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1

LINGUISTICS

LIST GOOD ACTIONS IN THE PRESENT TENSE

These actions feel like they're still happening.

Services feel more valuable in the present tense.

After inspecting a home, a contractor might say:

→ **Past:** Faucet *looked* good.
→ **Present:** Faucet *looks* good.

Each sentence activates a different mental image:

→ **Faucet *looked* good**. Work is completed.
→ **Faucet *looks* good**. Work is still happening. Even now.

In one study, people believed that John painted more houses when they read an ongoing action (*John was painting houses*) instead of a completed action (*John painted houses;* Matlock, 2011).

Ongoing frames depict a mental image of the labor:

(see fig 1)

It also happens with customer reviews.

Researchers analyzed 2 million Amazon reviews, and they confirmed that reviews get more helpful votes when they're framed in the present tense (Fang & Maglio, 2024).

→ **...*was* great.** Benefits have stopped.
→ **...*will be* great.** Benefits haven't happened yet.
→ **...*is* great.** Benefits are still happening.

Takeaways:

→ **Check Your Service-Related Copy**. When possible, frame completed actions in the present. Check service reports, sales calls, outreach messages, and customer support.

Fang, D., & Maglio, S. J. (2024). Time perspective and helpfulness: Are communicators more persuasive in the past, present, or future tense? Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 110, 104544.

Matlock, T. (2011). The conceptual motivation of aspect. Motivation in Grammar and the Lexicon, 27, 133.

John painted houses

John was painting houses

DIVERSIFY THE FLOW OF WORDS AND SOUNDS

Add variety in written copy by alternating phonemes, word lengths, sentence lengths, and emotional content.

Copy should flow seamlessly.

How can you tell whether copy is flowing? Read it aloud.

Copy is read through *inner speech*: You speak these words in your mind (Yao & Scheepers, 2015).

Thus, copy that is hard to *say* will be hard to *read*.

Add variety too (e.g.,, different words, sentence lengths). Eating the same food becomes repetitive and boring without variety (Rolls et al., 1981). Copy is no different.

WHAT TO DIVERSIFY

→ **Starting Phonemes.** I found a patio set on Target that described "sling-style seating" and "space-saving storage" which are tongue twisters. Alliteration can be persuasive in branding and advertising, but it can be a detriment in long-form copy. People are slower to read sentences with repeated sounds: *The sparrow snatched the spider swiftly off the ceiling* (McCutchen et al., 1991).

→ **Ending Phonemes**. Likewise, replace "sling seating" with "sling chairs."

→ **Adjoining Phonemes.** It's hard to read "chairs sling" because of the adjoining "s" phoneme.

→ **Word Length.** It's hard to read many small words (e.g., *free you up to do the things you love*).

→ **Sentence Length**. Read these short sentences. The writing might seem fine. Heck, it might seem engaging. But soon you'll notice something. This writing is becoming repetitive. Your brain wants a change. It's bored with short sentences. It wants a long sentence. So let's add a long sentence. Notice how this new sentence feels refreshing and invigorating because of its lengthy prose; it feels like a breath of fresh air that your brain has been seeking.

→ **Emotional Content**. Movies and written copy are more successful when they shift unpredictably between different emotions (Berger et al., 2021).

→ **Bold and Italics**. Especially on emotional words—like *exciting* or *frustrating*. Readers internally speak these words with stronger emotionality, intensifying their engagement (Yao & Scheepers, 2015).

RELATED APPLICATIONS

→ **Sequence Words in Alphabetical Order**. Customers preferred the slogan *Bufferil eases pain* because each word was positioned in alphabetical order. Something felt right (King & Auschaitrakul, 2020)

Berger, J., Kim, Y. D., & Meyer, R. (2021). What makes content engaging? How emotional dynamics shape success. Journal of Consumer Research, 48(2), 235-250.

King, D., & Auschaitrakul, S. (2020). Symbolic sequence effects on consumers' judgments of truth for brand claims. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 30(2), 304-313.

McCutchen, D., Bell, L. C., France, I. M., & Perfetti, C. A. (1991). Phoneme-specific interference in reading: The tongue-twister effect revisited. Reading Research Quarterly, 87-103.
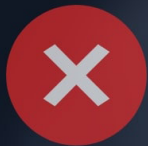
Rolls, B. J., Rolls, E. T., Rowe, E. A., & Sweeney, K. (1981). Sensory specific satiety in man. Physiology & behavior, 27(1), 137-142.

Yao, B., & Scheepers, C. (2015). Inner voice experiences during processing of direct and indirect speech. Explicit and implicit prosody in sentence processing: Studies in honor of Janet Dean Fodor, 287-307.

DEPICT INFORMATION WITH POSITIVE FRAMES

Negative frames instill a mental image of the negative event.

Don't think of a pink elephant.

Well, your brain needs to activate a pink elephant to understand the previous sentence.

Same with sales copy. Our product:

→ Doesn't leak.
→ Has no BPA.
→ Won't scratch your car.

Negative frames depict the *absence* of something, yet customers need to imagine these negative events to understand the meaning (see Béna et al., 2023).

Therefore, write sentences that depict pleasant events.

→ **Negative:** Won't damage skin.
→ **Positive:** Soft and gentle on skin.

Alternatively, morph negative words into positive frames:

→ Leak-proof
→ BPA-free
→ Scratch-free

"Doesn't leak" generates an image of something leaking, but "leak-proof" generates an image of durable material.

CAVEATS

→ **Negations Are Okay**. Negative frames contain ideas with a negative valence (e.g, *damage*, *leaking*, *scratching*), but regular negations (e.g., prices have *never* been lower) can be persuasive (Pezzuti & Leonhardt, 2023).

Béna, J., Mauclet, A., & Corneille, O. (2023). Does co-occurrence information influence evaluations beyond relational meaning? An investigation using self-reported and mouse-tracking.... Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 152(4), 968.

Pezzuti, T., & Leonhardt, J. M. (2023). What's not to like? Negations in brand messages increase consumer engagement. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 51(3), 675-694.
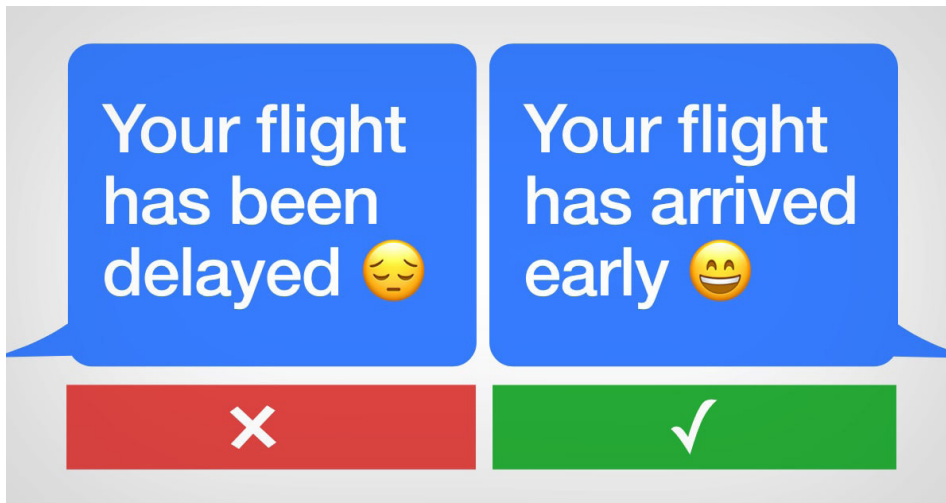
END POSITIVE STATEMENTS WITH EMOJIS

Emojis intensify whichever emotion is depicted.

Are emojis persuasive?

They can be. AirBnb hosts increase their bookings when they include smiling emojis in messages (Shuqair et al., 2024).

But you need to be careful.

EMOJIS SHOULD BE

→ **Supplemental**. Don't replace copy (e.g., it's so). You should be to remove emojis without reducing comprehension (e.g., it's so funny). Indeed, supplemental emojis get more likes, retweets, clicks, and purchases (Maiberger et al., 2023).

→ **End of Sentences**. Use them as a supplement conclusion. Keep this in mind .

→ **Facial**. Smiling faces activate contagion — viewers are triggered to smile because their facial muscles become activated. Indeed, anthropomorphized emojis induce more engagement (Shuqair et al., 2024).

→ **Positive**. Facial emojis activate whichever emotion is depicted. Researchers confirmed this effect in a text exchange with AirBnb hosts. Compared to no emojis: Happy emojis increased satisfaction while confirming the booking, whereas sad emojis decreased satisfaction while mentioning a delay (Shuqair et al., 2024). No emojis are better than sad emojis.

OTHER APPLICATIONS

→ **Use Many Emojis to Grab Attention**. Based on 200k AirBnB listings, new sellers increase their bookings when they insert multiple emojis in their listings because they stand out (Orazi et al., 2023). But the emojis needed to be supplemental; substitutive emojis reduced conversions.

→ **Don't Mix Emojis and GIFs**. Including both reduced app subscriptions and usage because the UI looked cluttered (Bashirzadeh et al., 2022).

Bashirzadeh, Y., Mai, R., & Faure, C. (2022). How rich is too rich? Visual design elements in digital marketing communications. International journal of research in marketing, 39(1), 58-76.

Maiberger, T., Schindler, D. & Koschate-Fischer, N. Let's face it: When and how facial emojis increase the persuasiveness of electronic word of mouth. J. of the Acad. Mark. Sci. (2023).

Orazi, D. C., Ranjan, B., & Cheng, Y. (2023). Non-face emojis in digital marketing: Effects, contingencies, and strategic recommendations. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 51(3), 570-597.

Shuqair, S., Pinto, D. C., Herter, M. M., & Mattila, A. (2024). Emojis as heuristic cues: The multifaceted role of emojis in online service interactions. Journal of Consumer Behaviour.

REMOVE MEANINGLESS WORDS FROM PRODUCTS

Products seem more expensive (yet worse in quality) when described with unfamiliar words.

Do you know what zal means? Me neither.

Researchers found that meaningless descriptions (e.g., zal fried chicken) reduced sales. These products seemed more expensive, yet worse in quality (Baskin, & Liu, 2021).

It's not just zal. Marketers sprinkle impressive words (e.g., *industrial*, *disruptive*, *esoteric*) in their copy, yet these words remain meaningless to many customers.

Exceptions might exist, but you could probably remove these words from your materials:

➞ **Beverage:** *full-bodied*
➞ **Restaurant:** *artisanal*
➞ **Furniture:** *industrial*
➞ **Tech:** *disruptive*
➞ **Fashion:** *esoteric*
➞ **Beauty:** *opulent*
➞ **Household:** *eco-friendly*
➞ **Luxury:** *avant-garde*

Baskin, E., & Liu, P. J. (2021). Meaningless descriptors increase price judgments and decrease quality judgments. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 31(2), 283-300.

ALIGN THE SEMANTIC AND LINGUISTIC MEANING

A sentence that depicts an easy process should be easy to read.

Linguistic traits convey meaning.

For example, prices seem numerically larger if the font size is larger (Coulter & Coulter, 2005). You think: *Hmm, something feels big, It must be the price*.

Same with copywriting. Read this sentence from a coffee brewer:

→ …effortlessly simple to use - just add fresh water to the reservoir, pop in your favorite pod, press the brew button and enjoy fresh brewed, delicious coffee in minutes.

The message? Brewing coffee is simple.

The problem? This sentence is long and complex.

Instead, try this version:

→ …effortlessly simple to use: **Just add water, pop in your favorite pod, and press the brew button**. Enjoy fresh brewed, delicious coffee in minutes.

To convey a quick and simple process, you need a sentence that – itself – is quick and simple.

Same with other traits. **Want to portray:**

→ **A variety of features?** Insert a variety of words.
→ **Consistent quality?** Repeat the same phrase.
→ **Fun experience?** Insert words that are fun to say (e.g., *hullabaloo, bamboozle*).

