



**writing to reach
today's audiences
on paper
or the web**

yvon prehn

“Nobody reads what we write!”

If there is a complaint I hear constantly from church communicators And this book will help change it. Through over two decades of helping church communicators write more effectively, I believe I have some advice that is useful.

Though this brief book will not give you all of the answers to solving this problem, it will address quite a few of them, and if you follow the suggestions, you will get a higher percentage of readership of your church communications.

The articles that follow come from a variety of sources including previous books, articles and newsletters I've written in and for. They are PDFs of these documents and some of the PDFs are of scans. The quality is not perfect, but I believe that the limitations of the scans are more than made up for by the advice in them.

Writing for a church audience is far different than writing for seminar professors or high school English teachers and these materials will give you practical writing training to do your job of church communications effectively.

Helping you communicate for the kingdom,

Yvon Prehn

Writing for DTP

"Christians owe it to themselves to be conscious of their words; they are full of history and power and spiritual significance."

*Bob Hudson and
Shelley Townsend, ed.,
A Christian Writer's
Manual of Style*

Writing for desktop publishing puts a new twist to the old skill of written communication. To communicate successfully with today's audience you need to learn to take your writing skills and add to them the skills of publication design, journalism, advertising and direct mail.

People today are busy. To save time when they receive a printed piece, whether it is their evening paper or your church newsletter, they skim it quickly. They look at the pictures and captions, read the headlines, and take in as much information as they can without having to work too hard or take too much time. If the articles are too long or the basic message can't be grasped immediately, they will put it aside—probably never to be read.

If you want to minister to people today, your challenge is to communicate in a form that is manageable for them.

A writing formula that works—the big three

Please note: if someone else or a group of people in your church or ministry do most of the writing for your publications, please have them read this section.

Keeping in mind how people take in information today, how can communication pieces be structured to appeal to them? There is an easy and effective way to do this. Once you grasp the following principles and apply them, your DTP projects will effectively communicate your message.

This chapter contains a summary of research about what works in direct mail and advertising. Researchers in these areas have the advantage of being able to measure the results of their work with precision and many of their findings have proven to apply well in the field of DTP materials.

The research shows that people take in information and respond to it in basically three levels in a fairly predictable pattern. Below is an overview of the levels. Following the overview, there is an example of how these principles apply in an actual article written by a minister for a church newsletter. The remainder of the chapter includes tips on effective writing for each level.

Level one

Consists of:

- Headlines and subtitles
- Subheads and call-outs
- Graphics and photos
- Captions that go with them

Time spent per page: 3-5 seconds

Percentage of readers: 80 percent

"On the average, five times as many people read the headlines as read the body copy. It follows that unless your headline sells your product, you have wasted 90 percent of your money."

David Ogilvy,
Ogilvy on Advertising

"Four times as many people read captions as read body copy."

David Ogilvy,
Ogilvy on Advertising

In direct mail studies, 20 percent of the folks who receive an unsolicited piece won't even open it.

Challenge:

- Be relevant here—give people a reason to continue reading.
- Give enough information so the reader learns enough to understand the key points or to make a desired response.

Level two

Consists of:

- Short sections of body copy
- Information inside boxes
- Charts, tables, diagrams
- Captions with them

Time spent per page: 30-90 seconds

Percentage of readers: 10-60 percent are still with you

Challenge:

- Expand key points.
- Provide another level of information.

Level three

Consists of:

- Body copy

Time spent: depends upon amount of remaining material

Percentage of readers: 1-10 percent

Note: You will have a higher percentage of readers of the body copy from people who are expecting a publication, or if the publication is of great benefit or interest to them. Probably less of our materials fit into that category than we'd like to think.

Challenge:

- Complete your message.

Communicate your message on all three levels

Readers want what is important to be clearly laid out; they will not read anything that is troublesome to read.

Jan Tschichold,
Thirty Centuries of
Graphic Design

People process information and make decisions on all three levels. If you get your message out through each of them, the favorable responses to your message and the participation rates in your ministry events will increase dramatically.

You can use the graphic and typographic tools available to you in DTP: changing the type size and style, using columns, graphics and pictures to break your message into the three levels.

The article on the next two pages illustrates how this can be done. The purpose of the article is to get people involved in the various volunteer ministries of the church. In the first example the material is presented as it might be in a typed or word-processed newsletter or flyer. The second is the same material organized in the three level format in a desktop-published church newsletter.

This is the same article as the one on the next page. But because it has no typographic clues, subheads, or other graphic devices for the reader to skim, it's much harder to read.

This is the kind of piece that is all too easy to "put aside to read later"—which means it will most likely never get read.

On the other hand, if you only read the subheads and the boxed material on the next page, even though you may not get the full message, you know enough to respond.

CLAIM YOUR OWN MINISTRY NOW

by Rev. Darrell E. Mount

In my 11 years of ministry here at First Church, I have never been so excited about our church! Why? Because we are on the threshold of a tremendous shift in our understanding of ministry. Below I'd like to share with you three reasons for my excitement about our program "Claiming My Ministry."

First, I'm excited about "Claiming My Ministry" because I know how significant my call to ministry is.

"Sure," you say, "You're a pastor, called by God to give himself to others in a special role." Well, yes, that's true, and it is a very special feeling to know that what I do every day is closely tied to Christ's ministry in our church. My calling to the ordained ministry came when I was 30, following careers in the military and in engineering. But I feel that God called me to ministry long before I became a pastor. And this special calling to ministry is one I claim every Sunday when I enter my Sunday School class to teach.

This ministry which I claim helps make sense of my daily activities. I know I am called by God to do it. There is purpose in my life.

Second, I'm excited about "Claiming My Ministry" because I'm sure many of you are going to experience the joy I know, as you claim your ministry.

One of the most joyful aspects of being a pastor in our church working with volunteers in all areas of the church's life is seeing the enrichment that occurs when someone claims his or her ministry for Christ.

Dr. Trigg, our senior minister, has a vision shared by the staff. This vision is: "every member in ministry." I know you will enjoy the added meaning in your life which will come to you, too, as you claim your ministry. Faith takes on an added dimension when you give yourself to a specific ministry. You're in for a treat.

Third, I'm excited about "Claiming My Ministry" because our community has never needed your ministry more than now.

Children, youth, singles, elderly—really, all of us—have a tremendous need for acceptance, understanding and caring. Only Christ can provide this. As you join your hands with His, you can make an awesome difference not only in our church, but also within our community when you claim your ministry. The goals of our church are basically five-fold: to be involved in mission, to pursue spiritual and personal growth, to engage in meaningful worship, to embrace the diversity of our work, and to provide a supportive church community. I am confident that you too are called by God to claim your ministry in one or more of these areas. What a difference you can make in our community as you claim God's call on your life.

This is a window of opportunity. Come on, let go and let God. God is calling. Claim your part of God's ministry. You'll be glad you did!

Adapted from FUMC

Above is an article presented as it would be if created on a word processor or typewriter and printed either as a handout or page of a simple newsletter.

Because the type and spacing are all the same, there are no visual clues for the reader and no way for the reader to scan the content.

It is all or nothing reading. If the reader doesn't have time to sit down and read the entire piece he will put it away to read it later, which means it probably won't be read at all.

This is the same article as is on the previous page.

Subtitle below the headline explains the program—remember not everyone is as familiar with your program as the staff is!

People will always look at pictures and read the caption below them. A great way to summarize your message is to restate it in your caption.

The first sentence of each section was increased in size, made bold, and printed in a different type style than the text. This turns the sentence into a subhead. The subheads lead readers through the article and allow for easy skimming.

the Encounter

First United Methodist Church

Claim your own ministry now!

“Claiming My Ministry” is a volunteer program at First Church that seeks to enable and encourage every person in the congregation to discover and practice their spiritual gifts.



This next week you will receive a special letter from Dr. Trigg along with a very important commitment card. On the card, you will find many areas of ministry waiting for your commitment.

This issue of the Encounter contains a special section which describes most of the areas.

