

"Hand Copy Sales Letters? Is This Really Necessary?"

By Katie Yeakle



As Rebecca and I get ready to kick off the [2018 Live Companion Series](#) for ***The Accelerated Program for Six-Figure Copywriting***, I'd like to get ahead of a question we're sure to get asked. And, that's "*Do I really have to hand write out the sales letters in Exercises 1, 2, and 3*"?

The short answer is — well, of course you don't have to. But, I recommend you do.

We start *The Accelerated Program* ... the foundation for all the persuasive writing you'll ever want to do ... with them for a very specific reason based on both science and experience.

It's been proven time and again that hand writing something you want to learn is effective because you stimulate a part of your brain called the Reticular Activating System (RAS). According to *LifeHacker*, "The RAS acts as a filter for everything your brain needs to process, giving more importance to the stuff that you're actively focusing on that moment — something that the physical act of writing brings to the forefront."

And a study from *Human Brain Mapping* proved that when you read AND copy something by hand, you also activate the left rolandic operculum, which is associated with sentence level syntactic encoding. Basically, in laymen's terms, this means when you simply read something, your brain is focused on figuring out the meaning of what you're reading. But, when you write out what you're reading, your brain is more engaged and is focused on the syntax as well as the meaning.

Mark Ford, whose idea it was to start the program with hand copying classic sales letters back when we first created it over 20 years ago, says,

"There are things you can learn by listening: ideas, principles, and principle's disabled cousins: rules.

And then there are things you can only learn by doing. When it comes to writing, skills such as rhythm, pacing, and diction are among them.

You can become a competent novice copywriter by following rules. You can become a considerably better copywriter by learning and applying the important ideas and principles. But if you want to master the art of copywriting and stand out among your peers, you must develop the sorts of skills that can only be absorbed by internalizing those from the works of the masters.

In terms of efficacy, reading masterful copy aloud is a sound approach to internalizing these skills. Typing adds a bit because the memory is stored in two dimensions: aurally and 'digitally.' And handwriting masterful copy might be even better than typing simply because it requires more neuro-physical activity than typing."

Sandy Franks, AWAI's Copy Chief, encourages this practice for other reasons too.

"Writing out a control by hand works in several ways. The longer the letter the better, because you actually see the little nuances throughout the sales letter ... the choice of words the writer used, the transitions from one thought to another, one paragraph to another, you understand how the golden thread is woven through the letter.

But then you also see the big picture stuff ... like the proof used to back up each claim, how credibility is used, the promise being made to the reader, and the USP of the product, and ways the value proposition is developed.

All of this happens on a subliminal level ... you train your brain to see things in copy you don't pick up simply by reading it to yourself."

Paul Hollingshead hand wrote sales letters throughout his first year to help him learn faster. He said, "It helped me with getting the rhythm of a sales letter down and introduced me to the language and structure of successful sales letters."

This isn't just true for copywriters. Many famous fiction and nonfiction writers got their start by hand copying works they admired — Jack London, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Benjamin Franklin among them. As reported in the *Art of Manliness*:

A large part of the self-improvement program Jack London set out for himself involved studying the work of other great writers. Of these literary mentors, London most admired the style of Rudyard Kipling. For hours at a time, and days on end, he would make it his assignment to copy page after page of Kipling's works in longhand. Through such feverish effort, he hoped to absorb his hero's rhythmic musicality and energetic cadence, along with the master's ability to produce what one contemporary critic called "throat-grabbing phrase".

Now, we don't suggest you spend "hours at a time, and days on end" hand copying great sales letters, but I hope you'll make this part of your practice as you're learning and developing your skills. There really isn't a better way to absorb the rhythm and structure of winning sales copy.

How to Get the Most from Hand Copying Successful Sales Letters

1. It's important that you're copying successful sales letters. By that I mean "controls" ... letters that companies mail repeatedly. (See below for more about this.)
2. It helps if you're copying letters in a niche that's of interest to you. (More about this below too.)
3. Write slowly and neatly. Don't just scribble trying to get it all down.
4. Leave spaces for the paragraphs just like they do in the letter. The way the writer breaks the paragraphs is important.
5. Write in 15-minute blocks.
6. Commit to doing this at least three times a week for the next month. (Feel free to keep it up after that!)

Where to Find the Letters You Should Be Writing Out by Hand

Knowing which letters to use for this exercise can be a challenge.

You can start with the letters in AWAI's Hall of Fame, which is included in ***The Accelerated Program for Six-Figure Copywriting***. Or, you can pull from your Swipe File if you've started one. (If you haven't started one yet ... start today!)

And as far as collecting letters to copy in your niche, think about the companies you might like to write for and the niches that excite you the most. Get on their mailing lists. Buy a low-priced product from them. This takes a little time to build, but the letters you receive from them will be great "teachers" for you to learn their style and voice.

But really, the easiest and quickest way to get started with this exercise and all the other tips and strategies we teach that will make you an in-demand copywriter is to join Rebecca and me for our 10 weeks of live training through our *Accelerated Companion Series*.

We walk you through the entire *Accelerated Copywriting Program*. You get feedback on your writing. You get to ask us questions in real time as you're learning. You get to meet and learn from some of our industry's top experts. And, best of all, in just 10 weeks, you'll be through the entire program and ready to take on clients. ([Details are here!](#))

Do you have any questions about the benefits of adding hand copying sales letters into your routine? Please comment below so we can help you with the answers.

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3 Responses to ""Hand Copy Sales Letters? Is This Really Necessary?""

Regarding your comments about hand writing copy, I recently enrolled in three writing classes at a local college and each instructor encourages "hand writing." I hand write between 15 minutes to an hour on a daily basis. This encourages me to always be wearing my "thinking cap."

Thank you for your encouragement.

Ezekiel

Guest (Dr Ezekiel) – over a year ago

I tried hand-copying letters in the Accelerated Program, but stopped due to severe arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome. I guess I must type the letters - I can still do that! Teachers have used copying exercises for years. I remember writing out spelling words 10 times each in school. And who can forget the punishment of writing a sentence 100 times on the chalkboard? "I will not do . . ." An effective exercise for getting lessons into your head - whether copywriting - or stealing

cookies!

June Frost – over a year ago

I like the idea of doing it only 15 minutes at a time. I can handle that.

Guest (Clara Mae) – over a year ago

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