Writing for the web

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Inspiration

Letting go of the words:

- Janice Redish

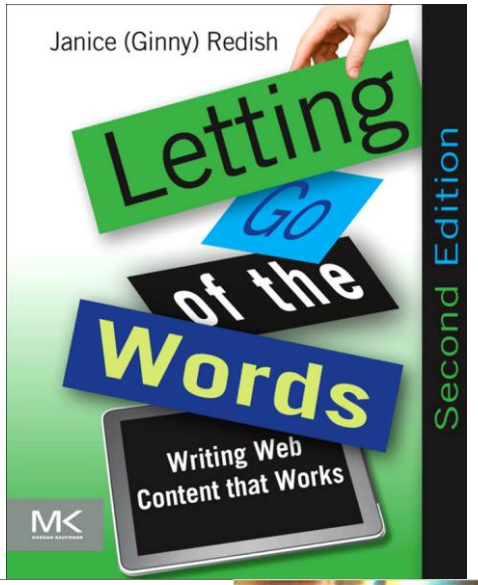
QuickSprout:

- https://www.quicksprout.com/

The pyramid principle:

- Barbara Minto

- How well do you inform
  - Thomas Johnson
  - IEEE Tranactions 1982



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When I started writing, I was no Shakespeare. I wasn't even a Hemingway.

In fact, I was downright awful.

Like many of you, I didn't get any kind of degree in writing. I didn't shine in high school English. I never entertained dreams of being a best-selling author.

And my first few posts online proved it.

But over time, I started realizing how important writing is in business. (Spoiler alert: it's super important.)

So I studied, practiced a lot, and got better. I'm still no Shakespeare, but I've learned a lot about writing.

Writing isn't a talent—it's a skill. A skill you can develop, refine, and improve.

Becoming a great copywriter isn't easy, but if you consistently work on your writing, your writing will get better and better.

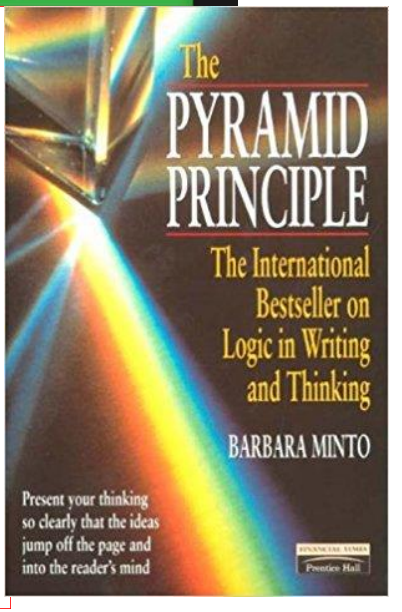
Here are 33 (count them!) writing tweaks that will propel you to copywriting mastery.

1. Use *you* instead of *we* or *us*

Guess what? Your copy shouldn't be about you. *It should be about the customer.*

Using *you* means the copy is talking directly to the customer. But using *we* and *us* turns you into another boring company.

Don't fall victim to the "all about us" copywriting trap. Show your readers how they'll benefit.



Just Beliefs

Many beliefs, little evidence, AFAIK, e.g.:

- Yoga is beneficial:
  - Evidence only for back problems
- Low levels electromagnetic radiation:
  - No evidence either way for long term effect

