic will give you many possibilities. This search got about 717,000 results on Google. There would be a lot of forums with multiple entries in that list but it still gives you plenty of possibilities.

Forum sites attract people that spend their time and money in that area.

You can usually scan the content of most Forum sites without signing up. But, you will have to sign up with your name and email address to some. Look at the questions people are asking in the forums and, of course, make note of the questions as well as any good advice which is posted in response. You will find answers or varying quality and reliability.

You can start by visiting some of those forums and looking for questions which the members of the forum ask. Make a list of questions which are repeated – that indicates problems which a lot of the people have, so make sure to include them and the best answers in your articles. Put everything in your own words.

Remember that you can only use the material in a forum to increase your own knowledge of a subject.

The text is protected by copyright which may be owned by the people making the posts or the owner of the Forums.

You will also have to be wary of collecting bad information. Always check any information you collect from forums and other web sites to ensure that it is accurate. You cannot take a chance that you might pass on bad information in your articles!

You want to focus on topics which are repeated every so often through the pages of the forums. "Repetition over time" is a strong sign that the problem is a common one and serious enough to get people actually posting about them in the forum.

Before you invest too much time into researching a topic, you can check whether the topic is one which has commercial possibilities.

Two simple checks which won't take much time are:

[1] When you enter the search into the search engine, there will probably be a number of related advertisements on the page. These show that some people are prepared to pay to advertise on the search engine when the terms you used are typed in.

That means that they have an expectation of making money through targeting those terms; they believe people that are interested in that topic are willing to buy their related products. You may have a topic which it is worth the time to prepare and submit articles about or to write them and put them on your own web site.

If the advertisements are very few, mostly just offer free information or are not really related to the topic you are researching, you might want to try a different topic.

[2] You can also type the same search into the search engine but add the word "free".

This will show you web sites which offer free advice for people interested in the topic. Many will also have advertisements on their site but be wary if there are lots of sites where the sort of information you would have in your article is already offered without charge.

This is only a rough guide to the potential of the article. The article may still



be worthwhile if you gather credible information from various sources and:

- You save the readers a lot of time which they would have to use to find, check and sort the information you provide.
- You show that some information which is offered elsewhere is inaccurate, misleading or potentially harmful.
- Some of your information is worth more to them than the freely available information which they can get elsewhere.
- You have some exclusive information based on your own experience or people you personally know and trust to increase the usefulness of the generally available material.

It is worthwhile to give some indication of the extra value that your readers are getting in your article.

How Fiction can Help Your Articles

Any kind of writing is fairly time consuming and you may think that reading fiction is an activity which you should keep to a minimum. After all, you have to read resource material, articles by established writers in the niches which you target and much else which has a direct benefit to the results which your own writing gets for you and your readers.

My opinion, based on my own experience and from closely analysing many very popular articles, is that reading quality fiction and studying the techniques which those writers use can have great benefits for article writers.

All writers need to grab their reader's attention and hold it through the whole piece.

If we learn to use the techniques of skilled fiction writers when we include true stories related to the subject in our articles, we can get better connection with the readers and help them to identify more with the people in our articles.

That can also help the readers to accept that they can successfully use the information you give them in the articles. Putting it on a personal level will help readers to understand any technical or theoretical content much better.

Short but Powerful – Your Title

Every article you write needs a great title. If you just apply some stock phrase to the top of your article, some readers will skip it entirely.

They will only see it in the contents list for that issue of the magazine or on the web site. If it doesn't intrigue or excite them, they'll move to something with more appeal.

Your title is like your business card.

If people don't keep your business card, they probably won't ever make contact with you so you can tell them more about what you offer.

If they aren't hooked by your title, the effort you put into that article will never be seen, used or appreciated by that reader.

The best titles address a major concern of the reader.

Some writers cannot resist sometimes using a joke in the title but that might not have any meaning for the reader, so they will move on to the next article or another web site.

Sub-headings

Using sub-headings in your articles help to focus your readers' mind on the particular sub-topic you cover in that section. It also gives them a welcome break in the sea of mostly uniform text on the page.

Research indicates that using sub-headings actually tend to increase the comprehension of the material in the article.

