



# Postal Newsletter

AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION



NATIONAL POSTAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

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## What should I write about?

By Tony Carobine, President

Did you ever find yourself, as editor, pondering this question; what should I write about for the next issue of the paper? No matter how hard you try, you can't come up with a topic that you think is worthy of spending time to develop into an article. I'm sure all of us could admit to being in that frame of mind at one time or another. But when you think about it, we should never suffer from a lack of subject matter to address in our publications.

From our union or postal service to the communities in which we live, there is always something newsworthy happening that could be addressed in the various forms of writing available to us as editors.

Today, one of the most neglected forms of writing in organizational publications is the editorial, wherein the editor expresses his or her personal views. Every one of us has an opinion on just about every subject. In today's world there are events happening on a daily basis that affect us as postal workers, consumers and citizens, not to mention our families as well. Why not delve into some of these important happenings on a regular basis by addressing them in the form of editorials in your publication?

By doing so you may just generate discussion on important issues of the day and prompt members to participate by expressing their opinions in the form of Letters to the Editor. Discussion on such issues, whatever they may be, projects "life" in an organization and may very well increase readership of the paper.

Editorials should contain logical arguments that are reasonable and honest. Us-

ing analogies and humor can also make an editorial more effective. A well-written, thought-provoking editorial is an asset as it will work to increase the stature and credibility of a publication and the organization it serves as a result.

Opinion/editorial columns should, of course, be labeled as such with the writer's

in their local union publications. Subsequently, they were contacted by the owners of copyrighted material seeking payment. These incidents illustrate that the use of copyrighted material without permission is not to be taken lightly. Should this ever happen to you, please contact the PPA immediately for assistance.

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byline to ensure the reader understands these are the personal views of the writer.

### **Beware of using copyrighted material without permission**

Mainstream media newspaper or magazine articles are copyrighted and therefore require the consent of the owner of the copyright before an editor reprints it in his or her publication. Usually, the publication owns the copyright if the article was prepared by a staff writer or reporter. Permission must also be obtained for use of any material from syndicated columns, individually copyrighted articles and articles that are published under the "byline" of the author. Copyright protection also extends to photographs, cartoons, poems, comic strips and graphics as well.

Recently, there have been some incidents whereby local editors unknowingly used copyrighted material (poem & photograph)

How did the copyright holders find out their poem and photograph were used? The publications were posted on the local's websites and therefore on the Internet. Software put in operation by the owners of the poem and photograph constantly searches the Internet for their copyrighted material and alerts them if unauthorized use is detected.

The safest practice is to assume that all material from a commercial source is copyrighted. Request permission and do not use it in your publication unless and until permission is granted.

Note: Please keep in mind that the monthly Huck/Konopacki Labor Cartoons provided to publication and website editors who are members of the PPA, while copyrighted, can be reprinted in the union publication or posted on a website. The PPA pays a subscription fee that allows for use of the cartoons by PPA members.



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**Statement of purpose:** Published by the American Postal Workers Union National Postal Press Association, the *PPA Newsletter* is an educational tool designed to assist PPA members with the performance of their duties as communicators and to help promote the goals and objectives of the APWU.

**This publication is 100% union printer produced: Union typeset, Union layout, Union printed.**

((ILCA))



# I missed you

By Jenny Gust, Editor-at-Large

For the first time in many years I missed the PPA Conference. Because of several health concerns I was not able to attend. Let me tell you I really missed being there. For as long as I have been involved in the union the PPA Conference is my favorite! It's not all grievances and contract talk – just about being an editor – actually becoming a much better editor.

So why is that important? A union paper helps us inform and educate our membership. It can show our members how to get involved. They have to know what the union is all about, what we are fighting for and how to go about it. Our members need to know that just paying their dues doesn't solve everything.

The union paper can help make people feel involved and knowledgeable. It can dispel rumors they hear. It will hopefully get some to participate in local activities. It is vital to let members know what the union is doing on a national level as

well as locally. I like knowing where my money is going and so do most of you. Well your members do also. Your paper can inform them of what is happening in Congress, local and national negotiations, and grievances. Your publication can keep them up to date on the benefits of belonging. People active in the union know how important the union is. So it is your publication's job to teach the average member the same thing.

