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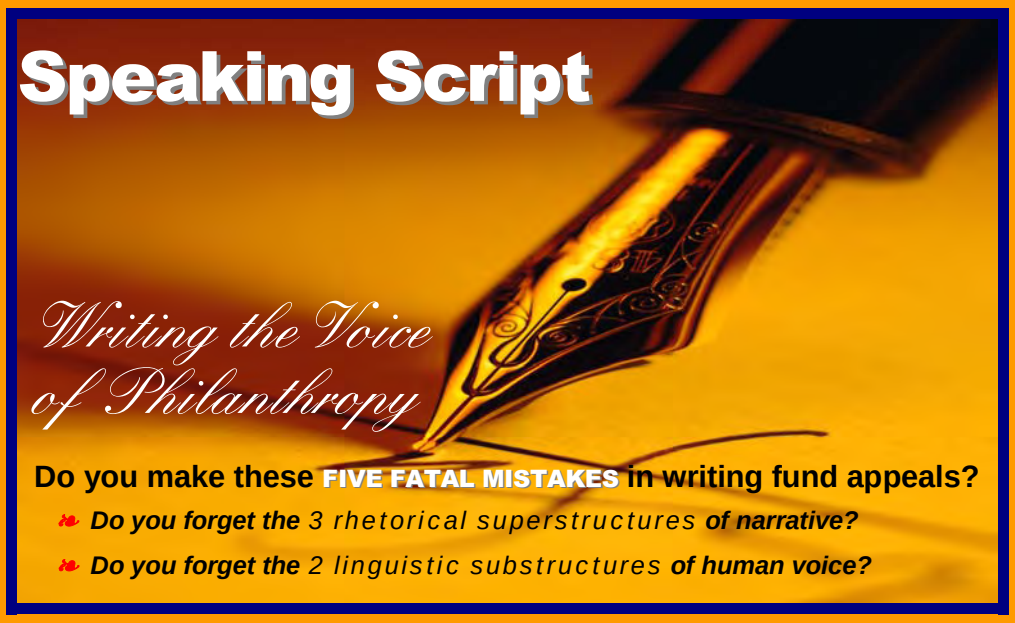

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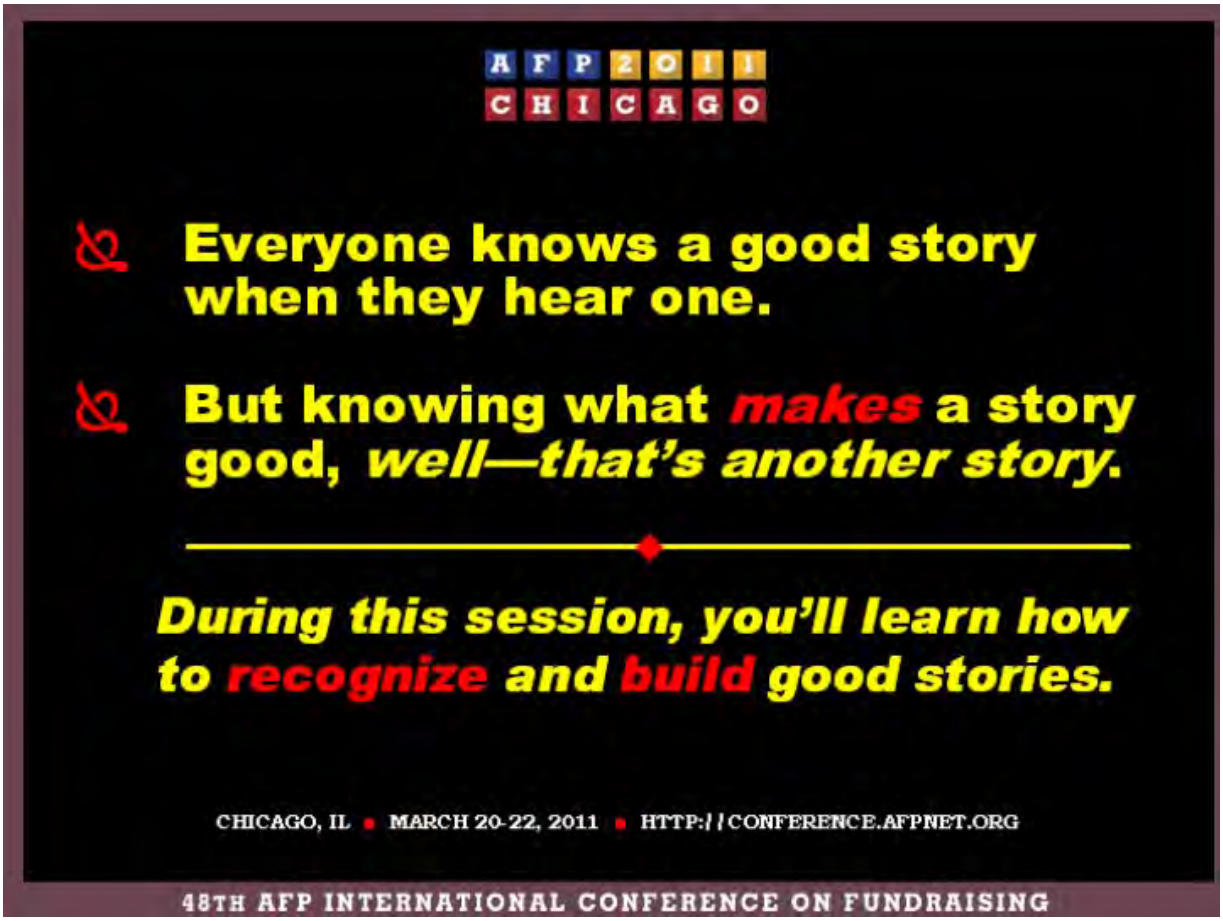
Objectives



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Foreword

This is an expanded version of the speaking script I used during my research presentation titled *Writing the Voice of Philanthropy*. This presentation was made on March 21, 2011 at the 48th International Conference on Fund Raising, convened by the Association of Fund-Raising Professionals in Chicago, Illinois. As a speaking script, this is not a polished document and follows no academic style guide. Never intended for publication, it may well have typographical errors. With these disclaimers, I'm happy to share this with Narrative FundRaising Seminar participants.

The slides reproduced here were keyed to my spoken presentation and were saved in .png format before distilling to pdfs. They were downsized to 25 percent in this process, which was good enough for the original purpose, but make them hard to read. So to increase readability, ***set your pdf reader to 160 percent*** (or as high as you can, while still fitting the full width of your screen). Due to copyright restrictions, ***do not reproduce or post any of the slides in this document online***.

During The Narrative FundRaising Seminar, the principles described here were studied alongside cases—numerous fund-raising texts I had been evaluated in my doctoral research. These cases are not included here. If you have questions, contact me at www.HighTouchDirect@msn.com or call (909) 864-2798. Several additions to the original presentation include these bonus materials:

- Locating this study amid the philanthropic research of the nonprofit sector—*Writing The Voice of Philanthropy: The Generative Core of Language versus the Descriptive Mirror of Statistics* (p. vi).
- Comments on my research findings by fourteen thought leaders in philanthropy (p. vi.).
- Ten selection's illustrating Aristotle's views on discourse from his *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* (p. vii).
- A reprint and analysis of the world's oldest matching gift fund-raising letter to raise funds for a local school, written circa 90 A.D. by Pliny the Younger to Roman senator, Cornelius Tacitus.

An expanded discussion of 23 linguistic features that produced interpersonal connection and 6 that produced narrative in the exemplar letter, *Help Send Carley to Camp* . This section cuts to the core of what makes good writing good. It illustrates how linguistic features work together to connect with a reader and narrate a story.

I'm working on a book-length treatment that will describe the disturbing findings of my research, implications for the nonprofit sector, and practical advice on how practitioners can improve their writing. It will contain a more extensive section on stylistic infrastructure of writing and will include a full list of sources cited.

Additional resources are listed at the end of the script. These resources can be downloaded at no cost from my academic research site: www.TheWrittenVoice.org. Past projects produced by my direct mail company, High Touch Direct Mail, can be accessed at my gallery site: www.HighTouchDirect.com. The implications of my research and this presentation can be boiled down to two action points. As a fund raiser you must:

1. write like you talk . . . if you wouldn't say it in a conversation then don't write it, and
2. write a connecting narrative moment (a very brief story) to make your reader scared, sad, glad, or mad.

Sincerely,

Frank C. Dickerson, Ph.D.

P.S. This script does not have footnotes since it was designed as a speaking script. My forthcoming book will incorporate citations and broader coverage on the stylistic infrastructure of writing. I hope you find this helpful. If I can assist you in any way, my direct line is 909-864-2798. Again, due to copyright limitations, do not post this material online and do not reproduce the slides. However, you are free to quote any text, making appropriate citation.

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Writing The Voice of Philanthropy—The Generative Core of Language Versus The Descriptive Mirror of Statistics:

Locating this study amid the philanthropic research of the nonprofit sector

The effectiveness or ineffectiveness of a fund-raising campaign is typically measured in terms of response rate and net income. However, such statistics are ***descriptive***, not ***generative***. Like a mirror that reflects reality but is powerless to create it, such quantitative measures only reflect results that were generated by language.

As the first discourse analyst, Aristotle explored the persuasive power of language, and in that process created paradigms that are still dominant. His *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* include taxonomies like the distinction among three types of persuasive appeals—to logos, to pathos, and to ethos. I slice written discourse into three dimensions that work together to achieve a writer's aim: rhetorical superstructure, linguistic substructure, and stylistic infrastructure. This presentation illustrates how dimensions of language work together either to ***infuse*** a written text with the passion of speech or ***suck*** it dry of human character and connection. I illustrate how the generative core of language can ***lift*** a text by creating a ***connecting narrative moment*** or ***sink*** it with ***detached information-heavy*** prose.

My doctoral research applied the hard science of multivariate statistics with the soft art of language analysis to describe how 67 linguistic features work together to create this range of effects. Like a linguistic MRI, my study analyzed more than 1.5 million words of text in 2,412 online- and print-based documents. This presentation summarizes the shocking profile that emerged from my analysis, and outlines suggestions the study indicates can improve the discourse of fund raising.

Comments on my research by thought leaders in Philanthropy . . .

- "Frank, I enjoyed reading your letter and hearing about your work. I tend to throw away many fundraising 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, Ph.D.: Prof. of Marketing, Northwestern University

- "Frank, this is amazing work, just the kind of thing we should be doing more of, thanks for letting me know."
  Grant McCraken: Ph.D.: Research Affiliate, MIT

- "Imagine my pleasure, receiving your email and realizing you're the author of the piece I read a few days ago that I hoped to recommend 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!' I hope your paper gets VAST circulation, especially among younger fundraisers who are eager to get it right (write?). Thank you. You've done everyone a big favor. Lousy written communications are costing the industry gazillions in lost revenue."
  Tom Ahern: Ahern Communications Ink

- "Frank, thank you very much for the heads up on your very impressive study. Having been in direct mail for more than 30 yrs, 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

- "Jerry Huntsinger has sent your great piece of work. Wonderful stuff and we'd like our 7000+ readers of The Agitator (www.theagitator.net) to benefit from it."
  Roger Craver: Founding Partner, Craver, Matthews & Smith

- "I was pretty impressed. We need more research into the 'soft side' of fundraising—story telling is where it's at!"
  Gail Perry: Gail Perry Associates

- "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: Founding Partner, Huntsinger & Jeffer

- "Dr. Dickerson shared the results of his exhaustive analysis of nearly one million words of fundraising copy—and found that nearly everything he studied came up short. He explains why."
  Mal Warwick: Founder & Chairman, Mal Warwick Associates

- "Frank I will be brief. Awesome, as my young Canadian associates say. Keep it up and if you get to London--well, if you don't call me for a pub-crawl you're not half the man you think you are! Here is to the preservation of wisdom."
  John Sauvé-Rodd: Datapreneurs, London

- "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: The Goodman Center

- "OMG Frank! Your work is brilliant! Would love to profile your research in an upcoming newsletter and support you any other way we can."
  Michael Margolis: President, Get Storied

- "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. Is it okay to blog parts of your papers?"
  Katya Andresen: C.O.O., Network for Good

- This research agrees with what almost anybody who spends any time looking at the way nonprofits communicate already knows: Most fundraising copy is wooden, artificial, dull, and ineffective."
  Jeff Brooks: Donor Power Blog, TrueSense Marketing

- "Thanks for sharing your research. I am interested in referencing your findings in *The Nonprofit Marketing Guide*. Thanks so much for your contribution to the field!"
  Kivi Leroux Miller: NonProfitMarketingGuide.com

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Insights from the First Discourse Analyst—Aristotle

On rhetoric:

"The subject can plainly be handled systematically, for it is possible to inquire the reason why some speakers succeed through practice and others spontaneously; and every one will at once agree that such an inquiry is the function of an art."

Rhetoric I:1

"Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. . . .Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. . . There are, then, these three means of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able 1) to reason logically, 2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and 3) to understand the emotions."

Rhetoric I:2

On friendship:

"We may describe friendly feeling towards any one as wishing for him what you believe to be good things, not for your own sake but for his, and being inclined, so far as you can, to bring these things about."

Rhetoric II:4

On kindness:

"Kindness-under the influence of which a man is said to 'be kind' may be defined as helpfulness towards some one in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself, but for that of the person helped. Kindness is great if shown to one who is in great need, or who needs what is important and hard to get, or who needs it at an important and difficult crisis; or if the helper is the only, the first, or the chief person to give the help."

Rhetoric II:7

On pity:

"Pity may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover to befall us soon. In order to feel pity, we must obviously be capable of supposing that some evil may happen to us or some friend of ours."

Rhetoric II:7

On writing:

"One must study three points: first, the means of producing persuasion; second, the style, or language, to be used; third, the proper arrangement of the various parts of the speech."

Rhetoric III:1

"Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes Place."

Poetics II: 14

On narrative:

"Plot is the imitation of the action- for by plot I here mean the arrangement of the incidents. By Character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents. The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place. . . .Third in order is Thought- that is, the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances. . . . Fourth . . .comes Diction; by which I mean . . . as has been already said, the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose."

Poetics I: 6

"Tragedy is an imitation not only of a complete action, but of events inspiring fear or pity."

Poetics I: 9

"Tragedy like Epic poetry produces its effect even without action; it reveals its power by mere reading."

Poetics III:26

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Preface

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Presenter

Apparently Dr. Dickerson's mother had wanted a baby girl, because she named him Frankie Carol—yes . . . both are feminine spellings!

He grew up in rural Southern Illinois and then moved to Ohio where he graduated from The Ohio State University in humanities, which he says prepared him to do nothing that would earn a living. Being a student activist on campus in the late 1960s, he chose a career path in the nonprofit sector.

Frank served with Campus Crusade for Christ for 17 years, eventually becoming national director of U.S. fund raising. In that role he trained thousands of individuals to set up and conduct face-to-face fund-raising appointments in communities across America. He then developed innovative strategies that helped to increase income from 7 to 10 percent annually during his tenure. The organization now ranks among the top 25 on the ***Philanthropy 400*** list, raising in excess of half a billion dollars annually.

in 1990 Frank joined a nonprofit consulting group to offer counsel in management and fund raising. He still serves part time with that organization, is a graduate school professor of marketing, and is president of three enterprises:

- ***The Written Voice.org*** Frank is a communications shrink (a discourse analyst). He profiles how leaders use/abuse language as they write, tell, and show why their organizations are worthy of support.
- ***High Touch Communication.org*** Frank helps nonprofits turn their core messages into communication ***products***—ranging from direct mail, to web content, to onscreen presentations that portray ***connecting narrative moments***™.
- ***Narrative FundRaising*** Frank has turned his doctoral research in the field of linguistics into practical educational and training modules like today's webinar. He also offers a six-hour live seminar on the same content.

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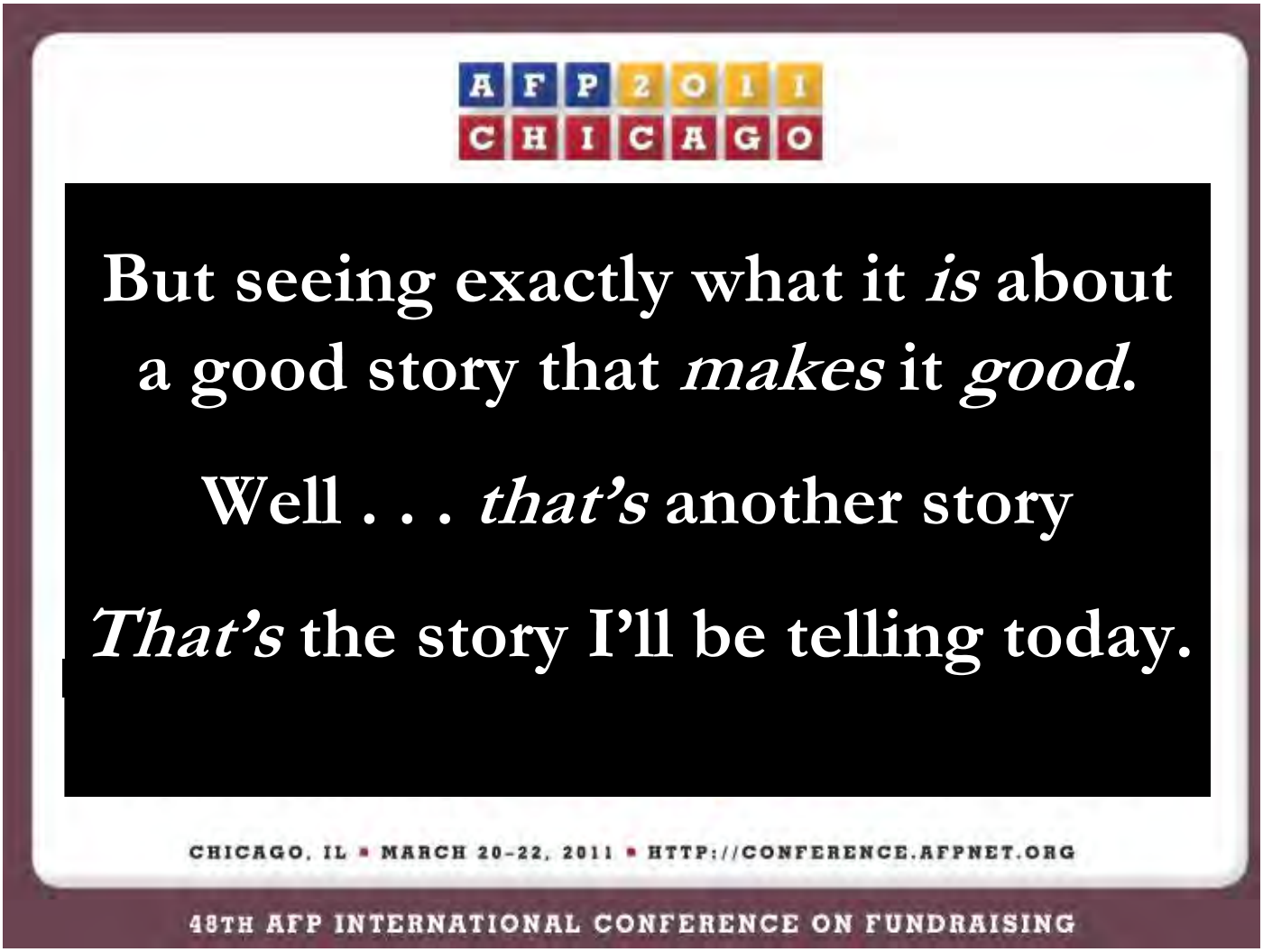

