



COPY HACKERS BOOK SAMPLE

The Dark Art of Writing Long-Form Sales Pages

BY JOANNA WIEBE

6 Genres of Long-Form Sales Pages

When an expert copywriter first sits down to write a long-form sales page, she doesn't necessarily think, *Hmm, what genre of sales page should I choose to write in?*

She doesn't look at a list like what I'm about to show you and randomly choose one of the six genres on it.

Nor do I expect that that's what any copy hacker reading this book will do.

Although you may, and that would be perfectly fine.

I haven't seen long-form genres discussed anywhere else, in spite of the fact that it's one of the things I wondered about most when I first started writing direct response. I was looking for a framework for my pages, and, as I stumbled upon them and added examples of them to my swipe files, I started referring to them as genres – just like literary and film genres, such as “horror”, “thriller” and “paranormal”.

A “genre” in this case describes a category of long-form copy that has form, style and *subject matter* in common.

The 6 genres I've run across most frequently are:

1. The Open Letter
2. The Personal Letter
3. The Reluctant Hero (and all “origin stories”)
4. The Special Report
5. The World Is Wrong
6. Align With Us

Genres aren't headlines. And they aren't hooks.

They're simply tried-and-true frameworks that any copy hacker can use to shape their long-form copy.

Each genre invites and demands a certain style and, in many cases, works particularly well for certain products and audiences.

Sometimes you'll fall into a genre by accident – the words will start flowing, and you'll discover you're writing as, say, The Reluctant Hero. (BTW, The Reluctant Hero is *by far* the most commonly used genre today.)

Other times, you'll be stumped about where to begin, and you'll be happy to have this list of genres to rely on to get your creative juices flowing.

Let me tell you more about them. Please keep this in mind: this is not an exhaustive list, and not every long-form page uses what one might identify as a genre... but beginners should.

THE OPEN LETTER

The Open Letter is a genre that presents you as an objective, trustworthy voice on the subject the letter will discuss. As you can imagine, being perceived as both objective and trustworthy can go a long way toward helping your readers believe you and consider opening their wallets.

Just don't abuse it.

Let me repeat that: **don't abuse your trust**. Don't trash your credibility. Don't offend your reader or their intelligence.

(When I recommended in the introduction that you *think* like a snake oil salesman, I did so to help you break through mental barriers around seeing your product as a cure for X. I do *not* recommend you stroll through your time as a long-form writer by *always* thinking that way. You'll just end up feeling gross about yourself and turning peeps off. Not cool.)

An open letter is great when you have a specific market you want to address directly.

The format of the open letter generally calls for a headline that goes like so:

An Open Letter to Talented Artists Who Are Sick and Tired of Snobby Galleries Robbing Them Blind

From there, you may have a subhead that expands on that headline, compelling the reader to read your salutation – which might read, “Dear Underpaid Talent” – and onward, in a style of writing that will feel like a letter directly from you to your audience.

David Ogilvy famously wrote an open letter for *Holiday* magazine, for which he was paid with 2 antique china lamps. Here’s his headline:

An open letter to Ted Patrick from 12 of Holiday’s 3,263,000 readers

In 2011, when I was Intuit Global’s lead writer, I used the Open Letter style on a long-form landing page for Intuit Payments (then called Intuit Merchant Services). I chose this style because of the environment in which this offer was occurring – that is, there was news happening – and because I wanted to directly address the select group of people who were affected by that new environment.

Here’s the opening for that page:

[Code of Conduct for Merchant Service Providers >>](#)

To Business Owners Who Are Thinking of Switching From Moneris®

Until June 30, 2011, you can leave your Moneris contract PENALTY-FREE.¹
That means Moneris won’t charge you any cancellation or related contract-termination fees when you cancel before June 30. You’re free to switch to *any* provider you choose.

You see, as my letter described, Intuit’s competitor had just fallen victim to some rough PR after they’d failed to meet the Code of Conduct for merchant service providers. Canada’s national paper *The Globe and Mail* had written about their blunder – making it public knowledge and giving us freedom to write about it – and the competitor responded to public disapproval by allowing all of their users to leave their contract, penalty-free, by X date.

