

GETTING THROUGH WINTER

In much of the country, it's been dark and cold for a while, with at least another month of winter to go. Here are a few items to keep you warm and energized as we all count down to spring.

- [1] Blogs and blogwriting
- [2] Lessons from presidential speech writers
- [3] OpEds: What yet another editor is looking for
- [4] And finally....

1. Blogs and Blogwriting

Blogs are hot. Just google "blogs" or "business blogs" and you'll see what I mean. Weblogs or blogs are instant e-publishing tools that are easy to use, making it darn cheap and convenient to put up a simple Web page and refresh it often. They started as online diaries, evolved into outlets for instant pundits, and are now used for just about everything, but especially to promote business, causes, etc.

If you think e-mail or Web sites are the way to reach the press, legislators, the public or new clients, you are so last week. At least that's what enthusiasts of business and marketing blogs say. To judge for yourself, a good place to start is with Debbie Weil, (blogwrite.blogs.com). She provides terrific resources on business blogs and blog writing, including links, excellent "how to's," and more.

Her advice for writing a blog is pretty simple. "Good blogging is good writing." Develop your own voice, and write like a reporter not a wonk. Use specific examples and tell stories (sound familiar?). Above all, keep it lively so people will want to come back time and again.

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2. Lessons from presidential speech writers

Most of the time, when you want to learn from a White House speechwriter you have to plunk down fairly big bucks at a conference. But in the last month or so, two former White House types have written articles that offer great advice, for free.

In the February 2 NEW YORK TIMES, former Clinton speechwriter Jeff Shesol offers a critique of rebuttal speeches to the State of the Union address. He recommends the party out of power stop offering a laundry-list response, and instead offer a short, pointed rejoinder. He says, "A short speech should have a sharp focus. It ought to make one clear, provocative argument and leave the audience with no doubt about the speaker's purpose. A less ambitious speech may well be a more effective one."

That's great advice for speechwriters everywhere, not just those who work for politicians.

Another Clinton speechwriter, Ted Widmer, read every one of America's 54 presidential inaugural addresses and offered his thoughts in a terrific article in the AMERICAN SCHOLAR. He found that almost everyone of them shared ten key elements, starting with "I am not worthy of this great honor," and ending with "Thanks, God."

More proof that a speechwriter's biggest challenge is to be original.

3. OpEds: What yet another editor is looking for

Once again, we provide writers the straight dope on how to do an OpEd, from people whose job is to decide which ones actually get into print.

Here's what the editor of the HARTFORD COURANT'S opinion page tells would-be OpEd authors.

1. Get right into the subject. Make your position clear from the beginning.
 2. Keep your sentences short, and don't try to make too many arguments in one article.
 3. Be sure that all names are correct and all quotations are accurate.
 4. Be sure to end your article with a forceful conclusion.
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4. And finally....

Been to a lousy presentation lately?

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