

THE SIMPLE SECRETS OF WRITING & SPEAKING (ALMOST) LIKE A PROFESSIONAL



COLLEGE EDITION

About the Author

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What can this book do for you?

The U.S. National Commission on Writing has reported that businesses are spending \$3.1 billion a year trying to teach employees to write clearly.

Quite simply, Americans are writing nonsense at work.

-- December 2004

Poor business writing is hardly a phenomenon limited to the USA. This book is based on *In the "I" of the Storm*, a short course (6-10 lessons) to help European business executives improve both their writing and speaking, both in English and their native languages. The principles and practices that govern good writing are almost exactly the same as those that govern good speaking, so these two imperative skills can be learned together.

Here are some of the accolades the course has received from business people who have completed it. And from the senior executives who encouraged and/or authorized their participation.

"I am very happy with the course you ran for my team. The level of their written English has greatly improved, as has their confidence in undertaking written work."

This testimonial comes from a Senior Sales Analyst with one of the world's largest mining companies and supplier of precious gems.

"Thank you very much for all your lessons about writing better. I have used the principles and practices you taught me to rewrite the document you critiqued. My boss was very pleased by the improvement.

"I am now working on another document that is also very complicated. I received drafts from colleagues in the United Kingdom. Both of them are native English speakers and have abundant experience in the subject. However, when I reviewed their texts, I found them full of many unnecessary words and phrases, and there was not always a logical link from one paragraph to another. I rewrote their texts to delete unnecessary words and phrases and to strengthen the logical structure. I think they are now much better.

"I still have a lot of room for improvement, but I am very pleasantly surprised that I am now able to revise texts that are done by native English speakers!"

This testimonial comes from a Japanese executive working in Brussels to facilitate trade between Japan and the European Union.

"Writing a good text is not as easy as it seems! But I'd like to think that after Mr. Yaffe's ***In the "I" of the Storm*** course, it has become less difficult.

"First, I realized that it is not the foreign language that is the problem (my native language is Dutch), but the way you write in general. Now, having taken the lessons, it's like there is a clearer structure in my mind before starting to write. The target I want to reach is better defined. When I am writing, I try to put myself in the mind of the reader, asking myself the questions he would ask in order to give him sufficient information, without overloading him.

"I have learned to pay more attention to keeping the content clear and easy to read, and to making sure there is a logical link between the sentences I am writing. I have learned to criticize what I write, and dare to rewrite it.

"Constant repetition of basic principles in the weekly sessions with Mr. Yaffe helped me remember them. Now, whenever I start to write they instantly pop into my mind. The different examples and exercises Mr. Yaffe used made it much easier to understand the principles."

This testimonial comes from the Brand Communication Manager—Europe, Asia and Africa for a major industrial company with European headquarters in Belgium.

Comments about the Book Based on the Course (published 2006)

"I am a technical writer living in Europe and I would like to tell you how much I enjoyed your book. It's so rare to read real information about writing. And so concise, all in one book!"

These comments come from a recognized specialist in banking and other industrial/commercial documentation.

"I have just read ***In the "I" of the Storm***. Quite simply, I think it's terrific.

"I found many descriptions and explanations direct and simple enough to use in my classes. Because my students come from incredibly varied backgrounds, I have a huge range of academic preparedness to deal with. So finding quick and simple ways to explain things is crucial.

Perhaps my favorite "nugget" is the notion that although it is appropriate to assume everyone will want to read what you write for creative projects ("creative writing attitude"), for expository writing it is appropriate to assume that **no one will want to**

read it (“expository writing attitude”). This discussion about “purpose and interest” is perhaps the best explanation of this vital writing principle that I have ever seen.

"I truly enjoyed this book. Overall, I find it to be incredibly direct, relevant and, most importantly, useful."

These comments come from a professor of writing at a technical college in the United States.

"Your book will be of considerable benefit to anyone reading it, because it's written well and presented in a short form that's easy to understand. Your recommendations for improving writing are well informed and should be read by anyone attempting to write well. Congratulations. It's a work of which to be proud of."

These comments come from the president of a leading news distributor in California and the western United States.

"I think you've done an admirable job of dealing with the extremely difficult problem of teaching business people how to communicate intelligibly, let alone effectively. I particularly like the careful and logical step-by-step approach you use in taking the reader from one point to a related one. What you have done merits the gratitude of anyone who has to read most official or business writing.

These comments come from one of America's leading coaches in business and expository writing.

A former reporter/feature writer with *The Wall Street Journal* and a marketing communication consultant, Mr. Yaffe teaches a course in good writing and good public speaking in Brussels, Belgium. This is an exceptional guide to help you sharpen your skills and rapidly learn to write and speak clearly, concisely, and persuasively. The principles are universal and the guide is fun and entertaining to read. Great work Philip!

These comments come from a leading Internet website devoted to the needs and interests of top-level business executives.

Why a Special College Edition?

An Indispensable Introduction

The book you have in your hands is exactly the same as *In the 'I' of the Storm* published in 2006, with one significant exception. The original book was aimed largely at busy business executives. It assumed that writing and public speaking were part of their jobs, but secondary to their principal functions. Therefore, they would be less motivated to really study and perfect these important skills.

This college edition assumes that you are no less busy, but that writing and speaking (writing, in particular) are absolutely crucial to your academic success. It therefore contains more than the original version. Not more fundamental principles and techniques, rather more examples and exercises.

A deeper exploration of these fundamental principles and techniques may be exactly what you need to reap maximum benefit over your relatively short academic career.

Let me start this exploration by explaining the origins of this book.

How an Ugly Duckling Became a Swan

Over the past 40-plus years, I have frequently been told that I am an exceptionally good writer, by teachers, friends, colleagues, and clients. But I wasn't always a good writing; in fact, I used be a very bad one.

So what happened to bring about this monumental change? Basically, university.

When I was growing up (I was born in 1942), I was a very unusual kid. I absolutely loved school. I was especially fond of math and science; I never really thought about writing. However, when I went from primary to secondary school, I quickly realized that writing would become increasingly important. So being the bizarre kid I was, I decided to teach myself how to do it.

I did two basic things. On my own:

1. I studied English grammar to the point that I knew it backwards, forwards, and upside down. I could put together the most involved, convoluted, grammatically flawless sentences imaginable.
2. I also studied vocabulary. Classically, I challenged myself to learn—and use—five new words a day. I very rapidly gained a vocabulary far above the norm for my age.

I then put the two things together and decided that the essence of good writing was intricate sentences liberally sprinkled with sophisticated vocabulary. This was how I wrote themes, essays, book reports, etc. As I expected, I always got top marks.

During my last year in secondary school, I submitted one of these arcane masterpieces, which came back with the traditional "A". But this time there was a note saying: "Philip, You have such interesting, original ideas. Why do you bury them under such complex, convoluted language? Next year when you go to university, I suggest that you take a one-term course in basic journalism to learn how to simplify your writing."

I had no particular interest in journalism, or even in writing. However, I did have particular respect for this teacher, so I decided to follow his advice. At university I enrolled in a first-term journalism class.

This was when everything changed.

At the end of the second week, the professor assigned us a short article to write. I confidently handed it in. But when it came back, instead of the traditional “A” grade, it had a “C”. I was severely shaken by this; I had never before seen a “C”. I worked rather harder on the second assignment, which also came back with a “C”.

I told myself that this just didn’t make any sense. So for the third assignment, I put my heart and soul into the work. This time it did not come back with a “C”; it came back with a “D”.

Now I was really shaken, and scared. I began really listening to what the professor was saying. Finally, I realized that writing clearly and concisely was much more difficult than the so-called “sophisticated” writing I had been doing.

Recognizing “simple” writing to be a challenge, I really concentrated on what I was doing, and my grades started to rise. Not just in journalism. Even better, I began getting complimentary notes from professors in other classes on how much they appreciated my new, crisp, clean writing style. In other words, what I was learning as basic journalism was generating positive results in my other academic pursuits.

For example, in a political science class I once turned in an essay that I knew went directly counter to the professor’s opinion. In an English literature class I turned in a review of one of the professor’s favorite books, which I trashed. In both cases the reaction was the same. I got an “A”. While neither professor was totally convinced, they both said I had presented my arguments in such a compelling manner, they simply couldn’t be dismissed.

Having discovered journalism, I subsequently joined the student newspaper, rose through the ranks, and in my final year became editor-in-chief.

I also began tutoring in writing. In the mid-1960s, universities did not have writing centers to help foundering students. About the only way to resolve writing problems was through private tuition.

I remember one case in particular. A girl came to me with a note from her professor: “Young lady, I advise you either to drop my course immediately or prepare to fail it.” Obviously, she was bright enough; after all she was a student at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). So where was the problem? I read a couple of her essays that had gotten such poor marks. There was no question that she had a lot of interesting things to say. Equally, there was no question that she was saying them very badly.

It very quickly became apparent where the problem lay. She simply was not fully using one of the fundamental principles of good writing, because she thought that consistently applying it was just too much trouble. It took a couple of sessions to

convince her that it was not too much trouble—in fact it was crucial. Her writing immediately began improving. At the end of the term, not only did not she fail the class, she had pulled her grade all the way up from a certain “F” to a solid “B”.

It is important to note that this is not a book about journalism.

It incorporates a number of key ideas from journalism. However, over the years I think I have added some insights into the good writing (and speaking) that I didn't learn in university. Or at least I have made explicit certain key ideas which previously were implicit, and therefore poorly applied.

Today, as when I was a student, my passion is still math and science. My career path has taken me in a somewhat different direction. But I don't regret it; it's been quite a journey.

The moral of the story? There are in fact two of them:

- Good writing—and by extension good speaking—are a fundamental skill, in academia and beyond.
- Beware of teachers bearing advice; it could radically change your life.

Fundamentals of Good Writing

How do “adult” writing and “childish” writing differ?

The short answer is—they don’t. People are fond of putting writing into categories—e.g. business writing, academic, political, scientific, argumentative, etc.—as if they were fundamentally different from each other. They aren’t.

Good writing is good writing, whatever the context.

For example, so-called “college (university) writing” is often declared to be significantly different from “secondary school writing”. This is not because the principles are different, but because they have different objectives. Much secondary school writing is aimed at helping students perfect their mechanical skills, i.e. grammar, vocabulary, syntax, diction, etc. In university, it is assumed that students already do these things well. The objective now is to help them perfect their thinking.

How can writing help perfect thinking?

At college level, most writing will require you to convincingly defend an opinion you hold or explore a situation and formulate a position. The technical term for this kind of writing is “argument” or “argumentation”.

