

Delivering the message



Philip
Dine

This column is a hybrid, with a section about language and words that follows on two columns last year on writing, and a segment about the twin elements of discipline and vigilance in dealing with the media that we highlighted last month. The common feature, of course, is getting our message out effectively.

First, some writing thoughts. The overall theme here is to write tight. Flabby wording or redundancies rob you of space you could use more productively; they also encourage the reader to question what you're saying or even to turn away. As usual, these are merely examples of things I've noticed on the job; apply the notions more broadly, if you will.

Don't say "There are two more training sessions that are scheduled for later this year," but rather "Two more training sessions are scheduled later this year." Instead of "Some of the findings may not be surprising to you," write "Some of the findings may not surprise you." Small revisions like these can reduce your word count by 20 to 30 percent, giving you space for other ideas.

Two problems with this: "Some features unique only to the new equipment include..." First, "unique" and "only" are redundant—drop the "only." Meanwhile, "some" and "include" also are redundant; each indicates that what follows is a partial list. So, drop the "Some," as in, "Features unique to the new equipment include..."

Worse, I've seen "some" or "include"—or even both—used when the list that follows is indeed complete. You would never write, "Some of the U.S. states include..." and then list all 50 (you'd say, "The U.S. states are..."), so why do it elsewhere?

Finding the best verb produces more efficient writing. Rather than saying "The new equipment gives letter carriers the chance to develop certain skills," say "The new program allows (or enables) letter carriers to develop certain skills."

Don't say "in regard to" when you can write "as regards" or simply "regarding."

I've said this before, but it bears repeating—almost every time you think of using the word "different," think again. It's usually not only redundant but nonsensical as well. Consider, "He tried to represent letter carriers in a variety of different ways." Obviously, if they weren't different, there'd be only one way. But beyond simply dropping the "different," try this: "He tried to represent letter carriers in various ways." You're using 25 percent fewer words to convey a sim-

ple thought; the reader benefits, as do you.

This one isn't about wordiness, but it's worth noting. Don't say that someone was elected "during the convention," because that implies a continual action, as in "The meeting room was cold during the convention." Say that he was elected "at" the convention.

Now, to discipline and vigilance, in that order.

Whether we respond to media requests depends on various factors—the reporter, the outlet, the timing and the topic. On the latter, the matter of staffing shortages has been useful as we've addressed delivery issues and letter carrier safety in recent months. But with the start of NALC's negotiations with the Postal Service over a new collective-bargaining agreement, we don't want to discuss subjects that will likely arise during bargaining, such as staffing issues. So, for now, staffing shortages are *not* something to talk about with the media.

What to do, though, if asked by a reporter? Simply forward such requests to your branch president and/or to me to handle. If reporters ask you directly—in person or on the phone—don't say "No comment," because a reporter can turn that right into a comment, as in "Letter carrier John Smith refused to comment." Instead, say that you're in the middle of something and will try to get back to them. Then inform us.

Here's a good example of vigilance. Doug Jaynes of Denver Branch 47, who's carried mail for three decades and who serves as president of the Colorado State Association of Letter Carriers, alerted me weeks ago that ABC's Denver affiliate had reported on local delivery snafus, with the anchor expressing puzzlement given that USPS had a huge \$56 billion profit in 2022, more than all competitors combined. (She was erroneously conflating the ending of the pre-funding mandate with a revenue surge.) Doug alerted me, then contacted the news director at the TV station—which in subsequent reports on delivery issues has not repeated that misinformation.

Thanks to Doug, and thanks to all of you who are helping deliver the message or watching for reporting that should be corrected. This is a team effort, and working as a team we will prevail.

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