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# Reaching People

DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND AGRICULTURAL JOURNALISM

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## What If The Open House Crowd-Isn't

Suppose for a moment that you are working for some company in a small city—it could just as well be your county extension office, but let's get away from that for a minute. Your company is a good one, doing a fine job of serving customers and community. It's a growing organization and is about to move to larger quarters with modern new equipment.

To show these new facilities to the community, the company president decides to have a public open house. Since you're the communication expert on the staff, you are given the job of getting the word out to the people to persuade them to attend.

### 3 Good Stories

You decide that the basic vehicle for this has to be the mass media and so you go to work on a series of three stories. You find good solid news pegs to hang them on; you write in clean clear language with crisp leads, short sentences, straightforward vocabulary, and tight copy. You write separate versions for newspapers and broadcast stations; you time release of the stories to give an equal media break to the weekly papers. You send the material to all the mass outlets in the county, and even to a few papers and stations in a city in a neighboring county.

You're proud of your work—until the day of the open house. Some 75 show up, instead of the 400-500 anticipated. The boss is disappointed—as are you. It's hard to shake the feeling that something went wrong, that you failed.

You start checking around and discover, first, that two of the five weeklies in the county didn't use the stories and two of the others used only one of the three. Only one of the two dailies used them, the one right in your community. Your batting average was about the same with the radio and television stations. Not only that, but two of the radio stations

used the stories only on their 7 a.m. newscasts—nowhere else.

### 'What Open House?'

You run into a friend, one you fully expected to see at the open house but didn't. You ask her. She asks you, "What open house?" "Don't you read the newspaper?" you counter. "Sure," she says, "every day. But I didn't see anything about any open house." (At this point, you don't bother to tell her that the local daily ran all three of your stories, right on schedule.) Another friend tells you that certainly he knew of the open house but thought it was just for employees and their families and friends. One person forgot the date, and another got interested instead in the TV ball game. Still another tells you that this open house business is just a bunch of propaganda and she is not about to be taken in by such stuff. The final straw is when one acquaintance tells you he didn't understand all that talk in the story about new electronic data processing equipment, automatic billing and the like, and could not see any point in being confused further.

As I said, it's hard to shake the feeling of failure in such a situation. But if there's failure, it may be less a matter of attracting attendance than it was forgetting how differently different people respond to the same messages. Perhaps it was also in being somewhat unrealistic about what can be done to persuade people to do something they don't see as vital to their own self interests.

There are many things that can be said about this communication situation. I'd like to mention only two here, and hope that you will permit me to come back to explore the open house at a later time.

### Message Goes One Way

One idea is that a mass media message is usually highly restricted, one-directional, and surrounded by literally hundreds

### IN THIS ISSUE

The many angles of communicating with the public get daily workouts in county extension offices. Here are some observations of communication strengths and weaknesses as seen, over the years, primarily through Staff Development Course 0124, where agents mail in samples of communication materials for evaluation. The Department of Information and the Agricultural Journalism and Communication and Educational Aids Program Area can offer consultative help in all of these areas from designing a headline for a newsletter or column to concocting a speech or launching a radio program.

Don Wells  
Program Director  
Communication and Educational Aids

of other messages competing for an audience member's attention and time. It is highly restricted in that it is usually short and is lacking some or all of the nonverbal codes that people use to tell others what they really mean and how they feel. The mass media message usually does not provide for exchange, for transaction. All we have to do to see how this works is to ask ourselves how often we are moved in any significant way by messages that give us no opportunity for response and debate. Add to this the competition of other messages and it is easier to see why our small series of open house stories had limited effect.

continued

## Know Audience's Struggles

The other notion is easy to describe but harder to deal with. It's the idea of knowing your audience, of having a real sense of what its concerns are, of what its members are struggling with, of what's occupying its principal attention at any time. It's not that we can't find out about all these things; it's that we often don't. We're busy and time is precious. So, we use ourselves as a model and judge the potential interest in things in terms of the way we see them. Unfortunately, we are not neat averages of the groups we're trying to talk to and our inclinations and normal daily business don't always give us much chance to interact with those who are different from us.

If we're to know some of the people we think we can help, we have to get off our chairs, out of the office, and down the street and out into the country where those people live and work. And we must listen very carefully and open mindedly to what they say.

