

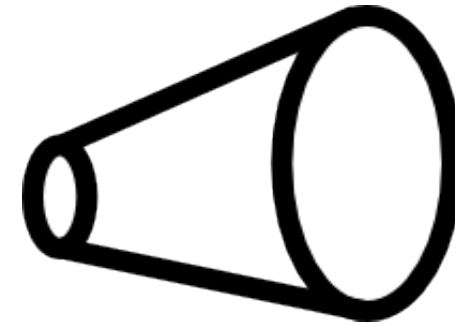
The Megaphone Book

A huge thank you to everyone
who helped make this happen
y'all are awesomeness in a bottle.

cracked sidewalk -
a Daisy looks for sun,
cloudy day.

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aword@J-SV.org 2008



What:

A zine on communication & media strategy for kick-ass activists.

(Hi there kick-ass activist!)

Beyond

WHAT:

Alternatives to normal communication.

WHY:

So far this zine has been about improving your communication and media strategy. But the playing field isn't level and the game sucks. So now we're going to look at ways of changing the game.

WHEN:

Always. This isn't an all or nothing kind of thing. The degree to which you use traditional media tactics or use alternatives will vary from situation to situation. The important thing is to focus on your goals and to remember that you always have a choice.

How:

First: stop playing their game. Second: get them to play yours. *For example:*

Change	Don't	Instead
The topic.	<i>Engage on the question of how many nukes we should build.</i>	<i>Talk about the morality of nukes.</i>
The venue	<i>Attend a forum they set up.</i>	<i>Hold an open-mic outside.</i>
The format	<i>Give a point-by-point rebuttal.</i>	<i>Use narrative and emotion.</i>
"Winning"	<i>Vote.</i>	<i>Have a revolution!</i>

This list isn't exhaustive. Find areas where you are reacting to the powers that be or working within parameters they have set up and then think about whether or not that will get you to your goal.

Not playing their game is fairly straightforward. Successfully getting them to play yours is more difficult. Sometimes you won't succeed. That's ok. If you decide not to participate in a dialogue that is part of an oppressive power dynamic but hold interpretive dance sessions on the lawn instead but nobody "gets" it you haven't necessarily failed.

Keep in mind your goals but also the bigger picture: Namely that part of activism isn't just "winning" on our specific issues but changing the way people relate to and interact with each other. Our communication should reflect that, because otherwise we'll never affect deep change but only surface victories.

Before

Good communication can't save a bad action (the Why)

Communication is important. But, it's just one tool out of many available to you. Don't start planning meetings by talking about "messaging". Start with goals and find the strategy that meets those goals and fits your group. Communication may be (an important, supporting) part of your action but don't confuse it with the action itself.

"Media is free. Use it. Don't pay for it. Don't buy ads. Make news."

Communication is neither spin nor framing (the What)

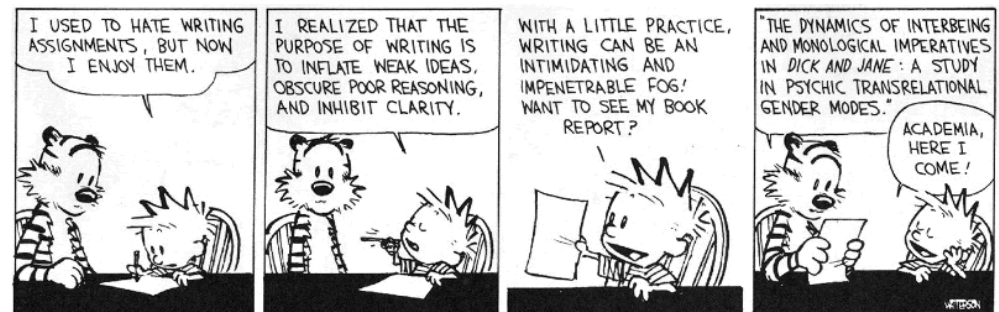
Communication is about effectively formulating the truth you already know, not about inventing an artificial message or clever phrases that will trick folks into agreeing with you. Tell the truth - the truth about the issues, your actions and your motivations. That's what convinced you and it's what's most likely to convince others.

Spell it out (the How)

You need to, exactly and explicitly, tell the facts, what they mean, how they're connected, and why they matter - with regard to both the issue and your action. Communicate as though you are the only the only source of information, because (a) this will often be the case (b) you'd rather information comes from you than from the other fellow. Communicate as though you were writing on a blank slate, because (1) this will often be the case (2) the point isn't to merely inform people of facts but imbue them with ideas.