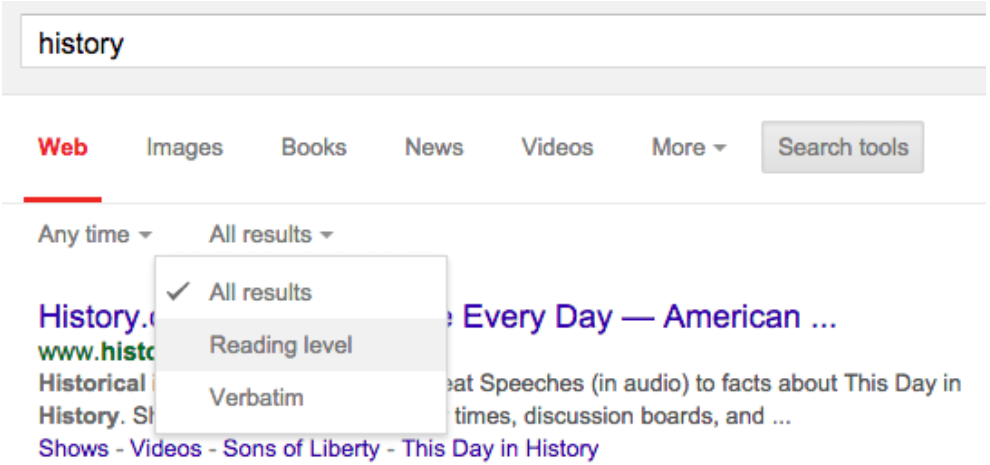
Much of what I say is my beliefs:

- Will suggest reasons:
  - What would Google do?
- Won't/can't provide stats.

Readability: possibly SEO ranking factor

Google indexed readability:

- From 2010 to 2015



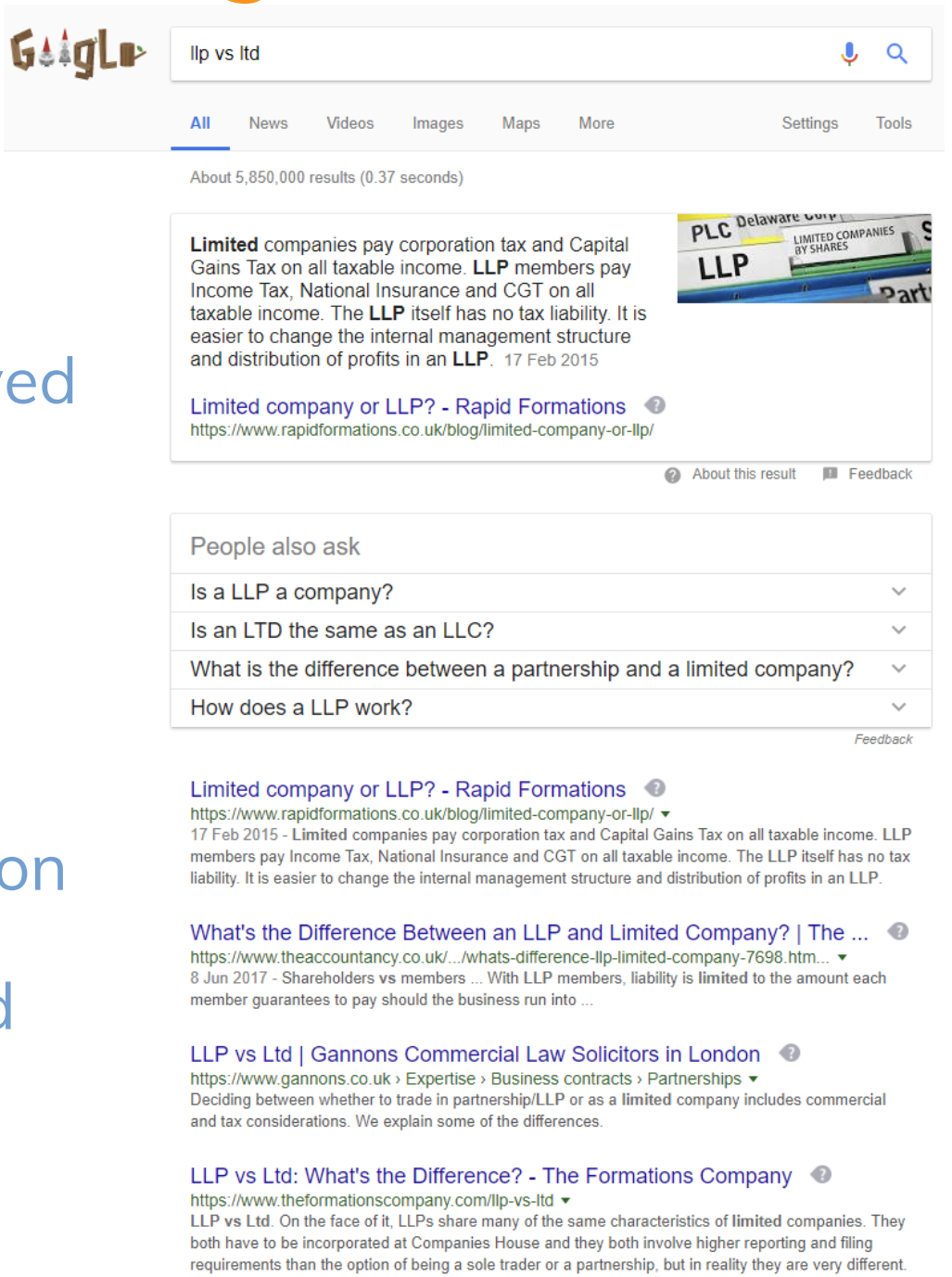
Now Google “personalises” search results.

