

Copywriting 101 for Authors Masterclass Transcript

Welcome to this masterclass, copywriting 101 for authors.

I'm your host, Suzanne Jefferies, writing coach, writing consultant and butt kicker. Butt kicking optional.

Why copywriting?

Writing a novel is about the long-game – the sixty thousand or hundred thousand word novel. There's no nanowrimo for copywriting. No writing sprints for adverts. Or word count competitions for newsletters.

And yet, all authors need copywriting.

All authors have to sell their works to someone. For those looking at traditional publishing, it's about pitching to agents or publishers. They'll still need to grow their newsletters, and will still have to be involved with the marketing of their books though. For self-published authors, the need for copywriting is more obvious: Insta, FB, Twitter ads, book blurbs, newsletters, giveaways...endless copywriting to build your reader base.

But authors aren't necessarily copywriters. You can always hire a copywriter. But that can get expensive, depending on your budget and how much copywriting you need to have done.

In this masterclass, I'm going to show you the tricks of the trade in writing **headlines** that grab your reader's attention, how to get to grips with **body copy and blurbs** and how to never again forget to write **a call to action**.

There's also a workbook with a summary of the tactics we learn here for easy reference.

Let's get started.

There are three means of persuasion: the use of argument, the appeal to emotion, and the use of endorsement.

Ideally, in the case of selling a novel, you'll be using the appeal to emotion, and if you can, endorsement. As I go through the examples, I'll show how the copywriter has used one of these means to persuade the audience.

I'm going to run through various rhetorical or persuasive devices that you can use to catch your audience's attention.

A word or two about visuals before we start. Obviously, the first thing your audience will see is your book cover or photograph. And then the headline. If your visual is unappealing in some way then you're not going to get interest, but if it is appealing then you will get interest. Simple as that. But for the purpose of this masterclass, we're going to assume that you have a sizzling visual.

Let's start with the headline. What's a headline? It's usually in bold and is used to grab attention. It's 'clever' in some way, and uses those persuasive devices to keep you looking.

When would you use headlines?

- Blurbs
- Pitches
- As a hook for your synopsis
- Newsletter sign-ups
- Reader groups
- Insta and FB posts

What rhetorical devices can you use to persuade your audience? The first one, and it's a popular one, is the rhetorical question. A rhetorical question is a question that doesn't require an answer. For example, *Love thrillers with a supernatural edge? Have you downloaded the latest free workbook? Can Jack survive without Diane after the thrill of living is gone?* The idea with a rhetorical question is that your audience answers the question in their head. So they'd look at *Love thrillers with a supernatural edge?*, think, yes, I do, and want to proceed further with the rest of the advert or the rest of the pitch. However, the one danger with a rhetorical question is that the audience says "no" and then flips straight onto the next advert. So, *have you downloaded the latest free workbook?* No, I haven't and no, I have no intention of doing so. You've then lost that particular audience member. However rhetorical questions are used because they're effective and they work. I've got some examples of a rhetorical question. Look at this—*is there more than one person for each of us? Second love of my life.* It's a rhetorical question that plays on our emotions—is there more than one person for each of us? The idea that there's just one person and one special person is quite a dominant belief, and it does tend to drive a lot of romantic behavior so there's a lot of emotional appeal wrapped up in that. Clearly in this book someone has lost

the first love of their life...maybe there's been some sort of tragedy...remember those appeals I talked about? This one's appealing to emotions. This next example of a rhetorical question asks *have you dreamt of him? what do you miss most? his embrace? his kiss?* That's four rhetorical questions asking the audience and again playing on your emotions. You read the text, think about somebody, potentially a partner that you've had in the past, who you've missed in some way, and what do you miss most about them?

Our next tactic is very popular amongst politicians. I am thinking specifically of the Barack Obama campaign which was, *yes, we can*. Prior to that we had a lot of campaigns that were "I" or "me" campaigns. Direct address means when we're directly addressing the reader, for example, *you want to sign up for my 12 day kickstart? or you don't want to miss out on this one time offer, we love erotic suspense, how about you*. The idea is that you're starting a conversation with your audience, that's why we use direct address, "you" and/or "we". Obviously if you want to make something feel inclusive like, *we're all a team together*, you'll use "we". Let's have a look at the example we've got for direct address: *In the end we only regret the chances we didn't take, stormy love*. We only regret the chances we didn't take so regret, another big hot emotional item, notice how it appeals to us...and the idea of potential loss?