If you want it to be known: **say it.**

If you want it to be thought: **say it.**



your list is longer using a service such as Google Groups or Riseup Lists will save you a lot of trouble.

A good email begins with a clear subject line. It serves an analogous purpose to the headline of press releases. If it's not clear from the subject line what the email is about most folks won't bother reading it.

Like all communication material, keep emails short and to the point. Personally I like using bullet points and one or two sentence paragraphs to clearly set off the important information.

Don't just send an email to say hi. Emails are most effective when they include an invitation to action. This (a) gives a reason for sending the email so folks will actually pay attention instead of regarding it as a nuisance (b) turn readers from passive bystanders into active participants in your cause.

→ *Speeches*

WHAT

Public speaking to the masses.

WHY

Because there are folks gathered in front of you who want to hear about your cause.

WHEN

When you have an audience you want to tell something to. Think about what it is you want to tell that specific audience and why.

How

Listen to yourself, you know what sounds right and normal. For the most part speeches are not that different from talking to people one on one. Just talk normally and don't over think it, you already know your message. Genuine sentiment and passion trump clever phrasing and don't be afraid to personalize it or show some passion.

91.7% of a good speech is confidence. If you know your topic, make an outline, speak clearly and practice and practice before hand and you will do spectacularly.

Speeches do have a few small quirks. Repetition of key ideas will help people process what you're saying. Being explicit about what your point is will help people pick out what's important. You don't have to shout but you do have to speak up. Similarly, don't speak unnaturally slowly but be careful not to rush.

Talking to the Media

The number one rule when working with the media is: they are lazy. Reporters rarely do outside research or give the issue much thought. They write what they have so give them what you want them to write.

Think about where you, and your target audience get most of their information. A front page article in the New York times isn't very useful if your constituency gets their news from the local weekly.

→ *Media Contact List*

WHAT

A list of names with contact information for everyone in the media who might write a story about your action.

WHY

So all your media literature gets to the people it's intended for.

WHEN

Before you send anything out, and updated continuously.

How

First, if you've had any previous contact with a reporter they should go on the top of your list. Next, make a list of all local and regional media outlets. You should be able to find contact information for them online. Some will list where they would like press releases sent, others will just have general contact information. Take whatever you can get. You want both phone and email. As you make contact with specific reporters add them to your list.

→ *Media advisory*

WHAT

A short notice announcing an upcoming event to the media.

WHY

To give the media a heads up that something is going to happen that they should attend and write about.

WHEN

1.5 to 2 weeks before the event.

How

Think of it as inviting your friends to see a movie with you. You have to give them the basic what when and where as well as convince them it's worth their while to see it. The format is essentially identical to the press release (next section) but with only the first 2 paragraphs and a third with logistical information to help the reporter show up.

font). Be creative and play around with the design to make your flier stand out but always ask yourself “if someone were to glance at this do they learn the one thing I need them to know?” Don’t forget to include contact information or a website for folks who want to learn more.

Once you’ve made your simple, clear, concise, visually appealing flier you have to distribute it. There are many ways of doing this. The most straightforward is passing it out to people on the street. You can also leave stacks in places people are likely to pass by or hand out a bunch for folks to give to their friends.

Posters are closely related to fliers, but because they are posted up instead of handed out they have to be even more visually compelling. Make text very big and put as little as humanly possible on your posters – folks are just going to see them in passing so all you need is the one thing you want them to know, **Don’t bother with your full message**

When putting up posters start with the obvious places such as bulletin boards and store windows (just ask, many will say yes). Then move on to any blank space you can imagine. With duct tape, staple guns & wheat paste you can put a poster just about anywhere (I especially like wooden telephone polls).

→ Signs

WHAT

A visual you hold/display at an action.

WHY

So folks who see you know what’s going on and don’t just write you off as a bunch of loonies.

WHEN

Make them before the action and don’t forget to bring and display them at the action.

How

Big poster-board and thick sharpie are all you need. For the deluxe version get a stake or piece of wood (hardware store) and staple it to your sign. The text has to be ludicrously big so that folks across the street from you will have no problem reading it. That means it has to be super super short. Which is fine, because all you need on there is the answer to “what are those folks protesting about?” Don’t worry about coming up with a clever slogans, just make sure you tell the world why you are out there ... what you are for or against?

→ Call backs

WHAT

Calls to reports that you sent media advisories and press releases.

WHY

To make sure they got what you sent them, establish personal relationship, provide more information and that extra follow up.

WHEN

Day after you send out a media advisory or press release

How

Call everyone you sent something to. Ask them if they got it, if they have any questions & if they plan on attending / writing about your action.