Your publication should try to present a positive image of our union. Our members need to know that the union is always working to protect their interests. It is a tough job but someone has to do it! Never answer that you are "just the editor!" I would argue that the position of editor is one of the most important.

From the reviews I have seen in your papers, I can tell the PPA Conference was a huge success. If you can hang in there for two more years, I hope to see you at the next one!

## 2016 dues notice sent

A dues notice letter and membership application for 2016 was mailed to PPA members on Tuesday, October 27. Occasionally, we find that dues notices are laid aside which then requires additional notices or phone calls as reminders. Your help in making sure your dues for the coming year are paid in a timely fashion would be appreciated.

Upon receipt of your dues, PPA Sec-

retary-Treasurer Brennan will send you a dues acknowledgement letter. Also, a 2016 PPA Membership/Press Identification Card will be prepared and sent to you provided your digital photo is already on file with the PPA. If your digital photo is not on file (or you would like to submit an updated photo), please email the photo to [ppa@apwupostalpress.org](mailto:ppa@apwupostalpress.org).

## Did you know?

Here's a great way to give members facts about their union in easy bites: Dig out three short but interesting and important facts, then run them as filler at the bottom of one or more columns of text.





# APWU & PPA: It's all in the family

By Edward J. Brennan,  
Secretary-Treasurer

At the Postal Press Association Conference in Madison, Wisconsin on two different occasions I was asked by a delegate or overheard several delegates wondering why we had so many children at the conference. As a person who has been a member of the UFPC and the APWU for a combined total of over 50 years, I cannot remember a time when children were not an integral part of the PPA and this union. Everything connected with the Postal Press Association and the union itself is spoken of as being part of our UNION FAMILY.

Our national union and most of our local and state organizations centered a large portion of our activities on our union family. Meetings had chairs in the visitors sections where family members could sit and learn about labor unions in general and about the workings of the organizations that defended and negotiated benefits for members and their families. Spouses, children and relatives joined the Auxiliary.

Children, parents and friends came to meetings, worked at registration desks or hospitality rooms. They also took part in demonstrations around post offices or places like Staples. They also joined public informational picket lines and went with their parents to meet with their local, state, or national political representatives to gain votes for or against legislation related to their jobs with the postal service.

Local and state organizations had options for family members that taught friends and spouses the importance of becoming a part of the union movement. Picnics, Christmas parties and other events brought workers and their families together as postal workers and union members. Family gatherings, union meetings, etc. taught friends, parents and children about the ways in which the union gains benefits and representation for the members. Such things as 40 hour work weeks, overtime, sick leave, vacation time, job protection and retirement benefits are all discussed during the family education processes. This is unionism in action. Families working together to educate their children in learning about and becoming

an integral part of the union processes and benefits for working bread winners in the United States.

That is why I was so amazed to hear someone ask why we had so many children at the Postal Press Conference...No wonder the union movement has floundered in recent years. No wonder young people are coming into the postal service in recent years without ever hearing about

into the union family. Why are we not going to union meetings or becoming officers in our locals? Why are we not voicing our opinions and training our children and family members to come to union meetings and take part in activities that protect our bread winners and increase benefits for our entire family?

If we did so we would be supporting our union with the presence of our entire fam-

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*"Family gatherings, union meetings, etc. taught parents and children about the ways in which the union gains benefits and representation for the members."*

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unions. Evidently, union workers have gotten away from bringing all of the members of their family together and using their support in gaining and protecting their wages and benefits at their workplace. Evidently, local unions are no longer asking spouses and family members to join the Auxiliary. Evidently, the workforce is becoming too complacent. Evidently, times are changing for the worse.

As members of the APWU we all need to look into the mirror of life and ask ourselves why we are not bringing our family

ily at union functions. As a Postal Press Association, we have since its inception, been providing educational programs for our members' families at our conferences. At the recent conference we enlisted Greg Pofert to lead his child actors (family members) in a program of labor activity and labor history for our delegates and their children. As an organization, children and families have always been a part of the Postal Press Association. It is an honor to be a member of the APWU and the Postal Press Association. It's ALL IN THE FAMILY!