For example, in secondary school you may be asked to write an essay on the United Nations. It probably would have been enough to say that the UN was founded after the Second World War, it is located in New York, its goals are to resolve conflicts and maintain peace. In college, such a description would be insufficient. You would probably have to compare the United Nations to the League of Nations formed after the First World War, discuss how the failure of the League of Nations influenced the founding and structure of the United Nations, comment on the UN’s successes and failures, and maybe enter into the current discussion over reforming the institution.

In this sense, “argument” does not mean simply stating an opinion and challenging people to take it or leave it. It means stating an opinion (even if it is to argue that it is too early to state an opinion) and trying to persuade people that your assessment of the situation is correct.

The interesting thing about building an argument is that sometimes while so doing, we may discover a new bit of information, look at the situation in a new light, or read someone else’s opinion of the subject, and in fact change our mind. This is what we mean saying that college-level writing can help you perfect your thinking.

In resume, building a credible argument means that your instructors will be looking for three things in your text.

1. **Claim**

They want a statement that encapsulates the subject in such a way that it encourages them to want to know more.

2. **Evidence**

They want facts, figures, statistics, the opinions of experts, etc., that would give them good reason either to agree with your claim, disagree with it, or suspend judgment in anticipation of further information.

3. **Balance**

They want to know that you have truly done your homework. Evidence is not always unambiguous. Any claim of real interest has both pros and cons. Are you aware of the cons? Have you dealt with them? An argument that shows only one side is unbalanced—and unbelievable. Your professor will know the cons, so if you ignore them to strengthen your argument, be prepared to be severely criticized.

The original version of *In the 'I' of the Storm* did not deal with how to research information, formulate a claim, marshal evidence, ensure balance, etc. Neither will this college edition. Our objective here is to help you best present your claim and supporting evidence in a clear, concise, persuasive manner.

If you are having difficulty with any of these other aspects of good writing, there are numerous other books with detailed information on such subjects. Even better, your college or university may have a student writing centre. If so, take full advantage of it. The resources and expertise it offers could be immeasurably helpful.

I would like to conclude this section with an instructive anecdote.

Before I became editor-in-chief of my university newspaper (*UCLA Daily Bruin*), I had been political editor. This meant, among other things, that I attended the weekly Wednesday meetings of the Student Legislative Council (SLC) and wrote a weekly editorial column about their activities. One evening they passed a piece of legislation that truly appalled me. And I said so with all the force at my command in my column.

The following Wednesday, I entered the SLC meeting room with considerable trepidation. Three of the student politicians approached me. "I'm really in for it now," I thought. Instead, I got an enormous surprise.

"You know, you have just written perhaps the most damning critique of SLC in living memory," one of them said. "But we aren't angry with you. You fairly and completely presented our side of the question. We disagree with your conclusions, but we cannot fault the way you presented your argument." They then sat down and the meeting went on as usual.

It's not only professors who appreciate college-level writing. Students do, too.

How do professional writers differ from other human beings?

As noted earlier, I have been a professional writer for four decades (since 1968). This was never my intention but it is how things worked out. When I was in school, I was passionate about math and science. Fortunately, most of my writing since then has dealt with scientific subjects, so my university degree has served me well.

But what exactly is a “professional writer”?

Anyone who has had a decent education is literate, i.e. they know how to write. Writing will probably be a part of your job, but could you make a living if it were the principal part, i.e. if you were directly paid for what you write?

Chances are, no. Professional writers are rare, making up perhaps 4% of the working population, or even less. So what distinguishes professional writers from non-professional ones?

You may be tempted to say “natural talent”. This no doubt plays a role, but only a minor one. The real difference is in how professionals go about their work—*their attitudes, methods, practices and procedures*.

Learning the simple secrets of the professionals can help you rapidly and dramatically improve both how you write and how you speak.

Actually, to call them “secrets” is probably an overstatement. No one is really trying to hide them; unfortunately, no one is really trying to promote them, either. They are “secret” in the sense that they are seldom taught in schools. Even books that purport to teach “good writing” seldom talk about them, preferring to offer tips, suggestions and warnings. These can be quite useful if properly applied. However, unless the basic principles of good writing are first defined and elaborated, these “tricks of the trade” cannot be truly effective.

The French have an excellent expression to describe this kind of situation. They say it is like “putting a cast on a wooden leg” (*mettre une plâtre sur une jambe de bois*).

We will not make this mistake. Before looking at specific techniques, we will first examine exactly what we mean by good writing—and even define tests for determining when a text is truly well written. Next we will look at the details of good writing. Because then, and only then, can specific practices and techniques be applied to best advantage.

Finally, we will look at how these self-same principles, practices and techniques can be applied to speaking

Know what you are doing

Many commercial companies do not live up to their potential—and sometimes even go bankrupt—because they fail to correctly define the business they are in.

Perfume companies, for example, do not sell fragrant liquids, but rather love, romance, seductiveness, self-esteem, etc. Bio-food companies do not sell organic produce, but rather honesty, purity, nature, etc. Automobile manufacturers do not sell transportation, but rather freedom, adventure, spontaneity, prestige, etc. The fact is, each industry, even each individual product, may have to determine what it is truly all about—and there are thousands of them!

We writers are lucky. There are numerous variations to what we do, but there are really only two fundamental types of writing. It is important to recognize this, because not only are they quite different, in some respects they are exactly opposite. So unless we clearly recognize which type of writing we are doing—and how it differs from the other one—we will almost certainly commit serious errors.

What are the two types? And how do they differ?

<u>Creative Writing</u>	<u>Expository Writing</u>
Texts such as short stories, novels, poems, radio plays, stage plays, television scripts, film scripts, etc.	Texts such as memos, reports, proposals, training manuals, newsletters, research papers, etc.
The fundamental purpose of creative writing is to <u>amuse</u> and <u>entertain</u> .	The fundamental purpose of expository writing is to <u>instruct</u> and <u>inform</u> .

Essential attitude towards expository writing

Because the objectives of creative writing and expository writing are so different, before striking a key you must adopt the appropriate attitude towards the type of writing you are going to do.

➤ Creative writing attitude

Everyone wants to read what you are going to write.

After all, who doesn't want to be amused and entertained?

➤ Expository writing attitude

No one wants to read what you are going to write.

Most people don't like to be instructed and informed. They probably would much prefer to be doing something else.

The importance of recognizing and adopting the "expository writing attitude" cannot be over-stated, because it can dramatically change the very nature of what you are writing. Here are three examples.

A. Corporate image brochure

I was once commissioned to write a corporate image brochure. Two things are certain about these expensive, glossy booklets:

- Almost all companies of any size feel compelled to produce them.
- Virtually no one ever reads them.

Starting from the attitude that no one would want to read what I was about to write, I created a brochure that people not only read. They actually called the company to request additional copies to give to friends, clients and professional colleagues!

B. Stagnating product

On another occasion, I was commissioned to develop an advertising campaign to revitalize a product with stagnating sales. Applying the expository writing attitude, I discovered that three of the product's key benefits were not being properly exploited. Why? The manufacturer felt that ***everything*** about the product was important, so for years they had been systematically burying these three key benefits under an avalanche of other information of less interest to potential buyers.

The new campaign sharply focused on the key benefits; virtually all other information was moved into the background or eliminated. As a result, sales shot up some 40% in the first year.

C. Advertising classic

The power of the “expository writing attitude” can perhaps best be illustrated by the Avis rent-a-car campaign. In the early 1960s, it propelled the name Avis to international prominence. And sent shivers down the spine of Hertz, until then their much larger and better-known competitor. “We try harder”, the slogan at the heart of the campaign, is still used by the company today, more than 40 years after it made marketing history.

This self-same expository writing attitude can be applied almost universally, not just to writing. Appendix A shows examples of its application—and stunning success—in professional trade shows. Since you are probably wondering how it happened, you will also find the details of this amazingly successful corporate image brochure.

Essential approach to expository writing

Because creative writing and expository writing have essentially different objectives and attitudes, they require essentially different approaches.

➤ **Creative writing approach**

*Play with language to generate **pleasure**.*

In other words, use your mastery of the language to amuse and entertain.

➤ Expository writing approach

Organize information to generate ***interest***.

Clever use of language will never make dull information interesting; however, you can *organize* the information to make it interesting. Forget about literary pyrotechnics. Concentrate on content.

We are now going to leave creative writing. If you have fully understood the differences between creative writing and expository writing, further comparison would not be useful. *However, it is crucial to remember these differences, so if you ever have any doubts, **re-read this section**.*

What do we mean by “good writing”?

When someone reads an expository text, they are likely to judge it as good or not good. You probably do this yourself. But what do you actually mean when you say a text is “good”.

After some struggling, most people usually settle on two criteria: ***clear*** and ***concise***. A third important criterion is seldom mentioned: ***dense***. We are going to look at these aspects of good writing in some detail. Unless we agree on how to measure what we are doing, it is unlikely that we will agree on whether or not we have achieved it.

A. Clarity

How do you know that a text is clear?

If this sounds like a silly question, try to answer it. You will probably do something like this:

Question: What makes this text clear?

Answer: It is easy to understand.

Question: What makes it easy to understand?

Answer: It is simple.

Question: What do you mean by simple?

Answer: It is clear.

You in fact end up going around in a circle. The text is clear because it is easy to understand . . . because it is simple . . . because it is clear.

“Clear”, “easy to understand”, and “simple” are synonyms. While synonyms may have nuances, they do not have content, so you are still left to your own subjective appreciation. However, what you think is clear may not be clear to someone else.

It is far better to give “clear” an objective definition, almost like a mathematical formula. To achieve clarity in a text—*i.e. virtually everyone will agree that it is clear*—you must do three things.

1. **Emphasize** what is of key importance
2. **De-emphasize** what is of secondary importance
3. **Eliminate** what is of no importance

In short:

$$C_L = EDE$$

Like all mathematical formulae, this one works only if you know how to apply it, which requires judgment.

In this case, you must first decide what is of **key importance**, *i.e.* what are the key ideas you want your readers to take away from your text? This is not always simple to do. It is far easier to say that everything is of key importance, so you put in everything you have. But there is a dictum that warns: *If everything is important, then nothing is.* In other words, unless you first do the work of defining what you really want your readers to know, they won't do it for you. They will get lost in your text and either give up or come out the other end not knowing what they have read.

As the writer, you have to decide what information and ideas are of key importance.

What about the second element of the formula, de-emphasize what is of **secondary importance**?

