Copywriting Success Blueprint

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INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this guide to learn the secret copywriting formula that will drive conversions, crush your sales goals, and supercharge the growth of your business, then you're in luck. Sort of.

FIRST, THE BAD NEWS.

I am sorry to say that there is no such thing as one copywriting formula to rule them all. While it is true that the quality of your copy has a tremendous impact on conversions and sales, there is, regrettably, no bulletproof formula that will guarantee an action on the part of your audience.

Great copy grabs and holds the attention of your audience. It evokes an emotional response and makes a connection. Most importantly, it persuades your audience to take action—the action you want them to take.

We all know what bad copy does.

Just about nothing. Worse than nothing, it can turn prospects off to your brand before you have even gotten a chance to show them what you're all about.

NOW THE GOOD NEWS.

Writing great copy is a lot easier than you think. And there are formulas to help you along the way—just don't get too attached to them. The formulas are designed to act as guides, but the real star of the show is your offer.

The best copy in the world can't save a bad offer. And the worst copy in the world… well, let's try to avoid that, shall we?

The simplified step-by-step instructions in this guide will help you write better copy, convert more prospects, and generate more sales.

Excited? Me too. Let's get started.

WHAT'S INSIDE

In this guide we are going to discuss the basics of writing great copy. We'll take a look at the fundamentals, along with several popular copywriting formulas, and give you a mountain of tips, tricks, and techniques to keep your audience engaged and eager to learn more.

- The basics
- A ton of tips and insight
- The PAR Formula
- The AIDA Formula
- The 1-2-3-4 Formula
- Numerous examples and more!

WHAT IS COPYWRITING?

Technically, copywriting is a skill and a field. But for the uninitiated it can seem like an art. Is it really possible to put *just the right* words together and generate sales out of thin air?

Well, yes. But there are some strings attached.

> ## No matter how good your copy is, it is only as good as the underlying offer.

That's the big one.If you aren't providing value to your audience, then you don't have a copywriting problem, you have a value problem. That's a topic for another day and another guide, but it is really the root of writing persuasive copy.

Stop thinking about yourself when you're writing copy. There is only one person who matters, and that is the reader. Effective copy is written with the reader in mind. More than that, it is best written by standing in the reader's shoes.

That's all well and good, but what does copy look like? How can you spot copy in the wild?

WHAT DOES COPY LOOK LIKE?
The practice of copywriting produces persuasive messaging known as copy. Copy is used by businesses to communicate with their audience, but more importantly, it's used to persuade their audience to take action.

And that's the key. It's the intent that separates copy from other forms of creative writing.

Creative writing is writing that interacts with the reader for the sake of the interaction. It can entertain the reader, excite them, scare them, or just interest them.

Once that interaction has occurred, there is no follow-up—or expectation of a follow-up—on the part of either party. That is to say that neither the author of the creative writing piece nor the reader needs do anything once the creative writing has been read.

That's a mouthful that boils down to this simple fact: creative writing exists to be consumed, no strings attached. We know copy does not exist with "no strings attached." Copy exists with a concrete goal.

Copy *always* has a call to action (CTA) associated with it.

Always.

A call to action is *the thing you want your reader to do when they are done reading your copy*.

It doesn't matter where the copy is, or what the call to action is. It could be a sales letter. It could be copy on a website or in a blog post. It could be on a flyer, in an email, in a banner ad, or on a cereal box. If it's written with the intent to produce an action (any action) on the part of the reader, it's copy.

QUICK TIP

COPYWRITING PRO TIP #1: New copywriters are often discouraged when they produce copy that doesn't shoot conversions through the roof. That's okay, but remember this: although copywriting is often seen as more of an art than a science, the harsh truth is that a lot of copywriting (and marketing in general) has more in common with the scientific method than with art. Copywriting is a lot of testing, learning, implementing, and testing again. Don't be discouraged by initially disappointing results.

Just because copywriting and creative writing are different doesn't mean that copywriters can't be creative. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

People aren't robots. They are not interested in reading tired formulas or thinly veiled appeals for their hard-earned cash. Whether consuming creative writing or copy, people want to be stimulated.

Put yourself in your reader's shoes.

In just the same way you or I would lose interest in a poorly written novel, poorly written copy can turn off your customers and cause your readers to lose interest in your offer and your brand.

WRITING GREAT COPY

Copy hardly ever exists by itself.

Think about it. It is almost always part of something else. A blog post, an ad creative, a product description, a persuasive email—you name it. And each of those mediums is a different facet of business communication.

They are business assets, and business assets incur cost.

Whether you're taking time away from other tasks to create the business asset yourself or you're paying someone else to do it, there is a cost associated with each and every word of copy that ends up in the final asset.

You wouldn't buy other business assets like machinery, cars, and office buildings without an objective in mind, would you?

> **The first part of any copywriting task is to *define your goal*.**

What do you want to accomplish with this business asset?

Be specific. If you aren't sure where you want your copy to lead people, how can you be sure that your words will help them get there? Where is "there" anyway?

