

# TEN TIPS ON WRITING FOR THE WEB

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## OVERVIEW

Why do some on-line articles spread like wildfire through social networks while others become stranded in an internet fog? Before concluding that the answer has to do solely with the subject area, it's crucial to look at issues of formatting: length, text layout, titles and taglines. The following tips aim at improving the visibility of your article or blog that has been written specifically for an on-line audience.

### TIP ONE: UNDERSTAND FAST FINGERS FREDDIE

Freddie is hunched over his computer, reading your on-line article. At the same time his fingers are twitching, anticipating the next sites he'll view. He may want to see his most recent eBay bid, check out new YouTube suggestions, view one of his four email in-boxes, or follow up on an RSS feed about the Loch Ness monster. The first step to more effective web writing is to understand the challenge of the on-line audience – i.e. their twitchy fingers!

### TIP TWO: SET A WORD LIMIT

An article on the web will typically be short, between 400 and 800 words. Take a look at on-line articles and blog entries you've read right to the end. How long are they? How about the articles and blogs that you didn't read to the end? How long are these? After answering these questions you will be able to establish a length that fits in terms of other articles in your area that actually get read.

### TIP THREE: SHOOT A BULLET

Having embraced a word limit, some writers then try to cram as many ideas into their short piece as possible. Freddie will simply find something else to

read. All effective writing must “breathe”. Your best strategy is to step away from your writing and ask this question: ‘what one main idea (or action, theme) must I convey in this piece?’ Once you’ve expressed this to yourself concisely, you may not feel that 400 words is such a challenging limit.

#### TIP FOUR: KEEP AN “OTHER” FILE

One technique that helps writers clear the decks for focused writing is to keep a personal file – physical or virtual – into which they place all of the “other” ideas that do not fit into the current article. This action has the advantage of both honoring your own ideas (by ensuring they are kept alive) and honoring Freddie by not burdening him with too many thoughts at once. Writers who write regularly for the web often have “other” files that are bursting!

#### TIP FIVE: FOCUS, AGAIN.

Having settled on a central theme or idea, you need to ensure that your way of explaining this theme remains focused. After all, there are at least 1,000 relevant sub themes that could be legitimately explored. Some writers find it helpful to ask themselves this question: “what two or three points must I make sure to convey in order to adequately support my theme?”

#### TIP SIX: CHOOSE THE RIGHT TITLE

Your title must (i) give a clear indication of the area you are writing about (this builds trust among your readers) and (ii) be expressed briefly – with flair. For example, for an on-line publication that deals with singing technique, “Garfunkel’s Elusive Voice” would be better than “Pop Singers Have Problems” (too vague: what problems? Sexual promiscuity?) and “Art Garfunkel’s Laryngeal Issues” (too technical for a non-medical audience). It doesn’t hurt to include words in your title that are likely to come up in Google searches.

#### TIP SEVEN: PLEASE THE EYES WITH YOUR TEXT LAYOUT

You may notice the journalistic articles on the web often separate each sentence with a line of space. Other effectively presented articles employ

short blocks of text with clear subtitles (that is the technique in these “Top Tips” pieces). You will seldom see a single block of text over 100 words without some kind of break. Try inserting subtitles in your article. If this makes your piece more pleasing to the eyes, keep them.

#### TIP EIGHT: TRY A TAG LINE

In the advertising world the tag line refers to a phrase manufacturers use for potential customers to remember their product. For a web-article a tag line can help Freddie to realize how much he needs to read your article. As with your title, the tagline reflects your central theme and presents it in a way that “teases” the reader to find out more. (Title:) Garfunkel’s Elusive Voice (*Tagline:*) *The second piece in our series of common vocal problems and how YOU can avoid them.*

#### TIP NINE: GET YOUR “ABOVE THE FOLD” RIGHT

News editors have always been concerned about what readers can see on a folded newspaper. In the web-world “above the fold” refers to what your viewer can see *without scrolling*. Ensure you know what readers can see of your title, tagline and first couple of sentences –and that this is clear and enticing.

#### TIP TEN: GO BEYOND POSTING

Your on-line article is now floating around the entire world; this does not mean that it is getting viewed. Many successful web writers embrace their role as promoter, publisher and advertizer by using all means at their disposal to point people to their articles. These writers use Facebook status updates, twitters, Google-ads and comments placed on other sites. Think about what steps you can take to let Freddie know you’ve written something he may want to read.

#### RESOURCES

Did I Remember? A Writer’s Checklist. Peter P. Jacobi.

Link: [www.publishinghelp.com/editors/archives/2010/01/entry\\_210.html](http://www.publishinghelp.com/editors/archives/2010/01/entry_210.html)

On Writing Well by William Zinsser

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