

The Enhanced Art of Writing Headlines

What makes a great headline, and why? How can headlines make the casual skimmer stop and read? While much has changed in media's shift from print to digital, these fundamental questions haven't. Editors and writers correctly describe headline writing as an art — but with all the technology out there, there is a scientific way to put evidence behind that art, and help publishers grow their engaged readership as a result.

Learn their language

In an analysis of headlines and headline tests, we examined linguistic traits and found that certain traits can actually help or hurt reader engagement.* Identify the nuances in what really captures the attention of your unique audience by experimenting with your own headlines to learn what resonates the most with your readers.

Positive effect

- demonstrative pronouns
- numbers
- adjectives
- interrogatives
- determinants
- negative superlatives
- quotations
- positive superlatives

No effect

- names
- proper nouns
- notably long headlines

Negative effect

- notably short headlines
- question marks
- time references

* Based on our analysis of 100,000 headline tests and 250,000 headlines

Test different options

A headline should not only entice readers to click—it should drive consumption of a story. Alternative headlines—ones that, without testing, would never have seen the light of day—were found to outperform the original by about 62%.*



On average, these **new** headlines see

78%
lift in traffic

71%
lift in Quality Clicks
that lead to at least 15 seconds
of reader engagement

* Based on a comprehensive evaluation of headline tests that use Chartbeat's multiarm bandit testing model.

Enhance reader connection

While gut instinct around language matters, technology and experimentation can enhance that ability to find the right fit between content and audience. These days, publishers wear many hats. They have to write, edit, promote, monetize, optimize and grow quality audiences. The good news is that science — both in terms of predictive modeling and engagement-focused technologies — can help us improve the imperfect art of writing so we can better connect with readers and, ultimately, with each other.