Establishing the FRG Newsletter

Reasons for Using a Newsletter

- Reach a small audience
- Communicate to a specific group with common interests
- Save meeting time
- Provide recognition
- Introduce new ideas
- Introduce yourself

Steps in Producing a Newsletter

1. Define your audience and its needs.
2. Name your objective.
3. Set up a mailing list.
4. Choose the messages, and locate sources of information.
5. Write the copy.
6. Design the layout.
7. Plan the reproduction.
8. Set up distribution.
9. Evaluate your product.

Planning Your Newsletter

The purpose of this newsletter is:

This newsletter will be sent to:

Describe audience needs:

The name of this newsletter is:

The requirements are:

The newsletter will be published: ___ Monthly   ____ Bimonthly ____ Quarterly

It will be mailed: ____ First of month   ____ Middle of month

Newsletter Guidelines

Purpose

What is your newsletter's purpose? What do you hope to achieve? You want to communicate accurate, unbiased, and current information. It sounds simple, but effective communication requires planning. Begin by getting to know your audience.

Audience

What do you know about the people you are writing to? Why do they need to know what you have to say? What are the most important things in their lives? The better you know them, the better your chances of giving them useful information.

Content

What are you telling your readers? Is it about their lifestyles and needs? Is it timely? Are you the best source of information on this topic, or do you need some assistance? If you use someone else's research or information, do you give them credit?

How much are you telling your audience at one time? Can they use all the information you provide, or is it overwhelming and confusing?

Newsletters should be short and to the point. Some studies indicate that you have about 20 seconds to grab your reader's attention, and if you accomplish that, you have about 10–20 minutes to tell them everything. The audience will affect this, of course.

Expect to share one to three major points. A four-page newsletter is a good length. A newsletter that looks interesting but is too long to be read now gets put aside for later—a time that never comes.

Writing Style

The most important news should appear in the first two or three words of the sentence, if possible. Begin with a strong lead. In a paragraph, put the most important sentence first. Give the major story "prime time" space in the newsletter, too.

Keep the sentences simple and short. Special events may call for added flavor and style, but keep in mind that most readers want you to get to the point quickly. The following writing tips may be beneficial to you:

- Use the active voice when writing the newsletter. Research shows that readers process and understand information more quickly when it is written in the active voice. Active voice attributes an action to a person or thing; passive voice focuses on what was done rather than who did it. Example of active voice: The FRG held a fundraiser." Example of passive voice: "A fundraiser was held by the FRG."

- Check noun and verb agreement. Some sentences are tricky.

- Certain words are used excessively and do not contribute to the message. Leave them out. Examples: very, nearly, only, almost, quite, really.

- Periods and commas always go inside quotation marks; colons and semicolons normally go outside quotation marks. Placement of question marks and exclamation points depends on their use in the sentence.

- Misspelled words stand out, so check the dictionary often since spell checkers don't catch everything. Maintain a professional look by proofreading carefully for errors.

- Check to see that words are divided correctly. Hyphenation programs can make mistakes.

- Titles of books, magazines, publications, songs, etc., should be italicized.

- Use boldface and italics (but not at the same time) for emphasis instead of underlining (an outdated form of emphasis, in most cases, now that computer software is used to prepare newsletters and other documents instead of typewriters).

- Use a grammar reference book and a style guide.

Newsletter Design

Good newsletter design involves certain principles, which are described below.

Paper Size and Format

Your laser printer will determine the size of paper you can use. Most desktop publishing computer programs allow printing on 8 ½ x 11 inch or 11 x 17 inch paper. Refer to Chapter 6 of the FRG Handbook for specifications regarding FRG newsletters.

White Space

Choose the margin widths when setting up your page layout. Margins on top, bottom, left, and right of each page should never be less than ½ inch and generally never more than 1 inch.

Another decision to make is how much white space to leave between columns. This should be ¼ to ½ inch and should remain consistent with each issue.

Columns

Laying out your newsletter in columns makes it easier to read. Your choices are one, two, or three columns, and the widths may vary. Once you decide, be consistent with each issue. Your readers will appreciate your consistency, and you will have eliminated another decision-making dilemma each time you send out a newsletter.

Margins

Another decision is whether to fully justify the text (have straight right and left margins) or to have a ragged-right margin (left-hand justification). You'll find it easier, less formal, and generally more reader friendly to use a ragged-right edge.

Layout

The layout of your newsletter should be attractive and should help your readers to understand your message. Good layouts include:

- **Balance**—Place elements on the page to achieve optical interest and balance. If a page looks top-heavy, bottom-heavy, or leans to one side or the other, rearrange elements until the page looks balanced. This does not mean all columns and elements have to be of equal size.

