

The Science of Great Headline Writing



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If you want your writing to be read, you should write with your readers in mind.

To be really effective at writing, you need to get inside your readers' heads.

The good news is that if you understand the psychological principles that drive human behaviour, and in particular, what drives curiosity; **you can do virtually anything.**

Great writers attract and hold our attention, using a variety of different techniques. But ultimately these techniques are all trying to do the same thing: compete for our attention and hold it for as long as possible.

And you don't have long to make an impact. Readers take 200-300 milliseconds to identify a single printed word. And the average reader spends fewer than 15 seconds actively on any given web page.

This guide will show you what works and the psychological principles that lie behind different writing techniques to help you grab people's attentions in a way that is relevant and helpful. So you can select the best kinds of headlines and devise new creative angles for your blog or website.

It's got headline prompts, tips and ideas to help you devise hundreds of new imaginative headlines to consistently appeal to readers.



Why do headlines matter?

Until relatively recently, headline writing was the sole preserve of journalists and editors, hunched over gin-soaked typewriters in smoky offices. The headlines of old were functional. But as the market for newspapers became more competitive, the art of headline writing grew in importance.

Now, publications compete for visits through judicious headline selection. Headlines are the primary currency of the world of online media. The publications do this the best have climbed to the top of the global rankings. And when you think the difference between a good headline and a substandard headline can be as much as 10x, 20x, or even more. It's not hard to see why headlines are getting all this attention.

Click-through data and A/B testing have turned headline writers into scientists. No longer can editors speculate about what headline works: they have data to prove it. At so-called viral sites like Upworthy, for example, writers must come up with 25 headlines for every article.

These sites have effectively acted as R&D facilities for headline writers. It's the end of 'the editor's word is final'. It's the readers who are having the final say.

For up-to-date information on the latest research into headlines check out -

www.thestoryscientist.com

About Me

I'm a recovering journalist and I've spent the last nine years working for major national newspapers and global niche magazines, including The Times and former Economist Group titles.

I've also freelanced for some of the world's biggest public relations agencies. And now I want to share some of the secrets I've learned with you.

The Story Scientist



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Make your readers curious

Q: Why are headline writers getting better at manipulating us?

A: Because they (increasingly) know us better than we know ourselves.

Headlines are changing, because we increasingly understand the drivers of curiosity.

We know more about the relationship between human psychology and headlines than ever before. We also know what makes readers tick, click, read and keep reading.

To create curiosity amongst your readers you should be ruled by the following principles -

Context

This is your who/what/why. It helps readers quickly identify how to categorise your article.

Context
+
Casuality
+
Emotion
+
Readability
+
Relevance

Causality

What happened when. We need to know enough to build up a picture in our minds.

Emotion

Successful headlines make us desperate to know the moral truth at the heart of the story.

Readability

Use simple but evocative words that can be quickly and easily understood by readers.

Relevance

Always be relevant to your audience. Don't spam them or make false promises, or you'll be forever classified as clickbait.

So let's get going.

Why focus on curiosity?

Humans are emotionally driven creatures. And curiosity is the emotion that drives us to seek out fresh information.

Ever felt the need to google an ex? Or a film star? Or found yourself going off on a tangent and watching documentaries on YouTube after being led there for some other reason?

Good news: it's completely normal.

In the last few decades, psychologists have explored what drives curiosity, which they've defined as the urge to keep learning.

Curiosity is the force that makes you click on headlines. So it's the thing that every headline writer and blogger should keep top of mind when they're writing.

Tell them enough to pique their interest.. but not too much

CONTEXT

TRICK 1: Use information gaps

In his 1994 paper, *The Psychology of Curiosity*, psychology George Loewenstein noted that curiosity requires some initial knowledge.

We're not curious about something we know absolutely nothing about. But as soon as we know even a little bit, our curiosity is piqued and we want to learn more.

Research shows that curiosity increases with knowledge: the more we know, the more we want to know. To get this process started,

Loewenstein suggests supplying people with intriguing but incomplete information.

Curiosity arises, Loewenstein wrote, "when attention becomes focused on a gap in one's knowledge. Such information gaps produce the feeling of deprivation labeled curiosity. The curious individual is motivated to obtain the missing information to reduce or eliminate the feeling of deprivation."

