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## Symposium Keynote Summary

Do you want to write more efficiently and leave your reader with a greater understanding of your topic? The keynote speaker for our Symposium was writing coach Don Fry who shared some useful tips with us on how to improve our writing. We've compiled a summary of his presentation for you here, and if you would like to delve into this topic further, you can contact the PenSPRA librarian Jason Davidek and ask to borrow Don's book "Writing your Way."

As you can gather from the title of the book, over the years as a writing coach Don has found that most people don't write to meet their own needs; they write to suit someone else, either a teacher, boss, or an editor. Don has a 5 step writing plan, which we will describe below, but he also advises writers to experiment and find what works best for you, even if it seems "weird." If it works for you and results in quick, good writing, it's not weird!

The 5 steps in Don's writing method are: Idea, gather, organize, draft, and revise. In the idea stage, talk your idea out with someone else. Spend a few more minutes flushing out the idea of what you are writing with someone else than you did previously. As you are talking with them, you will find that the parts they don't understand about the topic are the parts you don't understand. The person you bounce ideas off doesn't need to be a writer or editor. They just need to be a general reader.

After the idea stage you are ready to gather information. Many writers like the gathering information step of writing. They tend, however, to gather too much information, which then slows down their writing. Don advises that the "who, what, where, when, why" approach to gathering information doesn't work in corporate communication, which is essentially what we are doing in school PR. That approach is for journalism, and should really only be used in journalism.

After you gather the information you feel is necessary to support your topic, the next step is to organize the information. In Don's experience as a writing coach, about half of his clients do not organize their writing. This is the step that is the biggest problem for most writers. Organize your piece in three blocks: predict, content and close. As you structure it remember Don's theory of "2-No-1" - Make sure you leave the reader with what you want them to remember. "2-No-1" means that the reader will remember the last thing first, the first thing second and won't remember much of the middle at all.

Before you begin your draft, Don advises a debriefing session; discuss the writing piece again with someone. He has found that debriefing will do more to improve your writing than any other action.

You are finally ready to write something! As you write the draft, Don says never to think about yourself when your fingers are touching the keys. Only think about what you are writing about. Doubt and negative voices will distract you from thinking about what you are writing about. Remember too that perfection in your piece will not come until the very end. Don't strive for perfect sentences as you draft. Wait until you revise.

Don't draft and revise in the same step. Draft, and then revise once. It is faster. One extreme technique Don has clients try is to write a piece by covering your computer screen and not looking at the screen. Only look at your fingers and write as fast as you can. Nearly all writers find this results in faster and better writing.

After your draft, read your piece **ALoud**. Use a pencil and make a mark on sections that need revision but don't stop reading to revise. When you read your piece aloud you hear it the way the reader reads it. After you read it aloud and make notes on needed revisions, you are ready to revise.

Finally, Don recommends you write the beginning to your piece last. He finds the rest of your piece will lead you to write the beginning.

Remember, writers are guides. Your piece is a map. Take your reader by the hand and direct them through. Happy Writing!

## Regional workshops

Save the date for the eastern region workshop – 9 am to 12 pm on Friday, June 6<sup>th</sup> at the Montgomery County IU. Look for details on the agenda in the next issue of e-Comm.

The western region will be having a workshop on June 20 at 1pm at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette education reporter Mary Niederberger will discuss what to expect from the media during a school crisis.

## Symposium Survey

Thanks to all of you who took a couple minutes to answer our survey on the Symposium. If you missed it the first time, here it is one more time for anyone who would still like to share their thoughts. It is for both people who attended and didn't attend the Symposium. Thanks for your input!

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yIMkL-pQveAeZ4VqD0OjSJduI3MJrOBZXg5QM\\_na2qM/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1yIMkL-pQveAeZ4VqD0OjSJduI3MJrOBZXg5QM_na2qM/viewform)

Members only button and page

In order to make our members only page easier to find, we added a red button on the home page of the PenSPRA website that says “members only.” The button takes you right to the page instead of having to access it through the “about us” page.

We sent log-in information to all members a few months ago but some of you have reported you didn't receive the information. We will re-send your log-in information shortly after the e-Comm is published today. You will receive an e-mail from eschoolview. Just let me know if you don't receive the information or if you have trouble accessing the members' only page.

#### Education Committee report on Charters and Cybers, and pending legislation

The House Education Committee recently released a report on the progress of Pennsylvania charter and cyber charter schools, and the status of current charter reform legislation. It is a lengthy report, but contains some important findings. Of note are:

On average, charters and cybers are performing worse academically than traditional public schools

Average public school SPP score is 77.1

Average charter school SPP score is 66.4

Average cyber school SPP score is 46.8

No cyber school scored above 70, which is the minimum academic standard

These results reflect results from the two years prior to this year

Charter school performance is not improving over time. Even charters open for more than ten years are not demonstrating significant gains

The last section of the report is a chart which compares all the pending legislation on charter school reform, which could be a handy resource.

Here is the full report

[http://www.pahouse.com/pr/Charter\\_and\\_Cyber\\_Charter\\_School\\_Reform\\_Update.pdf](http://www.pahouse.com/pr/Charter_and_Cyber_Charter_School_Reform_Update.pdf)

#### News from around the state and nation

The May primary is drawing attention to Corbett's “1 billion in cuts.” This article from last fall has the best explanation of the funny math the politicians are using for this issue.

[http://articles.philly.com/2013-10-24/news/43327455\\_1\\_education-funding-charter-school-reimbursement-corbett#0cmPlwEVOh9B3UI9.99](http://articles.philly.com/2013-10-24/news/43327455_1_education-funding-charter-school-reimbursement-corbett#0cmPlwEVOh9B3UI9.99)

This is a recent TV news story on the topic, which as you can see, fails to completely explain the issue.

[http://blog.pennlive.com/capitol-notebook/2014/04/whens\\_a\\_1b\\_cut\\_a\\_1b\\_cut\\_when\\_i.html](http://blog.pennlive.com/capitol-notebook/2014/04/whens_a_1b_cut_a_1b_cut_when_i.html)

This article has a good summary of the current plans for school funding that are in the news and ads

<http://touch.mcall.com/#section/-1/article/p2p-80025460/>

Some local and national coverage of the opt-out movement, which is gaining momentum both in PA and across the country

[http://www.ydr.com/local/ci\\_25558877/more-area-parents-are-taking-children-out-standardized](http://www.ydr.com/local/ci_25558877/more-area-parents-are-taking-children-out-standardized)

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2014/04/15/testing-resistance-movement-exploding-around-country/>

Cyber charter teachers have joined PSEA

<http://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2014/04/15/Pa-Cyber-Charter-teachers-join-union/stories/201404150088#ixzz2ywtg09qC>

Coverage of the tragedy at Franklin Regional High

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/region/2014/04/15/School-safety-requires-many-approaches/stories/201404150076#ixzz2ywuTjNYo>

Philadelphia is facing another extremely tough budget situation

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/26/us/shortfall-may-force-more-cuts-at-philadelphia-schools.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/26/us/shortfall-may-force-more-cuts-at-philadelphia-schools.html?_r=1)

The national graduation rate is on the rise – now at 80%

<http://www.post-gazette.com/news/education/2014/04/28/Study-4-in-5-students-graduate-high-school-in-U-S/stories/201404280120#ixzz30AidnRyp>