**COPY** BEST PRACTICES

**Writing Best Practices**

**General**

**Start with what your audience wants to hear.**

* Not what you want to say.

**Use the provided copy templates.**

* Templates are the primary means of maintaining consistent and up-to-date practices.
* Templates contain important standards to guide writers’ adherence to HS’ needs.
* Writers needn’t spend time on formatting, as the Templates are pre-formatted.
* Templates stay pristine; they do not mutate into error-laden documents, a common problem when using non-templates as templates.
* Templates provide maximum opportunity to maximize quality copy.

**Unless otherwise advised, write conversationally.**

* Specifically, prioritize dialog between “you” and “us.”
* Try to reflect normal conversation speech patterns.
* Be aware that there are occasions when a more formal, less conversation approach is more appropriate.

**Write easy language, directive, friendly, and with an active voice.**

* Avoid passive language where and as reasonable.

**Avoid overuse of common words.**

* Use synonyms where possible, and avoid reaching too far.
* It is not always possible or appropriate to do this.

**Use contractions, sentence fragments and conjunctions (“and,” “but”) to start sentences, but only carefully and sparingly.**

* Yes, they help with making the copy conversationally, but have been historically problematic, with clients regarding them not as good marketing but lack of professionalism.

**For B2C copy, minimize (or avoid) the use of the word “patient.”**

* People generally don’t think of themselves as patients.
* Use “people,” “individuals,” or (best of all) “you.”

**Write Headlines and Subheads that address benefit to “me” (the audience).**

* Subheads are needed to break up the copy, provide “signposts” to the content of the pieces, and express key parts of the sales argument for those who skim or only read Heads/Subs.
* Do not simply use “labels” to introduce/describe a section, topic, list or paragraph.
* *EXAMPLE: Instead of “Elbow Surgery,” write something like “Precision Elbow Surgery to Get You Back to Competitive Play Fast.”*
* Heads/Subs should be clear and compelling.
* The importance of this Best Practice cannot be overstated.

**Subheads should pertain to the content below it.**

* And the body copy should service the topic that the subhead asserts.

**Consistency is king.**

* Avoid disparate presentation of like items
* Things like: doctor biographies, case studies, addresses (“Street” vs. “St.”), etc.

**Remember that people absorb information differently.**

* Some will read only the Heads and Subs. Some will pick and choose based on the Heads/Subs. Others will read every word, and still others will skim or read out of order or time.
* We need to get the Client’s message to all of these people. They need to be able to get the story even if they skim, just read the Heads/Subs, etc.

**Include instructions and clarifiers in Copy Document.**

* This includes what things are, where photos/logos go, how you think certain parts of the copy should be treated, layout ideas, etc.
* This is for the purpose of maximizing efficiency for Account Manager reviews and speed/accuracy of the work of Designers and Developers.
* Instructions/Clarifiers should be in BLUE type. (All black type will be the actual words in the project.)
* *EXAMPLES:* [Logo], FORM:, BUTTON:, SIDEBAR:, [Doctor Photo], [Recommend these be presented side-by-side.].

**Websites**

**Sr. Copywriter develops Website Outline (Site Map).**

**Website Outline (Site Map) must be kept current.**

* As changes in site architecture, page order, sections, URL name, etc. occur, they must be reflected in the Web Outline (Site Map).
* Each time the Web Outline (Site Map) is revised, it gets a new draft number, and the file gets shared with all who are involved.

**Nav name, page name, URL, slug and should all have parity to maximize organic SEO potential.**

* We can’t have a “Why Moreland” Nav option take visitors to a page whose name is “About Us” with a URL that is simply “/about/.”

**Messaging should be more promotional than informational.**

* This is *generally* true, as HS primarily creates marketing websites. However, even on a marketing site, informing visitors often is vital.
* Certain pages will by necessity have an Info/Promo mix that has a greater Info presence, perhaps even being Info-dominant.

**All copy must be unique.**

* Literally, it should be one-of-a-kind. No complete sentences can appear anywhere on the site more than once.
* No copy can be identical (or even overly similar) to copy found anywhere else on the Web.

**Teaser Boxes (like on a Home Page) should include copy.**

* Give users a reason to take the action that the box represents. Need messaging, not just a label and picture.
* There are occasional exceptions to this.

**Headlines and Subheads should still be marketing-minded while also being search-minded.**

* Generally, all HS copy should have Headlines and Subheads that address the needs/interests of the audience.
* But on the Web, search is an additional priority.
* Keywords should be forward in the Head/Sub.
* This cannot be achieved with each Head or Sub but, rather, with all Heads/Subs across the site. Some will be both search- and benefit-oriented, some will focus on search, some will focus on benefits/marketing. It’s spread across the site.

**All “content pages” should have a Call to Action with phone number.**

* Exceptions exist, but not often.
* Action Buttons should be specific and discrete.
* Not “Learn More” but “How Lithotripsy Helps You.”

**Provider biographies should be consistent, meet readers’ diverse needs (quote plus creds), and deliver credentials quickly/succinctly.**

* Self-explanatory.
* Writer responsibility for all words extends to Meta Tag and Meta Description.
* Keyword should be forward (or first) in Meta Description and definitely first in Meta Tag
* Mind the character counts (including spaces). Description not to exceed 160 characters; Tag not to exceed 60 characters.

