Demonstrative adjective like 'this,' 'that' and 'these' had a substantially higher click-through rate than the norm.

Long headlines also did modestly better. Reader interest and searchability are the strongest elements of effective headlines.

Clear, powerful words and a conversational tone make a big difference.

- Headlines need a “curiosity gap”. Too vague, and people don’t want to click. Too specific, they don’t need to click.
- Don’t give it all away in the excerpt, share image, or share text.
- Don’t be shrill. Don’t form an opinion for the end user. Let them do that.
- Don’t bum people out.
- Don’t over-think it.
- Be clever. But not too clever.
OBJECTIVE: To determine whether a new approach to headline writing will increase story clicks from the Daily Report.

OVERVIEW: To evaluate the effectiveness of headline construction, all 40,000 Daily Report subscribers participated in the A/B test. Subscribers were assigned to either group A or group B using a stratified random sample of people who opened and did not open the Daily Report on Friday, December 2, the day preceding the start of the test.

TESTING PERIOD: Two versions of the Daily Report were sent out over four days, from December 6-9, 2016.

TEST GROUPS:
- **GROUP A:** Subscribers in Group A received the Daily Report with headlines that were constructed using the current method [control group]
- **GROUP B:** Subscribers in Group B received the Daily Report with headlines that were constructed using recommendations developed through headline testing research.
TESTING METHODOLOGY

This test controlled for any possible effects of subject matter variance by testing the same story with this same picture and description in both versions of the Daily Report; the headline was the only thing changed.

**VERSION A**

BRINGING THEOLOGY TO LIFE: UVA PROJECT KEEPS RELIGIOUS STUDY GROUNDED
Charles Marsh founded the Project on Lived Theology, inspired by his own childhood in the Civil Rights era and by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day and others whose faith led them to work for justice in their communities. MORE >

**VERSION B**

UVA CENTER MAY CHANGE THE WAY YOU EXPERIENCE RELIGION
Charles Marsh founded the Project on Lived Theology, inspired by his own childhood in the Civil Rights era and by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day and others whose faith led them to work for justice in their communities. MORE >
What do we mean by click-bait?

Click-bait is a headline which promises one thing to get clicks, but does not describe the content of the article.

As The New York Times put it, “we don’t test click-bait versions [of headlines] because no headline should leave readers feeling cheated when they get to the story.”
1. **No click-bait**
2. Include any pertinent **numbers** from the piece or describe the content using numbers/steps: “5 Ways Molecular Biology is Changing.” Use numerals.
3. Use **demonstrative adjectives** (This, these, the, etc.): “These 5 professors define the spirit of discovery.”
4. Use **positive superlatives** when possible (only, best, top, first, etc.).
5. **Name notable individuals/entities** mentioned in the story.
6. Aim for **approximately 60 characters** (longer headlines can work better).
7. When appropriate create a “**curiosity gap**.” “They’ll have to rewrite the textbooks” is a good example. Provide enough information to pique interest but not enough to make clicking through unnecessary. And always be honest about the content.
8. **Emphasize benefits/value** to the reader whenever possible: “Research promises more effective diabetes treatments” versus “Research shows new connection between diabetes and diet.” Answer the question: “What’s in it for me?”
9. Include a **strong verb**. Avoid label heads unless they are self-evident.
10. Use **active voice**. “Board Passes Resolution to Cure Cancer” instead of “Resolution to Cure Cancer Passed.”
## TEST APPROACH WORKS!

