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Top 20 Copy Guidelines

1. Avoid borrowed interest. That is, don't introduce an unrelated item or concept that isn't essential to your product or offer.

2. Avoid exclamation points. They're fake and obvious.

3. Avoid passive phrases – use present tense.

4. Avoid rhetorical questions.

5. Don't reverse out copy unnecessarily.

6. Eliminate abstractions that do not convey a benefit: "convenience," "flexibility," or "comprehensive."

7. Eliminate "We" — it's self-centered and suggests attitude.

8. Include only one idea per paragraph.

9. Include specific reply instructions.

10. Simplify "institutionalisms," e.g., change "upon further notice..." to "soon."

11. Start letters, emails with "You."

12. Tell readers what they get in the headline.

13. Tell readers how to get it in the subhead.

14. Try to use a serif font in body copy (offline, Georgia works well online).

15. Use subheads and bullet points to break up copy.

16. Use italics sparingly – ok for captions, the word "*fast,*" etc.

17. Use short paragraphs (2 or 3 sentences).

18. Use short sentences (10 words or less).

19. Use short words (1 and 2 syllables).

20. Use transitions between ideas – but, so, and, also, because.

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Top 20 Design Guidelines

1. Avoid borrowed interest. That is, don't introduce an unrelated photos or images that aren't essential to your product or offer.

2. Illustrate benefits. Photos and images should support the main message and/or benefits described in the copy.

3. Use the Reverse Pyramid layout – major headlines at top with visuals.

4. Make response devices look redeemable and authentic.

5. Don't reverse out copy unnecessarily.

6. Minimize stacked headlines – aim for 3 lines at most.

7. If you use reverse type, use it in heads or subheads ONLY.

8. Consider faded background color behind copy – light blue or tan can help readability.

9. Use white space so the page is scannable.

10. Create a visual hierarchy on the page – Use font size/color to tell readers what's most important and where their eye should start reading.

11. Use directionals to guide readers.

12. Use boxes sparingly — they are barriers to the eye and.

13. Use italics sparingly – captions, the word *"fast,"* etc.

14. Pay special attention to kerning and leading — people reader words not letters, paragraphs not lines.

15. Use 12- or 13-point body copy — smaller sizes can be difficult to read.

16. Avoid long lines — (10 and 12 words at most).

17. Avoid ALL UPPER CASE — it's more difficult to read.

18. Use serif typefaces for body copy.

19. Let one element dominate the page — headline, graphic, visual, etc.

20. Don't use periods in subheads — it's the writer's equivalent of a stop sign.