Knowing about these things doesn't guarantee that our next effort will be successful, but it almost certainly will help. We can at least key our efforts more specifically to audience characteristics—and be a little more realistic about what is and isn't possible. ■

—Don Wells

- Review all stories, illustrations, and photographs with human rights considerations in mind.
- Be sure the University's equal opportunity statement appears on your newsletter.
- Include somewhere the editor's name and address and the editorial office address and phone number.
- Proofread all copy for typographical errors and for factual accuracy. Errors can make a well-written newsletter look unprofessional.

## Design Guidelines

Even a well-written newsletter can fail to communicate effectively if it is poorly designed. Simplicity is the key to good newsletter design and to minimum production costs.

- If you need it, seek professional design and planning assistance in creating a masthead to give individual identity to your newsletter. Include in the masthead the name of the newsletter, publisher's name, the volume, the number, and the date.
- Establish a workable format (page size, column width, margins, type style and size, headline schedule) and follow it consistently.
- Keep format simple. Don't use too many sizes and varieties of headline type. Use only one typewriter style for text.
- Don't use design devices that interfere with your message. Leave adequate margins and sufficient space around headlines and between illustrations and copy.
- Use quality photos and illustrations to support your message, not just as filler.
- To minimize costs, use only one color of ink.
- Select paper and ink combinations which won't interfere with legibility. Light colored inks are difficult to read.

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# Publications

## NEWSLETTERS—WRITING TO COMMUNICATE

A newsletter is just what its name implies—a newsy, informal "letter" written to a specific group of people. It can be one page, two, four, but usually no more than six or eight. It can have pictures and drawings or be straightforward reading material.

There are three main factors to consider as you continue with your newsletters or plan to start a new one: *Editorial Content*, *Design Guidelines*, and *Distribution Guidelines*.

### Editorial Content

A newsletter should contain short pieces of information that aren't readily available anywhere else. It speaks directly to a well-defined audience, and what it has to say is written clearly and concisely.

Here are some guidelines which may help the quality of your newsletter:

- Keep its purpose in mind as you gather and write articles.
- Know your audience before you start writing and then write to that audience.
- Write to inform not to impress.
- Be brief. Brevity attracts attention and cuts down on printing and mailing costs.
- In both writing and placing stories, put the most significant, timely, or interesting material at the beginning.
- Check all stories for consistency of style (capitalization, punctuation, abbreviations, etc.). Keep an up-to-date dictionary handy.

## Reaching People

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Coffey Hall, 1420 Eckles Ave., University of Minnesota, St. Paul, Minnesota 55108. It is intended primarily as a communication resource for the staffs of the 92 Agricultural Extension Service Offices in Minnesota's 87 counties.

The University of Minnesota, including the Agricultural Extension Service, is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, creed, color, sex, national origin, or handicap.

Using the same paper and ink combination for each issue will lend continuity and build identity for your newsletter.

#### Distribution Guidelines

The ultimate effectiveness of a newsletter depends on its getting to the appropriate audience. You want to reach as broad an audience as possible, but this desire may result in a mailing list of persons with little or no interest in the newsletter.

- Define your audience carefully and develop your mailing list specifically for that audience.

- Scrutinize your mailing list periodically to insure that your newsletter is being sent only to the intended audience. Solicit address corrections and update your list as you receive them.
- Survey your readers every year to give them the option of being dropped from the mailing list.
- Consider mailing requirements early in the production process to insure that your newsletter is properly prepared for mailing and take advantage of the most economical mailing method.■

—Leona S. Nelson

going to talk about and why. Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them. In addition, tell them why they need your information.

**DELIVERY:** You should **talk** rather than **read**. If you must read from a script, practice enough so that it sounds more natural. The best practice is to **speak** from an outline. Remember, radio is a very personal and intimate medium. You are talking to **ONE** person, not to a large crowd. Think of yourself chatting in the listener's living room. Go over the script 8-10 times, formulate an outline, and then speak from the outline. You will sound much better. Speak as you would to a friend sitting next to you. You do not need to worry about projecting your voice so that you can be heard. The amplifier and transmitter will do that. Maintain a constant distance from the microphone—don't move forward or backward. Breathing patterns are important. Take steady breaths. Avoid deep breaths when you are recording because you will likely over-modulate.

**TOPICS:** Programs should be single-topic. There are better ways to billboard events than on your valuable radio program. Select **ONE** topic and develop it. Do not present too much information. Do not hesitate to use repetition to advantage. Topics should be developed to supplement your plan of work, but be flexible enough to respond to immediate unplanned needs.