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## Information sharing: Posting of member publications on PPA website

Editors are encouraged to use the Member Publications section available on the PPA website for posting of their publications. This is a great no-cost way to share information with fellow members. To submit a newsletter for posting, e-mail it as a pdf to [ppa@apwupostalpress.org](mailto:ppa@apwupostalpress.org). Publications will be posted for 30 days.

All submissions are subject to the following policy. Should a publication include, but not limited to; libelous statements, personal

attacks, violations of federal laws, etc. it will not be posted. A publication containing questionable material will be submitted to the PPA Advisory Council who will serve as the Editorial Board and determine whether or not it is posted.

By submitting a newsletter for posting, the editor is granting permission to fellow editors to reprint any article originating in the paper as long as credit is given to the original source.



# Are you a good listener?

Why do we listen and not hear correctly? Why is such a basic and important skill so difficult for so many of us to acquire?

Any of us who have children or who have occasion to work with children know that poor listening habits develop very early. We spend 5 minutes explaining clearly (we think) the instructions for some simple task and when we are done the child will ask a question from which we know that he or she wasn't listening to us. Is the problem with the listener or with the speaker? Or both?

It's easy to get annoyed with people who don't listen and who get directions wrong. And isn't it frustrating when we explain something clearly to the doctor and he or she seems not to hear us at all. We go to the garage and the mechanic ignores our description of the problem with our car. And of course, it is more frustrating when our telephone messages are given to us with the wrong name or the wrong information. It makes you wonder sometimes how many so-called rumors got started because someone just didn't listen correctly.

The single biggest cause of poor listening is the failure to concentrate on the other person's point of view and ideas. There are many outside distractions to listening as well. If we are in pain or feeling ill, if we've just had a fight with our spouse, or such a simple distraction as loud background conversations or other noise, obviously we are going to have difficulty concentrating on what someone is saying.

Following are some common characteristics of poor listeners:

- Always interrupt.

- Jump to conclusions.
- Finish the speaker's sentences.
- Inattentive-have wandering eyes and posture.

- Change the subject.
- Write everything down.
- Don't give any response.
- Impatient.
- Lose temper easily.
- Fidget nervously with pen, pencil or paperclip.

Conversely, here are some characteristics of good listeners:

- Look at speaker while he or she is talking.
- Question speaker to clarify what was said.
- Show concern by asking questions about speaker's feelings.
- Repeat some of the things said.
- Don't rush the speaker.
- Posed and emotionally controlled.
- React positively with a nod of the head, a smile, or a frown.
- Pay close attention.
- Don't interrupt speaker.
- Keep on subject until speaker has finished thoughts.

Most of us can find some characteristics in each of these lists, but for many of us, unfortunately, we see ourselves more in the first group than in the second.

We must remember that the burden of listening and understanding is on the listener – not the speaker.

Here are some suggestions for improved listening:

Write down important facts, particu-

larly during phone conversations. We think we will remember what was said but our minds are so crowded with information we may forget or remember incorrectly. Taking notes is sometimes difficult, especially if the speaker is not well organized and the speech is long. However, we can learn to organize the speaker's thoughts if we listen carefully and make a written outline.

Stamp out distractions! Try to remove or curtail any extraneous sounds from inside or outside the room.

The next time you are listening to someone try to keep an open mind and empathize with the speaker – even if a topic which normally causes the pulse to quicken and the ears to close is brought up.

Finally, let's ask ourselves these questions:

- Do I listen to understand rather than spending the time preparing my next remark?
- Before agreeing or disagreeing, do I check to make sure I do understand what others mean?
- Do I try to summarize points of agreement/disagreement?
- Do I try to ask questions that result in a more informative answer than "yes" or "no?"
- Do I try to encourage others to participate in the discussion?
- Do I guard against assuming I know what others mean or how others feel by asking them questions to assure understanding?
- When another's feelings are hurt, do I respond in such a way that I show sympathy?

