Grateful *Hands*
WRITING & DESIGN STUDIO

A FREE FIELD GUIDE

5 words costing you *customers.*

And the ones that bring them back.

01	~~Solutions~~	*from solvere, to untie. Which knot?* Breaks Clear
02	~~Affordable~~	*an apology for your price.* Breaks Compelling
03	~~Just~~	*shrinks whatever follows it.* Breaks Confident
04	~~Quality~~	*nobody repeats it to a friend.* Breaks Contagious
05	~~We~~	*the pronoun they aren't looking for.* Breaks Customer-centered

INSIDE

The five C's every line needs: clear, compelling, confident, contagious, customer-centered. The six questions every buyer asks. Five Tampa businesses and the one lesson each teaches. A six-stop site walk and a worksheet.

TIME

Read it in 25 minutes. Make your first edit in 15.

Customers come back to the business they understand.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU START

I know what it's like to be better in person than online. I've lost customers to it too.

Nothing in this guide says your business isn't good. It says your words may not be showing it yet. Every fix inside is yours to keep and yours to make, today, without hiring anyone.

Gerardo Ponce
GRATEFUL HANDS

ROOT

customer

Shares its root with *custom*, from the Latin *consuetudo*: habit. The word holds the whole goal. Not a buyer. A habit that includes you.

Most people don't read your website. They scan it. Usability researcher Jakob Nielsen analyzed a browsing study in 2008: on an average web page, visitors have time to read at most 28% of the words. Twenty percent is more likely.[1]

People don't buy the best product. They buy the one they understand fastest. If your homepage needs a second sentence to explain what you do, your customer is already in the next tab.

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To use this guide: open your homepage in another tab. Read a page, make its edit, move on. Each edit takes 5 to 20 minutes. No developer needed.

Words that win customers are clear, compelling, confident, contagious, and customer-centered.

Each C has a finding you can check and an edit you can make this afternoon. Every page after this one marks which C a word breaks.

01

Clear

clarus: bright, and loud enough to hear

Read once, understood. In 1999, Rolf Reber and Norbert Schwarz found people judged statements more likely true when they were easier to read.[2] Clarity reads as honesty. The moment a customer has to translate, they start to doubt.

Today: swap one long word in your headline for a short one.

02

Compelling

compellere: to drive together

Tied to what the customer protects or gains: money, time, health, standing, the people they love. Kahneman and Tversky showed a loss weighs about twice an equal gain.[3] And in Ellen Langer's copier study, giving a reason raised yeses from 60% to 94%.[4]

Today: beside each service, write what it protects or gains. That line goes first.

03

Confident

con + fidere: with full trust

No apologies for your price, your size, or your ask. In a 1978 courtroom study, witnesses who hedged ("sort of," "I think," "um") were judged less credible than witnesses who stated the same facts plainly.[5] Customers hear the hedge before the offer.

Today: search your site for *just, only, affordable, try, hope.* See page 7.

04

Contagious

contagio: a touching

Short enough to pass mouth to mouth. Your best marketing is a customer quoting you at dinner, and they can only quote what they remember. Sound helps: in a 1999 study, "woes unite foes" was judged more accurate than "woes unite enemies."[6]

Today: say your main line to a friend. Ask for it back tomorrow. Cut what they drop.

05

Customer-centered

custom: habit

About them, not you. In 1977, psychologists found people remembered words best when asked whether the words described themselves.[7] A page about your business gets scanned. A page about your customer gets kept.

Today: run the pronoun count on page 9.

Before anyone buys, they ask six questions.

Your page answers these questions whether you mean it to or not. Most pages answer them backwards: they start with the business, and the customer is left to work out the rest.

yourbusiness.com, read top to bottom

1. **“Is this for me?”**
   Headline. Name what they get, not what you are.
2. **“Do you get what I’m dealing with?”**
   Subhead. Name the problem in their words, and how it feels.
3. **“Why you?”**
   Proof. One line of empathy, one fact: years, a number, a review.
4. **“What happens next?”**
   Three steps. Book. Meet. Enjoy the result. Simple beats complete.
5. **“What do I do now?”**
   One button. A plain verb and the thing they get. Repeat it lower on the page.
6. **“What do I gain, or lose?”**
   The after. Show life once it’s solved. Name the cost of waiting once.