**SUMMARY:** Use a clearly stated summary at the end of your program. You

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## Radio/TV

### RADIO—SPEAKING OF COMMUNICATING

Many county agent radio programs are excellent and agents are to be commended for using radio wisely as **part** of their overall plan of work to disseminate information effectively in their county. Radio is an important tool for the county agent who wishes to reach a large audience.

While most county agent radio programs are well done, many could be improved by following some very simple

advice. Here are some tips given to some county extension agents in Minnesota:

**INTRODUCTIONS:** Your program opener needs to gain audience attention within the first 15 seconds, and then be able to keep it throughout the program. Be creative. Use stories, statistics, questions, bold statements, or analogies. Following the attention getter, you need to indicate to your audience what you are

Good radio is natural, people being themselves, like coffee table conversation. It takes listening and reflecting to make the guest and audience feel at ease with the topic. Janet Macy's radio guest is Rachel Barrett, program assistant, Expanded Food and Nutrition Program (EFNEP) Red Lake Indian Reservation.



Dave Hansen

may wish to refer the audience to a publication or a meeting on the same topic. Don't just leave the audience dangling. You might also want to tell your audience what you'll be talking about on your next program.

**TECHNICAL ASPECTS:** You can enhance your broadcast "sound" by practicing a few techniques during recordings. Avoid popping of p's and unnecessary surrounding noise by placing the microphone about 6 inches from your mouth at a 45 degree angle. You might consider a mike stand of some kind so that handling the mike is unnecessary. If your tape recorder is noisy, you need to use a long mike cable to get as far from the recorder as you can. The room in which you record needs to be free from such things as excessive echo, noise from typewriters, or outside auto traffic.

**GENERALIZING:** Remember, you are talking to more than just your extension clientele. You are speaking to all who

might be listening. As a result, you need to prepare to address the total listening audience . . . all homemakers, or all farmers. Radio can be used to educate and inform the public.

**USING OTHERS:** Remember, you don't have to solo on radio. Consider interviewing others such as 4-H'ers, homemakers, farmers. Research tells us that listeners relate extremely well to one of their own. Try interviewing some of your outstanding people from time to time; it might prove to be more fun to you, too. You might vary your program by interviewing specialists when they are in your county.

An excellent radio communicator is not developed overnight. The important thing is to not get discouraged. It requires practice and experience. If you are using radio in your position, keep up the good work!■

—Sam Swan

them to do the impossible by attempting to photograph 35 people across an auditorium. Their effective range is about 15 feet.

It is also important to keep your subjects about the same distance from the flash so that people in the foreground don't come out too light while those in the distance are barely visible. Also avoid shooting pictures directly at a shiny wall or mirror for these create a hot spot in your picture. If you must make a photo against a wall, arrange your subjects so that you are shooting at an angle to the wall rather than directly at it. In this way your flash will bounce off at another angle rather than directly back into your lens.

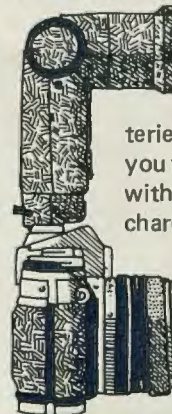
### Removables Are Important

If you are interested in purchasing an electronic flash, look for one that has removable penlight batteries rather than one that only uses rechargeable batteries. Rechargeable batteries tend to deteriorate quite rapidly if they are not charged and maintained properly. To replace the batteries in some rechargeable units requires sending them to a repair shop which is costly and time consuming. Many of the units now on the market will operate either on regular penlights or with rechargeable batteries and you can interchange the batteries easily yourself. These give you the option of using the unit with penlights when the rechargeable batteries fail.

Look for a unit with sufficient power output so you can use at least F 5.6 in the automatic mode with ASA 64 film. Many now have several power settings so you can use less light with higher speed films and more light with slower films. The lower (light output) settings also use less energy per flash so you get more life out of a set of batteries.

Another valuable feature is a removable sync cord. Even if your camera is equipped with a hot shoe that fires the flash without a connecting cord, a separate cord is valuable if you want to remove the flash from your camera for closeups or to avoid reflections. A removable cord is preferable to a fixed cord as it can easily be replaced if it breaks. A fixed cord again requires sending out to a repair service for replacement. Flash units that meet these specifications cost about \$50.■

—Donald L. Breneman



## AV Notes

### SOLUTION: A LITTLE (RIGHT) LIGHT

News photos county staff submit for evaluation as part of our staff development course appear to have one common problem, lighting.

