

How to Write Exquisite Subheads

by [Brian Clark](#)

Something terrible is happening to your reader...

You've hooked them with your [headline](#), and captivated them with your [opening](#).

But this is a longer piece of writing. You've got a lot to say.

Somewhere along the way, an awful transformation has taken place.

Your reader has become...

A scanner.

Stay calm. There *is* a cure.

Turn a Scanner Into a Reader With Subheads

The key to holding a reader's attention is, of course, compelling subject matter and delivery. However, large blocks of text are inherently unfriendly to a reader's attention span.

Emphasizing key points with the use of [bullets](#) and [lists](#) is one way to combat text fatigue. But often, breaking up large chunks of text at transitional points in an article or sales page with **subheads** serves a much more important role.

With subheads, you're actually "selling" the reader on *continuing* to read with a [mini-headline](#).

Keep Readers On Track With Benefits

With each sentence and element of our writing, there's one main goal—to get the [next sentence read](#) and keep the reader engaged. At all times readers must feel like they are gaining continued benefit from investing their time in your writing.

So, just like we have to make a [beneficial promise](#) with our main headline, we also should spell out the benefits of each salient point we are trying to make. With longer copy, this keeps your momentum (and the reader's interest) strong.

So, don't think in terms of subheads, think sub-*benefits*.

Simply identify all of your main points, and at the transition point between each, write a headline highlighting the benefit of reading the next section. Apply the same methodology as you would to any headline, while realizing that it's easier to keep an existing reader than it is to hook a new one, so don't go overboard.

Use These 3 Subhead Techniques for Better Results

1. Express a clear and complete benefit.

As long as you think of your subheads as what they actually are (sub *headlines*), you should do well. Even people who have learned to write compelling primary headlines often slack off with subheads, and commit the sin of cryptic or cute headings that fail to communicate anything of true value to the reader.

2. Use Parallelism That Advocates Action

In the case of articles and blog posts, your overall flow will improve if your subheads all start with the same part of speech (parallelism), and that part of speech is a verb.

For example, the subheads from this post are:

- Turn a Scanner Back Into a Reader With Subheads
- Keep Your Reader On Track With Benefits
- Use These 3 Subhead Techniques for Better Results
- Win the Battle Against the Scanners

I don't always follow the parallelism rule with sales pages. In that context, I'm usually more interested in using the most effective subhead possible to get the next section read, and will not try to "force" parallelism at the expense of the subhead.

3. Try Writing Your Subheads First

Just as it can be helpful to write your headline first to properly define the overall compelling benefit the piece has to offer, you can also clearly delineate the sections of your copy by then writing your subheads next before any body text. This will help you to optimally structure your content.

If it helps, think of everything you write as a list. How many points (benefits) are you trying to make in order to properly communicate your topic or pitch? List them out, and if you find that one or more of those points doesn't really "fit" or provide a benefit to the reader, toss it.

Win the Battle Against the Scanners

The fact that people ruthlessly scan content, both online and off, is just a fact of writing life. It's better to accept reality, and resolve to suck the scanners into your words by using beneficial subheads that are simply irresistible.