Our next tactic is the power of three. Our brains really love to sort items into threes, for example, *sheer driving pleasure, today tomorrow together, outwit outlast outplay*. To note: there's alliteration in there as well. We'll get back to that tactic in a moment. When it comes to headlines, mix it up, the more tactics the better. But I digress. The power of three. Look at this example, *my ex best friend, my first love, my tormentor is now my professor*, so one, two, three, *ex best friend, first love, tormentor*. Another example is, *the bravest of heroes, the brashest of rebels, the boldest of lovers*. Again, notice how it's a play on emotion. And hyperbole, exaggeration. Bravest, brashest, boldest—all superlatives. Combined with emotional appeal, alliteration and exaggeration, this power of three really sparks.

This example introduces us to our next tactic: language. Adjectives, alliteration, metaphor, simile, personification—all those things you learned at school. A quick reminder, metaphor is a comparison without 'like' or 'as', alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds, and personification is the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects. Look at the example we have here: *Looking for a fast pace, thrilling, edge of the seat, read?* That's three adjectives—why use one if you can use three? And notice our power of three in there. Remember the more effective headline probably uses more than one rhetorical device. This one uses three: it's got some adjectives, it's

got power of three, and it's got a rhetorical question. Next one: *better be sure to bag this bestseller before this offer expires*, alliteration alliteration alliteration. *When go getting Sherry collides with super ambitious Steve she's got a Tiger by the tail*. That's a great metaphor which gives a fabulous visual picture. Also more alliteration, *super ambitious Steve, go getting Sherry, tiger by the tail*, and again, adjectives Not just one tactic but many. In this next example, we've got *heartbreakingly beautiful entertaining absorbing smooth and addictive I could not willingly stop reading*. It's not just one adjective, it's many adjectives with a little bit of exaggeration thrown into the mix. Heartbreakingly beautiful is also an appeal to emotion.

Another very effective tactic or persuasive device is to hint to the central conflict in the novel. What's the book's inner conflict? This is particularly useful for Twitter pitching or pitching to agents and publishers. For example, *what if a vamp were to fall in love with a were?* Classic paranormal conflict. Or, *Queen Alice has unchained the slaves, rescued the Westerwain's only living dragon, and sworn to protect her people – until, dragon hunter Jon Whoa makes her a deal she can't refuse*. Only living dragon vs a dragon hunter – there's the set up. *It's hate at first sight for Paul and Mary, rival bakers whose fake partnership can't flop if they want the \$1,000,000*. There's the conflict—rival bakers and they have to somehow work together...how are they going to overcome that conflict in order to win? It's a snapshot of what to expect from the book. In this next example, *she could tell he was accustomed to getting what he wanted, well, not this time buckoo*, we also get a hint of the tone of the book. It's also a good measure of how clear your conflict is, if you're able to distill it into a quick headline. Try it before you write your novel, next time, see if it helps to clarify the central tension in your novel.

The next tactic is one you'd think wouldn't work too well, considering its groan-inducing potential, but puns, especially cheesy ones, are super popular. In fact, there's research in advertising that the worse pun, the more people loved it and people remembered it, so don't be scared of putting in cheesy puns. But only if the tone of your novel suits. For example, here are some book titles. *Tikka chance on me*, a play on the Abba song, *Take a Chance on me*, *Earls gone Wild*, a play on *Girls Gone Wild*, and lastly, *A Scot in the Dark* from a shot in the dark. Clever, funny, and eye-catching. So don't forget the potential power in your title either! Here's an example, *love's second bloom, love blossomed among the roses but it's a thorny path to the altar*. Bad puns but they really work.