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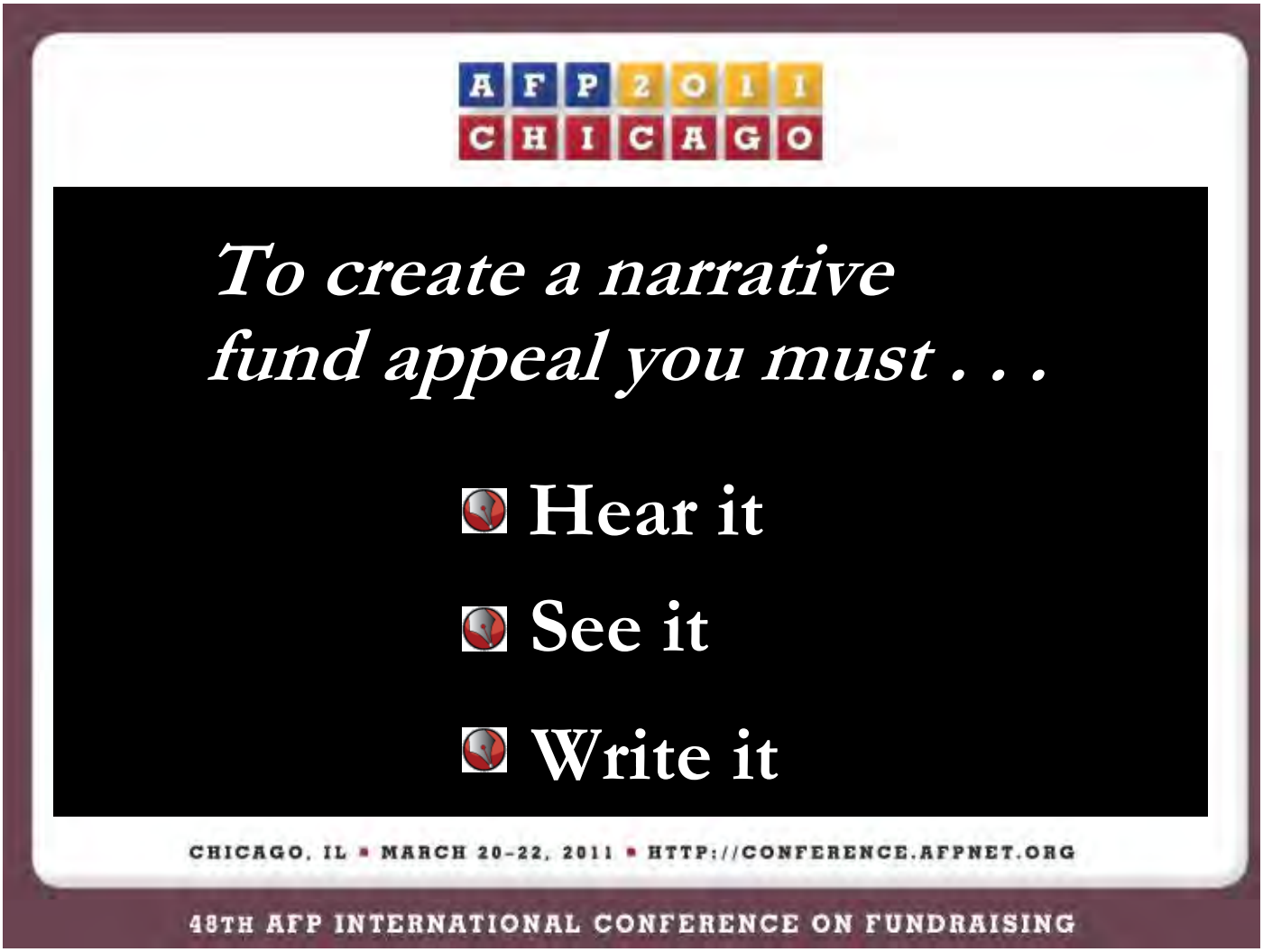

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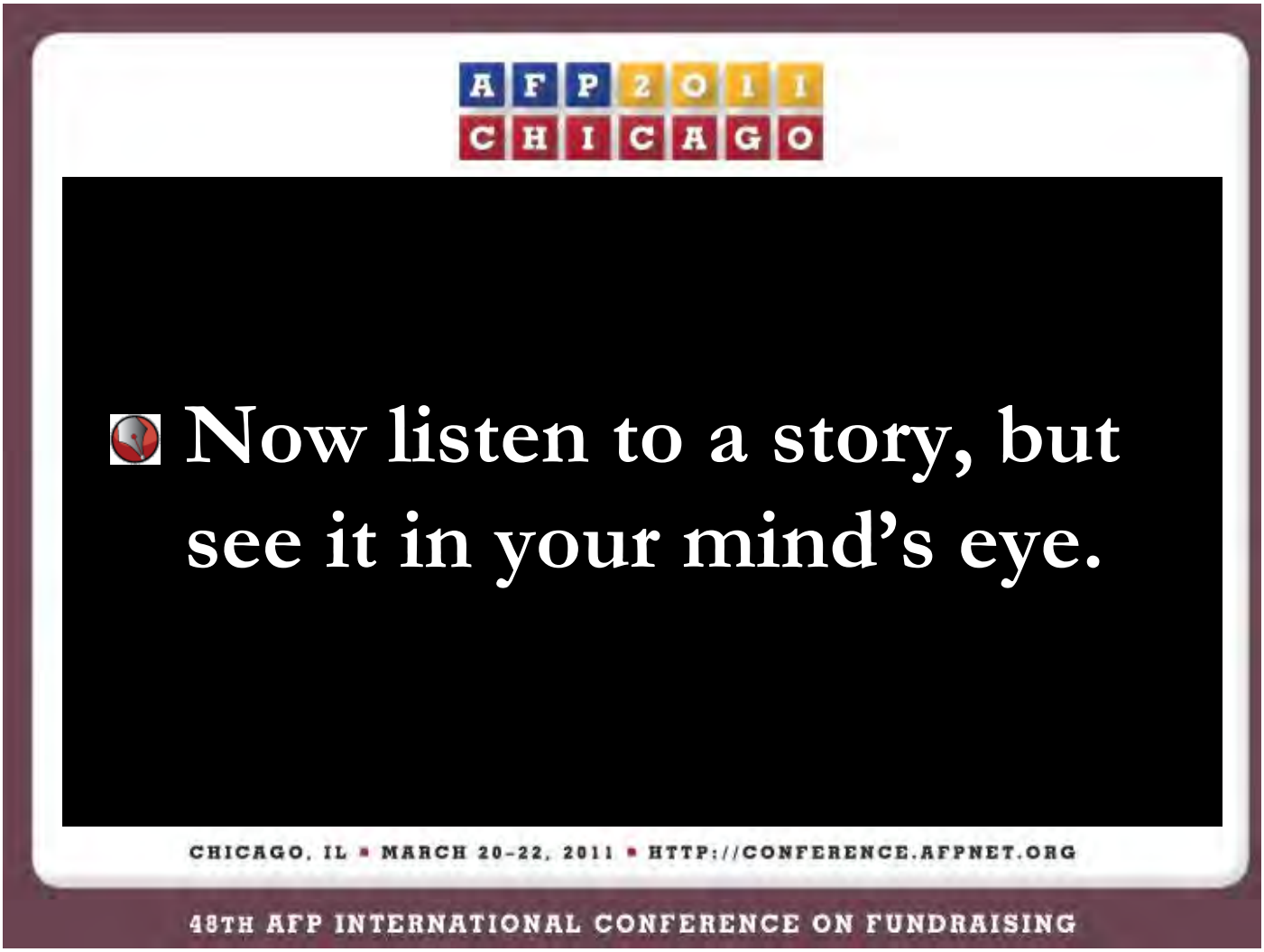

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July 17, 1981 was an overcast but balmy 88-degree summer night in Kansas City. Sally Firestone had just arrived at the Friday night tea dance with three of her friends after work.

She was all dolled up, standing on one of the three walkways suspended high above the four-story atrium lobby of the new Crown Center Hyatt Regency. Located next to the head-quarters of Hallmark Cards, the hotel's owner, the scene was a Hallmark moment in every way. The lobby-turned-ballroom was crowded with two thousand people, gathered for a dance competition, hosted by radio station KJLA.

Ron and Grace Treft were in town from St. Louis for a florists' convention. It was 7:00 p.m. and they'd just finished dinner at the hotel's elegant Peppercorn Duck Club, famous for its decadent chocolate bar. They even wrap up your leftovers in foil, shaped in the form of a cute baby duck.

Like Sally Firestone, the Trefts had planned to watch the dance contest from one of the elevated walkways. But as they were heading across the lobby, Grace paused and said, "Wait a minute, honey . . . I wanna call home and check on the kids first." "Okay," Ron said. "I gotta' get my glasses out of the car anyway."

Then at 7:04, the band began to play Duke Ellington's Satin Doll. "The last thing I remember hearing," Sally Firestone told an AP reporter . . . "was a loud . . . CRACK!"

Six of the tie rods supporting the 121-foot walkways that spanned the lobby had suddenly failed. The top bridge gave way and pancaked onto the walkway below it. Then both crashed to the lobby floor, crushing dozens underneath 128,000 pounds of steel.

At 7:15, Dr. Joe Waeckerle was driving home after a 12-hour shift in the ER when he gets an urgent EMS dispatch: "Joe! There's been a roof collapse at the Hyatt. Get over there."

Joe recalls: "It was like a war. There was a lot of screaming. Power lines had broken and were swinging above the lobby, arching electricity. A ruptured pipe had flooded the floor with several inches of water. Floating amid the debris were body parts. You just had to ignore it and focus on what you were doing." Speaking of the triage he'd set in motion, Joe writes: "I had to tell the fatally injured they were gonna die. I gave them morphine to ease the agony of their final moments. I had to do that for one lady whose family was right in my face screaming for me to do something."

That night 114 people died.
216 more were injured.
And for thousands life would never again be the same.

Sally Firestone lay unconscious and trapped for hours under the debris. She was the most severely injured of the survivors, and left a quadriplegic with no feeling below her shoulders. The momentary detours Ron and Grace Treft had taken saved their lives.

No one heading to the Hyatt that warm summer night in July could have envisioned they stood a one in twenty chance of not leaving the dance alive. In the final report, engineers said a nut and washer just 32 millimeters in diameter—just one and a quarter inches—***had ripped through the weld of a support beam like a staple ripping through a piece of paper***. Gillum Colaco Engineering was ultimately named the culpable party.

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Good afternoon. My name is Frank Dickerson. Why do I open with this narrative? How could it possibly relate to writing a fund appeal? It's relevant two ways.

1. First, it demonstrates a management principle that spans all professions . . . ***Not all Variables are Created Equal***. After 43 years of raising funds and studying the subject, I've concluded that at the very heart of raising money is what you write, tell, or show a person. In a word—**LANGUAGE**. ***Language is the critical variable that trumps all others.*** And . . .

2. Second, there are ***Five Fatal Mistakes to Avoid in Writing Fund Appeals.*** **Don't ignore the . . .**
   - ***3 Rhetorical Superstructures of narrative***, and the
   - ***2 Linguistic Substructures of human voice***.

We'll first look at how this narrative reflects these five variables. Then we'll see how they're at play in several fund appeals.

I happened to be in the Hyatt a year after this tragedy. My wife and I had dinner at the Peppercorn Duck Club. We then strolled the atrium lobby where these events unfolded. And later that afternoon, I had the privilege of meeting Hallmark's president, Don Hall, on a fund-raising appointment. In addition to his company owning the Hyatt, Don's a generous philanthropist through his Hall Family Foundation. I have to tell you, ***being there was a somber experience***.

I also learned that as an account of the worst structural collapse in U.S. history, the Hyatt walkways story is now a famous technical narrative. It's used as a case in schools of engineering to teach students about stress factors in load-bearing structures.

What's utterly amazing here is that no one noticed a change in the engineering plans had the effect of doubling the load on the six tension rods from which hung, those two 64,000-pound walkways.

They dangled there in mid air, four stories above the lobby . . . supported by just a half dozen nuts slightly wider than a quarter.

In any profession, ***some variables are more just important than others***. ***Everything was riding on the strength of those six 32-millimeter fasteners!*** And they failed.

Most of what we achieve, rides on so little of what we actually do: 80 percent of our effectiveness ***rides on the strength*** of just 20 percent of our efforts.

As a fund raiser, virtually everything ***rides on the strength*** of what you ***communicate***.

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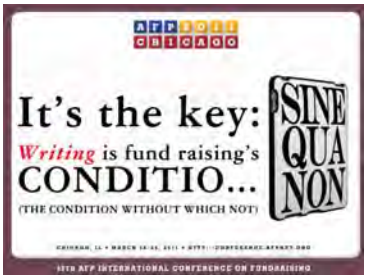
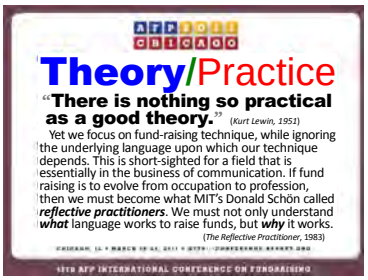
And essentially that means everything ***rides on the strength*** of what you ***write***. I know we produce events, go on face-to-face visits, and create YouTube videos we hope go viral. But even what we do in these settings and with these new media, ***ultimately begins with the words we write***. Sadly, as a profession we've failed to teach our practitioners why some language works, but most fails to raise money.

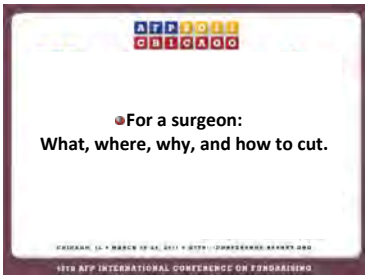


There's a Lain legal phrase that frames the importance of language— ***conditio sine qua non***. It means, ***the condition without which not***. Without effective fund-raising language, no money is raised, no programs are funded, and ultimately, the nonprofit sector ceases to exist.

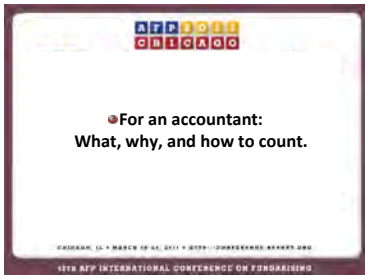


Kurt Lewin wrote: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory." Yet we focus on fund-raising technique, while ignoring the underlying language upon which our technique depends. This is short-sighted for a field that is essentially in the business of communication. If fund raising is to evolve from occupation to profession, then we must become what MIT's Donald Schön called reflective practitioners. We must not only understand ***what*** language works to raise funds, but ***why*** it works.

Fund raising is still an occupation versus a profession. Every profession is defined at its core by what its practitioners *do*. While education, training, autonomy, self-regulation and socialization among its members distinguish professions from occupations, at its very core, members of a profession, are knowledgeable and skilled at *carrying out specific tasks*.



For a surgeon, what, where and how to cut.



For an accountant, what, why, and how to count.

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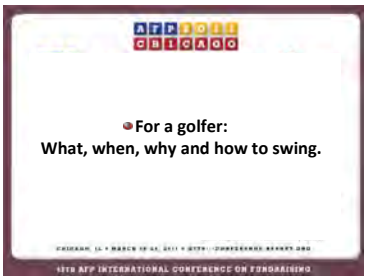
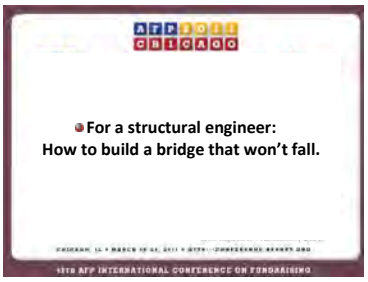


For a golfer, what when, why and how to swing.



For a structural engineer, how to build a bridge that won't fall.

For a fundraiser, how to communicate so people give.

I've raised funds for more than 40 years and helped lead development at a $500-million nonprofit ranked near the top of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy's Philanthropy 400* list. But I learned most of what I know through oral tradition, occasional seminars, trial and error, and a few newsletters. So I've long been interested in how to improve fund-raising results.

I've always felt that what experts have found works should be preserved through texts, seminars, and intentional apprenticeship programs. Established professions develop a base of literature and on-the-job training to preserve and transmit to their practitioners, both the theory base and the skill sets fundamental to what they do. (A surgeon knowing why and where to cut, a CPA knowing what and how to account). Fundraisers must learn why some language works and other language fails to motivate donors to give if it is to evolve from occupation to profession.

This interest led me to review the curricula of more than 300 university-level non-profit programs developed to equip nonprofit executives for the tasks unique to being a leader in the charitable sector. In 1995, with Kellogg Foundation support, Seton Hall's Roseanne Mirabella conducted a major research project that profiled nonprofit management education programs that have evolved in order to serve these leaders.

Of the 300-plus higher education programs whose curricula I reviewed, the majority teach just about everything but the raising of money. They prefer to focus on subjects like governance and policy. And when they do touch on fundraising, they focus on technique and ignore the underlying language techniques exist to deliver. This is myopic and unprofessional.

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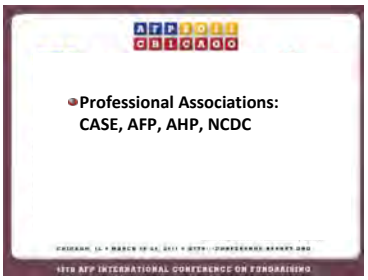

And professional associations are no better. I read the very detailed 118-page taxonomy of outcomes published by the Association of FundRaising Professionals. This impressive document described what a fund raiser should be able to do—from conducting walk-a-thons, job-a-thons and any imaginable "a-thon" to capital campaigns, online, and direct mail fund appeals. But missing is instruction on the language competencies important to their work. Professional fund-raising associations talk a lot about technique, but again, they focus on technique and ignore the underlying language techniques exist to deliver. This is myopic and unprofessional.

You'd think higher education and association leaders believe some benevolent philanthropy fairy just tosses magic dust, waves her wand, and poof—perfect messages and money materialize. But there is no wand, no magic dust, no fairy . . . only real people who raise money the old-fashioned way: They ask for it.

But how do we ask?

There are two points of view about asking.

One viewpoint takes an information-focused approach: exposition. This is what I call the "Sergeant Friday" approach. Jack Webb played the stoic detective Joe Friday in the 1960s television police drama *Dragnet.* Webb's Sergeant Friday was known for his curt instructions when interviewing witnesses: "Just the facts ma'am . . . just the facts. Often larger foundations appear to be interested only on the facts, limit your input to a specific number of words in boxes. They make it hard to humanize your proposal.

The other viewpoint takes a human-interest-focused approach: narrative. While foundations can make significant gifts, 72 percent of the more than $316 billion given by Americans in 2012 came from individuals. Just 15 percent came from foundations. And for ordinary people, a human-interest appeal is the best way to describe any nonprofit's cause. It puts a face on the cause and makes a personal emotional connection.

We're going to discuss the narrative structure of fund appeals. First, however, we're going to examine how a piece quite unlike a fund appeal—The Hyatt walkways story— reflects the three elements of classic ***Story Triad—people***, ***tension***, and ***resolution.*** Then we'll see how several fund appeals mirror this same structure.