→ Interviews

WHAT

Answering media questions.

WHY

Because it’s your chance to be heard directly and shape the story.

WHEN

Whenever asked. You can (and should) also offer to be interviewed.

How

Be prepared. Know your message and your supporting evidence. Role-playing is a good way to practice.

Be calm. The reporter just wants information for their article, they’re not grilling or debating you. You don’t have to prove anything or convince them of anything, just get your message across.

Be on message. Sometimes you get questions that drag you away from the point you want to make or are provocative or of the “gotcha” variety. You don’t have to respond – if you don’t say anything about it they can’t write about it. Either answer them curtly or ignore them completely. A good way out is “This isn’t about X, it’s about <insert message here>”.

Be honest. If you don’t know an answer that’s ok, just say so. Promise the reporter you’ll get them an answer as soon as possible. Then tell them what you do know (i.e. your message).

Be human and passionate. Talk the way you would to your friends and don’t be afraid of emotions. Reporters are people too!

A-B-C Rule:
Acknowledge the question. Bridge to your issue. Connect to your message.

Introduction

Why?

Because you might find it useful. If you don't, please recycle. Actually, you already know how to communicate effectively and, in fact, do it everyday. You talk to people, tell them stories, and invite them to events. Those are all the basic skills involved in media and communication strategy. This zine will help you ...

1. ... collect your thoughts and charge in with confidence.
2. ... tackle specialized writing formats (like press releases).

Who?

I'm a Jewish non-working-class heterosexual male with a background in academia and the non-profit-industrial-complex. (i.e. I come from the class of people who have traditionally made the most extensive use of media. On the one hand that's why I am able to write this guide. On the other it means I am propagating the dominant mode of communication which, as you will see in section III, is not necessarily a good thing). I'm not an expert, I'm just sharing my limited experience.

How (is this thing organized)?

There are four main sections. Sections II & IV can be used like a reference book to look up what you need to know in a specific situation. Section I & III are more general but (hopefully) worth reading.

- I. **Before** – *how are we going to do what we want to do?*
- II. **During** – *practical how-to's for common communication needs.*
 1. What are you actually going to say?
 2. Talking to the Media
 3. Talking to Real People
- III. **Beyond** – *making it all more awesome.*
- IV. **Resources** – *some other stuff that might help.*

I've also split each of the how-to's into what/why/when/how both because I thought that it would make it easier to follow and to get you used to thinking like a journalist.

Resources

RUCKUS SOCIETY

<http://www.ruckus.org/section.php?id=18>

The Ruckus Society is all about providing activists with the the best “tools, training, and support,” which of course includes extensive information about media work. A lot of it is on line but don't be afraid to drop them a line and see if they can help you out with other aspects of your organizing as well.

SPIN PROJECT

<http://spinproject.org/article.php?list=type&type=22>

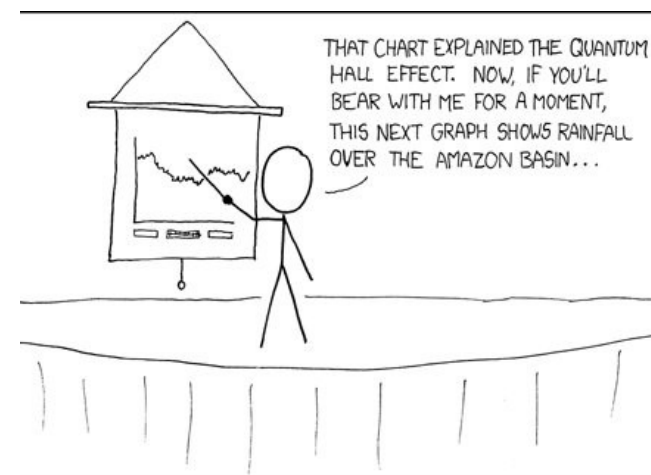
http://spinproject.org/downloads/Whose_Media_Entire_Toolkit.pdf

The Spin Project is essentially media consulting firm for “progressive” organizations. They have a number of tutorials on their website related to specific media skills as well as a massive 76 page pdf booklet about putting together a media and communication strategy

INDYMEDIA

<http://www.indymedia.org>

Indymedia tries to build an alternative to mainstream media. This zine is mostly focused on how to deal with mainstream media but Indymedia is a great place to look for folks already tuned into activism as well as find people with well developed media skills who might be willing to help or teach you.



IF YOU KEEP SAYING "BEAR WITH ME FOR A MOMENT", PEOPLE TAKE A WHILE TO FIGURE OUT THAT YOU'RE JUST SHOWING THEM RANDOM SLIDES.