Your story gets one scene. Your customer’s habit gets the rest.

New customers arrive unsure. Certainty is what lets them relax. Your page doesn’t need to brag. It needs to show you’ve seen this problem before and know the way through. Talk about yourself only enough to earn that trust. Customer-centered, and confident, at once.

USE IT TODAY Scroll your homepage and label each section with the number of the question it answers. A section that answers none of them is spending attention you need elsewhere. Cut it or move it lower.

~~Solutions~~

Latin *solvere*: to loosen, to untie. A solution unties a knot. Which knot? The word won't say.

BREAKS ✕ Clear | Compelling | Confident | ✕ Contagious | Customer-centered

Abstract nouns make the reader translate: solutions, services, offerings, experiences. Translation takes time, and a scanning visitor won't give you time. Plain nouns are what customers type into Google. Brunch. Bookstore. Roof repair. Divorce lawyer.

SEEN IN TAMPA · A KITCHEN CONTRACTOR

"[We] specialize in providing quality kitchen cabinet solutions."

Common, and fixable.

OUR REWRITE, ON THE HOUSE

Kitchen cabinets designed and installed across Tampa Bay, by a remodeler with 35 years of award-winning kitchens.

Plain nouns and a number. Two of our five words gone.

GETS IT RIGHT · OXFORD EXCHANGE, ACROSS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

Many things under one roof, named in plain nouns.

Oxford Exchange is a restaurant, a bookstore, a shop, and a membership workspace, inside an 1891 building across from Henry B. Plant's Tampa Bay Hotel that likely began as a stable.[8] A place like that could hide behind "experience" or "lifestyle destination." Instead, it names its main rooms the way a visitor would.[9]

The Restaurant	The Bookstore	The Shop

A first-time visitor knows where to go. A return visitor knows what to ask for.

The lesson: when you do many things, don't reach for a bigger word. Use several small ones, each in its place. Clear by definition.

YOUR TURN

WHERE TO LOOK TODAY · 15 MIN

1. Your main menu. Is every label something a customer would search?
2. Your service headings. "Solutions" becomes the actual thing. "Services" becomes the list.
3. Then check how Google shows those pages (page 11).

~~Affordable~~

Old English *geforþian*: to carry out, to accomplish. It once meant you could get it done. Now it apologizes for the price.

BREAKS Clear ✕ Compelling ✕ Confident Contagious Customer-centered

"Affordable" answers a question nobody asked: can I manage this? It makes price the subject before the customer knows what they're getting. Premium buyers hear "cheap." Budget buyers hear "still more than I hoped." The number alone, given a reason, does more than any word you put in front of it.

SEEN IN TAMPA · AN APARTMENT LISTING

"Affordability and comfort await you at [our apartments]."

Common, and fixable.

OUR REWRITE, ON THE HOUSE

Pet-friendly one-, two-, and three-bedroom apartments, from $1,237 a month.

The number already says what "affordable" was trying to.

GETS IT RIGHT · COLUMBIA RESTAURANT, YBOR CITY

Columbia didn't apologize for its prices. It threw a party with them.

Columbia began as a saloon in 1903 and built its name on 1905.[10,11] For years, on "1905 Day," the restaurant rolled menu prices back toward what they were a century ago, when it fed Ybor City's cigar workers. It's now saved for special anniversaries.[12] That low price was never an apology. It was a story, and a reason to show up.

The lesson: most of the time, price isn't the problem. Apologizing for it is. Give the number a reason, never a shrinking word.

YOUR TURN

WHERE TO LOOK TODAY · 10 MIN

1. Search your site for *affordable, cheap, budget-friendly, low-cost, competitive pricing.*
2. Replace each with the number, or with what the price includes.
3. Then read your pricing page aloud. Does it sound sure of itself?