Keep in mind, your goal might not always be to make a sale. While generating revenue is an overall goal of your business and the ultimate goal of your sales and marketing efforts, sometimes you are just trying to generate a lead. Or capture a prospect's email address. Or qualify a lead. Or get a referral.

Those are all valid goals that don't necessarily have a revenue number associated with them.

QUICK TIP

COPYWRITING PRO TIP #2: The best source of copy examples and inspiration can be found with your competition. Of course, you want to set yourself apart from your competitors, but think about it: your competitors are selling a product or service similar to yours to an audience similar to yours. That's a great place to look for inspiration.

NOTE

Throughout this guide we will be using an online retailer that sells all things juice-related as our example business. All things juice-related means juicers, accessories, recipe books, and even ingredient packs and add-ins like chia seeds and protein powder. Don't worry, no one is going to try to sell you a juicer—the topic of juicing was picked at random.

FEATURES VS. BENEFITS

A core concept in copywriting, and in sales in general, is the difference between features and benefits. Before we start constructing our content assets, let's take a look at the difference between the two.

> ## A feature is an aspect of a product or service that *sets it apart* from the competition.

Remember, we're selling juicers. Not all juicers are created equal. Some use a spinning basket that looks like a fine cheese grater on the inside to separate the juice from the flesh of fruits and vegetables. It's a (relatively) inexpensive method and it is effective. But what about real juice heads who want to make wheatgrass at home?

The basket method won't work for that. So, there are juicers that use a set of rotating gears that mesh very closely with one another. Material is passed through this gear interlock, and voila! Wheatgrass. You can even make nut butters like peanut, cashew, and almond.

Back to features and benefits:

> ## A benefit is the way in which a feature will *solve a problem* or otherwise improve the life of your customer.

Looking at our juicers, what are the features and what are the benefits? You may find the inner workings of juicers interesting. Then again, you may not, and I can't say I blame you.

At the end of the day, does anyone care how the teeth of a juicer's gears fit together? People buy the gear style of juicer because they want to be able to juice wheatgrass, not because the juicer has gears inside of it.

The gears are a feature of that juicer. They are literally what sets those machines apart from the basket style juicers. But that information is not helpful unless there is a benefit associated with it.

In this case, the benefit—the positive impact that the feature will have on a person's life—is that they will be able to juice wheatgrass.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?
When undertaking copywriting tasks, this means **focus on benefits, not features**.

QUICK TIP
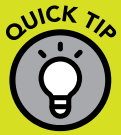
COPYWRITING PRO TIP #3: Benefits make a positive impact in the lives of your customers or solve a problem they have. People have a hard time relating to features, but they can relate very well to having their problems solved.

Features are important. They are the source of benefits. We can't have the great benefits of wheatgrass without the feature of a gear interlock system. ("Great" might be a little strong; have you actually tried wheatgrass?)

Moving on.

If you are copywriting for your own products or services, you should already be familiar with the features and benefits of your lineup. If you're copywriting for someone else's products or services, a good way that I have found to get from a feature to its benefit is to use a "what this means for you" statement.

Look at the specs or the elements of a product or service. Then ask yourself, from the customer's perspective, what this means for them.

Juicer-themed examples:

EXAMPLE

FEATURE: A juicer has a low profile (it is not too tall).
What this means for you is...
BENEFIT: It can be used on a countertop under cabinets or stored easily.

FEATURE: A juicer has a removable pulp catcher.
What this means for you is...
BENEFIT: Easy disposal of pulp straight into the trash/compost.

FEATURE: An ingredient pack containing greens and protein is pre-portioned.
What this means for you is...
BENEFIT: Save time and easily scale recipes without any guesswork.

Okay, by now I'm sure you get the picture, but the difference between features and benefits is so important that I want to make one final note:

> **Think of features as nouns and benefits as verbs. *Benefits do something* for your prospect. Features are important, but they don't do anything.**

Focus on what your product or service *does*, not what it *is*.

See how absurd it is to focus on features and not benefits?

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

I know, at this point you're tired of hearing about juicers and you just want the copywriting formulas.

There's a table of contents, I can't stop you.

But consider this:

> ## The right message for the wrong audience will miss the mark every time.

Knowing your audience is a key component of all sales and marketing activities. There are a lot of different ways to segment your audience to narrow the focus of your messaging with laser-like precision, but for the purposes of this guide, we're going to look at just one way to segment your audience: by temperature.

Your audience—no matter what business you are in—can be loosely segmented into three temperature categories:

- Cold
- Warm
- Hot

Unaware → Problem Aware → Solution Aware → Product Aware → Most Aware

COLD ——————————————→ WARM ——————————→ HOT

A **cold** audience is totally unaware. They may be unaware of the problem they have, and they definitely are not aware of the solution to that problem, or any specific products/services. They are also likely unaware of your brand in any meaningful way.

A **warm** audience is aware of the problem and likely aware of solutions to that problem. They may have done some research and may be familiar with some of your products or services. They may have heard of or interacted with your brand.

