

English professor Murray Kinloch, UNew Brunswick (Fredericton), has set up a Grammar Hotline also. The number there is 506/453-4500. He says the aim is to help people who get confused about such things as the proper place for quotation marks, the use of the subjunctive and the difference between affect & effect. "One of our objectives is to show people that there are solutions and there are some of us who care enough about the language to provide them," according to Reuters. He reports getting about 10 calls a day. The idea started when his dep't began discussing the kind of errors that crop up in letters it receives.

To celebrate wretched writing, English professors at San Jose State Univ have launched the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest. "There are a lot of literary contests around and most of them try to attract good writers and good talent ... so maybe there ought to be a contest for the opposite kind of talent," says contest's founder Bruce Rice. Contest seeks the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels. Entries must be written by the entrant & unpublished. Inspiration for contest came from Bulwer-Lytton whose 19th century novel "Paul Clifford" begins:

"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents -- except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops and fiercely agitating against the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."

ITEMS OF INTEREST FOR PRACTITIONERS

Asking for a willing suspension of disbelief is known to improve communication. But it's difficult to accomplish. A good example is Marriott Hotel's customer response form. Like most lodgings these days, hotel provides a form in every room. But instead of the pious mouthings found on most telling how the proprietors value our opinions, want our participation etc, the Marriott version uses a common phrase with human appeal. A large headline asks, "Will you let me know?"

Satellites are descended from carrier pigeons as a means of transmitting news, according to a bicentennial report of the Glasgow Herald (Scotland). Paper has the distinction of being the English speaking world's oldest national newspaper, publishing continuously since 1783. Its 1st edition carried an incredible scoop -- the story that England had agreed to grant independence to the US following the Revolutionary War. A fast horseman brought the news from the peace talks just as the printer was laying out the 1st edition. The paper's building has a dovecote tower -- built because the news originally came in by carrier pigeon.

New Year's cards? Why not? Every December offices & homes are besieged by Christmas cards until they look like something out of the current Federal Express ads. Some try to avoid being lost in the crunch by sending Thanksgiving cards which also eliminates sectarian overtones. The New Year's salutation offers opportunities for uplifting messages, lends itself to display thru January -- after the Christmas tree & Santa Claus cards have been filed away. One particularly appropriate message this year from Brian O'Connell, pres, Independent Sector: "You are among those special people whose regular good deeds and public services multiply to your honor and the country's strength. Thank you and Happy New Year." Card cover reads simply "1983."

"Where To Study Public Relations" tells the curricula and other details of every US and Canadian college or university offering courses in the field. Distinguishes between schools offering majors, "emphasis," and degree sequences. 42-page guide is co-sponsored by PRSA, PRSSA & IABC. (\$2 from PRSA, 845 3rd Ave, NYC 10022 or IABC, 870 Market St, San Francisco 94102)

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DURING ECONOMIC CRUNCH, LOWER COST OF GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNS, JOINS THEIR WELL-KNOWN EFFECTIVENESS TO STIMULATE USE OF A TECHNIQUE THAT WORKS IN NATIONAL, STATE & LOCAL LOBBYING

"Grassroots campaigns are increasing in usage. The reason is the economy. Organizations are after a cost-efficient way to promote their cause. They're putting a sunset on elaborate Washington offices. It's an economical alternative," says counselor E. Bruce Harrison (DC). The economy & effectiveness of grassroots campaigns are increasingly employed in lobbying the state capitol or city hall -- where the New Federalism has shifted some of the action.

Harrison explains that when an issue is not handled routinely within a legislative committee, the more important grassroots lobbying becomes. The Washington or state capitol reps' efforts, in a publicly contested issue, are not nearly so important as what you are able to stimulate at the grassroots. To show how it's done, Harrison has put together a Washington grassroots communications guide which applies to any legislative body:

Three Principles Help Communicate Legislative Issues

1. Self-Interest Motivates The Grassroots. People listen and are moved to act when the message is important to themselves. Messages on legislative issues should identify with the "public interest." But a fatal communications peril exists here -- that your message will speak to letterheads, not human beings. A message will not be effective unless each individual sees in it something for him/or herself.

2. Organization's Motives Are Almost Always Understood. People consider the source, and assume the message is motivated by what's good for the source. Expect communications to be questioned or viewed with suspicion. If the message doesn't connect both with the public interest and the self-interest of your audience, message may be sharply discounted or discarded. Be straightforward. Present messages directly, candidly & truthfully.

Top-two communication forms that most effectively influence Congressmen are 1) letters and 2) telephone calls from constituents. Getting your message in the media is fine to make people aware -- but letters & phone calls move Congressmen. (See prr 9/7/81 for top 11 comm forms from survey by Institute for Gov't Public Information, American Univ.)

3. Since You Can't Win Them All, Win The Best Ones. Decide who you need to convince & how to shape your communications to convince them. Define goals for specific results. List wants related to needs and rank as to priority. Compromise is part of the political process; keep this in mind when defining your goals.



