



Researching Auction Items

LESSON

3

Okay, you're getting familiar with the E-Process; these steps should start becoming regular habits soon. You've signed up to buy and sell on eBay and you've studied their online materials. Now it's time to move on to the first step of holding your own auction—research. Don't fade out on us now! Research is perhaps the single most important thing you can do to have a successful auction—and we're going to teach you exactly how to do it.

If, when you've finished this lesson, you feel you do not understand any of these concepts go back and review. Remember it never hurts to review all of the information in these lessons more than once!

1—Researching Auction Items— Why and How

One of the great things about running an eBay business is that you have access to thousands of completed auctions. That means you can look at those auctions that have gone before you and see what they did right and what they did wrong. You can benefit directly from years of other people's experiences!

There are people selling on eBay right now who are very experienced and skilled at

LESSON 3—OBJECTIVES

1. Researching Auction Items—Why and How
2. Getting Started
3. Title Area and Keywords
4. Sales Text- Features and Benefits
5. Using Pictures
6. Presentation
7. Purchasing Methods
8. Shipping and Handling
9. Using the Research Sheet
10. Lesson 3 Task List



Knowing how to appeal to the right buyer is what makes your eBay business successful.

making money with online auctions. We're going to teach you how to find these people and their auctions and, more importantly, how to learn from them. Once you master the art of research, you will have access to an ongoing school worth more than any college on earth.

Now, you might wonder: Why can't we just tell you how to do an eBay auction? After all, this research stuff seems like a lot of work. Shouldn't there just be a standard method no matter what is being sold? These are fair questions.

Ask yourself this: "How do I know if a restaurant is good?" Lots of factors go into the answer, but when you break it all down, it's whether or not you like the food. Now, does everyone like the same food? No.

Different things appeal to different people and there are literally millions of things for sale on eBay that appeal to a vast multitude and variety of people. Knowing how to appeal to the right buyer is what makes your eBay business successful. That's what we're going to teach you.

If you research high-tech items on eBay you will get a very different presentation than from researching tie-dyed t-shirts as the market they are selling to is different.

The same is going to be true for power tools, cars, women's apparel, children's toys and so forth. There will be some things in common with all the auctions and that is what we will discuss in this lesson and future lessons. There will also be some differences which we will discuss.

What all this means is that you need to research auctions that are *specific* to the items *you* want to sell. This way, you will gain understanding and insight on how best to present, list, and sell that item to the people who will buy it.

Okay, now that you know why you'll be doing all this research, let's move on to how.

Four Ways of Researching Your Item on eBay

With millions of auctions going on every day, researching eBay might seem like a daunting task. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. Once you learn how to do it, researching on eBay is actually quite simple.

You can research eBay items four ways:

- Items being auctioned now.
- Completed items found through members' histories (feedback).
- Completed items found through a 'Completed listings only' search."
- Bright Builders' auction research software and DeepAnalysis.

Items Being Auctioned Now

Items that are currently being auctioned are the most obvious research sources.

Type a few keywords into the search field on eBay and click Search. (The more specific you are the more refined your search will be.) This will bring up a list of ongoing auctions. Scroll through the list and find items that are similar to what you plan to auction. There is a lot of information that you can learn from and use.

Completed Auctions Found through Members' Histories (Feedback)

Often eBay members will get into a niche and sell the same kinds of items over and over. Looking at their past auctions gives you a view of a member who is specializing in selling a particular kind of item. You can see what they do, how they do it, and what they might have changed over time as they discovered what worked best.



Research current items being auctioned, completed auctions through member's history, completed auctions through Completed Listings links, and by using DeepAnalysis.

All the auctions an eBay member has completed in the past 60 days are listed in a separate area on eBay. Reviewing these past auctions can provide you with a wealth of information on to how to present your own auctions, specifically your titles, your sales text, your pictures, and your general auction layout.

To find these completed auctions, click on the member's ID or their feedback number. These can be found on the right side in the blue box on any of their auction pages.

Clicking on either of these links will take you to their history page. At the top of the page you will see the member's public information. Beneath that you will see a table of information with four tabs: "Feedback Received," "From Buyers," "From Sellers," and "Left for Others."

Under those tabs there are four columns: "Comment," "From," "Date/Time" and "Item #."

On the far right under "Item #" is a list of past auctions. Clicking on any one of those numbers will display that past auction on your screen. These links are only active for 60 days after the close of an auction. Look for past auctions of products that are the same or similar to what you want to auction.