A useful tip which I was given was to use the sub-headings as a path through the article. This means that anyone reading the sub-headings from first to last should have some understanding of the main points of the whole article.

Popular Types of Articles

These are some of the most popular types of articles with readers.

Reviews of products or services: These articles are a standard part of most magazines. They can be comparative reviews of the products or services from different companies which are intended to do the same task or in depth review of a new or updated offering from one supplier.

Credibility and even-handedness is important here. Any hint of bias would cause many readers to downgrade their view of the value of the article.

Promotional articles: Some writers produce articles which are deliberately designed to promote a product or service which the writer is either being paid to promote or has an arrangement with the supplier to be paid in some way.

These are very common on Internet sites but would only appear in print if the publisher actually had a direct arrangement with the company offering the product or service.

Any such arrangement should be disclosed to the reader. Print publications usually mark the article as an advertisement or advertorial.

Web sites are becoming more open about disclosing such arrangements since the U.S.A. Federal Trade Commission started taking an interest in whether readers might be misled. But, full and clear disclosure is not universal yet.

I think that being up-front about any such arrangement will make the writer more credible. That can have a bigger payoff over time than a few affiliate commissions.



Interviews: This is a very good field to explore. You might find an expert in your street or your town. But, thanks to V.O.I.P. services like Skype, you can contact someone for an interview almost anywhere in the world.

Opinion pieces: These are always

supplied by writers with a proven track record and credibility in the area which they are writing about.

Personal Experiences: An area where a new writer has as much opportunity as almost any other if they were a central character in a major event, adventure or disaster.

How-to: Articles of this type are always welcome if they contain original ideas. There is, of course, much competition.

Top (number) lists: This type of article is a favorite with writers and readers. Of course, ten has been very popular since TV host David Letterman featured his own version regularly on his show, but you can be just as successful with an article that explains seven, five or some other low number of items.

The main thing to remember is that the content must be closely targeted to the readers' needs.

The advantage for readers is that they know the article won't take much time to scan and the chance of finding one or more good hints is high.

Where to Find Great Article Ideas

Every good article starts with an idea.

But, when you consider how many magazines, newspapers, websites and blogs there are, you might think that all the good ideas have been used.

Where are you going to find an idea and an approach that will intrigue and editor and their readers?

I'll admit that there are very few ideas which are not being used. But that's not a problem.

Just think about how many books, movies and television shows have been very successful even though they were based on ideas that had already been used, probably many times over.

The important thing about each article that you do is that it contains your particular view and your ideas relating to the basic theme that it contains.

One of the most common questions which writers get from readers is, "where do you get those great ideas for your articles?"

My answer is usually, "I look for new ways to help solve problems which people have."

That is the truth because solving a problem which many readers have will probably be the basis of a very successful article.

Now, I will share some ways which I use to find what problems are most common and most important to the readers. I will also give you a few other suggestions about getting ideas and deciding which ones are most likely to produce really popular articles.

Your Experience: I have based a lot of articles on my own experience of the particular topic. The problems, successes and shortcuts which you have had with hobbies, your family and in your working life could be the basis of interesting and profitable articles.

Because, after all, there are thousands of people who have similar experiences and problems as you do.

When you solve a problem or find a better way to do something, write it down and file it.



If you think it is interesting and useful enough to be the basis of an entire article, I suggest that you write it up and submit it as soon as possible.

It is very common for the same idea to occur to different people around the same time. The rewards, such as publication recognition and payment, will go to the person who first takes action even if they don't write the article as well as someone else would have.

It doesn't have to be something of great importance. It just needs to be something which will help your readers save time and money or inform them.

The way you present your information is very important. If you don't convey enthusiasm or even excitement to the reader, they are not likely to take action. This will reduce the impact of your article. It is also unlikely that the reader will feel encouraged to look for more of your writing in the future.

What you hear: whenever you are with other people; your family, friends or workmates, you will probably hear about problems which they have had. They are also likely to share any solutions they've found.

This information can become the seed of an article. Their problem is likely to be shared by many other people too.

I emphasize problems because they are the basis of many popular articles.

Not many people would be interested in knowing, for instance, that your cousin Jane has a dog named Ralph. But, you could have the basis of an article if Jane had found an easy and effective way to teach Ralph to stop some annoying habit which a lot of dogs have.

