



Narrative Fundraising

*A hands-on workshop for those who make live presentations, produce media, & write copy:
Language that connects with donors & portrays compelling stories that move people to give.*

*** LEASIS Presents Doctoral Research That Reveals . . .**

- **The Five Fatal Mistakes Found in The Language of Fund Raising.**
- **The Two Non-Verbal Features That Increased Response by 346%.**

* **LEASIS** is the California nonprofit organization that supported this doctoral research on the discourse of philanthropy and now sponsors the Narrative FundRaising Seminar as an educational outreach to leaders within the nonprofit community.



Writing The Stories of Philanthropy



Thursday, October 31

Country Inn & Suites: Ontario
4674 Ontario Mills Pkwy | Ontario

Monday, November 4

Marriott Courtyard: Century City
10320 W Olympic Blvd | Los Angeles

Tuesday, November 5

Marriott Courtyard: Long Beach
500 E. First St | Long Beach

Wednesday, November 6

Burbank Holiday Inn: Media Center
150 E. Angeleno Ave | Burbank

Thursday, November 7

Marriott Courtyard: Laguna Hills/Irvine
23175 Avenida de la Carlota | Laguna Hills

Friday, November 8

Marriott Courtyard: Palm Springs
1300 Tahquitz Canyon Way | Palm Springs

Thursday, November 14

Citibank Bldg: Conference Room
300 E State St, 6th Floor | Redlands

Thursday, November 21

The San Diego Foundation
2508 Historic Decatur Rd, 200 | San Diego

Seminar: 9 am - 4 pm Free Briefing: 4 - 5 pm | The seminar contains all that's presented in the free briefing, **plus** hands-on practical application.

The Way We Write is All Wrong:

Do *your* fund appeals make these *five fatal mistakes*?

Presented by

Frank C. Dickerson, PhD



Frank C. Dickerson

In the largest linguistics study of its kind, Dr. Dickerson analyzed a 1.5-million-word body of fund-raising texts across nine philanthropic sectors. Representing all 735 U.S. nonprofits that raise \$20 million or more, his computer analysis found five fatal mistakes in the 2,412 appeals profiled. Findings were based on texts' use of 67 language features.

The takeaway—marrying the hard science of multivariate statistics with the soft art of language analysis made it possible to describe how fund raisers write. Conducted at Claremont Graduate University's Peter F. Drucker School of Management and School of Educational Studies, the research peered beneath the surface of a 50/50 mix of printed and online appeals, subjecting them to the equivalent of a linguistic MRI. In describing the implications of what he discovered, Dr. Dickerson paraphrases the famous distress call of Apollo 13 astronaut Jack Swigert:

Fund Raisers...We Have a Problem!

Language analysis revealed that the typical appeal...

- Reads like an *academic paper* for a professor who's no longer there rather than like a *conversation* between friends.
- Contains less *narrative* than *official documents*, using language that elevates *abstract concepts* over *people*.
- Lacks the three types of *characters* common to storytelling: *protagonists*, *antagonists*, and an *ensemble cast*.
- Fails to create *tension* by portraying *events* and quoting *dialogue* to make the reader *scared*, *sad*, *glad*, or *mad*.
- Neglects to show a donor how their gift can bring *resolution* to the narrative and make her or him its *hero figure*.

Ironically, this isn't the writing style leaders prefer...

In addition to profiling texts, the research surveyed those who wrote them. To learn what factors nonprofit executives believe make a fund appeal effective, they were asked to score the importance of using an argument-centric (expository) style of writing on a 1 to 5 scale (with 5 being high). *Only 5.04 percent rated exposition high.*

Then they were asked to score the importance of using a more emotional, human-interest narrative writing style. *Those rating narrative high increased to 45.21 percent.*

But despite their 9 to 1 preference for narrative, the linguistic evidence of leaders' own writing samples revealed a wide gap between what they believe about good writing, and how they actually write—they believe one thing but do another. This seminar will help you avoid this schizophrenia as you understand the cause of the five fatal mistakes most appeals make. *You'll learn how to right the way you write.*

Most-preferred Writing Style

Though nonprofit sector executives prefer narrative over exposition by a ratio of 9 to 1, their own writing doesn't connect at a personal level and is devoid of human interest—a grave disconnect between practice and beliefs. This hands-on seminar helps resolve this schizophrenia.

