

How to Communicate Effectively

United Steelworkers
2010

UNITED STEELWORKERS
USW
MÉTALLOS

On the cover: Gaétane David, president of the USW Local 9004 bargaining unit at l'Auberge Gray Rocks (Gray Rocks Hotel) in the Laurentians region, at a March 26, 2009 demonstration to save the facility, which has since been closed.



We communicate to educate and inform. As union leaders and activists, we want the written word to work for us in helping workers organize and fight for their rights. Most, if not all of us, could be communicating more, and more effectively.

In this section, we're providing some tips and ideas for communicating internally with your members and externally with the media. Using some of these basics, you'll be better understood. With a little practice, you'll also motivate and inspire – building for tomorrow's jobs!

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2. Media **TIPS**
 - When to contact the media
 - How to prepare a media advisory
 - How to write a news release
 - Tips for speaking with the media
3. Writing **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**
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Keep It Clear Checklist

Ask yourself the checklist questions to help you write in ways your reader will understand. Ask some of your intended readers to check your document and give suggestions for improvement.



Readers

- Who do I want to read my materials?
- Why do I want them to read it?
- What do I want my reader to do after they read it?

Contents

- Will my readers be able to see how this material relates to them?
- If my writing includes examples of people, do I use names from different cultures?
- Do my examples reflect issues faced by different members?
- Does the document contain all the information they need?

Organization

- Is the most important information first?
- Does the introduction give a context for what follows?
- Is the information presented logically?
- Do I guide my readers through the document using headings and sub-headings?
- Can readers find what they need to know quickly and easily?

*** Instead of**
Members are required to telephone the union office before they visit.

Use
Please phone the union office before you visit.

Tone

- Am I talking with the readers, not at them?
- Do I sound friendly and helpful, not bossy and distant?

Words

- Do I use words my readers know?
- Do I explain unfamiliar words?
- Do I avoid jargon, acronyms (initials) and abbreviations?
- Have I used any words that continue stereotypes or demean members?
- Do I use bias-free, inclusive language?

Sentences and paragraphs

- Do I use simple sentences, with only one new item of information in each sentence?
- Do I include only one topic in each paragraph?
- Do the sentences in my paragraphs relate to each other?
- Do I use point form, question-and-answer format or lists when possible?



Design

- Do I use illustrations to help readers understand, remember and become interested?
- Do photos or other graphic images reflect the diversity of the Steelworkers?
- Did I use space and headings on the page to break up the text?
- Do I use a ragged right margin, with no hyphens?

Instead of
A study of the policy may help the grievance officer to determine whether or not it is clear and unambiguous, whether it was properly posted, whether it was discriminatory in its application and other useful information on which a defence in any disciplinary grievance concerning the policy may be raised.

Use
Grievance officers should study every new management policy. They should ask the following questions:

- Is it clear?
- Was it properly posted?
- Does it apply equally to all members?

The answers to these questions can help defend a member who has been disciplined for disobeying the policy.



www.usw.ca

1 Keep it Clear

It may seem simple, but often we forget our audience. Sometimes we are too formal in our writing because that's what we're used to reading. Using a formal tone can mean that your readers won't connect to your message. And then you won't reach your audience, which is your goal. Here are some tips and examples to improve your communications and be better understood.

Avoid technical words and long sentences

Instead of

With respect to the processing, disposition and/or settlement of any grievance initiated under the Grievance Procedure Section of this Agreement, and with respect to any court action claiming or alleging a violation of this Agreement or any local or other agreement amendatory or supplemental hereto, the Union shall be the sole and exclusive representative of the employee or employees covered by this agreement.



Use

The Union is your bargaining and grievance representative in all areas covered by the contract.

Avoid multiple words when one will do

Instead of

ask the question
mandatory requirement



Use

ask
requirement

Avoid English idioms and words from other languages

Instead of

give someone a hand
modus operandi



Use

help someone
way of doing things

Avoid abbreviations

Instead of

i.e.

e.g.