Suddenly, people who'd been bound by a contract were free to choose!

This is a competitor's *dream*.

But we didn't just want to swoop in and scoop 'em up. We respected these prospects too much.

I realized it would be important to prove that we followed the Code of Conduct to the letter – that we were never going to do to them what others freely did. How better to prove that than by presenting ourselves as an objective, trustworthy voice on the matter?

The Open Letter was the perfect fit.

I'm not at liberty to disclose what came of that long-form sales page, but I can say that we exceeded the forecast by some 70%.

(Imagine hoping you were going to get 1000 customers... and then actually getting 1700 customers! You'd probably think you were on to something. And you'd probably be right.)

A close cousin of the open letter is the **Letter from the President**.

This sort of letter also presents you as an objective, trustworthy voice to a large group of people, but it adds the extra oomph of authority that comes with reading the words of a highly reputable, powerful – and, let's be honest, stinking rich – owner or leader of a company. An individual with a *name*, no less. And even a signature!

Feels good to be addressed by someone like that, don't you think?

Letters from the president give the sense of something important going on, and suddenly you get this twinge in your gut that says, "You should pay attention to this."

With a letter from the president, the reader imagines this well-dressed, greying person pensively staring out the window of some big, impressive corner office on the fiftieth floor of a New York City building.

Something's on his mind.

Something's bothering him... and it has been for a while.

Now he's decided to put pen to paper – if only to reach one or two people out there. If only to reach *you*.

As an example of a letter from the president, here's an advertisement by Louis Engel for Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Beane. It pulled 10,000 responses to the offer, which was buried at the end of 6,540 words (proving, once again, that long-form is powerful). Pay attention to the box with the headline, "Why We Are Publishing This Information".

ADVERTISEMENT ADVERTISEMENT ADVERTISEMENT

What everybody ought to know

About This Stock And Bond Business

Some plain talk about a simple business that often sounds complicated.

WHY WE ARE PUBLISHING THIS INFORMATION

A little while ago we were talking with the editor of a big national magazine, a well-informed man. He said that he had never done business with a broker because he was afraid he wouldn't understand the "lingo they talk."

Since we are brokers, you can imagine that was something of a shock . . . made us think.

The financial business *does* use a lot of specialized words, but there really isn't anything complicated or mysterious about what those words *mean*. Because we've used them so long and so frequently, we've just assumed that everybody understood them.

That has been our mistake. And a big mistake. For if people don't understand what stocks and bonds are, they aren't likely to invest their money in them.

"So what?" you ask. Well, here's "what".

If people do not invest their funds in securities, American business and American government will not have the capital they need for growth—for new products, new plants, new jobs. That capital can come from just one place: People. Not just a few people with great fortunes—there aren't many of them any more—but from millions of people.

MERRILL LYNCH,
PIERCE, FENNER & BEANE

is largely determined by one factor—earnings. That includes what the company has earned (its past record), what it is earning (its present state of health), and what it *might* earn (its prospects for the future).

So you see it's not just a matter of figures. It's a matter of facts . . . knowledge . . . judgment. How aggressive is the company? How good is its management? How popular are its products? What part of earnings will have to be paid out as preferred stock dividends or bond interest? After all, these *must* be paid first, and what is available for common stockholders depends on how much is left.

Then you have to look outside the company and consider the whole industry in which it operates. Is its future bright? (The buggy industry once offered many good investments.) And what about competitors? Are they in better shape than your company? Might they take the market away from Typical Manufacturing?

Finally, you have to consider general business factors. For instance, will rising costs of labor and raw materials pinch your company?

There are just some of the questions to which the intelligent investor wants answers so that he can form a reliable opinion of what his stock is likely to be worth — *tomorrow*.

Investment values constantly change. That's why this firm has always urged stockholders to "Investigate—then invest," and to keep on investigating afterwards.

Why Do Stock Prices Change?

At any given time, you may not agree with the price at which a particular stock is selling. You may think it is too high or too low.

