
~THE PORRO PASSAROUND - TIPS FOR COMMUNICATORS~

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STOCKING STUFFERS

Let's face it. While we all love the Christmas season, it doesn't leave a lot of leisure time. On top of that year-end work, planning for 06, and gathering tax info, there is all that gift buying and party planning. Since your time is limited, this month we've got some short and sweet items to help you through the holiday crunch.

- [1] OpEds: Audience, Audience, Audience
- [2] Speeches and Press Releases: Kill the Adverbs
- [3] And Finally: Watch the Clock

1. OpEds: Audience, Audience, Audience

One of the mistakes first-time OpEd writers often make is to focus so completely on their message that they lose sight of their intended audience.

Audience number one is the OpEd page editor. So make sure to start strong to grab his/her attention. But then, don't forget that you may be trying to reach a particular slice of the newspaper's readership.

Whether your target audience is utility ratepayers, upscale consumers, senior citizens, or members of the medical profession - it is extremely important to keep them in mind with every word you type, and to tailor your message to their specific needs and interests. By keeping your eye on the prize, you will grab your intended audience - and produce a piece that has a better chance of publication.

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2. Speeches and Press Releases: Kill the Adverbs

Tighter communications are more powerful communications. In the first volume of his autobiography, "Living to Tell the Tale," Columbian writer and journalist Gabriel García Márquez gives us one tip on paring away extraneous verbiage: Don't use adverbs. Somewhere along the line, the Nobel Prize-winning writer says, he decided to eschew the "bankrupt habit" of using those pesky modifiers.

Refusing to use adverbs forces you to develop a more disciplined attitude and search harder for powerful verbs, adding punch to your communication. That's because adverbs do more than modify the meaning of a verb - they dilute it.

Take the word "quickly," for example. But doing away with it, you'll be forced to find much better substitutes for "run quickly" "eat quickly," and "take quickly." How about "sprint," "wolf," and "snatch."

You may not win a Nobel Prize, but you will improve your writing.

3. Watch the Clock

Do you have the luxury of unlimited time? Probably not. Writers often become so involved in the mechanics of writing that they fail to develop a disciplined approach to it.

Here is a trick: Set a time limit on the amount of time you intend to devote to a writing project. Start with a project similar to something you have done before. For example, if you usually spend six hours writing a short editorial, this time allot yourself four hours for your first run at producing a draft.

Watch the clock. Use the first hour to type up your key ideas, putting in only those points you are certain you need for your argument. Use the second hour to flesh those ideas out. Use the third hour to organize, and the fourth to polish.

While these time limits are only an example, you get the picture. The fact is, you really can produce good communications material in a reasonable amount of time -- but you have to work at it. Try it next time around