

Postal Newsletter

Press

AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION

NATIONAL POSTAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

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Election 2012: get ready, get set – communicate!

By Tony Carobine, President

The term “American Dream” used to be a common phrase in the American vocabulary. What was this in reference to anyway? Some wild fantasy or unrealistic fable? Not

many states restricting or stripping workers of their collective bargaining rights. Several states have introduced Right-to-Work legislation and voter suppression laws have been passed that will potentially disenfranchise

workers and other working people are increasingly fighting back. APWU members across the country have stood up in their respective communities developing public support to save the Postal Service; over the past few months the Occupy Wall Street movement has continued to grow and gain strength, bringing to light the assault on the working class. In Ohio, a grass roots effort resulted in the repeal of SB-5 which had stripped public workers of collective bargaining rights. In Wisconsin, its citizens responded to repeated attacks on workers by collecting over one million signatures, initiating a recall election of its Republican governor, lieutenant governor and four state senators.

“We cannot afford to have any uninformed voters among our ranks; members and their families who base their vote on emotional issues; or those who unknowingly vote against their own self-interests.”

at all. This term was used to describe what most working Americans aspired to in life; having a decent paying job, owning a home, adequate health coverage, the ability to send their children to college, and after their working years, a comfortable retirement.

For many years, achieving the American Dream was commonplace in America. Unfortunately this has changed. Today, for more and more working Americans, the possibility of ever achieving the American Dream is fast becoming just that, a dream. Millions of good paying manufacturing jobs that sustained generations of Americans, gone; employers discontinuing pension plans; millions of workers are either unemployed or underemployed; many elderly, poor and middle class citizens are without adequate health coverage. These are just a few examples of the havoc being wreaked upon the citizenry.

As a result of the 2010 midterm elections that saw the election of radical Republican majorities across the country, the situation has gotten much worse. From the state to the federal level, a well-orchestrated war has been declared on the middle class and unions.

Laws have been passed or introduced in

more than 5 million poor, elderly, and young voters in the upcoming November general election. The Citizens United Supreme Court decision has opened the flood gates to unlimited corporate money being injected into elections, further hindering the possibility of electing individuals that will stand up for working people. In an effort to destroy public education, funding has been drastically cut or diverted in several states.

Meanwhile in Washington, obstructionism by the Republican majority has prevented any meaningful legislation from being passed that would benefit working class Americans.

Postal workers are no exception, we too are under attack. The Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act of 2006 which burdened the Postal Service with an annual \$5.5 billion payment to pre-fund future retiree healthcare costs, has brought the USPS to the brink of insolvency.

As of this writing, there are approximately 19 bills in Congress concerning the Postal Service; some would positively address the cause of the Postal Service’s financial problems while others would be detrimental to its future and our livelihood as a result.

However, all is not bad news as postal

The reality for postal workers and all middle class Americans is that we must continue to vigorously fight back or assuredly the American Dream will be forever taken away from us.

We need to especially pay close attention to which elected representatives support working people and which politicians are out to destroy us. Then, we must aggressively work to re-elect our friends and defeat our enemies over the coming months leading up to Election Day on Tuesday, November 6. Postal workers and all working families have a stake in the 2012 elections, as control of the White House, Senate, House of Representatives, governorships and state legislatures will be determined.

We must score a win for working people in November and the time to start is now. We cannot afford to have any uninformed voters among our ranks; members and their families who base their vote on emotional issues; or those who unknowingly vote against their own self-interests.

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I didn't get my press card

By Edward J. Brennan,
Secretary-Treasurer

At various times I will receive a call from a member or will see a member at a union meeting and he or she will ask, "Why didn't anyone tell me that my PPA dues were due?" or "I filled out my application but I haven't received my new press card yet." Upon further review, the solution to the mystery of the missing card is usually the direct result of a breakdown of communication on the member's end. Notices are not passed on, communications are not read, items addressed to local officers are not given to them but are left in post office boxes or on desks where they are eventually discarded, or somehow the completed application with dues payment is not sent in.

