

Fliers, and Brochures

Fliers

Fliers are perhaps the easiest type of public relations writing, because the writer presents a few bits of information. Gather the relevant data, present it clearly and succinctly, and you've done most of the work.

Fliers also offer great flexibility for the writer. It is not uncommon for organizations to distribute many fliers in their efforts to present information about events and activities of interest both to the organization and its various publics.

Fliers generally are used to announce specific events such as meetings, new products such as books or new programs such as college courses.

Characteristics of Fliers

1. *Fliers are unfolded sheets* designed to be posted on bulletin boards, delivered by mail or distributed by hand.

2. *Fliers are meant to be read as single units.*

They are designed to present a single message rather than a series of separate message units.

3. *Fliers are time specific*, and they address a particular event, often with the objective of promoting attendance or participation

4. *Fliers serve awareness objectives* by presenting information.

Visual Design for Fliers

The key to effective fliers is their visual appeal. Type should be pleasingly placed on the page. For example, use type within the same family; for emphasis, use different type sizes, or use variations within that family of type, such as roman, italic, boldface, lightface, condensed, extended and so on.

Font Style

In flier, various typefaces within two common font families, Times Roman and Helvetica are used.

Times Roman is a popular font with *serifs*, short lines capping the top and bottom strokes of each letter. Helvetica is a popular *san serif* font without those capping lines.

Two other type-related features are available with some printing systems—changing the *leading*, or spacing between lines, and *kerning*, or changing the space between letters.



Format

Fliers often use centered type, sometimes with boxes or text passages set for justified left and right margins, called *full justification*. *Flush right copy*, with a ragged left column, generally is avoided because it is difficult to read.

Centered type also is difficult to read in paragraphs, though centering often works well for one or only a few lines such as in headlines or subheads. Also, too much centering of type offers little or no impact.

Visual Effects

Reverse type (white lettering on a dark background) is difficult to read for body copy, though it can be effective for display or headline type.

Fliers can be visually enhanced by the discrete use of lines, borders, tints and boxes, and by the use of logos, sketches, clip art and photographs. One thing to keep in mind when designing a flier is to work with a visually dominant item—a headline, graphic or piece of art. Elements should not compete for the reader’s attention. Design the flier so that the most important or useful element draws the eye, with other elements gracefully flowing one to another.

Graphics

Many computer software programs include a wide variety of display fonts for titles and other special uses. Also, some computer programs make it easy to give special design treatments to titles and headlines.

Don’t overdo the special typographical effects though, because too much of a good thing is not a good thing. Remember: Give readers a single focal point with dominant visual attraction.

Samples



Brochures

When a message must last longer than it can on a flier, public relations writers often turn to brochures. These publications serve many purposes and offer many opportunities for presenting an organization's message to its various publics. Some distinctions exist among the various types of publications that an organization may produce. *Leaflet* and *folder* refer to a folded single-sheeted publication. Multipage publications are called, according to their increasing size, *pamphlets*, *brochures* or *booklets*. Other names for multipage publications are *tracts*, *bulletins* and *packets*. All of these publications are known generically as brochures.

Characteristics of Brochures

A brochure can be defined as a controlled, nonpublic medium presenting information of more than transitory interest and published as a stand-alone piece rather than as a part of a series. It is a folded sheet meant to be read as a booklet and providing information meant to be relevant over an extended period of time. The key points in this definition are expanded on below.

1. *Brochures are a controlled medium.* They allow the organization to determine not only the message content but also the presentation of that message, with its timing, duration and repetition.
2. *Brochures are a nonpublic medium.* They fall midway between interpersonal communication channels (speeches and open houses) and the public media (newspapers, radio and television).
3. *Brochures are published once rather than as part of a series.* To be most effective, brochure topics should be of long-term interest, with writing that serves the needs of various readers over several months, perhaps several years. Whereas a brochure may be revised and updated, it must be complete unto itself (unlike serialized publications such as newsletters, which can develop a topic over several editions).
4. *Brochures are stand-alone pieces that deal with all aspects of a topic.* Some organizations publish a series of brochures on related topics, but each of these must stand on its own to provide complete information on its particular topic. For example, an environmental organization may write several brochures, each addressing a different environmental issue. A bank might produce a series of brochures about its different savings and investment options.

Types of Brochures

A useful way of categorizing brochures is according to their objectives—awareness, acceptance and action.

Information (Awareness) Brochures. Some brochures present basic facts about the organization. These informational brochures seek to affect the level of awareness about some aspect of the organization. For example, a fitness organization might prepare a brochure about its history and its mission, whereas a historical site could print a visitors' brochure with a self-guided tour of the premises and an introduction to the artifacts on display.