Researching through the Completed Listings Link

On the Site Map page, you will find a link titled: "completed items." Clicking this link will bring up a screen that looks like the site map page. The difference is by clicking on the links of the Completed Listings page you will go to lists of past auctions rather than current ones. These auctions go back about 60 days. Clicking these links to view past auctions will show you what the item you are researching has sold for.

Using Bright Builders' auction research software and DeepAnalysis for Research

If you have the DeepAnalysis tool you can research past auctions and then sort the information according to what you want to know. This tool allows you to find out which auction items made the most money, which eBay members have been the most successful in auctioning similar items, and much more.

Use the DeepAnalysis tool to find the best eBay members to learn from.

2—Getting Started

Okay, now it's time to research the items you collected for auctioning on eBay. First, we're going to find out what others are doing and what they have done with similar items. There are six areas you are going to research and learn from for the creation of your own auctions.

- Titles and Keywords
- Features and Benefits
- Pictures
- Presentation
- Payment
- Shipping and Handling

We're going to talk about each of these areas in detail. To get started, grab the items you want to put up for auction and a pad of paper.

3—Title Area and Keywords

In the title area of every auction are key words. The search function on eBay looks at these keywords to decide which auctions to show you in any given search. Only those title areas that have key words matching your search will be listed.

So, how do you determine what keywords to put in the title area of your auction?

Every time you list a new item on the online auction site do the following:





*Be sure to answer
who, what, where,
and how.*

Take a sheet of paper.

Label the top of the paper the name of the item.

Write down all the words you can think of that someone might use to find this particular item.

Example:

Let's say you have a brown bean pot you are willing to auction on eBay. The key words could be:

- Pot
- Cook pot
- Cookpot
- Brown pot
- Bean pot
- Brown bean pot
- Brown cook pot
- Bean cook pot
- Clay pot
- Clay cook pot
- Brown clay cook pot
- Bean cook pot...on and on!

As you can see there can be a lot of words someone could use to search for a brown bean cook pot. If the era of when the pot was made is important that could be in the title area too. For example, "1800's" or "19thC" or "1792."

Perhaps the manufacturer of the cook pot is unusual or well known. Another attractive aspect of the pot may be its style or shape or how it was made. All these things can be important to someone searching for your item and should be considered for keywords. Even the order and spelling of the keywords can be important.

This list could continue on and it is not the point here to cover all the words and ways to find this kind of item. The point here is to make you aware that the words in the title area are very important. Now you

know what to look for when researching an item.

Here is a general checklist that will help you generate keywords when researching and later auctioning.

- What is the item?
- Who made it?
- What color is it?
- What is it made of?
- How old is it?
- Is it used or new?
- Does it come with its original box or packaging?

- Is it unopened or still shrink-wrapped?
- What country was it manufactured in?

Use these questions and the previous concepts to generate keyword lists for the items you intend to research.

4—Sales Text-Features and Benefits

The term "Sales Text" or "Sales Copy" refers to the words that appear in the description area of an auction page. This includes the headline in the description area and all the words that describe the item. This text will list what the item is, its benefits, its features, and anything else the member believes will be helpful to sell the item. As we will discuss later, some sellers get very creative and/or personable in writing their descriptions.

