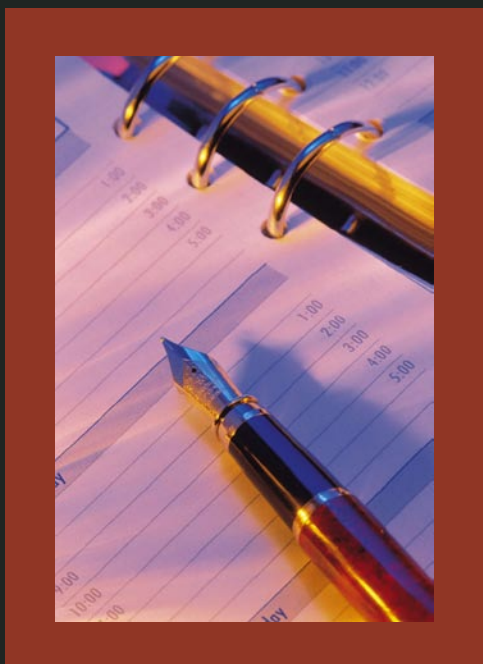


The 7 Daily Habits Of Successful Copywriters



**How to Become Successful...
By Imitating Success**

American Writers & Artists Inc.

The 7 Daily Habits Of Successful Copywriters



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By Imitating Success**

American Writers & Artists Inc.

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*How To Become Successful...
By Imitating Success*

Introduction

Dear Fellow Copywriter,

Imitation is not only the sincerest form of flattery, it can also be one of the surest paths to success ... if you imitate the right people, that is.

If you wanted to be a great pianist, you would study what Count Basie or Glenn Gould did every day to master their instrument. You would want to discover and imitate their professional success habits.

And if you wanted to be a great bicyclist, you'd follow Lance Armstrong's life and delve into what he did ... every day ... to become number one in his sport. You would want to imitate his professional success habits.

So since it's your goal to attain that same high pinnacle of success and respect as a copywriter, it makes sense to imitate

the success habits of the very best in our own field ... as well as those up-and-coming copywriters who are rapidly rising to the top.

You hold in your hands a very special document that will allow you to do just that. Our American Writers & Artists Inc. (AWAI) team surveyed some of the top copywriters in the industry to discover their success habits ... copywriters like Bob Bly, Clayton Makepeace, Nina Camp, Paul Hollingshead, Don Mahoney and David Deutsch to name a few.

We knew you could get tons of helpful ideas from these well-established masters.

But we didn't stop there. We also asked the fastest-rising stars to share their secrets with you — copywriters like Monica Day and Krista Jones, who, just a few years ago, were where you are now. We knew you'd want to know what they did that helped propel them up the ladder of copywriting success.

In order to understand the success habits of these copywriters, we asked them nine probing questions. Then, from their answers, we extracted seven core concepts and compiled them into this report.

Developing Good Habits Takes Practice

Of course, it isn't enough to simply know the success habits of these men and women. To attain their level of success, you must make the effort to practice those habits ... consistently ... just as you practice your copywriting skills.

It's going to be easier than you might think. Follow *The 7 Success Habits of Master Copywriters* for only a week and you'll

see how much more productive you have become. Continue following them and they will become almost automatic. Before you know it, you will have made them your very own.

Meet Your Success Habits Master Copywriters

Before we begin, we would like to thank the top-notch copywriters who took time out of their busy careers to answer our appeal for their core secrets of success ...

- Bob Bly
- Monica Day
- John Forde
- Krista Jones
- Don Mahoney
- Will Newman
- Nina Camp
- David Deutsch
- Paul Hollingshead
- Herschell Gordon Lewis
- Clayton Makepeace
- Michael Palmer

Yours for a successful career,



Katie Yeakle

Executive Director, AWAI

Success Habit #1:

Make The Commitment to be At Work

One of the main benefits of being a freelancer is being able to work at home ... or anywhere you choose.

But no matter where they have chosen to work, **every successful copywriter we interviewed has had to make the following commitment:**

When it's time to work, you must adopt the mindset that you are at work.

The biggest obstacle to success that you're likely to run into as a work-at-home freelancer is distractions. This cuts into your productivity and, consequently, into how much money you're able to make.

The best way to overcome this obstacle is to establish an area that defines your "office."

The Freelance Copywriter's Office

You do not have to have rent a room in an office building to have an office (although Bob Bly does). Nor do you even have to have a separate room in your house. It can simply be a table in the corner of your bedroom. But by designating a distinct place for work, you will signal to others ... and yourself ... that when you are there, you are at work and not to be disturbed.

Here's how three of our copywriters have set up their offices:

Bob Bly:

I rent a spacious room on the third floor of an office building around 8 miles from my house in northern New Jersey. I am the only occupant on the floor, so it is quiet. No one else is here, so I can work long days undisturbed.

Nina Camp: “Office Armoire”!

My office is my living room in New York City’s fabulous Upper West Side. (Just steps from Central Park, a 10-minute walk to Carnegie Hall, and one express subway stop away from all the excitement of the midtown theater district!)

My actual working environment is composed of two shelves with old research and promos, a file with contracts and invoices, and a notebook with my samples.