5.04%

Exposition

45.21%

Narrative

Percentage of nonprofit executives rating exposition and narrative high

Three Keys to **R**ighting the Way You Write



Margaret Atwood

Canadian author Margaret Atwood tells a parable about a dinner conversation which, though *fictional*, illustrates the *reality* of how we think about writing.

The man seated next to Margaret introduces himself and asks: “**What do you do, Ms. Atwood?**” She replies: “**I’m a writer.**” The man responds enthusiastically: “**Really! When I retire I’m going to become a writer too.**” Margaret reciprocates: “**And what do you do, sir?**” He replies: “**I’m a neurosurgeon.**” With a twinkle in her eye, Atwood shoots back: “**How interesting, I always thought that when I retire, I’d take up brain surgery!**”

Few of us think about *how* we write.

Atwood’s acerbic reply frames how we think about writing—we don’t. We take it for granted. We use it in discourse about more weighty matters, but seldom do we consider writing as a subject in its own right.

And when we do think about writing, we’re more concerned about not embarrassing ourselves by flubbing up on some point of grammar or syntax. While the rules of writing are important, it’s far more important to *think about the larger picture, comprised of the three language domains.*



You’ll learn about the three domains of language . . .



Domain 1: *Rhetorical Superstructure*

Architect Louis Henri Sullivan, known as the father of skyscrapers in late 19th century Chicago, wrote that *form ever follows function*. And like building a house (or erecting a skyscraper), as the architect of your text, you first have to define its *function*. What do you want your writing to *accomplish*?



This seminar holds two premises to be true about the *function* of a fund appeal: 1.) stories make the *emotional connection* that motivates giving; 2.) stories build long-term *donor loyalty*. Decades of thought leaders have championed these premises. Yet research shows few leaders write effective narrative appeals. *They know a good story when they see one, but they don’t see what makes a good story good.*

You’ll learn the ten secrets of writing a successful narrative fund appeal that . . .

- ❶ *Connects* at a personal level by *reading* like a face-to-face conversation between friends *sounds*.
- ❷ *Bonds* with your reader by introducing an appealing cast of characters *your organization helps*.
- ❸ *Shows* how your organization can change the life of one person by reenacting a *narrative moment*.
- ❹ *Anchors* your narrative moment in time and space by painting *word pictures that depict its setting*.
- ❺ *Upsets* the protagonist’s narrative world-in-balance by depicting an event that *creates a sudden shock*.
- ❻ *Describes* your protagonist as he or she struggles to set their world right again by *setting a strategy*.
- ❼ *Unfolds* movement toward resolution by recounting key events in the protagonist’s *scary sojourn*.
- ❽ *Offers* hope for resolution by describing how your organization can bring *specific resources to bear*.
- ❾ *Portrays* how your reader can be the hero figure by *funding* the cost of providing those resources.
- ❿ *Closes* the narrative by asking the reader to *accept the leading role of hero or heroine* by giving.



Domain 2: *Linguistic Substructure*

Like a contractor's raw materials of wood, wire, and pipe . . . a writer's stock-in-trade is the language she or he uses to compose texts. Computer analysis makes it possible to count the frequency of groups of words that create the voice of a document. For instance, twenty-three linguistic features create highly interpersonal texts, six produce highly informational texts, and six linguistic features create narrative.



A sample of 67 linguistic features that work together to produce specific outcomes . . .

Personal Connection Features

- Private Verbs (I think, I feel)
- Contractions (don't, that's)
- 2nd-Person Pronoun (you)

Dense Information Features

- Nominalizations (hopeful *vs.* hope)
- Prepositions (among, for, toward)
- Adjectives (supportive response)

Narrative Features

- Past Tense Verbs (broke, hit)
- Public Verbs (said, told)
- 3rd-Person Pronouns (he, she)

You'll see copy that fails to connect and tell stories so you can adjust your own writing

Informational Non-narrative Text

Help Ameliorate Economic Asymmetry

For mothers who are their families' sole source of support, economic impediments constrain their ability to make provision for childcare, adequate housing, and basic nutrition for their children. It is inopportune that as a consequence of these limitations, their discretionary funds for what social workers call bridging experiences, which research suggests are salient to the development of pre-teen youth, increasingly are being put in heightened jeopardy. Concurrently, anomalous revenue flows are curtailing county and city funding for the camping trips that would help inform the ecological views of at-risk youth, making philanthropy the only mitigating factor for ameliorating this causal economic asymmetry and its consequent malevolent outcomes. Thus, Wentworth, I remain hopeful consideration might soon prompt a contribution to this eleemosynary appeal.