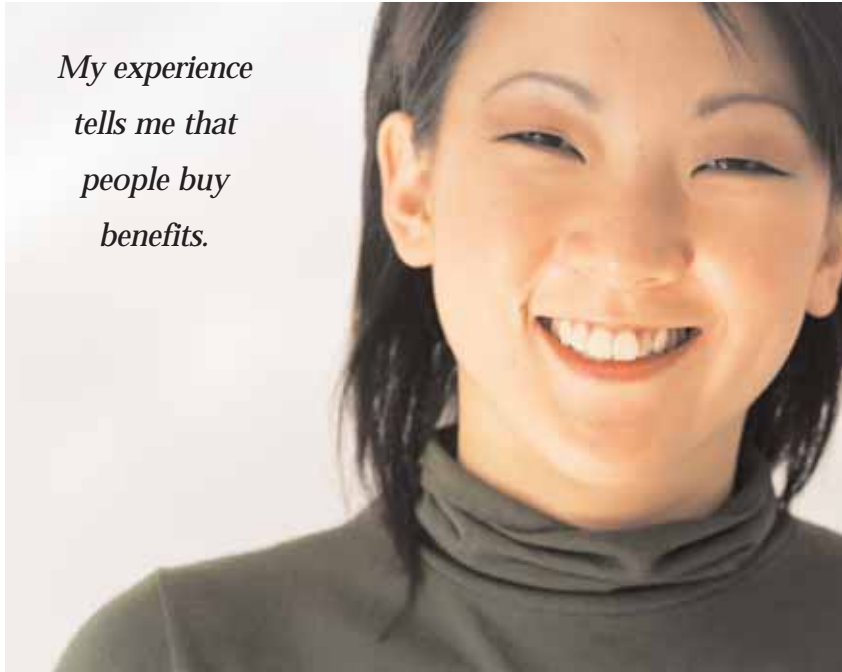
Benefits and Features

The terms "benefits and features" are words most people have heard before, but it seems not everyone is clear about what these words actually mean. Even those who know their meaning often don't know when or how to use them in writing their sales text for their auctions.

To assist you in understanding these two terms I am going to define and give you



*My experience
tells me that
people buy
benefits.*



examples of each, but I am going to discuss them in this order—features, first; benefits, second. The reason for this is that it is easier for most people to think of specific and “concrete” features. Benefits, while specific, can be more “abstract” and so a bit more difficult to get a handle on.

For example a **push button on an electric can opener**, which is a **feature**, is very **specific and “concrete.”** In other words, a push button on an electric can opener is easy to picture in the mind

“Easy to use” is a benefit of that that feature, but how do you picture “easy to use” in the mind? You can picture one finger pressing on the button to operate the can opener which *suggests* to the mind “easy to use,” but the term “easy to use” is more of an attitude or feeling, which is abstract and harder to specify.

This sounds complicated at first, but once you understand the difference between the two and how they relate, it is really simple.

Examples:

Item:

Power drill

Features:

Made of high impact plastic.
Variable speed control.
Cordless.
Drills holes.

Benefits:

- Good for many years of use.
- Control how fast or slow you want to drill.
- Take it anywhere.
- Bottom line you get holes in things.

Item:

Power Windows

Features:

Push buttons control.
Window lock.

Benefits:

- Convenience of opening any window in the car from the driver's seat.
- Lock windows to keep children and animals safe.
- Bottom line you get control and convenience.

Okay, does this make sense now? Features are the things your item is or does simply by existing. Benefits are what the owner gets from buying it. If you're having trouble with this concept, go back and read the examples again. It's critical that you understand this before we move on.

People Buy Benefits

Now that you understand the difference between features and benefits, we want to share a big secret with you... **people buy benefits**. Don't take this too lightly. Write in your notes in big block letters.



People Buy Benefits

PEOPLE BUY BENEFITS!

Features are nice and may draw buyers to read further, but in the end they want to know what they'll **get** out of owning the item you're selling.

To learn how to write effective sales text you must understand this concept. Once you make benefits your primary focus, it really isn't hard to write **compelling** sales text.

As you research your items, look to see who is selling features and who is selling benefits. You should learn how to recognize features and benefits and distinguish between the two. In your research, you will find some eBay members do a better job at mentioning their item's benefits than others. Not surprisingly, these members tend to do better with their auctions.

Descriptions should be complete and inviting to the buyer. There's a fine line to walk between being professional and eager and coming across like a stereotypical used car salesman. The key is to understand what is **emotionally appealing** to the buyer. Sales hype is rarely appealing. Understanding and writing about benefits the buyer is seeking is essential to successful sales text.

Researching Features and Benefits

Often, when dealing with warehouses, the product descriptions can be short and unappealing. Then what?

The best way to find out what features and benefits your item has, that appeal to buyers, is to look at what others are saying about similar items. Search eBay and look at the sales text being used. Generally speaking, you will find in the description of each auction the following:

Understanding and writing about the benefits your buyer is seeking is essential to successful sales text.

The Features of the Item:

- What the item is.
- A physical description of the item.
- The condition of the item.
- Information on shipping and handling and the associated costs.
- What payment methods the seller accepts.

The Benefits of the Item:

- What makes this item desirable?
- Why should you own this item?

Remember, good descriptions will be complete and inviting to the buyer. Again, there's a fine line between being professional and eager and coming across like a used car salesman. The key is to understand what is **emotionally appealing** to your buyer. Another important part of writing successful sales text is to know the approximate age of your potential client. Obviously, verbiage for a teen-ager would be quite a bit different than wording directed to a 40 to 50 year-old.

Here are some suggestions to help you to gather more information on products.

