



ProLiteracy Worldwide

Media Tool Kit



Dear Literacy Advocate:

ProLiteracy Worldwide offers you this **Media Tool Kit**, designed to help you to develop and implement a media cultivation plan in preparation for the Department of Education's release of the 2003 National Assessment on Adult Literacy (NAAL). The report is expected to be released in September 2005, but we hope that you will find the ideas and materials in this kit useful throughout the year.

The kit contains suggestions about how to be proactive in approaching the news media, sample news release templates, literacy fact sheets, and tips to improve media interviews. We hope that you find the Fast Facts About Adult Literacy sheets useful in your efforts to connect adult literacy to other timely and important issues in your community that may be of concern to the media and policy makers. You may work with, edit, and distribute the materials in any way that will be most effective for your organization. We hope that you will find something in this kit useful, no matter how large or small your budget and no matter how much prior experience with the media you have.

The Department of Education has indicated that it plans to release the NAAL report to Congress, the news media, the adult basic education and literacy field, and the general public at the same time. Because we will not know what the report data is in advance, you may face a challenge responding to questions without having the opportunity to fully absorb the NAAL findings. The contents of this kit have been developed to help you promote the issue of adult literacy and the valuable work of your program in your community no matter what the report actually says.

For more background information about the 2003 NAAL, please visit the public policy section of our Web site at http://www.proliteracy.org/policy_update.asp. We will post additional information and analysis about the report as soon as it is feasible after the release.

We at ProLiteracy appreciate all that you do to promote the cause of adult literacy in your community and to help adults improve their lives and the lives of their families.

Please feel free to contact Rochelle Cassella, director of marketing and corporate communications, with any questions or comments that you may have. She can be reached at rcassella@proliteracy.org.

Best wishes for success in your media endeavors!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marsha L. Tait".

Marsha L. Tait
Senior Vice President, Public Affairs
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Building Media Relationships

You know how the problem of adult low literacy affects your community and you know the many good things your organization is doing to address the issue. Who wouldn't want to know about the wonderful people who devote their lives to adult literacy and the successful students who have made great strides toward meeting their goals? Sending out a news release should result in immediate response from reporters who want to tell the story.

But, it isn't enough that your organization promotes a good cause. There is stiff competition for newspaper space and television and radio airtime. Building a relationship with reporters is a **must** in order to get media attention. Media attention can help you educate your community about the issue of adult literacy and is essential for promoting change and opening the door to increased financial support.

Here are some basic steps that will help you to create a partnership with the media in your community:

Know Your Audience

- Develop a targeted media list. Include all the publications and radio and television news outlets that offer newscasts and programs or columns that deal with community issues. Check their Web sites if you are unsure of their programming. Media references such as *Bacon's Publicity Checker* can help. In many communities, agencies such as the local United Way or Volunteer Center compile media lists; your local library can help you to find one in your community.
- Organize your list into a database by category: education reporters, assignment editors, features editors, talk show producers, calendar editors, public service directors. Create two versions of the data: one for creating mailing labels, the other with phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and deadline information.
- Note the names of specific reporters, editors, or producers to contact. Print news operations generally have reporters assigned to a specific topic (known as a "beat") while radio and television stations usually have assignment editors who select reporters to cover stories. Look for education reporters, business reporters, assignment editors, and news directors.
- Know what other issues are of immediate interest in your community and identify reporters who cover those beats. Then pitch your story to them demonstrating the connection between their issue and adult literacy. For example, are health costs in your community skyrocketing? Demonstrate how low literacy skills increase health costs for the general population and how your program is part of the solution.

NOTE: If you have worked with a specific reporter in the past or there is a journalist whose work you admire, you may wish to contact that individual directly rather than go through an assignment editor or a beat reporter.
- Find out **how** and **when** a reporter or assignment editor wants to be **contacted**. Some prefer e-mail while others want faxes, phone calls, or even regular mail. Ask about deadlines and the best time to reach them.



Make Your First Contact Personal

- Your first contact with the reporter should be by telephone. Make sure the first thing you ask is whether this is a good time to talk. Let the reporter or editor know you are updating your media files and would like to include them as your primary contact for this news outlet and that you will be sending them some background information on the organization via their preferred contact method.
- Follow up with an information packet about your organization, some basic facts about adult literacy, and alert them to the upcoming NAAL release. Be sure to include your name; e-mail address; and telephone, cell phone, and fax numbers.

Use E-mail Effectively

- If a news outlet indicates that news notices should be sent via e-mail, determine whether this means e-mail attachments or news releases embedded in the body of the e-mail. Many reporters will not open unsolicited e-mail attachments as a protection against viruses.
- Pay particular attention to the “subject” line of your e-mail. Using all caps or lots of punctuation may trigger a “spam alert.” Check the Web site: <http://publicity.c.topica.com/maactZ6aa8Gfka4HI04b/> for other tips about beating spam blockers.
- Make sure the reporter knows right away that the e-mail is important by starting the subject line with the words “News,” “Story Idea,” or “News Event Notice.” Use the reporter’s or editor’s name in the subject line and include their beat. Example: *News: John Jones for your education page.*
- Keep your e-mail message or news release short. Make sure the most important information is at the top. Proofread so there are no typographical or grammatical errors.
- Include all information about how you can be reached: name, organization, telephone, cell phone, fax number, address, and Web site address.



