

# How to Work with Copywriters

AN ARTISANAL COPY MINIBOOK

*to Create Truly Stellar Content*

# Hi.

We're Artisanal Copy—a nimble collective of writers and editors driven, above all else, to help businesses create great content.

Not okay content, not mediocre content, but truly stellar content.

Over the years, we've discovered that the best content stems from seamless collaboration between client and copywriter, and that relationship starts long before the first words hit the page.

Ready to take your content from “meh” to marvelous?

## SECTIONS:

CHOOSING A COPYWRITER

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The tricky part is that the “right” agency is not one-size-fits-all.

# Before You Begin: Understand What You Need—and What You Already Have

A successful copywriter/client relationship begins with choosing the right freelance writer or copywriting agency.

To find the perfect fit for your business, read on.

Already have a great copywriter or agency? Kudos! Skip ahead 3 pages to *First Project Prep* for masses of wisdom on making that partnership work better than ever.

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# Gain Clarity Around Your In-House Strengths

Maybe you've got a few rock star writers already on payroll—great! If that's the case, your copywriter search might actually be a *copyeditor* search, a hunt for someone who can check and polish copy that's already working.

Or maybe you have some staff who can write well, but they're not quite where they should be. You might consider an agency capable of doing lots of work at the beginning and then training up your current team, eventually handing them the reins entirely.

Want to outsource all of it? No problem—some companies prefer to work with an external marketing firm *and* a copywriting agency.

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# Assess Strengths of Potential Writing Partners

Regardless of what you need—be it pithy headline proficiency or persnickety citation savvy—ask for samples up front that demonstrate their prowess.

Once you've got a handle on your in-house capabilities, take a long look at potential writers' specialties and how they align with your needs.

Do you need to focus on creating demand? SEO? Maybe you need someone great at writing blog posts or succinct website copy? Be sure to inquire about their current and future bandwidth; the last thing you need is to decide upon a writer or agency, and then find out later that they can't handle your volume of work.

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# Prepping for Your First Project Together

Yay! You've chosen your copywriting partner. Now what? Get things off on the right foot with these tips.

Know thy own business—who you are (and who you want to be).

If you already have an established voice for your company, make sure your agency or writer has a copy of your brand guidelines. However, if your business is not quite there yet, don't panic. Gather advertisements, tweets, blog posts, and other content you've produced that represent

your company's personality, as well as external examples of content and social media snippets that align to your brand.

Next, make a list of any critical industry terms as well as their definitions and descriptions of your products or services. **The more information your copywriters have to start with, the better (and more consistent) your copy will be.**

# Outline Project Goals the Right Way, Right Away.

(Hint: It Involves a Conversation.)

Ah, the brief—that short document that kicks off most creative projects, which can range from being extremely helpful to almost useless. Clients can spend inordinate amounts of time creating these, and still not be sure that they included the right information.

While writing a brief is important, let go of the notion that it is the “end-all, be-all” source of information. **Your writers do need clear,**

**detailed information (and lots of it), but it should come from a combination of three sources: the brief, an initial phone meeting (aka kickoff call)\*, and supporting background information\*\*.**

\* For those of you wondering if you really need to hop on the phone first, the answer is almost always yes (or at least, 99 times out of 100). A short, direct conversation with the right people can avoid so much unnecessary confusion and revisions.

\*\* How much background information should you provide? If it feels like too much, you’re probably right on target. It’s infinitely easier for copywriters to scan through masses of material than guess about key information.

Key points to cover in the brief:

- Why you need this piece
- Who you hope will read it
- What action the reader should take
- How many characters or words are allowed
- When you need it complete

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# Determine the Type of Project

Copywriting is different than copyediting, but many people get them mixed up. Copywriting generally involves writing something, or part of something, from scratch. Editing is different.

**A fundamental question we writers and editors have before starting on an editing project is how deep to go. (There are levels.)**

Do you only want us to catch any grammatical errors? Or are you open to bigger changes and want us to create the best version possible? More often than not, this decision is dictated by time or budget constraints.

Get a break down on the difference between a light copyedit, a heavy copyedit and a rewrite on the next page.

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## Types of Editing Projects:

### Light Copyedit

Editor is checking for spelling, grammar and other glaring errors. They also might provide a few suggested cuts or simple rearrangements to increase clarity and understanding. This is the fastest type of editing. Choose this option when you are confident that the base content is already pretty good (i.e. written by a fairly strong writer who just needs a second set of eyes), if you are in a hurry, or your budget is limited.

