

# 3 Quick-and-Easy Tips for Writing "Chatty" Copy

## *By Jennifer Stevens*

When my husband and I lived in Baltimore, we shared an office on the third floor of our 14-foot-wide row house. It's a miracle we stayed married.

Now I admit: I'm a talker. But that wasn't the problem.

The problem was that I'm also a reader. I read everything I write out loud. This is not "friendly" behavior when you share an office.

Yet it is productive – and potentially quite lucrative – when you're a copywriter.

Because the more spoken your copy sounds, the better it works. You've heard this before, I'm sure.

But as you know if you've ever sat down to write "chatty" copy, it can be harder to produce than you think it should be.

I think this is because we lash ourselves to certain "rules" of writing we learned in school.

And to write "chatty" copy, you've got to let those rules go.

Now for the record: I am a strict grammarian. At least three times a day I interrupt the stories my children are telling me to say things like, "Johnny and *I* played on the slide ... not Johnny and *me*!" When people use apostrophes incorrectly, it makes me nuts. I wear t-shirts with grammar jokes on them.

So I am not suggesting that you cloak your good thoughts in bad English.

All I'm saying is that if you relax a few of those "academic" writing rules, your copy will automatically sound more "spoken."

Here are three quick-and-easy fixes that'll get you most of the way there:

1.

**Get rid of passive voice.**

First, know what it is. Passive voice is any form of the verb "to be" (is, am, are, was, were, be, been) plus a past participle of a verb. Like "is taken" or "was seen" or "are revealed."

Passive voice tends to make your writing sound more "formal" or "distant." But you want your copy to sound friendly. So here's what you do:

a) Use "you."

Instead of: "Relief can be had instantly with this single pill."

Try: "You can relieve your symptoms instantly with this single pill."

b) Put a "doer" before the verb in your sentence. That'll force you to tell your reader who's responsible for the action.

Instead of: "It is reported that 45% of older American workers have physically demanding jobs."

Try: "The *New York Times* reports that ... " or "Research shows that ... " or "I just read in the paper that 45% of older American workers have physically demanding jobs."

2.

### **Pick shorter words.**

I don't care how smart your readers are, I promise: They don't walk around speaking in long strings of three-syllable words. They just don't.

Yet it's easy to let "fancy" words creep onto your page when you write. Go back and edit them out. They sound artificial when you read them.

As Mark Twain put it, "I never write *metropolis* for seven cents, because I can get the same money for *city*. I never write *policeman*, because I can get the same price for *cop* ... "

Smart man.

3.

### **Trim your sentences and vary their length.**

Stick to one idea per sentence. That will help keep your sentences shorter. And shorter sentences are easier to digest.

Even one-word sentences – which you probably learned in school are *not* sentences – can be effective in copy. They can help you emphasize your point and break up a page, too.

## Read Your Copy Out Loud

As I said up front, I always read my copy aloud as I write. I suggest you do the same. It doesn't work to just read it in your head. You need to hear the sounds. That's when you notice the awkward parts, the areas where you stumble. So you'll know where to go back and fiddle.

I think it's more important than ever that your copy sound spoken. I say this because you may just find your client is "speaking" it for his file.

I have one doing exactly that. They're taking a sales letter and having the person who signs it (or an actor playing that person) read it, word-for-word. It's an audio file. And it's accompanied by slides that show the copy going by, one sentence at a time.

This "chatty" treatment is boosting response. But it's also putting the pressure on copywriters to make sure their copy isn't just "readable," but that it sounds natural and genuine, too.

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## 1 Response to "3 Quick-and-Easy Tips for Writing "Chatty" Copy"

Loved this. I relate to the "strict grammarian" comment, so I'm glad for the advice on writing more "chatty." Thanks!

*Guest (Sam)* – over a year ago

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