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Government of St. Vincent
and the Grenadines

Government of
Grenada



THE SUSTAINABLE GRENADINES PROJECT

**SUSTAINABLE INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT AND BIODIVERSITY
CONSERVATION IN THE GRENADINE ISLANDS**

Report on “Effective Writing Skills” Workshop for Non-Governmental
Organizations (NGOs) and Community Groups in the Grenadines

Resource Centre, Ashton Union Island, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

March 29 – 30, 2008



**Sustainable Grenadines Project
March 2008**

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Cover photo by Raquel Paul: Participants of the workshop with their certificates.

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INTRODUCTION

Background and Goals

The Sustainable Grenadines Project (SusGren) had detected that Grenadine NGOs and CBOs lack skills in most aspects of communication, including effective writing. SusGren therefore held an Effective Writing Skills Workshop. Its aim was to raise the participants' level of competence and confidence in writing reports, minutes, news releases and newsletters – all of which are forms of writing that the participants need some mastery of, in order to perform their various functions. The ultimate goal was to enable greater participant contributions to sustainability in the Grenadines.

Nuts and Bolts

The workshop was held in the Learning Resource Centre in Ashton, on Union Island, and took place on Saturday, March 29, and Sunday, March 30, 2008. Off island participants remained for the duration of the workshop. Those participants who did not return after the first day reside on Union Island.

Thirty-four participants attended. They ranged in age from 16 to 45, and varied widely in their baseline abilities. Attendees came from:

- Union Island (12)
- Petite Martinique (5)
- Carriacou (8)
- Bequia (7)
- Canouan (2)

Workshop design

This workshop was designed:

- to convey knowledge of the practical aspects of writing the target forms;
- to directly involve participants in thinking and communicating, both orally and in writing, thereby developing their skills;
- to develop social and communications confidence (attitudes)
- to examine the process of writing in general (all stages from planning to presentation;)
- and to put these skills, attitudes and knowledge to immediate use, in order both to reinforce them and to spot any pattern of weaknesses that showed up.

The design of the workshop also attempted to attune participants to different audiences and their needs, and to lodge the core questions (Who, what, where, when, how and why?) firmly in participants minds.

DAY ONE

Preliminaries

Sustainable Grenadines Project (SusGren) Manager, Martin Barriteau, opened the workshop with a warm welcome. After the Workshop's goals and expectations were stated, materials were distributed and the group began its first activity.

Baseline/Warmup Exercise

The first activity was an easy writing assignment: Say who you are and what you want from this workshop. The objectives of this exercise were: to help participants focus on their purpose for attending; to start them off with something that everyone could expect to accomplish easily; and to provide a rudimentary indicator of their writing abilities.

Interview exercise

Participants were then asked to partner with someone they did not already know, and to interview him or her, taking notes that would form the basis of their reportage. The questions were set forth: Name, age, where they came from; what NGO or CBO they served, in what capacity, and for how long; what their challenges and/or achievements were; a personal detail, which could relate to family, goals, personal philosophy or whatever. Afterwards, participants were then given a chance—or a challenge—to stand and deliver their reports.

This exercise had several objectives: to break the ice by giving participants a structure for learning about each other and the organizations they represent; to develop interviewing skills, which are useful for writing news releases, certain kinds of reports, and newsletter articles; to push participants' comfort zone even further outwards.

Introduction to the Four Target Forms of Writing

After a brief outline of what these target forms are, a common thread was presented: Though the emphasis may vary, all of these forms use the journalistic 5-W's and an H (Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.) The different forms have different purposes, formats, and audiences, which are important to bear in mind.

News Releases

A Power Point was presented. (See Appendices) Putting the 5-Ws to work, the session dealt with what news releases are, why they are written, who reads them, how to approach them, where to put which pieces of information, etc. Facilitator comments and questions accompanied the presentation. Handouts of samples were provided. The facilitator emphasized that in order to be effective, a news release needs to be accurate, useful and interesting.

She also suggested that participants think of the workshop itself as the subject of a news release. What would the writer's headline or angle be? To illustrate an attention-getting angle, a handout was distributed with its top folded over to block the headline. The body of the news release told about farmers who used satellite imagery for planning purposes. The headline, "Farmers Get Help from Outer Space," was then revealed. This provoked discussion!

Minutes

Again, a Power Point was presented, along with handouts. (See Appendices.) The group shared their difficulties in, and tips for, taking accurate minutes during rowdy or contentious meetings. In this context, the need for factual but neutral language was also discussed. The facilitator's emphasis was twofold: (a) minutes as a useful record of decisions and the factors behind them, whose readers may extend beyond the group to include researchers or even lawyers; and (b) how to make minutes more effective in their function as a clear plan of action that involves accountability. Again the 5-W's were invoked: Who will do (or did) what, and why? When will they do it, and how?

Reports

Another Power Point was presented, and a model report format distributed. (See Appendices.) This section was fairly dry. It appeared that the reports needing to be written by participants varied quite a bit in nature and complexity. Some participants noted challenges in obtaining information for their reports, because people were not always willing to divulge it. Others noted difficulties that arose from organizational limitations—things like running out of supplies. Although issues like these do have an impact on effectiveness, they were beyond the scope of this workshop.

Newsletters

In this section, lively discussion was provoked by observing that there are choices to be made. The main ones are (a) Does your newsletter seek to address a specific, interest-based audience or to expand that audience? It is important to know whom you want to reach and what you want them to do. (b) Is your newsletter in print or electronic (internet) form? What are the merits of each? We touched briefly on the need for different writing styles in print and electronic media. A Power Point was presented and discussed. (See Appendices.) Again, the need to be accurate, useful and interesting was emphasized, along with the need for brevity.

