

Quick Tip:

The AWAI Peer Review System

By Will Newman, Freelance Copywriter

Michael Masterson developed the AWAI peer review system to help copywriters get usable input for improving their copy. It is a way – as Michael said at this year's Bootcamp – to avoid vague criticism that not only doesn't improve the copy but also often leaves the copywriter's ego ground in the dust.

The process has proven to be *the most effective way* to get B- or C-level copy to B+ or A- level. Fast.

I've been fortunate to be on both sides of this process: as a copywriter being reviewed and as a facilitator.

I used to dread critique sessions. (Who doesn't?) But I now look forward to peer reviews of my copy because I know I'll leave them with meaningful suggestions and not something like "This doesn't work at all."

I've seen peer reviews work for a wide range of copywriters, from the absolute novice to the most experienced.

But to work, they must be done correctly. Here's how:

1.

The Peer Review Support Group

Five or six people is ideal. Don't hunt for the best or most skilled copywriters. You want honest, gut-level responses, not expert opinions. Form your group from copywriters you met at Bootcamp or on our online forum.

2.

The Purpose of the Peer Review

- To get a quick but realistic idea of whether the copy is working, and then to provide suggestions for improving it.
- To do so *without judging or criticizing*. This is VERY important.
- And to do so in ways that duplicate how the prospect responds to a sales letter ... on a gut level, without analyzing it.

3.

Peer Review "Rules"

- No negative comments. Reviewers should avoid saying things like "I didn't like XXX because it doesn't grab me and it's very weak."
- No explanations. The writer of the copy being reviewed is not given the opportunity to say things like "I did that because I wanted to ..."

4.

The Actual Process: The Headline

- A facilitator is chosen to help move things along.
- The first copywriter reads his own headline.
- The rest of the group immediately rates the headline from 1 (low) to 4 (high) based on their gut level response.
- The scores are added and averaged.
- An average score of 3.2 or above indicates the headline doesn't need changing, but the copywriter being reviewed can opt to get suggestions to strengthen it.
- A headline below 3.2 is analyzed for ways to improve it.
- To get recommendations for improving it, the facilitator asks: "Are there any *copy specific* suggestions for improving this headline?"
- "Copy specific" means no comments. What you're looking for is something like, "I suggest Joe say '\$6.8 trillion instead of 'trillions of dollars.'"
- The facilitator then asks each participant (except the copywriter being reviewed) if the suggestion makes the headline stronger, weaker, or makes no difference.
- The facilitator continues asking for copy specific suggestions until nobody has anything else to offer.
- The copywriter does *not* have to take these suggestions. But if most of the participants agree with a suggestion for improving the headline, he should strongly consider it. (Getting a suggestion that the whole group pretty much agrees with is like having your prospect talk directly to you.)
- If the group cannot come up with copy specific suggestions for the headline, they should then check to make sure (1) it has a big and deep promise and (2) it shows the Four U's (Urgent, Unique, Useful, Ultra-specific). If the headline falls short in any of these areas, they should be able to come up with copy specific ways to improve it.

5.

The Actual Process: The Lead

- Same process and ratings as for the headline – but the procedure for getting suggestions for improvements is slightly different.
- If, after the average score is calculated, the lead scores below 3.2, the facilitator asks: "Is there some piece of copy, some words or phrases from further down in the sales letter, that you think would make the lead stronger if moved higher or to the top?"

- If the group cannot come up with any useful suggestions, they should then check to make sure the lead shows the Four U's and/or speaks to the prospect as a real individual. If it doesn't, they should be able to come up with copy specific ways to improve it.

The first time you subject your copy to this process, it may be a bit awkward to have to rein in your desire to respond to the group's suggestions by giving explanations for what you did. But when it's over, you will walk away feeling that you have concrete ideas for improving your copy. *And* you will feel better about yourself as a copywriter.

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6 Responses to "Quick Tip: The AWAI Peer Review System"

The "Restaurant Letter" is my first letter. I would like to have it reviewed. I believe it was posted on April 22nd , 2014.
My e-mail address is :mike4102@aol.com

Michael Reiter – over a year ago

Do the AWAI personnel reviews come from a group of reviewers who have a consensus of opinion like the peer reviews, or are they from one reviewer? I'm still trying to understand the whole process in order to get my revisions to reflect better copy. And also to understand how I might become a "peer reviewer". Thanks for the support!

Deb

From Deb xoxo – over a year ago

The process is terrific, promotes constructive and creative feedback; avoids confusion, bruises and lacerations. How do I go about getting my restaurant letter reviewed?

Bob Cohn – over a year ago

Does anyone know how long it takes to get a post reviewed after it is posted?

Jerry Hansen – over a year ago

The more I read, the clearer it becomes, being a professional writer takes time, commitment, effort and persistency. I guess some things in life don't change no matter what profession your in? I'm very impressed with the people and program at AWAI.

Ikan C Clearly – over a year ago

I just read this article, and just subscribed to the discussion. I don't understand how this works..how do I access the discussion - and how do I know when/if someone responds to my comment(s)? Also - can anyone tell me how to find, access, join a peer review group? Or do I have to create my own?

Pamela Miller – over a year ago

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