



Headline Hacks

A "Cheat Sheet" for Writing Headlines That Go Viral

by Jon Morrow



In Defense of Stealing

An Introduction

In college, an English professor said something that changed my life.

"The best writers are the best thieves," he said. "Shakespeare stole his plots from Greek and Roman plays. Thomas Jefferson practically plagiarized the Declaration of Independence from John Locke. Oscar Wilde stole from . . . well . . . everyone. And so should you."

I was stunned. From Kindergarten on up, we're all taught that stealing the ideas of others is wrong, and we are threatened with everything from failing grades to expulsion from school for doing it.

Yet, here was a college professor (with tenure, I'm sure) telling everyone that the key to great writing is blatant and unrepentant theft. And I had to admit, he had some pretty solid examples.

"Can it possibly be true?" I thought. "Could I really be hurting my writing by trying to be original?"

My answer, more than a decade later, as a professional writer who has helped to build three of the most successful blogs in the world:

Yup.



The Truth about Being a "Serious Writer"

One of the worst ways you can torture yourself as a writer is to believe everything you do has to be original. Yes, it's possible, but your work rate will be lousy, and the continuous pressure will give you a nervous breakdown.

It's far, *far* better to steal. No, you shouldn't violate copyrights or willfully claim someone else's work as your own, but the writers who make it in this business – and yes, writing is a business – watch what's working for everyone else and then creatively adapt it for their own purposes.

It's not because they're lazy. It's because they're *busy*.

If you write for any serious purpose, you learn very quickly that you can't afford to spend months or years dreaming up a daring new approach for everything you write. No one has that kind of discipline.

The only way to survive is to write quickly, and the only way to do that is to take a page from the playbook of guys like Shakespeare, Jefferson, and Wilde – copying from others not because you lack genius, but because true genius is clothed in the ideas of others.

Headlines are No Exception

None of those irresistible headlines you see on the covers of *Cosmopolitan* and *The National Enquirer* are new. They can all be traced back to headlines written more than 50 years ago by great direct response copywriters like Eugene Schwartz and Claude Hopkins.

It's the same in the online world too. With few exceptions, the headlines for the most popular posts on your favorite blogs are simply rehashed versions of those same ideas. Sure, they might change the wording around and update some of the concepts, but the basic ideas are the same.

Do their readers complain? No – they lap it up.

And here's the interesting thing. If you look carefully at any great headline, you can distill it down to a fill-in-the-blank "template" that works for almost every topic in any niche.

The best writers I know have thousands of them either saved to a file on their computers or floating around in their heads, where they can reference them at a moment's notice to develop a winning headline of their own.

But collecting all of those headline templates can take *years*.

Fortunately, I've done all the hard work for you.



A Simple Shortcut You Can Apply Immediately

The following headlines are my own personal collection of "Headline Hacks."

Just as "life hacks" are shortcuts for dealing with the complexity of life, these Headline Hacks will allow you to bypass the years of study and failure required to write truly great headlines.

It's not because they're "magical." It's because they're based on headlines that have worked time and time again for some of the most popular publications in the world.

Use them.

Because of all the ways you can improve your skills as a blogger, this one is by far the easiest. I mean, what could possibly be easier than filling in the blanks?

Of course, it's not a silver bullet for every blogging problem, but you will see an increase in traffic. In fact, I get emails all the time from people telling me they saw a significant boost to their traffic and social shares the first time they used these templates.



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"How-To" Headlines



"How-To" Headlines

Called the "Granddaddy of All Headlines," the "how to" headline has been used for almost 100 years, featured in countless winning ads and articles, and with good reason:

We, as readers, are naturally biased toward articles that help us *do* something. Ideas and opinions are great, but for most people, they have no lasting practical value. To really get our attention, we need an expert to show us how to *apply* those ideas in a practical way.

And that's the basic promise of this headline hack. "Click me and I'll teach you something useful."

If the "something" is something you want to do, or at least *do better*, then you'll find it hard to resist clicking.

Since its first appearance in those early ads and articles, the humble "how to" has evolved to create different variations, each potent in its own way.

So let's break them down, one at a time.

How to [Blank]

This hack shows the "how to" headline in its simplest form and leads to some of the most straightforward – and most effective – headlines you're ever likely to read.

Despite its simplicity, it works surprisingly well. I've often been surprised by how a simple "how to" headline that took me five minutes to write outperforms an original headline I worked on for days. Sometimes I wonder why I bother writing anything else.

