

Want to Hook Readers? Follow These 10 Rules

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Ten rules for writing a captivating story on a hot topic, whether in print or online, to keep readers in your blog.

1. Begin with the most important facts first.

The intro to every article needs to grab the reader's attention instantly and summarize the story with around 25 to 30 words.

2. Make your text thorough but succinct.

The first few sentences need to include "who, what, where, when, why, and how." Remember most people will not read more than 250 words before they start to skim. You should try to give them all the information they need as quickly as possible.

3. Use the active tense.

It is faster and uses fewer words. For example, "Argentina was beaten by Germany in last night's World Cup final ..." takes longer to read than "Germany beat Argentina ..."

4. Communicate what's new or different.

Why would the reader care about what you have to say? Why is it relevant to them? Is there a trend happening in pop culture or the world that you can incorporate? What are people talking about right now, and how does this tie in with what you do?

5. Focus on human interest.

While people may be interested in the latest political polls, a new cancer treatment, a food or product recall, or what the weather will be like tomorrow, if you can put a human face to the story, you will create an emotional connection that will draw readers in and keep them engaged.

6. Avoid jargon.

Every industry has its own language, including journalism. For example, do you know what a byline is? (The name of the author included in a box at the beginning or end of a story.) How about a NIB? (News in brief: short snippets of news, which run down the outer edge of a newspaper page.) Or a splash? (The lead story.) Think about the language you use — keep it clear, concise, and to the point.

7. Write acronyms out in full in the first reference.

Consider the following acronyms: ROI, ASBO, PCT, SATs, and FTSE. What do they stand for? Answers, respectively: Return on investment, Anti-social behavior order, Primary care trust, Standard Assessment Tests, and Financial Times Stock Exchange.

8. Use quotes.

It's powerful to convey important thoughts with someone else's words. However, when you quote others, make sure to get it right. Double check the spelling of your interviewee's name, and make sure you don't take quotes out of context in a way that distorts the person's intentions.

9. Keep it real.

Although journalists often joke about never letting the truth get in the way of a good story, you should never, ever write something you know is untrue. We all make mistakes, but a mistake is very different from a lie.

10. Have someone else proofread your work.

Very few people can spot their own mistakes, so it's wise to have a colleague double-check your work before you publish. Remember that the human brain reads words rather than letters, so if the first and last letter of a word are correct, we will often read it correctly, even if the others are jumbled up.