Six tips for crafting subheads for web copy

By [Tiffany Markman](#)   14 Feb 2011

A visitor to your site will glance at the whole page before he so much as tastes the first sentence. For this reason, it's important to clearly separate web copy with well-articulated ideas, divided by subheadings or 'subheads' that allow the reader to move from headline to headline in search of the value beneath.

And, search engine optimisation (SEO) dictates that good subheads be used to bring in additional traffic. So it's a win-win. Here are six tips for crafting subheads that enhance your online copy.

1. Make your subheads complete

Your reader should be able to tell from each subhead what each section is about. For example, a subhead such as "Hiccups" is vague. Your reader might ask, "What *about* hiccups?" More exactness is needed. A subhead such as "Dealing with Chronic Hiccups" is better because it tells the reader exactly what will be covered in that section.

2. Write meaningful subheads

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that every subhead you write must be witty, clever or try to establish an emotional connection with your readers. Online readers don't have that sort of time, and search engines don't have feelings or a sense of humour. Just provide a brief description of what follows - in seven words or less.

3. Use subheads wherever possible

If you find that you've gone over a page without a break in text, you've gone too long without a subhead. Look over what you wrote. Can it be broken into two, three or more sections? If so, split up the info. This will save your reader time by allowing her to navigate directly to the information she is interested in. (Note: My personal rule is one subhead for every two paragraphs of web copy, at the very least.)

4. Keep your keywords in mind

Search engines look at typical editorial elements such as subheads, bullets and **bold** or *italic* type for clues as to what an article is about. So stick with short, keyword-laden titles that convey the info contained in the article. A good method is to treat each subhead as a complete phrase and use words that are likely to be used in searches.

Here are some examples:

- Instead of "Get your child to wash up", try "Age-appropriate chores for kids".
- Instead of "Taking the shirt off my back", try "Giving tweens an allowance".
- Instead of "Feeding your dog", try "Nutritious food for miniature dachshunds".
- Instead of "Setting limits", try "Disciplining an employee in the workplace".
- Instead of "Good subheads', try 'Keywords make online subheads strong".

5. Start with active verbs

Most web copy asks its readers to do something; to perform some kind of action. So it makes sense to start subheads with an active (instructive) verb: write, make, use, start. Have a look at the various subheads that appear above to see what I mean.

6. Craft subheads that match

The fancy term for this is parallelism. In web writing, your overall flow will improve if your subheads all begin with the same part of speech and are more or less uniform in length. Again, have a look at those I've used above. Also, here's a taste of what *non-matching* subheads look like. Can you see why they don't flow as they could?

- Turning a scanner back into a reader with subheads
- Reader benefits
- Three subhead techniques for better results

- How to win the battle against the scanners

TIP: Try to write your subheads first

Pro writers often demarcate the sections of their copy by writing subheads before body copy. This helps us to structure our content. If you'd like to try this, think of everything you write as a list. How many points are you trying to make to communicate your topic? Write them down in order. If one or more doesn't fit, toss it.

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