The Very Best Way to Grab and Hold a Reader's Attention

By Heather Robson



So far this week, you've learned how to use sales packages to improve your writing skills … how reading advice from great writers is a smart use of your time … how reading can turn you into an industry expert with a laser-like sense of what your audience is looking for … and how doing a little pop culture reading can turn you into the type of idea-generating writer that marketers covet.

Do you know what sets great copywriters apart from good ones? It's the ability to tell a story. Which brings me to …

"Reading-to-Write-Better" Tip #5: My favorite advice — read more fiction.

Stories are powerful. They're powerful in novels. They're powerful in articles. And they're powerful in sales letters, too.

When you tell a story, it engages your reader in a different way than when you give him facts or merely highlight benefits.

In brain imaging studies, scientists can see that stories don't just trigger activity where the brain processes information. Stories also trigger sensory activity. And they trigger empathy.

In other words, a good story leaves the reader feeling more satisfied. And that puts him more in a mindset to act on what he's read.

One of the best ways to learn to use stories in your copywriting and content creation is to read more stories. By reading good fiction, you'll learn (without even realizing it):

- How to draw a reader in and get him or her emotionally invested in what you're writing.
- How to create a sense of empathy and connection between the reader and the narrator (that's whomever you're writing on the behalf of).
- How to write descriptions that trigger activity in more of the reader's brain, making him want to read more.
- How to write transitions that keep the reader's eyes glued to the page.
- How to create tension within your writing, making it almost impossible for the reader to walk away without finishing.
- How to capture good pacing within your work — if your reader is never bored, he'll be very unlikely to put down your letter or click away from your web page.
- How to write more conversationally — the best stories sound like someone is telling them to you inside your head.
- How to make your writing effortless to read.

Like the other reading recommendations I've made this week, the quality matters. It also matters that you pick fiction you'll enjoy reading. If your brain isn't engaged, you're not going to retain much. And that won't benefit your writing.

Look for classic authors like Hemingway, Austen, Dickens, and Steinbeck. The stories they tell and the way they tell them have stood the test of time.

Look for current authors who get good reviews and high recommendations. Some to try include Graeme Simsion, Toni Morrison, Cormac McCarthy, Margaret Atwood and Khaled Hosseini.

Look for current popular fiction authors. These authors usually have pacing, ease of reading, and engagement nailed down. Think King, Koontz, Patterson, and Sparks.

And, ask any friends who are avid readers what they recommend. And if you have recommendations of your own, tell us about them in the comments.

If you're not the novel-reading type (and not everyone is — that's okay), you can get the same benefit by reading short stories. Many authors have wonderful collections of short stories that can expose you to great story structure and storytelling without demanding the commitment that a novel does.

Through reading, you expose yourself to good writing. And, over time, that affects the quality of your writing in a positive way. This doesn't take a big time commitment … just 20 minutes a day reading any of the things I've recommended this week can improve your writing significantly.

So, pick up a book or a short story or a direct-response sales package or your favorite blog and spend some time reading. No one will know that you're secretly sharpening your skills!

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8 Responses to "The Very Best Way to Grab and Hold a Reader's Attention"

Being an animal lover, I really enjoy the books by James Herriot.

Michael Cambron – over a year ago

Thank you Heather! So you know, your articles have become part of my every day readings! You have a compelling style that's easy to follow, enthusiastic and very engaging. I'm excited to be part of the AWAI team and look forward to launching my business!

Diane B – over a year ago

I'm definitely on the same page with you--literally. I read a couple of novels a week, plus some non-fiction. As a book editor I have recommended for years that my authors read a lot to help them become better authors themselves.
Most of my reading is Christian fiction, and there are some really awesome authors in that genre. My all-time favorites are

Randy Alcorn and Joel Rosenberg.
Kay

Kay Coulter – over a year ago

This whole series has been excellent! Two short-story writers I have been into lately are Kelly Link and Catherynne M. Valente. They write super imaginative, out-there, genre-bending fiction that is always exciting to read.

Kate F – over a year ago

It's amazing how we think alike. I have been reading Hemingway's The Complete Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway. The short stories are incredible. He sets the stage in a honest, fair and unexpected way. You know something crazy is going to happen, but what. He holds your interest right up to the end. I know this will help my writing greatly.

Guest (Gregorio) – over a year ago

Thank you Heather, I have enjoyed following you. heather you have shared a great deal of insight. Please keep sharing.

Thank you Lewis V

Guest (Lewis) – over a year ago

Thanks Heather, Wonderful posts.
Really learnt a lot. You have given excellent pointers for newbies like me on how to improve the craft.
Thanks again..Keep writing

Guest (Anil) – over a year ago

Thank you for sharing such great insights. I've always been a non-fiction reader, but I am going to add fiction to my reading! My husband has a collection that I just never paid attention to.. it wasn't non-fiction..Thank you for helping me break a barrier!

Guest (Cheryl Davis) – over a year ago

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