

The Accelerated Bullet Workshop

The Secret of the Four U's

By Michael Masterson

You've seen them sprinkled throughout direct-mail promotions time and time again. The ubiquitous bullets. Short lines of benefit-oriented copy attached to big bold dots.

They appear to be so simple, so straightforward. And that's precisely what makes them such deceptive — and potentially dangerous — copywriting devices. (Hence, an entire *Masters Session* on bullets!)

The novice copywriter, intent on knocking the prospect over with benefits, writes page after page of bullets, each one stressing some benefit of the product or service he is selling. The more bullets, the novice reasons, the better. And since all his bullets are beneficial, he assumes they are all helping the sale.

Not true. Unless bullets are very, very good, they have the potential to derail the interest of the prospect and damage the success of the promotion. That's because bullets are easy to read. Easy to read means quickly read. Quickly read can mean superficially reviewed. Disconnected. Distracted.

Although writing a page of bullets may seem a snap compared to creating a compelling lead ... or proving an exaggerated claim ... or establishing credentials where too few exist ... it is, in fact, one of the more challenging tasks a professional copywriter can face.

Ordinary bullets don't work because they are quickly and easily identified as ordinary. Bullets, like headlines and subheads, need to be as close to perfect as possible. And that takes time and judgment. Think of bullets like little haikus. Carefully crafted verbal gems. Or think of them as worker ants — small but able to carry a lot of weight.

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very good bullets can sometimes do the work of eight or 16 pages of prose. The *Master of Bullets* is generally thought to be Gene Schwartz, who used his particular type of bullets (often called “fascinations”) to help Boardroom Reports and Rodale Publishing become very successful.

Don, Paul, and I were lucky enough to study bullets with Gene, and I’ve incorporated many of his best ideas in this lesson. But the three of us have done a lot of thinking about and studying of bullets ourselves, and we’ve concluded that there are four ways to make your bullets stand head and shoulders above those of your competitors.

The Four U’s

For lack of a better phrase, I’m calling this lesson the **Secret of the Four U’s**. Originally, there were two U’s and an S. But we thought *Four U’s* sounded better, so we went out and found an extra U and converted an S to a U by putting “ultra” in front of it.

The *Four U’s* are designed to create bullets that hook the prospect’s interest, tempt him with a promise or benefit, establish credibility, and encourage him to read on. A good bullet will leave the prospect feeling, “Boy, that’s really interesting. I’d like to know more about it.”

Forget the **Secret of the Four U’s** and your copy might end up in the wastebasket. Remember the *Secret of the Categorical Imperative* (the Bill Bonner secret we explained in our undergraduate copywriting course)?

When a reader sees a string of bullets, he assumes that all of the bullets are pretty much in the same category. If he reads and understands two or three, he thinks he understands them all. That’s why it’s so important to make each bullet ... especially at the beginning of a string of them ... strong and unique.

As an aspiring *Masters Level* copywriter, you should view the categorical imperative as your impetus for creating the strongest, most powerful bullets possible. Don’t ever give your reader a reason to dismiss your bullets! Supercharge them by using **The Secret of the Four U’s**.

Here's the secret in a nutshell ...

- (1) Bullets must communicate **Urgency** (a reason to desire the benefit sooner rather than later).
- (2) Bullets must be **Useful** (promise or claim something that has value to the prospect).
- (3) Bullets should suggest a **Unique** benefit. (The prospect should get the feeling that the bullet references one particular thing. Not a group of things. Or a set of things. Or a kind of thing. But one particular thing that is different — in at least one small way — from everything else of that type. Uniqueness suggests that you are talking about something real and concrete.)
- (4) Bullets must be **Ultra-Specific**. (This is perhaps the most important of the Four U's. Vagueness is probably the single greatest fault among novice copywriters, and vague bullets are surprisingly evident with mediocre copy.)

Before I go any further, let's stop for a moment and recap what you've just learned. You know the *Four U's* formula for writing winning bullets. You know why it's important. And you know the repercussions of ignoring it.

Okay, now let's apply this knowledge ...

Welcome to My Accelerated Bullet Workshop!

Grab your front-row seat and roll up your sleeves! Because we're going to dig into the entire bullet-writing process — from breaking them down to building them up.