Real World Examples:

- [How to Create a Social Media Marketing Plan](#)
- [How to Build a Sales Machine That Works While You Sleep](#)
- [How to Make Lavender Lemonade to Get Rid of Headaches and Anxiety](#)

How to Be [Desirable Quality]

Thanks to modern psychology and neuroscience, most of us aren't just interested in what to do. We're also concerned with what to *be*. Science now tells us we can transform ourselves in almost any way we can imagine, and we're aching to know *how*.

That's the question this headline answers. By figuring out which traits your audience most desires and then putting them into this headline, you can harness the natural curiosity people have in transforming themselves into something more.

Real World Examples:

- [How to Be Interesting](#)
- [How to Be More Productive on Social Media](#)
- [How to Be Unforgettable](#)



How to [Blank] Without [Objectionable Action]

Whereas the last headline hack is about what we want to *be*, this one is about a concept psychologists call cognitive dissonance.

Lots of times, we want something, but we don't want to do what it takes to get it. For instance, a woman might want to get a date, but she feels the only way to make men notice her is to dress like a slut, and she doesn't want to do that. Just because she believes it's impossible doesn't mean the desire goes away, either. In fact, the tension between two conflicting desires probably makes her pay *more* attention to it.

This tension is called "cognitive dissonance," and everyone experiences it, not just women who are looking for dates. Consciously or not, everyone is also looking for a way to eliminate it. It's almost like your mind gets stuck in a loop, wanting to get rid of it. That's where this headline hack comes in handy. It relieves the cognitive dissonance by showing you how to do one thing without doing the other.

Real World Examples:

- [How to Communicate **Without** Making Assumptions](#)
- [How to Double Your Writing Speed **Without** Lowering Its Quality](#)
- [How to Go Through a DUI Checkpoint **Without** Opening Your Window](#)

How to [Blank] and [Blank]

Ever heard of the book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie? Who hasn't, right?

Yes, it's a classic book, but its title is also one of the most famous "how to" headlines ever. It's a perfect illustration of a headline hack that lets you offer two benefits, instead of just one, while also allowing you to play with the relationship between the two benefits.

The most popular structure is to hint at a connection between the two benefits. For example, Carnegie's headline implies winning friends will *lead* to influencing people. It's subtle, but readers pick up on it subconsciously.

You can also setup an intriguing contrast. "How to Read Less and Learn More," for example, would probably be popular in any student magazine. It sounds impossible, and the idea of an article telling you how to do it is irresistible.

Real World Examples:

- **How to** Simultaneously Meet Your Needs **and** Make Others Happy
- **How to** Make Your Last Name Plural on Holiday Cards **and** Avoid Apostrophe Catastrophe
- **How to** See All the Companies Tracking You on Facebook - **and** Block Them

How to [Do Something] in 5 Minutes

When I first started writing, I thought this headline hack was sleazy.

5 minutes? You can hardly do anything worthwhile in 5 minutes. By making that promise, I felt like writers were lying to their readers. Then I realized something. Most people are totally overwhelmed with the complicated long-term advice that most writers like to dispense. They're looking for simple little tips they can implement in just a few minutes. They're not looking to change their lives, just make a small improvement.

Some writers also use it to create curiosity, with headlines like "How to Make \$1,000 in 5 Minutes." But I don't recommend it. Unless it's actually something 90% of your readers can do in five minutes, you risk losing their trust.

It's far better to give them real advice they can implement in five minutes (or whatever length of time). That way, you're delivering on your promise.

Real World Examples:

- [How To Make Your Wife Happy in 5 Minutes a Day](#)
- [How to Write an Article in 20 Minutes](#)
- [How to Start a Blog in 10 Minutes](#)

How to [Do Something] Like a Boss

The phrase "like a boss" entered the public consciousness around 2009 courtesy of a Saturday Night Live video that went viral on YouTube.

But even if the exact expression is unfamiliar to you, the sentiment won't be. Doing something *like a boss* clearly means doing it like someone who's in full command of the situation; someone who totally owns the problem at hand.

In headline terms, this is an obvious descendant of countless posts promising to teach you to do something "like a pro", but it goes beyond the desire to simply be competent and professional.

Because most people don't want to settle for *just* being good. They want to be the very best – to *dominate* their area of expertise. By recognizing the heart's inherent desire to stand out "like a boss," your headline quickly moves from a simple promise of help to an irresistible lure.