There is a simple reason for that: What a stock is "worth" is a matter of personal opinion. But what it actually sells at is the sum total of a lot of individual judgments about it. The price of a security is nothing more than the collective expression of all the

to recognize the fact that there's enough of the speculator in even the most conservative investor so that he naturally wants to buy as low as he can and sell as high as he can. He doesn't want to lose an unnecessary dollar by an ill-timed purchase or sale. That's why we are always urging stockholders to make close and continuous study of the markets, for it is only through such study that one can reduce the risks in deciding *when* to buy or sell.

That point is especially important with respect to the *rate* of stock. If you own a stock which has risen to such a high price that you wouldn't consider buying it, it is only good sense that you at least consider selling it.

Too many people make the mistake of buying stocks, then putting them away and forgetting about them. That's bad business. If you want to invest successfully, you've got to pay attention to your securities and be always alert to new investment opportunities. What may have been a good buy last year or even last month may not be a good buy next year or next month.

Like everything else in this world, "securities are perishable."

How Are Stocks Traded?

There are thousands of different stocks and bonds—they are both called securities—but the ones that are bought and sold most frequently are those that are traded on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. The securities of more than 1,100 major companies are "listed" on that Exchange, which means that they have been accepted for trading there.

All buying and selling on the Exchange is done between the hours of 10 A.M. and 3 P.M., New York time, Monday through Friday, and 10 A.M. to noon on Saturdays except in the summer.

What is the New York Stock Exchange? Physically, it is a large area, about two-thirds the size of a football field, in the Stock Exchange building at the corner of Wall and Broad Streets in New York City.

includes a return to the dealer in place of a commission. In the end, the dealer may gain or lose on such transactions.

Merrill Lynch will handle over-the-counter transactions either as a principal or an agent (on either a net price or commission basis) *at the customer's request*. If a transaction is handled on a commission basis, it is the policy of this firm to charge commission rates that are even lower than those that now prevail on New York Stock Exchange transactions. If we handle such transactions on a net basis, we believe our price will be as low (if you're buying) or as high (if you're selling) as any you are likely to find. Further, we will trade only those stocks on a *net price* basis whose quality has been approved by our Research Division.

Who May Buy Stocks and Bonds?

Anybody—or perhaps we should say any honest and responsible citizen. For their own protection, brokers have to be sure about the responsibility of their

How to . . .

How Do You Do Business with a Broker?

Here is what actually happens when a customer—let's call him Kenneth Smith—comes into our office, at 70 Pine Street to place an order for a hundred shares of Typical Manufacturing Company.

Mr. Smith goes directly to the desk of the man who regularly handles his business. (We'll call him John Ross.) Ross is registered with the New York Stock Exchange, which means that he is qualified as a man of good character and has passed an examination on the operation of the securities business. He is an employee of ours, with the title in our firm of "account executive." He's a man who

A strong impetus for choosing to write in the Open Letter genre is the arrival of news on a subject close to you. (Headlines that reference timely stories have been shown to perform very well.)

If that's the case for you, then haul ass and read this book already so you can write an open letter of your own!

If it's not, well, maybe one day it will be. And, when that time comes, you'll be armed to leverage it.

THE PERSONAL LETTER

If you're really good at tone – if you have a natural, human tone when you write – the Personal Letter may be your new best friend. The Personal Letter reads very much like a letter you'd get from someone you know well. Or like a heated conversation you might have with a friend.

It assumes – no, it *demands* – personality.

It is generally written in the first-person. And it speaks to one person rather than a larger audience; compare this to the Open Letter, where you're addressing a whole group.

The best way to explain the Personal Letter may be with an example of someone who gets it right. So here goes.

If you've ever bought anything from AppSumo, you've probably been convinced by the copy of Neville Medhora. His stuff relies heavily on tone and personality – which is a great fit for the AppSumo brand and which has, in fact, *shaped* the AppSumo brand into what it is today.

Check out a bit of the personality-filled long copy he wrote for my *Copy Hackers* ebook bundle, when it was featured on [AppSumo](#) (2012):

Whenever you sit down and write something-- an email, a website blurb, a product description, or carrier pigeon letter...