First, we're going to dissect a handful of bullets and uncover their strengths and weaknesses using the *Four U's*.

Then, we'll eliminate the weaknesses and transform otherwise marginal bullets into rock-solid winners.

Finally, we'll uncover the vast possibilities of the *Four U's* as well as an important exception to the rule. And who knows, you might even get a chance to make a little cash along the way. (*Hint, hint!*)

Have I piqued your interest? Are you ready for the first part of the workshop? Do you think you can distinguish a strong bullet from a "so-so" one?

Bullets must communicate Urgency.

Bullets must be Useful.

Bullets should suggest a Unique benefit.

Bullets must be Ultra-Specific.

Part 1: The Bullet Breakdown

Try this for starters ...

Bullet #1: Learn How to Cut Your Taxes.

OK, what do you think? Does it pass the *Four "U's"* test?

Let's look at the first "U." Does this bullet communicate **Urgency**? In other words, has the writer supplied us with an immediate benefit? No. It doesn't tell me when I can start cutting my taxes. Will it be in two days ... next week ... next month? Will it be before tax time of next year? We just don't know.

Is this **Ultra-specific**? Does it contain specific facts or numbers? No again. This bullet is extremely vague and general. *How much* can I cut my taxes? 10%, 20%, 50%? *How* will I cut my taxes? Is there some special 2-minute technique? Is it by asking my accountant three very important questions?

Is it **Unique**? No. We all know that there are ways to cut taxes, and this bullet fails to communicate anything beyond that.

Finally, is it **Useful**? Yes. There isn't a single person who wouldn't want to learn how to cut his taxes.

Overall Score: 1 point

Wow, that's a pretty low score, isn't it? Imagine a whole list of bullets like this ... The categorical imperative would suggest that most readers wouldn't stay with the copy and that the promotion would fail.

But that's not the only point I want to make here. It's also important to realize that this bullet *could* be effective if certain changes were made. Because often, as a copywriter, you're going to be asked to rework existing bullets. And if you can turn merely ordinary bullets into extraordinary bullets, you'll have acquired an *invaluable* copywriting skill. In Part 2 of today's **Bullet Workshop**, I'll show you how to do just that! But I'm getting ahead of myself here.

On to the second bullet ...

Bullet #2: Make \$50,000 Or More a Year in This Part-time Business.

What about this one?

How does it score on the **Urgency** scale? Low. *When* can I start

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making this money? *When* can I find out the name of this lucrative business opportunity?

How about the **Ultra-Specific** criteria? I know I can make at least \$50,000 a year in a certain part-time business. Not bad. But we can still tweak it a bit.

Does it offer some **Uniqueness**? Being able to make \$50,000 a year in a part-time business seems like a unique opportunity. But there's got to be more to it. Some kind of special twist. We'll have to work on this.

Lastly, is it **Useful**? Definitely.

Overall Score: 2 points

Well, that's a little better. In fact, most of the bullets you see in the mail fall within this 2-3 point range.

Towards the end of this session, I'll show you why masterful copywriters *purposely* use these imperfect bullets at very specific places in their packages.

But for right now, we want perfect bullets. Ones that hit all *Four U's* ... So, how do you bring them up a notch? Keep reading!

Lastly, try this one on for size ...

**Bullet #3: Do You Suffer From a Hacking Cough?
Find Out Today Which Common Food Will Ease
the Cough in 24 Hours Or Less.**

Would you say this bullet is overall

- (a) better than Bullet #2,
- (b) worse than Bullet #2, or
- (c) about the same?

Is you answered "a," you're right. Why? Because all *Four U's* are present. The bullet is **Useful** (evidently), **Urgent** (in that the promise can take place so quickly), **Unique** (the solution is something that is eaten commonly — that must be unique!), and **Ultra-Specific** (well, at least it's somewhat specific).

Overall Score: 3 points

Masterful copywriters purposely use these imperfect bullets at very specific places in their packages.

OK, now that we've identified both the strengths and weaknesses of our three bullets, let's apply the *Four U's* to make them stronger and more enticing. Get ready for ...