In the normal progression of events, several dues notices and reminders are sent to members. If a response is still not forthcoming, I telephone to find out if the editor is still

publishing a paper and if he or she would like to renew their PPA membership. Through this process members receive at least four or five notices regarding payment of dues.

Upon receipt of the dues payment and application I check to make sure the dues payment amount is correct and the applicant qualifies for membership as per the category requirements on the application. I then finish processing the application and forward it to President Carobine and he sends the member a new press card.

By sending in the appropriate amount of dues and a properly completed application in a timely manner, members find they receive their new membership/press cards in a very short time and never have to wonder "Where is my press card?" Also, they never have to ask "Why didn't anyone tell me the dues were due?" Just like the Postal Press Association itself – it's all a matter of having good communication.

PPA to participate in pre-convention workshops

The PPA is scheduled to participate in the pre-convention workshops being held on Friday, August 17 from 10:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. at the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles.

Two half-day workshops will be presented by the PPA. *Union Publications – Reaching the Membership* will examine the need to communicate and the process of producing a member-oriented, high-

quality union publication. *Legal Issues: Union Publications & Websites* will be devoted to a discussion on editorial policies, libel, copyright, internal union and federal election laws as applicable to union publications and websites.

Information about the workshops will be included in the March/April issue of *The American Postal Worker* and APWU website, www.apwu.org.

Election 2012 . . .

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As communicators and representatives of the union we need to prepare our members for this important election. We need to educate them about the issues, encourage contributions to APWU COPA, advise them about how candidates and political parties stand on issues important to postal workers and all working families, help them become registered voters, and constantly remind them about the significance of voting on Election Day. We need to work very hard to get individuals elected that will help save the American Dream.

As the late labor leader Walter Reuther said, "There's a direct relationship between

the ballot box and the bread box, and what the union fights for and wins at the bargaining table can be taken away in the legislative halls."

Preparing members and their families for the upcoming election is quite an involved task, but nonetheless a vital one. Communication is the key and it should be a continuous effort in the days and months leading up to this important day. The best way to increase turnout is to educate members about the issues and candidates. Armed with this knowledge, members and their families are more likely to participate and will make informed choices when going to the polls on Election Day.

Persuasive writing techniques

By Frank Antinone, Editor-at-Large

Want to convince your readers to do something or agree with your point of view? Of course you do. Persuasion is generally an exercise in creating a win-win situation. You present a case that others find beneficial to agree with. It's simply a good deal or a position that makes sense to that particular person. But there are techniques that can make your job easier and your case more compelling. While this list is no way comprehensive, the following strategies are used quite a bit because they work.

Repetition – Talk to anyone well versed in learning psychology and they'll tell you repetition is crucial. It's also critical in persuasive writing, since a person can't agree

with you if they don't truly get what you're saying. Of course, there's good repetition and bad. To stay on the good side, make your point in several different ways, such as directly, using an example, in a story, or a quote from a famous person.

Reasons Why – Psychological studies have shown that people are more likely to comply with a request if you simply give them a reason why, even if that reason makes no sense. The strategy itself does make sense if you think about it. We don't like to be told things or asked to take action without a reasonable explanation. When you need people to be receptive to your line of thinking, always give reasons why.

Social Proof – Looking for guidance from others as to what to do and what to accept is one of the most powerful psychological forces in our lives. It can determine whether we deliver aid to a person in need. Obvious examples of social proof can be found in testimonials and outside referrals, and it's the driving force behind social media. You can also casually integrate elements of social proof in your writing, ranging from skillful alignment with outside authorities to blatant name dropping.

Predictions – Another persuasive theme involves providing your readers with a

glimpse into the future. This entire strategy is built on credibility. If you have no idea what you're talking about, you'll end up looking foolish. But, if you can back up your claims with your credentials or your obvious grasp of the subject matter, this is an extremely persuasive technique.