Paul Hollingshead:

I’ve traded in my big office for a small, comfortable, bright room in my home. I use a laptop to write. There’s a good solid desk, a shelf for keeping old promos, a small filing cabinet, and a leather recliner that I’ll often sit in when I’m on a roll writing copy. A fireplace that I’ll light on particularly cold winter days caps off the space.

It’s very important to create a space you enjoy going to — that’s all your own — that’s bright and conducive to creativity.

Dealing with Distractions

Setting up a home office will help you avoid distractions — but it won't eliminate the temptations.

Here's how to handle the most common productivity-killers you'll face as a freelance copywriter:

1) Phone calls

Train family and friends not to call you during your work hours. If you have a separate phone line for your business, it will be easy.

Don't answer your home phone during business hours. Put a message on your answering machine that says something like: *"Sorry I can't take your call right now. My business hours are between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. I'll return your call at the end of my workday."*

If you have only one line, get Caller ID and monitor your incoming calls. If the call is not related to business, let the answering machine pick it up. If the caller insists that it's an emergency ("I know you're there! Pick up the phone!") — don't get suckered in. (A friend wanting advice about an upcoming wedding is not an emergency).

2) Household chores

Do your big household chores during non-work hours — like you did when you were working in a "real" office. Of course, the beauty of working at home is that you also have

the option to get small chores out of the way during scheduled 10-minute breaks. You can fold a load of laundry, wash the breakfast dishes, chop some veggies for dinner, and so on.

3) The urge to goof-off

When you hit a rough patch in a project, you might feel the urge to watch TV, go to the mall, or putter in the garden. When that happens, you're going to have to take drastic action to force your brain back to the business at hand. Jump up and yell, "Not now! I'm working!" Or drop to the floor and do 10 pushups. Do whatever it takes to get yourself back to work.

Be especially careful not to allow productive research work that you're doing on the Internet to slide into time-wasting random surfing. Stay away from eBay. Do your online shopping after hours. And do not start up Instant Messaging while you're working. If you cannot disable it, you are not being rude if you ignore it.

Remind yourself that if you engage in time-wasting activities like these on the job, most employers would probably fire you. By stealing time from them, you would be stealing their money. Don't steal from yourself.

Here are a few comments from our copywriters about avoiding success-thwarting distractions:

Monica Day:

Avoid chat rooms and message boards. I've rarely seen much good come out of these — too much griping to weed through. Successful writers are writing and studying. Aspiring writers are writing and study-

ing. If you're complaining — or reading the complaints of others — on a message board, you're just wasting time that would be better spent writing and studying. You get the picture.

John Forde:

Every morning, this is what you're going to do: You're going to set aside your email and phone calls. You're going to postpone meetings until at least after lunch, if not later. And if you work at home, you're not going to touch the breakfast dishes either.

Instead, you'll tackle the biggest job on your project list -- if only for a set number of hours. (Four would about do it.) That and only that will be what you work on until that time is up.

Will Newman:

I screen my phone calls. I answer only work-related calls during my work time. For instance, I have a godson who loves to call me from his work. I ignore his calls because they are not work-related. I have Caller ID and a message machine that I can hear for this purpose.

My wife Linda has an elderly mother, so if I get a call from the family, I can determine if it's important to answer right away or if I can let the machine get the entire message.

Success Habit #2:

Establish A Consistent Schedule... And Stick To It!

One of the secrets to being a successful copywriter is to work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week ... right?

Wrong. Completely wrong. Many of the most successful copywriters work far less than that — far less, in fact, than the average office worker.

Gene Schwarz — one of the early masters of copywriting — worked about four hours a day. And he created one million-dollar promotion after another. How did he do it? He understood the real secret of how to structure work time.

The secret is this:

Know when you work best ...

Know how you work best ...

Build a productive schedule around those times ...

And stick to it.

Many freelancers in all fields ignore one of the most crucial habits to success: **scheduling**. When you don't schedule your work, it will expand and fill as much time as you give it. And then, instead of knocking out four productive hours on a project (like Gene Schwarz), it will take you eight hours to make the same amount of progress.

You'll find yourself working eight, 10, 12 hours a day ... every day of the week. And on your vacations ... if you allow yourself to take them ... you'll be tied to a laptop.

That's certainly not the lifestyle you dreamed of when you made the decision to be a freelance copywriter, is it.

Successful scheduling means more than just writing down the times you're going to work.

- It means understanding when you are at your most productive.
- It means understanding the way you work best.
- It means setting up a work schedule based on what you know about yourself.

Understand When You Are At Your Most Productive

If you've had a chance to hear or read what Michael Masterson has to say about the subject of productivity, you know that he believes very strongly in getting an early start on your workday.

So we weren't surprised that 10 out of 12 of our copywriters told us that their **most productive time is in the morning ... sometimes very early in the morning.**

Why do so many people experience a productivity spike at the start of the day? Some obvious — and not-so-obvious — reasons:

- Assuming you haven't been out partying until 2:00 a.m., you are refreshed and more energetic when you wake up.
- There are far fewer distractions at 5:00 a.m. than at 3:00 p.m. No phone calls ... fewer family demands ... and your surroundings are quieter and more conducive to concentrating.

