



Narrative Fundraising™

Writing the Stories of Philanthropy™

A Writing Workshop *for* Those Who Make Presentations, Produce Media, & Write Copy

Learn How You Can Build A Story That Inspires Giving *by* Writing *in* Three Language Domains

* **LEVASIS** Presents Doctoral Research That Reveals:

- ◆ The Five Fatal Mistakes Found *in* The Verbal Language of Fundraising Texts
- ◆ The Two Non-Verbal Language Features That Lifted Direct Mail Response *by* 346%



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

Seminar Schedule: 9 am - 4 pm • Cost: \$225.00 | Briefing Schedule: 4:15 pm - 5 pm • Cost: Free

During this hands-on writing workshop you will learn how to build a compelling story that motivates giving. You will apply what you learn by writing elements of a narrative appeal. Then, you'll read selections of your writing to the workshop and get immediate feedback.



The Way We Write is All Wrong



Frank Dickerson, Ph.D.

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

Language analysis found that the typical fund appeal . . .

- Reads like an academic paper for a professor who's no longer there, rather than like a conversation between friends.
- Contains less narrative than official documents, using language that elevates abstract concepts over people.
- Lacks the three character types common to storytelling: protagonist, antagonist, and supporting cast member.
- Fails to create tension with action, conflict, imagery, and dialogue in order to make the reader scared, sad, glad, or mad.
- Neglects to cast the donor in the role of hero by showing how his or her gift can bring resolution to the story told.

Do your fund appeals make these
FIVE FATAL MISTAKES?

Most-preferred Writing Style

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

45.21%



5.04%
Exposition

Percentage of nonprofit executives rating exposition and narrative high

It doesn't matter that the email or envelope gets opened . . . if what's inside doesn't get read!

Doctoral research that married the hard science of multivariate statistics with the soft art of language analysis made it possible to describe how fund raisers write. The study was conducted at Claremont Graduate University's Peter F. Drucker School of Management and the university's School of Educational Studies.

Computer analysis peered beneath the surface of a 50/50 mix of 2,412 printed and on-line fund appeals. Texts were subjected to the equivalent of a linguistic MRI that yielded counts for 67 language features in each appeal. These counts made it possible to judge which, of 23 text genres, the appeals analyzed were most like.

Conclusion: *the writing of fund raisers most closely resembled the genres of academic prose and official documents.* This was shocking given that on a survey, study participants had indicated they actually preferred narrative over expository writing by a ratio of 9-to-1. *They believed one thing, but did another.*

This hands-on workshop will teach you how to *write better* and *raise more*. *Space is limited to allow time for writing exercises followed by table reads and critiques.

**To ensure your whole team can benefit, consider scheduling a private workshop at your site. Call Dr. Dickerson at 909-556-9997 to learn more.*



"Frank, I tend to throw away many fund-raising letters and I never thought about analyzing the content to determine what works. Your language analysis and findings are critical to practitioners."

Philip Kotler, Professor of Marketing • Northwestern University



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

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

Three Keys to Righting the Way You Write

The Handmaid's Tale author, Margaret Atwood, wrote me to credit another Margaret from Canada, Margaret Laurence, as the source of a parable. Atwood called it *an old writer's joke*. Though *fiction*, it illustrates the *reality* of how we think about writing . . .

The man seated next to Margaret at a Toronto banquet introduces himself and asks: “*What do you do?*” She replies: “*I’m a writer.*” The man responds enthusiastically: “*Really! When I retire I’m going become a writer too.*” Margaret reciprocates, asking: “*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!*”

Few of us think about **HOW** we write.

Laurence's acerbic reply frames how we think about writing: *we don't*. We take it for granted. While we use language to engage in discourse on any number of subjects, we seldom give it much thought.

And when we do think about writing, we're more concerned with how to avoid the embarrassment of flubbing up on some rule of grammar or word choice than with how to communicate effectively. But the rules of grammar and lexis merely reflect common language patterns at a point in time. And as those patterns change over time, so change the rules that govern them.