Go Tribal – Despite our attempts to be sophisticated, evolved beings, we humans are exclusionary by nature. Give someone a chance to be part of a group that they want to be in. Whether it's to be wealthy, green, conservative or liberal; they'll hop on board whatever train you're running. Find out what group people want to be in, and offer them an invitation to join while seemingly excluding others.

Storytelling – Storytelling is really a catch-all technique. You can and should use it in combination with any and all of the previous strategies. The reason why storytelling works so well lies at the heart of what persuasion really is. Stories allow people to persuade themselves, and that's what it's really about. You might say that we never convince anyone of anything, we simply help others independently decide that we're right. Do everything you can to tell better stories and you'll find that you're a persuasive person.

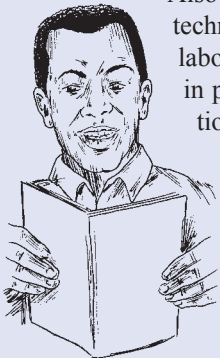
Booklet in production

Federal Elections, Union Publications, Union Websites

The 2012 version of the PPA booklet, *Federal Elections, Union Publications and Union Websites* is currently in production and will be provided to PPA members upon completion.

This booklet contains the legal requirements involved for including information in a union publication and website regarding the November 6 election for federal representatives along with regulations pertaining to APWU COPA solicitations.

Also discussed are techniques used by labor organizations in past federal elections that generated a high level of participation by union members and their families on Election Day.



True life stories

By Jenny L. Gust, Editor-at-Large

Here's an idea for one of your upcoming newsletters. Try a true life story! What is that? Look for a real life story of someone in your local who has benefitted from being a member.

Perhaps there is a grievance settlement that you can share with the membership? Check with your officers and stewards to see if they have won a case recently that would be good publicity for the local. Also be sure to check with the person involved. They may not mind having their name (and maybe even a photo) in the paper. If they don't really want their name public, you can see if it would be OK to publish without their name. Explain the case, the work involved by the officer or steward, and what was won by the grievant. A photo of the grievant with a check would be great. It

shows your membership that it indeed pays to belong.

Perhaps your local provides or subsidizes another benefit such as the APW Accident Benefit Association (ABA). You might have a member who was injured in an accident and collected funds from the ABA. This member was probably thrilled to receive this extra money. On the national level members can go to UnionPlus.org and find discounts and scholarships.

If your local provides any benefits and a member uses those benefits and comes out ahead – let everyone know. Always be sure to publicize the free giveaways, movie tickets, events such as picnics or Christmas parties. If you have a scholarship program, make sure to include that also. Your members need to know there are other benefits available beside filing grievances!

Avoiding the pitfalls of bad website design

Let's face it! If visitors get lost or become confused while attempting to surf your website, they might hit the back button and exit. People do not like to think, when it comes to finding their way around websites. Don't make them think. You need to plan your website from stage to stage and make a difference between a very poor website and a very good website.

What are the pitfalls inherent in designing and setting up a website? You may

4. Free web hosting:

This is a common web page mistake you definitely need to avoid. Often, organizations delay moving their site to a domain host. Do not use free web hosting if you want your organization to be taken seriously. It reflects on your image and credibility.

To resolve this issue, you must choose and purchase a domain name if you do not have one. You also need to choose a pro-

headings. Do not cram your web pages with complex words. Readers do not have time to fill their heads with confusing and unnecessary details.

Make your text more effective. Keep your text simple, crisp and to-the-point. Use decorative words in the right context. Your language should spell clarity, consistency and coherence in content, style, structure and font. The pages should be easy to read and simple to understand with

“People do not like to think, when it comes to finding their way around websites. Don't make them think. You need to plan your website from stage to stage and make a difference between a very poor website and a very good website.”

know some of them already but by avoiding and correcting them, you can be sure to keep a constant flow of visitors entering and re-entering into your portal! Following is a look at some common web design errors:

1. Site best viewed:

New designers usually use this “site best viewed” with a disclaimer statement regarding which web browser or screen resolution they designed their site for best viewing. It does not impress the visitor. Instead, invest in a skillfully designed website that renders well in multiple browsers and in any screen resolution.