### Heavy Copyedit

In this case, the editor is checking for the major errors mentioned to the left, but also opportunities to improve the flow of the piece. They will suggest ways to reorder sections of copy and provide ideas on how to improve the meaning and story.

### Rewrite

These types of requests might start out as an editing ask, but then either the client or editor realizes after a first read-through that more is required. Although not starting from scratch (as in a new copywriting project), this would be taking some base content and writing new sections to help fill in gaps in understanding or to provide new direction. It's important to note that writing takes more time than editing and that additional background (in the form of source documents or interviews) might be necessary.

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# Decide on Deadlines and Bandwidth

Use rushes sparingly.

Emergencies will arise, but constant rush requests indicate poor planning more than anything.

Different agencies require different lead times, and this also varies based on time of year, workload fluctuations and other factors. Ask for what you need, and be realistic. There will likely be few revisions before the final copy is set, so don't set the deadline for the first draft the day you actually want it published. (This happens more than you'd think.)

If your business needs a lot of content created or edited on very tight deadlines, consider setting up a retainer instead of managing project by project.

# The Revision Process: Where the Magic Happens

The drafts are in and ready for the tweaking that will take them from good to great. This is indeed where the magic happens, but it's also where many collaborations can explode in a puff of smoke.

**Learning how to give useful feedback is the single most important ingredient to consistently arriving at high quality finished pieces of content.** It also happens to be the best way to save time and money, and to sidestep unnecessary headaches.

See the next three pages for the basics of giving feedback—as well as why it is so critical to the final output.

# Say the thing.

Giving feedback doesn't come naturally to anyone—it takes practice.

But being candid and straightforward is better than dancing around something. Writers are quite used to receiving feedback, so be as clear as you can, and don't hold back if something isn't working.

Be specific  
and kind.

# For Feedback: Comments > Rewrites

When giving feedback on a piece of writing, always keep track of changes made and resist the urge to rewrite the copy yourself. Even if you absolutely nail it and arrive at perfect new copy, you are denying the copywriter an opportunity to understand *why* that change was needed.

And if your rewritten section still needs work, you've not only missed that opportunity to gain clarity on why the change was necessary but have added confusion to the process flow. Should the copywriter now

give you feedback for writing the next iteration? Who has the pen, so to speak?

Adding comments to the document is much more constructive. **Comments like “This isn’t working because…” or “Can we elaborate on this point more?” provide fuel for the writer to come back with a much stronger next draft.**

Explain what is not working or why you think that part has fallen short. This type of explanation will not only make

the current piece better but will give the copywriters insight as they work on future pieces for your business.

# The Power of the Positive

Throwing in a few positive comments is extremely helpful when giving feedback. We've noticed that the first instinct for most people is to point out the things that need fixing. It's natural, but don't stop there.

Emphasizing which parts are the strongest is also very valuable—especially for future projects. So pepper in some “I like what you did here!” in the comments. Knowing what your business finds appealing makes it more likely that the writer(s) can repeat that success later.

Don't assume that “no comment” is the same as praise.

(This is true for all human interactions, not just writing feedback.)

# Post-Publication: Don't Stop Learning

The revisions are finished, and your first piece is officially out in the world. Congratulations! But wait—don't just set it out to pasture, learn as much as you can from it.

Use quantitative data to measure what is working. A/B testing and tracking key metrics are invaluable tools. Giving your writers access to that kind of data will help them create even better content next time.

Copywriters often create more than one version of a headline or email subject line as part of our normal writing process, so ask to see those and test them out.

Having a better understanding of what actually works for your unique audience is infinitely useful.

# Developing a Relationship: The Payoffs That Come with Playing the Long Game

Have you ever avoided starting with a new therapist because you didn't feel like getting into your whole life story all over again? Granted, copywriting is not therapy (when done correctly!), but there's that same feeling of starting over when you have to brief a new copywriter or agency on your business.

Choosing your copywriter is like choosing any other skilled professional: you wouldn't decide on your doctor solely based on price, or your plumber on availability. You choose wisely and once you find someone amazing, you don't let go.

Working with the same writers over time leads to more consistent, quality content produced in less time.





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tell better stories.

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