In a fund appeal, the footprint is small. You only have a few pages at most—and often just a page. But even in the smallest space a text can contain a compelling narrative. Early twentieth century novelist EM Forster contrasted two sentences that illustrated the critical ingredient for compelling writing. Forster said . . .

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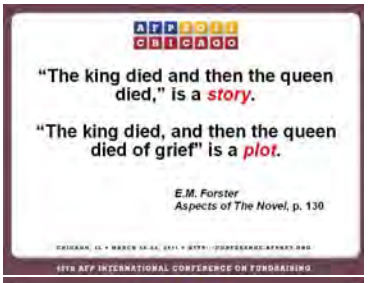
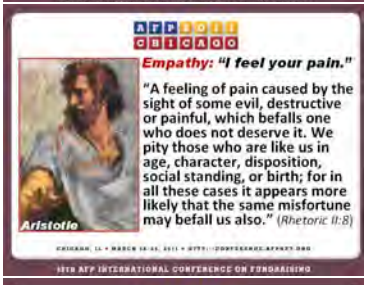


"The king died and then the queen died," is a story.
"The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot.
The first sentence, Forster notes, is just a string of events: The king died first. Then the queen died second. But the other sentence adds the hint of cause when it expands the story with just two words—"and the queen died ***of grief***." That added element of cause marked the difference. It provoked curiosity . . . it evoked empathy.

A fund appeal has to do the same thing. It has to provoke interest by creating empathy.



Long before Bill Clinton said "I feel your pain," Aristotle described empathy as . . .

"A feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one who does not deserve it. We pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also." (*Rhetoric II:8*)

We don't have to look too far for images that evoke empathy.

Recently week my wife Kathleen, was summoned along with her fellow teachers, to an emergency school board meeting. Her friend Debbie learned that cutbacks meant her job of 17 years was gone. In emotional shock, her knees buckled, and to catch herself Debbie stretched out her arms toward my wife as her head fell on Kathleen's shoulders. "I'm sorry, Kathleen," Debbie said. "I thought I might fall so I just grabbed you."

I hear such stories when my wife comes home and says "Okay." The word "Okay" in linguistics is called a discourse particle. It doesn't have any significant meaning other than to introduce what comes next. When my wife says "Okay," it means "You won't believe this," Then a story follows. What I just summarized was from such a Kathleen told me. It took 72 words or 420 characters (three times longer than a Twitter Tweet) to put on paper.

This illustrates what I define as a ***connecting narrative moment***. A connecting narrative moment is essentially a scene—a dramatic anecdote that shows people dealing with conflict. If we are to move a donor to give, our writing must not only show people and conflict . . . but it must also show a donor how their gift can help resolve that conflict. ***The Challenge***, then, is ***Writing Empathy-Evoking Copy*** that reduces to word pictures what we see, feel and hear . . . or what our staff see, feel and hear on the front lines where the action happens. And that action needs to be emblematic of what our organization does. The challenge: to write such copy without neutering scenes of emotional impact.

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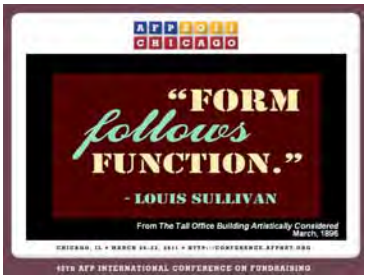
Like a Tradesperson's ***wood***, ***wire***, and ***pipe***, ***Words, Grammar and Narrative are a Writer's Stock-in-Trade.***

A builder uses the same materials to build an elegant mansion or a simple tract house.

A writer uses the same materials to write both good and bad texts alike. What's produced is first determined by the answer to this question: ***"What kind of text do I want to build?"***

As the architect of a text, you have to decide what you're going to write—exposition focused on ideas, or narrative focused on people



Architect Louis Henri Sullivan coined the phrase:

"Form
Follows
Function."

A fund appeal has to achieve two critical ***functions . . .***

- First, you have to build it to ***Connect*** with the reader, and
- Second, it has to ***Tell a Story.***

Before we use the ***Story Triad*** to analyze The Hyatt narrative and several fund appeals, let me share my own story—how I got be involved in fund raising and what I've learned about the communication process.

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I've been curious about the language of fund raising since my undergraduate years at Ohio State, where I studied rhetoric and mass communication. That curiosity eventually led to several years of doctoral research at Claremont Graduate University. My dissertation was in the field of linguistics. And my research analyzed how we as fund raisers, write.

One of the great joys of that experience was studying under Peter Drucker at the management school. Though Peter is rightly acknowledged as the father of modern management, he earned that reputation because he was first, a great writer and storyteller. People, not management principles, were the central characters of what he wrote and taught. He'd heard John Maynard Keynes in Cambridge in 1939 and later wrote about that lecture: "I suddenly realized Keynes and all the brilliant economic students in the room were interested in the behavior of commodities, while I was interested in the behavior of people."

Peter's advice led me to analyze the discourse of philanthropy. That discourse is not unlike what a company writes, shows, or tells a customer to get them to buy a product. Drucker believed that among all the tasks an enterprise (whether for profit or for the public good) must achieve, two stand out: marketing and innovation. This seminar deals with the nonprofit sector's cognate of marketing—the raising of money. And our focus today is how to build persuasive narrative fund appeals that will attract, keep, and lift financial support of people as we invite to become the heroes and heroines of our nonprofits' stories.

I observed that fund raising is all about helping a person see him- or herself as a hero when I was thrown into fund raising as president of a student organization my freshman year at OSU. My first experience raising funds had me driving back to my small hometown of Mt. Gilead Ohio to raise money for a student leadership project. And my first visit with was with Roy V. Whiston.

Roy was an OSU grad, class of '24, and owned Whiston's pharmacy. He knew me as a one of the high school kids who'd browse his pharmacy's magazine rack after school, but never buy anything more than a Payday candy bar. Now I was a college student living in a dorm next to the Horseshoe Stadium on campus. As we talked, Roy told me he remembered when they started building that stadium in 1920 during ***his*** freshman year at OSU.

Looking back on that visit, it was all about connecting with Roy, and telling stories about what was happening on campus. And plenty was happening in the anti-war era of the Nixon years. I must have asked for a gift, but I honestly don't remember. What I do remember is Roy folding a check and handing it to me. Then as I began to unfold it, he puts his hand on mine, indicating he doesn't want me to look at it right away.

I knew why as soon as I got to the car. I was stunned to see it was for $200—the entire amount I had to raise. Doesn't sound like a lot. But that was 1969 when the Dow closed at 800, mean household income was $8,500, gas was 35 cents a gallon, and the typical home cost $15,000. In 2011 money, his $200 gift would now be $1,035.30. Ratios have changed a lot since then. But the same human motivations that prompted Roy to help me, remain unchanged. People still give to people who do things that help people. And language that connects at a personal level and tells stories is the still the best way to motivate people to give.

My first job after college was working with a nonprofit organization, and I've spent my entire adult life working for, or consulting with nonprofits. Eventually I helped direct development at an organization that now raises more than a half billion annually in direct public support—no government grants, no fees, just real money from ordinary people.

Today I head up a company called High Touch Direct, an agency that produces hand-personalized direct mail, and a research group called TheWrittenVoice.org. We analyze how people write, tear their copy apart, and then put it back together again. In that painful process our goal is to help people ***infuse the written text with the passion of speech***. And that's ultimately the goal of this session—to help you write what I call ***The Voice of Philanthropy***.

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Writing the Voice of Philanthropy can be visualized as a ***process loop*** that begins with observing ***events***. Then second, you use the ***story triad*** to outline the most interesting of those events into a ***narrative***. Third, you reduce that narrative outline to ***writing***. And finally, the ***reader*** processes your message online, in print, in speech, or in a medium like video.

To ***Connect*** and ***Tell a Story***, ***you have to think like a movie director***. A good written fund appeal, like a good movie, is about . . . ***People***, ***Tension***, and ***Resolution.*** And whether you have just a paragraph on a web page, an hour-long appointment, or a two-page letter, you can build a narrative that fits the time and space allotted.

Above all, ***Stories require people***.

Your first job, then, is to be ***Director of Casting.***

Most fund appeals break down because, were they a movie, they'd be a documentary, not a drama.

As casting director, you need to ***Let me See the Faces of People I'll Care About.***

You have to cast three roles . . .

First, the ***protagonist***. ***Make me cheer*** him or her.

Second, the ***antagonist***. ***Make me boo*** the bad guy.

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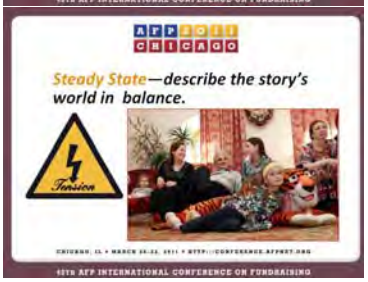
Then the ***Ensemble*** cast. ***Make me notice them***. The reader may well identify more with a secondary character because they see themself in that person.

Then second, you have to ***Create Tension***. There are ***five elements*** in that process:

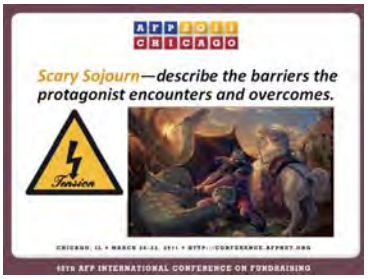
The **first** is the ***Sequence & Setting—situate the story at a specific point in time and space***.



The **second** element is the ***Steady State—describe the story's world in balance***.

Third is the element of ***Sudden Shock—knock the world off its axis. Sometimes you'll actually start here "in medias res" (the Latin for "in the middle of things")***.

Then **fourth**, ***Set Strategy—define the protagonists' quest to set the world right again***. For example, describe what one person aims to ***do*** to educate a child, feed a homeless family, enrich the world with art, heal the broken environment or cure a child whose life hangs in the balance, threatened by cancer.



And **fifth**, take the reader on a ***Scary Sojourn—describe the barriers the protagonist encounters and overcomes***.

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Finally, the third element of the ***Story Triad*** is ***Resolution***.

- Reward the reader with a mission accomplished.
- Or give them a chance to help complete the task by making a gift.

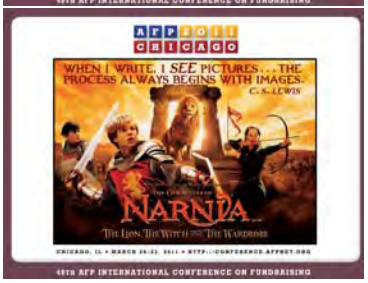
As he documented the rise and fall of civilizations, historian Arnold Toynbee made an observation that applies to the smaller stage of raising funds.

Toynbee wrote, "Apathy can be overcome by enthusiasm. And enthusiasm can only be aroused by two things:

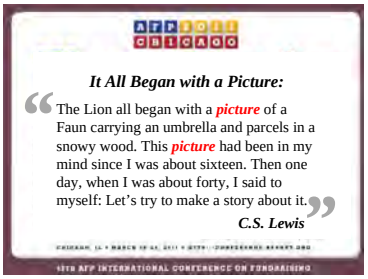
- ***an ideal which takes the imagination by storm***, and second,
- ***a definite intelligible plan for carrying that ideal into practice.***"

Good fund appeals contain these elements, portrayed in stories of...

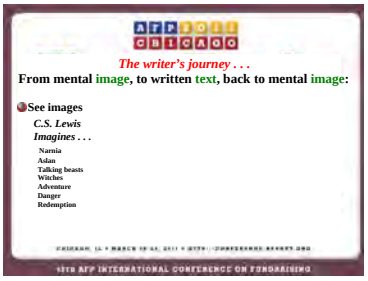
People with ***ideals*** that have taken their imaginations by storm, ***Tension***, caused as those ***ideals*** get translated into ***practice***, and ***Resolution***, as that ***practice*** sets the world right again.



And these stories begin with what you see happening. C.S. Lewis said: "***When I write, I see pictures, It is the only way I know: Images always come first***" (1985, p.p. 5, 6). In writing a narrative fund appeal, begin ***with the details you see***. And if you don't have details, then you need to dig for more information.



The process for Lewis always began with images.



He envisioned the land of Narnia, Aslan, talking beasts, witches, adventure, danger and redemption.

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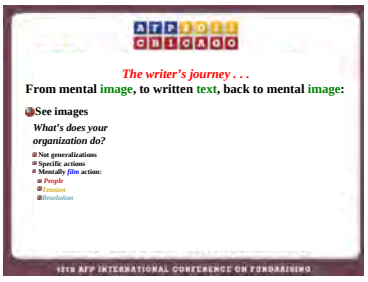
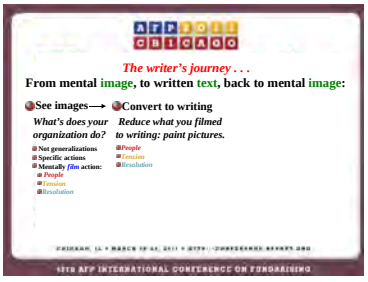
The writer's journey took C.S. Lewis from what he had imagined to narratives that became *The Chronicles of Narnia.*

Then, because his work was full of images, they were easy to turn into feature films. Many great authors' works are so filled with characters simply telling the reader about their inner thoughts, that little raw material exists to translate their work into a decent film. It's not easy to see an idea on screen. Ideas are abstractions. Actions, not ideas, are the stuff from which interesting television, and movie scripts are created. You can't see an ideal on screen.



A good fund appeal grows out of what a person sees and hears and thus can describe with word pictures that cause the reader to see what you, the writer, originally saw. This requires being aware of what's happening in your organization. And if you are not a first-hand witness, then you need to debrief others who are close to the action. You need details about actions involving people, tension, and resolution.



Then as if you were producing a short film, you need to reduce what you have seen or what has been reported to you to a treatment that could be seen on screen. It shows people doing things versus people standing around motionless thinking things.

People thinking things does not translate well to screen.

You want to depict people doing, not people thinking.

So the acid test of good narrative fund appeals is this . . . does your writing cause the reader to see what you originally saw, hear what you originally heard, and feel what you originally felt?

Does the reader see people?
Does the reader see elements of a story that cause tension?
Does the reader see how he or she can be the hero of your story by giving?
In sum . . . a fund appeal must paint a word picture of someone doing something. It needs to depict action.

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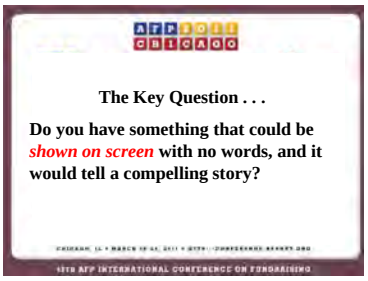
A fund appeal that is just exposition telling you what someone thinks fails. Ask, "Can I see what I've written on screen with action and dialogue?" The advice director David Mamet (Glengary Glenn Ross) gives with regard to film applies equally to your work in writing a fund appeal. In a memo to the writing team of his television show, The Unit, Mamet wrote:

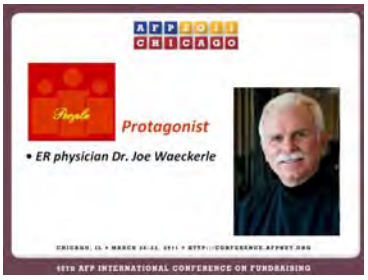
"If the scene is not dramatically written, it will not be dramatically acted. There is no magic fairy dust which will make a boring, useless, redundant, or merely informative scene dramatic after it leaves your typewriter. You, the writers, are in charge of making sure every scene is dramatic. This means all the little expositional scenes of two people talking about a third. This (and we all tend to write it on the first draft) is less than useless, should it finally, god forbid, get filmed.



"If the scene bores you when you read it, rest assured it will bore the actors, and will, then, bore the audience, and we're all going to be back in the breadline. Someone has to make the scene dramatic. It is not the actor's job. The actor's job is to be truthful. It is not the director's job. His or her job is to film it straightforwardly and remind the actors to talk fast. It is your job. Every scene must be dramatic. That means: the main character must have a simple, straightforward, pressing need which impels him or her to show up in the scene."

So applying Mamet's advice to a fund appeal, ask: "Is my writing more about exposition more than action?" Make people feel the drama of your organization's work.

To see this at play, consider the word pictures embedded in the Hyatt walkways narrative. Word pictures of ***People***, ***Tension***, and ***Resolution*****.**



- First, who was the ***Protagonist*** in the Hyatt Walkways Story?

  ER physician Dr. Joe Waeckerle.

- Who was the ***Antagonist***?

  Gillum Colaco Engineering.

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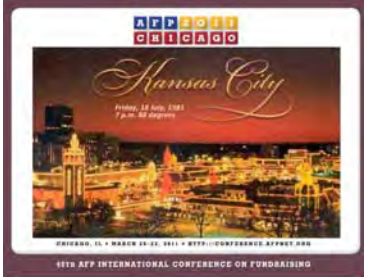
The ***Ensemble*** cast included . . .

- Sally Firestone (a ***specific person***) and her three unnamed friends
- 2000 guests at the tea dance (a ***specific number***)
- Radio Station KJLA (a ***specific*** host radio station) and a band
- Ron and Grace Treft and the kids back home (***more specific people***)
- A distraught family and their loved one—a woman who was trapped beneath debris.

What was the ***Sequence & Setting***?

- A specific time and date are mentioned, anchoring the scene—***7:00 p.m. July 17, 1981***.
- Then the sentence uses the clichéd ***adjective, balmy.***



- But then ***balmy*** is described ***more specifically*** as an ***88-degree summer night***.
- And the story unfolds in a ***specific place***: ***Kansas City***.

- ***A beautiful hotel in the heart of America*** was described in ***specific*** terms . . .

- ***the new Crown Center Hyatt Regency. Located next to Hallmark Cards, the hotel's owner.***

The ***Steady State*** of a world in balance is described as . . .

- ***A Hallmark moment in every way***. But the word, "Hallmark" is just a vague ***adjective*** modifying the ***noun*** "moment." That was essentially a way of saying something was ***really nice***.
- But the following picture what a ***Hallmark moment*** means. The setting was presented through the discourse device of ***description.***

- the beautiful ***atrium lobby*** of the new Crown Center Hyatt.
- And we also learn it was ***Located next to the headquarters of Hallmark Cards, the hotel's owner***.

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Then the description lets us ***see*** Sally Firestone with her friends.

- You read it was a girls' night out at the ***tea dance after work***.
- Sally was ***all dolled up***.
- She's pictured standing on one of the three walkways ***suspended high above the four-story atrium lobby***.
- And the ***lobby-turned-ballroom*** is described as ***crowded with two thousand people, gathered for a dance competition***.

- The narrator then describes the Trefts having ***just finished dinner*** at what is described with a vague ***adjective***, ***elegant***.

- But the setting is described in more ***specific detail***. We picture ***The Peppercorn Duck Club***.

  And then still more details make us ***see*** what it looked like.

- The restaurant was described as having a ***decadent chocolate bar***. Although ***decadent*** is an ***adjective***, it works here.

- The restaurant had also developed the tradition of wrapping guest's leftovers in foil, ***formed into the shape of a cute baby duck.*** The description makes you ***see*** that duck.

- Then we ***see*** through more ***word pictures***, the specific actions of this couple. After dinner each took a slight detour in their plans—

  Calling the kids and fetching glasses from the car

  (The narrator quotes this as back and forth dialogue.)