A **hot** audience is as aware as can be. They are fluent in the problem they face and the available solutions. They will have done research and are product/service aware and will have interacted with your brand. They may even be customers.

Considering the temperature of your audience will have a dramatic impact on the effectiveness of your copy.

It makes sense, right?

Someone who isn't even aware that they have a problem isn't going to leap at the opportunity to purchase a solution that they feel will have no impact in their life. By the same token, a hot audience will (rightfully) lose interest if you talk about their need. They know they have a need, that's why they're there.

Consider this Gene Schwartz quote:

> QUOTE 66 99
>
> *"If your prospect is unaware of your product and has realized that it can satisfy his desire, your headline **starts with the product**. If he is not aware of your product, but only the desire itself, your headline **starts with the desire**. If he is not yet aware of what he really seeks, but is concerned with the general problem, your headline **starts with the problem** and crystallizes it into a specific need. [emphasis mine]"*

The above quote speaks specifically to headlines, but that insight holds true when addressing audiences of different temperatures. Focusing on the wrong aspect will tank conversions and will turn your audience off from your brand.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Once you have figured out who you are talking to, craft copy that really *speaks* to them.

People do business with other people. A corporation or a brand may be the entity they do business with, but at heart, that transaction is done between two people. The same goes for the connections we make.

People make connections to other people.

That means that the more personal your copy is, the likelier you will be to form connections and the stronger those connections will be. There are a couple of tricks the savvy copywriter can employ to make his or her writing more personal and, therefore, more likely to convert.

THE ACTIVE VOICE

Like knowing the difference between features and benefits, using the active voice is one of those inescapable parts of the copywriting process.

Grammar is never an exciting topic, but the difference that writing in the active voice—as opposed to the passive voice—can make on the quality of your copy is well worth the grade school recap.

A sentence where the subject *performs* the action is said to be in the active voice.

A sentence where the subject *receives* the action is said to be in the passive voice.

Let's look at some examples.

EXAMPLE

ACTIVE: Brad took the garbage out.
PASSIVE: The garbage was taken out by Brad.

ACTIVE: I decorated a cake in record time.
PASSIVE: The cake was decorated by me in record time.

ACTIVE: The team ran the entire course twice.
PASSIVE: The entire course was run by the team twice.

See the difference?

When the active voice is used, it increases clarity and improves the readability of the sentence. When the passive voice is used, the intent of your copy can be obscured and your message can be garbled. If your copy isn't easy to consume, your audience will lose interest fast. Do you blame them?

QUICK TIP

COPYWRITING PRO TIP #4: The word "by" is a passive writing red flag. It is the word that transfers action away from the subject of your sentence. Scan your copy for the word "by." There are, of course, many good reasons to use the word "by," but check to make sure there aren't any bad ones hiding out in your copy and robbing your subjects of action.

TELL STORIES

Storytelling compels your reader to keep reading. A story that people can identify with is the best way to forge an emotional connection with them. This emotional component is probably why stories make a bigger impact on audiences than facts, statistics, and product specs.

The power of storytelling has long been known by salespeople all over the world.

Salespeople know that although their prospects may forget the pitches that were delivered, the stories will stay with them.

People also have a tendency to block out sales pitches. Once they have identified a segment of copy as a sales pitch, their guard goes up and they are less interested in getting to the end of the pitch. This is true whether that pitch is being delivered in person or is being read from a segment of copy.

When presented in the right way, your story can circumvent this tendency. When your audience is caught up in the story and invested, they will pay attention and be more receptive to your call to action.

Suspense
Suspense is a great way to compel your audience to continue reading. When we are invested in rising suspense or tension, we want to close the loop and find out what happens. When suspense is done correctly, your audience will have no choice but to follow through with your CTA; they have to see how the story will end!

Metaphors
Metaphors are comparisons. To help your audience understand more complex concepts, compare those concepts to simpler ones that the audience is already familiar with. Be careful not to make your metaphor too layered. In fact, a great way to bridge between similar concepts is to use a sentence such as "it's kind of like when..." and make the direct comparison that way.

SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE AS YOUR AUDIENCE

And I don't mean English, Spanish, etc.

The biggest thing when it comes to speaking the same language as your audience is to avoid using jargon or overly technical terms that may confuse them or turn them off from your brand. If you had to look up every other word in a segment of copy, would you bother following through with the CTA?

No, you would expect to run into more of the same if you continued.

Speaking the same language as your audience also means using the kinds of words they would use and emulating their euphemisms or speech patterns.

Speaking to a business audience? Discuss benefits in the terms that your audience would use. Speaking to a fitness audience? The same applies.

USE POWER WORDS

We all know there is power in words.

There are a number of industry resources for copywriters that rank the effectiveness of different words when it comes to strengthening your messaging and increasing its ability to convert. We don't have enough space to get through all of them in this guide, but we'll take a quick look at some of the heavy hitters.

