

# Postal Newsletter

## Press

AMERICAN POSTAL WORKERS UNION

NATIONAL POSTAL PRESS ASSOCIATION

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## Members: Lifeblood of the union

By Tony Carobine, President

One of the biggest challenges facing unions today is developing and maintaining a loyal membership.

A key ingredient needed to maintain a loyal membership is communication. However, communication involves a lot more than passing down information from union officials to members. Psychologists that study groups who work together over a long period say that in order to keep people motivated and interested they must be included. This means they must be made part of what's going on, be included in the group, and not be made to feel like an outsider.

As union communicators we should take into account our audience, in other words our readership when preparing our publications by keeping the following points in mind:

- Is the paper published on a regular basis so members are aware that the union is always working to protect their interests?
- Does the publication include labor or postal union history information?
- Are longtime members periodically interviewed for a newsletter article about how pay and conditions were in the post office many years ago as compared to today because of the union?
- Does the local recognize membership loyalty by honoring members in various ways for achieving union membership milestones; such as: Listing their names and/or printing their photos in the paper for 5, 10, 15, 20, etc. years of union membership?
- Does the publication use every opportunity to include the membership in the paper; such as a "Members Speak Out" column whereby randomly selected members are asked their opinion on various issues?
- Do stories in the paper about grievance settlements include direct quotes from members affected by the union's efforts?

• Are members recognized in the union publication for their volunteer efforts in the community?

• Does the publication use every opportunity to include photographs of members participating in various union activities?

Given the appropriate content, a union paper will be read. Why? Based on studies, union publications that employ what is called "member-oriented" labor journalism enjoy an extremely high readership. Member-oriented labor journalism involves using the type of examples cited above, which is simply including the rank and file members in the publication. In other words, telling the union's story through the experiences of its members. By including the membership in

the paper, by making it the "member's publication," two things will happen. Readership will increase and members will be more likely to see the union as their organization and as a result are more inclined to be supportive.

Remember, people like to read about people, themselves first and others second. By striving to bring a human touch to a union publication and including the membership, the paper becomes much more interesting to read and the union is less likely to be perceived as an institution or a clique being run by a few. The idea is to develop the paper into a forum for an exchange of ideas and a place to share the experiences of members  
*Please see Lifeblood of the union, page 2*

### Altoona, Iowa site of 2019 PPA Conference

The Meadows Events & Conference Center at Prairie Meadows Hotel, Race-track & Casino will be the site of the 2019 Biennial Conference of the APWU National Postal Press Association.

Hosted by the Des Moines Area Local, the conference will take place from Thursday, August 1 through Saturday, August 3, 2019 with a pre-conference session on Wednesday, July 31.

A guestroom rate of \$129.00 per day single or double occupancy will be in effect throughout the conference, in addition to three days before and three days after the actual meeting dates. Current tax rate is 12%. Prairie Meadows will provide free shuttle service from Des Moines International Airport, complimentary Internet access and no charge for parking a vehicle.

Further details will be forthcoming as they become available.



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



# Overcoming writer's block

When faced with a writing project, it's not always easy to get started. Try these tips to keep the creative juices flowing when your mind is blank:

- **Clarify your purpose.** Before you start writing, identify your goal. Do you want to inform, persuade or move your reader to action? Until you clearly define your goal, you'll remain stuck.
- **Pick the right environment.** If you're in an environment where you're distracted by noises, find a quiet spot. That might mean writing a first draft away from your desk and returning to your desk to make revisions.
- **Put something – anything – on paper.** You don't have to begin at the beginning. Start where you have ideas. If you have a random idea that doesn't fit anywhere, put it at the bottom of the page in a "parking lot" for later reference. If you don't write down your idea, chances are you'll forget it.
- **Save the editing for later.** Don't try for perfection in your first draft. Type ideas

as they come to you. You'll start to see a pattern emerge, and you'll group ideas together. Much of what we call "organization" goes



on in our heads while we are in the act of writing.