I encourage you to look it over and prayerfully consider God's call to you.

This Sunday you will have the opportunity to personally claim your ministry for this next year.

by Rev. Darrell E. Mount

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Adapted from FUMC

Using the same material as on the previous page, this page has been laid out using the three-level approach by making the lead sentence in each section bold and larger than the text. In addition, a subtitle below the headline, subheads throughout the text, a picture and caption and section of boxed text (pulled from the article) have been added.

The reader now has a way to quickly skim the page to find out the essential facts of the article. Even if they spend only five to ten seconds skimming the page, they will know enough to respond.

Successful level one writing

Level one consists of:

- Headlines and subtitles
- Subheads and call-outs
- Graphics and photos
- Captions with them

These column headers are labels only.

The reader has no idea of the content of what follows or if it's worth the time to read.

Remember these categories of writing are what 80 percent of your readers will read. If you want to get your message across to the greatest number of people, you need to do it here. Following are guidelines and examples on each category.

Headlines

To make an effective headline, you need to do more than simply label. Tell a story; give some information; ask for action.

For example, most church newsletters have a column that is entitled something like:

Pastor's column

Message from Rev. Smith

This type of headline is a useful label, but it doesn't tell you anything about the contents. If people are in a hurry and don't know what the article contains or why they should read it, a large percentage will skip it.

It is much more likely people will read the column if the headlines intrigue the reader or give them an idea of the content of the article that follows. You don't need to do away with the title "Pastor's column" or similar labels. Just typeset them as a section head and then put the headline below it.

This treatment works well. You can label the column, but also provide a headline that informs the reader of the contents that follow.

Pastor's column

Church Relief Committee giving aid just hours after hurricane's devastation

Additional headline tips:

Consider using downstyle

Traditionally headlines have been written with the first letter of each word capitalized.

A more contemporary way of writing headlines is to write in what is called downstyle. USA TODAY pioneered this style in journalism. Downstyle is when the headline is written as a sentence without a period. When a headline is written downstyle, proper names and acronyms stand out and are easier to identify.

Though both methods are still used, downstyle is preferred for contemporary publications.

A headline written downstyle—written as a sentence without a period. Do headlines this way for contemporary publications.

A headline written in the traditional manner of capitalizing the first letter of every word—Jan White, premier publication designer, calls these “headlines with hiccoughs.”

Without a verb this headline merely labels the event

Using verbs in this headline adds power to the message. It turns the label into a story.

Joy Smith challenges HUGS singles’ group to develop a theology of self-care

Joy Smith Challenges HUGS Singles’ Group To Develop A Theology Of Self-Care

Use a verb

Think of your headlines as a sentence with a period. Sentences need verbs. Headlines that stop at simply labeling are boring—no action takes place. Adding a verb is not only more informative, but it adds action and life to your headline.

Promise Keepers Mens’ Conference

Promise Keepers Mens’ Conference expects 50,000 men to pack CU stadium to hear challenge for godly living

Longer headlines work well

After reading a headline like the one above, people often ask, “But isn’t that too long for a headline?”

It isn’t if you want to communicate your message. Effective direct mail and popular journalism all have headlines that are sometimes quite lengthy. People will say, “But they’ll find out all the facts when they read the story.”

True. And remember on average only one 1-5 percent of your readers will read the entire story, but 80 percent will read the headline. Give your readers a key part of your message in the headline if you want the greatest number to get your point.

Promise a benefit in your headline

This is one of the primary rules for writing effective advertising and direct mail copy. Though you may not often think of it in this way, when you are writing about your church or ministry, you are in some ways attempting to sell a product. To paraphrase a book title, it is in many ways the greatest product ever created, and one with many benefits.

Consider the following headlines for an article on giving:

Innumerable studies show that the number one question in peoples' minds when they read is "What's in it for me?"

Because not too many of us are looking to add additional guilt to our lives, guilt in the headline is not a powerful motivator to get a reader to look at your story. Promising a benefit works much better.

Headline without a benefit:

Can a man rob God?

Good news headline:

You can take it with you—giving as an investment of eternal value

What to avoid in headlines

Puns, inside jokes, acronyms that only an inside audience knows— all of these can make your headline harder to understand. Don't try to be cute or catchy in a headline. Strive to be clear and complete the first time your headline is read.

Subtitle or deck

Though these can clarify or expand a headline, don't use them as an excuse for an unclear headline.

Though decks or subtitles can be considered part of the headline because they are usually read along with it, these lines serve as a transition between the headline and the text. They explain or expand the meaning of the headline, show its significance and help encourage the reader to continue into the text.

Subtitles are especially useful in church and ministry publications as a place to explain the meaning of a term or program mentioned in the headline. The example below shows how:

Writing a descriptive subtitle like this is a great way to explain an unfamiliar program in your ministry and to set up the background of the upcoming article.

Youth find Christ in Chrysalis

Chrysalis is a three-day spiritual renewal retreat for youth patterned after Emmaus for adults. The term chrysalis is the name of the growth stage between caterpillars becoming butterflies. Spiritually it symbolizes that through the experience of dying to self, Christ can transform us into new beings.

Six First Church teens experienced this transformation on Chrysalis weekends this summer. Below two of them tell their stories.

Adapted from FUMC

Not only do subtitles get readers into the story, but they explain programs to long-term church attenders who may have forgotten their meaning. Decks also introduce newcomers to some of the programs of the church. Try to use them in more of your writing.

Subheads

These sections of text or labels notify readers of the subdivisions of text by labeling or summarizing what follows. After skimming

subheads a reader can then go back and either read the entire article or select those sections that contain information they need.

In the previous article, "Claiming your ministry," skimming the subheads gives readers the main points of the article even if they don't have the time or interest to read the entire piece.

In the example below the subheads allow readers to select the areas they need to read and to find them quickly. The subtitles are clear, not cute or confusing.

Enjoy each other, outdoors and time with Jesus on retreat

What is it?

The entire Youth Sunday School of First United Methodist Church will gather together for a weekend at John Wesley Ranch. The weekend will give youth a chance to escape the pressure of school while they enjoy the outdoors, each other and Jesus.

Who is it for?

This is an All-Youth Sunday School Retreat. Every Youth in grades 7-12 is eligible to attend.

When is it?

The retreat is November 6-8. Transportation will leave First Church at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, and will return on Sunday.

How much does it cost?

The cost of the weekend is \$39.00 if you register and pay by October 19, \$44.00 by October 25 and \$49.00 after that. Last day to register is November 4.

Remember: scholarship money is always available to you if you have trouble coming up with the bucks. Contact Robert or Gary if you need financial help.

What to bring?

Yourself, sleeping bag or blankets, pillow, toiletries, towel, jeans or casual clothing, rain poncho, warm coat, flashlight, Bible, pen, notebook, tennis shoes or other comfortable shoes, a wacky cos-

tume for Saturday night, and don't forget your Jerry Trigg look alike dolls (available in the Youth department for \$9.95 plus \$15.95 for shipping and handling).

Where will we sleep?

Senior High, grades 9-12 will lodge the John Wesley Ranch. Junior high grades 8-9 will lodge at the Golden Bell Retreat Center. (Golden Bell was Robert's great grandfather who established the camp in 1984).

What not to bring?

No boom boxes will be allowed. You may bring Walkmans.

Adapted from FUMC

The brief article above makes excellent use of subheads.

They clearly label the information that follows and make it easy to look up facts for future reference.

It's a well-written, brief article that has all the important information included, plus it has a bit of humor woven in (after all it is for junior high and high schoolers).

Visual tips for subheads

- Make subheads one size larger than the text below them.
- Use boldface type.
- Use either the same typeface as the text below them or a contrasting typeface.
- Make them flush left (not indented, but placed next to the margin) whether or not the text below them is indented.

Writing subheads

Think of the subheads as a layer of meaning or an outline sitting on top of your article that summarizes the main points of the message you want to get across.

You can either determine these main points first and then write the additional information under them, or write the sections of text and then summarize or label them with your subheads.