Do you immediately start writing **boring stuff that no one reads?**

It's very possible... and it's VERY possible that it's killing your sales and conversion rates.

Repeat after me:

"My name is Young Sumo-ling... and I'm a sucky-writer-aholic!"

OK good... now that you've admitted it, let's solve this problem:

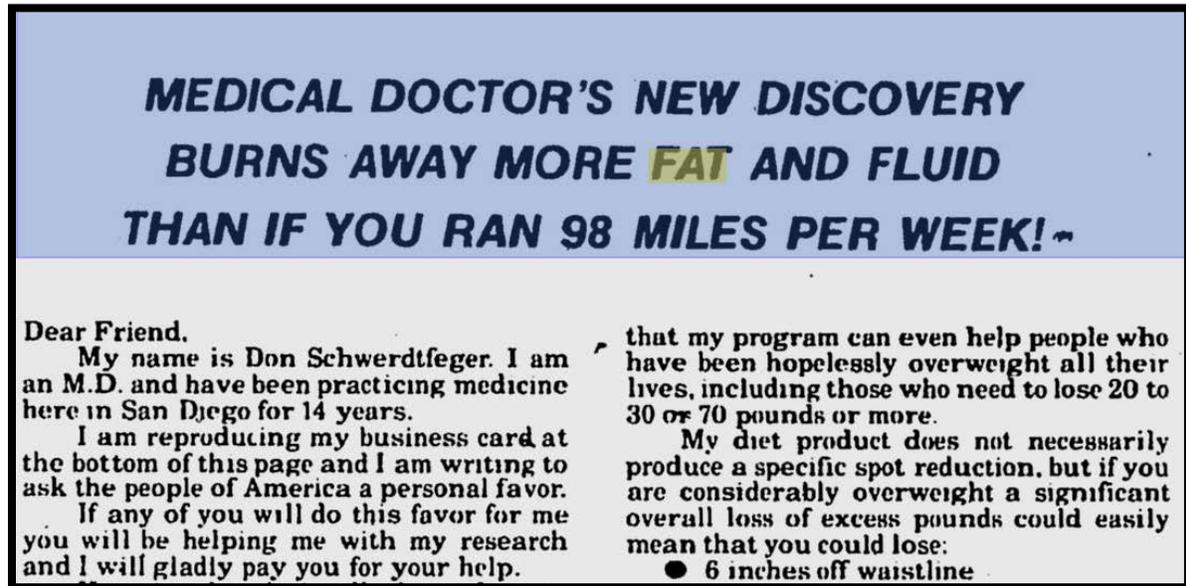
We've got your copywriting therapist here to help you. Her name is Joanna (we're not gonna say her last name because you'll probably start stalking her).

See how *personal* it feels? See how it sounds like it's going out to one person?

Of course, you don't have to use the same tone Neville uses in your sales copy.

You should develop your own tone as a writer, and that tone should match the brand of the product you're trying to sell as well as the expectations of your reader.

If you find that very hard to do, you may want to try a genre other than the Personal Letter... or you may want to do as the writer of the following print ad does:



**MEDICAL DOCTOR'S NEW DISCOVERY
BURNS AWAY MORE **FAT** AND FLUID
THAN IF YOU RAN 98 MILES PER WEEK!**

Dear Friend,
My name is Don Schwerdtfeger. I am an M.D. and have been practicing medicine here in San Diego for 14 years.
I am reproducing my business card at the bottom of this page and I am writing to ask the people of America a personal favor.
If any of you will do this favor for me you will be helping me with my research and I will gladly pay you for your help.

that my program can even help people who have been hopelessly overweight all their lives, including those who need to lose 20 to 30 or 70 pounds or more.
My diet product does not necessarily produce a specific spot reduction, but if you are considerably overweight a significant overall loss of excess pounds could easily mean that you could lose:
● 6 inches off waistline

That's the opening copy for a Personal Letter-style ad placed in multiple American newspapers in 1980 by Don Schwerdtfeger MD.