That sounds easy enough. You don't want key information and key ideas to get lost in details. If you clearly emphasize what is of key importance—*via headlines, Italics, underlining, or simply how you organize the information*—then whatever is left over is automatically de-emphasized.

Now the only thing left to do is eliminate what is of **no importance**.

I hope you see that we now have a problem. How do you distinguish between what is of secondary importance and what is of no importance? Once again, this requires judgment, which is helped by the following very important test.

Secondary importance is anything that supports and/or elaborates one or more of the key ideas. If you judge that a piece of information in fact does support or elaborate one or more key ideas, then you keep it. If not, you eliminate it.

A word of warning

Resist the temptation to keep information because it is “interesting” or “unusual”, or because you spent a lot of time researching it. The reader, consciously or subconsciously, will always be asking himself why a piece of information is

there. If it is neither of key importance nor secondary importance, it will make your text less clear.

B. Conciseness

How do you know that a text is concise? If this again sounds like a silly question, let's again try to answer it.

Question: What makes this text concise?

Answer: It is short.

Question: What do you mean by short?

Answer: It doesn't have too many words.

Question: How do you know it doesn't have too many words?

Answer: Because it is concise.

So once again we end up going around in a circle. The text is concise because it is short . . . because it doesn't have too many words . . . because it is concise.

Once again we have an almost mathematical formula to solve the problem. To achieve conciseness, your text should meet two criteria. It must be as:

1. **Long** as necessary
2. **Short** as possible

In symbols:

$$C_o = LS$$

If you have fulfilled the criteria of "clarity" correctly, you probably already understand "as long as necessary". It means covering all the ideas of key importance you have identified, and all the ideas of secondary importance needed to support and/or elaborate these key ideas.

Note that nothing is said about the number of words, because it is irrelevant. If it takes 500 words to be "as long as necessary", then 500 words must be used. If it takes 1500 words, then this is all right too. *The important point is that everything that should be in the text is fully there.*

Then what is meant by "as short as possible"?

Once again, this has nothing to do with the number of words. It is useless to say at the beginning, "I must not write more than 300 words on this subject", because 500 words may be the minimum necessary.

"As short as possible" means staying as close as you can to the minimum. But not because people prefer short texts; in the abstract the terms "long" and "short" have no meaning. The important point is that **all words beyond the minimum tend to reduce clarity.**

We should not be rigid about this. If being “as long as necessary” can be done in 500 words and you use 520, this is probably a question of individual style. It does no harm. However, if you use 650 words, it is almost certain that the text will not be completely clear—and that the reader will become confused, bored or lost.

In sum, conciseness means saying what needs to be said in the minimum number of words. Conciseness:

- Aids clarity by ensuring best structuring of information.
- Holds reader interest by providing maximum information in minimum time.

C. Density

Density is a less familiar concept than clarity and conciseness, but it is equally important. In mathematical form, density consists of:

1. Precise information
2. Logically linked

In other words:

$$D = PL$$

Importance of precise information

Let’s try an experiment. Suppose you enter a room where there are two other people and say, “It’s very hot today.” One of those people comes from Alaska; in his mind he interprets “hot” to mean about 24°C (75°F). The other one comes from Texas; to him “hot” means 44°C (111°F).

You are off to a rather bad start, because each one has a totally different idea of what you want to them to know. But suppose you say, “It’s very hot today; the temperature is 30° C (86°F)”. Now there is no room for confusion. They both know quite clearly that it is 30° C outside and that you consider this to be very hot.

Using as much precise information as possible in a text gives the writer two significant advantages:

- **Mind Control**

Let’s not be embarrassed by the term “mind control”, because this is precisely what the good expository writer wants to achieve. He needs for the reader’s mind to go only where he directs it and nowhere else. This is also what the reader wants. After all, he is reading your text to find out what you think; he already knows what he thinks.

Because they can be interpreted in unknown ways, ambiguous terms (so-called “weasel words”) such as “hot”, “cold”, “big”, “small”, “good”, “bad”, etc.,

allow the reader's mind to escape from the writer's control. An occasional lapse is not critical; however, too many weasel words in a text will inevitably lead to reader confusion, boredom and disinterest.

- **Reader Confidence**

Using precise information generates confidence, because it tells the reader that the writer really knows what he is talking about.

Reader confidence is important in any kind of text, but it is crucial in argumentation. If you are trying to win a point, the last thing you want is for the reader to challenge your data, but this is the first thing that imprecise writing will provoke. Precise writing ensures that the discussion will be about the implications of the information, i.e. what conclusions should be drawn, not whether the whole thing needs to go back for further investigation.

Importance of logical linking

Precise data (facts) by themselves are insufficient. To be meaningful, data must be organized to create information, i.e. help the reader understand.

There are two important tests to apply when converting data into information:

1. **Relevance**

Is a particular piece of data really needed? As we have seen, unnecessary data damage understanding and ultimately undermine confidence. Therefore, any data that do not either **aid understanding** or **promote confidence** should be eliminated.

2. **Misconceptions**

The logical link between data must be made explicit to prevent the reader from coming to false conclusions. For example: a specific situation may be mistaken for a general one; credit for an achievement may seem to belong to only one person when it really belongs to a group; a company policy may appear to apply only in very specific circumstances rather than in all circumstances, etc.

To ensure that a logical link is clear, place the two pieces of data as close to each other as possible, preferably right next to each other.

When data are widely separated, their logical relationship is masked and the reader is unlikely to make the connection.

Important Tip

The definitions of “clarity”, “conciseness” and “density” are absolutely crucial, **so memorize them word for word and their formulae exactly as written.**

We are all familiar with Einstein’s famous equation $e = mc^2$ (energy = mass x the velocity of light squared). But it would be less familiar if the next time we saw it, it were written $e = c^2m$, or $e = mcc$, $e = ccm$. These are all the same formula; however when written differently each time we see it, it loses its impact.

Likewise, if each time you start to write, you think about “clarity”, “conciseness” and “density” using different words, they too will lose their impact. And all the enormous benefits these simple, fundamental concepts have to offer.

What do you want? What do your readers want?

I frequently ask non-professional writers what they are thinking when they sit down at the keyboard. The answer is usually something like, “How do I want to present my material?” “What tone and style should I use?” “In what order should I put my key ideas?” And so on.

However, if you start with the correct attitude, i.e. no one wants to read what you write, your first task is none of these. Ahead of anything else, you must **find reasons why people should spend their time to read what you write.**

In general, you cannot force people to attentively read what they don’t want to, even if they are being paid to do so.

For example, you produce a report defining opportunities for increased sales and profits. However, if it is not well written, even people who must read it as part of their job are unlikely to give it their full attention. On the other hand, if they immediately see their own self-interest in reading what you have written, they will do so gladly and with full attention. In fact, you probably couldn’t stop them from reading it!

There are various methods for generating such a strong desire to read. These will be explained later (see Appendix B). *The crucial thing is to recognize the imperative need for using them. Until this need is met, nothing else is of any importance.*

What can we learn about writing from our daily newspaper?

You may not have thought about it, but newspapers provide the best examples of clear, concise, dense writing you can find anywhere; otherwise people wouldn’t read them.

Journalists not only write superbly well, they do so extremely rapidly. When a news event occurs, they do not have the luxury of spending several days to put together their text. At best, they have a few hours.

Suppose that the Eiffel Tower in Paris collapses at 6:30 p.m. The journalists covering the catastrophe would be obliged to gather all relevant information, write a clear, concise, dense article, and have it ready to go to press by 11:30 p.m. so that the newspaper could be printed and delivered to its readers by 7:00 a.m. the next morning. If the event had happened at 10:30 in the morning, you would probably already expect to see it on the front pages of newspapers printed that afternoon.

Can understanding how journalists work their “daily miracles” help you write better at your much more leisurely pace? Indeed, it can!

Let’s look at an example. Here is a story from an international newspaper.

Britain yesterday renewed its call for the United Nations to mount a peacekeeping operation in the violence-torn Darfur region of Sudan in response to increasing complaints from aid agencies on site that international efforts to help Darfur’s desperate, displaced population are woefully inadequate.

At the same time, Her Majesty’s Government is joining with other European Union countries to threaten sanctions against Sudan unless its government energetically moves to end the “ethnic cleansing” against black villagers in Darfur by the mainly Arab Janjawid militias. UN officials report that the conflict has already claimed from 30,000 - 50,000 lives and about 1.2 million people have been displaced, with about 200,000 seeking refuge in neighboring Chad.

(And the story continues)

In the first paragraph, we learn that:

1. The British Government is concerned about the situation in Darfur.
2. Darfur is a violence-torn region of Sudan.
3. Britain believes a peacekeeping force is urgently needed.
4. It is pressing the United Nations to supply this peacekeeping force.
5. This is not the first time it has called on the UN to supply a peacekeeping force.
6. The population of Darfur has been displaced.
7. Aid agencies in Darfur say that international assistance to these distressed people is inadequate.

In the second paragraph, we learn that:

1. The trouble in Darfur is a race war.
2. Arab militias are attacking black villagers.
3. Britain and other European Union countries believe the Sudanese Government is not doing enough to stop the war.
4. They threaten sanctions against Sudan if its government does not quickly take action to end the attacks.
5. To date, some 30,000 - 50,000 people have been killed.
6. About 1.2 million have been displaced.

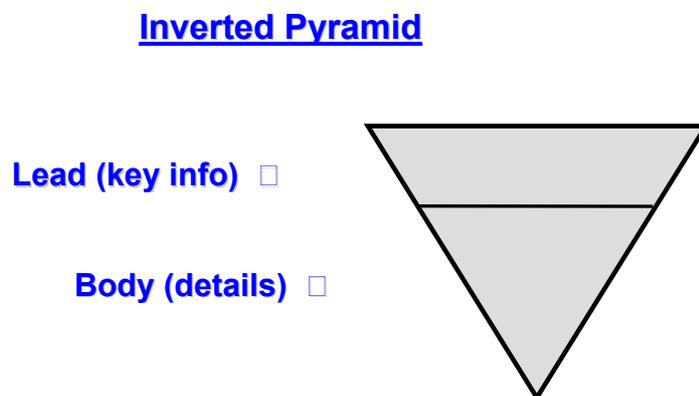
7. About 200,000 have fled across the border into the neighboring country of Chad.
8. These figures come from the United Nations, which is a reliable source.

Assume that you knew absolutely nothing about Darfur before reading this text. Within two paragraphs you have learned virtually everything you need to know about this tragic situation.

This is certainly clear, concise, dense writing at its very finest. But how does it happen?