Use

that is

for example

Avoid nouns made from verbs

Instead of

To effect a proper utilization of time, ensure that preparation of an agenda has been accomplished before the meeting.



Use

Make an agenda before the meeting. This will help you use your time better.

Use a friendly conversational tone - write like you talk

Instead of

Members are required to telephone the union office before they visit.



Use

Please phone the union office before you visit.

Avoid complicated type styles

Break long sentences into lists

Instead of

You can qualify for benefits under Section 43 if you are sixty-four or older and unable to work, and that section also provides benefits in the event that you are blind in one eye, or both eyes, or are permanently disabled in the course of your employment.



Use

You can qualify for benefits under Section 43 if you meet any one of the following conditions:

- ▶ you are 64 or older and are unable to work, or
- ▶ you are blind in one eye or both eyes, or you are permanently disabled in the course of your employment.

Layout: simple is better

- ▶ Don't use too many design elements on a single page.
- ▶ Too many elements can confuse readers and make it hard to pick out information.
- ▶ Don't start something new at the bottom of a page.

It's your future ... YOU have a choice

Sears wants everyone to believe that one of its guiding principals is "to continue to provide meaningful value and fairness to all associates." Really?

Is moving call centre jobs to another country and terminating the employees that did these jobs being fair to all associates? Ask these associates and their families how much meaningful value they receive from this move.

Is cutting vacations being fair to all associates? Ask the associates that lose vacation time how much meaningful value they and their families receive from this decision.

Is arbitrarily altering benefits and other terms and conditions of employment being fair to all associates? What's fair about all associates being forced to accept arbitrary corporate decisions affecting their wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment?

What will Sears arbitrarily change or cut next? Will it affect you? Will the next corporate arbitrary decision provide you *real fairness* and *real meaningful value*? Vaughan associates joined the union and gained a real voice in what happens to them at work. You can do the same – your future and it's your choice.

The Union Advantage... Being a union member and having a union contract means...

All employees must be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. You have expert union legal, health and safety, pension, bargaining, research, and educational staff available to help you when needed. You and your co-workers assisted by expert Steelworker negotiators have the legal right to bargain for improvements on a regular basis. You have a legally enforceable grievance resolution process that ensures your issues are taken seriously and resolved in a fair manner all the time. Your wages, benefits, and working conditions are protected and can't be cut or changed unless democratically agreed to by you and your co-workers. Your union membership and legal right to bargain and vote gives you a democratic voice and a real say in what happens to you at work.

Before

After

It's your future ...
YOU **have a choice**


Sears wants everyone to believe that one of its guiding principals is "to continue to provide meaningful value and *fairness to all associates*." Really?

Is moving call centre jobs to another country and terminating the employees that did these jobs *being fair to all associates*? Ask these associates and their families how much meaningful value they receive from this move.

Is cutting vacations *being fair to all associates*? Ask the associates that lose vacation time how much meaningful value they and their families receive from this decision.

Is arbitrarily altering benefits and other terms and conditions of employment *being fair to all associates*? What's fair about all associates being forced to accept arbitrary corporate decisions affecting their wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of employment without a democratic vote?


What will Sears arbitrarily change or cut next? Will it affect you? Will the next corporate arbitrary decision provide you *real fairness* and *real meaningful value*? Vaughan associates joined the union and gained a real voice in what happens to them at work. You can do the same – **JOINING THE UNION IS YOUR LEGAL RIGHT, IT'S YOUR FUTURE AND IT'S YOUR CHOICE.**



The Union Advantage...

Being a union member and having a union contract means...

- All employees must be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness.
- You have expert union legal, health and safety, pension, bargaining, research, and educational staff available to help you when needed.
- You and your co-workers assisted by expert Steelworker negotiators have the legal right to bargain for improvements on a regular basis.
- You have a legally enforceable grievance resolution process that ensures your issues are taken seriously and resolved in a fair manner all the time.
- Your wages, benefits, and working conditions are protected and can't be cut or changed unless democratically agreed to by you and your co-workers.
- Your union membership and legal right to bargain and vote gives you a democratic voice and a real say in what happens to you at work.