Putting the News in Your News Release

A common complaint made by many organizations is that “I sent out a news release and didn’t get any coverage.” There are many reasons that this happens: everything from more compelling news events took precedence that day to sending the release to the wrong person (this should be addressed by your targeted media mailing lists!). The primary reason that news releases fail to result in media attention, however, is that the item the release is announcing is not newsworthy.

Ask yourself the following questions to determine if your release meets **news criteria**:

1. Is the release about a recent event or something that is going to happen in the next two weeks? Does it relate to a current trend? Can you tie it into a high profile issue or event in your community? In other words, is it **timely and relevant**?
2. Is it a **hard** news story — something that has impact and is happening immediately?
3. Is it something that will have an **impact** on many people? The more people it impacts, the more likely you will receive coverage. Always include the number of people in your area that your program is serving and an estimate of the population in need of service.
4. Is it happening in the media’s **coverage area**? You shouldn’t expect a reporter or video crew to cover a story that doesn’t take place or affect viewers or readers in the coverage area.
5. Is someone **famous** involved? “Fame” can be locally determined. It doesn’t have to be an internationally known celebrity to earn coverage.
6. Can you find an angle of the story that sounds unusual or different?
7. Can you tie the story to a current event? For example, do you have a story about a veteran that you can release for Veteran’s Day?
8. For television coverage — is there something that you can provide that helps tell the story **visually**? If you are talking about tutoring, can you provide the camera crew with a tutoring session to videotape? If you are talking about a student receiving an award, can you offer the camera crew the opportunity to talk to the student and to show that individual at work or home, using his or her new literacy skills?

Ask yourself what goals you want to achieve in sending the news release:

- Introduce a new program innovation in your organization
- Educate the public about your program and/or the issue of adult literacy
- Encourage public support for legislation supporting your program/adult literacy
- Counteract misconceptions or negative comments about your program and/or adult literacy



Identify your call to action: what is it that you want people to do as a result of the coverage?

Develop a news “hook” or “angle” that would serve to attract media attention and increase chances for coverage. Examples:

- New survey or research results
- Introduction of a new program or service, especially if it fills an unmet need in your community (a health literacy program, for example, or workplace training)
- Reaction to news about a national trend — release of the NAAL, for example. Your news release could discuss your program’s volunteer levels and how you recruit and retain volunteers to address the issue. Be sure to set up interviews with a long-term and a new volunteer. Or, describe how your program is dealing with the increased demand for English-as-a-second-language instruction or an influx of immigrants into your community
- A partnership or joint venture with a local company and/or other human service organization
- Relationship to a holiday or event — home safety literacy near Fire Prevention Week (Oct. 9–15, 2005) or workplace readiness near Labor Day



Writing Your News Release

Write news releases that get noticed — publicity is priceless! Knowing how to write a release in a format that will be read by reporters can be more effective than advertising and very inexpensive. News releases must be well written, newsworthy, and presented in a factual manner. Most of all, they must be credible.

Important factors in establishing credibility are:

- The news release is well written and presented properly.
- Information is presented in a factual manner. The media does not accept sales pitches or embellishing. Don't write an advertisement.
- The information is relevant to the recipient.

Determining Target Audience

Before you begin, it is important to **define your target audience**. Develop a demographic profile of the people that you want to reach including factors such as business or consumer status, average age, average income, ethnic background, lifestyle, and gender.

Once you have determined the audience you are attempting to reach and know what their interests are, you need to find out **what publications are best** for attracting their attention. Don't make the mistake of sending the same news release to a group of general media sources in hopes that someone will pick up the story. The bulk of your work will end up in the wastebasket if your announcement has no interest to their readers. Make sure you send the news release to the appropriate editor — don't send a food story to a sports editor.

Writing the content

- **Keep it short.** News stories are made up of simple, short sentences with simple words. Break up long sentences into two. The release should be between 300-500 words and no more than two pages.
- **Make it newsworthy and timely.** Identify the current need for the product and/or service.
- **Be factual.** Do not embellish the facts with opinions.
- Write it from the **reader's perspective**. The information must be relevant to the recipient.
- Write a **powerful headline**. What you say here determines whether the reporter will continue reading the release.
- Write a **strong opening paragraph**. It should contain the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" of the product and/or service.
- Give a **detailed explanation**. This will help establish the value to readers. If you're announcing a new program, be sure to include information on all key points.
- Don't use **important words** more than once in a paragraph.



- Don't begin a sentence with the **same word** with which you just finished the previous sentence.
- **Proofread** the story and take out any unnecessary or redundant words. Have other people proof it as well. Remove typos.
- Be careful with your **facts, spelling, and grammar**.
- Include **photos** if you can, or make them available digitally on a Web site.