**Process Best Practices**

**Writers are responsible for all copy.**

* Whatever it is, if it’s written, it’s a Copy responsibility. Calls to Action, addresses, doctor credentials, on-page contact forms, sidebars, etc. If it has words, it’s us.
* Writers are not responsible for obtaining all of these assets, but they are responsible for informing the Accout Manager that they are needed.

**Keep lists to help ensure optimal communication and product quality.**

* This can be anything that matters or *might* matter. Questions for the Client. Questions for the Account Manager. Topics to research. Copywriter decisions. Assets needed from the client. Ideas to discuss internally. Things to point out to the client. Pages/pieces that cannot be written (and why).
* The importance of list-keeping cannot be overstated.

**Always proof your own copy.**

* While this is often done “while writing,” this Best Practice is specifically referring to a complete proofing read after completion of the copy.
* It’s recommended to get up and walk away from the piece after completion and before proofing. It can make a difference.

**All copy is provided to the Account Manager (or Sr. Copywriter) for review.**

* In essence, the Writer is a wheel spoke and the Account Manager is the hub. All Copy work goes through the AM.
* For new writers, the Sr. Copywriter will see the copy first, reviewing it and providing revisions to help the Writer become familiar with HS’ marketing philosophy and copy Best Practices.

**Writers review QA proofing and make QA changes.**

* Writers need to know what errors they’re making and what fixes Proofers advise.
* Proofers lack knowledge of Clients’ preferences and Writers’ challenges/choices; certain QA revisions are ill-advised.
* Writers often make QA changes differently than a Proofer advises, with marketing in mind.

**Writers make Client revisions.**

* Writers need to know Clients’ copy sensibilities and preferences in order to implement them.
* Clients’ revisions are often inelegant, awkward, self-contradictory, contrary or disorganizing to the messaging goals, etc.
* Clients tell us they trust that we’re exercising our expertise. As with Designers and ART and Developers and WEB, and AMs with AM-ing, Writers possess the COPY expertise, especially regarding the challenges faced and choices made during the writing.

**Healthcare Success leads with its best practices, explains its recommendations if Clients query, then does as client wishes.**

* Clients are purchasing our best practices and expertise.
* Clients receive these, but they don’t always see it, so they often request revisions without knowing how they might go against best practices or present problems.
* Client still deserves our expertise and our recommendations explained.
* After that, the customer is always right.

**Writers provide reasoning for unmade or differently made revisions.**

* Writers make changes differently or don’t make certain changes, always with specific reasons.
* Reasoning is oft-requested by AMs.
* This isn’t a best practice for all clients and tends to be reserved for those that demonstrate a need/desire for it.
* Writers’ and overall Agency efficiency is improved by AMs being more copy-aware/-capable.

**Minimize research time by acquiring maximum of input info and assets before expending Copy labor.**

* Copy spends significant time on research.
* Everything provided before research begins reduces the time involved in finding/absorbing that information.
* Prime Example: Interview notes from AM. These allow the writer to have not just their own notes but the notes through the filter of the account’s leader. Important insights, priorities, emphases, directives, etc. from the AM would otherwise (1) not come or (2) come at a time that would force cycles of touch/revision. Importantly, AM Interview notes compel the AM to consider these insights, priorities, emphases, etc. when everything is hot-fresh (immediately following the interview). It is less efficient to think about these things at Copy Done, when it’s not fresh in mind and would require an avoidable cycle of changes.

**Minimize confusion, redos, errors, misunderstandings…internally and with clients.**

* Confusion, redos, errors and misunderstandings occur…
* …and consume Copy labor

**Minimize number of times touching a task or project.**

* Every action is labor time, no matter how small.
* Many, many actions can be combined or eliminated, bringing significant compound reduction in labor time.
* Prime Example: Changes to Web Copy on a Dev or Live site. It takes more time to logon to, navigate through and wait for Word Press than to make a simple copy change. So making copy changes only to make them again wastes significant time. Sending partial changes knowing others are coming is therefore a disproportionate consumer of labor.

**Minimize number of revisions.**

* Revisions occur.
* Unnecessary and/or unwise revisions are common.
* Time spent revising is time spent not writing.

**Maximize topic and task specificity in TO DOs, minimizing need for questions, requests for attachments, etc.**

* Time is spent looking for needed details, searching for most recent files, asking questions because of incomplete TO DOs.

**Minimize or eliminate errors of lack of communication.**

* *EXAMPLE: Copy changed by a different department, and Copy changes it back thinking it is wrong because it was not notified otherwise.*
* Labor has been expended unnecessarily unmaking and remaking revisions that were requested without Copy’s awareness.
* Minimizing errors and lack of communication is a universal quality measure.

**Minimize time spent cutting the volume of copy.**

* For copy that is not space-limited or limited by client preference, less cutting = less time spent.

**Minimize support-content obligations, such as rationales for particular choices, detailing which changes were made or not and why.**

* Time spent on these tasks directly reduces time spent writing copy.
* Our account managers are able to provide much of this rationale.