You

Let's face it, we're all a little narcissistic sometimes. A healthy dose of self-interest is what gets us through life, and copy that speaks to this primal urge will be better positioned to make stronger connections. As a bonus, focusing on "you" as the subject naturally helps you write in the active voice.

Free

It's no surprise that everyone's favorite word makes it into the list of the top five power words. People love free, and while there is a limit, the more you can use the word "free" (and deliver what you promise) the more interested your readers will be in what you have to offer.

Because

It's a little surprising that this word makes the top five. The psychology behind the effectiveness of the word "because" is well outside the scope of this guide, but think of it this way: "because" reinforces the original statement or request. It is a "how" and a "why" instead of just a "how."

Instantly

This is the twenty-first century. We have high expectations for instant gratification. The more your copy (and your offer) can deliver on this desire, the higher your conversions will be.

New

There is a certain excitement that surrounds things that are new. Use this power word with caution, however—things that are new are not only novel, but they are untested and unproven. Don't use the newness of a product or service as a crutch to prop up your copy. Make sure that your benefits are clearly presented and that your messaging matches the pain points of your audience. This will have a much bigger impact than the novelty of your product or service.

THE PAR FORMULA
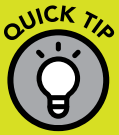
The PAR formula is a time-tested copywriting formula. PAR stands for the following:

- Problem
- Agitate
- Resolve

To start, ask yourself what the problem is that your product or service solves. Think back to the difference between features and benefits: people don't buy juicers because they have gears.

> **People don't buy products and services; they buy *solutions to their problems*.**

For our example, let's look at the ingredient packs that our juicing retailer sells. A *feature* of these products is that they come pre-portioned. What this means for your audience is that they can save time, hassle, and guesswork. That's a benefit of using pre-portioned ingredient packs.

People who want to enjoy fresh, healthy juice in the morning can be pressed for time. Tired from a long day at work? Don't get out the cutting board and start pawing through the produce drawer. Throw in a pre-portioned ingredient pack.

The next step in the PAR formula is to agitate the problem, which is just a fancy way of saying make your readers connect with the problem. That means make the problem big and make it real. Explore the problem and accentuate the associated pain points.

This is where the artistry comes in, and, admittedly, it can be tough to find the right mix and focus on the right pain points. Go overboard and your problem becomes larger-than-life and cartoonish. Don't agitate enough and your audience won't be impressed.

If you're not sure where to start, make a list of all of the problems. Rank them from the most disruptive (or most painful) to the least disruptive (least painful). Pull out the biggest pain point that your product or service provides a solution for. If that pain point doesn't seem to have enough oomph, go for the next on the list as well.

Keep in mind that your copy will be more effective if you stick to a single central theme or try to make a single point rather than trying to address every single pain point that your audience may feel.

After you have agitated the problem and made your audience's pain points real and very big, it's time to resolve the problem for them. By now you should have realized that the only logical resolution is to follow through with the call to action that is associated with this content asset, product description, or copy segment.

Resolving the pain point doesn't just mean listing benefits. It means fitting the problem and the solution together in a way that makes a perfect fit. You have spent time crafting copy that connects your reader to their pain point; they have to believe that your resolution really will be a resolution for them.

Don't forget to include a clear and direct call to action to seal the deal. For example:

EXAMPLE

What would you do if you could have 29 hours of your time back this year?
Catch up on your reading? Go sailing? Finally clean out the garage?

PROBLEM: If you start your day with a healthy juice blend, you're doing your body a ton of favors. But not your schedule. Between weighing, washing, chopping, and cleaning up, daily juice drinkers use about seven minutes every morning just to prep the ingredients for their morning blends.

AGITATION: Over the course of a year (not counting weekends), that adds up to 29 hours' worth of could-have-stayed-in-bed. That's 29 hours of "hey, it's me, running a little late this morning, be there in ten." The next time you're standing in your kitchen in your socks and underwear pleading with your juicer to hurry up, know it doesn't have to be that way.

RESOLUTION: Just one five-count Juice-Ease Veggies & Kale Super Green Recipe package will save you half an hour this week alone. Each pack is perfectly portioned for a delicious, nutrient-packed juice blend that comes with seven extra minutes in the morning. Just tear open, pour in the contents, and add water.

Tear, pour, and add. What will you do with your 29 hours?

CTA: Tell us your seven-minute story and learn how you can take back your mornings at www.29hoursofjuice.com.

The above example is a complete segment of copy that follows the PAR formula. The problem—the time consumed in the mornings by a juicing habit—is clearly presented and repeated. The problem is agitated with some humorous examples where those seven minutes per morning have caused people to run late, and the resolution is presented as the product we are trying to sell.

Notice the call to action. While our ultimate goal is, of course, to sell as many Juice-Ease Veggies & Kale Super Green Recipe packages as is humanly possible, the fact that this CTA isn't something like "Shop Now" or "Buy Today" should tell us that this copy segment is an external ad, or some other form of copy that is not being presented to traffic that we own (hot traffic). Furthermore, we should be able to infer that this ad is being presented to "cold" audiences, or those who probably have never heard of our brand or products.

