

The Proof Angel Summary of

How to write a...: March 2014

How to write a decent headline

A headline is an important tool to catch attention. The problem is that most of us tend to use labels rather than headlines. This post will help you re-educate yourself to write headlines instead.

<http://ow.ly/vEqSs>

How to write a synopsis

Writing a synopsis can be a pain.

When a task is a pain, it is good to have a system for controlling it.

A template can be just what you need to give you focus. It stops you dithering, even if it is only because you are tearing the template up & starting again.

Here is a template for a synopsis:

<http://writerswrite.co.za/how-to-write-a-one-page-synopsis-1>

Then of course, you probably need a covering letter to go with it:

<http://writerswrite.co.za/how-to-write-a-query-letter-in-12-easy-steps>

What should you put in a style guide?

A style guide is a useful tool for creating a corporate image. It helps you to achieve consistency, so everything you write looks as though it comes from the same person. It allows a group to speak with one voice.

Every time you write anything, you make decisions. What font to use, when to underline, & how much you hyphenate are not significant, but these sorts of things accumulate into the impression the piece gives. Vary these factors & the result looks different.



The Proof Angel is the trading name of Sarah Perkins, freelance editor and proofreader.

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When a group of people write on behalf of an organisation, setting out the rules of house style makes it easier to give the organisation a voice. It helps customers to feel that they are dealing with one knowledgeable company, rather than a string of individuals.

Individuals can also benefit from setting out a style guide. If all your written material is in the same style, it isn't possible to pick out the newer items. Sometimes you can look at a collection of material & spot which items were written at a similar time, for example:

- a group of articles where paragraphs are indented differently, or
- a group where you decided to make an effort to type out & in full.

And of course if you know how to set out a document in house style, you don't waste time on trivial points like deciding what font size you need for your headings for this document. The decision has already been made.

So what should you put in your style guide? Here are some suggestions.

<http://writerswrite.co.za/style-guide-guidelines>

You should also put in:

- Anything that you need to look up regularly.
- Anything that causes confusion.

There is no point in having a style guide if it doesn't apply to your own situation. And here is another perspective:

<http://writerswrite.co.za/create-a-style-guide-for-your-company-in-10-steps>

How to write your bio

Am I the only one to dread writing those "about me" sections? I know some people like to talk themselves, but my mind tends to go blank. Even if someone else will write a bio for you, it still needs reviewing, which means you need to have an idea of what you are expecting to see.

For many people like authors and speakers, bios are an important marketing tool to help you stand out from the crowd, particularly if your bio is one of several displayed in an anthology or a conference brochure.

Look around & see what other people are doing

There are 2 aspects to think about:

- In your line of business or genre there will be certain similarities between the bios people present. It is good to comply with expectations, particularly by covering ground that everyone expects. If you miss something that is standard, people may wonder why there is a gap in your experience.

- Look out for things you could say that make you a little different.

As you look around, see what is usual, what is dull, & what catches your eye. Learn from the mistakes of others.

It is useful to make a list of what you need to cover at this stage, so you don't overlook anything.

Decide where to draw the line

Remember that whatever you choose to share about yourself, people will ask questions about it. If you are very candid, they may expect that from you all the time. Think about the longer term & decide what's right for you not only for now, but for the future as well.

Make local connections

Link yourself to places. People identify more easily with real people who come from, live in, or holiday regularly in places they know & love.

It isn't very rational to try a Scottish author because you've had lovely holidays there, or perhaps because the author was born in the same town as your Grandma, but people do react that way. We have probably all done it at some point. Make sure you mention any connection you have with anywhere large or glamorous. Get the benefit of those networks.

Keep it relevant

In your standard bio, don't mention irrelevant points to sound cool. Try to mention things that enhance your professional reputation.

Sometimes people try so hard to sound interesting that they look as though they are distracting attention from the boring subject matter they are trying to put over. Ask yourself if anyone is going to care about your favourite food or whatever.

Once you have marshalled the relevant points, ask yourself:

- Does this point add anything, or does it repeat something that has already been covered? There is no need to mention everything - just the best things to give people the impression they need.
- Does it justify the amount of space it takes up?
 - A statement that you have published x books & a link to them is better than listing all the titles.
 - Saying you speak regularly at major conferences, perhaps with one example, is better than listing everything for the last few years.

