

Newsletters

Why are you doing a newsletter?

Who is your newsletter for? If there is more than one audience, what is their order of priority? What kinds of information do you believe they want or need? What do you want to tell or sell them? What are you trying to accomplish by producing a newsletter that couldn't be accomplished more effectively through other communications tools, such as posters, pamphlets, or even meetings? Setting clear objectives for your newsletter will not only help you choose among possible articles, but will also help to identify items that you might otherwise neglect to include. They also help to guide you through decisions about design and distribution.

Must it be expensive to be effective?

No! But it does need to be appealing to their eye, easy to read, interesting and useful. You can produce a very effective newsletter on a home computer with basic software.

Find the image that works for your chapter

The first thing anyone notices about a printed document isn't the content but what it looks like. Does it catch your eye? Does it look heavy, dense, overwhelming? Is it easily identifiable-does the recipient immediately know it's from you? What sort of image does it portray? Is it consistent with other CPF publications?

The "banner"

The "banner" or "nameplate" is the large header across the top of the front page. CPF-SK has graphics that are available to chapters (*check on the website for material that can be downloaded*)

Make your newsletter look like part of the CPF "family". A consistent image at all levels of the organization is important for instant recognition. It makes us look "together". A large banner immediately identifies who the document is from.

Headlines

The headlines initially draw attention to articles, alerting the reader to the content and piquing his/her interest. Later they help the reader find information s/he wants to review. So, make them eye-catching.



The “Look”

The typeface and layout you choose are an essential part of the image you project. Print that goes across the page instead of in columns, little white space, small headings, and no graphics all result in a dense, boring, and even intimidating document. There’s no one best layout. Don’t make the type size too small. Look for clean, clear lines and avoid fonts that are difficult to read.

Graphics and Pictures

Draw attention to your key articles and help break up text. Use graphs and/or charts to present statistics. Remember to include a map showing the location of your next meeting (and the best parking).

Look for photographs that have good contrast and simple subjects. Don’t use photos of children that can be identified. Lines or rules between columns, across the top and/or bottom of each page, around each page or around some key articles are another way to spice up your layout or draw attention to certain items.



Check out newsletters from other organizations as well as the CPF National and branch newsletters and analyze their “looks”-what matches your newsletter’s objectives? How is it achieved? Establish a look and then be consistent so that your members a) instantly recognize your newsletter instead of losing it in the mass of paper that seems to come everyone’s way, and b) are encouraged to read it. You can introduce refinements as you go along. If you have established a look for your newsletter noted the reasons, it will be easier for future editors to understand and abide by your decisions.

The “Proud of Two Languages” symbol (POTL) is a recognizable symbol of CPF. Electronic copies are available from CPF-SK.

Style and Substance

Writing for a newsletter is quite different from preparing an essay or a brief to your school board:

- Use the inverted triangle construction. Start with the most important/ interesting aspects of the story, working down to the least. Readers can get the critical points quickly, then decide whether they wish to read to the end. And you can shorten the story with ease if space is tight. The exception is an editorial or column aimed at persuading, when the “tell them what you’re going to say, say it, tell them what you said” outline may be more effective.
- Use subheadings to break up long stories
- Write correctly but informally
- When asking someone else to write an article, it’s important to make several things clear:
 - The reason for the article: the point to be made or illustrated, the information to be given, the message to be imparted
 - The target audience
 - The length
 - Your deadline

- If you want to use an abbreviation, first give the full term with the abbreviation in brackets after it. If you must use a term that is unique to CPF or to French-second-language education (FSL), define it either at the beginning of the article or in a footnote.
- Keep sentences short, language compact. Go back over your article and replace phrases with single words that will do. Then break up any remaining long sentences into two or three short ones.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Use the active rather than the passive voice: “we presented a brief”, not “a brief was presented”.
- Use strong and clear language: “change” rather than “modify”, “I” rather than “your editor”, “you” rather than “members”.
- Write headlines in the present tense, using the active voice “CPF Anytown Challenges Fee”, not “Brief on Fee Presented to School Board”. Even if it’s a President’s report, use a headline that relates to the content, not the author.
- Put your thesaurus to work to avoid repetition, stereotypical terms, and generic titles and descriptions.
- Be careful what you copy! Get permission before using someone else’s article or illustration.

Style Sheet

A style sheet is simply a cheat sheet to help you be consistent. It should include:

- Capitalization-whether or not to capitalize various words, such as “northeast” and “social studies”
- Numerals-usually words are used for zero to ten except as part of a series (“grades 3,5, and 7), numerals from 11 on except at the beginning of a sentence
- Spelling-“catalog” or “catalogue”, “colour” or “color”
- Referencing style-be consistent, always cite your source
- CPF-SK uses the following standards:

No capital letters for chapter, board, member, membership, grade, newsletter, intensive, core, any French title (only the first letter of the first word), except when these words are a direct quotation of text used in another publication.

Capital letters for any person's position or title, National (when referring to CPF National), French, English, Board of Directors, Francophone, Francophiles, Anglophone

- A style sheet is available from CPF-SK. Whatever conventions you choose to use, be consistent.

Putting It All Together

Some of your members will never have time to look at anything but the front page, so decide what you want to be sure they see-put that on the front page. Place the next most important articles on the back outside cover. Insert your standard items (events, calendar) inside. If you have too much material, ask yourself which items best meet the objectives of your newsletter. Are there any that can wait for a later edition? Can any be shortened or tightened?

Proofing vs. Goofing

Leave enough time in your schedule for careful proofing. Try to find one person who pays attention to content: inconsistencies, unclear sentences, and so on. Usually someone else will be better at reviewing your newsletter for details of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and so on. If you use French words, phrases, or names, have someone fluent in that language check out those sections-a missed accent is a spelling error, and a poor translation can completely change meaning. ("*camp de jour*" is "day camp" while "*camp du jour*" means "camp of the day"). Double check that names are spelled correctly and titles are accurate. Finally, no newsletter should be published until your chapter President has reviewed the content. This is both to check for accuracy and to ensure that s/he is aware of what your members are being told.

Finally

Send a copy to CPF-SK as part of keeping the branch informed as to what is going on in your community.

*Note: Much of this section has been drawn from **Newsletters Needn't Be Boring** by Judy Gibson*