- **Keep moving.** If you get stuck in the middle of a sentence looking for the right word, type XXX or ??? You can come back later and fix it. Now is not the time to staunch the flow of ideas.
- **Enlist help.** If you're really stuck, have someone read what you've written and discuss it with you. Ask the person to tell you whether any sections are unclear.

## 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.

## Lifeblood of the union

*Continued from page 1*

not only at work, but in other aspects of their lives as well.

The reasons for publishing a union newsletter extend beyond the need to inform the membership about the business of the union. As communicators we must remember that members are the lifeblood of the union and the union's strength depends on the loyalty of its members. Adopting a style of membership inclusion and education in our publications is a step towards maintaining a loyal membership.

## Biannual or biennial?

**Biannual** means twice a year and is a synonym for the word semiannual.

**Biennial** means every two years. Example: The local's officers attended the Biennial All Craft Conference in Las Vegas.

# Projecting your union's image

By Jenny L. Gust,  
Editor-at-Large

Occasionally, it is a good practice to take some time and review previous editions of your paper. Get a cup of coffee or a beverage of your choice – I'm going with tea (it's too early for a margarita!) and take some time to look these issues over with a critical eye. Do you like what you see? Was your publication interesting, informative, readable? As they say, hindsight is 20/20, but you can make the choice to liven things up a bit.

Think about the purpose of your paper. Remember how important it really is! Very few members attend union meetings unless something big is happening they want to know about. Even then some will be working at the time of the meeting or possibly sleeping depending on their tour. People have many home and family obligations – they just don't have the time to attend meetings. So your publication becomes their source of information. Most people know they can't believe everything they hear. It is up to you to make sure they get the facts!

In this time of turmoil within the Postal Service your officers probably have plenty to write about. Try to make sure their articles read well and look good. How? Put in paragraphs where needed – it just looks good and reads even better. Subheads help also. Proper spelling and punctuation help. Use two columns – don't type from one side to the other. Don't type in bold or caps all the way through. Give the headline some punch to get people to want to read the article. Pull an interesting item from the article and put it in bold or a box to draw the reader in. Do you

## Break text with bold subheads

Why? Readers are busy. Attract them with bite-size chunks of copy. But such heads can also backfire if not positioned properly. So . . .

- **Don't center the subheads.** It interrupts the flow of ideas and reading rhythm.
- **Flush-left the subheads.** That signals a change in thinking without interfering with the natural left-to-right rhythm.

have a photo or graphics to go along with the article? All of these items are ways to keep the reader wanting to read every article!

Take a look at all aspects of your paper.

has your local or state steward's/representative's information. Keep this up-to-date so members know how to reach someone for help when they need it. Do you print photos

***“Remember that your paper is paid for by your members. It is supposed to project your union's image – strong and unified – willing to go to bat for all!”***

Have you updated or changed your nameplate (also called banner or flag). This is the identity of your local or state.

If I looked at your paper would I know right away who this paper belongs too? I should and so should your reader! Have you updated the information in the masthead? The masthead identifies the union, its officers, and contact information; such as mailing address, phone numbers, email and website addresses. Many times it also

of your officers? It might be time to update those.

Remember that your paper is paid for by your members. It is supposed to project your union's image – strong and unified – willing to go to bat for all! We are in this together – we are a team. Together, as editors, we can keep our members hopeful, informed, and believing their money is well spent. Without them – we wouldn't have reason to be here in the first place.

## Attention PPA Members:

**Send in your photos!**

**Have your event featured in the *Members in Action* section of *The American Postal Worker***

**The APWU Communications Department needs your help!** Please send photos of local officers and members at APWU local or state (retiree chapter or auxiliary) sponsored events, community parades, picnics, or any other civic gathering.

Photographs from events such as informational picketing, supporting a picket line or organizing drive for other union brothers and sisters, charitable activities, to handing out flyers or membership picnics, would be appreciated.