Notice how dry it is? That's no accident.

This is still a tone-heavy piece, even though it doesn't read at all like Neville's example earlier.

What's the tone here? Why, it's exactly the sort of tone you'd expect from a doctor: it's cut and dry – it's *to the point*.

The writer appeals to the reader on a personal level, in a manner that makes it feel like a letter intended for them from a reputable doctor *who sounds like a doctor*. The tone is the right tone. The language is the right language. And both combined have made this ad a classic in the world of long-form copywriting.

THE RELUCTANT HERO

Most of the sales pages I read today are written in the Reluctant Hero genre, which relies on a story.

Here's the basic plot of any Reluctant Hero story:

1. A person stumbles on something he either has a natural talent for or is forced to develop a talent for, due to circumstances beyond his control
2. He gets good at that thing
3. Others start asking him for help with that thing, and he reluctantly concedes
4. He teaches others how to do what he does
5. Those he teaches get great results
6. Soon everyone in the community wants to know how to do the same thing

The idea is that you accidentally discovered something, and now it *behooves* you to share it with the world.

You couldn't live with yourself if you didn't share it.

In your eyes and the eyes of your customers, you would be doing a major disservice to the world – you would *anger the gods* – if you didn't try to help others do as you've done.

You **have** to write this letter. And you **have** to sell this product.

That's the Reluctant Hero.

When I first launched books 1 through 4 in the *Copy Hackers* series, I did so with a blog post that organically became my own reluctant hero story.

On the following page, read the opening lines:



On October 26, 2010, Shereef Bishay – of [BetterMeans](#) and the recently launched [ClassParrot](#) – told the HackerNews community about some copywriting work I did for him:

- [“Show HN: I asked an HN member for feedback and she blew my mind”](#)
- [on SlideShare](#)

Requests for copywriting help flooded my inbox over the course of the following 2 weeks.

It was awesome. But, unfortunately, I just couldn't help everyone who asked. There wasn't enough time in the day!

That sucked because, as a startup co-founder ([Page99Test.com](#)), I knew that the people who were asking *actually needed my help*... or they wouldn't ask.

They knew copy was critical to conversion.

They knew their solution – product or service – solved a pain for people or brought great delight to them.

They just didn't know how to work the copy on their website to emphasize to customers that their solutions did, in fact, do wonderful things. And they couldn't afford to hire a conversion-focused writer. (We cost muchos dinero, after all.)

They needed quality copywriting help. Fast. And inexpensively.

The Solution: HN Members Suggested I Write a Copy Ebook

Give a man a fish or teach him to fish – the answer was obvious.

At least, it was obvious to HNers. I hadn't thought of writing a copy ebook.

But, on their suggestion, I realized how valuable an ebook *could* be.



Like I mentioned earlier, copywriters don't necessarily sit down to write a sales page and choose a genre to write in – that just happens naturally. That was the case for me with this one. I happened to have a true story to tell, and it happened to be the true story of accidental discovery and reluctant “heroism”.

I posted this page on Hacker News, and the payoff was awesome. I was quickly voted up to the first page of results (a major feat!), where I stayed for nearly a day (another major feat!). I sold thousands of dollars in ebook bundles to that small group alone, and I got some great feedback on my sales page, such as:

“What’s very cool about this is that the page itself is actually a sample that will sell you on the book. Best marketing of the year award. Really awesome.”

“Immediately went to go buy the bundle of 4 books (good copywriting!)”

“It’s funny how it goes just like a standard blog post for several paragraphs and then... BAM, it does a complete 180 into a sales pitch. Quite striking and rather effective!”

When you consider the fact that Hacker News is a programmer community first and foremost – and programmers, as I showed earlier, are largely skeptical of long-form copy – the true success here shines through. And let me tell you what that success is.

It’s the success of a *story*.

A true story that people can relate to and believe will almost always sell your product better than the best salesperson in the world could.

The reluctant hero story is exactly that kind of story. So if you’ve got it, flaunt it.

