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Christmas Newsletters Needn't Be Deadly, Says University of Dayton Writing Expert

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NEWS RELEASE

CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTERS NEEDN'T BE DEADLY, SAYS UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON WRITING EXPERT

DAYTON, Ohio — If you want your friends to smile instead of sigh when they open your Christmas card and find your annual family newsletter, keep professional standards in mind when you produce it, said Joyce R. Durham, associate professor of English at the University of Dayton who teaches, among other subjects, business writing.

In Durham's family, it's her husband, David, who writes the Christmas newsletter. She's the editor.

"If you're going to do it, like any newsletter, you need to be very sensitive to your audience," Durham said. "If you're sending a card to a business colleague who knows your spouse only vaguely and your children not at all, don't send the newsletter. And generally, a newsletter shouldn't be sent to people you see all the time throughout the year. Send it to people you don't see or write to but once a year."

Adhere to professional standards, she counsels, and summarize events instead of including every detail. Tell about the significance of having everyone in the family on the summer vacation and the feelings that you experienced rather than recounting every detail of your trip, she said.

Don't boast. "You can say nice things without boasting about your financial successes or your child's grade point average," she said.

Practical tips include keeping the length of the newsletter to one sheet of paper and keeping it visually interesting by using bold and underlined text and graphics that catch the eye.

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“Don’t overdo photos, particularly of children,” she said. Keep the author’s voice consistent, whether that’s a “we” voice representing the entire family or the “I” of a single author.

Most importantly, add a personal note to every single copy that you send out, Durham said. “Ask about the people you’re writing to. Why send a card at all unless you say something friendly in it? You want someone to smile because you’re keeping in touch with them. That’s the Christmas spirit.”

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