

Goofus and Gallant Write Marketing Copy

By Scott Palmer

When I was a kid, *Highlights* magazine had a regular cartoon strip that tried to teach proper behavior. It featured Goofus, a rude, noisy, trouble-making little boy, and Gallant, a polite, quiet, well-mannered child who was every mother's ideal.

Each month, Goofus did something wrong: forgot to say "thank you," lied to the teacher, or forgot to do his chores. Gallant, by contrast, always said thank you, always told the truth, and always volunteered to do more than his share of chores. The suggestion was that we should all emulate sweet little Gallant.

In that spirit, here are a few examples of the Goofus-and-Gallant approach to writing book marketing "tip sheets." Goofus, naturally, does it wrong, while Gallant does it right. Most of the "Goofus" examples are from actual marketing copy that writers turned in to me for editing. The "Gallant" examples show how I rewrote the flawed marketing copy.

Principle	Goofus (wrong)	Gallant (right)
Don't forget your audience (publishers' salespeople and buyers for bookstores).	Key Features Do you want to connect to the Internet and surf your way to free goodies?	Key Features Shows readers how to connect to the Internet and surf their way to free goodies.
Don't use big words when smaller ones will do.	<u>Depicts</u> numerous ways for readers to <u>utilize</u> advanced programming constructs.	<u>Shows</u> hundreds of ways for readers to <u>use</u> advanced programming constructs.
Don't use long, complex sentences when shorter, simpler ones will do. Don't include too many details.	Visual Basic, the easiest way to write object-oriented applications, is expected to overtake Cobol as the most widely used programming language in history, according to PC Week. The ease and reusable nature of object-oriented programming and the rising popularity of Visual Basic leave no doubt ... <i>blah blah blah blah blah ...</i>	Visual Basic is the most popular programming language in history. Object-oriented programming is the wave of the future. What happens when you put the two together? You get <i>Object-Oriented Programming With Visual Basic 5</i> , a blockbuster title that shows readers how to use true object-oriented techniques with the latest and most powerful release of Visual Basic.
Don't include irrelevant information.	The author collects stamps and is a licensed airplane pilot.	The author has 15 years of programming experience and has written two other books.
Don't speak in generalities if you can avoid it.	The book includes <u>many</u> example programs ...	The book includes <u>over 50</u> example programs ...

Principle	Goofus (wrong)	Gallant (right)
<p>Don't lose control of the process.</p>	<p>Author: "We really need to include something about my Aunt Matilda, who looks after my cats while I'm writing."</p> <p>Goofus: "Well, okay, if you feel strongly about it."</p>	<p>Author: "We really need to include something about my Aunt Matilda, who looks after my cats while I'm writing."</p> <p>Gallant: "Remember that the marketing tip sheet is to sell your book and <i>make money for you</i>. Everything in the tip sheet should contribute to that goal. Let's find another way to show your gratitude to Aunt Matilda."</p>
<p>Do use parallel structure (all sentences in a series of bullets should have roughly the same structure, such as beginning with an action verb).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features 16 pages of full-color illustrations ... • Readers will get all the help they need from the included step-by-step instructions ... • How to do the most arcane tasks is demonstrated ... • The book gives explanations of the most advanced features ... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Features</u> 16 pages of full-color illustrations ... • <u>Includes</u> step-by-step instructions ... • <u>Demonstrates</u> how ... • <u>Explains</u> the most advanced features ...
<p>Do make the tip sheet as accurate and specific as possible.</p>	<p>Millions of programmers are switching from Cobol to Visual Basic ...</p>	<p>Visual Basic has over 2 million users worldwide and over 900,000 users in the United States ...</p>