Loewenstein's theory helps explain why curiosity is such a potent motivator: it's not only a mental state but also an emotion, a powerful feeling that drives us forward until we find the information that will fill in the gap in our knowledge.

Your headline is dangling a carrot, telling the reader enough to get them interested, but leaving enough untold to get them to click on the story.

Getting the context of the headline right is essential. You give enough context to rouse curiosity, minus the punchline.

The equation for a curiosity gap =

Previous knowledge or experiences
+
something new

Take [Upworthy](#) for instance. It rose to eminence stringing together what I call 'extreme' curiosity gaps.

"You Won't Believe What Happened Next"
etc. "You'll Die When You See .."

It's admittedly a tactic it seems to employ less these days, presumably because people are increasingly growing wise to it. But it helped it become one of the world's biggest sites and the approach was mimicked across the internet.

TRICK 2: Leave out at least one crucial piece of information

How to use curiosity gaps without sounding like *Upworthy*

Many of these articles are written about surprises. They are tales of happenings that don't confirm with our regular expectations of the world. To be successful, the headline needs to give the reader enough information to stoke their curiosity without necessarily giving them the whole story. And it shouldn't disappoint. But more on that later.



Example: 'Only One Country Jails More Journalists Than Iran' [*Business Insider*]

What does it tell you?

- That this story is about media freedom.
- That Iran jails the second highest number of journalists.
- That there is just one country that jails more.
- That the article is going to reveal which country that is.

TRICK 3: Make words and pictures work together for optimal effect

According to some researchers, we build inferences by drawing on our long term memory to compare the sentences we read to what we know of the world around us, relying on as many as five categories to turn sentences into scenarios: time, space, actor, cause, and intention.

Or, put more simply: who, what, when, where, how and why enable readers to see sentences are tightly connected.

TRICK 4: Start your headline with one of these

WHY

WHAT

HOW

WHEN

WHERE

These kinds of headlines stimulate curiosity because they tell the reader the blog posts will provide an answer or viewpoint, without revealing the twist in the headline. They're like a mini cliff-hanger.

Examples:

WHY

Why Taylor Swift Was Wrong to Take on Apple
Why I Stopped Wearing High Heels

WHAT

What I Hate Most about Sundays
What You Need to Survive as an Entrepreneur

HOW

How to Eat Cheese All Day and Not Get Fat
How to Launch a Successful Ecommerce Business

WHEN

When Working Couples Can't Get It Together On Retirement Plans

When the Breakdancing Craze Swept Britain

WHERE

Where Are the Cast of Shameless Now?

Where the Benghazi Committee Went Wrong
This Is Macedon House: **Where** Indifference Threatens a Jewel in Victoria's Heritage

Note that while 'When' and 'Where' frequently appear in headlines, they don't always appear at the beginning of a headline.

TRICK 5: Take the advice of advertising writers who say you can't write a bad headline that begins with "how to"

Many people online are seeking practical answers to problems they have. Find a problem people are searching for online and create a 'how to' article under the same name.



TRICK 6: Be thought provoking. Create content around current news events by asking the right question



Questions in headlines are not something that sits easily with many traditional editors. In the journalism world, question headlines are generally an indication that there's not much meat on the bones of the story. In other words, question-led headlines allow journalists to shoehorn in a story, when they don't have much in the way of evidence to back it up.

But they are great for comment pieces. So bloggers use them regularly to ask sometimes controversial or thought-provoking questions, which form the basis of comment pieces. If you're looking to write more comment pieces, the question mark is your friend. They allow you to question the premise of an existing story and add your own take.

The main challenge is not to ask banal questions directed at the reader, so the reader can easily answer with the word 'no'.

So:

Q: *Is Your Wardrobe Missing This Red Handbag?*

A: *(reader) Erm. No.*

Questions can work well, however, when you're asking a controversial question.

Q: *Is Media Silence about Clinical Trials Evidence of a Right-Wing Conspiracy?*

TRICK 7: By adding the emotional trigger word 'conspiracy', you've instantly made your headline much more intriguing

[See glossary at the end for a list of helpful trigger terms]

Examples:

Are People Right to Blame Climate Change on Cows?

Can You Guess What Happened Next?

Is It Game over for Volkswagen?