THE SPECIAL REPORT

Have you ever given your email address to download a free “special report” or whitepaper? It’s likely that you have.

And it’s likely that, even as you entered your email address, you knew the “special report” was a marketing tool for somebody.

But, because you wanted the report badly enough – because the subject matter appealed to you so strongly – because you hoped to learn at least one thing from it or validate what you’d already come to believe – you gave away your email addy anyway.

Special reports are appealing.

They address a specific topic of keen interest to the reader.

And they make the reader think they’re getting access to powerful new information. (And, to be clear, that should be exactly the case.)

Where some marketers choose to put their special report content into a physical report that can be downloaded, printed or ordered, the long-form copywriter puts that content into the sales page itself. And thus, the Special Report genre is born.

Here's a contemporary example of a Special Report-style sales page, written by Gary Bencivenga:

Lies, Lies, Lies!

A Special Report from Mark Skousen, Editor of FORECASTS & STRATEGIES

**Why we investors are fed up with everyone lying to us!
But getting rich is the best revenge...
Smartest ways to do it in 2007
Best & worst investments now**



Dear Fellow Investor,

The "experts" say that individual investors like you and me are motivated by only two emotions -- *fear and greed*.

Well, they're wrong.

I've seen another powerful force shaping investors' attitudes as never before, and that's anger -- *righteous anger* with all those who are either lying to us or dreadfully mismanaging our wealth. In this letter, I invite you to join a

And on the next page is another, this time by [AWAI](#) (2012):

Hurry!
Special \$100 Discount Ends Friday April 27th at Midnight!

AWAI Special Report:

First there was the Web ... then Web 2.0. As the Internet continues to evolve, copywriting has had a similar transformation. Now every new, aspiring, and experienced copywriter needs to know about ...

“Copywriting 2.0”

Inside this Special Report:

- **Why “Copywriting 2.0” is in HUGE DEMAND** by U.S. businesses that will be pumping \$36 BILLION into a market that can’t survive without it in the coming year...
- **How to CASH IN on the insane world-wide demand:** Global spending in this Copy 2.0-dependent market is expected to reach \$100 BILLION in the next 2 years.
- **What you MUST do NOW** to guarantee you’ll be booked solid with desperate Copy 2.0 clients eager to pay your asking price!

By Rebecca Matter, Co-Managing Partner and Vice President of Marketing, American Writers & Artists Inc.

Saturday, April, 14, 2012

Unlike the Open Letter and the Personal Letter, the Special Report relies heavily on facts and pure, hard information. It is, after all, supposed to be a report on a subject. So it needs to give away some compelling information. Additionally:

- It’s timely
- It addresses real concerns and issues
- It cites powerful data
- It’s written (or signed) by an authority on the subject

In case this wasn’t clear earlier, let me repeat: **the letter itself is the Special Report.**

You're not selling the special report with this genre. No, you're selling a closely related product – a product that is a natural extension of (or solution to) the issues posed in the special report.

Some of the sales pages you may have seen in this genre will have headlines like:

**The Truth About Seven-Figure Salaries:
A Special Report from the Editors at *Glass Ceiling***

or

**A Just-in-Time Report from Johnson Davis LLC:
9 Critical Tactics to Keep Your Shirt in This Tanking Economy**

As you can imagine, the element of this genre that makes it so successful is the free information. You must give away free, meaty content – not all the content you have, but some of it – to get your reader to believe these three things:

1. That you **know** what you're talking about
2. That you **care** about sharing it so much, you'd even *give it away*
3. That there's **a lot more** where that came from... if they buy your product

Although not every page that is written in the Special Report genre needs to include the word "report" in the headline (or elsewhere at the top of the page, such as in a Special Report stamp), doing so can be an unmistakable sign to readers that they should read.

"THE WORLD IS WRONG" (aka "I TRIED EVERYTHING")

You're doing everything right.

The mistakes you've made – they've been lessons to learn from. The hearts you've broken – that's what love's about, baby. The enemies you mocked and tried to destroy – all's fair in love and war.

If it weren't for your brother crashing your car when you were a teenager, you'd have gone to college, and you'd have a whole team of employees under you now.