- Your brain has a full supply of glycogen, the sugar it uses to do its work.
- Early morning is much closer to the time when your mind is at its most creative: during REM sleep, when you dream.

Not everybody is at their best early in the morning. Some people don't get started until noon. Others are dyed-in-the-wool night owls. Only you know what your own most productive hours are.

But before you discount the idea of getting an early start, give it a try.

Rise before the sun does. Enjoy the quiet. Harness the energy you feel ... and turn it into copywriting success.

Here's what six of our copywriters had to say about their most productive work time:

John Forde:

I used to be the kind that worked best in the evening. Sometimes through the night. That's all changed now that we have a baby. When he gets up, we have to get up. And it pays to go to bed when he goes to bed.

So now I prefer to get started in the morning. I try to work in the quiet time before the house starts stirring. Then I help get things ready and go into the office.

This is really a much better way to work, anyway. It's the big, weighty tasks one should attack first thing.

Save the little things — like answering email — for the end of the day. You'll get a lot more done if you do.

Don Mahoney:

Very, very early ... like 5:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., sometimes earlier.

Bob Bly: *From 7:00 a.m. to noon.*

Krista Jones: *Morning, very early morning.*

Paul Hollingshead:

From 5:00 a.m. to noon. I rarely do any writing after noon. Copywriters need to find a time when they're most creative. And that's usually when there are the fewest distractions.

Clayton Makepeace:

Early, before the phone starts ringing. I'm usually at my desk between 4:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. I quit work around 3:30.

Understand the Way You Work Best

All the successful copywriters we surveyed told us they have a routine to help them get into the right frame of mind to work. Some do mental warm-up exercises. Some have little “tricks” to get themselves started or stimulate their creativity.

As you continue to build your copywriting career, you'll

develop your own routine to enhance your productivity. But start by trying out some of the ideas that are already working for our copywriters.

Here are the routines that four of our top copywriters have established to help them do their best work:

Krista Jones:

I plan and write down the next day's tasks the night before, and block off specific times to complete each task. In the morning, I review those plans.

Herschell Gordon Lewis:

Every day, I read two newspapers and at least one magazine with content totally outside my personal fields of interest. I also watch television programs with content that bores or repulses me. This helps me immerse myself in the contemporary marketplace.

Monica Day:

To get ideas, I read a promo out of my stack of swipe files — usually something that's in the same area as one I'm writing.

And I read e-zines as they arrive from John Forde, Bob Bly, ETR, and the like. There are usually some pearls of wisdom in there that speak to something I'm working on or wrestling with in my work.

Clayton Makepeace:

Energy is creativity. For me, energy comes from a bal-

anced, low-calorie diet, nutritional supplementation, 4-6 hours of aerobic exercise per week, 8 hours of sleep per night, and avoiding booze during the work-week and on Sundays.

I allocate an hour or so each week to just sit and think, away from my computer. I usually spend that time thinking about my prospects and what they are thinking and feeling — trying to get inside their heads. I also spend time talking with friends about the projects I'm working on. I get a LOT of great ideas from these conversations.

Set Up A Work Schedule Based On What You Know About Yourself

To set up an effective work schedule, you have to do three things:

- You have to make it work for you.
- You have to make sure it's reasonable.
- You have to write it down.

We're talking here about a general work schedule. This is not the same as the task list that Krista Jones described above. She has a general work schedule — plus, every night, she organizes the specific tasks that she plans to tackle the next day for the project she is working on at the time. (You should do the same thing.)

Making your schedule work for you

Your general copywriting schedule should be built around two things: when you can be your most productive ... and

when your personal commitments won't get in the way.

As we said earlier, most copywriters work best with an early-morning schedule. If you haven't yet tried getting up and working before the sun rises, try it for a week. You may be a bit draggy the first couple of days, but there's an excellent chance you'll discover that this is when your creative juices are flowing freely.

Of course, if you're already getting up at 4:30 every morning to get to your "other job" on time, maybe you'll have to adopt a late-night writing schedule.

That's what Danielle Steele did. Before she became the Queen of American Romance novels, she wrote late at night after her husband and children had gone to bed. It was the only time she could find to turn her passion into profit.

Making sure your schedule is reasonable

Many people who set up a work schedule sabotage themselves from the very beginning by being unrealistic about what they can accomplish.

If it takes you about an hour to write one page of copy during your most-productive early-morning hours, don't establish a schedule that says something like: "6:00 a.m. to 9 a.m. — Write 5 pages of copy."

Given the rate at which you normally write, you can't do it.

On the other hand, you have to be honest with yourself. If the real reason it takes you an hour to write a page of copy is because you also check email, do a little Internet surfing, and take time out to read the newspaper, you probably could do

five pages of copy in three hours. And scheduling yourself that way could be just the kick in the butt you need.

Writing it down

You are far more likely to stick with your schedule if you write it down.

To be as efficient as possible, your schedule should be organized in general blocks of time, grouping like activities together.

Here's how Will Newman, who lives on the West Coast does it:

4:30 Wake up, shower and dress

5:00 to 7:00 Work on current projects

7:00 to 7:30 Check and respond to emails
[Will's East Coast clients are at work by then]

7:30 to 8:00 Have coffee and breakfast with my wife.