Our next tactic I'm pretty sure you probably saw coming because it's already shown up in some of the adverts I've shown you. Repetition. Why say it once when you can say it three times—remember our rule of three? Let's look at

these examples: *why him? why now? why not?*, *first of her name, first of his heart, first couldn't come in last*, and *you loved Sarah's story, you cried for Thabo's, get ready for Jamie's*. Notice again the use of emotional appeal, you have to hit people in the feels, otherwise you're just not going to grasp them. Look at this example, *she was writing his story, it became their story, the story of us not*. Just out of interest, if you cover over the picture of the book and you just were left with, *she was writing his story, it became their story*, do you see what I mean by power of three? You're looking for the third story even if it's not a conscious thing. It's something to bear in mind when you're doing your copywriting and putting your pitches or adverts together. We've already been bombarded by advertising since we're pretty much out of the womb, so all of these tactics have become subconsciously ingrained. This means we as consumers are looking for them so to go against those particular rules is not going to help you. So please be aware of that.

Our next persuasive tactic is more of a traditional selling tactic. There are some words that light up our brains: words like *new, special offer, limited offer, special deal, exclusive*. We love to think that we've got a bit of a bargain, that there's something specially for us. Nothing like a little time pressure too. Statements like, *now available in all bookstores, out now Kindle, for a limited time available at Barnes and Noble, offer expires in three days*. Look at this example, we have *Nicholas Sparks available now* so for somebody who's been waiting for a book to come out those two words are like the two most blessed words—available now.

Then we come to our last tactic which is also our third means of persuasion. The endorsement. If you have somebody quite famous who can give you an endorsement of some sort lead with that. The more famous the person giving the endorsement the more likely we are to believe it, so if you've got a famous friend this would be the time to bribe them with chocolate. If you don't, you can use a Goodreads or an Amazon's reviewer or a well-known book blogger. The key here is credibility. For example, *Hart's war is hands down the best romcom of 2020*—notice it's got that hyperbole that exaggeration—*it's the best I cannot recommend Hart's War enough, Nora Roberts*. If it's a romance novel, and you've got the Queen Nora Roberts endorsing your book, you would lead with that. *I loved Hart's War, I'm going to give it to all my friends*. The example I have here: *a sexy delicious toe-curlingly good time* by Marie Force, a New York Times bestselling author. Another way of endorsement is to mention if you're a NYT or USAT bestseller or if you've won a significant literary award.

So those are your persuasive tactics that you can use to create your headline. But we're going to find out now that we don't only use these

devices in headlines only. We saw that we can use them in book titles, but we can also use them in body copy.

So, what's body copy? In terms of your novel, it's the blurb at the back of the book. You see a book you like, then flip it over and read the blurb to find out more. But in this digital age, we use blurbs on Amazon and other online retailers, Goodreads, to attract ARC readers on Netgalley and Booksprout. We also use the blurb in our emails to agents and potential publishers, hoping to get them reading more.

Bearing all those things in mind, I'm going to look at a book of mine where everything that could go wrong did. It started with an unfortunate cover that shall remain forever in the trash folder of my laptop. Fortunately, a friend's husband helped out with a cover two days before publication. To this day, I still don't have an electronic copy of this book despite many requests to the publisher, and I never had a chance to get it out for reviews. And as it was with a publisher, my ad reach was limited. But what was the biggest issue was this blurb. *Is this blurb.*

It starts: What would happen if a jaded romance writer had the opportunity to create her perfect man, only to find out he wasn't perfect, and that everything she thought of as romantic was decidedly not? There's a good start, a rhetorical question. But it's five lines long and look at the whitespace...there isn't any.

It continues: Adam is everything romance writer Joan Richardson could want: handsome, thoughtful, kind, and made entirely to her specifications—a one-of-a-kind prototype droid—but sadly not without glitches. On their way to his designer's lab for repairs, they're ambushed by Jack Carter, a smuggler, who instantly loses his catch to another band of thieves. Jack hitches a ride with the reluctant Joan as they follow the thieves to an airfield, where they sneak onto a cargo plane and end up crash landing in the Amazon rain forest. (It's the Congolese rainforest, by the way). Joan makes a deal with Jack to get her and Adam back home safely blah blah blah blah blah blah blah blah

Where are the stakes? The conflict? It reads like a table of events. This happened, then this happened...There's no emotional appeal. Besides the fact that it has no review copies out there, I'm not surprised it can't get any traction because if you were to click on it, and then read this blurb...would you know what it's about? Would you even keep on reading that big 'ole chunk of text?