If the whole world hadn't convinced you that you had to buy real estate in 2007, you never would have. And you wouldn't have this mortgage you can barely handle now. And you'd

be free to move somewhere with better jobs. And you'd be able to go to the gym instead of mowing the damn lawn every Saturday.

You're doing everything right.

The world is wrong.

That's what sales pages written in this genre – The World Is Wrong – convince their readers of, at least.

This genre appeals to our belief that we're victims of forces beyond our control. It taps into prevailing complaints, such as:

- Why can't I keep the weight off? Will I yo-yo diet forever?
- Why do I need a college diploma to apply for jobs?
- Why didn't anyone tell me my cute little puppy was going to grow into this 100-pound untrained beast?
- Why is it so hard to keep up with all the information flooding me?
- Why do I have to spend *years* practicing to get good at something as easy as that?

Your response to those complaints?

"You're right to be upset. The world is wrong. You're doing everything right."

Of course, you probably won't ever write those exact sentences... because they're condescending.

But you'll communicate that sentiment in the story you tell when using this genre, just as Gary Halbert did in this print ad for Nancy Pryor's "Diet Secret" (next page):

The Amazing Diet Secret Of A Desperate Housewife

My name is Nancy Pryor. I am 35 years old. I am a housewife and mother of three children. I would like to tell you something personal about myself.

One day last September I just broke down and started to cry.

I couldn't help it. I had reached my breaking point. I felt like I was going to have a nervous breakdown.

It happened one Monday morning right after I got on the bathroom scales to weigh myself. I had been on a strict diet for nearly 2 months. I had gone off the diet over the weekend to give myself a break and just to live like a normal human being for a couple of days. Now the scales said I weighed 188 pounds. I just couldn't believe it! That meant that in one lousy weekend I had more than gained back every single pound I had lost in the last 3 weeks.

Maybe this doesn't sound like a big deal to you, but to me it felt like a tragedy.

I had been trying to lose weight for the last 5½ years. I had tried liquid protein. I had tried fasting. I had tried hypnosis. I had tried exercise. I had tried sauna belts. For a while I even used dangerous diet drugs. As far as diets go I tried almost every one I heard about. The Adkins diet. The Stillman diet. The grapefruit diet. The Women's Ski Team diet. Etc. Etc. You name it—I tried it.

The results were always the same. I would struggle and struggle to lose a few pounds and then the very first time I would give myself a small break the weight would come right back on.

It had happened many times before, but somehow this time it seemed like the last straw. I didn't know where to turn or what else to try. I was about to give up.

Don't get me wrong. I don't want this to sound like a sob story. I'm not telling you all this because I want you to feel sorry for me. There is no need for that anyway. My story has a very happy ending.

"... You will lose weight faster on this diet than if you ran 7 miles every day. You will be able to measure the difference in your waist line in 24 to 36 hours. I think this is the fastest safe diet in the world. If you can find a diet that works faster I will buy it from you and gladly pay you good money for it..."

SIMPLE AND EASY

This diet is very simple. It is easy to follow even if you eat in restaurants all the time. You do not count calories. You do not measure portions. The only thing you keep track of is how much you lose.

HEALTHY AND SAFE

This is not just a weight loss diet. It is a health diet also. It is safe. It is probably much safer than the way you eat right now.

Don't ever take a chance with your health. It's not worth it. Besides it is not necessary. You can lose weight fast with my diet plus get healthier every day you stay on it.

NO EXERCISE

You do not have to exercise to lose weight with this diet. However, since after the first few days you will have a lot more energy you will probably become more active. But you will lose weight very rapidly whether you become more active or not.

"... I have lost 75 pounds. My friends say I look 15 years younger. I enjoy a peace of mind I have never before experienced. I feel good all the time. Best of all, my husband has fallen in love with me all over again."

foods every day. All of them are what I call "natural food tranquilizers." At exactly the same time these foods are releasing new energy into your system they also work to release all tension from your nerves and muscles and give you an emotional lift. Believe me it is very hard to diet if you are upset and in a bad mood all the time!