Where Is the World's Windiest City? Spoiler Alert: It's Not Chicago

Or you could try something like this from the New York Times:

How Do You Raise \$3.47 Billion? Ask These Guys.

This question gives you enough context to know what's coming next, without telling you who the 'Guys' are.

Questions in headlines also allow you to question the prevailing sentiment. When everyone else on Twitter or Facebook is saying one thing, you can take a different tack.

SO ...

If done well, questions in headlines also allow you to give enough context to tell the reader the essentials of what the article is about, without giving them the whole story. Perfect for arousing curiosity.

CAUSALITY

TRICK 8: always link cause to effect

'Everything happens for a reason,' so the saying goes.

Why is it so comforting to believe? The clue lies in our brains, which are hardwired to infer causes from effects. If something goes wrong, we want to know why, so we can try to avoid it in the future. If someone is successful, we want to try to understand why so we can replicate it.

Remember what happened when MH370 went missing? The world was desperate to know what happened. Countless conspiracy theories did the rounds, and thousands of editorials were penned, without so much of a scrap of evidence.

When we witness or we're made aware of an occurrence we like to know what caused it. Our tendency to make causal inferences is closely tied to our ability to read and comprehend.

We read faster and recall content better when sentences use transitions that explicitly flag causation. Sentences with causal relationships

are processed more quickly.

Readers of behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman's book [Thinking Fast and Slow](#), will be familiar with the following experiment at the beginning of chapter 4.

| bananas



— vomit



You may not have realized it but..

'..your mind automatically assumed a temporal sequence and a causal connection between the words bananas and vomit, forming a sketchy scenario in which bananas caused the sickness.'

We believe the bananas and vomit are connected. In other words, we infer or see reasons and connections, even when we have no reason to.

Why does this matter?

Because headline writers can exploit our brain's tendency to see causal relationships between words.

Remember: Readers devour and recall easily sentences that include cause and effect.

TRICK 9: Brains love numbered lists

Our brains are constantly fact-checking, receiving new information and trying to make sense of it. Which is why, according to Maria Konnikova, author of [Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes](#), 'our brains love lists'.

According to Konnikova, the list works because:

"The article-as-numbered-list has several features that make it inherently captivating: the headline catches our eye in a stream of content; it positions its subject within a pre-existing category and classification system... and it promises a story that's finite, whose length has been quantified upfront. Together, these create an easy reading experience, in which the mental heavy lifting of conceptualization, categorization, and analysis is completed well in advance of actual consumption

"And there's little that our brains crave more than effortlessly acquired data.

"On a physical level, the answer is often simple: difference. Whenever we're scanning the

environment for nothing in particular, our visual system is arrested by the things that don't fit—features that suddenly change or somehow stand out from the background.

"A headline that is graphically salient in some way has a greater chance of capturing our eye, and in an environment where dozens of headlines and stories vie for attention, numerals break up the visual field."

In other words, we are drawn to numbers in articles because they allow our brains to classify the content more readily.

TRICK 10: Brains love the number 7



The number 7 was voted the world's favorite number in a recent poll.

According to Alex Bellos who wrote *Alex Through The Looking-Glass: How Life Reflects Numbers and Numbers Reflect Life*:

Odd numbers stick in our brain more, are harder to digest – and as a result gain extra

meanings. In western culture the numbers that attract the most superstition, three, seven and 13, are all odd.

TRICK 11: Try to communicate change and transformation wherever possible

Could you imagine a world where journalists wrote about the continuing status quo? Nope? Me neither.

Most headlines communicate something new and shiny – something disruptive and innovative. Journalists want to write about how the world is changing because that's what readers want. Thanks to science, we now understand why change is so important.

The brain draws information in from the world around it to create models. We constantly seek out new information in order to build and enrich our models.

This is why headlines about transformation stoke our curiosity.

How to convey change in headlines -

1. *Became*

'How Christopher Columbus Became a Hate

Figure for Many Online'

2. *Reinvented*

The Knick Reinvented the Period Drama

3. *Turned*

'Scandal' has turned Olivia Pope into TV's best anti-hero since Walter White

4. *Transformed*

'The Man Who Transformed Shanghai into Global Financial Centre'

5. *From X to Y:*

'Prodigy to Poster Girl: How Charlotte Church Lent the Voice of an Angel to Political Causes'

TRICK 12: There's another very easy way to convey transformation in your headline, and that's simply to insert the word: 'became', 'reinvention' or 'turned into'

How Bernie Sanders Turned Himself into a Serious Presidential Contender

So - inject change into your headlines. Allude to transformation.