2. Shabby layout and glaring design:

Some sites are totally unbalanced in their layout and overloaded design. The designs do not match the page content and appears misplaced and misfit in the entire scene. Give your pages a pleasing appearance, with just the necessary facts and place your design outlay with a professional touch. Always take screen shots of designs in different resolutions before uploading the appropriate one.

3. Horizontal scrolling:

The horizontal scroll makes it extremely difficult to read the content on your site and often your visitors will lose patience and leave. Check your website in a site resolution viewer. A professional website can be viewed without horizontal scrolling in both a smaller and larger screen resolution. Users find scrolling from the top to the bottom of your pages, more clear to view and easy to read.

fessional domain host. There is no getting around this one.

5. Appalling Images:

Don't allow your visitors to view badly shaped or terribly cropped images and missing graphics files. Optimize your images using the best height and width. Keep your files in the best formats – jpeg for photographs and gif for artwork.

6. Blaring and ghastrly color schemes:

Avoid using ghastrly and loud colors that does not match your website concept and mission. Although your text may be easy to read, overly-bright colors distract and repel the reader away from your site's purpose. Your designs must reflect class and designer quality, with state-of-the-art designs and pleasantly eye-catching color schemes for your web pages.

7. Slow loading:

If your page does not download rapidly, visitors will quickly move on to find another site. Take action now to reduce the “weight” of your pages. Each image on your site must be correctly sized and optimized for web use. Keep your pages lean and fast for the visitor to move on quickly, with interest.

8. Spell check:

Always spell check the text, keeping it free of grammatical errors, punctuation and spelling mistakes. Without spell check, the site looks amateurish and shabby.

9. Ineffective Text Content:

A major mistake is to fill the pages with long text, without any headings and sub-

a smooth flow. The text needs to be phrased in short paragraphs, giving a pleasing feel to the reader.

Your website must provide a clear message with a goal-oriented direction. Your content should easily answer this question – “what's in it for me?” The reader must be able to easily identify with the site's content.

10. No contact information:

Just giving your email identification and the web address is not sufficient for your readers. Keep your detailed contact information easy to find and easy to read. Inclusion of a site-map works wonders.

11. Under construction:

Avoid having a “closed – under construction” or “yet to open” website. Give your visitors at least a single page of content, with a notice – when the whole site will be open.

12. Music:

Do not include music, if it is not needed. If used, music should not be out-of-control and keep the control buttons easy-to-use. Music can turn one's mind on but at the same time put your mood off, if it is not rightly timed, controlled and soft.

Conclusion

The above general tips give you an idea of what to avoid and how to resolve. By keeping your website design in good shape, ensuring your web content writing is in good taste and up-to-date, you will find more people visiting your website!

The art of interviewing (part two)

By Lance Coles, Editor-at-Large
(Continued from the November-December 2011 issue of the *PPA Newsletter*.)

The Interview

Rapport:

The relationship between the reporter and the source is crucial to the success of the interview. The relationship is sometimes relaxed, sometimes strained. Often it is somewhere in between. The type of relationship you try to establish with your source is determined by the kind of story you are doing.

When you write the story, let them tell the story. Don't finish their sentences, or ask questions that get a "yes or no" response. Keep yourself out of it. Don't interrupt.

Interview Approaches:

Your interview will go much better if you can put your source at ease. Start with small talk. Look around their office or home, and talk about what you see.

Get them away from co-workers, friends and family. The source will either play to them as if they were an audience or be inhibited by them. Do the interview where they feel comfortable, but keep your safety in mind as well. If they are comfortable, they tend to relax and open up, then you can work them up to the big questions.