Interest (Acceptance) Brochures. Some brochures seek to make an impact on the interests and attitudes of readers. These brochures carry a persuasive message that is intended to gain the interest and acceptance of readers. For example, an environmental organization might produce a brochure about the health hazards of second hand smoke.

Action Brochures. Finally, some brochures feature a direct call to action or a sales pitch. Their objective is to affect the behavior of the reader. One of the environmental organization's brochures might want the reader to send a financial contribution; another offers how-to advice about recycling.

Planning Brochures

You've heard it before; you'll hear it again: All effective public relations writing begins with a plan. Brochures are no exception. In fact, because brochures offer so many different possibilities in both content and writing style, planning is especially important. So you don't get off track, follow this step-by-step outline for preparing brochures.

Planning Sheet. Complete a planning sheet for the brochure, giving particular attention to identifying the specific publics. Some brochures try to do too much. This is understandable, because brochures can be expensive. But remember: It is seldom a wise decision to try to shape one brochure to accomplish the work of two or three. "What Would *You* Do? Writing for Different Publics" offers just such a dilemma.

Continue the planning process with the usual attention to the key publics—their wants, interests and needs; credible sources; and benefits. Identify the tone you desire for your brochure. Clearly articulate your objectives. Consider the life span you envision for the brochure and the way it will be distributed.

Topical Divisions. Before you begin writing a brochure, subdivide the topic into various categories, like chapters in a book. For example, a brochure by a county agency advocating recycling might include the following sections: benefits of recycling, items to recycle, ways to prepare recyclables for pickup, the local law about recycling, penalties for violating the law, contacts for additional information and other communities' experience with recycling. Your intention here is to identify various facets of your topic and then to deal with each of them in some way. You may decide that some of the sections you identify can be eliminated and that others can be combined or reorganized. At this stage, your intention is simply to list the various areas of information you want to provide.

Tips for Better Writing *Writing Brochure Copy*

The following guidelines may be helpful in writing copy for brochures:

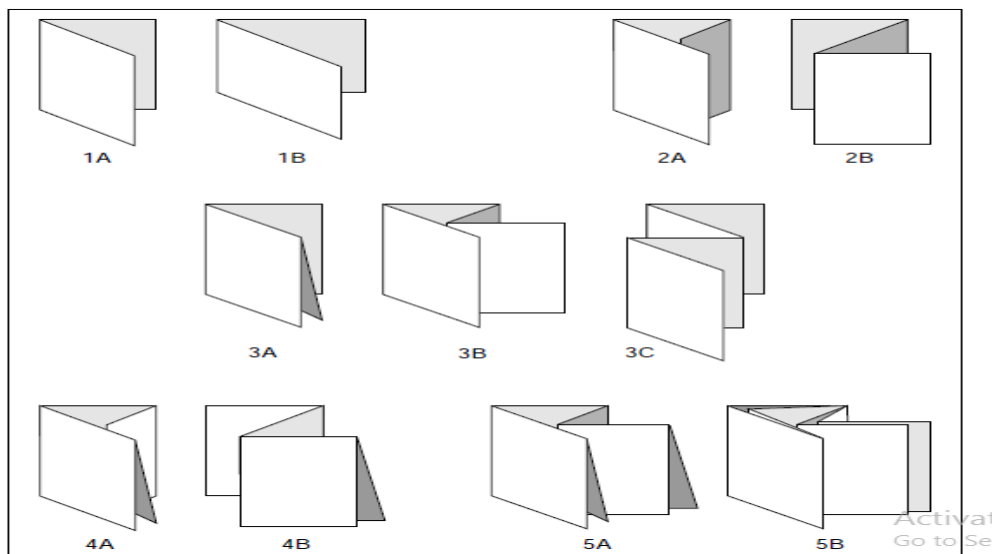
1. *Make the cover interesting.* There's a lot of competition to the reader's time, so you've got to appear to offer something worth the effort of opening the brochure and reading it. A big question mark just won't do it. Use a headline and/or artwork that pulls the reader into the topic.
2. *Highlight the benefit to readers.* Place this on the front cover. The headline doesn't have to be clever, and it shouldn't be cute. Instead, it should be an accurate indication of the advantage the reader will find inside. If you have planned well and clearly addressed a specific public, your headline will be most effective when it simply indicates a topic of interest to the reader.
3. *Make the copy easy to read.* Use short sentences and short paragraphs. Highlight important facts. Consider using lists instead of narrative paragraphs. Keep the writing clear and simple. Use language with a readability level appropriate to your intended readers.
4. *Write in personal terms.* Don't hesitate to use "you" words, which help readers identify with the topic.
5. *Write on a friendly level.* Consider the appropriateness of keeping your message lighthearted. Even serious topics can be presented in ways that are not ponderous. Write as if you were discussing the topic with a friend.
6. *Write in positive terms.* Even situations with serious consequences can be presented without resort to pessimism or scare tactics.
7. *Don't make information so specific and time bound that it quickly becomes obsolete.* Brochures are meant to last for a period of time. Many have been forced into a reprinting because a price was raised or a director was replaced. Avoid writing about details that change frequently.
8. *Make sure the writing is direct.* Don't make readers guess, but lead them to the desired conclusion or behavior.
9. *Increase reader interest* by providing tips or useful advice. Give readers concrete suggestions rather than abstract ideas.
10. *Highlight headlines and subheads.* These should be more than mere labels. Question heads can be useful. When you use them, make sure the questions are logical and honest. Readers will spot loaded or leading questions and lose respect for the brochure. Readers also are unlikely to tolerate dumb or meaningless questions.