Callouts

These can also be called pull quotes, breakouts or similar terms. In traditional magazine publishing they are a particularly interesting quote that is literally pulled from the main part of the text. Their purpose is to pull the reader into the text of the story.

Though you can use this method in your DTP publications, because of the limited space in these publications and the time constraints of your reader, a more powerful way to use them is to emphasize the point of your message or to add additional material to the subject being discussed as the example below illustrates.

Does success for the Christian mean a heavenly Disneyland?

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"I climbed the ladder of success to the top, only to discover that my ladder was propped against the wrong wall."
Jeb Stuart Magruder

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"Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."
C.S. Lewis

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Too often in an effort to cram in more text than will actually fit, quotes are jammed in like this.

When they are this crowded they lose their impact.

Either edit your material to give them more room or leave them out.

Also remember to indent your text inside boxes.

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"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" Mark 8:36

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Captions

Tips on taking, cropping and reproducing photos for desktop publishing are in the chapter on photography.

People always look at the pictures on a page and if there is a caption beneath it, they will read it.

Captions provide a wonderful opportunity to get our message across, to summarize the main idea of an article to give essential information.

Consider the church newsletter on this page and the next. The only difference between them is one has captions and one doesn't.

Without captions the pictures on this page don't make any sense.

We know they are probably about the mission trip, but we aren't even sure what people are doing in them.

the Encounter

First United Methodist Church

Youth Mission Team learns the language of love

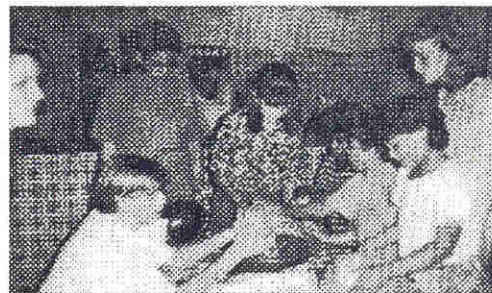
"How can I speak to these people if I don't know their language?" Pondered a frustrated Susan Meider upon arrival of the Sr. High Mission Team to the orphanage in Ciudad Serdan, Mexico.

About two-thirds of the team did not know a lot of Spanish, but to the team's delight, they found that the love of Jesus is a universal language. As the team interacted with the residents of the orphanage, they found ways to express their care and compassion. The residents of the orphanage, likewise, were able to share their joy for life and love for the Lord.

The team spent four wonderful days at the orphanage teaching the Bible, playing games, singing songs, and sharing together with the residents. The Lord knit hearts together in spite of the language differences.

The team shared in a communion service with the residents of the orphanage in which the power of the Holy Spirit was evident. The residents and the team both knew the Hebrew song "alleluia" and could sing it together. As they lifted their hearts to the Lord in praise, the presence of Christ was manifested. The team learned that the language of love is compassion, mercy, empathy, and concern.

The Mexico Mission team will share their experiences at the 8:25 a.m. service on August 16. Come and hear the great things that God has done!



Adapted from FUMC

Youth Mission Team learns the language of love

With the addition of captions, these photographs now tell a story, because the captions tell you what is going on in the pictures.

Unfortunately, people often don't take the time to caption photographs in their church or ministry newsletters, prayer letters, or other material that is sent out. It's so easy to assume everybody knows what is going on or that they will read the article and then figure out the picture. Both assumptions are seldom correct. Take the extra time to caption your photos and get maximum communication impact from them.

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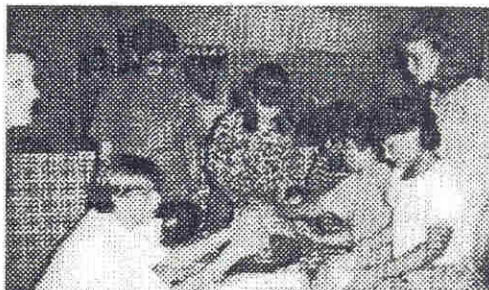
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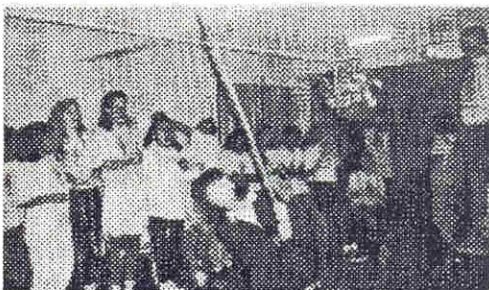
The Mexico Mission team will share their experiences at the 8:25 a.m. service on August 16. Come and hear the great things that God has done!



The language difference didn't stop these teens from sharing many fun activities.



Team members and residents of the orphanage worked together on many projects.



On their last night together they celebrated with a traditional Mexican party.

Adapted from FUMC

Not only are leaving out captions a missed opportunity to communicate, but think about what happens when you look at a photo album of a family you don't know. It can bring up lonely feelings. If you have lots of photos in our ministry publications, but don't tell people who is in them or what they are doing, that same feeling of loneliness can arise in the readers of our publications.

You want your ministry publications to not make anyone feel left out, to make people feel at home—writing clear explanatory captions can help do that.

Successful level two writing

Level two consists of:

- *Short sections of body copy*
- *Information inside boxes*
- *Charts, tables, diagrams*
- *The captions that go with them*

After your readers have looked at the headlines, pictures and captions, they will usually skim over this next level. If they find it useful and interesting, they may invest the time in reading the body copy, but you can't count on it. If your message is important, (and most ministry messages are) try to get at least enough of it in this level for your readers to take action or learn the most important facts that you want them to know even if they don't read the rest of the text.

Below are tips for creating successful level two communication.

Short sections of body copy

"I try to leave out the parts that people skip."

Elmore Leonard

Anything is easier to assimilate if it is in manageable parts. You don't put a whole pizza into your mouth at one time, a box of chocolates isn't a melted mass of sugar and fillings you consume with one gulp.

Cut up your article like dividing a pizza. Give people a piece they can hold on to. Arrange your suggestions with each thought complete like chocolates wrapped in their paper holders.

Creating bite-size sections of body copy is easy to do if you were careful in constructing your subheads—your body copy will naturally fall into easily digestible sections of text.

Information inside boxes

These sections of text are also known as sidebars.

If you have a list of items, tips, schedules, anything that can be arranged in a bulleted list—all of these can be communicated well in a sidebar. You can also use boxed text to point out a significant part of your message or to emphasize the date and time of a special meeting.

Not only are lists and summaries usually easier to read in such an arrangement, but boxed text and lists add visual interest to your desktop published page.

Charts, tables, diagrams, and the captions with them

The most important point to remember in placing charts and graphs in your publication is that not only are the charts and graphs themselves important, but even more important are the captions that go with them.

Just as with photographs, people will usually look at the graph or chart. If you don't have a caption with it, don't count on its message being understood. Few graphs or charts are self-explanatory.

Successful level three writing

Level three consists of:

- *Body copy*

Writing body copy for desktop publishing is like giving a three-minute speech. Three minutes doesn't seem like much time to make your point, but you can pack a lot into it and the results can be quite powerful.

The following tips will help you write effective body copy.

Get to the point

We must be powerful and concise in our writing. A captive audience for our communications does not exist. Americans are bombarded with:

- *500 commercial images per day*

If that is not distraction enough, they also have available:

- *10,000 magazines*
- *6,000 radio stations*
- *400 television stations*

There is no time in DTP material for rambling introductions, space to tell your personal history, the theories behind what you're writing or your feelings on why you think it is important.

Nor is there room for apologies, Please don't ever say, "This is such an important topic, I really can't do it justice in this small space."

No one piece ever said it all. John tells us that even all of the books in the world can't begin to tell the full story of Jesus. Think of your writing as a continuing dialog with your audience. Tell them one thing at a time, get right to the point, and then tell them something else another time.

The following example is an excellent illustration of this principle. It comes from a church newsletter and is part of a continuing series of articles on working with volunteers.