Sometimes you want the source to be edgy, nervous, uneasy or scared. You may pretend that you know more than you actually do. I don't recommend this process.

Verbal gestures and good body language will keep them talking. "That's interesting" or an "mm-ha". Do not sit directly in front of the source but allow them to make eye contact with you. A nod or a grunt of understanding will encourage the source to continue talking without you having to interrupt them. Always wait a moment after they have finished speaking in case they are just trying to formulate the next sentence they wish to say. Keep eye contact so they know you are following what they say.

Some people are disturbed by the way a reporter takes notes. A tape recorder ensures accuracy of quotes, but it makes many speakers self-conscious or nervous. Writing notes longhand interferes with your ability to digest what is being said. But not taking any notes at all is risky. Only a few report-

ers can leave an interview and accurately write down what was said, and no one can do it and reproduce direct quotes verbatim. Learn shorthand or develop a system of your own.

It is always a good idea to get permission to record. Tell them this so there will be no error in what you quote, that it's for their benefit.

Accuracy is extremely important. Before you leave, make sure you ask them if it is OK to call them and clarify your notes or ask a couple more questions.

Observing:

A good reporter observes. The TV show *The Mentalists* says he is not a psychic but that he just observes. Look around, watch and converse. Is the source nervous? What questions are hitting home. What is lying on the desk, on the walls? What is their body language and mannerisms?

Understanding:

Understanding what you see is crucial to the story, but understanding what you hear is also very important. Don't just record what was said, but digest it.

Ask follow up questions: If you understand what the source is saying, you can ask good follow-up questions. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification or ask the question again to get an answer that makes more sense.

Sometimes you need time to catch up with your notes, so it is OK to ask them to explain something, or tell them you don't understand. You may also ask for more information and encourage them to keep talking or ask them to tell you more. A good pause is also a good signal to the source that you are waiting for something more. A lack of response will indicate that you are skeptical or did not understand and this will force the source to react.

Many dull interviews become interesting after they end. There are two things you should always do when you finish your questions: Check key facts, figures and quotes and then put away your pen but keep your ears open. You are not breaching any ethical rule if you continue to ask questions after you have put away your pen or turn off the tape recorder. That's when some sources loosen up. Many reporters find they get their best material after the formal interview has ended and they are

having a cup of coffee with the source. Put the pen down, shut off the recorder and just talk. Once you put the pen down, it relaxes the person. If you have the tape recorder out of sight, let it roll, they tend to forget you are taping them. As soon as you are done, get out of sight of the source and immediately write down anything they said during the down time, while it is still fresh in your mind.

The Story

Quotes and Attributions:

"Can I quote you on that?"

Quote marks mean that you are stating exactly what they said.

Direct quotes add color and credibility to your story. Direct quotes tell the readers you are putting them directly in touch with the speaker. Direct quotes are personal. Quotation marks signal the reader that something special is coming. Direct quotes provide a story with a change of pace, and loosen up a clump of dense type.

Don't make your whole interview a string of direct quotes – factual yes – but boring.

You need to learn what to quote directly and when to use partial quotes and when to paraphrase. (Examples). Remember just because someone else said it, and you quoted it – does not get you out of a libel issue.

1. Use direct quotes when someone says something unique.
2. Use direct quotes when someone says something uniquely.
3. Use direct quotes when someone important says something important.

Don't place simple, factual material inside quotation marks. Just because they said it, does not mean you have to quote them.

Colloquialism – the language or use of words specific to an area can add life to your story as well quoting them exactly as they say it – it is who they are. Don't use quotes to harm them or show lack of education, unless that is the core of your story. (Example: "I was just fixing to leave" "Hey ya'll" "soda or pop".)