We are seeing too many pictures taken with existing light in dimly lit interiors. The result is shaded faces and muddy gray prints unsuitable for newspaper reproduction. Today modern cameras equipped with a fast lens and high speed (ASA 400) film, can record an image under just about any conditions short of total darkness. Yet, having enough light to record an image doesn't mean that the light is coming from the right direction and falling on the subject correctly.

It is important that your subject be well lighted because the viewer's eye is always attracted to the lightest area in a photo. Avoid shooting pictures of people standing in shadows or in front of brightly lighted walls or ceilings.

#### Direction Permits Contrast

The lighting must also be bright enough and directional enough so that pictures

have some contrast: meaning the range of tones between black and white present in a black and white photo. Pictures taken under very low light levels have an overall grayish cast that makes them look flat or muddy. Newspaper reproduction tends to decrease contrast further so start with a print with a good range of tones between black and white.

A small electronic flash unit can be an asset when making newsphotos under poor lighting conditions. Most of these units have a built-in sensor that automatically shuts the flash off when the light output is sufficient. This eliminates the old chore of changing the F setting on your camera every time you take a picture at a different distance. With an automatic unit you just set your lens F stop to the recommended setting and any picture from about 3 feet to 15 feet will be properly exposed.

#### Range Is Limited

These small flash units work fine for pictures of 2 or 3 people, but don't expect



Picture A—Note how this subject at the Minneapolis Grain Exchange blends in with the background. There was enough light for picture taking, but it was not falling on the subject with direction and intensity.

Don Breneman



Picture B—This is the same scene, but a small electronic flash was used to light the subject. Note how it stands out in contrast to the background. There was enough natural light falling on the background so the detail there has correct exposure.

Don Breneman

# News

## STORIES TO WRITE OR SUGGEST

Although most of you don't have journalism degrees, the columns and separate news stories appearing in local county newspapers are generally well done and informative. Beyond their value as information sources these writings serve another purpose: they help you to establish an identity in the community.

Even the most professional writer makes minor mistakes now and then. Most

errors have to do with newspaper style, not writing style. Newspaper style refers to how your material is presented—when to abbreviate, when to capitalize—along with some basic rules. Here are some common errors spotted in county agents' newspaper pieces and suggested remedies.

Otherwise known as the first paragraph in a story, the **lead** is the place to hook readers, draw them into the story, and

keep them there. A good lead is never longer than 25 words no matter what type of story you're writing. In a news story, the lead should attempt to summarize what is to follow by touching on the four "W's" of reporting: who, why, where, when and the honorary "W", how. Feature stories are more relaxed, and the lead should reflect this casualness while teasing reader interest.

continued

## Check Out Style

Try reading your favorite newspaper writers' stories for style rather than for content. Notice how leads can hook readers, and also notice how leads fail. Remember these tricks the next time you're writing a news or feature story.

Each story, whether news or feature, needs **quotes**, and yours is no exception. Rather than having an invisible narrator explain why the 4-H sheep project is so important or why women should participate in budget making, why not use yourself as a quoted source? This not only adds interest, but also gives you added visibility.

## 'Say' Won't Distract

Tradition has it, news stories are usually written in past tense, feature stories in present tense. When using a quote in a news story, use "Jack said," and in a feature story, "Jack says." By the way, Jack whispers, exclaims, rebuked, purported, etc. should only be used if it's true and fits the quote. Sometimes it feels awkward to use "Jack says," over and over, but the reader's eye will pass right over it. For proof, check yourself the next time you're reading.

Some of the information used in agent's columns comes from various outside sources and is written for a general audience. Always try to take the time to localize news releases and by all means personalize them as well. A well placed

"you," "us," or even "county residents" adds to your story and involves the reader. You might want to add some of your own personality to news releases. Personal anecdotes, opinions, and ideas make readers feel they know you and also work to dilute the somewhat "teachy" tone that often goes with how-to-do-it material.

