COPYWRITING FOR COALITIONS

How to Write Compelling and Persuasive Messages

Participant Guide

American Cancer Society®

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Introduction

In 2017, the *American Cancer Society,* supported by the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,* developed an online course on **Copywriting for Coalitions: How to Write Compelling and Persuasive Messages** for Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalitions. This written guide is a companion document to the online course.

Copywriting is the practice of using words to persuade people towards a decision. This course is intended for coalition members who are new to this topic. It introduces basic copywriting principles for the creation of more effective messages in print and online formats. For example, it can help coalition members to increase their communication effectiveness by writing compelling messages and motivating their audiences with persuasive reasons.

Learning Objectives

In this course, you will learn how to:

- Apply the basic principles of copywriting to create compelling messages
- Use open loops to maintain your audience's interest in your message
- Use both emotional and logical reasons to persuade your audience
- Use the AIDA template – Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action

Course Features

This course has the following helpful features and benefits:

- **A user-friendly online format** – you can proceed at your own pace with pause and replay
- **A companion guide** – you can scan the key ideas in written format
- **A coalition-specific example** – shows you how to be successful
- **Practice exercises** – to further develop your skills
- **Online resources** – for further exploration of techniques

Topics in This Guide

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- Your Words Have Intense Competition
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What Is Copywriting?

Copywriting is the art and science of using words to motivate people towards action. Copywriting is usually associated with the advertising and marketing industries because those industries benefit directly from persuading consumers to purchase products and services. But, the practice of persuading people is everywhere in human life, from persuading people to support different ideas and causes to persuading people to make better health decisions. Copywriting is a critical skill for persuasive writing.

Copywriting can be used in the following scenarios:

- Promotions for screening
- Promotions for new health behaviors
- Notices for community events
- Social media posts

- Meeting announcements
- Webinar announcements
- Educational materials
- Email communications

Basic Principles of Copywriting

Persuasive Communications Have Multiple Parts

The first principle teaches that persuasive communications have multiple parts. Each part plays a role in the step-by-step process of persuading readers towards a desired decision outcome.

For example, to a copywriter, an email is not "just a one-piece email." Instead, an email has multiple parts. It has a title; an opening sentence; a first paragraph that joins the conversation already in your reader's mind; and body parts that provide emotional reasons, logical reasons, and a closing that calls your reader to action.

Recognize that your readers go through a series of mental steps on their way to making a decision. Each part of a good copywritten message should be designed to provide your readers with the right information, at the right time, as they move through the steps in the decision-making process.

Your Words Have Intense Competition

The second copywriting principle is concerned with the competition in the minds of your readers.

The words of your coalition message have intense competition in the minds of your readers. Their minds, like yours, are full of many competing thoughts and priorities about events and issues from their work life, their family life, their physical needs (if they are hungry or tired), and from new thoughts that they create on their own.

Because there are so many competing – and sometimes urgent – thoughts in your reader's mind, it is easy for them to disengage from your message. They might disengage after the title, after the first sentence, or midway through your message. If that happens, your message has not been fully received, and it will be less effective than you wanted it to be.

Idea 2 - Your Words Have Intense Competition

The mind of your reader is full...
  ➢ With many competing thoughts
  ➢ With urgent calls for attention
  ➢ With dinner, work, children, issues

Copywriting can help you to...
  ➢ Slide past the noise in their mind
  ➢ And hold their attention long enough
  ➢ To finish what you want to say

Copywriting for Coalitions

Copywriting can help your message to compete more successfully in your reader's mind. It does this by helping you to structure each part of your message to be as appealing and as attention-holding as possible. That way, it has a better chance of out-competing other thoughts in the minds of your readers until they have finished reading your entire message.

Focus on the Center of Your Audience

To a copywriter, your audience is not "just a single-part audience." Some segments of your audience will be more receptive to your message than others.

For example, a first part of your audience might be immediately receptive to your topic and any message that you send out. They do not need to be persuaded to decide in favor of your message.

Conversely, a second part of your audience will not be receptive to your message. They will not be persuaded by you no matter how well you write your message. Do not worry about these people – you must respect the right of all adults to make their own decisions.

