

The Headline Checklist

Does your headline check off *all* of these?

- It's specific-to-super specific.**
What is your story about? Don't be vague –that is the leading cause of headline fatalities. Avoid generic words and phrases. Show don't tell. (*Hundreds plan to march into D.C. July 4 with guns in hand*)
- It's localized.**
Include something – a name, landmark, or reference – that signals to your audience this story is about the place they live. (*San Francisco's 'cheap' rentals are really not that cheap*)
- It leads to a reaction and an action.**
Imagine you're seeing this for the first time. What's your reaction? Would you click? Would you share? (*Superheroes Wash Windows at Ann Arbor Children's Hospital*)
- It's a clear promise of what's inside.**
The story should deliver on what you've promised in your headline. (*Here's a list of Oregon's most 'endangered places'*)
- It can be understood in 2 seconds.**
Keep the headline simple and straightforward. Avoid names or acronyms that aren't universally known. (*Delaware becomes 11th state to legalize same-sex marriage*)
- It's not clever.**
Avoid puns, rhymes or cultural references. This approach is fun but distracts from the story and could put the audience on the outside of an inside joke. (*Watch out for the billions of cicadas arriving in the D.C. region soon*)