Do a search on eBay for the same product to find what other eBay sellers have written.

Do research on the Internet to find additional descriptions for the product.

If available, go to the manufacture's website and look up the product description website.

If you find through your research that the description of the product covers only the features, then you will have to brainstorm its benefits. Ask yourself, "By using this particular feature what would I **get** out of it?"

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you better define your product's benefits:

Ask yourself, "By using this particular feature what would I get out of it?"

- Does it save me time?
- Does it save me energy?
- Does it save me money?
- Does it make me money?
- Does it make something easier?
- Does it make something more convenient?
- Does it make me a better person, healthier, happier, greater peace of mind, friendlier, stronger, thinner, more attractive, etc.?
- Does it make my family better, healthier, happier, etc?
- Does it make my work/business better, more successful, easier to run, etc.?
- Does it assist me with other people?
- Does it assist me with my hobbies, pets, possessions, etc?
- Does it make my life more enjoyable, more fun, more fulfilling, more worth living, more productive, more efficient, more secure, etc.?
- Does it make my life less stressful, less painful, less frantic, less of a hassle, less lonely, etc.?

In a word or two, benefits give us gains and reduce/eliminate our pains.

When generating your benefits for any product, focus on how your product gives your buyer gains, (positive things), and saves them from pains, (negative things).



5—Researching the Pictures in Auctions

We are a very visual society. There is great truth to the idea that “to see is to believe.” Conversely, if we do not see something we tend not to believe it exists, or that it exists in a different form that we are told it does. That’s why there are those newspapers out there that publish pictures of aliens. They are saying with the picture, “See, the



alien? Proof that aliens exist!” (Or at least it proves that they can take a picture of someone dressed like an alien.)

Pictures of Your Items Are a Must

Showing a picture of an item in an auction is a must. Most bidders on eBay will not believe you have the item you are auctioning in the condition you are claiming if you do not have a picture of it. Also, people envision details, such as color, differently. There are a lot of shades between blue and purple and what you might determine is a light blue color another might see as more

If a picture tells a thousand words,

write your short story with photographs.

The picture of your item may be the only thing stopping customers from bidding. Make sure it is clear, well lit, free from dust, glare or reflections

of a pale purple. Many other descriptive words have the same problems with interpretation. So you have to have pictures of your item in your auctions.

A picture, they say, is worth a thousand words. On the other hand, a bad picture can cause a thousand frustrations. Pictures don't just show what the item is; they also impart a **feeling** about the item. A well-done picture creates a desire to own the item. With the right picture a bidder cannot only imagine (feel) they own the item; they imagine how they would actually use that item if they were to own it.

Seeing is not only believing it is *owning*. The next time you watch a TV commercial or see an ad in a magazine notice your response. "Hey, I'd look great in that car!" is exactly the response a car dealer is wanting from you, which is why car ads show cars going where you'd want to go and have people that appeal to you.

As you research other members' auctions, examine their pictures and ask yourself these questions:

- Is the picture clear?
- Is the picture well lighted? (Enough light to see the item clearly and not too much to burn the image out).
- Is the image free from dust spots, glare, or reflections from the flash?
- Are there enough pictures to show the item, its features, details, and flaws, if any?
- Am I clear on what the item is and its general condition?

It is also important that the color in the picture shows the true color of the item. This is not always easy. If you can't get the color just right, mention that in the description. Also, keep in mind that different monitors may display colors differently. That is

something you cannot control, so do not worry about that. Just be aware of the potential causes.

Surplus Alert Product Pictures

You are fortunate if you are working with Surplus Alert because they provide a picture of the product online through your member login.

You can save this image to your hard drive by putting your cursor on the picture, right clicking it, selecting the option "Save Picture As" on menu that appears on your monitor and then saving it onto your hard drive. (Make sure you name the image so you know what it is and you know where you saved it on your hard drive. I suggest you set up a folder for your eBay product images).

I will tell you later, in Lesson 5, how to use those images when setting up your eBay sales.

A Great Source to Assist You in Taking Quality Pictures

Taking pictures of items to sell can be challenging, particularly if your item is shiny or has reflective surfaces, as with jewelry and mirrors. A great tool to assist your picture taking is the Cloud Dome, located at **www.clouddome.com**. This tool, as its name suggests, is a light with an umbrella-like dome that helps disperse the light over your item in such a way that it eliminates the glare that can ruin a good picture of your item, making it unsuitable to post on eBay.

