

The Fastest and Easiest Way to Improve the Clarity of Your Copy ...

By John Wood

John Wood here.

Today, I'm going to show you one of the easiest and fastest ways to make your writing stronger ... improve the clarity of your writing ... and catch embarrassing typos.

And if you're not doing it religiously, I suggest you apply it to *everything* you write from this day forward.

I'm referring to reading your copy out loud.

Now, you may think you've heard it all when it comes to this idea, but stick with me, and I'll give you some tips and solutions that you're probably not using.

Let's start by looking at a few of the specific benefits of reading your copy out loud. You'll:

- **Quickly find missing words** – One of the biggest mistakes I make when typing up a first draft of something is thinking of a word in my mind but not typing it. For example, I might type the sentence "I will talk about the additional benefits in just second." In my mind, I say the letter "a" that goes before "second," but I don't type it. Reading what you write out loud quickly catches these pesky mistakes.
- **Find homophones that might fly under the radar** – If you accidentally type "know" instead of "no" or "your" instead of "you're," reading each word out loud should make it easy to identify typos that the spell checker misses.
- **Know if your transitions work seamlessly** – Good copy must flow effortlessly from one thought to the other. If your transitions are bumpy, you should be able to catch them when reading aloud.
- **Have a warning system if what you're typing doesn't make sense** – We've all done it. Typed a paragraph up that makes absolutely no sense to anyone except you. Forcing yourself to read something out loud will instantly tell you whether it isn't clear.
- **Know if your sentence structure and grammar are sound** – If your sentences run on too long or if you write something that is grammatically challenged, you should be able to discover it here.
- **Be able to judge whether you're striking the right tone with your copy** – Are you too forceful? Not friendly enough? Condescending even? Reading what you write out loud will provide you with a good barometer of the tone you're striking with your copy.

- **Become good at reading aloud** – It could be to a group of kids or a newspaper article to a peer or client, but there are times in life when it's handy to have mastered this skill.

I'll admit, sometimes I get a little lazy, and I don't read the parts of my copy out loud that I think I have down pat.

Even still, I never cease to be amazed when I get some copy back from my "copy buddy" and find that in an essay I've read 10 or 12 times silently to myself, I've left out a word. Usually, it's a small word, but it still makes for a bumpy ride when reading.

I've come up with seven tips you can use to make sure it never happens to you:

1. **Listen to yourself** – Record yourself reading your copy either using a tape machine or a software program that converts your voice to MP3. This will give you an excellent take on the flow and clarity of your copy.
2. **Have somebody else read your copy to you** – If someone is available, ask them to read your copy out loud. This gives you a different perspective on whether it sounds good to someone other than you.
3. **Read every word** – Take the time and focus on *every* word on the page.
4. **Stick with the format that works best for you** – I prefer reading it from the printed page. But you may like reading from your computer screen. Do what's most comfortable.
5. **Don't read too fast** – Relax and read at a comfortable pace. Reading too fast heightens the chance of you missing something.
6. **Follow along with your finger if it helps** – Use your finger to help you focus on the words you're reading – or use a piece of paper to cover up the lines you haven't read yet.
7. **Have your voice-to-text software read what you type back to you** – This isn't a substitute for actually reading it yourself, but it's a fun way to check your copy for errors and areas that need improvement. I use Dragon Speech Recognition Software by Nuance. If I say the words, "Read screen out loud," it reads the text on the screen back to me.

One little typo or miscue can create the wrong impression with a client, especially if you're new to them and haven't yet had an opportunity to prove yourself. Use these seven tips and read your copy out loud as many times as possible, and you'll be able to all but eliminate mistakes in your copy.

Do you have any other "reading out loud" related tips? If so, I'd love if you'd share them with your fellow AWALers. Post a comment below.

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Thanks for the suggestions. It's good to have a clear list in one place.

I particularly like the suggestion about getting Dragon to read your text back. I do most of the others, but that one is new.

Debra H – over a year ago

One more idea that I have found very helpful:

Read your copy from the end to the beginning. In other words, read your last sentence. Then read the next to the last sentence, and so on until you reach the beginning. Oftentimes reading a sentence you know so well, you will insert missing words because you expect them to be there. Using this technique helps to break that because each sentence will not be coming in the order you expect or remember.

Guest (Wally Mountz) – over a year ago

I am a fast reader and find that reading the copy, starting from the end rather than the beginning, is quite helpful. It forces me to look at each word and catch homophones.

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