Why?

This is a fictitious example, but we can expect that if we visited the URL in the CTA we would be directed to a landing page full of more copy, testimonials, long-form sales letters, and/or product videos. The CTAs on that

page would reflect a higher-commitment action on the part of the reader, such as purchasing a value-sized bundle or requesting a trial size.

Cold traffic—audiences that have never heard of our brand before—are unlikely to buy simply because we made them imagine the vulnerability of juicing in their underwear on a time crunch. This is another example of the copy being subordinate to the strength of the offer.

It will take significantly more than a chuckle to convert cold traffic.

Words are indeed magical, but words without value behind them are like a magician without a wand.

WHAT I *LIKE* ABOUT THE PAR FORMULA

The PAR formula is built to be a workhorse for all but the coldest of traffic.

What I also like about the PAR formula is that it forces copywriters who are using it to get creative about the ways in which they make emotional connections with their audiences. Sales aren't rational. They are emotion-based, then rationalized later.

The term "agitate the problem" means to make the problem big and to make the problem real. How do you make things big? Make them emotional. How do you make things real? Make your audience experience them—make them emotional.

Here's another thing about the PAR formula. It is a tweaked version of the AIDA formula (up next) that has been a copywriting standby since before you and I were born. And I can say that with confidence because it was developed over a hundred years ago. So the PAR formula has the pedigree of stemming from one of the industry's standbys, while reflecting some modern twists for modern audiences.

QUICK TIP
COPYWRITING PRO TIP #10: Don't give your readers a reason to object. Instead of asking "Why not call today?" use a more decisive alternative such as "Give us a call today." Better yet, make your call to action ultra-specific: "Give us a call and book your free consultation today!"

WHAT I *DON'T LIKE* ABOUT THE PAR FORMULA

Experienced copywriters have an instinct for finding angles, hooks, and quirks. What I don't like about the PAR formula is that for the new copywriter, it doesn't preach interest, attraction, or intrigue.

The PAR formula is all business. Here's your problem, here's why you should care about it, and here's how we can fix it for you.

Remember that when you put a message out on the internet, unless you own the traffic you are speaking to, you're competing for eyeballs every second of the day. So what if your juicing ingredient packs save me time in the morning, I'm watching a video titled "Top 10 Silliest Cat Tricks of All Time." That's a big hurdle to clear.

That's why the sample copy segment started off with a non-sequitur open-loop question.

The irony of having the world instantaneously available at our fingertips is that none of us lives in the moment. It takes a non-sequitur question to pique interest and stop our audience from scrolling, swiping, or half-paying attention to four devices at once.

THE AIDA FORMULA

The AIDA formula is over a hundred years old. It was developed in the early 1900s and is attributed to an American advertising pioneer by the name of Elias St. Elmo Lewis. It has long been a copywriting staple and has spawned a large number of other copywriting formulas. We'll take a look at some of the variations of the AIDA formula, but my opinion (and the consensus of other copywriters within the community) is that they are often just watered-down versions of AIDA.

AIDA stands for Attention, Interest and Desire, and Action.

- Attract the **Attention** of the audience
- Create **Interest** and **Desire**
- Encourage people to take **Action**

See? Even 100 years ago, copywriting was still all about the action.

WHAT I *LIKE* ABOUT THE AIDA FORMULA

An interesting aspect of the AIDA formula is that it is impressively scalable. We're discussing it here in the context of copywriting, but a business's entire marketing campaign could conform to the AIDA model.

For example, if our online juice retailer decided to open a juice bar, the AIDA model could be used to plan the high-level marketing execution.

Awareness

A PR campaign is run three months prior to opening the bar, promoting the assortment of juices available, the unique and healthy ingredient pack add-ins, and the trendy atmosphere. This awareness campaign is reinforced in the last month prior to grand opening with a direct mail campaign and neighborhood door-hangers segmented between business customers and regular consumers.

Interest

All materials (PR, direct mail, door-hangers, etc.) focus on the healthy aspects and exclusive unique blends that the juice bar will feature. These aspects are a direct comparison to "boring" offerings in the area.

Desire

Close to the opening of the juice bar, an invite-only campaign is run for a first-look party before the bar opens to generate buzz and create a premium brand experience. The limited guest list drives desire through scarcity; the first-come-first-serve policy drives desire through urgency. Sign-ups are handled through a squeeze page that collects customer info for marketing campaigns later.

Action

All communications include a clear, frictionless CTA.

This near-infinite scalability is a testament to how robust the AIDA model really is and is an interesting look at its applications outside the field of copywriting.

WHAT I *DON'T LIKE* ABOUT THE AIDA FORMULA

The AIDA formula is just like any other writing guideline in the sense that it shouldn't be treated as an exact template.

Today's audiences aren't reading product catalogs or newspapers. They are reading your copy on websites, in emails, and on social media. More specifically, they are scanning your copy on a multitude of different devices while multitasking and splitting their attention.