Remember that being relevant does not mean stating the obvious. If you write about collecting stamps, don't put in your bio that you are a keen collector. If your picture shows you with your cat, don't mention it in your bio.

Each time you use your bio, try to personalise it just a little with something relevant for the article, conference etc.

Strike a happy medium

Don't sound like a used car salesman. Boasting & gloating turn people off, which is another reason not to list everything you ever did.

On the other hand not having anything to say can be as bad as saying too much. If you aren't interested enough to write a few lines, why should people take an interest in you? Your work may be so great that it sells itself, but people will only know that if they give it a chance. They won't give it a chance if you put them off.

Should you use a picture?

In most cases the answer to this is yes, because:

- People like to deal with other people.
- Any sort of pictures liven up the text, whether it is in a brochure, on a website, or in a book.

If you use a picture, give it some thought. Decide:

- How do you want to sell yourself?
- What is suitable for your purpose?
- What fits the context?

Have a look to see what other people do. Think about a suitable background, what to wear, & what you should be doing in the picture. Then find a good, reliable photographer, and make sure you explain what you need to achieve

Reviewing your bio

Once you have finished your draft bio, put it aside for a while. When you come back to it again you will be fresh, and you will see things in a more objective way:

- Make sure you have covered everything you need to say.
- Have you given enough priority to the important points?
- Have you over emphasised anything?
- Is everything relevant?

How to write a press release

Now this isn't a task faced by most of us on a regular basis, so when you know where do you start?

This post from Writers Write is a nice brief summary to keep you focused, but will raise questions such as where do I get a template? And what sort of things do I need to be saying?

<http://writerswrite.co.za/10-essential-tips-for-writing-a-press-release>

To put more meat on the bones, try this guide from Greenpeace:

http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_64_press_release.pdf

Or this one from Freelance: UK:

<http://www.freelanceuk.com/news/1126.shtml>

You will also find some useful guidance in Smashwords Book Marketing Guide:

<http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/305>

And if you are still looking for inspiration, try this quick search on good old Google!

<https://drive.google.com/templates?q=press+release>

How to design a Google search

OK, so perhaps design is a bit grand. Perhaps it is more like phrasing a question. A search on Google or any other search engine is just the same as asking a question.

How you word it can be very important.

This post explains how to get the most relevant results from your search.

<http://dailyinfographic.com/get-more-out-of-google-infographic>

How to check a service contract

I know a lot of people regard a contract as an annoying piece of administration. Often they have not had their fingers burned. A contract is there to make sure both sides are protected.

This post is a useful summary of things you should look for in a contract:

<http://ow.ly/vEwa1>

There are two important aspects:

- Setting out what to expect. The key think here is to think about what matters to you & make sure those items are mentioned clearly.
- Setting out what happens if things go wrong.

I used to work at a university where people were very keen on innovation. They had wonderful ideas about new ways of working, and believed that partnership with other organisations helped not only to spread the word, but also to get better results of all kinds. All good stuff.

The policy was to have an agreement of some sort with partner organisations, and it was part of my job to review them before anything was signed. A large percentage were huge documents of over 50 pages saying:

- We are nice.
- You are nice.

- Higher education is good. Often this part was backed up by an appendix of a third party document setting out why this is true. At great length.
- If we work together we will both get further.
- We will work together for a set period & A will pay B £x per quarter.

If the other party goes off on what you think is a tangent, that sort of contract gives you no help at all.

If you are selling widgets, it is easy to specify what you want. Other times, as when you are developing something innovative, it is much harder. Writing a detailed specification can be more trouble than it is worth, especially for something that you expect to emerge as part of the process. However, it is always good to include some kind of regular consultation process so that both parties can be sure progress is in the right direction & at a sensible pace.

And one last thing: don't let VAT catch you out. You may not be VAT registered yourself, but you still need to be sure how much money is actually changing hands. If possible, the best position is:

- Prices excluding VAT when you are selling (so you know how much you are going to get).
- Prices including VAT if you are buying (so if the rate changes mid contract you won't pay more).

The first sentence of your sales pitch

Sometimes you will have a really good idea about how to get your foot in the door to make a sales pitch. It is often a good idea to consider how your attention grabbing opening will make the prospective client feel. Remember that people are more likely to buy from someone who makes them feel better about the world. Pointing out that they have made obvious mistakes can be counter productive.

Here are some thoughts about how to make your first sentence more effective.

<http://ow.ly/vEw2u>