Real World Examples:

- [How to Cut a Pineapple Like a Boss](#)
- [How to Restore a Classic Ferrari Like a Boss](#)
- [How to Order Coffee in 26 Different Countries Like a Total Boss](#)



List Headlines



List Headlines

Rivaling "how to" headlines in terms of popularity are list-based headlines.

In fact, some of the biggest sites on the web are built on list posts (or *listicles*) and there's no sign enthusiasm for them is waning.

But why are they so enduringly popular?

For one thing, they're so damn digestible – lists are a highly efficient way to organize information. After all, what do you take to the local grocery store, a shopping essay, or a shopping list?

Also, a list headline declares its intentions upfront: "I'll make X points then finish." You know exactly what you're getting into before you click. It's approachable and non-threatening.

Finally, there's almost no topic that can't be tackled via a list, so you can be sure list-based headlines will continue to appear in every imaginable corner of the internet for years to come.

That said, certain flavors of list headline are more popular than others. Let's take a look.

7 Ways to [Do Something]

On the surface you'd think this one would turn people off. Most of us aren't looking for *seven* ways to do anything. We're looking for one way that's going to work. So why promise 5 or 7 or even 51 ways to do something?

It's all about perception. Subconsciously, we all have the tendency to believe most of the ideas in an article won't work for us, but maybe we'll find one idea that will. The more ideas the article offers, the better our chance to find one that applies specifically to our situation.

So this hack usually works best when your readers are searching for a range of ideas. It doesn't work as well when they're seeking the best solution, and don't want to be bothered with the rest.

For instance, "7 Ways to Buy an Engagement Ring" would probably flop because guys don't want options. They just want a good deal on a ring they've already picked out. So "7 Ways to Negotiate Your Local Diamond Dealer into the Ground" would probably be much more popular.

Real World Examples:

- [12+ Ways to Use Web Analytics for Better Content Marketing](#)
- [13 Ways to Rethink the Foot of Your Bed](#)
- [14 Ways to Increase Your Clickthrough Rate on Twitter](#)

13 Ways to [Do Something] When [Situation]

This *contextual* hack makes it easy for people to see a headline's relevance to them by telling them the circumstances where it applies.

For instance, the headline "13 Ways to Be More Confident" might appeal to generally timid people, but will be too broad for most. Whereas "13 Ways to Be More Confident When Meeting New People" will be more successful as it evokes the specific situation where the advice applies.

This hack can also be used to define the target group rather than the situation. For instance, "13 Ways to Eat Out When You're on a Diet" clearly targets people on a diet. And who among that group hasn't faced the temptations of navigating a new eating regimen without becoming a social hermit?

These headlines set up the situation, directly address the reader's most common problems, fears, and frustrations, and then list ways you can solve them or put them to rest.

Real World Examples:

- 11 Ways to Make Any Server Love You **When** You Dine Out
- 5 Ways to Ground Yourself **When** You're Feeling Overwhelmed
- 11 Ways a Woman Changes **When** She Begins to Travel Alone

➔ (The) Top 10 [Blank]

Ahh, how could we possibly talk about headlines without mentioning the illustrious Top 10?

Sometimes people don't want 73 techniques, 101 resources, or 21 ideas. Their heads are already spinning, and they want you to *reduce* their options, not increase them. They want you to give them the best and exclude everything else.

And what better way to do it than a “top 10” list?

It has alliteration, making it more appealing to our brain's phonological loop. It's also a short headline, giving you ample room to expound on what your “top 10” list is about. Then there is the number 10 – a nice round figure that's not too high and not too low.

Overall, it's one of the most effective headlines we have, which is probably why you see it so often. You can use it for almost anything.

Real World Examples:

- [Top 10 Strategic Technology Trends for 2015 \[Infographic\]](#)
- [Top 10 Food Lies That Keep Us Sick and Fat](#)
- [The Top 10 Careers With the Most Psychopaths – Is Your Job on the List?](#)

7 Steps to [Objective]

Another oldie but goodie. Like the “7 Ways to . . .” Headline Hack, this is essentially another “how to” headline disguised as a list, but with one important difference. It’s finite. All you have to do is five or seven or however many steps, and you’ll achieve the promised result.

It makes it sound *easy*, and that’s important. Sometimes a reader might not read a traditional “how to” headline because they assume it’s going to be too much work.