Part 2: Building Top-Notch Bullets

Let's see how we can improve Bullet #1. For the purposes of this exercise, we are going to "make up" benefits and features. We are going to invent uniqueness, urgency, and specificity without making reference to the product itself. In the real world, you would be working with real features and real benefits, so you wouldn't (and shouldn't) invent details. But here, since we don't have a real product to work with (in this case, a real tax-saving program), we are going to use our copywriting imagination.

The original bullet was ...

Learn How to Cut Your Taxes.

Remember, this bullet needs help on all the "U's" except for usefulness.

First, let's add some ultra-specificity ...

Cut Your Taxes 35% to 50% With This 2-Minute Technique.

That's much better, isn't it? The prospect knows an exact range of tax reduction he can expect ("35% to 50%" is more specific than, say, "by half" or "up to 50%") and that this tax-cutting technique can be accomplished in two minutes. He assumes that there must be some specific technique referred to because of the specificity of these two details – and the two-minute promise is intriguing.

Now, let's make it unique (or at least "more unique") ...

Cut Your Taxes 35% to 50% By Turning Your Hobby Into a Business. This "Patented" Technique Can Be Accomplished in About 2 Minutes!

Well, that makes a difference. The bullet is longer now, but that's OK. It's actually a good idea to vary the length of your bullets. Some can simply be short phrases. Some complete sentences. Some several sentences running.

We have added more specificity — not only to create more credibility and intrigue, but also to suggest that this piece of tax advice is unique. It is not something common like “Use deductions aggressively.” It is about turning a hobby into a business and then, presumably, taking deductions you couldn’t take otherwise. The prospect is fairly convinced by now that if he could find out more about this claim, he could receive a very specific tax benefit. If he wants to cut his taxes, he should be very interested by now.

And now, let’s see if we can *add a touch of urgency* ...

**Cut Your Taxes 35% to 50% By Turning Your Hobby Into a Business. This “Patented” Technique Can Be Accomplished in About 2 Minutes!
(Find Out Before Tax Day Rolls Around Again!)**

Urgency was added by an additional, parenthetical phrase. It could have been incorporated in one of the two sentences, but in this case I thought it was cleaner to do it this way. As I said before, the length of bullets can, and should, vary.

By referring to an actual event in time (e.g., tax day), we’ve communicated a sense of urgency to the reader. He can start slicing his taxes before the IRS strikes again!

Do you see how this last bullet is so much stronger than the original one? Try it out for yourself. Pretend you’re the prospect and read the first bullet. Note your level of interest. Then read the last bullet and record your reactions. Which one did you find more alluring? Which one spurred you to read on? I thought so! (By the way, anytime you write bullets, you should always reread them as if you were the prospect. If it doesn’t entice you, don’t expect it to entice your reader.)

OK, let’s rework Bullet #2:

**Make \$50,000 Or More a Year
in This Part-Time Business.**

As I said before, this bullet is already “good.” But since we are in the business of turning good into great, what can we do to improve it? The first thing I’d do is revise that \$50,000 because it seems like a number conjured up out of nothing. Why \$50,000 and not \$60,000? Putting myself in the prospect’s place, I become suspicious of the claim because the promise is too conveniently rounded.

Anytime you write bullets, you should always reread them as if you were the prospect. If it doesn’t entice you, don’t expect it to entice your reader.

So, if the facts supported it, I'd try to make the \$50,000 more specific. This could be done either by putting it in a range, as we did with the tax bullet above ("Make \$40,000 to \$60,000"). Or we could state a more specific number ("Make \$54,000"), which would suggest that you are talking about a very specific business opportunity ... one with very exact income potential. This creates a tension of its own that tends to lead the curious reader further. Let's opt for the exact number — \$54,000 in this case — and make a mental note that somewhere later in the copy we need to explain why it is \$54,000 and not \$53,000, and that this explanation itself will make the sales effort more specific and therefore believable.

Now, there is something about "part-time business" that doesn't work for me. As the prospect, I've heard it many times before. I wonder if it's just an empty promise. What can I do to make it more believable? To give it more credibility? When it comes to bullets (and headlines, too, incidentally), the answer is almost always specificity. So let's make that phrase more specific. Hmm. How about saying something about start-up costs? People are always concerned about how much new ventures cost. So I'd like to insert a word or phrase that could address that issue. How about "no investment necessary"? That's more specific and also an additional benefit.