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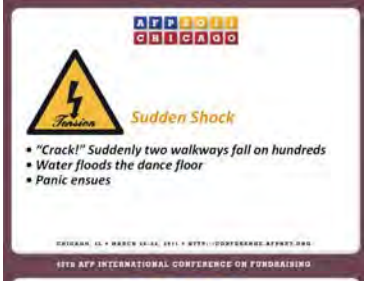
- ***"Wait a minute, honey. I wanna call home and check on the kids first." "Okay," Ron said. "I gotta' get my glasses out of the car anyway."***

The ***discourse device*** of quoting dialogue puts us there in the thick of things. Collectively these word pictures let us ***see*** the ***Steady State*** of a ***world in balance***.



Then came the ***Sudden Shock*** . . .

- ***"Crack!" Suddenly two walkways fall on hundreds***
- ***Water floods the dance floor***
- ***Panic ensues***

Within ten minutes of the collapse, the ***protagonist*** appears . . .

- ***Dr. Joe Waeckerle gets an urgent EMS dispatch***
- ***He arrives and immediately sizes up what he sees***
- ***He then decides on a triage strategy***

During this ***Scary Sojourn*** stage Dr. Waeckerle uses the . . .

- ***Simile of Like War (a vague adjective form)*** But then Joe paints a
- ***Word Picture*** ***(he narrates what was seen):*** ***electric lines***, ***water***, ***body parts.*** Next Dr. Waeckerle . . . ***Quoted*** himself saying: ***"you're going to die"*** Then he . . . ***Quoted*** a family who screamed ***"do something"***
- Joe's story is found in *Everyday Crisis Management*.

The take-away: ***Details are the raw materials out of which interesting stories are built. No details . . . no story. So if you don't have details, go sleuth for them***. Interview people. Ask questions that can't be answered yes or no. Write down quotes word for word. Identify characters people will identify with and portray the tension that leads them through struggles and to a potential resolution.

Resolution is then ***Reached*** . . .

- 216 injured are rescued
- 114 die
- Though permanently disabled, Sally Firestone is freed
- The Treft's take detours that save their lives
- Blame is laid at the feet of Gillum Colaco Engineering
- The story eventually becomes a case for schools of engineering

This account reflects the elements of ***people***, ***tension***, and ***resolution***.

Next, let's see how these three elements are reflected in the world's oldest fund appeal. It was written by Pliny the Younger, who lived from 61 to 112 AD. Pliny was a lawyer, author, and magistrate of Ancient Rome, and nephew of Pliny the Elder with whom he witnessed the eruption of Vesuvius on August 24th, 79 AD.

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Gaius Plinus to his dear Cornelius Tacitus, greeting.

I am delighted that you have returned to Rome, for though your arrival is always welcome, it is especially so to me at the present moment. I shall be spending a few more days at my Tusculan villa in order to finish a small work which I have in hand, for I am afraid that if I do not carry it right through now that it is nearly completed I shall find it irksome to start on it again. In the meanwhile, that I may lose no time, I am sending this letter as a sort of forerunner to make a request which, when I am in town, I shall ask you to grant.

But first of all, let me tell you my reasons for asking it.

When I was in my native town recently, a young lad, the son of one of my fellow townsmen, came to pay his respects to me.

"Do you go to school?" I asked. "Certainly," he replied.

"Where?" "At Milan."

"Why not here?"

"Because," rejoined his father, who was with him and had in fact brought the boy, "we have no teachers here."

"Why no teachers?" I asked.

"Surely it would be tremendously to the interest of you who are fathers" (and quite opportunely several fathers were listening) "that your sons should by all means have their schooling here. For where could they live more happily than in their native town, or be kept better under control than under the eyes of their parents, or at less expense than at home?

"It is no greater task, certainly, to collect money to hire teachers, and you can apply toward their salaries what you now spend for [the boys'] lodgings, travel, and the things that have to be paid for when one is away from home (and away from home everything costs money).

"Indeed I, who do not yet have children, am ready to give for the benefit of the municipality, as if for a daughter or parent, one third of any sum it will please you to assemble.

"I would even promise the whole if I were not afraid that such an endowment might one day be tampered with through political corruption, as I see happen in many places where teachers are hired by the municipality.

"There is but one way of preventing this evil, and that is by leaving the right of employing the teachers to the parents alone, who will be careful to make a right choice if they are required to find the money. For those who perhaps would be careless in dealing with other people's money will assuredly be careful in spending their own, and they will take care that the teacher who gets my money will be worth his salt when he will also get money from them as well.

"So put your heads together, make up your minds, and let my example inspire you, for I can assure you that the greater the contribution you lay upon me the better I shall be pleased. You cannot make your children a more handsome present than this, nor can you do your native place a better turn. Let those who are born here be brought up here, and from their earliest days accustom them to love and know every foot of their native soil. I hope you may be able to attract such distinguished teachers that boys will be sent here to study from the towns round about, and that, as now your children flock to other places, so in the future other people's children may flock hither."

I thought it necessary to repeat all this in detail and from the very beginning, as it were, so that you might the better understand how glad I should be should you undertake what I request.

Now then, I request, and in keeping with the importance of the matter I beg, that you look around among the great number of students who come to you out of admiration of your genius for teachers whom we can solicit—on this condition however, that I do not make a binding contract with anyone, for I leave complete freedom of choice to the parents. They shall judge, they shall select. For myself I claim only the trouble and the expense.

(*Book 4 Letter XIII -- To Tacitus.* Lewis and Reinhold, 1966, p. 354;
http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_plinyltrs4.htm#XIII)

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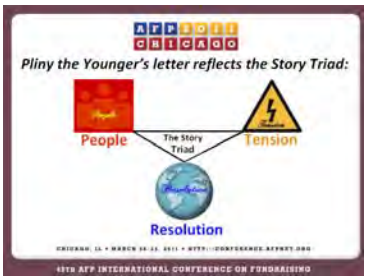

Let's consider some of the images behind Pliny's letter to Tacitus that produce the three elements of a good story . . .

People, ***Tension***, and ***Resolution*.**

Who are the ***Protagonists***? There are two—Pliny the Younger and Cornelius Tacitus. Pliny is known for hundreds of surviving letters which he wrote to reigning emperors and other notable people including, in this case, his friend Cornelius Tacitus. Tacitus was a Roman senator and historian of the Empire. His two major works—the Annals and the Histories—examine the reigns of the Roman Emperors Tiberius, Claudius, Nero and the four Emperors who ruled in sane year of 69 AD: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian.

The ***Antagonists*** were corrupt politicians:

Pliny was nervous about totally endowing a school lest it " might one day be tampered with through political corruption, as I see happen in many places where teachers are hired by the municipality."

The ***Ensemble*** cast included . . .

"A young lad, the son of my fellow townsmen."

Also present were several fathers who were listening to Pliny.

And finally, the ***Ensemble*** included Tacitus' students.

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The ***Sequence and Setting*** involved activities in four locations:

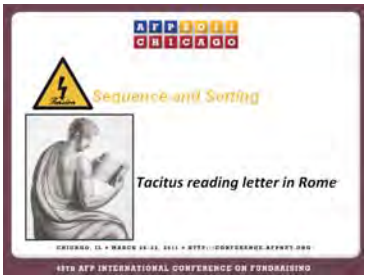
1. ***Pliny's Native Home:*** Lake Como where wants to found a school
2. ***Students' Current School:*** Milan
3. ***Pliny writes from:*** Tuscany
4. ***To Senator Tacitus in:*** Rome

Circa 90 A.D.

The primary ***Setting*** was Pliny's villa on Lake Como where he met with a group of townspeople from Como..

A secondary ***Setting*** was Pliny's villa in Tuscany.

From his Tuscany villa Pliny writes to his friend, Cornelius Tacitus.



And yet another secondary ***Setting*** was Rome, where Tacitus receives and reads Pliny's letter.

In the story's ***Steady State*** pictures a world in balance that has the town's students attending a boarding school in Milan.

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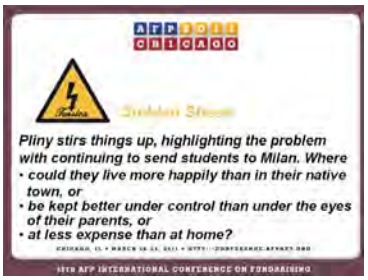
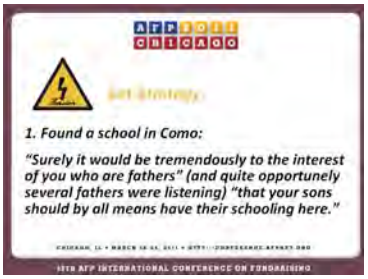


The ***Sudden Shock*** is induced by Pliny during the house party.

Pliny stirs things up, highlighting the problem with continuing to send students to Milan. He asks:

- Where could they live more happily than in their native town, or
- be kept better under control than under the eyes of their parents, or
- at less expense than at home?



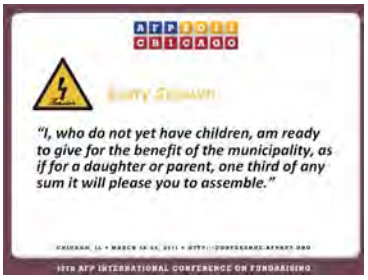
Pliny ***Sets his Strategy*** to accomplish two goals:

1. ***Found a School in Como***

"Surely it would be tremendously to the interest of you who are fathers" (and quite opportunely several fathers were listening) "that your sons should by all means have their schooling here." and . . .

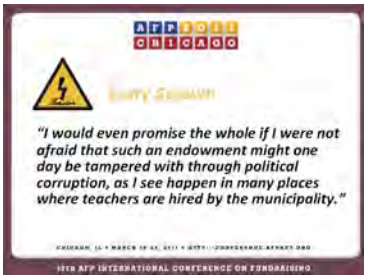
2. ***Enlist Tacitus to recruit teachers from Rome***

"I am sending this letter as a sort of forerunner to make a request which, when I am in town, I shall ask you to grant."



Pliny's ***Scary Sojourn*** involves determining how to implement his vision by offering what is perhaps ***the earliest recorded matching gift challenge***:

"I, who do not yet have children, am ready to give for the benefit of the municipality, as if for a daughter or parent, one third of any sum it will please you to assemble."



Next during his ***Scary Sojourn*** Pliny explains that because he doesn't trust politicians, he's not going to give the entire amount:

"I would even promise the whole if I were not afraid that such an endowment might one day be tampered with through political corruption, as I see happen in many places where teachers are hired by the municipality."

Pliny's distrust of potential politicial shenanigans causes him to frame conditions on hiring new teachers . . .

"On this condition however, that I do not make a binding contract with anyone, for I leave complete freedom of choice to the parents. They shall judge, they shall select. For myself I claim only the trouble and the expense."

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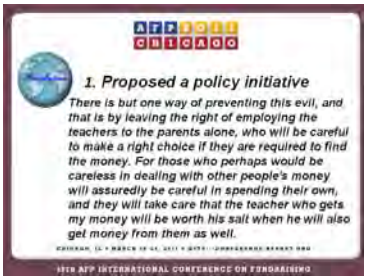


1. Pliny proposes five points of resolution.
He first ***Proposed a policy initiative:***

"There is but one way of preventing this evil, and that is by leaving the right of employing the teachers to the parents alone, who will be careful to make a right choice if they are required to find the money. For those who perhaps would be careless in dealing with other people's money will assuredly be careful in spending their own, and they will take care that the teacher who gets my money will be worth his salt when he will also get money from them as well."

2. Then he ***Asked parents to give:***

"So put your heads together, make up your minds, and let my example inspire you, for I can assure you that the greater the contribution you lay upon me the better."

3. Next he ***Promised what their gift will do for their children:***

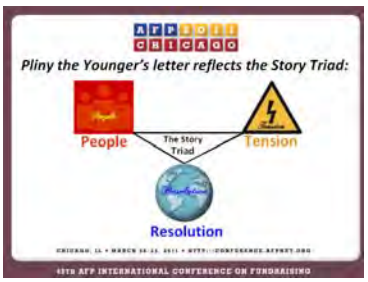
"You cannot make ***your children*** a more handsome present than this, nor can you do ***your native place*** a better turn. Let those who are born here be brought up here, and from their earliest days accustom them to love and know every foot of their native soil."

4. ***Promised what their gift will do to make Como a leading center of education for the region:***

"I hope you may be able to attract such distinguished teachers that boys will be sent here to study from the towns round about, and that, as now your children flock to other places, so in the future other people's children may flock hither."

5. And Pliny finally ***Asked Tacitus to recruit faculty***

"Now then, I request, and in keeping with the importance of the matter I beg, that you look around among the great number of students who come to you out of admiration of your genius for teachers whom we can solicit."



This account of the first surviving matching gift appeal from antiquity reflects all three elements of . . .

people, ***tension***, and ***resolution***.

Five points of resolution are framed as components of a grand plan to create educational capacity for Como. Pliny 1.) proposes a way to avoid corrupting political influence, 2.) asks parents to become co-heroes by giving to their own school 3.) appeals to their motivation to invest in their children and Como's educational infrastructure, 4.) casts a vision that Como can extend its influence beyond its borders and 5.) invites Tacitus to recruit faculty.

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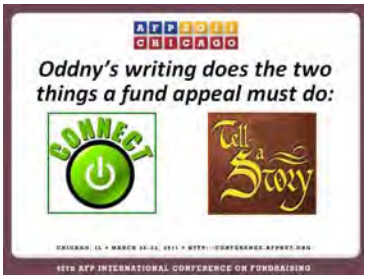
Now let's fast forward two millennia and look at the blog of Oddny Gumaer and see how it reflects the ***Story Triad***. Oddny is a Norwegian woman who, along with her husband Steve, founded Partners Relief & Development. Partners works in zones of conflict like Burma to help refugees.

Oddny is the ***voice*** of Partners . . . and de facto the ***voice*** of the Burmese people who have no ***voice.***



Oddny's blog succeeds for two reasons.

- First it ***Connects*** at an emotional and very personal level, and . . .
- Second, it ***Tells a Story***.

- As it appears on her site, what I'm going to read is actually looks quite plain . . . simple text with one photograph. Her blog post for January 14, 2011 looked like this . . .

I note the simple design of her blog to emphasize that good writing creates its own imagery . . .

Oddny's ***language creates an emotional climatic zone in a text . . . and word pictures constitute its thunder and lightening***.

Her blog begins . . .

Power or No power?

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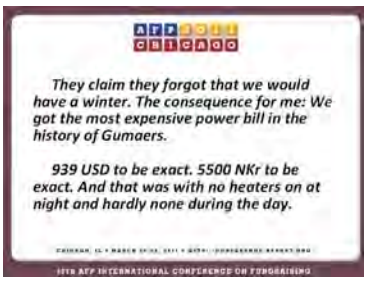
There is a photo that has been haunting me all day.

Another haunting thing is the huge power bill we got yesterday.

This has been the most expensive power-month in the history of Norway. It has never been more expensive—ever, ever. The reason: It has been very, very cold, and the power companies accidentally sold a lot of electricity to Germany and other countries last summer. Now there is not enough for us.



They claim they forgot that we would have a winter. The consequence for me: We got the most expensive power bill in the history of Gumaers.

939 US Dollars to be exact. 5,500 Norwegian Kroners to be exact. And that was with no heaters on at night and hardly none during the day.

Must be the showers every other day.

(Is this too much personal information? Sorry. I shower after every workout, just to get that straight. Some times that is every day. Over-sharing? Over-sharing.)

I had a "my-body-suddenly-feels-numb"-moment. That is a lot of money that I'd rather spend on other stuff.

Or rather: That is a lot of money that I have to find somewhere.

I thought a lot about eating bread and butter and drinking water for a month.

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Until I got this picture in my inbox today:

These are people who are in hiding in the jungle of Burma right now. The rice they are eating is their only food and it was given to them by Partners.

It doesn't seem like a lot. But it is a lot when the alternative is no food at all. It put things in perspective. It made the power bill seem small.

What you see on this photo are people who have just fled from the Burma Army. As far as I know, they are still hiding.

Then there is the prosthetic the man on the photo walks on:

A piece of bamboo with a woven something and a big rock on the end. That is how he gets through the jungle with soldiers chasing him.

The reason he lost his leg in the first place is of course because he stepped on a landmine the soldiers hid on the ground.

- It's an expensive power bill, but we can pay it.

- It's an expensive power bill, but we have two healthy legs each.

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- It's an expensive power bill, but we have a bed to sleep in.

- It's an expensive power bill, but we will have dinner every day.

- It's an expensive power bill, but we have power.

- An expensive power bill is a small price to pay for the freedom of living in a country abundant with privileges such as the privilege of turning on a light when it is dark.

Okay, now let's take a few moments to evaluate Oddny's blog using the ***Story Triad***.

First of all, who's in the cast?

Oddny Gumaer is the ***Protagonist***. Here she is with her husband Steve and three daughters.

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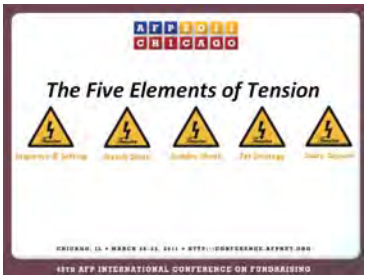
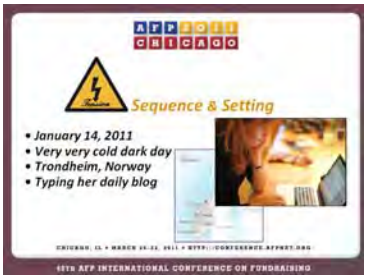
And the chief ***Antagonist*** is General Than Shwe who, along with his henchmen, have been compared to Pol Pot, whose Khmer Rouge were responsible for Cambodia's killing fields.

And the last ***People*** element in the ***Story Triad*** is the ***Ensemble*** cast. It was the refugees in the photo who produced for Oddny what I call a ***connecting narrative moment***—that moment when Oddny looked at the photo, then at the power bill, then back at the photo. So that's the first element—***People***, consisting of the ***Protagonist***, the ***Antagonist***, and the ***Ensemble***.



Now comes ***Tension***, which is comprised of five elements:
Sequence and Setting,
Steady State,
Sudden Shock,
Set Strategy, and
Scary Sojourn.



The ***Sequence and Setting*** frames the story in time and space . . .

- January 14, 2011
- Very very cold dark day
- Trondheim, Norway
- Oddny is typing her daily blog

The ***Steady State*** describes life in balance . . .

Busy wife and mother Oddny with husband Steve, and 3 daughters.

The ***Sudden Shock*** . . .
"A humongous power bill"

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Next the writer ***Sets Strategy*** . . .

"I had a 'my-body-suddenly-feels-numb'-moment.

That is a lot of money that I'd rather spend on other stuff.

Or rather: That is a lot of money that I have to find somewhere."

This was followed by the ***Scary Sojourn*** . . .

"I thought a lot about eating bread and butter and drinking water for a month."

Finally, ***Resolution is Reached*** . . .

"Then I got this picture in my inbox today . . .

"It put things in perspective.

"It made the power bill seem small."

Oddny's blog accomplishes the two functions of a fund appeal—to ***Connect*** and ***Tell a Story***.

Now let's look at another fund appeal Partners recently mailed to its donors—a hand personalized note card I've titled ***Elise's gift***. Elise is Steve and Oddny Gumaer's oldest daughter.

In this package, two dimensions of language were evaluated: verbal and nonverbal.

The story was the gift to the donor, but the package that gift came in mattered too.

