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# Getting eyes on your stories: Crafting the perfect headline

Top tips to write the perfect headline to increase your story's visibility online

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## Who am I? / Why should you care?

- **I write headlines almost every day**  
(And have done pretty much for 6 years)
- **4 years at New Scientist, as Deputy Digital Editor**
- **2 years (and counting) at Nature, as Chief Editor of Audience & Engagement**
- **When not doing headlines, I write social copy, newsletters, etc...**



# Why should you care about headlines?

→ **Headlines aren't written by writers**

Editors and subs will usually write these

→ **But you know the story best**

And a good editor will take your ideas on board

→ **Knowing the key search terms for story, and how the headline could frame it, can help guide you**

It can help your pitch, will give you a sense of direction, can help you organically include relevant keywords



# Caveats

→ **Remember the human reader**

Don't get bogged down thinking about keywords, prioritise good clear copy

→ **Think about the paywall - but not too much**

Know the paywall structure of the publication you're writing for - but don't overthink trying to work around it

## Best practice #1

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**Write headlines for  
people**



# A good headline is

→ **Clickable**

Piques interest; grabs attention

→ **Accurate**

People get the story they were sold

→ **Stand-alone**

Makes sense on its own without qualification

→ **Discoverable**

Needs to include relevant keywords so readers can actually find it

## Best practice #2

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**Check your headlines  
for SEO - what people  
are searching for**



# SEO checks

→ **Think about keywords**

What would people looking for this story search for? Are there any big names/brands?

→ **Use google & free tools to help optimise**

Google search and Google Trends can help. Ahrefs has a useful free keyword tool

→ **Target one or two keywords**

Be specific and avoid 'keyword stuffing'



## Best practice #3

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**Workshop your  
headlines**



**Traci (she/her)** 4:26 PM

Sorry to home in, would love to get everyone's thoughts before UK workday is over, for a story that will come off embargo late today.

[@Anne Marie](#) [@ngaind](#) [@Lauren Wolf \(she/her\)](#) [@kerri](#)

The top:

Two new drugs for treating obesity are on course to become available within the next few years — and they offer advantages beyond those of the [highly effective blockbuster drugs](#) already on the market. The first, called orforglipron, is easier to use, easier to produce, and will likely be cheaper than [existing treatments](#). The second, retatrutide, has an unprecedented level of efficacy, and may become the new gold standard for pharmacological obesity treatment.

"They're both breakthroughs," says endocrinologist Daniel Drucker from the University of Toronto in Canada, who was not involved in either study.

Phase 2 clinical trial results for both were announced at a recent meeting of the American Diabetes Association and in the *New England Journal of Medicine*<sup>1,2</sup>.



**Anne Marie** 4:26 PM

ooo



**Traci (she/her)** 4:26 PM

Thoughts

New 'breakthrough' obesity drugs are coming – and they have more benefits than today's drugs

New 'breakthrough' obesity drugs could outdo existing medications

'Breakthrough' obesity drugs dodge pitfalls of today's medications

'Breakthrough' obesity drugs are cheaper, more effective than today's shots



**Anne Marie** 4:28 PM

I did think we should avoid breakthrough given these are brand

**Brand new crop of obesity drugs....**



**Traci (she/her)** 4:28 PM

Makes sense to avoid breakthrough



**ngaind** 4:29 PM

agree that underscoring the actual newness is good/necessary h



**Anne Marie** 4:29 PM

can we say they "are cheaper, more effective than today's shots



**Traci (she/her)** 4:29 PM

New wave of obesity drugs offers benefits over existing jabs  
offer



**Anne Marie** 4:29 PM

not 'could be'?



**Traci (she/her)** 4:30 PM

I'll ask reporter whether are or could be are better



**ngaind** 4:30 PM

could it be worth name-checking ozempic in the hed?

this isn't right but



**Traci (she/her)** 4:30 PM

I like yours Anne Marie



**Anne Marie** 4:30 PM

do you think 'new' conveys enough that this is NEW new  
?