News Release Format: Paper

- Use 8.5 x 11 white paper. **Company stationery with logo** and slogan is preferred, unless it is on colored paper.
- Keep it **short**. Most releases that will be faxed or mailed should not exceed two pages.
- Use **one side** of the paper only. Margins should be one-inch on both sides and top and bottom.
- **Double-space** your text.
- If you do not use company stationery, include the organization's name, address, telephone number, fax number, Web site address, and e-mail address at the top of page 1, left-side corner.
- Center "**News Release**" several lines down from stationery masthead or organization information.
- On the left-hand side, print FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE to let editors know they can use the information right away. If you want the information held, put FOR RELEASE ON (DATE) in this space.
- On the right side of the page, justified right, provide **contact** information — the individual's name, title, telephone number including cell phone, and e-mail address.
- Skip a space and center your attention-grabbing **headline**. Use all caps.
- You may choose to add a **subtitle** directly under the headline to provide additional information. Use the same font but upper and lower case letters.
- At the bottom of each page (except the last) add **—more—**.
- At the top of the second page (and additional pages, if they are necessary) use a **slug** line, something that summarizes the headline. Directly underneath, add Page 2. These should be flush right and will help identify the release if the pages become separated.



- Your last paragraph should be a boilerplate piece that provides basic information about your program: “ProLiteracy Worldwide is the world’s largest organization of community-based adult literacy programs...” for example. Skip several lines after the final paragraph, and indicate the end of the news release by adding **### or —30—**.

News Release Format: E-mail

- Do not send your release as an **attachment** unless specifically directed to do so. Many reporters will not open attachments for fear of opening a virus.
- The **Subject line** is the most important element. Make sure the reporter knows right away that the e-mail is important by starting the subject line with the words “News,” “Story Idea,” or “News Event Notice.” Use the reporter’s or editor’s name in the subject line and include their beat. Example: News: John Jones for your education page.
- **Embed** your release in the body of your e-mail.
- Follow with a short note to the reporter or editor, using the individual’s name. Point out something new that makes your story newsworthy — a link to something in the news, for example, or connection to a holiday or community issue:

Hello John:

I thought this might be of interest for your (metro section, column, 6:00 p.m. newscast, etc.). If you have any questions, please call.

Thank you for your consideration.

Name

Title

Organization

Work phone

Mobile phone

Home phone

- Add body of news release using **plain text**. (The other option is HTML, which allows you to make your release look like a Web page, but takes longer to download and may cause accessibility issues for some reporters.)

Writing the Release

The more effort you put into writing your news release, the more likely that it will be used. This is especially true of community newspapers. Include all pertinent research, story angles, and people to interview. If you write the news release as if you were the reporter writing the actual story, there is a chance your news release will be printed verbatim.

- Write your release using the **inverted pyramid** style of writing — the most important information in the first paragraphs, the least important at the bottom.
- Put your main message in the first paragraph. This is the “who, what, where, when, why, and how” of your release. Be clear about your reason for the news release here.



- The second paragraph is a good place for a **quote** from your executive director or board of directors' chairperson. Use an important statistic or significant fact, then attribute it to the individual: "The survey indicates an increasing need for English-as-a-second-language instruction," ProLiteracy Worldwide President Robert Wedgeworth said.
- The third section should include a detailed explanation to help the reporter/editor determine the value of the event. Make a connection to your organization here.
- Keep it short and the language simple. Make sure you don't use **jargon or acronyms** that would be unfamiliar to anyone outside the adult literacy field.
- The final paragraph should provide your **organization information**. This should include your location, years in operation, brief description of services provided, and number of students you serve in a year.
- **Proofread** your release, proofread it, and proofread it again. Then have someone else proofread it. Look for typos and grammar and spelling errors. Make sure names and titles are correct and that numbers haven't been transposed. Test phone numbers and Web site links.

Distributing the Release

All your work in writing the news release will be for naught if you don't send it to the right person in the right way.

- **Deadlines** are important. Make sure you know the deadlines for each news outlet in your area. Morning newspapers need information by mid-afternoon; afternoon newspapers generally have an 11 a.m. deadline, so make sure your release arrives no later than 9 a.m. Television and radio stations have deadlines throughout the day, but if you want to make the evening broadcasts, make sure your release is at the station by 8:30 a.m. This enables the assignment editor to assign the story to a reporter and gives the reporter and video crew the opportunity to videotape and edit the piece in plenty of time for "air."
- Find out what the appropriate **lead time** is to send your news release.
- Send the release to the right person at the news outlet and use his or her name. As an adult literacy organization, you will send most of your releases to the education reporter. If you are writing about a partnership with a local business, however, or a workforce readiness program, consider sending it to the business editor instead. Check the publications' or stations' Web sites for the name and e-mail address of the appropriate individual, or call and ask if that information is not available online.
- Mail releases by first class mail. Use the reporter or editor's name on the envelope; avoid using labels, if possible.
- Add News Release and Release Date on the outside of the envelope.
- Include the release in the body of your e-mail. Do not send attachments, unless directed to do so.



- Don't follow up with editors by calling to ask if they have "received your news release" or if they are "planning on covering the story" unless you have a personal or professional relationship with the individual. You may send an e-mail reminder as the event date gets closer; be sure to include your contact information.

Tracking Your News Release Performance

The following services can assist you with monitoring the coverage and reach of your press releases.

Google News - GoogleNews crawls news stories and headlines from 4,000 news sources worldwide, and searching is free.