Sic—generally inside square brackets, [sic], and occasionally parentheses, (sic)—when added just after a quote or reprinted text, indicates the passage appears exactly

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as in the original source. The usual purpose is to inform readers that any errors or apparent errors in the copied material are not from transcription – that they are reproduced exactly from the original writer or printer. A bracketed sic may also be used as a form of ridicule or as a humorous comment, typically by drawing attention to the original writer's mistakes. (Wikipedia)

Important people – when important people say something, others like to listen or read it – but just because they are important does not mean they are accurate.

Clarifying quotes: Do not quote someone unless you are sure of what that person means. Just because they said it is no reason to quote it – especially if it confuses the reader. Ask for clarification, or to explain jargon, but don't let this drag the interview down.

The best way to avoid confusing and unclear quotes or needlessly long and wordy quotes is to paraphrase. It is the meaning of the speaker that you must convey to the reader. There are times you need to take that quote and convey it in fewer words and in better language than the speaker did – but do not change the context or intent. (Example: “when I first started singing lessons, I assumed I would be a public school teacher” he said, “When I graduated from the university, I still thought I would be a teacher, and I wanted to teach.” Paraphrased: When he first started singing lessons, and even after he graduated from the university, he wanted to be a public school voice teacher.

It is also much better to paraphrase or to use full quotes than to use fragmentary or partial quotes. (Example – President Guffey said we need to “stand up” to Congressman Issa.) When you use partial quotes the reader wonders what you left out and why.

Getting the exact quote is very difficult. What you hear is usually not exactly what they said, and many times they will let you know that after they read the article. Do not take quotes out of context.

Correcting quotes: Most of us do not speak in perfect grammatical sentences, but if we write it down it would be. There are times you need to help a quote, but this should not be done very often and again

should not change the intent or context.

Remember your audience – if you are quoting someone and they use an obscene word – do you print it? The exception to this would be if the words are essential to the story or the character.

Attributing Direct and Indirect Quotes:

“Said” is unobtrusive. It hides in the news and calls no attention to itself. “Said” is also neutral, it has no connotations. To use the word “said” is to be objective. When you use words like “claimed,” “maintained” or “contended” – these words imply that you do not really believe them.

Citing Sources:

Off the record: You may not use the information

Not for attribution: You may use the information, but may not attribute it.

Background: You may use it with a general title for a source (e.g., “a business agent said”).

Tips on taking notes:

Use a notebook: which keeps all your notes in one place? You can carry a small notebook with you at all times in case you observe or hear something to report on.

Use short lists: words and phrases instead of complete sentences, except when taking down quotes (which should be taken down exactly).

Use ball point pen: rather than a pencil, to prevent smearing and fading.

Write legibly: making certain that names, titles and departments are spelled correctly.

Record detail about separate items or from separate interviews under separate headings and print out names in capital letters.

Keep all notes about a specific issue together in one section of the notebook. (U of I Labor Center)

Using a tape recorder is the best way to get exact quotes – most of the time. Sometimes there are issues with the recording, or background noise, but it is far more accurate than your notes or memory.

Recording someone is very easy these days; you can use your cell phone or digital recorders, which allow you to save on computers and store on CD's. Be careful with recording. There are laws about recording someone when they are not notified, espe-

cially on the phone. At the USPS, you cannot record at all.

I recommend you use a tape recorder, but ask first. Put the recorder off to the side where they cannot look at it all the time. Get a voice activated one so you don't waste time. If you are sure they will not let you record or it will hamper your story, then use your cell phone or hide the digital and use it for exact quotes. Don't rely on just the recorder, take notes. This will protect you in case the recorder fails, and it also shows the source you are interested. Use your written notes to remind you to get the exact quote. Most digital recorders have numbers to show where that quote was and you can write that number down.

Accuracy is a must. If you are inaccurate misleading or misquote someone, your readers will lose trust in you.

You have done your homework, asked your questions; finish the interview, now it's time to write. You still need to write the article.

As previously discussed, there are several styles of stories where interviews play a major role.