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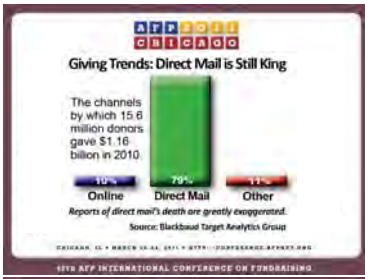
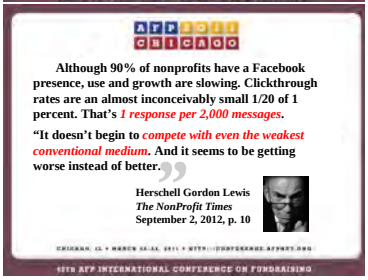


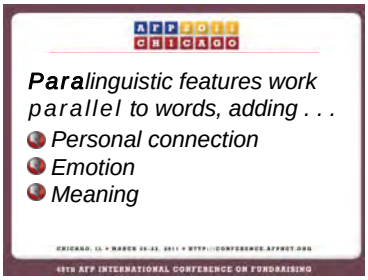
Research by Blackbaud's *Target Analytics Group* identified the how 15.6 million donors gave an aggregate of $1.16 billion. The study found that 10% was given online, 79% was given by mail, and 11% was given through other channels. And this was among "tech savvy" nonprofits, with less sophisticated nonprofits receiving 85% of their income through direct mail.



On June 2, 1897, The New York Journal mistakenly published a report that Mark Twain had died . . . to which Samuel Clemens replied: Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated. Similarly, "Reports of direct mail's death have been similarly exaggerated. In fact, Hershel Gordon Lewis observed that online media like Facebook can't "compete with even the weakest conventional medium." He notes that Clickthrough rates (equivalent to opening an envelope) are only 1/20th of 1 percent."

Today, spam filters and can "can spam regulations make it difficult for electronic mail to achieve the breadth and depth of reach paper mail achieves. At the same time, most nonprofits' postal mail resembles junk mail. As a result, response rates hover well below one to three percent for most direct mail. Like low email clickthrough rates, much postal mail doesn't get opened.

In their homes, prospective donors sort their mail "trash, trash, trash, trash, *keep*. Trash, trash, trash, trash, trash, *keep*. In that environment, a simple hand-addressed letter really stands out and always gets opened. So to ensure Partners Relief & Development's mailing would get opened, we tested the use of a mailing strategy that addressed and wrote notes on mail using a highly realistic computer simulated handwriting program.



My doctoral research had tested this strategy in mailings American Heart Association eventually sent to more than a million households. So we replicated that strategy for Partners Relief and Development. Our premise was that ***para***linguistic features work ***para***lell to words, adding . . . Personal connection, Emotion, and Meaning.

The underlying premise was:

What a ***smile*** adds to speech, ***physical features*** add to a text.

The goal was to use ***physical features*** to land mail in the keep pile.

Which would you open? While this workshop focuses on the message carried by what you write, the fact is that Pulitzer-prize winning copy, supported with stunning art, targeted to your most loyal donors is powerless to raise money if the envelope it's sent in doesn't get opened.

So to improve odds of success, this mailing emulated the paralanguage features American Heart Association tested. HandScript was used strategically to personalize the mailing.

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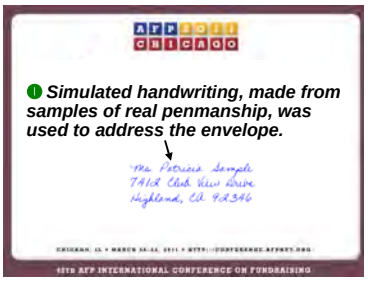
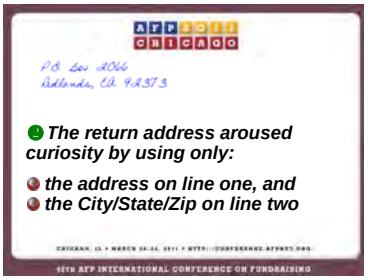
To make sure their envelope got opened, this direct mail fund appeal for Partners Relief and Development, used five physical features that made it look like first class mail.

When the average donor sorts their mail, its trash, trash, trash, trash, keep, trash, trash, trash, keep. The goal was to make sure mail landed in the keep pile.

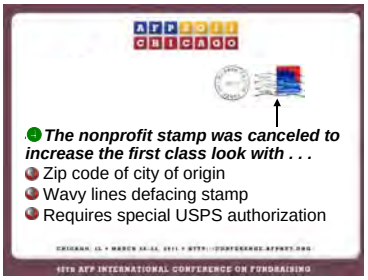


The first feature was realistic computer simulated handwriting, used for the outgoing address.



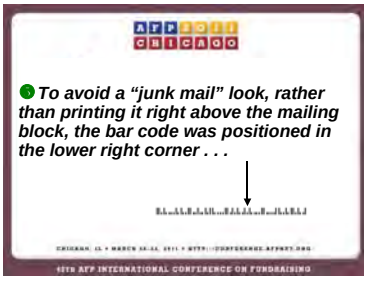
Second, to set it apart from corporate mail and make it look like a real human being wrote the piece, the return address created suspense by showing only the address on line one and the city, state, and zip code on line two.

Third, rather than using a preprinted indicia, that screams “I’m junk mail,” a live nonprofit postage stamp was affixed.



Fourth, to dress a naked nonprofit stamp (naked meaning not cancelled) it was cancelled.

A naked nonprofit stamp is easy to spot. It screams “I’m junk mail.” So this test piece was cancelled to make it look like a first class letter. The cancellation mark shows the city of origin, the zip code, the permit number of the mailer and wavy lines defacing the stamp. It looks like the cancellation used on first class mail.



Fifth, to avoid the “junk mail” look, the bar code was not printed immediately above or below the address block. The bar code was printed in the lower right corner where it’s printed on first class mail.

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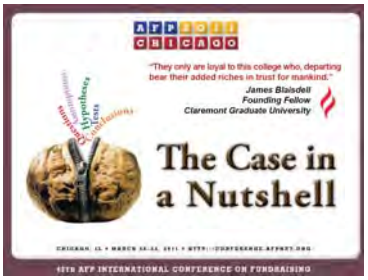
Sixth, the note card was personalized for Partners Relief using handwriting on the cover and back of the card. While most pieces of this kind are personalized on the inside, the front and back cover.

These features were tested in a series of mailings that were ultimately sent to one million, seventy-seven thousand, and sixty-seven households. Prior to this roll out, three fifty-thousand A/B tests were conducted. The full results of these tests are available in a chapter that has been excerpted from my dissertation—Case Study: Three A/B test panels from a million-household mailing by American Heart Association. You can download this excerpt from: www.TheWrittenVoice.org.



Here's that case in a nutshell.

The research asked three questions.

First, how, sending discount mail, did the American Heart Association

Increase response up to 346%?

Create a first class look?

And show how to save $301,578?

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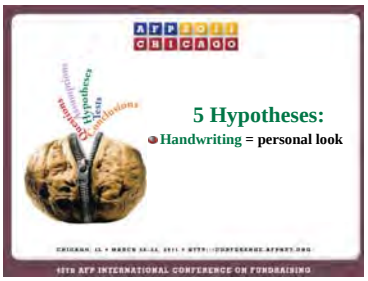
36 percent of the $828,726 raised.

That's the amount I calculated could have been saved had American Heart (which sent this mailing with first class postage affixed) used cancelled nonprofit stamps.

Two assumptions were made

One, a smile, voice and gestures connect speaker to audience.

Two, handwriting and cancellation of stamps connect text to reader.



Five hypotheses were proposed:

Handwriting can create a personal look

A simplified return address can create a personal look

A live postage stamp (rather than a preprinted indicia) can make discount mail look first class

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Canceling a nonprofit stamp makes it look first class.

Printing the bar code in the lower right corner makes it look first class.

To test these five hypotheses, three A/B tests were conducted—tests in which equal segments were compared with a variable controlled in the A segment and a variable changed in the test B test segment.

Package A in each test was a control package—one that had been used regularly. Package B in each was a test package as the same—a note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting.

In the first test, half of a fifty-thousand (panel A, 25,000) received the control package—a note card fund appeal that had been addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note penned using ***real*** handwriting. Panel B (24,997) received a note-card fund appeal addressed and personalized with a P.S. note printed using computer simulated handwriting.

In the second test, half of a fifty-thousand (panel A, 25,000) received a free box of greeting cards. This is often called a “freemium,” based on the idea that if you give away something, the recipient will feel obligated to reciprocate with a gift. Panel B (25,000) received a note-card fund appeal addressed and personalized with a P.S. note printed using computer simulated handwriting.

In the third test, half of a fifty-thousand (panel A, 25,000) received an appeal sent in a double remit envelope. This is a common low-cost method used by a number of larger national charities to renew gifts. Again, panel B (25,000) received a note-card fund appeal addressed and personalized with a P.S. note printed using computer simulated handwriting.

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In the first mailing, the B (test) package—a note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting—beat the A (control) package—a note card fund appeal that had been addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note penned using ***real*** handwriting. A totally unexpected outcome!

In the second mailing, the B (test) package—a note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting—beat the A (control) package—a free box of greeting cards.

In the third mailing, the B (test) package—a note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting—beat the A (control) package—an appeal sent in a double remit envelope.

All three of these tests are summarized in the full case study that's posted at www.TheWrittenVoice.org. I'll summarize one here—the third mailing comparing an appeal sent in a double remit envelope with a note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting.

The B (test) package—a note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting—beat the A (control) package—an appeal sent in a double remit envelope in these key measures.

1. Response increased 346% using the note-card fund appeal addressed with and personalized with a P.S. note printed in computer simulated handwriting. 2. Gross revenue increase 331%.

In a separate test, a 20,000-piece direct mail fund appeal for Franciscan Friars of the Atonement was divided into two panels. The control panel (A) used nonprofit stamps that were sent naked (not cancelled). The test panel (B) used nonprofit stamps that were cancelled. The cancelled panel increased response by 27.27 percent. This suggested that had American Heart Association used cancelled nonprofit stamps rather than first class stamps, could have saved $301,578 with nonprofit postage (36 percent of the $828,726 total amount raised)!

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These techniques proven to be effective for American Heart, were used in this appeal for Partners Relief and Development. The mailing envelope looked first class, using computer simulated handwriting called Computer HandScript. It gave the mail an inviting look. And a live nonprofit stamp was affixed and canceled to make it resemble first class mail, but at a fraction of the cost.

The note card measures 6.33 x 9.75 inches and folds in half to 4.875 x 6.33 inches. And on the cover, the card pictures ***Elise Gumaer*.** Unlike most appeals, this one was personalized in simulated handwriting on the front and back covers. The inside copy was all generic.

Then the card opened up and to copy both on both top and bottom panels. Here's what the top panel looked like.

And this was the bottom panel.

Finally, the appeal was finished on . . .

the back panel, ending with a HandScript-personalized Post Script.

The narrative begins ***in medias res*** (Latin for into the middle of things).

Immediately the first words are a contrast to the peaceful picture of Elise . . .

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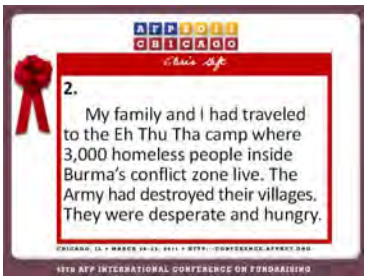
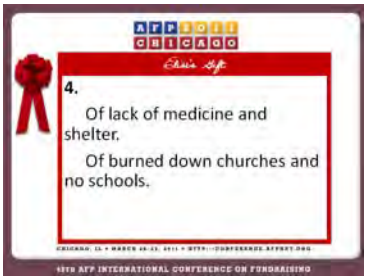
"To get there, we had to travel after dark. No flashlights. We could only whisper basic instructions. We climbed up a hill in the jungle as fast as we could. Nobody had seen us."



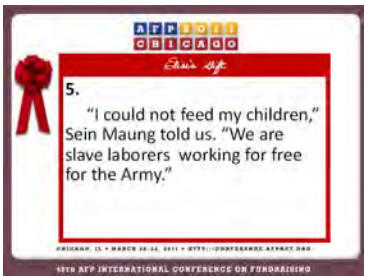
Then the inside panel sets the stage: "My family and I had traveled to the Eh Thu Tha camp where 3,000 homeless people inside Burma's conflict zone live. The Army had destroyed their villages. They were desperate and hungry."

"We were there to interview families, listen to their stories, pray, and learn how we could help.

"They told us stories of hunger and death.



"Of lack of medicine and shelter. Of burned down churches and no schools.



"'I could not feed my children,' Sein Maung told us. 'We are slave laborers working for free for the Army.

"'If we don't do what they tell us, they beat us up. We were only allowed to work to provide for our families a few days a month.'"

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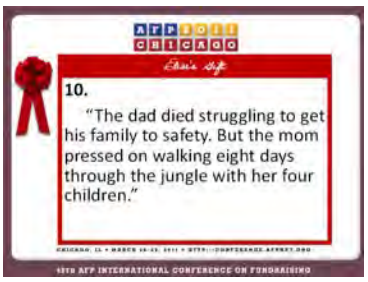
"With your help, Partners responded. You helped us provide families with food and vital supplies. We also played games with the children and comforted the people.

"Getting out of the camp was harder than getting in. We secretly crossed a river. We had to cover ourselves with tarps for protection. Then we had to wait in the jungle until dusk to hike out.

"Two days later, we learned a new family reached the camp. Partners staff member Ron Salone said:



"'The dad died struggling to get his family to safety. But the mom pressed on walking eight days through the jungle with her four children.

"'And as soon as they reached the camp her only son, 10-year old Aung San, died.'

"Khin and her daughters had no clothes, no mosquito nets, no blankets.

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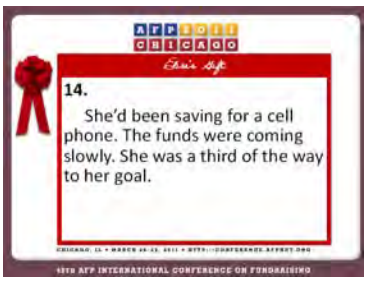
"Before going to bed that night Elise—now 13—handed me an envelope. In it was all the money she owned.

"30 dollars.



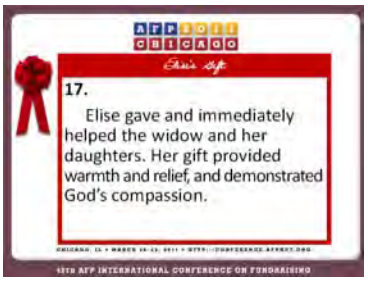
"She'd been saving for a cell phone. The funds were coming slowly. She was a third of the way to her goal.

"'This is for that family,' said Elise.

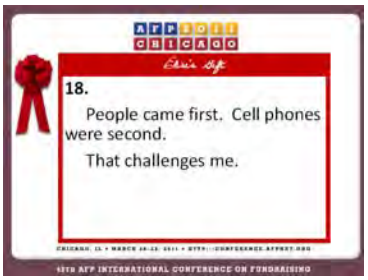
"'But, honey, this is all the money you own,' I replied. 'Are you sure you want give it away?'

"'Yes, I do. It is a little hard, but I still want to do it. It's the right thing to do.'"

Then the note card is finished the back cover . . .



"Elise gave and immediately helped the widow and her daughters. Her gift provided warmth and relief, and demonstrated God's compassion.



"People came first. Cell phones were second. That challenges me.

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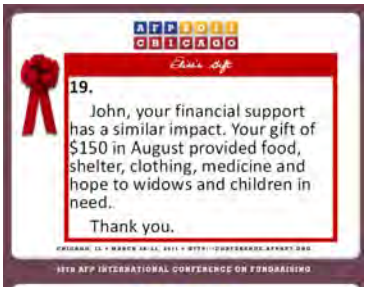

"John, your financial support has a similar impact. Your gift of $150 in August provided food, shelter, clothing, medicine and hope to widows and children in need.

"Thank you.

"Will you join my daughter, Elise, and help Burma's families again today?"

For them,
Oddny Gumaer
Then the note closes with a handwritten P.S. that adds to the personal touch . . .

"Sometimes our children teach us rather than the other way round.

"Can you add to Elise's $30 gift so we can help more families in areas of conflict?

"Thanks to the generosity of a friend, anything you give by December 31st will be matched.

"So your $100 gift will become $200. Just make your check to Partners Relief.

"Thanks for anything you can send."

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So let's highlight how this letter reflects the ***Story Triad*** structure.

Let's identify the variables of ***people***, ***tension***, and ***resolution***.

Who's the ***Protagonist?***

Elise Gumaer.

Who's the ***Antagonist?***

The Army that had destroyed the people's villages.

Who are key characters in the ***Ensemble?***

The displaced people of many villages.

Then more specifically, there's Sein Maung who had said: "We are slaves."

And there's Khin—the mother who had pressed on for eight days in the jungle after her husband died.

Aung San, Khin's son, who died just as they reached the camp.

Then Khin's three daughters who survived the dangerous trek.

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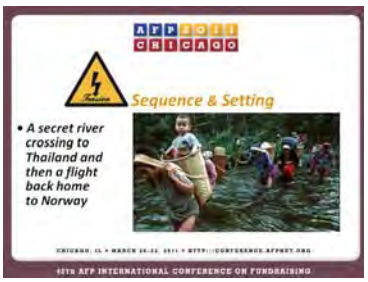
The ***Sequence and Setting*** include . . .

The jungle of tropical Burma

The Eh Thu Tha refugee camp inside the conflict zone

Hiding in the jungle till dusk on the return



A secret river crossing to Thailand and then a flight back home to Norway

The ***Steady State*** was Elise and family at home, which was boring, so the story really begins in the middle of things—the sudden shock of being in Burmese territory.

The ***Steady State*** that this cute picture of photo of Elise portrays is juxtaposed to words that paint a very different word picture. The peaceful world in balance is contrasted with activity that pictures a place of fear and uncertainty when we read that the Gumaer family was . . .

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Hiking up a hill quietly in the night to avoid being caught by the soldiers. The story begins on the note card cover with: ***"To get there, we had to travel after dark. We had to whisper . . ."*** This ***Sudden Shock*** takes us into the middle of things.

But then there was another ***Sudden Shock***. ***The stories were dreadful. But the real shock came as she heard about a mom who'd lost so much—her son and husband.***

It was ***this story in a story*** that became a ***connecting narrative moment*** for Elise, and moved her to ***act***. Oddny knew this story would ***connect*** with donors as it had with ***her***.

The ***protagonist Sets her Strategy.*** Elise's quest becomes the internal personal journey of deciding what she, a Norwegian teenager, could do to help.

The ***Scary Sojourn***. ***Elise thought about waiting to get the cell phone she had been saving for in order to help the family who'd lost so much.***

Resolution Reached. ***The Sojourn was not so scary—People came first. Cell phones were second.***

Together, the pieces we've just evaluated—the blog and now this note card—are examples of ***The Voice of Philanthropy***.

So ***What does it mean to Write the Voice of Philanthropy?***

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Philanthropy literally means "Friend of Man." So the **voice** of **philanthropy** is quite literally **The *Voice* of the *Friend* of Man**.

The title of this seminar is ***Writing* the Voice of Philanthropy**.

And I know the word ***Writing*** in that title sounds like a mistake

After all, we don't ***write*** with our voice, we ***speak*** with it.

But the notion the written voice is that as an advocate for others, we must infuse the written text with the passion of speech.

In some ways, writing is like building a house. And . . .

