



Making Your HR Article Resonate with Readers

It takes more than an interesting idea, a case study, facts, or other content to write an HR article that engages readers. You need to apply key strategies to hold their attention for the duration of your article.

Here are six steps for crafting articles that resonate with readers:

Choose a single compelling theme.

If you try to cram in multiple ideas, each with various facts, perspectives and backgrounds, readers will not know where you are taking them and will quickly lose interest. Instead, choose one compelling story line and build upon it, perhaps with several layers, but be sure everything reverts back to the central idea.

Compare these two openings for an article on increasing employee engagement:

- **Unfocused – too many themes:** An engaged worker is more productive, according to many studies. In order to engage employees, companies need to cultivate a positive culture, offer workplace training that sparks their careers, develop teams that support each other, and encourage managers to have more face-to-face communication with direct reports.
- **Laser-focused on a single theme:** If you want to engage direct reports, speak to them more – face-to-face.

Trim the fat.

Somehow, many of us got the idea that the more words we write, the smarter we will sound. While most people recognize the fallacy of this statement and the importance of succinct writing, old habits – maybe from submitting all those academic papers – can be hard to break. You need to train yourself to eliminate every word, sentence, or paragraph that does not contribute meaning.

Compare these two pairs of fat versus lean

sentences:

- **Fat:** All employees must submit time sheets on a daily basis.
- **Lean:** All employees must submit time sheets daily.
- **Fat:** It has come to my attention that most first-year employees do not understand their benefits package.
- **Lean:** Most first-year employees do not understand their benefits package.

Let's see how many words are wasted when conveying generalities and specifics, rather than just specifics:

- **General, then specific:** In the fourth quarter of 2019, we significantly increased the percentage of enrollment in soft skills training. In that period, 40 percent more employees completed these courses compared with the fourth quarter of 2018.
- **Specific only – enough:** In the fourth quarter of 2019, 40 percent more employees enrolled in soft skills training than in the fourth quarter of 2018.

Getting right to the specifics shortened the sentence by 12 words (from 34 to 22).

Write with style and rhythm.

While “Get that rhythm!” is great advice for singers, musicians and dancers, as a writer, you need to ensure that your words flow. The more they flow with a natural rhythm, the more readers will pay attention and the easier it will be for you to create a cohesive, well-organized article.

Rhythm starts with a strong style – defined as the conscious and unconscious decisions you make while planning and writing documents. These include sentence structure and length, paragraph type and length, organization, and use of graphic elements like boldface,

underline and italics.

Some of these choices are subjective and depend on factors such as the publication's style or your own preferences. Other style choices are more black and white and can reveal the quality of your article. Two of the most frequent style errors are using the word "there" instead of the true subject and choosing passive verbs or weak nouns instead of active verbs. See the next two examples.

Avoid using "there" as a false subject and replace it with the true subject.

Compare these two sentences:

- **There** (false subject) are four more subject matter experts who need to be interviewed before we develop the technical training program.
- **Four more subject matter experts** (true subject) need to be interviewed before we develop the technical training program.

Unleash verb power.

Strong active verbs, as opposed to weak passive verbs or hidden verbs (verbs disguised as nouns), will energize your writing. Compare these two pairs of sentences:

- **Weak:** Most of our division heads *are in agreement* that regional meetings should be in Chicago.
- **Strong:** Most of our division heads *agree* that regional meetings should be in Chicago.

The first sentence uses the weak verb, *are*, with the hidden verb *agreement*. In the revised sentence, the active verb *agree* replaces both of them.

- **Weak:** Please take the operations manager's suggestions under *consideration*.
- **Strong:** Please *consider* the operation manager's suggestions.

Here the hidden verb is *consideration* combined with the passive verb *take*. The active verb is *consider*.

Use transitions to unify text.

We have heard the phrase, "No man is an island." And, neither is a sentence or paragraph, both of which are part of a broader set of ideas that need to be connected. Enter transitions. They include simple words like also, but, so,

and *still* as well as phrases like *on the other hand*, *as a result*, *to make matters worse*, and many more.

See the value of transitions when comparing these two versions of a paragraph about a banking initiative:

No transitions – disconnected

Wiring money is a relatively simple procedure. Many of Lind Bank's customers had, for several years, been making errors that delayed the completion of their transfers. Mixing up the routing and account numbers was an example of the common mistakes they made. The bank distributed a one-page Wire Transfer Guidelines to customers in 2017. It found that 40 percent fewer errors were made by customers since the guidelines were introduced.

Connected with transitions

Wiring money is a relatively simple procedure, but many of Lind Bank's customers had, for several years, made errors that delayed the completion of their transfers. *For example*, they mixed up the routing and account numbers. *To address this problem*, in 2017 the bank distributed a one-page Wire Transfer Guidelines to customers. *Since then*, 40 percent fewer errors have been made.

Separate your ideas.

Among the most frequent organizing mistakes writers make is scattering information throughout an article, instead of dividing it into single-point paragraphs or sections. You cannot just automatically write ideas the same way you processed them – from your mind or another source – because they likely will not be in a logical order. As a result, the reader may get confused or lose interest.

To separate concepts and make your article more readable, use subheads before each major section to clue the reader about where you are going next. This process will also help you organize your ideas as you write. Plus, subheads avoid that long and often-dreaded *blob* of text, i.e., long paragraphs, so common in academic writing.

Sometimes you only need simple subheads, such as when reporting on the cost of four major types of employee benefits: *Medical*, *Disability*, *Life* and *Retirement*. But when you are trying to lure the reader into your topic, consider explicit subheads that prod the

person to say, “Tell me more!” – like in the song, “Summer Nights,” from the classic 1978 movie, “Grease.”

Compare these two pairs of ordinary versus explicit (“Tell me more!”) subheads:

Ordinary: Cyber threats

Explicit: Data encryption can stem soaring cyber threats.

Ordinary: New recruitment software

Explicit: New recruitment software assesses skill and personality match.

Another strategy for separating ideas is using subcategories for long lists of bulleted text. See the difference in readability between these two lists of banking products:

Too many bullets – hard to process

Below are some key growth areas:

- Student checking accounts,
- Cash reward credit cards,
- Money market accounts,
- Elite level credit cards,
- Certificates of deposit,
- E-savings,
- Checking overdraft protection,
- Platinum select credit cards, and
- Access select credit cards.

Separated into subcategories – more readable

Below are some growth areas:

Checking

- Student accounts,
- Overdraft protection, and
- Access accounts.

Savings

- Money market,
- Certificates of deposit, and
- E-savings.

Credit cards

- Cash rewards,
- Premium select, and
- Elite.

Close by reiterating the main theme.

Without simply repeating the opening paragraph, underscore your article’s key messages. You could incorporate the bigger picture, bring up new evidence to support your position, provide another reason why the topic is important, or offer a specific call to action. Below, see how I did it for this column!

Today, editors are besieged by countless submissions, many of which fail to make the grade. Engage them – and, ultimately, your readers – with a compelling and cohesive article. Hone in on a thought-provoking and relevant theme and follow these steps to make your text flow smoothly from start to finish.

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