TRICK 13: Talk about the future



Most people want hard and fast predictions about what will be changing the world in five years time. Why? Because we want information that will give us advantages over others.

Examples:

How the [Keyword] Is/Are Changing

How the Future of [Keyword] Will Be Different

Ten Things You Need to Know about the Future of [Keyword]

TRICK 14: Play with readers' emotions

Emotion

Most people react emotionally to things. So another effective tactic to evoke curiosity is to use some other handy keywords, sometimes

referred to as 'hardwired' words.

Why they work

We are innately moral creatures who are wired to react emotionally to acts of altruism and selfishness.

Our brains are fact-checking machines constantly trying to discern good and bad in the world.

And we're psychologically predisposed to sniff out liars and troublemakers, crooks and charlatans, which is why we are drawn towards stories that promise to expose the truth.

As readers we want to know about myths, hidden truths, scandals and surprising facts. This is why we are drawn to exposés and myth-busting articles.

TRICK 15: Understand the power of negativity

Many people bemoan the content of newspapers and magazines. 'It's all depressing news, they say. But there's a good reason for this. As humans our survival is predicated on our ability to determine who is an ally and who is an enemy. Many of the documentaries, news and features we read will contain warnings and

lessons, for our own lives.

This could be one reason why there are more negative emotional words (62%) than positive words (32%) in the English dictionary.

It could also be why many headlines rely on words with negative connotations, tapping into our greatest fears.

Newspapers have known this forever. Stoking fears and insecurities sells papers. So can negatives like:

Don't Leave Home without [Keyword]

Don't Go on a Date without [Keyword]

'Myths about Y' headlines or 'The Truth about X' headlines help stir people's curiosity because we are drawn to anything that conflicts with our regular expectations of things.

Examples:

The Grim Truth about Cottage Cheese

Can You Stomach the Truth about Quinoa?

5 Incredibly Dangerous Weather Myths That People Actually Believe

Three Years Of The Benghazi Hoax In Five Minutes

Vauxhall Dragged into Emissions Scandal

Consider dropping these words into your headlines to stoke people's curiosity:

Without

Five Things You Shouldn't Leave Home Without

Stop

Why It's Time to Stop Weighing Yourself Every Day

Missing

Finally. The Thing You've Been Missing All Your Life

Fear

Fears Grow on Greek Bailout Rumors

Myth

Seven Myths about Startups

Hoax

Five Ways to Beat Hoax Callers

Warning Signs

Are You Burning Out? Nine Warning Signs

Shock

Overcoming the Shock of Discovering My Wife Was Cheating

Truth

The Shocking Truth about Bananas

Mistakes

Five Mistakes to Avoid When Writing Your Business Book

Crisis

Five Things We've Learned from the Financial Crisis

Trust

A Crisis of Trust in the Food Industry

TRICK 16: Take a moral stand

As previously stated, we are obsessed with discerning right from wrong. We want to know how we can learn from the mistakes of others. Which explains why headline writers often use the format:

Why Obama Was Right to Take on Congress

Why Donald Trump Was Wrong about Feminists

These headlines speak to our moral selves. We

are constantly acting on the belief that certain actions are right or wrong, by promising to tell us more in the article they are holding a red rag to our curiosity.

These kinds of articles work well around specific news events. If you are looking to write a comment piece around a newsy hook, this format will help you create an irresistibly clickable headline.

TRICK 17: Namecheck your reader

Connect on a personal level.

"Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language." ~ Dale Carnegie

We all know that emails that use the recipient's name have higher open rates. This level of personalization isn't possible in headlines but you can connect more readily with your readers



by referencing 'you' or 'your' in the headline. A study of viral headlines carried out by Buffer, found 'You' to be the fifth most popular word, with 'your' also making the top 20. Together,

these two pronouns appeared in 16 percent of all headlines in the study.

TRICK 18: Know when to use hyperbole and superlatives

Journalists hate it when PR people use superlatives in their press releases. Yet they're often guilty of using words with inflated meanings in order to grab people's attentions.

PR people will often rankle journalists by inserting words like 'leading', 'best in class' and other overblown terms into press releases.