Always check information which you hear or read unless you get it from someone with qualifications in that area. Even then, it is important to

protect your credibility with editors and readers by checking the information with at least one other qualified source.

Forums: If you visit any forums or chat sites on the Net, especially those which deal with an area of special interest, watch for questions which get several responses.

This shows that the problem is fairly common and there is wide interest in ways to fix or prevent it.

You should be careful not to use the original writer's words as they are copyright protected.

Anyway, it is only fair and a sign of personal integrity, to ask the original writer if they will give you permission to use the information.

The rights are usually the author's but some web sites claim the rights to anything which people post to that web site. Check the Terms of Use for the web site to see what they claim and what is allowed, if anything.

Book and Magazine Sites

Another great source of ideas is the web sites which are devoted to books and magazines.

Sites such as Amazon.com and Magazines.com are full of possible topics.

Check the titles of articles featured on the covers of current magazines when you are shopping.



You can visit magazines.com. This web site offers subscriptions to a huge range of magazines to suit all tastes.

Scan their "**Top Categories**" list at the left of the web site's home page to see what they say are the most popular types of magazines.

Then, click on one of those broad categories which you are interested in writing articles for.

That will show you a list of the most popular magazines for that category. Click on the cover picture to enlarge it so that you can see the titles of the featured articles and sections of that magazine.

They even provide lists of "most popular" or "best sellers" which can point you to the hottest current topics.

Keep in mind that what you write for print publication will not be published for a month or even longer. A topic which is very "hot" today may have become stale by that time.

Don't Make These Mistakes

Timing

One important point to keep in mind with writing articles is the timing your submissions.

Print publications often have a lead time of weeks or months between the bulk of the magazine being prepared and its appearance on the shelves in your supermarket.

That means that you should be submitting your Christmas-related articles in June. Check the website of the particular magazine you want to submit your work to for information about this.

If it is not clear, send an email to the relevant person.

If you are publishing your own material on the Internet, you need to have it online well in advance of the relevant dates so that it can be found by the search engines before people start searching for the information closer to the season.

You could submit travel articles in the off-season and do trips (for research, so they might be tax deductible!) at the best times of the year!.

Copyright

You cannot use anything which other people have written and claim it as your own.

This applies to material in Internet forums, web sites and e-books as much as it does to traditional printed books and magazines.

There is a widely held belief that all material which is published on the Internet is free to use however you wish.

But, you always need to respect other people's work even if there is no copyright notice or other restriction shown with the material.

This is as important for the sake of your own reputation as much as it is for possible legal implications.

Government Sites are not Copyright free.

You may have heard that material on U.S.A. or other government web sites can be used by that country's citizens without any copyright restrictions?

That may be true for some material but it is always wise to check about anything specific which you are interested in before using it.

Some of the material on those web sites is produced by outside commercial organizations which are paid by the government department or authority.

Many of those companies retain the copyright on the material which they produced. If you use the information without their specific written permission, which usually requires payment of a fee, you could have a serious problem.

The department or some other body may have actually produced the material you want to use and hold copyright on it, but they may have other restrictions.

Always check the "Terms of Use" on the website. If you can't find the information about usage, check with the department directly so that you are in the clear. When you check, get the name of the person you speak with and details of the position which they hold.

Is the Information Accurate?

There is a lot of valuable information which can be quickly and safely accessed on the Internet. There is also a great deal which is biased, out of date or just plain wrong.

It can be very hard to tell the difference.

When someone answers a question through a forum or by writing an article or blog post, they may not give the best answer but one which is intended to bring some benefit to them.

Their answer may be skewed to;

- Promote a product which they benefit from the sale of.
- Support their point of view.

- Make them look good.

They may just want to mislead the person who asked the question.

Sometimes, they may be trying to help but are passing on a suggestion which they heard or read but have no personal experience with.

Even a site with the good reputation of, say, [Wikipedia](#), has many entries which are not accurate because any visitor is able to edit almost any entry which they want to.

Another point is that much of the material which is put on web sites is not maintained or updated. The material you saw may have been the best available information available anywhere when it was posted but may now be outdated and even possibly dangerous.