For instance, a certain percentage of readers will ignore an article titled, “How to Build a Seven-Figure Restaurant Business” because they assume (probably correctly) it’s going to take years of hard work. Changing the headline to “7 Steps to a Seven-Figure Restaurant Business” might work better because it sounds easier, and they’ll be curious to see what the steps are.

Just as with many headlines, it’s all about managing the perception of the reader.

Real World Examples:

- [6 Steps to Content Marketing Domination](#)
- [Four Steps to Simplify Your Daily Social Media Activities](#)
- [14 Steps to Cut Processed Foods](#)

7 Tips for [Objective]

Everyone loves tips, right? We all have something we'd like to improve and a "tip" promises a practical, bite-sized solution.

Want a *strategy* for losing weight, getting a job or eating healthily? Maybe, maybe not. It sounds like a lot of work. But a tip? Yes, please! No wonder they're so irresistible.

And don't be fooled into thinking that "7 Tips for . . ." meets the same needs as "7 Steps to . . ." – these two headlines are worlds apart. Tips give readers *options*, but steps give them obligations: things they *must* do. And that can feel overwhelming, particularly if the number is large.

Consider this: would you rather learn "26 Tips for Improving Your Social Media Marketing" or "26 Steps . . ."? Exactly. Tips win every time.

A list of tips is like a buffet. Take what you like, leave what you don't. Who could refuse?

Real World Examples:

- [5 Tips for Getting Sharper Images When Doing Long Exposures](#)
- [10 Tips for Staying Sane and Not Raising an Asshole](#)
- [26 Tips for Improving Your Social Media Marketing](#)



7 [Adjective] Facts [Person/Audience] Should Know

Facts have an almost revered status in modern culture.

The person with the most facts often wins an argument. People who seem to know a lot of facts are often perceived as being more intelligent. We even celebrate and reward the possession and recall of facts through countless quizzes on TV and online.

So a headline which promises to swell your “fact bank” creates curiosity and desire.

You can't see a headline like this without wondering what *mind-blowing*, *little-known* or *unbelievable* facts you might be missing if you don't read on. Plus, these are facts that, for all practical purposes, you *should* know. So if you don't, the implication is that you're woefully ignorant.

Wrap all of that allure and social proof up in a list, and you can't help but have an irresistible headline. No wonder it's so popular!

Real World Examples:

- [16 Mind-Blowing Facts You Should Know about Yourself!](#)
- [25 Psychology Facts Everyone Should Know](#)
- [6 Facts People Should Know about Teachers](#)



7 Quotes from/by [Famous Person] That Will [Desired Result]

Let's be honest. We're all fascinated by famous people.

Even if you have little patience with modern celebrity culture, certain big names – including historical heroes – will provoke a sense of awe.

We can't help but feel if we could only understand people like Steve Jobs, Oprah Winfrey or Michael Jordan a little better, we might be able to replicate some of their success. And that's why quotes from famous people hold such power. They represent the finest wisdom of the world's most successful people distilled to just a few words.

This hack leverages our natural desire to be successful combined with our inevitable curiosity about people who've found success on a large scale. To make it work for you, just take someone who fascinates your audience, and insert their name into your headline.

Real World Examples:

- [5 Quotes from Billionaire Mark Cuban That Will Inspire You to Work Your Ass Off](#)
- [10 Quotes from Wayne Dyer That Will Inspire You to Live Your Best Life Now](#)
- [18 Quotes from Mark Twain That Will Make You Question Society](#)

7 [Blank] That Will Change Your Life

This one goes straight to the heart of the matter and makes a big, bold claim: *this post will change your life*. It's almost irresistible. After all, who doesn't want to change *something* about their life?

Interestingly, a broad promise like this would normally be less effective than a narrower one (specific is usually better in headlines), but the universal appeal of life change means this one has a power all its own.

Of course, the advantage of remaining vague about the nature of the change is that it allows readers to transplant their own specific desires. And even if they don't do that, they'll find it hard to resist the offer to learn more about something that has the power to change lives.

These headlines feed into our inherent discontent, and our search to find that one thing that will change everything.

