

Power Persuasion

By

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About the Author

Beth Ann Erickson lives in Minnesota with her husband, son, and Rat Terrier. She's written hundreds of articles for publications throughout the nation. Check out her latest projects, subscribe to her free e-zine, plus get some freebies at <http://filbertpublishing.com>.



Lucy's looking for trouble – again.

Hi. Nice to meet you! I'm Beth Ann Erickson, an actual working writer. I write copy for businesses, corporations and nonprofit organizations. I've written hundreds of articles for newspapers, newsletters, and nationally distributed magazines. I've got ten titles under my belt.

I hold a bachelors degree in Communications and Sociology. I even attended Sorbonne University in Paris one summer. (Boy, that was an experience of a lifetime!)

Recently my "business partner" died. He was a beautiful black Schnauzer. Today I write with Lucy, my little (and CRAZY) Rat Terrier. She chews a lot and is constantly finding ways to get into trouble. Drives me mad. But I love her lots...

So here's my point. If I can live in the middle of nowhere and make a living writing, there's no reason why you can't. All it takes is a little know-how and practice.

So roll up your sleeves. Get ready to write. Get ready to have fun.

And if you like "Power Persuasion," be sure to check out "Jumpstart Your Writing Career – and Snag Paying Assignments." And thanks for subscribing to Writing Etc., the bimonthly magazine that will give you tips, techniques, and inspiration to keep your keyboard humming. Tell all your friends about Writing Etc. and send them to <http://filbertpublishing.com>.

Power Persuasion

By

Beth Erickson

You're sitting at your desk, wracking your brain, staring at the blank computer screen. A hole forms in your stomach as you struggle to form words to begin that accursed project. You've got to sell your writing.

You've got a great project but don't know how to get that sales piece, back of the book blurb, press release, written so you can sell it.

Well, here are some techniques that will make writing that next project a breeze:

The first sentence is the most important. By reading your opening, your prospective customer/reader decides whether your book is something of interest or not. Your first sentence must somehow capture your reader's attention and entice him to read on. Here are a few ideas to help you ...

Start With Style

- Jump straight into your story. Cut and paste the first couple sentences of your project directly into your sales piece. Here's an example:
“Mary Olson thought she was sending her child to a safe preschool that fateful morning, but by late afternoon she would find out her perceptions were completely wrong...”

Is your curiosity piqued? Would this example keep you reading? If you're interested, chances are an editor would be.

- Make an announcement.

“For the first time in 20 years, the only eyewitness to the [insert disaster here] tells his story.”

This approach is effective if your reader *wants, needs, or thinks* your project piques his/her interest. If you use this approach make sure you've targeted your audience sufficiently and captured their voice.

- Tell a story. Sales pieces written in a story format have great reader appeal. Everybody loves a good story and usually wants to find out how it ends so they keep reading. How many times have you stopped what you were doing because you didn't want to miss the end of Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story?" So shorten your project enough to include a good chunk of it in your sales piece. Perhaps it could begin something like this:

Twenty-five years ago, a man did the impossible. In a harsh economy, he defied the experts, he ignored his accountants, and followed his dream. In the middle of an economically distressed area, he opened a store that sold only men's suits...

This opener went on to tell a rather intriguing story that drew me through the opening, the body, all the way to the close.

- Begin with a provocative quote. It should contain news, a startling statistic or fact. It should be like the lead of a news story and make the reader want to read more. An example:

“Hold it carefully and take a deep breath; this little book may well represent the future of literary magazines...”

Or how about this quote?

“Did you know that 75 percent of American homes have a silent killer in their basement?”

These quotes are strong – and intriguing to boot. I don’t know many well targeted audiences who wouldn’t want to know a little more about these article ideas.

- Ask a question – but make sure your answer is interesting or important to the reader. Your question should arouse the reader’s curiosity. And here’s some examples:

What’s your definition of “fun?”

What isn’t the corporate-owned media telling you?

How much do you love your job?

A word of caution here: Be absolutely sure your question is provocative enough to arouse attention or it will fall flat. Try to use open-ended questions. Use yes/no questions carefully. If your reader answers the question and isn't intrigued, they may skip the rest of your letter. However, a well-phrased question will naturally draw your reader into the body of your piece.

- Stress a benefit. A straightforward presentation of a strong benefit can out pull any other technique to get your sales piece started. Here's an example from a newsletter:

“READ THIS OR DIE. Today you have a 95 percent chance of eventually dying from a disease or condition for which there is already a known cure somewhere on the planet.”

I know... this one's bordering on hyperbole but you have to admit... it does attract your attention. It would definitely work if you wrote a strong letter after this first sentence.

- Write a good anecdote. An anecdote will pull your reader into your story and showcase your writing abilities.
- Quotes and dialogue add color to your query. Beginning your letter with a conversation or quote will make it stand out.