Inverted pyramid

The basic structure of a news story is known as the “inverted pyramid”. It looks like this.



Historically, the inverted pyramid had nothing to do with improving writing; it was developed for an entirely different purpose. Therefore, before examining how it works, it would be useful to see where it comes from, and how it became the standard for superior expository writing.

A couple of centuries ago, there were very few newspapers because there were very few people to read them. They were read essentially by the top echelons of society—emperors, kings, the nobility, government ministers, etc. They were published infrequently (weekly rather than daily) and they had very few pages. It was therefore assumed that every reader would want to read everything they printed.

As literacy spread and newsgathering techniques improved, the number of readers increased, the number of pages increased, and weeklies became dailies. This acceleration of newsgathering and reporting presented a serious technical problem.

In more leisurely days, if a story was too long for the space assigned to it, there was always plenty of time to either rewrite the story or redesign the page. However, when newspapers became dailies—with some even having several editions each day—this was no longer possible.

What newspapers needed were stories that they could cut off from the bottom. In this way, instead of laboring to revise a story at the last minute, they could simply remove the last few sentences or paragraphs, and the job was done.

However in order to do this, stories had to be written in a very special way. It is of no value simply to cut from the bottom if the lost information is crucial for the reader to understand what the story is all about. Consequently, stories had to be written “top down”. All key information had to be concentrated at the beginning and all secondary information presented in declining order of importance. In this way text could be deleted from the bottom and no one would know that it had ever been there.

This was the inverted pyramid. It worked extremely well, because it not only solved the mechanical problem of overly long texts, it also turned out to be how people prefer to get their information, particularly when they are in a hurry.

With today’s computer technology, the mechanical problem that gave rise to the inverted pyramid is no longer relevant. However, because it constitutes the very basis of good expository writing, the inverted pyramid is still held in high esteem.

How to use the inverted pyramid

It is one thing to say that all key information should be concentrated at the beginning and that all secondary information should be presented in declining order of importance. It is quite another thing to achieve it. Let’s look at the two parts of the inverted pyramid in some detail.

- **Constructing the lead**

The beginning of the story (“lead”) must be concise, i.e. as long as necessary, as short as possible. This may be a single sentence or several sentences, whatever is appropriate.

Journalists often say that they spend about 50% of their time writing the lead; writing the rest of the story also takes about 50% of their time. Why? Because this is usually how long it requires for them to determine the key information to put into the lead, and then to package this information in a clear, concise and dense manner. After that, the rest of the story almost writes itself.

As you might have guessed, determining this key information is not a matter of intuition. There is a method. Before journalists start to write, they ask themselves a series of questions known as the **5Ws & H**.

1. **Who?** Who are the person or persons involved in the story?
2. **What?** What happened?
3. **When?** When did it happen?
4. **Where?** Where did it happen?

5. **Why?** Why did it happen?
6. **How?** How did it happen?

Not all these questions will be relevant all the time, but they provide a good test. After writing the lead, check to see how many of the questions have been answered. If any answers are missing, there are two possible reasons:

- The question isn't relevant, so do nothing.
- The question is relevant but was neglected, so rewrite.

Another way to evaluate the lead is the **Stop Reading Test**. Remember, you are generally writing for busy people. They generally do not want—and often do not need—to read the entire text. So ask yourself: At what point could someone stop reading and still get a clear, sharp picture of what the text is all about? If they would need most or all of the text, you must do some serious rewriting.

- **Constructing the body**

Take a second look at the inverted pyramid. It is a pyramid because at each point from the lead downward the information becomes less and less important. This does not mean the information is necessarily less interesting; that is for each individual reader to determine. However, it is no longer vital.

But how do you arrange information in descending order of importance? Remember, it must be possible to delete information from the bottom without anyone knowing that it was ever there.

I will not try to suggest that this is easy; it requires a lot of skill and practice. But once again, there is a method that offers considerable help. It is called the **Q & A Technique**. It works like this.

After each sentence you write, examine it to see what question it could raise in the mind of your readers.

Then answer it !

If you do this consistently, you will find the answers becoming more and more detailed, so the information will become less and less vital. When you run out of questions, it is probably a good time to stop writing.

Example of 5Ws & H

Here is the lead of a story in an international newspaper.

Super-sportsman Lance Armstrong, seven-time *Tour de France* winner, filed suit Wednesday in a Paris court to force the publisher *La Martinière* to include his denial of doping charges in

a new book about him, scheduled to reach bookstores in September.

Here are the 5Ws & H.

1. **Who?** Lance Armstrong, seven-time *Tour of France* winner
2. **What?** filed suit against the publisher *La Martinière*
3. **When?** Wednesday
4. **Where?** in a Paris court
5. **Why?** to include his denial of doping charges in a new book about him
6. **How?** (not relevant)

Note the “Who” is not simply Lance Armstrong but “Lance Armstrong, seven-time *Tour of France* winner”. The name Lance Armstrong may not be immediately familiar to everyone, but with this description even people who have never heard of him would now know who he is.

Similarly, the “What” is not simply that he filed a lawsuit but that he filed suit against “the publisher *La Martinière*”. This is an excellent example of density. Most readers probably will not know who *La Martinière* is, but they will know that the writer does, which reinforces their confidence in the accuracy of the text.

Exercise

Find the 5Ws & H in this article.

Muhamed Al Fayed, owner of Harrod’s, London’s prestigious department store, Thursday attacked CBS by filing suit against the American television network for having shown a photo of Diana, Princess of Wales, as she lay dying next to his son Dodi. The offending picture was taken by a Paparazzi photographer just moments after the August 1997 car crash in Paris that killed both the Princess and his son. Mr. Al Fayed contends that by broadcasting the photo across America, CBS had invaded his privacy and had caused him severe emotional distress.

Answers

1. **Who?** Muhammad Al Fayed, owner of Harrod’s, London’s prestigious department store
2. **What?** filed a law suit against American television broadcaster CBS
3. **When?** Thursday
4. **Where?** (not specified, will probably be added in following paragraph)
5. **Why?** for having shown a photo of Diana, Princess of Wales, as she lay dying next to his son Dodi
6. **How?** (not relevant)

It is one thing to identify the 5Ws & H in professionally written leads such as in these two examples. It is quite another thing to determine what is ***missing*** in a poorly written lead. Identifying what isn't in a text is perhaps the best way to fully understand and appreciate how useful the technique of the 5Ws & H really is. In Appendix C, you will find several exercises that ask you to do just this.

In Appendix D, you will find a detailed analysis of a news article according to the Q & A technique.

Uses of the inverted pyramid outside of journalism

You may now feel that the inverted pyramid is an excellent idea—for newspapers. But is it relevant for the type of writing that you do?

Emphatically, yes!

Remember, the inverted pyramid provides information in exactly the way people prefer it, particularly when they are in a hurry.

Suppose you are writing some kind of company report—a financial analysis, a new product proposal, changes to the company's employment policies, etc. It runs to 20 pages. Obviously you cannot organize it into one big inverted pyramid; even the most accomplished professional writer wouldn't attempt such a daunting task. However, you can organize it into sections and subsections, and write these as inverted pyramids.

You can even go a step further. Most such reports begin with an executive summary. Write this as you would the lead of an inverted pyramid, i.e. be certain that all the key information is located there and that it is presented in a clear, concise and dense manner.

Treating the executive summary as the lead of an inverted pyramid is not easy, but it confers some extraordinary advantages on both the writer and the readers.

• Advantages for the writer

Identifying and writing the executive summary first⁽¹⁾ helps you to:

- Determine what information you really need in the body of the report (key importance, secondary importance), and what can be eliminated (no importance)
- Organize the body into the most appropriate sections and subsections
- Present the information in each section and subsection in descending order of importance

(1) *Yes, you read correctly. You should write the executive summary **before** you write the body, at least as a rough draft. To emphasize the point, perhaps we should replace the term “executive summary”, which implies writing the body first and then summarizing it, by something more appropriate such as “executive briefing”, “executive focus”, etc.*

- **Advantages for the readers**

With an executive summary written like the lead of an inverted pyramid, readers can:

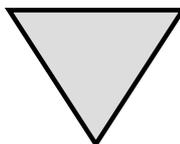
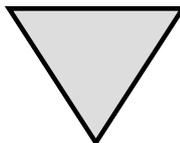
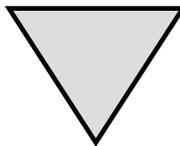
- Get a clear overview of what the report contains
- Determine which sections and subsections of the body may be of particular interest
- Decide whether or not they even need to read the body at all⁽²⁾

(2) *Remember, you are dealing with busy people; they have neither the time nor the desire to read the entire report. What they really want is for the writer to clearly identify what they **must read** (executive summary). Any additional material they may wish to read should be left to their own judgment*

General structure of a well-written report

**Executive Summary
(5 Ws & H)**

Sections & subsections



Professional writing tips and techniques

Now that we have fully covered the fundamental principles of professional writing, we can look at some specific tips and techniques. But remember, they can be effectively applied only when these fundamentals are consciously and consistently observed. Otherwise you will end up “putting a cast on a wooden leg”.

To help you keep these fundamental principles uppermost in mind, here they are in review.

Professional Expository Writing

Fundamental Purpose
Expository writing is designed to inform and instruct.

Fundamental Attitude
No one wants to read what you are going to write.
First and foremost, you must give them reasons for doing so.

Fundamental Approach
Organize information to generate interest.

Definition of Clarity: $C_L = EDE$

- Emphasize what is of key importance
- De-emphasize what is of secondary importance
- Eliminate what is of no importance

Definition of Conciseness: $C_O = LS$

- Long as necessary
- Short as possible

Definition of Density: $D = PL$

- Precise information
- Logically linked

Inverted Pyramid

- **Lead**
Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- **Body**
Detailed information in declining order of importance

General writing tips and techniques

The principles of good writing are the same in all languages; the following tips and techniques are therefore applicable to all languages.

Fog factors

Unnecessary words in a text cause fog (reduced clarity). **Eliminate them.**

Fog: On the one hand the box was big and on the other hand it was green.

Clarity: The box was big and green.

Fog: When we take into account those factors that have an effect on the economy

Clarity: Concerning economic factors

Fog: In the last place on the list

Clarity: Finally

Remember:

Nothing in a text is neutral.

Whatever doesn't add to the text, subtracts from it.

Sentence length

Contrary to the popular belief, a logically constructed long sentence can be easier to understand than several shorter ones. ("Long" and "short" are weasel words, because what is long in one situation is short in another.)

