



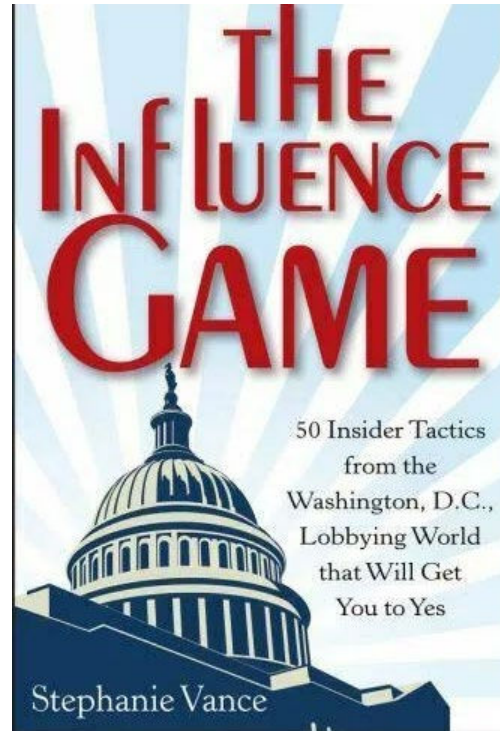
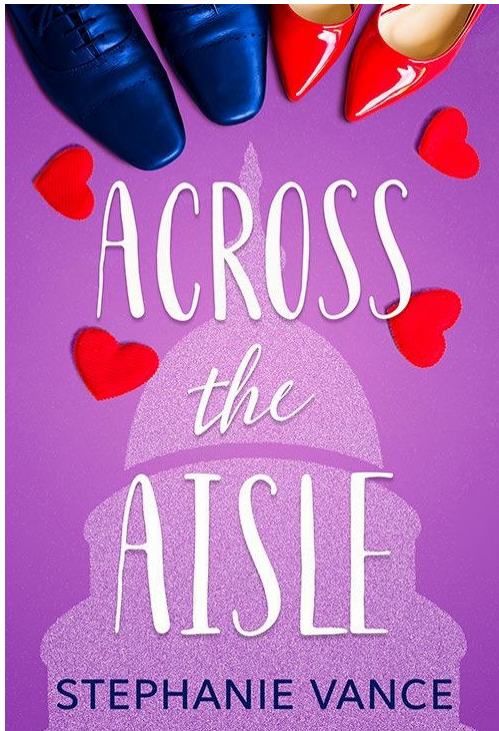
# Improving Your Advocacy Writing

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# About Stephanie

## Managing Partner Advocacy Associates

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Author of five books on effective advocacy, including the Washington Post bestseller, *The Influence Game*, and the recently released romcom, *Across the Aisle*

# Topics



Basic Craft & Grammar



Knowing Your Audience



Applying the Appropriate Structure



Back to Basics

Use Verbs  
Instead of  
Nouns: They  
Convey Action

Their findings were that installation of coax in wired cable systems would result in the benefits of dropped signal reduction and ISP error prevention.

They found that installing coax in wired cable systems resulted in fewer dropped signals and ISP errors.

# Subject-verb-object

**John kicked the ball.**

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*“Who kicked the ball?”* Answers that veer from S-V-O order tend to be longer, less efficient, less direct/active:

“The ball was kicked by John.”

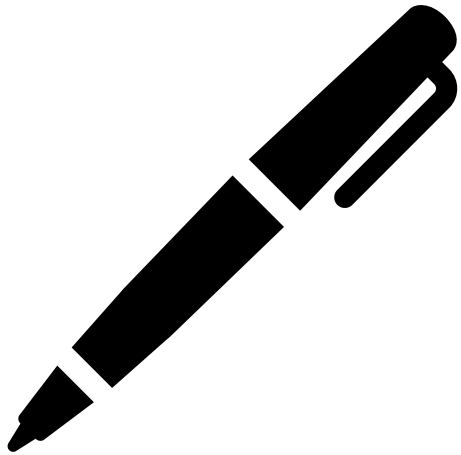
“The kicker of the ball was John.”