High-resolution photos should be emailed to [communications@apwu.org](mailto:communications@apwu.org).



# Content development: What's news?

Ask any person "what's new," and the reply will be about something timely, important, useful, or of some consequence. Or it may simply be about something that is interesting. It will often contain elements of conflict, competition, or accomplishment. Something happened . . . or didn't happen. The main character may be somebody important and well known . . . or a stranger. And so on.

Although "news" is hard to define, we all know it when we hear or read it. News is what makes a newsletter interesting, informative, and worthwhile.

To determine what's news for your newsletter, ask:

- Is this news to me as an editor?
- As a member of this organization?

If something is news to you, chances are it will be news to your readers, too.

It seems obvious that readers want to know something if it will affect them personally. Sometimes only you may know it is something they need to know. But you always have to make them *want* to know.

To do this, you have to grab the reader's attention in the headline and the very first sentence. Learning to write like newspaper journalists is imperative for the volunteer editor.

Writing in a traditional newspaper style can be a real boon to a volunteer editor. It is easy to read, easy to cut, and easy to write, once you get the hang of it. Getting the hang

of it may be even easier than you think. Get to the point fast. In the first sentence or so grab your reader's attention and get your message across quickly. Put first things first. You'll keep the reader's interest longer. And you don't waste their time.

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*“Writing in a traditional newspaper style can be a real boon to a volunteer editor. It is easy to read, easy to cut, and easy to write, once you get the hang of it.”*

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## Turn things upside down

The elements of good news writing require that reporters turn things upside down to get the facts straight and told in a fast, easy-to-read manner. You don't want your article to read like the minutes of a meeting or like a speech. Public speakers often lead up to the main point or an announcement.

This keeps the audience listening . . . sometimes. But if you do the same thing, you are most likely to lose your reader.

Use the inverted pyramid which contains all the important information at the start.

Then as time and space permit, you can fill in the details.

The five w's: A good news article contains all of the relevant facts answering these questions:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why? (or How?)

You can't write the article until you have the basic facts. You may not even know what your story is until you have all of the relevant information.

The lead is the most important element of a good news story. A good lead is short and to the point. That's why it grabs attention. It may be only one sentence, but it is never more than two or three.

When you have all the facts, try to say the main message quickly. Pretend you are that person on the pay phone making an urgent one-minute call.

You'll find that you leave out some facts because they aren't necessary at that point. They come later – all the way down to the tip of that "inverted pyramid."

The inverted pyramid by another name is an upside down triangle. The whole point of it is to put the main point at the beginning of the article. Arrange the rest of the facts in descending order of importance, closing with the least important point.

## How to beat your enemies: Stand united!

A farmer, who had a quarrelsome family, after trying in vain to reconcile their differences with words, thought he might more readily prevail by an example. So he called his sons and told them to lay a bunch of sticks before him. Then, having tied the sticks into a bundle, he told the lads, one after another, to take it up and break it. They all tried, but tried in vain. Then, untying the bundle, he gave them the sticks to break one by one. This they did with the greatest ease. Then said the farmer, "Thus, my sons, as long as you remain united, you are a match for all your enemies, but differ and separate, and you are undone."

— Aesop



# Maintaining editorial enthusiasm

Expert editors show enthusiasm – for their profession, their publications, and the material they cover. Enthusiasm radiates and touches everything editors create. It makes their publication even more attractive and more inviting to readers.

Publications sometimes fall a little short on enthusiasm because long-term editors find it hard to stay effervescent month after month. Without such energy, publications can grow humdrum, adequate but no longer sparkling.

How do you keep up enthusiasm for your work? By constantly injecting novelty into it; by never letting it grow stale. To maintain enthusiasm for your creations, you must constantly work to rejuvenate your skills:

- Your writing;
- Your mechanical techniques (learn to take better pictures and to make the most of your electronic equipment);
- Your feature ideas (dig, really dig, for current and exciting subjects);
- Your basic editorial approach (study what works for other editors; exchange publications, read other periodicals), and ultimately;
- Your special look, your package, your design.

