

MODUL PERKULIAHAN ELEARNING

MATA KULIAH - MCJ 301 - PENULISAN ADVERTORIAL

PERTEMUAN 6 – *ELEARNING*

***GETTING READY TO WRITE ADVERTORIAL* DAN STUDI KASUS ADVERTORIAL – PRODUK OTOMOTIF**

Dosen

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(ID 7715)

Sumber penulisan modul:

Bly., Robert W. 2005. *The Copywriter’s Handbook. A Step-by-Step Guide to Writing Copy that Sells*. 3rd edition. New York: An Owl Book Henry Holt and Company. Halaman 58–64.

Catatan: Setelah mempelajari *WRITING TO SELL* pada pertemuan sebelumnya, kali ini mari belajar tentang *GETTING READY TO WRITE*, sebelum melanjutkan pada studi kasus ADVERTORIAL produk properti.

**GETTING READY TO WRITE**

Helmut Krone, the art director who helped create such famous campaigns as Avis’s “We Try Harder,” Volkswagen’s “Think Small,” and Mennen’s “Thanks, I Needed That,” has a basic approach to tackling advertising assignments:

“I start with a blank piece of paper and try to fill it with something interesting.”

But what exactly should the copywriter do to prepare himself for facing that blank piece of paper? What information do you need before you’re ready to write your copy? How do you go about collecting this information? How do you develop advertising ideas?

This chapter provides answers to these questions and outlines specific techniques you can use to gain familiarity with a product and its market before you tackle your copywriting assignment.

**INTENSIVE RESEARCH GIVES YOU THE EDGE**

Unnecessary, time-wasting meetings are probably the thing I hate most about the advertising business. But the smart copywriter can eliminate 95 percent of these meetings by working with clients primarily by e-mail and phone. Oh, you can have an occasional meeting to renew old acquaintances or discuss major ideas and strategies that aren’t easily handled long distance. But with e-mail now an accepted method of rapid communication, the majority of assignments can be handled without long meetings that drag on and go nowhere.

Of course, convincing some clients to work this way takes time. You may have to educate them on the efficiency and economy of “copy by email.”

You have to demonstrate that you can provide great copy and concepts without marathon meetings or the legendary three-martini lunches that Madison Avenue is famous for.

Most important, you need to establish a procedure for conducting research that will allow you to handle assignments by e-mail and phone, especially when working with out-of-state clients. My way of doing it is outlined below.

**USING INTERVIEWS TO GATHER FACTS**

Of course, collecting background material doesn’t always give you all the answers to the questions listed above. At times you must get additional facts from product experts employed by your client: engineers, designers, salespeople, product managers, and brand managers.

Journalists will tell you that a face-to-face interview is better than a phone interview. When you sit across the table from people, you can observe their manner, their dress, their appearance. And you can learn a lot about people from their surroundings.

But the kind of interview you conduct as a copywriter is different than the interview conducted by a reporter. You are not interested in the subject’s colorful personality or history. You are only seeking straight facts and product information of an informational nature. Therefore, there’s no need to get “up close” to the subject, and a telephone interview will serve your purpose just as well as an in-person conference.

Actually, there are a number of advantages to doing interviews by phone. **First**, although the experts have intimate knowledge of the product, advertising is usually not their area of responsibility and, since they are busy, they don’t want to get involved with it. A phone interview takes less of their time and busy managers appreciate the efficiency of this method. **Second**, it’s easier to take notes by phone. Some people are made nervous by tape recorders; others get jittery when they see you scribbling on a pad or clicking away on your laptop. But these note-taking tools are invisible in a phone conference, and the subject can talk in a relaxed, natural manner without being aware that his words are being recorded. **Third**, the copywriter eliminates a trip to and from the client’s office. If you’re billing by the job, this increases your profit on the assignment. If you’re billing by the hour, the time saving is passed on to the client as less time spent on research. Either way, money is saved.