“The person who kicked the ball was John.”

“John, having come upon the ball, kicked it.”



# Brevity and Clarity



# Why is it important?

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IN ADVOCACY, NO ONE NEEDS TO READ  
WHAT YOU'RE WRITING.



# Key Points

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Don't use your  
college vocabulary

Don't be David  
Foster Wallace

Leave some space

# Which is Easier to Understand?

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## **Message #1**

Efficiency measures that been implemented by the company with strong involvement of senior management have generated cost savings while at the very same time assisting in the building of a culture that is centered around the value of efficiency. We anticipate that, given this excising of unnecessary expenditures and enhanced control of other expenditures, the overall profitability of the company will be increased in the near term of up to four quarters.

## **Message #2**

Our senior management team has cut costs and made the company more efficient. We expect to be more profitable for the next four quarters.

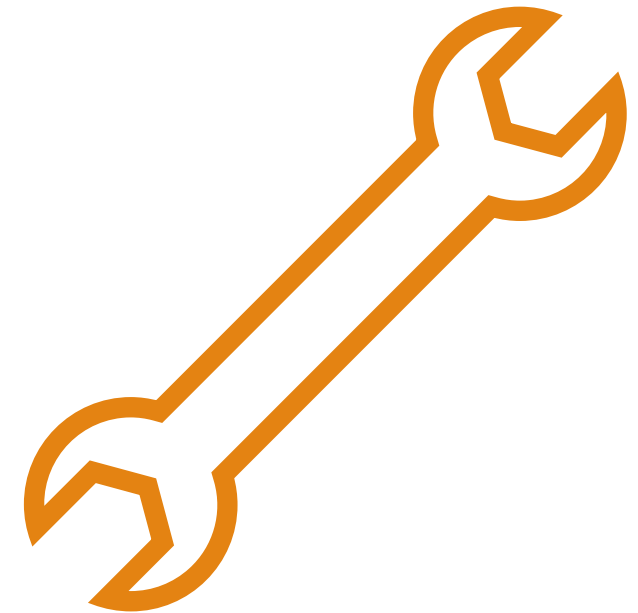
Nick DeSarno, Public Affairs Council

# Examples of Excess Verbiage

How would we fix it?

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In a GAO investigation, they found that...

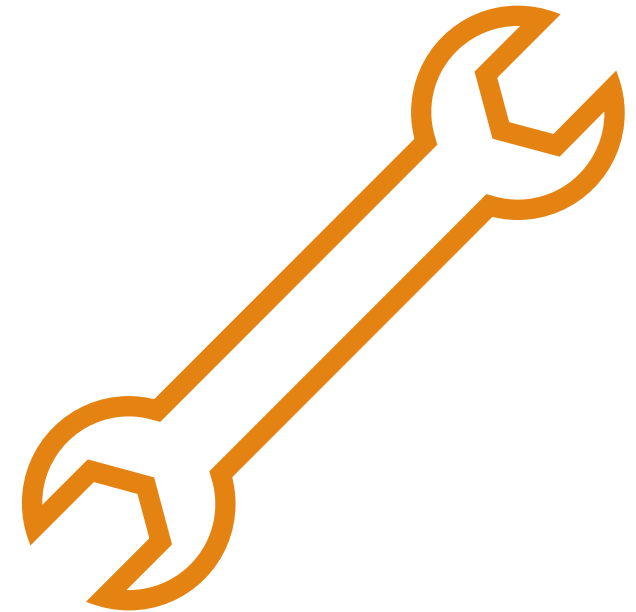


# Examples of Excess Verbiage

## How would we fix it?

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On the 2nd of September, 2005, just weeks after Hurricane Katrina, Congress rapidly delivered legislation requested by the Bush administration to the desk of President Bush.