For this reason, I like more straightforward and compact copywriting formulas like the PAR formula or CopyBlogger's 1-2-3-4 formula (up next). They're concise and get right to the point, and when matched with the right audience, they have a proven track record of converting time and time again.

SOME VARIATIONS ON THE AIDA FORMULA

AIDA isn't the only game in town, and it has been tweaked for specific applications, some of which are included below.

The ACCA Formula

ACCA stands for

- Awareness
- Comprehension
- Conviction
- Action

This is an AIDA variant that's tweaked for colder audiences. Instead of focusing on attention and desire, it presupposes that your audience is not aware of the problem, the solution, or your product. The task then becomes increasing their awareness, helping them understand the problem they face, persuading them to believe that they do in fact have a problem or that your solution is the best one, and finally, persuading them to take the next steps.

The AIDPPC Formula

Ignore the fact that AIDPPC is not a word. It stands for

- Attention
- Interest
- Description
- Persuasion
- Proof
- Close

This is an AIDA variant designed for sales letters that would be sent to very warm or hot audiences. In the case of a sales letter, the "close" takes the place of a CTA; however, the close of a sale can simply be thought of as a call to action to buy the product or service enclosed in the sales letter.

The 4 P's

Not to be confused with the four P's of marketing (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), the four P's copywriting formula consists of the following steps:

- Picture
- Promise
- Prove
- Push

This AIDA variant captures the attention of your audience by involving them in a story or some other presentation of a future state where their problem will be solved. Next, the copy promises a certain result, demonstrates proof, then encourages the reader to take action.

THE 1-2-3-4 FORMULA

Here's a copywriting formula that comes straight from the experts at copyblogger.com. They call it the 1-2-3-4 formula, and it really is that simple.

1. What I've got for you
2. What it's going to do for you
3. Who am I?
4. What you need to do next

The folks over at copyblogger.com are consummate professionals, so when they say they have a copywriting formula that's as simple as 1-2-3-4, I'm inclined to pay attention.

This formula is designed for an audience that is at least warm enough to be aware of their problem. It starts out with the solution. A reader who is aware of their problem will immediately understand that this solution—in the form of a product or service—applies to them.

Next, we move on to benefits. This formula doesn't get bogged down harping on the difference between features and benefits. It simply answers the question "what will this do for me?" The only way to answer that question is with benefits.

Attempting to answer the question with features simply wouldn't make sense. For example:

EXAMPLE

- **QUESTION**: What will this juicer do for me?

- **ANSWER**: It will use a pair of interlocking gears to juice for you.

Element number three is the answer to the question "who are you?" Right away, you will notice that this element is missing from other copywriting formulas.

This is an optional element. It is especially useful if you've been cultivating a persona or a trusted brand. The "you" in this step doesn't have to be a person, it can be a brand.

Of course, element number four of the 1-2-3-4 copywriting formula is the action that you want your audience to take after reading your copy—your call to action.

WHAT I *LIKE* ABOUT THE 1-2-3-4 FORMULA

I really like this formula for copy that relates to opt-ins, content upgrades, and other non-sales-related CTAs. When your offer is something to the effect of "let me give you something valuable for free," then telling your audience up front, right away what you have to give them is great.

This formula also revolves around the benefits and the value proposition at the core of your offer. That makes it a tremendous guide for new copywriters. Tape those four questions to the wall in front of your desk, then get into your reader's shoes every time you write a segment of copy. Ask yourself those four questions as the reader and think about your confidence in the answers.

This is a great complete, rinse, repeat formula.

WHAT I *DON'T LIKE* ABOUT THE 1-2-3-4 FORMULA

This formula is set on autopilot to be a poor fit for cold audiences. That's okay—not every messaging method is going to be a good fit for every messaging opportunity—but it does mean that the copywriter who uses this formula will have to do some tweaking or use some imagination when using this method to communicate with cold audiences.

TROUBLESHOOTING

A multitude of factors can contribute to lackluster copy. Because copywriting can seem like a mysterious art rather than a science, new copywriters can fall into the false belief that bad copy is bad, it can't be fixed, and that is that.

Not true.

Copywriting (and marketing in general) is more a science than an art. There are a number of formulas to guide us, we have our own experience and intuition, and we have best practices to follow.

This doesn't change the fundamental truth of marketing efforts. We write copy, assemble content assets and ad creatives, and then we set them loose into the world and see what happens. Like a scientific experiment, we start from our hypothesis, run our test (releasing the copy), and wait for the results.

Once we understand a little bit more, we tweak it all and run it again.

Not everyone wants to hear that, but it is the harsh truth behind marketing and sales.

Just like the copywriting formulas that guide your creation of copy, use this section to guide your troubleshooting process to identify and fix poorly converting copy.

DID YOU ASK THEM TO TAKE ACTION?

This issue is more common than you might think. It's also very easy to identify and very easy to fix. Read your copy and take the place of your audience.

At the end of the copy, is it clear what your next steps are?

Copy *always* has a call to action.