<http://news.google.com>

Beacon's Clipping Bureau – Bacon's provides a wide range of information and assistance for anyone needing to research, contact, or monitor the media.

<http://www.beaconsinfo.com>

Dow Jones News Retrieval - A pay service that archives more than 60 million documents and 3,400+ trade and business publications. CustomClips® feature scans more than 2,600 media outlets for specific information.

<http://bis.dowjones.com>

LEXIS-NEXIS - The world's largest provider of credible, in-depth information. From legal and government to business and high-tech, their products and services provide direct access to an enormous information universe.

<http://www.lexis-nexis.com>

Luce Online - An automatic, electronic news clipping service provider delivering up-to-the-minute stories from over 7,000 print publications, newspapers, wire services, magazines, trade publications, and Internet/Online news sites. Receive full text articles and abstracts of stories matching your custom news criteria via e-mail or Web site delivery.

<http://www.luceonline.com>



News Release Template

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:
Contact Person
Title
Telephone Number
Cell Phone number
E-mail Address

HEADLINE

(This is one of the most important components of the press release as this needs to “grab the attention” of the editor. It should be in bold type and a size that is larger than the body text. Preferred fonts - Arial, Times New Roman, Verdana.)

The Subtitle Goes Here

(Use the subtitle for additional information. Use the same font as the headline, but a smaller size and upper and lower cases.)

<City>, <State>, <Date> - Your first paragraph of the release should be written in a clear and concise manner. It needs to contain information that will “entice” the reader. Your story must be newsworthy and factual.

Your text should include pertinent information about your product, service, or event. If writing about a product, make sure to include details on when the product is available. If you are writing about an event, be sure to include the date, location of the event, and any other pertinent information. Answer the questions “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why,” and “how.”

You should include a quote from someone who is a credible source, include his or her title or position with the company, and why he or she is considered a credible source.

—more—



News Release Template
Page 2

Always include information on any awards won, articles published, credentials earned, or interviews given.

ABOUT <Organization> - Include a brief description of your program along with the products and services it provides.

- # # # -

(At the end of the release, you need to indicate that the release is ended. The usual method of transmitting your release is via fax, and this is the best way to let journalists know they have received the entire release.)

Some information for this section was supplied by Concept Marketing Group Inc., www.marketing-source.com.



Preparing for a News Interview

A newspaper reporter has just called you to schedule a mid-afternoon interview for tomorrow's newspaper. What do you do? The information that follows will help you decide what to do and how to do it.

General Interview Guidelines

The following recommendations are general hints that will give you the tools you need to succeed in most interviews. Going through these steps in a mock news interview setting will help you prepare for the real thing. You may wish to videotape the mock interview so you can review and critique your performance. If you have not already recruited someone for your board of directors with local media experience, this is a great opportunity to do so. A local reporter or media personality, someone who works in public relations for a local company or governmental agency, or a public relations consultant would be a great asset to your media cultivation efforts. You may want to check with your local chapter of the Public Relations Society of America to see if they have a community relations initiative.

Preparation

- Prepare two to three important issues that you hope to address and get across to the reporter during the interview. These are your communication points.
- Make a list of the issues and questions that may arise during the interview, and be prepared to use those issues to launch your communication points.
- Avoid jargon and long explanations.
- Research the media outlet — what type of publication or program is it? Who is the target audience? Is the program live or taped? How long is your segment? Are you the only interview subject?
- Know your subject matter well.
- Have your best answers ready.
- Confirm the date, time, place, and length of the interview the day before.

Arrival, Location, and Pre-Interview

- Allow plenty of time for the unexpected (no parking space, traffic, flood, etc.).
- Arrive at the media outlet five to ten minutes early. Expect to wait!
- If the interview is at your office, be prepared early and have all calls and interruptions held.
- Put away piles of papers and clutter.



- Try not to be interviewed behind your desk as it creates a barrier between you and the reporter.
- Pre-interviews: Some reporters spend up to 30 minutes prior to an interview warming up the subject, and some spend five seconds. Take the opportunity to find out what the reporter is looking for and set the tone for the interview.
- Ask when the story or article is going to be run.
- Don't ask to pre-approve a story.

Simplicity

- Respond in "sound bites" — short, simple, specific statements.
- Explain your most important point first.
- Don't stray from the topic.
- Summarize and then elaborate. (Example: "The issue of adult literacy affects everything we do in this community. Let me explain what I mean...")

Answering questions

- Pause after you have completed your thought. This will help with editing your interview for radio and TV.
- When you think you've answered a question adequately, stop talking. Rambling leads you to say things you didn't intend to say.
- Do not say the reporter's name in the middle of a sentence; do not use phrases like "as I explained earlier." Example: "We got all of our information in March 1995, *John*, and *as I explained earlier*, this will back up our first estimates." The reporter's name and the phrase will be difficult to edit, and viewers may not know what you and the reporter have discussed previously (radio and TV).
- Avoid fillers such as uh, ah, well, yeah, and you know (radio and TV).
- Use positive responses to respond to negative questions. Example: Q: "Shouldn't we really be spending these dollars on teaching *children* to read?" A: "We are very supportive of efforts to improve the literacy skills of children in our community, but research demonstrates that the most effective programs include an adult literacy component, as well."
- Always tell the truth. Your credibility is crucial.
- Avoid "off the record." If you say something to a reporter, expect that it will end up in print. If you don't want it printed, don't say it.
- Avoid "no comment" answers. It sounds as if you have something to hide.