When you update a publication and inject it with renewed enthusiasm, you should also

aim to improve readability. You do this by trying to see each issue from the readers' point of view.

Redesign to give readers . . .

- Pieces of text, with plenty of heads and shoulders, for easy entry into text.
- A brief contents listing, boxed on page one, so readers can quickly scan for stories of special interest.
- A strong nameplate to convey your organization's distinct personality.
- A masthead that credits all involved in production, including the names of officers and where they can be reached.
- Columns that are easy-to-read (no wider than four inches) and plenty of white space to give readers' eyes a break.
- Contemporary reading cues – rules, boxes, screens – and dependable heads and page positions to aid in locating standard information.
- More creative graphics – employ more varied photo angles, thoughtful cropping, quality-oriented reproduction methods and contemporary art – to enhance text.

Are you as enthusiastic today as you were when you first became editor? Does your publication sparkle with news and information – or has it grown bland? If you find yourself squeamish about answering either of these questions, maybe it's time

to take action and implement some basic makeovers (for both editor and publication). Start today to transform what's good into what's great!

## Photo etiquette

Photographs enhance the looks and appeal of a publication. People not only like to read about people (themselves first and others second), but they also like to look at photographs. However, editors should



be careful when selecting photographs for publication. Editors need to ask themselves, what message am I sending by publishing this photograph? The first and foremost consideration is to make sure that photographs which show a person in an unfavorable way are not used.

What are "unfavorable ways?" Anything that may embarrass a person. Following are some examples. A photo of someone with a strange look on his or her face, eyes closed, face obliterated because of poor lighting.

Extreme caution should also be used when taking photographs at conventions and seminars. Editors should consider limiting photos to the meeting portion, and put the camera away during hospitality functions. Photos from hospitality events published in a paper are easily misinterpreted. Furthermore, snapping photographs indiscriminately in a hospitality room or bar without a person's knowledge and then publishing the photos is unethical and could be considered invasion of privacy. Where individuals spend their free time and whom they associate with is their business.

## It's all in the title

How often have you written what you consider to be a fine article, only to discover that a handful of people read it? In this article you may have researched a problem with management that everyone should be aware of or it could be a piece on some accomplishment that your local should be recognized for, yet very few know it. For the life of you, you cannot seem to understand why. Well, maybe it is the way you titled that particular article.

Headline writing is one of the most important areas that part-time journalists have to work on. With just a few extra minutes, you can come up with a suitable headline that will grab your readers' attention and make them want to read the piece that you or another officer worked so hard to produce.

One common practice repeated over and

over in PPA affiliated publications is the use of the same headline for each regular contributor. Headlines like "President's Report" or the "Editor's Corner" are just a few. On other occasions the writer's name will be incorporated into a catchy slogan that identifies the writer. The problem is that repeated column headings say nothing about the content of the article.

With just a little more time, a suitable headline could be run that will let the reader know something about the article. The use of bylines like "President's Report" can still be used but would be secondary to the main headline. A proper headline may mean the difference between whether or not an article gets read, especially if readers see a headline that lets them know that the article contains useful information.

# Take time to de-stress your life

The demands and expectations that others place on us, or we place on ourselves, can add stress to our day. It can manifest

a consistent sleep schedule. Being overly tired imposes stress on the body, and increases the likelihood of reacting to events



itself in many ways: Physically, causing high blood pressure, headaches, digestive disturbances . . . even ulcers; emotionally, disrupting the harmony of our personal relationships. And stress may also be an underlying cause of depression and other mental illness.

Because we all experience stress at some time, we must find ways to cope with it. First, though, it's important to note that stress is a result of two sets of factors: the external events of our lives and our internal reactions to them. While we don't always control the former, we can learn to exercise some control over the ways we respond. By doing so, we can de-stress our lives.