It is important to check any information against a few sources before using it.

If you use inaccurate information in your article, the responsibility is entirely yours, no matter how careful you thought you had been.

Keep Records

Don't keep your receipts in a paper bag or a shoebox!

You need to keep careful, clear records for tax purposes. This can be more complex for writers than people with a regular day job. You need to make sure you have enough supporting information and sales to convince the Tax department that you are writing as a professional and not just as a hobby.

I strongly advise you use an accountant, preferably one with other clients who are self-employed.

You might ask them if they would be interested in being interviewed for an article.

Use Appropriate Language.

You should always use language which will be easy for the type of reader you want to attract to understand.

That does not ever mean "dumbing down" the content.

It means that you need to ensure that you make sure that you write the article in clear, plain language.

Avoid special terms unless your readers are likely to know what the terms mean in relation to the topic of the article.

Don't miss any steps in the instructions for articles with practical, hands-on content. This is a big problem for many people who may have years of experience doing a particular task, so they skip over some minor but important details.

A simple example of this is to write an article which explains how to do a common everyday task such as tying your shoelaces.

Try that and you may be surprised to find how difficult it is to follow your “clearly written” instructions.

Planning Your Article

Writing of any kind is like the iceberg. The article or other finished piece gets the most attention but the other ninety percent which is mostly out of public view is critically important.

Everything which you write should be planned before you start writing.

Using an Outline

Do you use an outline for the articles and other material which you write?

Many people think that it's boring and a waste of time. They may remember a teacher at their school pushing them to sketch out a plan of any creative writing they had to do. But, all they wanted to do was write the required number of words and get out of there!

I sympathize with them because I had a similar experience.

An article just needs a short outline or skeleton.

It may seem unnecessary because you are writing an article of maybe 500 to 800 words and not a full-length book.

But, it is actually a great help to writing better articles. After I was given this tip by another writer and tried it a few times, I decided I would never write another article without doing a brief outline first.

It helps you to stay focused on the point of the article.

It will also save you valuable time. If you don't have an outline, you may waste time and e.g. writing material which is not directly relevant to the main interests of the type of reader you are targeting with that article.

You may also write too much about some parts of the subject and have to cut some of the material you sweated over to make the article fit into to required length. You might be able to use the material you cut another time



but you will probably regret the time you wasted writing it as your deadline approaches.

There are computer programs which will help you with outlining your articles. Microsoft Word® has an Outline option which formats the text you write into several levels of Headings and one basic level called bodytext.

You can easily change the Level for one or several Headings at any time. This is quite easy to learn and worth trying if you already have or intend to buy the Office package.

You can use a whiteboard or large sheet of paper to list the topics which you want to cover.

Until recently, I found it much easier to write each of the points on separate small slips of paper. Then, I would shuffle the pieces around to get the points in the order which I felt would be most useful for my readers.

Then, I found Tony Buzan's book on Mind Mapping. This was not the only book about the topic but Mr Buzan made the whole process very clear and easy to follow.

Mind Maps

I believe this is the best way for me to outline my articles but I know people who still prefer to use the other methods which I mention above.

You can make a mind map on a large sheet of paper like you use for the list method mentioned above. You can also get computer programs which will make it easier and quicker to produce mind maps.

One program is called FreeMind. It is free and there are versions for Windows, Linux and the Macintosh OS X operating system.

This could be a good introduction for you to the Mindmap concept. Then, you could decide if that was the right program for you or you could investigate the many others which are available.

Please read the introduction at

http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page and

then download the package for your type of computer system from <http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Download>

The basic method of creating a mind map of your article or almost any other type of project is to start by drawing a circle in the center of your computer screen or piece of paper. Write the main topic into that circle.

Then, you draw a line outward from the center to another circle (or appropriately shaped object) for each sub-topic.

You continue to add more branches from each circle you have drawn for the subordinate topics which depend on them.

Draw links between the circles.

You will discover that some points need to be moved to another section of your mind map.

Some might need to connect more closely to the center while others are relegated to outer sections once you begin to organize your material.

This stage is much easier when you use a computer based system.

All programs which produce mind maps have a viewing program so that you can share the output mindmap with people that do not have the actual program which produced the mind map.

