

## GETTING READY FOR FALL

While all of us would like to spend the entire summer snoozing on a beach or deciding exactly which tall drink with a little pastel umbrella we should try next, the dog days are also a time to get ready for the fall rush. To help you do that, here are some tropical tips on

- [1] Jargon: Can't live with it, can't shoot it
- [2] Writing styles: Promotional vs. technical
- [3] Speechwriting: Know your (younger) audience

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### 1. Jargon: Can't live with it, can't shoot it

A standard feature of "PR 101" books is to quote from an incomprehensible press release filled with technical language. The author uses that bad example to make the point that you should avoid jargon at all costs, if you're trying to reach the press or the general public. I couldn't agree more, but the reality is... sometimes it's not that simple.

Sometimes you don't even realize a word or phrase is jargon. In your everyday work, you and your colleagues may use "rich feature set," or "gene expression," or "architected" so often that the words are everyday speech for you. Two ways to deal with this problem: First, use a writer who's not part of your in-group. If that's not possible, imagine you're trying to explain your press release or speech to your Mom. What language would you use to reach her?

But what if your press release or speech is designed to reach a mixed audience of specialists and normal humans? The solution here is to add just a few more words to explain the technical term as soon as it occurs. A couple examples:

"Researchers have developed only 19 lines (or colonies) of stem cells."

"Acupuncture restores balance and regulates the flow of ch'i - the basic life force."

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### 2. Writing styles: Promotional vs. technical

A company's writer has just produced a white paper that everyone agrees is brilliant. But when she's asked to turn it into a press release, reporters ignore it. Why?

It's not that she's a bad writer, just the wrong kind of writer. Dennis Jerz, a professor at Seton Hill University (PA), makes the following distinction.

\* A public relations writer delivers a compelling message to influence the behavior or opinions of a broad, general audience.

\* A technical writer provides concise answers to specific problems faced by a small, specialized audience.

Some writers can shift easily from one style to the other, but most are more comfortable with either public relations OR technical writing, but not both. So when you're looking for someone to do that press release or speech, your best choice will usually be to find a PR type.

Having said that, a good PR writer will rely heavily on a technical writer to make sure the press release not only grabs reporters' attention, but is accurate and complete.

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### 3. [Speechwriting: Know your \(younger\) audience](#)

What do you do if your boss or client is asked to speak to a younger (high school or college) audience? Every audience is different, of course, but I've found an approach that usually works pretty well with the under-drinking-age set. First, don't try to be hip or cool by including slang or pop star references. You'll probably get them wrong, and young people have strong pander meters.

Instead of trying to get jiggy with it, get personal. In my experience, younger audiences are particularly interested in learning about the personal side of the speaker. And they really enjoy hearing from speakers on what it was like when they were young. What was similar, what was different about college or high school a few decades ago? What were the speakers' fears and hopes at a similar point in life?

For a sample of a speech by a man in his seventies that got a tremendous response from a roomful of teenagers, go to [http://www.porrollc.com/news/brookly\\_speech.pdf](http://www.porrollc.com/news/brookly_speech.pdf).