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Elementary Teachers

Teacher to Parent: Do you read me?

by Ed Grube

Do you have the gift of writing? Did you know that it's not so much a gift as it is hard work? The days of the one draft wonder are over. Truth be told, it never had a day. More truth: Parents need information. Many parents exert little effort to get it, which requires you to exert more effort to get them to read your newsletter.

Parents need information. Many parents exert little effort to get it, which requires you to exert more effort to get them to read your newsletter.

Five tips to maximize your efforts:

Communication factors speak louder than words.

While intended to let parents know about field trips, projects, class progress, and so forth, the communication piece also displays your professionalism. Since that's not the intent of the communication piece, there lurks a temptation known as flash and dash. Write out the news flash; dash off to something else. The consequences may be inaccurate spelling, confusing language, typographical trespasses, and pathetic punctuation. These all involve things taught in your school. The clash with consistency between teaching and doing will be detrimentally apparent to parents — especially your annual critics.

proofread

The remedy? Proofread your news before you publish it. Read it aloud. If you suffer spelling, vocabulary, and writing in general depravations, ask a spouse or friend to provide feedback. (It only hurts for a little while.) Activate your word processor's grammar checker.

Avoid bloating

Most Americans want information quickly. We teachers sometimes feel the need to explain everything. That tension often relegates teachers' newsletters and bulletins to low priorities. Principles that guide writing for the internet apply also to hardcopy. Bloated paragraphs have high morbidity rates. The victim is information that parents need, often without knowing that they need it. And it has potential to become contentious, as parents complain about what they didn't know — and blame you for it.

bloating

Keep communications brief. Newsletters that stretch beyond a page have a greater chance of not being read. Initially, it might take less time to write long newsletters than it does to produce short ones. That's because it's significant work to cram exciting ideas and effective reports into brief paragraphs. Does practice make the process become easier? Definitely—a maybe.

So what do you *not* write? The process of elimination may not require reducing the number of articles. You must judge which information is vital for each article or item. Do parents really need to know all the details that you know? Can you handle the parents who demand tons of details by inviting all parents to email or call for more information? An interesting aside is that the information age has offered so much information that it becomes almost impossible for decision-makers to reach conclusions; there simply are too many "ifs, ands, and buts."

Combat wordiness by:

- Chopping information into bullet points.
- Using a text box for announcements that don't require much information beyond "what, when, and where."
- Deleting adjectives and adverbs. Most are unnecessary in newsletters.

(The bulleted list above originally read "You can combat wordiness by chopping your information into bullet points. You can use a text box for announcements that don't require much information beyond "what, when,



Review, Reflect, Resolve

How do your written communications sound when they are read aloud?
Which writing mistakes do you make most often?
Who can you anoint (or is it appoint?) as trusted proofreader?

Links & Resources

[OneLook Dictionaries](#)

[Visual Thesaurus](#) (low-cost subscription)

[Gnarly Genglish](#)

[Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips](#)



Other articles you might be interested in in this issue of **ShapingtheFuture**:

[Who Advocates for the Church Worker?](#) by Julie Pallas (Feature)

[Bridging the Gap: Ministering to Children from Birth to Age Three](#) by Jennifer Welch (ECEnet)

[Life in the Real World](#) by Steven Buuck (SECnet)

wordy
wordy
wordy
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wordy
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wordy

and where.” If you find yourself using lots of adjectives and adverbs, delete them. They just take up unnecessary space in newsletters.)

Watch your prepositional phrases

Examine the phrases that end your sentences. How many end with prepositional phrases? How many can you strike without changing the sentence’s meaning? Prepositional phrases often slow the reading process—and cause bloating.

on
before
over
beginning
under
of
at
after

Cheat prepositional phrases—if you feel their communication vital—by turning them into possessives. For example, consider the previous sentence that asked “How many can you strike without changing the sentence’s meaning?” Prior to revision, it read “...changing the meaning of the sentence.” This was not a great gain in word economy but it offered a better reading rhythm.

Exercise greater vigilance for strings of prepositional phrases. An example? “The mother of one of our students invited all of you for cookies at her house after the basketball game on

Friday.” Something better? Mrs. Sweet will open her house for cookies and fellowship following Friday’s game.” Obviously, you’ll need additional information—without all the prepositional perplexities.

Beware of couch phrases

Your academic training works against you. Professors and their media often write passively. Passive sentences are the couch potatoes of language. Maintain active sentences. The classic school blemish? “A good time was had by all.” A better version of the same information is, “Everyone had a good time.” Your word processor’s grammar checker effectively—and annoyingly—addresses this problem.

Nouns and verbs

Language arts teachers drum specific nouns and verbs into their students’ psyches. Writing a classroom newsletter in the waning moments of lunch sorely distracts teachers from practicing what they teach. Verbs and nouns invigorate sentences. The remedy to dull sentences costs time. Circle your newsletter’s nouns and verbs. (It’s okay if you miss a few. You won’t get a grade.) Can you substitute a more precise word? Use your word processor’s dictionary for synonyms or go to [OneLook Dictionaries](#) online.

Newsletters benefit from creativity, but clear and inviting copy are absolute necessities. The previous five tips provide basic reminders about good writing.

Newsletters benefit from creativity, but clear and inviting copy are absolute necessities.

Consider these additional tips:

- Include spiritual items that clearly demonstrate your Christian nature—prayers for home use, Bible passages, Gospel statements, etc.
- Publish hardcopy in two-column format; use content cells (not right or left cells) on your webpage.
- Limit yourself to two fonts—one serif and one sans serif.
- Avoid full justification. Variable spacing between words slows reading.
- Offer links to webpages where parents may search for beneficial information.
- Use actual names for jargon that parents new to your school may not understand.
- Enjoy refreshing grammar and writing tips from places like [Visual Thesaurus](#) (low-cost subscription), [Gnarly Gnenglish](#), and [Grammar Girl Quick and Dirty Tips](#).

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Word art by Kathryn Brewer.



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