

~~~~~ THE PORRO PASSAROUND - TIPS FOR COMMUNICATORS ~~~~~  
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#### HOW NOT TO BE IGNORED

Being ignored is always aggravating, but it's devastating if you're trying to influence legislators, regulators, or the media. Here are some attention-getting ways to craft a speech, an OpEd, and an action e-mail.

- [1] Speeches
- [2] OpEds
- [3] E-mail
- [4] \*\*\*\*BONUS\*\*\*\* - Paul Begala's Tips for Pitching Stories

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#### 1. SPEECHES - STORIES, NOT STATS

We've all been there, listening to a well-intentioned speaker recite statistic after statistic about some hot issue facing Congress or a state legislature. People in the audience try to listen, but their eyes glaze over, their attention wanders, and before long chins are bouncing off chests.

You never want your boss or client (or your self) to suffer that fate. One way to prevent it is to write a speech that conveys key points by telling stories. People look for stories to give meaning to the information thrown at them each day. When they listen to a speech, they always perk up when they hear a dramatic, ironic, or humorous anecdote grounded in day-to-day reality. At best they are moved. At they very least, they can relate.

A terrific high-school English teacher of mine tried to teach me this lesson by writing "TAP" (for "talk about people") on my papers. No matter how perfect or telling a statistic is, it won't work in a speech nearly as well as a story about a relative who was a victim of a bureaucracy, a neighbor fighting asthma, a high school teacher who taught you a lesson (see what I mean), etc.

Bottom line: In a speech, real, simple stories about people get audiences interested, involved, and motivated. Statistics get yawns.

[For a clip from an effective "story speech" go to [http://www.porrollc.com/news/chem\\_soc.pdf](http://www.porrollc.com/news/chem_soc.pdf)]

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## 2. OP/EDS - START FAST

If you don't want the OpEd you've drafted to be ignored, make sure it STARTS FAST. Remember, the first audience you have to reach with an OpEd (aka "commentary" or "guest editorial") is a busy newspaper editor. How busy? Thanks to e-mail, these harried men and women get dozens of OpEd submissions a day, many more if they work for a national paper like the Washington Post, New York Times, or Wall Street Journal.

So you've got to grab their attention fast--ideally in the first sentence, but definitely in the first paragraph of the OpEd. These folks are looking for an excuse to toss your submission in the circular file. Don't give them one.

What grabs attention? A little humor can be a good way to start. ("If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.") Talking about a specific person often draws people in ("Mary Smith is a business owner who wants to give jobs to at-risk young people, but state bureaucrats won't let her."). It can also help to connect the OpEd to some event or trend that is in the headlines ("As Americans rush to jump on the information superhighway, people with disabilities are being forced onto a dead-end street.") The key is not to dawdle--long-winded early paragraphs guarantee the OpEd will sink like a stone.

[For an OpEd with an effective "fast start" go to <http://www.porrollc.com/news/invasives.html>]

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Porro Associates LLC helps corporations and nonprofits improve the written and spoken materials they use to reach key audiences. <http://www.porrollc.com/results.html>

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## 3. E-MAIL - KNOW THY AUDIENCE

Poorly-crafted e-mails get ignored. Good ones get results. What's the difference?

One key factor is knowing your audience. That's important whenever you write, but it's absolutely critical when you're crafting an e-mail. People usually fly through their e-mails. If the first few sentences aren't geared for them, they hit delete and move on. A soccer mom doesn't want to read e-mail filled with policy wonk jargon, but a scientist might. Eve Fox, of M&R Strategic Services ([www.mrss.com](http://www.mrss.com)) has

written a lot of effective e-mail legislative action alerts. When she sits down to write, she says, she thinks of a group of people she actually knows - relatives, college roommates, Senate staffers - and pretends she's writing directly to them. That helps keep the email lively and targeted on the right audience.

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4. \*\*\*\*\*BONUS\*\*\*\*\*

Read Paul Begala's 7 Rules for Highly Effective Pitchers  
[From A Goodman, Good Ideas for Good Causes]

[http://agoodmanonline.com/\\_pdf/free\\_range\\_2003\\_03.pdf](http://agoodmanonline.com/_pdf/free_range_2003_03.pdf)