A frequent question beginning copywriters ask is, “Should I use a tape recorder or take notes by hand?” My answer is that it depends on the situation and on the assignment. By the way, if you do decide to tape the interview, be sure you let the subject know your intention before you begin.

At times, you will be forced to go to a briefing without much background material on the product or the market. In this case, new information will be given to you at a frantic rate. It’s best to use a tape recorder in these situations, because you can’t write fast enough to get it all down on paper.

And when you tape the interview, it leaves your pen free to jot down questions as they occur to you.

If, on the other hand, you have been thoroughly briefed and are familiar with the product, you should go into the meeting or the phone conference with a list of specific questions: gaps in your product knowledge that the background material didn’t fill. Here you are looking for short, specific answers, and taking notes with pen or pencil does the job. When in doubt about how much note taking you need to do, have both a notepad and a tape recorder handy.

The method of note taking also depends on whether you need quotations from the subject. In **writing testimonial copy**, **feature articles**, **speeches**, **press releases**, **newsletters**, and **case histories**, you want the information in the person’s own words, and you need a tape recorder to get it right.

But if the interview is just for collecting information that you’ll rewrite as copy for an ad, mailer, commercial, brochure, or catalog, use a pencil and pad instead.

In an article in The Writer, author Dorothy Hinshaw Patent gives these tips for arranging and conducting a successful interview (the basic tips are Dorothy’s, and some elaboration to tailor them to the needs of the copywriter):

1. When you call a person to arrange an interview, **immediately say who you are**, who suggested you get in touch with the person, and why you want to interview him or her. For example: “Jim Rosenthal? Good morning. My name is Bob Bly, and I’m handling the writing of the ground radar brochure for your ad agency, Anderson & Associates. Lansing Knight at the agency suggested I give you a call and says you know a lot about the design of the radar dish. I’d like to ask you a few questions, if that’s convenient. . . .” At times, you will encounter resistance from the person. Here are a few tactics to overcome this:
   1. **Explain that the interview won’t take much time**. (“Well, I’ve got a small list of just six questions in front of me, and the interview will take but ten minutes to complete. I know you’re busy, but do you think we might chat for just ten minutes sometime in the next few days?”)
   2. **Flatter the subject, but be sincere**. (“I suppose I could talk to someone else in your department. But they told me you designed the antenna, and I’d really like to make sure I get the right information for this ad, since it’s appearing in Machine Design, Design News, and Electronic Digest.”)
   3. **Explain the importance of your assignment**. (“The article I’m putting together will be published in this year’s annual report, so you can see why I’m trying to get the most accurate information possible.”)
   4. **Use authority as leverage**. (“Shirley Parker, your department head, is working closely with the agency on this one and she felt it would be really important to get your input.”)
2. **Let the subject select the time and date for the interview**. Offer to do the interview in the morning, during lunch, after work, in the evening, or any time that’s convenient and comfortable for the person. Some people are too busy during office hours to talk with you, and would prefer to do it after 5 P.M., when they can relax. Others may find lunch to be the best time. Schedule the interview at the subject’s convenience. And, just as important, set a firm date and time for the interview, whether it’s a face-to-face meeting or a phone call. If you’re doing a phone interview, make sure the subject understands that you are setting aside time to be by your phone on that date; the phone interview should be considered as firm a commitment as a meeting.
3. **Arrange for interviews well in advance of your deadline**. With advertising’s short deadlines, this isn’t always possible. So it’s best to arrange interviews the day you get the assignment. That way, if a key interview subject is out of town or unavailable to meet, you can notify your client and work around it (by extending the deadline or finding someone else to take the subject’s place).
4. **Do your homework**. **Come prepared**. Read all the background information before the interview. Know in advance specifically what you want to find out during the interview. Prepare a written list of questions you want to ask. The subject’s time—and your time—is money spent by the client. Don’t waste it by asking your subject to give you an education in the basics. Instead, use this valuable time with the expert to get specific, detailed product and marketing facts that the product literature and other background material didn’t provide.
5. **Be on time for the interview**. Many businesspeople are impatient types, and if you miss your appointment, you may never get a second chance. If you can’t avoid being late, call in advance and explain the situation.
6. **If you are taking notes, write down only the information you need to get the facts straight**. This saves time when you type up your notes later on.
7. **Establish a rapport with the subject**. You two may not have a lot in common, but by showing an interest in and understanding of the subject’s problems, you win that person over as a friend. And friends give better interviews than hostile or indifferent subjects. Maybe you really don’t care how difficult it was to manufacture the world’s first fiber-optic fishing pole. But the engineer you’re interviewing does. So, when he turns to you and says, “Boy, you don’t know the problems we had in adjusting tensile strength to the right length-to-diameter ratio,” give an understanding nod and a smile. Maybe even say, “I can imagine the problems you’ve had. But it sure is a great fishing pole.” This is just common courtesy, and it helps make the interview go smoothly.
8. **Keep a list of the people you interviewed**. Also save your notes until the copy is accepted and published. Refer to the list and notes if the client wants to know where you got your information or questions the accuracy of the copy.
9. **Show your appreciation**. You should always say “thank you” at the close of the interview. A short note in the mail is an even nicer way of showing your gratitude. A copy of the ad or brochure you’ve written (in its published form) is even better. You may not have time to do all these follow-ups, and it’s not a necessity. But when you do follow up, it will always be appreciated.

