

A Quick Primer on Writing

We all write, right? But does everyone write *well*? Writing well is actually not very hard, especially for inbound content, which consists of a lot of writing.

Let's go back to elementary school for a minute. There are four types of writing: expository, persuasive, narrative, and descriptive. Inbound content for advisors—blogs, ebooks, video scripts, and fact sheets—should focus primarily on expository with a just a dash of persuasive.

Actually, it's more like expository writing for the purpose of persuading. In case you don't remember what expository writing is, its focus is to explain a topic. Remember, class: **expository** explains. This genre consists of textbooks, how-to's, news, and most inbound marketing blogs.

As an advisor, your most attractive inbound content will center around explaining how to respond to market movements, breaking down complex financial issues, expounding on what the latest news means for your readers, and, if you're anything like some of the advisors I read, participating in an occasional nerd-out session where you get excited about numbers (this is a good thing!).

While you explain the above topics, you also want to let people know that you're the right advisor for them. You want them to realize that they can trust you with their money. You don't want to be pushy. Remember, your main purpose is to explain the subject at hand. But you can still add a **CTA** at the end letting them know they can contact you. That's what I mean by "a dash of persuasive" writing.

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Regardless of which subject you're tackling, if you don't follow certain writing guidelines, your readers will either **fill up** in frustration, or come away from your blog with a negative view of your firm. Of course, writing is an art. That's why some people love Danielle Steele while others love Stephen King and others still prefer Mitch Albom. Your inbound content might be steamy like Ms. Steele, while mine might be suspenseful like Mr. King's, while Johnny's might be sappy like Mr. **Albom's**. My point is, your style is your style. No one can tell you your style is wrong, but there is a basic framework of writing that makes the medium engaging. With that in mind, I put together a list of the bare essentials advisors should keep in mind when writing engaging content.

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The Essentials of Engaging Exposition

Stay on Topic

[T]o say the very thing you really mean, the whole of it, nothing more or less or other than what you really mean; that's the whole art and joy of words.

— C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*

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We're all guilty of getting off-topic every now and then in conversation and writing. Sometimes you start telling a story and then a detail pops up that seems worth explaining, then you're telling an entirely different story. What started as a quick recap of your conversation with your mom turns into a rant about how few chips they put in those individual bags of **Doritos**.

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When I'm listening to my wife tell me about her day, I don't mind these side journeys. I find them quite endearing, actually. But when I'm reading an article, I cannot stand them.

A headline is a promise. When I see the headline “What Does Brexit Mean ~~f~~or Your Portfolio?” I expect to come away from it knowing what Brexit means for my portfolio. I don’t want additional definitions just because you felt like writing or you got a little sidetracked and now, ~~since~~ you spent all that time writing it, ~~you figure~~, you might as well put it in there, right? No, thank you. If you get off-topic, take all that currently irrelevant goodness and make ~~it~~ the topic of another blog where it will be relevant.

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Good, engaging writing wastes no words. If your headline promises one topic and you’re adding in content that does not relate to your headline, you’re wasting words—not to mention your readers’ time. They came because of the promise of the headline, not the promise of your flowery prose.

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If you’re struggling with writing at length on a single topic, here are two tried and true methods I use to spark additional ideas:

- Imagine you’re writing a letter to your mom/best friend/spouse about the subject. What would you want them to know?
- Apply the Potter Box to the subject. (This one takes a little time to learn, but it’s worth ~~it~~.)

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In the advisor world, this ~~rule~~ can definitely refer to writing off-subject, but more often than that, ~~it~~ refers to an article that just plain doesn’t deliver on its headline, which brings us to rule #2.

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Deliver on Your Promise

Headlines are the window display of the blog. They’re the thing that pulls people in. They’re the difference between fifty views and five thousand views. Believe me, I’ve written some pretty

good headlines in my day, but I've also written some stinkers, and the numbers proved it. The number of views you're getting is a good indicator of the quality of your headline. (The quality of your *article* can be determined by the amount of *time* people spend on the post, but that's a topic for another day. Let's stay on topic!)

Commented [MD8]: You undermine yourself with this. I would recommend leaving it out.

Yes, headlines bring the readers in, but they won't stick around if the content doesn't actually give them what they came for. It's like naming your band *Free Drinks for Everybody All Night*. If you don't follow through on that promise, people will show up, but they won't stick around. And they probably won't have the greatest opinion of your band (or firm).

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All too often, we see articles with headlines like *Five Steps to the Perfect Portfolio* or *How to Invest with Zero Risk*. Not only are these headlines not very compliance-friendly, but they're also impossible to deliver on. Chances are, you'll click on one of those headlines and find another article about risk management or diversification. That's called a "bait and switch," and the people on the receiving end never appreciate it. Your article might get views out of it, but your firm won't get prospects.

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