The story Halbert tells (in the first-person) is that of a typical woman who wants to shed a few pounds, who's tried everything – diet fads, exercise – but who just can't seem to keep the weight off. It's a story we can all relate to, which is what makes it so powerful... and such a natural fit for the product he's selling.

The world is the problem.

The reason you can't keep the weight off is because the media forces fast-food imagery on you, and the women from your neighborhood compare notes about how busy their kids are, making it impossible for you to find the time to eat well or exercise – to say nothing of how busy your job keeps you. You're forced to be a Supermom today. The world is telling you that's what's required. And now you're supposed to be a size 4, too?

The reason you can't keep up with all the information flooding you is because more has been published in the last 10 years than was published in the 1000 years prior. Computers double in speed and memory every 2 years. The world is forcing information down your throat.

The world is the problem. (And – hurray – there’s a *boatload* of proof out there confirming it, all of which you can use in your sales page to support that point.)

In many ways, we believe the world is against us. If your target audience is likely to believe that – and if your product is a way to fight back or to outsmart that devious ol’ world – this may be just the genre for you.

ALIGN WITH US

As the saying goes, there are two sides to every story. Well, there are really two sides to almost *everything*. And here’s the thing: **we each identify with one of those sides.**

We rarely identify with both sides.

And we’re rarely neutral. There aren’t a lot of Switzerlands when it comes to people.

We like to believe that the side we identify with is the best one. If we didn’t believe that, well, we’d just switch sides.

And it is from that idea that the Align With Us genre arose.

You’ll probably recognize it in this famous example from 1974 by Martin Conroy. This letter is known as the “billion dollar letter” because it performed so well over the course of its 25-year run.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The daily diary of the American Dream.

22 Cortlandt Street/New York, New York 10007

Dear Reader:

On a beautiful late spring afternoon, twenty-five years ago, two young men graduated from the same college. They were very much alike, these two young men. Both had been better than average students, both were personable and both—as young college graduates are—were filled with ambitious dreams for the future.

Recently, these men returned to their college for their 25th reunion.

They were still very much alike. Both were happily married. Both had three children. And both, it turned out, had gone to work for the same Midwestern manufacturing company after graduation, and were still there.

But there was a difference. One of the men was manager of a small department of that company. The other was its president.

What Made The Difference

The story sets up an “us versus them” scenario.

It presents two men who have everything in common – except *one* thing. One very important thing. And that one thing has directly impacted the success of each man.

The unsuccessful man doesn’t use the thing. And the successful man does.

So, what is that one very important thing?

(...Does it even matter?)

In Conroy’s letter, it’s The Wall Street Journal. The successful man reads The Wall Street Journal. The unsuccessful one doesn’t.

It certainly didn’t hurt the success of the letter that it ran in The Wall Street Journal, so those reading the ad felt validated that they might be as successful as that man. That only helped an already strong way to position the product in this letter.

Here's the thing: there are people who use your product, and there are people who don't. If you want people to believe they should use your product, it makes sense for you to make the people who use your product look highly desirable... and to make those who don't use your product look undesirable – or even worth pitying.

Nobody wants to be a cautionary tale. We want to be success stories.

We want to be on the side of the winners, if we can't be the winner ourselves.

Beer commercials have been doing this *inelegantly* for years. Conroy did it elegantly. And so can you.

How Are Genres Different from Headlines or Hooks?

In a few of the examples I showed you, the headline seemed to dictate the genre. And sometimes (as you'll see when we talk about hooks), the story seemed to *be* the genre – as in the case of Align With Us.

But the genre is distinct from the headline and the hook.

The genre feeds the headline you'll write. And it shapes the story – or hook – you'll lead with.

The genre grounds your whole piece as you write. It often tells you, as the writer, what sort of content you'll need and what sort of tone you'll want to take.

And, importantly, it actually helps you know where to *end*, which is a big challenge when you're writing long copy. After all, if you're writing a Special Report and you've come to the end of the information you wanted to share... well, that means your letter should end rather soon. Got it?

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