

The Headline List

These are characteristics of what makes a great headline. Scan this list when you're brainstorming ideas.

It's specific

Pretend an elevator door is shutting and you want to tell someone on the other side about a story. This exercise will help you think of headlines that get right to the point and aren't vague.

It's easy to understand

People will likely see your headline while scanning social media on their mobile device. So keep it simple. If it's long and confusing, they'll likely move on to something else after a couple of seconds.

It leads to a reaction

Imagine someone seeing your headline for the first time. How will that person react? Curious? Surprised? Happy? Sad? Hopefully not disinterested or confused.

It's not overly clever

Be cautious of the overly clever headline. Creativity is a good thing. And you want your headline to stand out. But be careful you're not distracting people with a pun or an outdated cultural reference. Avoid being clever for the sake of being clever.

It captures the spirit of the story

Is it a happy story? A serious one? Is it an essay? An investigative piece? Is it written with a unique voice? Is it hard news? The style and tone of the story should be reflected in the headline.