

Writing Your Rental Ad.

by Don Conrad

To attract the best pool of tenant prospects possible, writing a well thought out ad is a must. So that you better understand this procedure, I will explain the basics of ad writing, using a “build as you go” system. Each step of the system will be represented by a number, and each number represents an important ingredient in the structuring of your ad. We will write an ad for 712 Oak in the town of Miller, referring to each number one at a time and build our ad as we go.

1) Area. Start with the area the rental is located. People almost always begin looking for a dwelling in a certain area or areas, so use the area name that the majority of people will know. Remember that if the rental is in a large city or locale, try to list the smallest popularly known area possible. For our example, we would list “Miller.”

2) Hook, snare, bait, the catch. What do the following phrases have in common?

- * “Where’s the beef?”
- * “Help. I’ve fallen and I can’t get up.”
- * “Clap on. Clap off. Clap on. Clap off. The Clapper.”

They all have “sizzle” words or catchphrases that make us remember the product years after the ad that popularized the catchphrase is extinct. These simple phrases were vital to the success of the product they represented and in these examples actually helped to rocket sales and brand recognition past anyone’s expectations.

I’m not saying you need a catchphrase so people will remember your ad for all eternity, but I will say that the first word in your ad needs to be a sizzle word or phrase that grabs the reader’s attention. This word or phrase is the most important one in the whole ad because it should pique the reader’s interest, causing them to look at your ad more closely than the other ads in that section—and hopefully getting them to call in response to your ad.

Basically, the word or phrase could be anything that really highlights the house or the area it’s in. Examples include: close to schools, cleanliness, big yard, pool, large garage, or quiet.

Remember to view this phrase from a tenant’s eyes, because what you think is great may not be that hot to a tenant. For example: Miller, large lawn, 3 acres.

If you have a small two-bedroom house on 3 acres of lawn that will attract mostly new couples or retired elderly folks with very little money who probably can barely afford their \$100 push lawnmower, do you think 3 acres is a plus or minus? Not that I wouldn’t use big yard, 3 acres somewhere in the ad, but just remember that you want 20 calls in response to your ad, not two. So write the ad in the same way your prospective tenant base will interpret the ad.

What do you do if your house is so mundane and ordinary that you absolutely can’t find a good sizzle word to describe it? Go clean it again and then advertise extra clean as your sizzle words. Clean sells, plain and simple. Always remember that fact..

Another idea you might want to try is making your sizzle word(s) the general heading of the ad. Simply spell it out in capital letters, centered on the first line of your ad to draw people’s attention to

it. This technique is often employed by car dealers and large apartment complexes in the classifieds. This method will probably cost you more, but it could be worth it.

One of the best phrases I used to use at the beginning of my ad was A-1 tenant wanted. I say "used to" because our paper had a management change in the advertising department and the new management felt this term might be discriminatory, so eventually they refused to print it. I argued that the person reading the ad would decide if they were of A-1 quality or not, so I wasn't discriminating, I was just looking for people who held themselves up to high standards. I lost the argument, but that doesn't mean you can't try this catch phrase and see if you have success with it. Before my newspaper refused to print my ads with this phrase, I got a lot of quality tenants with that phrase. Let's add the chosen sizzle word to our ad. We now have: Miller, super clean.

3) The body. Here's where you list amenities. First, always list the number of bedrooms. This is your biggest call eliminator, next to the price. People almost always have a preset bedroom standard in mind when they begin to house hunt. Next, list bathrooms, but only if there is more than one. If you only have one, use your ink on something else. Of course, if your area still relies on outdoor facilities and an indoor bathroom is a plus, then by all means, do list the bathroom.

Then, if the house has any of these items, list them in this order: basement (bsmt), garage (gar), fenced yard (fncd yd), and central air (CA). There are many other amenities worth listing and feel free to do so, but I find these four features are the heart and soul for most house hunters. As far as listing other amenities, keep this rule in mind: Whatever you put in print has to be of interest to the prospective tenant. Newer roof or new siding means a lot less to a prospective tenant than to a prospective home buyer. If you ran out of home amenities but still want to include more information, add another sizzle word, such as spacious, beautiful neighborhood, or, close to highway to the ad. Let's review what we have so far: Miller, super clean, 3-bedroom, 1.5 bath, basement, central air

4) Closer. The closer is a word or words that tilt the caller in your favor should they have many properties to possibly call on. It is usually not about the house, but geared toward the prospect themselves, such as Section 8 okay, available August 1, or no pets allowed.

If you personalize your ad with a closer, you must make sure you do not say anything that could be misconstrued as violations of the Fair Housing Act. You'd probably be wise to stay away from words or phrases that have to do with children or religion such as: close to Catholic church or close to playground. Since smokers are not covered by these laws, you can use a closer about smoking. Pets also are fair game with the exception of animals used for the aid of a handicap or disability, such as a Seeing Eye dog. Section 8 OK just shows you are willing to accept a broader range of applicants.

Using a closer is a good way to take an ad to a more personal level, just be sure you do not violate any Fair Housing laws. Let's add a closer to the ad that we've structured so far: Miller, super clean, 3 bedroom, 1.5 bath, basement, central air, pets allowed.

5) Address. If you wish to list the address, this is the spot to do it. Never list your address first because you want people to read your ad before they see the address. Otherwise, if they run out to look at your three-bedroom dwelling when they need four, you've wasted their time. Also, listing the address after describing amenities allows the potential tenant to get enthusiastic about your rental unit.

If you don't want to list the exact address but would like people to know the general proximity, simply list a well-known landmark or intersection in the ad, such as near Miller Mall or close to First and Taft. The ad now includes the following: Miller, super clean, 3 bedroom, 1.5 bath, basement, central air, pets allowed, 712 Oak.

6) Rent. I always list rent. This is the greatest determining factor for people calling or not calling. With very few exceptions, people know what they want or can afford to pay. Now our ad includes: Miller, super clean, 3 bedroom, 1.5 bath, basement, central air, pets allowed, 712 Oak, \$800 per month.

7) Security deposit. Putting the security deposit in print is not as important as rent, but I still list it because I want people to know how much money they'll need to move in to my unit. If you also collect last month's rent, this would be the place to list that as well: Miller, super clean, 3 bedroom, 1.5 bath, basement, central air, pets allowed, 712 Oak, \$800 per month, \$750 security deposit.

8) Contact info. Of course, you need a phone number or email address where prospective tenants can reach you once you start advertising. Also, if you use a website to further help advertise or show your rental, this is the location for saying so in your ad. Something along the lines of "additional information or photos available on your website at _____" is appropriate. Now let's add the contact information to complete the ad: Miller, super clean, 3 bedroom, 1.5 bath, basement, central air, pets allowed, 712 Oak, \$800 per month, \$750 security deposit, 555-1234.

Now that we have finished constructing an ad, I want to remind you to customize your ad as needed. Eliminate or add sizzle words, phone numbers, and other information to make your ad work for you. A well written, well placed ad, will go a long way to find that quality tenant. (To learn a little more about ad placement, go to my website at <http://www.findthatqualitytenant.com> and check out the ads chapter in my ebook).

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If you would like further information on this topic, please purchase my book "How to Find That Quality Tenant". Ask your locale bookstore or see my website at www.findthatqualitytenant.com.

I am not a lawyer, therefore, if you have any legal concerns with anything in this article, please contact the appropriate legal counsel.

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Thank You. Don Conrad

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Note: See Don in person at our CCIA meeting on June 28th at Signature Events in Woodriget!