Make your meetings matter

by Gretchen Richardson, Director of Volunteers

Volunteers need to feel that their presence matters—that what they discuss and plan will result in decisive action and visible ministry. How you conduct your meetings sends a direct message to volunteers on how much they matter to you.

How are your meetings?

- Is your committee stuck in a reporting mode so that you can't decide where you're going?
- Do the staff chairs make the reports rather than leading an exploration of goals, making decisions and determining action?
- Are committee members slipping away?

Here are some meeting hints that may be helpful:

- Try skipping the reports.
- Try dealing with a clear agenda, making critical decisions, and taking action.
- Let volunteers know that their opinions do matter. Wake everybody up and give them the chance to participate.
- If no action is required, decide whether the meeting is necessary. If not, call it off or postpone it.

Next week: How can business and fellowship be combined?

Adapted from FUMC

No wasted words here. The author gets directly to the point, tells the story, and quits.

Write for the eye

Desktop writers can place words on a page, but unless they create a clear and vivid picture in another's mind, the message isn't communicated. A selection of words alone won't communicate. Our minds have to create a visual image to give our emotions and will something to respond to. Choose words that will fashion a specific and powerful image in your mind's eye. Make your audience touch, see, smell and experience exactly experience what you are writing about. The examples below show how to do it. First, try to picture this description of a ministry:

This first description does not give the mind's eye a concrete picture—"wonderful" is a word without a specific meaning.

Description #1

I want to share with you how wonderful the Prison Fellowship pen pal program is.

What do you see in your mind's eye? You don't see anything specific do you?

Now try to visualize this:

In this description, the specific words enable the reader to see the ministry.

Description #2

Mark had been in prison for two years. During that time he had never had a visitor, never received a letter or a phone call.

His first contact with anyone outside the prison came the day he got his first letter from his Prison Fellowship pen pal.

Do you see Mark? Of course you do.

Different readers might see a different Mark, but each one sees a person being helped in a concrete way. You see him in the second description and not the first because the second description contains concrete words that call up concrete images in your mind.

Generalities like "wonderful" call up completely different images in each person's mind. When some people think "wonderful," they think hot fudge sundae, not a prison ministry. Give people a concrete picture made up of specific people, places or events to give meaning to whatever you write about.

How to write for the eye

Tell stories about specific people

Jesus was a master at this. He didn't just tell us that God waits to forgive us, that He loves us no matter how far we fall. He told the story of the prodigal son.

The Bible is filled with stories of the experiences of individuals. When we think about the Bible what comes to mind is not the doctrine of the atonement or the theology of spiritual gifts. We think of Moses, Ruth and Peter. God used human lives to illustrate His eternal truths and our publications can do the same.

To illustrate a ministry, instead of using a dry description have somebody tell you their story. For example, imagine you want to get people to help in your youth program. You could place a notice like this in the church bulletin or newsletter:

Typical notice asking for help in a church newsletter.

Experience satisfaction in working with our youth—volunteer at the church office today!

Or you could tell the story about a couple who are working with youth like this youth department did in a recent newsletter:

Why do two 50-year-olds spend 20 hours each week in youth ministry?

"The Van Normans are the coolest adults I know," says eleventh grader, Jessica Untener.

This article not only asks for help, but it tells you what your involvement would be like, allows you to meet a couple already involved, and puts the needs and rewards of the ministry in the terms of their life.

You may not either have or want to use this much space in your newsletter to write a story like this. You can still illustrate a ministry or lesson in the life of a person in a paragraph or two.

Look at the Gospels for examples of how to do this. In Luke 21:1-4, Jesus illustrates sacrificial giving by briefly telling the story of a widow who gave "all she had to live on."

The life you put into your story is more important than the length.

Jessica has known the Van Normans for two years through Disciple Bible Study, retreats and mission trips. She's not alone in her evaluation of the "cool" Van Normans. Linn and Judy have been loving teenagers at First Church for the past five years. They've done everything from teach Sunday School to sweat on mission trips. Currently they lead 27 youth in Disciple Bible Study on Sunday nights. They are putting in about 20 hours per week in ministry.

"The more we put in, the more we get back," says 51-year-old Linn. "God has put us in a situation financially so that we can give a lot of our time to teens." The Van Normans believe God has blessed them, not so that they can travel the world, but so they can contribute to the lives of others.

Judy and Linn feel their calling is to teenagers because they remember their own struggles as teens. "I remember my own adolescence clearly," says Judy. "There were a lot of conflicts. I wish I could have had a significant adult that I could have talked to. It would have made a difference for me."

The pay-off comes in the connectedness we feel to the kids in love, understanding and appreciation.

So what makes a "cool" youth worker? The Van Normans didn't come equipped with boom boxes, but they've got one invaluable asset. "Love is the only way to live successfully," says Judy. "And God is love."

The difference that Christ's love has made in their lives is what the Van Normans are sharing with our teens.

If you've got some extra time and love to give, meet with us for one hour on Wednesday evening, June 6 at 6:00 p.m. in the youth meeting room. We'll be sharing an overview of the ministry of the youth department and ways you can help. Our needs range from volunteer prayer partners and cookie makers to active involvement with the kids. The time involved? From one hour a week to as much time as you can spare. Call us at 555-0000 for more info.

Adapted from FUMC

Illustrate a concept or theological idea with a real-life situation or picture.

Again, the Bible is masterful in doing this. In it we witness people living out the reality of God in their lives. Our challenge is to come up with illustrations from life today to change lives.

For example, say you want to motivate people to work with your youth program. You want people to see how difficult life has become for teenagers today and you decide teen suicide is the example you will use to illustrate it. You could say:

The facts are impressive amounts, but they don't communicate anything real.

Too many kids are dying by their own hands each year. And though the number that commit suicide is in the thousands, even more attempt suicide.

Or you could say:

A word picture that makes the facts come alive.

Think back to the last athletic event you attended at a high school gym. Envision the mass of kids, their enthusiasm and excitement. The average high school gym holds 1,000 kids. Last year the same number of students that would fill five high school gyms—5,000 kids—took their lives. Ten to twenty times that many attempted self-destruction.

How do you come up with life pictures that illustrate what you want to communicate? Here are some ideas:

- Keep in mind what you'll be writing about and keep your eyes open to the larger picture of life. When something reminds you of something else make a note of it.
- Ask other people, in your ministry or church, what reminds them of salvation or grace or any other topic you wonder about.
- Be prepared to do research. When I got the idea for the suicide illustration above, I called high schools and colleges all over the area asking about the seating capacity of their gyms.
- Keep a file of ideas for future writing and illustrations.

Tell the tiny tale

A tiny tale is also known as an anecdote, “a short entertaining account of some event.” These are the stories, the life of any communication piece that make it come alive. These are the images we remember.

Anecdotes are especially useful in DTP writing because we can tell the tale, and then follow it with the lesson we want to teach. If we've shared a vivid word picture, not only will our audience understand our teaching but the picture will remain in people's minds and our lesson will be tied to it.

In the same issue of the youth newsletter on the previous page the youth minister had a message to share. The story on the next page shows how he did it.

In this story the author uses the story of his lost daughter to communicate a message about God's unconditional love.

We see God's love fleshed out in Robert's concern for his daughter.

This is an effective and powerful way to teach a lesson about God's love.

Look for events in your life that remind you of biblical truth and record them for resources in your writing.

My daughter was lost in the woods

Linn and Judy Van Norman and I were talking on their front deck when my six-year-old daughter Amanda asked if she could take a hike out around their house. The Van Normans live on a high ridge that is surrounded by woods filled with short, safe hiking trails. Off Amanda went.

When she didn't return after 15 minutes I began to worry. I realized it would be very easy for a little girl to become disoriented in the woods and end up lost. Linn and I searched the area around his house for another 10 minutes but could not find Amanda.

I was scared. I decided to make one more sweep through the woods before I called the Search and Rescue Unit. But as I set off into the woods, Amanda emerged and came running into my arms. She was crying but relieved that she was found.

Lost from God

As I reflected on what happened to us, I began to think about what it is like for God when we are lost from Him. When we become disoriented in the woods of life, we often make decisions that take us away from God.