## How readable is your writing? Perform this test to find out

There's a simple test for estimating the grade level of your writing. It's called the *Fog Index*. Start at the beginning of a sentence and count off a 100-word sample. Count the number of sentences in your sample. Next, count the number of words with three or more syllables. Then do this calculation:

- 100 words
- divided by number of sentences
- plus number of words with three or more syllables
- times .4
- equals years of education needed to read the sample.

For example:  $100 \div 6.5$  (number of

sentences) + 12 (number of words with three or more syllables)  $\times .4 = 11$  years (high school education).

Generally, material should be written at a grade six to eight level. If your writing tests consistently over 12 on the Fog Index (college level), you need to use shorter words and sentences.



# Why every paper needs photographs

Big, striking photos attract readers. They help people picture what the organization's doing and why. And best of all, photos can show readers the paper involves them. Print as many photos as possible of your members. And don't stop there. Include pictures of all different kinds of people, someone for every reader to identify with.

## Say it with pictures

A good picture is worth a thousand words. And when a picture dramatizes an idea, the text doesn't need to repeat what the photo says. An article written partly with pictures is shorter, quicker to read, more powerful, and more fun to look at than a page full of words.

## The best proof

Don't expect people to believe whatever you say. Convince them with facts, interviews and logic – plus the right pictures. Photos may show just a part of the truth, but at least readers know what's before their eyes is real. Reading that a hall was filled to capacity isn't as impressive as seeing a photo with hundreds of animated people everywhere you look.

## The camera doesn't lie; it exaggerates

Photographers aren't neutral observers; they pick and choose what to show. The same room is either half-full or half-empty, depending on how the photographer looks at it. If you're glad so many people showed up, pick the most crowded bunch, and take a close-up. If you're upset there weren't more people, capture rows of empty chairs in front.

## Make your group's events look interesting

If you don't think before you shoot, you'll find yourself printing nothing but boring clichés. Who wants to see a parade of speakers hugging the podium, the same old officials holding awards, and officers sitting behind a long dreary table? Here's how to avoid photos that make your group look dull.

## Look for action

To take a picture of the union president for example, visit him or her on a busy day. Don't let the president sit behind a desk, dressed up in fancy clothes looking like a manager. Instead, capture a photo of the president serving the membership. Snap

a photo of him or her visiting the workplace, speaking at a meeting, talking on the phone, discussing a problem, or just plain on the move.

## Make speeches come alive

You may not think there's much action in a speech. Granted, the action is subtle. It's in the gestures and the expressions on people's faces. When you shoot each speaker, include the hands and capture as many moods and gestures as possible.

Show the speaker with the audience. If you forget the audience, you'll get photos that make it look like the speakers are up there all alone, as isolated as if they were in their offices.

When the audience does appear, too often it's just the backs of heads. It takes some doing, but look for an angle where you get at least part of the faces of both speaker and audience. It will be near impossible to get that shot if the front row or two of the audience is empty or the podium is too far from people.

If you just pop in, take a picture and take off, you will likely get an audience that looks half asleep. Sooner or later they will clap, laugh at a good joke, or otherwise look alive. Don't be shy. Stand in front of the audience and take head-on shots of the whole group.

Sometimes the situation is hopeless, when look-alike speakers just stand there reading while everyone else examines their papers. Unless you're exposing the dullness of the event, look for photos that dramatize the issues the event deals with. After the speech, stick around. If people rush the podium to chat with the speaker, that could be the shot you need.

## Get close-ups

If you're too far away from the speakers, that big clunky podium could end up dominating each photo, making all the speakers look the same. To capture the gestures and faces that make each speech special, don't be shy. Move in close. If you shoot a group that's too far away, everyone will look like little ants. Get close enough to a few people so that their faces stand out bigger than everyone else's. That will help draw the casual viewer into the scene.

## Try different angles

Move around so that each speaker and each event or person interviewed is seen in a different way, from a different spot. For variety, hold the camera different ways, to get both tall and wide shots of the same subject.

If tables and other lines in the photo go straight up, down and across, they just echo the lines of type and columns on the printed paper, and don't attract attention. To get dramatic diagonal shapes instead, shoot from an angle – the side, above or below. For example, to shoot a bunch of people sitting at a table, stand to the side so that the table goes diagonally across the photo. (That also gives you a nice, big face in the foreground.)

