Communicators Guide

For Federal, State, Regional, and Local Communicators
by the Federal Communicators Network*

* www.fcn.gov

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"Vigorous writing is concise."
– William Strunk

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Introduction

"Communication is the essential life blood of organizational life."
– Ann Harriman

Communicators fill a unique role. We are career employees who are part journalist and part *flack*. Although we usually serve as advocates for journalism and a free press, we are not considered working journalists. Many times, our bosses don't want to trust us with sensitive information, because, after all, we often talk to reporters and correspondents.

Communicators have to negotiate the bureaucracy while translating gobbledegook into plain language. We are the ones who put news releases, publications, and Web sites to the test. If we can understand it, then perhaps the public—our customers—will greet our products by saying: "This is from the government. I'll be able to understand it."

Founded in 1996, the Federal Communicators Network, **www.fcn.gov,** has more than 700 members who are involved in disseminating information within and outside government. Our membership includes writers, editors, public affairs specialists, program managers, analysts, speech writers, Web masters, artists, photographers, graphic artists, and librarians. With this range of talent and expertise, we set out to create a guidebook for both new and seasoned communicators.

This guidebook, written, edited, and published by members of the Federal Communicators Network and other communicators, is our attempt to:

- offer some general guidance for other federal, state, regional, and local communicators;
- compile a list of sources and resources to help communicators refine and sharpen their skills; and
- improve the trust between government and the public by helping us communicate clearly to the public and by making government's message relevant to our customers.

Marci Hilt
Project Manager

Are you a bureaucrat? You might be if...

- Your FTE can't find the RFP on the IRP and the CRP for the EPA and the NWS or—even without the CDAs—the JIB and CENTCOM PAQ briefing shows there are 9 KIA, 6 WIA, and 2 MIA.
- An agency reorganization would negatively impact your functional capabilities to provide essential services.
- You ask for comments from interested people, but never tell those who aren't interested where to send theirs.
- You use your compensatory time to study beach renourishment in a coastal management area, rather than taking a vacation at the seaside.
- When someone asks you what you do for a living, you say you "develop and implement policy."
- There are *pavement deficiencies* in the streets, rather than potholes.
- Your program depopulates animals with contagious diseases, rather than killing them.
- Your agency repositions, reduces duplications, focuses reductions, downsizes, right-sizes, outsources human resources, or talks about the human side of downsizing, rather than firing or laying off employees.
- You used the words *program* and *procedure* more than 100 times each in your annual report.
- You're politically correct, but your temperamentally challenged supervisor thinks you have an attitudinal impairment and an intellectual deficiency.
- Moral: Not only does relying on jargon give you a wrong image—it makes you hard to understand. Use Plain Language **(www.plainlanguage.gov)**.

"We can lick gravity, but the paperwork is overwhelming."

– Wernher von Braun

chapter one

Keeping Current

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

– Arthur C. Clarke

Latest Communication Trends

The new information highway runs right through your backyard. With Internet resources and online news services, every word ever written or broadcast about your agency is readily accessible to everyone. The Internet breaks down old barriers to information.

Americans have an ever-expanding appetite for new technology. In 2000, more than half owned a cell phone, up from 24 percent in 1995. One in five Americans (18 percent) has a satellite dish; 5 percent own a Palm Pilot or other PDA—Personal Digital Assistant. This revolution in communications technology is not only changing the way we live; it has created a highly competitive environment for those in the news business who are providing information to the public.

The Changing Media Landscape

In June 2000, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released a report that found that only 48 percent of Americans follow national news closely most of the time, a new low. Although daily newspaper readership was down slightly from 68 to 63 percent since 1998, TV network news viewership dropped from 65 percent in 1995 to 50 percent in 1999. One-third of adults now regularly get their news online; among those younger than 30, some 46 percent go online for news at least once a week.

News resources are dwindling. Media mergers and cost-cutting mean that there are fewer reporters who have the luxury of doing detailed, in-depth stories. Many times, the reporter doing a story about your agency is not familiar with what your agency does. This provides you with a golden opportunity to fill the information void.

But, because our society is experiencing *information overload*, it is crucial that you get your information out—in plain language—in easily digestible *chunks* and in a form that will be used. And, you have to do it using the very latest technology that works. Because of the immediacy of the Internet, reporters and writers no longer have daily deadlines—stories are often posted as soon as they are written.

Get Your Point Across

We communicate every day. Every time we smile at another person, say "hi" to them, have a conversation with them, or even ignore them, we are communicating. Getting your point across is very

important to successful business relationships. Good communication is difficult because it requires a lot of effort, time, and patience.

☞ Tips to help you get your point across:

- Be prepared.
- Be confident.
- Stay focused on your conversation and your listener.
- Maintain eye contact with your listeners.
- Make sure your listeners are following you by asking them for questions or feedback.
- Don't lose your temper or get over-emotional.
- Speak slowly and calmly; don't raise your voice.
- Speak clearly and concisely.
- Get to the point; don't ramble.
- Be kind, compassionate, and empathetic.
- Be honest. Don't play games.
- Be assertive, but tactful.

Networking

Today's workplace is a lot different from yesterday's. And, how you do your job is different, too. One big change is networking. By branching out, you can form relationships with colleagues who have information that you need to do your job or you can give them the information they may need to do theirs.

Networking is a dynamic process often resulting in outcomes that far exceed what you as an individual communicator could generate. You can come up with novel and unusual ideas and techniques by brainstorming and partnering with communications professionals outside your institution or agency. Networking is*:*

- A way to connect people.
- The open asking for and sharing of ideas, experience, and information.
- A working approach to get things done or to get things done better.

Networking can:

- Help you collaborate on projects of mutual interest and exchange information, taking full benefit of everyone's expertise.
- Foster supportive relationships that contribute to the increased quality of services or products.
- Broaden impact, both in terms of reaching more people and/or new audiences, and as a way of getting more for your investment in both time and money.

- Create a means to more effectively and rapidly pursue communications objectives, respond to changing communications practices, and solve problems.
- Provide access to expert guidance on skills, including writing, editing, design, marketing, Web design, distance education, and development of electronic products and audiovisuals.
- Provide remote access to technology and other information resources, such as databases, e-mail, bulletin boards, and shareware.
- Enable collaborative communication on the often complex range of subjects and issues packaged for your target audiences.
- Provide a springboard for marketing and distributing communications products, increasing visibility of your products and services to new audiences.
- Foster collaboration and create awareness of potential funding sources.
- Create opportunities for cost savings through choices to buy-in to press runs of products useful to your institution and clients, but developed by others.
- Help to achieve project success more readily. An indirect, but welcome, benefit is that your work might get recognition through various award programs.

Tips for Successful Networking

- Identify people who have what you want, such as mentors and experts, and those who need what you have. These relationships will enhance individual communications skills.
- Think locally; act globally. Sometimes it is easier to network on a local level—local chapters of professional communications societies, campus communications groups, one-on-one communication with colleagues in other departments. It is also important to branch out beyond your local resources to consult with communicators on a regional or national level. Serving on committees or on boards of national/regional communications associations can connect you with valuable future networks. You will likely earn trust and respect, and once you've done that, you will not only have business associates to call on when you need help or advice, you will also have good professional friends.
- Share information through e-mail, listservs, Web bulletin boards, and newsletters—all good networking tools.
- Keep up-to-date on the latest developments in communication technologies.
- Use computer networking to involve more people with diverse skills in problem-solving and innovation. New technologies help break down barriers between groups.
- Check the Internet to find out what others are doing. Information on the Internet is a constantly updated wealth of useful, timely, and sometimes in-depth material. Also, the Internet offers a forum through which you can raise questions, solve problems, and share your work. Check out Web-based video libraries and photo and graphic image archives.
- Create opportunities for collaboration among researchers, outreach specialists, and educators when networking activities make us aware of similar projects occurring in other geographic regions.

- When initiating projects, identify collaborators with whom you have common mission or goals and build this into your implementation or action plan. Think pro-actively!
- Because networking can give you so many new opportunities and approaches, try to avoid getting derailed from your initial quest for information. When you are working with others to share information, try to avoid conflicts of demand and priority. This will help you avoid stress or work overload.

Where You Can Network

- Government or university settings: Formalized communications networks, informal gatherings of communications professionals, and professional development workshops.
- Local settings: Local chapters of professional communications societies; communications businesses in your community—public relations, information technology, marketing, and design firms, and fellow attendees at local workshops/seminars.
- Statewide, regional, national settings: Professional communications conferences and seminars, electronic listservs, bulletin boards, and discussion groups on Internet Web sites.

Make Your Job Vital—How to Market Your Work

Public affairs folks are dedicated to promoting their agencies—using the best resources available and working hard at the job. However, it is a good idea to make sure your boss and your boss' boss know about all the work that you, your co-workers, and your staff are doing. Don't assume they already know. Here are some tips you can use to help demonstrate the value of a public affairs program and how vital communications work is to your agency:

- Collect recent communications success stories in one place so you can share them with your boss, or other influential associates.
- Submit articles about your successful projects to an outside trade magazine, or write a column for your in house publication.
- Get involved with—and regularly speak before—professional, civic, and social organizations about your work.
- The next time you or your staff get an award or promotion, publicize it. Don't forget in-house bulletins, your hometown weekly, your alumni magazine, and your society/association newsletter.
- Tape speeches that you or your staff make. You can use the tapes as promotional tools to your boss and others.
- Make sure you and your staff have a ***speaker's introduction*** that others can use before your presentations or ***about the author*** notes that editors can use with your articles.
- Teach an adult education class and encourage your staff to do the same.
- Keep a reference list of professionals who are willing to give testimonials about your work, or that of your staff.

- Consider developing and distributing a newsletter to share professional tips.
- Consider adding a personal promotion note to your voice-mail message ("Hi. You've reach Jane Doe, a member of the communications team that won the 2000 speaking award.").
- Start a focus group of professionals who meet periodically to help each other with career advancement.
- Create a marketing kit for you or your staff that consists of—among other things—bio sheets, photos, testimonial letters and copies of professional articles. Be sure to keep it up-to-date.

Distance Learning

Technology has radically altered education in our country. Today's students may not interact with their teachers at a specific place or time. In fact, they may not even be in the same city. Because we tend to change careers and relocate more often than our parents did, our educational methods are becoming portable and flexible enough to provide life-long learning opportunities for everyone.

You can adapt these new distance learning techniques for internal training projects, as well as to help get information about your agency out to the public. Distance education gives you more freedom and flexibility because you can deliver your product both in the workplace and at home.

To use distance education, you'll need to:

- Define your overall goal in broad terms.
- Define your audience; choose one primary audience.
- Develop learning objectives—include audience characteristics and define what they will do once they master the objective.
- Develop the content.
- Select the instructional method or strategy.
- Develop ways to evaluate and make changes to your program.

A number of new technologies are available:

- Compressed video, which uses digital technology to compress video images to save transmission bandwidth. With this technology, you can have video conferences over telephone lines, using two-way video and audio.
- Satellite transmission, which uses uplink transmitters to send a broadcast signal to an orbiting satellite that returns the signal to downlink sites.
- Audio-conferencing, which uses telephone lines to transmit audio. In this way, many people can participate using a teleconference bridge.
- CD-ROM (Compact Disc-Read Only Memory), which lets your students and customers interact with educational material via the CD-ROM player in their computer. CD-ROM supports multiple media, including text, audio, sound, pictures, graphics, animation and video, which can be linked to other programs and sites on the Internet.

- The Internet, which lets students or customers connect through Web sites to explore topics through various multiple media resources, including text, sound, pictures, graphics, animation, and video.

About the Internet: The Internet is rapidly gaining popularity as a distance-learning delivery tool because it can incorporate text, sound, pictures, animation, and video into instructional packages. Students or customers can access the material on their own schedule via a personal computer.

- However, this technique does require your student to have a high-speed connection to the Internet and browser software.
- If you are using a Web page to teach, make certain it loads quickly, displays in all Web browsers, is well-organized, and is easy to follow.
- Learning on the Web is not much different from learning in more traditional environments. However, to engage students, lessons must have a clear purpose and be tightly focused.

chapter two

Working With the Media

"I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers."

– Gandhi

What Do Reporters Want?

Just what do reporters want? Why don't they quote us? Why don't they ask us? How can I find out? There aren't any easy answers, but there is an easy way to find out: ask the reporter.

But, before you ask, be ready to hear the answers. Call or schedule an appointment when the reporter or correspondent isn't on deadline and has time to give you some thoughtful answers. Ask what kinds of stories the reporter wants to do; what turns that reporter ***on***, which ***hot buttons*** to push; and when is the best time to call with your story idea.

Find out what he or she hates, what stories the company will or won't do, and what kinds of stories the reporter's editor likes. Not every story a reporter does or wants to do gets into print or on the air. Who runs the assignment desk? What producer might be interested? What does the bureau chief want? Who runs the futures desk? How many stories does the reporter or correspondent do every day?

What considerations go into the news mix of the day? What are the media demographics? Who are their readers? How old are they? How much time do they spend reading the paper or magazine? Who listens or watches? Is there a farm or business show? How old are average readers, listeners or viewers? How good are the ratings?

Ask, Ask, Ask ...

How are features handled? Is your department or agency given top priority, or are you at the bottom of the heap? When and why do your stories get to the top? What kinds of stories should you spend time pitching?

What does the reporter want from you—stories or story ideas? By mail with a follow-up phone call? By fax? Phone? E-mail? On your Web site? When is the best time to call, fax or e-mail? What are the deadlines? When do the reporters broadcast ***live?*** What hours do the reporters work? What other agencies/beats does your reporter cover? How can you tie your story into a current hot topic? Who do you call if you can't get to your reporter and you have an urgent story? Does this reporter know what a wonderful source you are? What a great interview your boss gives?

Once you know the answers to these questions, you'll be in a much better position to get your story idea covered.

