

THE HEADLINE CARD

Eight ways a headline gets your click without telling you anything, and the check for each.

PULL IT UP THE NEXT TIME A HEADLINE GETS YOUR THUMB MOVING.

01

THE MISSING NOUN

“This common food.” The important word is gone on purpose.

WHAT TO DO Fill in the blank. Can’t say what the story is about? It was built for the click.

02

THE VILLAIN FRAME

“Slams.” “Destroys.” One verb turns a comment into a fight.

WHAT TO DO Swap the verb for “said.” If the story collapses, the word did all the work.

03

THE QUESTION MARK

“Is coffee killing you?” Plants the idea, skips the proof.

WHAT TO DO Read it as “we couldn’t prove yes.” If they could, it would be a statement.

04

THE NUMBER WITH NO BASE

“Up 200%.” From two to six.

WHAT TO DO Ask: up from what? A percentage without a starting number says nothing yet.

05

NOBODY DID IT

“Mistakes were made.” Something happened and no one did it.

WHAT TO DO Ask: who did it? If neither headline nor story will say, that silence is information.

06

“EXPERTS SAY”

Which experts? How many? What were they asked?

WHAT TO DO Look for names and the actual question. No names is an opinion in a lab coat.

07

THE QUOTE THAT ISN’T

Three words in quotes, lifted from a sentence that said the opposite.

WHAT TO DO Find the full sentence. If the article won’t give it to you, that tells you why.

08

THE LOCAL STORY GONE NATIONAL

One incident, one town, one headline that calls it a trend.

WHAT TO DO Ask: how many times has this actually happened? One story is one story.

ONE TOOL FOR ALL EIGHT · THE SOURCE TEST

FIRST MOVE Fill in the blank. Say, in one plain sentence, what actually happened and who did it.

STAKE Who gains if you click? The site gets paid whether you learn anything or not.

SOURCE How do they know? Look for names and full sentences.

STEELMAN What’s the honest reason this headline might be fair? The boring true version is usually the real one.

THINK SHARPER. STAY SOVEREIGN.

Sources on the video: Facebook Newsroom (2016) · Wegner et al. (1981), replicated 2024
Gigerenzer et al. (2007) · Fausey & Boroditsky (2010) · UK ASA (2007) · Best & Horiuchi (1985)

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SCAN TO WATCH THE VIDEO

Why Headlines Lie Without Lying:
8 Tricks Explained

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