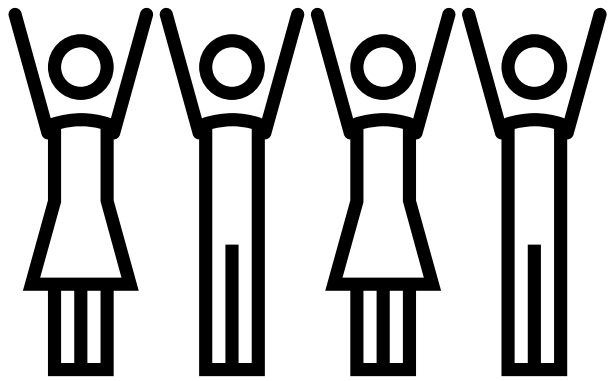
Questions?

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# Understanding the Audience

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Grassroots:  
Who Are  
They?

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# Not all Grassroots are the Same!

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Non-  
membership  
Nonprofit

Membership  
Nonprofit

Trade

Corporate



# Grassroots Advocates: What do you write for them?

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Action Alert Text



Action Alert Social  
Media



Deeper background  
in the action center



Newsletters



Talking Points

Not tuned into DC

Busy, Busy, Busy

Nervous

Grassroots:  
Key  
Characteristic  
s

Avoid all jargon

Make everything easy

Reassure

Put the relevant stuff first!

Make the connection

Grassroots:  
Making it  
compelling

# Example: Newsletter/Action Alert

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On February 11<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Committee on Appropriations marked up the FY25 Department of Interior appropriation bill. The bill includes 8 bazillion dollars in funding for the Saving Baby Zebras program at the Department of Interior. This program is essential to our efforts to establish a viable monitoring and predator deterrent system for baby zebras in the wild. The bill now goes to the Senate floor, where it's expected to reach the 60-vote margin necessary to invoke cloture. Once passed, it will be conferenced with the already passed House bill, which includes only 7 bazillion dollars for SBZ. We need to reach out to conferees ASAP and ask them to use the higher Senate number in the conference report.

IS THIS COMPELLING?



# Sentence by Sentence

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## OLD VERSION

On February 11<sup>th</sup>, the Senate Committee on Appropriations marked up the FY21 Department of Interior appropriation bill.

## NEW VERSION

Earlier this month, funding for our “Save Baby Zebras” initiative made it through another stage in the Congressional budget process and is nearing the finish line.

# Sentence by Sentence

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## OLD VERSION

This program is essential to our efforts to establish a viable monitoring and predator deterrent system for baby zebras in the wild.

## NEW VERSION

This program helps baby zebras by giving scientists the tools they need to protect them from predators.

# Sentence by Sentence

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## OLD VERSION

The bill now goes to the Senate floor, where it's expected to reach the 60-vote margin necessary to invoke cloture. Once passed, it will be conferenced with the already passed House bill.

## NEW VERSION

The House and Senate are expected to pass different versions, which they'll soon need to reconcile.



# Sentence by Sentence

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## OLD VERSION

Once passed, it will be conferenced with the already passed House bill, which includes only \$7 bazillion dollars for SBZ. We need to reach out to conferees ASAP and ask them to use the higher Senate number in the conference report.

## NEW VERSION

The House's proposal includes only \$7 bazillion for SBZ, while the Senate includes \$8 bazillion. The Save Baby Zebras Foundation is urging all baby zebra lovers to push for the higher number, and you can help! Take a minute to go to our action center.

# Newsletter/Action Alert Version 2

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Earlier this month, funding for our “Save Baby Zebras” program made it through another critical stage in the Congressional budget process and is nearing the finish line. As you’ll recall from earlier alerts, this program helps baby zebras by giving scientists the tools they need to protect them from predators. The funding is part of a spending bill for the Department of Interior. The House and Senate are expected to pass different versions, which they’ll soon need to reconcile. The House’s proposal includes only \$7 billion for SBZ, while the Senate includes \$8 billion. The Save Baby Zebras Foundation is urging all baby zebra lovers to push for the higher number, and you can help! Take a minute to go to our action center.



# Grassroots Structure

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The  
situation

Why they  
should care

What they  
can do

How can  
they do it

What  
comes next

For action alerts



# Example

The Situation: Earlier this month, funding for our “Save Baby Zebras” initiative made it through another critical stage in the Congressional budget process and is nearing the finish line.