Some of the programs can also export your mindmap as an outline which you can use in your text editor or word processor, or in a form which can be used by other computer programs such as Microsoft Powerpoint®

I strongly suggest that you give mindmaps a try. The results which can be achieved after some practise are well worth the effort and time involved for most people.

Writing Your Article

Tell it to a Friend

The best advice I got when I started to write articles was to write as if I was sending the information to a friend.

An article is not a lecture or a dissertation. So, keep it conversational unless it is intended for publication in an academic or scientific publication.

Focus: Unless the focus of the article you are writing is a personal adventure or experience, use "you" and other related terms instead of "I".

This will help you to maintain full focus on the reader and what they will get from the article.

Hooks

Because there are so many distractions and alternatives available to readers on the Internet, we need to use techniques which will attract and hold each visitor's attention as firmly as an angler hooking a prized fish.

Some of the techniques which I have found work best include:

- 1) Make them curious.** Human beings are as curious as the proverbial cat.
- 2) Promise them benefits.** Just make sure that you give the readers all the promised information in the article.
- 3) Hit their hotspots.** Research to find the most important things about the topic and give your readers relevant information about them.
- 4) Scare them.** Don't overdo it, but point out what they might lose or never have if they don't follow the advice which you give in your article. I believe that Abraham Maslow (originator of the "Hierarchy Of Needs") said that people feared losing some things more than they desired to make similar gains.

Editing your Articles

The most common thing which causes a poor response from articles is when the writer offers them for publication or puts them on their web site while they still have obvious mistakes in them.

If you post poor quality material on the Internet, it will probably remain there for years. It could cause damage to your reputation long after you forgot you had written it when people see those early mistakes.

Proper editing is very important. It is not hard to edit your own articles

You also benefit from editing your work before you submit it or post it on your web site. Editors and webmasters that you submit your articles to will welcome your work and you will start to build a reputation for articles which don't require too much work before they can be used.

If you make their job easier, they are more likely to give you more exposure.

Using an outline to prepare your article will actually help make your editing easier.

You can use the outline to check that you have covered all the most important relevant points in your article.

Don't try to check your writing just after you finish the article. Even if you are on a tight deadline, put it aside for at least a couple of hours while you do something else that will fill your conscious mind with totally different thoughts.

If you try to edit it while you still have your brain stuffed with the points you made in your article, you will miss even fairly obvious errors.

Formatting For Print and the Internet

Difference between print and Internet presentation: Some formatting is common to both print and web-based articles.

Each paragraph should contain just one main point. Each sentence should explain some aspect of that idea and they should be arranged to help the reader get a better understanding as they read through the article.

The first couple of paragraphs should contain a summary of the most important information in your article. This helps the reader decide whether they need to read the rest of the article.

Your article should answer as far as possible within the allowed length the standard five questions; Who, What, How, Why, When.

Always link each part of the article to the reader's specific area of interest.

It is important to realize that your writing style on the Internet can generally be a bit less formal than many traditional publishers require for their printed publications.

Formatting can be a bit different too.

People that are reading articles on their computer monitor are often not concentrating as much as we do when we read a regular magazine.

Give the Internet reader more visual variety.

Break up the text in your Internet articles with sub-headings, lists of bullet points and, maybe, a take-out or two (a take-out is a small box with additional information about a particular point).

Don't overdo the highlights and changes in text color and font. These tactics are likely to annoy and distract the reader more than encourage them to keep reading. They may also make it more difficult for them to remember the points you make.

Keep your paragraphs short. Three or four short sentences focusing on one thought is about right.

Writer's Block and other Problems

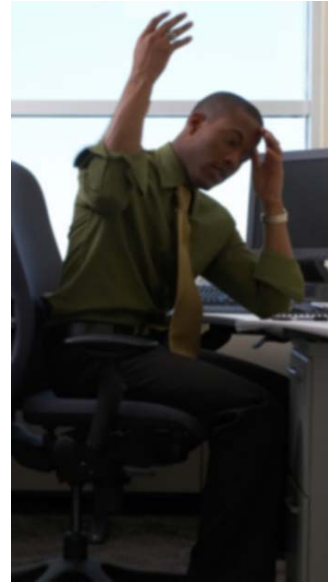
Writer's Block

I'm sure you have heard of "writer's block"?