The most important third part of your audience is in the center of the audience spectrum. It includes people who have not made a decision yet and who are open to being persuaded by the information in your coalition message. This part of your audience can be influenced by your good copywriting.

Your Words Are a Bridge to a Single Person

Your message can hold the attention of your reader better if you write your message to speak to an individual person – as if you were having a one-to-one conversation with that person.

For example, if I write a sentence like this to you, it reads like I am speaking to you in person. My words make it easy for you to feel like you are listening to me in a one-to-one conversation.

However, sentences written to a general group have far less ability to hold attention. For example, it has been observed that sentences that talk about populations and external groups of people have limited ability to invoke feelings of connectedness among individual participants.

Now I have a question for you. Did you feel the difference in engagement between that paragraph and the paragraph before it? Did the paragraph about groups make you feel like I was speaking directly with you in a one-to-one conversation? I encourage you to read these three paragraphs again if you want to experience the transitions one more time for clarity.

When you write your message, write it to a single person. It helps if you can hold a picture of that person in your mind while you write. Write your message like you would speak to that person in front of you. Reach out to one mind at a time. Try to influence and persuade just one person at a time; because that is how your readers will read your message – one person at a time.

Your Words Must Keep Their Interest

The next copywriting principle is that your words must hold the attention of your reader to the end of your message. One of the most useful copywriting techniques for holding attention is the concept of an *open loop*.

An open loop creates an unfinished thought in your reader's mind. This is useful to you because human nature encourages all of us to continue reading until we find out the answer to the unfinished thought. This is what makes us read to the end of a good novel to find out what happens next.

Curiosity will encourage your readers to continue reading your message as long as they have an open loop to resolve in their mind.

If you create open loops in your writing, people will want to read your messages to the end. They will get a feeling of anticipation for what they will find out if they keep reading.

It is best if you can give your readers a steady stream of useful information while making them feel like they want to find out a little bit more. Do not worry – with practice it is not difficult to do.

Open loops are a key part of good storytelling as well as copywriting. Use them to your advantage.

People Use Emotion to Decide and Logic to Support

In general, people use emotions to make decisions and use logic to justify the decisions.

That is why it is important for your messages to include emotional reasons that readers can use to make positive decisions in favor of your message. Emotional reasons often involve ego, status, social acceptance, family, love, health, and security and safety. If you can appeal to some of these emotions in your message, your message will be more likely to persuade your reader.

But, you must also be careful to include one or more solid, logical reasons to help your reader justify their decision to themselves and to other people.

If you do not provide logical reasons to support their emotional decision-making, they might feel too insecure to carry out their decision. You can help them by providing logical reasons that they can easily understand and use as part of your message. It also helps if you include reasons that they might not have thought of themselves.

To summarize, if you write your message according to these copywriting principles, your message will:

- Recognize that readers go through multiple mental steps on the way to a decision
- Include sentences to guide readers through each step of their process
- Include both emotional and logical reasons to motivate readers

It will also close with a clear call to action, as described in the 4-Step AIDA template in the next section.

The 4-Step AIDA Template

The AIDA template is a decades-old, very successful communication pattern in copywriting. The AIDA acronym stands for attention, interest, desire, and action. Those four steps should be addressed by the corresponding parts of your message.

Usually, the title and opening sentence gain the attention of your reader, the first part of your message increases their attention with ideas that interest them, the second part of your message brings your reader to a decision point, and the final part of your message makes it easy for your reader to see what to do next (the call to action).

Attention

The main goal of the attention part of the AIDA formula is to capture the initial attention of your reader. Your title must capture and redirect their attention away from the competitive environment of other attention-seeking messages and ideas in their mind.

Typically, you can gain a person's attention by using words and topics and promises of benefits that strongly interest them. Your reader is constantly looking for a match between their interests and the messages that they see in their environment.

It is critically important that you understand the matching principle because if your reader does not see a match in the first few seconds, your message will be viewed as irrelevant and will not be read. Ideally, your title will not only create a match in their mind but will also create an open loop at the same time.

Interest

Once you have gained your reader's attention, you must keep their attention while you give them the information that you want to share. In addition, you should be careful not to create any "rough spots" in the flow of your communication that will give your reader a good opportunity to disengage.