Strategies for handling “question traps”

- **Either/Or.** When the answer is not “black or white,” say so.
- **Absent Party.** Don’t get trapped into being a spokesperson for another individual, business, or organization or into criticizing an absent person or organization. This is particularly important with respect to the policy-makers in your community, whom you want to support your program. Don’t blind-side them with public criticism in the media.
- **False Statement.** Correct wrong information immediately with the comment “That’s not really true, the facts are...” Repeating misinformation only reinforces it. If you make a mistake, correct it immediately.
- **Hypothetical.** You do not have to answer a question that is hypothetical or conditional. It presents a scenario that never occurred.
- If you don’t have the answer to a question, don’t fake it. Promise to get back to the reporter when you do have the information.

Let’s Talk

For any recorded interview (radio or television), the impact of your spoken message depends on how you say it. The sound of your voice determines how well you hold the audience’s attention.

- Common voice problems involve pitch, rate, and articulation.
- Don’t make everything you say sound like a question. This undermines your authority.
- Watch your rate — the speed at which you speak. Speak too fast and people may miss portions of your message; speak too slowly and you may bore them.
- Make sure you clearly articulate your words.
- Analyze your mock news interview tape for pitch, rate, and articulation.

Appearance Is Everything

Television viewers will judge your trustworthiness by your substance and your style; however, your appearance also must match viewer expectations.

Clothing (in a studio setting)

- Stick to a conservative, professional appearance style.
- Wear a tailored sports coat. Men: button coats if standing, unbutton if sitting. Women: a blazer or suit jacket will provide a lapel where the microphone can be attached.
- Skirt length and neckline should be appropriate. Showing too much skin will detract from your message.
- Women: wear tan or black hose. Men: make sure there is no leg showing between your trouser and the top of your hose when you sit and/or cross your leg.



Clothing (in an on-location setting)

- Dress naturally. You are not expected to wear a suit in a setting that doesn't require one. If you are being interviewed at your literacy program, wear what you would normally wear to work, but try not to wear clothes that will distract viewers from your message.
- Avoid hats. If you must wear one, push back the brim so people can see your eyes.
- Never wear black or white for television interviews. Aim for mid-tone colors. Dark- or bright-colored clothes can make your face look extremely washed out or dark under television studio lighting.
- Your blouse/shirt should have a place to clip a microphone.
- Studio lighting will make your light-sensitive glasses darker and viewers won't be able to see your eyes.

Jewelry

- Wear only a few pieces.
- Avoid clunky or dangling jewelry. Big gold or high-gloss pieces can reflect studio lights and heavy bangle bracelets can make noise that a microphone will pick up.
- Short necklaces are best. Long necklaces rub against clip-on microphones.

Make-up

- Aim for the "natural" look. "Every day" make-up should be fine. Neutral colors are best.
- Use a matte finish to reduce shine (this includes lipstick).
- Be sure your nails are neat and manicured; clear polish is fine.
- If you don't normally wear make-up, be open to the suggestion. Some television stations will ask that you apply make-up because of the bright studio lights.

Enthusiasm

- Be animated. Use gestures, facial expressions, and body language to add vitality to your words. However, be careful not to overdo it.
- Smile. A good first impression can help establish your credibility.
- Be conversational.
- Say it in 30 seconds or less.
- Deliver your message with confidence. After all, you know more about the story topic than the interviewer.



Body Language

- Look at the interviewer, not the camera. Glances up or to the side may make you appear untrustworthy.
- Sit still in your chair. Rocking or swiveling can take you out of a cameraperson's shot.
- Don't chew gum or play with the change in your pockets.
- Make eye contact with the reporter. Don't look at notes during an interview, although you can refer to them if you get stuck.
- Stay seated when the interview is over. You might still be on camera.
- If you are part of an on camera panel, always act as if the camera is on you, even when you are not speaking. Camerapeople look for reaction shots.

Nerves of Steel

You are now ready for radio and television interviews. You are prepared, you look great, and you are ready to go. You arrive at the station on time, and then IT happens. You realize YOU will be the one in front of the microphone or camera. Your palms sweat. Your stomach churns. What are you going to do?

- Be organized and concise. Read over your material in advance to keep from sounding strained and awkward.
- Concentrate on the question you're being asked. Pause before answering a question just long enough to formulate an outline of the answer.
- Before the interview starts, take a deep breath, get a drink of water, laugh or yawn. You can't yawn and be tense at the same time.
- Remind yourself that you were asked to be interviewed because you're knowledgeable on that subject. You're the expert.
- Prior to the interview, review taped performances to identify strengths and weaknesses, and remember to make changes that will make you more effective.
- Be sure the TV station has your proper name and title and the correct contact information for your organization. Seeing either item appear incorrectly on the TV screen can throw you off guard.
- Try to convince yourself you're having a normal everyday conversation with someone.
- Prepare your voice before the interview. Relax your throat with a glass of lemon and hot water before leaving your house. Avoid cola drinks, chocolates, milk, and milk products. They will coat your throat and create difficulty in speaking.¹

¹ A portion of this document is Fact Sheet AEC 338; and 98-01, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication. Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication Date: January 1999. Please visit the EDIS Web site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.