Inverted Pyramid: Placing the most important information at the top of the pyramid and less important information at the bottom. Most of your stories will follow this format.

Alternative to the Inverted Pyramid:

Backgrounders, which explain and update the news.

Investigative pieces, which reveal information and make news.

Profiles, which explain people and organizations.

Human-interest stories, which describe people.

Brighteners, which bring a smile to the reader.

Profiles, human interest and brighteners are usually considered “features.” Features go deeper into an issue and are usually much longer than a traditional news story. These types of stories involve a lot of preparation with research and questions. You need to have a good idea where you want this story to go. Keep your story idea down to a few topics. Have as many angles as you can think of where this story may go. Once you have done your research and in-

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Editor's toolbox: Helpful ideas for APWU communicators

Review your listening skills with this checklist

One-on-one communication is a two-way process, and the part most often neglected is listening. Following are eight poor listening habits. Are you guilty of any of them?

Editing. You hear only what you want to hear, selectively blocking out the rest of what the person is trying to communicate:

Rehearsing. As the person speaks, you are preoccupied formulating what you will say next.

Delving. Instead of listening, you focus on trying to discover a hidden message.

Daydreaming. Failing to concentrate, you allow your mind to wander which often leads to an embarrassing request for the

person to repeat what he or she just said.

Personalizing. You relate what is being said to your own experience and allow your thoughts to go off on a tangent. What the person is saying becomes about you, not the speaker.

Switching. You are too quick to change the subject, sending the message that you are not interested in what the other person has to say.

Arguing. You are quick to disparage or ridicule what was just said. You are more interested in verbal sparring than communicating.

Agreeing. You nod and mumble agreement to everything that is said, just to avoid conflict.

interest and appeal. It reduces errors and increases motivation. In fact, studies show that people are 35 percent more likely to be interested in a piece with color than one without it. Just adding one color to your piece can give it a new dimension. Some tips include:

Use color to direct the reader's eye or make an element stand out.

Use color for contrast – and stay away from using color-on-color designs.

Color printed on a smooth, glossy surface appears purer and more brilliant than the same ink on a rough surface.

Full-color photos will capture a reader's attention immediately.

Top tips from Mark Twain

Mark Twain helped to shape the American language. Here are some quotes worth noting from this great writer:

On style (to a 12-year-old boy): "I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English – it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it and don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in."

On using short words: "I never write 'metropolis' for 7 cents when I can get the same for 'city'."

On being concise: "With a hundred words to do it with, the literary artisan could catch that airy thought and tie it down and reduce it to a . . . cabbage but the artist does it with 20 – and the result is a flower."

On word choice: "The difference between the almost-right word and the right word is really a large matter – 'tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."

Can't solve the problem?

If you've tried everything else to solve a problem, try standing. Researchers at the University of California say you can improve your chances of solving the problem by 20 percent if you're standing instead of sitting.

Reason: Standing boosts your heart rate by about 10 beats a minute. And the increase in blood flow stimulates your brain.

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interview, you can then focus your article on one of the topics – unless you were thrown a curve during the interview.

Features allow you to be more creative. Use colorful language and freedom to express yourself. You are not stuck with hard facts. Try to make your readers feel like they are there. This is where the observations come in handy. You may start your story by creating an atmosphere, describing the room, or the person. You can be a narrator, and walk the reader through a day, a process, a life.

Since features do not usually follow the inverted pyramid style, you may need to bring the reader back to the beginning, tie the story up, and give the reader closure.

You all have people in your local or community that have a story to tell. People love to talk about themselves or their families – let them, ask them, and prod them. They may not know how to tell their story – that's your job.

Resources: *University of Iowa Labor Center, Wikipedia, News Reporting and Writing, Media College.com, matadornetwork.com, about.com, associated content, ehow.com, edubook.com and interpretative reporting.*

Tips for proofreading

If you're proofreading publications, you might want to:

Reread all headlines and subheads.