There's no punch, no short sentences, no white space.

Here are some pointers as to what good body copy should have:

- good body copy starts in the middle. Potential readers want to know what the conflict is. Don't repeat information...romance writer pitches up twice in my blurb.
- don't open with the name of the product or book. Never start your blurb with, The Romeo Prototype is a sci-fi romance novel of 65,000 words. Who cares?
- use concrete language (specifics) where possible
- talk about the conflict, the stakes. Remember that means of persuasion, emotional appeal? That's what hooks readers, the emotion. How do we get to emotion? Through the conflict. Readers want to know what your protagonist is fighting for, what are they fighting against.
- try not to use cliches
- short words, short paragraphs

Unlike the first example I've shared with you, I've now got three examples of good body copy. We'll look at the rhetorical devices they've used, and how they've appealed to the reader's emotion.

The first we're going to look, is Wild Hunger by Chloe Neil.

In the first thrilling installment of Chloe Neill's spinoff to the New York Times bestselling Chicagoland Vampires series, a new vampire will find out just how deep blood ties run.

That's your headline. It tells you immediately it's got an endorsement—New York Times bestselling vampire series. Adjectives, “first” and “thrilling”. It's also got a selling tactic, the use of “new”. And it's one short sentence.

Then we go straight into the conflict: *As the **only vampire child** ever born, some believed Elisa Sullivan had all the luck. But the magic that helped bring her into the world left her with a **dark secret**. Shifter Connor Keene, the only son of North American Central Pack Apex Gabriel Keene, is **the only one she trusts with it. But she's a vampire** and the daughter of a Master and a Sentinel, and **he's prince of the Pack** and its future king.*

There's the central conflict: were versus a vamp. So we know it's a taboo or forbidden relationship. But it's worse than that, not only are they forbidden, he's royalty and pretty much, so's she. They're not your regular vamp and were who could maybe conduct their relationship quietly in private. And,

even worse, they're both ONLY children. Hello, parental expectations. And the only person who she trusts with her dark secret is a were so that's problematic. All of the internal conflict all bundled up in a tidy package. There's also alliteration, *prince of the pack*.

It continues: *When the assassination of a diplomat brings old feuds to the fore again, Elisa and Connor **must** choose between love and family, between honor and obligation, **before** Chicago disappears forever.* There's the external conflict. Is it just me, but I wanted another between x and y to complete the power of three in that last statement.

Three punchy paragraphs that sell the book, right?

Here's the next one. Totally different genre. The headline: *Sometimes the best man is the one you least expect...*Note the use of pun. Best man could be the best man for the job, or the best man as in a wedding. Going by the cover, I'm going with the wedding.

Faith Holland left her hometown after being jilted at the altar. Now a little older and wiser, she's ready to return to the Blue Heron Winery, her family's vineyard, to confront the ghosts of her past, and maybe enjoy a glass of red. After all, there's some great scenery there....

Note the tone in that one...enjoy a glass of red. So we know it's light-hearted. We're not expecting heavy drama.

And here's the conflict: *Like Levi Cooper, the local police chief—and best friend of her former fiancé. There's a lot about Levi that Faith never noticed, and it's not just those deep green eyes. The only catch is she's having a hard time forgetting that he helped ruin her wedding all those years ago. **If** she can find a minute amidst all her family drama to stop and **smell the rosé**, she just **might** find a reason to stay at Blue Heron, and finish that walk down the aisle.*

Another cheesy pun alert, “*Smell the rosé.*” That aside, we know that in comparison with the previous example, the stakes are not as high. But there's unfinished business here. Have you noticed in this blurb and the previous blurb the use of words like “if”, “might”, “but”, “however”? The reason for this is to create doubt. Will the character overcome their inner and external obstacles to find true love? Will they find the magic trinket that can stop the monster that's chasing them? Will they have two seconds away from family drama? It creates tension, drama, the suggestion that these obstacles might not be overcome.