DAY TWO

It being Sunday, the day started with a prayer and a joyful song, “This is the Day That the Lord Has Made.” This, plus general hugging, set a positive tone for the day.

Participants were reminded that they would have a writing project to do, based on topics that had been covered the previous day.

Preparing to Put it in Practice

First, the group examined the principles of Clear Writing. (See Appendices.) The group especially enjoyed the competitive exercise in being concise. They were then presented with a quick chalk-and-talk session on Preparing to Write. Mr. Barriteau made a valuable contribution to this session—the “spider method.” (See Appendices.)

Practical Exercise

In the practical writing exercises, participants could choose which form of writing to undertake. They could also choose to produce work as a group, and considering this, the number of works turned in indicate a very high level of participation.

News releases were the most popular choice. Of the 21 people who did them, 19 got the format elements quite well. In the headline department, 13 wrote good, snappy ones, and six were good enough. There was not always a correlation between the headline and the angle or substance of the piece, which indicates a need for further clarification and/or practice. Two had very strong angles. Six used the device of quoting a relevant person. Twelve showed an excellent grasp of the inverted pyramid. Three wrote about the success of the workshop; others tended to write about their own organizations. Almost all remembered the 5 W’s and an H.

The results were then read aloud for constructive criticism and/or admiration. At times, this part grew quite boisterous, usually in support of each other’s efforts.

Grammar and Spelling

A review of the previous day’s writing had showed the facilitator that an additional workshop feature was needed: Grammar and Spelling Tips. On a flip chart, she presented

common errors and rules of thumb. Some participants advanced an argument on behalf of dialect and other instances of local parlance. The rebuttal was that well-written standard English is necessary if one wants to reach people outside of a small sphere. This mini-debate could be seen as further evidence of increased confidence among participants and of grappling with the principle of knowing your audience. (See Appendices)

OUTCOMES

Comparing expectations and results

IT WAS EXPECTED THAT:	WHAT HAPPENED:
Participants would interact and perform or absorb the activities described above.	Most participants performed the activities. Individually or in groups, participants wrote. In fact, some wrote quite a lot and some was publishable. Due to time constraints, there was not as much interactive feedback on the exercises as the facilitator had hoped to provide.
The workshop would get creative juices flowing and enthuse participants.	Interest levels varied among topics and participants, as is to be expected, but written output and participation levels were high.
The core questions (Who, what, where, when, how, and why?) would lodge firmly in participants' minds.	This was demonstrated consistently in written work.
Handouts would be useful for future reference and would enhance the presentation.	Evaluation forms showed the handouts scoring very well in the category of usefulness for future reference, and well in enhancing the presentation. The latter was due in part to conceiving of these materials too much as augmentations of sessions, and not enough as a recap or memory aid.
The workshop would develop confidence, both socially and in terms of writing.	As reflected in the evaluation forms (where increased confidence was unanimously noted) and as an observable phenomenon, the workshop pushed people out of their comfort zones and into new behaviours. Participants also showed the confidence to try applying new knowledge, skills and attitudes.
Participants would be challenged to detect and eliminate fuzziness, in order to communicate clearly and concisely.	Exercises and interaction dealt with this. It would have been good to do more. See Recommendations
Written work would serve to reveal more about the participants—their interests, needs, values, and goals, and	It did, in all ways, and could be useful reference for future planning. The variation in skills levels was particularly noteworthy,

about their current skills in written communication.	leading to the Recommendation, below.
Basic writing skills would improve.	This was hard to do and to measure in such a short time. However, an ad-hoc session on grammar and spelling was devised in response to problems noted in early exercises.

Participant Evaluation

Participants filled out forms asking them to evaluate all aspects of the workshop. With few exceptions, the response was very positive. Participants said that the workshop covered topics that were important to them, and that the main thing they learned was the proper content and format of the particular forms. The news release component was rated the most outstanding, followed by minutes and the interview/report. Participants were generally satisfied with the coordination and overall execution of the workshop. The trainer, handouts, exercises and examples also scored well. Everyone reported (and displayed) increased confidence.



CONCLUSION

Judging by the evaluations, by much of the written work, and by personal inquiry, the Effective Writing Skills Workshop was successful in achieving most of its objectives for most of its participants. The behaviour of the participants showed this too, as they engaged in lively exchanges of questions, information and opinion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of participants expressed a desire for another writing skills workshop. The facilitator believes that this would be beneficial, but that in order to be most effective, further writing training should identify two competence levels and deal with them in separate sessions. The levels are: 1) people who need work with basic writing skills and

the thought processes behind them; 2) more advanced communicators, who need to hone particular skills.