I know that many people, even some fairly experienced writers, have this problem at some time.

I am not professionally qualified, but my suggestions are based on my personal experience, discussions with other writers in many fields and watching new and experienced writers in good times and bad.

Although I don't say that every instance of writer's block will be cured, I suggest that you try these tips.



They have helped me and several other writers that I have direct contact with. They are all easily reversible, so I don't think there is any chance that following them might make your situation any worse.

I believe that the problem is often caused by holding back your writing while you try to make it perfect.

Here are some reasons why this won't work.

- You might become discouraged about your lack of progress so the piece is never completed. This will also discourage you from starting another article.
- The information which you included may become outdated or widely known which will make the article worthless. That also means that you have wasted your time on research and all the other work you did on the article.

The best way I know to get over writer's block is fairly quick and can help over time to reduce the instances of it.

Start by putting firm times in your schedule when you will write.

Write them down.

They don't have to be long periods. I suggest that you start with some ten or, at most, fifteen minute sessions.

The real trick is to not do anything but write in those periods.

Treat each period as important. Avoid the thought that "you can always catch up next time"!

If you can't get started on the topic you are supposed to be writing about, write something and write for as much of the time period as you can.

When I did this, I felt I was wasting the time because I could not get started. After I started writing and stuck to it, the ideas came. I was surprised about how much I could accomplish in a concentrated fifteen, or even ten minutes.

It sounds too simple but that's also true of many of the best ideas.

And, after all, you are only risking a few blocks of fifteen minutes which you weren't getting much value of anyway.

Unless I am travelling or have other firm commitments, I now write in two two-hour blocks about six days a week.

Those sessions each consist of four half-hours of concentrated writing.

Interruptions

Most writers who work from home, are used to being interrupted by friends



and family who don't realize that they really are working and not always available for a quick chat just because we "don't seem to be doing much" That's a direct quote from one of my friends shortly after I started working from home!

The best solution is to have a separate room which you use as your office. When that door is closed, the family understand that you should not be disturbed expect for emergencies.

That will help reduce interruptions from friends too.

But, if you can't have a whole room for your work, you need to set up a corner in your home and just have your work materials there.

But, I always have short breaks for exercise and a drink of water about every half hour. The exercise is important to keep good circulation in my legs. The water also helps with my circulation but its main purpose is to keep me hydrated so my brain can keep working at its best rate.

I don't have music or the radio on in the room where I am writing. I found they tend to distract me. Television is even worse. But, your results may vary.

I get more done in those sessions than I used to do when I was trying to devote seven hours a day to my writing.

Interviewing

One of the best ways to produce a credible and useful article is to interview someone who has relevant experience and reputation related to the subject.

This may be a friend or someone you know through your work or family.

You can even contact someone that you have not had previous contact with.

These tips will help you to produce a good article and avoid some of the problems which people can have with this sort of project.

Get in touch with the expert as early in your preparation of the article as you can.

Give them enough information about yourself and your project. Tell them about your own background or lack of it with the subject.

Tell them where and how you will be using the material. If you are expecting to profit from the article, tell them. They may want a fee or some other consideration (mention of a book they have written or whatever).

Most people will want a copy of the interview.

They may ask for the right to check the finished article before publication. If you are publishing it, you make the decision. If you will submit it to a publisher, you cannot give that undertaking unless you get approval from the publisher first.

You will need to accommodate their time constraints. I have done interviews by phone ([Skype](#) over the Internet) at 1 a.m. to suit the interviewee's time zone.

If you want to record the conversation, get their permission first, preferably in writing.

You may also need to check your country's laws regarding recording of conversations, especially if you are using a regular phone or tape recorder.

Work out what questions you want to ask the expert and send them your list before you meet or call them to do the interview.

There are some good reasons for this:

- They may not want to be asked some of the questions.
- They will possibly need some time beforehand to confirm the accuracy of their answers to one or more questions.
- They will appreciate being able to see the questions in advance so they don't hesitate or stumble when you ask them during the interview.
- They may suggest rewording a question or even additional questions which will improve the interview or its value to them.