Reread all sentences following headlines and font changes.

Cross-check the table of contents against the text.

Proof corrections and also the area surrounding corrections.

Check pages where stories are continued to be sure the story "restarted" at the right place.

How to prune your prose

Here are some ways to tighten your writing:

Look for sentences that begin with "There is or There are."

Wordy: "There are five people who are working on the project." (ten words)

Tighter: "Five people are working on that project." (seven words)

Avoid using "in the process of."

Wordy: "He is in the process of adding names to the committee." (eleven words)

Tighter: "He is adding names to the committee." (seven words)

Color tips

Don't overlook the effect of color in your printed pieces. Color can add both

All about words

American English reflects the place of the circus in both our folk and literary history. The source of “like a three-ring circus,” used to describe a place where various attention-getting activities were going on at once, is plain enough. Other familiar terms that originated beneath the big top include:

Gargantuan: After Gargantua, a famous 650-pound circus gorilla.

Get the show on the road: What the circus bosses shouted when it was time to move on.

Grandstanding: What the local politicians often did when the circus came to town; they worked the crowds, for the benefit of the omnipresent newspaper reporters.

Hold your horses: What the man preceding the elephants in circus parades shouted as they approached people with horses, who were frightened by the elephants’ unusual smell.

Jumbo: Barnum & Bailey’s huge African elephant.

Rain or shine: Part of an advertising pitch of the 1820s when circuses were first performed in tents.

Side show: The side show was usually of people or creatures with anomalous features or unique abilities. Today, the “side show” effect is a marketing term for the type of bonus items given with the purchase of a product at a particular time or place.

Toss one’s hat into the ring: What

President Woodrow Wilson did while attending a circus in 1916, as the band struck up “Hail to the Chief.” Reporters at the scene interpreted it to mean that Wilson was declaring he would run for President again.

* * *

O.K. was first uttered in the presidential campaign of 1840. Back then everyone seemed to have nickname and when Martin Van Buren ran for president he was nicknamed “Old Kinderhook” after his birthplace. His New York City supporters formed a club in his honor called “The O.K. Club” and “O.K.” became a rallying cry for their candidate. Van Buren lost. But “OK” won, and it’s the most widely used word in America.

* * *

How did the phrase “barking up the wrong tree,” come to mean that one is mistaken about something? You can thank the old raccoon hunters. When raccoons were hunted, they’d often run through the bush and scurry through bramble. But when they couldn’t shake a hunter, they’d climb up the nearest tree. Raccoon hunters always brought along a dog whose job was to park itself under that tree and bark to keep the raccoon in the tree and to signal the critter’s location. But the raccoons often outsmarted the hounds and would jump to another tree to make a getaway. The dogs would be left “barking up the wrong tree.”

* * *

Quack (as in charlatan): People began to use the word quack to describe the sound made by traveling patent-medicine salesmen as they hawked their miracle elixirs. They were called “quacksalvers because they boasted endlessly about the miraculous properties of their cures, quacking about their “salves.” Quacksalvers was quickly shortened to quack.

* * *

Raining cats and dogs: There are three possible theories on why we would use cats and dogs as a metaphor for a downpour. One is that in Northern European myths, the cat stood for rain and the dog for wind. Then there is the theory that the noise of a heavy thunderstorm reminds one of the sound of cats and dogs fighting. The third and most gruesome theory is that in 17th century Britain, a thunderstorm often caused gutters to overflow with filth that included dead animals.

* * *

Luddite: Legend says that Ned Lud was the village idiot of a town in Leicestershire, England, in 1779. One day Ned went mad, ran into the shop of a textile manufacturer, and destroyed several of his looms. When, in 1811, new mechanical looms threatened the livelihood of English textile workers, the workers rebelled and wantonly destroyed the machines. The rebels called themselves Luddites after Ned Lud. Now the term is used to apply to anyone who resists new technology.