Building a house
requires three kinds of work . . .

three levels of house building

It requires ***Three levels of workmanship*** . . .
thinking like an ***architect***, a ***contractor***, and a ***finish artisan***.

An *architect* establishes the overall design . . .
she *decides what to build.*

A ***Contractor builds*** it out. And then . . .

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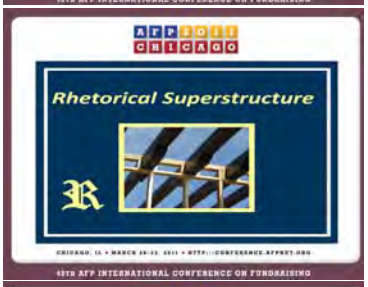
And . . . **A *finish artisan adds elegant touches of style.***

Writing a fund appeal also requires three kinds of work . . .

Three levels of text building

Rhetorical,
Linguistic, and
Stylistic

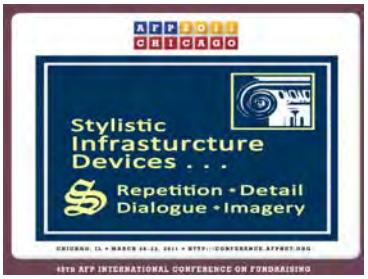


We've been talking the ***Rhetorical SUPERstructure*** . . . This is the strategic level at which you ***decide*** what kind of text you want to build—whether expository, or narrative.

Second is ***Linguistic SUBstructure,*** which is what we're going to talk about next. At this level you make language choices.

Third is ***Stylistic INFRAstructure.*** At this level you choose discourse devices. For example Oddny Gumaer chose to use repetition:

- It's an expensive power bill, but we can pay it.
- It's an expensive power bill, but we have two healthy legs each.



Since we won't have time to cover style issues in detail, I've listed some helpful resources on my research site on the use of repetition, detail, dialogue, and imagery.

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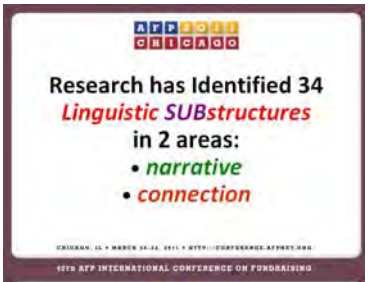
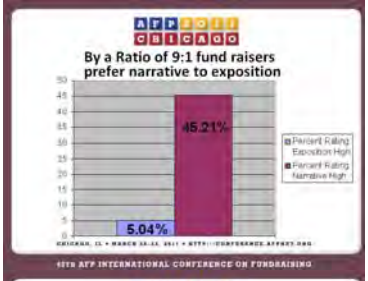


So for for the rest of this session, we're going to focus on the second level of writing—the two ***Linguistic SUBstructures*** of human voice: linguistic features that produce ***narrative***, and that produce ***connection***.

What I'll be sharing summarizes my doctoral research at Claremont Graduate University.

On a questionnaire, I asked nonprofit leaders to rate how important they felt it was to use an ***expository***, ***argument-centric*** writing style.



On 1-5 scale, with 5 being high, **5%** rated ***exposition*** and ***argument*** high.

I then asked them to rate ***personal connection*** and ***narrative***.

45% rated ***connection*** and ***narrative*** high.

By a ratio of nine-to-one they preferred writing that contained ***narrative*** and ***connection***.

My next task was to measure how fund raisers actually write.

I came across an unsettling article by Ulla Connor and Thomas Upton at Indiana University. They'd studied the linguistic patterns in direct mail letters and wrote: "This genre contains some counter-intuitive features. These include the fact that . . .

Fund-raising letters are . . .

- More ***academic*** than ***personal***,
- More ***informational*** than ***involved***,
- More ***expository*** than ***narrative***, and
- More closely ***edited*** than ***chatty*** like personal conversation.

They wrote . . .

These direct mail letters are more informational than even academic prose . . . and quite unlike the personal letters that we tend to consider them modeled after . . . direct mail letters are more strongly non-narrative than almost all other genres—spoken or written—including professional letters and academic prose."

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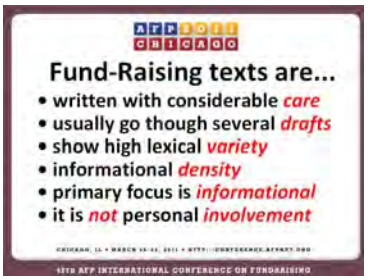
That was a shocking accusation . . . ***were it true***. To illustrate what they found, Connor and Upton published this excerpt from a letter written by the Girl Scouts:

Young women are growing up in an ever-changing society. As a contributor to the Council in past appeals I know that you are aware of our mission—to prepare girls with ethical values, character, a desire to succeed and a commitment to their community. This letter is our request for a gift to the

Annual Campaign for support of our operating budget. This year's Annual Campaign goal is $65,000. We invite you to consider a contribution. Your gift, along with the many others we receive, will provide vital resources for today's Girl Scouts to become tomorrow's community and business leaders. (Connor & Upton, 2003, p.78)

Thom and Ulla said this Girl Scouts appeal was typical of what they found. They wrote:



Fund-Raising texts are . . .

- written with considerable ***care***, they
- usually go through several ***drafts***, they
- show high lexical ***variety***, and reflect
- informational ***density***. Clearly, their
- primary focus is ***informational***,
- it is ***not*** personal ***involvement***.

Here's what they said about the Girl Scouts letter in particular: "this text is clearly not interactional in nature but instead is tightly and carefully written to convey a lot of detailed information in a succinct manner." ***This was a disturbing discovery!***

So I called Ulla Connor to talk about their work. That's when I discovered the 316 letters they analyzed had come from just 108 organizations within a 50-mile radius of Indianapolis.

That explained it. They were written by smaller nonprofits. My assumption was that the staff of these local organizations just didn't have the writing skills you'd find among elite nonprofits.

Let me go into a bit more detail on why Tom and Ulla characterized the Girl Scouts letter and virtually all they reviewed the way they did.

Now what I'm going to say may sound unkind. It is not intended to be. However, to be helpful it is a critical analysis of the Girl Scouts letter.

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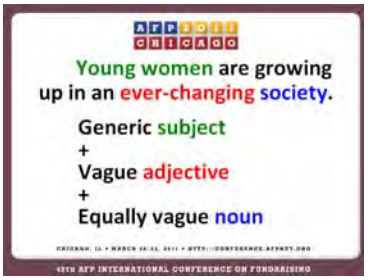
The Girl Scouts letter opens with: "***Young women are growing up in an ever-changing society***."



- The writer sets the stage using a ***generic subject***: ***Young*** + ***women*** describes a faceless class of people, not an individual anyone could care about.
- And then the letter uses a ***vague adjective*** to modify an equally ***vague noun***: ***ever-changing*** + ***society***.
- This description is so vague that it could mean just about anything . . . so it really means ***nothing***.

Next, ***Who's the writer?***

The writer's referred to twice by the possessive plural pronoun ***our***:

This letter is our request
support our operating budget.

And ***Who's the reader?***

She's ***Referred to in cold*** terms:

"as a contributor to the
Council in past appeals."

. . . which I'm sure she was.

But . . . it's always better to

Refer to a reader by name and as a friend.

Next, there was the clinical-sounding mission-statement-ease . . .

* ***our*** mission—to prepare girls with
* ***ethical values***,
* ***character***, a
* ***desire to succeed*** and a
* ***commitment*** to their community

The vague language used in this letter begs the question, ***"How will I recognize such a girl when I see one?"*** The problem is, ***ethical values***, ***character***, a ***desire to succeed,*** and a ***commitment*** to their community are abstract ***nouns***. This letter ***tells*** us about ***traits*** a Girl Scout is supposed to ***have***, but it fails to give specific examples of what a girl who has those traits, actually ***does***. The language fails because it's ***abstract,*** and not ***concrete.***

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So Connor and Upton said this letter (like virtually all they studied) presented a . . .

Vague mission that ***TELLS*** but ***SHOWS*** ***NOTHING.***

The writer needs to ***SHOW ME . . .***
values, ***character***, ***desire***, ***commitment***.

The writer needs to:

Write one girl's story to ***SHOW***
values, ***character***, ***desire***, and ***commitment*** ***in action***.

My research focused on expanding Connor and Upton's study to

- 735 nonprofits that raise $20 Million or more, and another
- 145 smaller nonprofits

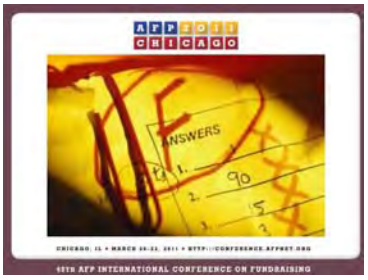
I called the research population the Elite 880 Nonprofits.

I analyzed . . .

- 2,412 documents containing
- More than 1.5 million words of text
- Half of which were printed and half were from online sources
- Spanning all nine nonprofit sectors

Two Questions drove my research . . .

- Was the Indiana University sample ***skewed*** as I suspected?
  and . . .
- Do the Elite 880 nonprofits in fact, write ***much better*** copy?



In comparing the Elite 880 with the Indiana 108.

The Elite Nonprofits got a big Fat F.

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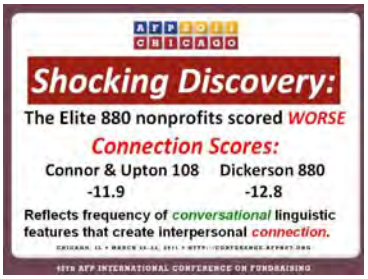
Texts written by Connor and Upton's 108 local nonprofits scored -3.1 for narrative. And the fund appeals written by the Elite 880 scored virtually the same: -3.0.



Fund appeals written by Connor and Upton's 108 nonprofits scored -11.8 for personal connection. But the score for appeals written by the Elite 880 were worse: -12.8!

The research identified six types of linguistic features that create narrative.

And it identified 23 linguistic features that create interpersonal connection.

Finally, 5 linguistic features were identified that create high information in texts.

Here's how these scores were derived and what they mean. It was like performing a linguistic MRI on 1.5 million words of copy.

- We can measure a two-by-four in feet and inches with a tape.
- We can weigh chopped beef in pounds and ounces on a scale
- But how do we measure words?

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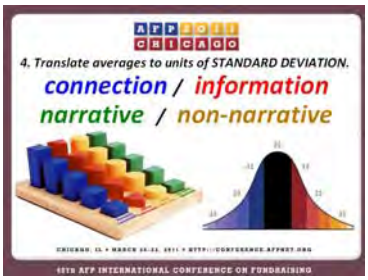
This is the analysis process . . .

First, I ***tagged*** words with a computer program that recognized parts of speech, their functions, and contexts.

Second, I ***tallied*** these words by groups.

Third, I ***averaged each*** tally to a per-thousand-word ratio.



Fourth, I translated these averages to units of ***Standard Deviation***—which measured of how far from the mean a score fell.

Fifth, these standardized scores made it possible to ***Compare*** how fund-raising texts sized up next to 23 other common kinds of writing.

This last step was the real pay off. It answered the Big Question:

"What other types of writing do fund-raising documents most closely resemble?"

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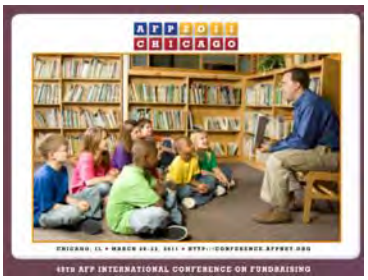
I placed scores for my fund appeals on several scales. Like a thermometer each scale had positive and negative numbers. This made it possible to visualize where my texts fell, compared to the benchmark scores of 23 common genres.

The top pole on one scale, for example, was labeled ***Narrative*** and the bottom pole was labeled ***Non-Narrative***.

On another scale, the top pole of its continuum was labeled ***Connection*** and the bottom pole was labeled ***Content***.

I started with the assumption that fund appeals written by the typical larger nonprofit would sound like the transcript of a personal conversation between friends over a cup of coffee—filled with personal views, concerns, emotion, and of course, stories. So I assumed they'd be located at the top of these two scales. But I was ***DEAD WRONG***.



For example, rather than telling a story about how Ben, Joe, and Beth had benefited from a children's reading program, a library's fund appeal was more likely to have a title like: ***A study indicating positive correlation between elevated test scores and literacy immersion strategies targeted to at-risk youth in socio-economically depressed SMSAs***.

For more detail, you can download my paper, *The Way We Write is All Wrong* from TheWrittenVoice.org.

After the results sunk in, the big question was . . .

So what . . . What are the implications?

Astronaut Jack Swigert's line from Apollo 13, came to mind: ***"Houston, we have a problem."***

I thought: ***"Fund raisers . . . WE HAVE A PROBLEM!"***

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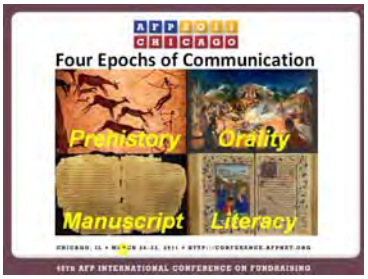
Here's the profound disconnect the study revealed . . .

1. You have everyone agreeing written fund appeals should connect at a personal level.
2. And everyone believes stories motivate giving by putting a human face on a cause.

So why, if nonprofit leaders prefer ***connection*** and ***narrative***, does their writing contain neither? What happened?

- It's our academic upbringing. In the past, certain writing behaviors earned a reward while other behaviors were punished. We've always been rewarded for writing in an academic style.
- But academic writing tends to be ***Abstract*** and ***Disconnected***.

It's written that way to preserve the distance the scientific method demands. That's why agentless passives are used in academic prose. The agent (the person doing an experiment) is ignored to put the focus on the experimental process. But in fund-raising, rather than writing the passive statement: ***"A gift was made to our assistance fund,"*** the active voice would phrase it: ***"Because you gave $150, we were able to help 100 families this Thanksgiving."***



You can see how we came to write in an abstract disconnected way by tracing four major communication epochs—epochs that were defined by the media that dominated each.

It began with the epoch of prehistory then progressed to the epoch of orality, then to the epoch of manuscripts, and finally to the epoch of literacy.

In the first epoch of prehistory, around campfires cavemen shared stories of the hunt and escapes from fearsome beasts.

In the second epoch of orality, Greek odes like The Iliad and The Odyssey told stories of battle, betrayal, and the long journey home.

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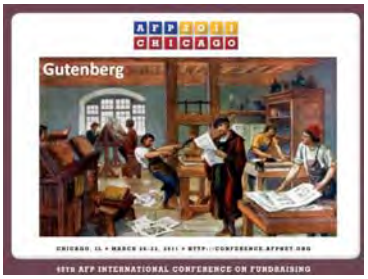
During the third epoch of manuscripts, scribes copied texts like the battle between David and Goliath and the parable of the Good Samaritan. A monk would take as long as twenty years to copy the text of the bible.



Then suddenly everything changed in 1436 when German goldsmith Johannes Gutenberg, used an olive press to print with movable type. That innovation marked the beginning of the fourth epoch.

Gutenberg's innovation of the press marks a ***Watershed.*** By 1499, 20 million books were in print!

- The Reformation, was spread by Luther's writings, which had been preceded by Gutenberg's Bible, printed at Mainz in 1455.
- The Renaissance began with writings emanating from Italy, and
- The Revolution in the colonies was flamed by Thomas Paine's 48-page pamphlet, *Common Sense*.

The Gutenberg shift has forever changed the way we access, process, and communicate information.

And this shift affects how we, as fund raisers, write today . . .

Oral culture was ***tribal***	but literacy focused on the ***individual***.
Orality focused on the ***particular***	but the focus of literacy shifted to ***universal*** truths.
Narrative dominated oral culture	but ***exposition*** was the dominant mode of literacy.
Oral cultures focused on ***people***	but ideas became central in the epoch of ***literacy***.
In the epoch of orality, people were ***connected***	but post Gutenberg, people became ***disconnected***.

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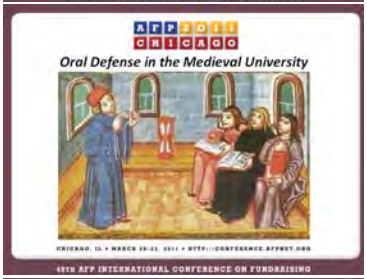
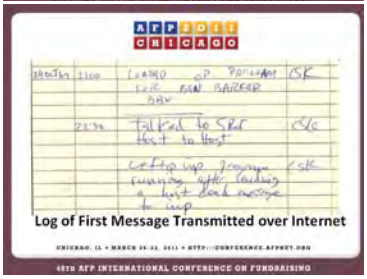
The Gutenberg Shift has had two effects on our discourse . . .

1. We write in a ***disconnected*** style . . . and
2. We have abandoned ***narrative***.



Even the medieval university's tradition of making an oral defense of a dissertation has been eliminated in many schools.

And now we're more than 40 years on this side of yet another cultural ***watershed***. This fifth epoch began at 10:30 p.m. Pacific, past midnight in Chicago, on Wednesday, October 29, 1969. The setting was the Westwood district of Los Angeles—on the campus of UCLA. Student programmer Charley Kline types five letters, "l o g i n" and presses enter. But the SDS Sigma 7 Host computer in professor Leonard Kleinrock's lab crashes.



Only the two letters, "l-o," reach the SDS 940 computer nicknamed Genie, which was located in the lab of professor Doug Engelbart up in Menlo Park. An hour passes. Charley tries again. This time all five letters—"l o g i n" reach the Stanford Research Institute. This is the actual log record of that historic transmission. That was the very first message ever sent over what we now call the Internet.

We're now into the fifth epoch of Digital Connection.

The diary was once the medium of ***personal*** expression for just a ***teenage girl.***

But facebook is now the medium of ***public*** expression for people of ***all ages***.

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The diary has been reborn in facebook as a pubic medium of connection.

Whatever you think of the 600 million who are on facebook, the millions who twitter and are Linked In . . . social media reflect ***The Power of the Fifth Epoch . . . Digital, Yet Personal Connection***.

Fund raisers need to take a hint from this ***watershed*** development and realize that ***Writing is an Emotional business***.

Our writing needs to make a reader ***Scared, Sad, Glad or Mad.***

Problem is, fund raisers write like they're still back in college working on a term paper. Even though fund raising requires a different style, we seem to be living in ***another place***, at ***another time***, writing for professor who's ***no longer there***.

The take-away is this. You need to observe what's happening in your organization. Ask questions that dig out the facts. Then . . .

- ***Detect the Connecting Narrative Moment in a story.***
- ***That MOMENT that makes you Scared, Sad, Glad or Mad.***
- ***Then make that Connecting Narrative Moment the focus of what you write.***

Now let's take a look at a Tale of Two Texts. The first is a really bad fund appeal. It's a parody. But the second is actually what a good fund appeal might read like. Neither are real. I wrote both to illustrate the use of specific linguistic features.

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The first text shows how a group of 5 linguistic work together to create a densely packed informational text. It's called ***Help Ameliorate Socio-Economic Asymmetry***.

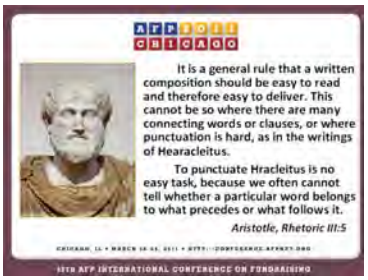
For mothers who are their families' sole source of support, the growth of economic asymmetry places in jeopardy their provision of quality childcare and the attainment of adequate housing for their children. Exacerbated by fiscal weakness on the part of the municipality, this trend is particularly troublesome.