Rough spots are sentences that lose their interest by moving too slowly or providing information that is not of interest to them. The first rough spot is usually in the first sentence of your message. Therefore, your first sentence should smoothly join the conversation that is already in your reader's mind after they read the title.

It is good practice to keep your first sentence short so that it is not challenging. It is also best if your first sentence reinforces, expands upon, or connects with the thoughts that they might have in their mind after reading your title. For example, if you create a strong open loop or promise in your title, your first sentence should "keep the promise" by continuing the subject and momentum that you established in the title.

If you suddenly switch topics between the title and the first sentence (bait and switch), your reader might disengage because their feelings of a good match to their interests were lost.

Desire

To develop desire and motivation in your reader, you should speak to their emotional interests first. Your message should make it easy for the reader to get an emotional benefit if they decide in favor of your message. Do not forget to include logical reasons for logical thinkers, and to provide justification reasons for emotional decision-makers.

It will help to strengthen your message if you can anticipate one or two of the most likely and most popular objections your reader might find in their mind after reading your message. If you can provide a logical justification for why an objection is not as important as it might initially seem to them, it will make it easier for your reader to justify moving forward with their decision.

Action

Finally, after communicating your message and providing both emotional and logical reasons, the last part of your message should make it easy for your reader to know what to do next. Typically, the next step is to call a phone number, go to a website, attend an event, or make a healthcare appointment.

The closing call for action is another typical "rough spot" where your reader can disengage from your message. Suppose you successfully lead your reader to a decision point, but you do not clearly say what to do next. They can easily disengage at that point because they do not know what to do next. Or, they might think that it is too much work to find out what to do next.

Make it easy for them to know what to do next, and your message will be more successful.

A Coalition Example

The following example shows two messages that announce a "Lunch and Learn" event on the topic of the efficient use of electronic medical record systems for clinical personnel. The first message does **not** use copywriting. The second message **does** use copywriting.

Compare and contrast the two messages below and look for open loops, promises, benefits, and emotional and logical reasons for motivating readers. Compare the clarity and ease of the final calls to action. When you have finished, turn to the next page to see the purpose of each phrase in the second message.

Modern EMR System Efficiencies

Come join us for a Lunch & Learn seminar this Wednesday, sponsored by CoalitionName, as part of their Community Clinic Outreach seminar series intended to advance the current state of knowledge about the important topic of EMR systems.

EMR efficiency is important because statistics show that 60% of women and 15% of men over the age of 85 should be assessed for XXX. This in-depth seminar will discuss EMR systems that enable staff to input comprehensive data for possibly complex patient conditions.

Registration is optional. Contact the webinar organizers at 683-344-3942 for more information or contact the presenting company by phone at 574-442-6343 or by email at seminars@statecoalition.org.

5 Easy EMR Speed Tips for Busy Clinical Staff

Get 5 easy new tips this Wednesday and learn how to spend less time entering and reconciling data in your EMR system and more time delivering care to your patients.

Increase your knowledge of EMR techniques in your clinical field and receive a handy checklist to help you minimize potential EMR errors. The 5 tips in this 45-minute seminar will save you time for many years into the future.

Seating is limited, so reserve your seat now. Email your name to talk23@LunchnLearn.org. Do not bother including the title of the seminar *5 Easy EMR Speed Tips for Busy Clinical Staff*. Just email your name to **talk23**, and we'll take care of the rest. We'll save your seat and give you a checklist at the door.

Identifying the Purposes of Copywritten Phrases

Especially when practicing, it is helpful to clearly identify the purpose of each phrase that you put into your messages. The following text shows you how to "tag" or label phrases in the copywritten example that appears on the previous page. Phrase-tagging is a powerful way to improve your writing because it helps you to explicitly identify the purpose of each phrase or sentence that you write.

Tags appear in *colored italics*.