When we are lost, does God hate us for it? Does God get angry with us? I don't think so. When Amanda was lost, my only concern was her welfare. I would have done anything to help her get back home.

I think that must be the way God thinks of us when we are away from Him. Like me, as our Father God will do anything to help get us out of the woods. Jesus demonstrated that to us by laying down His own life to rescue us from our lostness. As the Bible puts it, "While we were still sinners [lost], Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Yet is so easy to think Christ hates us when we stumble away from Him. But the reality is, like a parent with a lost child, Jesus searches earnestly for us in the woods. What a relief when we are found by Him.

God doesn't hate us for being lost. He just wants to help us find our way home.

adapted from FUMC

It's interesting how the mind works when we read stories. We can take a specific example and generalize it to our lives—from Amanda's story we feel what it is like to be searched for and found by a loving father. But it's difficult to do the reverse. If we hear a general statement like "God is waiting for you in a non-judgmental way to come to Him" —we aren't touched as deeply.

Some tips on finding tiny tales:

- Journal about how you see God working in your life and the life of others. Record when your life is similar to a lesson in the Bible. Look at your journal for stories to share.
- Read about the lives of others. It's OK to tell a story about another's life.
- Ask people to tell you stories. Ask kids, ask teens, ask seniors, "Tell me about a time in your life when God taught you a lesson."
- Don't make them up and pass them off as true. If you can't come up with a real life story be sure to say something like, "Imagine this event happening. . . ."

Practical writing how-tos

"If a writer is so cautious that he never writes anything that cannot be criticized, he will never write anything that can be read. If you want to help other people you have got to make up your minds to write things that some men will condemn. . . . If you write for God, you will reach many men and bring them joy. If you write for men, you may make some money and you may give someone a little joy and you may make a noise in the world for a little while. If you write for yourself, you can read what you yourself have written and after ten minutes you will be so disgusted that you will wish that you were dead."

C.S. Lewis

Know the length needed before you start

Make a mock-up and count words or lines on the computer or by hand—whatever you need to do to have a realistic estimate of the length you can write. Then write with that guideline in mind. If someone else is writing, give them the guidelines also.

This seems obvious, but somehow people tend to think that DTP can take a piece of writing of any length and compress it into whatever space is available just by passing it through the computer—it doesn't work that way.

Write a terrible first draft

Give yourself permission to be awful and just begin writing. Start anywhere, start in the middle, start at the end and work backwards, it doesn't matter, just get something on paper and then go back and clean it up later.

You'll always be surprised—your first draft may need work, but it's usually much better than you first thought.

After you've gotten it down, first revise for structure and then revise for readability and grammar.

Ignore the voice within

You'll always hear messages like this one writer recorded in his journal, "I'm no good. . . I'm desperately upset about it. I have no discipline anymore."

Remember Satan is the accuser, and you can bet he won't leave you alone when you are working on writing that can heal and bless and bring people to the Savior. Refuse to listen to that voice.

Know when to let go and go to press

You will rarely, if ever, have all the time you want to do a DTP piece of writing as perfectly as you'd like.

Part of the reason for this situation is the tremendous time acceleration of DTP production. In the past, you may have never even thought about doing a newsletter, let alone getting one out weekly or monthly.

Another potential problem with DTP is you can continue to make changes up to minutes before you run it off and you'll always see one more thing you'd like to do. Or someone else in the ministry will see it and they won't realize that "one little change" will cause you to have to rearrange four pages.

Set realistic deadlines; work until you meet them; then stop and save your improvements for your next project.

Desktop publishing, like the rest of our life, is a pilgrimage—nobody has arrived at perfection yet.

Writing for the Web—suggestions for success

By Yvon Prehn

For ministry leaders accustomed to writing for paper-based communications, writing for the web presents new challenges and requires new skills. In this article we'll discuss some of the differences between paper-based and web-posted communications and what to do about them to help you make your web-posted writing achieve your ministry goals.

What's new in web-posted communication

It's non-linear communication.

In contrast, when writing for a paper-based publication, we assume that our readers will start at the beginning of an article and progress in a linear manner through it to the end. We take this progression for granted as we construct our arguments or teaching.

You can't count on that linear progression for material posted on the web. Readers can scroll up, down, jump to a page or section or topic at will.

One suggested solution is to divide your material into manageable chunks, that make sense on their own. Provide clear markers (top of page, beginning of list, index, etc.) and links so they can go to these sections easily.

The reader is in control.

When you publish something on paper, perhaps a newsletter article or update in a ministry publication that you send out on a set schedule, you decide what you want people to read and when you want them to see it. You give up this control when you publish on the web. You put the material out there and your readers come to you if and when they want to.

There are two areas that you have to deal with concerning this issue. First of all, we often say our writing is done to serve our constituency. We have to put the works of service into practice in writing for the web. Our heart and attitudes often need to be changed before we can change the outward format.

Second your material has to be organized in ways that serve your readers, that help them get the information they want. It doesn't matter how cool you think something is or how necessary or important if people aren't accessing it.

You find out what your readers want by observing what is accessed on your site and what isn't. You ask what they want, in surveys, in informal conversations, in structured interviews.

One of the great things about the web is that it is such a fluid, flexible medium. If something doesn't work, you haven't printed 50,000 hard copies that are suddenly useless.

What isn't new in web posted communication

The importance of content over design

It seems that with every new technology it is easy to become enamored with the latest innovations and forget it's simply another tool we can use to tell the story of the gospel and the role of our particular church or ministry in sharing it.

One of the signs that a ministry is more enamored with the new tool than the effectiveness of their communication is an overemphasis on web design for design's sake. I realize some of my following comments are my personal reaction, but when I go to a ministry web site, I usually go for information. If I want to be entertained I go to a movie. Flashing animations and overly complex designs do not impress me, they irritate me. I realize that there is a place for every sort of technological wizardry for web sites for teens, gen xers etc., but as with any publication, if your site is for the average middle-aged church goer, don't assume that the latest web magic your web designer is dying to try will impress them.

The importance of honesty in your communications

This would seem to be obvious in any web site that calls itself Christian, but I have seen and had personal experiences with far too many web sites recently, where the look of the web site does not truly reflect the ministry. In the past few months, my husband, a pastor on study leave has attended two seminars put on by national ministries that we found on the web. Both web sites were highly professional, very well done, very technically advanced. One assumed the seminars would reflect the same degree of professionalism.

They did not. In one, the presenter used overheads (no Powerpoint projection) and didn't even bother to write in the fill-in the blank statements, on old, well-used acetates. In the second, the highly advertised Christian leader who was supposed to speak did not even show up. Very different than the high tech, super professional web site that advertised the events.

It is the responsibility of every leader in a church or Christian ministry to make certain that their web presence and presentation is a true representation of the ministry itself.

Many publications for small businesses have written much about how an elaborate web site can make a small business look like a major organization. It's also true that your web site can make any church or ministry look like a professional mega-ministry. While the value of that technique may be debatable from a business perspective, to represent yourself as something you are not in ministry is not communicating with integrity.

Final advice for leaders writing for the web

Be involved in the graphic design and final form of your web site material.

Don't just pass content on to your web master without being involved in how it will be presented. Take the time to understand and work together on breaking lengthy content into sections. Learn how to layer content. Think about what other topics relate to yours and learn how to link to useful additional material. Talk to; survey, learn about how your readers want to take in your information and structure your material to meet their needs.

Don't assume fancy design equals ministry value.

Don't be intimidated by technological expertise. Good communication principles never change. If you don't like how something on your web site works and most of your constituency are people in your age group, they probably won't like it either.

Read Jakob Nielson's book, *Web Usability*. It is a classic on the value of information over appearance on the web.

Do an integrity check on your finished web site.

Ask yourself, “Does this correctly reflect who we are as a church or ministry? Is this a true representation? Do we follow up on the promises we make on the site?” Instill in everyone that works on your web site that you want to communicate with honesty and integrity in images as well as words.

