

Content Marketing
 UNLOCKED

NEILPATEL

Ultimate Headline Formula List

How To **Grow Your Traffic With**
Content Marketing

THE KEY TO WRITING POWERFUL HEADLINES:

On average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy.

-David Olgivy

David Olgivy is an oft-referenced copywriter, and he pegged it right. In countless heatmap studies, marketers have found that people rarely read a page in full, word for word. Instead, they scan the page for important key points. In particular, they are looking to see if the page is worth the time it takes to read (or watch/listen) all the way through. This is why headlines and subheadlines are imperative to your content marketing success.

The key to successful headlines, is to grab the attention of the reader. A headline should...

- Address your specific **audience** (Being vague or general = ineffective)
- Highlight the specific **benefit** or outcome they desire
- Highlight the specific **pain** that your read most wants to avoid
- Create **curiosity**
- Add **urgency**

Another useful way that a member of KISSmetrics outlined what should be present in an effective headline is:

S – Specificity
H – Helpfulness
I – Immediacy
N – Newsworthiness
E – Entertainment value

For example:

The Best Five Minutes (immediacy) You'll Spend Today (entertainment): The Latest Tips (newsworthy) From Buffer (specificity) on Getting More Followers (helpfulness)

THE BETTERIDGE LAW OF HEADLINES

Something else to keep in mind as you write your headlines, is something called Betteridge's Law of Headlines. Basically, it means to be careful asking questions.

Created by journalist Ian Betteridge, he found a growing trend in question headlines around the web. And that is, that any headline that ends in a question mark can be answered with a "no". In a lot of cases, that's not a good thing.

For example:

Are You Tired of Your Cell Phone Plan?

This could be answered with a "no". Perhaps your reader doesn't yet realize that their cell phone plan costs more and gives them less features. A better way to write the headline would be:

Does Your Cell Phone Plan Include Unlimited Media Message To Anywhere In the World?

If they answer with a "no", then they are obviously a good match for you—and you've made them aware of what they are missing.

FORMATTING YOUR HEADLINES

Lastly, there is the question of how to format your headlines for better conversions. Here's some guidelines to follow from Unbounce:

- Center your headlines
- Make them big and dark, dark grey (or, when on a dark background, white)
- Use "Title Case", aka Capitalize Each Word
- Don't use a period at the end as such visual cues present mental stopping points for your visitors
- Break up lengthy headlines with "eye rest" punctuation marks, such as ellipses and em-dashes
- Consider putting quotation marks around the headline as this can draw the eye
- Support each headline with a meaningful subhead written in sentence case, aka Capitalize the first word only

THE ULTIMATE HEADLINE FORMULA LIST

How to [Achieve a Desired Outcome]

- *How to Run Faster*

[Large Number] of Ways to [Achieve an Outcome]

- *28 Ideas for Content Upgrades To Grow Your Email List*

- *28 Ideas for Content Upgrades To Grow Your Email List*

The Ultimate Guide to [Achieve a Desired Outcome]

- *The Ultimate Guide to Eating Healthy on a Budget*

Warning! Are You [Something Undesirable]?

- *Warning! Are You Eating This Food That Could Kill You?*

[A Call to Arms]

- *Let's Stop Eating This Poisonous Food!*

[Number] Proven [Actions/Ways] to [Achieve Desired Result]

- *18 Proven Techniques to Build More Muscle in Less Time*

[Number] Mistakes Most People Make When/With [Common Action]

- *11 Mistakes Most People Make When Washing Their Hair*

[Number] Secrets to [Achieve Desired Outcome]

- *7 Secrets to Becoming a Digital Nomad*

[Outrageous/Controversial Claim]

- *Why Canadians Are Actually Evil*

[Number] Lessons I Learned When/From [Experience]

- *7 Lessons from General Assembly*

[Social Proof] [Desired Outcome]

- *The Tool Over 283,000 Websites Use to Grow Their Traffic*

[A Quote From/Summary of a Testimonial]

- *How Crazy Egg Changed My Business*

No/Yes, You [Pre-Empt Objection] to [Achieve Desired Result]

- *No, You Don't Have to Count Calories to Lose Weight*

[Provocative Question]