APPENDICES LIST

1. Participants List
2. Workshop Programme
3. News Releases: Power Point
4. Minutes: Power Point
5. Minutes: Checklist
6. Reports: Power Point
7. Newsletters: Power Point
8. How to Write More Clearly: Power Point
9. Addendum for Participants: Planning to Write
10. Grammar and Spelling Tips



Appendix 1. PARTICIPANTS FOR EFFECTIVE WRITING SKILLS WORKSHOP - RESOURCE CENTRE, ASHTON, UNION ISLAND, MARCH 29 - 30, 2008

NAME	ADDRESS	POSITION	GROUP/ORGANIZATION	TELEPHONE	FAX	EMAIL
<u>Carriacou</u>						
Lauriston Redhead	Hillsborough Police Stat.	Constable	Royal Grenada Police Force	473-443-7482/7840	473-443-6943	-
Melissa Haemer	Bogles Carriacou	Secretary	Hillsborough Secondary School	473-443-7872(w)		-
				473-443-7974 (h)	473-443-7872	melissacsh@hotmail.com
				473-404-9577 (c)		-
Patrica John	L'esterre	President	Carriacou Historical Society	473-443-7587 (h)		patjohn60@hotmail.com
Sherma Joseph	Limlair Carriacou	Floor Member	Bayaleau Development Committee	473-443-6716		
Trevlyn Cox	Belvedere Carriacou	Assistant Secretary	Bayaleau Development Committee	473-443-7105/6073 473-406-7226		trevolinaempres@gmail.com
Calista Mc Intosh	Limlair Carriacou	Treasure	C.E.C	473-443-8040		calista_mcintosh@hotmail.com
Virginia F. Noel	Petit - Caranage Carriacou	Executive Director	Carriacou Environmental Comm.	473-404-4678	473-443-8977	Virgnoel2000@yahoo.com , carriacouenvironmentalcommittee@yahoo.com
Wendy Samuel	Mt. Pleasant Carriacou	V. President	Carriacou Regatta Committee	473-443-7289/403-9548	473-443-8900	ccoueregatta@spiceisle.com , livvy60@spiceisle.com
Crystal Francis	Petite Martinique	Secretary	Petite Martinique Catholic Youth Group	473-443-9234		lilgeg@hotmail.com
Mevion Clement	Petite Martinique	Vice President	P.M. C.Y.G	443-9266/449-5862		
Cecelia St. Ignac	Petite Martinique		Petite Martinique	473-443-9198		
Kayon Roberts	Petite Martinique	Asst. Secretary	Petite Martinique	473-443-9191		kayonloves@hotmail.com
Tahera Paul	Petite Martinique	Asst. Secretary	Petite Martinique	473-443-9130		taherapaul@hotmail.com
<u>Bequia</u>						
Raison Compton	Paget Farm Bequia	President	Paget Farm Sports Cultural	784-526-8856		pagetfarmsceo@yahoo.com , docj_2004@hotmail.com

Anthony Compton	Paget Farm Bequia	Leader	Paget Farm 4H Club	784-458-3029		comptonac@hotmail.com
Kellyann Kydd	Paget Farm Bequia	Incoming Secretary	Paget farm 4H Club	784-433-9372		Bequiagirl_13@hotmail.com
Lezlian James	Paget Farm Bequia	V. President	P.F.S.C.E.O.	784-529-1616		bigswagg@hotmail.com
Rochelle Tannis-Ollivierre		2 nd Asst. Leader	Bequia Red Cross	784-526-2225/593-5207		rochelle_tannis@hotmail.com
Leah Belmar	La Pompe Bequia		Ripples	784-495-3351		belmars@yahoo.com
Tryson Marshall	Bequia		Paget Farm 4-H Movement	784-457-3634/533-4747		
<u>Union Island</u>						
Vernalyn Blencowe	Union Island	Committee Member	Union Is. Cultural Youth in Action	784-485-8316		canvern@vincysurf.com
Donyasia Domerge	Clifton Union Island	Secretary	Union Island Attackers	784-593-4773		songspiration@yahoo.com
Britney John	Union Island	Co-ordinator	Union Is. Cultural Youth In Action	784-458-8485		
Philmon Taylor	Ashton Union Island	Public Relation Officer	Union Island Attackers	784-529-6117		Phillo104@yahoo.com, phillo_10@hotmail.com
Ann Harvey	Ashton Union Island	Adult Leader	Young Help Striders 4H Club	784-458-8769/485-8889		Cinder4ever2003@yahoo.com
				784-532-9244		
Laverne Roberts	Clifton, Union Island	Library Assistant	U.I.S.S.	784-530-9665	784-458-8465	
Shevon Scrubb	Ashton Union Island	Adult Leader	Young Help Striders	784-593-5525		
			4H Club	784-530-4846		
Emril Pompey	Clifton Union Island					
Kavita Alexander	Clifton Union Island	President	St. Joseph Church Youth Group	784-485-8846/492-0673		
Urika Alexander	Clifton Union Island		T.C.M.P	784-485-8191		rickah_a@hotmail.com
Meritha Small	Ashton Union	Admin Assistant	Tobago Cays Marine Park	784-485-8191	784-485-	Meritha1@hotmail.com

	Island				8192	tmp191@hotmail.com
Lorette Coy-James	Clifton Union Island		U.I. Museum & Ecological Society	784-458-8575/531-6460		
<u>Canouan</u>						
Hansel Henry	Canouan		Club Nuevo	784-431-9448/455-7279		hanselhenry@hotmail.com , henryhansel@hotmail.com
Nicolette Snagg	Canouan		Netball Club	784-495-7153		

Appendix 2: Programme

Effective Writing Skills for NGOs, Grass Roots and

Governmental Organisations in the Grenadines

2-day Workshop on Union Island

Day One

08:30 - 09:00	Registration
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome, Introductions, Purpose, Goals and Expectations.
09:15 - 09:30	Baseline Assignment: Say who you are and what you want from this workshop, in writing.
09:30 - 10:30	Introductions Exercise: What's your story?
10:30 - 10:45	BREAK
10:45 - 11:15	Finish the Exercise. Get to work Introduction to the forms of writing we will cover: reports, minutes-taking, scripting newsletters and news releases.
11:15 - 12:00	Participant exercise Finding an angle: What stories are here in this room? Applying to different forms.
12:00 - 01:00	LUNCH
01:00 - 02:00	Focus on News/press releases
02:00 - 02:15	BREAK
02:15 - 03:15	Essentials of Minutes & Reports; Essentials of Newsletters
03:15 - 03:30	Form groups. Talk about/clarify the project/ assignments. Homework: Participants should begin working with their notes tonight.
03:30 - 04:00+	Exercise: Planning your writing work