The last blurb is Rae Rivers's Ethan. The headline reads: 'Vampires and werewolves are so 2000. As in: over. Thanks to ...Rae Rivers, we're now totally hooked on witches.' - No. 5 on Grazia SA's 'Ten Hot Things to Do List'

Another endorsement—always lead with an endorsement if you have a great one. In this case it's Grazia magazine.

Then her blurb gives a teaser extract:

"Going to Ameera to find Hazel. Stealing the spell ... You think you can pull it off?" he asked.

She nodded, not trusting herself to speak. Just as she thought he'd kiss her, he reached for her jacket and said, "Then let's go."

It's a short extract but it lets us know we're in a romance, and one with CONFLICT.

A portal to another world has opened, unleashing dangerous creatures on earth. A dark witch is out for revenge. The stakes are high, a war inevitable.

*One person can stop the madness. Jenna. She's a Keeper to a powerful hybrid witch but she harbors **a secret** and **if** Jenna steps through the portal - seduced by the whispers of her hidden past - she **may** never return.*

*Fortunately, she has company... infamous Bennett brother and fiercely protective Keeper, Ethan. Their whip-cracking banter makes them perfect sparring partners in training, **but how will they manage when their lives and everything they were born to defend are on the line?***

Look at the use of adjectives through this blurb: *dangerous creatures, dark witch, powerful hybrid, whip-cracking banter...not any old banter, their's is whip-cracking, perfect sparring partners.* And the ending with a rhetorical question.

To continue: *When the battle lines are drawn, will Jenna and Ethan stand side by side - as friends, protectors, lovers ... or as traitors?* Power of three, and rhetorical question all rolled up with the central conflict. Compelling? Absolutely.

It seems such an obvious one, but all of these blurbs ended there...no call to action. What do you want the person reading your blurb to do next? Put the book back on the shelf? Click onto an 'also read'. No, you want them to do something.

The whole purpose of copywriting is to use persuasion to get your audience to do something they wouldn't ordinarily have done. In this case it's buy your book or read your book or sign up for an advance copy or sign up for a newsletter.

For example:

Buy now!

Get it now!

Click here!

In this example, there's an endorsement, there's the conflict, *he's a horse whisperer on her family ranch. She's the spirited beauty he never should've touched.* And a HUGE BUY NOW button. Most Book Bub ads look like these. The Call to Action is the most important part. If you've hooked your reader this far, and they've read your headline, and your blurb, ask them to do the next thing...BUY it.

So, now that we've worked through the various tactics, how can you adapt your copy for your audiences?

It's easy to think you've got one audience – readers. But in reality, authors have more than one audience. There are agents, publishers, reviewers, potential readers as well as your fans.

Ideally, for each release, write up a headline and a blurb/body copy. As I mentioned earlier, if you can't sum up your book in one line, you might have to crystallise the conflicts in your novel. Sometimes you'll get lucky, or not in my case, and someone will write up your blurb for you, but most of the time, it will be you.

For potential publishers or agents, you can use your headline and body copy as follows:

- YOUR EMAIL PITCH: HEADLINE + BODY COPY in your initial email, as well as the first paragraph of your synopsis. Ideally, the first paragraph of the synopsis should be your blurb.
- YOUR TWITTER PITCH: HEADLINE
- BLURB: HEADLINE + BODY COPY
- ADVERTISING ONE-LINER: HEADLINE

For potential readers and reviewers:

The reality for most authors is that somewhere along the line, you're going to be making up your ads, so best to know how up front.

- ARCs: HEADLINE + BLURB
- COVER REVEAL: HEADLINE
- RELEASE DAY: HEADLINE for Insta, FB adverts
- ONLINE MARKETPLACES & GOODREADS: HEADLINE + BLURB

Lastly, for your fans:

- NEWSLETTER SUBJECT TITLES: HEADLINE
- NEWSLETTER ADVERT: HEADLINE + BLURB
- BOOK TRAILERS: HEADLINE

Things to remember when writing up your copywriting:

- THINK short, sharp, punchy
- THINK clever but not too clever
- THINK conflict

Thank you for joining me on this Masterclass. I've loved having the opportunity to share some of the tricks of copywriters with you.

If you'd liked to leave a review, please click the link in the email.

And if you'd like to take advantage of my special offer to you, please click Writer Rocket Fuel in the same mail.