**ORGANIZING YOUR INFORMATION**

At this point, you’ve read mounds of product literature and have taken notes or underlined key passages, or both. You also have notes or tapes of interviews with product experts. The next step in getting ready to write copy is to type up your notes on your PC and print them out for quick and easy reference.

There are **two benefits** to this. **First**, by filtering the information through your brain, to your fingers, and onto the typewritten page, you gain more familiarity with your facts. In elementary school, teachers often assigned simple reports that could be based entirely on articles found in the encyclopedia. Not much research was involved, and as students, we thought we were pulling the wool over the teacher’s eyes by cribbing from the World Book or Encyclopedia Britannica. But the teachers were smart. They knew that, by re-forming the encyclopedia essay in our own words, we would think through the ideas and come to our own conclusions about the subject.

So it is with the copywriter. As you retype interviews and previous copy in your own words, you gain a perspective on the product and generate your own ideas on how to sell it. Now, to be fair, I know many copywriters who don’t go through this step. All I can tell you is that it works for me, and I wouldn’t tackle an assignment without first reprocessing all the information I’ve collected through my brain and keyboard and onto the printed page.

The **second** advantage of typing up and printing out your notes is that you have clean, typewritten sheets to work from. By single spacing, you can reduce hours of interviews and mounds of old brochures and catalogs to three or four sheets of paper. Instead of searching through tapes and a pile of literature to find a key fact, you can quickly locate it in your typed notes.

You can also use the notes as a checklist, checking off facts you have used in your copy, circling those facts you must include but haven’t yet, and crossing out information that will not be used in the copy. Also, looking at typed notes is a lot easier on the eye than trying to decipher page after page of your handwriting.

Convenient as these notes are, I must tell you that once you’ve gone through the process of typing them, the material will be so fresh in your mind that you will probably be able to write the copy with only an occasional glance at the pages to confirm a fact or search for a missing bit of data.

If you have written complete ads and brochures without once looking at your notes. After the copy was finished, I used the notes as a checklist to make sure all important facts were included. Some writers prefer index cards to 8½- by 11-inch pages of notes because cards are easily rearranged in different order. The advantage of pages over cards is that you can see more information at a glance. With experience, you’ll choose the method that works best for you.

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Many copywriters debate the usefulness of preparing an outline before they write the copy. Again, this depends on your individual approach to writing, and you should make an outline only if it is helpful to you.

With most short pieces of copy—ads, sales letters, pamphlets---the number of separate sales points to be covered is small enough that I can hold the outline in my head. And so there’s no need to commit it to paper. But if the copy has an unusually large number of sales points, or if an organizational scheme hasn’t popped into my head (as it usually does), I will sit with pencil and paper and work up an outline.