PROGRAMME

Effective Writing Skills for NGOs, Grass Roots and Governmental Organisations in the Grenadines 2-day Workshop on Union Island

Day Two

08:30 – 09:15	Review of previous day.
09:15 - 10:00	Exercises in clear writing Cutting out unnecessary words Not all conversions are religious. Passive to active voice. Can you be misunderstood? Let's try!
10:00 - 10:15	Break
10:15 - 10:30	Power point presentation on clear writing
10:45 - 12:00	Work on projects, in groups
12:00 - 01:00	LUNCH
01:00 - 01:45	Finalize projects
01:45 - 02:30	Presentation of projects (whatever is ready)
02:30 - 03:15	Evaluation of projects – breakout groups
03:15 - 03:45	Review of workshop, by participants
03:45 - 04:00+	Presentation of Certificates to participants

Appendix 3

What is a press/news release?

By definition a press release is simply a statement prepared for distribution to the media. The purpose of a press release is to give journalists information that is useful, accurate and interesting.

To put it another way, a press release is pseudo-news story, written in third person, that seeks to demonstrate to an editor or reporter the newsworthiness of a particular person, event, service or product.

How is it used? They can also be part of a full press kit, or may be accompanied by a pitch letter. Press releases are often sent alone, by e-mail, fax or snail mail.

Press releases are basically 'cookie cutter'. Once you get the hang of writing them, all you have to do is fill in the blanks. Press releases conform to an established format. Journalist receive so many press releases a day, they have set standards and expectations that you must conform to just to have your release read, let alone published. If your press release is printed 'as is', without changing even one word, then you know you have conformed to the journalistic standards of that particular medium.

FORMAT

Letterhead. News/press releases should be printed on company or organisation letterhead. If this is not feasible, adding the company logo is essential. The company's name, web address, location address and phone number should be printed clearly at the top of the page.

PRESS RELEASE should be spelled out in all CAPS. Underneath that, put the date. The press release contact person's name should be underneath that, along with his/her contact numbers printed. If the press release is for IMMEDIATE RELEASE, say so. Where to put this? Styles differ. Many people prefer to put this section at the top right.

Headline or Title. The next essential component of the press release is the Headline or Title. It should be centered, and in **bold**. The heading of the press release should be short and snappy, grabbing the attention of the journalist and impressing them enough to read on. It should state your most exciting news, and suggest the drama of your story.

The angle. Angles have points. So do stories. Your headline should do more than name the topic of your story. It should hook the reporter's attention. To do this, you need an angle. Facts alone do not make a story. An angle does. An angle is the perspective from which you look at the facts. There are several things that can help you find your angle. Here are some:

- Ask yourself: What's the story? Or What's the point here?
- Ask yourself, Who am I talking to? What is their interest?
- Ask yourself, What is in the news these days? How does my story relate to The Big Picture?

You may also use a **sub-heading**. Subheads are remarkably useful tools, yet usually overlooked by press release writers. Basically, the press release subhead gives you the

opportunity to flesh out your angle and further hook the reporter, without stepping on the drama of the press release headline.

The reporter isn't interested in helping you get people to attend your event, make money, or grow your organisation. He's looking for a story that will be interesting to his readers and pleasing to his editor.

The body of the release. The body of the press release is very basic; who, what, where, when and why. The body of the release must be

- Useful
- Accurate
- Interesting

Format tip: The body of the press release begins with the date and city from which the press release originated.

The first, or lead, paragraph of the press release should contain in brief detail what the press release is about. The lead paragraph includes the who, what, when, where and how of the story. If the reporter were only to read the lead of a good press release, he'd have everything he needed to get started. Sometimes, that's all he has space for.

Press releases and news stories are boring to journalists without a 'human interest'. The **second paragraph** explains, in detail:

- who cares;
- why you should care;
- where one can find it; or where it happened
- when it will happen, or happened

Tip: Use quotes. It is more interesting to the reader, and makes it seem more important, alive, and human, when you quote someone who is involved in the story, or a relevant expert.

The **third and generally final paragraph** is a summation of the release and further information on your company with the company contact information clearly spelled out.

Boilerplate Boilerplate is an old newspaper term meaning a block of standard text that's used over and over again. In this case, it's text that you might use at the bottom of all your releases. Place your boilerplate right above the # # #'s.

Your boilerplate would consist of a sentence or two describing your organisation and what you do. Example: The Caribbean Conservation Connection was founded in 1999 to coordinate and communicate the activities of 20 regional conservation organisations. Its website (www.ccc.net) offers the most comprehensive and up to date listing of events, programmes and partnering opportunities across the Caribbean basin.

More on formatting:

FONT The content of the press release, beginning with the date and city of origin, should be typed in a clear, basic font (Times New Roman, Arial, etc.)

SPACING Often, releases are double-spaced. Alternatively, especially if it is sent by email, single space within each paragraph and double space between them, the way you see the material in this box. The margins should be 1 to 1/2 inches wide. The object is to make it easy for your readers. In this case, it's a writer or editor who wants to (a) read quickly to pick out what's interesting (b) possibly make some changes. Adequate margins and spaces between blocks or lines of text will enable him to make legible marks more easily.