5 (*open loop)* Easy (*logical appeal*) EMR Speed Tips for Busy Clinical Staff (*emotional appeal to belonging to the busy target audience*)

Get 5 easy new (*logical appeal)* tips this Wednesday and learn how (*emotional appeal to status/ego/knowledge gain*) to spend less time (*logical appeal*) entering and reconciling data in your EMR system (*emotional appeal to avoid an unenjoyable task*) and more time delivering care to your patients (*emotional appeals to caring and purpose*).

Increase your knowledge of EMR techniques in your clinical field (*emotional appeal to status and knowledge*) and receive a handy checklist (*logical appeal to efficiency*) to help you minimize potential EMR errors (*emotional appeal to avoid making mistakes*). The 5 tips (*open loop*) in this 45-minute seminar (*logical appeal to limited time cost*) will save you time for many years into the future (*logical appeal to saving time for many years, a good investment)*.

Seating is limited (*emotional appeal to missing out*), so reserve your seat now (*first call to action*). Email your name to talk23@LunchnLearn.org (*second call to action*). Do not bother including the title (*emotional appeal of less effort required*) of the seminar *5 Easy EMR Speed Tips for Busy Clinical Staff*. (*reminder of the title again, which contains benefits, open loops, etc.*) Just email your name to **talk23** (*third call to action*), and we'll take care of the rest (*emotional appeal to reduce worry about booking*). We'll save your seat (*emotional appeal to "your own" seat*) and give you a checklist at the door (*logical benefit of a free and handy checklist*).

How to Handle Sponsorship and Funding Acknowledgments

The example above illustrates copywriting principles in the context of a sample event announcement. But the example is not complete without wording that acknowledges the contributions of funders, sponsors, key participants, and volunteers.

When you write a message for such an event, you must balance the needs of copywriting with the needs of acknowledgments.

Here are some tips for adding acknowledgments:

- **Keep the long names and acknowledgments out of the title and first sentence.** Focus on copywriting in these sentences, because they are critical sentences for capturing your reader's interest.

- It is okay to put organization names in the first sentence of a document when the sentence is **written in the active voice** with the organizations as the sentence subject and when the first sentence **is as short as possible**. Because the sentence is written in the active-voice storytelling style, it creates an open loop that will encourage your readers to continue reading to see "who did what" in the active voice.

- **Put the acknowledgment sentence at the end of the first paragraph.** This way, if you write a three-sentence first paragraph, your first two sentences can give your reader some benefits and create an open loop before they reach the sponsorship sentence.

- **If your acknowledgments involve multiple organization names**, you might need to devote the entire second paragraph to those names. If you have enough space, you might even put them in a bulleted list, for example. That way, your readers will find them easier to read.

On the following page is an example of what the message might look like with sponsorship acknowledgments.

5 Easy EMR Speed Tips for Busy Clinical Staff – With Acknowledgments

For clarity, the purpose of each phrase has been marked in colored italics. This example shows you how to front-load your message with reader benefits before presenting the long acknowledgment information. In addition, the acknowledgment information has been interleaved with appeals and an open loop to show you how to maintain your reader's interest.

Get 5 easy time-saving EMR tips (*benefit*) this Wednesday at lunch! *(logical appeal to limited time commitment)* Join us (*emotional appeal: social participation*) to learn (*emotional appeal to social status and knowledge*) how you can spend less time (*logical appeal to saving time*) entering data into your EMR system while spending more time delivering care to your patients (*emotional appeal to caring*).

This short Lunch & Learn (*logical appeal to minimum time investment*) seminar is being hosted by The Hosting Organization (*acknowledgment*) and sponsored by CoalitionName (*acknowledgment*) as part of their Community Clinic Outreach seminar series (*open loop about the bigger series picture*). The seminars are designed to help clinical staff (*logical appeal to target audience*) to advance their knowledge (*emotional appeal to social status and knowledge*) about how to efficiently use EMR systems.

For skill practice, please try to "phrase-tag" or "sentence-tag" the words in the following sentences in the style of the paragraphs above. Labeling the purpose of each phrase will give you practice at making every word count in your messages.

Increase your knowledge of EMR techniques in your clinical field and receive a handy checklist to help you minimize potential EMR errors. The 5 tips in this 45-minute seminar will save you time for many years into the future.