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Source: *Making It Clear: Clear Language for Union Communications*, The Canadian Labour Congress, 1999.

Contact the USW Canadian National Office if you would like a copy of the *Keep It Clear Checklist* poster pictured on page 2. info@usw.ca • 416-487-1571

2 Media Tips

Why do unions only make the 6 o'clock news when we're on strike? The story that isn't told is how our locals and our members are making positive contributions to our communities every day. As activists, we can help change the image of the union by writing letters to the editor and alerting our many local media about our good news. Here are some tips for getting your 15 minutes of fame

When to contact the media

Consider contacting your local media when your local is holding an event that might be of interest, such as:

- ▶ when your local union is holding an event for a good cause.
- ▶ one of your members has received an award or other recognition.
- ▶ your local has invited a special guest speaker to your union meeting.
- ▶ to tell a story.

Don't forget to let the District or National Office know about your event so that we can consider including it in one of our publications or on our websites.



When contacting the media, you may want to write a media advisory or a news release.

A media advisory is sent out one or two days ahead of the event so news outlets can consider covering your event.

A news release is sent out during or following the event to let the media know and interest them in writing a story about your event.

Often you write both an advisory and a release so that if your event doesn't get covered in the news with one, you might get included with the other. With many local media, it makes sense to combine the two.

Decide on a media spokesperson. This person should be able to speak and present well and know the details of the issues or event. This person should also be available whenever the media want to speak to him or her. This person may also be the one quoted in your news release.



How to prepare a media advisory

The advisory gives the media everything they need to know to cover your event. It includes a brief summary of your event and lists the five Ws: **Who, What, When, Where** and **Why**.

The image shows a sample media advisory document. At the top right is the USW logo with the text 'UNITED STEELWORKERS' above 'USW' and 'MÉTALLOS' below it. Below the logo, the words 'MEDIA ADVISORY' and 'GREAT PHOTO OP' are written. The main title is 'Strikers Take Fight to Tony Clement: 'Do Your Job or Resign!'' followed by a paragraph of introductory text. Below that is a paragraph describing the event. Then, a 'Photo Op' section is followed by a 'WHAT:' section, a 'WHO:' section, a 'WHEN:' section, and a 'WHERE:' section. At the bottom, there is a line for more information and a 'Contacts:' section with names and phone numbers.

This document begins with the words "Media Advisory" so the media know it's an advisory and not a news release.

Describe your event and who will be attending or speaking.

State the city or town where your event will take place. Don't assume the media will know where you are. The media may forward your advisory to outlets in other cities, so including the location is important.

If you need to add more context that isn't included elsewhere, include it here. The media is very busy and won't take the time to read long paragraphs of context. Short and to the point is all you need.

At the bottom of the advisory include your contact information including your name, phone number and email address.

Media advisories are sent to your local newsrooms by email. Depending on your event, direct the advisory to the proper department. For example, find out who the news editors are at the various outlets you are planning to contact. Build a list of names, email addresses and phone numbers.

The day after you've sent your advisory and before your event, follow up with a phone call to see if the news outlet received your advisory and is considering covering your event. Be ready with a very short summary of your event that you can deliver that will interest the media in your event. Selling the event with a smile can make a big difference.