- DON'T OPEN WITH dumb jokes, puns, technical jargon, and unsubstantiated claims. Keep your piece brief, to the point, and with an eye towards your potential reader's desires.
- Finally, from the first word you write, until the last word of your P.S., ALWAYS remember to write peer to peer. Write using the language of your reader.

Every demographic has a “voice.” The language expected by a romance reader is somewhat different from a sci-fi reader. READ voraciously in your genre. Always write using the appropriate “voice.”

When you match your voice to the voice of your reader you're saying, “Look, I'm like you.” Here's an example:

“One day years ago my writing professor handed back a story I had written, shook her head gravely, and said, “This is so bad it makes me want to quit teaching.”

Writing peer to peer – writing as you would to a friend – is the tone you want to cultivate in every query you write. Imagine you're writing a personal letter or an e-mail and use that language. Attempting to impress your reader with your grasp of language will only succeed in alienating them – and in most of your sales efforts netting dismal returns.

OK. You've started your letter. Let's assume your editor is intrigued enough to read on. This leads me to the next section of your sales letter: You need to write...

The Lead

Your lead is the section of your piece between your first sentence and the body. Your lead needs to be vivid, short, use ultra specific words, and compel the reader to read further.

You can use a newspaper-type lead that answers the questions: When, Where, What, Who, Why, and How.

You can also use an inverted pyramid structure where you lead with the most important information and save the details for later. When you use this structure you generally arouse interest in the beginning of your letter, provide specifics in the following paragraphs, then close with your key point. After your lead is complete, you can move on to the body of your letter.

By using ultra-specific words, your lead vibrates with life. Instead of car, use Buick. Instead of dog, say Rat Terrier. Scour each sentence you write and look for words you can make even more specific.

The Immaculate Body

The body of your letter contains your sales pitch. But don't worry. You won't have to write a long and detailed body because many sales pieces (press releases, blog posts, articles, etc. shouldn't be longer than two pages unless you absolutely have to make them longer. Also, sales pieces like back of the book blurbs, Ingram snippets, bios, and Youtube descriptions need to be even shorter.

The body of your letter tells specifically what you want your reader to do – whether it's to purchase book, contact you for more information, or read your blog. Here are a few tips to make your query more effective:

- Organize your most powerful selling points. Write each point you want to cover on a note card and put them in the order you'll write about them. As you write each point on your note card, emphasize how it will benefit the reader. Also, think about how you'll transition from one point to the next to make sure that your letter will flow smoothly.
- Write with your reader – not you. How will your reader benefit from your writing? Will they understand what you're saying? Are you telling them anything useful? Are you telling a compelling story using their language? If you were reading this, would you be persuaded to buy your stuff?

One way to build your reader's interest and "hook" him/her is to use the word, "you." Read any magazine on the market and you'll find that 90 percent of the ads contain the word "you." Use of the word "you" will answer your reader's question, "What's in this for me? How does this affect me? Why should I spend time reading this?" Notice the difference:

Me-Oriented writing:

When I first became a writer I hoped I could change my world and make it a little better. That's why I wrote, "Power Persuasion." Power Persuasion will help me achieve that goal because it will help other writers get published.

You-Oriented Copy:

I'm sure that *you're* a lot like many of the writers I meet. Like them, I'd bet *you* hoped *you'd* make a difference in *your* world. That's why I wrote Power Queries. It will help *you* structure your letter from start to finish... and will get *you* on the road to publication – fast. (Italics added for emphasis.)

- Use interesting facts and figures when you need to. Quote your sources. This establishes credibility and helps the reader realize you know your stuff.

- Divide your sales pieces into short paragraphs. There's nothing more intimidating than long blocks of solid text. Use white space to break up your body. Use short paragraphs.

Write in crisp, short, snappy sentences. Because we don't always speak in complete sentences, don't be too afraid to write like you speak. That means you can often get away with ending your sentences with prepositions. Sometimes you'll even use sentence fragments.

Always remember your goal IS NOT to write the perfect sentence – your goal is to sell. Period. (However, vary your length of your sentences to make your writing flow.)

- Use simple words and avoid jargon. When you're writing any persuasive piece, you're trying to communicate with your reader, not impress them with your huge vocabulary or boost your ego. Always remember you're trying to SELL – not impress.
- Write in a conversational style. How would you phrase your sales pitch if you were speaking to your reader in person? Write like you speak and you'll hold on to your reader.
- Be credible. You can establish credibility by knowing what you're writing about. This may include providing credentials that make you the best source to provide the article. Mention your education, life experience, publishing credits, and hobbies if they're relevant to the

topic. You'll also want to include a short biography to introduce yourself.