- *Are You Still Eating Dairy?*

[Person] Did [Unusual Action] [Timeframe]. Here's What Happened

- *I Did Yoga Every Day for 6 Months. Here's What Happened*

How [A Seemingly Inconsequential Action] Can [Undesirable Result]

- *How Your Morning Coffee Can Lead to Heart Disease*

How to [Achieve Desired Outcome] Like [Celebrity]

- *How to Sing Like Adele*

How to [Desired Outcome] Without [Unpleasant Action]

- *How to Increase The Traffic to Your Website (Without a Marketing Budget)*

[Number or How to] Simple/Easy Ways to [Desired Outcome]

- *14 Easy Ways to Save \$100 This Month*

We Analyzed [Number] [Measurable] And This Is What We Learned

- *We Analyzed 100 Million Articles (And This is What We Learned)*

A [Power Word] Tutorial to [Achieve Desired Outcome]

- *A Comprehensive Tutorial to Make a Budget*

[Number] Hacks to [Achieve Desired Outcome]

- *25 Hacks to Save More Money*

Why [Thing] [Outcome]

- *Why Spirulina Makes You Smarter*

[Number] Steps to [Achieve Desired Outcome]

- *3 Steps to Improving Your Emotional Intelligence (and Income!)*

[An Odd or Funny Claim]

- *John Cena And His Giant Hands Playing With A Tiny Tortoise*

Quiz: [Which/What/How] [Quiz Topic]?

- *Quiz: Which Harry Potter Character Are You?*

[Controversial Claim or Story]

- *People Called This Mom An "Exhibitionist" After She Took A Breastfeeding Pic With Santa*

[A Claim as if You Know the Future]

- *You Won't Be Able to Lose Weight in 2016.*

Breaking: [Story]

- *Breaking: Whooping Cough Outbreak in Your City*

[Strong Command]

- *Stop Selling Out*

[Number/"Here's Why] [Outcome]

- *16 Reasons You're Fighting With Your Spouse*

Imagine [Desired Outcome]

- *Imagine Becoming a Millionaire*

[4 Words or Fewer Summarizing Topic]

- *You Aren't That Special*

[Claim That Goes Against What Most People Think is True]

- *How Fruit Will Make You Fat*

Why [Problem] (And What to Do About It)

- *Why You're Not Getting Traffic to Your Website (And What to Do About It)*

[Number] [Expert] Share [What]

- *14 Nutritionists Share Their Favourite Plant-Based Recipes*

Reminder: [Claim or Truth]

- *Reminder: Your Weight is Not a Reflection of Your Health*

Are You More Like [X] or [X]?

- *Are You More Like a Tiger or a Lion?*

Can You [Find/Spot/Answer/etc]

- *Can You Find The Problem With This Photo?*

[Keyword]: [Supporting Keywords]

- *Healthy Eating 101: How To Eat Healthy on a Budget*

[Promise of What Your Business/Content Will Do]

- *We Can Help You Boost Your Traffic By 20%*

How We [Desired Result] in [Timeframe]

- *How We Boosted Our Traffic by 20% in 6 Weeks*

These/Find Out Which [Thing] Could/Will [Desired Outcome]

- *These 6 Foods Could Help You Lose 15 Pounds*

[Headline] ([Sidenote to Tease One of the Points])

- *7 Lessons We Learned from General Assembly (#2 is Our Favorite)*

[Headline Formula] [Unique Branding]

- *123 Ways to Get More Website Traffic: A Sumo-Sized Guide*

[Action] NOW!

- *Fix Your Conversion Rate NOW*

[Audience]! Are You [Undesirable/Desirable Outcome]?

- *Bloggers! Are You Leaving Traffic on the Table?*

[Provide social proof] [Ask a compelling question]

- *Derek Jeter Trusts Us: Do You Know If You Are A Good Candidate for Lasik Surgery?*

The [previously untrusted or unproven product] That [authoritative person/group of people] Now Endorse

- *The Water Substitute Thousands of Fitness Trainers Are Using To Hydrate*

[Threat] + [Promise of a solution]

- *7 Legal Cheats That Keep The IRS Out Of Your Pocketbook*

[undesired result] + [mysterious solution]

- *How To Avoid Public Embarrassment: A Professional Speakers Secret Revealed*

[respected person/group of people] + [exclusive/new information]

- *A Fresh Look At An Ancient Problem: How Los Angeles City Planners Overcame The Energy Crisis*

A Little Mistake That Cost a [Title of Avatar] [Painful Loss] a [Time]

- *A Little Mistake That Cost a SaaS CEO \$50,000 a Month*

[Gain] Hiding In Your [Avatar's Location]

- *5 Optimization Secrets Hiding In Your YouTube Analytics*

How I Made a [Gain] With a [Simple/Crazy/Wild Idea]

- *How I Got My Newborn to Sleep With a Cherry Red Gibson Guitar*

Are You Still [Painful/Embarrassing Things]?