During

So what are you actually going to say?

→ Message

WHAT

The basic thinking behind the action in just a few sentences.

WHY

The process of writing it will help you clarify and nail down what you want to say. And, you can use it as a crib sheet for the rest of your communication needs.

WHEN

First thing, before you create any other communication related stuff.

How

Forget about this whole “communications” thing for a second. Now, imagine a friend asks “What’s this thing you’re involved with?” Give your simple, honest answer. Say it out loud before you write it down.

Ideally you outlined (1) the issue, (2) why it matters, and (3) what you’re doing about it – in about one sentence for each part. Together these express the basic argument underlying your action.

You’re first go at it won’t be perfect. To improve it imagine what your friend’s likely follow-up questions would be; i.e. where are you not being explicit enough about, how, or why something is the case. Remember: facts are not an argument, they support arguments. Think about why you’ve bothered to mention that specific fact. Go back and try to rephrase your original response to incorporate the missing information to bring out all the connecting thoughts and meaning behind your words. If you’re stuck, think back to the discussions you had about goals and possible actions, you’ve already thought through the reasons for this action.

Sheer repetition can be helpful in making it shorter and snappier. Spout off a whole bunch of ways of saying it and see what sticks.

Read over what you have and ask yourself: (a) Is this an answer I would actually give my friend? (b) Does it answer the question? (c) Could it be shorter?

In addition to your message proper you should make a list of 3-4 pieces of **supporting evidence**: facts, statistics & anecdotes that support your case. But don’t throw away your passion and emotion. They are real and powerful!

→ Public Comments

WHAT

A specific type of public speaking which takes place before some sort of official body (such as a council or a board) and is governed by formal rules set by that body.

WHY

Because the body is responsible for something related to your cause.

WHEN

Most bodies that allow public comments have strict rules governing when they take place. Usually it’s before the start of their meetings but be sure to look up the details ahead of time.

When you decide to take your cause before an official body should be part of your overall campaign strategy. Note that it can either be to directly influence the body or as a publicity event.

How

Know the rules.

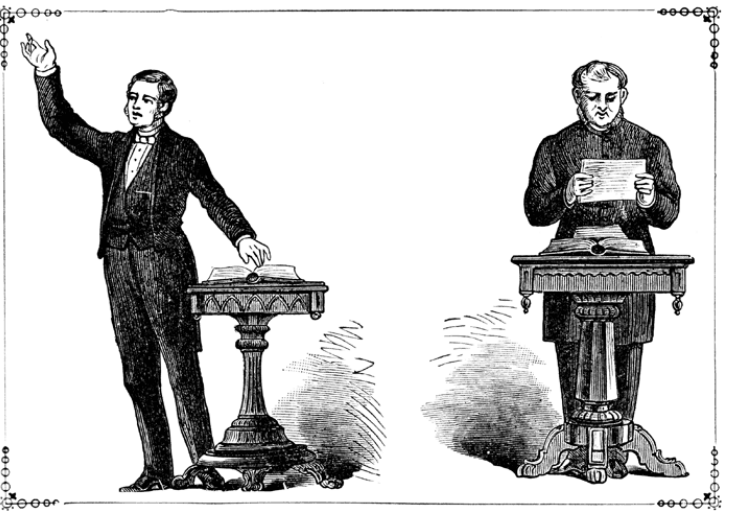
You might have to sign up before hand and there will likely be a time limit to how long you can talk. Online is a good place to look or just call them up to ask.

Know your purpose. Don’t be sucked into

directing your comments at the official body if that’s not what you’re there for.

Because of the artificial format and tight time constraint don’t try to use public comments to make an argument but to make an impact and raise issues and questions.

Lastly, more than one person can speak and you don’t all have to say the same thing. And, in my personal experience, the information in the “Beyond” section of this zine is especially relevant to public comments because the power dynamic of communication is so clearly evident.



→ Press Release

WHAT

A short notice telling the media what happened.

WHY

So the media will (a) write a story (b) write the story you want them to.

WHEN

Day of the event. If anything extraordinary happen send out another press release the day after as an update.

How

Write the article you would ideally like to read in the newspaper the next day. Remember: you're not trying to convince the reporter of anything.

Here's what a press release looks like:

Ideal Newspaper Headline

Subheading that summarizes what the press release is about

For Immediate Release: MONTH DAY, YEAR

For more information contact:

Mrs. Main Media Contact (314) 159-2653

Mr. I Can Give a Nice Supporting Quote (271) 821-1828

1st paragraph is very short (1-2 sentences) and gives the basic facts of what happened.