Now let's add another detail. When searching for details, it's always a good idea to try to find something beneficial. In this case, let's try to make this business opportunity easier to travel to. In fact, let's eliminate the commute altogether ...

**Make \$54,000 Or More a Year in This Part-Time,
No-Investment-Necessary Business –
Working Right From Your Kitchen Table!**

This certainly promises to reveal something the prospect doesn't already know. He's always dreamed of making good money. \$54,000 sounds like a good number to him. He's already dreaming about what he can buy with it. And to make it sweeter, he's going to be making this money right from his kitchen table! That's almost irresistible.

Now for some urgency ...

**Make \$54,000 Or More a Year in This Part-Time,
No-Investment-Necessary Business –
Working Right From Your Kitchen Table!
(Set Up "Shop" in Just Three Days!)**

He can start making his new fortune in three days? Wow! That's some incentive! By making the promise imminent (something you can't always do, unfortunately), you give the prospect a much stronger reason to respond to your offer. We all know how easy it is to put things off. Especially things that require a little work and effort. In this case, we've promised the prospect a new, higher income which can be made working from home. That's pretty good. But if he could start making that money in less than a week, that's an offer he can't refuse.

And that's what you want to do. Make each bullet as enticing as it can possibly be. The best way to do that ... by far ... is to pay attention to the *Four U's*.

Now, let's look at our last example, Bullet #3:

**Do You Suffer From a Hacking Cough?
Find Out Today Which Common Food Will Ease
the Cough in 24 Hours Or Less.**

OK, we said before that this was already a good bullet. It has usefulness, urgency, (both "find out today" and "in 24 hours or less") and ultra-specificity. (This is for hacking coughs. The solution is a "common food.") The prospect wonders which food it might be. His interest is aroused. He is not suspicious, but curious. Let's see what we can do here. Since we like the "common food" idea, maybe we can make that more specific ...

**Do You Suffer from a Hacking Cough?
Find Out Today Which Common Food
(That's in Every Refrigerator)
Will Ease the Cough in 24 Hours Or Less.**

This goes a bit beyond urgency, doesn't it? It actually creates suspense. The prospect is inclined (almost compelled) to wonder, "What could this food possibly be? *When* can I find out what it is?" And that's what you want. Because once your reader starts asking questions, he'll read on in the hope of finding the answers.

By using AWAI's patented **Secret of the Four U's**, your direct-mail copy will be stronger and more successful. You will notice the difference right away. Your bullets will feel stronger, more persuasive, and more believable. Plus, by forcing yourself to consider these four aspects, you will be challenging your client to think more about the features and benefits of his product or

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The beauty of the Four U's lies in its far-reaching application. Not only does it power-charge bullets, it can also spruce up any headline or sentence.

service. This will result in all kinds of improvements for which the consumer, your ultimate boss, will be grateful.

The secret of the *Four U's* is a powerful tool for any Master Copywriter, but it can also be used to strengthen other aspects of your copy.

Part 3: Extending the Rule

The beauty of the *Four U's* lies in its far-reaching application. Not only does it power-charge bullets, it can also spruce up any headline or sentence.

How can this work? Simply put, bullets — like packages — need to achieve balance. A bullet with all *Four "U's"* stands on solid footing, just as a package with all four "legs" does.

The same holds true for sentences and headlines. They, too, must have balance. A headline that doesn't supply an immediate benefit or refer to an actual event in time ("urgency") is just as lopsided as a sentence that doesn't provide "useful" information.

So, whenever you want to strengthen a headline or sentence, apply the *Four U's* as we've done in this workshop. Not only will it enable you to instantly detect your weak link, it will help you build a strong, sure-fire winner!

Hmm ... That sounds like an additional benefit of the *Four U's*. How might we turn that into a *masterful* bullet?

- Need to soup up your headline? Learn what four secret elements guarantee a high-impact headline. (You won't find this information anywhere else!)

And that's how easy writing effective bullets can be when you apply the *Four U's*.

Of course, as I was saying before, there are going to be times when you actually *want* to put some 2-point or 3-point bullets in your package ...