But newspapers are guilty of similar crimes, especially in online versions of their articles.

Seen something **incredible** recently? You're not alone:

'Incredible Drone Footage Shows Two Whales Swimming Alongside a Paddleboarder'

'25 INCREDIBLE Photos That Look Fake But Are Actually Real'

Superlatives

Before [Buzzfeed](#) and [Upworthy](#), the word 'incredible' was used sparingly in headlines.

Now, most of us will see at least one headline purporting to show something incredible most days. But by nature, not everything can be incredible or amazing all the time. So why do they do it?

Because superlatives work, especially when you look beyond the obvious.

Here's a list of lesser-used superlatives:

- Excellent
- Amazing
- Brilliant
- Prodigious
- Remarkable
- Formidable
- Best
- Greatest
- Worthiest
- Faultless
- Flawless

What do we mean by **hyperbole**?

A hyperbole is an extreme exaggeration used to make a point. By definition, hyperbole shouldn't be everywhere. It should be used to express the out of the ordinary. Yet anyone with a passing interest in headlines will know that hyperbole is everywhere.

In theory, nonfiction news writing should be free of hyperbole. It should be a dispassionate representation of events. But if you believe that you'll believe anything.

Newspapers rarely, if ever, report the facts in the way you would in conversation. Journalists like hyperbole. Here are a few examples of journalists being OTT.

Meetings = Marathon talks
Share price fall = Share price collapse
Told off = Fingers burned

When it comes to going overboard, sports writers are the worst: A 3 nil soccer victory is a thrashing, a butchering, a crushing or a humiliation.

So why do they do it? Because it makes writing more interesting.

My advice? Think about the tone of your site. Do you want it to have the feel and tone of a tabloid site or a viral news website? If not, use sparingly.

TRICK 19: Consider negative modifiers

Remember I mentioned about understanding the power of negativity?

Some studies have shown that negative modifiers (like worst) lead to more clicks and shares than positive modifiers (like best).

In a study of 65,000 titles, content discovery platform [Outbrain](#) compared positive superlative headlines, negative superlative headlines and no superlative headlines.

The study found that headlines with positive superlatives performed 29% worse and headlines with negative superlatives performed 30% better. And the average click-through rate on headlines with negative superlatives was 63% higher than it was for positive ones.

TRICK 20: Choose your verbs carefully

Readability. Verbs are your best friend. So choose them wisely.

According to several recent studies looking at the most read, shared and clicked on headlines,

verbs beat nouns in headlines most of the time.

The verb is what conveys the drama in your headline. So clever choice of an unusual and evocative verb in your headline can lead to higher click-throughs and shares.

TRICK 21: Write longer headlines for more shares

In the world of journalism, brevity is key. And when it comes to SEO, remaining within 70 characters is the name of the game. Yet when it comes to social sharing it seems that bigger (up to a point) is better.

News aggregator site [Newswhip](#) found the mean headline length for leading media sites was 8.9 words. But there's a big difference between the outlets.

Traditional publications like the [BBC](#) average 5.4 words, while the [New York Times](#) averages 7.5 words. While relative newcomers like [TechCrunch](#) average at 12.4 words and [Business Insider](#) at 10.9 words. This is because the traditional publications have more established readerships and so don't have to fight so hard for shares.

[The Daily Mail](#), one of the biggest sites in the world, frequently publishes 14-word headlines,

nearly three times the length of the BBC. Take this example from [ViralNova](#):

At First, I Felt Sorry For The People Who Live In This Tiny House. Then I Looked Closer...Now I'm Jealous.

That's 104 characters long...roughly 50% over the maximum recommended length for a title. Yet despite this it attracted 116,331 Facebook likes, comments and shares.

Relevance. Being relevant is the key to building and maintaining trust with your audience.

In his book called "[How To Do Better Creative Work](#)", author and copywriting guru Steve Harrison, uses the phrase 'relevant abruption'.

You want to catch people, that's the 'abruptive' part. Something that stands out, something that is eye-catching. But it has to be relevant.

Only grab attention in a way that's relevant. Don't attempt to lure people in under false pretenses, you'll only annoy your audience.

