The SEO Copywriting Cheat Sheet

Every time you write

Check all of this stuff

Your headline

Your headline **must** pass the blank sheet of paper test. It should fully describe the article. No exceptions. At all. Ever.

The reason: The headline is typically also your page's **title tag**. The title tag is the single most influential on-page ranking factor. A fully descriptive headline means a fully descriptive title tag, which means better rankings.

Your headline will often get taken out of context: It ends up in things like RSS feeds, search results & links. When that happens, fully descriptive means more clicks.

Good headline: Ford Mustang sweeps Sunset Auto Show Awards
Bad headline: Mustang gallops into sunset

Your first paragraph

The first paragraph of your article, page, product description or blog post should also pass the blank sheet of paper test.

It's the first content people will see when they land on your page. It will instantly tell the reader whether they made the right choice coming to your site.

It's also one of the first 'chunks' of content search engines see when indexing a page. They want to deliver a great experience to readers. You should do the same.

Help readers scan the page

Have no more than:

- 6-8 lines per paragraph
- 3-4 paragraphs per section
- 13-15 words per line

Break up the page with

- Subheadings
- Relevant images
- Empty space (it won't hurt you!)
- Notes or callouts

Use lists

Any time you separate more than 2 ideas with commas or semi-colons, change it to a bulleted or numbered list.

Link related content together

On the page, the first time you mention other content on your site, link to it. If you mention something someone wrote on another site, link to that, too.

Link consistently

Always link to the same page, the same way. The **url**, the address you use in the link, should be exactly the same. Don't add stuff. Don't remove stuff.

Promote your writing!

You wrote it! Tweet it! Post it on Facebook! Let people know.

Not for resale. That means you.

Not for beginners

This sheet assumes you know how to write. If 'active voice' & 'brainstorming' are new words for you, you should work on those, first.

The blank sheet of paper test

If you wrote your headline, or paragraph, or other 'chunk' of information on a blank sheet of paper & showed it to a total stranger, would they be able to state your page's topic & idea?

Think chunks

People read content online differently than they do in print. They scan & digest independent chunks of information like the headline, a list, the first paragraph, etc.

It's safe to assume search engines 'think' the same way, because all they want happy searchers. 'Happy' means 'I got the information I needed, thanks!'

Ergo: Chunks.

Why scan?

Make the page easy to scan because that means more folks will read it, share it, & pass it around.

And, make it easy to scan because if you think search engines can't/don't somehow measure this, you're many pickles short of a barrel.

Links, likes, and authority

As a writer, most of your SEO concerns focus on relevance. But authority is also a huge factor. Almost any form of online citation, from links to social media 'likes' to basic mentions of your brand, help your authority.

That includes internal links between pages on your site, which is why 'link related content' is one of the list items.

HTML you must learn

<p> makes a paragraph
<h1> makes a level one heading
<h2> makes a level two heading
<h3>… you get the idea
<strong> bolds text (usually)
<em> italicizes text (usually)

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Every day

Do everything on this list.

Curate content

Find cool stuff you didn't write. Send it to your friends and followers on Twitter and Facebook.

You can use aggregation sites like Alltop.com, or use Google Alerts, to find interesting & useful links that you know your audience will want.

On Facebook, you'll have to test, but 2-3 posts per day seems to work. Post **directly** to Facebook using Facebook.com. Third-party tools like Hootsuite appear to hurt EdgeRank.

On Twitter, more is better. Send out 10-20 tweets a day, if you can. This makes you a resource - a filter - for everyone who follows you. Here's an example:

@portentint
Ian Lurie

Good post from @gfiorelli1 itseo.org/p18Tkj about the Google kerfuffle.

Build relationships

Leave good, insightful comments on other folks' blogs. talk to them on Twitter. Link to them from your blog posts when it makes sense.

Don't spam! If you leave 500 comments around the web that read "Great post! See my site here!" and then tell people I told you to do that, I'll slap you.

Well, probably not. But I'll mock you. On my blog.

Working with images

Compress images

Use JPEG compression for photographs.
Use GIF or PNG compression for line art or other non-photographic images.

Resize images

Resize images using an image editor. Do **not** resize them using the height and width attributes in your content management system, or in the HTML code.

Write good ALT text

Write a fully descriptive 'ALT' attribute for every image on the page. The ALT attribute is what your browser displays if the image is missing or broken. It's also what search engines use to help figure out the image and page's subject matter..

Write a great caption

If your site supports it, write a caption that passes the blank sheet of paper test, too. You can use the caption text as your ALT text, or vice-versa, if that helps.

Curate other people's stuff? No way.

Yes way. Curation builds your audience. A bigger audience means more people to retweet **your** stuff when you post it.

Did I mention that retweets and likes affect search engine rankings? I didn't? Oh. Well they do.

Spread 'em out

Don't send out 20 curation tweets at once. Blech. Spread them out over the course of the day. You can use scheduling software like Timely.is if you want, or just do it by hand.

Images

Images are really their own separate discipline, but it's worth learning the basics. If you don't know how to compress or resize an image, get a copy of Adobe Fireworks or Photoshop and learn how.

Or, if you're at a big organization, you may have a photo editor or designer whose job is to work with you on this kind of stuff. Be nice to them. Buy them the beverage of their choice. Then ask for their help.

What about keywords?

Oh, that.

If you follow this cheat sheet, you don't need to worry about keywords.

If you're fully descriptive, the right keywords occur naturally in the course of your writing. If you write for scanning, your readers like the content and share it.

If you curate content, you'll build audience and get more attention.

Keywords? We don't need no stinkin' keywords. We're writers.

If you want more

I've written some books:

The Fat-Free Guide to SEO Copywriting
E-book, PDF, $7   buy it

The Fat-Free Guide to Google Analytics
E-book, PDF, $17   buy it

Conversation Marketing   buy it
E-book, PDF, $7