Letters to the Editor and Op-Ed Pieces

Letters to the editor and op-ed pieces are other options for raising the visibility of your organization. They also help to position the writer as an expert in the area, which adds to the organization's credibility.

Letters to the editor usually are written in response to a current issue or a previously published article or letter. Generally no longer than 200 words, they can serve to correct something in the published piece or to add information. They are written as personal viewpoints rather than as the opinion of an expert or representative of an organization, although you may want to disclose your relationship to your program and the issue if you are writing to express an opinion about adult literacy.

Opinion articles, or "op-ed" articles, run opposite the publication's editorial page. They can be as long as 800 words and give you the opportunity to express your opinion and offer solutions on an important topic as an expert. Op-eds also give you control over the content, unlike a general news story. If your piece is printed, you are guaranteed that your name and the organization's name will be included.

Improving Your Chances for Publication

- As with news releases, know your audience. Read the op-ed articles that appear in the publication where you will send your submission to get a sense of how they are written.
 - Know how the publication prefers articles to be submitted — e-mail (with or without attachment), fax, etc.
 - Determine if the publication prefers exclusivity. Some publications will automatically reject an op-ed article if it has been submitted to more than one publication.
 - Follow the rules for length.
- Make sure your article is timely and newsworthy. Make sure to include your news "hook" in the first paragraph and submit your article as quickly as possible to maintain its timeliness.
- Editors are looking for your opinion. State it clearly in the first paragraph and then support it with information in the following paragraphs. Talk about people affected by the issue first and then include supporting facts or statistics. Make sure your information is accurate. Focus your argument on the issue and make your point quickly.
- Offer new ideas or solutions in the closing paragraph. Editors like strong viewpoints and challenges to conventional wisdom. Make the last paragraph powerful and memorable.
- Use language that can be easily understood by the general public. Avoid acronyms, jargon, and clichés.
- As with news releases, print your op-ed article on your letterhead and double-space. Proofread for grammatical and spelling errors.
- Include your contact information — name, title, organization, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address.



- Include a short paragraph that describes the writer and substantiates the writer as an expert, for example: Robert Wedgeworth is a founder of the National Coalition for Literacy and the president of ProLiteracy Worldwide, the world's largest organization of community-based adult literacy programs.
- Send by first class mail. If the publication accepts e-mail, check to see if attachments are allowed. If not, include your article in the body of your e-mail, and include "op-ed on [issue]" in the subject line.



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: In the U.S.

Current public policy in the U.S. is inconsistent with research findings about the importance of the issue of adult literacy.

- The Congressional Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 defines adult literacy as an individual's ability to read, write, and speak English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential.
- The U.S. Department of Education plans to release the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) in September 2005. It defines literacy as using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.
- The Department's National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) of 1992 estimated that 40-44 million adults in the US (21–23 percent of the adult population) function at the lowest level of literacy skill; that is, they do not have sufficient literacy skills to access and use information effectively in their daily lives.
- The federal government authorizes appropriations for adult basic education and literacy programs under WIA. Approximately three million adult students per year receive basic literacy instruction in federally funded adult literacy programs.
- Americans spent \$64.38 per taxpayer on video games in 2002. The federal government spent \$3.56 per taxpayer on adult basic education and literacy instruction in the same period.
- In 2003, Congress appropriated \$575 million for state grants for adult basic education and literacy programs. In the same period, Americans spent \$838 million on premium label ice cream.
- A federal appropriation of \$570 million, or \$190 per adult student per year, is currently pending approval for fiscal 2006.



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: Youth

Adults who are born in the United States may not acquire literacy skills in school because of undiagnosed learning disabilities, visual and physical disabilities, childhood trauma such as illness or domestic violence, sporadic attendance at school, or poverty. Teachers may not be equipped, nor have the resources, to address all these problems in their classrooms.

- Approximately 60 percent of students move to another school district during the school year. In areas of high rent, poor housing, and economic hardship, some school districts are experiencing a 100 percent turnover of their enrolled population each year.¹
- One-third of all teens entering ninth grade will not graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years.²
- Sixty-six percent of high school graduates do not have the skills and qualifications necessary to attend college.³
- High school dropouts earn less than those who graduate — on average \$18,700 per year for dropouts compared to nearly \$28,000 a year for high school graduates. Workers with a bachelor's degree earn an average of more than \$51,200 per year.⁴
- Only 13 percent of out-of-school youth are employed. Twenty-five percent of high school dropouts have received taxpayer-supported public assistance compared to 10 percent of high school graduates.⁵
- Youths with low academic achievement are three times more likely to join gangs than students with good grades.⁶

¹ The Educational Consequence of Mobility for California Students and Schools, Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education Report No. PACE-99-2, 1999 and Effects of Family Mobility on Student Achievement, ERS Spectrum 8, 1990

² Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis, Gary Orfield, 2005

³ Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates, The Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, 2005

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau

⁵ Cain, Alice (2003). "Is the GED Valuable to Those Who Pass It?" Focus on Policy, Vol. 1, Issue 1, April 2003 Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), Harvard Graduate School of Education.