Why not give the reporter a list of contact folks at your agency including phone, fax, and e-mail addresses? Staple your business card to it. If there are areas your agency doesn't cover, let your reporter pal know where your agency ends and another one begins. Don't assume reporters know everything about your agency. Even if they did, they have forgotten; or they need you to refresh their memories. Even if you've already sent them 20 copies of your contact list or phone numbers, give them another. In fact, give them two or three—one for their assignment desk, one for their boss, and one for their backup.

You'll build even more credibility with your reporter if you can suggest other expert sources of information.

> "Journalism largely consists of saying 'Lord Jones is Dead' to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive."
>
> — G.K. Chesterton

Building Media Relationships

One of the keys to success with the media is to understand that you can be an ongoing resource for reporters. Your job is to build relationships with members of the media, not just pitch stories to them every now and then.

- To introduce yourself to local media, set up a series of initial meetings with editors at your community newspaper, and with producers and program or news directors at your local radio and television stations.
- Send out a press kit mailing that has general information, a few story ideas, and a cover letter introducing yourself to newspapers and radio and TV stations in your region.
- Join professional organizations such as the Public Relations Society of America and attend monthly meetings. Members of the media are frequently guest speakers at these events.
- Develop a monthly one-page bulletin, or tip sheet, with news about your agency. This is a good way to keep in regular touch with your local media. You can send this tip sheet by fax or e-mail.

☞ Tips for Even Better Media Relations:

- Keep a list of people in your organization who are willing to give an interview so that you're ready when a reporter wants someone to interview.
- In general, call reporters/editors/producers in midmorning. In late afternoon they're on deadline and won't have time to listen to your pitch. ***However, there are exceptions to this rule.*** As you begin to build relationships with members of the media, take the time to find out when the different reporters and editors are not on deadline and are able to talk. Depending on their beats, some may always be out of the office, or in a story budget meeting, at 10 a.m. ***Always*** ask at the beginning of your conversation, "Do you have time to talk?"

- The same rule applies to the day of the week. Make your pitch earlier rather than later. Unless you have breaking, hard news, don't make your pitch on Thursday or Friday.
- Make sure you know your reporters' beats before you make any calls. Know exactly what they do and do not cover, so you don't waste their time or yours.
- Be mindful of a newspaper's deadline structure, especially with features departments. A Sunday ***Lifestyle*** section probably has deadlines on Wednesday or Thursday, so make your pitch well before then.
- Most reporters prefer brief, concise faxes or e-mails over flashy press kits. Your brief, concise press releases should be one page, or no more than two pages. If you go over two pages, that's an indication that you should break your story into two separate pitches. Or break your oversized release into a release and a fact sheet. Many reporters prefer you send them fact sheets so they can develop their own stories.
- Once you've established a relationship and have a good contact in a newsroom, don't hesitate to turn to him or her for advice. If you have a story idea and aren't sure who to pitch it to—or if it's even a strong enough pitch—call your contact and ask if you can run it by them. Ask what they think of it, and who, if anyone, they would suggest you pitch it to. This approach works incredibly well—if they're not on deadline or otherwise swamped, reporters love to be asked for their opinion.
- Every paper has to write seasonal stories, such as Valentine's Day, Independence Day, and Thanksgiving, away from home on the holidays, and World AIDS Day. Find an angle that relates to your organization and develop it.
- Assume that anything you say to a reporter or a correspondent will end up in print, on the radio, or on TV. Nothing is ever off the record.
- Check your sources. Always talk to sources before you give their names and phone numbers to reporters. Look for interesting anecdotes that you can use to entice a reporter to interview your sources, and more importantly, find out what, if any, negative things your source might say. Caution your sources that their words can carry a lot of weight.
- If your job is to prepare people for media interviews and public speaking, consider doing some mock interviews for new hires—do the interviews yourself or invite a reporter friend to the office to help you with this training. Or, contract with commercial sources, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, to provide this training.

"The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read."

– Oscar Wilde

- When you're making follow-up calls to members of the media, don't ask whether they received the press release you just faxed. This will only annoy them. Instead, ask if they want more information or if they would like to set up an interview. If possible add a new angle that tailors your release to their readership.
- Don't forget your local columnists. You will be surprised—they may pick up your story idea when the news and features desks won't. As always, familiarize yourself with their columns

and know what they write about before you make the pitch. If you don't, you risk insulting them and making yourself look foolish.

- Don't be afraid to go the extra mile for a story, especially a feature.
- Don't pitch the same story to two different assignment desks on one paper, or to competing newspapers, at the same time. If either editor finds out you've double-dipped, they may get upset with you and may kill the story completely.
- Remember, it takes two steps to start a new relationship with a reporter or editor. It takes 11 steps to repair a damaged one.
- Always offer visuals. Visuals define a feature story, and are essential to a television news package. Find out ahead of time what kinds of visuals you may have available (photos or videos, for example), and make sure you have plenty of stock photos and B-roll (extra footage) on hand to provide to your media contact.
- When you're creating press releases, write like a journalist. Use attention-grabbing headlines. Put your news first, use quotes, and localize as much as possible. Come up with creative leads. Today's readers want the most recent facts first; background later.
- Two of your most important assets are a sense of humor and a thick skin.

☞ **Media Tip:** Have up-to-date information about your organization near your phone so that you can rattle it off quickly to the media without leaving anything out. Hang your ***General Facts*** over your telephone.

☞ **Media Tip:** What should you do if you or your boss is misquoted in the media? If the error is substantial, you may want to call the editor or bureau chief and ask for a correction or retraction. If it's not a major error, and doesn't hurt the effectiveness of the article, you may decide to do nothing.

"Anyone nit-picking enough to write a letter of correction to an editor doubtless deserves the error that provoked it."

– Alvin Toffler

What to Do When a Reporter Calls

Reputable reporters will always identify themselves as reporters. Ask what they want. If you're not the person they need this time, tell them who is—if you know. Try to be helpful—take the time to get phone numbers and addresses right.

Ask what kind of story they're doing—who they've talked to and what they're looking for—what facts and figures they need.

☞ ***There are two basic rules for dealing with reporters: Always return their phone calls promptly and always tell the truth.***

☞ ***Always respond to reporters—even if you're just calling to tell them you don't know the answers to their questions. Reporters are like elephants. They never forget public officials who lie to them, don't return phone calls, or give them wrong information.***

Make sure you give media calls top priority. Media representatives are usually working on short deadlines. If you don't return their calls, you will give them a negative image not only of your agency, but of all public servants.

Media Interviews

What if the reporter wants an interview?

If the reporter wants an interview, find out the subject and scope ***before*** you agree—or ask your boss to agree—to be interviewed. Ask who else the reporter has interviewed or plans to interview. If this is a broadcast talk show, ask who the other guests will be and what topics will be discussed. Also, will it be taped or live?

You control the parameters for any interview—time, place, and length. Keep time with reporters short—that way you'll both be forced to focus on the issues you want to talk about. Fifteen minutes should be long enough for radio; 30 minutes for TV, including time for equipment set-up and breakdown; as long as an hour for print. If you allow too much time, you might end up saying things you didn't mean to say.

How do I get ready for a media interview?

Do your homework. Review all the materials you can get about your agency, not just the material the reporter is asking about. Decide what ***you*** want to talk about.

Refine your three positive talking points. These are the three main points you want to make. Keep them positive. Keep telling yourself this is an opportunity. With a little thought, you can anticipate the reporter's questions and tailor your answers according to the three main points you want to get across. From your point of view, the interview should be driven by these messages, not by the questions. Plan to use your three points as the foundation for all the questions you will be answering.

Practice talking in 20-second sound bites. Practice making your points clearly and briefly. Don't use doublespeak, government-speak or jargon—phrases no one else understands. Talk in plain language. Organize your ideas logically. Use appropriate words. Speak in the active voice, rather than the passive.

Figure out how to personalize and humanize your information; tell how it affects the viewer or reader.

Get some show-and-tell materials ready—a book, a simple graphic to illustrate a complex statistic, or perhaps a model of what you're going to talk about. If you have videotape, get an extra copy ready to give to the correspondent.

Find out everything you can about the reporter or correspondent. What is his or her reputation for fairness? What stories has the reporter done? What types of stories has the publication or station done in the past? Are the stories long and in-depth, or short, lacking details? What is the slant to most of the stories?

Scan the news of the day to make sure you're prepared for any last-minute questions. For a TV interview, watch the news show to see how much air time each story gets. If this is a print interview, scan the latest issue of the publication.

Use Plain Language

People will understand what you are writing or saying the first time if you use plain language. Speak so that everyone can understand—not just other government bureaucrats. Use natural expressions and common words. Organize your ideas from general to specific; or from specific to general; from positive to negative; step-by-step or from most important to least important.

Use appropriate words—simple, everyday words. If you can take advantage of a popular expression to illustrate a point, do it. Don't use technical words. If you're forced to use a technical term, explain what it means. Don't make verbs into nouns. Choose your words consistently and be very careful of using acronyms. If there is any doubt, spell the acronym out. Keep your sentences easy to understand.

What if my boss is scared to talk to reporters?

Work with your boss. To get what you both want out of an encounter with the media, you both need to do your homework. You prepare for everything else in life that is important. An interview affects not only your own reputation, but also your organization's reputation.

Put your boss in front of a video camera to practice giving the major talking points and answering questions. Pretend you're a correspondent for *60 Minutes* when you're asking questions. Let your boss critique his or her own video. If you don't think you can do this, hire a media consultant to help. Many government agencies hire outside help for this job.

But be honest. If your boss can't put two sentences together in front of a microphone and media training doesn't help, don't pitch your boss for on-air radio or TV interviews. Find someone else in your agency who is good at it.

Do These at the Interview

- Do your homework before you talk to a reporter. Be prepared for the reporter's worst questions with three positive points you want to get across. Practice what you want to say. Remember you're selling your activity. Talking to a reporter is an ***opportunity***.
- Speak in short sentences using plain language. For TV and radio, think in terms of 20- or 30-second answers. This assures the reporter will use what you say.
- Smile. Act like you enjoy what you're doing. Call reporters by their first name. Look interested and alert.
- Tell a ***positive*** story. You do a lot of good things; tell the reporter about your three positive points.
- If you don't know the answer, say, "I don't know." If you do know the answer and can't tell it now, tell the reporter when you can give him or her the answer. Refer the reporter to someone who does know the answer, or offer to find out who does.

- If a TV station offers you makeup, take it. The TV camera will add ten years and ten pounds. Remember, the TV pros all wear makeup.
- Dress conservatively and simply. Be remembered for what you said, not what you wore. Ignore this rule if you're a rock star.
- Stop talking when you've made your point. Don't ramble on and on. Don't speculate. Stick to your key message. Let the reporter worry about the empty air space.
- If a reporter asks several questions in a row, pick the one you want to answer. Or, ask the reporter to repeat the question.
- Have ***show and tell*** material. A simple pie chart works well. Have videotape? Take it, too.
- Take advantage of the opportunity at the end of the interview when the reporter asks if there is anything you'd like to add. Repeat your three talking points and summarize.

Never Do These

- Never say, "No comment." "No comment" means "guilty" to most people ***when they hear it.***
- Never say anything "off the record." Assume all microphones are ***live.***
- ***The most important rule: Never say anything to a reporter you don't want to see on TV or read on the front page of a newspaper.***
- Never lie to a reporter.
- Never lose your temper. Be polite, but firm.
- Never use profanity or slang. Don't say anything that could even remotely be construed to be off-color, sexist or racist. Don't comment on anyone's age, religion, or politics. Tell jokes ONLY if they are self-deprecating.
- Never say *uh.* Drop all the *uhs* from your speech. Make your pauses *silent.*
- Never wave your hands. Don't *bob and weave* your head around. Sit still.
- Never answer hypothetical questions. Don't speculate. Be specific. Stick to what you know.
- Never comment on what others have said, particularly if you haven't seen or heard it. Don't verify something that might not be true.
- Never use doublespeak, government-speak, or jargon. Use numbers in an interesting way. Make your information easy to understand. Personalize your information. Relate it to the reporter. Humanize it.
- Never talk to a reporter without doing your homework. Prepare. Turn the interview into a *sales call.*
- Never stop talking after you've answered a "yes" or "no" question. Keep going. Say something like, "Yes, but you should also know …" Or "No, but let me elaborate …" But, keep your response very brief and to the point.

At the Interview

Smile and enjoy yourself. Relax the reporter and you'll be relaxed, too. Tell the reporter you're looking forward to the interview. The best way to diffuse a hostile situation is to be warm and accommodating.

When the interview begins, remember that you are the expert. Don't smile and nod your head as the interviewer asks a question—just look interested.

Make sure your body language and speech patterns back up your sincerity. To combat nervousness that an audience might interpret as insincerity or untruthfulness, sit up straight and take deep breaths. Don't sit back on soft seats. Sit on the forward portion of the seat cushion and keep your back as straight as possible. If your mouth is dry, bite the sides of your tongue—it will make you salivate. Stop talking when you've made your point. Many people say things they didn't mean to say after they've made their major point. Don't worry if there is silence. It isn't your job to fill it up.

Don't let the reporter put words in your mouth. If the reporter uses inaccurate facts when asking a question, correct the error. Don't fall into the black hole of "no comment." Instead say: "That's not the critical issue, this is …" Or, "That's currently part of a law suit. Our policy is not to discuss ongoing litigation …" Or, "We'll have an announcement about that later this week."

If this is a TV interview, remember that ***TV is not always fair***. TV's visual impact can make stories more emotional than any other media. You are not seeking the truth—don't let yourself get pulled into such a search. You are ***not*** there to answer questions; you're there to elaborate on your three talking points.

Never lose your temper. TV's visual impact will magnify your emotional response.

Let the reporter know you are keeping track of the interview. Ask if you can tape the interview and have a tape recorder ready. Turn it on when the interview starts. Tell the reporter that you want to evaluate how clearly you are answering the questions so that you can be a better source.

