

SEO isn't always the answer

To lure transient traffic to websites, headline writers often rely on principles of Search Engine Optimization, which call for headlines to clearly state exactly what a story is about so that individuals seeking information about a specific topic may find it. While this may increase transient traffic to free online sites, it can reduce the ability of headlines to serve habitual subscribers of print or digital products because it emphasizes actors instead of actions – what the story is about, rather than what the story is. The impact of even routine headlines can be enhanced by following several simple rules, which in some cases go against the principles of SEO:

1. **Make each word count.** There's no magic number of words, but when you find yourself using six or more words, particularly if they are long words, get antsy.
2. **Stress what's new and what's important to the reader.** Don't stress who took the action as much as what action was taken. Don't emphasize that a group met or will meet; say what it did or will do when it meets.
3. **Avoid all abbreviations, acronyms and initialisms and most names and other proper nouns.** Describe the role, identity or function rather than give its full name.
4. **Emphasis action.** Verbs can be active or passive but should be powerful.
5. **Stress the most unique and engaging element** of each story.
6. **Avoid characterizing** anything as good, important, enjoyable, controversial, etc. Let the actions hint at the conclusions; don't try to force conclusions on readers.

Some examples, drawn at random from actual headlines originally written for real stories:

ORIGINAL	BETTER
Prairie view accepting applications for housing assistance	Mentally ill can get help with rent
Centre receives \$1,000 grant	Grant to encourage healthy eating
Hillsboro Rec to offer oil class	Class to discuss healing, cleaning with oils
Generous benefactors help Westview clients	Nursing home gets large-print Bibles
TEEN to meet Jan. 13	Group to discuss school tech
Vogel plans to push Shop Hillsboro First campaign	Chamber head to stress shopping at home
Burns area Christmas celebrations shared	Families celebrate Christmas
Sorosis Beta club meets	Club hears about Singapore trip
Tabor College PLP candidates	14 invited to leadership program
Kansas Soybean Commission to meet in March	Soybean group to pick national nominee

Ebenfeld receives "faith" lift to sanctuary	Sanctuary gets a faith lift
Superintendent anticipates enough for JV baseball team	Enough expected for JV baseball
Ampride provides lottery hostesses	Extra clerks to help with lotto
Local music teacher receives \$500 grant	Grant to pay for choir workshop
Inmates relocated during possible fire at jail	Smoke forces inmates evacuation
Filing deadline looming for city council positions	Council filing deadline Jan. 26
Students enjoy learning with Mid-American Indian Center envoys	Visitors teach about Indian culture
PBES spelling bee is Friday	Young spellers to compete
Pavlik, Gerhardt to wed in May	Couple to wed in McPherson
St Luke Hospital Auxiliary meeting Jan. 21	Auxiliary to celebrate shop's anniversary
Betty Sebree will be 90	Family to observe 90th birthday
Senior board to meet	Seniors to consider fund requests
Centre scholars bowl places 4th at SES	Centre scholars place 4 th
TAPP to serve soup supper Friday	Soup supper to precede game
Ramona man leads national cattle industry	New leader has no beef with cattle industry
Warriors trounced by Cougars at Centre	Centre trounces Marion
Warriors place 7th at Norton	Warriors place 7 th
Scott blends culinary talents with teaching	Cook puts the 'home' back in nursing home cuisine
All-stater Harms strikes athletic, academic balance	All-stater strikes athletic, academic balance
Officials say evac of Co-Op perimeter during fire was just a precaution	Evacuation termed a precaution
Adkins to leave city council in May	Adkins to leave council
Marion schools lose two teachers	Two teachers leaving
2016 Hillsboro Chamber dinner to be Jan. 29	Chamber to hear about archeology
Centre board approves budget for virtual program	Centre to keep advertising online school