- Does your target group see results for their level of readability?

Time on page a ranking factor?

Google from academia where citations = perceived quality.
So backlinks measured perceived quality, but now abused.
Social media ratings: Google maybe blocked.
Could measure time between:

1. Click on a search result
2. View content in link
3. Either return to tab & click on another search result
4. Or stop searching as found best result.



Web visitors skim-read

Corporate e-commerce Search results

www.useit.com

- Solving problem, seeking answers.
- Read opening paragraph, &
  - Beginning of first couple paragraphs.
- Eyes scan down on left hand side

Paragraphs: avoid wall of words

Subtitle

- 1 subtitle / 2-3 paragraphs.
- Subtitle for 1 paragraph ok

Paragraph length

- 1 sentence is fine
- 2-3 sentences good
- 5+ too long.

QuickSprout writing style

- Readability-score.com
  - 2,167 words
  - 250 sentences
  - 8.7 words per sentence
  - 4.5 characters/word
- 2-3 sentences/paragraph
- Presumably A/B tested

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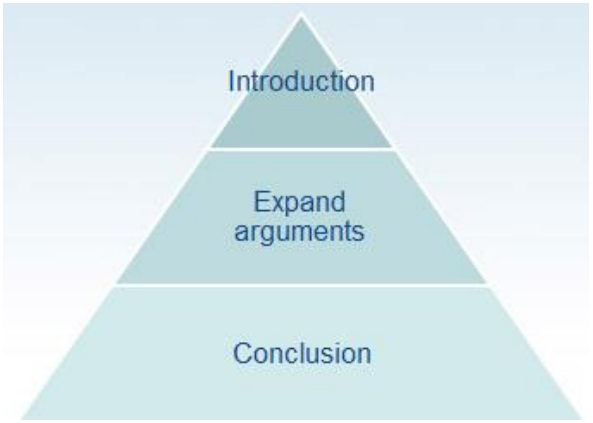
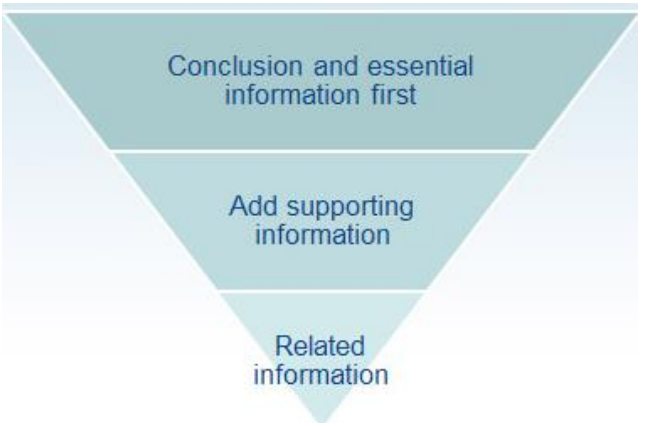
https://www.quicksprout.com/2016/11/09/33-writing-tweaks-that-will-turn-you-into-a-copywriting-master/#more-36717

