

Copywriting Project Questionnaire



A cheat sheet & primer for stronger copy, smoother projects, and happier clients.

So you got a gig. Sweet! Now what?

Let's give you the best chance of nailing your client's objectives with minimal rewrites.

Enter the Copywriting Project Questionnaire! (Cue Vanna White hands and chime sound effects.)

In all seriousness, in this resource you'll find a handy questionnaire to guide your new project discussion and planning. Nail that kickoff discussion and you'll be far better equipped to write copy that converts, and retain your client long-term.

Plus (and this is a big plus!) your project will flow MUCH more easily from there. How? Because having a clear direction, deep understanding of your readers and the problems you're solving for them are powerful antidotes to writer's block.

Three things before we get too far:

>> As the title implies, the guidance advice in this resource are best suited for *copywriting* projects — those designed to persuade readers to buy or commit to something (as opposed to, say, an educational article or blog post).

>> We'll start with the rationale driving our sample questionnaire, and end with how to get better answers through interview amplifiers, plus ineffective questions to avoid so they don't derail your project.

>> You'll find my contact information at the end should you hit a snag or need clarification on anything. I'm here to help.

Our goal: To write irresistible copy in less time and with less effort.

Let's get started.

- Increase your chances of nailing the assignment while making things easier on yourself.
- Overcome your audience's 7 mental hurdles.
- Get better answers and deeper insights with interview amplifiers.
- Position yourself as a trusted consultant.

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Calming Your Buyers' Fears

7 MENTAL HURDLES YOUR COPY MUST OVERCOME

Think back to the last time you made a big purchase. Not the cheap, impulsive buys we all succumb to, but that big-dollar purchase or commitment that sparked a familiar dilemma:

Can I really afford this?

Is it worth the investment?

Will this thing deliver on its promises?

What if it doesn't? What do past buyers say about this? Do I trust these claims?

Where's the proof?

... and on and on.

The bigger the price tag or commitment, the more we wrestle with this internal debate. So does your target buyer or reader.

In fact, big purchases require buyers to conquer 7 mental hurdles before they will comply with your call-to-action (CTA). The bigger the CTA, the more you have to address these hurdles in your copy.

That's what our questionnaire is designed to do: Uncover those 7 hurdles so you can banish them, clearing the way for prospects to click, sign up, request a quote, or hand over their credit cards (and feel good about it).

The Big 7:

TARGET AUDIENCE

You already know this: Everything hinges on your understanding of the target audience. Your job as a copywriter is to get inside the head of those ideal customers and figure out what makes them tick, and what will move them to action. Get pretty darn clear on whose head you're getting into.

PROBLEM

Your best chance of getting your prospects' attention is to join the conversation that's already going on in their heads. If you don't isolate and highlight the problem they're battling from the get-go, your message will never get higher priority over all the other stuff competing for their attention. Your copy should open and revolve around your target audience's greatest frustration.

SOLUTION

Forgive me if you've already heard this, but it must be said: Solutions (a.k.a. benefits) aren't the same thing as Features. Marketers get this wrong all the friggin' time. If you have a headache, for example, your solution is to be free of pain, not an "advanced capsule that dissolves three times faster and soothes your nervous system with a minty fresh after-taste." (Those are great features, but they're not a solution.) Your solution is the *transformation* your prospect will experience after responding to your CTA. How will his or her life be different?

OBJECTIONS

Objections will flood your reader's mind as he/she tries to make a decision; count on it. Effective copy raises those objections and destroys them, showing the reader they're not worthy of concern.

PROOF

What unbiased source can back up your claims? Proof points reduce the risk or fear in the prospect's mind. Examples include testimonials, studies, statistics, and success stories.

RISK REVERSAL

Your reader is feeling a lot of pressure when considering your service. He doesn't want to waste money or look like a fool when something goes wrong. Alleviate this pressure by taking some of the risk away. Common risk reversals are free trials, money-back guarantees, high-value bonuses, satisfaction guarantees, and so on. What can you guarantee to ease or erase that sense of risk?

UNIQUENESS

What makes the product/service/provider different from competitors? What do current customers get from this brand that they wouldn't get elsewhere? How is their experience better if they buy from your client?