- **Emphasis**—Plan one dominant element per page. This helps your reader know where to begin reading or what is most important. It also simplifies the look of your page.

- **Proportion**—The type, graphics, margins, and other elements of each page should fit together proportionally. For instance, don't use heavy bars or graphics with a lightweight type.

- **Flow**—Good page layout directs the reader across or down the page and helps to keep their interest. Simple design helps readability.

- **Unity**—Tie everything together with white space to the outside for alignment and consistency.

If you choose to use a desktop publishing program for your newsletter, many of these elements will be available to you on templates. Choose the one that best suits your purpose.

Copyright Laws

Printed Materials

The role of the FRG is to disseminate information. This responsibility allows the freedom to use information released by government agencies but not individual or institutional sources, unless permission is granted and the source is referenced.

Ethically, a person should always reference sources; *legally*, if a document is copyrighted, it must be referenced. The copyright owner has the power to prosecute when their work is used and permission was not granted.

Attributing the person who produced a piece of work is courteous. Asking permission, whether verbal or written (written, if possible), is professional. Most producers are glad for you to use their work. Do not use copyrighted cartoons without permission.

Plagiarism is theft that is accomplished by using a created product as one's own work. It can occur whether the publication is copyrighted or not.

Libel (injuring a person's or institution's reputation) is not likely to occur, but keep in mind that the chief causes of libel are carelessness, misunderstanding of libel laws, and the limitations of the privilege defense (First Amendment). Text, photos, artwork, broadcast, and computer software are all potential media for libel. Check every detail two or three times! Good judgment is essential.

The **fair use** of a copyrighted work, including reproduction of copies for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is usually not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use of a work in any particular instance is fair use, consider the following:

- the purpose and character of the use (commercial or nonprofit),
- the nature of the copyrighted work,
- the amount of material used in relation to the whole copyrighted piece,
- the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the piece.

These principles should apply to presentations as well.

Computer Software

Software piracy is common among computer users and often by people who do not realize they are doing anything wrong. Copying a copyrighted software program onto a blank CD or disk is the same as stealing any other item. Making a copy "for educational purposes" is not legal with software, unless a site license has been purchased from the software company, which allows a specific number of additional copies to be made of the software. Any time you reproduce any material in multiple copies, seek permission.

The most common violations against computer software license agreements are:

- making an illegal copy of a program CD or diskette,

- copying all or part of a computer manual,

- loading several computers simultaneously with one program CD or diskette, and

- copying and distributing multiple copies of software not licensed for such use.

Newsletter Headlines

Headlines are important elements because they help your readers comprehend and enjoy reading your newsletter. Write your headlines with this specific function in mind—not just for decoration or to fill space.

Headlines lead your readers through your newsletter and help them to see at a glance what an article is about. Be sure they are specific and accurate.

Type Size

Make the type size for headlines large enough to stand out. This calls for at least a 12-point type, with a 14–18 point type preferable in most situations. Always use boldface type for headlines so they will show up well.

Placement

Place the headline above the beginning of the story. If necessary, place the headline first, then the story, followed by the picture or artwork at the end.

Try to include a subject and verb in each headline. Often, an object should be added. Omit minor words, such as articles like "a" or "the." Sometimes you can use a comma in place of the word to save space.

Allow plenty of white space around headlines to give an open, easy-to-read look. As a rule, leave more white space above the heading than below.

Acronyms

Use only the most familiar abbreviations and acronyms. For example: ERA could mean "earned run average" or "equal rights amendment." Know your readers, and write for them.

Caps and Lower Case

Set headings in capital and lower case letters—never all capital letters, because they are harder to read.

You can capitalize the first letter of the first word and all proper nouns. Or, you can capitalize the first letter of all words except articles and prepositions. Be consistent with all headlines from issue to issue, whatever the style used.

Headline Writing Guides

- Make the head an accurate guide to the story. Avoid sensationalism or misleading headlines.

- Make the head a complete sentence, if possible. Try to include a subject and a verb. Active verbs tell more about a story.

- Use present or present perfect tense for current happenings, and future or infinite tense for announcing future events. Use past tense for past events.

- Avoid repeating the wording of the lead sentence, although the heading should reflect the lead.

- Avoid repetition of key words.

- Omit minor words, such as articles, unless they add to the meaning.

- Make each line as complete a thought as possible (if more than one line is used).

- Avoid negative, tentative, or question heads.

- Keep numbers to a minimum, and round off when possible.

- Punctuate correctly. A comma can replace "and."

- Use only the most familiar abbreviations and acronyms. Avoid jargon.

- Be specific and literal.