Inverted pyramid style





Pyramid Style

- Introduction:
  - history,
  - background,
  - rational
- Whatever happened
  - In order occurs to you
- Conclusions

Inverted Pyramid Style

- Main Point:
  - what to remember
- Supporting info
  - In order of importance
- Background
  - history
  - rational

How to write inverted pyramid

Just write. May not quite know key point.

- Use subheading h2, h3, h4 & lists
  - Each h2 has 1 to 3 h3 sub-paragraph
  - Can move around chunks of content
  - So create scan-readable content

- Opening sentence = copy of meta description?
  - Meta-description sells why visitor reads the page.
  - Google might use it.

<h1>Page Title</h1>

Copy meta-description. 2 more sentences.

<h2>Sub-Title</h2>

Max couple paragraphs, 3 sentences each, 15 words.

<h3>Sub-Sub Title</h3>

Max couple paragraphs, 3 sentences each, 15 words

<h3>Sub-Sub Title</h3>

Max couple paragraphs, 3 sentences each, 15 words

<h2>Sub-Title</h2>

Max couple paragraphs, 3 sentences each, 15 words:

- Bullet: ~< 10 words
- Bullet: ~< 10 words
- Bullet: ~< 10 words
- Bullet: ~< 10 words

Inverted pyramid: paragraphs

Paragraph: Assert then justify

If reader agrees they skim the paragraph, so:

- Write as you think:
  - because A, because B, because C
  - thus conclusion
- Cut conclusion, usually last sentence
- & Paste into opening sentence.

We're off to see the Wizard

We're off to see the Wizard,
The wonderful Wizard of Oz,
We hear he is a whiz of a wiz,
If ever a wiz there was,
If ever, oh ever a wiz there was,

The Wizard of Oz is one because
Because, because, because,
because, because
Because of the wonderful things
he does
We're off to see the Wizard
The wonderful Wizard of Oz

Sentences: No passive

Susan was given a prize.

A prize was given to Susan.

Write: Subject verb object

- Easier to imagine.
- Passive often has no clear subject to picture.

Sentence length: 15 words ish

Gunning Fog Index:

- Years of education to understand text.
- Complex = 3 syllables
  - Not -ing, -ed etc.

So

- 15 words = 6 ish years
  - If technical use long words
- 1 line: 75 characters?
-
- Even lower value for skim reading web page?

SOURCE	GUNNING FOG INDEX
Financial Times	13
The Economist	11
Wales Business Insider Magazine	14
New York Times	12
The Sun	10
Wordtree website	12

Avoid prepositional phrases

Use dependent clauses

- When
- If
- Because
- Who
- That

- Clauses have subject & verb
- Remove “of” use possessive:
  - The X of Y:= The Y’s X

The unlikelyhood ***(of meeting orders) (from the majority) (of its new customers)*** is ***(of concern)(to the company)***, due ***(to tardiness)(in the installation) (of its new manufacturing line)***

The company does not know whether it can meet most new customer orders, because its new manufacturing line is not yet installed

Use lists

Use lists for

- E.g.:
- Either/or
- Includes:
- Features:

Lists are:

- < 8 words
- **2 bold words**: then more explanation
- Ideally started with verb
  - Keep some tense/flow
-

Lists:-

- Are easier to skim read
- Demonstrate expertise
- Like bullets in presentation
- Screw up readability stats

