

Communications

Examples

Sample news article

The Shoreline Neighborhood Association is bursting into spring with its first neighborhood event of the year.

The Gardening Spring Fling is set for Thursday, April 13, at 6:30 p.m. at the Shoreline Elementary School gym, 1234 Main Street W. Refreshments will be served.

Get to know your neighbors while creating a garden mosaic out of cement provided by the neighborhood association and items you bring with you. Suggested items include rocks, shells, beach glass or anything that will withstand weathering.

At 7:45 p.m., Water Conservation Consortium Master Gardener Les Watering will share his expertise about drought-tolerant plants for the northwest.

Other neighborhood events in the works for this year include a National Night Out Against Crime barbecue in August and an October meeting about traffic patterns in our neighborhood. Look for more details in upcoming issues of our newsletter.

For more information about the Gardening Spring Fling or the neighborhood association, call Shoreline Neighborhood Association Vice-President Simon O'Neal at (206) 543-9876.

Basic flyer layout

Here is a basic layout that you can do on any program and that doesn't need special art.

Shoreline Neighborhood Presents

Gardening Spring Fling

Make garden mosaics and learn about drought-tolerant plants

Thursday, April 13. 6:30 p.m.
Shoreline Elementary School Gym
1234 Main Street West

<p>6:30 p.m. Create your own garden mosaics out of cement provided by the neighborhood and items you bring from home. Enjoy refreshments as you get to know your neighbors.</p>	<p>7:45 p.m. Water Conservation Consortium Master Gardener Les Watering will share his expertise about drought-tolerant plants for our northwest climate.</p>
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For more information, call Shoreline Neighborhood Vice-President Simon O'Neal at (206) 543-9876.

Communications

It's all about your message

Communication Strategy

Whether you are writing a press release, designing a flyer or even sending an email, the goal is the same: to communicate your message to a specific audience. That's why the following steps are important no matter how you plan to communicate your message.

Who is your audience?

Who are you trying to reach? Why are they interested in your message? What will they want and need to know to either be informed about what you are telling them or to participate in your invitation? Keep in mind that your message will reach people who have a range of existing knowledge about what you are communicating. Be sure to tailor your message to the person who knows the least.

What is your message?

Be clear about your key message. Are you inviting people to participate? Are you informing them about something that already happened?

Answer all questions

Be sure to gather all the information you need to convey your message. It is helpful to remember the five W's and an H: who, what, where, when, why and how. This is the basic information people need to be well-informed.

Start simple and don't reinvent the wheel

You don't have to be fancy to communicate well. In fact, it is better to be simple and clear than risk losing your message by trying to be too creative. Copying things you like and using templates is not only a time saver, but increases the chance that you will be pleased with the result.

Edit and revise

A secret to being a good writer or designer is to edit and revise until you get your story or design where you want it. It is extremely rare to put something down exactly right the first time. Work on it. Massage it. Read it over for errors. Have other people review it. You will never be sorry for editing too much.

Why are good communications more effective?

- Says what you intend it to
- Reaches the right audience
- Doesn't get lost in the noise
- People trust the message



Writing

Focus on clarity

When you are sharing news through writing, focus on being clear. The biggest stumbling blocks are not providing all the information your audience needs or having the information lost because it is not organized well.

Provide necessary information logically

Make sure you have all the information your audience needs. Answer who, what, where, when, why and how. Organize information logically. If you're announcing an event, make sure the date, time, place and address are together. Don't make people hunt for the important facts. Think about what questions people would have if they read your story and try to answer them. For example, include people's titles if they are relevant and spell out acronyms the first time you use them.

Be professional

Typos, inconsistent punctuation, nonstandard formatting of information like addresses or phone numbers, emphasizing words with underlines, italics or bold face, poor choices of type size and style make articles difficult to read. It also sends a subliminal message to your audience that you are careless and unprofessional, which gives them less reason to trust or care about your message.

Avoid editorializing

Another thing to beware of that can send an unintended message is editorializing. Stick with the facts and clear out any personal opinions. The downside to editorializing is that you will lose the interest and respect of the people who disagree with you. Trust that by presenting the facts people will draw their own conclusions. One exception to this is when you are inviting people to a "Fun, family event, great for all ages!" Positive editorializing about upcoming events is easily forgiven by most people.

Edit, edit, edit

Edit for typos, consistency, organization and completeness of information, and extraneous words. Shorter is better because there is less chance that your message is lost in the fluff. Have someone (or two) proofread for you. It is amazing what your eye will skip over when you've read something more than once.

Story structure

Whether you are writing an email or a news article, following this basic structure will serve you and your audience well. It follows an inverted information pyramid where the most important information is at the top with less important details following. If a reader only gets through the first few sentences or paragraphs, he or she knows what the story is about. If they are interested, they can read further to get more details.

- **Lead sentence**
Captures both the essence of the story and the audience's attention
- **First paragraphs**
Who, what, where and when
- **Middle paragraphs**
Why and how
- **Final paragraphs**
Next steps and how to find more information via a Web site or contact person and phone number.

Graphic Design

The goal is balance

Balance is the key to good graphic design. It prevents distractions and tells your eye where the important information is on the page and where to look next for more details. The common pitfall is trying to make all the information equally important. This translates into a busy, unreadable design that sends people's eyes in circles looking for a place to land. Don't forget that your main goal is to communicate. Move things around, resize and revise until you get a balance that makes sense and moves your eye from one piece of information to another.

Provide necessary information logically

Again, answer who, what, where, when, why and how and group information logically. Keep things together that go together such as date, time and place.

Delete extraneous words

The fewer the words, the clearer the design. Don't label information, just provide it. (Don't say: Time - Now, Who - Us, Where - Here. Just: Us, Now, Here.) Complete sentences are not necessary on flyers. Abbreviations are okay as long as they are ones that everyone understands. Providing information using standard punctuation makes it more readable. For example, phone numbers listed like this (206) 543-9876 are easier for the eye to recognize as phone numbers than like this 206.543.9876.

Readable type

Make sure all your type is readable. This means the size is large enough for most people to read -- generally no smaller than 12-point type. Be careful using reverse, italicized and fancy fonts. Also avoid using too many different fonts. This makes your design busy and thus harder to read and follow. Pay attention to how lines break and force a break at a logical point, especially with larger type such as headlines.

Artwork

Good artwork supports your message and can be the focal point of your design. One dominant piece is usually easier to work with than many smaller pieces. Avoid artwork that won't reproduce well. No art is better than bad art cluttering your design.

Layout guidelines

In design you are balancing the elements such as art and text blocks that you can move around against the white space that surrounds them. The following steps will get you closer to a balanced, easy-to-read design.

- **Choose a focus**
One element should be the dominant focus of your design and convey your message at a glance.
- **Vary element sizes**
Besides the large, dominant element, include medium and small elements. An odd number of elements is preferred.
- **Text**
Size your text based on the importance of information.
- **Line it up**
Pay attention to how things line up to each other above, below and to the sides.