Interpersonal Narrative Text

Help Send Carley to Camp

As soon as everyone was gone, I saw tears well up in Carley's eyes. She said: "Mama told me I can't go to camp 'cuz we can't 'ford it." Suddenly her little dream of a week at camp with friends had evaporated. Twenty dollars is all we ask families to pay. Not much. That's the cost of a few gourmet cups of coffee for you or me. But for Carley's mom, Laura, \$20 might mean her other three kids—Sally, Tom and Jon—could miss a meal. It matters! It broke my heart to think Carley and others wouldn't get to go to camp. But it takes money to get them there. And frankly, right now I just don't know where that money's going to come from. That's why I'm writing, John. Can you help Carley and her friends get to camp? Can you send a gift of \$20 or more in the enclosed envelope today?

You'll review & learn from fund appeals like these . . .

- A 1633 letter by John Eliot for a Massachusetts Bay Colony school that would become Harvard.
- A 90 AD letter by Pliny the Younger to Cornelius Tacitus for a school in Pliny's hometown of Como.
- The best narrative reviewed among 2,412 documents, written by Covenant House of New York.
- An online appeal by Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to assist Holocaust survivors.
- An online appeal by Stanford University that tells the story of a PhD candidate in Economics.
- An online blog and letter by Partners Relief, a Norwegian human rights agency working in Burma.
- A letter by the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. that illustrates the problem with generalization.
- A University of Wisconsin appeal that ranked highest among 2,412 texts for informational density.

You'll learn the truth about the *philanthropy fairy* — she's a myth . . .

In reviewing the curricula of more than 300 higher education programs that feature courses on nonprofit management, few were found to offer significant coverage of fund raising. And while professional associations offer plenty of fund-raising training, they fail to teach practitioners how to use the underlying language that shapes the fund-raising message their training equips practitioners to deliver. This lack of attention to the central tasks of fund raising and its language might lead one to think that higher education and association leaders believe some benevolent philanthropy fairy just tosses magic dust, waves her wand, and *poof*—money suddenly appears. ***But there is no wand, no magic dust, no fairy . . . just real people who raise money the old-fashioned way. They ask for it. This seminar will give you the language resources to ask effectively.***





Domain 3: *Stylistic Infrastructure*

Language is the bridge that connects us to others through what we write or say. But it's more than the sum of its linguistic and rhetorical parts. As the setting and design of the Sydney Harbor bridge creates an elegant scene, language can be structured to make a human connection.

The bridge spanning Sydney's harbor is the world's largest, containing 6 million hand-driven rivets and huge hinges to accommodate expansion. A fund-raising narrative contains its own support paraphernalia—elements of stylistic infrastructure that produce the emotional torque which enables it to . . .



- **Connect** at a personal level like two friends talking over a cup of coffee, and
- **Narrate** a compelling story that evokes an emotional response.

A fund appeal must create emotional resonance with a narrative that motivates a donor beyond what naked facts alone might convince him or her to give. But while everyone knows a good story when they see one, few know what makes a good story good. You'll learn four *style techniques* essential to building an effective story:



Repetition



Clarity



Dialogue



Imagery

You'll see how the stylistic infrastructure of language can . . .

- **Grab** attention with an opening that makes them want more (She glanced nervously up and down the street).
- **Cut** a narrative window through which the reader sees and feels tension (Jan was shivering and was scared.)
- **Animate** scenes by replacing adjectives with verbs (My boyfriend beats me up. *vs.* He has been abusive).
- **Quote** dialogue (Jan said "My boyfriend's gonna' be mad." Sister Mary asked "Boyfriend? You mean your pimp?")
- **Visualize** a gift's impact by showing tangible outcomes (Just \$3.57, the cost of a latte, will provide Jan two hot meals).

You'll put all the pieces together in a story-raising session . . .