Why they should care: As you’ll recall from earlier alerts, this program helps baby zebras by giving scientists the tools they need to protect them from predators.

What they can do: The funding is part of a spending bill for the Department of Interior. The House and Senate have passed different versions, which they’ll soon need to reconcile. The House’s proposal includes only \$7 bazillion for SBZ, while the Senate includes \$8 bazillion.

How can they do it: The Save Baby Zebras Foundation is urging all baby zebra lovers to push for the higher number, and you can help! Take a minute to go to our action center.

What’s next: Once the bill is reconciled, the House and Senate will need to vote on the final package, so stay tuned!

# Social Media: Same Principles Apply

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## NOT GREAT

Congress will be debating the Interior Appropriation bill soon! That bill funds the Department of Interior Baby Zebra program, and the House and Senate are proposing different amounts. We need advocates to contact their representatives and ask them to support the Senate's higher proposed level of funding. Visit our action center now.

## BETTER

Attention baby zebra lovers! Congress is talking about funding for the federal baby zebra program right now. We need your help to get the highest amount possible, so visit our action center today!

# Example: AI-Generated Social Media Post

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🌟 Big news for our “Save Baby Zebras” initiative! 🐾 ✨ Funding is making its way through Congress, and we’re closer than ever to securing vital resources to protect baby zebras from predators.

The House has proposed \$7 billion, while the Senate aims for \$8 billion. We need your help to advocate for the higher amount!

📁 Visit our action center to make your voice heard! Together, we can make a difference! 💖 #SaveBabyZebras #wildlifeconservation

# A Word About Generative AI



Can be useful for first drafts



The text is only as good as the  
prompt



The machine doesn't know as  
much as you about the topic

# Questions to Ask Yourself When Writing for Grassroots

Can my smart friend who knows nothing about DC understand this?

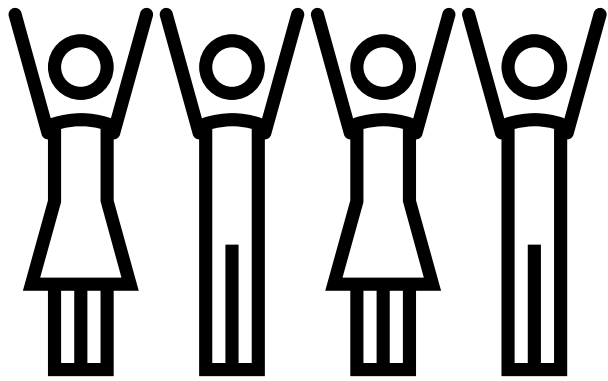
Will they know how it directly impacts them?

Will they know what I want them to do?

Will they know why I want them to do it?

Will they know how to do it?





Grasstops:  
Who Are  
They?

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# Not all Grasstops are the Same!