8:00 to 9:30 Work on current project

9:30 to 10:00 Check email again [for West Coast clients]

Will says that his creativity usually begins to ebb around 10:00 a.m., but he continues working on things that don't require much creativity (like editing, researching, answering phone calls, and the like).

Will's schedule is pretty standard — the kind of schedule that works for most of the copywriters we know. At the

other end of the spectrum is the oddball schedule that Gene Schwartz used. Crazy as it may seem, it has been adapted by many successful copywriters — and might work for you.

Here's how Mike Palmer does it:

“I write first thing each morning for at least 3 hours each day. I use the Gene Schwartz method of setting a timer. Gene did 33 minutes ... I write for 45 minutes with no interruptions, and then take a short break. I do at least 4 of these sessions a day.

I set the timer and I'm not allowed to do anything else except look at and work on the copy for 45 minutes. Then, when the timer goes off, I must stop and take a 5-10 minute break.”

Success Habit #3:

Read Every Day

Reading provides fuel for your brain. And because it's so basic and so necessary to being a good writer of any kind, every one of our top copywriters identified this success habit. So, what should you be reading? Everything. Including:

- *Current direct-marketing controls*

AWAI's Monthly Copywriting Genius is a great source for you. In addition to reprinting the full control (along with an analysis of all its elements), MCG's editor Sandy Franks interviews the copywriter, asking in-depth questions about the process he or she used to create it. (www.monthlycopywritinggenius.com)

- *Past controls*

The *AWAI Hall of Fame* collection is a good place to find past controls. So is the Internet. You can do an Internet search using specific master copywriters' names to see if they have copy posted online.

- *Good, mediocre, and bad examples of copywriting*

Pay attention to all the sales material that shows up in your mailbox and your emails. How can you tell if it's a good piece or a bad piece? If you receive the same piece over and over again, it's probably doing pretty well. And once you've become familiar with really great copywriting through a source like *MCG* or *AWAI's Hall of Fame* collection, you won't have any trouble spotting the dogs.

- *Copywriting-related e-zines and online newsletters*

Subscribe to and read *The Golden Thread* (www.awaionline.com), *Early to Rise* (www.earlytorise.com), Bob Bly's *Direct Response Letter* (www.bly.com), John Forde's *Copywriter's Roundtable* (www.jackforde.com), Gary Bencivenga's *Bencivenga's Bullets* (www.bencivengabullets.com), and Clayton Makepeace's *The Total Package* (www.makepeacepackage.com).

Everything you read (and see) becomes part of your creative idea bank. So in addition to immersing yourself in direct-marketing copy, you should also read:

- *Newspapers, magazines, and books*

And not just The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal. Read the National Enquirer, the Globe, and other supermarket tabloids. You don't have to believe that space aliens are keeping Elvis alive in Area 51 — but your prospects read this stuff. And you should know what's going on in their heads so you can “talk” to them in your copy.

You should also be reading periodicals that relate to your marketing niche. Magazines and books are a great source of gems to scatter throughout your promotions. But you won't know about them unless you mine them through your reading.

- *Product labels*

If you buy a product and like it, see if there's a website listed on the label. Look at the site. Learn about the product. Learn how they are marketing it. Study

everything that can possibly help you in your career as a copywriter.

- *Fiction*

Do not give up a passion for romance or science fiction or historical novels just because your brain is filled with direct marketing. You need to take a break from business so you can integrate information that's of interest to the rest of the world. After all, that's where your prospect lives — in the rest of the world, not in the world of direct marketing.

Here's what two of our master copywriters say about the importance of reading:

Mike Palmer:

Read like crazy — everything you can get your hands on. As a copywriter, you should be reading at least one new book a week.

Bob Bly:

I read every day.

I study at least one direct-mail piece or online promotion a day.

I watch people wherever I go, observing behavior and listening to conversation.

I absorb popular culture — TV shows, movies, and magazines that the masses read, like People.

Success Habit #4:

Write Every Day

Writing is not art. Writing is not a special gift. **Writing is a craft, a skill that that you learn ...** and then perfect with practice.

If you've been to one of AWAI's Bootcamps, you've heard Michael Masterson talk about his 1,000-hour/5,000-hour model for copywriting success. It goes like this:

To be a good, competent copywriter, it will take 1,000 hours of practice. If you want to be a great copywriter, it will take 5,000 hours.

So to accelerate your progress and supplement the hours you spend writing for a client or doing an AWAI exercise, copy the Hall of Fame letters. And the great controls in *MCG*. And any mailings you get that strike you as having something special. Copy each piece in longhand — paying attention to the way it's constructed.

Another idea: When a poor piece of marketing copy lands in your mailbox, rewrite it to make it better ... just for the practice.

While you're waiting to land the bigger, more lucrative clients, write for local clients even if you have to do it on spec.

Write for local nonprofits that do work you believe in — and don't charge them for it. This is a way for you to get more practice, develop your portfolio ... and start to make a name for yourself. (Plus, when those nonprofits have paid work

available, your name will be at the top of their list to call.)
All of our master copywriters agree that writing daily is incredibly important.

