

The 21 Most Powerful Copywriting Rules of All Time

by Joe Vitale

1. Know your USP.

USP = Unique Selling Proposition = a one line statement (proposition) that explains (sells) how your product or service differs (unique) from the competition. You can't know it unless you research your product as well as your competition. What does Federal Express say? Dove soap? You must know your basic offer before you can begin to persuade anyone to accept it.

2. Use layout that supports copy.

Graphics, fonts, and layouts don't sell, but they can help bring attention to your sales message. Use proven formats. Look at the famous Maxwell Sackheim ad in my book, The [*AMA Complete Guide to Small Business Advertising*](#). Consider an advertorial style. It can get 80% more attention than any other ad layout. You must know the form your sales message will take before you begin to draft your actual message. Knowing you are about to write a classified ad will lead you to write differently than if you were about to write a sales letter or a display ad.

3. Create a riveting and relevant headline.

Round-up your prospects with a headline that makes them sit up and take notice. Best place to see good headlines is on the cover of *Reader's Digest*. See my AMA advertising book for 30 ways to write headlines. A headline *calls out* your readers. A change in headline can bring 19 times more response.

4. Write simply, directly, and in the conversational style of your prospects.

Who are you trying to reach? Housewives, business executives, children? You must know the type of person you are writing to. Write to one person from that group and you will speak to all people in that group. Forget trying to impress people, win writing awards, or please a past English teacher. Good copy often violates the rules of English but still makes the sale.

5. So that -- ?

Write of the benefits, not the features. A feature generally describes a product; a benefit generally explains what the product does for you. A good way to write about benefits would be to keep saying *you get this...and the product does this...so that you get....* Look at Kodak. People don't buy film for the pictures they create. They are buying memories. Look at their advertising and you'll barely see film anywhere. What you will see are family reunions, graduations, weddings, etc. You get film which helps you take pictures so that you get memories. Keep asking So that -- ? to dig up benefits. For example, *This computer is a 486...so that...you get a computer that is twice the speed of other computers...so that...you can get twice the work done in the same amount of time...so that...you are free to have longer lunches, make more calls, or focus on something else.*

6. Use emotional appeal.

People buy for emotional reasons and justify with logic. Gene Schwartz wrote an ad that ran for 20 years and sold so many flowers it exhausted nurseries. It's packed with emotional appeal. It read in part:

When you put this into the Earth, and you jump back (quickly), it explodes into flowers. And everybody in your neighborhood comes and they look. And people take home blooms because you've got so many you could never find a house big enough to put them. And you've become the gardening expert for the entire neighborhood.

7. Demolish the five basic objections within your copy:

- A. I don't have enough time.
- B. I don't have enough money.
- C. It won't work for me.
- D. I don't believe you.
- E. I don't need it.

8. Activate your writing.

Whenever you write the words "is," "was," "are," or "to be," train yourself to stop and change them to something more active. "The meeting is tonight" sounds dead; "The meeting starts at 7 PM sharp tonight" feels clear, direct and alive. "Clair Sullivan is the finest promoter in the country" doesn't convey the excitement that "Clair Sullivan creates corporate events better than anyone else on the planet" does.

9. Tell them something they don't know.

Fascinate your readers. The more you tell, the more you sell. Long copy usually works better than short copy, as long as the copy holds interest. After all, people read whole books. They will read your copy IF it interests them.

10. Seduce the reader into continued reading.

Keep your reader reading any way you can. Questions, unfinished sentences, involving statements, sub-heads, bulleted points, quizzes, all work. These techniques also handle the *skimmers* who just glance at your copy, as well as the word-for-word readers.

11. Say *collie*.

Be specific. Whenever you write something vague, such as "they say," or "later on," or "many," train yourself to stop and rewrite those phrases into something more concrete, such as: "Mark Weisser said...", or "Saturday at noon" or "Seven people agreed." Don't say *dog* when you can say *collie*.

12. Overwhelm with testimonials

Get as many testimonials as you can. The more specific, the more convincing. In short, deliver proof that your claim is for real.

13. Remove the risk!

Give a guarantee. Less than 2% of your customers will ever ask for their money back, so offering a guarantee is a safe risk. Here's the guarantee from my book, [*The Seven Lost Secrets of Success*](#):

Use these seven principles for six months. If you're out of work, you'll find a job. If you're employed, you'll get a raise. If you're in business, you'll see a whopping 25% jump in revenues -- or return this book and your receipt for a full cash refund!

14. Ask for the order

Too much copy these days never asks anyone to buy anything. Sales copy should SELL. Use a coupon as a way to signal readers that you want their business and to remind yourself to always ask for the order (or at least to ask people to contact you or remember you).

15. Use magic words.

There are certain words which have been proven to help get attention. If you just string these words together, they sound like fluff. But weave them into your sentences, along with your facts, and they become powerful:

Announcing, astonishing, exciting, exclusive, fantastic, fascinating, first, free, guaranteed, incredible, initial, improved, love, limited offer, powerful, phenomenal, revealing, revolutionary, special, successful, super, time-sensitive, unique, urgent, wonderful, you, breakthrough, introducing, new, and how-to.

And consider the connotations of the words you use: *workshop* sounds like hard work while *seminar* sounds easier. *Read* sounds hard while *look oversounds* easy. *Write* sounds difficult while *jot down* sounds easy. Be aware of the psychological implications of the words and phrases you use.

16. Get pumped up!

Show your excitement for your product. If you aren't pumped up about it, why not? Enthusiasm sells.

17. Rewrite and test ruthlessly.

Test. Test. Test. A change of one word can increase response 250%. Sackheim tested his famous ad at least six times before he found the headline and format that worked. Most copy isn't written in one day. You have to write, rewrite, edit, rewrite, test, and test again. Keep asking yourself, *Would I buy this product?* and *Have I said everything to make the sale?*

18. State a believable deadline.

Most people won't take any immediate action unless there exists a sound reason to do so. Deadlines help, as long as your deadline sounds credible.

19. Instantaneous satisfaction!

Everything should be nearly instantaneous because we want instant gratification. Toll-free numbers and fax numbers help. If you're marketing on the Web, include a [link](#) or a button that makes it easy for your readers to order.

20. Sincerity sells.

Don't offer fluff, mislead, or lie to your prospects. Tell them the truth. While rarely done, it actually helps sales to admit a weakness or a fault. Remember the ad, *These neckties aren't very pretty, but they're a steal at a nickel each!* Tell the truth in a fascinating way.

21. Copy your copy from the best.

Read excellent copy, write it out word-for-word in your own hand to get a feel for its rhythm, and memorize the following books:

- *The Copywriter's Handbook* by Bob Bly
- [*The AMA Complete Guide to Small Business Advertising*](#) by Joe Vitale
- *Tested Advertising Methods* by John Caples
- [*CyberWriting: How to Promote your Product or Service Online \(without being flamed\)*](#) by Joe Vitale

BONUS TIP: The Easiest Way to Write Anything

I use the method described in my booklet, [*Turbocharge Your Writing!*](#) I write in spurts. After you have decided what you want to accomplish with your writing, and you have completed your research, then write in 33-minute non-stop blasts. Then take a 10-minute breather, do some push-ups, get some air, dance, drink some coffee. Then write in another 33-minute spurt. This helps your left and right sides of your brain work in harmony.