- *Are You Still Biting Your Nails?*

There Are Only/Always [Number] Types of [Avatar] You Ever Want To [Result] – Which Group Are You In?

- *There Are Only 4 Types of Employees You Ever Want To Hire – Which Group Are Your Employees In?*

To People Who Want To [Avatar's Action] – but Can't Get Started

- *To Young Mothers Who Want To Have Their Own Business While Raising Their Kids – But Can't Get Started*

How One Word Can Get You [Avatar's Worry]

- *How One Word Can Get You Fired*

Add This One _____ To Your _____ To Get a [Wild Result]

- *Add This One Word In Your Menu To Get Your Customers To Order It, Every Single Time*

The Greatest Reason in The World To Start [What Avatar Wants To Achieve]

- *The Greatest Reason In The World To Start Playing Chess*

The [Avatar] in the [Your Product/Service]

- *The WalMart Cashier in the Ferrari*

How [Your Product] Is Making [Avatar's Niche] History

- *How My Newest Court Case Is Making Legal History' or 'How GM Dynamic Keyboards are Making PC History*

How To [Crime in Avatar's Niche] Legally

- *How To Get Cuban Cigars, Legally*

A Startling Fact About [Avatar's Desired Gain]

- *A Startling Fact About Your Doctors' Success Rate*

[Celebrity] Is a [What They're a Celebrity For]. S/He's Also [Your Niche]. See How [Your Niche/Product] Helped Him/She Change The World

- *Mark Zuckerberg Founded Facebook. He's Also a Taurus. See How His Horoscope Helped Him Change The World' or 'Warren Buffet Is One of the Wealthiest People Alive. He's Also From Omaha. See How Growing Up In Omaha Helped Him Become So Successful*

How To Write a [Avatar's Needed Action]

- *How To Write a Resume*

The Secrets of Making [Avatar's Target Audience] [Gain Desired Benefit]

- *The Secrets of Making The Dentists Office Fun Again*

Advice to [Avatar] Whose [Avatar's Challenging Person] Won't [Avatar's Needed Action]

- *Advice To Single Mothers Whose Families Won't Help Them' or 'Advice to CEO's Whose Employees Won't Listen To Them.*

How a New [Discovery/App] Made a Plain/Ugly [Avatar] [Avatar's Desired Gain]

- *How My New Software Made an Ugly Website Beautiful...In 24 Minutes' or 'How a New Organic Supplement Made a Headache Disappear...Fast*

Think [Avatar's Niche] Is Just For _____? Meet This [Surprising Person] Who Might Disagree With You On That

- *Think HTML Is Just For Young Coders? Meet This 82 Year Old Grandma Who Might Just Disagree With You On That*

A New Kind of [Avatar's Niche] Encourages [Avatar] To [Desired Result]

- *A New Kind of Office Design Encourages Employees To Stay Longer At Work*

You Can Laugh at [Avatar's Niche] Worries – if You Follow This Simple Plan

- *You Can Laugh at Your Money Worries – If You Follow This Simple Plan*

[Number] Known [X] Troubles – Which do You Want to Overcome?