So, while language rules matter in polite society, *what matters more in fund raising is understanding and writing in the three domains of language.*



Margaret Atwood



Learn About the Three Domains of Language



Rhetorical Superstructure

Architect Louis Henri Sullivan, known as the father of skyscrapers in late 19th century Chicago, wrote that “*form ever follows function.*”

Like building a house (or erecting a skyscraper), as the architect of your text you first have to define its *function*. What do you want your writing to accomplish? This seminar holds four premises to be true about the function of a fund appeal:

- 1.) A fund appeal must make an emotional human connection that will motivate someone to give.
- 2.) A story is the best way to make that connection.
- 3.) But a story must not camouflage the cause.
- 4.) Nor can a story be allowed to suffocate the ask.



“Dr. Dickerson shared the results of his exhaustive analysis of more than a million words of fund-raising copy. He explains why nearly everything he studied came up short.”

Mal Warwick, Founder & Chair • Mal Warwick Associates



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

Grant McCracken, Ph.D. • Research Affiliate MIT



Linguistic Substructure

Like a contractor who builds a house with the raw materials of wood, wire, and pipe . . . a writer builds a text with words, grammar, and narrative. The type and number of linguistic features used gives a text its **voice**. Twenty-three linguistic features create the voice of personal connection, six make a text sound dense and detached, and six more linguistic features produce a narrative tone.

A sample of 67 linguistic features that, if built into the foundation of a text, will produce three specific effects . . .

Personal Connection Features

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

Dense Information Features

Nominalizations (make a donation vs. donate)
Prepositions (among, for, toward)
Adjectives (supportive response)

Narrative Features

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

VOICE

A fund appeal is only as strong as the language with which it's built.

But . . . in reviewing hundreds of higher education programs on nonprofit leadership, most focused on topics like governance and *totally ignored the subject of fund raising*. Of course, the folly of this omission is that apart from fund raising, a nonprofit has nothing to govern.

And while professional associations like AFP, CASE, and AHP offer high-quality training on how to raise funds, they focus on technique *while ignoring the underlying language used to shape the message technique delivers*.

This lack of attention to the central tasks of fund raising and its language might lead you to think that higher education and association leaders believe in *some benevolent philanthropy fairy who tosses magic dust, waves her wand, and poof—money appears*.

But there is no wand, no magic dust, no fairy . . . just real people who raise money the old-fashioned way. They **ask** for it. And in asking, they leverage **language** to become **the voice** of those who have no voice. This workshop will give you the language resources to strengthen your **voice** so you can **ask effectively**.

You'll learn from some of the oldest, best, and worst fund appeals . . .

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

**There is no philanthropy fairy . . .
only the hard work of writing!**



"I was pretty impressed. We need more research on the soft side of fund raising. Storytelling is where it's at."

Gail Perry • Gail Perry Associates



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

Jeff Brooks • Future Fundraising Now



Stylistic Infrastructure

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

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



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

A fund appeal must create emotional resonance with a narrative that motivates a donor beyond what naked facts alone might convince him or her to give.

But . . .

while everyone knows a good story when they see, hear, or read one, few know what **makes** a good story good. This workshop will help you leverage four elements of stylistic infrastructure to build stories that move people to give.

You'll learn four elements of style that will make your stories both readable and memorable:

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

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

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

Whether your connecting narrative moment will be used in a direct mail fund appeal or newsletter, a piece that will be emailed or posted on a social media platform, as an anecdote to support a formal proposal, or as a blueprint for what will be a face-to-face conversation with a donor . . . the message needs to include *the three elements all well-built stories need:*

- **PEOPLE**
- **TENSION**
- **RESOLUTION**



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

Jerry Huntsinger, Founder • Huntsinger & Jeffer



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

Kivi Leroux Miller, Principal • NonProfitMarketingGuide.com



Swap Your Story and Learn How to Get it Read



Group Story Swap:

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

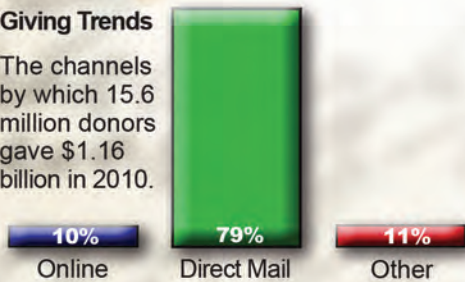


BUT . . .

