
~ THE PORRO PASSAROUND-TIPS FOR COMMUNICATORS ~

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SOME SURPRISING SUGGESTIONS AND A NEW ADDITION

For fall, we offer some surprises: suggesting that the movies can help you write and that stereotypes aren't all bad. Plus we introduce a new Porro associate.

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1. Meet the new senior writer

We're happy to announce that Phil Piemonte is the new Senior Writer at Porro Associates LLC. Phil has furnished writing and editing services to Washington businesses and nonprofit organizations for more than 20 years. A veteran of several leading public affairs firms, including Powell Tate, Hill & Knowlton and Chlopak Leonard Schechter, he has served clients including Verizon, Microsoft Corp., MSNBC.com, the American Counseling Association, the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals in Business, and the American Society for Industrial Security International. Piemonte also has worked as a writer, editor and research analyst for some of the nation's leading business-to-business news operations.

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>

2. OpEds: Take a break -- and go to the movies

Some writers who find it difficult to begin working on an OpEd take the standard way out, and simply state their argument at the top of the piece. There's nothing wrong with that.

But writers looking for a more interesting approach should try going to the movies. They may decide to approach their problem cinematically.

Imagine for a moment a western that opens with a "wide," panoramic shot, and then zooms in to reveal a single rider whom you had scarcely noticed was there. Translated into a literary method, this cinematic device is the equivalent of starting with a universal truth or general statement, and then narrowing the focus in order to apply it to the specific point of an editorial or opinion piece.

Example: 1.) Self-regulation is a time-honored tradition in American industry. 2.) Recent accounting scandals have brought that tradition under scrutiny. 3.)

This week, revelations in the case of company X prove that this scrutiny is justified.

The alternate cinematic method - which also translates into a literary approach - is to begin with a tight focus on a specific thing or event - and then "pull back" the camera in order to see the larger picture, or message.

Example: 1.) Regulation X is an unworkable regulation. 2.) This is only the latest in a number of recent regulatory failures. 3.) These bad regulations are symptomatic of a bigger problem: The entire system that needs to be fixed.

Universal to specific, or specific to universal -- good writers can take a cue from the movies.

3. Speeches: Stereotypes, Good and Bad

Say the word "stereotype" and the first thought that comes to mind likely will be the ethnic or racial variety. In fact, as Walter Lippmann pointed out in his groundbreaking 1922 communications classic "Public Opinion," a stereotype is any convenient mental image that helps us to simplify, quantify and conceptualize a more complex thing or idea.

In the hands of a savvy speechwriter, a stereotype can be a useful tool for conveying an idea -- in a certain way -- to an audience that may have little personal context for the idea behind the stereotype. But you have to be very careful to know your audience. For example, different people can attach far different meanings to something as simple as the word "corporation." Suppose a pro-business speaker uses that word in a speech meant for general consumption: If the listener is a business person or lawyer who works in corporate environment, they likely will regard the word as a neutral term or even just legal term. For social activists, the word "corporation" conjures up images of a soulless organization interested only in profits.

Good writers learn to recognize the words and phrases in their work that may trigger stereotyped responses. Learning to use some stereotypes more effectively - and to avoid others - can add strength and persuasiveness not only to a speech, but to any written product.