- *10 Known Health Troubles – Which do you Want To Overcome?*

How I Improved My [X] in One [Time]

- *How I Improved My Cooking Skills For My Family In One Afternoon*

Use/Do [Avatar's Niche]? You Need This [Numbered Content] of [Avatar's Resources]

- *Exercise Much? You Need This List of 10 Post Workout Recipes*

New Free [Resource] Tells You [Number] Secrets of Better [Benefit]

- *New Free Webinar Shows You The 12 Secrets of Better Family Vacations*

The Secret to Being [Avatar's Desired Outcome]

- *The Secret To Being a Woman That Every Man Wants*

To [Avatar] Who Want to Quit [What Avatar Wants to Avoid] While [X]

- *To Loving Fathers Who Want To Quit Their Cubicle-Job While Their Kids Are Still Young*

Imagine [Avatar's Big Desire] for/in [Short Amount of Time]

- *Imagine Being Able To Protect Yourself Like Batman, In Just 62 Days*

We Analyzed [Big Number] The Most Successful [Avatar's Niche] of All Time & Discovered This Secret to [Avatar's Desired Result]

- *We Analyzed 174 of The Most Successful High Schools In American History to Discover The Secret to Successful Education*

Thousands Now [X] Who Never Thought They Could

- *Thousands of Senior Citizens Now Create iPhone Apps – Who Never Thought They Could*

[Avatar's Desired Action] for [Short Amount of Time] Will [Achieve Desired Result]. Here's How

- *Being Lazy for 45 Minutes a Day Will Make You More Productive. Here's How*

- *Dear Uber Driver: You Saved My Life*

[Avatar]! Want Quick [X]?

- *English Teachers! Want Extra Income on the Side?*

You May Be [Doing X] More [Avatar's Enemy] Than You Should

- *You May Be Working Harder Than You Should*

Get Rid of That [Avatar's Enemy]!

- *Get Rid of That Crack In Your iPhone*

How You can Get a Quick [X] of [Desired Outcome] – By [Using Your Product]

- *How You Can Get a Quick, Lasting Burst of Energy In Your Day – By Snacking on This Vegetable*

Become a [Desired Benefit] [Avatar Title] With [Your Product/Resource]

- *Look Like James Bond With These 5 Style Hacks*

How To Get More [Desired Benefit] From The [X] You [Already Take This Action]

- *How To Get More Money From The Job You Already Have*

See How [Avatar]'s Life/Career Changed When They Started [Using Your Product]

- *See How One Stylist's Career Changed When They Started Using Johnson & Johnson's New Conditioner*

Wow! [Celebrity Name] [Doing Surprising Action] In [Surprising Location/Publication]

- *Wow! Jack Black Does Bikram Yoga On Set Before Any Shoot*

See [Your Product] In Action

- *See #Slides In Action*

How I [Achieved Result] in [Short Amount of Time]

- *How I Got a 6-Pack In 32 Days*

You Can [Achieve Desired Result] Easily – Just Like [Person]

- *You Can Learn Spanish Easily – Just Like David*

Get Rid of [Avatar's] Worries for Good

- *Get Rid of Blood Pressure Worries For Good*

Keep Your [X] safe This [Current/Upcoming Season]!

- *Keep Your School Safe This Summer Vacation*

Free to [Avatar]. [Action] for [Major Media/Publications/Company] You Want.

- *Free to Members of our Gym. Be Featured In Any Fitness Magazine You Want*

Break Out/Stop of [Bad Habit]!

- *Stop Overeating*

Free Yourself From [X] With [Number] of these [Avatar's Niche] Secrets

- *Free Yourself From Anger With 4 of these Meditation Techniques*

What Sort of [Avatar] [Takes Action With Your Product]?

- *What Sort of Driver Reads Road & Track*

Will You Help me [X]?

- *Will You Help Me Rebuild Our Community?*

Don't Even Think About [X] Without Reading This Report!

- *Don't Even Think About Suicide Without First Reading This Letter*

Why [Avatar] [Achieves Exciting Result]

- *Why Grammar School Teachers Live Longer*

The Secret of Having [X]

- *The Secret of Having a Business That Runs Without You*

How To [Benefit] by just [Doing Simple Actions]

- *How To Swim Like an Olympian By Just Doing This One Stretch Before Going In The Pool*

How To [Desired Outcome] Without [X] for [Minimal Output]

- *How To Write Perfect Headlines Without Breaking Your Teeth In Just 90 Seconds*

[Number] Steps to [Outcome]

- *4 Steps to a Passionate Marriage*

How To [Action] a [Desired Outcome] and [Extra Benefit]

- *How To Win at Poker & Make Extra Money on The Side*

Who is [Getting Desired Outcome] and How

- *Who Always Feels Like They're In Zen At Work...and How*

How The Experts [Actions]

- *How The Experts Do Sit-Ups*

Want to Be a [Avatar Title]?

