

ATTENTION RETENTION: GRAB READER INTEREST AND DON'T LET GO!

By Meredith Pond

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No matter your profession, chances are you find yourself sitting down to write some kind of document at least once every day. Though many of us don't particularly enjoy it, writing is just one of those things that very few of us manage to get along without.

Whatever your current writing project may be, it won't do anyone any good if nobody wants to read it, correct? So, if you're not a professional writer (which most of us aren't), how do you make sure that your audience actually pays attention to what you're trying to say? Believe it or not, there are several simple ways to grab and retain your readers' attention.

First of all, think about how you (and most other people) read. When perusing the newspaper or other publication, most of us start by looking for headlines or titles that look interesting, informative, or fun to read. Titles should flow from the lips easily, and inform readers of what they'll learn from that piece. At the same time, they should be short enough to be memorable, and quit before they become uninteresting.

Ironically, pumping up a limp title can be as easy as A-B-C, if you'll just think back to grade school. Remember when you learned how to rhyme? Believe it or not, rhyming is an essential tool in the world of headlines and titles. A title that rhymes is catchy, jazzy, and fun. In fact, it's likely that the title of this article was at least part of the reason you decided to keep reading. Am I right? If I had titled this article, "How You Can Make People Keep Reading the Things You Write," would you have as excited about seeing what else I had to say? Probably not. Who wants to read 500-word article when even the title sounds boring? Yuck!

Rhyme isn't the only useful titling tool. Alliteration is a fantastic, fun, fabulous way to dress up a plain title. Alliteration involves the repetition of a particular consonant sound at the beginning, end, or middle of two or more words (i.e. fantastic, fun, fabulous). An alliterative title is easier to say, easier to remember, and just plain fun to read.

Once you've grabbed your readers' attention, how do you keep it? Sometimes, the answer lies in form of a question. Asking the reader questions is a great way to provoke thought, introduce a new topic, or break the monotony of simple sentence after sentence. Chances are, if you're getting bored writing your article, it's time to shake things up with a question. Try posing a question every paragraph or two, but make sure you also provide the answer.

The problem many of us have with writing is that we try to sound too formal, too scientific, or simply throw out a lot of information without having any fun with it. Most people, no matter what they're reading, like to be entertained. If your article sounds like a textbook, your entertainment value is going to be a big fat zero. Even in the most official of documents, it's almost always possible to write as if you were speaking, using words that flow easily and are sure to be understood. If you use a word that needs explaining, do so, but do it concisely (even in parentheses). Using rhyme and alliteration in the body of your document will also add to your entertainment value, keeping readers on their toes.

While writing, stop every few minutes and read what you've written. Is it easy to read, or do you have to stop and re-read parts of it? Do you have commas in the natural breaking places? Are your readers going to have to look up words as they go along? Most importantly, is your copy boring? If you're having a hard time getting through what you've written and enjoying it, chances are, so will your readers.

If your goal is to make an impact and create a name for yourself as a writer or business person, there's no greater asset than engaging writing. Attention-grabbing titles and informative, yet entertaining copy will give your articles, stories, web copy, and other documents a much greater chance of being widely read... and remembered.

Meredith Pond is a professional and freelance writer with extensive experience working on the web. Meredith provides writing and editing services to individuals and businesses alike at great prices. See <http://www.geocities.com/wordsmith25/MeredithPond.html> for details. For instant info on prices and services, send a blank email to <mailto:meredithpond@getresponse.com>. Contact Meredith directly at <mailto:wordsmith25@hotmail.com>.

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