Like an old-fashioned barn raising, this seminar will include a chance for you to roll up your sleeves and build a **connecting narrative moment**, which as the words imply, has three characteristics . . .



- **Connecting:** It makes an emotional personal **connection**.
- **Narrative:** It **narrates** a story with people, tension, and resolution.
- **Moment:** It does this in a short **moment** of copy space.

Whether your connecting narrative moment will be used in a direct mail fund appeal or newsletter, a piece that will be emailed or posted on a social media platform, or it becomes the core of a face-to-face conversation with a donor, the message needs to include the three elements of a story: **People**, **Tension**, and **Resolution**.

A connecting narrative moment has three elements . . .

1. *People*



Protagonist | **Antagonist** | **Ensemble**

Fund appeals need to be more about **people** than ideas. But because details about **people** are hard to come by, writing often degenerates to a boring, lazy regurgitation of mission-statement babel. So **bring to the seminar; details on the three types characters found in stories.**

2. Tension



Sequence & Setting | Steady State | Sudden Shock | Solution Strategy | Scary Sojourn

People are like toothpaste tubes. What's inside comes out when they get squeezed. It's the **tension** of conflict that does the squeezing. But to portray conflict, you need details. Only then can you write across the five elements of the story-arc listed above.

3. Resolution



Your connecting narrative moment needs to show the reader how their gift can help resolve the conflict described. In a **commercial exchange**, the seller tells a potential customer how the product their money would **buy** could benefit **him or her**. In a **philanthropic exchange**, a fund raiser tells a potential donor how the charitable work their money would **fund** could benefit **others**. While a customer can kick the tires or thump the melon before **buying**, a donor depends on the promise delivered in words before **giving**. Bring the information necessary to write a compelling promise about what the donor's gift will do—the details needed to write the **offer**.



Group Story Swap: Like cookies, stories are meant to be shared

Before you leave, like an old-fashioned **cookie swap**, you will have baked and shared with your fellow seminar participants, a brief connecting narrative moment. You'll receive constructive criticism and have the beginnings of a story that you can post online, use in face-to-face presentations, speeches, newsletters, and direct mail appeals.

You'll learn how to get your story read and heard . . .

The best story won't raise a penny if the email, or the envelope it's sent in, doesn't get opened.



A 2008 *Nonprofit Times* review of research drove this home in an article on *email open rates*. Citing data from Convio, their report concluded: **"Getting a donor or advocate to open an email message is getting tougher, down to 14 percent from 22 percent"—a precipitous 36% drop.**



In 2011 Blackbaud opened a window on the strength of U.S. mail. They analyzed the channels 15.6 million donors used to give 1.16 billion dollars: **"Five years in, it is clear that direct mail giving is still the overwhelming majority of fund-raising revenue, and organizations must find ways to optimize multichannel giving versus hyper-focusing on Internet giving alone."** To paraphrase Mark Twain, **"Reports of direct mail's death have been greatly exaggerated."**

Giving Trends

The channels by which 15.6 million donors gave \$1.16 billion in 2010.



In 2013 the M+R/N-TEN e-Nonprofit Benchmarks study reported: "Email response rates were down in 2012. Way down, particularly for fundraising messages—0.07% (a 21% drop). Fundraising message click-through rates declined particularly steeply—down by 27% from 2011." The decline in email response and the continuing dominance of direct mail thus prompted a second vein of research into the non-verbal side of language—the dimension of **paralanguage**.

Paralanguage works **parallel** to the spoken word to **enhance the impact of speech** like tone of voice, gestures, facial expressions. These non-linguistic variables contribute more to speech than the words spoken.

Similarly **paratextual** factors work **parallel** to the **written word** to **get more mail opened**. Two physical features in direct mail were tested—addressing envelopes and writing notes in simulated handwriting, and canceling discount stamps to make them look first class. The question: do these factors increase response?

You'll see two factors that increased response 346% . . .

Handwriting & canceled nonprofit stamps add to mail what a smile adds to speech.