Here are a few of their answers to our “What are some things you try to do every day that contribute to the success of your copywriting business?”

Don Mahoney:

Write ... write ... write ... write ... write. I write every day, maximize my productive time, learn from mistakes, and try to figure out why others are successful.

Bob Bly: *I write every day.*

Paul Hollingshead:

Write every day. Doesn't matter if it's good copy or bad — just write every day.

Success Habit #5:

Prepare to Write... Before You Write

- Before a master sculptor begins chiseling away at a chunk of marble, he gathers his tools together. He talks to the model. He makes sketches and maps out his approach.
- Before a master cabinetmaker touches saw to wood, he draws up a plan and makes extensive measurements.
- Before a master copywriter puts a word on the screen, he, too, makes some careful preparations.

And here's how seven of our masters do that:

John Forde:

The first thing I do is read.

I start by reading relevant article clippings. Then I study the product and any documentation or editorial elements that come with it. And finally, I get together with two or three of those people who know the product best.

You can do this by phone. You can do it in person. I record every preliminary meeting or conference call, and then listen to it on my iPod while walking to work.

You don't have to go that far. But do take precise notes. A lot of what the people closest to the product or prospects will say eventually ends up in my finished copy.

Clayton Makepeace:

I try to approach each project by thinking first about my prospect. *If I'm working on a promotion for an investment product, for example, I think about what the prospect's investment experiences are likely to have been over the past year or so. And I consider how my prospect is likely to be feeling about those experiences, as well as the prospect's feelings about his overall financial situation.*

I consider what's working and what isn't to this market. I try to understand why strong controls are connecting and why failed packages are not.

*Then I study the product, looking for the specific ways in which it addresses my prospect's strongest resident emotions: **1)** Solves his most frustrating, frightening problems, and **2)** delivers on his deepest desires.*

I spend a day or two letting all that wash over me, talking to friends and family about the project at hand, organizing my thoughts and, finally, selecting a main theme for my package.

Paul Hollingshead:

I do some research, of course, to get to know the product. *I think of who my audience is, and then I boil it down to one person. Usually, I picture that person as someone I know, so I can have a visual image of who I'm writing to.*

I start with the headline and usually don't get into the letter until I have a headline I'm at least happy with. Then I write the letter — sentence by sentence — as opposed to some writers who like to do the order form first, write out bullets, and so on.

The reason I like to write a letter from the beginning is because — as I add sentences — I’m constantly going back and editing previous sentences and paragraphs. I find that this way, the earliest (and arguably the most important) parts of the letter get the most attention, and therefore tend to be the strongest.

Will Newman:

*Right after getting the assignment, I try to **do a burst of research** that includes examining the product and doing some Internet work. But this research is to prime the pump. After the first day or so, if I have the luxury of time to be able to do so, I “let it go.” I don’t do anything for several days.*

After a while, my conscience and my calendar nag me about getting back on the project. I start doing extensive research at this point into the product, the market, and the prospect.

I resist the impulse to try to force ideas about the promises or the lead. I just research and take notes. This is where ideas form. I make sure I have scraps of paper or tablets with me. And, of course, a pen. (I always carry at least one).

Once I reach this point, most ideas come in the shadows: falling asleep, waking up, showering, etc. This is where I begin writing ... usually on paper.

Nina Camp:

Read everything the client gives you. Make a list of questions. Call the client and discuss. Read promos for similar products. Read other promos the client has

mailed — know which are the most successful.

Mike Palmer:

Spend at least a week reading books, back issues, newspaper articles, talking to editors and product managers, etc. *I don't try to figure out what the theme of the package will be — I just immerse myself in the research.*

Bob Bly:

I gather as much information as I can about the product and the market. When you have a file full of facts at your fingertips, writing good copy is easy. You simply select the most relevant facts and describe them in a clear, concise, direct fashion.

Here's the four-step procedure I use to get the information I need to write persuasive, fact-filled copy for my clients.

Step #1: Get all previously published material on the product.

For an existing product, there's (hopefully!) a mountain of literature you can request as background information. By studying whatever the client can send you, you could have as much as 80% of what you need to get started. And you can get the other 20% by picking up the phone and asking questions. That's where Steps 2-3 come in.

Step #2: Ask questions about the product.

You want to know things like: What are its features and

benefits? How is the product different from the competitions? If the product isn't different, what attributes can be stressed that haven't been stressed by the competition? What problems does it solve? How reliable is it? How efficient? How economical? Who has bought the product and what do they say about it?

Step #3: Ask questions about your audience.

You need to know things like: Who will buy the product? What is the customer's main concern? (Price, delivery, performance, reliability, service maintenance, quality efficiency?)

Step #4: Determine the objective of your copy.

This objective may be to generate inquiries ... to generate sales ... to answer inquiries ... to qualify prospects ... to transmit product information ... to build brand recognition and preference ... and/or to build the company's image.

Success Habit #6:

Research Everything

In the last section of this special report, we hope you got the message — loud and clear — that research is of major importance to every copywriting assignment. It is so important that we asked our top copywriters exactly how they go about doing it.