Never forget that the interview isn't over until the reporter leaves. TV correspondents commonly shoot ***B-roll,*** sometimes called ***cutaway footage,*** or ***cutaways.*** These are used to fill in the interview so it isn't just a ***talking head.*** B-roll also makes the final produced story more visually interesting. Camera crews usually leave the sound on while taping the B-roll. The reporter might ask you again how you really feel about an issue. Make sure you repeat only what was said earlier, as the mike is still live and anything you say is being recorded.

Sometimes, radio or print reporters will also leave their tape recorders running to capture any off-the-cuff remarks that you might make.

If you are giving a telephone interview, assume the reporter is taping the conversation. That way you won't have any regrets later.

At the end of the interview, thank the reporter for the opportunity.

The media world isn't equal: There are inequalities when you agree to a media interview. Reporters can cancel at the last minute. You can't. If you can't make the interview you've agreed to, you must provide a substitute. Reporters can be late, but you can't.

What if the reporter interrupts or tries to rush you?

Ask to finish your statement and begin what you were saying again. Don't start in the middle; make a complete, but succinct, statement.

What if a reporter catches you when you're not prepared and tries to interview you?

Smile and walk away—even if the video camera is rolling and the reporter is sticking a mike in your face. Tell the reporter you're glad to see him or her, but you don't have time to talk now. Give your phone number and suggest they call your office to set up an appointment. Never talk to a reporter unless you've taken the time to prepare.

What if the reporter asks how you "really feel" about an issue?

Give the same answer you gave before. There is no room for your personal opinion, only your professional one. If you don't say it, the reporter can't use it.

What if there is a silent, awkward pause after you've answered a question?

Smile and wait out the pause. The reporter is using one of the most effective techniques in interviewing—getting you to volunteer information. Stop talking when you've made your point.

What if you don't understand the question?

Ask the reporter for clarification. Some reporters don't ask clear questions.

What if you can't think of the answer to the question?

Smile. Be serene. Ask the reporter to repeat or clarify the question while you take a mental break. Buy time by saying, "That's a good question." If you really can't come up with an answer, tell the reporter you need to look it up or consult with someone else and offer to call the reporter later in the day with the answer.

What if you start to answer a question and make a mistake?

Start over. If this is a TV or radio interview, tell the reporter you are going to start over.

"Rock journalism is people who can't write interviewing people who can't talk for people who can't read."

— Frank Zappa

chapter three

Planning

"There cannot be a crisis next week. My schedule is already full."

– Henry Kissinger

Writing Communication Plans

An effective communication plan includes initiatives that truly reflect your organization's goals. At the same time, a good communication plan must not only target relevant primary and secondary audiences, but it must identify key messages and themes that will likely resonate with these groups.

Writing communication plans that are on target, and likely to be well received, requires a combination of careful planning and a strong understanding of the attitudes and opinions of the stakeholders you plan to reach. As you write, you need to focus your plan on solid, well-thought-out initiatives backed by a strong and compelling rationale, and you've got to hone your writing style to a fine edge. There is no room for writing that doesn't get right to the point.

☞ Tips for writing an effective communication plan:

- **Use a structure that lets you *chunk* information into main points and key headings.** A communication plan can be structured just like other kinds of strategic plans. A typical approach includes:
  - **Situation analysis**—the current background, history, circumstances and a clear statement of the problem or opportunity involved.
  - **Goals and objectives.**
  - **Target audiences**—including primary and secondary; demo and psycho graphics, if relevant.
  - **Strategy and rationale** for achieving your goals and objectives, as well as your arguments in favor of the approach you plan to take.
  - **Tactics**—specific executions or elements—the deliverables and products of the plan as well as talking points, budgets, and time lines, if appropriate.
  - **Evaluation**. How you will measure the effectiveness of your plan, along with the specific outcomes that will represent success or failure.
- **Do some research to make sure you are identifying the right audience—internal and external.** Conduct focus groups to evaluate public understanding of your intended messages and the information products you intend to use to communicate with those audiences. In addition to focus groups and opinion polling, check what other agencies or organizations like yours might be doing to find out what their constituencies are thinking and feeling. Maybe they have data from a poll they have run with an audience similar to yours, or know of someone who does.

The Web is a great place to find out what people are thinking. Try being an active surfer and you'll be amazed at how much you can pick up about your constituencies. If you have a Web site, adding an online feedback form is another good way of keeping your hand on the pulse and getting data to support your plan.

If the primary audience is internal, go to meetings, talk to people, set up informal ***listening sessions.*** Encourage feedback and input, all of which you can document and draw on as part of your rationale.

Don't rely on instinct or your own reactions. Very often, the audience you need to target will be enough unlike you that your instincts stand a good chance of being incorrect.

- **Spend time developing and defining your goals and objectives for yourself and your readers.** What are the outcomes, communication and otherwise, that should result from your plan? Have you articulated them well enough so that your agency understands the importance of what you are proposing?

Thread your goals and objectives through your plan. To keep these foremost in your readers' minds, a good trick is to re-state them as you outline your strategies and tactics ("to achieve the objective of…").

- **Identify key message themes, but don't bog down in the details.** Try to get a consensus from key players as to what the major communication points need to be. State these broadly, and make sure you explain the reasoning behind them.

Use visuals where possible to convey conceptual communication ideas involving media. Remember, a picture ***is*** worth a thousand words.

If the plan entails many tactical executions and/or messages, use flow charts to graphically show how you'll execute it.

Consider presenting your plan as a polished "Power Point" briefing to agency decision-makers.

- **Don't be afraid of using innovative strategic and tactical approaches.** As we know, not every communication problem can be solved by mass media. The most effective approaches are usually not one-way communication.

Use a range of elements, both media and non-media, to insure both coverage of and responses from your targeted groups.

Think through the balance of reach and frequency as well as penetration and impact strategies. Is it better to reach more people, or more frequently reach fewer people? Do we want our audience to have more information, or to be more influenced by the information we give them?

Don't overlook the importance of grass roots campaigns and volunteer efforts. All politics may be local, but so is effective communication. Provide your grass roots affiliates with resource materials to help get the message out to the public. Where possible, have them localize the message.

- **Tie your evaluation plans to your goals and objectives.** If your goal is to enhance awareness of a new policy or program, use awareness-based measures like recall, exposure, and media impressions. If your goal is attitude/behavior change, then survey analysis may be in order.

Don't overstate what you think will be the outcomes. It's a natural tendency (and sometimes a management directive) to expect big results, but some objectives, such as attitude/behavior change, are complex and hard to achieve or measure.

- **Write your plan in plain language.** Like many other kinds of writing, communication plans are often written in a specific style and tone. To be most effective, your writing should be clear and direct – free of jargon. Make sure your readers can follow your line of reasoning with no distractions. Academic or creative writing styles are not nearly as effective as plain language.

To get that lean edge to your writing:

- Use active, action-oriented verbs and sentences that begin with subjects.
- Edit out clumsy, compound-complex sentence constructions and sentences that start with subordinate clauses and prepositional phrases.
- Be goal-directed. Write about your plan's elements in terms of benefits and outcomes. Strike a balance in favor of giving your readers reasons to support your ideas rather than just informing about the details.

Strategic Planning—Preparing to Meet the Future

You've written your communications plan for a fiscal year full of exciting projects. Now your boss needs your communications office input into the agency's strategic plan. Where do you begin?

Nearly the same place, but with a broader view. In the place of the situation analysis substitute one that explores all the external factors that impose long-term limits or provide more than local opportunities. Involve your staff in this analysis, and include an inward look as well, because you need to know, before you begin planning, if your organization is prepared to respond to change. Will your staff need retraining or retooling to keep up with technology?

Next step is writing the vision statement. It describes, concisely, your organization as its members see it operating in the future. Include only important aspects:

> The Communications Services Office will be the preferred provider of communication services for all national and field office components within the XYZ Agency.
> or
> The Communications Services Group will support the mission of XYZ Agency by using telecommunications and information technologies to make access to public services faster and more convenient and efficient, thus better serving the agency's customers, stakeholders, and the public at large.

Goals, Strategies, and Objectives

A goal describes where you want to wind up; a strategy is a way to get there; and an objective is a specific step you can take to follow the strategy for reaching the goal. It may take more than one strategy to reach a goal, and it may require a number of objectives to implement a strategy.

One goal related to the vision statement above could be:

- XYZ Agency public service announcements will be enhanced by the use of multimedia.

Objectives should be specific (describe exactly what is to be accomplished) and measurable:

- "90 percent of companies receiving XYZ Agency publications rate them as useful by FY 2003." Note the specific completion date.

An objective under the goal above could be:

- 90 percent of the necessary multimedia technology and a fully-trained staff will be in place by mid-FY 2001.

Another could be:

- Multimedia Public Service Announcement on the research benefits of XYZ Agency's genetic information initiative will be ready for distribution by September 2002.

Action Plans

A plan of action brings an objective down from the lofty realms of the planning world to the hard realities of actually doing something. For each objective, an action plan spells out the who, what, when, where, and how. This phase of planning, which leads directly to implementation, may be done by a team, with team members resolving the various details. Each step of the project should be known at the outset, even though there may be changes along the way. Without an action plan, you won't achieve many objectives. A time line is also usually required, as well as links to the organizational budget request.

Performance Measurement

An important part of the planning process is to determine how you'll measure your performance.

To measure performance that involves public recognition, you can use customer surveys, Web site hit counts, and focus groups. The resources your communications unit can commit to such activities will determine how much you will learn from them. It's a good idea to meet with the officials in your agency who are managing the overall strategic planning effort, probably under the Government Performance and Results Act. Not only will they be able to spell out exactly what is required, but they'll also be able to share examples that are pertinent to your mission.

However, strategic planning should not be thought of as producing a report, but as an ongoing process. It is iterative, dynamic, and above all inclusive. A good strategic plan is the basis for all the important things communicators do each day in supporting their agencies' mission-related outcomes. If your staff is involved, as well as your clients inside and outside the agency, developing a strategic plan will help clarify your priorities and shared goals.

There is a great deal of help available if you need it. Private sector organizations and corporations have been doing strategic planning for years. Try key wording ***strategic planning*** in any of the Internet search engines; you'll be surprised at the number of references. The Government Accounting Office **(www.gao.gov)** has many reports and guidelines. There are strategic planning

groups that meet periodically in Washington, D. C., some sponsored by the Office of Personnel Management. But better still, seek out your agency's management gurus and ask lots of questions.

"We don't get offered crises, they arrive."

—Elizabeth Janeway

Crisis Communications: Planning to Attack the Crisis Before it Attacks You

Don't wait until your agency is in a crisis before you come up with a plan to deal with it. Crisis communications is sometimes called ***damage control.*** It's about protecting your agency's reputation and credibility when a major problem arises that could lead to public and media scrutiny. You can predict nearly 90 percent of the crises your agency could have. The other 10 percent include such sudden crises as natural disasters or product tampering. Since you can predict the majority of potential crises, you can plan for them.

The Five Types of Crisis

Facilities Crisis
Damage such as that caused by an explosion, fire, leakage, or natural disaster.

Community Crisis
Adverse condition created by the organization or outside organizations hostile to the agency or its mission.

Employee Crisis
Includes loss of life, sabotage, or a reduction in force.

Consumer Crisis
Includes defective products, contracts that can't be met or an allegation against your agency.

Image Crisis
Includes unlawful or ill-perceived activities, such as sexual misconduct, drug use, or the indictment or arrest of a senior agency official. This is the most difficult crisis to counteract.

Pro-active versus Reactive

The best way to be pro-active about a crisis is to plan for it in advance and have a crisis management and communications plan in place and ready to go. It only takes one mishandled crisis to cause your agency to lose the respect and trust that it has been building for decades. There are seven phases that an agency in crisis usually goes through:

- Denial
- Wishful thinking
- Anger and aggression
- Spin
- Damage Control
- Reconstruction
- Recovery

With a crisis communications plan in place ***before*** the crisis occurs, your agency can skip the first four phases and move immediately to damage control. That makes you a lot closer to recovery

when you start. A crisis communications plan gives you time to formulate more comprehensive ideas and explanations. While you're in the midst of a crisis, stress reduces your field of vision, leaving you blind to alternatives that are obvious during a planning session done during a less stressful time.

How to do a Crisis Communications Plan

- Sell the idea. The hardest job is to sell top managers their need for a plan. Brainstorm with them about the most likely crisis you could have. Ask them to assess how prepared you are to handle such a crisis.
- Once you've sold the idea, work with management to start mobilizing and training a response team that will be responsible for coordinating communications with each of your various publics in the event of a crisis.
    - Select the top manager who will head the in-house team to communicate with employees. Have workers from across your organization represented on the team.
    - Select the top manager and team to deal with the media. Train several people to be media spokespersons.
    - Select the manager and teams to communicate with customers, shareholders, and the key government and law enforcement agencies in your communities.
    - Select the manager and team to keep your Web site updated throughout the crisis.
- Arrange a central site and phone number where all team members will check in when a crisis arises. Also select a secondary site and phone number.
- Plan and tell employees how you will communicate quickly and effectively with each group. Make sure the teams know how to contact one another at all times by having current business and home telephone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses. Use an intra-net Web site to distribute information to employees.
- Establish separate points of contact for employees, media, customers, and others to call for information on the situation.
- Determine who will make final decisions when you are releasing sensitive information.
- Have each team review previous communications involving their publics. Look for strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve relations. Begin working on those improvements.
- Be sure the crisis teams know how to reach their key contacts at all times. Make sure they have day and night telephone numbers for both primary and secondary contacts, and keep those lists up-to-date.
- Arrange for training and conduct simulations. All crisis team members need media and crisis training and regular refreshers. Keep everybody on their toes and constantly assess new potential problems.
- In some situations, you may need to rely on wireless communications between teams and law enforcement officers. Do your homework and training; locate equipment.