American Heart Association Campaign Data

A/B
Testing

FEATURES:

Double remit envelope
Conventional address
Indicia (no stamp)



FEATURES:

Note Card Envelope
HandScript address
Canceled stamp



	Qty	Resp%	Gift Avg	Gross
A Control:	24,997	1.70%	\$23.49	\$10,007
B Test:	25,000	5.89%	\$22.48	\$33,092
Increases:		+346%		+331%
A Control:				
B Test:				

Two Key Factors:

You'll learn how 1.) addressing and personalizing mail in computer *simulated handwriting* and 2.) *canceled discount stamps*, increased response by **346%** for The American Heart Association, and showed how they could have **saved \$301,578.76 in postage** during their roll out to 1,077,067 households.

What thought leaders are saying about this research:



"Frank, I tend to throw away many fund-raising letters and I never thought about analyzing the content and determining what works. I am pre-conditioned to favoring certain charities and causes and pay little attention to other solicitations. But your language analysis and findings are critical to practitioners."

*Philip Kotler, PhD
Professor of Marketing
Northwestern University*

"Frank, this is amazing work, just the kind of thing we should be doing more of."

*Grant McCracken, PhD
Research Affiliate
MIT*



"Frank, wonderful stuff and we'd like our 7000+ readers of *The Agitator* to benefit from it."

*Roger Craver, Founder
Craver, Matthews, Smith*



"Wow, we are true soul mates when it comes to fund raising. Terrific. This stuff is great. I can't wait to highlight it in my work."

*Katya Andresen, C.O.O.
Network for Good*

"Fantastic. Great job in dignifying what I have also practiced: 'Write the way you talk.' I still do it and still dictate all my letters."

*Jerry Huntsinger, Founder
Huntsinger & Jeffer*



"Imagine my pleasure realizing you're the author of the piece I read a few days ago that I hoped to commend in my e-newsletter. One of my chums in the nonprofit world said: 'Look, we're NOT all nuts; and here's the research to prove it!' Thank you. You've done everyone a big favor. Lousy written communications are costing the industry gazillions in lost revenue."

*Tom Ahern, Principal
Ahern Communications Ink*



"I was pretty impressed. We need more research into the 'soft side' of fund raising—story telling is where it's at!"

*Gail Perry, Principal
Gail Perry Associates*



"I am interested in referencing your findings in *The Nonprofit Marketing Guide*. Thanks so much for your contribution to the field!"

*Kivi Leroux Miller, Principal
NonProfitMarketingGuide.com*



"Frank, a very impressive study. Having been in direct mail for more than 30 years, your research is a window to the craft of words and how important copy is to successful direct marketing. In fact, considering that twitter only allows 140 characters, I think the ability to write clearly and concisely is even made more important through social media."

*John McIlquham, C.E.O.
The NonProfit Times*

"OMG Frank! Your work is brilliant! This research is profound and needs to be shared widely."

*Michael Margolis, President
Get Storied*



"This research agrees with what almost anybody who spends any time looking at the way nonprofits communicate already knows: Most fund raising copy is wooden, artificial, dull, and ineffective."

*Jeff Brooks
Future Fundraising Now*



"*The Way We Write is All Wrong* is a wake-up call based on solid evidence, and it couldn't come at a better time."

*Andy Goodman, Principal
The Goodman Center*



"Dr. Dickerson shared the results of his exhaustive analysis of nearly one million words of fund-raising copy. He explains why nearly everything he studied came up short."

*Mal Warwick, Founder & Chair
Mal Warwick Associates*

"I completely agree with your take on the way we write. So much communication sent by great organizations is poorly crafted. And that makes it difficult to get people to listen to very important messages."

*Joan Smyth Dengler, Sr. VP
Covenant House*





Frank C. Dickerson, Ph.D.
Narrative Fundraising
 7412 Club View Drive
 Highland, California 92346

Dear Colleague,

I started my fund-raising career in 1969 as president of a student organization during my freshman year at Ohio State. That led to 20 years in the nonprofit sector, during which time I eventually directed fund raising for a charity on the *Philanthropy 400* list that now raises more than half-a-billion dollars annually.

Then while consulting with nonprofits over the next two decades, I also conducted academic research that culminated in a linguistics study profiling the discourse of philanthropy.

This seminar grew out of my doctoral research at Claremont Graduate University, which discovered five fatal flaws in the writing of fund raisers. Because so much rides on what they write, I've developed this seminar to help nonprofit leaders frame effective narrative fund appeals that move people to give.