PAGINATE If your press release exceeds one page, the second page should indicate 'Page Two' in the upper right hand corner.

END Journalistic standards have set basic parameters to define the end of a press release: ###. Three # symbols, centered directly underneath the last line of the release indicate the end of a press release.

An extra: Below the ###'s, add a line that offers more. Example: If you'd like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview with John Smith, please call Pat Brown at 555/555-2222 or e-mail Pat at pb@ccc.net

Writing tips:

- Always write from a journalist's perspective. Never use "I" or "we" unless it's part of a quote.
- Shorter is better. Get to the point and trim unnecessary words. Try to keep your release to one page.
- Read good newspaper writing. Go online if there's none locally. The BBC website provides good examples.

Press Release Checklist

- ? Company Letterhead, Name, Address, Phone Number, Web Address
- ? PRESS RELEASE in all caps
- ? Contact Person's Name
- ? Immediate Release or Release Date(all caps)
- ? HEADLINE or TITLE in BOLD/CAPS
- ? BODY-Date/City in bold. Then a few paragraphs telling who,what,when,where, why, and how.
- ? Catchy Text and clear writing
- ? Sum it up...
- ? Format: Basic Font, Double Spaced, Page Numbers, and ###

Appendix 4

ON WRITING MINUTES

Minutes serve as a record of a group's proceedings.

Minutes are used to guide the actions that have been decided upon; they may someday be of value as a historical record; and in extreme cases, they may be required for legal use, e.g. if someone sues the group or a member of it. So it is important that minutes be as accurate as possible.

It is also important that minutes are comprehensive without being overly wordy, that they are organized, and that they are presented in a way that is easy to scan. In other words, make them readable too.

WHAT TO INCLUDE

Group name, date, and place

Present

Absent

Excuses

Agenda

This is usually on a separate page. It is useful in several ways:

- It sets out the order of business to be conducted
- It helps keep the meeting on track.
- It helps the minute taker to organize his/her job.

Topics of discussion, decisions, assignments

First agenda item.

Second agenda item, etc.

In other words,

- What topics were discussed?
- What was decided?
- What actions were agreed upon?
- Who is to complete the actions, by when?

If appropriate, you should also note the following:

- Were materials distributed at the meeting? If so, are copies or a link available?
- Is there anything special the reader of the minutes should know or do?
- Did anyone leave the meeting early? If so, who, and when?
- Is a follow-up meeting scheduled? If so, when? where? (Possible why?) If the group normally meets at a regular time for regular business, this item is not essential. However, since people do forget, it is perhaps wisest to include this.

Time the meeting was adjourned.

How to make your minutes even more useful:

Use headings so that readers can skim for the information they need. Your template may include these:

Topics
Decisions
Actions Agreed Upon
Person responsible
Deadline
Next Meeting: Date and Time Location Agenda items

Tips:

Do write minutes soon after the meeting--preferably within 48 hours. That way, your notes are less likely to confuse you.

Do circulate minutes promptly after the meeting. That way, those who attended can be reminded of action items, and those who did not attend will promptly know what happened.

Don't skip writing minutes just because everyone attended the meeting and knows what happened. Meeting notes serve as a record of the meeting long after people forget what happened.

Don't describe all the "he said, she said" details unless those details are very important. Record topics discussed, decisions made, and action items.

Don't include any information that will embarrass anyone (for example, "Richard said the contractors Terry had chosen were a bunch of crooks and incompetents." Or "Then Terry left the room in tears. Susan said it was because the contractors were his relatives.")

Do use positive language. Rather than describing the discussion as *heated* or *angry*, use *passionate*, *lively*, or *energetic*--all of which are just as true as the negative words.

Appendix 5

A MODEL FORMAT FOR WRITING REPORTS

By Phil Bartle, PhD

A Guide for Community Mobilizers

1. Title of Report
2. Author
3. Highlights: (or overview, major events, headlines, summary) during the reporting period; or since the previous report. This is the summary and conclusion. Write it last, but put it here in the report.
4. Changes in The Action Environment: This sub-title can name the geographic area covered by the report. In this sub-section, include external events that affect the project or field worker's work (but not caused by the project or the field worker). External events or changes in conditions.
5. Progress [This is the essence of the report]: here you list each objective, or desired result; make each a sub section with its own sub-title; then you briefly describe what actions and activities were undertaken and/or completed to work towards the objective or desired result.

Indicate the degree to which the objectives or desired results were achieved;

Indicate the reasons for the level of success (contributing factors);

Indicate the hindrances, constraints, reasons why 100% was not reached;

Describe what lessons were learned.

Do this for every objective.

6. Recommendations: Based on the above, make recommendations (eg continue, change, if so then how, why) make sure you identify to whom you make the recommendations (they should get a copy) different recommendations may be made to different persons, groups or organizations.
7. Appendices: Include any information that supplements the above, especially quantities and details: eg mileage, costs, lists of meetings, workshops, communal labour: number and names of participants, minutes of meetings, participants and any supplementary documents, such as maps or tables.

[SV says: It doesn't hurt to include a photo or two. Remember that the report's reader is human too!]

Appendix 6

NEWSLETTERS

First, Some Definitions

Newsletter: A Regularly-published, not lengthy, for a specific audience/purpose

Webster's New World Dictionary defines it as:

"1. A bulletin issued at regular intervals to subscribers containing recent news, often of interest to a special group, and usually including interpretations and predictions.

2. Any similar report issued by a firm, governmental agency, etc. to keep employees or the public informed."

Electronic:

Newsletter appears primarily in electronic form, and is distributed either as email or resides on a Website. Electronic newsletters have a lot in common with print newsletters. But electronic newsletters have a lot of additional, mostly technical, elements to deal with. And for the web, the writing style differs.