Coulter, K. S., & Coulter, R. A. (2005). Size does matter: The effects of magnitude representation congruency on price perceptions and purchase likelihood. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15(1), 64-76.
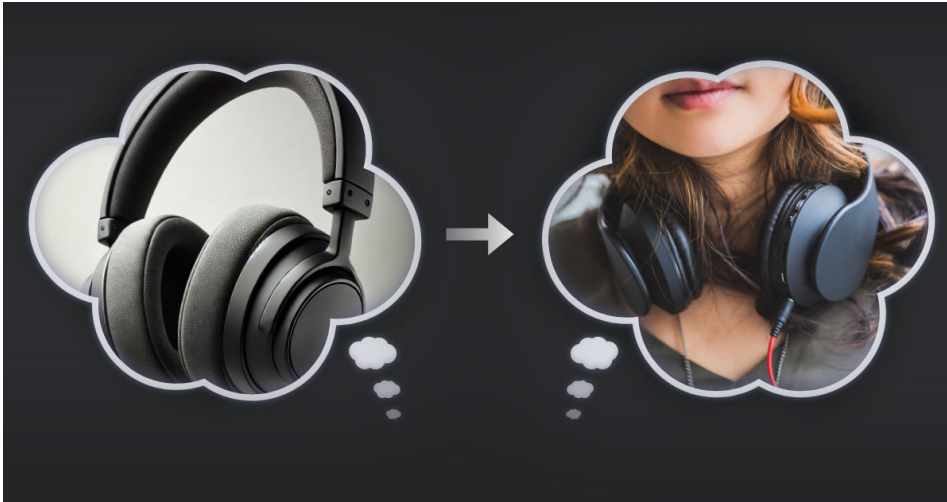
BUILD AND EXPAND THE SAME MENTAL IMAGE

Help readers imagine a seamless flow of imagery.

Your copy should have *linguistic continuity*.

Customers imagine a series of mental images:

> *...subjects try to integrate each incoming sentence into a single coherent mental model (Ehrlich & Johnson-Laird, 1982, p. 296).*

Write your copy to maintain this seamless flow of imagery.

END SENTENCES WITH A CONCRETE IMAGE

Avoid ending sentences with prepositions:

→ **Don't Say**: What time are you leaving at?
→ **Say**: When are you leaving?

Prepositions often imply that an object is appearing next, so the abrupt ending feels jarring.

BEGIN SENTENCES WITH THE PREVIOUS OBJECT

Read these sentences:

→ The knife is in front of the pot. The glass is behind the dish. The pot is on the left of the glass.

Confusing, right? But you can ease the readability by swapping the last two sentences:

→ The knife is in front of the pot. The pot is on the left of the glass. The glass is behind the dish.

Start sentences with the ending idea from the previous sentence so that you maintain an unbroken flow of imagery (Ehrlich & Johnson-Laird, 1982).

BIND SENTENCES WITH CONNECTIVE WORDS

Readers want *coherence markers*:

→ **Additive:** *and, or*
→ **Temporal:** *then, next*
→ **Adversative:** *but, though*

→ **Causal:** *because, so*

Causal markers like *because* and *so* are especially persuasive. Customers often read on autopilot, searching for any words that signal justification even if the underlying reason is weak (Langer et al., 1978).

ADHERE TO THE SAME SUBJECT

Sometimes I'll catch myself intermingling subjects:

→ *Customers* are influenced by...
→ *We* are influenced by...
→ *You* are influenced by...

But these small adjustments change the key protagonist in mental images.

Kamalski, J. (2007). Coherence Marking, Comprehension and Persuasion on the processing and representations of discourse (Doctoral dissertation, Netherlands Graduate School of Linguistics).

Langer, E. J., Blank, A., & Chanowitz, B. (1978). The mindlessness of ostensibly thoughtful action: The role of" placebic" information in interpersonal interaction. Journal of personality and social psychology, 36(6), 635.

2

CALLS TO ACTION

KEEP POSITIVE WORDS NEAR BRANDS AND ACTIONS

A chair seems softer when the words "chair" and "soft" are closer together.

Customers group nearby objects.

Two nearby objects can fuse into a single object.

(see fig 1)

Same with words.

Customers don't translate *individual* words into a mental image. They translate *clusters* of words.

For example, a "small $5 fee" seems cheaper than a "$5 fee" because customers infuse the idea of smallness into the price (Rick et al., 2008).

Same with positive descriptions:

→ Customers find that the chair is comfortable.
→ Customers find the chair comfortable.

The chair seems more comfortable in the second version because of this spatial proximity (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Place Assurances Near Calls-to-Action**. Buttons trigger simulations of the action. In other words, users imagine performing these actions to gauge how they feel — if they feel good, they click. Well, nearby statements can intensify these mental images. Add positive statements like: *Instant Access*, *100% Secure*, *30-Day Guarantee*.

→ **Move Negative Words to Be Further Away**. Negative frames describe an absence of something negative: *Our cream won't damage skin*. But your brand will suffer because it's now placed near a negatively valenced word (e.g.,. *damage*; Béna et al., 2023). Perhaps healthy food packaging should also separate any negative descriptors (e.g., *fat free, low sodium;* see Mai & Hoffmann, 2015).

(see fig 2)


Béna, J., Mauclet, A., & Corneille, O. (2023). Does co-occurrence information influence evaluations beyond relational meaning?. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 152(4), 968.

Coulter, K. S., & Coulter, R. A. (2005). Size does matter: The effects of magnitude representation congruency on price perceptions and purchase likelihood. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15(1), 64-76.

Rick, S. I., Cryder, C. E., & Loewenstein, G. (2008). Tightwads and spendthrifts. Journal of consumer research, 34(6), 767-782.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). The metaphorical structure of the human conceptual system. Cognitive science, 4(2), 195-208.

Mai, R., & Hoffmann, S. (2015). How to combat the unhealthy= tasty intuition: The influencing role of health consciousness. Journal of Public Policy & Marketing, 34(1), 63-83.

2 OBJECTS   **3** OBJECTS

1

2
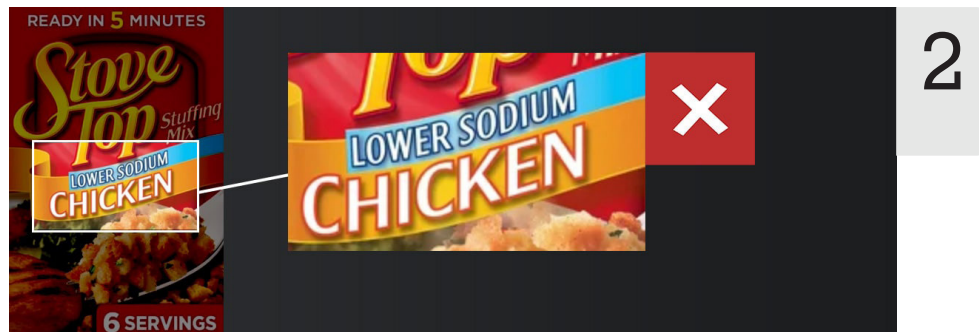
PRIME THE MOTION ACTION IN DESIRED BEHAVIORS

Touchable cues activate your muscles, making nearby actions seem easier.

Most behaviors involve a motor action.

If you want customers to perform a behavior, activate the muscles involved in this behavior.

In one study, participants were asked to turn a knob once they understood a sentence. They turned the knob faster when this knob rotation (e.g., counter-clockwise) matched the rotation depicted in a sentence (e.g., Katie opened a water bottle) because these muscles became activated (Zwaan & Taylor, 2006).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Tell Users to "Click" or "Tap" Buttons**. These verbs activate relevant muscles, easing the perceived ability to click or tap.

→ **Tell Customers to "Walk" In**. Retail signage often says "we're open" to entice nearby patrons, but a more direct "We're open — walk in" should pull more patrons.

→ **Include Hand Graphics**. Add these graphics on tip jars, donation bins, vending machines, or any medium where customers insert money. Customers feel ownership of these hands (Luangrath et al., 2022).

(see fig 1)

→ **Show Graspable Cues Near Writing Tasks**. Want customers to write something? Based on 7,000+ interactions, shoppers were 3x more likely to write their information for a loyalty program when the tabletop poster showed a vegetable peeler with the handle on the right, which primed the motor action of writing for right-handed shoppers (the majority of the population; Maille et al., 2020).

(see fig 2)

→ **Insert Textures Near Buttons**. Customers can't imagine the feeling of a button, but they *can* imagine this bumpy texture. And they misattribute this *ease* of touching with a *desire* to touch

(see fig 3)

(see fig 4)

Luangrath, A. W., Peck, J., Hedgcock, W., & Xu, Y. (2022). Observing product touch: The vicarious haptic effect in digital marketing and virtual reality. Journal of Marketing Research, 59(2), 306-326.
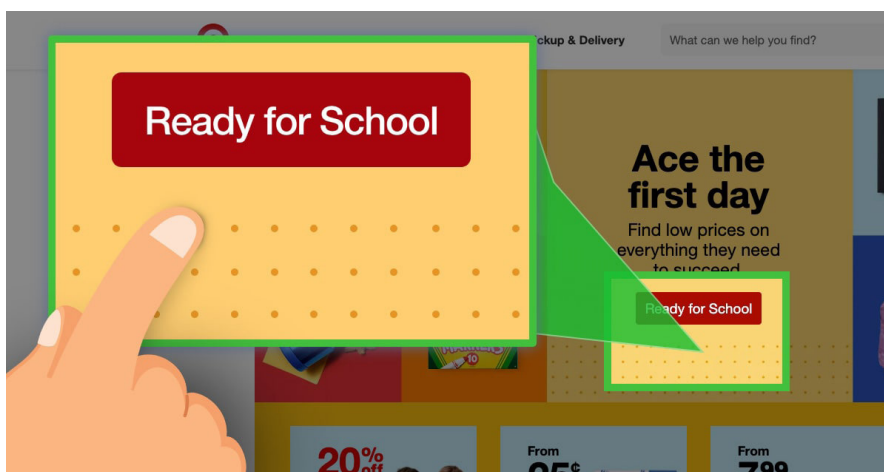
Maille, V., Morrin, M., & Reynolds-McIlnay, R. (2020). On the other hand...: Enhancing promotional effectiveness with haptic cues. Journal of Marketing Research, 57(1), 100-117.
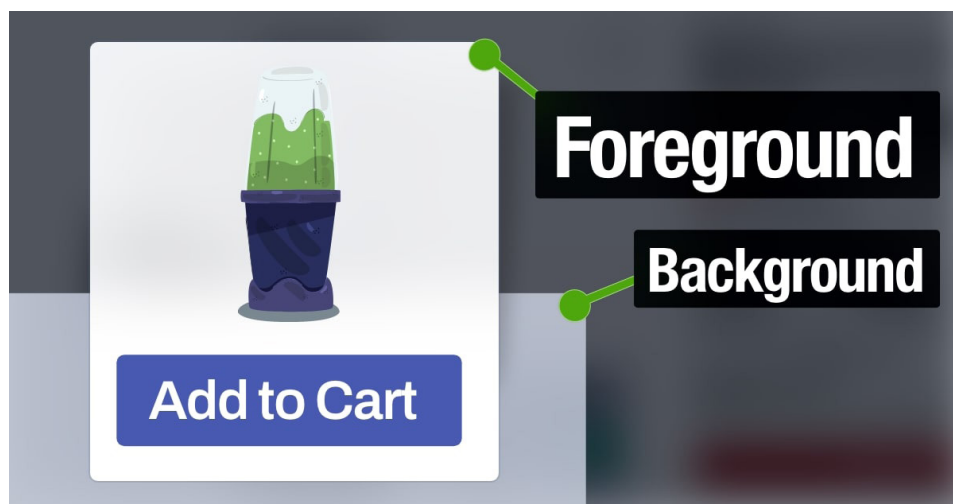
Zwaan, R. A., & Taylor, L. J. (2006). Seeing, acting, understanding: motor resonance in language comprehension. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 135(1), 1.
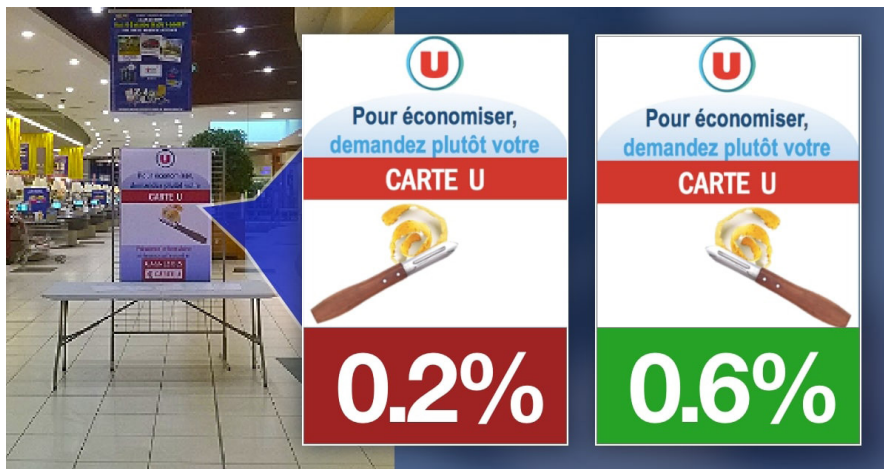
BRING INTERACTIONS TO TOUCHABLE AREAS

Buttons feel clickable when they look physically closer.