An Exception to the Rule

Your first several bullets should, if possible, be perfect 4-point marvels. These should grip your prospect and hold him. They should prove to him that you are not making anything up, that you have genuine benefits to offer, that these benefits are useful and desirable, and that he can and should get them as soon as possible.

After your first few perfect bullets have hit their target, it is possible to use bullets that are not quite as strong. Even the best bullet writers (copywriters who write for Rodale Publishing or Boardroom Books, for example) include some 3-point and even 2-point bullets in their promotions.

All your bullets don't have to be 4-pointers. In fact, they shouldn't be.

Why?

Simply this — *if you use nothing but perfect four-pointers, your copy takes on an artificial feeling.* The reader begins to sense that the copy feels too good, kind of like the copywriting equivalent of Disney World.

By making some of your bullets imperfect, you create an ebb and flow that works to relax and soothe the prospect. He senses that he is being spoken to by a real person.

Choosing how to “disable” your perfect bullets is an art. In my own writing, I've found that ALL my bullets are **Useful** and most of them are **Ultra-Specific**, but many of them are not especially **Urgent** or **Unique**.

My own rule of thumb is to make the first two or three bullets of every string of bullets perfect. After that, one perfect bullet out of three or four is enough. And one 2-pointer out of three or four is enough on the downside. (There's no reason for an AWAler to write 1-pointers. It's just beneath us.)

Well, my dear budding copywriting genius, that wraps up the workshop. Please do the following practice exercise ... and at the very end you'll have an opportunity to write some “real live” bullets for “real live” cash!

By making some of your bullets imperfect, you create an ebb and flow that works to relax and soothe the prospect. He senses that he is being spoken to by a real person.

Practice Your New Skill With This Exercise

OK, here we go. I'm going to throw out some bullets that have been extracted from "real" promotions and ask you to use the *Four U's* to rate them on a scale of 1 to 4.

When you're finished, flip to the **Answer Sheet** at the end of this exercise to see how closely your ideas match ours.

- (1) 3 secret "tax loopholes" that can save you \$3,200 a year. Legal! Easy!

Urgency: _____

Ultra-Specificity: _____

Uniqueness: _____

Usefulness: _____

Overall Rating: _____

(2) **Conventional wisdom: You can't push an insurance company when it comes to collecting money. Wrong!**
Here are two proven ways to get your check within days.

Urgency: _____

Ultra-Specificity: _____

Uniqueness: _____

Usefulness: _____

Overall Rating: _____

(3) Persuade and motivate others to help you reach your goals.

Urgency: _____

Ultra-Specificity: _____

Uniqueness: _____

Usefulness: _____

Overall Rating: _____

(4) **Dirt cheap government bargains!** How and where to buy homes, cars, and boats for as little as 10% of their value!

Urgency: _____

Ultra-Specificity: _____

Uniqueness: _____

Usefulness: _____

Overall Rating: _____

(5) Improved Sex For Men. The popular diet you should avoid. It reduces your testosterone level 30% — resulting in poor sexual performance.

Urgency: _____

Ultra-Specificity: _____

Uniqueness: _____

Usefulness: _____

Overall Rating: _____

Answer Sheet

- (1) **3 secret tax loopholes that can save you \$3,200 a year. Legal! Easy!**

Urgency – 0 points. Although my interest is piqued, the bullet doesn't convey a sense of urgency. Let's see how we could have induced action ...

"Stop getting ripped off by the IRS! Find out today the 3 secret tax loopholes that can save you \$3,200 a year. Legal! Easy!"

Ultra-Specificity – 1 point. There are exactly 3 loopholes that can save me \$3,200 a year.

Uniqueness – 1 point. These aren't just any old loopholes ... They're *secret* loopholes which means I don't already know them — and neither does anyone else. Uniqueness. And here's another twist ... They're legal!

Usefulness – 1 point. Everyone wants to cut their taxes.

Overall Rating – 3 points. (*Note: This is an example of a bullet that would work well after the prospect has been warmed up a little.*)

- (2) **Conventional wisdom: You can't push an insurance company when it comes to collecting money. Wrong: here are two proven ways to get your check within days.**

Urgency – 1 point. You can get your claim check within days.

Ultra-Specificity – 1 point. This is for an insurance company. 2 ways.