Real World Examples:

- [12 Little-Known Laws of Gratitude \(That Will Change Your Life\)](#)
- [15 Little Life Experiments That Will Change Your Life](#)
- [21 Insanely Easy Single-Dish Meals That Will Change Your Life](#)

➔ 15 Things You Didn't Know about [Person/Thing]

Most of the headline hacks in this report are designed to *make* the reader curious. They use power words or easy-sounding lists to "trick" the reader into checking out the article.

But sometimes the smartest thing you can do as a writer isn't to manufacture curiosity – it's to harness the curiosity that's already there. When you have a strong interest in a topic – it might be a favorite celebrity, a hobby, or even a health condition – you will always want to learn more about it.

No, it might not be *urgent* for you to learn more, but you are curious, and you'd happily read an article promising you the inside scoop on interesting people or things.

This headline hack is all about helping your readers scratch that itch. It promises to satisfy their curiosity as well as give them something interesting to talk about around the water cooler tomorrow. What's clever about this hack is that even if you think you already know everything about a topic, you'll still read the list – just to prove the author wrong about what you "didn't know."

Real World Examples:

- [9 Awesome Things You Didn't Know about Bill Nye the Science Guy](#)
- [14 Things That You Didn't Know about Celiac Disease](#)
- [10 Things You Didn't Know about Dachshunds](#)



7 Things to Remember About/When/If [Blank]

Sometimes we don't need to learn something new, just to be reminded of something we've forgotten or lost sight of in the heat of the moment.

This hack promises comfort and reassurance. Instead of pointing out what you don't know or should know, it places a friendly hand on your back and says, "I realize you may already know this, but I'm just reminding you – because it's important."

That's why this headline style can be so effective. The prospect of spending time with someone who understands your situation and can even offer some relief is strongly appealing, particularly when times are tough. And even before you read the post itself, you feel compelled to share it with people in the same situation as you.

But only use this headline if you've walked in the reader's shoes and can genuinely empathize with their situation.

Real World Examples:

- [10 Things to Remember about Toxic Family Members](#)
- [13 Things to Remember if You Love a Person with Anxiety](#)
- [5 Things to Remember When Everything Seems to Be Going Wrong](#)

7 Things Only [Group] Understand

No one wants to be alone. In fact, it's one of our greatest fears – not belonging or feeling a part of something bigger than ourselves. And that's why this headline hack works so well.

If your mom once stood in line for hours outside a toy store just so she could grab you the very last Cabbage Patch Kid in the city, you're highly likely to click on the headline, "14 Things Only Children of the '80s Understand." If you're in that group, you can't escape it. *It's who you are.*

That same desire for belonging drives you to join like-minded communities where people think like you, talk like you, and can identify with your specific stressors, frustrations or worries. Being part of a community also gives you the right to poke fun at some of the things outsiders might consider ridiculous. And you don't care because . . . hey, *they just don't understand!*

The genius of this hack is that it will attract people from outside the community, too, who want to find out if they really know as little about your group as you claim.

Real World Examples:

- **14 Things Only Skinny-Fat People Understand**
- **15 Things Only People Who Do Shift Work Will Understand**
- **23 Things Only People Who Were Raised by Really Strict Parents Understand**

7 Things We/You Should [Blank]

Let's face it. In the real world, "should" can get you into a lot of trouble.

Like when you tell your friend what she *should* do with her bratty kid who cried straight through the movie you just watched. You think you're doing her a favor, but what she hears is: "You should [judgment], and [judgment], and by the way, you [suck] at this parenting gig."

Mind you, the judgmental overtones of "should" are exactly what make it a powerful addition to a headline. And since it's not aimed at one specific person, it's less likely to offend.

"21 Things Parents Should Know Before Taking Their Bratty Kids to the Movies" doesn't mince words and would travel like gangbusters. Why? Because every person at some point or another has endured someone else's baby crying or kid whining through a movie they paid to see. And your friend who took offense at your advice about her kid? She'd probably read it and laugh too. Even if she felt defensive, you can bet she'd click through to read it as fast as anyone else.

Real World Examples:

- [20 Things We Should Say to Ourselves More Often](#)
- [21 Things You Should Know Before Dating a Teacher](#)
- [7 Things You Should Insist On No Matter What People Say](#)



10 Things [Group] Do Differently

Heard this quote before?

“If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got.”

It's usually attributed to either Henry Ford or Mark Twain, but regardless who said it first, the underlying message is clear: if you want something different from your current situation, you need to do something different.

Which is all well and good, except: how do you know the *right* different thing to do to get the result you want? Because that's critical, right? If you don't know that, you're just floundering around in the dark.