Buttons shouldn't impact a purchase.

But they do.

Customers evaluate purchase decisions by imagining two scenarios:

→ **Consuming a product** (*outcome*)
→ **Acquiring a product** (*process*)

Easy-to-click buttons can strengthen process simulations. Customers can easily imagine themselves completing the next step, blaming this vivid imagery on their *desire* to complete the next step.

PLACE BUTTONS IN THESE LOCATIONS

→ **Bottom**. Bottom locations feel physically closer to us. That's why purchase buttons on iPhones are located at the bottom of the device. Interestingly, though, it depends on height. In a pilot study, I confirmed that short people prefer buttons at the bottom of a screen, while tall people prefer buttons at the top of a screen.
→ **Right**. My pilot studies confirmed that right-handers prefer buttons on the right, while left-handers prefer buttons on the left. Right-handers comprise most of the population, so these locations will usually convert better. That's why product pages typically place buy buttons toward the right side of desktop viewports.
→ **Foreground**. Insert something behind buttons so they look physically closer.

WRITE BUTTON TEXT THAT FEELS NATURAL TO SAY

Users will speak these words in their mind, so this text should feel natural.

Reading triggers inner speech.

You speak these words in your mind (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015).

Since buttons represent a 1st person declaration, they should produce inner speech that feels natural. Otherwise, something will feel wrong. And users will blame this negative emotion on the requested action.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Mimic Their Tone of Voice.** Avoid cutesy text (e.g., *Count Me In*) and exclamations (e.g., *Buy Now!*).
→ **Mention the Immediate Next Step**. The text *Buy on Amazon* can feel weird because this step isn't imme-diate. After clicking this button, users would still need to read the product details and evaluate the purchase. The text *View on Amazon* feels more natural and less effortful.

CAVEATS

→ **Measure Conversions in Later Stages**. Even though *Buy on Amazon* might reduce click-through rates, this text could increase conversions in later stages by extracting more commitment. Clicking this button will spark a battle of cognitive dissonance that requires users to reject this commitment to the purchase.
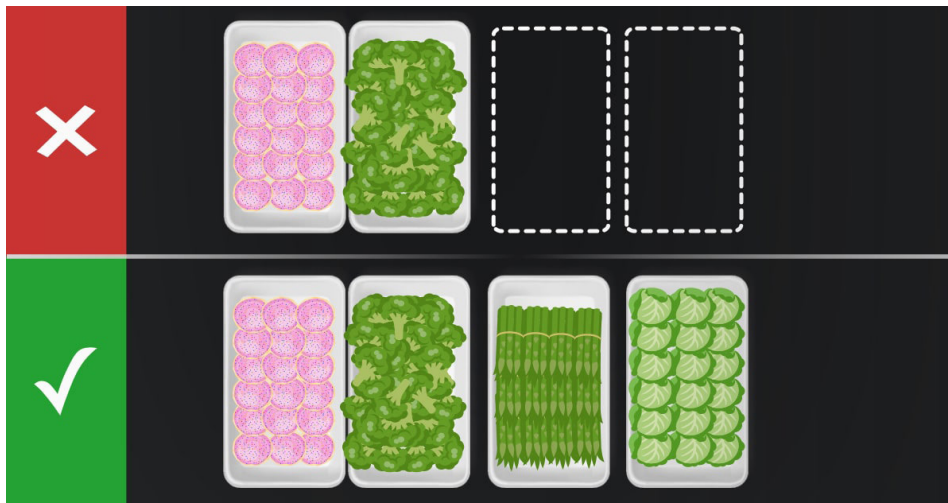
INCREASE THE RATIO OF POSITIVE SELECTIONS

You pull or push equal amounts from discrete categories.

People distribute resources equally:

...[for] decision tasks in which people are called on to allocate a scarce resource (e.g., money, choices, belief) over a fixed set of possibilities (e.g., investment opportunities, consumption options, events)...they are biased toward even allocation. (Fox, Bardolet, & Lieb, 2005, p. 338)

Investing $10,000?

If your options are stocks and mutual funds, you are biased toward equal dispersion—$5,000 in stocks, while $5,000 in mutual funds.

But now, you see a third option: Treasury bonds. Your dispersion will be further diluted—$3,333 in stocks; $3,333 in mutual funds; $3,333 in bonds.

The same effect occurs when *pulling* resources.

Suppose that you see two trays of food:

→ Healthy
→ Unhealthy

You are biased to pull an equal amount of food from each category.

But aha, we can influence this choice by partitioning the "healthy" category into multiple categories:

→ Healthy—Vegetables
→ Healthy—Fruit
→ Unhealthy

The "healthy" category now comprises a larger percentage of the group. Less food will be chosen from the "unhealthy" category.

Fox, C. R., Bardolet, D., & Lieb, D. (2005). Partition dependence in decision analysis, resource allocation, and consumer choice. In Experimental business research (pp. 229-251). Springer, Boston, MA.

EASE THE SYMBOLIC MOTION OF PROGRESS

Downward motion seems stronger because of gravity. A downward progress bar feels more capable of reaching the end.

Ideally, use downward motion to symbolize progress.

In one study, a moving square vanished. Everyone believed that this box vanished farther ahead because of the momentum. And this misjudgment was stronger with downward motion (Hubbard, 2005).

(see fig 1)

Downward motion seems stronger because of gravity.

Consequently, users can imagine this bar moving to the later steps (e.g., delivery) more easily. They will imagine receiving their package faster.

Need horizontal progress? Ease motion in other ways:

→ **Linear Gradient**. Gradually change the color from left to right for illusory motion.
→ **Shorten the Distance**. Position the bar near the final step so that the end goal feels closer.
→ **Thin Bar**. A short bar feels easier to move than a fat bar.

(see fig 2)

Hubbard, T. L. (2005). Representational momentum and related displacements in spatial memory: A review of the findings. Psychonomic bulletin & review, 12, 822-851.

VANISHING POINT

THEIR GUESS

HUBBARD, T. L. (2005). REPRESENTATIONAL MOMENTUM AND RELATED
DISPLACEMENTS IN SPATIAL MEMORY: A REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS.
PSYCHONOMIC BULLETIN & REVIEW, 12, 822-851.

ORDERED

SHIPPED DELIVERED

WWW.KOLENDA.IO
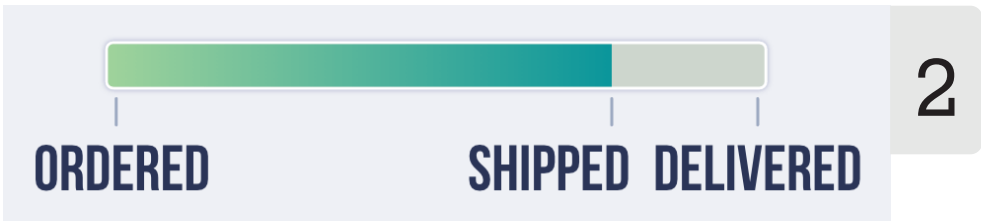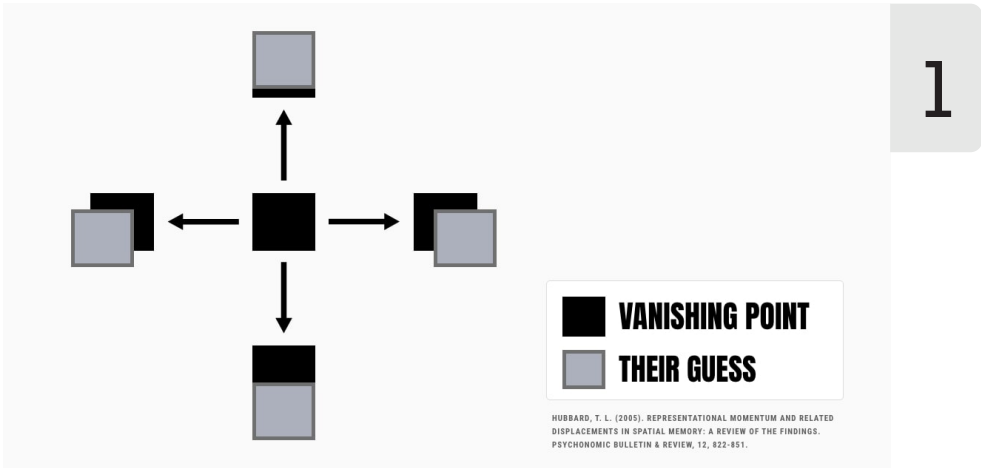
REDUCE THE FLUENCY OF REJECTION OPTIONS

Design rejections that look ugly or sound unnatural.

Purchase buttons should look pretty.

When customers view a button, they contemplate the decision: *Hmm, should I click?*

A pretty button can activate positive emotions that become attributed to the decision: *Hmm, something feels right. I must want to click.*

Rejections are different. You *don't* want clicks. Follow the opposite advice and reduce the fluency of these options.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Make Them Ugly**. Weird fonts, wide spacing, or unbalanced designs. Customers blame this disfluency on the decision: *Hmm, my gut is telling me to click the other option*.

→ **Insert Unnatural Phrasing**. Customers read button text inside their head; it's called *inner speech*. If it sounds natural — something they would typically say — they are more likely to click. But you want the opposite. Try replacing "No Thanks" with "Postpone the Decision."

→ **Insert Mean Phrasing**. "No thanks" is common, yet polite and natural. Try a blunt "No."
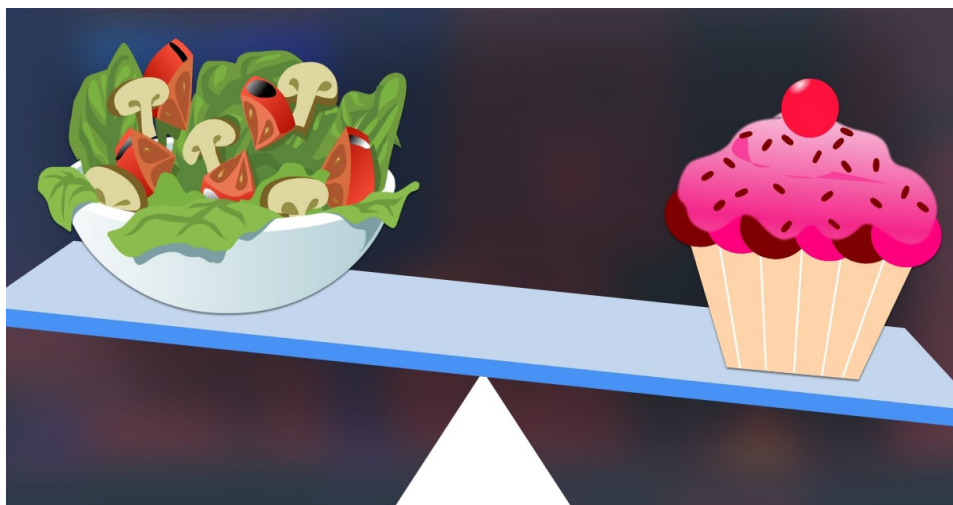
COUNTERBALANCE A DESIRED ACTION

Do something bad? You feel obligated do something good. Do something good? You feel entitled to do something bad.