- *Want To Be a Hand Model?*

How To [Action] a Good [Outcome]

- *How To Cook a Great Dinner In Just 15 Minutes*

How To [Achieve Desired Result], Hour-by-Hour

- *How To Meditate Like a Buddhist Monk, Minute-By-Minute*

Is Your [Location] ['X'] Poor?

- *Is Your Neighborhood Park-Benches Poor?*

Why Some [Avatars] Almost Always [Achieve Desired Outcome] in [Location]?

- *Why These Salons Almost Always Make More Money In Detroit*

How Much is Your [Thing You Wish Was Gone] Costing Your [X]?

- *How Much Is Your Extra Fat Costing Your Grocery Budget Every Month?*

[Number] New Ways to a [X's] Heart – in This fascinating Presentation/Report/Book/Review

- *10 New Ways To a Man's Heart – In This Fascinating Presentation*

How To Give Your [Avatar] Extra [Desired Benefit] – 3 [Surprising Word] Ways

- *How To Give Your Granddaughter Extra Savings For College – 3 Simple Ways*

Little [Problem] That Keep [Avatars] [Pain]

- *Little WordPress Bugs That Keep Your Blog From Being Found*

This is a [Avatar] – [Action] To Her Death

- *This is a CEO – Working To Their Death*

Here Is a Quick way to [Remove Pain]

- *Here is a Quick Way to Relieve Stress*

“I lost my [Pain] – and [Got Benefit] too!”

- *I got rid of all my debt – and made \$42,000 too!*

The Truth About Getting [Benefit]

- *The Truth About Owning Your Own Restaurant*

What [Avatar] Owns His Own [Your Product]?

- *What Kind of Guy Wears Old Navy Jeans?*

The Most [Pain] Mistake of Your Life

- *The Most Expensive Mistake of Your Life*

[Number] ways to [X] Your [Thing Avatar is Avoiding] (

- *21 Ways to Kill Your Procrastination*

Need More [Desired Outcome]?

- *Need More Passion In Your Marriage?*

What Your [X] Doesn't Want You to Know

- *What Your Bank Doesn't Want You to Know*

Surprise

- *This Is Not a Perfect Blog Post (But It Could've Been)*

Questions

- *Do You Know How to Create the Perfect Blog Post?*

Curiosity Gap

- *10 Ingredients in a Perfect Blog Post. Number 9 Is Impossible!*

Negatives

- *Never Write a Boring Blog Post Again*

How to

- *How to Create a Perfect Blog Post*

Numbers

- *10 Tips to Creating a Perfect Blog Post*

Audience referencing

- *For People on the Verge of Writing the Perfect Blog Post*

Specificity

- *The 6-Part Process to Getting Twice the Traffic to Your Blog Post*

Numbers + Adjective + Target Keyword + Rationale + Promise

- *10 Simple Steps You Can Take Today That Will Make You Happier*

[Do something] like [world-class example]

- *The Impossible Task of Capturing Love in Photos: How These Photographers Pulled It Off*

[Do Something Desirable] Like [an Expert] Without [Something Expected & Undesirable]

- *Blog Like an All-Star – Without Bankrupting Your Free Time*

[Amazing Headline]: Subhead

- *The Fine Art of the Apostrophe: How to Master the Most Difficult Punctuation Problems*

[Adjective] & [Adjective] [What You Are / SEO Keyword Phrase] That Will [Highly Desirable Promise of Results]

- *New and Useful Content Marketing Trends That Will Drive You More Traffic*

Little Known Ways to _____

- *Little Known Ways to Get More Traffic From Social*

Here's a Quick Way to [solve a problem]

- *Here's a Quick Way to Clean Up Your Profile Page*

Have a / Build a _____ You Can Be Proud Of

- *Build an Online Community You Can Be Proud Of*

What Everybody Ought to Know About _____

- *What Everybody Ought to Know About Marketing on Pinterest*

[Number] Lessons I Learned From _____

- *17 Lessons I Learned From Writing a New Blog Post Every Day for a Month*

How to _____

- *How to Survive Your First 40 Days of Work on a Distributed Team*

How to _____ – The Essential Guide

- *How to Save 10% or More When Filing Your Taxes – The Essential Guide*

How to _____ like _____

- *How to Crank Ideas Out Every Day Like James Altucher*

How to _____ even if / without _____

- *How to Lose 10 Pounds **Without** Giving Up Your Favorite Foods*
- *How to Lose 10 Pounds **Even If** You Eat Your Favorite Foods*