This is a particular disappointment given the determination of recent studies constituting confirmation of the presence of significant positive correlation between the achievement of educational progress among at-risk children and the expansion of *bridging* experiences such as camping trips and visits to cultural venues.

Yet philanthropy provides a source of optimism that supportive structures by which the realization of these programs may lead toward the amelioration of academic underachievement among the most vulnerable of our city's youth, may yet be realized. I am, therefore, hopeful, John, that your supportive response will be forthcoming at your earliest convenience.

That may sound unrealistically bad. However, fund-raising texts really do trend toward this level of nonsense.

Aristotle had no patience for such writing. In his *Rhetoric* he wrote:



It is a general rule that a written composition should be easy to read and therefore easy to deliver. This cannot be so where there are many connecting words or clauses, or where punctuation is hard, as in the writings of Heracleitus. To punctuate Heracleitus is no easy task, because we often cannot tell whether a particular word belongs to what precedes or what follows it.

Aristotle, Rhetoric, III:5

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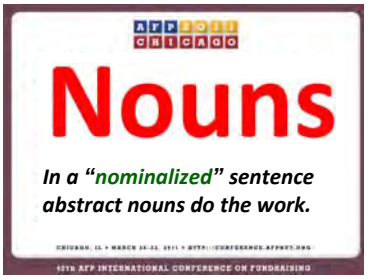
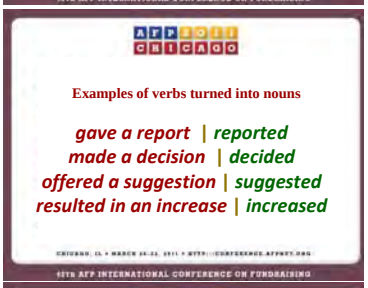
Okay, let's take a look at what makes this piece of writing sound so academic and so bad.

Five linguistic features work together to create highly informational writing.

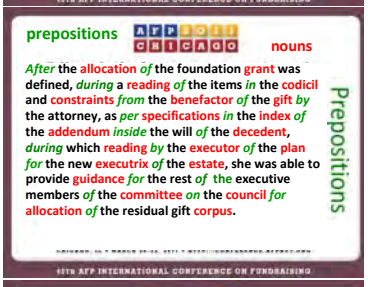
Academic prose is heavily laden with nouns. A common problem with heavy writing is the practice of nominalizing verbs.



We neuter a dog or cat by taking something away. Conversely, we neuter a verb by adding something to it that creates a linguistic eunuch. We do this by adding endings like tion, ity, ent, ing or ive. For example: contributed becomes made a contribution, conforms becomes was edited to be in conformity, arranged becomes made an arrangement, jumped becomes the jump, and evoked becomes was evocative.

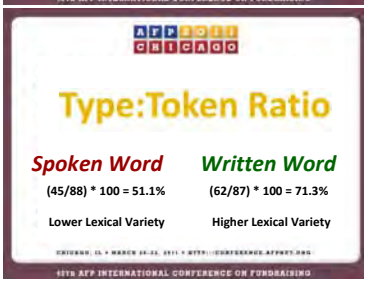


Writing in the New York Times, the University of Auckland's Helen Sword of writes about nominalizations: "Academics love them; so do lawyers, bureaucrats and business writers. I call them 'zombie nouns' because they cannibalize active verbs, suck the lifeblood from adjectives and substitute abstract entities for human beings: 'The proliferation of nominalizations in a discursive formation may be an indication of a tendency toward pomposity and abstraction.'"



Look at the ***green*** and ***red*** words on this stretch of text. The ***red*** words are nouns and the ***green*** words are the prepositions that were needed one a verb was neutered. The prepositions are necessary to make it all make sense.

The total number of words it a text is a measure of tokens—each word is a token. The total number of different words in a text is a measure of different words in a text. For example: "Count the votes, please; and complete the vote count tonight. This sentence has 10 words (10 tokens). But when you count the types, only 6 unique words (types) were present, since four words were used twice (count, the votes, please). So when you adjust for these duplicates, the ratio of types to tokens becomes 6/10 or 60 percent.



So when quoting dialogue, in an ill-advised attempt to increase variety, novice writers may at one time say "Joe said." Then to show you she or he is inventive, the writer may thrown in a number of variations on "Joe said," like "Joe opined," "Joe lamented," "Joe intoned," "Joe proclaimed," "Joe replied," and "Joe reported." That's a bit much and not typical of real conversational narrative. Keep it simple.

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Often the adjective count will be high when the writer has not taken time to describe the setting in which an action occurs

And a text will sound dense because it gets over-packed with ***nouns***. And adding to this, verbs and adjectives are often ***turned into*** nouns by adding "tion" to the end of a verb or "ness" or "ry" to the end of an adjective. The ***red*** words in this sample are nouns, and the ***blue*** are examples of verbs and adjectives that have been ***turned into*** nouns. The problem with nominalizng verbs is that it robs a sentence of its drive train—its power source.

For example, this noun-heavy sentence might be more simply put:

It's hard for mothers to provide childcare and attain adequate housing."

Provision and ***attainment*** revert back to their verb roots—***provide*** and ***attain***.

But it would be better yet to rewrite it to something like this:

Mothers can't find good childcare or a home where their kids feel safe.

And notice how this is about mothers (plural). It would be better rewritten once more.

This should be rewritten as a story about a particular mother who has a name, who has a child with a name.

It is better to give the reader a description of a person that makes them see the characters of the narrative.

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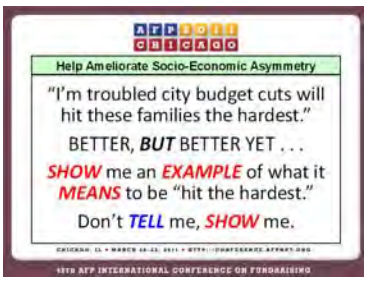
The average ***word length*** in this text make is hard to read. The words marked in ***red*** here are longer than necessary**.**

For example, the second sentence uses ***exacerbated*** and ***troublesome***.

This line could be simplified and shortened from 14 to 11 words. And in the process, you'd restore the driving force of the verb "troubled," which had been robbed of its power when tuned into a noun:



"I'm troubled city budget cuts will hit these families the hardest." The pronoun "I" becomes a character in this sentence. And the nominalization ***troublesome*** is replaced with a private verb ***troubled***, which gives you a glimpse of the writer's personal thoughts.

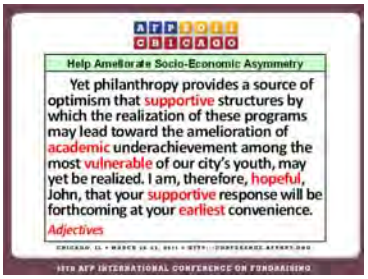
BETTER. ***But*** BETTER YET . . . ***SHOW*** me an ***EXAMPLE*** of what it ***MEANS*** to be "hit the hardest." Don't ***TELL*** me, ***SHOW me!***

For example, describe the impact of budget cuts on a jobless, homeless mother of three. Show me the hardship this real family of four is facing—a flesh and blood family with first names, who are afraid and have lost hope for the future. Show me what it means to them to be "hit the hardest" by the city's "fiscal weakness."

And by their nature, when verbs are turned into nouns (are nominialzed) the text also contains an overabundance of ***prepositions*** that are needed to connect thoughts together like a string of train cars hooked to up a locomotive. Trouble is, it's hard to always keep the train of thought straight. In this sentence, eight prepositions complicate the prose.

This text can be cut in half from 44 to just 22 words:

"This really disappoints me, since new studies prove that kids who visit museums and experience outings like camping trips get better grades."



The ***attributive adjectives*** in this text attribute qualities to things described, but in doing this the writer ***tells*** us about the subject, using abstract terms. Better to ***show*** us people and conflict in the context of reality.

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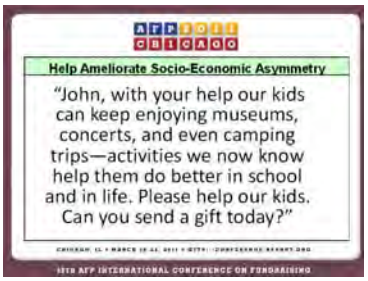
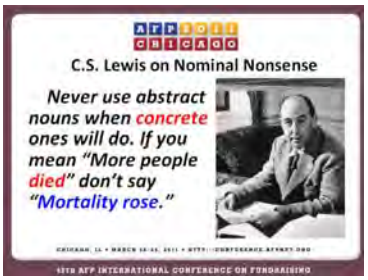
It would have been better to write:



"John, with your help our kids can keep enjoying museums, concerts, and even camping trips—activities we now know help them do better in school and in life. Please help our kids. Can you send a gift today?"

The kinds of problems that make this text so bad were addressed by C.S. Lewis in a letter he sent to a teen-age girl from Florida named Joan. Lewis often wrote fans of his *Chronicles of Narnia* who asked for advice on how to improve their own writing. In 1956 he wrote:

1. Always prefer the plain direct word to the long, vague one. Don't ***implement*** promises, but ***keep*** them.



2. Never use abstract nouns when ***concrete*** ones will do. If you mean "More people ***died***" don't say "***Mortality rose***."

3. In writing. Don't use adjectives which merely ***TELL*** us how you want us to *feel* about the thing you are describing. I mean, instead of telling us a thing was "terrible," ***DESCRIBE*** it so that we'll be terrified.

Lewis was telling Joan . . .

Make Words
DESCRIBE
& thus Drag out
FEELINGS
of *TERROR*

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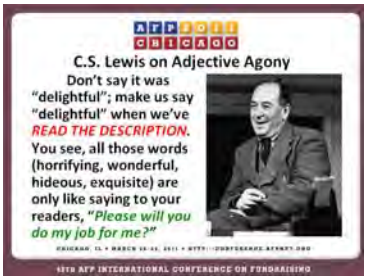

Then he wrote:

Don't say it was "delightful"; make *us* say "delightful" when we've ***READ THE DESCRIPTION***. You see, all those words (horrifying, wonderful, hideous, exquisite) are only like saying to your readers, "***Please will you do my job for me?***"

Make Words
DESCRIBE
& thus make
me say . . .
"DELIGHTFUL!"

E.B. White put it more bluntly:

"Adjectives are the ***leeches*** that infest the pond of prose, ***sucking the blood out of words***." E.B. White

Okay, so we've looked at what doesn't work. Now let's look at what does.

This next letter illustrates what you'll find in writing that ***connects*** with readers and ***narrates*** stories.

Twenty-three linguistic features create ***interpersonal connection***—the kind of language used in everyday face-to-face conversation and personal letters.

And six features are common to ***narrative***.

Help Send Carley to Camp illustrates these.

See if you can spot these features as I read this short letter, and then I'll highlight a few.

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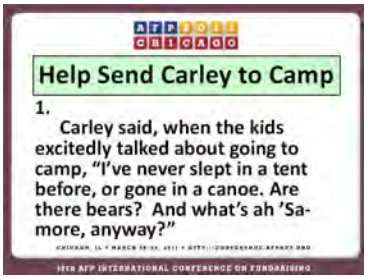

1. Carley said, when the kids excitedly talked about going to camp, "I've never slept in a tent before, or gone in a canoe. Are there bears? And what's ah 'Sa-more, anyway?"

2. You could tell her 10-year-old mind was really racing and spinning dreams of what it'd be like. Being with best friends. Adventure. Animals. Cooking out on a campfire!

All of which was exotic stuff to a child of Inner-City Chicago.

3. Then last week when she came to the club meeting, I could tell something was wrong. "You ok, honey? What's wrong?," I asked as kids were heading out the door.

4. Carley had been hiding her feelings. Looking up, she waves bye to best friend Lori. Other girls had been laughing, planning and screaming as they left for home.

5. Then when we were alone, and it was "safe," I heard again what I hear every year from a child whose mom is their family's sole source of support.

6. When everyone was gone, tears almost come. She whispers: "Miss. Lasater, Mama said I can't go to camp 'cuz we can't 'ford it." That did it. I knew what that meant to Carley—her little dream of camp with friends had suddenly evaporated.

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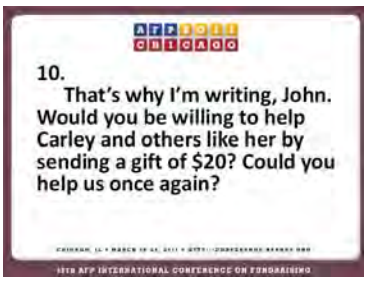
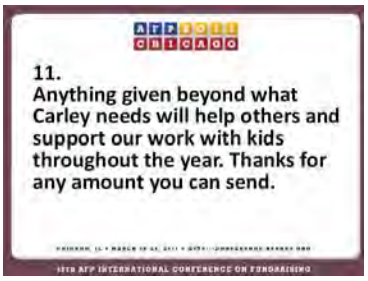
7. Twenty dollars is the share of the cost we ask families to provide. Not much. That's the cost of a few gourmet cups of coffee for you or me. But for Carley's mom, Laura—

8. well . . . $20 might mean her other three kids miss a meal. It matters a lot! Because just a little help can mean so much to girls like Carley, I knew you'd want to hear about this need.

9. It breaks my heart to think Carley and others will not get to go to camp. But it takes money to get them there. And I just don't know where money's going to come from.



10. That's why I'm writing, John. Would you be willing to help Carley and others like her by sending a gift of $20? Could you help us once again?



11. Anything given beyond what Carley needs will help others and support our work with kids throughout the year. Thanks for any amount you can send.

A very different text. It sounds like something you might say to a friend about your week at the Girls and Boys Club, doesn't it.

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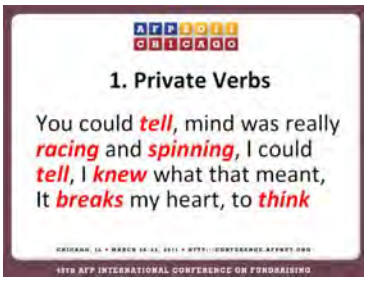
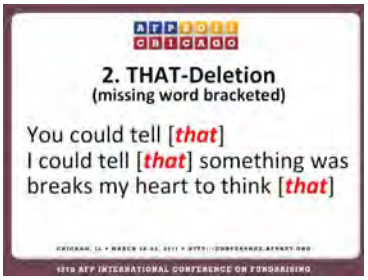
What specifically about the language in this letter heightens the interpersonal connection factor? There are 23 specific kinds of words that do that, and this text was specifically written to illustrate each one. I'll cover just the top five here and you can download a paper that describes the rest. First there are the . . .



1. ***Private verbs*** that express thoughts and feelings. In ***Help Send Carley to Camp*** there are at least eight such words at work:

You could ***tell***, mind was really ***racing*** and ***spinning***, I could ***tell***, I ***knew*** what that ***meant***, It ***breaks*** my heart, to ***think***. These words let you see what the characters in the narrative were thinking and feeling.



2. Then there's the feature called ***That Deletion***

In conversation we often delete the ***that*** in phrases like "You could tell [that] her 10-year old mind was racing." It sounds less formal.

There are at least three instances here: You could tell [***that***], I could tell [***that***] something was wrong, It breaks my heart to think [***that***]

3. Next there are the ***Contractions***.

Like deleting the word ***that***, contractions give writing the friendly informal feel of personal conversation. Seven are used here . . .

I've never, ***what's*** ah 'Sa-more I ***can't*** go, we ***can't*** 'ford it, ***That's*** the cost, ***That's*** why ***I'm***

4. Then there are the ***present tense verbs***.

They create the feel of immediacy, like you're there watching the action of a drama through the lens of a camera. In relating what she experienced in her conversation with Carley, Miss Lasater writes:

Looking up she ***waves***, tears almost ***come***, She ***says***, we ***ask***, It ***breaks***, it ***takes***

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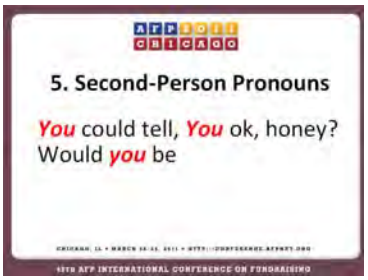
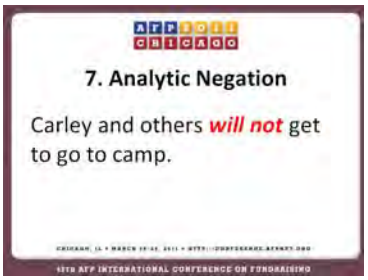


5. ***Second person pronouns*** add to this feeling of real-time interaction. In the dialogue between Miss Lasater and Carley you read: ***You*** could tell, ***You*** ok, honey? Would ***you*** be.

These are the top five of 23 features that work together to create interpersonal connection. The main take-way is this. Write like you talk. So if you wouldn't say something in a conversation, don't write it in a fund appeal.

6. The pro-verb ***do*** substitutes for a clause and makes a sentence seem less dense. In grammar, the pro-verb do is often used rather than repeating a verb, especially in conversation, much like a pronoun often substitutes for a noun.

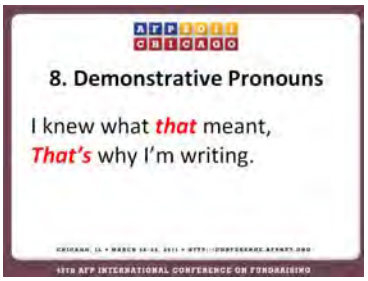
In ***Help Send Carley to Camp***, Miss Lasater responds to what Carley tells her: Carley says, "Miss Lasater, Mama said I can't go to camp 'cuz we can't 'ford it." Then Laura replies, "That ***did*** it!"



7. Analytic Negation is when you use the word ***not*** or its contracted form (***n't***).

It's the opposite of synthetic negation which is to synthesize two words into one like joining together no + one = none, not + ever = ***never***, no + thing = ***nothing***, not + either = ***neither***).

In ***Help Send Carley to Camp***, Miss Lasater writes: Carley and others ***will not*** get to go to camp



8. Demonstrative pronouns ***this*** and ***these*** stand in place of nouns and refer to things close in time and space, while ***that*** and ***those*** refer to things more removed.

In ***Help Send Carley to Camp***, Miss Lasater lets us know how Carley felt about the possibility to go to camp:

All ***that*** was exotic, I knew what ***that*** meant, ***That's*** why I'm writing.

9. General emphatics emphasize things without adding additional meaning. They just add stress ad are sometimes called boosters or intensifiers. They're worlds like ***awesome, definitely***, ***just really***, ***really, most***, ***more***, ***absolutely***, ***for sure***, ***it's obvious***, ***clearly***, ***in fact***, ***indeed***.

In ***Help Send Carley to Camp***, Miss Lasater notes: You could tell her 10-old mind was ***really*** racing

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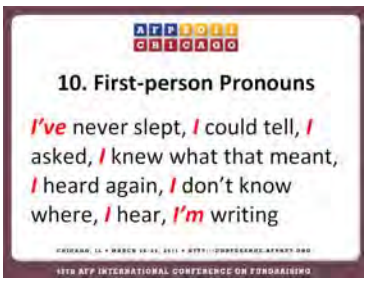


10. First person pronouns indicate an interpersonal focus.

The narrator of the story refers to herself to interject her personal feelings, as opposed to the anonymity of an academic piece.