The best story won't raise a penny if the email or the envelope it's sent in
DOESN'T GET OPENED.

Giving Trends

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



Tech company *Blackbaud* has opened a window on the strength of U.S. mail. Their research analyzed the channels that 15.6 million donors used to give 1.16 billion dollars: *"Five years in,"* their report concluded, *"it is clear that direct mail giving is still the overwhelming majority of fund-raising revenue, and organizations must find ways to optimize multi-channel giving versus hyper-focusing on Internet giving alone."*



Social media have similarly proven less effective than direct mail. Reporting in *The NonProfit Times*, Herschel Gordon Lewis wrote: *"Response rates for Facebook ads are an almost inconceivably small 1/20 of 1 percent. That's one response per 2,000 message-recipients. It doesn't begin to compete with even the weakest conventional medium."*



To paraphrase Mark Twain:
"Reports of direct mail's death have been greatly exaggerated."



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

Tom Ahern Principal • Ahern Communications, Ink

See Two Factors that Increased Response 346%



Simulated Handwriting . . .

looks realistic because it's crafted from genuine penmanship, complete with imperfections and variability.

Canceled Nonprofit Stamps . . .

make mailings look first class. In tests comparing mail using canceled nonprofit stamps to identical packages using an indicia or window envelope, the stamped segments lifted response up to 27.27%.

NON-VERBAL FEATURES TESTED:

- Note Card Style Packages
- HandScripted Addresses
- HandScripted P.S. Notes
- Canceled Nonprofit Stamps

Handwriting & canceled nonprofit stamps add to mail what a smile adds to speech. Result: more envelopes get opened . . .

- 1.) American Heart Association addressed mail in simulated handwriting.
- 2.) That lifted the response rate to their donor renewal campaign by **346%**.
- 3.) And they could have saved **\$301,578.76** in postage by using canceled nonprofit versus first class stamps in their roll-out to 1,077,067 homes.

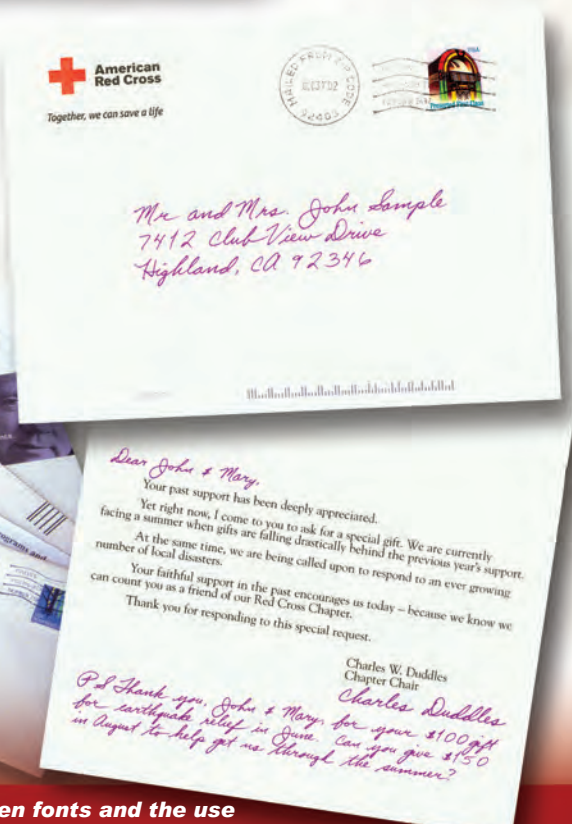
This *Detroit Symphony Orchestra* fund appeal used computer-simulated handwriting and canceled nonprofit stamps. It got a **26%** response and raised **\$160,000**.

The Chronicle of Philanthropy reports that *CARE* got a **9%** response and **\$41** average gift to a renewal appeal sent to lapsed donors. A note card package, it also featured hand-written personalization.