Here is how five of our top copywriters approach the job:

Krista Jones:

I do Internet research for background information and to study similar products. And, I read previous promotions for the product and its competition. Depending on what the project is for, I try to immerse myself in the product. If there's a relevant book, I'll read it.

Herschell Gordon Lewis:

Now that Google exists, I no longer need an encyclopedia for historical references. When selling vitamins and supplements, or items requiring technical descriptions, I can get tons of information online. (The trick is to figure out how to sell within the recipient's experiential background.)

Monica Day:

It all depends. A financial project that hinges on a big idea — or even a track-record promo — requires a lot of outside research. A promo that sells a book or a course might not require too much more than becoming very familiar with the product.

I must say that no matter how much research I do, I always have a nagging feeling that I haven't done enough. I still search out better and better sources, more ways to look at something. There's so much information out there ... at some point, you have to say "Enough," and just start writing. But you don't always feel confident that you've drawn the line at the right spot in the sand.

When you're new, especially, you can suffer from not knowing what you don't know. I didn't think I'd survive my first financial promo — it was truly trial by fire. Things that seem simple now -- like looking up a stock price on a certain day, understanding the difference between a put and a call — were mysteries to me. And to a certain degree, each new promo still is.

Options trading, value investment, futures contracts. These all have a certain lingo. You have to work pretty hard to learn and absorb all the information, then figure out a way to make it simple enough to "talk" to someone about it in your promo in a "barstool" manner of speaking. Not easy. But very, very worthwhile.

Ultimately, to be good at researching, you have to love learning about new things, thinking about new angles, and, especially, putting your head into the head of your prospect. It's actually a great life lesson. I'm a pretty liberal type when it comes to politics, but I'm often talking to a much more conservative crowd. It's not only a great challenge, but it helps me understand people better in my day-to-day life. A nice bonus.

John Forde:

If you had asked me how to do research 10 years ago,

I would have said “Go to the library to read article clippings on microfiche.” Of course, the Internet has completely changed all that.

You have to study the product, of course. And all the documents and premiums and cover letters that come with it. Studying past testimonials and other letters and emails from past customers also helps.

*Aside from this, **I’d have to say that the most typical research I do comes down to three things: 1)** Talking to the people on the inside (who are closest to the product). **2)** Looking for books on the same great theme I intend to use as a thread running through my copy. **And 3)** going to websites like “Google.com” (or, even better, Google’s “News” service) and typing in keywords until I get links to hundreds of articles worth reading.*

*Ah, there’s one thing I’m leaving out: **Studying past promos that have worked.** Any marketing manager can help you identify the biggest hits of past marketing efforts. You gain a lot just by digging in to study the top two or three.*

Clayton Makepeace:

*It changes from project to project, of course. If I’m promoting a health or financial newsletter, **I begin by reading each premium and every issue of the newsletter that I can** — at least the last year’s issues, and sometimes as many as five years of back issues.*

As I read, I type (or, if I’m working from electronic documents, I copy and paste) the articles that pertain to the themes I’ve selected for my copy. I create sev-

eral documents, one for each type of research: One may be all the personal stories and facts I've learned about the editor. Another may contain articles that directly address my prospect's most powerful emotions. Still another may contain articles that make the challenges my prospect faces real and demonstrate why others haven't been able to solve his problems or deliver on his desires.

If I'm going to be offering pre-existing premiums, I identify the value that they offer the prospect, and then write ads for each of them.

When doing this, I: **1)** Identify proof elements (surprising, ingenious tips, tricks, and tactics that I can give away in the promotion to demonstrate the value of the premium), and **2)** identify fascination fodder (advice in the premium that addresses the prospect's fears and/or desires in intriguing ways that I can tease to in my sales copy).

Success Habit #7:

Put Writer's Block Behind You

William Faulkner described it as “the tyranny of the blank page.” Most of us call it “writer’s block.”

It’s that dead feeling between the ears when nothing seems to want to come out of your fingers.

And if you intend to be a successful copywriter, you cannot afford to let it go on very long.

Herschell Gordon Lewis tells us, *“I’ve never had writer’s block ... and I regard the whole concept as an artifice.”*

Here’s how some of our other masters deal with this common -- and serious -- problem:

Krista Jones:

I walk away and try to get my mind off of it. Sometimes, I’ll go for a walk. Other times, I’ll take a shower. If it’s late at night, I’ll just go to bed. If I don’t have time to put it down for a while, I’ll read a direct-mail package or two to try to jump-start the creative engine again.

Monica Day:

*For me, writer’s block comes out in the form of procrastination. **Just sitting down and forcing yourself to dive in is the cure.** Sometimes, switching to another project and then going back helps. But often, that’s nothing but a diversion. You just have to bite the*

bullet. Writer's block is a luxury that working writers don't have the time to indulge in. That may sound harsh — but it's true.

Will Newman:

I don't believe in large-scale writer's block (the "What the hell am I going to write about?" type).

My writer's blocks come when I'm stuck on making transitions. When that happens, I'll pace the house, take a 5-minute nap, do something else, shower (if it's really bad), or pull out my hair. If it's getting near my down time, I'll simply stop writing and move on to my next non-writing project ... and return to the writing at a later time.

John Forde:

I don't get writer's block. I do so much research that I get fascinated by the ideas. More often, I have a hard time NOT writing, even when it's time to stop.