There are many reasons why copy would be released without a call to action. Maybe the copywriter who wrote it isn't very good, doesn't understand copywriting, or was under pressure to meet a deadline. Maybe there were too many chefs in the kitchen and the copy was diluted to the point of ineffectiveness as a result.

Whatever the reason, the fix is as simple as it is self-explanatory—add a CTA!

Or maybe there is a CTA, but it isn't very clear. It doesn't matter what level of familiarity with the topic your reader had at the outset, or what their background is, or what they had for dinner last night, or what they do for a living. If they can read the language your copy is written in, then they should know what the next step is when they are done reading.

It's that simple. Of course, it can't be just any call to action that was pulled out of a hat.

The CTA associated with your copy must be:

- Absolutely, inescapably crystal clear and specific
- Relevant to the copy
- Strategic to business goals
- Relevant to the offer
- Consistent with the value provided

That last point has been touched upon in this guide, but it's worth mentioning again. If you are just asking someone for their email address and offering them nothing of value, don't expect a high conversion rate.

Similarly, if you're offering your reader a single checklist or worksheet, don't ask for their name, phone number, home address, and social security number. The ask must be value-aligned with the offer.

QUICK TIP

COPYWRITING PRO TIP #11: When examining your calls to action, don't forget to double-check and see if you are actually delivering the thing you said you would. If your reader clicks a button that says "Click here for your free report," then is charged a fee when they get to the final page, that is only going to turn them away from your brand.

Here is an example of copy that *does not* have a clear call to action:

EXAMPLE

"Is your morning missing something? If you juice every morning but find yourself dozing off when that early afternoon slump hits, you need a spark. Our new Spark Caffeinated Juice Boosters stir right into your morning juice and deliver the energy you need to take charge of your day. Spark Caffeinated Juice Boosters are the no-jitter, no-sugar-added, 100% organic secret to making your juice work as hard as you do."

What is your reader going to think when he or she reads that? Something to the effect of "Cool story, bro." There is no next step. But any one of the calls to action listed below would work with this segment:

- Visit www.sparkjuiceadvantage.com to claim your free trial size
- Click here to save 25% off your first order
- Add any regular Spark five-pack to your cart and receive 10% off your entire order – Shop Now
- Look for it on store shelves this July! Visit www.sparkjuiceadvantage.com to find a location near you

See how easy it is to fix that?

One final note on calls to action. Notice how none of the CTAs listed above was simply "Shop Now," "Buy Today," or "Submit"? You owe it to yourself and to your brand to write better calls to action. Specific, clear, and creative CTAs convert better than clichés or other generic stand-ins.

QUICK TIP
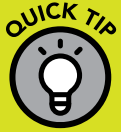
COPYWRITING PRO TIP #12: The more specific and clear your call to action is, the better it will convert. You want your reader's journey through your copy to be seamless and frictionless. Ambiguous calls to action put up roadblocks and don't help your audience move on to the next step.

IS YOUR AUDIENCE CONFUSED?

Consumers today have more choices than... well, than they know what do with. It's somewhat counterintuitive, right?

Humans are smart and capable. We have skyscrapers, Wi-Fi, and airplanes. But present us with more than three or four choices and we often prefer to make no choice at all.

An anecdote that I have heard told in several different ways goes like this:

EXAMPLE

A brand-new employee of a popular jam manufacturer was hired to boost sales through in-store product demos. Eager to make a good impression and sell jars of jam, she set up her demo table with one jar each of the company's fourteen flavors. When she offered shoppers samples, she assumed that they would want to try new and exciting flavors like berry blends and unique fruit pairings. Interest was minimal at best.

The next day, instead of displaying the company's entire assortment, she set out just their three most popular flavors. She ran through multiple jars of each. Everyone she asked wanted a sample and made their choices confidently.

Same jam, same store, same demo salesperson.

When people are faced with too many choices they become paralyzed. You don't have to admit it, but I'm guessing it has happened to you at some point as well. This concept comes home in the effectiveness of your copy.

How many benefits are you highlighting? How many calls to action are present in the copy?

Your copy—and your call to action—will always convert better if you narrow the focus and select *just one* call to action.

Fixing this problem is straightforward, but it isn't always as easy as simply adding a call to action. To truly fix copy that is confusing your audience, you have to go back to the drawing board and figure out exactly who your audience is.

Once you have reassessed who your copy is geared toward, then select one or two key benefits that speak to that audience's pain points. Addressing more than one audience? You need more than one segment of copy.

Here's an example of a jumbled-up segment of copy.

EXAMPLE

"If you're working out and keeping fit but not including fresh, organic juice in your diet, then you're missing out on a big part of healthy nutrition. Juicing unlocks key vitamins and minerals that otherwise pass through our bodies without being put to use. Today's juicers are powerful, efficient, and designed to deliver consistently delicious juice at the press of a button, which means that there is no reason to let those valuable vitamins and minerals stay locked up inside the fruits and vegetables you are already eating. You are not getting the most out of your diet!