6—Researching Auction Presentations

"Presentation" refers to the overall look and feel of a seller's auction. How are the text and pictures arranged? What colors



The overall presentation of an auction item will vary depending on the item. Even within an auction category you will find a wide variety of presentations.

and fonts are used? What is the general impression you get from viewing the page?

The overall presentation of an auction item will vary depending on the item. Even within an auction category you will find a wide variety of presentations.

In your research you want to focus in on eBay members who have a track record of success selling the kind of item you plan to auction. You will know that they have been successful by looking at their past auctions.

An eBay member who gets into a groove of auctioning the same or similar kinds of items will have a similar presentation they use again and again. The message here is, when you find something that works, keep using it! And, specifically for you, when another seller finds something that works, learn from them.

Now, some of the auctions you will find will be rather sophisticated. Don't worry about that while you are coming up with ideas for your first auctions. There are templates you can use for your auctions supplied by eBay for a minimal fee. As you gain experience, you can learn how to use your own templates or design your own presentations using HTML if you choose. All that is down the road a bit, however.

What to Look for in the Presentation of an eBay Auction

The presentation of an auction is about the layout. The layout includes:

- The general description area design.
- The fonts—the font types, sizes, and colors used.
- The pictures—the number and sizes of the pictures and where on the page they are put.
- The template and/or background colors.

Fonts

Your font selection should be kept to these basic fonts:

Arial
Times New Roman
Courier New
Verdana
Comic Sans MS

Generally speaking, every computer on the planet that uses English will support these fonts. This means that a potential buyer will see your auction the way you intended it to be seen. When you use non-standard fonts, you run the risk that a buyer's computer won't have that font. If that happens, the buyer's browser will substitute a standard font to replace your non-standard one. This usually ends up looking terrible. Keep control of what your auctions look like by using standard fonts.

It is okay to mix fonts on a page as long as they are all standard fonts. It is not unusual to see one font for the headline and another for the sales text. This draws attention without being overwhelming or confusing.

Font Sizes

Larger font sizes are generally used for headlines and sub-headlines. Larger fonts create emphasis and draw attention. Keep in mind that a particular monitor's settings will dictate the size of the font. That being the case; stay away from fonts that are too small. Your fonts should be large enough for the average person to read without glasses.

Larger fonts are also used to sell to members whose eyesight might not be very good. So, items targeted to seniors often have a larger font throughout the presentation.

Colors create moods:

urgency

relaxing

loyalty

friendly

luxury

mystery

fun

Font Colors

Most font colors you will see on auctions will be black, and for good reason. Nothing says “amateur” like the over use of color. There are a couple of exceptions where using color can help accent your auction.

A colored font creates emphasis and draws attention to the text. The two most popular font colors, after black, are: Red and Green for reasons we’ll go into a little later.

Another way to use multi-colored fonts is to make each word, or even each letter, a different color. The reason to do this would be to appeal to members who are:

- Buying children’s items—clothing, toys, and furniture.
- Older buyers who are not particularly sophisticated about the Internet.
- Alternative culture, New Age, etc.

Colors in Templates, Backgrounds and Layout Areas

As you research other members’ eBay auctions you will find some that use color templates, backgrounds, or areas that have color. These are to give the visitor to the auction a *feeling* about the auction and the item(s). Remember many people buy emotionally.

Here is a list of common auction text and background colors:

Red—an emphasis of immediate attention, urgency, hot, fast acting.

Green—money, relaxing or nature.

Blue—trust and loyalty.

Orange—warmth, friendly and social.

Purple—luxury, and wealth; (women usually like this color much more than men).

Gray—mystery or indifference.

Yellow—quick action, fun, outside, sunshine (It is an action color like red, but not as powerful or long lasting).

Obviously, this is a lot of information and not all of the auctions you view will use these colors the way they are used by professional designers who understand the psychology of color. Nevertheless, we have been amazed over time how people use these colors intuitively and accurately on their websites and auctions.

Before we move on, here’s a word of caution on the overuse of color or font size. A page that is too busy and seems to have too much information and too many points to pay attention to can be a turn off to a buyer. As you research, pay attention to how many colors and font sizes are used with certain items, where things are left with a chaotic feel versus a very visually appealing streamlined presentation.

7—Purchasing an Item

Each auction will contain instructions on how the seller wants the winner to pay. Almost all eBay members use PayPal and some have their own merchant accounts. Many members will give the winner the option of paying by PayPal, credit card, cashier’s check, money order or check.