What to Do When Crisis Occurs

- Communicate. Don't hide behind "no comment." If you do that, you immediately lose control. Even if all you can say is that you don't know, say so, say why and when you think you will know. Reporters look favorably on people who are trying to be helpful.
- Never lie or speculate. Provide only factual, confirmed information.
- Put people first. Help the people most affected by the crisis. In the case of accidents, remember to deal with victims' families before any other group. If they want you to, intercede on their behalf with the news media. Be sensitive to legal restrictions regarding information, such as the Privacy Act and Freedom of Information Act. Know what kind of information is public and what must be withheld.
- Communicate your concern about the victims.
- Be available at all times to respond to your various publics. Know media deadlines and don't rely only on news conferences.
- Don't be defensive. Be prepared for aggressive questioning. You might have to answer the same question several times.
- Provide brief, precise answers to questions. Don't ramble. Use plain language. Short answers also help alleviate nervousness.
- Take your time in explaining difficult issues to reporters.
- Monitor media accounts and quickly correct errors by contacting the reporter or correspondents.
- Don't attempt legal battles in the media. Express assurances that matters of litigation or potential litigation will be investigated thoroughly.
- Prepare key points you want to make ahead of time. Make them short and to the point. Try to repeat them several times during the news conference or interview.
- Stay with the crisis throughout its duration.
- Follow up with the news media to keep them updated about what preventive actions were taken after the crisis ended.

Remember, the public's immediate assessment of an agency in crisis is based on these four factors of earning trust and credibility:

- Empathy and/or caring (usually assessed within the first 30 seconds)
- Competence, expertise, and readiness
- Honesty and openness
- Dedication and commitment

Communicating Risk

Gauging how your audience will react to government messages about physical risk is tough. When many people hear the word ***risk*** they think ***danger.***

According to risk communication research, people can react to news about danger in one of two ways. They either:

- think about the justice of the situation or
- think about the physical hazard itself.

Frequently, people who are managing physical hazards think about the hazard. They focus on making people understand how large or how small the dangers—tire tread separation, low-level radiation, or cooking meat without a thermometer—really are. They ignore the justice of the situation.

People who are getting the messages, on the other hand, may be wondering about how competent the risk managers are and what their motives are. They aren't thinking about the physical hazard. Audiences can be highly skeptical of messages that say, on one hand, that genetically engineered food is safe but, on the other, that cooking meat without a thermometer is dangerous.

What is Your Audience Concerned About? The key to communicating risk is to find out what your target audience is concerned about. Are they mainly concerned about management issues or are they concentrating on trying to understand the physical hazard? When people trust and respect the risk managers, they can start listening to information about physical hazards.

There are a number of risk communication guidelines. Some deal with good listening and some deal with good explaining. Try the good listening techniques before you try to explain. It's tough for an audience to listen to Biotech 101 when they're wondering if the lesson is really an excuse for poor management or unethical practices.

One set of good listening and explaining techniques is presented in Vincent Covello and Fred Allen's *Seven Cardinal Rules of Risk Communication* (in an Environmental Protection Agency brochure). Here are their seven rules:

1. Accept and involve the public as a partner. Your goal is to produce an informed public; not to defuse public concerns or replace actions.
2. Plan carefully and evaluate your efforts. Different goals, audiences, and media require different messages and actions.
3. Listen to the public's specific concerns. People often care more about trust, credibility, competence, fairness, and empathy than about statistics and details.
4. Be honest, frank, and open. Trust and credibility are difficult to obtain; once lost, they are almost impossible to regain.
5. Work with other credible sources. Conflicts and disagreements among organizations make communication with the public much more difficult.
6. Meet the needs of the media.
7. Speak clearly and with compassion. Never let your efforts prevent your acknowledging the tragedy of an illness, injury, or death.

Don't Explain Until You've Listened: Listen to your audiences' concerns about the hazard before you try to tell them that their view is right or wrong. One way to gauge potential public reaction to your message is to call a few friends and ask them what they think about your message.

Make Your Message Easy to Understand: Here's a sample message: The Earth is weightless. The words in that statement are familiar. That's a short sentence, so it should be easy to understand, right? It's not the words that make the sentence hard to understand. It's the counter-intuitive idea that something as big as the Earth could somehow be weightless

Sometimes messages about risk are just as counter-intuitive. Here's one: "The only way to be sure a ground beef patty is cooked thoroughly is to use an accurate instant-read thermometer." That's a tough message to understand. But the words in that sentence, and the sentence's length, aren't the problem.

The problem is that lay theories make this message tough to believe. You might have cooked a hamburger just last night without using a thermometer. And, you feel fine today. So why should you use a thermometer?

When a risk message is hard to believe, acknowledge that. Try presenting your message this way.

- State the message.
- State the lay theory.
- Acknowledge that the lay theory is apparently reasonable.
- Describe a familiar experience that makes the lay theory questionable.
- Then explain the scientific account and the way it makes sense of that familiar experience.

Here's what you might say: "New data show that the only safe way to cook a ground beef patty is to use an instant, accurate-read thermometer. Many of you are probably thinking you didn't get sick the last time you cooked a hamburger and didn't use a thermometer. So, it's reasonable to assume you don't need to use a thermometer.

"But, some people—such as the young and the elderly—are more likely to get sick from harmful bacteria than others. And, it is possible to develop a resistance to harmful bacteria. People assume meat color is the key to its doneness and safety. But, meat color is a result of other factors such as oxygen exposure. At 160 degrees Fahrenheit, a ground beef patty can look either brown or pink. It's the cooking temperature that kills harmful bacteria. How can you know if your ground beef is hot enough to kill harmful bacteria? Use a thermometer to make sure your ground beef is safe — and tasty."

By listening and putting some thought into your messages, you can better gauge what kinds of messages your audiences want to hear about potential hazards.

Measuring Your Effectiveness

Too often, we measure our effectiveness only by counting the number of products produced in a given amount of time. But, measuring that way, we're really only evaluating productivity, not effectiveness.

If we don't measure our effectiveness in creating and delivering communications products, we'll never be able to let go of some of the routine tasks we've been performing for years. We need to demonstrate the added value of putting our energy into new, more meaningful projects. As resources become tighter, communicators are being asked, along with everyone else, to prove their worth.

Here are some ideas that you can use to measure your effectiveness:

- Accept that measuring effectiveness is your responsibility, just as you accept responsibility for creating products that are within budget and on deadline.
- Make planning and evaluation integral parts of your projects. Effective communication begins with effective planning and continues throughout the life of the project. Meet periodically with subject-matter specialists and your internal customers. That way you'll be aware of upcoming projects. Let them know that you are willing to help in the planning process so you can help identify communications objectives and shape the effort, including the products and the evaluation.
- At first, select only a few projects to measure for effectiveness. This won't make the task seem so overwhelming. Once you've successfully planned and produced an effective product that you can prove accomplished your objectives, the process will become easier. Eventually you'll want to evaluate all your projects.
- Identify your communications objectives. Make sure everything you produce meets those objectives. These steps are the same as for program development. You'll need to answer these questions:
  - What problems are you addressing?
  - Who is your target audience?
  - What are your objectives? List the types and degree of behavioral or attitudinal change you want to see happen by a certain time; the effectiveness of the delivery method, or both.
  - What methods will you use? Fact sheets, phone contacts, or personal visits?
  - How will you evaluate your effectiveness? Will you measure changes in attitudes or behavior or measure impact on budget?
- Ask evaluation specialists within your organization to help develop a first-rate evaluation process. You don't have to do it alone.
- Track the use of your products. This measures whether your delivery techniques are effective, but not necessarily if your messages are effective. Here are some ways you can track use:
  - News clipping services. However, research shows that clipping services often find only half of the stories that actually make it into print.
  - Nielsen ratings or other broadcast monitoring services. These ratings let you know how many households are being reached with your program or video news releases, but not necessarily how many people are hearing your message or being moved to action.

- Quantity counts. Counting how many of a product you create—or better yet, how many you reprint or reproduce—might tell you something valuable. The question, however, is whether your product is really effective or whether it is the only thing available.
- Web tracking. A simple though not necessarily reliable measure of effectiveness is simply to count the number of hits on your Web site. Some counting programs are better than others at tracking real users; they exclude multiple hits from the same person or hits from your staff.
- Readership surveys to measure reaction to periodicals you are producing.

- Explore more sophisticated ways to measure product effectiveness, such as:
  - User surveys and questionnaires can be effective for publications, videos, video news releases, Web sites—virtually everything you produce. Be sure to make them simple and easy to complete and return to you. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for mailed surveys. For audiences who have access to the Internet and are comfortable using the technology, you can use e-mail surveys.
  - Telephone surveys, if short and well crafted, can provide you with rich information on your customers' use of and feelings about your products and services.
  - Interviews and focus groups can also provide you with personalized information about your products and services.
  - User observation is an effective evaluation tool for such things as Web site navigation and Internet educational modules.
  - Participant evaluations are useful tools for evaluating workshops and programs. This is especially true if you also use a follow-up survey to evaluate whether participants have truly demonstrated the knowledge, attitude, or behavior changes you were targeting.
  - Business reply cards, or bounce-back cards are good tools for getting feedback on mailed materials. If you don't get a sufficient response this way, however, you may need to make follow-up phone calls.
- Learn from others. Many organizations have extensive experience in measuring effectiveness. Check Chapter 6 for some useful Web sites.

Once you've started, you'll find that measuring your products' effectiveness won't take nearly as much time as you thought it might. You'll find the rewards can be gratifying, not only in terms of recognition and increased support for your organization, but also in increased recognition of your expertise as a communicator.

chapter four

The Internet

"For a list of all the ways technology has failed to improve the quality of life, please press three."

– Alice Kahn

The lack of a Web page is far more obvious and potentially embarrassing than the lack of an e-mail address. The Web is more like TV than e-mail. At first glance, the Web looks like a tool for untargeted, mass distribution. However, the Internet is a powerful research tool for the media.

It is crucial that your Web site maintain a consistent message and identity. Maintain and update it on a daily basis. Make it accessible to customers with cutting-edge technology like PDAs—Personal Digital Assistants, cell phones, and pagers that offer Web access. And, make it accessible to all. That means incorporating features to provide access to the hearing and visually impaired, and the learning disabled.

There are no "fixed" deadlines in the Internet—the information can change minute by minute. The possibilities for using the Internet are seemingly endless. Instead of a media event, you might want to try a web-cast announcement. Your agency representative can be in the middle of Iowa and the media reporters and writers can be anywhere in the country, but they can interact online or have an Internet chat. The Internet gives you the possibilities of new tools for reporters—Web-based press kits, Web casts, and digital information available online. Tomorrow will see more audio and video streaming on the Web as broad banding becomes more common.

Writing for the Web: Tricks of the Trade

On the Web, you have about eight seconds to capture your reader. Great information isn't enough. Glitzy graphics won't do it. And, hypertext—at its worst—provides appealing distractions that tempt your readers to move on. So, how can you make your Web pages alluring, attractive, and easy-to-read?

- Design for easy scanning.
- Provide visual navigation and accessibility aids.
- Be concise.
- Convey credibility.

How We Read Web Pages

To design Web pages that attract and keep customers, you have to understand that we read Web pages differently than we read paper.

- Reading rates slow by 25 to 40 percent on the Web.
- The monitor's flicker causes eyestrain.

- Almost 80 percent of Web readers scan Web text. That means only 20 percent read every word.
- Readers scan a site for only about 10 seconds before they move on.

Design for easy scanning. Do whatever you can to attract and keep your customers coming back to your Web site for more.

☞ Tips for attracting and keeping your customers:

- **Make your fonts legible**. Sans serif fonts are, in most cases, the best choice for publishing chunks of text on the Web. Letters look different on the computer screen than they do on paper. People usually don't read letter-by-letter as much as they recognize words by their shape. For example, a word typed in all capitals looks like a rectangle, which slows your reader down.

On paper, serif fonts, which have both thick and thin lines, increase legibility based on shape recognition. They also guide the eye between letters on paper. But on the monitor, serifs may cause letters to appear as blobs or make them look like they're running into each other.

- The smaller the type, the more important it is to use sans serif fonts.
- Italics decrease legibility; use them sparingly.
- Use serif fonts on articles that will be printed to be read.
- Dark type on a light background reads and prints much better than light type on dark.
- Writing on pictures or textures stands out when it's large and bold (check out magazine covers for ideas).
- Verdana, Arial, and Helvetica are good sans serif choices for monitors. Georgia, Times New Roman, and Times are good choices for serif fonts.
- Remember that browser settings, whether altered by the user or not, will determine what the user ultimately sees.
- **Use the journalist's tool: The inverted pyramid.** Journalists sell their content by bringing the conclusion to the top of the story. Although this may sound upside-down, it will work for the Web.

Web readers only give you a few seconds to persuade them that you've got what they're looking for. The inverted pyramid structure is the perfect device to grab readers who are looking for factual content.

Shape an inverted pyramid by starting with your conclusion and building down to the background information. Better still, link to detailed and background information. Web readers will pursue what they want. That's why it's called surfing.

- **Keep line lengths short.** Don't make your Web lines longer than 40 to 60 characters. Keep in mind that it's hard to read from a monitor. Font size on the screen should be a bit larger than what you might choose for paper publishing.

- **Use headlines and subheads to break up your text.** A good headline or subhead is brief, simple, and meaningful. Web surfers can come to your site from many different directions, particularly when they are using a search tool to look for key words. Thus, each page on your site should carry a meaningful headline—one that can stand alone out of the context of the rest of your pages.

Don't be overly clever or use puns when you're writing headlines. Users could misunderstand your topic.

