

Power Words and Phrases that Influence, Persuade and Move Listeners to Action

“Join us!”

“Sign up!”

These phrases litter the huge variety of email newsletter boxes you’ll come across online, and they generally serve the same purpose: Click here to give us your email address. They serve the same purpose, but do they say the same thing?

Can one word change the way you feel about a button?

In my experience, yes. I subscribe to the copywriting school of thought where every single word is absolutely worth stewing over and A/B testing because **one single word can change everything**. The difference between “joining” and “signing up” is the difference between fellowship and enlisting. A word changes the meaning, the mood, and the motivation.

Research reveals how a single word makes all the difference

You likely know inherently that specific words matter. You click on a headline because a single word strikes you. You click a signup button because a word creates an emotion.

The research behind this power of words is incredibly deep. Researchers have found that the word you use to describe a car accident (“contacted” vs. “smashed”) paints the way eyewitnesses view the event. Another study found that simple stock names that are easier to pronounce lead to quicker gains post-IPO.

Perhaps my favorite study is one shared by Brian Clark of Copyblogger. Social psychologist Ellen Langer tested the power of a single word in an experiment where she asked to cut in line at a copy machine. She tried three different ways of asking:

“Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine?” – 60% said OK

“Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine **because** I’m in a rush?” – 94% said OK

“Excuse me, I have five pages. May I use the Xerox machine **because** I have to make some copies?” – 93% said OK

I don’t know about you, but I thought Langer’s third request was rather elementary. Yet it didn’t matter. The trigger word “because” was all she needed. The takeaway: When you want people to take action, always give a reason.

The 5 most persuasive words in the English language

- You
- Free
- **Because**
- Instantly
- New

You've seen these words countless times before—and for good reason. The research behind these words has shown over and over that they work. Gregory Ciotti wrote about these five in a post for Copyblogger, showing exactly how each is vital for persuasive speech and copy. For instance, immediate words like “instantly” trigger mid-brain activity and feed our zest for quick gratification.

Where to try these words: Calls-to-action, headlines, email subject lines, headings, opening sentences and paragraphs

The 20 most influential words

- Suddenly
- Now
- Announcing
- Introducing
- Improvement
- Amazing
- Sensational
- Remarkable
- Revolutionary
- Startling
- Miracle
- Magic
- Offer
- Quick
- Easy
- Wanted
- Challenge
- Compare
- Bargain
- Hurry

David Ogilvy is to advertising as Jimi Hendrix is to the electric guitar. His list of influential words you see above was first published in 1963, and many remain in vogue today.

Where to try these: Headlines, bullet points, subject lines

3 words to encourage community

- Join
- Become a member
- Come along

These community phrases provide a sense of togetherness to the user; they feel like they're taking part in something larger than themselves.

Where to try these words: Email signups, trial offers, in-app messaging

10 cause-and-effect words and phrases

- Accordingly
- As a result
- **Because**
- Caused by
- Consequently
- Due to
- For this reason
- Since
- Therefore
- Thus

Author Darlene Price, the originator of this cause-and-effect list, has great insight into what makes these cause-and-effect phrases so useful: "Cause-and-effect words make your claims sound objective and rational rather than biased and subjective."

Where to try these: Closing paragraphs, transitions

12 phrases that imply exclusivity

- Members only
- Login required
- Class full
- Membership now closed
- Ask for an invitation
- Apply to be one of our beta testers
- Exclusive offers
- Become an insider
- Be one of the few
- Get it before everybody else
- Be the first to hear about it
- Only available to subscribers

9 phrases that imply scarcity

- Limited offer
- Supplies running out
- Get them while they last
- Sale ends soon
- Today only
- Only 10 available
- Only 3 left
- Only available here
- Double the offer in the next hour only

The fear of missing out (often abbreviated as FOMO) is a common driver of action for marketers and advertisers. FOMO is essentially scarcity. By showing that an item or product is in limited supply, you hope to ratchet up demand.

Where to try these: Headings, promo copy

28 words and phrases that make you feel safe

- Anonymous
- Authentic
- Backed
- Best-selling
- Cancel Anytime
- Certified
- Endorsed
- Guaranteed
- Ironclad
- Lifetime
- Moneyback
- No Obligation
- No Questions Asked
- No Risk
- No Strings Attached
- Official
- Privacy
- Protected
- Proven
- Recession-proof
- Refund
- Research
- Results
- Secure
- Tested
- Try before You Buy

- Verify
- Unconditional

Boost Blog Traffic's Jon Morrow collected a huge list of power words (his full list of 317 is well worth the read) and sorted the list by category. The above section is Morrow's grouping of words that engender feelings of safety. It's my favorite group from Morrow's list because these safety words have an amazing effect on the person reading: They create trust.

Where to try these: Payment forms, signup forms, testimonials

48 ubiquitous power words

- Improve
- Trust
- Immediately
- Discover
- Profit
- Learn
- Know
- Understand
- Powerful
- Best
- Win
- Hot Special
- More
- Bonus
- Exclusive
- Extra
- You
- Free
- Health
- Guarantee
- New
- Proven
- Safety
- Money
- Now
- Today
- Results

- Protect
- Help
- Easy
- Amazing
- Latest
- Extraordinary
- How to
- Worst
- Ultimate
- Hot
- First
- Big
- Anniversary
- Premiere
- Basic
- Complete
- Save
- Plus!
- Create

Each employee on the circulation and email marketing teams at Interweave Press has these words printed and posted on their wall. The list, which was originally compiled Linda Ruth and Curtis Circulation Company, came from studying best-selling magazine covers, and Interweave's Bob Kaslik found that the words work equally well on magazines as they do in promo copy and in email subject lines.

Where to try these: Email subject lines, headlines, calls-to-action

9 word for shareable content

- Secret
- Tell us
- Inspires
- Take
- Help
- Promote
- Increase
- Create
- Discover

Where to try these: Social media updates