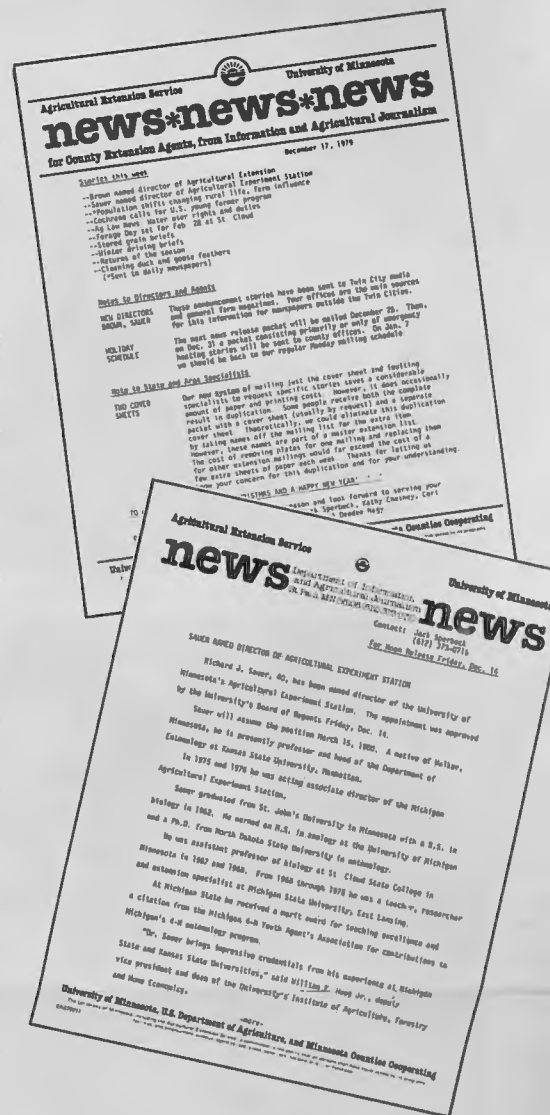
## Involve the Reader

Don't forget this idea when it comes time to write your own stories. Speak directly to the readers, make them feel involved in your stories. Remember, the object of writing for publication is to communicate, and you can't communicate with someone who isn't reading your writing!

When it's time to submit your work to your local editor, make sure your stories are neatly typed double-spaced in a type style that isn't too small or too ornate to be easily read and on sturdy paper. Editors receive many, many stories every day. Those that are well written and easy to edit have the best chance of appearing in the newspaper.

And speaking of your local editors—the next time you have a story idea that you think is interesting yet haven't the time to pursue it yourself, pass the tip along. Editors always are on the lookout for interesting, **local** stories they can develop on their own. ■

—Cori Scarbnick



# Communication Scene

## 10 TENETS FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS

Awakening one night from a deep and tossing sleep replete with dreams of MEMIS, plans of work, and reports, I hurriedly grabbed my beside bed paper and pad to record certain inviolate rules of public relations. That, I suddenly remembered, was my commitment to this *Reaching People*, an issue devoted to a review of salient points brought out in our professional development courses.

The ten commandments that I put forth here now seem less significant, less visionary and less glorious than they were in that wakening moment, beset as I was

with mental brainstorming (a distinctive extension method). Obviously they were not inscribed on stone tablets nor were they delivered on a mountain top or even from the revered sanctuaries of Coffey Hall. Until now they have been barely legible scribbles on scraps of paper or, at the most, messily written grease pencil marks on an overhead acetate.

Ordinarily I would put forth my concisely stated objectives at this point and would, of course, define public relations before setting forth these commandments.

However, we'll leave that for later, if space permits. So here they are:

1. Thou shall listen attentively to thy audiences and adjust to their legitimate, felt, or expressed needs and desires as put forth by them in their program planning sessions or otherwise (mostly). Ask not what are legitimate, expressed, or felt needs. Who knows?

2. Thou shall not bear false witness or "bad mouth" your colleagues, your superiors, your organization, or even those who oppose you and promulgate compet-

continued

ing but inferior (of course) programs. That's bad P.R.

3. Thou shall not cover up or "Water-gate" your own mistakes. They will catch up with you sooner or later unless they are fortunately forgotten and/or forgiven. You can't depend on that!

4. Thou shall tell your story clearly, succinctly, in as many ways as possible with thy limited time and resources. Exhibit neither braggadocio nor false modesty but set forth your words with honesty, forthrightness, and pride.

5. Thou shall have no other goals and objectives before you than those of your organization. Dispel or forget those hidden self-seeking agendas that may lurk clandestinely in your mind.