Overall, headlines in version B of the Daily Report earned **26% more clicks** than the headlines in version A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE A</th>
<th>TITLE B</th>
<th>% CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professor Discusses Recent Trip to Iraq and Fieldwork in the Refugee Crisis</td>
<td>Professor’s Novel Solution Could Save Billions in Aid to Refugees</td>
<td>+139%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UVA Law Team Hopes to Put Brakes on Driver’s License Suspensions Due to Debt</td>
<td>This Case Has Energized UVA Law Professors, Students and Alumni</td>
<td>+59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing Theology to Life: UVA Project Keeps Religious Study Grounded</td>
<td>UVA Center May Change the Way You Experience Religion</td>
<td>+58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate Schools Project Offers New Take on P.E./Health Curriculum</td>
<td>This Curry School Project Could Help Students Become Better People</td>
<td>+57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Hospital Still Has Lessons to Teach About Soothing the Sick</td>
<td>This Old Hospital Still Has Lessons to Teach About Soothing the Sick</td>
<td>+41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Impact Study: UVA Generates $5.9 Billion for Virginia Economy</td>
<td>5.9 Billion Reasons Why UVA Is a Boon to the Virginia Economy</td>
<td>+33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry Chair Seeks to ‘Make a Difference’ Across the Board</td>
<td>Professor Guides 30 Grad Students, 7,000 Undergraduates on Path to Success</td>
<td>+23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Economist Shaping the Future of Public Housing</td>
<td>This Economist is Shaping the Future of Public Housing</td>
<td>+19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alumni Start-Up Opens the Door to Rapid App Creation</td>
<td>Want to Build an App? Alums’ Idea May Save You Hundreds of Tedious Hours</td>
<td>+13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can Better Classroom Instruction Close the Racial Discipline Gap?</td>
<td>UVA Research Finds Interesting Way to Close Racial Discipline Gap in Schools</td>
<td>+7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Residents Mull Design Issues for UVA Memorial to Enslaved Laborers</td>
<td>How Should the University Remember Enslaved Laborers?</td>
<td>+3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 Years After Fateful Attacks, Students, Faculty Chronicle Pearl Harbor Stories</td>
<td>They’re Preserving Pearl Harbor Veterans’ Stories, 75 Years Later</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UVA Darden Executive MBA Student Takes Home News Emmy</td>
<td>Darden Studies, Emmy Award All in a Day’s Work for NBC Producer</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology Professor Releases Free, Open-Source, Preprint Software</td>
<td>Psych Professor’s New Services May Upend Traditional Research Publishing</td>
<td>-25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HEADLINE TEST RESULTS

Headline B earned 41% more clicks than Headline A.

HEADLINE A

OLD HOSPITAL LEADS GRAD STUDENT TO PROBE HOW NATURE ENCOUNTERS HELP PATIENTS
Graduate nursing student Elizabeth Hundt is exploring how the design of an old federal psychiatric hospital may hold importance for the architects of modern health care facilities. MORE >

HEADLINE B

THIS OLD HOSPITAL STILL HAS LESSONS TO TEACH ABOUT SOOTHING THE SICK
Graduate nursing student Elizabeth Hundt is exploring how the design of an old federal psychiatric hospital may hold importance for the architects of modern health care facilities. MORE >

CURIOSITY GAP
Just enough to spark interest.

DEMONSTRATIVE ADJECTIVE
Which old hospital?
HEADLINE TEST RESULTS

Headline B earned 23% more clicks than Headline A.

**HEADLINE A**

CHEMISTRY CHAIR SEEKS TO ‘MAKE A DIFFERENCE’ ACROSS THE BOARD

VIDEO “Making a difference” — for undergraduates, grad students and colleagues — is the theme that flows through the career of chemistry department chair W. Dean Harman.

MORE »

**HEADLINE B**

PROFESSOR GUIDES 30 GRAD STUDENTS, 7,000 UNDERGRADS ON PATH TO SUCCESS

VIDEO “Making a difference” — for undergraduates, grad students and colleagues — is the theme that flows through the career of chemistry department chair W. Dean Harman.

MORE »

**STRONG VERB**
Specific to the story. Suggests action.

**NUMBERS**
Gives readers a sense of the scope and scale. Numbers stand out on the page.
HEADLINE TEST RESULTS

Headline B earned **57% more clicks** than Headline A.

**HEADLINE A**

**HEADLINE B**
HEADLINE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **INCORPORATE ELEMENTS FROM RESEARCH WHEN POSSIBLE.**
   Follow headline B guidelines.

2. **NO CLICKBAIT.**

3. **DON’T OVERUSE ONE STRATEGY.**
   For example, the curiosity gap can be a powerful element of a headline, but if it is overdone, it will have diminishing effects.

4. **ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL.**
   Choose headline elements to fit the story; certain headline elements will not always work for the story and that is okay.
HEADLINE RECOMMENDATIONS

HEADLINE WRITING GUIDELINES

1. No click-bait
2. Include any pertinent numbers from the piece or describe the content using numbers/steps. Use numerals.
3. Use demonstrative adjectives (This, these, the, etc.).
4. Use positive superlatives when possible (only, best, top, first, etc.).
5. Name notable individuals/entities mentioned in the story.
6. Aim for approximately 60 characters.
7. When appropriate create a “curiosity gap.”
8. Emphasize benefits/value to the reader whenever possible.
9. Include a strong verb. Avoid label heads unless they are self-evident.
10. Use active voice.