**Traci (she/her)** 4:30 PM

? is only one of them will be cheaper, not both  
and only one will be more effective



**Anne Marie** 4:31 PM

yeah agree Nisha, like "After Ozempic: Brand new crop of obesity drugs offers benefits over existing jabs



**Traci (she/her)** 4:31 PM

Wow, is O that well known even outside US?

"fresh crop"?



**Anne Marie** 4:31 PM

I think everyone who will want to read this story will have heard of Ozempic



**ngaind** 4:31 PM

can't think of the word right now, but:

**Beyond Ozempic: this fresh crop of obesity drugs are even more effective — and cheaper**

yes ozempic is everywhere!



**Traci (she/her)** 4:32 PM

Geez

## Keyword ideas for “Ozempic”



The first 100 keywords out of 9,989

[Phrase match](#) / [Questions](#)

Keyword	KD <sup>i</sup>	Volume <sup>↓</sup>	Updated <sup>i</sup>
ozempic	54	75K	4 days
ozempic uk	8	21K	4 days
ozempic weight loss	33	12K	1 day
ozempic side effects	38	7.3K	4 days
ozempic face	26	4.9K	3 days
ozempic for weight loss	26	4.2K	about 6 hours
ozempic pen	14	2.8K	about 4 hours
ozempic uk boots	5	2.6K	20 minutes
ozempic injection	37	2.5K	about 10 hours
buy ozempic online	7	1.7K	4 days
ozempic weight loss before and after pictures	<a href="#">Sign up</a>	1.5K	6 days
ozempic nhs		1.3K	4 days
6 week plan ozempic weight loss results		1.2K	3 days

## People also ask :

Is Ozempic approved for weight loss?

Is Ozempic available on the NHS?

How much weight can you lose in a month with Ozempic?

How much weight will I lose with Ozempic?

How much is Ozempic per month in the UK?

Can I get Ozempic without diabetes?

# Final headline:

NEWS | 26 June 2023

## **Beyond Ozempic: brand-new obesity drugs will be cheaper and more effective**

**Hormone mimics offer advantages even beyond those of the potent weight-loss jabs on the market now.**

## Best practice #4

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**Know what works**



# What works

→ **Check your target publication's headline tone and style**

A New Scientist headline might not work for Nature, a Nature headline might not work for the New York Times



# What works

→ **Superlatives**

'How the world's biggest brain maps could transform neuroscience'

→ **Numbers**

'Seven technologies to watch in 2022'

→ **Quotes**

'I hope you die': how the COVID pandemic unleashed attacks on scientists'

→ **Answering questions**

'Will Omicron end the pandemic? Here's what experts say'



## Best practice #6

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**For article SEO: Think  
beyond headlines**



# Beyond headlines

- In-line links (within the body of the article)
- Standfirsts
- Captions
- Image metadata / alt text



# A note on social media copy

→ Social copy:

- ◆ Doesn't need to rely on SEO keywords
- ◆ Needs to grab attention faster
- ◆ Can often be less formal
- ◆ Can use pics, emoji, gif, video

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# Thank you

Get me at:

Twitter: @annemarieconlon

Bluesky: @annemarie.bsky.social

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# Appendix (if time!)

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# Some good Nature headlines (and why they're good)

**Heart-disease risk soars after  
COVID – even with a mild case**

**New & interesting**

**‘Killer’ immune cells still recognize  
Omicron variant**

**Question  
and  
answer**

**Will Omicron end the pandemic?  
Here’s what experts say**

**Do vaccines protect against long  
COVID? What the data say**

# **The next variant: three key questions about what's after Omicron**

**Numbers / lists**

**How COVID vaccines shaped 2021 in eight powerful charts**



# How the pandemic might play out in 2021 and beyond

## Just plain interesting

***Started Out as a Fish. How Did It End Up Like This?***

A meme about the transitional fossil Tiktaalik argues that although we did come out of the sea, we aren't doing just fine.

# Don't keyword stuff



Liam Neeson: What is a cosh?  
Liam Neeson in staggering  
revelation but what is a cosh?

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# How long? As long as you need, as short as you can



## **Best practice**

Put your keywords at the front - longer headlines may be cut off at the end on google search results pages