⁶ North American Transitional Youth Gangs: Breaking the Chain of Violence, 2005



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: The Prison Population

America is wasting money incarcerating adults when it should be educating them.

- The prison population in the U.S. has tripled since 1980.⁸
- The U.S. and Russia have imprisonment rates higher than any other industrialized nation.⁹
- Seventy percent of the more than one million inmates in state and federal prisons are functionally illiterate or read below the eighth grade level.¹⁰
- Forty-six percent of prison inmates do not have a high school diploma.¹¹
- In 1999, only 25 percent of jail jurisdictions offered a basic skills education program.¹²
- In 2004, the cost to keep an individual incarcerated for one year averaged \$22,650. For the same period, combined federal and state spending on adult basic education, adult literacy, and English-as-a-second-language instruction averaged \$850 per student.¹³
- Inmates who participate in basic education programs while incarcerated have lower recidivism rates than those who do not.¹⁴
- Inmates who participate in basic education programs while incarcerated are more successful at finding and sustaining gainful employment on release than those who do not.¹⁵

¹ Captive Students: Education and Training in America's Prisons, Educational Testing Service, 1996

² Comparative International Rates of Incarceration: An Examination of Causes and Trends, The Sentencing Project Report, 2003

³ Literacy Behind Prison Walls, Profiles of the Prison Population from the National Adult Literacy Survey, 1994

⁴ Research Literacy Facts and Figures, National Center for Family Literacy, 2002

⁵ Correctional Education Facts, National Institute for Literacy, 2002

⁶ Bureau of Justice Statistics, May 2004; OECD Factbook 2005, Expenditure on Education, www.oecd.org/dataoecd/42/29/34416230.pdf

⁷ The Three Rate Recidivism Study, Correctional Education Association, 2001

⁸ Correctional Education Facts, National Institute for Literacy, 2002



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: Health and Family

Adults with literacy proficiency raise healthier and more successful children than those with limited literacy skills.

- In 2002, the average American spent \$5,440 for health care. Studies indicate that health care costs for adults with low literacy skills are four times the national average — \$21,760.¹
- Individuals with low literacy skills have a higher rate of hospitalization and increased incidents of medication and treatment errors than the general public.²
- The health care industry estimates \$73 billion per year of unnecessary health care expenses attributable to poor literacy.³
- Research demonstrates that low literacy, poor health, and early death are linked.⁴
- The U.S. has the highest teen pregnancy rate of any developed nation at 900,000 teen births per year. Only one-third of teen mothers obtain a high school diploma.⁵
- The higher a mother's education level, the better the child's performance on tests and in school.⁶
- Children whose parents have low literacy skills are more likely to become adults with low literacy skills than children whose parents are good readers.⁷
- Parents enrolled in basic literacy programs participate in school activities and support their children's success in school more, and their children's school achievement improves.⁸
- Thirteen percent of native-born American adults and 17 percent of their children live in poverty.⁹

¹ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Statistics, 2004; Center for Health Care Strategies, Inc. Health Literacy and Understanding Medical Information Fact Sheet, 1997 <http://www.chcs.org/resources/hl.html>

² Ibid

³ Low Health Literacy Skills Contribute to Higher Utilization of Health Care Services, National Academy on an Aging Society, 1999

⁴ Empowerment Health Education in Adult Literacy: A Guide for Public Health and Adult Literacy Practitioners, Policy Makers, and Funders, M. Hohn, 1998

⁵ Children Having Children: The State of The World's Mothers, Save The Children, 2004

⁶ National Center for Family Literacy

⁷ Double Duty Dollars, Thomas Sticht, 2002

⁸ Family Literacy Programs: Who Benefits, Paka & Rasinski, 1997

⁹ Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics, Pew Hispanic Center, 2005



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: Business and Industry

The economic self-sufficiency of Americans and the global competitiveness of the U.S. are dependent on a literate adult population.

- The success of American manufacturing in the global economy depends on quality and productivity, which are directly dependent on the skills of its workforce.¹
- Adults in Bermuda, Canada, Norway, and Switzerland outscored adults in the U.S. on reading and numeracy literacy tests in a recent survey.²
- If literacy levels were the same in the U.S. as they are in Sweden, the U.S. GDP would rise by approximately \$463 billion and tax revenues would increase by approximately \$162 billion.³
- A rise of just one percent in a nation's literacy scores yields a 2.5 percent increase in labor productivity and a 1.5 percent increase in GDP per person. These raw numbers mean a real improvement in quality of life.⁴
- More than 40 percent of the U.S. workforce and more than 50 percent of high school graduates do not have required basic skills for employment.⁵
- American business spends \$16.6 billion each year on employees who lack basic skills in reading, writing, and math.⁶
- U.S. business and industry spends an average of \$600 million per year on remedial reading, writing, and math skills training for employees.⁷
- Eighty percent of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. require some post-secondary education.⁸
- Twenty-five percent of American CEOs interviewed by the Conference Board of Canada identified workforce skills shortages as a top management challenge.⁹
- Toyota plans to build a new automotive plant in Woodstock, Ontario in 2008, citing the low literacy skills of the available labor force as the reason it declined millions of dollars of incentives to build the new plant in the U.S.¹⁰

¹ The Skills Gap, National Association of Manufacturing, 2001

² Learning A Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Statistics Canada and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2005

³ Alliance for Excellent Education (2003) The Impact of Education on: The Economy, Fact Sheet, November 2003

⁴ Literacy scores, human capital and growth across 14 OECD countries, Statistics Canada. June 2004.