How to _____ while _____

- *How to Write a Book While Working a 9-5 Job*

How to use _____ to _____

- *How to Use Flowhacking to Get More Done (Without Losing Sleep!)*

How to _____ in X easy steps

- *How to Make Homemade Sriracha Sauce in 5 Easy Steps*

The mini-headline: 4 words or fewer

- *Don't Waste a Moment*

Headline + Headline

- *14 Advanced Twitter Tips: 14 Strategies to Get the Most Out of Twitter*

The Ultimate Guide to _____

- *The Ultimate Guide to European Pizza*

The Beginner's Guide to _____

- *The Beginner's Guide to Quilting*

The Big List of _____

- *The Big List of 189 Words That Convert: Write Copy That Gets Your Customer's Attention Every Time*

Number or Trigger Word + Interesting Adjective + Keyword + Promise (as near to six words as possible)

- *13 Far-fetched Headlines You Must Investigate*

Who Else Wants [blank]?

- *Who Else Wants a Great WordPress Theme?*

The Secret of [blank]

- *The Secret of Successful Podcasting*

Here is a Method That is Helping [blank] to [blank]

- *Here is a Method That is Helping Children Learn to Read Sooner*

Little Known Ways to [blank]

- *Little Known Ways to Hack Google's Gmail*

Get Rid of [problem] Once and For All

- *Get Rid of Your Unproductive Work Habits Once and For All*

Here's a Quick Way to [solve a problem]

- *Here's a Quick Way to Backup Your Hard Drive*

Now You Can Have [something desirable] [great circumstance]

- *Now You Can Meet Sexy Singles Online Without Spending a Dime*

What Everybody Ought to Know About [blank]

- *What Everybody Ought to Know About Writing Great Headlines*

Get the [Rarely Seen But Relevant Adjective] Power of [What Your Product Does] Without [Pain]

- *We Promise You This: [Highly Desirable Promise of Results]*

[Your Brand Name] [Does This Highly Desirable or Impressive Thing]

- *WinQuest WorldWide Gives You the Tools to Overcome Mental-Physical Performance Hang-Ups In Less Than One Hour*

[Do Something Hard] in [Period of Time] or [Promise]

- *Tune Your Piano in 15 Minutes or “Piano Tuner App” Is Free*

[Do Something Desirable] Like [an Expert] Without [Something Expected & Undesirable]

- *Learn to Play Chess Like Bobby Fischer – Without Any of the Crazy!*

Behind the Scenes of a _____

- *Behind the Scenes of the Guardians of the Galaxy Special Effects Set*

9 Out of 10 (Group Members) Can't/Don't _____. Are You One of Them?

- *9 out of 10 Forex Traders Don't Make a Dime, Are You One of Them?*

Make Your First (\$) Sale in Just (X) Hours (Watch Below to See How!)

- *Make Your First \$200 Sale in Just 12 Hours (Watch Below to See How!)*

Are You Still Wasting Money on _____ (Without Anything to Show for It?)

- *Are You Still Wasting Money on Hair Regrowth Products (Without A Hair to Show For It?)*

How to Permanently Stop Your _____, Even if You've Tried Everything!

- *How to Permanently Stop Receiving Calls From Collection Agencies, Even If You've Tried Everything!*

Is (Subject) a Scam? Find Out If You're Putting Your _____ at Risk

- *Is the Acai Diet A Scam? Find Out If You're Putting Your Chances of a Beach Body at Risk*

How Your _____ is Ripping You Off – And What to Do About It Right Now.

- *How Your Cell Phone Company is Ripping You Off – And What To Do About It Right Now.*

Recently Downsized/Fired (Profession) Reveals the Dirty Little Secrets to _____.

- *Recently Fired Hedge Manager Reveals the Dirty Little Secrets of Hedge Funds*

X Little Known Factors That Could Affect Your _____

- *12 Little Known Factors That Could Affect Your Chances of Being Accepted Into an Ivy League School*