No abstract nouns: can’t sense them

Ability
Activity
Basis
Case
Character
Circumstance
Concept
Concern
Condition
Connection
Course
Degree
Effect
Effort
Employment
Extent
Facility
Factor
Instance
Intent
Interest
Manner
Measure
Method
Nature
Necessity
Order
Permission
Policy
Position
Possibility
Practice
Problem
Prospect
Purpose
Quality
Question
Reason
Reference
Relationship
Respect
Responsibility
Result
Situation
Standpoint
Substance
System
Type
Use
Utilisation
View

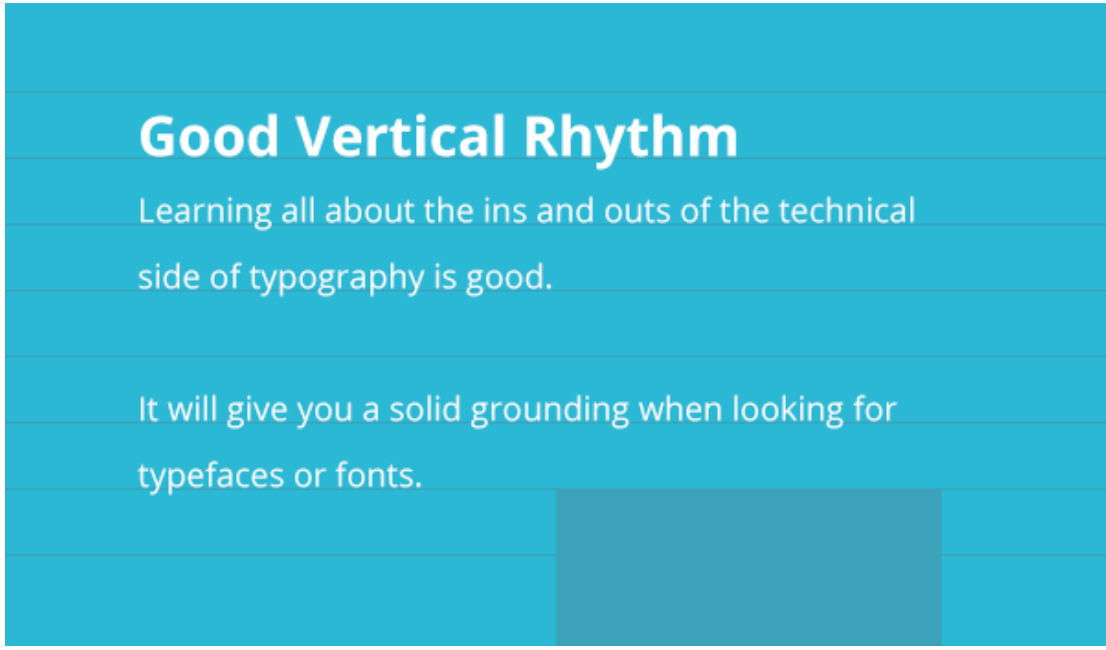
Sentences

If read aloud, would you speak in this way:

- At a dinner party?
  - With target personas
- To Aunt Agatha?

Typography for readability

- Line length:
  - 40 to 75 characters
  - Some say 95 for fastest read speed
- Vertical Rhythm
  - Consistent line height for p, h1, h2, h3, ul, ol,
- Left justify
- <p> 16px



Typography: don’t

- Floating sub-headings
  - Which paragraph
- Center justify text
  - Eye doesn’t know where to start.
- Picture on left hand side
  - Breaks up LHS
- Pdf’s
  - Extra effort

Floating Subheading example

Waffle, waffle, because because, because, because, finally lose will to continue, after reading three sentences.