Wondering what we'd write for your line? The free audit starts there →

Just

Latin *iustus*: upright, exact, right. It once meant precisely. Now it mostly means merely, and shrinks whatever follows it.

BREAKS Clear | Compelling | ✕ Confident | Contagious | Customer-centered

"Starting at just $2,860." "Just checking in." "It's just a quick call." Each one apologizes before it asks. The customer hears the hedge first and the offer second. "Just" has cousins that do the same quiet damage:

only · simply · try · hope · hopefully · sorry to bother · a little · we think

SEEN IN TAMPA · AN APARTMENT SPECIAL

"Move in today for just $599, including security deposit and all of [this month's] rent!"

A strong offer, apologized for.

OUR REWRITE, ON THE HOUSE

Move in today for $599. That covers your deposit and all of this month's rent.

Same offer, same price. It sounds bigger without the apology.

GETS IT RIGHT · BUDDY BREW COFFEE

Friendly is not the same as apologetic.

Dave and Susan Ward started roasting in their garage and named the brand after their dog, Buddy.[13] They built it to feel welcoming at a time when specialty coffee often felt exclusive.[14] Warm, yes. Shrinking, never. Ward doesn't describe Buddy Brew as just another choice for coffee drinkers. He calls it the choice. The company buys only beans that score 85 or better.[15]

Notice "only" in that last sentence. Here it works the other way. It isn't an apology. It's a standard.

The lesson: you can be warm and certain in the same sentence. Certainty is what lets a customer relax.

YOUR TURN

WHERE TO LOOK TODAY · 10 MIN

1. Search your site, last three emails, and recent posts for every word in the dashed boxes.
2. Delete it. Reread the sentence.

If it reads stronger with nothing added, the word was apologizing.

~~Quality~~

Latin *qualitas*, said to be coined by Cicero from *qualis*: "of what kind?" Quality began as a question. Claiming it answers nothing.

BREAKS Clear | ✕ Compelling | Confident | ✕ Contagious | Customer-centered

Every competitor says quality. A word anyone can claim proves nothing, and nobody repeats it to a friend. Customers trust, and pass along, what they can check: a number, a process, a place, a name.

SEEN IN TAMPA · A CUSTOM BUILDER

"We bring our clients' vision to life by combining innovative design, quality craftsmanship, and exceptional service."

Common, and fixable.

OUR REWRITE, ON THE HOUSE

One team from first sketch to final walkthrough, for your renovation or custom build.

Three adjectives out. One promise a customer can repeat.

GETS IT RIGHT · J.C. NEWMAN CIGAR CO., YBOR CITY

The word doing the work isn't "quality." It's "last."

In 1895, J.C. Newman borrowed $50 for tobacco and turned his family's barn in Cleveland into a one-man cigar factory.[16] The company moved to Tampa in 1954 and bought El Reloj, a 1910 factory named for its clock tower. Ybor City residents once told time by its bell.[17]

At its peak, Tampa had more than 150 cigar factories. Today J.C. Newman runs what it calls the last traditional cigar factory still operating in the United States.[18]

The lesson: "the last cigar factory in America" is a sentence people repeat at dinner. One true superlative outworks ten adjectives.

DOWN THE ROAD

Bern's Steak House doesn't call its wine list "extensive." It counts its collection: more than half a million bottles.[19] A number ends the argument an adjective starts.

YOUR TURN

WHERE TO LOOK TODAY · 15 MIN

Search your site for *quality, premium, best, top-notch, world-class, exceptional.* Replace each with the fact that would prove it.

No fact to use? That's not a word to keep. That's your next piece of work.

We

Consider the word *advertise*, from the Latin *advertere*: to turn toward. Every "we" turns the page back toward the business.

BREAKS Clear | Compelling | Confident | Contagious | ✕ Customer-centered

Open your homepage and count. Every "we," "our," and your business name goes in one column. Every "you" and "your" goes in the other. If the first column wins, your homepage is about you. Your customer came looking for a page about them.