How to write a news release

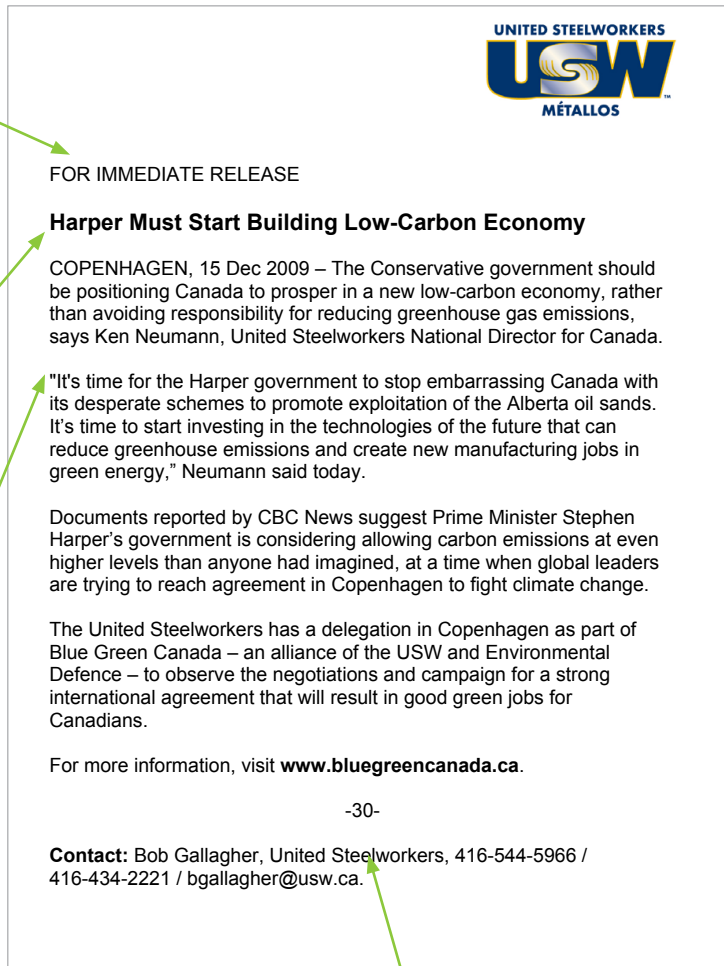
A news release provides reporters with all the information they require to write their article. News releases are structured to make writing the story as simple as possible. News releases should be one page.

Write **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** in all capital letters in the upper left-hand corner of the page under your letterhead or logo. This phrase means the news included in your release is ready to go public.

Write the headline in a bold typeface. Your headline should be 10 words or less and fit on one line. Write your headline to include the most important and attention-grabbing information.

Your first paragraph, known as the “lead paragraph,” begins with the dateline – the city and date of your release. News releases are sent to the media on the day of the event, so the date in the news release should be the date of the event and the date of distribution.

The lead paragraph should grab the reader’s attention. Use the “inverted pyramid” style of news writing. Include the important points in the first paragraph and then work down. The body paragraphs will contain more detail. Spend 75 per cent of your time writing your headline and lead paragraph and 25 per cent writing the rest of the news release.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Harper Must Start Building Low-Carbon Economy

COPENHAGEN, 15 Dec 2009 – The Conservative government should be positioning Canada to prosper in a new low-carbon economy, rather than avoiding responsibility for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, says Ken Neumann, United Steelworkers National Director for Canada.

“It’s time for the Harper government to stop embarrassing Canada with its desperate schemes to promote exploitation of the Alberta oil sands. It’s time to start investing in the technologies of the future that can reduce greenhouse emissions and create new manufacturing jobs in green energy,” Neumann said today.

Documents reported by CBC News suggest Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s government is considering allowing carbon emissions at even higher levels than anyone had imagined, at a time when global leaders are trying to reach agreement in Copenhagen to fight climate change.

The United Steelworkers has a delegation in Copenhagen as part of Blue Green Canada – an alliance of the USW and Environmental Defence – to observe the negotiations and campaign for a strong international agreement that will result in good green jobs for Canadians.

For more information, visit www.bluegreencanada.ca.

-30-

Contact: Bob Gallagher, United Steelworkers, 416-544-5966 / 416-434-2221 / bgallagher@usw.ca.

All news releases end with “-30-”. This marks the end of the news release. Ending with -30- tells the media that they have all the information they need and that there is no second page.