Pray that the Lord will help your web site to be a true representation on who you truly are and your place in ministry. Pray for wisdom and insight that no matter what tools you use, the truth and power of the gospel message will be clearly communicated.

Content quality essential for ministry communication success

By Yvon Prehn

In a past article, web guru Gerry McGovern says, “Web content management will continue its shift away from a technology focus towards a content one.” The bottom line for your church or ministry is: it isn’t enough just to have a website (or newsletter or multimedia). You must present content of value to your reader. Following are some ideas to help you do that.

Realize your audience is not impressed with your mastery of technology

The increase in spending on technology and the increase of church websites has not contributed significantly to increased attendance in most churches in North America. I summarized the situation this way in my new book, *Ministry Marketing Made Easy*:

“We did it with desktop publishing!” “We have a new projection system in the church!” “We now have a web site!” and similar affirmations can be heard when a church finally figures out how to use some new technology. This subtle (and often unspoken or misanalysed) shift assumes that if we master the marketing communication tools, including desktop publishing programs, multimedia and projection software, and web sties, then our message will be successfully communicated. Mastering the medium has become the focus of our energies.

The world is not impressed.”

In contrast to mastering the medium, we’ve got to get back to mastering the creation and control of our content. To do that, we’ve often got to start from the ground up.

Review the rules for content creation

In redoing my ministry website, I’ve found I’ve needed to review some basic writing and content creation skills. The guidelines for good communication never change. We might get distracted from them momentarily by the novelty of new form of presentation, but that novelty wears off quickly. The three books I’m currently reviewing are:

The Elements of Style

By William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White

Every blog writer ought to be required to pass a test on this book before being allowed to post. Over 75 years ago, in the book, William Strunk seems almost prophetic in his *List of Reminders on Style* when he commanded:

“9. Do not affect a breezy manner

The volume of writing is enormous, these days, and much of it has a sort of windiness about it, almost as though the author were in a sate of euphoria. “Spontaneous

me,” sang Whitman, and, in his innocence, let loose the hordes of uninspired scribblers who would one day confuse spontaneity with genius.

The breezy style is often the work of an egocentric, the person who imagines that everything that pops into his head is of general interest and that uninhibited prose creates high spirits and carries the day. . . . He has not done his work.”

This little book teaches the writer once again how to do his or her work. On the web, the danger of thinking that whatever comes out of your head is brilliant is especially tempting because of the ease of publishing on the web. There is value in sharing your thoughts, no matter how polished or professional, but don't delude yourself that free flowing always equates with genius.

On Writing Well, an informal guide to writing nonfiction
By William Zinsser

Again, though written over 25 years ago, Zinsser could have been writing about the current state of many web sites when he said, “Clutter is the disease of American writing. We are a society strangling in unnecessary words, circular constructions, pompous frills and meaningless jargon.”

McGovern advises his corporate audience to clean up their websites and one command of Zinsser's is a great starting point: “Simplify, prune and strive for order.”

On Writing, a memoir of the craft
By Stephen King

Yes, the same one that writes all the horror stories. This is not a Christian writer's handbook. If a few words of profanity and bits of bathroom humor offend you, don't bother reading it. But if you can put that aside, it is a quiet, thoughtful book from a man who won a Bible as a little boy from memorizing verses in Sunday School, who totally adores his wife and often mentions her, who tells the story of how he almost died when he was hit by a van taking his usual walk in the country, and who absolutely loves to write.

His advice on grammar, I believe, applies to web creation as well: “Communication . . . must be organized by rules of grammar upon which we agree. When these rules break down, confusion and misunderstanding result.”

Similarly, on the web and elsewhere we take in information of all sorts by often unspoken rules of content organization. When a web site (or any form of communication) focuses on anything other than the importance of its primary message (in flash animations, cramming as many ads as possible on the page, etc.) confusion and misunderstanding result here also.

All three books were recently available on www.amazon.com for around \$7 each, used.

Newsletter article advice: long vs. short, sermons or not

By
Yvon Prehn

At a seminar I gave recently, a church business administrator asked me: “For our church newsletters, should it contain long articles or short ones, sermons or not, visitor friendly?” It’s a great question and one that should be answered as you plan the content for your church or ministry newsletter. We’ll explore the options for answering it in this article.

Long articles or short?

The answer to that part of the questions isn’t as obvious as it might seem. I think initially, with our busy schedules today many people would instinctively answer “SHORT!” Almost no one complains that newsletter articles are too short.

But in consideration of length there are a number of factors to consider:

- Newsletters contain a variety of material. Some is vision-casting from the senior pastor, some teaching, some history or story-telling, some news, notes and announcements.
- More important than setting an arbitrary length, the length of the articles or announcements in your newsletter material should be appropriate to the topic. For example, if the senior pastor is explaining the vision of the church, inspiring members for outreach or missions, setting a new direction or challenging for a building campaign, that piece might require a page or two.
- Announcements of reoccurring events usually do not need long, lengthy explanations on why people should attend. Short, catchy announcements designed what I call “want-ad style” and that contain the name of the sponsoring person or group, purpose, starting and ending time, full contact information, cost and directions to get there and if child care is provided are what is needed.
- At the same time, even more lengthy material that takes a page or two can be made more visually interesting by breaking it into sections with headers, summarizing key facts in a side-bar, pulling out interesting or key quotes and highlighting them, adding a picture and caption. A page or two with these visual elements integrated into the story will be read more easily than a solid page or two of text with not breaks.

Sermons or not? Seeker-Friendly or not?

Again, no simple answer.

We know we shouldn't use terms like justification and sanctification in our church bulletin when we are first talking to unchurched folks, but so much of our church jargon, we don't even see. The examples above are all out of real church bulletins and similar ones could be repeated thousands of times. Our insider talk, terms and jargon permeates the initial printed pieces we give visitors telling them that this church is for those in the know only. We don't even see it, but they do and they don't come back.

Jargon solutions

Awareness is a good first step. Look at your bulletin and other publications that are some of the first things seen by a visitor and ask the Lord to help you see them as a visitor would.

Ask yourself what would make you feel welcome?

At the least, welcome people, tell them what is going on. On pages of announcements for church people only, in addition to explaining as much as you can, giving complete information such as beginning and ending times, locations, contact phone numbers, etc., you might consider some sort of heading such as:

“Church Family Activities: below are all of the events taking place in our church this week. We realize that newcomers might not be familiar with all the programs or people. Please call xxxxxxx, email xxxx or visit our website xxxx for explanations and more complete descriptions. We welcome you and invite you to participate in all of the activities of our church.”

A brief notice such as that at least acknowledges that newcomers might be in the congregation.

Follow up with some visitors—especially those who are new to church and ask them what would make them feel more welcome, what would they like to see in the initial literature they get when they come in the door.

Second, consider some radical revisions of your church bulletin. Redesign it with seekers in mind. Many churches have greatly modified their service, but what about your publications?

This is an area that needs great work in the church. We have incredible communication tools and technology and we need to revise our approach to publications so 100% of those visiting our church feel we care for them as much as the Savior who died for them.

Almost implied in the question is the supposition that a sermon isn't seeker-friendly. But there is no need for the two terms and approaches to be mutually exclusive.

When Jesus was on earth, He gave a lot of sermons. There is no doubt they were theologically correct, true and convicting, yet it says in Mark 12: 37 that "the people heard him with delight." Proverbs 16:23b reminds us that, "pleasant words promote instruction."

Our goal in our writing combination in ministry newsletters should be the same as our goal for a great meal for guests. It should be well balanced—meat and veggies for certain, but also some tasty appetizers and a bit of chocolate to top it off. Here are some hints on how to achieve that balance.