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Local Official

Lay person  
you've trained

Personal  
friend of  
legislator

Celebrity

# Grasstops Advocates: What Do They Do?

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PERSONAL MEETINGS



ENGAGE THEIR  
NETWORKS



PARTICIPATE/TAKE THE  
LEAD IN FLY-INS

# Grasstops Advocates: What do you write for them?

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Memos



Personal e-mails



Materials to share  
with their networks



Testimony



Personal Talking  
Points

A little more familiar with politics

Willing to carve out time for advocacy

Have networks they can work with

Grasstops:  
Key  
Characteristic  
s

Tread lightly

Give them every tool they need

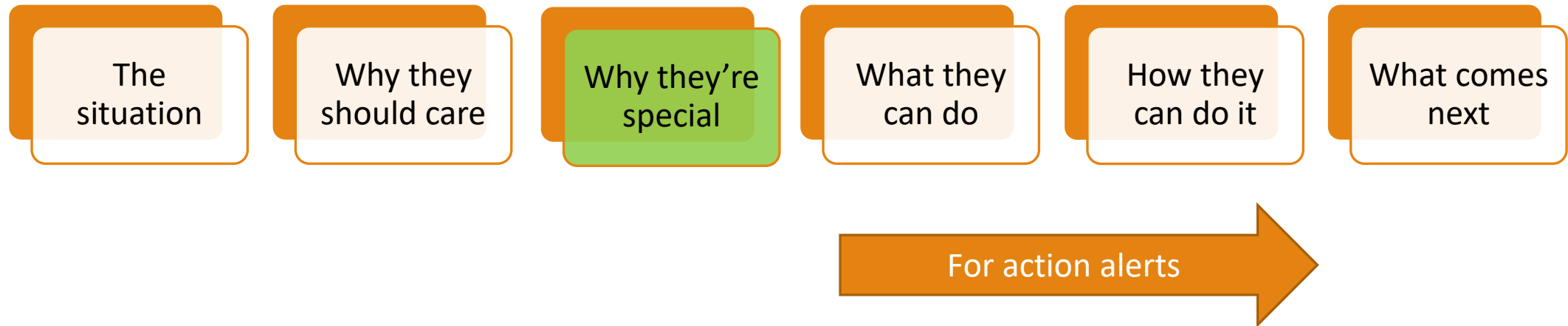
Explain why they're special

Prepare them for more in-depth interaction

Grasstops:  
Making it  
compelling

# Audience: Grasstops Structure

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# But What if “The Ask” is Complicated?

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Reduce congressional/federal jargon.



Promote connection to your audience (they'll know their own jargon).



Put information on more complicated situations in a backgrounder, one-pager, or FAQ.



Use visuals to outline the process and where you are in it.





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It's Not a Documentary!

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PRODUCTION \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTOR \_\_\_\_\_

TAKE \_\_\_\_\_



Questions?

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# Legislators & Policymakers

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# Policymakers: What do you write for them?

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Letters for advocates to  
send



Letters from your  
organization



Materials they'll use

Prefer jargon

Focused on constituents

Won't read beyond a half page

Want to know what you want them to do

## Legislators: Key Characteristics

# Legislators: Solutions

Bill numbers, committee names, where it is in the process

Constituent connection

Keep. It. Short.

Make the ask

# Legislator Structure: Letters from Advocates & Organizations

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Relevancy  
& Ask

Constituent  
Story

Ask again

Contact

# Legislator Structure

## Letters Coming from Advocates

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YES

I live in the third district of Oregon, and I write today to ask you to cosponsor H.R. 1234, the Save the Zebras Act. This bill provides funding for the SBZ office in the Department of Interior to establish a monitoring and predator deterrent program to protect zebras, who are on the brink of extinction.

NO

I write today to share with you my interest in protecting zebras from dangerous predators. Because of these predators, zebras are facing extinction in the near future. There's a bill in Congress that would help fund a program to stop these predators, and I urge you to consider supporting it.



# You're Not Writing. You're Rewriting

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REVISION IS KEY PART  
OF THE PROCESS



OTHERS ARE BEST  
JUDGES OF OUR  
WRITING



SEEK FEEDBACK



READ WITH FRESH  
EYES



USE WORD'S TOOLS



PERSIST!



The most important  
thing to keep in mind  
while writing in the  
advocacy world...

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We're All  
Dorks!



# Fake Legislation

For Writing Teachers of America Grassroots Advocates (or your own!)

Congresswoman Stephanie Vance introduced H.R. 2519, the Writing Revision Is Totally Excellent, or WRITE Act.

This bill would establish a new interagency public/private taskforce designed to analyze current writing styles within the federal government and identify options for creating a more cohesive style.

The taskforce must include private sector representatives from the teaching, corporate, and library communities, and would be required to submit a report to the Committee on Government Oversight within 365 days from enactment with recommendations.

This act shall establish ten pilot programs at universities across the country to develop curricula designed to implement the recommendations from the WRITE taskforce.

This act establishes a fund to hire contractors able to implement the recommendations through AI strategies, software development, and other strategies as deemed appropriate and useful.

# Exercises

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Create an action alert for advocates. You can pick one set.

Create a compelling one-pager/backgroundner

Create a social media post

Create a letter for advocates to send to legislators

Explore AI if you want!