- **Use bullets and numbered lists.** They're easier to read and scan. The format helps you more concisely shape your content. Numbered lists help your readers pinpoint the next step. When you bury the information in a paragraph, your readers get frustrated.
- **Highlight key words.** If you highlight key words, you'll help your readers scan more efficiently. Use a color—reserve blue for links—or simply use a bold face font. Remember, only 20percent of Web readers read every word.
- **Provide visual navigation and accessibility aids.** The Web is a visual medium. Graphics and words work together, and the reader uses both to navigate. Experienced surfers expect a colored bar at the top or left of the page will have links to key sections of the site. Although it's common that the center of the page will attract attention first, most of your readers will instinctively look to the top and side for navigational cues.
  - Don't put more than three carefully chosen words in buttons or text hyperlinks.
  - If you can't succinctly describe an area of your site, break it down differently.
  - Don't squeeze jargon and abbreviations into small spaces. If your readers don't know what it is, they won't use it.
  - Don't use icons alone; use them only as supplements to a hyperlink.
  - Use hyperlinks within text blocks carefully. They may tempt your reader away from the text flow. Consider a section of links in a block by themselves where they may also be easier for your reader to find again later.
  - Group hyperlinks when you have a lot of them. Make these groups visually distinct.
  - Use ***alt*** tags with all buttons and graphics.
  - Don't rely on colors for navigation.
  - Use graphics, but keep the file sizes small. Most Internet surfers have slow modem connections to the Web and won't wait for long screen downloads.
- **Be concise.** *Woman's Day* magazine warns that you should be aware of the "Fatigue Factor." For most in our culture, it's a driving force. Research on Web readers shows they prefer lean text. In one study, most readers thought they were getting a greater amount of information from concisely written pages than from wordy pages, even when they weren't. Writing concisely will brand your page as one that is packed with content. Here's how:
  - Limit each paragraph to one idea.
  - Begin each with a topic sentence.

- Use three or four sentences per paragraph.
- Keep sentences short.
- Use simple sentence structure.
- Use plain language
- Don't use passive sentences.

- **Chunk your content.** Help your audiences find the information they seek more efficiently. Your readers who scan don't like to scroll through long Web pages. Chunk your information into meaningful pieces. Then:
  - Size each chunk to fit on a single screen that carries a meaningful headline.
  - Reduce word count by 50 percent when you edit print documents for the Web.
  - Chunk each page into a few paragraphs.
- **Just the facts, ma'am...** Web readers want facts. Don't pollute your factual content with wordy embellishment. Take special care to avoid words and phrases that sound like marketing jargon.
- **Why rewrite something that's already on paper?** All the evidence points to the inevitable: People won't read your page when it's wordy, full of fluff or jargon, or not chunked into meaningful pieces. Remember that people will enter your site from many different points. You can't expect Web readers to read your content in a linear fashion.
- **Convey Credibility.** Web readers look for marks of credibility when scanning a Web page. Here's how you can be credible:
  - Make it clear who is publishing your Web site. Web readers are skeptical about content when they can't identify who is sponsoring it.
  - Provide your credentials. You can use a link to give this information.
  - Link to high-quality, credible sites that support your content. Readers sometimes like to see links to opposing points of view, as well. Many interpret this as objectivity on the part of the author.

And finally, use your professional judgement. You know when your audience and subject matter may make it appropriate to break the rules. Apply a bit of the "less is better" principle. Ask for feedback from clients and co-workers, and you'll be on your way to having a Web site that is alluring, attractive and easy-to-read.

Make Your Web Site Customer Friendly

- Break your information up into small bites.
- Label your Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) "How do I ...?" Most people assume their question will not be in the FAQ section.

- Use common terms that people are familiar with. People think "I want to file a complaint," not "I want to file an incident report."
- Less is more. It is better to have a main page with category links that direct folks down a path than to put everything you have on the front page.
- The fewer clicks, the better. Don't make people search too much for what they want. If there is a logical progression, people will keep clicking. If they have to click more than four or five times in what seems a random manner, they will give up.
- Personalize your information whenever possible. Using zip code-driven searches or other ways to make the information apply to the constituent drives home why the information/agency matters to them.
- Be a station, not a destination. People are looking for information as part of a process. Often they aren't familiar with the structure of government. If they need to go to another agency (instead of yours), provide the link on your page. There is ***nothing*** worse than telling the customer, "It's not my department."
- Put your most sought-after services on the front page. People really want to find the information or complete their task quickly—a biography of your commissioner gets in their way and frustrates them. Your customers shouldn't have to hunt for your information.
- If you provide a public e-mail address and solicit comments or questions, be sure you have the time and resources to answer all of the inquiries you will undoubtedly receive.

Push versus *Pull*

Most traditional advertising and promotional media use a ***push*** system to deliver messages to potential customers. One example would be "This program is interrupted for an important message from ...". Direct mail appeals fill your mailbox daily. The Internet has ***push*** technology too, but users can choose it or not. Ideally the Internet is a ***pull*** system, because you ***attract*** Web surfers to your home page. If you get too pushy, by sending unsolicited e-mail, for example, it will earn you a bad reputation.

Netiquette

There are some special rules that apply to communicating on the Internet. The most important is to remember that you are communicating with real people, not a computer. Don't spam—that is don't send unsolicited e-mail. Remember that the Internet is a ***pull*** system, where customers request information, rather than one where you send them information without being asked. A wise person once suggested you treat the Internet like a foreign culture—study it for a month or more, as an anthropologist would, before you participate.

chapter five

How To Do It

"Writing is not necessarily something to be ashamed of, but do it in private and wash your hands afterwards."

– Robert Heinlein

Writing Awesome and Effective News Releases

There are four basic steps to creating effective news releases – formatting, writing, getting noticed, and tracking your success.

☞ Formatting Tips:

- **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** These words should appear at the top, just under your letterhead. Be sure to capitalize every letter.
- **Contact Information:** Skip a few lines and then list your contact person, along with his or her title, phone and fax number, and e-mail address. You might also want to include home or cell phone numbers, since reporters work on deadlines and may be trying to call after normal work hours. Make sure your contact is available and capable of answering questions. Also include your agency's Web site address.
- **Headline:** Skip two lines and use boldface type. Don't make it longer than one line. Use caps and lower case.
- **Dateline:** This should include your city and the date you are issuing the release.
- **Lead paragraph:** The first paragraph needs to grab the reader's attention and should have the five W's and an H – who, what, where, when, why, and how.
- **Text:** Use 8-1/2 by 11 paper; with one-inch margins on each side. Keep it to one page, or no more than two. Reporters usually won't read more than one. If your release is longer than two pages, you have more than one news release. If you do need a second page, center the world "- more -" at the bottom of the first page.
- Center ***# # #*** or ***-30-*** at the end of the news release.

☞ Writing Tips:

- **Make it newsworthy:** Are you solving a problem? Pinpoint what the need is and write from that perspective.
- **Write a headline that gets to the point:** Immediately tell why this news is important. Avoid promotional-sounding words. What you say in the headline determines whether or not the reporter will read your release.

- **Write a strong lead paragraph:** Answer the who, what, where, when, why, **and** how. Use this graph to summarize the news. Make sure the first ten words of your release are effective, as they are the most important. Don't use fancy language or too many adjectives.
- **Once you have provided a brief description of the news**, then you can tell who is announcing it, not the other way around.
- **Give news details** so that the reporter or correspondent understands why it is important to read on. Add background, quotes, and comparisons to other products, services, or research to illustrate the importance of this news. If you're announcing a new product or service, mention when and where it is available and other points. Deal with the facts. Don't editorialize.
- **Include a short summary of your organization.** Especially include any information about what distinguishes your agency's expertise. Include your expertise and location, but keep it short—this isn't an annual report.
- **Make sure** your contact information is complete.

☞ Making News: Tips for Getting Noticed:

- Make sure your information is newsworthy and targeted to the appropriate audience.
- Find out the best way to contact reporters and correspondents who may be interested—mail, e-mail, fax, Web site?
- Don't include attachment if you send an e-mail release. Put the release within the body of the message.
- Don't issue a news release until you have something of substance to say.
- Make it easy for the media to do their jobs—include tip sheets, background papers, or Q&As.
- Know the publication or station deadlines.

☞ How to Track Your News Release:

It's important to track your media coverage to make sure your news releases are being used. News clipping services can help you track how effective your news releases are by monitoring newspapers, magazines, and broadcast outlets across the country. See the suggestions in Chapter 6.

Tip Sheets/Fact Sheets/Questions and Answers

Tip sheets, fact sheets, and questions and answer sheets can be one- or two-page supplements to your news releases.

- A tip sheet is generally a ***how to*** instruction list;
- A fact sheet may contain historic or general information about your organization or about a particular project;

- A Q&A sheet is a fact sheet in a question-and-answer format. It is often used successfully to correct misconceptions about your organization or project.

Here's the type of information you might use in a fact sheet about your agency:

- Your director's name.
- Your agency's mission.
- The history of your agency or project.
- Partners, customers.
- Information about your project, including its budget and staff size.
- Who you are; what you do; how long you've been around; notable accomplishments.

You can also use a Q&A to define common terms a reporter might come across when doing a story about your agency. These supplements should be no more than one page with an open layout that is easy to follow (bold section headers, bullets, and indents). Stay focused on one topic in each fact sheet. Fact sheets should complement the news release. Make sure fact sheets include your Web site address as well as contact names and phone numbers.

Background Papers

Background papers can be useful tools to get additional information to reporters and correspondents. Background papers delve more deeply into a subject area than news releases. You will increase your chance of media coverage if your pitch and materials are interesting and easy to understand. If you make your message consistent and accurate, you'll stand a better chance of being the media's primary source.

Don't let your background paper read like an academic paper or technical document, laden with acronyms and bureaucratic language. It should read more like a story—easy to read and understand. Make the reporter's job easy and you'll get better media coverage.

Earned Media—Coverage on a Shoestring

Can't afford to buy advertising? Then earn media coverage.

The best way to implement your communication strategy is to keep repeating your message to a target audience. When you buy advertising—online, radio, TV, print, outdoor, or any other media the ad industry creates—you know what you are getting. You control the message, you control the medium, and you know approximately who your audience will be. But it costs a lot of money to buy advertising. Most government agencies are prohibited from doing so with appropriated monies.

The good news is that you don't have to buy space and air time for news and feature articles—all it takes is a little savvy and a lot of determination to get those articles placed. You can ***earn*** media coverage by developing contacts with reporters, writers, and news directors, as well as by pitching news story ideas, holding news conferences, and using other creative techniques to get their attention. All this effort makes it ***earned media*** rather than paid-for publicity.

Make Your News *Newsworthy.* The biggest challenge with earned media is that your message must appeal to the media's audience. Often, what we think is newsworthy and exciting just makes reporters yawn. To get their attention, you'll need to frame the issue in an appealing way. Try to find a current news issue, event, or other news hook to hang your story on. Don't forget to provide a media link from the home page of your agency's Web site. If your Web page is updated daily, reporters will come every morning to check for news leads.

Get Your News to the Right Person. Make sure your information is getting to the right person at the newspaper, magazine, or broadcast station. Don't just fax news releases out and assume they'll get to the right person. Check media reference books to target your information. Call the media to see which reporter covers your agency or would be interested in your issue. When you send a news release, direct it to the right person. Follow up with a call to see if the reporter needs more information. Better yet, offer an additional bit of information of special interest to that publication's readers, listeners, or viewers.

☞ Other Ways to Earn Media Attention:

- Submit an opinion editorial (Op-ed) with your position to the newspaper.
- Write a letter to the editor.
- Create a PSA (public service announcement).
  - TV stations often run video PSAs free.
  - Radio stations run audio PSAs.
  - Magazines often give free ad space for print PSAs, especially if your PSA is visually interesting, professionally done, fits the magazine's format, and if your message is relevant to their audience.
  - PSAs that have a local slant are more apt to be aired than national themes.
  - Check out **www.psaresearch.com**, a web site devoted to PSAs.
- Use banner ads to promote your Web site. Place these ads on sites that cater to your primary audience. Many big-name sites provide free banner ad space for non-profits.

Tips for Producing PSAs that Get Used:

- Learn the latest PSA trends
- Understand what the media needs
- Provide the material in a flexible format
- Get professional, experienced help for production, distribution, and evaluation
- Develop creative, intrusive packaging

☞ Freebies: Don't Forget Your Community

Your community may have many media resources available to you that are free:

- Many cable companies provide free production facilities and air time on their public access channel. For very little expense, you could develop programs on many topics.
- Local radio and TV talk shows are always looking for guests with interesting stories.
- Public transit systems often offer free PSA space on their buses or subways.
- TV stations may be willing to work with you to create and air an ongoing campaign, which gives your message better exposure than if you had done your own PSAs.
- Businesses might co-sponsor your campaign.
- Supermarkets might put your message on their grocery bags or milk cartons.
- Fast-food restaurants could put your message on their place mats, especially if the material is educational.
- Be creative and don't be afraid to ask for what you want. The worst they can say is, "no." More than likely, though, they'll say "yes."

Satellite Media Tours

Half of all Americans get ***all*** their news on TV. Since these folks don't read newspapers or magazines, you can't reach them through words—you need pictures, video footage, and broadcast interviews to reach them. A satellite media tour can help you deliver your message in a timely, credible, and cost-effective way.

Rather than having your spokesperson spend days or weeks on the road meeting your target media face-to-face, you can schedule all the interviews on one or two days from one local TV studio, for a fraction of the cost of air fare. By making sure you have a timely, interesting subject to discuss, some in-studio visuals and/or B-roll footage, a satellite media tour can reach a vast audience. And, unlike video news releases, station bookings let you know your results in advance. Local TV stations like satellite media tours because their own anchor or correspondent gets to interact personally with your spokesperson. The stations can broadcast the interview live or tape it for later use. A typical satellite media tour can cover 12 to 20 stations in two to three hours.

Here's how it works:

- Several days before your scheduled satellite media tour, you tell TV and cable stations about your topic and spokesperson.
- Stations can then reserve time to do a brief 3- to 10-minute interview with your spokesperson via satellite during a window of time.
- During the satellite media tour, your spokesperson remains in one TV studio while TV stations across the country are beamed in electronically to do their own interview.
- You can transmit a video news release or b-roll footage during your media tour.

- You can beam in spokespersons from several locations around the country.
- You can include a live demonstration of your product or service.

Be creative in setting up your media tours to make the best use of your time and financial resources. Also consider setting up radio press tours.