- Check "long" sentences for **logical coherence**.
 - If the ideas are closely related, leave the sentence alone.
 - If not, divide it into logically coherent shorter ones.
- Check "short" sentences for **logical linkage**.
 - If the ideas in several sentences are closely related, put them together into a single sentence.
 - If not, leave them separate.

Placement for Emphasis

- Words at the **beginning** and at the **end** of a sentence have stronger emphasis than those in the middle. Put important information in these key locations to aid reader understanding.

Example

Poor

Astronomers hunting for evidence of life outside of our solar system announced discovery of a new class of planets yesterday.

Better

Yesterday astronomers hunting for evidence of life outside of our solar system announced discovery of a new class of planets.

Best

Astronomers hunting for evidence of life outside of our solar system yesterday announced discovery of a new class of planets.

Parentheses & Dashes

Use parentheses (these are parentheses) to incorporate explanatory or secondary information into a sentence.

Use dashes—these are dashes—to highlight exceptionally important information within a sentence.

Example

Newspapers used to be published infrequently (weekly rather than daily) and had very few pages. When they became dailies—*with some even having several editions each day*—they no longer had time to rewrite stories to fit the space for them on the page.

Separation

Separate a key idea from a longer sentence for dramatic impact.

Poor

Only a few years ago, we were a small specialty manufacturer in Europe, but we have grown, so that today we are no longer small.

Better

Only a few years ago, we were a small specialty manufacturer in Europe, but we have grown. Today we are no longer small.

Separation can also be used with paragraphs. This may lead to single-sentence paragraphs, which many grammarians and conventional writers would say violate some kind of grammatical rule (who makes these rules!). However, professional writers will frequently ignore this rule when it increases clarity; dramatic effect and clarity often go hand-in-hand.

You have already seen many examples of paragraph separation throughout this book. Here are two of them.

Conventional writing

Over the past 40 years, I have frequently been told that I am an exceptionally good writer, by teachers, friends, colleagues, and clients. But I wasn't always a good writer; in fact, I used be a very bad one.

So what happened to bring about this monumental change? Basically, university. When I was growing up (I was born in 1942), I was a very unusual kid. I absolutely loved school. I was especially fond of math and science; I never really thought about writing. However, when I went from primary to secondary school, I quickly realized that writing would become increasingly important. So being the bizarre kid I was, I decided to teach myself how to do it.

Professional writing

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Conventional writing

You may now feel that the inverted pyramid is an excellent idea—for newspapers. But is it relevant for the type of writing that you do? Emphatically, yes! *Remember, the inverted pyramid provides information in exactly the way people prefer it, particularly when they are in a hurry.*

Professional writing

You may now feel that the inverted pyramid is an excellent idea—for newspapers. But is it relevant for the type of writing that you do?

Emphatically, yes!

Remember, the inverted pyramid provides information in exactly the way people prefer it, particularly when they are in a hurry.

Repetition for Clarity

- Do not be afraid to repeat a word for clarity and emphasis. *Continually changing terminology causes hesitation and reduces clarity.*
 - The big dog looked at me strangely. I am afraid of big dogs, so I cautiously moved away.
 - **Not:** The big dog looked at me strangely. I am afraid of large canines, so I cautiously moved away.
- If you wish to use more than one term to mean the same thing, be certain that you clearly inform the readers.

Poor

Atopic dermatitis is a common disease of infants aged 0-2 years. About half of all infants with infantile eczema will develop asthma before their fourth birthday.

Better

Atopic dermatitis (infantile eczema) is a common disease of infants aged 0-2 years. About half of all infants with infantile eczema will develop asthma before their fourth birthday.

Avoid Using the Conjunction "and"

The conjunction "and" is like an equal sign, indicating that the two ideas it connects have essentially the same weight. However, often they don't; one idea is more important than the other. Make this relationship explicit; don't expect the reader to do it.

Example

- **Poor**

It started to rain **and** John went into the house.

- **Better**

It started to rain, **so** John went into the house
It started to rain; **therefore** John went into the house
Because it started to rain, John went into the house.
As it started to rain, John went into the house.

text while your conscious mind is focused somewhere else. When you do work on the revised draft, you will be more efficient. You will produce a much better text in much less time than if you try to do the two phases simultaneously or immediately after each other.

Specific writing tips and techniques in English

English, like other languages, has its own ways of doing things. These can be exploited to increase clarity (help the reader to understand). However, aspects that are characteristic of English are not necessarily unique to it. If you are not a native English speaker, as you read these tips and techniques, ask yourself if they also apply to your native language or any other language in which you may need to write.

General vs. Specific

- English usually distinguishes general things from specific things by whether or not it employs the definite article (“the”).
 - “I like cats” (cats in general)
 - “I like the cats” (specific cats, not necessarily all cats)

Important exception

- The dog is man’s best friend (all dogs, all men)
- The computer is changing society (all computers)
- The words “a” and “one” mean the same thing. “One” is more precise; therefore, it adds emphasis.
 - I have eaten in a Japanese restaurant
(*at least one, perhaps more*)
 - I have eaten in one Japanese restaurant
(*precisely one, no more*)

Active vs. Passive Voice

- English uses passive voice much more than some other languages because its verbs do not really have a pronominal form (se développe, ontwikkelt zich, se desarrolla = is developing).
 - **Active voice** = action and/or conviction
 - **Passive voice** = neutrality and/or indifference
- Prefer active voice except where neutrality and/or indifference are consciously desired.
 - **Active voice:** Management approved the new product
 - **Passive voice:** The new product was approved by Management
- Occasionally mix passive voice with active voice to avoid an impression of aggressiveness or dogma.

Standard vs. Phrasal Adjectives

- Adjectives generally come in front of a noun, so avoid phrasal adjectives.
 - A last-minute decision
 - **Not**: A decision of the last minute
- Don't be afraid to use a phrasal adjective when it aids clarity.
 - The 14th provision of the European Union Constitution
 - **Not**: The 14th European Union Constitution's provision

Past vs. Present Tense

- Don't use a past tense when a present or future situation is clearly indicated.
 - The United Nations said that malaria is still a worldwide health menace.
 - **Not**: The United Nations said that malaria **was** still a worldwide health menace.
 - The President asserted that the economy is going to remain strong at least until 2010.
 - **Not**: The President asserted that the economy **was** going to remain strong at least until 2010.

Employ this technique with caution because it may get you into trouble. Most people would use the second form ("was") because they believe a grammar rule says a sentence that starts in the past tense must remain in the past tense. Professional writers ignore this rule when it clearly makes no sense (see examples in Appendix E).

If you are not a native speaker, check your own language to see if it has the same "rule". And if professional writers ignore the rule when it makes sense to do so.

Progressive vs. Fixed Tense

- English verbs carefully distinguish between something that is happening, and something that frequently happens or has happened and is now finished. Correct use of these verb tenses can add interest and aid clarity.
 - **Simple present**
I eat (in order to live).
 - **Present progressive**
I am eating (at this very moment).
 - **Simple past**
I ate yesterday.
 - **Past progressive**
I was eating when the telephone rang.

Infinitive vs. Noun

- In English a conjugated verb is seldom followed by the infinitive of another verb. The preferred form is to show the result of an action (noun) rather than the action to be taken (infinitive).
 - I hear him coming (coming = noun)
 - **Not:** I hear him to come (to come = infinitive)
 - He did this with the aim of collecting data (collecting = noun)
 - **Not:** He did this with the aim to collect data (to collect = infinitive)

If you don't recognize "coming" and "collecting" as nouns, remember that a gerund (-ing form of a verb) is a type of noun, which often serves as an adjective.

Example: Collecting stamps is an interesting hobby.

- **Exception**

When the verb includes the preposition "to", it is correct to use the infinitive.

- They are going to come
- **Not:** They are going to coming

The verb is considered to be "to go to" because "to go" without the preposition has a different meaning.

The common expression "I am looking forward to seeing you" seems to defy the rule. This is because it is elliptical (some words have been left out). The full expression is "I am looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you", which obeys the rule.

Eliminate the Definite Article

The definite article ("the") is generally used to:

1. Identify a specific thing
2. Refer to a previously mentioned thing

When this is clear from the context, at the writer's discretion the definite article may be eliminated.

Example

A. With definite article

The European Union Commissioners yesterday discussed **the** ways to help **the** new EU members more easily integrate their economies.

B. Without definite article

European Union Commissioners yesterday discussed ways to help new EU members more easily integrate their economies.

Analysis

- The (all) European Union Commissioners, not a specific group of them
- The (all) ways to help, not a specific set of them
- The (all) new EU members, not only the most recent 10 members

These specific writing tips and techniques in English are located here in the theoretical part of the book rather than in the appendices because I consider them to be of key importance. You will find a number of other tips of secondary importance in the appendices.

Good writing is not easy . . .
but it gets easier

Oral Presentations: Giving Voice to Your Words

It should come as no surprise that if you write better, you will also speak better. This is because the fundamental principles of good writing—the expository writing attitude, clarity, conciseness, density, inverted pyramid, etc.—are identical to those of good speaking.

Nevertheless, writing and speaking are distinct disciplines. Thus, while the principles are the same, how to apply them effectively to speaking must be closely examined.

How are writing and speaking similar?

Essential Attitude

Writing

No one wants to read what you write

Speaking

No one wants to hear what you say

While less true for speaking than for writing (see ***How are writing and speaking different?***), in both cases your primary task—*before anything else*—is to give your readers and listeners reasons why they should be interested in the information you are about to give them.

Essential Approach

Writing

Organize information to generate **interest**

Speaking

Organize information to generate **interest**

Speaking in public obviously requires a different degree of mastery of the language than does writing. Nevertheless, the essential approach is identical.

Fundamentals

For both writing and speaking, it is of course still necessary to be:

- **Clear**—effectively use the three elements of clarity (**C_L = EDE**)
- **Concise**—effectively use the two elements of conciseness (**C_O = LS**)
- **Dense**—effectively use the two elements of density (**D = PL**)

You should also make full use of the inverted pyramid, i.e. a clear, concise, dense lead (introduction); then the Q & A technique to develop the body of each section of your presentation.

How are writing and speaking different?

The differences between writing and speaking are rather subtle. They arise from the fact that readers and listeners have somewhat different mindsets.

Essential Attitude

Writing

No one wants to read what you write (*expository writing attitude*)

It is safe to assume that when readers pick up an expository text, their initial attention is rather low. Since they probably do not want to read it, they are not fully concentrated on the task at hand.