Tips for speaking to the media

Once you've sent out your news release, the media may call you to interview you or your spokesperson about your event. When speaking to the media:

- ▶ know in advance what your MAIN point (message) is. And focus and repeat that message. Find creative ways to come back to your main point.
- ▶ keep to 1 or 2 other points only.
- ▶ keep your answers short and simple.
- ▶ speak slowly, in concise sentences.
- ▶ use examples from your workplace.
- ▶ if you don't know the answer – say so.
- ▶ always personalize and humanize your story.
- ▶ respect media deadlines when returning calls.
- ▶ nothing said to a reporter is “off the record.”
- ▶ smile.
- ▶ be certain of your facts.
- ▶ don't speak for others.
- ▶ don't speculate.



3 Writing letters to the editor

Print media (newspapers and magazines) publish letters to the editor to allow the public to comment on issues not raised by the editor or to respond to a published story. If you have a local or regional newspaper or magazine, make a point of reading the letters to the editor to see the range of issues and writers that get published. You'll notice that most letters to the editor are short, and that they respond to articles published recently.

When to write a letter to the editor

You can write a letter to the editor anytime. If you want your letter published, it should be written quickly in response to a published story.

You can write a letter to the editor to:

- ▶ respond to an article or editorial.
- ▶ add the union or worker perspective to a local issue.
- ▶ welcome fair coverage of union or worker issues by the publication.
- ▶ add or correct information that was missed in a story.
- ▶ respond to a letter to the editor.

Topic of discussion

A letter to the editor has a better chance of being published if it responds to a story included in the publication and if it is timely. Find a topic you are passionate about (for example, the benefit of unions for workers, health and safety, human rights). Relate your issue to a story in the publication you are writing to. Be sure to include the date, title and name of the author of the article you are responding to in the first paragraph of your letter.

Writing the letter

You can write the letter as an individual or as a member of an organization. Write clearly and get to the point. Letters have a better chance of being printed if they are two to three paragraphs long, or from 150 to 200 words. Make your point in the first two paragraphs in case the editors shorten your letter. Use a tone that is direct, sincere and civil.

Write a headline for your letter

Some publications precede letters with a headline. If you don't include a headline or title, the publication may write one for you. When this happens, you'll wish you'd written the headline. So include the headline you would like to see with your letter.

Proofread

Newspapers and magazines prefer not to edit letters to the editor and will select only well-written letters for publication. Make sure you haven't made any spelling or grammatical errors.

Contact information

Include your name and contact information (home address, home phone number, email address) at the end of your letter. The publication you are writing to will usually have a page on their website or a section in their publication detailing what information they need to consider your letter. The publication won't print your address or phone number, but they usually require this information of all writers in case they have to verify something in your letter.

Sending the letter

Most publications these days prefer that letters to the editor be submitted electronically, generally via email, though many also accept letters by fax or mail. Be aware of the publication's instructions/requirements. Some publications have an online form for submitting comments that prompts you to include all the information required.



4

On the Web- tips for online communications

Writing for the web is different from writing for print. If you are maintaining a website or blog, you need to keep it current. You also need to make sure that you are providing the information visitors to your website are looking for. If your unit or local is holding events or sending out news releases, make sure you include these on your website.

Keep in mind that once posted online, text lives forever. Caches and search engines can find pages and documents even after they've been taken down from your website. Don't post anything you don't want others to find years from now.

Some tips for websites:

- ▶ Include the main points in the first paragraph.
- ▶ Write concisely and have one idea per paragraph.
- ▶ Don't use large files – some readers have slow computers and won't stay on your site if it takes too long to load.
- ▶ Use bulleted lists instead of long paragraphs.
- ▶ Use meaningful subheadings.
- ▶ Bold your keywords.
- ▶ Limit the use of words in all-capitalized letters. ALL CAPS IS LIKE SHOUTING.
- ▶ Use spaces between blocks of information.
- ▶ Update your content regularly to keep your site fresh.

Resources

www.usw.ca

See the Education section of the website for a copy of ***Keep It Clear: A Steelworker Literacy Guide***.

www.usw.org

See the United Steelworkers Press Association section of the site (www.usw.org/resources/uspa) to learn of the many tools and resources the USPA offers to help you get your message out and to inform, entertain, motivate and unite your membership.

www.nald.ca

The National Adult Literacy Database is an adult literacy information network including resources, services and links.



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