

# The Red Letter



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*I Give You My Words*

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## Headline: More Than An Attention Grabber

The headline is the Atlas of your ad, brochure or direct mail. It bears tremendous responsibility, with the success or failure of your marketing piece resting on its shoulders.

Advertising icon David Ogilvy once said that four out of five prospects read the headline and skip the rest. No matter how great your product or service is, or how persuasive the body copy is, your marketing piece won't sell anything without a good headline. Ideally, a headline fulfills four important functions. It:

1. **Grabs attention** by appealing to prospects' self-interest, providing news they can use, or arousing curiosity.
2. **Selects the audience** by speaking directly to your prospects' demographic or psychographic traits.
3. **Delivers an inclusive message** by making a complete statement about your product or service.
4. **Draws your prospect into the body copy** by promising valuable information to those who take time to read on.

A headline that only grabs attention is doing a quarter of its job. Attention-getting for its own sake attracts lots of curious people but only a handful of serious prospects. And few organizations today have the advertising and marketing resources to waste on generating simple curiosity among people who won't buy.

## Poor Martha & Martin

Love or hate Martha Stewart, she makes for great copy. When the gavel fell on the Antikitsch Queen, clever food- and craft-related headlines were abundant. “Just Deserts” appeared on *Time's* cover and in *Newsweek's* cover story. They got it wrong, I hollered. Martha's not in the Sahara.

Certain the word for getting what one deserves has a different spelling, I envisioned a great piece on proofreading for The Red Letter. Then I grabbed my Oxford American and read: *Desert – a person's worthiness or entitlement to reward or punishment.*

Moral: They were right, and with a great double entendre, but I was, too – I reached for my reference first.

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*Words are the most powerful drugs used by mankind. – Rudyard Kipling*

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*The Good Word*

## I Assure You, Sir, The Word You Want Is Ensure, Not Insure

Assure, ensure, insure. These are some of my favorite difficult words. When misused in marketing materials, they remind me of the hilarious “Who's On First?” routine.

- “To **assure** against natural disaster...” – *Who?*
- “We **ensure** you that we...” – *What?*
- “We **insure** exceptional quality...” – *I don't know?*

You don't insure your boss you've given her accurate information. Granted, there are days when most people think (or dream) they'd benefit from the death of their boss. Unfortunately, you can't purchase a policy to guard against her untimely demise. You **insure** your car and your house, **ensure** the bills are paid on time, and **assure** your clients that your creative ideas will cut through communication

clutter and be effective. To be more specific:

- **Assure** means to give some confidence.
- **Ensure** means to make certain.
- **Insure** means to protect against loss.

Forget who's on first in your corporate materials, and your organization will look just as silly as Abbott and Costello.

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