The cost is \$189. But the cost of ineffective communication is far greater. If you can't attend, you're invited to a free research briefing after the seminar from 4-5 pm. And if you can't attend the briefing either, email me for a seminar summary and cases. One case shows how a paralanguage factor increased response 346 percent.

Sincerely,

Frank C. Dickerson
 Frank C. Dickerson

What you learn could significantly lift your fund-raising results.

REGISTER or Request FREE Information by fax, mail, phone, email, or by going online.

Complete the form below to register and pay for a seminar, reserve space at a free research briefing, or to get a summary of the seminar and case studies.



FAX: 509-479-2690



MAIL: Make check payable to Levasis* and mail to: 7412 Club View Dr. Highland, CA 92346

*Levasis is the nonprofit sponsor of the seminar.



PHONE: Toll Free: 888-444-4868 or Direct: 909-864-2798



EMAIL: Frank@NarrativeFundRaising.org

OR ...



REGISTER & Pay or Request Info Online: www.NarrativeFundraising.org



Seminars: 9 am - 4 pm | Free Briefings: 4 pm - 5 pm
(RSVP: Frank@NarrativeFundRaising.org)

Thursday, Oct 31 Ontario Country Inn & Suites	Monday, Nov 4 Century City Marriott Courtyard	Tuesday, Nov 5 Long Beach Marriott Courtyard	Wednesday, Nov 6 Burbank Holiday Inn Media Ctr.
Thursday, Nov 7 Laguna Hills/Irvine Marriott Courtyard	Friday, Nov 8 Palm Springs Marriott Courtyard	Thursday, Nov 14 Redlands CitiBank Building	Thursday, Nov 21 San Diego San Diego Foundation



Narrative Fundraising

*A hands-on workshop for those who make live presentations, produce media, & write copy:
 Language that connects with donors & portrays compelling stories that move people to give.*

Narrative Fundraising Seminar

A hands-on workshop for those who write & tell the stories of philanthropy

Cost: \$189

Fall 2013 Dates:

- 10/31 Ontario
- 11/4 Century City
- 11/5 Long Beach
- 11/6 Burbank
- 11/7 Laguna Hills
- 11/8 Palm Springs
- 11/14 Redlands
- 11/21 San Diego

Who should attend:

Anyone who communicates with donors:

- VP Development & Advancement
- C.E.O. • Major/Planned Giving staff
- Development Director • Alumni staff

Schedule: 9 am - 4 pm

Free Research Briefing

Can't make the seminar? Then learn what the research uncovered

Cost: Free

What you will learn:

- 5 fatal mistakes in 2,412 appeals
- 10 secrets of narrative & connection
- 2 visual language factors that lifted response 346% for American Heart

A/B Test Mailing Results:

	Qty	Resp%	Gift Avg	Gross
Control	24,997	1.70%	\$23.49	\$10,007
Test	25,000	5.89%	\$22.48	\$33,092
Improvement:		+4.19%		+\$23,085

Schedule: 4 pm - 5 pm

Free Research Articles & Case Studies

Can't make either the seminar or briefing? Research summaries are free upon request.

Cost: Free

More than a dozen resources:

- Research Summaries • Case Studies
- Limited Test Mailing Slots Available**

Repeat American Heart's Test:

A: Control



B: Test



Registration Form Complete and mail this coupon, along with a \$189.⁰⁰ check payable to **Levasis**, to address below (note: lunch & parking **not** included). Or go to www.NarrativeFundRaising.org to register and pay by **credit card** or **paypal**. If you can't attend, but wish to come to the **free briefing**, want a **free seminar summary** and **case studies**, or you want **test mailing information**, indicate that below or email Frank@NarrativeFundraising.org.

Name _____ Organization _____

Address _____ City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

(If paying by credit card, print credit card **billing address** here)

Position _____ Ph (____) _____ - _____ Email _____

☐ Check enclosed

☐ Charge my: ☐ Discover ☐ AMEX ☐ MasterCard ☐ VISA (Card Number) _____ (Exp. Mo/Yr) _____ (Security #) _____ (Name on Card) _____

Check all that apply: I'll attend: ☐ the seminar ☐ the free briefing in _____ on ____/____/____ (City) (Mo/Day) ☐ Please email article & test mailing case.

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