The obvious drawback to both seller and buyer in using any of the check options is that it takes more time for the check to clear. That means it will be a while before the item can be mailed or shipped. You can choose not to wait until the check clears, but this is a very dangerous option as a bounced check can result in fees and leaves you trying to track down the buyer, who already has your item.

PayPal offers certain protections for both seller and buyer and so it is the preferred method of payment for the majority of eBay sellers and buyers.



8

8—Shipping and Handling

Finally, there are instructions on each page regarding the item's shipping and handling. These include:

- The fee for shipping by regular carrier by ground or USPS.
- The fee for shipping overnight or two day.
- The fee for insurance if the buyer selects that and it is appropriate for the item.

These are self-explanatory. You want to note the language that is used in describing these methods, as you may want to use those words or similar wording yourself.

Shipping costs should be a fair representation of what you will pay to ship the item. Before writing your sales text, weigh the item and find out what the shipping options are and approximately what they cost. This can often be done online at the USPS or UPS websites, or at most local post offices or UPS stores. You don't have to charge exactly the amount that you are quoted, but it will give you a range that you can use in your auction.

Note that auctions offering low or free shipping often sell at a higher rate. You may decide that the shipping cost can be figured into your base costs in exchange for a higher final sale rate.





9—Auction Research Sheet

Now that you have a good background on how to do your research on eBay for your start up items, here is an additional tool you can use. It's simple to use and it will help you keep track of the auctions and items you research. Use a new sheet for each auction you review.

Instructions for Using the eBay Item Research Sheet

1. Write in the name of the item you will be auctioning.
2. Write in the keyword phrase you are using to research this or similar items on eBay.
3. Write in the item number of the auction you are researching/reviewing.
4. Write in the eBay member's ID.
5. Write in the item's title.
6. Rate the item's headline Good, Fair or Poor.
7. Write in any comments you have on the headline.
8. Rate the picture(s) Good, Fair or Poor.
9. Write in any comments you have on the pictures.
10. Rate the item's sales text.
11. Write in any comments you have on the sales text.
12. Rate the fonts usage Good, Fair or Poor.
13. Write in any comments you have on the fonts usage.
14. Rate the overall presentation.
15. Write in any comments you have on the overall presentation.
16. Write in any other comments you have on the auction.

eBay Item Research Sheet	
My item to be auctioned:	_____
Keyword phrase for search:	_____
Item Number:	_____
Member ID:	_____
Item Headline:	_____
How would you rate the headline?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor
Comments: _____	

How would you rate the picture(s)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor
Comments: _____	

How would you rate the sales copy?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor
Comments: _____	

How would you rate the font usage?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor
Comments: _____	

Rate the overall presentation?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Poor
Comments: _____	

Any other comments: _____	

Lesson 3 Wrap-Up

How much research you do is entirely up to you. You should look at as many auctions as you think you should to get a feel for what is happening out there on eBay. You should be able to recognize a well written title area, good sales text, and how fonts and color were used. Once you can do this, you should be able to apply these things to your own auction's presentation.

Most people tend to look at only three to six auctions, which is *not enough*. The more auctions you look at, the better off you will be. We suggest that for each item you have to auction, in the beginning anyway, you look at 20 to 30 similar auctions. It will take time, of course, but this exposure will only help you. Be patient, and what you learn will assist you now and as you create other auctions hereafter.

Congratulations for getting through Lesson 3!

If you have been keeping up with the assignments you have already accomplished a lot. You have:

- Set up the space for your home business.
- Begun implementing the entrepreneurial tools.
- Gone through the eBay education.
- Registered as a buyer and seller on eBay.
- Registered with PayPal and have an account with them so you can process your auction sales.
- Come up with a list of items out of your home, garage, attic, basement, (and wherever else you could look), so that you can do your eBay auction learning and testing.

- Begun researching your auction items in preparation for setting up your own auction.

You know, when you think about it, you have accomplished quite a bit! And *if* you have done it, you *know* you've done a lot...and that is great!

10—Task List for Lesson 3

Use your Time Management Plan to schedule and complete the following tasks:

1. Complete your Time Management list for this week's tasks.
2. Write in your Business Journal.
3. Review your Business Vision Statement.
4. Research the items you have gathered for auction.
5. Fill out a research sheet for each auction item.
6. Keep notes and records of your favorite auctions for future reference.
7. Review your Commitment Letter and reasons why you are going into business for yourself.

Once you have completed your tasks and feel comfortable with the content of this lesson move on to lesson 4.