And if you are tired of spending too much money at juice bars to get your wheatgrass fix, we offer a complete range of juicers that allow you to produce healthy wheatgrass drinks right in your own home. With a chlorophyll content of up to 70%, wheatgrass is a super juice that ensures your workout is as effective as possible.

Start benefiting from the wheatgrass advantage, save money and time today. Click here to get started."

What is this about?

There's a lot going on in those two paragraphs, and the segment lacks direction overall. Plus, that CTA is a mess. What exactly will the reader get if they click on the link?

IS YOUR AUDIENCE MISSING SOMETHING?
Not just a CTA, but is there something more material missing?

Can your readers see the picture you are painting for them? Are you holding their hand and walking them through the exact ways that the benefits your product or service provides are a perfect fit for their (conscious or unconscious) pain points?

This problem is a little harder to fix because it can have such a wide range of causes. The first question to ask yourself pertains to the audience:

"Is this message right for the audience I'm targeting?"

Misalignment between your message and the audience you're targeting creates a dissonance that even the best copy can't shake. The right message will never hit home if you're talking to the wrong people.

If you are confident that your message and your audience are correctly paired, then the culprit could be the copy itself. It isn't always easy to dive into your work knowing that it might not be up to par, but remember that copywriting is more science than art.

As you try different approaches, keep track of what works and what doesn't. Trash the stuff that doesn't pan out and hang on to the stuff that converts, to provide inspiration later.

QUICK TIP

COPYWRITING PRO TIP #14: The topic of swipe files is a divisive issue among marketers. A swipe file is a collection of all the successful pieces of copy that one brand or copywriter has used. On one side of the coin are the marketers who say, "Yes, definitely use whatever swipe files you can get hold of, there is no reason to reinvent the wheel." On the other side of the coin are those who say, "Don't use someone else's swipe file; they were writing about their product/service and you are better off exploring your own product/service than relying on someone else's." Both parties have points, but regardless of which path you take, be sure to create your own swipe file. Take notes, look at your competitors, and constantly be on the lookout for ways to improve your copy.

Like I said, there's no quick fix for this issue. Some copywriters think that they should be relying on adjectives to pump up their copy, and this often isn't really the case.

Rarely is the issue solved by *more* words. The remedy is often the *right* words.

This can be tricky, but when constructing your copy, really think about what you are trying to say. Stay away from jargon and take the time to pick the right words.

If this means cracking open a thesaurus, so be it.

DOES YOUR AUDIENCE WANT WHAT YOU ARE OFFERING THEM?

This is the toughest copywriting issue to fix, because it isn't really a copywriting issue.

If the underlying offer isn't attractive or valuable, the best copy in the world won't be able to save it. It is simply a dud offer. This is a time when it makes sense to look to your competition.

- What kinds of offers do they have?
- Is their offer simply much better than yours?
- And a final question: is anyone else doing what you're doing?

We would all like to live in a world where our businesses don't have competitors, but in reality, a situation where your business existed without competition might not be such a good thing. Take stock of the situation and ask yourself an honest question: are you without competitors because what you're doing is truly innovative and without peers, or do you not have any competitors because what you're doing is not working?

HIRING A COPYWRITER

I believe that with instruction and practical experience anyone can craft compelling copy, but if you don't have the time, the interest, or the know-how and would simply rather hire a copywriter to handle it for you, use the following tips to sift through the freelancer marketplaces:

GOOD COPYWRITERS HAVE A PROCESS.

It won't do you much good to grill your prospective copywriter about the difference between PAR and AIDA. That kind of information can be regurgitated with a simple Google search. Instead, provide them with a profile of your needs and ask them how they would craft copy for that audience. Good copywriters will be able to answer this question concisely and clearly.

GOOD COPYWRITERS ARE IN DEMAND.

I have been an unproven freelancer in a crowded marketplace and I know how much it sucks. That being said, the people who have a full schedule got that way because they know what they're doing. Not every freelancer with an open schedule is a bad copywriter, but know that you are taking a chance on them.

GOOD COPYWRITERS KNOW THEIR PORTFOLIO LIKE THE BACK OF THEIR HAND.

Not only do good copywriters have extensive portfolios, but they are fluent in discussing the strengths of and differences between the copy samples that are presented.

GOOD COPYWRITERS WORK BETTER WITH SUPPORT.

No matter how good your final choice is, he or she won't be a mind reader. Provide your contractor with a full creative brief, and make sure they understand the features and benefits of your product/service along with the audience that they will be writing for.

CONCLUSION

Copywriting is complex. It is a big deal, and it can be tricky.

The best way to become better at copywriting is to simply get out there and do it. Use one of the formulas from this guide, or find one that fits your audience, and start experimenting.

Keep track of what works and what doesn't work and keep an eye on your competitors. Build your own swipe file of copy that you see and like, copy that you produce that works, and other tips and techniques that you come across.

Always write with your reader in mind, and obsessively look for ways to provide him or her with value.

Above all, remember that your copy isn't as important as your offer. Your copy is just a part of your equation for success. No pressure.