For longer pieces—brochures, annual reports, feature articles, Web sites, white papers—an outline is always helpful. You can pin the outline to the bookcase next to my computer and use it to guide me through the assignment. As first drafts of each section are completed, you can check off the section on the outline. This gives me a sense of accomplishment and motivation to go on to the next step.

For over a decade now, you have made a practice of showing at least a rough outline of the promotion to the client and getting approval before you proceed to a first draft. The outline consists of a working headline and a description, either in a numbered or bullet list or in paragraph form, of the theme and contents I intend to cover in the body copy.

Known as a “copy platform,” this type of outline ensures that the client agrees with your approach before you write. Without submitting a copy platform and getting it approved, you risk writing an entire promotion on a theme or concept that the client is going to reject, forcing you to write the whole thing over again. This is far less likely to occur when you are writing from an approved copy platform.

**THE WRITING PROCESS**

Now comes the hard part: the actual writing of the ad, letter, commercial, or brochure. Each writer has his or her own way of putting the words on paper, and you should use the method that’s most productive for you.

Some writers start with a headline and rough drawing of the visual, then fill in the body copy. They cannot write a word of body copy until they have a headline and visual concept that pleases them.

Others write the body copy first. Then they extract the headline from the body copy or from their rough notes. Some writers like to start with the longest or most difficult section of a brochure or annual report. Others prefer to “warm up” by typing up the easy sections first: the list of the board of directors; the company branch offices; the cover note.

However you approach copywriting, one thing you must realize is that you’ll rarely get it right the first time. The key to writing great copy is rewriting two, three, four, five, six, seven drafts, or as many as it takes to get it right. Beginning copywriters tend to “freeze up” when faced with having to produce copy. They get nervous because they’re afraid to write bad sentences or generate lousy ideas.

But nobody has to see your first efforts, and you don’t have to get it right the first time. So don’t be afraid to write down all the ideas, phrases, slogans, headlines, sentences, and fragments that come to you. You can always delete words that don’t work. But once you have an idea or think of a way to say something, it is lost unless you write it down.

Many copywriters write much more copy than they will need in the final version. This lets them trim the fat and save only the prime cut. In the same way, you should collect much more information than you will use in the final version. This lets you be more selective in the facts you include in your copy.

Basically, **copywriting can be divided into a three-stage process**, although there may be several rewrites in each stage.

In the **first stage**, you “get it all down” on paper. Just let the ideas flow. Don’t edit yourself; don’t stop ideas from forming. Just write what comes to mind. Don’t go back and fix up the words you’ve put on the page, but instead go on and keep writing as long as you have a flow of ideas and phrases you want to put down on paper.

Some writers have trouble letting their thoughts flow freely. They become inhibited and intimidated because they are “writing an ad,” and that sounds like a difficult and challenging thing to do. If that’s the case with you, try pretending you’re writing a letter to a friend . . . a letter to convince this friend to buy a new product you’ve become excited about. This technique seems to work, perhaps because letter writing, unlike ad writing, is a familiar, everyday task.

In the **second stage**, you edit your work. You delete unnecessary words. You rewrite awkward phrases and sentences. You read the copy aloud to make sure that it flows smoothly. And you rearrange and reorder material into a more logical sequence.

Also, you read what you’ve written to see if it conforms to your criteria for effective, persuasive copy. If it doesn’t, you rewrite to strengthen its selling power. This may involve more facts, a better headline, a stronger closing, or a different visual.

In the **third stage**, you “clean up” your copy by proofreading for spelling and grammar and checking the accuracy of your facts. Here’s where you make sure you are consistent in your copy. For example, you don’t want to write the company name as “GAF” in the headline and “G.A.F.” in the body copy.

Skill in copywriting, and in any type of writing, comes only with practice. As you write copy, you will learn to overcome poor stylistic habits, become more comfortable with your writing, and gain greater control over the English language.