Your questions should almost all be open questions which give the expert an opportunity to say more than just a flat "Yes" or "No".

You must also work out before you start the interview how you can politely move them to your next question if:

- They start rambling on about something for too long or
- You feel that you need to get them off that particular point for any reason.

Put the most important and interesting questions early on your list in case the length of some answers makes it impossible to get through all the questions you have.

Be sure to find and ask those questions which will be of most value to your readers. Even if you don't have any great knowledge of their subject, try to find something relevant which they have not been asked at every interview they have ever done. They will appreciate it and it will also make the possibility of good feedback from your readers much better too.

Ask the expert in advance to let you know if there are any points which they want you to ask them about.

You will often see TV journalists ask their guests questions which seem to show they have a deep knowledge of the subject. But, they do not have time

to study the topics their various guests are talking about that deeply. They rely on their researchers and questions which the guests provide before the interview.

If you use Skype or any other Internet based phone service, or a recorder (digital or tape), be sure to test everything fully as close to the time of the actual recording as possible.

Have a back-up system as well as spare batteries and globes if you are using special lighting.

When you call them to start the interview, the first thing which you should do is ask if they are ready to do the interview at that time.

It is always possible that there has been something that came up for them at the last minute. If so, they are likely to be very accommodating about arranging another time and trying to provide you with an above-average interview at that time.

Treat the expert as you would a close friend. Your personal feelings are largely irrelevant. You owe them courtesy because they are giving you their time and you would not have an interview without them.

Good luck!

Tell them "What's in it for me?"

Whatever type of article you are writing, your primary aim should be to ensure the readers are satisfied that they got good value.

If they can't recognize a benefit which is worth the time they took to read your article, then they are very unlikely to act in the way which you recommended, visit your web site or look for more of your articles.

It is not enough to just present the bare facts in an article. That might work if all your readers who come to your page were already motivated to read your entire article.

But, most people have many demands on their time. You have to give them maximum value in every sentence to hold their attention.

Then, hopefully, you can get them to respond as you want them to when they have read your article.

The traditional view of somebody reading an article in a magazine is that they will be sitting in a comfortable chair with a cup of their favorite beverage at their side and fully focused on what they are reading.

But, it's common these days for somebody to read an article while they are having a conversation with their family or people they work with. At the same time, they probably have the radio or television at high volume demanding their attention.

It is even more difficult to gain and keep the attention of somebody who is reading your article on their computer. Research suggests that you have no more than about 7 seconds to gain their attention and that you must work very hard to keep it.

My favorite description of somebody reading a webpage is that it is as if they are reading it while they walk down the middle of a busy highway against the traffic. That gives you some idea of the potential distractions your words must compete against.

Feedback

Feedback from editors, readers and even other writers can be very helpful to us.

With everyone being so busy these days, it is usual for editors to use standard rejection notices to save time and to ensure that their message is clear and does not cause any confusion to the writer of the rejected piece.

Every writer gets some rejections so don't worry too much about it.

Please understand that editors do not have time to give writers any information about why the piece was not accepted. So, it is a good sign when an editor adds some sort of personal comment to a stock rejection.

It could mean that they see some potential in the way which you write and they think you are worthy of some encouragement.

Don't take it as a sign that they want to start a dialogue about the piece or you're writing in general.

Just keep their suggestions in mind when you write another article for submission to them.

You might also review the article which they rejected and see if you can improve it by taking their comments into consideration.

The other valuable type of feedback is that from your readers. This is a lot more common when your writing appears on the web. But you need to listen carefully when readers of any of your writing take the trouble to actually share their impressions and suggestions.

After all, it is their views that editors, publishers and advertisers are all focused on? You need to listen, respond and give their feedback careful consideration too.

You may also get feedback from other writers.

It can be very valuable when it is in the form of constructive criticism from more experienced writers. But, it is often just polite praise which means little.

That's because many people, writers included, may ask for constructive criticism but really only want confirmation of the high quality of their writing and their obvious talent.

Anything else may offend them.

Experienced writers tend to avoid saying anything which is even slightly critical and work out some complimentary statements which don't actually mean much.

If you get constructive criticism, take what lessons you can from it.

An Article, Step by Step

Here is a quick overview of the process I use when actually writing an article.