That's why this hack works so effectively. It promises to cut through the uncertainty by revealing the different things that people *who've already achieved the result* do. And it's only natural for us to assume that if we copy their behavior, we might just get that result too.

Real World Examples:

- [15 Things Great Parents Do Differently](#)
- [10 Things Healthy People Do Differently \(Hint: It's NOT Eating Salad\)!](#)
- [12 Things Truly Confident People Do Differently](#)



Bonus Headline Hacks



Bonus Headline Hacks

Although it might sometimes seem like every headline on the web is either a "how to" or a list, in reality other templates can be wildly successful too.

Here are a few hacks that defy easy classification, but work like crazy nonetheless.

Warning: [Blank]

"Warning: Shark-Infested Waters!"

"Warning: Hurricane Approaching!"

"Warning: Coffee Is Hot!"

The one thing these signs all have in common is that you don't want to ignore them. If you do, you could be eaten, drowned, burned, or God knows what else.

The word "warning" is so powerful that it almost doesn't matter what you put after it. People will read it, and if it seems halfway important, they'll read your article too.

The trick with this one is to make sure the second part of your headline inspires curiosity – otherwise your headline demands attention but no further action. Consider, for instance: "Warning: Late Night Snacks Can Sabotage Your Diet." The reader can simply agree with the message and move on – after all, what else needs saying? However, write "Warning: These Late-Night Snacks Can Sabotage Your Diet" and they'll want to find out which snacks.

Real World Examples:

- **Warning:** [Use These 5 Surefire Headline Formulas at Your Own Risk](#)
- **Warning:** [Selfie Sticks May Cause More to Appear in Picture than Desired](#)
- **Warning:** ["Hanging In There" Is Destroying Your Health](#)



Why [Activity/Thing] Is/May Be [Opinion/Assertion]

They say opinions are like birthdays – everybody has one.

But while opinions may be plentiful, it can be difficult to resist a headline that presents an interesting take on a topic you care about. This hack uses "why" not to pose a question, but to put forward a point of view and promise an explanation:

"Why Sugar Is the Biggest Threat to Your Children's Health"

"Why Introverts Are Better Designers"

"Why Facebook May Be Bad for Your Business"

The beauty of this hack is that readers who agree with the opinion will click to validate their own ideas, and more skeptical readers will click to find out if there's any weight to the author's claim. And the more controversial or surprising the viewpoint, the more we want to find out whether the writer can make it stick.

Real World Examples:

- [Why Avoiding Your Boss Is a Terrible Career Move](#)
- [Why Interactive Content **May Be** the Most Exciting Marketing Tactic of 2015](#)
- [Why Link-Building Is NOT the Future of SEO](#)



[Question/Problem?] Here's How to Fix It

Most people these days are *busy*. So when problems come along, we want to solve them as quickly as possible.

That's why "fix it" headlines have such allure. They give you the break you need. If you don't have the time to work out an answer for yourself, *they'll do it for you*.

They say, "Oh, you have a headache? Here's how to fix it." "Oh, you've picked up some love handles? Not a problem. Here's how to fix it." "Your zipper broke just as you were heading out the door? Easy. You fix it like this."

Sometimes it's a problem you already know you have. Other times the headline raises a problem you weren't aware of, and offers you a fix in the same breath.

Either way, this hack promises to put the problem behind you, so you can get on with your day.

Real World Examples:

- [Have a Zipper That's Broken? Here's How to Fix It at Home!](#)
- [This Vitamin Deficiency Causes Migraines and Headaches \(And Here Is How to Fix It\)](#)
- [Where You're Getting Fat the Most Will Give You a Clue on How to Fix It](#)

The Ultimate Guide to [Blank]

Who could resist this one?

Sure, an article with a few quick tidbits of information might be nice when we're mildly curious about the subject, but where are we going to turn when our ass is really on the line? An "Ultimate Guide" sounds more reassuring. It promises to tell you everything.

If you as the author can live up to that promise and really put together a resource-rich article for your readers, this headline hack can be a blockbuster.

People will bookmark it, tell their friends about it, and retweet it. You can get traffic from it for years.

It's a lot of work, yes, but it's well worth it, especially if you're trying to grab attention in a competitive space. And the links it draws are perfect for rocketing your content up Google's search rankings.

