

# 31 TIPS FOR WRITING COPY



- Describe sights, sounds, smells, actions, reactions.
- Use direct quotes.
- Attribute all quotes.
- Use specific facts.
- Use vivid verbs.
- Use plain language.
  - Say “he said” instead of “he stated.”
  - In quote attribution, use “said,” not commented, observed, stated, yelled, etc.
- Use precise words.
- Write to the emotions. Include the senses.
- Use active voice.
  - (Passive voice) The ball was thrown by the quarterback.
  - (Active voice) The quarterback threw the ball.
- Make positive statements.
- Write in the third person.
- Write in past tense.
- Tie your conclusion to your lead.
- Proofread and correct all spelling and grammar errors.
- Have a copy read-around to get input from others in your class.
- Avoid writing anything that can tell the story of any other high school somewhere else.
- Don’t use dates/labels:
  - The 2013-2014 Northstar High School Band.
  - This year, the varsity cheerleaders did many new and exciting routines.
  - This year, the 2013-2014 Lady Gators at Northstar High School...
- Avoid using clichés such as:
  - Purpose
    - The purpose of learning history is to find out what happened in the past.
  - Goals
    - The goals of the English Department were to teach...
  - During
    - During the year, the students of Northstar High School were interested in...
  - Hard work, dedication, team unit.
- Worthless Quote
  - “English was a lot of fun. We did lots of different things.”
- Yes/No Question
  - Do you know what happened in Science this year?
- Saying nothing
  - Lots of new things happened this year at Northstar High School. The students were together more than ever and they had more school spirit than ever.
- Editorializing
  - Don’t write your own opinion. Include facts and quotes in your story instead.
- Avoid writing the obvious.
  - Get behind the scenes with in-depth reporting and research.

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- Never use these words in your yearbook:
  - Numerous
  - Various
  - Many
  - Some
  - Several
  - Few
  - A lot
  - Not many
- Spell out numbers one through nine.
  - Use Arabic numbers above nine.
  - Spell out numbers that begin your copy.
- Never use the name of the school, its initials or mascot in any copy or caption, except in competitive situations.
- Report about this year. Never predict anything about next year.
  - Never let editorial terms creep into copy.
  - Avoid using words such as “beautiful,” “spectacular,” “wonderful,” “seemingly,” “apparently” or “awesome.”
- Capitalize all proper nouns.
  - Do not classify students into different years or classes (Mary Jones, ‘04 or Junior Matt Dell)
- Do not invert sentences or verbals. Use active voice, not passive voice.
  - Use “The play was memorable.” Don’t use “Memorable was the word for the play.”
  - Use “The quarterback threw a touchdown.” Don’t use “The touchdown was thrown by the quarterback.”
- Learn the difference between “its” and “it’s.”
  - Its is possessive. “The dog wagged its tail.”
  - It’s is the contraction for it is. “It’s going to be a great day.”
- Learn subject-verb agreement and use it correctly.
  - “Everyone said they enjoyed the show,” is incorrect. “Everyone” is singular and “they” is plural.

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