

Writing for Non-Writers: An Outline

This is not a one-size-fits-all formula. You don't want everything you write to sound the same. The goal here is to get your ideas on paper and organize them.

Headline/Title

Write your headline first. This will help you focus on your main point from the start. You can always go back and revise if your content shifts. Your headline is as important as the content of your article. It's what will determine if someone decides to read on.

What makes for a good headline? Unexpected is good, but specificity rules — a specific message, specifically for your audience. You want your readers to be intrigued but also to know exactly what they'll get out of reading. Simultaneously, do not overpromise. Your content should do what you say it will, and no less.

Hook

Start with something your audience can relate to. A hook grabs attention and signals that you know what you are talking about. It says this is going to be good; read on. You can do this by speaking directly to a pain point or by telling a story, personal or general. A personal story can describe something in your life or someone you know. A general story can detail your observations in your field: a surprising statistic, for instance.

Topic Sentence

In your first paragraph, include one sentence that sums up the whole article. It should be direct and to the point. This isn't the place for hyperbole or decoration. Imagine it as the pull quote. If this is the only sentence a reader processes, they will understand the entire article.

Supporting Points

Support your topic sentence with three or five supporting bullets. With the title, the topic sentence, and the three supporting points, you should summarize the piece without reading the rest. Also, notice that it says three or five. Readers react to how a blog post looks. If there is an even number of supporting points, there is a good chance they won't read them all. (We know you're thinking there isn't a difference between four and five, but trust us, there is.)

Call To Action

Wrap up your article with a takeaway or call to action. This could be to sign up for something or give you a call. Whatever it is, it should be what you want your reader to do after reading.

Once you are satisfied with the changes, it's time to publish. Remember: writing does not have to be perfect to be good. Writer Neil Gaimon once said that sometimes it is better to be finished than perfect. And on the internet, writing is never finished.