Here are five ways to cope:

**1. Get plenty of rest.** Try to maintain

in a stressful manner. Poor sleep habits also increase susceptibility to illness, another cause of physical stress.

**2. Breathe deeply.** When you find yourself feeling overwhelmed by what you have to do, or disturbed by the actions of another, stop

and take five deep breaths, exhaling slowly each time. Concentrate only on your breathing. This may calm you down.

**3. Maintain a "present" awareness.** Much of the time, our minds are busy rehashing what happened in the past or worrying about what may occur in the future: Both kinds of concerns increase feelings of stress. If you feel your stress level starting to rise, get up and take a walk. A change of scenery, fresh air, and a different focus may provide relief.

**4. Exercise.** Research has proven that exercise is a great stress-reducer. Vigorous exercise can be an effective way to shift your attention. As you work out, your mind focuses more on your body and less on the stresses that bother you. What's more, a

sustained period of exercise relieves muscle tension.

**5. Get rid of your "should."** Much stress is self-imposed, resulting from mental "tapes" we play in our heads. "I should be working harder" . . . "He shouldn't have treated me that way" . . . "I should have known better" . . . "I should spend more time with her." Try to stop thinking in terms of what you "should" and "shouldn't" do. Instead, decide what you will and will not do. That subtle change in thinking gives you more control over your actions and reactions, which can reduce feelings of stress.

Finally, realize that stress is not always a negative condition. Some people thrive on it (it keeps them alert, revved up and ready to do their best). But it's up to you to decide how much stress you want in your life and how you deal with it. No one else can change the way you think and feel. To a considerable extent, then, stress may be a personal choice.

## Does your copy pass the dollar bill test?

In a world of flippers and skimmers, how communicators package their words can be key to drawing in busy or distracted readers. Studies indicate that if a story looks easier to read, people are more likely to read it. A few suggestions are to keep copy in short and easy-to-read chunks, breaking up monotonous gray type with such graphic devices as subheads, bullets, pull-out quotes, boldface lead-ins, sidebars, boxes, captions, illustrations, and photographs.

Test your layout with the dollar bill test. Slap down a buck, horizontally or vertically, and make sure no chunk of copy stretches without a break longer or wider than that dollar bill.

## Freshen up your writing

- **Jot it down.** Keep a notebook handy. Scribble down an idea when it comes to you. You may remember it later, but the language won't ever be as alive and fresh.

- **Start the flow, keep it going.** Get the first draft down as fast as possible. There's time later to polish it, add facts and details, correct names, dates, spelling, etc.

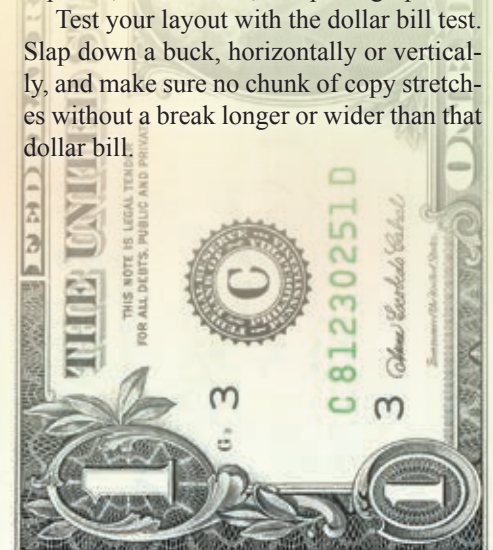
- **Start in the middle.** If you have a clear idea about the guts of your article, get it down. Worry about the introduction

later. A lead may come to you as you get into the story.

- **Trim the deadwood.** Read your article carefully. Test every word, sentence and paragraph to make sure each is doing the job you want it to.

- **Attend to the beginning and end.** The lead is your chance to make a good first impression (or any impression at all) and the closer is your opportunity to make a lasting impression.