6. Thou shall plan your P.R. as you plan your entire program, not only for this year but also for the years ahead. If you do, your days will be long in the extension service, if you so desire.

7. Thou shall always communicate with your colleagues, giving credit where it is due . . . and even if it isn't due in your mind. If they know not what you do, how can they help in your unit's P.R.? (At this time I pause to give credit to Leigh Hunt, the poet, to Moses and His Inspirational Source, and to all of you who participated in the public relations seminars that led to my dreams and to what some people might dubiously, or even derisively, term inspiration.)

8. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's program nor steal her/his good ideas or glory without acknowledgment and deeply felt gratitude. If thou dost, your P.R. will go down the drain and your neighbor will look at you with a jaundiced eye and even with axe in hand.

9. Thou shall forgive thy neighbor and this poor communicator, too, for their follies (imagined or real) and their numerous faux pas. Nor should thou

spread rumors about these follies. Those in glass houses should not toss stones or something to that effect.

10. Thou shall submit at least one good commandment to me so that I can come out an even 10 or dozen or 50 or 100 or some other glamorous, psychologically significant number. Please.

There will be adequate rewards (defined by the author) for winners in three categories—county staff, state staff, and non-extension persons whom I hasten to add we love, revere, and appreciate for their fine support. The size of the prize will depend on the number of entries. The best will be printed in a future issue of *Reaching People* (if the editors don't get uppity).

O, yes, that definition of public relations. Public relations is . . . (we ran out of space but watch for forthcoming issues of *Reaching People* with the next thrilling (?) episode which will define in detail that illusive term, public relations).■

—Harold B. Swanson

↓ This half page is for you to communicate with us. We want this newsletter to be a two-way street. Please let us know how we can better serve your communication needs. Your comments, questions, suggestions for points you'd like discussed in future issues will be grist for our mills. The Reaching People address is 433 Coffey Hall, 1420 Eckles Ave., University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108. We're eager to hear from you!

# Word Power

## SAVING THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH

What is needed is not the teaching of new words but fighting the misuse of the great old words. —Martin Buber, in *To Create New Words*.

Each New Year's Day since 1970, while others are trying to forget the night before, a group of Michiganders is out saving the world from misused, mal-used, over-used, and generally useless words.

The group, which goes by the unassuming name of the Unicorn Hunters of the World, gallantly protects the honor of the Queen's English by releasing a list of banished words to the press every January 1. Unicorn Hunters everywhere send in suggestions from which final selections are made. The list appears in newspapers worldwide, and the event gives way to seven days of unabashed celebration, known in Unicorn circles as Silent Record

Week, to "promote the virtue of silence in a world of cacophony.

Just so that you won't be mortally embarrassed the next time you're in the company of an incognito Unicorn Hunter, here's a selection of banished words from the 1979 list.

### UNCONDITIONAL BANISHMENT:

**I feel** which is too often used when "I believe" or "I think" is meant. Since "feel" is emotional, the speaker is thus protected from challenge. Whereas, if the speaker were to "believe" or "think" it would invite debate . . . **social security** being neither social nor secure . . . **What are you into?** as in "I'm into kids, but I used to be into death." . . . **energy crisis** since no one is certain what it is, if it is, and so what to do about it.

### DISHONORABLE MENTION:

**Beautiful** which has lost most of its original meaning . . . **viable alternative** . . . the confusion of **perimeters** and **parameters** . . . **irregardless** and **irrespective** as a phrase.

**SPECIAL AWARDS:** The new Fried Cabbage Leaf Cluster was awarded to "yuh know." It's been suggested that this is now used as a punctuation mark and could be noted on the typewriter by the key "¢" which, for all practical purposes, is useless . . . **RED ALERT:** In this same category, **okay**, **really**, **eh** (Canadian) and **right** which have become punctuation [sic] and are cluttering up the language to such an extent that real words may be totally obliterated.

**TWO-YEAR PROBATION:** There is nothing wrong with these words, but they're being over-used, particularly by restaurant critics and architects, and in this over-use tend to be pompous: **opt** and **ambiance**.

You're too late to contribute to the 1980 list (watch for it), but 1981 is just around the corner. To become a Unicorn Hunter, write to Banished, Unicorn Hunters, Lake Superior State College, Sault Ste. Marie, MI 49783.

—Cori Scarbnick

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