Tested Route To Grassroots Lobbying

To pass a bill in Congress, a majority of members need to be convinced of its economic, social & political value. Conditions may not be favorable, but a coordinated communications

plan can present your case in a way which copes with conditions and turns them to advantage.

1. Phrasing The Issue. State the legislative question being addressed: e.g., "Will Congress amend the ___ Act along the lines suggested in HR ___?"

(& subcommittees) with jurisdiction over the legislation. Indirect approach comprises "grassroots lobbying" -- stimulating action by anyone who has a stake in the legislation's outcome. Objective is for timely, personalized action by groups & individuals toward the Congressional targets.

2. Organization. Coordinate & unify your work in support of the bill. Your central coordinator group should meet regularly and share reports continuously. It should keep targets & actions in focus, make plans, obtain commitments for funds & personnel, implement strategy, get feedback.

d) Assign responsibilities. Decide exactly who is going to contact each legislator, when.

3. Strategy. a) Form the message you intend to convey. Consider the message being conveyed by other groups regarding the target legislation and use a similar one. Reinforce what Congress is hearing and you'll get better mileage from your efforts. Make it positive, clear & relatively simple.

e) Establish a realistic timetable with check points along the way -- and a definite reporting mechanism.

b) Identify the targets you want to reach. Ultimately all your outreach efforts aim for Capitol Hill.

4. Implement Strategy. First step, even before preparing any written materials, is to contact sponsors of the favored bill, thanking & encouraging them; then House & Senate members you know, urging them to get active. Send a strong early message to the Hill, staking your claim, letting them know you're in gear. Written materials should give rationale to those not opposed to the bill, and neutralize the views of those who are opposed. Maximize impact thru consistent, clear, credible information. Repeat it often.

c) Choose the approaches you intend to use. Direct approach requires ranking Congressmen & Senators you need to reach, targeting members of committees

What Do You Want To Accomplish?

1. To neutralize the opposition. Respond early and blunt your opponents' thrust. Positive effects include: a) opponents know they aren't going unchallenged; b) Congress learns there is a counter-force to be considered; c) news media know there is an informed, alternative source of info on the bill; d) "troops" know their grassroots campaign is under way.

2. Widespread favorable news media coverage. Local stories abound when the action is local, not in Washington.

3. A stream of messages to flow to Capitol Hill. Letters, mailgrams, telegrams, telephone calls from home districts or home states are the most impressive ways to communicate to Congress on an issue.

(For copy of guidelines, write E. Bruce Harrison Co, 605 14th St. NW, Wash DC 20005; 202/638-1200)

AR TRENDS: DOES B&W LOOK LIKE YOU SAVED MONEY? IS THEME OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY NOW DORMANT?

"Annual report trends are usually set by what the public wants to know and how organizations want to be portrayed," explains Al Ross of Shareholder Graphics (NYC). His firm has been producing ARs for 15 yrs. He notes the following trends:

"You may see more b&w reports this year. The savings over a 4-color report are minimal but the look is there. A lot of companies want to take the position that if they can save money they will. The trend toward b&w reports has been happening for the last couple of years. But I think you'll see more of it this year because a lot of companies are coming up with poor balance sheets."

"The theme now is R&D, high technology, putting money back into plant expansion because those are the problem areas."

"Less emphasis is being placed on social responsibility. I don't think they'll totally give up their social responsiveness. Right now the concern is to put as many people back to work as possible. Chairmen's letters will reflect this."

"A few companies have tried video annual reports successfully. Emhart, for example (pr 8/11/80). But video offers too many controls. Editing, added drama, background music becomes a commercial product. They lose the effectiveness of a CEO fielding questions from a platform, live. They're also expensive, both in terms of production & then reaching the audience you want."

"We've done quite a few foreign language annual reports. But they're coming down in numbers now since English is becoming more international. They're done more for political reasons than for shareholders."

US & CANADIAN GRAMMAR HOTLINES GIVE YOU "CORRECT" ANSWERS TO LANGUAGE PROBLEMS, BUT BAD USAGE PAYS OFF, TOO

Farther. Further. What's the difference? (Farther refers to measurable distance. Further doesn't.) Are split infinitives acceptable these days? (They are in the

New Yorker.) Should you say to a friend "You're looking good" or "You're looking well"? (You're looking well.) When answering the telephone, which is correct: "It is I" or "It is me"? (It is I.) Answers to grammar questions like these will be given to people calling Dial-A-Grammarians, a service available during California Ass'n of Teachers of English conference, Feb. 18-20. Number to call is 213/623-1675. (Hopefully, you won't have to ask how to use hopefully....)

Keep your message simple because readers of ARs may only take 5 minutes to read it, advises Patrick Boylan, fin'l rels expert (Denver). He points out:

1. "All the reader should have to do is look at your cover to get an idea of what you're trying to say. And that message should be the theme of the rest of the book."
2. Use photos to communicate your message, too.
3. Set the theme for your AR in the president's message to shareholders.
4. Keep the report aimed at one group. Prepare separate fact sheets for different audiences.
5. Collect ARs and learn from others' mistakes.