First Draft. Based on the sections you have identified, gather the necessary information and write a first draft to address each of them. Remember to write from the perspective of reader interests rather than organizational priorities. Only if the brochure serves the needs of your readers can it be of any use to your organization. "Tips for Better Writing: Writing Brochure Copy" lists additional guidelines.

Copy Revision. After you have written the first draft, review your planning sheet. Pay particular attention to the wants, interests and needs of the target public; the benefits your organization can offer them through this brochure; and your public

relations objectives. Also review the way you have segmented the topic. Compare your plan to what you have written, and revise your draft accordingly. If your planning suggests more attention or different treatment of some aspects of the topic, now is the time for revision.

Graphic Elements. You probably will have begun thinking about the design of the brochure as you were writing the first draft. In fact, you probably should begin giving some early thought to the look. But don't let design run the show. Only after the first draft of the brochure has been completed should you seriously deal with design considerations. Effective brochures use illustrations to reinforce the message. Whereas a paragraph provides information to the reader, a chart can present the same data in a visual form, and a photograph may reinforce the message.



The first design decision is to determine how many panels the brochure will have and how these will be folded. The most common format is an 8.5 by-11-inch sheet of paper, with two folds into the center. This creates six panels, as shown in Exhibit 11.2. In this format, the inside cover (Panel E) has importance second only to the front cover, because it is the first panel the reader sees on opening the brochure. The inside cover serves as a continuation of the front cover and a bridge to the three inside message panels (B, C and D). The back panel (F) can be used either as a message panel or as a self-mailer.

Brochures can be vertical (folded on the side like a greeting card) or horizontal (folded on the top). Most brochures use a vertical design because they are easier to read. But be consistent. Avoid designing a brochure with a horizontal cover and vertical inside panels. “Tips for Better Writing: Designing a Brochure” offers additional suggestions.

Tips for Better Writing *Designing a Brochure*

Following are some guidelines related to brochure design:

1. *Emphasize the upper third of the front cover* because brochures often are used in display racks. Use a design that makes effective use of this space.
2. *Use type fonts and sizes that are reader friendly.* Type for brochures should be at least 10 point. Serif type is easier to read in paragraphs; sans serif type may be more appropriate for bulleted information. Alternatives to paragraph form include lists, often introduced by decorative marks called *dingbats* as well as bullets, hyphens, squares, asterisks and so on.
3. *Text should be set flush left*, with a solid left margin and a ragged right margin. This not only is easier to read, it also provides a relaxed feel. Use boldface and/or italic type for emphasis. Avoid using all caps, which is the print equivalent of shouting. Use large initial capital letters sparingly.
4. *Don't be afraid of white space.* Crowded brochures give the impression of being ponderous, which signals that reading this will be a chore.
5. *Strive for short blocks of type.* Lengthy sections of text can be shortened, or they can be broken up by subheads, artwork, design elements such as lines and boxes, and white space.
6. *Spot color can be very effective.* This can be accomplished graphically, using tints or colored heads. Or it can be accomplished artistically, such as with washes of color underneath the text.
7. *Colored paper can enhance a brochure inexpensively.* A low-cost way of adding color is to use paper manufactured in a light or pastel color.
8. *Black-and-white photos don't reproduce well in other-than-black ink.* If you are using a color with photos, make sure the ink is a dark shade.
9. *Balance graphic elements on the inside panels.* Spot photos or graphic devices at different locations in each panel. Avoid top-heavy or bottom-heavy layouts.
10. *Don't exaggerate the role of graphics.* Brochures are vehicles primarily for the written word. Don't fall into the trap of having a brochure that is overdesigned but underwritten.

Polished, Edited Copy. The final stages of preparing a brochure are the same as for any kind of writing: Polish your language. Aim for a unity between the headlines and artwork or other graphic elements. Read the copy out loud and listen to the flow of your words. Edit your copy for style, spelling, punctuation and other mechanics of acceptable writing.

Approvals. Brochures may require the approval of one or several organizational executives. After the brochure has been pretested and found appropriate, the writer may need to obtain approval from organizational leaders to publish and distribute the brochure.