Not everybody will use this exact method, but it will give you something to start with. I expect that every reader will adapt and improve on this as they gain experience and confidence.

I start by refining my idea of the type of person that I expect will be reading the article. The management of every publication spends a lot of time and money working this out for them. So, I think it's a good idea for me to do the same.

This helps me to decide:

- The tone of voice which I will use in the article. I don't mean that I pretend to be somebody that I'm not when I write particular types of articles. I only adjust my tone and the type of words that I use to best fit with the type of person that will be reading a particular article.
- Which points will be most important to that reader. That helps me to keep focused as tightly as possible to their needs.
- Which points will be of less value to that reader. This will help me to decide which points I can remove or leave out if the article turns out to be longer than the required length.

My next step is to type a very brief outline of the article.

I will put one line about each topic I will mention. Each of those are followed by a line about two or three sub-topics. I'll include references to people, places and important reference material which I want to be sure to include.

I'll then decide roughly how much I'll write about each of the topics and sub-topics, depending on their relative importance to the reader.

Heading: Start with the heading or title. I usually spend a significant amount of time on the title and first couple of paragraphs.

It's very common for writers to try a dozen or more titles before settling on the one which they finally decide to use.

Don't throw those other titles away! Add them to your swipe file. You might find some of them useful for later articles. That can save you time if you are near to a deadline and just can't think of something which fits that article.

Body: The first couple of paragraphs give your reader the main points which you will flesh out in the body of your article.

This section covers all off the important questions which you have promised to explain in your headline and introduction.

Conclusion: This is where you put your "call to action" which you want your readers to do.

It is usually better to be a bit subtle and let the readers figure out the action for themselves rather than spell out every detail for them.

If they believe it is their idea, they will have ownership of it and will be more likely to act in the way that you want.

Important Terms

Attribute: To give credit or refer to the person or group that is the source of a quote or piece of information you use in an article.

Hook: This is something which increases the reader's interest and encourages them to keep reading your article. This may be the promise of valuable information to be revealed later in the article.

Deadline: the latest time by which an article must be delivered to the editor.

Lede: This is an old term for the first paragraph of an article.

Swipe File: This is a collection of written pieces which the writer admires and learns from. While it is most common in advertising, it is a good idea for each writer to have their collection of personal favorites of the type of writing which they specialize in.

I still collected examples of other writers' work for inspiration and study.

Take-out: A take-out is a small box with additional information about a particular point. The box may have a colored border and there may be a colored background behind the text to set it apart from the rest of the article.

Resources

Snopes <http://www.snopes.com/> This site is a highly respected, independent verifier and debunker of urban and Internet legends. There are many stories which are repeatedly told as fact or "from a reliable source" which have no truth in them. You can often get the best information about them here. An important point is that they say, "We don't expect anyone to accept us as the ultimate authority on any topic". They do a very good job though.

American Rhetoric <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/> This site holds a "database of and index to 5000+ full text, audio and video versions of public speeches, sermons, legal proceedings, lectures, debates, interviews, other recorded media events, and a declaration or two".

It is a great resource for checking what someone actually said in a speech.

Ezine Articles <http://www.ezinearticles.com/> is one of the most widely known article directories on the Internet.

Freemind <http://freemind.sourceforge.net/> A mind mapping program which is available free for most computer systems. Because of the good results I got from using it, I suggest you try it for at least a couple of weeks. Then, you can continue using it, get a different program or use a different method of producing mind maps of your articles and other projects.

Open Office <http://www.openoffice.org/> Excellent free suite of programs similar to Microsoft Office® Frequently updated and well worth trying if you don't have the Microsoft package. There are versions of this free package for both Windows® and Macintosh® computer systems.

Afterword

I hope that you got some ideas, encouragement and maybe even a little inspiration from my ebook.

Writing articles is a great way to make a part-time or full-time income. Keeping motivated can be difficult at times but the rewards can be great.

You don't have to work to set hours but regular effort will pay off.



You don't have to commute – you can write and submit your work from almost anywhere!

You don't have a set income – you can make more money by writing more articles or aiming at better paying outlets.

My final tip for you is:

Remember that SUCCESS always comes after ACTION!

Harvey Watson

[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)