Self-published:

Newsletter is published in-house by an individual or team, rather than out-sourced. You handle all aspects of the newsletter.

Purpose and objectives:

What are newsletters for? You need to decide what you want yours to do.

- **Communicating with your established audience.**

Your purposes may include:

Providing information they can use.

Keeping them up to date with your organization's news.

Keeping them loyal.

Getting them to do things.

- **Communicating with a prospective audience.**

In this sense, newsletters can be seen as a marketing tool. You want to introduce readers to your organization, its activities and goals, and to create an impression that will lead to a desired action or mind-set. You might want to educate them, or get them involved.

Getting them involved can mean something as intangible as creating a good impression of your organization so that you can reap the rewards of good will for a known entity at some later point.

Involvement can go as far as grants or donations from supportive readers, or getting them to volunteer for something, or to make a change in their practices.

A newsletter can also be one of your organization's products, one which conveys authoritative information, advice, and/or instruction. This creates another kind of perceived value for your organization

You might even want to change the world! Or at least your corner of it.

Always keep focused on your objectives! Use them to evaluate your choices.

Know your audience.

Most organizations' newsletters are aimed primarily at a known target group, such as members of the organisation.

Is your newsletter for insiders only, or do you want to reach out and draw others in? If so, don't lead off with your in-house items. Start with the most exciting, general interest material instead.

And speak your readers' language.

In what format will your newsletter be published? Electronically or on paper? Each has its benefits and drawbacks.

Even good writers need to understand how writing for the Web/email differs from writing for print medium. Check out Web style guides for help with making the transition from writing for print to writing for an electronic environment. In brief, **writing for the web** means writing for people who don't so much read as scan. Visual considerations, like graphics and how you organize your text, are very important. So are hyperlinks, or clickable places that lead to another level. So is brevity.

The writing part.

Use attention-getting headlines.

Keep your strategic audiences in mind, always.

What is relevant to them? What is important?

Be concerned about how your newsletter *reads* before you worry about how it *looks*.

Attractive graphics can obscure the content. Relevant and well-written content should be able to stand on its own, even as plain text.

Write compact copy in the active voice. Edit for clarity, conciseness, jargon, length, correctness.

Lead with strong items that have broad appeal.

People decide *within seconds* whether or not to read.

Learn the distinction between simple information and a story.

Information comes to life as a story when someone talks about it. So quote people.

The true test of performance is behavior.

You'll know you have an effective publication when your strategic audiences clip and save articles and when people are eager to write for it.

Here are two excellent websites, from which much of this material was taken:

<http://www.unc.edu/~kotlas/sarc99.html#obj>

<http://www.topstory.ca/newsletters.html>

If you are the editor, you'll also have to think about:

- Content and length. More about that later.
- A publication structure and an editorial calendar. Will each issue have a theme or will there be a variety of topics?
- Who are your resource people? Contributors add variety in terms of information, outlook and voice. Quotable experts too. And who will copy edit, so that messy spelling and grammar won't detract from your good impression?
- What are your standards? You should prepare a written list of Writers' Guidelines.
- Consider an acknowledgment box that lists everyone who contributed to an issue. This will reward people for helping and encourage others to participate.
- Will you include reprints from, or summaries of, other articles?
- Frequency: How much can you manage? Can you be consistent? It is important to establish a publishing schedule and stick to it. Otherwise, people may think something is wrong.
- Sustainability: financial and otherwise.
- The title, layout, and other identifying details.
- Will you have advertising in your newsletter? If so, establish some criteria for acceptable ads. Keep in mind that most of your readers probably detest advertising in email newsletters.

Content Decisions and Article Topics: What will your newsletter contain?

The most basic newsletter should have:

- a few lead stories,
- shorter news items,
- and a message from your leader.

A more developed publication might include:

- features,
- departments,
- columns,
- an editorial,
- cartoon,
- in-house news,
- news tidbits, regional round-ups, etc.

Subscriber Feedback: Listen to your readers

Have you given your readers a way to get in touch with you with their comments and questions? These can be extremely valuable. They let you know, for example, what moves your readers.

Appendix 7 **How to write in plain English**

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Abbreviated and altered slightly for workshop purposes. The original may be found at http://www.ai.uga.edu/mc/WriteThinkLearn_files/frame.htm

So what's plain English?

Almost anything - from leaflets and letters to legal documents - can be written in plain English without being patronising or over- simple.

? It doesn't mean reducing the length or changing the meaning of your message. Most of the UK's biggest insurance companies produce policies that explain everything fully in plain English.

? It's not about banning new words, killing off long words or promoting completely perfect grammar. Nor is it about letting grammar slip.

? It is not an amateur's method of communication. Most forward- looking senior managers always write in plain English.

? And finally, it is not as easy as we would like to think.

Sadly, thanks to bureaucrats, we have learned to accept an official style of writing that is inefficient and often unfriendly. But in the last few years, many of these offenders have started to put things right.

The main advantages of plain English are:

? It is faster to write;

? It is faster to read; and

? You get your message across more often, more easily and in a friendlier way.

If you spend more than an hour a day writing, you are to an extent a professional writer. So it's vital that you get it right.

So what is plain English? It is a message, written with the reader in mind and with the right tone of voice, that is clear and concise.

Keep your sentences short

Most experts would agree that clear writing should have an average sentence length of 15 to 20 words. This does not mean making every sentence the same length. Be punchy. Vary your writing by mixing short sentences (like the last one) with longer ones (like this one), following the basic principle of sticking to one main idea in a sentence, plus perhaps one other related point.

