

COASTAL COMMUNICATORS

A newsletter for the nation's coastal management and research reserve programs.

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Pamela Jacobs
Office for Coastal Management

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A PROFESSIONAL
WRITER IS AN
AMATEUR WHO
DIDN'T QUIT.

– Richard Bach



January 2020, Issue 15

COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS

KEEPING STRESS LEVELS LOW DURING THE DOCUMENT REVIEW CYCLE

Just imagine that a high-profile news release—scheduled to enter the media stratosphere in mere days—is getting that last look by colleagues. Heartburn acting up all of a sudden? You're not alone. More than a few communicators have lost sleep over document-review time pressures and crossed signals. The tips below can cut the stress, delivering any written material for which clarity is essential and group rewrites are undesirable (which is pretty much all of them!) on time and with everybody's okay.

Before charging ahead on a new review process, remember these two things:

- Change takes time, so get your supervisor's approval and backup before proceeding.
- Make all articles as accurate and lively as possible, focusing on the number-one takeaway for the target audience—this will lessen pushback and attempted rewrites.

SET CRYSTAL-CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

In a friendly "Hello" email to the review audience, politely but clearly signal that you're seeking corrections and clarifications only. In other words, no paragraph rewrites, editing advice, or added, nonessential content.

Why be so direct? Put yourself in your reviewers' shoes. Many of them have only ever commented on internal documents that go through countless rewrites, circulating for months. Be considerate and clarify, "different process, different deadline."

When possible, give reviewers a minimum of four days' turnaround time for a one-page document, longer for complex or lengthy articles. But leave no doubt about the deadline and what will happen if they neglect it. Follow this advice and your days spent chasing down nonresponders will dwindle in a hurry.

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Here's an example of two brief bullet points to get the message across:

- Corrections and clarifications are due **January 15 at 5:00 p.m.** If I do not hear from you by that time, I'll assume you've approved the article and will prepare it for release.
- Please do not rewrite or add entire sentences unless you are adding a new fact.

DELEGATE

Give your office point-of-contact (usually the project leader) the responsibility of running the document by essential colleagues and partners, collecting feedback, and sending corrections on to you.

Here's what you might put in your email:

- Only you know the additional people who should review the document—they might include colleagues, managers, field staff members, or partners. Please compile their corrections by the stated deadline.

STICK TO A "ONCE AND DONE" REVIEW CYCLE

Reviewers get one comment-and-correction round before the final edit and design, and then off it goes. Starting strict is always best, but you can still grant that rare exception for emergencies.

A single review cycle is wise for another reason. Multiple correction rounds increase the risk that an error or mix-up in the final file version will mar the document launch, causing embarrassment and hot tempers.

Don't take on the very last read-through by yourself. If no copy editor is on staff, at least show the approved version to a trusted colleague. Listen for their reaction and make any necessary tweaks. Then wait a day, give it a fresh look, and launch!

Best wishes on a more relaxing review process.

Kitty Fahey
Science Writer
CSS on contract with the
NOAA Office for Coastal Management
Kitty.Fahey@noaa.gov



COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH



Name: Pamela Jacobs
Title: Writer and Editor
Organization: Lynker on contract with NOAA's Office for Coastal Management, Charleston, South Carolina
Contact: Pamela.Jacobs@noaa.gov

For the past year, I've enjoyed publishing the profiles of communicators from the reserve system and coastal zone management programs. But for the first issue of 2020, I thought it was only fair to share my profile with readers and provide some insight into how communications work at the Office for Coastal Management. If you'd like to be profiled in an upcoming issue, please contact me!

Organizational Structure: Our communications department functions much like a full-service advertising agency, offering writing, editing, outreach, and design services to Office for Coastal Management staff members and their respective products and "clients" (i.e., regions, partners). Each team member serves a distinct role—for example, two outreach specialists focus on different tasks and "clients," a writer is responsible for all online impact stories, graphic designers work on different types of products, and the communications director, Donna McCaskill, captains the ship and keeps everything running smoothly and with purpose.

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COMMUNICATOR OF THE MONTH (CONTINUED)

That said, everyone works collaboratively. This newsletter is a good example of that—the articles are written by various members of the team, the outreach specialists provide information on upcoming campaigns, I put it all together and edit it, and then Daniella Fishburne, one of the graphic designers, does the layout. The copy editor gives it a final edit (I always have him edit my stuff—it’s hard to edit your own work!), and then everyone on the team has a chance to give it a final read before it reaches your inbox.

Outreach Approach: Our outreach specialists have a very strategic approach. They create simple-yet-effective outreach plans for all products, services, and teams within our office (see the December 2018 issue of this newsletter for an article on developing an outreach plan). The emphasis is on delivery, and the focus is on a specific, actionable goal and audience. In fact, everything we produce is made with the intention of being focused, clear, and repeatable; we aim to create something once and use it multiple times.

Job Duties: I write and edit a variety of internal and external products. Everything that our office produces must go through editing, so either Jerry Esch, our copy editor, or I will edit; I serve as his backup and do all copy editing for a few categories of products (PowerPoint presentations, for example). I curate and edit several newsletters and publications (such as the publications we created for the reserves in recent years), and I manage the Fast Facts on our website home page, which are meant to provide easy, useful facts for those writing speeches, articles, and handouts on various coastal topics.