I categorized all behaviors by valence and agency.

I call it the *equity scale* or *decision scale*.

(see fig 1)

Basically, there are **4 behaviors**:

1. **Misdeeds—**You do something bad
2. **Mishaps—**Something bad happens to you
3. **Obligations—**You do something good
4. **Enrichment—**Something good happens to you

Every behavior tilts the scale: *Misdeeds* and *enrichment* tilt leftward; *mishaps* and *obligations* tilt rightward. In both cases, you crave behaviors on the opposing side of the scale to regain balance.

This scale is ingrained into the criminal justice system. Someone who commits a *misdeed* (e.g., crime) will typically suffer a *mishap* (e.g., prison, monetary fine) or be required to perform an *obligation* (e.g., community service). The victim (who suffered a *mishap*) might receive *enrichment* (e.g., money) to rebalance their scale.

See my book The Tangled Mind for applications with *morality*. See my other book Imagine Reading This Book for applications with *self-motivation*.
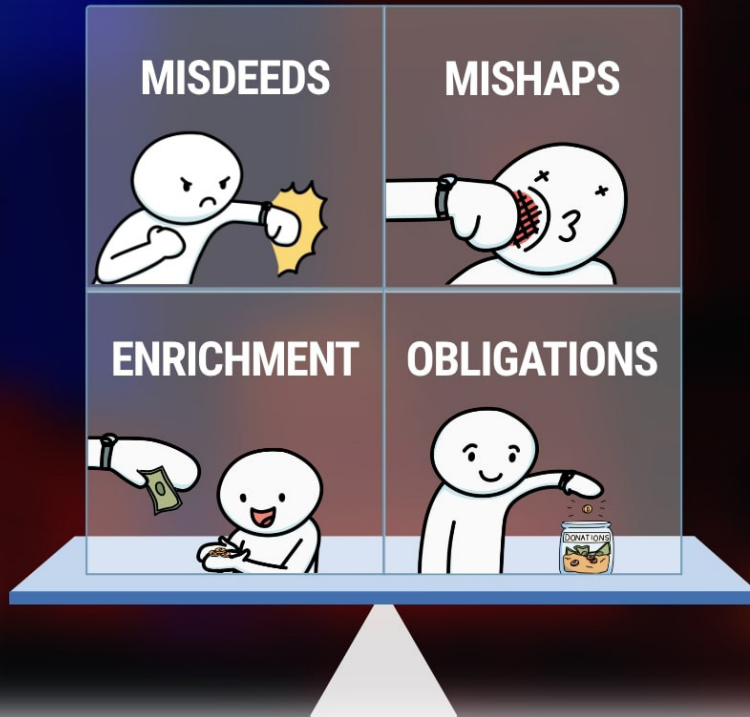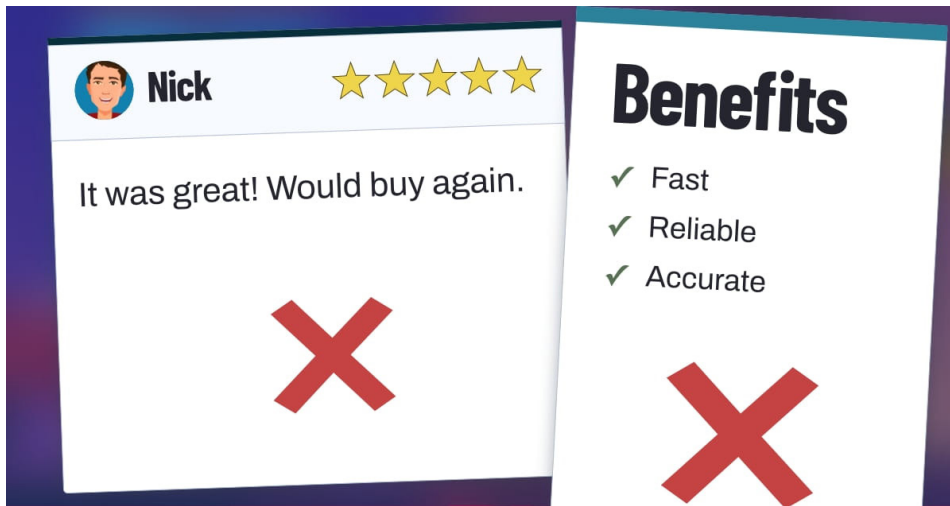
3

FRAMING

REMOVE EMPTY SPACE BELOW SALES COPY

Customers believe that marketers were unable to fill this space with additional benefits.

Be careful with empty space.

Even though it can optimize visual layouts, it can also reduce persuasion.

Across 7 studies, messages were less persuasive when they were surrounded by empty space (Kwan, Dai, & Wyer, 2017).

(see fig 1)

Empty space is most harmful *below* arguments. Readers infer that you were unable to fill this space with additional reasons, so your message seems less credible.

    "a communicator who intends to convey a strong

opinion is likely to use all of the space available to elaborate his or her position, whereas a communicator who is less confident... may leave space unused." (Kwan, Dai, & Wyer Jr, 2017, p. 450)

Plus, it triggers an anchoring effect. Your benefits might "feel smaller" if they consume a small fraction of available space.

(see fig 2)

Try shrinking this canvas so that customers receive 100% of potential benefits.

Kwan, C. M., Dai, X., & Wyer Jr, R. S. (2017). Contextual influences on message persuasion: The effect of empty space. Journal of Consumer Research, 44(2), 448-464.

1

2
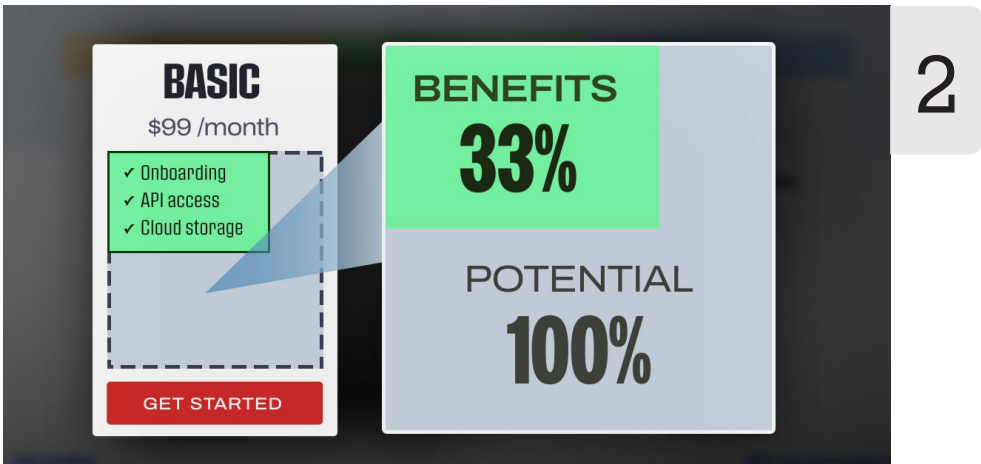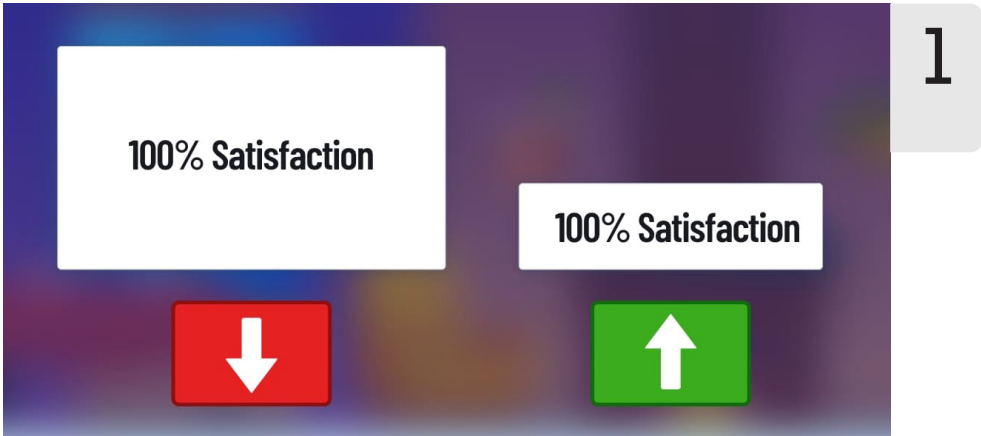
TAILOR YOUR PITCH TO INDIVIDUAL SCENARIOS

Help prospects imagine using your product or service.

Consider a clothing store.

If a customer is trying a shirt, a salesperson could say:

→ **THAT** looks great!
→ That **TOP** looks great!
→ That **SHIRT** looks great!
→ That **GREEN T-SHIRT** looks great!

Each subsequent example instills a more concrete image.

(see fig 1)

And this imagery is persuasive. Customers imagine themselves using your product, so this imagery intensifies their emotional response because they can simulate the benefits.

Find and replace any vague placeholders in your copy too.

→ **Vague:** This *service* can…
→ **Concrete:** This *makeover* can…

Or consider support messages.

You might hear: *I can't add a new product to your order. But you can cancel the current order, then add a new item.*
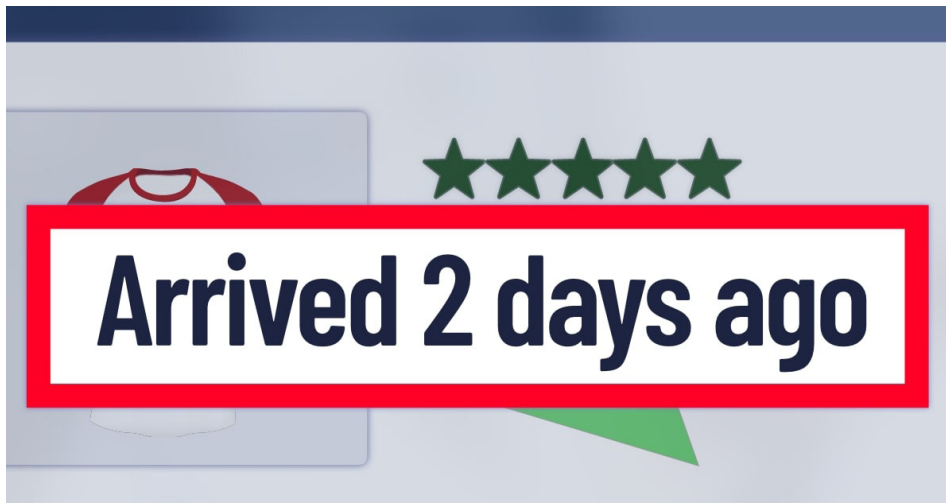
This specialist should be customizing the message: *I can't add those jeans to your order. But you can cancel the shoes, then add the jeans.*

Tailored responses are more persuasive (Packard & Berger, 2021).

Packard, G., & Berger, J. (2021). How concrete language shapes customer satisfaction. Journal of Consumer Research, 47(5), 787-806.

REFRAME PRODUCTS TO BE CHRONOLOGICALLY NEWER

People like new stuff merely because it's new.

There's a recent finding called the *mere newness preference* **(Jie & Li, 2022).**

How does it work?

Well, I just called it a "recent" finding. Based on this mere newness, you think the study is more important. Even though it could be garbage.

Researchers argue that it stems from evolution:

> *"Over millennia of evolution, humans have developed a taste for fresh foods due to their greater nutrition content and disgust toward decaying foods due to their possibility for illness." (Jie & Li, 2022, p. 2)*

I suspect that it's also proximity: Since you live in the present, new products feel subconsciously closer to you:

(see fig 1)

A study from 20 years ago might seem boring, while a new study – even if it were the same finding – would seem relevant and impactful because it's closer to you.