TRICK 22: Emulate the kind of voice that's right for your audience

Most people who have a blog want to build credibility with audience. There's no point posting articles about cats on skateboards if it doesn't support the objectives of your blog and your business. Sharing alone is not the sole aim of content creation. The aim is to reach and influence those you need to market to.

It really depends on the kind of business you have and what kind of overall tone of voice you're going for. If you're going for a cerebral vibe, stuffing your headlines full of numbers and adjectives probably won't help your cause. The key thing is to understand the techniques out there, research your audience profile and pick and choose the best ones for your blog.

Could you imagine The Economist writing headlines in the style of Upworthy? Consider this example:

Original -

German flexibility: No one was sure Germany could handle its migrant crisis. It turns out it can

And see it hear again refashioned for the viral content era:

For a viral site -

5 Heart-warming Truths about Migration in Germany

It doesn't really work does it?

The problem is the viral sites often blur the line between marketing and editorial. Use too many viral style tricks and you risk coming across as sounding more like marketing material, as opposed to a more trusted editorial voice.

TRICK 23: Profile your ideal reader. What kind of content do they and their friends share?

What kinds of content does your audience share on which channel? How colloquial or serious is it? Identify the kinds of publications they're sharing and try to emulate those.

TRICK 24: Make a promise about what you will learn/see/experience if you click

And remember: deliver on that promise, otherwise the headline is annoying click bait.



TRICK 25: Understand the SEO implications of the choices you make

Newspapers will often run the same stories with different headlines in their online and print editions. This is partly because of context, an editor of a newspaper can show what the story is about with just a photo. Whereas Google won't know your story is about Taylor Swift, unless you write Taylor Swift in the headline.

See how these headlines from [The Guardian](#) are adjusted online:

Print

'Prodigy to poster girl: how Charlotte Church lent the voice of an angel to political causes'

Online

Charlotte Church: pop star turned reluctant champion of the left

Print

'Startling reinvention from good old Egg to a hard-nosed zombie killer'

Online

'Andrew Lincoln: from happy-go-lucky Egg to star of The Walking Dead'

Print

'My big fat phoney wedding: with marriage in crisis, Argentiniains fall for fake nuptials'

Online

'I do ... not really: young Argentiniains spurn real weddings for fake ones'

In the first two examples outlined above the online version has moved the name of the celebrity to the front of the online headline and put a colon after it. They have done this because this is the term people are most likely to be searching for.

These are on page headlines.

If you want people to find your content via search engines, it is usually seen as a good idea to use likely search terms (keywords) in your article and heading (especially at the beginning)

Does that mean you have to stuff your headline full of SEO keywords?

No. You could put all your keywords in your HTML title (meta title) instead, which is what Google shows in its web results. Using this approach means you can write a great on-page headline with personality, cater for search engines, searchers and regular readers, all at the same time.

And remember -

Google news

Google will often display a news box in with its web results. BUT the headline that Google shows in its news results is usually the on-page headline (usually the <H1> or <H2> tag) - and NOT the HTML title.

News sitemaps are only relevant for Google News results. If you're not in Google News (and most bloggers aren't), or searches relevant to your content do not trigger a news box, this is usually not an issue.

How much should you worry about SEO?

Keywords are important. But stuffing a headline full of keywords can make for pretty boring headlines. Moreover: in an age where Google rewards social links, creating great content (and headlines) is arguably the number one priority for all content creators.

TRICK 26: Use Anglo Saxon words over Latin equivalents

Anglo-Saxon words typically refer to concrete objects and have single or a few syllables. The more concrete the language, the more easily readers can picture, grasp, and recall your meaning.

CONCLUSION

Always make sure you deliver on your promises. Without trust, you have nothing. So do not use these tactics if you cannot deliver on your promise. Don't promise sex or Miley Cyrus in an article if you can't deliver sex or Miley Cyrus.

Pick an approach that works for the kind of site you're writing for and what you're writing about. And remember: what works for leading newspaper sites may not be appropriate for B2B content.

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Glossary of popular headline words:

Secrets

One of the most curiosity-gap friendly words out there. The headline is promising to tell us something there's a good chance we don't know already. It could also allude to someone's dirty little secrets (the ones they didn't want us to know), or the secret truth about something.

Breakthrough

This word (meaning a sudden, dramatic, and important discovery or development) has long been used by journalists, normally in relation to scientific discoveries.