WE · OUR	YOU · YOUR

SEEN IN TAMPA · A CONTRACTOR

"[Our company] has built an unsurpassed reputation for commitment to quality and dedication to service."

Common, and fixable.

OUR REWRITE, ON THE HOUSE

Your kitchen, bath, or ADA renovation, built by a Tampa Bay team with 28 years on the job.

Same facts. Now the sentence starts with what the customer gets.

GETS IT RIGHT · SMITH & ASSOCIATES REAL ESTATE

A fact about you becomes a promise about them.

Founded in 1969, Smith & Associates describes itself as Tampa Bay's largest independent, locally owned brokerage. The line that stands out in its public description isn't a ranking. It's a rhythm: the company completes seven transactions a day.[20]

On its face, that sentence is about the firm. Read it as a seller and it says something else: the people here know how to get a house to closing, and they do it all the time. Notice what it doesn't say. No "we strive to." No "we hope to." A plain fact, stated with confidence.

The lesson: keep your best facts. Then add the one sentence that tells the customer what they mean for them.

YOUR TURN

WHERE TO LOOK TODAY · 10 MIN

1. Run the count on your homepage's first screen.
2. Run it on your About page's first paragraph.
3. Rewrite the first sentence of each to start with "You" or with what the customer gets.

Your story stays. It moves to paragraph two.

Hard to count your own page honestly? Send it to us, free →

Seven more fixes that keep readers reading.

01
Adjective stacks
BREAKS CLEAR

Adjective comes from the Latin *adicere*: to throw at. Three thrown at one noun ("innovative, reliable, customer-focused") land as noise. Keep the noun. Prove it with a fact.

02
Clever before clear
BREAKS CLEAR

A pun makes the writer smile and the reader pause. Pause long enough and they leave. Be clear first. Clever can come second, once they're in.

03
Features without the after
BREAKS COMPELLING

"Infrared sauna" is a feature. "Leave warm and loose in 30 minutes" is the after. Lead with the after. Let the feature explain how.

04
Too many doors
BREAKS CLEAR

Eight menu items and four buttons ask a customer to choose before they understand. In a 2000 grocery study, a table of 6 jams sold more than a table of 24.[21] *Decide* comes from *decidere*: to cut off. Cut for them.

05
A different voice everywhere
BREAKS CONTAGIOUS

A formal website, a jokey Instagram, emails from a template. The customer meets three businesses. Pick one voice, write down five words that describe it, and use it everywhere.

06
A hidden next step
BREAKS COMPELLING

When a customer can't tell what happens after they click, the click feels like a risk. A "starting at," a range, or "here's what the first call covers" lowers it.

07
Writing for yourself
BREAKS CUSTOMER-CENTERED

Package names, industry shorthand, inside jokes. They make sense after years in the business. Your customer met them a moment ago.

THE TEST THAT CATCHES MOST

Read your homepage aloud to someone outside your industry. Watch their face, not the page. Where they frown, rewrite.

The site walk. Six places that decide whether customers stay.

Check each box as you go. About an hour, all in.

☐	**The headline** First large line on your homepage.	**Test:** would a stranger know what you sell, and who it's for, in one read? **Fix:** use the formula on page 12.	15 min
☐	**The main button** First button on the first screen.	**Test:** does it name what they get? **Fix:** a verb plus the result. "Book my first class."	2 min
☐	**Your Google listing** Search your business name.	The blue title and the lines under it are your page title and meta description, set in your site editor's SEO settings. **Fix:** "What you do in [Neighborhood], Tampa | Name," about 60 characters. Your Google Business Profile description holds up to 750 characters. Lead with the plain noun.	10 min
☐	**About page, paragraph one** Usually in the menu or footer.	**Test:** does it start with the customer or the founder? **Fix:** open with who you serve and what changes for them. Your story follows.	10 min
☐	**The form, and after** Contact, quote, or booking page.	**Test:** count the fields, then submit it yourself. **Fix:** cut every field you don't need for a first reply. Make the thank-you say what happens next and when: "We'll text you by 5 p.m. tomorrow."	10 min
☐	**The email signup** Footer, pop-up, or checkout.	**Test:** does it promise anything besides "our newsletter"? **Fix:** name what arrives and how often. "One recipe from our kitchen, every Friday."	5 min

BEFORE YOU START Take a screenshot of each spot first. You'll want the before, and in a month you'll want to compare it to what changed in your inquiries.