PRACTICAL TECHNIQUES:

→ **Choose the Most Recent Framing.** Whether it's the production date, release date, purchase date, etc.

→ **Indicate When Products Are New.** Customers want fresh cars at a dealership over identical cars that have been sitting on the lot, even if nobody has driven them.

→ **Mention New Arrivals.** Products seem more appealing if customers know they arrived in a recent shipment.

→ **Offer Limited Editions.** These products are inherently new.

→ **Highlight Product Updates.** This knowledge numbs the pain from rising prices

→ **Reframe Scarcity.** Mentioning scarcity (e.g., "only 2 left") could backfire if these products are viewed as the oldest units in a batch. Try the opposite ("newly arrived 2 days ago"). Instead of motivating customers to buy leftover options that nobody wanted, motivate

them to buy fresh options that won't stay fresh much longer.

It works outside of ecommerce too:

(see fig 2)

Jie, Y., & Li, Y. (2022). Chronological cues and consumers' preference for mere newness. Journal of Retailing, 98(3), 527-541.

1

2

WRITE COPY THAT IS EASY TO IMAGINE

Help readers simulate your product experience.

Visualization is motivating.

Help readers simulate how they'd feel using your product, revealing their desire and motivation to buy.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Write Concrete Features**. Describe cookies in terms of "bags" or "pieces" (rather than "ounces" or "grams") to help them visualize this experience (Monnier & Thomas, 2022).

→ **Write Concrete Actions**. Stop writing vague tasks in your calendar, like "study" at 2pm. What does "study" mean? Study chemistry? Memorize notecards? Read a textbook? If an action is harder to imagine, it feels harder to do. Write concrete tasks, like *review past exams*. Same with *calls to action*: Replace vague requests (e.g., sign up for an account) with concrete steps (e.g., create a username and password).

→ **Write Concrete Benefits**. What does "easy to use" software mean? *Why* is it easy? Minimal features? Beautiful interface? Quick onboarding? Automates tasks? Novices can use it? Likewise, what does *durable* mean? No tearing? Withstands damage? Heavy?

Long-lasting? Replace all of these common culprits: *quality, powerful, high-performance, fast, reliable, premier, best.*

→ **Fill Sentences With Related Words**. Your brain is a web of knowledge — activating one concept will activate related concepts because of *spreading activation*. For example, reading DEEP, SALTY, FOAM will spread activation toward the related concept SEA (Collins & Loftus, 1975; Topolinski & Strack, 2008). Therefore, try filling sentences with semantically related words. Selling a coffee brewer? Replace "make coffee" with "brew coffee" so that these two words — brew and coffee — merge their activation into a stronger burst, resulting in more vivid imagery.

→ **Match All Word Meanings**. All meanings of a word become activated when read. For example, you might see a "Surprise Me" feature in content platforms (e.g., Netflix, Spotify, TikTok). You expect to see output that is *unknown*, but you also expect this output to be *unusual* because both meanings are activated from *surprise* (Schumacher et al., 2024). Perhaps these results should also be displayed in a sudden and jolting way to align with an additional meaning of *startling*.

→ **Arrange Words to Create a Single Meaning**. In the following copy for a kitchen bundle, I emphasized a

portion that translates into a mental image in which you are spoonfeeding a wall decal: *From a microwave oven, coffee maker, mini refrigerator, serveware and utility cart to help you **prepare and serve food to wall decals**, rugs and letterboards to bring decorative flair to your space, this dorm room kitchen collection ensures your limited space is effectively utilized.*

(see fig 1)

Monnier, A., & Thomas, M. (2022). Experiential and analytical price evaluations: How experiential product description affects prices. Journal of Consumer Research, 49(4), 574-594.

Schumacher, A., Goukens, C., Geyskens, K., & Nielsen, J. H. (2024). Revisiting surprise appeals: How surprise labeling curtails consumption. Journal of Consumer Psychology.

DESCRIBE YOUR PRODUCT WITH DIRECTIONAL CONSISTENCY

Products convert better when their explanation matches the directionality of their benefit.

What is your product benefit?

Some products create an *increase* or *decrease*:

→ Skin creams *reduce* wrinkles
→ Shampoos *increase* silkiness
→ Air fresheners *remove* odors

And you might depict a separate change:

→ Increase in skin cells
→ Increase in blood flow
→ Reduction of hormones

Both directions should be consistent even if they're unrelated (Bharti & Sussman, 2024).

Customers preferred:

→ An energy supplement that *increased* a hormone
→ A sleep supplement that *decreased* a hormone

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Processing Fluency**. Something feels right, and we blame the product.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Tweak Your Explanation**. Does your cream *reduce* wrinkles? Describe the *reduction* of collagen, rather than the *increasing* turnover of skin cells (Bharti & Sussman, 2024).
→ **Tweak Your Branding**. Does your supplement *reduce* anxiety by *increasing* chemicals? Swap your positioning so that it *increases* calmness.
→ **Describe an Increase When Possible**. Explanations with an *increase* often converted better. Similar effects occur with size: Bigger seems better, even if size is irrelevant to actual benefits (Silvera et al., 2002).

RELATED APPLICATIONS

→ **Align Directionality of Discounts**. Which is better: *save 30%* or *get 30% off*? It depends on the directionality of the purchase: Discounts should reduce losses for prevention needs (e.g., *save 30%* on a first aid kit), but increase gains for acquisition needs (e.g., *extra 30% off* for bulk purchases; Ramanathan & Dhar, 2010).

Bharti, S., & Sussman, A. B. (2024). Consumers Prefer Products That Work Using Directionally Consistent Causal Chains. Journal of Consumer Research, ucae066.

Ramanathan, S., & Dhar, S. K. (2010). The effect of sales promotions on the size and composition of the shopping basket: Regulatory compatibility from framing and temporal restrictions. Journal of Marketing Research, 47(3), 542-552.

Silvera, D. H., Josephs, R. A., & Giesler, R. B. (2002). Bigger is better: The influence of physical size on aesthetic preference judgments. Journal of Behavioral Decision Making, 15(3), 189-202.

DEPICT THE FIRST STEP AS COMPLETED

Additional tasks feel easier if the first step is already completed.

Need to motivate someone?

Try emphasizing a completed step.

For example, customers visited a coffee shop more frequently when they were given a loyalty card that started with existing progress (Kivetz et al., 2006).

(see fig 1)

It happens with *any* sequence of tasks.

Like this email from Change.org:

(see fig 2)

Insert any completed task, even if it's trivial (e.g., opening an email, visiting a website, reading a description).

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Law of Inertia**. Objects in motion stay in motion. Well, we use motion to imagine abstract ideas. If we're *moving* across tasks, we imagine physically moving across these tasks. Additional progress feels easier because we're inheriting the law of inertia. Since we're moving, it feels easier to continue moving.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Start Progress Above Zero**. Need users to complete their profile? Don't say it's 0% complete. Say 5%. Or start referral programs with 1 referral instead of 0.

→ **Acknowledge Trivial Completions.** Survey takers give more details when they see occasional completion screens because they can see their progress (Gu et al., 2024).

→ **Remind Customers They're Already at Your Store**. Why postpone? They would need to revisit.

→ **Reframe Finished Goals As a New Starting Point.** Customers bought more wine if their selection became the first product in a bundle (Bauer et al., 2022).

(see fig 3)

→ **Bundle Past Purchases With New Items**. After a customer buys a shirt, you could bundle it with a "casual night out" bundle of clothes. Since they already collected one item in this bundle, they'll be motivated to collect the remaining items.

(see fig 4)

Bauer, C., Spangenberg, K., Spangenberg, E. R., & Herrmann, A. (2022). Collect them all! Increasing product category cross-selling using the incompleteness effect. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 50(4), 713-741.

Kivetz, R., Urminsky, O., & Zheng, Y. (2006). The goal-gradient hypothesis resurrected: Purchase acceleration, illusionary goal progress, and customer retention. Journal of marketing research, 43(1), 39-58.

Gu, Y., Chan, E., & Krishna, A. (2024). The trivial-task motivation effect: highlighting completion of an initial trivial task increases motivation for the main task. Marketing Letters, 35(2), 219-230.

ILLUSIONARY PROGRESS
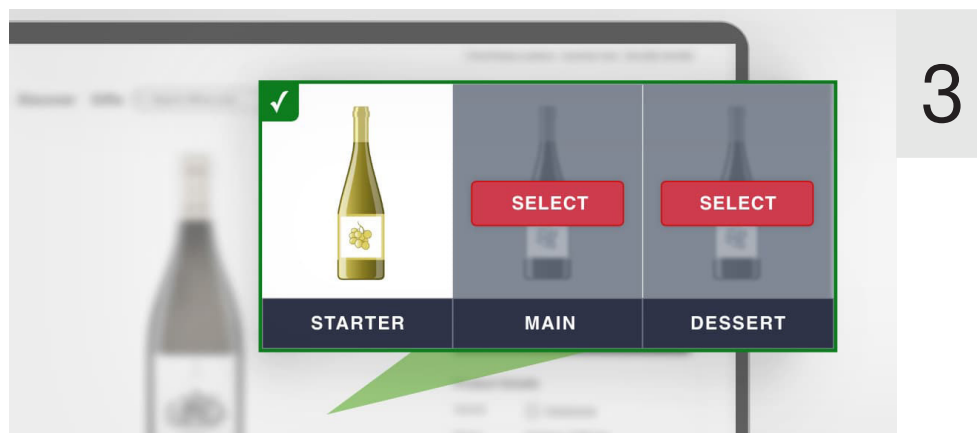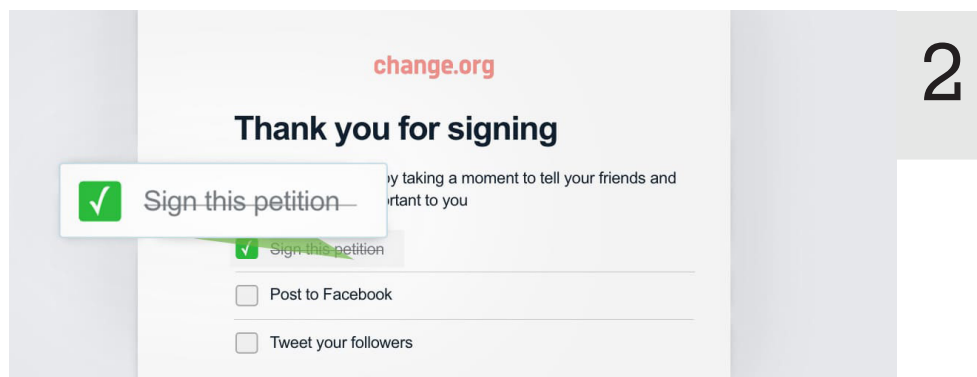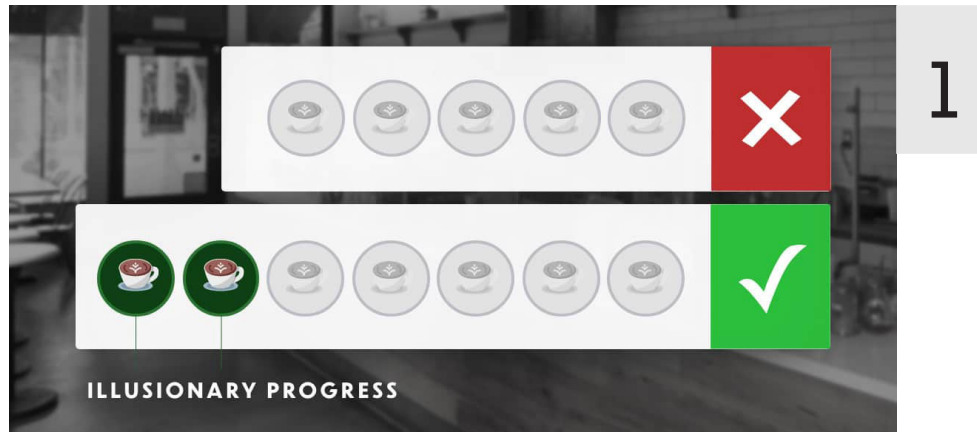
OUTFIT

Casual Night

ADD
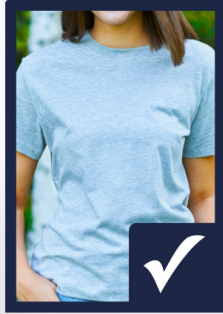
INSERT CUSTOMER NAMES INTO PURCHASES

Customers prefer order tracking by name (vs. number).