Even when I do get stuck, it's usually because I have too MUCH information ... too broad a core idea ... or too poor an understanding of what I need to write about.

So I read something, start taking notes. Eventually, I find myself pounding away at the keyboard. Ultimately, there's no way around writer's block. You just have to plow straight through it.

Clayton Makepeace:

If I'm struggling with a creative task — like outlining,

writing heads or subheads, or creating copy out of whole cloth — I switch to a more detail-oriented task like research. And vice-versa.

Bob Bly:

I don't have a problem with writer's block because I am always working on multiple projects. If I get bored or stuck with Project A, I just move on to Project B until I feel ready to tackle Project A again.

Nina Camp:

I never have writer's block when it comes to copy. There are simply too many examples of good copy already out there. As long as I have a solid foundation with the research, all I need to do is imitate the competition, then tweak it until it's mine — and hopefully stronger.

What I suffer from is "writer's inability to sit down and start looking at the material." I'm told the cure for that is to sit down and do it anyway.

David Deutsch:

There is always some part of the promotion I can work on. Or I just write whatever comes into my head without thinking about whether it's any good or not. It's important to just get the momentum going.

Success Habit Bonus!

Success Habits Revisited

For this report, our goal was to give you a systematic breakdown of the 7 most important success habits of the top copywriters we interviewed. To do that, we had to pick and choose among the answers we received and categorize them so into groups.

But as it turned out, one of the questions we asked elicited answers that fell into more than one of our 7 categories — yet got to the heart of what you really need to learn from the masters. **The question was this:**

What success habits that have helped you would you recommend to our new copywriters?

When you see their complete responses to that question, you'll see what we mean — and will understand why and how these copywriters have built ... and are continuing to build ... such enormously successful careers.

Here they are:

Krista Jones:

Find a niche that you enjoy and try to get as much work in that area as possible.

If you get really stuck, don't beat yourself up about it. Get your mind off of it for a while and let your subconscious mind do the work. You'll be amazed at how things will come to you out of the blue.

Always do the very best work that you can. Then,

when you send it to your client, you can rest knowing you gave it all you had.

Never miss a deadline.

Herschell Gordon Lewis:

- *Keep your ego at bay.*
- *Check for weakness.*
- *Don't have two elements saying the same thing.*
- *Always, ALWAYS think: If I were getting this instead of sending it, would it grab and shake my interest?*

Monica Day:

Rise Early: *Getting up early has changed a lot for me — and when I get lax, I can tell the difference in my productivity throughout the day.*

Seed Yourself Deep and Wide: *Getting lots of promos in the mailbox and in your email box provides a steady stream of copy to study, a sense of what's in the industry, and what's out there. And it gives you a great swipe file after a couple years. I'm appreciating that more and more as time goes by.*

Get Out!: *Getting out to conferences or some type of professional gathering a couple of times a year will keep you sharp and circulating. Make contacts, talk to people, and stay in touch. Do little things to help other people out when you can. The day will come when you*

have a promo that's out of your league and you're in a jam -- and you'll need someone to return the favor. Deposit more in the favor and goodwill bank than you withdraw.

Learn the industry: *Study other copywriters, know the big mailers, and keep up on trends.*

Always have projects in the works — whether you're getting paid for it or not. If you don't have an assignment from a client, work on a spec assignment for a potential new client.

Avoid chat rooms and message boards: *I've rarely seen much good come out of these — much griping to weed through.*

Do a marketing task every week — or every day, if you're just starting out — to keep the pump primed. *Even if you're so busy you can't see straight — it's a good practice. Better to turn work away than to have the phone stop ringing.*

Will Newman:

- *Get up early.*
- *Establish and stick to a schedule.*
- *Establish the mindset for yourself and others that I AM AT WORK. If you worked at a Del Monte cannery (like I did in college), you wouldn't be able to take personal calls or do personal things while standing on a packing line. Don't do it in your home office.*
- *Read every day.*

- Write every day.
- No excuses ... unless there is a medical degree of some sort attached to it.
- Have fun. If you're not enjoying doing this, it will show in the quality of your writing.

John Forde:

Read a lot. Write even more. And do both consistently. But beyond ideas so obvious, one insight that's proved valuable to me comes from Michael Masterson, who was inspired by Steve Covey.

First, make a list in the beginning of the steps you'll need to get the project completed. Return to this list at the end of the day to make sure it's still on course.

And then, every morning, this is what you're going to do: You're going to set aside your email and phone calls. You're going to postpone meetings until at least after lunch, if not later. And if you work at home, you're not going to touch the breakfast dishes either.

Instead, you'll tackle the biggest job on your project list -- if only for a set number of hours. (Four would about do it). That and only that will be what you work on until that time is up. If you feel stuck, stare at the screen until you can make something happen. Or just start typing, "I'm really stuck. What I'd like to say here, if I could find the right words, would b e..." You can't get up until you've filled the time requirement.

When you're done, you can then move on to the other,

smaller, “urgent but less important” things. I can’t promise you I always succeed at doing this, but I know when I do that I finish the day feeling like I’ve gotten ahead of the game.