"Frank, we've also been testing simulated hand-written fonts and the use of nonprofit versus first class rate stamps as you did in your study. And we continue to learn from our testing and tweaking of direct mail copy as well. Your research will be invaluable to us as we keep trying to 'crack the code' on what motivates individuals to take action through our direct response vehicles. Thank you. This is very interesting work and extremely relevant for large nonprofit organizations."

Kimberly McElgunn Wolff, Sr. VP for Development • Habitat for Humanity | Former Sr. VP for Resource Development • CARE





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



Scan QR Code to Register

Dear Colleague,

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

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

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

The cost is \$225.00. But the cost of ineffective communication is far greater. If you can't attend, you're invited to a free research briefing after the seminar from 4:15-5 pm. And if you can't attend the briefing either, email me for a free seminar summary and cases. One case shows how a paralinguistic factor increased response by 346%.

Sincerely,

Frank C. Dickerson
 Frank C. Dickerson

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

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

Sign up online or complete the form below to register and pay for a seminar, reserve **space at a free research briefing, or request** a free seminar summary and case studies.

Online: www.NarrativeFundRaising.org
 Mail: Send check, made to LEVASIS, to: 7412 Club View Dr. Highland, CA 92346
 Email: Frank@NarrativeFundRaising.org
 Phone: 909-864-2798 FAX: 509-479-2690

Writing Workshop: \$225.00 | 9 am - 4 pm
Briefing: Free | 4:15 pm - 5 pm

Presenter: Frank C. Dickerson, Ph.D.
Claremont Graduate University

Sponsor: Levasis, a California Nonprofit

Dates: See www.NarrativeFundRaising.org for a listing of upcoming workshops in your area or call Dr. Dickerson at 909-864-2798

Narrative Fundraising™

Writing the Stories of Philanthropy™

Narrative Fundraising Seminar

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

Cost: \$225.00

Who should come:

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

Schedule: 9 am - 4 pm

Free Research Briefing

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

Cost: FREE

What you will learn:

- 5 fatal mistakes in 2,412 appeals
- 10 secrets of narrative fund appeals
- 2 paralinguistic factors that boosted response 346% for American Heart

Schedule: 4:15 pm - 5 pm

Free Research Article & Case Study

Can't make the seminar or briefing? A summary of seminar and case studies presented are available free upon request.

Cost: FREE

- Seminar Summary
 - Seminar Case Studies
- Limited slots are available for test mailings replicating American Heart campaigns.

Email: Frank@NarrativeFundraising.org

REGISTRATION Go to www.NarrativeFundraising.org to register and pay by credit card or Paypal. Or, complete and mail this coupon to the address below with a \$225 check payable to LEVASIS (the nonprofit sponsor of the seminar). Note: cost of lunch and parking not included. If you can't attend but wish to come to the free briefing, indicate that below. If are unable attend either, but want a free seminar summary and case studies, indicate below or email Frank@NarrativeFundraising.org. (Note: if you are registering for more than one person, copy & complete a coupon and enclose \$225 for each.)

Name _____ Organization _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

(if paying by credit card, print credit card billing address here)

Position _____ Ph (_____) _____ Email _____

Check enclosed Charge my: Discover Mastercard VISA AMEX

_____ Card Number _____ Exp. Mo/Yr _____ Security # _____ Name on Card

Check all that apply: I'll attend: Seminar Free Briefing in _____ on _____

Please email article, case studies & test mailing information

LEVASIS • 7412 Club View Drive • Highland, CA 92346 • 909-864-2798 • Fax: 509-479-2690 • Email: Frank@NarrativeFundraising.org



What 22 Thought Leaders and Practitioners Say About This Research and The Writing Workshop That Applies It to Practice

"What an interesting extension of narrative research, Frank! Indeed, there are hardly any studies (that I know of!) that deal with the effectiveness of storytelling in fundraising—though it's taken for granted, somehow, that without a "good story" one's appeal for funds will not get you far. Let me hear more about what you're up to. It's very "consciousness raising."