- Picture the people you are talking to. You aren't writing for your seminar professor anymore. Actually put some of their pictures by your computer. Your level and style of writing will vary according to the people attending your church and those you want to attend, but talk to *them*, not to an imaginary critic. Put a little chocolate next to the steak.
- The better you know your people and those you want to reach, the better you can write seeker-joyous sermons. Walk the neighbor. Take informal surveys. Ask people what are their dreams, their fears, the questions they have. Answer them in your newsletter articles.
- Before you sit down to write, read USA TODAY and some current, popular news magazines. Especially in USA TODAY there are great examples of writing that explains often complex topics in an upbeat, easy to read and understand style. Also notice how the publication writes headlines, subheads and captions. These can add interest and reader involvement in your story.
- Speaking of stories—tell them. Stories about real people or about you are a great way to illustrate a lesson and be interesting at the same time. They don't always have to be deadly serious to teach a serious lesson. Jesus wasn't. Think about it. At the wedding at Cana he turned huge water pots into giant jugs of wine—that's like turning your hot tub into a punch bowl. A bit over the top, but a lesson never forgotten was taught.

Don't forget the details

Sometimes what makes a newsletter most friendly to seekers (and to people who aren't regular attenders at your church) are the little details that we think everybody knows. But everybody doesn't know and when you leave these things out, no matter how upbeat your graphics or how colorful your writing, the content can leave people cold. Some of these details are:

- Stating that anyone (or if attendance is limited to an age group or to men and women) can come to an event. If you advertise a “Singles Night Out” and a newcomer in their early 60s shows up and the rest of the group is all singles in their 20s because “everybody knows the Going Concern is for 20 somethings” but you don’t state it in the announcement, chances are that person won’t return to your church.
- Making the details child care clear. There are many single parents who would love to come to church if the church provided free child care for church events. If it doesn’t specifically state “Free child care for kids babies to 6th grade” most single parents just don’t attend.
- If an event costs make that very clear. It isn’t nice to assume “everybody knows the men’s breakfast is \$5 at the door.” If you don’t list it clearly be sure a person with the gift of grace and mercy is at the door for folks who didn’t bring \$5 with them.

Making your newsletter something people read with delight isn’t a matter so much of rules, but of loving your people, talking to them, asking their needs and feedback and genuinely seeking to serve them with your publications.

For more information on creating successful internal marketing, please check out my website: www.thelionsvoice.com. You can also sign up for my free newsletter on ministry communications by sending me an email with SEND FREE NEWSLETTER in the subject line to: yvonprehn@aol.com.

Use a REPORTER FORM to make putting together your publications easier and more complete

You don't need to be told how hard it is to get people to write for the church letter, bulletin, or whatever it is that you need to publish in the church office. Typically, you ask folks to "write up a little piece telling me what's happening in the mission's committee this

quarter" or men's ministry, or youth department, or whatever. You wait and wait; you call; you remind them and the piece finally comes in. Then you end up rewriting most of it because the person you asked to do it isn't used to having to write. When they see your corrections their feelings are hurt and they never want to write for you again. You feel like you can't win.

Reporter form for ABC Church

Thanks so much for agreeing to be a contributor to the communication ministry for our church. Please fill in the form below and return it to _____ no later than _____. We will take your basic information, write it up and use it in whatever of the following formats we are able to: the bulletin, newsletter, web site and other mailers or PR pieces. Please call _____ if you have questions.

Name of event _____ Date _____

Sponsored by: department of church or person _____

Person in charge and phone number _____

Location of event _____

If not at the church, please give directions and a name and phone number for the location _____

Time (be sure to include start and ending) _____

Cost _____

Child care? Cost and location _____

Who is it for? Age group, church, visitors etc. _____

Describe the activity:

What will the person attending get out of it?

Why should people attend?

Any other information we need to know:

Thanks so much for taking time to do this. Now our job will be to publicize the event; your job is do all you can to make it an event the Lord will be proud of and to pray for the leaders and people attending.

Blessings!

The Communications Department at ABC Church

Reporter forms are the solution! Instead of asking people to write the pieces themselves, just ask them to fill out the form. It takes them less time and you can easily write it up what you need. You can list the person who provided the information in the publication as a "Contributor" and nobody's feelings are hurt.

Additional benefits: if they don't have time to fill out the form, it's very easy to use the form, call, and interview them. Also, you can keep the completed forms by the phone in the church office and if someone calls and has a question you have all the information right there.

The Lord calls us to work in peace and joy as we serve him. This form may help accomplish that goal.

Sample reporter form
Use a form like this to get in information for your ministry publications and it will make your job easier than having to rewrite the typical pieces that are turned in. Modify the form any way you want to make it useful to you and your people.

Captions define what we see—*never* publish a photo without them

WE'VE ALL HEARD the saying, "a picture is worth a 1,000 words." That may be true, but when creating your DTP publications for ministry, it is very important to ask, "which 1,000 words?"

If you don't have a caption under a picture, you probably haven't communicated the true message of the picture. No photograph is self-explanatory; without a clear caption, people will make up

their own meaning for the photo. It may not be what you intended.

On the other hand, if you put a clear, complete caption under a photo, it can tell the entire message you want to communicate, invite people to a ministry event, promote a program, or inspire folks in their walk with God.

Photos are always a powerful drawing piece in a publication. People may

not always read the articles, but they always look at the pictures. Use a clear complete caption under the picture to then make sure you are getting your message across.

In the sample illustrated, the photograph is from the Inspirational Images Photo CD by Proclaim Communications (for how to order, see p. 2), notice how the varying captions cause the picture to "say" a 1,000 different words.

Application: How to get the most out of your photos and captions

- **Select a photo that represents the message you want to convey.** Ask yourself: what is the most important message you want to get across? Is it to market an event? To get folks to think about an issue?

- **Summarize the message in your caption** after you've decided on the most important message. If you want a response, ask for it in the caption.

- **A photo of one person to illustrate an event is much more effective than a photo of a group.** Picture how differently the effectiveness of the illustrated photo would have been if instead of having one boy with his fish, you would have just lined up all the kids by the lake and published a group picture.

Group pictures don't *say* anything visually. Edit them like you would a story that has too many words.

- **Print your photos large enough for people to see what is going on.** If you can't see the expressions on faces or easily tell people apart, you've probably printed the picture too small.

- **Always print your captions next to your photo.** If you don't, our minds won't store the message and the picture together and you've lost the power of the caption.

Caption options



photo: Proclaim Communications

1. Identifying caption
Kevin Myers, from Olathe, Kansas exhibits the first fish he caught at the Ol' Fishin' Hole at Camp Lazy Days. The "First Fisherman's Camp" teaches boys 6-10 how to have fun fishing.

2. Marketing caption
Attention kids! If you've never had experience fishing and you'd like to learn, we've got a place for you! Our Ol' Fishin' Hole will turn anyone into a successful fisherman just like young Kevin Myers here. Sign up now!

3. Questioning caption
What was a flesh-eating piranha doing in the Ol' Fishin' Hole?

4. Bible-lesson caption
It makes a person proud to catch a fish and it isn't always easy to land one. We need to remember to not only have fun at the Ol' Fishin' Hole, but to learn how to be "fishers of men" like Jesus taught His disciples to be.

5. Pull quote caption
"I was scared to try fishing!" says Kevin of his first fish-catching prize, "but my counselor helped me and made it easy and fun!"

6. Thought-provoking caption
When was the last time your life was this carefree? Come to the men's breakfast and learn about "Recapturing the Art of Having Fun."

Write for results, not just to inspire

Have you ever heard someone described as being "so heavenly minded they were no earthly good?"

In a similar vein, the book of James talks about "faith, by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17).

Neither of these statements put down the value either of being heavenly minded or of having faith, but they illustrate a challenge to those who write Christian desktop publishing. That challenge is to combine your inspirational messages with a clear call for life-changing action.

There are two key reasons for doing this. First, is the example of the how Jesus communicated, and second is the need for clear messages in people's lives today.

Jesus communicated for action

Much of Jesus' communication followed the two-step process of first teaching a spiritual truth and then asking for action. The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 gives numerous examples of this method:

- **Teaching:** "You are the salt of the earth. . . . You are the light of the world."
- **Action:** "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16).
- **Teaching:** "Why do you worry

about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. . . . If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

- **Action:** "So do not worry" (Matthew 5:28-33).

