
~~~~~ THE PORRO PASSAROUND - TIPS FOR COMMUNICATORS ~~~~~  
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## DIFFERENT WRITING STYLES FOR DIFFERENT MATERIALS

A writing style that works terrifically for one kind of promotional material may be all wrong for another. That's why, for example, great press release writers sometimes struggle with speeches or brochures or action e-mails. Here are some tips on how to customize your prose for different materials.

- [1] Speeches
- [2] E-mail
- [3] Press releases

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### 1. SPEECHES Style Tip: Repeat Yourself Repeatedly

Your boss loves your press releases and adores your OpEds, so she asks you to write a speech. It looks great when it comes out of the word processor, but when your boss gives it, it falls flat.

What's going on?

You're probably a victim of something experienced speechwriters know well -- the profound difference between the written and the spoken word. The trick for speechwriters, veteran oral wordsmiths say, is to prepare something much more focused and organized than everyday conversation, but make it sound like everyday speech.

So how do you pull it off?

First, stop doing what you automatically do when you write a press release or OpEd -- pruning, paring, and condensing. Natural speech is much more expansive than the written word.

In a speech, don't be afraid to expand by repeating yourself, using slightly different words. That's the way we talk, after all.

A press release might simply say, "The nation needs deregulation." But your boss would sound better if she said something like, "The nation needs deregulation. Our economy cries out for it. Families in cities and towns all across America will thrive if Congress passes the deregulation bill."

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## 2. E-MAIL Style Tip: Make the Subject Line Count

When you're writing an e-mail designed to move people to action, don't forget that the first thing people see is the subject line. The e-advocacy gurus at M&R Strategic Services, a Washington DC grassroots firm, report that a well crafted subject line can DOUBLE your response rate.

So how do you do it?

The first rule is never, ever, ever leave the subject line blank.

Next, make it brief: six to 10 words maximum. If at all possible, make the subject line include personal information, like the recipient's name, state, or other information. Avoid the generic.

You should also try to make your subject line as un-spam-like as possible. So stay away from openings like

"Jeff, here's your chance"

"Great opportunity for John Smith"

Finally, the grassroots experts say that subject lines that ask a question often perform better than those that just make a statement So instead of:

"Stem cell ban threatens vital medical research"

you should try:

"John, do you want to help protect vital medical research?"

Spend extra line on that subject line. It will pay off for your organization or client.

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## 3. PRESS RELEASE Style Tip: Don't Lead with Statistics

If you are an academic, or a bureaucrat, or Al Gore, you find statistics fascinating. If you're a reporter or editor or the average newspaper reader, however, numbers don't float your boat. In short, statistics can make your press release sink like the Titanic. That's a big problem if you want to win press coverage for your organization's latest ground-breaking study, which just happens to be chock full of statistics. But it's a problem that can be solved.

The key is not to lead with the statistics in the headline of your release, or even in the first couple paragraphs. Instead, use those early parts of the release to show the human side of the statistics. That is, first tell the press how the findings in your report affect the lives of specific people, or how the findings reveal unexpected truths about the lives of real people.

Reporters do this all the time, and you can learn from them. For example, if a reporter does a story on the growing problem of obesity in young people, you can bet the writer will start off with a profile of a local chubby teen coping with those extra pounds. Or the reporter will start with quotes from parents, teens,

and teachers. One thing is certain, the reporter won't bring in the statistics until he or she has grabbed your interest.

In a press release, instead of starting with the numbers, start with the attention-getting change the numbers illustrate: "America's Kids are Fatter Than Ever," or "Soaring Obesity in Teens Means More Diabetes, Heart Disease Later in Life." Put in colorful quotes from real people as soon as possible, too.

Then, and only then, should you plug in your report's numbers. Statistics can be effective, but only if they are properly introduced.