Speaking

No one wants to hear what you say (*expository speaking attitude*)

Although listeners may not want to hear what you say, nevertheless they have made the effort to come together with you. For at least the first few minutes, therefore, they are likely to be totally focused on your presentation. Make good use of this initial high attention, because it is fragile and can rapidly dissipate (see **Listener Attention** below).

Fundamentals

There is no difference between writing and speaking with regard to “clarity”. However, there are slight but important differences with regard to “conciseness” and “density”.

Clarity ($C_L = EDE$)

Remember, clarity means:

1. **Emphasize** what is of key importance
2. **De-emphasize** what is of secondary importance
3. **Eliminate** what is of no importance

Whether you are writing or speaking, clarity remains imperative. Indeed, there is nothing more important.

Conciseness ($C_O = LS$)

- *As long as necessary*

Whether you are writing or speaking, you must still be as long as necessary. Whatever your time constraint, it makes no sense to leave out important information necessary for clarity. The inevitable result is that you will either confuse your listeners or leave them dissatisfied. One way or another, you must

be certain that you include in your presentation everything that is needed to make it clear.

So what do you do when time is limited?

Ideally, you should seek more time. If the need for additional time is properly explained to the person in charge, it may very well be granted. If not, the following could help:

1. Never cut out anything of key importance.

If key ideas are sacrificed, you might as well not give the presentation at all.

2. Reduce things of secondary importance

You might think that you need about 30 seconds to relate a piece of secondary information, but on reflection you may find that you could do an adequate job in 25 or even 20 seconds.

3. Eliminate some things of secondary importance

Suggesting this is not sacrilege.

- If you have three pieces of secondary information to support a key idea, using only two of them could be just as effective. Eliminating one of them could save precious time.
- Carefully review your material. Certain pieces of information you have already decided to use may in fact be borderline, i.e. your judgment about whether they are of secondary importance or no importance could have gone either way. If you have any doubts, eliminate them.

- *As short as possible*

In writing, we saw that any words beyond the minimum needed to be “as long as necessary” damage clarity. We also saw that expository writing should give information to readers as rapidly as possible, because this is what they want.

In speaking, listeners are not in quite such a hurry. They may not admit it, but in addition to being informed they also want to be entertained. To be fully effective, oral presentations need to be both expository and creative. This is why a pleasant voice, good eye contact, good body language (i.e. anything that makes the presentation a more agreeable experience) are useful to oral success.

But let’s not exaggerate their influence. *The single most important thing you need in order to be a successful speaker is enthusiasm.*

Passion for one’s subject is infectious; listeners respond. If you make it clear that you are deeply committed to what you are saying, all the behavioral aspects of oral presentation, however useful, will fade into the background.

Density (D = PL)

Precise information is crucially important in both writing and speaking, and for the same reasons:

1. **Listener confidence**

The more you seem to know about your subject, the more listeners will want to hear what you say. Using precise information generates this confidence and interest.

2. **Mind control**

Precise information does not allow unpredictable interpretations. Therefore, the more precise information you use, the more firmly you control the listeners' minds.

But be careful. However much they resemble each other, reading precise information and listening to precise information are fundamentally different.

A reader can stop and think about a piece of information if he finds it of special interest, or skip over it if he finds it of no interest.

A listener can do neither, because it is the speaker who controls the situation. When something in a presentation particularly arouses a listener's interest, it is the speaker who decides how much time will be spent on it. When the listener finds some part of the presentation dull and tedious, there is no escape. He can only sit through it, waiting for the speaker to move on to something more interesting.

How do you handle these important differences between writing and speaking? Here are some suggestions:

- **Prepare the listeners**

Before giving a block of precise information, data, statistics, etc., tell the listeners why you are doing so. In other words:

- First make a general statement
 - Then give the precise information needed to support it
- What you are in fact doing is creating "oral bullet points".

- **Limit the amount of precise information**

Unlike readers, listeners cannot take hold of a piece of information and examine it. First it is there, then it is gone. Listeners will therefore more easily accept the validity of a general statement with less supporting information than they might demand in a text. Indeed, giving too much supporting information during an oral presentation can become tedious, and therefore counterproductive.

- **Ensure that related information is logically linked**

In writing, failure to make logical links clear is a serious fault; in speaking, it is close to a sin. The speaker has total control. If logical links are not instantaneously apparent, listeners have absolutely no possibility of making these vital connections themselves.

As in writing, the best way to ensure logical linkage is by putting related information as close together as possible, reinforced by a linking transition such as “**Information A** naturally implies **Information B** because”

If it is not possible to place them one immediately after the other, when the second element does appear, use a linking transition to alert listeners to their relationship.

Example: “A few moments ago we looked at **Information A**. It should now be no surprise that **Information B** is a necessary consequence of **Information A**”

Listener Attention

As noted early under **Essential Attitude**, it is reasonable to assume high initial listener attention at the beginning of an oral presentation, but we must not allow this advantage to dissipate. To profit from this advantage, we must first make a fundamental distinction between how readers behave and how listeners behave.

When you sit down to read a text, chances are that you try to isolate yourself from noise and other distractions. If someone interrupts you, you might ask them to come back later when you have finished what you are doing. In large measure, readers control their reading environment.

Listeners have no control over their environment. If someone nearby starts making comments, listeners could be distracted. If someone starts coughing, listeners could be distracted. If someone enters the room, they could be distracted. If someone leaves the room, they could be distracted. And so on.

Each time listeners are distracted, you as the speaker lose some precious mind control. What can you do to prevent this from happening?

Exercise your control.

You may not be able to eliminate distractions, but you do have it in your power to significantly reduce them.

- The first thing is to rivet the listeners’ attention on what you are saying by being certain that it is clear, concise, and dense. If each listener can easily understand and appreciate the importance of your words, distractions will be less intrusive and loss of mind control will be reduced.
- The second thing is to support your presentation with well-designed visual aids. Attention goes where the eye goes. A well-conceived series of slides can do wonders to diminish the power of distractions and maintain mind control.

➤ Finally, you can ask questions. In my course and presentations, I always designate key moments to engage listeners by challenging them in this way. For example:

→ First, I define the appropriate attitude for a creative writer as, “Everyone wants to read what I am going to write.” Then I ask what would be the appropriate attitude for an expository writer. A few timid volunteers usually offer their opinions, and usually one of them finally answers, “No one wants to read what I am going to write”. If not, I give them the answer and then explain it.

→ Another good moment to ask a question occurs during the definition of clarity. I give the listeners the first two elements (emphasize what is of key importance, de-emphasize what is of secondary importance). I then ask, “What do you suppose the third element would be?” Someone almost always gives the correct answer: “Eliminate what is of no importance.”

Asking questions not only helps maintain mind control, it memorably impresses key ideas on the listeners—a significant advantage!

How can you most effectively use body language?

In the first edition of this book, I did not talk about the use of body language in speaking because I didn’t feel I had anything original say. Since then, on many occasions I have heard people say that effective public speaking depends up to 93% on body language and only 7% on words.

This contention must not go unchallenged. In fact, it is nonsense.

If your objective is to convey important information and ideas, or to convince people to consider and adopt your point of view, words are crucial. No matter how effective your eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, etc., if people cannot easily understand and assimilate what you are saying, your effort is useless.

This can easily be demonstrated. How many great orators of the early to mid 20th century moved audiences—and indeed changed the course of history—via radio, where body language was not an option?

So where did this pernicious myth come from? Well, actually it is based on serious scientific research. Unfortunately, like much scientific research, careless interpreters have distorted it beyond recognition.

The source of this distortion are studies carried out in the 1960s by Prof. Albert Mehrabian at UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles). In essence, Prof. Mehrabian said that effective spoken communication consists of three elements:

- 7% on the meaning of the words that are spoken
- 38% on para-linguistics, i.e. the way that the words are spoken
- 55% on in facial expression

But note, he was talking mainly about informal spoken communication, i.e. the sort you might engage in at social gatherings (dinner party, after-work drink, etc.). Or on a somewhat more formal occasion such as a job interview, where you are trying to impress people by who you are totally, not your specific words. Also note that Prof. Mehrabian does not use the term “body language”. Instead, he talks about “facial expression” which, along with eye contact, body movement, hand gestures, etc., is only one aspect of body language.

In short, Prof. Mehrabian valid research in one area of spoken communication has been grafted on to public speaking, often with unwanted results.

For example, some speakers regularly pace back and forth in front of an audience because they believe movement attracts and holds their attention. Indeed, it does. However, when movement is mechanical and as predictable as a metronome, it has exactly the opposite effect. Likewise, speakers who mechanically wave their hands around or constantly shift their weight from one foot to the other are making the same mistake.

The true purpose of body language is not to focus attention on the speaker, but on what he or she is saying. Movements that take on a life of their own are counterproductive.

So what should be the proportion between words and movement in a successful oral presentation? This question has no answer, because it makes no sense. It all depends on what the speaker is saying and what kind of response he is seeking to achieve.

Perhaps the best overall advice on the subject comes from Toastmasters International. Founded in California in 1924, Toastmasters is a worldwide club (not a school) devoted to improving public speaking. In their manual for members (more than 200,000 in more than 80 countries), they say:

Body language should look natural and unrehearsed, and be consistent with the words being spoken. Using body language that is comfortable for you and enjoyable for your audience takes thought and practice.

After you have drafted your speech, read it and note any places where body language would be appropriate and help convey your message. Try several different ways of using your arms, hands, and facial expressions.

Match your gestures to your words. You should be compelled to gesture and make facial expressions when your thought requires such action.

In short, body language must complement and reinforce your words, never overpower them.

How can you design effective slides?

Vocabulary note

In distinguishing between writing and speaking, I have used the terms “readers” and “listeners”. We are now going to look at slides, which are visual, not auditory, so it may seem strange to continue talking about listeners. However, slides are aids to listening and understanding. To keep this crucial idea firmly in mind, I prefer to maintain the term “listeners” rather than switching to “viewers” or “audience”. This may sound strange at first, but you will rapidly get used to it.

For full effectiveness, slides should be designed according to well-defined principles and precepts. Unfortunately, this is seldom the case.

Slides I have seen too often seem to have no thought or structure behind them at all. Because they have no coherent schema to guide them, slide designers appear to do whatever pleases them. They make little effort to “please” the listeners, i.e. enhance the communication, which is the only real reason for using slides in the first place.

The fundamental principles of good writing and good speaking make an excellent foundation for designing effective slides.

Keep in mind that the following suggestions are guidelines, not rules. There may be occasions when you will not wish to apply some of them. But if you do decide to depart from the schema, be certain you have very good reasons for doing so.