Weird/Bizarre/Eerie/Mysterious/Strange

Again our brains are constantly looking for things that are out of the ordinary. It's doubtful that newspapers used to have a 'weird news' section, tucked inside the sports section. Yet the Express, the Mirror and the Huffington Post all have dedicated URLs for 'Weird news' on their websites. It's not just weird, Sky News has a dedicated tag for 'Strange' news.

Amazing

One of the most prolific terms in the world of headlines. Use sparingly, or people will stop believing you.

Incredible

This word tends to be used more in headlines accompanying videos. But it's everywhere. Even the relatively conservative British newspaper, the Daily Telegraph, uses this ploy.

Conspiracy

Humans are tribal creatures that make quick decisions about whether to trust other humans. We're drawn to stories that might help us to avoid forming alliances with people who might cause us harm.

Untold story

Often you'll see headlines, documentaries or programmes where the words 'Untold Story' appear. Who wants to see rehashed story you've heard countless times before? The

untold story framework appeals to human curiosity by promising to tell us something we (and most other people) don't know.

Wrong/Right

As previously stated, we are obsessed with discerning right from wrong. We want to know how we can learn from the mistakes of others. These headlines speak to our moral selves.

Truth/Lies

Lies, scary truths, sad truths, hidden truths are all popular headline constructions.

Essential

In a complex and uncertain world, we are always on the look out for the information that will give us the edge. Classifying your article as essential reading tells the brain that the article will give you the most important answers to the big questions in your work or life.

Prompts:

1. Things I Love about [Keyword]
2. Why I've Changed my Mind about [Keyword]
3. Why 99 Percent of [Keyword] Are Getting It Wrong
4. When [Keyword] Goes Awry
5. How to Be a Better [Keyword]
6. 19 Great Books for Any [Keyword]
7. 17 Myths about [Keyword] Life
8. 15 Things That [Keyword] Was Wrong About
9. 13 Surprising Reasons Why [Keyword] Doesn't Work
10. 11 Time Saving [Keyword] Tips
11. 7 Habits of [Keyword] People
12. 5 Things You Probably Didn't Know about [Keyword]
13. 3 Must Have Resources for Any [Keyword]
14. The Best 15 Apps for [Insert Keyword]
15. The Ultimate [Keyword]'s Checklist
16. 11 Biggest Mistakes Made by [Keyword]
17. How to Launch a [Keyword] Business
18. How to Be a More Productive [Keyword]
19. How to Get a Job as a [Keyword]
20. How to Get Paid to Be a [Keyword]
21. How to Be a More Influential [Keyword]
22. 3 Strategies for Rapid [Keyword]
23. How to Survive as a Freelance [Keyword]
24. The Top Marketing Mistakes Made by [Keyword]
25. 7 Foolproof [Keyword] Tricks
26. How To Change The Way you Do [Keyword] Forever
27. 5 Approaches to [Keyword] That Won't Backfire
28. The Best Apps for [Keyword]
29. The Solution to the [Keyword] Quandary
30. The Sad Truth That No-One Wants You to Know about [Keyword]
31. The Secrets Have Changed The Lives Of [Keyword]
32. 5 Easy Ways To Make [Keyword] Faster
33. 5 Steps to Solve Your [Keyword] Problem
34. How You Could Benefit From These [Keyword] Methods
35. Winning Tactics For [Keyword]
36. The Pros and Cons of [Keyword]
37. Learn How to [Keyword] in 4 Weeks
38. How Well Do You Know [Keyword] from your [Keyword]?
39. The Amazing Apps That Will Change Your [Keyword]
40. How I Overcame My Fear of [Keyword] in 5 Days
41. The Untold Secret To Mastering [Keyword] In Just 7 Days
42. Little Known Ways To Rid Yourself Of [Keyword]
43. How to Improve [Keyword] in 1 Day
44. The Ultimate [Keyword] Checklist
45. 3 Myths of [Keyword] Finally Shattered
46. The Must Have [Keyword] Resource List
47. Avoid The Top 10 [Keyword] Mistakes
48. Is the [Keyword] Under Threat?
49. 10 Helpful Tips For [Keyword]
50. Find a [Keyword] That Matches Your Personality
51. Don't Download Another [Keyword] Until You Read This
52. How I Improved My [Keyword] In One Day

Thank you!

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