Real World Examples:

- [Ultimate Guide to Asking for a Raise and Negotiating Salary](#)
- [Ultimate Guide to Social Media Image Sizes](#)
- [How to Make Money – The Ultimate Guide](#)

➔ (The) [Group/Famous Person] Guide to [Blank]

Another "guide" headline, but this time with a twist.

Instead of offering the *ultimate* guide to a topic (effectively promising to be all things to all people), it presents a much narrower view, in two distinct flavors.

The first tailors the guide to a specific audience. By naming the audience in the headline – as in, for example, "The *Introvert's* Guide to Dating" – it'll instantly feel more relevant to people who identify with that label. (Sure, people outside that group will likely switch off, but if you try to appeal to everyone you'll end up appealing to no one, right?)

The second flavor presents a guide written from a clear perspective – someone who's widely acknowledged as being an expert or ideal role model for the topic. For instance: "The Tony Robbins Guide to Public Speaking." This version also offers opportunities for humor, by picking the worst possible person to model for your guide. "The Gordon Ramsay Guide to Modern Manners," anyone?

Real World Examples:

- The Nerd's **Guide to Learning Everything Online**
- The Caucasian's **Guide to Black Barbecues**
- Dennis Wolf's **Guide to Wide Shoulders**



Appendix I

50 HEAVY-HITTING HEADLINES FOR
INSTANT INSPIRATION



Appendix I

In practice, you could write a post every day for a year and not even come close to exhausting the possibilities presented by the headline templates above.

But I'd be lying if I said every popular headline of recent years is covered by these Headline Hacks.

So here are 50 popular headlines to inspire you whenever you feel like stepping outside the sandbox.

Who knows, in the future some of these may be added to my official list of hacks, but until then just consider this a bonus list of creativity triggers for the discerning headline writer.

50 Heavy-Hitting Headlines for Instant Inspiration:

- [20 Habits Happy Couples Have \(But Never Talk About\)](#)
- [Why You Should Be Friends with the Oldest Mother in Your Child's First Grade Class](#)
- [40 Powerful Mantras to Help You Think Positive](#)
- [17 Signs You Have The Coolest Mom In The World](#)

- [20 Tricks That Can Make Anyone An Excel Expert](#)
- [Measles Can Kill, And It's Spreading. Sue Parents Who Didn't Vaccinate? Absolutely.](#)
- [30 Things to Let Go of Before the New Year](#)
- [Why People Are Rude and Unkind \(and Why It's Not about You\)](#)
- [America's Miracle Meat: The Story of Spam \(+ 3 Recipes\)](#)
- [Researcher Reveals 4 Happiness Rituals](#)
- [12 Stages Of Getting Drunk With Your Best Friends](#)
- [The Best And Worst States To Make A Living In 2015](#)
- [5 Minutes Early Is On Time; On Time Is Late; Late Is Unacceptable](#)
- [Some Practical Thoughts on Suicide](#)
- [Lessons from the Sioux in How to Turn a Boy Into a Man](#)
- [A Picture To Show You Clearly The Effects of Aperture, Shutter Speed and ISO On Images](#)
- [De-Quasimodo Yourself: 6 Exercises to Counteract Slouching](#)
- [14 Witty Jokes for the Grammar Nerd in Your Life](#)
- [This Is How We Date Now](#)
- [Why Keeping Your Goals Secret Is the Best Way To Be Successful](#)

- [The Influence of Fathers on Children](#)
- [100 Skills Every Man Should Know](#)
- [Prisoner Workout: Bodyweight Workouts](#)
- [The 10 Best Cities to Live Rich on a Dime \(So You Can Bring Your Dreams to Life\)](#)
- [The Most Unhealthy Jobs in America](#)
- [Joke All You Want, But My Sorority Days Were Golden](#)
- [The Biggest Legal Mistake Photographers Make](#)
- [Use Your Baby For Exercise](#)
- [Changes to Make in Your 30s](#)
- [Taylor Swift's Blank Space Translates Perfectly To Exhausted Moms](#)
- [That 'Useless' Liberal Arts Degree Has Become Tech's Hottest Ticket](#)
- [19 Real Life Examples of An Extroverted Introvert So You Don't Get Confused](#)
- [The Colossal Hoax Of Organic Agriculture](#)
- [Understanding the Difference Between Photoshop and Lightroom](#)
- [17 Reasons Why High School Sweethearts Have The Strongest Relationships](#)
- [The Power of Conversation: A Lesson from CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien](#)