How should you track orders?

For example:

→ Starbucks tracks by *name*
→ Costco tracks by *order number*

Generally, customers prefer name tracking (Lim et al., 2024).

WHY IT WORKS

→ Relationship feels personal
→ Positive emotions from names can transfer to the product.
→ Products feel more valuable when we own them (e.g., endowment effect).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Address Customers By Name**. Emails from GoDaddy address the Customer ID.

(see fig 1)

→ **Insert Names in Ecommerce**. Try naming the customer's basket.

(see fig 2)

CAVEATS

→ **Privacy**. Use number tracking with privacy concerns.
→ **Failure Contexts**. In a mock restaurant, slow service was tolerated in a private room called Room 212 (vs. no name or Kitamoto). Participants also tolerated an overcooked steak at Table 218, compared to an unmarked table (Song et al., 2022).

(see fig 3)

Lim, S., van Osselaer, S. M., Goodman, J. K., Fuchs, C., & Schreier, M. (2024). The Starbucks effect: When name-based order identification increases customers' store preference and service satisfaction. Journal of Retailing.

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DIGITS CONVERT HIGHER THAN WORDS

Customers expect to see digits, so these numbers "feel right."

Which is better: 5 or five?

Popular guidelines encourage the latter:

> *…use numerals to express numbers 10 and above, and use words to express numbers zero through nine (APA Style)*

But is that persuasive? Maybe not.

Turns out, digits convert better than number words (Romero, Craig, Mormann, & Kumar, 2024).

It happened in:

→ Facebook Ads (e.g., 5 grams of protein)
→ Amazon Reviews (e.g., 5 stars)
→ Product Features (e.g., 3 free toppings)

Use digits in copywriting, even if you're breaking writing guidelines.

CAVEAT #1: EXPERTISE

Do you sell expertise?

Then your customers want *complexity*.

So they'll prefer visual complexity:

→ Obscure fonts (Thompson & Ince, 2013)
→ Ugly faces (Peng, Cui, Chung, & Zheng, 2020)
→ Long brand names (Kelly, Springer, & Keil, 1990).

Those traits "feel right" because they mimic the complexity that customers are seeking.

Perhaps your prospects would prefer a "thirty-minute" consultation because it feels like more time or complexity is crammed inside that duration.

CAVEAT #2: NARRATIVE CONTEXTS

Most writing guidelines allow digits in exempted scenarios.

You can show them in:

→ Measurements (e.g., 5-mg)
→ Time (e.g., 3 days)
→ Scores (e.g., 6 out of 7)

Unfortunately, the study used these exempted contexts (e.g., 5 grams).

So it's not entirely surprising that customers expected to see digits — since digits *were* the expected formats.

Perhaps the effect reverses in linguistic-driven contexts (e.g., *I'll have two*).

Kelly, M. H., Springer, K., & Keil, F. C. (1990). The relation between syllable number and visual complexity in the acquisition of word meanings. Memory & cognition, 18(5), 528-536.

Peng, L., Cui, G., Chung, Y., & Zheng, W. (2020). The faces of success: Beauty and ugliness premiums in e-commerce platforms. Journal of Marketing, 84(4), 67-85.

Romero, M., Craig, A. W., Mormann, M., & Kumar, A. (2024). Are '10-Grams of Protein" Better than'Ten Grams of Protein"? How Digits versus Number Words Influence Consumer Judgments. Journal of Consumer Research, ucae030.

Thompson, D. V., & Ince, E. C. (2013). When disfluency signals competence: The effect of processing difficulty on perceptions of service agents. Journal of Marketing Research, 50(2), 228-240.

AVOID MEANINGLESS 100% CLAIMS

Customers notice these claims, and they resist buying these products.

Doesn't 100% feel enticing?

→ 100% organic
→ 100% guarantee
→ 100% effective

And sure, those examples are likely persuasive.

But consider these claims:

→ 100% juice
→ 100% milk
→ 100% tasty

Some marketers inject 100% claims into questionable phrases:

> *...the term "100%" is sometimes coupled with an otherwise informative attribute (e.g., "juice" or "tasty") to create a claim that, upon closer inspection, is meaningless–because the concept of perfection is not well defined with respect to the focal attribute (Munichor & Levontin, 2024, p. 720)*

Are customers persuaded by these pseudo claims?

Turns out, no. They actively resist them (Munichor & Levontin, 2024).

In fact, they preferred 99% juice to 100% juice.

They even scorned people who bought 100% juice, believing them to be less successful, intelligent, and high status.

TAKEAWAYS

→ **Stick to Relevant Claims**. Don't needlessly insert 100%.
→ **Shift from 100% to 101%**. Ironically, this framing — a number that seems even *less* relevant — can be *more* persuasive. Customers preferred a hotel with a 101% (vs. 100%) satisfaction guarantee (Munichor & Levontin, 2024). Still unclear why.

Munichor, N., & Levontin, L. (2024). The effects of pseudo- relevant 100% claims. Psychology & Marketing, 41(4), 719-733.

SPECIALIZE FOR ROLES, NOT ACTIONS

Roles are more persuasive than actions because they describe permanent benefits with implicit social cues.

Most products do _[something]_ for _[someone]_.

Imagine a course on writing.

Which side is more persuasive: A course...

→ ..._on_ writing?
→ ..._for_ writers?

I'd argue that _roles_ are more persuasive than _actions_.

1. ROLES ARE PERMANENT

Compare these:

→ Jennifer enjoys dogs a lot
→ Jennifer is a dog person

Both seem similar, but Jennifer seemed more enamored with dogs when she was described as a dog person (Walton & Banaji, 2004).

Same with these examples:

→ ...is a coffee-drinker VS. drinks coffee a lot
→ ...is a night person VS. stays up late
→ ...is a baseball fan VS. watches baseball a lot

Verbs are fickle — they depend on the day, time, and more.

But nouns? They're permanent.

Therefore, a course "for writers" will convey _permanent_ benefits.

2. IMPLICIT SOCIAL PROOF

Consider each mental image:

→ **...on writing:** Prospects imagine the act of writing.
→ **...for writers:** Prospects imagine a group of writers taking your course.

Roles contain social proof. And these hypothetical

people belong to the same ingroup as prospects, so this effect is further magnified.

3. VALIDATION FOR NEWCOMERS

Some purchases can validate a role.

If writers are buying your course, they will inherit this designation (i.e., become an official writer) by merely purchasing it.

TAKEAWAY

→ **Sprinkle Roles Throughout Copy**. You can still mention actions too. Just don't forget to include roles.

CAVEATS

→ **Foster a Growth Mindset.** Customers were less likely to sign up for a training program for "leaders" because it seemed difficult (Savani & Zou, 2019). But this hesitation was resolved by describing leadership as a skill that could be developed.
→ **Harder With Diverse Segments**. You might need action-framing if your product caters to many types of people.

Savani, K., & Zou, X. (2019). Making the leader identity salient can be demotivating. Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, 25(2), 245.

Walton, G. M., & Banaji, M. R. (2004). Being what you say: The effect of essentialist linguistic labels on preferences. Social Cognition, 22(2), 193-213.

DON'T USE SCIENCE TO SELL EMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

Scientific rationales feel misplaced in emotional contexts, so they weaken perceived benefits.

Science is persuasive, unless you sell emotional products.

Across 10 studies, customers were less likely to buy emotional products with scientific rationales (Philipp-Muller et al., 2023).

→ **Science:** "Our rigorous scientific development process ensures that Zoza cookies taste delicious, indulgent, and gooey."
→ **Control:** "We ensure that Zoza cookies taste delicious, indulgent, and gooey."

Participants preferred the control cookies.

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Disfluency**. Scientific reasons feel misplaced in emotional contexts. Emotional products are driven by feelings; they should be *easy* to process. A \$24.37 pillow just feels wrong (Wadhwa & Zhang, 2015).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Sell the Experience, Not the Details**. Brooklinen could probably remove the "dual-core structure" blurb from their pillow description:

(see fig 1)

→ **Be Cautious With AI Features**. Don't needlessly jump on the AI bandwagon.
→ **Explain Why Science is Necessary**. A brief disclaimer minimized backlash in the studies. Scientists were also immune to this backlash.

Philipp-Muller, A., Costello, J. P., & Reczek, R. W. (2023). Get Your Science Out of Here: When Does Invoking Science in the Marketing of Consumer Products Backfire?. Journal of Consumer Research, 49(5), 721-740.

Wadhwa, M., & Zhang, K. (2015). This number just feels right: The impact of roundedness of price numbers on product evaluations. Journal of Consumer Research, 41(5), 1172-1185.

dual-core structure

Add to Cart

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consetetur sadipscing elitr, sed diam
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MENTION THE GROWING POPULARITY OF A BEHAVIOR

People are more likely to comply with a request if they believe this behavior is growing in popularity.

Social norms are persuasive, but what if a behavior isn't popular?

For example, in the United States, less than 15% of people eat enough fruits and vegetables. Mentioning this small percentage will *discourage* people from eating fruits and vegetables because it points the social norm in the wrong direction.

A new technique — the *uptrend effect* — solves this hurdle. Simply mention the relative increase in people following a behavior (Costello, Garvey, Germann, & Wilkie, 2023).

Researchers offered free apples at an outdoor event.

Some participants saw a sign that said: "...the number of Americans eating enough fruit (2 servings/day) has been increasing over time!"

And it worked. People were more likely to take the fruit.

They replicated this effect across 7 studies, including a Facebook ad campaign.

Why does it work? Because people equate a growing trajectory with a large absolute size, even if the true size is small (e.g., 15% of people).

Costello, J. P., Garvey, A. M., Germann, F., & Wilkie, J. E. (2023). EXPRESS: The Uptrend Effect: Encouraging Healthy Behaviors Through Greater Inferred Normativity. Journal of Marketing Research, 00222437231167832.

SUPPLY LIMITED EDITION	EXPERIENCES	LUXURY
DEMAND ONLY 2 LEFT	UTILITARIAN	CHEAP
TIME AVAILABLE UNTIL...	HEDONIC	EXPENSIVE

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TYPE OF SCARCITY

Each type of scarcity (supply, demand, time) affects behavior in different ways.

Scarcity is persuasive.

But the *type* of scarcity also matters (Barton et al., 2022).

LIMITED SUPPLY = STATUS SYMBOL

Restricting supply (e.g., limited editions) boosts sales for experiences and luxury brands because these products become status symbols. For example, it works for "conspicuous" products (e.g., clothing) because buyers need to compete with each other, endowing these products as status symbols (Jang et al., 2015).

LIMITED QUANTITY = HIGH DEMAND

"Only 2 left" conveys high demand, and this social proof boosts sales for rational products.

LIMITED TIME = MOTIVATION TO START

Seasonality boosts sales of indulgences (e.g., chocolate) because customers can rationalize these purchases (*Well, it's only available now...*).

Deadlines also help large purchases because customers feel motivated to begin researching the product.

Barton, B., Zlatevska, N., & Oppewal, H. (2022). Scarcity tactics in marketing: A meta-analysis of product scarcity effects on consumer purchase intentions. Journal of Retailing, 98(4), 741-758.

Jang, W. E., Ko, Y. J., Morris, J. D., & Chang, Y. (2015). Scarcity message effects on consumption behavior: Limited edition product considerations. Psychology & Marketing, 32(10), 989-1001.

DESCRIBE IMPACTS ON OTHER PEOPLE

Hospital staff were more likely to wash their hands when a message framed the benefits toward patients (vs. themselves).

Everyone is self-interested.