Seating is limited, so reserve your seat now. Email your name to talk23@LunchnLearn.org. Do not bother including the title of the seminar *5 Easy EMR Speed Tips for Busy Clinical Staff*. Just email your name to **talk23**, and we'll take care of the rest. We'll save you a seat and a checklist that you can pick up at the door.

Skill Practice

Open Loops

Choose 1-3 scenarios from your world, such as sending an email message, an event announcement, a resource announcement, or some other message.

What open loops might cause curiosity in your readers? For each scenario, list 3-5 phrases that might capture the attention of individual people within your intended audience. Here are some hints:

- What might be new, unique, or special about the event, speaker, or peer attendees?
- What might appeal to them about the event?
- Discover… Find out… Learn more… 3 key factors… Improve…
- Ask the professionals your key questions… for free
- Top lessons from experts… Free take-home guide to…

Emotional Appeals

What emotional appeals might motivate decisions in your readers? Emotions often involve ego, status, social acceptance, family, love, safety, and security.

Write a few emotional appeals for each one of your scenarios. Here are some hints:

Skill Practice – Emotional Appeals

Chose 1-3 scenarios from your world
- Your words should appeal to emotions to encourage a decision
- What emotional appeals might motivate decisions in your readers?

Write 3-5 emotional appeals for each scenario
- Do it for your family… What if they lost you… (appeal to love, responsibility)
- Don't risk… Find out for sure… Know where you stand… (appeal to security, safety)
- Be more knowledgeable about… Get the facts… (appeal to ego, knowledge, status)
- Join the movement… Take the pledge… (appeal to acceptance, social groups)

Copywriting for Coalitions

Logical Justifications

What logical appeals might help your readers justify their decisions? Justifications often involve facts, statistics, cost, features, progress, reputations, and numeric justifications.

Write a few logical justifications for each of your scenarios. Here are some hints:

Self-Evaluation Questions

How do most people make decisions?

1. Use logic to decide and then enjoy the emotional benefits

2. Use emotion to decide and then enjoy the logical benefits

3. Use emotion to decide and use logic to explain the decision

What does AIDA mean?

4. Ask, Investigate, Decide, Action

5. Attention, Interest, Desire, Action

6. Ask, Include, Discover, Approve

7. Attention, Investigate, Describe, Action

What is the purpose of an open loop?

1. A way to delay and frustrate busy people who are in a hurry

2. A way to keep people interested in what you have to say

3. A way to hide information from people

Why is copywriting useful to you?

1. Because it encourages you to use words that people do not understand

2. Because it increases communication friction for your readers

3. Because your words always face intense competition in your reader's mind

4. Because it forces you to use boring, ineffective pattern templates

Why should your words tell a story?

1. Because stories help people to visualize what you say

2. Because stories make people want to find out what is next

3. Because stories can carry emotion in them

4. All of the above

Which types of writing can benefit from using known, effective templates?

1. Titles, introductions, chapters, and sections

2. Marketing ads and communication pieces

3. Event and resource announcements

4. Calls to action

5. All of the above

Why should you use communication templates like AIDA?

1. Because you love doing more work and having more rules to follow!

2. Because you feel good when you use a professional pattern

3. Because templates get better results from readers

Answers to the questions

Q1. Making decisions: 3

Q2. AIDA: 2

Q3. Open loops: 2

Q4. Why copywriting: 3

Q5. Why tell stories: 4

Q6. When use templates: 5

Q7. Why use templates: 3

Resources for Next Steps

Here are three different options for taking the next steps to finding out more about copywriting. The American Cancer Society does not endorse any product or service.

Title Generators

These online links make it easy for you to explore titles that have a good track record of capturing the attention of readers. Generate a few hundred titles to give yourself ideas. **Search for "title generator" to see a list of other title generators. Some will fit your needs better than others.**

- title-generator.com

Free Video Course

This resource is a short, free, online-video copywriting course by a well-known industry professional. It is a series of interviews with other professionals on core copywriting topics.

- training.copyhackers.com/

Free PDF Documents

This resource provides several free PDF documents that explore and address common problems in copywriting for public institutions and nonprofits. (Recommended for people who like to read.)

- thegoodmancenter.com/resources/