You should soon be able to keep to the average sentence length - used by top journalists and authors - quite easily. However, at first you may still find yourself writing the odd long sentence, especially when trying to explain a complicated point. But most long sentences can be broken up in some way. Like this one was.

Prefer active verbs

Do you want your letters to sound active or passive - crisp and professional or stuffy and bureaucratic?

To explain the difference between active and passive verbs, we need to look briefly at how a sentence fits together. There are three main parts to almost every sentence:

? a **subject** (the person, group or thing doing the action);

? a **verb** (the action itself); and

? an **object** (the person, group or thing that the action is done to).

To give an example, in the sentence 'Peter watched the television':

? the **subject** is Peter (he is doing the watching);

? the **verb** is watched; and

? the **object** is the television (it is being watched).

Good uses of passives

There are times of course when you should use a passive. To make something less hostile - 'this bill has not been paid' (passive) is softer than 'you have not paid this bill' (active).

? To avoid taking the blame - 'a mistake was made' (passive) rather than 'we made a mistake' (active).

? When you don't know who or what the doer is - 'the England team has been picked'.

? If it simply sounds better.

But aim to make about 80 to 90% of your verbs active. This difference between active and passive verbs is not easy to grasp. So if you are any way confused, read this section again.

Use 'you' and 'we'

Try to call the reader 'you', even if the reader is only one of many people you are talking about generally. If this feels wrong at first, remember that you wouldn't use words like 'the applicant' and 'the supplier' if you were speaking to somebody sitting across a desk from you. Here are some examples of this.

Applicants must send us...

? **You must send us...**

We always tell customers before we...

? **We will tell you before we...**

Advice is available from...

? **You can get advice from...**

Similarly, always call your organisation 'we'. And there is nothing wrong with using 'we' and 'I' in the same letter.

Use words appropriate for the reader

When you are talking to your reader, say exactly what you mean, using the simplest words that fit. This does not necessarily mean only using simple words - just words that the reader will understand.

Jargon is a type of language that is only understood by a particular group of people, such as an industry or a club. You can use jargon when writing to people who will understand the terms and phrases; it can be a useful form of shorthand. But try to avoid using specialist jargon on the general public.

So in general, keep to everyday English whenever possible. And again, imagine talking to your reader across a table.

Don't be afraid to give instructions

Sit! Brush your teeth. Please send it to me.

These are all commands - officially called imperatives. They are the fastest and most direct way of giving someone instructions. However, if we asked a hardened bureaucrat to write these expressions, we would end up with something like this:

Dogs are advised that they should sit down.

Your teeth should be brushed.

I should be grateful if you would send it to me. [SV says: This point is debatable. The sentence is more formal than "Please send it to me." It would be appropriate to say you would be grateful if (a) the request is extraordinary; (b) you do not know the person you are addressing and it might be advisable to be obsequious; and/or (c) if you really would be grateful.]

There always seems to be a fear of commands. The most common fault is putting 'customers should do this' or 'you should do this' instead of just 'do this'. Perhaps people worry that commands sound too harsh. But you can often solve this by putting the word 'please' in front.

Here are some examples of long-winded phrases and shorter versions that use commands.

You should just think of it as a complete statement.

? **Just think of it as a complete statement.**

Writers should aim to be punchy.

? **Be punchy.**

They should be split where suitable.

? **Split them where suitable.**

The packet should be removed from the box. The contents should then be placed in the oven.

? **Remove the packet from the box. Then place the contents in the oven.**

Avoid nominalisations

A nominalisation is a type of abstract noun. (Is that plain English?) In other words, it is the name of something that isn't a physical object but a process, technique or emotion. Nominalisations are formed from verbs.

For example:

Verb Nominalisation

complete completion	introduce introduction
provide provision	fail failure
arrange arrangement	investigate investigation

So what's wrong with them?

The problem is that often they are used instead of the verbs they come from. And because they are merely the names of things, they sound as if nothing is actually happening in the sentence. Like passive verbs, too many of them make writing very dull and heavy-going.

Here are some examples.

We had a discussion about the matter.

? **We discussed the matter.**

There will be a stoppage of trains by drivers.

? **Drivers will stop the trains.**

The implementation of the method has been done by a team.

? **A team has implemented the method.**

Use positive language

Always try to emphasise the positive side of things.

For example:

If you don't send your payment, we won't be able to renew your membership in the scheme.
(Negative)

Please send your payment so that we can renew your membership of the scheme. (Positive)

? ?

Use lists where appropriate

Lists are excellent for splitting information up. There are two main types of list.

? You can have a continuous sentence with several listed points picked out at the beginning, middle or end.

? Or you can have a list of separate points with an introductory statement (like this list).

In the list above, each of the points is fairly long (in fact, they are both complete sentences) so they each start with a capital letter and end with a full stop.

For the same type of list with short points, it is better to set it out like this.

Participating fishers will need to take

? **a tape measure**

? **an old bath towel**

? **a pad of paper**

? **a pen.**

Myths

We're not trying to be trendy here by breaking some of the grammatical rules. We're just going to destroy some of the grammatical myths.

? You can start a sentence with **and, but, because, so** or **however**.

? You can split infinitives. So you can say **to boldly go**.

? You can end a sentence with a preposition. In fact, it is something **we should stand up for**.

? **And you** can use the same **word** twice in a sentence if **you** can't find a better **word**.

Of course, this does not mean you should break these so-called rules all the time - just when they make a sentence flow better.