I've never slept, ***I*** could tell, ***I*** asked, ***I*** knew what that meant, ***I*** heard again, ***I*** don't know where, ***I*** hear, ***I'm*** writing

11. Pronoun **IT**

Marks relatively inexplicit lexical reference

In ***Help Send Carley to Camp***, Miss Lasater notes:

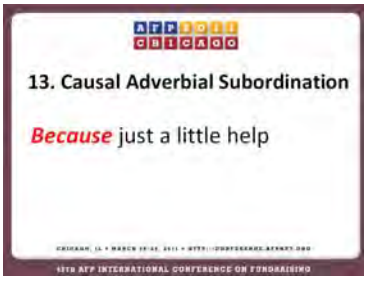
It breaks my heart, ***It*** takes money

12. **BE** as main verb

Communicates sate of being versus action

In commenting on how Carley felt about going to camp, Miss Lasater writes:

Are there bears, All that ***was*** exotic stuff

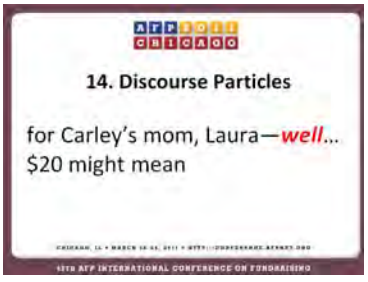


13. Causal Adverbial Subordination

The adverbials ***because*** or ***as*** mark causation

Miss Laura uses adverbial subordination to explain her feelings about Carley's need:

Because just a little help can mean so much to girls like Carley



14. Discourse Particles are . . .

attitudinal and structural discourse markers

Discourse particles contribute no meaning prepositional content to what they modify, but are frequently used in conversation attitudes and express emotions. Miss Laura uses well to pause before stating the implication of paying the $20 camp fee for Carley: But for Carley's mom, Laura—***well*** . . . $20 might mean her other three kids miss a meal. And I ***just*** don't know where the money's going to come from.

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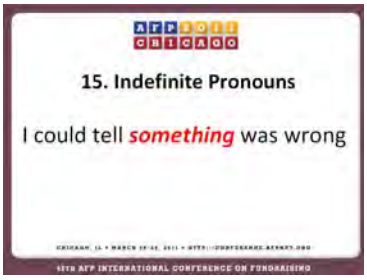


15. Indefinite Pronouns

General referent device often used like *IT*

Miss Lasater notes uses this device to describe what she saw:

I could tell ***something*** was wrong

16. General Hedges

Informal markers of probability or uncertainty

As narrator, Miss Lasater notes that when Carley's friends left . . .

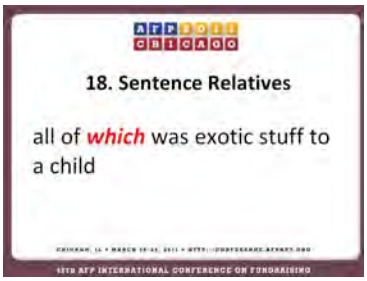
tears ***almost*** come

17. Amplifiers

Lexical *degree* words to magnify verbal force

Amplifying how precious even as little as $20 is to Laura, Carley's mother, Miss Lasater writes . . .

$20 might mean her other three kids miss a meal. It matters a ***lot!***

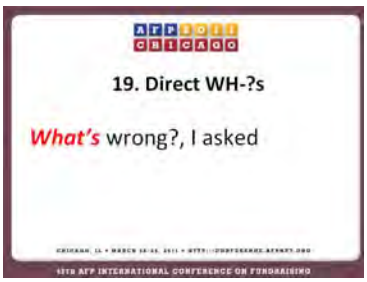


18. Sentence Relatives

Speech-like relative, comments on context

Commenting on how the prospect of camp felt to Carley, Miss Lasater writes . . .

All of ***which*** was exotic stuff to a child of Inner-City Chicago.



19. Direct WH Questions

Direct questions, marks personal interaction

Miss Lasater asked Carley . . .

What's wrong?, I asked

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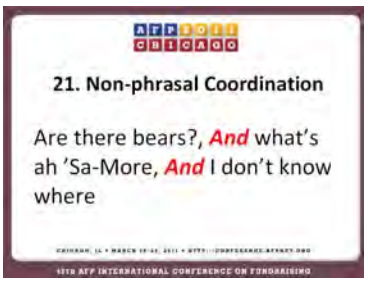
20. Possibility modals

Subjective, tentative, states possible reality

In expressing the feeling that the donor could help resolve the problem of lack of money for kids' camp, Miss Lasater writes . . .

Could *you help us once more? Thanks for any amount you* ***can*** *send.*

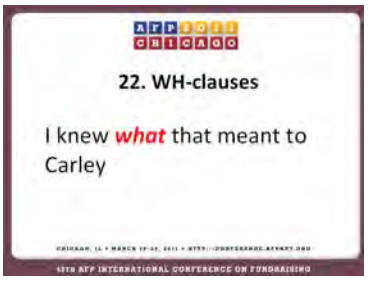


21. Non-phrasal Coordination

And acts as loose general-purpose connector

Carley's quoted speech strings a number of separate thoughts joined by the ***And*** and Miss Lasater transitions to a coclusing thought on the problem she is facing with a simple ***And***

Are there bears?, ***And*** what's ah 'Sa-More, ***And*** I don't know where the money's going to come from.



22. WH-Clauses

Verb complement, to give personal viewpoint

Miss Lasater uses this clause to let the reader know she understands the consequence of Carley's mom not being able to afford $20 . . .

I knew ***what*** that meant to Carley

23. Final Prepositions

Miss Lasater describes her dilemma of not having the funds to help Carley . . .

Reflects surface reduction, marks speech

And I don't know where money's going to come ***from***

You can download the speaking script that contains what was discussed here and more. It covers the linguistic features that make a text connect with the readers and that fame narratives. You can download if from my academic research site at:

www.TheWrittenVoice.org

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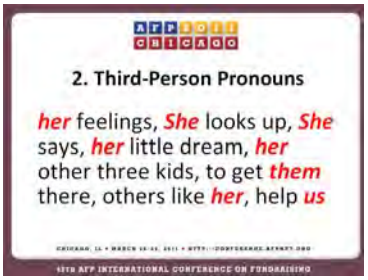
Finally, six features indicate the presence of narrative in writing.

Help Send Carly to Camp reports a prior event using ***past tense verbs.***

Miss Lasater wrote:

when kids excitedly ***talked***, Carley ***said*** I ***asked***, I ***heard*** again, her little dream ***evaporated***, Mama ***said***

And because like all stories this letter has characters, Miss Laura refers to these characters using several linguistic features you might find in the dialogue of a screenplay.



2. This is accomplished using the second narrative linguistic feature—***third-person pronouns***:

her feelings, ***She*** looks up, ***She*** says, ***her*** little dream, ***her*** other three kids, to get ***them*** there, others like ***her***, help ***us***

3. Then third, there were the three instances of ***perfect aspect*** verbs. This class of verbs is used to talk about past action that has a continuing effect on the story in the present. Miss Laura writes:

Carley ***had been*** hiding her feelings, Other girls ***had been*** laughing, her little dream of camp . . . ***had*** suddenly evaporated

4. Fourth, while private verbs let us understand another's private thoughts and feelings, in contrast, ***public verbs*** introduce the words of others in dialogue.

Carley ***said***, She ***whispers***, I ***asked***

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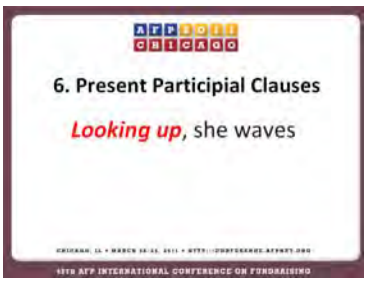
5. The fifth item is called ***synthetic negation***, in which two words are combined like ***not*** and ***ever*** to create ***never; can*** and ***not*** to create ***can't;*** and ***do*** and ***not*** to create ***don't.***



6. Finally, the sixth narrative feature is ***present participial clauses***. They're used to frame narrative action. In describing her encounter with Carley, parts of Miss Lasater's letter reads like the stage direction of a screenplay:

Carley had been hiding her feelings. ***Looking up***, she waves bye to best friend Lori.

This story is just that . . . a story that presents ***people***, ***tension***, and potential ***resolution*** if John can make a gift. It strikes an emotional chord and creates that ***connecting narrative moment*** that can move a donor to give.

More detail on the linguistic analysis of fund-raising discourse is covered in my article, ***The Way We Write is All Wrong***, which may be downloaded from my research site—www.TheWrittenVoice.org.

There you'll find an article published in The *Journal of the Direct Marketing Nonprofit Federation*.

And another published by The Nonprofit Quarterly is there along with an early longer draft of *The Way We Write is All Wrong* which contains the world's oldest fund appeal. It was written by Pliny the Younger in the first century to raise matching gift funds for a school in his hometown of Como Italy.

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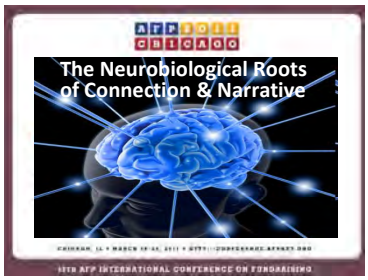
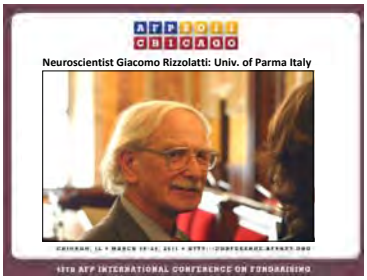
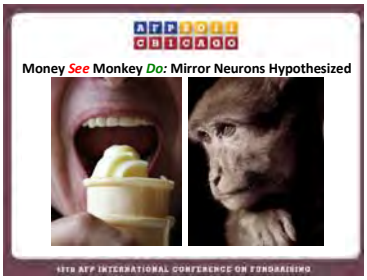


Neurobiological studies provide evidence that people respond differently to narrative and expository language. Recent studies show evidence of these differences.

The first evidence of was uncovered in 1992 by neurophysiologist Giacomo Rizzolatti and his colleagues at the University of Parma in Italy.



Rizzolatti's team was studied variation in brain wave activity as macaque monkeys exhibited changes in behaviors. Probes embedded in subjects' brains recorded variation across a range of behaviors. For example, as a monkey grasped and moved a peanut to its mouth, a distinctive pattern of neuron firings were recorded. Then one day something amazing happened.



A research assistant came into the lab one day eating an ice-cream cone. Upon seeing the assistant place the ice cream cone to his mouth, a macaque, wired to the EEG, set off the same pattern that had been recorded when he reached for, grasped, and put a peanut into his mouth. From this observation, the team hypothesized that as we see others experience something, we process and compare what we see to our own past experiences in similar scenarios. In short, it suggests neural evidence for patterns of human empathy.

Mirror neurons may explain the roots of human empathy. What does this mean for us? Narratives transport us psychologically to another place and time. They ignite our imaginations as they create scenes that portray people, reacting to tension, hoping for resolution.

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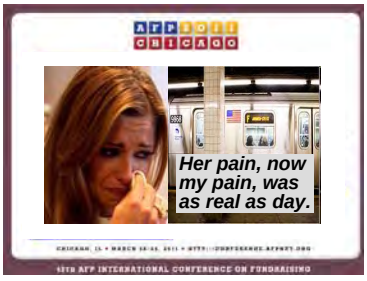
Take, for instance, the moving interview with Len Gengel and his wife with CNN's Wolf Blitzer. The Gengel's daughter Britney was trapped with several from Lynn University beneath the Hotel Montana, which has collapsed in the Haiti earthquake of 2010. I still recall his voice and gestures as he begged: "Mr. Obama, get down to the hotel Montana and dig them out . . . now.

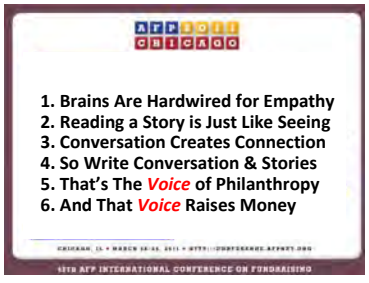
In that moment he became the voice of his daughter Britney who had no voice. He spoke with passion and urgency. It won't always be appropriate to strike that kind of tone in our writing, but most writing goes the other direction—it falls flat and fails to infuse the written word with any passion. Our writing needs to make a reader feel like they could become the hero of our organization's story.

Recent experiments on human subjects (this time without cutting the top of their skulls to embed probes in their brains, but using functional magnetic resonance imaging). One such experiment at USC's Brain and Creativity Institute, led by Dr. Lisa Aziz-Zadeh compared the brain activity of individuals who had observed actions on video, or read about the same actions in a text. With both media (visual and written) similar neural activity was observed.

Science writer Gordy Slack summarizes the implications of mirror neurons to creating, processing, and interpreting language. He not only states, but also artfully illustrates implications in a brief text that marshals linguistic features to paint a narrative scene (note his use of past tense to report past actions and move the reader sequentially through time), intensify interpersonal involvement (note his use of contractions, first person pronouns, private verbs, and conversational style), and produce empathy (note how he makes you feel, thus achieving his rhetorical aim—to make you care).



A young woman sat on the subway and sobbed. Her mascara-stained cheeks were wet and blotchy. Her eyes were red. Her shoulders shook. She was hopeless, completely forlorn. When I got off the F-train, I stood on the platform, paralyzed by emotions. Hers. I'd taken them with me. I stood there, tears streaming down my cheeks. But I had no death in the family. No breakup. No terminal diagnosis. And I didn't even know her or why she cried. But the emotional pain, her pain, now my pain, was as real as day.



The evidence of neuroscience suggests that the current style of writing dominant among fundraisers actually circumvents the way the human brain is hard-wired to process language. The implications: fundraisers should not shy away from emotion, they should tell stories, and they should not over-edit and formalize texts because 1.) our brains are hardwired for empathy, 2.) reading a story is just like seeing, 3.) conversation creates connection, 4.) so write conversation & stories, 5.) that's the ***Voice*** of philanthropy and 6.) that ***Voice*** raises money.

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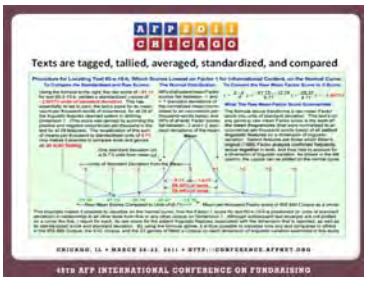
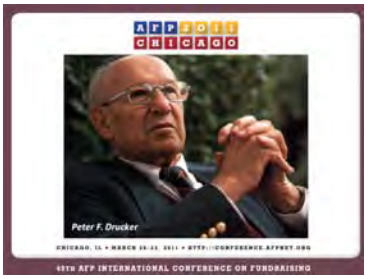
Resources on my academic research site (www.TheWrittenVoice.org) list specific kinds of words that create a conversational and narrative style of writing. There are eighteen items you an download.

And if you're interested in how scores for texts were calculated, more detail on that process is also covered . . .



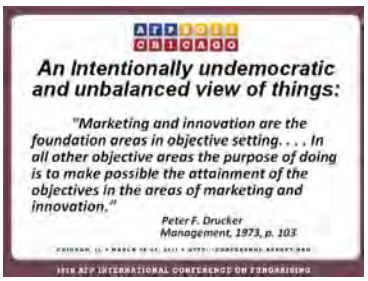
Finally, I illustrate how texts are then placed on scales to make it possible to compare them with other kinds of writing.



In studying under Peter Drucker at Claremont, one of the lasting impressions he made on me was his strategic planning framework. He used it to differentiate the critical from the peripheral in setting objectives. Peter believed certain key result areas were "the same for all businesses, for all businesses depend on the same factors for their survival." And he believed that these factors were also relevant to leading a nonprofit.

His eight key result areas included 1.) marketing, 2.) innovation, 3.) human organization, 4.) financial resources, 5.) physical resources, 6.) productivity, 7.) social responsibility, and 8.) profit requirements.

But . . . Drucker held an intentionally undemocratic and unbalanced view of things:



"Marketing and innovation," he wrote, "are the foundation areas in objective setting. It is in these two areas that a business obtains its results. In all other objective areas the purpose of doing is to make possible the attainment of the objectives in the areas of marketing and innovation." For a nonprofit organization, fund raising is our parallel to marketing. We need to be as skilled in raising funds as businesses are in marketing their products and services.

I opened this session reflecting on the fact that ***not all variables are equally important***. In any job, ***some variables are just more important than others***. That's the case with writing the voice of philanthropy. It's the ***conditio sine qua non***—the condition without which nothing else follows.

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The conclusion . . .

Everything ***REALLY DOES*** *ride on the* ***strength*** of what you ***write!***

And writing takes a dose of theory along with lots of practice. A conversation between Canadian author Margaret Atwood and a dinner companion at a charity event in Toronto underscores this.

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

Brain surgery and writing alike are hard-acquired skills, that are refined only by time and practice.

I encourage you to look for ***connecting narrative moments*** that combine the elements of ***people***, ***tension***, and ***resolution***. Then write about them as if you were talking to a friend.

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Contact Information

This presentation was developed by Frank C. Dickerson for the 48th International Conference on Fund Raising, that was convened in Chicago, Illinois from March 20-22, 2011 by The Association of Fund-Raising Professionals.

The study, which represents the findings of his doctoral research at Claremont Graduate University, marries the soft art of language analysis with the hard science of multivariate statistics to describe how fund raisers write.

The methodology involved identifying patterns across five dimensions of linguistic variation in 1.5 million words of fund-raising text. The 2,412 printed and online documents studied were written by leaders in nine philanthropic sectors at all 735 nonprofits that raise at least $20 million annually in the U.S., along with 145 smaller nonprofit organizations. Together this study population is called *The Elite 880* nonprofits.

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Site:	**www.TheWrittenVoice.org**	**Site:**	**www.HighTouchDirect.com**	**Site:**	**www.NarrativeFundRaising.org**

Additional resources available at www.TheWrittenVoice.org

1. **PUBLISHED** in Journal of the Direct Marketing Association Nonprofit Federation: *The Way We Write is All Wrong*
2. **PUBLISHED** in The Nonprofit Quarterly: *Writing the Voice of Philanthropy: Fixing the Broken Discourse of Fundraising*
3. **DISSERTATION EXCERPT**: *American Heart Association Case Study*
4. **PUBLISHED IN MAL WARWICK'S NEWSLETTER**: *Debunking the Philanthropy Fairy Myth*
5. **PUBLISHED by SOFII**: *Harvard's University's Failed First Fund Appeal of 1633*
6. **PUBLISHED by SOFII**: (with Ken Burnett): *The World's Oldest Fund-Raising Letter Written by Pliny the Younger*
7. **PRESENTATION**: *How to Avoid the Five Fatal Mistakes Fund Appeals Make*
8. **WORKSHOP**: *Narrative Fundraising Seminar: Writing the Stories of Philanthropy*
9. **DISSERTATION EXCERPT**: *Rhetorical Structure and the Neurology of Narrative*
10. **DISSERTATION EXCERPT**: *Writing the Connecting Narrative Moment*
11. **GALLERY**: *Exhibits of Narrative Fund-Raising Formats*
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15. **DRAFT**: *Text Analysis Guide--Evaluating The Three Domains of Language*
16. **DRAFT**: *Examples of Linguistic Structure in Right & Wrong Fund-Raising Discourse*
17. **DRAFT**: *Marketing Leadership In The Twenty-first Century*
18. **GUEST AUTHOR WILLIAM ZINSSER**: *William Zinsser on Good English*

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