— *Writer's Little Instruction Book: 385 Secrets for Writing Well & Getting Published*



# Editor's toolbox: Suggestions for improved communication

## Organization's past helps point the way to its future

Most organizations have a rich history from which you can draw ideas to help define new goals and strength. The history will point to values on which an organization was built and how those same values can apply to the future.

Who can you rely upon to obtain such information? In every organization there are a few people who've been around for long enough to tell you how things used to be. If you draw out their stories, they'll open your eyes as to how the organization



outstanding contribution by bringing more members into union activities?

These are just a few of the many ways to use members' names in the newsletter. In doing so, you will be on your way to increasing the readership level of the publication and bringing about a greater awareness of the union as an organization made up of real people!

## 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.

## Back page: shining star or afterthought?

Be honest: Do you plan the last page of your publication, or do you let it happen?

Many editors concentrate on page one, do wonders with their second first page (usually



page three), put effort into a center spread, and then dump their jumps and leftovers onto the back page of the newsletter. What a waste!

Just think about how you handle any newsletter or brochure. Chances are you read page one, glance through the rest of the publication, then refold it and put it away, back page up. And that's what the eye catches whenever you subsequently glance at the publication. So why not make your final page worthy of catching and holding the eye?

The point is this: Because your back page is not hidden from sight, you should take a little time to make it spectacular and definitely read.



has progressed and came to embrace certain beliefs. Such stories reveal a past that can strengthen the organization today.

## Names make news

People like to read about people they know. Has any local union member made community (or national) headlines? Been chosen for outstanding accomplishments? Or has been recognized by a civic group for special community contributions?

Do any members have unusual hobbies? Or has anyone faced an unpleasant or dramatic work situation that was resolved in a way that other members ought to hear about?

Are there any new volunteers in the organization who should be recognized in the local union newsletter? What about recognizing longtime members?

Has any local union member made an

# Help with avoiding libel

You can always be sued. The suit may not prevail against you because the person suing may not want to pursue it any further, or the suit has no merit, but you can still be sued. Therefore, it's best to be careful with controversial subjects.

There is a rule of thumb: "when in doubt – leave it out," but this is not always the proper route. If you think, however, that running a certain photo, article, cartoon, or piece will bring out the worst in someone, strong enough for them to want to sue your or your local, maybe you shouldn't run it.

Your local can be ruined by a large libel suit. So could you. You don't want your local to disappear just because of the newsletter you work hard to produce. Here are a few guidelines:

- If you quote a source, identify it.
- Double check facts.
- Be critical – but is it in good faith and for the public good? Never criticize for a personal reason. It's not "your" newsletter.
  - Avoid commenting on anyone's personal life.
    - Are you being fair and impartial?
    - Keep opinion and statement of facts separate. Mark them as such.
    - Cartoons can be particularly effective. But be clever about them. Don't just jump into the gutter with those you want to criticize.
      - Don't "doctor" photos to make a point. Picturing a supervisor with (or as) a famous criminal or murderer may seem funny, but it's actually quite juvenile and libelous.

Unsure of whether or not an article is libelous or inappropriate? Your Postal Press Association can help. Upon request, (if the material has not already been published)

the PPA will provide a confidential review and offer an opinion. Over the years this service has greatly helped to avoid costly litigation.

## Pre-convention workshops planned

The PPA will be participating in the pre-convention workshops sponsored by the APWU Research & Education Department being held on **Friday, August 17** in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Two half-day workshops will be presented by the PPA. ***Communicating at the Local Level:*** Examines the importance of information sharing using various mediums with special emphasis on the process of producing a member-oriented, high quality, highly read, union publication.

***Legal Issues and Union Communications:*** A review of editorial policies, union election regulations, libel, copyright and federal election laws that apply to hardcopy and electronic forms of communication.

More information about the workshops and registration will be available on the APWU's website, [www.apwu.org](http://www.apwu.org).