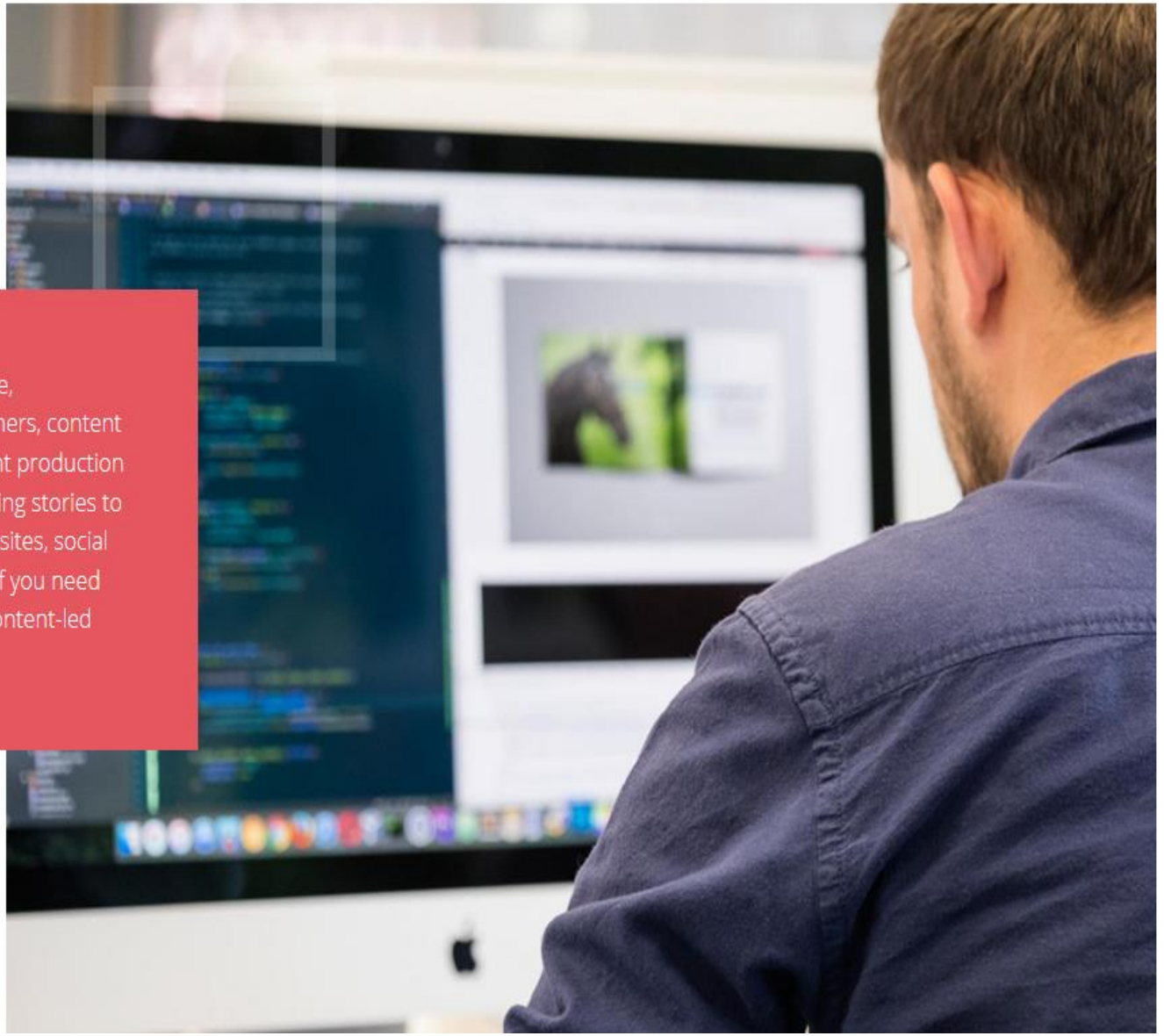
Subheading

Don’t know that subheading is attached to following paragraph. Some assertions, followed by loads of justification, because, because, because, because, because

I’d say wrong

- Centred
- No bullets for lists
- 1 paragraph
- Unreadable

CPL’s team, based in Cambridge, includes journalists, editors, graphic designers, content strategists, videographers, developers, print production specialists and commercial experts. We bring stories to life in print, and in digital formats via websites, social media channels and video. Speak to us if you need expert strategy, flawless delivery and content-led communications that work.



Discussion