Life today requires clear communication

If you want people to do something based on your communication, tell them clearly. Don't assume they will figure out what you want or give or volunteer based on vague spiritual promptings. People don't have the time.

Much writing done by DTP is in newsletters, bulletins, donor letters and updates. These pieces need a response—ask for it. For example:

- If you are writing to inspire a life change based on Christian teaching, give a brief biblical lesson and follow with a clear statement of how to apply it to everyday life.
- If you need volunteers, state the need, list clearly how many people you need, what the requirements and commitments are, and what training will be given.
- If you have a financial need, give the background, show precisely what the funds will be used for and then ask for a clear commitment.

Our publications should reflect acceptance, not condemnation

John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

This verse is a caring challenge to our attitude as communicators. What is the overall tone of our ministry—is it to condemn or to save?

Look at the ministry of Jesus. This verse is part of his talk with Nicodemus, the teacher of the Law who came to Jesus at night asking questions. I wonder if Nicodemus might not have left more confused than when he came. Here was a man people were calling a prophet, but he wasn't like any prophet who was before him.

Jesus didn't call down fire from heaven; he turned water into wine at a wedding. He didn't part the sea or send plagues; he played with children and set out picnics on the beach for his disciples. When Nicodemus asked Jesus about his message, he didn't retell all the shortcomings of the world he had come to straighten out. Instead he told him that God loved the world, and that he did not come to condemn but to save.

Do our communications reflect the redeeming nature of our Lord? How easy it is to take pen in hand (or today, mouse and keyboard) and to pile on guilt. Not that there is never a time to point out error, but for the most part we do well to remember it is the Holy Spirit's job to convict of sin (John 16:7-9).

It is our job to share the good news of salvation and the joy and fulfillment of living for Jesus.

Most people today know they fall short. They aren't sure quite what of, but a pervasive sense of guilt fills many lives. Alcohol, drugs, unhealthy relationships, and overwork are some common attempts to medicate the pain. People don't need more bad news from the followers of Jesus.

They need good news. They need acceptance. They need to be invited to the eternal community of forgiveness and meaning found in Jesus.

As you plan and produce your ministry communications, pray that they be filled with the good news of salvation, of the grace and love of your Lord.

From: *The Heart of Church Communication*, by Yvon Prehn, available from www.lulu.com/yvonprehn

Out of the heart, we communicate

Matt 12:34 You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. 35 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

Out of the abundance of the heart not only does the mouth speak, but the computer creates.

The quality of communication we produce never ultimately depends on circumstances outside ourselves. It's easy to blame tight deadlines, inadequate equipment, and the difficult people we work with for doing less than our best, but ultimately the quality of our ministry communications reflects our hearts.

We always have choices within circumstances. Tight deadlines can challenge us to streamline our methods, to focus our work. Inadequate equipment can challenge our creativity to see just how much we can get out of this old machine. Difficult people can drive us to prayer and force us to learn interpersonal skills.

It's in our hearts that we decide whether or not we believe that "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans. 8:28, NAS).

If our heart is the key, how can we make it overflow with what is pleasing to our Lord?

Overflow comes from an abundance of what is already inside. Fill your heart with the things of God. Spend time in his Word; read your Bible daily; listen to Christian tapes and music; be with other Christians in church and conversation. Think about God's promises and challenges; write his encouragements and promises on cards to post by your computer.

If you consciously work to fill your mind with the things of God, if his Word and will is your priority, your heart and communication work will naturally and joyfully reflect it.

End notes, Reprint Information, Resources, etc.

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I would appreciate you linking to the website, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

PLEASE let your friends know about our ministry of helping church communicators and the resources we have for them at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn.

Interview info:

If you would like to interview Yvon Prehn on any of the topics in this publication or any topic related to church communications for either print articles or other media, I'd be happy to chat—contact me through yvon@effectivechurchcom.com. I have done extensive radio work, some television, and am comfortable with unscripted interviews, call-in, and talk formats.

Additional resources, training and church communication instruction:

The website: www.effectivechurchcom.com has hundreds of articles, videos, podcasts and additional resources to help you grow as an effective church communicator. The website has free materials, low-cost downloadable communication helps, and materials available to members only,

Effective Church Communications also has a church communication resources storefront at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn that sells downloadable and paperback books and instructional materials on CDs.

Citation note:

Some of the material here appeared in earlier versions of articles in *Christian Computing Magazine*, articles in my newsletters or other publications, my misc. books and reprints, or on my website, www.effectivechurchcom.com. I'm always advising church communicators of the importance of repetition and I repeat key articles, advice, and key communication teachings in many ways.

Scripture versions and citations:

Unless otherwise noted, Bible verses are from the New International Version.

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Comments, corrections, questions, suggestions for additional articles or information to help church communications etc.

Please send to yvon@effectivechurchcom.com

And may the Lord give you strength, joy, wisdom, and peace as you serve Him in church communications ministry,

Yvon Prehn

Ventura, CA

About Effective Church Communications

Effective Church Communications is a ministry that provides training, resources, and inspiration to help church communicators

fully fulfill the Great Commission. The hub of our ministry is the website: www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Our definition of effective church communication is communication that fully fulfills the Great Commission—that helps people come to know Jesus as Savior and helps grow them to mature discipleship.

Our approach to church communications includes more than design and communication construction how-tos, though we have lots of them. It includes foundational, biblical teaching related to communications, communication leadership, and church communication teams. We constantly remind church communicators that we have been entrusted with the words of eternal life and the eternal destinies of people depend on how well we communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

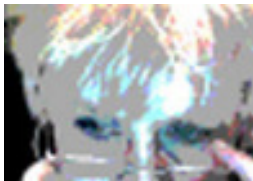
Though we work hard to stay current with technology (our training is web-based, we tweet, podcast, and are moderate tech junkies), we value and teach timeless communication skills and principles. The majority of our training has application in every communication channel from print to podcasts.

We believe churches of every size, from tiny house churches to mega-churches benefit from clear, effective communication. We strongly encourage churches be who they are in their communications and to reflect their unique denomination and heritage. We encourage them to speak personally to their congregation and community rather than copy the latest mega-church or marketing trend.

We do not allow, encourage, link to, or promote in any way, irreverent, profane language or snarky, cynical approaches to church communication or in the discussion of it. We serve a holy God and we seek in all we do to walk worthy as we communicate a worthy message.

We strongly believe church communicators, from any size church, who use any software, with any skill level, can do all the work they need to, with the people (staff and volunteers) they have, to create the communications needed at their church. We also believe church communicators from churches of every size and description be an encouragement and help to each other.

Though we encourage church communicators to pour their hearts, minds, and souls into the hard work of communicating the words of eternal life, we are constantly aware that our words will only accomplish eternal results because of His blessing of them and His working through them, by our eternal God.



About Yvon Prehn

Yvon Prehn is the founder and director of the training site for church communicators, www.effectivechurchcom.com.

Yvon has worked in communication ministry for over 25 years. She was a free-lance newspaper reporter and religion writer for the *Colorado Springs SUN*. She was a top-rated, national trainer in desktop publishing for Padgett/Thompson, the nation's largest one-day seminar company when desktop publishing was first invented. She worked as a communications consultant and trainer for many of the ministries headquartered in Colorado Springs and was senior editor at both Compassion International and Young Life International. For fourteen years she traveled full-time all over North America teaching seminars on church communications.

Yvon has written for many of the major Christian magazines. Her most recent books include: *Church Bulletins, how to create and use them to touch and change lives*, *Church Connection Cards*, and *The Five Steps of Effective Church Communications & Marketing*, all available at www.lulu.com/yvonprehn.

Yvon has a master's degree in Church History and has done additional extensive graduate work in theology and communications. She has taught high school English and was an adjunct professor in church history at Regis University. She is the wife of a bi-vocational pastor and does the secretarial and church communications work for her husband Paul, in addition to co-teaching in a variety of ministry settings at the church they work with in Ventura, California.