

# Why You Need a Swipe File

*By Sean McCool*

If you've been hanging around AWAI long, you've heard the term "swipe file."

In copywriter lingo, it's a file of good copy that works. This can be a printed file, a folder on your computer, or both.

It should be full of copy that makes you want to take action and gets the point across, in your opinion. It's stuff you wish you had written.

The point of this whole exercise is to have ideas to riff off when you write your own copy. You won't be using these headlines, bullet points, and other elements straight up, but you'll be modeling them.

A swipe file is essential when you're just starting out. It will be your greatest inspiration and a key part of your copywriting education. You'll run across techniques you've never seen before, as well as new ways of doing things you thought you already knew the best way to do.

But here's the thing I've discovered ...

It doesn't have to be traditional direct-response copy. For example, one of my successful headlines, *Seven Meals From Anarchy*, was a rewording of a quote from a book of quotes I keep nearby.

I also use magazine covers for bullet ideas. And fiction titles for headline ideas. Swipe files are everywhere ... even billboards and road signs could be the spark that gives you your next hook for your copy.

Without a swipe file, you're relying only on your own knowledge and education. With it, you get to build on the knowledge and imagination of other great authors, copywriters, and thinkers from around the world and throughout time.

So how do you get started? In my article "[Apprentice Yourself as a Copywriter](#)," I talk in depth about the importance of building a swipe file. Here's how to start:

1. Begin by copying or saving the best ads, letters, and emails you see every day. These are the ones you get more than once. The more often you get an ad, the better it's working ... otherwise they couldn't afford to send it out.
2. To make sure you're seeing a lot of great copy, get on as many lists as possible, both physical and email. Make sure you set up a separate email account for marketing lists. The easiest way to get on a list is to buy something by mail in the niche you are in. Getting on a list is also covered in the [Six-Figure Copywriting program](#).
3. Look outside traditional direct response for ideas. Browse the bookstores looking for what captures your attention. Notice everything ... color, font style, titles, subtitles. Look at what's on the bestseller racks, and take note of what's on

clearance and NOT selling. Ask yourself why.

4. Start your swipe file today, and add to it every day, even if it's only one item. Make a commitment to spend a few minutes every day building your swipe file and looking through it. (Recently, I've started using Evernote to collect and search my swipe files.)

But don't take my word for it. Consider what [2012 Bootcamp](#) Speaker Clayton Makepeace says: "Every professional copywriter keeps a swipe file – a collection of proven direct response promotions – and for good reason. Building a swipe file is easily one of the most powerful things you can do to advance your career as a copywriter. "

The best copywriters use swipe files. If you want to be one of them, this is a fundamental technique you must use to improve your copy. It's also one of the easiest things you'll do as a copywriter to build your knowledge and skill.

Published: July 19, 2012

#### Related Content:

- [Apprentice Yourself as a Copywriter](#)
- [The 90-Day Financial Experiment That Will Put You on the Path to Wealth](#)
- [Your Job: Make Their Job Easier](#)
- [Discover the Formula One of the Founding Fathers Used to Power His Success...](#)
- More by [Sean McCool](#)
- More from [The Writer's Life](#)

## 5 Responses to "Why You Need a Swipe File "

Thank you for contributing this article. I really appreciate your point of view.

However, I have to wonder whether every creative has to have a swipe file.

I am sure there are plenty of copywriters out there who manage just fine even without one.

You have not taken that fact into consideration in your article.

Nor have you mentioned the cultivation of hobbies and interests as a way to jog your memory and to come up with new connections and novel associations.

Variety, after all, is the spice of life.

*Archan Mehta* – over a year ago

Thank you for contributing this article.

I really enjoyed reading it.

These days, it has become normal for people to use a swipe file through the use of technology.

However, a lot of copywriters also maintain a regular file made of paper/plastic/cardboard: I know I do.

In this file, you can keep clips from newspapers and magazines and journals.

You can photocopy material or literature that you found to be of interest in a book or novel.

And later, when you feel inspired or are in search of ideas, you can return to what you have saved up for a rainy day.

*Archan Mehta* – over a year ago

**Archan, Thanks for the reminder. I too use a paper swipe file though now I scan things into Evernote so they're easier to find.**

**And as for other sources of inputs, I agree, the more the better. Thing is I can only fit so many ideas into one article.**

**The articles are meant to get you thinking.... not solve and answer every question.**

**And thanks for your spirited debate this week!**

*Sean McCool* – over a year ago

One of the very best brain cell stimulators is that small bit of paper inside your fortune cookie. Some are very funny and some are very wise.

*Ina - Other Creations* – over a year ago

**Right you are, Ina. Swipe ideas show up everywhere - we simply need the eyes to see.**

*Sean McCool* – over a year ago

**Copyright © American Writers & Artists Institute(www.awai.com)**

**American Writers & Artists Institute**

220 George Bush Blvd, Suite D

Delray Beach, FL 33444

(561) 278-5557 or (866) 879-2924