Paul Hollingshead:

- **Write every day. Doesn’t matter if it’s good copy or bad** — just write every day.
- **Find the best time for you to write.** Block off that time and do it every day. For me, I get the bulk of my daily writing done before 9:00 a.m. Anything after that is gravy.
- **Take small breaks throughout the day.** Go and do something completely different, just to give yourself a mental rest and refresh your mind.
- **Be an avid reader of direct-mail letters.** Get seeded on as many lists as you can. Read the email promotions that come your way. (Not the spam — the legitimate marketing promos.) Read and study five promos a day.
- **If possible, get one of those lightweight wireless laptops.** It’s a great feeling to know you can go and work on a project anywhere you like at any time ... on a mountain top ... at a cottage ... on a boat ...
- **Have fun with it.** Don’t put a lot of pressure on yourself. After all, all you’re doing is writing a letter to a friend that you care about — with great news about a product that’s going to help him be happier. That’s what copywriting is.

Clayton Makepeace:

1. *Look for ways to bring added value to your clients by immersing yourself in the nuts and bolts of marketing:*

- **Study the numbers** — how page size, print cost, and mail mode affect response relative to overall cost.
- **Understand how mailing lists are selected.**
Read data cards to get to know your prospects better.
- **Get a grasp on how results are collected and analyzed.**
- **Understand your client's marketing goals:**
Is he looking to generate maximum response at breakeven or slightly below? Or is he determined to make a profit on each mailing. And if so, how much of a profit?
- **Think about how boosting order size and cutting premium costs** can be almost as important as response rate.
- **Look for innovative offers** used successfully in other industries.
- Study and **take an active role in the graphic design of your copy** — the “clothes” in which your copy is presented to the prospect.
- Realize that while 95% of the time you spend on each project is in the guts of the copy, the other 5% — the head, deck, and lead-in copy -- can give you a 20% ... 30% ... 40% jump in response.

2. Think beyond the copy. Spend time each week thinking about your business.

- *How much time do you waste each month in a learning curve about each new product, its promotion history, and prospects? What if you wrote two or three pieces in a row for that product while you're deeply immersed in it? What if you structured a relationship in which you dedicated all of your time to that one product?*
- *Which parts of your writing process could go faster if you had someone else do it (typing long sections out of printed documents, for example)?*
- **Identify and delegate the business tasks that you don't get paid for** — selling and scheduling new products ... bookkeeping ... cleaning the office ...
- **Copywriting isn't something you do. It's who you are.** As a copywriter, you are always in one of two states: You are either 1) Writing copy, or 2) getting ready to write copy (otherwise known as "time off"). In that time off, you can either do unpleasant tasks and return to work feeling tired, unmotivated, and unexcited about your next time off — or you can spend those hours resting your mind and body and doing things that make you feel eager to get through the next workweek so you can do them again.
- *Hiring a lawn guy, a housekeeper, a handyman, an accountant are the best investments I've ever made. They free me to use my time off in more rewarding ways. Like tooling around the mountains on my Harley.*

Don Mahoney:

Write every day and maximize your productive time. Learn from your mistakes. Try to figure out why others are successful.

Bob Bly:

Study copy written by the masters: Bill Bonner, Michael Masterson, Paul Hollingshead, Don Mahoney, Clayton Makepeace, David Deutsch, Parris Lampropoulos. Also read controls written by other writers. Studying your direct mail is the most important thing you can do.

Care about your clients and their products. If you don't care and aren't enthusiastic, write for different clients and products — or try a different type of writing. Maybe copywriting is not for you.

Be flexible, accommodating, and humble when dealing with clients. Be a nice guy. Don't be an arrogant jerk or a prima donna.

Nina Camp:

- **Obsess over strong, successful copy.**
- *Get excited for your prospective customer and let that excitement come through in your copy.*
- **Try not to censor your writing in the early stages of a project.**

David Deutsch:

Find out what works for you — which work environment, which time of day, music or silence, computer or paper -- things like that.

Don't give in to the temptation to answer emails and telephone calls.

Ruthlessly and honestly **keep track of your time** for a while and see where it goes. You'll be shocked.

Mike Palmer:

- Write first thing each morning.
- **Write for at least 3 hours every day.**
- Write in 45-minute, uninterrupted sessions. (Use a timer). When the timer goes off, stop and take at least a 5-10 minute break.
- **Read like crazy** — everything you can get your hands on. As a copywriter, you should be reading at least one new book a week.

There you have it: *The 7 success habits of 12 of AWA's top master copywriters*. Now it's your turn to become a huge success. Practice these habits. Make them yours. Make them natural and second nature to you.

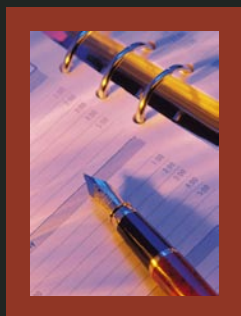
Will that guarantee your success?

Of course not. You'll still have to find paying jobs and make a long-term commitment to being the best in your chosen field.

But this we can guarantee you:

If you follow *The 7 Success Habits of Master Copywriters*,
your path to success will be easier, quicker, and more fulfilling.

Good luck to you on that path!



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