Writing Style and Grammar Usage

A newsletter is a type of newspaper. When you write for a newspaper, you learn to follow certain conventions of style and usage. These help make the writing consistent and more direct. Reporters and editors use *The Associated Press (AP) Stylebook* as their major reference. You can find a copy of this book in most libraries. It's also sold or can be ordered from a bookstore.

Newsletters are often prepared with inconsistencies in style and grammar usage. The following are some common problems and the "rules" for handling them.

Time

Use figures, except for noon and midnight. Use a colon to separate hours from minutes, such as 10 a.m., 3 p.m., 4:30 p.m.

Use periods and lowercase letters with a.m. and p.m. (not A.M. or P.M.). State the exact time, and don't add redundancies, such as "9 a.m. in the morning."

Months and Years

Capitalize the names of months. When a month is used with a specific date, you can abbreviate it: Jan. 1, Feb. 14. Spell the month out when using it alone: "The crafts fair is set for March." When a phrase lists only a month and year, don't separate the month and year with a comma, but if there is a month, day, and year, use the comma. Examples:

January 15, 2002, is the filing deadline for benefits.

December 2001 records the biggest Family Day attendance ever.

Capitalization

Avoid unnecessary capitals. Proper nouns and proper names are, of course, capitalized.

One problem is what to do with titles. The rule is to capitalize formal titles when used immediately before a name (President John Doe). A title should be in lowercase when it is used alone or is set off from a name by commas. Examples:

President Mary Smith attended the national board meeting.

Mary Smith, president, attended the national board meeting.

Acronyms

Avoid overuse of acronyms. Spell out the proper name on its first usage, with the acronym in parentheses after it. Example: National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS). On second and later references, you can use the acronym.

Also, if it won't create confusion in meaning, you can also use a shortened version of a person's name after they have been identified by their full name. (Example: The association awarded Jones its highest honor.)

Newsletter Font Types

Having a choice of font families and sizes is probably the biggest difference between a newsletter prepared on a typewriter and one prepared on your computer and printer.

Not only will your readers notice—and appreciate—when you use type and sizes to improve readability and attractiveness of your publication, but you will also have more flexibility in fitting text into a limited space.

Speaking of Fonts

You usually have at least two fonts available to you. For example, **Times Roman** is what printers call a serif typeface; **Arial** is a sans serif typeface.

Serif typefaces have lines extending from the upper and lower ends of strokes on each letter. Sans serif typefaces do not have serifs or decorative "tails," thus the name, sans (without) serif.

Typefaces

A general rule is to never mix more than two typefaces (fonts) on a page or in a newsletter.

Newspaper or newsletter style will often use bold sans serif type for headlines. Serif type is often used for text because it is easier to read in larger quantities.

Use boldface sparingly, however; too much boldface on a page makes copy look weaker instead of adding impact. Boldface and italics should not be combined—one catches the reader's attention; two or more (such as bold, italics, and underline) may cause the reader to notice the type rather than concentrate on the words you have written.

You can use different sizes of these type styles to add emphasis and interest to your publication, but always use the same type styles in each issue of your newsletter. Remember, your readers like consistency and simplicity, and so will you.

What is a Point Size?

Point sizes are no mystery at all if you can remember that 72 points equal 1 inch. That is probably the largest size type you will ever need in your newsletter. The smallest type you will use is 8- or 9-point type, and then only sparingly in tables and footnotes.

Your readers will feel most comfortable with text printed in 10- to 12-point type. You can decide which of the three sizes of type is best depending on the importance of the article and the amount of space you have to fill.

Newsletter Analysis Checklist

Here is a quick, easy way to analyze your own newsletters and discover any chronic faults they may have. Apply the following checklist to all outgoing newsletters.

Can you answer **Yes** to these questions?

- Is the newsletter clear and easy to read, assuring quick understanding with a minimum of effort on the reader's part?

- If your message is intended to induce action, does it stress the reader's interests and point out benefits to the reader?

- Is the tone of your newsletter courteous and friendly, suggesting that you enjoyed writing it?

- Is your message well organized, containing all the necessary facts or information, without irrelevant details?

- Does your newsletter show consideration for the reader by revealing a genuine desire to be helpful?

- Is your newsletter neat and attractive because of proper layout on the sheet, clean typing, and short paragraphs?

Can you answer **No** to these questions?

- Does the newsletter contain trite, outmoded expressions, such as "contents duly noted," "kindly be advised," "pursuant to," etc.?

- Are the words "I," "we," "us," and "our" used too often, indicating too much emphasis on your own interests and point of view?

- Does your newsletter contain any superfluous words that contribute nothing to the sentences in which they appear?

- Are any of your statements vague or ambiguous and, therefore, liable to confuse the reader?

- Does your newsletter contain any tactless words that carry connotations unpleasant to the reader?

- Is there anything about your message that gives it the tone or appearance of a form letter?