Summary

? **Stop and think** before you start writing. Make a note of the points you want to make in a logical order.

? **Prefer short words**. Long words will not impress your customers or help your writing style.

Use everyday English whenever possible. Avoid jargon and legalistic words, and explain any technical terms you have to use.

? **Keep your sentence length down** to an average of 15 to 20 words. Try to stick to one main idea in a sentence.

? **Use active verbs as much as possible**. Say 'we will do it' rather than 'it will be done by us'.

? **Be concise**.

? **Imagine you are talking to your reader**. Write sincerely, personally, in a style that is suitable and with the right tone of voice.

And always check that your writing is clear, helpful, human and polite.

Words to avoid

Try to use the alternatives we suggest in brackets. They don't apply in all cases. You need to judge what language is appropriate for the form of communication.

Legal documents, for example, are more formal – and perhaps designed to be intimidating!

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| ? additional (extra) | ? advise (tell) |
| ? applicant (you) | ? commence (start) |
| ? complete (fill in) | ? comply with (keep to) |
| ? consequently (so) | ? ensure (make sure) |
| ? forward (send) | ? in accordance with (under, keeping to) |
| ? in excess of (more than) | ? in respect of (for) |
| ? in the event of (if) | ? on receipt (when we/you get) |
| ? on request (if you ask) | ? particulars (details) |
| ? per annum (a year) | ? persons (people) |
| ? prior to (before) | ? purchase (buy) |
| ? regarding (about) | ? should you wish (if you wish) |
| ? terminate (end) | |

Appendix 8

Grammar and Spelling tips

Spelling and grammar may have annoying details and exceptions, particularly in the English language, but they are part of the business of communicating accurately. Correct grammar and spelling help tell the reader exactly what you mean. The better you do it, the better you will be understood. Always make it easy for the reader. If you don't, you risk being misunderstood or having your work rejected.

SPELLING

It's easier to spell a word when you have really heard what is in it. Read these sentences aloud and exaggerate the pronunciation of every single sound and syllable. Do it to a ridiculous degree, so that you hear both "r's" in library, the "t" in correctly, and the "h" in exhibits, for example. It will sound silly, but this exercise is fun and useful.

- Mr. Willingham attempted to develop the envelope of existence correctly.
- The library hosted educational exhibits on consecutive weekends.

COMMON SPELLING ERRORS. Note the differences:

Develop/envelope

Whether/ weather

Spear/ spare

Praise/prays/prayers

We're/where/were

Example: Where were we? We're where they were.

You're/your.

Example: You're at your best when you are relaxed and alert.

Lose/loose

Example: If you have a hole in your pocket, you could lose your loose change.

Remember the simple rule: I before E except after C (unless it's CH.)

Example: I am relieved that the chief cannot be deceived.

They/their/there

In this region, we may understand "Dey get dey fish dey," but proper English requires us to use They...their...there: They get their fish there. Compare and translate "He get he fish hey."

LOOK FOR PATTERNS:

Suffixes: ENCE/ANCE/ANT/ENT

Assistant/assistants/assistance

Confident/confidence not confidance

Existence, not existance

COMMAS

Like so many things in English, this form of punctuation can be tricky. In general, they indicate a slight pause. Imagine yourself speaking what you write, so that you can hear where they go.

Use them

- To separate items in a list, e.g. pencil, paper, and rubber.
- To enclose a descriptive phrase, as in this example: Mr. Barriteau, head of SusGren, announced a new program.
- To separate independent clauses that begin with “and” or “but.” In other words, when you use those words to join things that could work as two separate sentences, then use a comma first. Example: Mr. Barriteau announced a new programme, but he added that it would not begin until October.

Don't just plunk a comma in between the subject (or subject phrase) and the verb. Here's a mistake: Members of the NBC, have been seeking redress.

AGREEING BY NUMBERS:

Caribbean people often say things like “She have” or “It have” or “You was” or “I were.”

That's fine in colloquial speech but for writing ...

Singular subject requires singular verb, and plural requires plural

Examples: I, he, she, it IS or WAS or HAS

We, they ARE, WERE or HAVE

Also, you ARE, WERE or HAVE

People who need ... (Not People who needs...)

Members of the party have ... (Not Members of the party has ... Remember, you're talking about the members, which is plural.)

OTHER COMMON MISTAKES:

What I will like to achieve... (Should be what I would like to achieve.)

I have learn... (Should be learned.)

People who needs... (Should be people who need...)

It self (Should be itself. Same with myself, yourself, etc.)

A human is a Who, and a thing is a That: “Anyone who wants to learn should practice.” NOT Anyone that wants to learn, or Someone that wants ... or People that want ...

Don't forget your APOSTROPHES, and where to put them.

Put them

- (a) where there's a contraction—in other words, where something has been shortened.
Example: Where is Martin? Martin has gone fishing. = Where's Martin?
Martin's gone fishing.
- (b) where you are indicating possession. Example: Martin's fishing skills are excellent. (You are talking about his fishing skills, skills that he possesses, that belong to him.)

BEWARE OF IT AND ITS APOSTROPHES!

It is = it's. Use the apostrophe to show a contraction of "It is."

Example: It's really good.

There is a confusing exception to the rule when you are indicating possession. When you are indicating something belonging to "it," don't use an apostrophe.

Example: The boat lost its engine. NOT: The boat lost it's engine. Annoying, isn't it? ☺

Be aware of who your readers are, or may be:

The plural of person is people. Caribbean people tend to say (and accept) "persons" instead.

Outside the region, this is not common.