Social Media: The outreach specialists handle all social media. In addition to creating and scheduling the posts for our office’s Facebook and Twitter accounts, they monitor related accounts and keep track of engagement, which includes responding to comments on our posts. They’re currently exploring the possibility of adding Instagram to the social media roster.

Most Fun, Most Challenging: I really love seeing the tangible ways our products are being used. For example, one of our Fast Facts was recently used as a visual tool by a congressman when advocating for a package of bills aimed at improving the resilience of our nation’s coasts. Talk about gratifying! I also love knowing that products I work on, such as the publications, help tell the story of our work. If someone picks up a copy of the “Explore” publication and learns about the research reserves and why they matter, that’s a win.

My background is actually in magazine editing and travel writing. While traveling to glamorous destinations and writing about five-star hotels certainly was fun, it wasn’t nearly as fulfilling—both personally and professionally—as what I do now. (Fun fact: I was once mistaken for Lady Gaga by a throng of teenagers outside a hotel in St. Petersburg, Russia; turns out she was staying in the hotel as well).

Sometimes it’s a challenge to remind our office staff that everything has to go through editing. People are busy and juggling a lot of tasks, so they often think that a short piece of writing can just go out unedited, but we really want every single thing we produce to be polished and the best possible version of itself.

Work Mantra: One of the greatest lessons I’ve learned while working here is the importance of being succinct and direct when communicating. Writers tend to think more is more, but effective communication is as much about trimming the fat as it is about putting pretty words on a page. Fun fact number two: I’ve also learned, while offering volunteer marketing services for a goat farm, that when in doubt, pictures of baby animals are always effective!

Wish for the Future: That everyone wants to get involved in protecting our coasts, ecosystems, and planet! But more specifically, I hope to keep helping to create novel, effective approaches to telling your stories. So if you have an idea for a communications product that will help you tell the coastal management program or research reserve story, I’d love to hear it. And if you just want to see pictures of baby goats, I can help with that too.

FROM US TO YOU

OUTREACH TOOL SPOTLIGHT – COASTAL FLOOD EXPOSURE MAPPER

As communicators, we love words, but as the old saying goes, sometimes a picture is worth a thousand of them. This is especially true when talking coastal hazards. The Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper creates maps that show the people, places, and resources at risk of flooding, which you can then use to effectively communicate your community's coastal story. Find this online visualization tool here: coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/tools/flood-exposure.html.

UPCOMING SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and tag along with these campaigns.

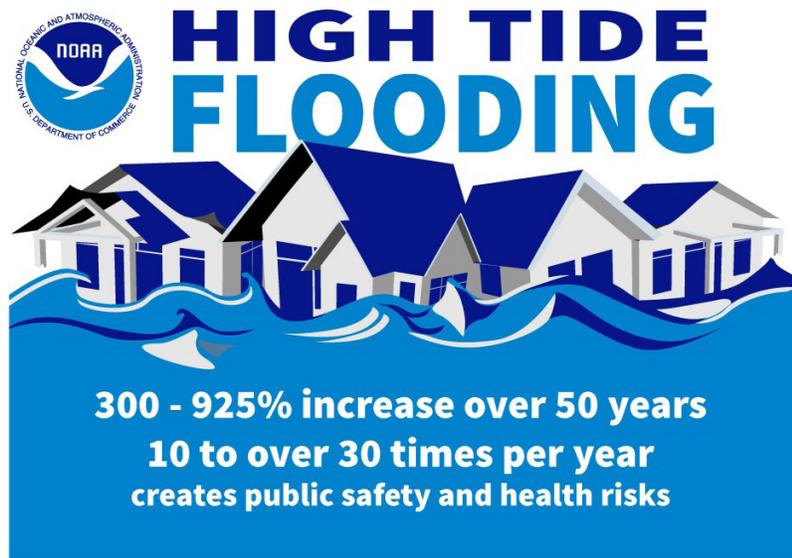
- ✦ January 1 to 11: Use [#Resolutions](#) to share plans and priorities for the coming year.

- ✦ January 14 to 18: Use [#StormSurge](#) to spread the word about keeping coastal communities safe.
- ✦ January 21 to 25: Use [#Northeast](#) to celebrate this region's many riches.

THE COASTAL COMMUNICATORS COLLECTION

We had so much fun debuting this newsletter last year and watching it grow that we decided to gather all of the past year's "communications insights" articles, along with some of our favorite writing-related resources, and package them all into a handy publication. We hope you've had a chance to read and enjoy it. If you haven't yet, please let us know and we'll be sure to send a copy your way!

FAST FACTS – HIGH TIDE FLOODING



This is one of the many graphics and fast facts available for your use in presentations and handouts. Grab this one at coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/recurrent-tidal-flooding.html. If you have an idea for a new group of fast facts or illustrations, please let us know.

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To subscribe to this newsletter, visit coast.noaa.gov/contactform.

Send questions or suggestions to coastal.info@noaa.gov.

Editor: *Pamela Jacobs* | Communications Director: *Donna McCaskill* | Graphic Designer: *Daniella Fishburne*

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