New Project/Client Questions

(A GREAT START FOR UNCOVERING THE BIG 7)

1. Who's your ideal customer?
2. What are his/her hot buttons or primary concerns?
3. What keeps him/her awake at night, staring at the ceiling, dreading the day ahead?
4. How do you want this reader to feel as a result of reading this piece?
5. What do you want this reader to do as a result of reading this piece?
6. Paint me a before-and-after picture: What transformation do customers experience after buying this product/service?
7. Walk me through what happens after someone purchases your product or service, step by step.
8. What are common objections that cause prospects to hesitate, drag their feet, or decide against your product or service?
9. Is there a built-in bias in the way these people make decisions?
10. Who else is selling something similar to this audience, and how?
11. What do you do better or differently from your competitors?
12. If your product/service isn't different from your competitors', what attributes can be stressed that haven't been advertised or stressed by the competition?
13. Who has bought this (or something similar) from you in the past? What do they say about it?
14. Can you share any proof points (testimonials, studies, data, or success stories) that back up your claims?
15. Do you offer a guarantee or risk reversal of any kind?
16. Are there time-sensitive factors (like a deadline-driven bonus or penalty) affecting the cost of your product/service?
17. Is there an early-bird benefit, deadline, or scarcity to help create urgency?
18. Anything else I (or your readers) should know? Any benefits we haven't discussed?
19. Thinking of your brand's personality: If your brand were a celebrity or public figure, who would that be? (What you're looking for are clues to the tone and voice of the piece -- formal, casual, conversational, humorous, etc.)

Interview Amplifiers

It's been said the key to great interviews are deep follow-up questions. Journalists and storytellers know this — it's how they get the juicy details that grab readers' hearts and minds. And it's an easy-peasy habit to adopt.

When interviewing a client or source for any writing project (copywriting or otherwise), your best insights will come from follow-up questions:

Why?

How?

What do you mean?

Tell me more about that.

What might happen next?

What's important about that?

Describe that for me.

How do you know that?

How would you explain that to your grandmother? (This one is particularly useful to clarify or simplify complex, jargon-filled concepts.)

You get the idea: follow up your client's answers with more questions. Be curious. Dig deeper.

"Why" is your friend; don't be afraid to ask it three, four times in a row — it's how you get to the compelling, emotional triggers that resonate best with prospects, and that competitors overlook.

Ineffective Questions

AVOID THEM.

Whoever said there are no dumb questions was mistaken. But not for the reasons you might think.

The following types of questions do more harm than good because they hinder your client's ability to speak freely and your ability to listen fully. Tread carefully and try to avoid them:

Leading questions

Assuming questions

Biased questions

Arguing questions

Interrupting questions

Oh, it's so tempting to showcase your knowledge of the subject or audience you've been tasked with. I know! But do work hard to suspend preconceived notions.

If it helps, pretend you're a therapist encouraging a patient to spill their guts and frame issues in their own words while you listen, ponder, and take notes. By doing so, you'll protect yourself from inaccurate assumptions that can derail your project.

That said, I do recognize it's sometimes appropriate or necessary to guide your client, and share what you do know about the market. Use your best judgement. My intent is just to give you a heads-up that the types of questions listed above aren't the best arrows in your quiver and might hinder your discussion.

Parting Thoughts

POSITIONING YOURSELF AS A TRUSTED ADVISOR

Years ago, I worked with a business coach for a full year as I sank my savings into a magazine publishing business. My meetings with Jim felt very much like therapy. Each time, I walked away energized, with a renewed sense of calm and purpose. I often marveled at Jim's ability to pinpoint the root cause of my troubles, and make the best course of action seem so obvious.

One day, Jim told me his secret. As a shy young man starting a sales career, Jim was terrified of delivering sales pitches or sounding like a fool in front of potential clients. So he just asked a ton of questions and listened. Then he asked follow-up questions, and dug deeper into the client's mindset. (Sound familiar?)

It turns out you and I can offer tremendous guidance to our clients by just asking the right questions. As a bonus, the pressure is off:

You don't have to be an amazing talker.

You just have to be an amazing listener.

Jim's approach has served me well, and I trust it will benefit you too. It's a fantastic (and sometimes the only) way to uncover deep motivations, pain points or hang-ups that would have remained hidden otherwise.

As a result, your writing will be stronger, and so will your client relationships.

Wishing you much success,

Andrea

Got a Q? I have an A.

Need clarification on any aspect of this resource or your project kickoff discussion? Drop your question in our private Facebook group; I'll be glad to help.

>> facebook.com/groups/freelanceb2bwriters

Sharing is Caring.

Know someone who'd benefit from this resource? Share away! Also, check back often for new resources at andreaemerson.com.