Make someone look sinister or bigger than life by crouching down and shooting up. Diminish that person or make someone look vulnerable by standing on a table and shooting down.

## Catch someone looking right at you

Whoever's looking at you will end up peering into the eyes of the reader browsing through your paper. This "eye contact" can startle readers, making them feel involved. Just make sure the expression on the person's face is meant for the reader.

## Avoid "grip-&-grin" shots

If you keep taking the same tired shot, over and over again, of your leader presenting a check or plaque to someone as they shake hands, your group will start looking like a bunch of robots who spend all their time at ceremonies stiffly clasping hands. Instead, show the person holding up the check and looking excited. Or catch someone hanging the plaque on the wall, surrounded by merry well-wishers. Think up shots that dramatize how the money was raised, or why the check or plaque was awarded. Capture spontaneous good feelings, not frozen grins.

## Use symbols

Ask members to wear union or group t-shirts or buttons. When picturing a protest or picket line, ask people to hold original hand-made signs (if available) rather than pre-printed ones.



# Article submissions during election period

**Editor's note:** Elections for local and national officers will take place in the coming year. While various questions always arise regarding the use of a union publication during the election period, some situations are more common than others. One of the most frequent inquiries is whether or not it is appropriate to publish articles in a union paper during the election period authored by members who are not regular contributors or have not previously submitted articles.

Section 401(g) of the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA) states:

*"No moneys received by any labor organization by way of dues, assessment, or similar levy, and no moneys of an employer shall be contributed or applied to promote the candidacy of any person in any election subject to the provisions of this title. Such moneys of a labor organization may be utilized for notices, factual statements of*

*issues not involving candidates, and other expenses necessary for the holding of an election."*

Under this provision, union newspapers that are funded by the union cannot be used to promote the candidacy of any person in a union election. The purpose of this regulation is to ensure fair and impartial elections for all candidates.

It has been argued that the appearance of articles in a union publication during the election period from a candidate who has never or rarely before submitted articles in that union publication is a promotion of that individual's candidacy through the union publication in violation of the LMRDA.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Labor-Management Standards which is responsible for administering provisions of the LMRDA: *"Generally, a six month period prior to an election can be considered as time when the newsletter may be construed as a campaign tool.*

*Placement of articles, changes in format, blunt campaigning and letters from members or candidates to the editor could be considered as campaigning."*

Therefore, in an effort to avoid the appearance of impropriety and to thwart efforts to overturn elections, the Postal Press Association recommends that local editors do not permit members to publish articles in the union's publication six months prior to an election, unless the member is a regular contributor. This policy will protect the local from an allegation that the local unfairly allowed particular candidates to use the union-paid for newsletter in support of his or her candidacy.

The determination of a regular contributor must be made on a case-by-case basis taking into consideration the number of times that the union publication is published every year. Anyone who is deemed a regular contributor should therefore be allowed to continue to contribute articles to the paper throughout the election period.

Because some members may have already announced their candidacy while others have not, the safest course for the local to take is to adopt a policy prohibiting all non-regular contributors from submitting articles to the union publication during the election period.

There are no hard and fast rules with respect to when the election period begins. The six month rule is a general guideline that seeks to avoid the appearance of impropriety as the election nears. Certainly, once members announce their candidacy for office the election period should be deemed to have begun. (A candidate is announced when it is common knowledge that he or she is going to be running for office, either as an incumbent or challenger. Under election regulations, an individual does not have to be formally nominated to be considered a candidate for office. An expressed intention to run is sufficient for the individual to be considered a candidate.)

Finally, no one who writes for a union publication, whether a regular contributor or not, can advocate for the election or defeat of a particular candidate for union office, him or herself or others. The exception is a local sponsored forum to allow all candidates to make a statement in the union publication in support of their candidacy.





# Editor's toolbox: Helpful ideas for APWU communicators

## Editing for brevity and clarity

You've written a draft document, and you're fairly satisfied with your effort. Don't stop now. The most important part is editing your own copy. Use these tips to tighten and polish your prose:

Purge extraneous words from every phrase. Weed out any word that adds nothing to meaning. Example: Change "during the course of" to "during."