- [Lawyer Moms Are the Scariest Moms](#)
- [The Cities Where African-Americans Are Doing The Best Economically](#)
- [27 Outstanding Owl Images](#)
- [10 Differences Between Middle Class And Rich People](#)
- [When Close Friends Live Far Away \(A Request\)](#)
- [Taking Care of Yourself When You Feel Like Shutting Down](#)
- [If My Kid Is Being An Asshole, I Want You To Tell Me](#)
- [9 Rules of Swearing for My Children](#)
- [The Surprising Benefits of Marrying Young](#)
- [10 People You Will Hate After Giving Birth](#)
- [What It Means To Date A Girl Without A Father](#)
- [Shave Your Beard Right Now](#)
- [Manliness Precedes True Gentlemanliness](#)
- [Why Do Moms Always Talk About Coffee and Wine?](#)



Appendix II

173 AWESOME ADJECTIVES TO ADD
POWER AND PIZAZZ



Appendix II

Sometimes the difference between a good headline and a great headline is a well-chosen adjective dropped in exactly the right place.

Often these are *power* words that add strong emotions to your headline, like anger, excitement, disgust or desire. But sometimes they just add a little extra interest and help to set your headline apart from those that have come before.

You'll find many excellent examples in the headlines throughout this guide, but here's a list of 173 useful adjectives drawn from 500 of the most popular headlines on the web right now.

A



Absolute
Advanced
Adventurous
Amazing
Arrogant
Ass-Kissing
Authentic
Awesome

B



Backstabbing

Beautiful

Best

Best-Selling

Blissful

Bold

Brave

Brazen

Brilliant

Brutally

Honest

C



Cheap

Clever

Colossal

Common

Confident

Confidential

Controversial

Courageous

Critical

D



Daring

Dazzling

Defiant

Delightful

Dependable

Devoted

Disgusting

E



Effortless
Endorsed
Energetic
Enduring
Enterprising
Epic
Essential
Excellent
Exceptional
Exclusive
Exposed
Eye-Opening

F



Faithful

Fantastic

Fascinating

Fearless

Feisty

First-Class

Friendly

Forbidden

Forgotten

Free

Fun

G



Generous

Genuine

Giving

Gorgeous

Great

Greatest

Guaranteed

Gutsy

H



Hard-Working

Healthy

Heartbreaking

Heartwarming

Honest

Horrific

Horrifying

Hot

Humorous



- Idiotic
- Immediate
- Important
- Incredible
- Ingenious
- Insane
- Insanely Easy
- Insightful
- Inspiring
- Interesting
- Intuitive
- Inventive
- Irresistible

J



Jaw-Dropping
Jubilant

K



Kickass
Killer

L



- Laid-Back
- Legitimate
- Life-Changing
- Lifetime
- Light-Hearted
- Little-Known
- Lively
- Lonely
- Lousy
- Lovely
- Luxurious

M



- Magical
- Massive
- Memorable
- Mighty
- Mind-Blowing
- Miraculous
- Money-Back
- Money-Grubbing
- Most
- Must-Have

N



Natural
New

O



Obnoxious
Official
Optimistic

P



Painstaking

Perilous

Perfect

Persistent

Persuasive

Popular

Powerful

Powerfully

Practical

Precious

Profitable

Protected

Proud

Provocative

Proven

Q

Quick
Quick-Witted
Quotable

R

Random
Refreshing
Reliable
Resourceful
Ruthless

S



Scandalous
Sensational
Shocking
Simple
Spectacular
Spontaneous
Staggering
Strange
Stress-Free
Strong
Stunning
Successful
Surprising

T



Talented
Thoughtful
Thrilling
Tireless
Troublesome
Trustworthy
Truthful

U



Ultimate
Unbelievable
Uplifting
Useful

V



Valuable
Victorious
Vigilant

W



Weird
Whopping
Winning
Witty
Wonderful
Wonderous

What to Do Next?

So, you successfully plowed your way through all the headlines, hmmm?

And now you're wondering what to do next?

My suggestion:

Keep writing headlines. When I started writing seriously, I wrote more than 100 headlines per day, and it was only after writing thousands of them that I really felt like I was getting good at it.

The same will most likely be true for you. The sooner you get started, the better.

And hey, who knows...

Maybe that next viral post is right around the corner. :-)

Best Regards,
Jon