- Don't use weasel phrases like "I think that..." "The article may..." and "I'll do my best to explain..." You wrote the information. You better know what you're talking about. Use phrases like, "The article/book will..." and "I know...."
- Check all your facts one more time to make sure they're correct.
- Know what the reader needs, then give it to them.

Closing the Deal

In your closing paragraph you need to clearly state the action you want your reader to take. Here's a nice "call to action.":

"Surf to WEBSITE and sign up for my VIP reader list." "Get SPECIAL REPORT TITLE when you surf to this WEBSITE and join my VIP reader list." "BOOK TITLE is available at BOOKSTORE. Buy your copy today." "Click HERE to get a special deal on TITLE for the next 24 hours." "I look forward to hearing from you." "Let me know what you think. I've enclosed a SASE for your convenience."

Make it short, to-the-point and very clear.

If you're content marketing, make it easy for your editor to respond by including a Self Addressed Stamped Envelope (or SASE for short). If you don't include a SASE, in all likelihood you will not be contacted by the publication you just queried. Plus you'll look like a rank amateur.

The Letter's Done!

That about covers it! All you have to do is sign your name and add a P.S. if you have something irresistible to add to your query.

P.S. I've just been commissioned to do an article on XXX for the XXX issue of XXXX Magazine. Be sure to watch for it!

P.S. Remember, you can make your writing sparkle, market smart, and craft the writing career you've always dreamed of when you surf to <http://FilbertPublishing.com>. You'll get exclusive VIP offers as well as the free booklet, "Power Queries" when you sign on. Long time readers call Writing Etc. an "indispensable resource."

Most readers skim your headline, then head straight to the P.S. So if you include a P.S., make it strong. Make it reinforce your credibility.

Now you need to proofread, proofread, and proofread. Look for typos. Look for unneeded words. Are your sentences concise or wordy?

Fire up your computer and work on a novel or two. Draft a sales letter and try to draw some corporate writing your way. Become a writer for hire and write for people in your community. Get going writing a nonfiction book.

You're a writer. You may as well earn a few bucks while you're working on something you enjoy! The possibilities are endless.

I hope these tips help you write a stronger query that will attract tons of writing assignments. And if you're looking for more guidance on how to make a living as a writer be sure to check out "Jumpstart Your Writing Career – and Snag Paying Assignments." I think you'll enjoy it.

And if you're a lover of romantic suspense, be sure to check out <http://BethAnnErickson.com>. I've got some great deals going on over there including interactive e-serials, discount pricing, fiction journal entries as well as some (strangely popular) cancer updates.

Good luck – keep in touch. Let me know how it's going! Contact me here:

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<http://writersmarket.com>

Other Books By Beth Ann Erickson

Beth Ann Erickson has been freelancing professionally since 1995 and has studied advertising/marketing since 1999. She launched Filbert Publishing in 2001.

All her titles are available at <http://FilbertPublishing.com>:

Letters to Freelance Writers: Insider Secrets to Effective Shoestring Marketing, Managing a Winning Mindset, and Thriving in Any Economy Volume 1, Volume 2, and Volume 3.

How to (Really) Live 24 Hours a Day: And Truly Live the Miracle That is Called "Life." Book and Workbook Revised and Edited by Beth Ann Erickson

Jumpstart Your Writing Career: And Snag Paying Assignments

101 No Cost (and Low Cost) Techniques to Turbo Charge Your Writing Career

Filbert's Fast Guide to Getting Published Without Falling for Scams, Hooks, Lines, or Sinkers

She writes advertising for local, national, and international clients and has three novels in print, "TGV" "The Almach" and "Heart Songs."

She also has various audio programs and meditation CDs created specifically for freelancers.

Her websites include:

<http://FilbertPublishing.com>
<http://BethAnnErickson.com>

Beth is also the editor of Writing Etc. the free e-magazine that'll help you make your writing sparkle, teach you to market smart, and give you the tools

to get published. You'll receive the e-booklet "Power Queries" when you subscribe. Info's here: <http://FilbertPublishing.com>

You can reach Beth at Beth@BethAnnErickson.com

Upcoming Titles

Murder on First Trilogy

A brutal small town murder turns out to be far more complicated than originally thought. Small town life is simple? Ha. In your dreams.

Murder on First, arriving in 2016.

Murder on First Journal

Discover the inner workings of a novel. Find out how it's constructed, where ideas come from, and how each scene is knit together to form a complete story.

But this journal is more than that... it's a personal journey from a serious cancer diagnosis, healing, and rebuilding a writing career after far too long out of the public eye (cancer treatment is rough). While the future is uncertain, every healthy day is definitely a gift.

You can get a sneak peek at the Murder on First Journal when you become a VIP reader at <http://BethAnnErickson.com>. Just sign up using the form on the right sidebar. :)