Substitute short punchy words for long, showy ones. Examples: Use "try" for "endeavor" and "total" for "aggregate."

Avoid vague adjectives. Example: Instead of writing, "We received numerous inquiries," write "We received 104 inquiries."

## Powerful anti-procrastination tools

Scores of people have found these two tips helpful in dealing with procrastination:

**Use the "five-minute plan."** Every task has a first step. Commit yourself to the five or ten minutes it takes to make that first step, perhaps writing a paragraph or making a phone call. When that's completed, consider committing to another five minutes for the next step . . . and then another five. Once you start, momentum will keep you going.

**Lighten the pressure.** Before you begin, promise yourself that you will work on the project only within the time you have available that day. By being reasonable with yourself and your expectations, you stand a far better chance of starting, and that's usually the hardest part.

## Laughter really is the best medicine

A hearty chuckle combats stress with physiological effects: It quickly increases heart rate and blood pressure. Then there is a sudden relaxation period where blood pressure drops below levels previous to the laugh; the brain may then release endorphins, which are the stress busters we release during exercise. A good laugh also gives the face, diaphragm and abdomen a

muscle massage. Scientists believe it even increases the saliva's virus combatant, immunoglobulin A. By allowing us to take a more removed angle on a stressful situation, and play up its absurdities, humor turns our daily disasters into comedy.

## Break writer's block

You've been asked to write a report on an important conference you just attended. But the more you work, the more frustrat-



ed you become. A four-step technique can help you when you're stymied by a long, important writing assignment. Here is how it works:

1. **Write down everything** that comes to mind on the subject. Don't try to arrange, evaluate or censor your ideas at this point. Don't worry about organizing your thoughts; there will be plenty of time for that.

2. **Categorize your information.** At this stage you should have very broad classifications. Take a note pad and list one general heading to a page. Then, on that page, copy all the notes related to the category.

3. **Create an outline.** You'll probably be able to eliminate whole sections because you won't have enough supporting material to justify including a topic. You may also decide that you want to keep certain sections and need to do additional research to flesh out these topics.

4. **Take a critical look at your outline.** Does one section lead logically to the next? Have you kept your audience in mind? Can you do some more cutting to sharpen your focus? Do you build to a logical conclusion?

With a clear, well-organized outline you should have little trouble filling in the sections of your report.

## Me, myself and I

Do you use reflexive pronouns properly? Reflexive pronouns are words that end in -self and refer back to the subject. *Examples:* "He had himself to blame." or "I timed myself in the reading test."

The same form is sometimes used to emphasize that someone is doing something personally. *Example:* "The announcement was made by the president himself."

Unfortunately, some writers mistakenly consider "myself" to be more polite than "I" or "me." In Standard English, reflexive forms are not used as substitutes for "I" or "me."

*Incorrect:* "Ms. Smith and myself attended the meeting."

*Correct:* "Ms. Smith and I attended the meeting."

*Incorrect:* "The project was completed by Harry and myself."

*Correct:* "The project was completed by Harry and me."

## Write killer copy for your website

If you write copy for your organization's website you need to take into account the reading habits of the typical Internet surfer. Most people don't actually read – they scan.

Research indicates that 79% of surfers scan the page instead of reading it word for word. If you don't adopt your copy to this scanning style – you're just a mouse click away from cyber extinction. When you write for the web make sure the copy is:

**Concise.** Web content should have 50% fewer words than its paper equivalent and no single chunk of text should run more than 75 words. To write concise text you must tighten your language and avoid overly detailed information.

**Scannable.** To write scannable text add tables of contents, section summaries, bullets, numbered lists, highlighted key words, headings and short paragraphs with well-developed topic sentences.



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Past



Present

# NO FAIR!

Management's plan to privatize postal services was "fairly obvious" at this year's Minnesota State Fair. For decades Saint Paul P&DC retail clerks provided complete on site mail services including special state fair cancellations to visitors – but no more. The effort to sell off postal services marches on – one mailbox at a time.

— By Mike Mazurkiewicz, APWU retiree and former *Postmark* editor.