As a philosopher once noted: *“Knowing what needs to be done is usually the easy part. The hard part is doing it, because so often it appears to be easier or more fun to do something else.”*

Fundamental Objectives

Before you can do anything well, you need to understand why you are doing it. Visual aids in general and slides in particular have two fundamental objectives.

1. Help the speaker deliver a better presentation
2. Help the listeners better understand the presentation

Every aspect of slide design must fulfill these two objectives.

As we recall from the definition of “clarity”, anything that does not respond to at least one of these objectives should be eliminated. Excuses such as a certain design feature is “artistic”, “original”, “colorful”, “exciting”, etc. are irrelevant. Whatever doesn’t clearly add to your presentation, surely subtracts from it.

The following principles and practices deal mainly with text slides.

There is a false belief that most slides—if *not all of them*—should be illustrations. If your objective is to show the beauty of a tourist destination, the genius of an architectural concept, the difficulty of a manufacturing procedure, etc., then illustrations make sense. But images are distracting. Each person’s eyes will be attracted to different parts of the image according to their own likes and interests, which means the speaker loses mind control.

Therefore, if your subject does not naturally call for visual support, **illustrated slides should be avoided.**

Basic Structure of a Slide

Effective slides generally consist of two parts.

- **Heading**

The heading announces the subject to be discussed, thereby preparing the listeners for the information they are about to receive.

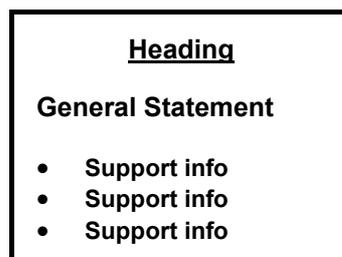
If several slides are devoted to the same subject, the same heading should appear on each succeeding slide. Eliminating the heading because it is “redundant” requires the listeners to remember the subject to which the information refers. This is the equivalent of using the word “respectively” in writing. It is far more effective to remind the listeners of the subject each time you pass from one slide to the next.

- **Body**

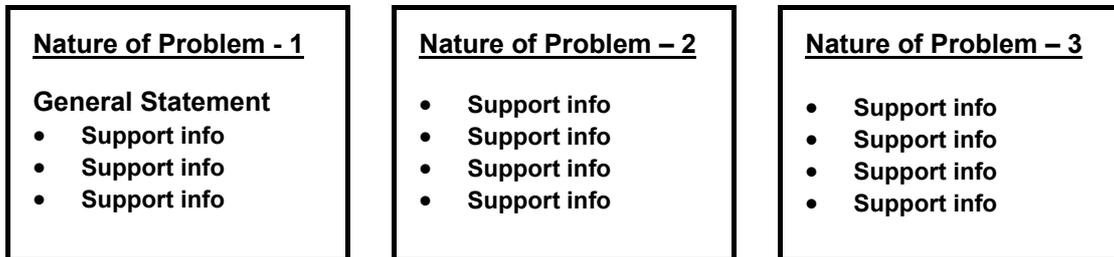
The body serves to examine specific aspects of the subject announced in the heading

Basic Layout of the Text

Whenever possible, the top part of the slide should make a general statement. The general statement serves to **emphasize** a key idea. The rest of the slide should **reinforce** the key idea by supporting or elaborating the general statement. This often takes the form of bullet points.



Tip: A carefully conceived heading on the first slide can often serve as a reminder of the key idea on succeeding slides, so that the general statement does not have to be repeated.



Style of the Text

Let's agree that the moment the text appears on the screen, people will want to read it. Let's agree that they read at different rates, so that some will finish sooner than others. Finally, let's agree that those who finish rapidly are likely to let their minds wander to thoughts other than the presentation.

This implies loss of mind control, which is the last thing you want to happen.

There are several effective ways to prevent loss of mind control with text slides. Some have to do with the structure of the slides themselves, others with the way the speaker uses the slides. Effective speaker behavior will be discussed later under ***How can you use slides most effectively?***

One way to maintain mind control is to keep the text on the screen to an absolute minimum. The less people must read, the more likely they will finish more or less together, so there is less opportunity for their minds to wander.

Minimal text on the screen confers another significant advantage. It encourages listeners to immediately re-focus their attention on the speaker for elaboration of what they have just read. To abuse a metaphor, you could say that the slide is the appetizer and what the speaker says about the slide is the main course. What could be better than that!

Extremely short text is often referred to as "telegraph style", because this is how people wrote telegrams in the past to save money on the number of words. Today, it might be called "SMS style", for the same reason. Whichever term you prefer, it basically means employing sentence fragments rather than full sentences, eliminating definite articles, using abbreviations, etc. Some speakers even delete much standard punctuation, notably full stops, commas and semicolons at the end of bullet points. Consider this example.

A

Style of Text

The style of the text should be telegraphic. This is in order to:

- Minimize how much text the listeners must read on the screen;
- Re-focus the listeners' attention on the speaker so that he can elaborate what is on the screen.

B

Style of Text

Telegraphic

- Minimize how much text listeners must read
- Re-focus listeners' attention on speaker for elaboration

Both slides give essentially the same information, but they do not have the same effect. **Example A** is heavy and tedious, and takes considerable time to read. **Example B** is light and crispy, and takes only moments to read. Over a series of 20 - 30 slides, which would you prefer?

Choice of Colors

Like every other aspect of a slide, its colors should aid understanding. Colors must not be chosen for their "esthetic value", because this often gets in the way of understanding.

Three of the most common errors are:

- **Color combinations that damage readability**

The classic example is white type on a red background. The red tends to swallow the white, making the text difficult to read. Other typically poor combinations are white on blue, yellow on blue, blue on yellow, and red on black.

Choose color combinations that **reinforce readability**.

- **Too many colors**

A lot of colors on the screen may be "esthetic", but they are also confusing. In general, limit colors to three or four. Any more than this is almost certain to be detrimental.

- **Color coding**

Color coding is the practice of identifying related data on graphs and charts by assigning them the same color. This is a good idea in books, but not on slides.

- First, it almost invariably requires more than four colors, often leading to poor combinations for readability (e.g. white on blue, red on black, etc.).
- More importantly, it causes the eye to trace out the different color trails on the slide while the speaker is talking. This means the listeners are not really listening to what the speaker is saying because their attention is either split or totally somewhere else. In turn, this means loss of mind control, the one thing that we must never allow to happen.

Backgrounds

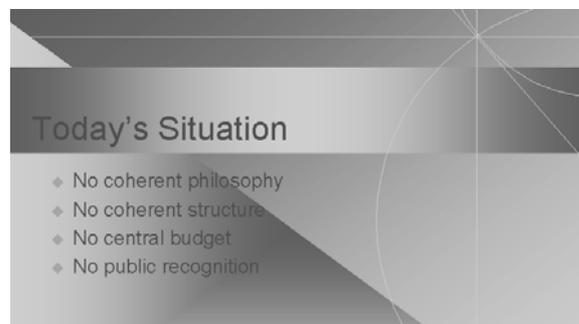
The terms “foreground” and “background” clearly indicate their purpose. The foreground contains materials put up front where they can be easily seen, because they are the stars of the presentation.

The background is there to support the foreground, not to compete with it. In particular, the background should reinforce the text. Therefore, keep the background simple. Avoid complex patterns and other “esthetic” artifices that:

- Compete with the text for listener attention
- Make the text difficult—and sometimes impossible—to read

Example

This slide has been converted to black and white. It is even more difficult to read in color.



Animation

Until fairly recently, slides were either 35 mm transparencies or overhead transparencies. By their very nature, they were fixed and couldn't move. With today's computer slide software, animation is not only possible, it is temptingly easy.

Don't be lured. Use animation to highlight key ideas, not to entertain.

For example, if you are showing a flow chart, animation can emphasize the flow. If you are showing bullet points, animation can reinforce the importance of the general statement and then each piece of data supporting it.

Animation used for entertainment usually distracts from the idea or ideas the slide is trying to convey. Flashing lights, spinning texts, cartoon characters moving in the

background, and other “theatrical effects” may charm the eye, but they damage comprehension.

Be consistent in use of animation. Choose a style, then stick to it. Frequently changing animation style also damages comprehension.

Exception

Use of theatrical effects and style changes can provide emphasis. Use such artifices sparingly. Listeners must recognize that these departures from convention signal something special, so they should pay closer attention. Changing style too often has the opposite effect. *When everything is special, then nothing is.*

How can you use slides most effectively?

Basic structure of the presentation

We now have a set of well-designed slides, so half the problem is solved. The other half is how to use them to best advantage during a presentation. This in turn depends on how well the presentation itself is structured.

There is a story about a famous speaker who was interviewed about his success. He was neither very educated nor very articulate, yet every time he spoke vast numbers of people came to listen to him. “So what is the secret of your success?” the interviewer asked. “It’s really quite simple,” he replied. “First, I tell them what I’m going to tell them. Then I tell them. Then I tell them what I told them.”

In my favorite version of the story, the speaker gives his response in the laconic, honey-flavored drawl of the American Deep South. But whatever the accent, the advice is sound. And by now should be rather familiar to you. It is in fact a form of the inverted pyramid.

- **Tell them what you are going to tell them (lead)**

In other words, give the listeners a clear, concise and dense résumé of what the speech will be all about. In this way, they will already know what to expect, so they will be alert to the importance of the more detailed information to follow.

- **Tell them (body)**

Elaborate on the key ideas you introduced in the résumé. And of course you do so by dividing the speech into sections and sub-sections, each one structured in the form of a mini-inverted pyramid.

- **Tell them what you told them (conclusion)**

This is somewhat different from the inverted pyramid described earlier in this book, but not alien to it. The basic reason for invention of the inverted pyramid was so that a news article could be cut off at the bottom and no one would know that anything was missing. There is another kind of article found in newspapers and magazines called “features” and “editorials”. These do not relate news, i.e. what is happening at this very moment, but offer background, comment and analysis.

Readers start such an article knowing that it will be deeper and more elaborate than a news article. Feature writers therefore have the luxury of assuming that many people will read the article to the end. And of course the listeners in an oral presentation have little choice but to remain to the end. Therefore, we can use a structure slightly different from our classic inverted pyramid.

- The beginning will give a kind of executive summary (Tell them what you are going to tell them).
- The body will be structured in sections and sub-sections, and will be elaborated in mini-inverted pyramids (Tell them).
- The conclusion (Tell them what you told them) will review the key points for emphasis, express a strong opinion based on the key points, raise a call for action (we must remedy this situation now), etc.