Jerome Bruner, PhD

New York University School of Law

"Dr. Dickerson, I enjoyed learning that you are another language vigilante struggling to keep everyday writing clear and plain. The subject of fundraising writing has never crossed my path in all my years of teaching various forms of writing. Thank you for your contributions to this craft."

William Zinsser, Author of On Writing

Columbia Graduate School of Journalism

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

Roger Craver, Founder

Craver, Matthews, Smith

"Frank, your workshop was the best seminar on effective fundraising communication I've ever attended! Thanks. I will definitely recommend your workshop."

Russ Gibbs, D.Min, CFRE, Director of Advancement

University of Houston Law School

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

Joan Smythe Dengler, Sr VP

Covenant House

"This research is a wake-up call based on solid evidence, and it couldn't come at a better time."

Andy Goodman, Principal

The Goodman Center

"Frank, thank you for providing such an insightful workshop. I walked away knowing what I need to work on and how to improve my storytelling. This was the most useful training I've had as a fundraiser. Thanks again for sharing your knowledge."

Giuseppe Nespoli, Director of Seaver Associates

Pepperdine University

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

Mal Warwick, Founder & Chair

Mal Warwick & Associates

Acknowledging Peter F. Drucker ◦ ◦ ◦

At Claremont Graduate University, Peter Drucker's advice focused my research on the language of fund raising. That research was shaped by his *intentionally imbalanced perspective* about which were the most important goals a leader must plan for and achieve. Peter wrote:

"Marketing and innovation 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."

As *marketing* is critical to any commercial organization's success, so *fund raising* is critical to the success of any nonprofit. And similarly, the *effective use of language* is critical to crafting successful messages for commercial and nonprofit organizations alike. My doctoral work profiled the broken discourse of fund raising. And now, The Narrative FundRaising Seminar shows how you can *write better and raise more*. **FCD**

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

Philip Kotler, PhD

Professor of Marketing Northwestern University

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

Grant McCracken, PhD

Research Affiliate, MIT

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

Katya Andresen, C.O.O.

Network for Good

"Frank, a very impressive study. Having been in direct mail for more than 30 years, your research opens a window on the craft of words and how important copy is to successful direct marketing. In fact, given 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, CEO

The NonProfit Times

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

Michael Margolis, President

Get Storied

"Frank, thank you for sharing your research. This is very interesting work and of course extremely relevant for a large nonprofit organization like CARE. We know the importance of language in delivering our message to donors and the public, and it is both interesting and helpful to read your analysis of the current problems that plague written fundraising communications. We've also been testing simulated hand-written fonts and the use of nonprofit versus first class rate stamps as you did in your study. And we continue to learn from our testing and tweaking of direct mail copy as well. Your research will be invaluable to us as we keep trying to 'crack the code' on what motivates individuals to take action through our direct response vehicles."

Kymerly McElgunn Wolff, Sr. VP for Development

Habitat for Humanity, Former Sr. VP for Resource Development CARE

"I am a better fundraising writer today thanks to the Narrative Fundraising workshop at Vanderbilt. Dr. Dickerson revealed the science behind crafting a successful fund appeal, using simple, direct language that tells a compelling story."

Bill Smith, Sr. Director of Grants and Fundraising

Second Harvest

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

Kivi Leroux Miller, Principal

NonProfitMarketingGuide.com

"Dr. Dickerson, as part of his doctoral studies at Claremont Graduate University, in California, recently analyzed more than 1.5 million words of online and printed fund-raising texts to determine how effectively fund raisers communicate with their audiences. While his findings were enough to fuel a 350-page dissertation, his thesis can be boiled down to a few short words: Most fund-raising copy stinks."

Peter Panepento, Assistant Managing Editor

The Chronicle of Philanthropy

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

Tom Ahern, Principal

Ahern Communications Ink

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

Jeff Brooks

Future Fundraising Now & TrueSense Marketing

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

Jerry Huntsinger, Founder

Huntsinger & Jeffer

"Frank I'll 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, Principal

Datapreneurs, London

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

Gail Perry, Principal

Gail Perry Associates