Producing an Agency Newsletter

Spend some time figuring out ***why*** you're publishing a newsletter. Talk with everyone involved—your boss, colleagues, and, most importantly, your potential readers. Ask these questions:

Purpose: What do you want the newsletter to do? Have you read the competition? Will your information be new or different? What will be your writing style? Is there enough material to do it weekly? Biweekly? Monthly? Quarterly? Is this newsletter being printed to make everyone feel warm and fuzzy about the organization? Who chooses the articles? Who edits? How much? Is the newsletter for information? For entertainment? For publicity? Is it official or unofficial?

Time: How much time will you have to produce each issue? Will it be on company time? Who will prepare format the newsletter? Will you have a designer? Do you have desktop publishing equipment and software? Are you trained to do all the jobs? How many pages are you trying to fill? How will you proof your own work?

Budget: Do you have start-up money? Do you have a guaranteed budget for a specific time? Enough cash for equipment? Do you have or need a scanner for photos? Pencils, paper, furniture, phones? How are you going to promote the newsletter? How much will it cost?

Design: Do you have a design? A designer? Will the newsletter be full width, one column, two column, three? Will there be copy only, photos, line drawings? Where will graphics come from? Who does the layout? Black and white? Color?

Printing: Does your printer do newsletters? Can someone else give you a better deal? Will the printer mail or deliver your copies?

Internet: Who will put your newsletter in HTML? How quickly will it be posted? How frequently updated?

These are just a few questions to ask. Add your own. Make sure you have a good idea of what you are doing, before you start a newsletter.

Editing Your Newsletter

Most newsletter editors accept articles written and contributed by subject-matter experts, who unfortunately aren't usually communications experts. This poses challenges. Although it is often difficult to coax busy people into contributing articles, it is even harder to ask those people for rewrites when their work needs polishing. It does a tremendous disservice to the reader and to the publication, however, to merely plug an article into a publication without edits and revisions. Writers depend on good editors to make their work better and easier to read. Here's how you can ease the burden:

- Is the piece suitable for use? Is it well written, factual, informative, and interesting? Does it conform to the purpose of the publication, and does it target the intended audience? Has the author remembered to include necessary details that support the conclusion? If the content is on target, the writing style can be refined for publication. If the content isn't on target, rewrite or replace it.
- Don't be timid about asking the writer for either a revision or an interview to expand information needed for the article. The author has information you don't, and a quick e-mail or short phone call may complete the article. Explain any confusing or unclear statements so the author can fix them.
- If you have interns who write for you, be sure to give them plenty of guidance and review their drafts carefully.
- If you are soliciting an article, give the writer specific guidelines up front. If your authors know and understand the parameters before they begin writing, you should need to do very little editing. Be explicit about the purpose and the audience. Even better, give the writer written guidelines.

☞ Guidelines for Your Contributing Writers

- Give your writers background information about your publication and a recent copy. Let the author know who your target audience is and why they read the publication.
- Tell them how long the piece should be (word count). That way, you won't have to cut. It will also help the writer stay focused on the topic.
- Give the writer a deadline. Make sure you give yourself enough time before the production deadline to edit and ask for a rewrite, if you need it.
- Set parameters. Give the author a subject and a focus, or an angle for his or her article. Be specific in communicating your goal. Tell the author to keep the audience in mind.
- Include a list of things to avoid in your newsletter, such as political statements, jargon, acronyms, slang, long sentences, clichés, and redundancies.
- Give the author a copy of your agency's style manual.
- Let the author know that you reserve the right to edit all material for length, clarity, and style.
- Ask for written permission to use copyrighted materials.
- Tell the author to keep a copy of the work.

☞ Disclaimers:

If you accept submissions from outside writers or use materials created by non-staff, include a disclaimer. Here are some sample disclaimers:

> The opinions expressed in [your publication] are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of [your agency]. Previously published material appearing in this publication may not be reproduced in any form except with the express written permission of the copyright holder.

[Your publication] is published by the [your organization]. Views expressed in [your publication] are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily represent the official views of [your organization].

The [your publication] welcomes submissions. [types of submissions that will be accepted] will be considered. Submissions cannot be returned. We reserve the right to edit for style, clarity, and length. Black-and-white and color photos are also accepted. We regret, however, that we cannot return them. Please identify all photos clearly. [Your organization] reserves the right to use any writing, photos, and artwork in other publications. Inquiries and letters should be sent to: …

"I can't write five words but that I change seven."

— Dorothy Parker

Elements of Good Writing

Your agency can maintain consistency in writing style and usage by using either an in-house style guide or a standard commercial guide, such as the *AP Stylebook* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*. But you should also simplify your language, streamline your text by eliminating unnecessary phrases that do not add to your message, and never go to print with a first draft. When you're revising your own text or editing someone else's work, keep these basic elements of good writing in mind:

☞ Logic:

- Is the purpose clear and relevant?
- Are all the necessary details there to support the conclusion?
- Is the tone right for the audience?
- Is the presentation balanced?
- Is all the important material presented?
- Is the material accurate and current?
- Are the transitions between thoughts in place?
- Can the reader follow the logic?
- Are the conclusions supported by facts or are they forced?

☞ Word Choice and Language/Style:

- Is it easy to read?
- Do the paragraphs have parallel construction (i.e., are the sentences balanced)?
- Is the language active, positive, and personal?

- Is it written in plain language (avoiding acronyms, technical terms, clichés, redundancies, colloquialisms, slang, and long sentences?)
- Are the spelling, grammar, punctuation, and format consistent with your agency's standards?

☞ **Message:**

- Is the message consistent with your agency's policies?
- Does the author refrain from bias and discrimination?

☞ **Legal Issues:**

- Have you verified the references?
- Are the text citations/attributions/copyright notices in place?

"Fighting clutter is like fighting weeds—the writer is always slightly behind."

— William Zinsser

Tailoring Your Message

One of the most common errors we make is to try to speak to everybody when we want to reach a target audience. As a result, we reach almost nobody. We can do better if we tailor our messages, rather than ***shotgunning*** to everyone. When we know our specific audience, we know why and how we are trying to reach them—and we can evaluate whether we were successful.

Unless you're giving them information about a hot issue or a crisis, most of your audience will be indifferent or only mildly interested in what you're trying to tell them. Some research shows that we are subjected to more than 1,500 competing messages every day. You can cut through to make your message a prominent one if you focus on what you want to see happen with your audience.

For each audience, you should have a set of objectives. Use terms that are clear and precise. You'll need to answer these questions:

- Who is the primary audience for this message?
- Why (for what cause, reason, or prospect) is the message being delivered? What is the general aim of this information? What is the need to be met?
- What obstacles must be overcome?
- What will the content be?
- How will the message be presented?
- What result will satisfy you? What outcome do you want?
- How will you measure what you've done?

- The objective—is it possible?
- The audience—can they change? What do you want them to do?
- The media—are they right for the audience? For the message?
- The message—does it fit your audience?
- Your techniques—are you constructing the message for some hoped-for result or impact?

Your message will reach your targeted audience in direct proportion to your writing skill. Keep a member of your audience in mind while you're writing your message. You need to know all you can about this person's interests, values, and lifestyle characteristics. By using demographics and psycho-graphics to profile and understand your audiences, you can discover what motivates them to respond to what you are offering.

Keep your expectations reasonable. Changing behavior and attitudes can be slow and time-consuming. The same message may have to be repeated often and regularly. Each time you repeat the message, you are creating awareness.

Sometimes, your message will be to teach or inform. Another time, it might be to ask questions you want your audience to consider. Still another time, it might be about their behavior—is it normal? Does it need to be changed? Do you want them to adopt a new idea, product, or service?

It may be useful to keep in mind how your audience adopts new ideas. Here are the stages involved and questions you should consider:

- **Awareness:** Create or develop awareness? Heighten or raise awareness? Inform about a new method, an idea? Warn? Alert community to a problem? Publicize a program?
- **Interest/Learning:** Stimulate or arouse interest? Teach specific information or skills? Provide information? For the sake of knowledge? Leading to a behavior change? Leading to a one-time-only action? Leading to a long-term change in behavior? Identify sources of help, resources available? Create an understanding?
- **Evaluation/Desire:** Pose questions?
- **Trial:** Convince? Try something?
- **Adoption/Action:** Adopt an innovation, an idea, a new technique? Cause a change in behavior? Temporarily? Long-term? Cause an attitude or value change? Temporarily? Long-term? Take action? Seek help? Respond?

Why do audiences respond to messages?

- Information—they want to find out about relevant events and conditions in their immediate surroundings, in their society and the world; they are seeking advice on practical matters or opinions and decisions or choices; they are satisfying curiosity and general interest; they are learning, self-educating; gaining a sense of security through knowledge.
- Personal identity—they are finding reinforcement for personal values; finding models of behavior; identifying with valued others (in the media); gaining insight into oneself.

- Integration and social interaction—they are gaining insight into the circumstances of others; experiencing social empathy; identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging; identifying a basis for conversation; having a substitute for real-life companionship; helping to carry out social roles; becoming enabled to connect with family, friends, and society.
- Entertainment—they are escaping or being diverted from problems; relaxing; getting intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment; filling time; undergoing an emotional release.
- Need—they need a product or a service.

Marketing

Marketing is much more than selling or advertising. It encompasses everything from what products or services you sell to how you get them to your customers. The traditional four Ps of marketing are product, place, price, and promotion.

Product, of course, refers to your services, including packaging, design, branding, trademarks, warranties, guarantees, product life cycles, and new-product development.

Place covers the physical distribution of goods.

Price is a factor in your customers' decision about whether to buy or use your product. Customers can't see your expertise, your insight, or your past experience. When they make a decision to buy a service, they will decide how much they like you or trust you, in addition to the price.

Promotion refers to all the marketing methods you use. Marketing must get your customer's attention. If people don't know that you or your programs exist, they can't do business with you.

When you do a marketing plan, this is what to consider:

- What benefits does your agency provide or offer?
- What happens to people if they don't use your services?
- What new segments or target audiences does it make sense for you to try to reach?
- What are you doing to enhance your relationship with your customers?
- Have you committed time and attention to regularly consider these questions?

☞ Marketing Musts:

- Get involved. Help develop your agency's marketing plan.
- Pay attention to your customers. Answer e-mail and return phone calls promptly.
- Integrate. Your Internet presence should be an integral part of your marketing efforts. Put your e-mail address and URL on your business cards and stationery. Use it on all your promotions.
- Don't get complacent. Make sure your approach is always fresh and bright.
- Market your Web site. Enter your site in all of the appropriate indices and search engines and make sure it stays there. Negotiate for reciprocal links. Consider banner advertising.

- Don't give up. Keep plugging away.
- Have goals. Delete the non-essentials and stick to your concrete marketing goals.
- Keep your standards up. Don't settle for anything less than high standards.

Product Marketing—Selling Your Stuff

Sometimes we produce educational materials that are aimed at many constituent groups—policy makers, businesses and industries, teachers, students, or the general public. Some government agencies can sell their products; others can't. If you can sell your materials, here's how to build a marketing system that includes working with wholesalers and retailers.

Wholesalers and retailers serve in the middle—they can expand your ability to get your valuable information into the hands of your customers. The income that these companies generate for themselves is their compensation and incentive to help you carry out your educational mission.

Here are some tips on how to build and implement a wholesale and retail sales system:

☞ Getting Started:

- Make sure your products don't duplicate or compete directly with ones already in the private sector. Selling government-produced items is not about cutting into private sales; it's about disseminating useful information that isn't already being produced.
- Identify constituent needs within the context of your agency's objectives and goals. Depending on your agency, there are many ways to identify these needs.
- Based on the needs you have identified, create marketable products. Looks count. Your products will compete for the attention of wholesalers, retailers, and customers. Make sure your products are not only useful but also attractive. If your product is printed, this requires good writing, editing, and graphic design.
- Create an attractive print catalog and one-page flyers and a Web site that features items you especially want to highlight.
- Give consumers as many options as possible to buy your product. Get a toll-free phone number for orders. Accept orders by fax, e-mail, regular mail, and over your Web site.

☞ Using Wholesalers and Retailers:

- Set a wholesale discount of no less than 40 percent off suggested retail price.
- Anticipate packaging and shipping costs, and figure out how to recover those costs.
- Identify potential wholesalers and retailers. Look in the phone book listings. Get mailing lists from chambers of commerce and state offices of commerce or economic development. Copy addresses or get business cards or brochures when you chance on businesses that might sell your items.
- Check with the Government Printing Office to find out if your product is eligible to be sold through GPO's retail stores, which are located in major cities.

- See if your product is eligible to be listed in the federal government's master catalog of consumer information publications.
- Build an electronic database of wholesalers, retailers, and retail customers. Use a database program that will allow you to categorize and code your customers, track inventory, process orders, and generate invoices.
- Call, visit, or write each potential seller and describe your product.
- Follow up by mailing complimentary samples of your items. Include your price, discount schedule, and shipping instructions.
- If it's too costly to part with many free samples, send a promotional flyer instead, along with any compelling supporting materials such as newspaper reviews of your product, kudos by credible people, and award citations.

☞ Selling Via Direct Mail:

- Do special promotional mailings at strategically determined times of the year. If your product is useful to summer tourists in Northern states, for example, send your promotional materials in February or March, when tourism retailers are stocking up for the summer season. If your items are useful to school teachers, find out when they generally write up their budgets for the coming year, and time your promotional mailing to precede that activity.
- Let the news media help you. If you are involved with public safety, tell news media about your safety-related products just before whatever season or event normally causes increased problems in that area.
- Make sure you have a system in place, including competent staff, to quickly fill orders and process payments. Don't overlook storage space for your products and mailing supplies, along with a budget for these expenses. Factor in shipping materials when you calculate prices for your products.
- Provide as many options as you can to make it convenient for your customers. Accept credit card orders and consider a toll-free telephone number. Accept orders by mail, fax, e-mail and on your Web site. If your office is open to the public, be prepared for walk-in buyers.
- Track supply levels so you won't run out of inventory. This is important to good customer service.

☞ Selling on the Web:

- Create a catalogue on your Web site that is an attractive, compelling, logically organized, easy-to-understand, and easy-to-use. Copy approaches used by other successful online retailers. Include teaser color graphics of book covers. If you can, include clips of videos. And make sure your information loads fast on all computers.
- Have your Web master include keywords (or metatags) when coding for each item in the catalog. Search engines use metatags to find key information.
- Incorporate a keyword search function in your catalog.