⁵ Turning Skills Into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs, The Conference Board of Canada, 1999

⁶ No Voice, No Exit: The Inefficiency of America's Public Schools, 2001

⁷ National Institute for Literacy, Literacy Skills for 21st Century America: A blueprint for creating a more literate nation, 2000, Washington, D.C.

⁸ Fact Sheet, Jobs for the 21st Century, The White House, 2004

⁹ Turning Skills Into Profit: Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs, Conference Board of Canada, 1999

¹⁰ The Canadian Press, 2005



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: Immigration and Citizenship

Basic literacy skills and English proficiency are the key ingredients for success for unprecedented numbers of immigrants to the U.S.

- In 2002, the U.S. admitted more than one million legal immigrants.¹
- In 2004, there were 35.7 million foreign-born individuals living in the U.S.²
- As of 2004, 25 percent of legal immigrants have less than a high school education.³
- As of 2004, an additional 25 percent of legal immigrants have only a high school education.⁴
- Eighteen percent of legal immigrants live in poverty and 31 percent of the children of legal immigrants live in poverty.⁵
- Hispanics accounted for more than half of the population growth of 2.9 million people from 2003 to 2004.⁶
- One of every seven people in the U.S. is Hispanic — as of 2004, approximately 41.3 million.⁷
- Hispanic immigrants generally enter the U.S. with low literacy skills, take up low-paying jobs, and struggle financially.⁸
- Asians accounted for the second largest population growth of legal immigrants from 2003 to 2004.⁹
- Adults with low literacy skills or for whom English is a second language represent \$380 million in consumer spending power annually, yet the U.S. consumer distribution system requires shoppers to use comparative shopping skills, coupons, discounts, and other complex literacy tasks in order to shop cost-effectively.¹⁰
- As baby boomers retire, the available labor force for manufacturing jobs consists primarily of immigrants, many of whom lack adequate education, language, and job skills.¹¹

¹ Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, 2003

² Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics, Pew Hispanic Center, 2005

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, 2005

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Decision Making and Coping by Functionally Illiterate Consumers and Some Implications for Marketing Management, Madhubalan Viswanathan, José Antonio Rosa, James Edwin Harris, 2005

¹¹ Keeping America Competitive: How a Talent Shortage Threatens U.S. Manufacturing, A White Paper, National Association of Manufacturers, The Manufacturing Institute, Deloitte & Touche, 2003



Fast Facts About Adult Literacy: The Global Perspective

Illiteracy can be linked to child labor, trafficking in women, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and human rights abuses around the world.

- The United Nations defines illiteracy as the “inability to read and write a simple message in any language.”
- The United Nations estimated that in 2005, there were 785 million illiterate adults in the world.¹
- In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2003-2101 the “United Nations Literacy Decade,” with a particular emphasis on adult literacy.
- Women account for two out of three illiterate adults. In 2000, there were 236 million more illiterate women than men.
- One in every ten births worldwide is to a mother who is still a child (aged 10-19).²
- Young women who are educated tend to marry later, have fewer children, and raise healthier, better-nourished children who attend school.³
- In 2000, about 70 percent of the world’s illiterate adults lived in three regions: Sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia, and the Arab States and North Africa. East Asia and the Pacific reported an estimated total illiterate population of 185 million. The Latin America and Caribbean region has an illiterate population of 39 million.
- The United Nations Development Programme 1997 report included lack of knowledge and literacy in its definition of “human poverty.”

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/ev>

² Children Having Children: State of the World’s Mothers, Save The Children, 2004

³ Teach A Child, Transform A Nation, Basic Education Coalition, 2004



Fast Quotes About Adult Literacy

Education helps freedom thrive. Citizens who are educated can choose for themselves, make up their own minds, and assume their responsibilities as citizens... Education unleashes the creative contributions of every citizen, to improve their own lives and to build the common good. Education benefits all, and education should be available to all.

Mrs. Laura Bush
Speech to World Education Forum, 2005

Education and literacy are necessities in a world devoid of certainty but abundant with opportunity. Lives can be transformed — lifted over time from poverty and chaos to dignity and independence. Education offers a ladder on which to climb and a foundation upon which to stand... In this knowledge-based world, earning depends upon learning. Education helps both people and nations rise above their circumstances.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings
Speech at UNESCO Conference, 2004

Ideally, literacy skills are acquired as people progress through the K-12 system in this country. However, this system does not always work for those who pass through it, and many who have immigrated to the U.S. have never participated in it.

Increasing societal and workplace demands may exceed what is taught in school, creating situations in which the skills of the populace are not aligned with the needs of the nation.

**National Research Council Committee on
Performance Levels for Adult Literacy,
National Academy of Sciences, 2005**