Write your new headline before lunch.

1 · WHO

Who is it for?

A person, a place, a moment.

2 · THE AFTER

What do they get?

Money, time, health, standing, the people they love.

3 · WITHOUT

What do they avoid?

The hassle, wait, or worry.

THE FORMULA

What they get + For whom, or where + Without what

"Fresh pasta for weeknights, delivered in South Tampa. No subscription."

Illustrative example.

YOUR HEADLINE

CLEAR

Stranger test

Read it to someone outside your field. Can they say what you do?

COMPELLING

"So what?" test

Ask it twice. The second answer is closer to your headline.

CONFIDENT

Apology test

Circle just, only, affordable, try, hope. Delete. Reread.

CONTAGIOUS

Tomorrow test

Say it to a friend. Ask for it back tomorrow. Keep what survives.

CUSTOMER-CENTERED

Mirror test

Do they see themselves in it, or see you?

YOUR THREE-STEP PLAN

1

2

3

YOUR BUTTON

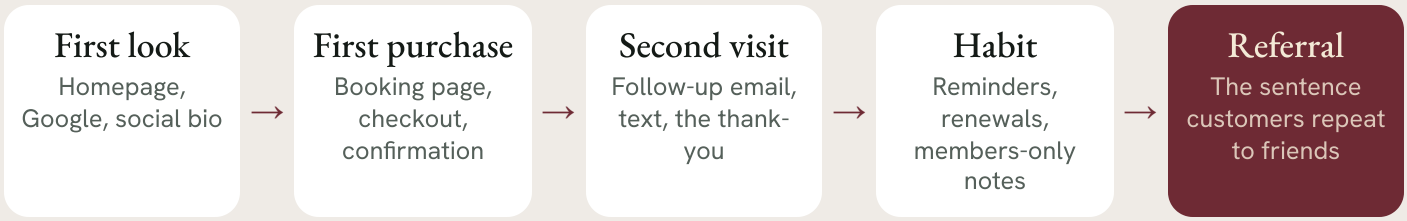
[Verb] my [thing]

"Get my quote." "Book my table."

One edit earns attention. A system keeps customers.

Everything in this guide works today. None of it holds on its own.

Go back to the first root: *customer*, from *custom*. A habit. Habits don't form on a homepage. They form across every place a customer meets your words: the site, the confirmation email, the reminder text, the post, the receipt, the line your team says at the counter.



Most businesses fix the first box and wonder why the rest leak. The last box only works if your words are contagious: customers refer you with the line they remember. The words have to match at every step. So does the path: fewer clicks to pay, fewer fields to fill, less time to the first good moment. Getting both right, and keeping them right as your offers change, is strategy. It's what we build for you.

YOUR NEXT STEP · FREE

You can make every fix in this guide. The one thing you can't do is read your own page as a stranger.

You're too close to it. Everyone is. So start with your homepage, and we'll read it the way your customers do.

Send your website or social link. Within three working days you get what's working, what's costing you customers, your biggest fix, and a price for the rest if you want us to make it. No call required.

Get my free homepage audit →

Every claim here can be checked.

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The “Seen in Tampa” lines were quoted as published and viewed November 6, 2026, with identifying words in brackets. We left the names off on purpose: these lines are common, and the businesses behind them are good at what they do. Every rewrite is ours, offered free. Grateful Hands has no affiliation with any business named in this guide.

The better business deserves to win.

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