But not *always*.

Sometimes you can boost persuasion by describing how a specific action could benefit other people.

For example, a hospital influenced more people to wash their hands when they described the benefit toward patients (Grant & Hofmann, 2011).

→ Hand hygiene prevents **you** from catching diseases.
→ Hand hygiene prevents **patients** from catching diseases.

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Blind Optimism**. Nobody expects a car accident to happen, so they feel unmotivated to buy something that might prevent one. Therefore, describe how this decision (or lack thereof) could impact other people. Suddenly readers are no longer gambling their own safety – they are gambling the safety of their family and loved ones.

→ **Emotional Transfer**. Mentioning "your family" can transfer positive emotions to the product (Fisher et al., 2023).

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Frame Discounts for a Significant Other**. Mention other people who can benefit from your coupon (Fisher et al., 2023). You'll also activate a specific budget (e.g., family budget), narrowing the scope and capability of these funds so they feel less painful to spend (Pomerance & Reinholtz, 2024).
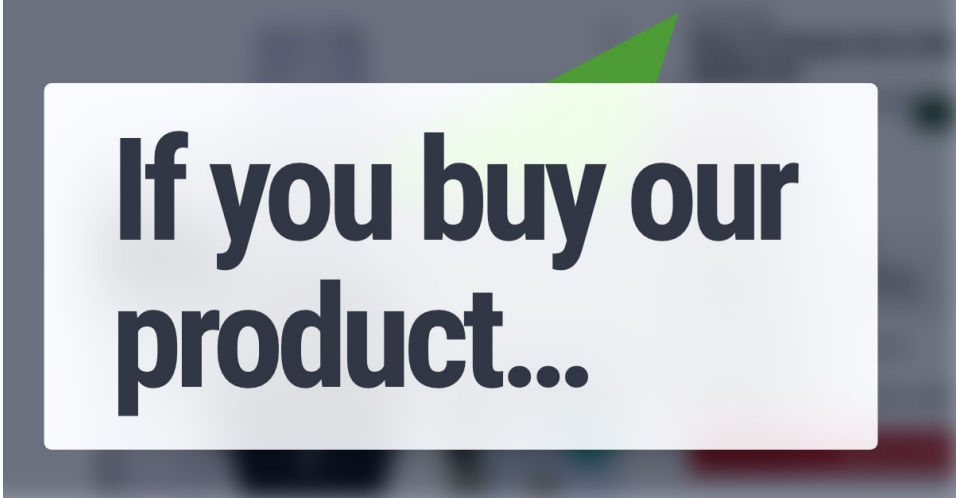
(see fig 1)

Grant, A. M., & Hofmann, D. A. (2011). It's not all about me: Motivating hand hygiene among health care professionals by focusing on patients. Psychological science, 22(12), 1494-1499.

Fisher, G., McGranaghan, M., Liaukonyte, J., & Wilbur, K. C. (2023). Price promotions, beneficiary framing, and mental accounting. Quantitative Marketing and Economics, 21(2), 147-181.

Pomerance, J., & Reinholtz, N. (2024). Cut me some slack! How perceptions of financial slack influence pain of payment. Psychology & Marketing, 41(5), 1100-1114.

If you buy our product...

MAKE HYPOTHETICAL ACTIONS MORE VIVID

More vivid? More desire.

Do you ask rhetorical questions?

Like the previous question?

If not, try them. Readers evaluate these messages more carefully:

> *Rhetorical questions tend to invite a response from the message recipient, overt or otherwise... [This] may increase the certainty of one's attitudes through an implicit response (Blankenship & Craig, 2006, p. 124)*

In fact, these questions can distort reality. Read this sentence:

→ If you win the lottery, what would you do?

You just read an IF-THEN statement. Even though the IF portion is hypothetical, winning the lottery now feels more realistic because you imagined this scenario.

Running a giveaway contest? Ask people what they would do if they won the prize or money. This imagery will entice them to participate because they will feel more likely to win.

But this technique can work in any scenario:

→ If you [desired behavior], how would...

Examples:

→ If you watch this course...
→ If you work with our team...
→ If you create an account...

> *. . . if-then statements trigger a mental simulation process in which people suppose the antecedent (if statement) to be true and evaluate the consequent (then statement) in that context . . . evaluating a conditional will heighten belief in its antecedent more than in its consequent (Hadjichristidis et al., 2007, p. 2052).*

Or replace *if* with a stronger hypothetical:

→ *If* is uncertain
→ *When* is certain, but before the event

→ *After* is certain, and after the event has happened (thus most vivid)

CAVEATS

→ **Reactance**. Don't be pushy or manipulative.
→ **Leave Something to Be Desired**. People who imagined eating candy subsequently ate less candy because they satiated their desire. Perhaps keep uncertainty for inconsequential actions (Morewedge et al., 2010).

Hadjichristidis, C., Handley, S. J., Sloman, S. A., Evans, J. S. B., Over, D. E., & Stevenson, R. J. (2007). Iffy beliefs: Conditional thinking and belief change. Memory & cognition, 35(8), 2052-2059.

Morewedge, C. K., Huh, Y. E., & Vosgerau, J. (2010). Thought for food: Imagined consumption reduces actual consumption. Science, 330(6010), 1530-1533.
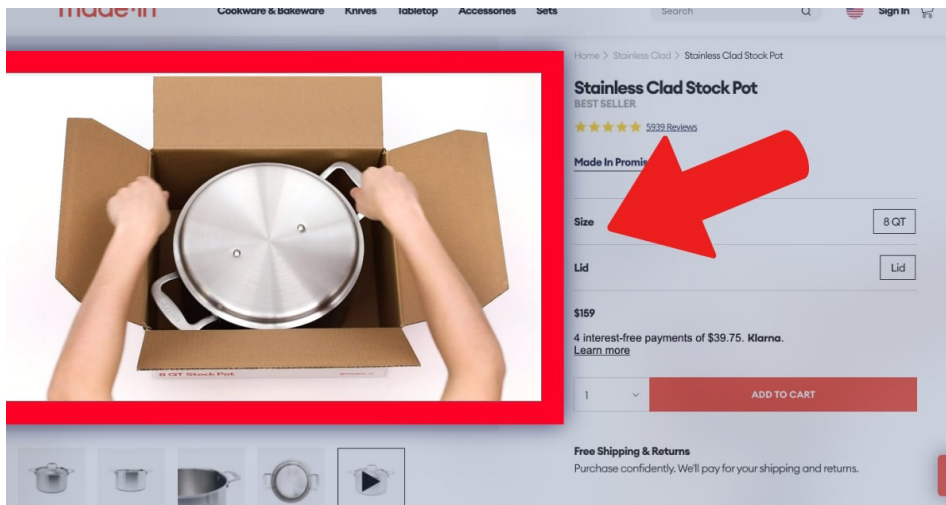
HELP CUSTOMERS SIMULATE A PURCHASE

You imagine the outcome of a decision (benefits). Then you imagine the steps (costs). Then you gauge which feeling is stronger.

You're reading this tactic.

But *why*? How did you make this decision?

Before clicking, you imagined reading it, using this mental imagery to gauge your desire. Did this imagery feel good? Then you clicked this tactic.

In every decision, you simulate two events:

→ **Outcome:** What happens afterward?
→ **Process:** What steps are required?

Those are the benefits and costs, respectively.

Next, you subtract these emotions to calculate the "net" value of the decision.

For example, should you buy a new suit? You will simulate the outcome (e.g., looking good, getting hired), then compare these positive emotions to the negative emotions of the process (e.g., spending money, spending time to find a suit) resulting in a surplus or deficit.

(see fig 1)

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Show the Unboxing**. Show an image or video of somebody opening a delivery that contains your product. Ease their ability to imagine buying your product: *Hmm, do I want to buy this pot? I can picture myself buying it. Therefore, I must want to buy it.*

HOW WE DECIDE

OUTCOME — PROCESS = NET VALUE

EXAMPLE

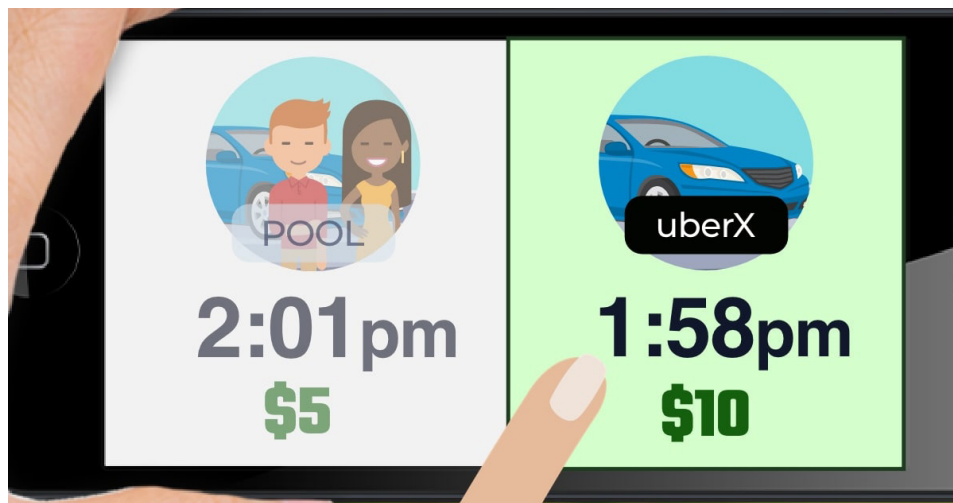## Should I buy a new suit?

DEFICIT
DECISION IS **NO**

— Look good
— Get hired

OUTCOME

—

— Spend $500
— Effort

PROCESS

=

NET

nickkolenda

4

DATES & NUMBERS

KEEP WAITING PERIODS FROM PASSING A ROUND NUMBER

1:58 PM feels sooner than 2:01 PM

Time is categorized into brackets.

Customers prefer a more expensive UberX if it arrives within the same hour (e.g., 1:58pm). Crossing a time bracket (e.g., 2:01pm) feels longer even if the difference is trivial (Donnelly et al., 2022).

(see fig 1)

Therefore:

→ Minimize brackets for negative events (e.g., layovers).
→ Maximize brackets for positive events (e.g., lunch break).

WHY IT WORKS

→ **Anchoring**. This effect resembles *just-below prices* in which $4.99 feels cheaper than $5.00. Much like a one-cent difference, a one-minute difference can be deceptively powerful because your brain overemphasizes the unit difference.

(see fig 2)

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Shipping**. Imagine that today is August 23. Free shipping feels worse if the product arrives in September, while expedited shipping feels enticing if the product arrives within the same month of August.