2nd paragraph is your message written out in nice snappy language. If you're doing this right this will essentially form an argument, the conclusion of which is the headline.

3rd paragraph is supporting evidence. Quotes are especially good. You're not including them to convince the reporter but so that they can be used in the story. Give what you imagine appearing in the newspaper. This is your chance to speak directly to the public.

4th paragraph is optional. It contains a slightly more in depth take on the matter. Don't expect any of it to show up in the newspaper. Include it to give context so that the reporter will have your thoughts in his head when she sits down to write.

(Press releases end with three hashes.)

In addition to sending it to everyone on your media contact list bring printed copies to the action itself to hand out to reporters there.

→ Website

WHAT

An on-line presence.

WHY

Mostly because people expect you too and because it can be useful to have somewhere to refer folks to for more information. But, don't expect your website to be your core outreach tool. It's a nice supplement but that's all.

WHEN

Put it up as soon as you can and update it if something major happens but don't spend too much time with it.

How

I don't have room in this zine to go over the technical side of things so either find someone who knows or search around online for a clear how to. As to the content: of course your message and this is a good place to unload all of that supporting evidence you have. If you happen to have pictures that's great but don't worry too much about it. If you are tech inclined feel free to keep it up-to-date with your latest press release and news, but if all you have up is your message, contact information and some supporting evidence you're totally golden.

It's ok not to have a website.

→ Emails

WHAT

Electronic letters sent to a list of specific people.

WHY

Either to inform, or better yet, to ask people to do something.

WHEN

Not too often. When you have very big news or really want folks to do something, such as attend an event or write a letter or donate or whatever.

How

First you need a list of email addresses. Having folks sign up to receive emails from you is a great organizing tool. But remember, sending an email to folks who signed up for more information and to say informed is different than to co-organizers or members of your group.

You can have multiple lists for different target audiences.

If your list is short just put all the emails in the BCC section (never the To section – that way the recipients can't see whom else you sent the email to which is far more polite), and your own email address in the To section. If

Talking to Real People

Talking to real people is far more important than talking to the media. Think about how you get information and form opinions. The news might give you the basic facts but you likely give far more weight to what you hear from your friends and come to conclusions through conversations with them.

You should be saying basically the same thing to real people as you do to the media (i.e. your message). However, when talking to real people the third part of your message (what you're doing about it) becomes vitally important and should **always** be phrased as **invitation for participation** – here's what you can do about it.

→ Conversations

WHAT

Just talking with other people.

WHY

Word of mouth is the best way to get the word out and folks on your side.

WHEN

Every chance you get.

How

You talk to people everyday, but it can be difficult to bring up controversial issues and we don't like arguing with our friends. The solution is don't be controversial and don't argue. Talking to other people isn't about convincing them you're right, it's about showing them what you believe in. Focus on getting your message across. Don't apologize for your opinion, but don't be afraid to concede good points to those who disagree and always seize and emphasize common ground. You want to avoid being preachy and pushy. Ultimately, your main asset here is that you are a real honest to god human being and you believe in this cause. If you show that, the rest will be easy.

One useful tactic to get started is begin with a question (often of the form "what do you think about ..."). It's non-confrontational and elicits a response which will help make folks feel involved with your issue. But be upfront and honest about the fact that you're advocating a position.

Try to make starting conversations an integral part of all your outreach, especially when you're out fliering, tabeling or protesting. Also, don't artificially separate your activism from your life. When your friends ask what you've been up to, tell them!

→ Letters to the Editor

WHAT

Those letters you always read in the opinion section.

WHY

They're free, widely read and highly trusted and respected because they come from regular folks just like you.

WHEN

They can take a while to be published so start sending them at least a week before you want them to appear.

How

Writing a letter to the editor is very simple:

Dear Editor,

Your message.

One piece of supporting evidence.

The shorter it is the more likely it will be published. Have multiple people write about the topic. Newspapers won't publish them all but will notice that a lot of folks care and be more inclined to publish at least one.

Include your name and contact information. The paper may wish to get in touch with you before publishing to confirm some details.

→ Fliers & Posters

WHAT

A piece of paper you hand out or hang up somewhere to tell people something.

WHY

Because you want to tell people something and don't want to have to repeat yourself. Plus, advertising works.

WHEN

It's never too early to start getting the word out. It takes repetition for an idea to be noticed and sink in. If you're advertising an event folks need to know about it well in advance in order to be able to attend.

How

Fliers are primarily visual. Keep it short. You really don't have room for more than your message spelled out in the most concise terms possible. The one thing you want to get across (which will likely coincide with the headline from your press release) should be very visible (think BIG THICK