- Make sure your ordering instructions are complete and easy to understand.
- Have a secure, online order form and a system that accepts credit card orders. Include a printable order form for customers who prefer to mail or fax their order.
- Find other agencies or businesses related to your agency's mission that have Web sites that contain links to other Web sites. Ask them to link to your home page or catalog.
- Always include your Web address on all of your print materials.

Effective Meetings

Most meetings are called to solve problems that might not exist if we didn't have meetings. There are some key questions you should ask before you call a meeting. Is this meeting essential? Can we do without it? Can it wait another month? Can we get things done with fewer meetings? Can we accomplish the task another way?

Accessibility: If you do decide to have a meeting, you need to consider the need to make your meeting accessible to people with disabilities. To make your meeting accessible for people who are visually impaired or disabled, you may need to provide alternative formats, such as braille, cassette tape, computer disk, and/or large print. Whenever possible, try to work with the vision-impaired attendee ahead of time to find out what format he or she prefers. To make your meeting accessible for people with hearing impairments, find out ahead of time if you need a sign language interpreter. Also, make sure your meeting location is accessible to people using wheelchairs.

☞ Tips for Holding More Effective Meetings:

- Start and end meetings on time.
- Have an ***open*** agenda on a chalkboard or flip chart. Participants can add items to the agenda, but they must be prepared to lead the discussion if they put an item on the agenda.
- If an item isn't on the ***open*** agenda, it can't be discussed. If it needs to be discussed, it must be on the agenda.
- Give each item on the agenda a time limit. Three minutes is a good amount of time. If action or discussion cannot be completed within the allotted time, it must be delayed until the end of the meeting.
- After all agenda items have been discussed, address the delayed items and estimate how long it will take the discuss them. Decide if the item can be discussed today or needs someone to perform an assignment or activity first. Maybe the item needs more research, details, data, or opinions.
- Any delayed item should be the first item on the next open agenda.
- Summarize and record action items before adjourning the meeting.

"Make sure you have finished speaking before your audience has finished listening."

— Dorothy Sarnoff

Effective Speeches

You don't have to be a polished speaker to share your agency's message, but you must be able to communicate effectively. It takes time and effort to craft an effective speech. Here's how to make your speeches more successful:

Know Your Audience. Find out who and how many will be present, their ages, interests, and occupations. Will they be friendly? If not, why not? What is the format of the meeting and the context of your speech? Will there be speakers before and after you? What will they discuss? Who will introduce you? Will there be a question and answer period? How long will you be expected to speak? What are the physical arrangements? What does the room look like? Where will you stand? Will you have a podium? Do you want one? Will you have a microphone? Will the speech be recorded? Will media be there? Can you have visual aids?

Know Your Subject. Public speaking is stressful under the best of conditions. But there is nothing worse than speaking to an audience without having a firm grasp of the material you're presenting. There is no substitute for knowledge of the subject. Don't speak unless you have that knowledge. If, in an emergency, you must speak on a subject you don't have a firm grasp of, immediately tell the audience you are not an expert.

Have a Clear Goal. What is your goal? Organize your presentation around it. Is your goal to inform or to persuade the audience? Appeals to reason and emotion can be effective, but a persuasive speech supported by sound evidence is more effective than a speech without it. You should restate your basic message more than once. Repetition helps audiences remember.

Prepare Thoroughly. If you don't have time to prepare thoroughly, don't accept the assignment. Public speaking is just like any other task—to do it successfully requires your time, effort, and preparation.

You can grab the audience's attention immediately with a startling fact or provocative opinion. You can use a concrete illustration, a quote, or a humorous incident. Or you can ask a rhetorical question that makes people think.

Convey no more than three or four main points. Your listeners won't remember more than this. Illustrate the points with examples. Guide the listeners clearly and easily from point to point.

Use your conclusion to stress the purpose of your talk. But leave no doubt about your central idea and what you've tried to say.

Take some time to prepare your own one-page introduction. Provide a copy to the person who will introduce you. Bring an extra copy with you just in case. Also, bring an extra copy or two of your speech in case anyone wants a copy.

"Talk low, talk slow, and don't say too much."

— John Wayne

Add Style to Your Next Speech

Some speeches linger in the hearts and minds of audiences. Others are forgotten as soon as the words have left the speaker's mouth. What makes a speech memorable? Style! Here's how you can add some style to your next speech:

- **Anecdotes.** Even the most sophisticated audiences like to hear anecdotes. Give them what they want; they'll remember the speaker who tells a good story.
- **Colloquial Language.** Consider the appeal of regional sayings, colorful proverbs, and casual slang.
- **Definitions.** Ever notice how frequently speakers say, "According to Webster ..." and then proceed to bore the audience with a long, technical definition they lifted straight from the dictionary? If you want to define something, look in a book of quotes or come up with something interesting. For example, here's how Edmund Burke defined government: "compromise and barter."
- **Parallel Structure.** Use parallel structure to provide a sense of balance and create the appeal of harmony. Examples: President Johnson said, "Aggression unchallenged is aggression unleashed." President Kennedy said, "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich."
- **Repetition.** Repetition is crucial. Audiences get restless. Their minds wander. Distractions pop into their heads—deadlines, budgets, kids, you name it. Whole sections of a speech can pass right by their ears. So, if you have a particularly good phrase, slogan or line, repeat it. Again and again.
- **Rhetorical Questions.** One way to involve your audience is to ask rhetorical questions. They encourage the audience to think about your topic. When you pose a rhetorical question, be sure to pause afterward—that gives the listeners some quiet time to answer the question in their own minds.
- **Short Sentences.** Short sentences pack a big punch. They're easy for speakers to deliver and easy for audiences to grasp. Timed properly, a four-word sentence following a long one can deliver a memorable punch.
- **Sounds of Words.** Use rhyme, alliteration, and word games—they all add style to your presentation.
- **Statistics.** If you think statistics are boring, you haven't heard the right ones. Follow these guidelines: Round off the numbers, because your audience is listening, not reading. And put numbers in everyday terms and personalize them.
- **Titles.** Choosing a good title will help you focus your speech. More importantly, it will help the audience grasp your main message and remember your main point. Be clever—use pop-

ular songs, movies, or best sellers as springboards. Be irreverent, if you want. Be daring. Just don't be boring.

- **Triads.** Putting items in groups of three creates a compelling rhythm.
- **Visual Imagery.** Who can forget the *iron curtain* of Winston Churchill? Or the *big stick* of Teddy Roosevelt?

How to Deliver Effective Speeches

Most of us fear speaking in public more than anything else. We often get a weak, queasy feeling, often accompanied by shaking, sweating, or a pounding heart. Excessive nervous energy causes these feelings. But your nervous energy can help give vitality to spark your presentation. Without it, your speech would be flat, dull, and lifeless. The key is to take your nervous energy and control and channel it.

Be Prepared: Being prepared will help remove your fear. The more prepared you are, the more confident and less nervous you will feel. Try to breathe deeply and exhale fully between breaths. Try to consciously slow down your breathing rate. When you are introduced, walk briskly to the podium. Take a step toward the listeners on one side of the room as you talk to them.

Your Appearance: How you appear will either enhance or negate your message. Project earnestness, sincerity, and enthusiasm. Try to be well rested before a speech. Rehearse the night before, but get a good night's sleep. You'll come across better and will be less prone to make mistakes.

Your clothing should not be so casual or so bold that people focus on it instead of your message. Wear an outfit that makes you feel confident and comfortable. If possible, check yourself in a full-length mirror before you start.

Stand straight but not rigid. Balance your weight on both feet, and hold your stomach in—it'll improve your posture. Avoid nervous body movements, even if you feel uncomfortable. Vary your stance occasionally, but don't fidget. Unnecessary or annoying activity detracts from your message. Keep your hands away from your face and out of your pockets.

Look Them in the Eye: Eye contact with your audience is a powerful tool to connect with them. Try to include everyone in the audience equally when you look out over the crowd. Good eye contact increases your credibility as a speaker.

Smile, Smile, Smile: Remember to smile—convey a sense of comfort, relaxation, and confidence. Even if you don't feel that way initially, it'll get easier with experience.

Gestures should appear to be a natural extension of your voice, neither contrived nor artificial. Avoid a white knuckle grip on the podium—relax your hands and it's easier to relax the rest of you.

> "Tell 'em what you're gonna tell 'em. Then tell 'em. Then tell 'em what you told 'em. And then sit down."
>
> — John Holliman, Jr.

Move smoothly, not abruptly—the way you would do in a conversation with a friend. And vary your stance occasionally. If you're not using a stationary microphone, you have more freedom to walk about and create some visual variety for your audience.

It's fine to have notes to speak from—but don't let your notes be a distraction. It's usually apparent from your tone of voice and your appearance when you are reading from a script. But no one objects to a few index cards in your hand with the main points you want to remember to make.

Visuals: Visual props—a book, poster, exhibit, video, photos, or overhead transparencies/slides— can enhance your speech. They can help reinforce your points, but choose them carefully. They should be visible to everyone in the audience, and you should be able to handle them smoothly with no fumbling. Remember to keep your mouth near the microphone when you're talking about your props. Pre-test any equipment to be sure that it works—and that you know how to run it. Check your visuals for accuracy and readability from a distance equal to the last chair in the room. Faulty visuals—or good visuals poorly displayed—are worse than none at all.

Overheads: With overheads/slides, the rule is ***less is more***. The best and most effective overheads are short and to the point. You'll lose your audience if they're busy trying to figure out poor overheads. The type should be of a size and font that is easy to read. Check the readability of your overheads from the back of the room to make sure everyone can see them easily. If the audience is older, they'll be less able to read the print. Also, be sure to leave the overheads up long enough for the audience to read them. Make sure your position is not blocking anyone's view.

☞ More Tips for Overheads/Slides:

- Think about your audience. Slides/overheads should highlight important points, not duplicate your entire presentation. Slides or overheads are meant to support your talk, not overpower it. ***Never read to the audience from the slides.*** It's okay to pause and let them read it themselves.
- Think about composition. Aim for a visual balance between all the text and graphic components. Don't crowd your information too close to the edges. Leave space between lines of type to ensure legibility.
- Be consistent. Make the colors and styles of elements the same on all overheads or slides. Put all titles and subtitles in the same location, same color, and same type face.

Your Voice: A good speaking voice is essential for delivering an effective speech. Your voice should be pleasant, conveying a sense of warmth. It should be natural, reflecting your true personality and sincerity. It should be dynamic, giving the impression of force and strength, even when it isn't especially loud. Here are some ways, other than increasing volume, to give the impression of force or strength:

- Pitching your voice higher or lower.
- Using emphatic gestures.
- Reducing or increasing your rate of speech.
- Pausing for effect.

Your voice should be expressive—portraying subtle shades of meaning and never sounding monotonous or without proper emotion. It should be easily heard—with proper volume and clear articulation.

Be sure you can be heard clearly. Pause to let brief interruptions (such as an airplane going over or a waiter dropping a tray) subside. Also pause when your audience is moved to laugh or applaud—you

don't want them to miss anything. When you are making a natural transition in your speech, pause to let your words have a chance to ***soak in.***

Vocal Variety: Vary your voice for a successful speech. Be sure to vary:

- Your rate (speed up or slow down to make a point).
- Your pitch (work within a comfortable range, but not all on the same level).
- Your tone (match your tone to your message—humorous, serious, inspiring, or comforting).
- Your volume (but don't under-or over-power the microphone).

Project your voice to the farthest person in your audience. Watch the audience to determine if they are receptive or if they are straining to hear.

Don't over-memorize or over-rehearse your speech so much that you sound like you're doing it on automatic pilot. You want to sound confident, but also fresh. Attempt to sound conversational, certainly not pedantic or strident.

Effective Pauses: Even though many speakers are afraid of them, effectively used pauses attract listener attention. Pause when you want a point to in the minds of the audience before you go to the next point. Brief pauses are also effective when you're building to a climax with your message. Pause as a sign of transition—this tells your audience that you intend to shift to a new point.

Articulate: Pay attention to your articulation. Don't mumble or slur your words together. Avoid lazy utterances, like *gonna* for *going to,* or *wanna* for *want to.* Some people rehearse with a tape recorder – and then listen to themselves to find ways to improve their articulation.

Avoid Fillers: Avoid audible *fillers* (especially *uh*)—short, silent pauses are much better. Using *uh* between thoughts is, unfortunately, a common problem, even among experienced speakers. Listen for it on your speech tapes, or ask a friend or family member to listen to you rehearse and tell you if you're using audible fillers that are distracting. Practice *silent pauses* so your *uhs* will be silent. Train your mind to set off a little warning bell whenever you say *uh* and then work to eliminate this annoying habit from your speech.

Keep Your Head Up: It is harder for your audience to hear you when you're looking down at your notes or facing your visuals or props instead of the audience. Keep your head up and face your audience as much as possible.

Applause: Finally, wait for and acknowledge applause (if it's appropriate to the occasion) with a smile or nod. But don't leave the podium unattended—if you're introducing another speaker, or if there's a master of ceremonies or host, wait for that person to come back to the podium before you step aside.

20 Tips for Overcoming Fear of Public Speaking

1. Nearly everyone is nervous about public speaking—you're not alone in your fear. Effort and practice will help you overcome your fear.
2. Public speaking is a skill to develop—not an inherent talent.

