

# Opportunity



**Philip  
Dine**

**W**hen news events provide opportunities to get letter carriers' voices out there, we should take those opportunities.

They offer a chance to weigh in in a timely fashion. Focusing narrowly on an event already in the news is simpler than writing a standalone piece on a broad topic such as postal finances. Just make a point or two tied to the event in question, and you're done. Plus, because you're addressing something that's newsy, an editor is more likely to run it.

To be clear, some of you like to look at the big picture, informing readers of operating profits and a reliance on earned revenue, pre-funding and stamp price rollbacks, and the appropriate legislative fixes. That's important work that advances our efforts, so please continue to do it.

Others, though, may find it convenient to use the topic of the day to get the message out. For example, government shutdowns unfortunately seem to be making a comeback, given the partisan dysfunction in Washington, DC. That provides an opportunity to pen a quick letter to the editor, perhaps like this:

*Residents surely noticed that their mail was unaffected by the recent government shutdown—that's because the Postal Service doesn't use taxpayer money for its operations.*

*In fact, relying entirely on earned revenue, USPS provides [Ohio's, Nebraska's, Georgia's—plug in your state] residents and businesses, and their counterparts nationwide, with the industrial world's most affordable delivery network.*

Just two paragraphs, yet consider all you've communicated about our Postal Service: reliable, not funded by taxpayers, important for businesses and hence for jobs and our economy, affordable. You've also localized a national story. And you've surely opened some eyes—and minds—by explaining that folks are getting their mail and your visits and all the value you add at no extra cost.

If the publication—a metro or small town daily, a weekly, a business journal—has reported on the government shutdowns, you can cite the article in your letter. Editors like letters that mention their coverage. But if it hasn't, no problem.

Similarly, leading up to our food drive on May 12, a short letter could alert residents to the date, note the 1.6 billion pounds of food letter carriers have collected over the past quarter-century for distribution to food pantries and shelters and church shelves, and explain that food collected locally from generous residents stays in Pittsburgh or Buffalo or Amarillo (for you non-country music fans, that's in Texas).

Or, you might highlight a heroic or compassionate deed performed by a local letter carrier or branch, then note that we're always looking to help when needed—beyond delivering the mail, six days a week, without a dime of taxpayer money.

As always, let me know if you'd like help writing such letters, or getting them published.

**Speaking of which, given the positive response to last month's section on words and writing, I plan to make it an occasional element in this space. Here are a few more.**

The word "said" is a simple one—so simple that people often seek a more interesting substitute. And so we read that someone asserts or claims or contends.

Here's the thing: "said" is entirely neutral. Most of its synonyms are not. Writing that someone contends or maintains or asserts implies that what they're saying may be a stretch. And if you use "claims," you're expressing outright skepticism.

If you write, though, that someone observes or notes, explains or points out, you're suggesting that what follows is probably correct—that it's based in fact.

Either way, you're taking a stance on the person's truthfulness or accuracy. If that's your intent, make sure your term conveys what you intend.

Otherwise, it's best to stick with "said." If you really want a substitute, perhaps for variety's sake, "remarked" carries no judgment. Nor does "stated"—though it's a bit stilted.

A term I periodically see misused is "a propos," as in, *His response was entirely a propos*. But the term, borrowed from French, doesn't mean appropriate—it means "on the subject of" or simply "regarding." So using it as just noted is akin to saying, *His response was entirely regarding*. If you mean appropriate, just say appropriate.

"Incident" and "incidence" sometimes are used interchangeably; I've heard even law enforcement officials speak of "today's two incidences." That's nonsensical. Incident means event, while incidence means the rate at which something occurs. (To remember, note that "incident" and "event" both end in "t.") So, a story about a town's robbery spree over the past month could say, "With the 36 reported incidents, July's incidence of robbery is double that of any month so far this year."

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