

Guide the way with subheading signposts - transcript

You know how it is.

You've written your document. Now you want people to read it (or what was the point?).

You probably know no one wants to look at a big block of text, so you break it up.

Good start. But that's not enough, is it?

No, you also need 'signposts' - like subheadings.

Well, that looks better already.

And subheadings don't just help your writing look good and your documents more inviting. They can work much harder than that. More on that in a minute.

But first, a word of warning.

Far too often, people write subheadings like these:

Background

Our experience

Recommendations

Background: What does that tell you about what's coming? Not much.

Our experience: Is that specific? Not really.

Recommendations: Are you engaged by this?

Do you want to follow these signposts?

Probably not.

If you're trying to find your way in the world, a signpost will be no help at all if it doesn't actually tell you what it's pointing to.

And, just like signposts you'd follow to get somewhere, your subheadings have to be specific.

They have to tell your reader exactly what's ahead, to help them get where they need to go.

Even better if your subheading signposts make the reader **want** to go there.

For example:

Background → *What you told us*

Our experience → *40 years in the business*

Recommendations → *How we'll meet your aims*

So, what techniques can you use to inspire subheadings that not only draw your reader in but also lead them through your document?

Well, remember: well-written subheadings can make your reader want to ... dive in. So try some of these techniques.

Direct

Interest

Verbs

Evoke curiosity with a question

Insight (to expand on)

Numbers

Play on words (if appropriate)

Short (ish)

Make sure your subheadings are **direct** and to the point.

Corporation tax rate reduced

Say something that will be of **interest** to the reader.

How to expand our customer base

Try using **verbs** - remember, those are the 'doing' and 'being' words. Doing so sounds dynamic and might even encourage action in some cases.

Industry achieves positive change

Evoke curiosity with a question.
Ready for the low-carbon future?

Give an **insight** that you'll expand on in the following section.
Real estate to outperform

Try including a **number** - a technique often used online, which lets your reader know exactly how much information to expect.
Five ways to combat climate change

And there's a PS...

You can use a **play on words** - but only if you think it's appropriate to the tone of your document and the intended reader.
Face the storm with catastrophe bonds

And finally: remember to keep your subheadings short...ish. They should be long enough to be meaningful but short enough to be understood and absorbed quickly.

So, try some of these techniques for signposting your next document and see how far it takes you.