Uniqueness – 1 point. Most people think they can't push an insurance company to pay out money, but this bullet will show them 2 ways they can. That's privileged information.

Usefulness – 1 point. Insurance companies are notorious for being slow and/or negligent in paying money to claimants. There isn't a person who wouldn't want to know how to "muscle" the money out of them.

Overall Rating – 4 points

(3) Persuade and motivate others to help you reach your goals

Urgency – 0 points. There is no immediate benefit. When can I start moving towards my goals? Tomorrow? Next week? Nor is there a reference to an actual event in time. *For example:* “Persuade and motivate others to help you reach your goals. (Read this before your next job evaluation!)”

Ultra-Specificity – 0 points. This bullet is particularly vague. How will I be able to persuade and motivate people? Is there some kind of special method or approach? Will I reach my goals 50% faster as a result of this method?

Uniqueness – 1/2 point. Instead of motivating *yourself* to reach your goals, you can motivate *others* to help you reach your goals. A unique twist. This could be something I don’t already know. But because the bullet is so vague, it’s hard to tell.

Usefulness – 1 point. Everyone would like to know how they can achieve their goals.

Overall Rating – 1-1/2 points

(4) Dirt cheap government bargains! How and where to buy homes, cars, and boats for as little as 10% of their value!

Urgency – 0 points. This bullet promises to tell me *how* and *where* to find good deals, but neglects to tell me *when*. Again, we need some kind of time reference. (“Snatch up these deals before anyone else!” or “Walk away with a brand new car in 5 days!”)

Ultra-Specificity – 1 point. I know that these “bargains” include homes, cars, and boats, and that they can be purchased for as little as 10% of their value. The benefit is clearly stated.

Uniqueness – 1 point. How many people do you think know how and where to get homes for 10% of their market price? That’s what I thought! But this bullet promises to show you just that.

It's almost like it's information you're *not* supposed to know ... Special access! Privileged knowledge!

Usefulness – 1 point. Anyone would want to exploit this wonderful opportunity. And here's a subtle benefit ... You can actually get a good deal from the government. Imagine that!

Overall Rating – 3 points. (*Note, again, that this would be a good bullet after three or four perfect bullets have loosened up the reader.*)

(5) Improved Sex For Men. The popular diet you should avoid. It reduces your testosterone level 30% — resulting in poor sexual performance.

Urgency – 1 point. Although there is no time reference attached to the benefit, the bullet actually does convey urgency/suspense. Why? The reader (presumably a man) is apt to think, “*What is this diet? Could I be eating it now? I better find out fast and avoid it at all costs!*”

Ultra-Specificity – 1 point. This popular, yet detrimental, diet can reduce testosterone levels by 30%, which results in poor sexual performance. The problem is clearly articulated for the reader.

Uniqueness – 1 point. It is a “popular diet,” not just a food group. This must refer to one, specific thing.

Usefulness – 1 point. This goes without saying. And not only is it valuable information for the target reader (men), but think about its value to all the women out there!

Overall Rating – 4 points

And that concludes *Masters Session #5*.

Don't forget to apply everything you've learned in today's workshop to your *Monthly Copywriting Genius* package. Use the *Four U's* to bolster up existing bullets, strengthen headlines, and spruce up sentences.

(over, please)

The Real Thing: The Chance to Make Some Money Writing Bullets!

Here's an opportunity to put what you've just learned into practice ...

... by writing 4-star bullets for AWAI !!!

No one knows better than you the benefits of the AWAI program ... or the core desire of our members.

What do we offer our members? What is unique and special about our program? How do we help our members achieve their dreams? Why did *you* sign up?

Now, transform these benefits into bullets using the *Four U's*. (Remember, we're looking for the perfect 4-point bullets we talked about before.)

Finally, read and reread your bullets. Do they flow smoothly — or do you need to sand down some rough edges? Would these bullets entice *you* to read on?

When you're done, send your bullets to **American Writers & Artists Inc., Marketing Dept., 245 N.E. 4th Ave., Ste. 102, Delray Beach, FL 33483.**

Good luck!

AWAI will pay \$10 for every bullet you write that we use in a promotion. Think about that for a moment ... say you write 50 bullets and half of them make the cut. *That's \$250 free and clear!*