3. Your audience wants you to succeed; they are almost always on your side.
4. Be glad that you care enough about succeeding that you're nervous. It can be a good sign.
5. Think of public speaking as an opportunity—not a chore.
6. It isn't a ***speech.*** It's an opportunity to share information you have with those who have an interest in hearing it.
7. Believe in yourself, but not so much that you try to ***wing it*** without adequate preparation.
8. Envision success—***act*** the part. Think about what success would look like and then go for it.
9. Assume you will do all right, and you probably will. Assume you will fail, and you probably will.
10. Know your subject well, and thoroughly prepare yourself to talk about it.
11. Control nervous responses:
    - Quaking hands—use them constructively with natural gestures and props.
    - Quaking voice—take a deep breath or a sip of water.
12. Channel your nervousness into enthusiasm; if your nervousness is apparent, joke about it to ease the tension.
13. Rehearse and time your speech (with a friend, tape recorder, and/or mirror).
14. Dress at least as well as you think your audience will—or maybe a step better. Looking more casual than your audience will work against your self-confidence and detract from your credibility.
15. Have a written outline handy in case your mind goes blank.
16. ***Fake*** eye contact if you must (look at hairlines or mouths instead).
17. Have a glass of water handy. You can't talk well when your mouth is dry, and your audience will notice.
18. Don't sweat small mistakes—everyone makes them, even experienced broadcasters.
19. Afterwards, ask selected listeners for sincere feedback. People don't usually like to force it on you, but they like to be asked. Then attempt to incorporate this feedback into your next speech.
20. Seek out and accept ***every*** opportunity to speak before an audience. It ***does*** get easier over time—and for many, even enjoyable.

Disabilities

Communicating about People with Disabilities

More people have disabilities than we commonly realize. Many disabilities are ***hidden*** or not apparent, such as epilepsy, arthritis, or diabetes. As we age, we become more disabled. About one in six Americans have some degree of disability.

Words can hurt. The way we describe people shapes our perceptions. Positive language empowers people. When you write about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first.

☞ Tips:

- Don't use catch-all phrases such as "the blind," "the deaf," or "the disabled." Use nouns like "employees" and "people."
- Focus on the individual, not the disability. The disability is only one facet of the person.
- Show successful people with disabilities as successful people, not as super-humans. Don't overstate their achievements, as this may imply that other people who have disabilities aren't competent.
- Don't use stereotypes. Many people with hearing impairments can talk and have some degree of hearing.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. Don't say "confined to a wheelchair." The wheelchair provides mobility; people would be confined if they didn't have a wheelchair. Say instead, "uses a wheelchair."
- Be accurate in describing disabilities.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions. People with disabilities are generally used to questions and don't mind answering them.

Positive Phrases	Negative Phrases
person who is blind; visually impaired	the blind
woman who uses a guide dog	blind woman
person who has a hearing loss	is deaf
person who has multiple sclerosis	afflicted or stricken by MS
person with cerebral palsy	CP victim
person without disabilities	normal person
person who uses a wheelchair	confined or restricted to a wheelchair
person with psychiatric disability	crazy, nuts
person who no longer lives in an Institution	deinstitutionalized
unable to speak	dumb, mute
seizure	fit
successful, productive	has overcome his or her disability
says he has a disability	admits he has a disability

Communicating with People with Disabilities

As more and more people with disabilities become your customers and enter your workforce, you must be prepared to put your agency's communications materials in such alternative formats as braille, captioned video, and tape. In addition, your Internet Web site should be designed so it provides easy access to people with disabilities. If you run your Web site through **www.cast.org/bobby/**, it will tell you which areas are inaccessible and suggest improvements.

☞ Tips:

- When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person, rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
- When introduced to someone with a disability, offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
- When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who are with you. When talking in a group, remember to identify the person you are talking to.
- If you offer help, wait until the offer is accepted. Then, listen to or ask for instructions.
- Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when you are being that familiar with others. Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
- Don't lean on or hang on to a person's wheelchair. This is like hanging on to a person and most people don't like it. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
- Listen carefully when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If you need to, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. ***Never pretend to understand if you don't.*** Instead, repeat what you have understood and let the person respond. The response will clue you and guide your understanding.
- When you're talking to a person who uses a wheelchair, or a person who uses crutches, put yourself at eye level in front of the person. That will help the conversation.
- How should you get the attention of people who are deaf? Tap them on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person. Speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to see if they can read your lips. Not all deaf people can read lips. Be sensitive to the person who can read lips by putting yourself so you face the light source. Keep hands and food away from your mouth when speaking.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions like "see you later" or "did you hear?" Don't be afraid to ask questions when you don't know what to do.

chapter six

Tools of the Trade/Resources

"Seek not, my soul, the life of the immortals; but enjoy to the full the resources that are within thy reach."

– Pindar, 518-438 B.C.

Organizations:

ACE (Agricultural Communicators in Education): **www.aceweb.org**

Federal Communicators Network: **www.fcn.gov**

International Association of Business Communicators: **www.iabc.com**

National Association of Government Communicators: **www.nagc.com**

Public Relations Society of America: **www.prsa.org**

United States Distance Learning Association: **www.usdla.org/**

Books:

Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity, (Neilsen, J) Indianapolis: New Riders

Guidebook: Communication Public Risks and Benefits, (Pat Melgares) Kansas State Research and Extension.

On Writing Well, William Zinsser, HarperCollins

The Associated Press Broadcast News Handbook: Incorporating the AP Libel Manual, Brad Kalbfeld, AP

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, Norm Goldstein, Editor, AP

The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th Edition, University of Chicago Press

The Elements of Style, William Strunk, Jr., and E.B. White, MacMillan Publishing Co.

The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage, Allan M. Siegal and William G. Connolly, Revised and Expanded Edition, Times Books, Random House

The Word, An Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing, Rene J. Cappon, AP

UPI Stylebook: The Authoritative Handbook for Writers, Editors & News Directors, UPI

Writing News for Broadcast, Edward Bliss, John M. Patterson, Columbia University Press

Internet Clipping Services: These are only a few of the many clipping services now available on the Internet:

Bacon's Clipping Bureau, **www.bacons.com**

NewsDesk: **www.newsdesk.com**

Powerize: **www.powerize.com**

Reuters: **www.bizinfo.reuters.com**

Dow Jones Interactive: **www.dowjones.com**

NewsEdge: **www.newsedge.com**

NewsEdge's newsPage: **www.newspage.com**

Hoover's Online: **www.hoovers.com**

LEXIS-NEXIS, **LEXIS-NEXIS.com**

Web Sites by Subject: Web sites seem to change on an almost daily basis. These Web sites were active when we went to press:

Access America E-Gov E-Zine: **www.accessamerica.gov**

Accessibility: **www.cast.org/bobby/, www.section508.gov, www.access-board.gov, and www.w3c.org.**

Accountability data (gathering): **www.ces.ncsu.edu/AboutCES/Factsheets/**

Agricultural Communications Documentation Center: **web.aces.uiuc.edu/agcomdb/docctr.html**

Copy Editors' Site: **www.theslot.com**

Choosing Fonts: **www.will-harris.com/typoscrn.htm**

Crisis Communications: **www.oklahoma.feb.gov/emergencyplan.html#Purpose**

Distance Education: **www.uidaho.edu/evo/distglan.html**
see also The Distance Education Handbook: A Guide for University Faculty (*Telg, R.W. & Irani, T.).*

Federal Press Releases: **www.fedbuzz.com**

Good Documents: **www.gooddocuments.com**

Government-Wide Information: **www.firstgov.gov**

How People Read Web News: **www.poynter.org/centerpiece/071200.htm**

Instructional Design and Teaching Strategies for Online Course Development:
Illinois.online.uillinois.edu/model

Journalism/content/publishing: **www.content-exchange.com**

Jeff Kagan's weekly column**: www.newsbytes.com**

Marketing online: **www.emarketer.com**

Measuring effectiveness: Journal of Extension Web site. **www.joe.org/joe/** or
Journal of Applied Communications Web site **www.aceweb.org/JAC/jac.html**

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press: **www.people-press.org**

Plain Language: **www.plainlanguage.gov**

Public Service Advertising Research Center: **www.psaresearch.com**

Risk Communications: **www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HEC/primer.html#OVERVIEW**
www.rutgers.edu (click on "Center for Environmental Communication," then click on "publications.")

Successful Online Student Profile: **Illinois.online.uillinois.edu/model/Studentprofile.htm**

Testing Web Sites with 5 Users: **www.useil.com/alertbox/20000319.htm**

Usable Web: **www.usableweb.com/**

Web Authoring Tools: **http://www.fas.org/cp/author.htm**

Web Design and Usability: **www.abeleto.com/**

Web Writing (evaluating): **www.oznet.ksu.edu/prev/** and click on "Summary of Data Collection Methods and Procedures."

Web Writing: **www.useit.com/papers/webwriting/writing.html**
www.useit.com/alertbox/whyscanning.html
www.useit.com/alertbox/980906.html

Writer's Page: **www.ignet.gov/ignet/writing.html**

Yale Style Manual for Website Design: **info.med.yale.edu/caim/manual/contents.html**

Media Directories:

Bacon's Media Directories, **www.bacons.com**

Burrelle's Media Directory, **www.burrelles.com**

Finderbender Media Directories, **www.finderbender.com**

Gebbie Press, **www.gebbieinc.com**

The Capital Source, National Journal, Washington, DC

Media Web Sites:

ABC: **www.abc.go.com**

AP: **www.ap.org**

Atlanta Journal Constitution: **www.ajc.com**

BusinessWeek: **www.businessweek.com**

CBS: **www.cbs.com**

CNN: **www.cnn.com**

Federal Times: **www.federaltimes.com**

Forbes: **www.forbes.com**

Government Executive Magazine: **www.govexec.com**

Los Angeles Times: **www.latimes.com**

MSNBC: **www.msnbc.com**

NBC: **www.nbc.com**

PlanetGov: **www.planetgov.com**

Newsweek: **www.newsweek.com**

New York Times: **www.nyt.com**

Salon Magazine: **www.salon.com**

Time Magazine: **www.time.com**

USA Today: **www.usatoday.com**

U.S. News & World Report: **www.usnews.com**

Wall Street Journal: **www.wsj.com**

Washington Post: **www.washingtonpost.com**

All resources are for information and do not imply endorsement.

chapter seven

Contributors

"Some editors are failed writers, but so are most writers."

– T. S. Eliot

Susan Bale, Web master, Kansas State University, 307 Umberger Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506-3402, sbale@oz.oznet.ksu.edu, (785) 532-6379.

Lew Brodsky, Director of Public and Congressional Affairs, Selective Service System, 1515 Wilson Blvd., 4th Floor, Arlington, VA 22209, lbrodsky@sss.gov, (703) 605-4191.

Susan Buchanan. Publications Editor, Office of Communications, Peace Corps, 1111 20th St., N.W., Washington, DC, 20526, sbuchanan@peacecorps.gov, (202) 692-2214.

Kurt Byers, Communications Manager/Editor, University of Alaska Sea Grant College Program, PO Box 755040, Room 203 O'Neill Bldg., Fairbanks, AK, fnkmb1@uaf.edu, (907) 457-2231.

Donise Cheeks, Senior Analyst, Office of Research, Internal Revenue Service, Washington, DC 20224, donise.cheeks@irs.gov, (202) 874-4099.

Dr. Denise Decker, Customer Service Manager, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 6812-S, Washington, DC 20250, denise.decker@usda.gov, (202) 690-0648.

Joan Detz, Joan Detz Speechwriting, 73 Harvey Ave., Doylestown, PA 18901, jdetz@joandetz.com, (215) 340-9752.

Dr. LaRae M. Donnellan, Professor and Section Leader, Extension Communications, P.O. Box 1071, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37901-1071, lmdonnellan@ext1.ag.utk.edu, (865) 974-7363.

Wendy Douglass, Marketing Director, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, 235 Aylesworth Hall, N.W., Fort Collins, CO 80523-4050, douglass@coop.ext.colostate.edu, (970) 491-6430.

Sareen R. Gerson, Chief, Classification and Performance Management, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, Room N3308, 200 Constitution Ave., Washington, DC 20210, sareen.gerson@osha.gov, (202) 693-2468.

Robin G. Goettel, Communications Coordinator, Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program, University of Illinois, 63 Mumford Hall, 1301 W. Gregory Dr., Urbana, IL 61801-3605, goettel@uiuc.edu, (217) 333-9448.

Marci Hilt, Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Communications, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 421-A Whitten Building, Washington, DC. 20250, marci.hilt@usda.gov, (202) 720-3088.

Dr. Tracy Irani, Assistant Professor, University of Florida, 213 Rolfs Hall, Gainesville, FL 32611, irani@ufl.edu, (352) 392-0502 x225.

Tom Knecht, Head, Office of Agricultural Communications, 110-J Bost Bldg., University Drive, Mississippi State University, PO Box 9625, Mississippi State, MS 39762, tomk@ext.msstate.edu, (662) 325-1716.

David McAllister, Writer/Editor, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Waterfront Centre, 800 9th St., S.W., Washington, DC 20250 dmcallister@reeusda.gov, (202) 720-7185.

Katherine E. ("Kathy") Rowan, Associate Professor, Dept. of Communication, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030, krowan@erols.com or krowan@gmu.edu, (703) 993-1090.

Dennis Senft, Public Affairs Specialist (Retired), Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 319 Amber Dr., San Francisco, CA 94131, dhsenft@aol.com, (415) 641-9355.

Dann Stuart, Chief, Communications Services, Farm Service Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 3633-S, Washington, DC 20250, dann_stuart@wdc.fsa.usda.gov, (202) 690-0474.

James Vaughn, Senior Manager for e-government Programming and Products, America Online GovernmentGuide.com, AOL, 22070 Broderick Dr., Dulles, VA 20166, vaughnj99@aol.com, (703) 265-2966.

Kathy Wright, Associate Information Technology Specialist, 211 Umberger Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, 66506-3402, kwright@oznet.ksu.edu, (785) 532-6270.

Special Thanks to:

Dennis Carroll, Senior Publications Clearance Editor, Office of Communications, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 428-A Whitten Building, Washington, DC 20250, dennis.carroll@usda.gov, (202) 720-3298.

Patricia B. Wood, Web Communications Manager, National Partnership for Reinventing Government, 750 17th St., NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006, pat.wood@npr.gov, (202) 694-0063.

Style Note: The stylebook for the "Communicators Guide" was *"The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law,"* AP, Norm Goldstein, Editor, 2000.

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