

When research starts working against you



Research strengthens long-form content — until it starts diluting the message. When every source, stat and expert insight makes it into the draft, clarity suffers. This issue explores why research overload occurs and how to keep your content focused and useful.

Hi ,

Most long-form content projects (like white papers) start with good intentions:

You want to be thorough.

You want to be accurate.

You want to show you've done your homework.

So you gather all the reports, studies, internal documents and expert input you can, just to be safe.

At some point, though, your research stops helping the reader...

and starts making the writing process harder.

This Week's Insight: Research Loses Value When It Isn't Anchored to Your Reader's Pain Point

Research is meant to *support* your message, not sink it.

When the reader's pain point isn't clearly defined at the start of the project (as we discussed last time), research becomes a safety net rather than a tool.

Everything feels relevant, so very little gets filtered out.

And one of the biggest drivers of research overload?

Your subject matter experts.

The Fast Path to Research Overload: SME Input

Subject matter experts are invaluable. They care deeply about the topic *and* their reputation, so they want your content to be accurate, complete and credible.

That's why SME interviews are often the *fast path* to research overload.

In addition to critical data and valuable quotes, experts tend to share:

- broad context
- background history
- insights that are interesting, but not always essential

Marketing teams, meanwhile, can be reluctant to sift through that input, especially when the SME is senior or highly respected.

So everything stays.

The problem isn't the expert opinion. It's that, without a clearly defined pain point, there's no practical way to filter what the reader actually needs from everything the expert knows.

Why Research Tips Into Overload

Research overload usually comes from a mix of factors:

- **Fear of omission**
“What if we leave something important out?”
- **Credibility anxiety**
“More sources will make this feel more authoritative.”
- **Political pressure**
“They took time to contribute — we should include it.”
- **Poor interview preparation**
No clear sense of the reader’s pain point or the scope of input required.
- **Missing filters**
No agreed rule for what stays in *this* content asset versus what’s saved for later.

None of this is careless.

It’s human.

But without boundaries, research starts to dilute the message instead of strengthening it.

A Simple Way to Keep Research Working for You

Before adding any stat, quote or expert insight to your draft, ask one question:

“Does this help my reader understand or solve this specific pain point?”

If the answer isn’t clear, don’t delete it — **park it**.

Create a separate document for background material, interesting side points or ideas for future content. That way, good research isn’t lost — it’s just not allowed to dilute the message.

Why This Matters for Flow (and What’s Next)

When too much research makes it into the draft, the next problem usually isn't length. It's flow.

Sections feel pasted together.

Ideas don't build cleanly.

The reader has to work too hard to follow the argument.

That's exactly what we'll look at next.

If you're working on a long-form piece right now, I'd be curious: what's the hardest part to cut back — the desk-top research, the SME input, or both?

Until next time!



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