(see fig 3)

→ **Store Hours**. Perhaps extend store hours from 8:30pm to 9:00pm so that you reach a new time bracket. This extra 30 minutes will feel like 60 minutes.
→ **Length of Benefits**. Access to customer support might end on the final day of a month (e.g., August 31). Why not shift this timeline a single day (e.g., September 1) so that it feels like an extra month.
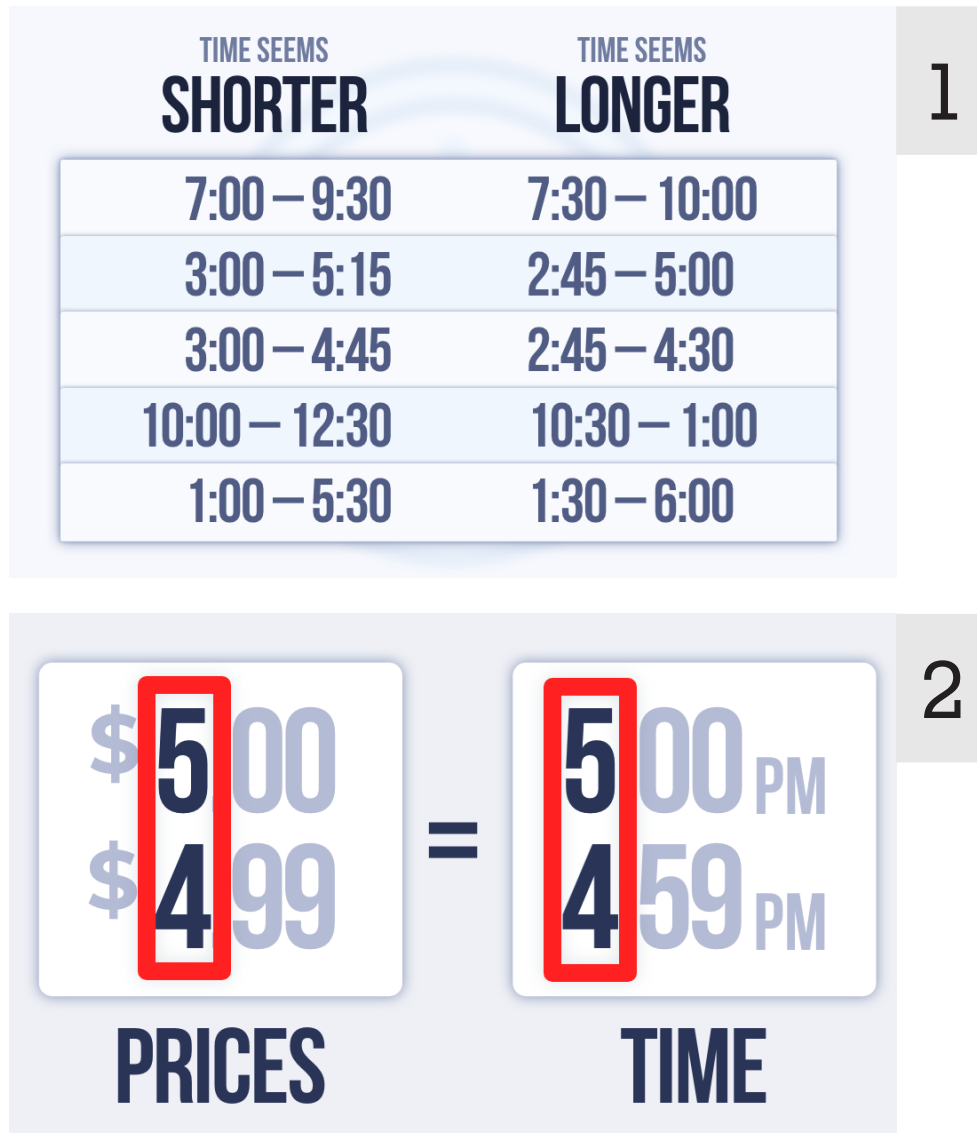→ **See Results By**. Frame results within the current time bracket (e.g., end of the month, quarter, or year).

→ **Meetings**. A 45-minute meeting is preferred from 1:00pm to 1:45pm (vs. 1:30pm to 2:15pm). However, meetings seem more productive when they span more time brackets. People estimated they could accomplish more tasks during seemingly larger time windows.

(see fig 4)

→ **Life Decisions**. Would a 17-year old be tempted to pursue a 2-year degree that finishes in their teens? Would an 18-year-old be less intimidated with a 4-year degree since both programs end in their twenties?

Donnelly, K., Compiani, G., & Evers, E. R. (2022). Time periods feel longer when they span more category boundaries: Evidence from the lab and the field. Journal of Marketing Research, 59(4), 821-839.
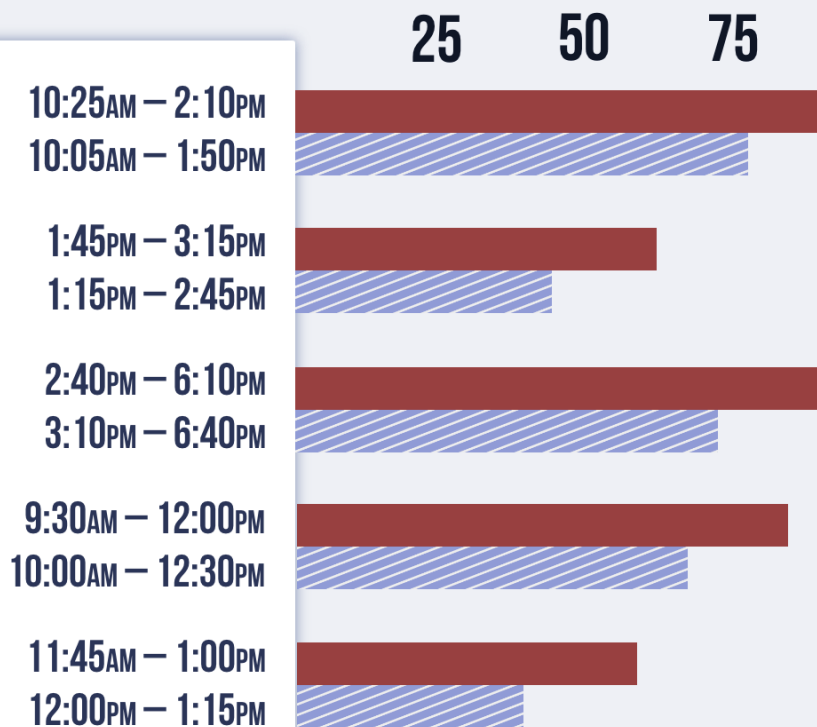
TIME SEEMS SHORTER	TIME SEEMS LONGER	1
7:00 – 9:30	7:30 – 10:00	
3:00 – 5:15	2:45 – 5:00	
3:00 – 4:45	2:45 – 4:30	
10:00 – 12:30	10:30 – 1:00	
1:00 – 5:30	1:30 – 6:00	

2

$5.00
$4.99

=

5:00 PM
4:59 PM

PRICES   TIME

3

ARRIVES ON:

○ **SEPTEMBER 1**
FREE NO-RUSH SHIPPING

● **AUGUST 25**
$6.95 PRIORITY SHIPPING

4

"HOW MANY TASKS CAN YOU FINISH?"

25   50   75

10:25AM — 2:10PM
10:05AM — 1:50PM

1:45PM — 3:15PM
1:15PM — 2:45PM

2:40PM — 6:10PM
3:10PM — 6:40PM

9:30AM — 12:00PM
10:00AM — 12:30PM

11:45AM — 1:00PM
12:00PM — 1:15PM

125% longer battery

Feels like 25%

125% MORE FEELS LIKE 25% MORE"

A "more" percentage feels like an "of" percentage.

Customers believe that:

150% more than [number] = 150% of [number]

But these variations are different:

→ 150% of 100 = 150
→ 150% more than 100 = 250

Customers equate these statements, but they differ by a full 100 percent. That's why it's called the *Off by 100% Bias* (Fisher & Mormann, 2022).

(see fig 1)

Therefore, be careful with percentages that depict a relative change. Suppose that you increased a product's battery life from 4 hours to 9 hours.

→ **Don't say:** Battery lasts 125% longer.
→ **Say:** You doubled the battery life.

The latter is technically smaller, but it sounds bigger.

Fisher, M., & Mormann, M. (2022). The off by 100% bias: the effects of percentage changes greater than 100% on magnitude judgments and consumer choice. Journal of Consumer Research, 49(4), 561-573.

MON - SAT

Feels longer

MON   SUN

JAN 1 - JAN 6

1   31

FRAME WAITING PERIODS IN CALENDAR DATES

Jan 1 to Jan 6 feels shorter than Monday to Saturday.

Suppose that it takes 6 days to deliver your product.

Frame this duration in calendar dates (e.g., Jan 1 to Jan 6)

Days-of-the-week feels longer because it has a longer *relative* length:

→ **Jan 1 to Jan 6**. 15% of the month.
→ **Monday to Saturday**. 85% of the week.

HOW TO APPLY

→ **Frame Negative Times in Calendar Dates**. Shipping delay, construction, detours.
→ **Frame Positive Times in Days-of-the-Week**. Vacations, conferences, festivals.

Sokolova, T. (2023). Days-of-the-week Effect in Temporal Judgments. Journal of Consumer Research, 50(1), 167-189.
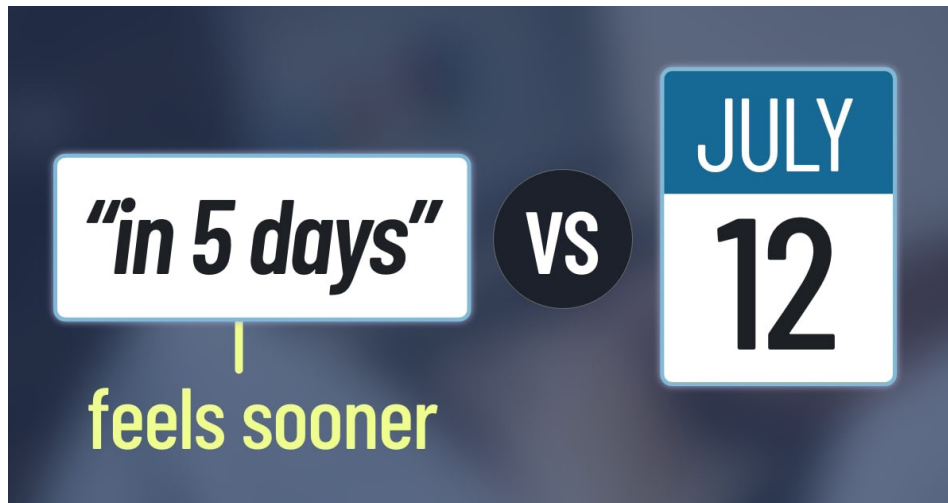
FRAME DEADLINES WITH REMAINING TIME

Durations (e.g., 5 days) feel sooner than calendar dates (e.g., July 12) because they are moving closer.

Suppose that today is July 7.

If something is due in 5 days, you could frame this deadline in different ways:

→ **Duration:** "Due in 5 days."
→ **Date:** "Due by July 12."

In a recent study, college students were more likely to begin a writing assignment when they were given a duration (Jeong et al., 2023). It also happened with other contexts (e.g., coupons) and longer durations (e.g., 120 days).

Why? Because we conceptualize time in two ways:

→ **Moving Observer:** *We* move toward the future.
→ **Moving Time:** *The future* moves toward us.

Durations are motivating because they activate Moving Time:

(see fig 1)

We conceptualize "July 12" as stationary, but we conceptualize "5 days" as if it were approaching us. And whenever something is moving toward us, we feel anxious and act sooner (Xu et al., 2023).

Need people to act before July 12? Mention the remaining number of days, and frame this deadline with approaching motion.

(see fig 2)

Jeong, Y., Hwang, S., & Suk, K. (2023). Ten days (vs. May 10) make you rush: The effect of time descriptions on task scheduling. Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 53(2), 121-133.
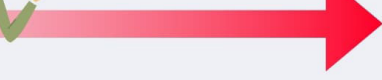
Xu, X., Jia, M., & Chen, R. (2023). Time moving or ego moving? How time metaphors influence perceived temporal distance. Journal of Consumer Psychology.

1

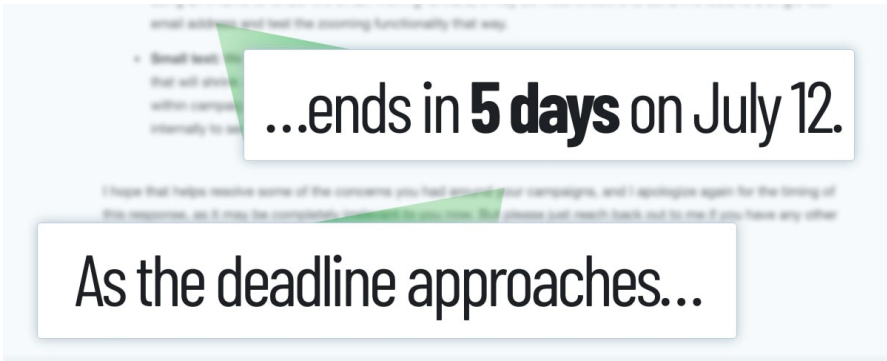5 days

MOVING TIME

July 12

MOVING OBSERVER

2

...ends in **5 days** on July 12.

As the deadline approaches...

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