Basic behavior of the speaker

Below you will find a number of suggestions about how to use slides most effectively. Like most other things in this book, the term “effectively” has a precise, functional definition. To be truly effective, slides must be used to:

1. Benefit the speaker
2. Benefit the listeners

It is not a question of either/or. *The speaker and the listeners must both benefit; otherwise, neither one will.*

• Use build-up slides

Try this experiment. Get a newspaper or magazine and open it to any page. Keep looking at it, *but try not to read anything on the page*. It is virtually impossible. The moment the eye is confronted with text, there is a natural tendency to read it.

Many speakers commit the error of putting too much text on the screen. They expect the listeners to pay attention only to the part they are talking about and to ignore the rest. While the speaker is talking about item 1 of a bullet point list, the listeners will almost certainly be reading items 2, 3, 4 and 5.

The result is loss of mind control. Since mind control ensures better comprehension, using slides in this way is detrimental to speakers and listeners alike.

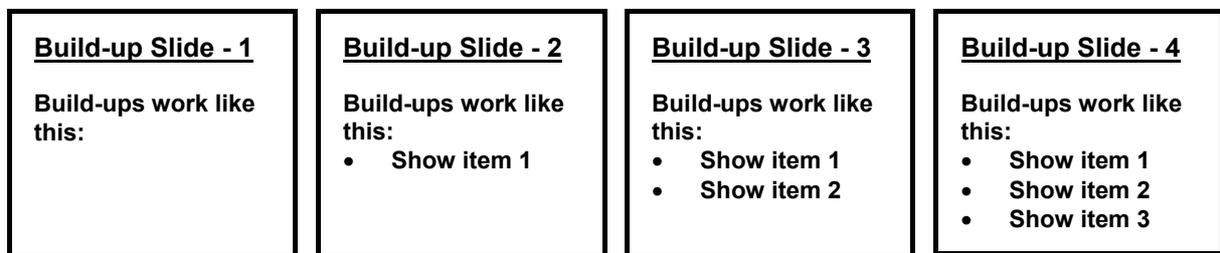
To maintain mind control, introduce text gradually, not all at once.

In the days of 35 mm and overhead transparencies, this was achieved by using “build-up slides”. Instead of showing five bullet points on a single slide, the speaker prepared six sides. The first showed only the general statement; the rest of the screen was left empty. The next one showed the general statement plus bullet point 1 while the rest of the screen was left empty. The next slide showed the general statement plus bullet points 1 and 2. The same was done for each succeeding slide. It was only on the last slide that the full text became visible.

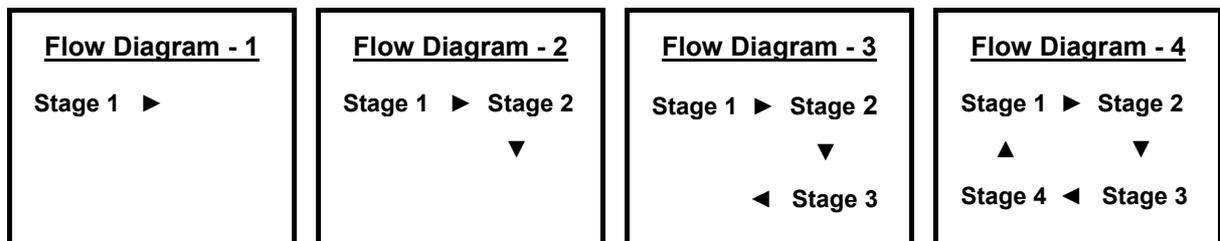
Producing six slides was considerably more expensive than producing only one. But it was also considerably more effective.

You should use the same technique with computer-generated slides. There is essentially no additional cost. Moreover, you can use animation to highlight each new item as it appears on the screen in order to reinforce its importance.

Text slide



Illustrated slide



- **Read the text to the listeners**

Another common, attention-diverting mistake is when the speaker continues talking while the listeners are reading. Once again, this results in loss of mind control.

The remedy is quite simple. *The speaker should read the text aloud to the listeners.* This ensures that:

1. The attention of the listeners is first focused totally on the text
2. Next, it is focused totally on the speaker

This way, listeners are not forced to split their attention by reading the slide and listening to the speaker at the same time. Mind control is maintained, and everyone benefits.

- **Use your laser pointer correctly**

My *bête noire* (black beast) is in fact red. It is the horrendous way that many speakers use their laser pointer. Like old-fashioned stick pointers, lasers should be used to:

- Help listeners identify and better understand the importance of key words and phrases in text slides
- Help listeners identify and better understand the importance of key elements in photos, drawings, diagrams, and other visuals

Pointing is all that is necessary. Do not keep circling key words or visual elements. Do not keep swinging the laser beam back and forth across the screen. The eye will naturally follow these movements. Since they add nothing to the presentation, they can do nothing but subtract from it.

The best way to avoid making these distracting gestures is by using the pointer as name implies. Just point to identify the key word or element you want to talk about, then turn it off. When you want to point to something else, simply turn it on again.

- **Pace your slides**

Slides support what the speaker is saying. Therefore, they should:

- Appear on the screen only when needed
- Stay on the screen only as long as needed

The first point is obvious. You don't want to show a slide before you are ready to talk about it. And of course hardly anyone ever does this.

Immediately removing the slide from the screen when it is no longer needed apparently is less obvious. Many speakers leave a slide on the screen while they talk about something else just to have something there until they are ready for the next one. Worse, they create "filler slides" they don't really need just to have something there.

Both tactics damage the presentation. As long as something is on the screen, the eye will be attracted to it. This reduces attention on the speaker and what the speaker is saying.

When you do not really need a slide, do not show one. Either leave the screen blank or project a soft background color until the next slide is needed. This is the best way to maintain mind control, to everyone's benefit.

Tips for giving better presentations

Overcoming nervousness

Even experienced speakers feel nervous at the beginning of a presentation. However, if you are well prepared, nervousness will rapidly disappear.

Being well prepared means that you put your presentation together by applying the expository speaking attitude (no one wants to hear what you say), and the “mathematical formulae” for clarity, conciseness and density. If you are going to use well-constructed slides, you will be even better prepared.

What else can you do to overcome nervousness? Here are a few suggestions.

- **Be yourself**

We have all seen speakers whose presentations we admire. It is only natural to think, “If only I could do it the way they do it, I would be a great success.” You can learn from other speakers; however, the worst thing you can do is to try to imitate them.

Chances are that you admire them because when they speak, they project themselves, not someone else. Listeners sense honesty and passion, and appreciate it. Your style is your style; your thoughts are your thoughts. They are unique. No one else can use them as well as you can, just as you cannot use other peoples’ style and thoughts as well as they can.

Be yourself, and enjoy it!

- **Have an excess of information**

The more information you have when preparing your presentation, the better you can choose what to use and what not to use. However, information you choose to leave out is not useless. It is proof that you know more about your subject than what you are going to say.

If you put everything you have into the presentation, of course you will be nervous, because you will fear that the listeners will find what you are saying to be weak and shallow. By contrast, knowing that you have chosen the real pearls of your subject to present to your listeners will make nervousness disappear.

- **Memorize the introduction & conclusion**

It is generally a bad idea to either read or memorize your presentation, because this tends to drain it of personality and spontaneity. Nevertheless, you are well advised to memorize both the introduction and the conclusion word for word.

Introduction

- To capitalize on the listeners' initial high interest in your presentation, you need a clear, concise, confident statement of what you are going to talk about ("tell them what you are going to tell them"). The introduction should be carefully crafted and memorized word for word in order to leave nothing to chance.
- Knowing exactly what you are going to say at the beginning helps you get comfortably up to cruising speed. Initial nervousness rapidly disappears.

Conclusion

- The conclusion is perhaps the single most important part of your presentation because "last said = longest remembered". Like the introduction, the conclusion should be carefully crafted and memorized word for word in order to leave nothing to chance.
- Knowing exactly what you are going to say in the conclusion acts like a beacon. If nervousness returns in the middle of your presentation, focusing your mind on what you will say at the end helps you get back on track. Nervousness disappears.

- **Minimize mistakes**

Here is an idea that should boost your confidence. When you are speaking, it is very difficult to make a mistake. Or at least it is very difficult to make a mistake that listeners will notice, **unless you tell them about it.**

Speaking is ephemeral. Your words are in the air, then they are gone. Even listeners who think you might have said something wrong are likely to give you the benefit of the doubt and forget about it the moment you pass on to something else.

If you make a mistake (and everyone does), do one of the following:

1. **Minor mistake**

If the mistake is minor, don't draw attention to it. We all have slips of the tongue, especially when we are nervous. The more minor mistakes you admit to, the more nervous you will become, thus increasing the likelihood that you will make even more mistakes.

2. **Major mistake**

If the mistake is major, i.e. something that could seriously mislead your listeners, then correct it. Avoid being overly apologetic. You want to correct the

mistake, not dramatize it. Simply say that you think you have made a misstatement that could be important, put it right, then move on.

Using Notes

In general, the more often speakers consult their notes, the more they appear not to really master their subject, i.e. listeners lose confidence in them. Notes are necessary. Ideally, however, they should be used only as backup.

How can you diminish your dependence on notes? Let's consider two situations.

- **Naked Presentation**

A “naked presentation” is where you speak without slides or any other visual aids, e.g. models, samples, chalkboard, flipchart, etc. There is just you and your listeners, so the temptation to constantly consult your notes will be strong.

The best way to minimize dependence on notes is by ensuring that the presentation is logically structured. When one idea naturally flows into another, you never have to nervously ask yourself, “What do I say next?” You will know.

If you have conscientiously applied the fundamental principles we have discussed—the expository speaking attitude, clarity, conciseness, density, inverted pyramid, etc.—your presentation will automatically have the logical structure you need to make nervousness disappear.

You might occasionally wish to consult your notes in order to give specific facts and figures. This is quite acceptable. Listeners do not expect you to keep such detailed information in your head, so using notes to ensure precision will only increase their confidence in you.

On the other hand, they will quite rightly lose confidence if they find you consulting your notes because you don't know what comes next. Moving from one idea to another throughout your presentation should be as natural as breathing.

- **Slide Presentations**

As noted above, slides are a visual aid. They are there to help the presentation, but they are not central to it. Nevertheless, properly constructed slides can often reduce the need to consult notes almost to zero.

How?

Remember that the basic structure of a slide consists of a heading that announces the subject to be discussed, and a text that expands on the subject. Although some people consider it a waste of space, putting a heading on each slide provides several advantages, because it:

1. Reinforces the presentation's logical structure

2. Prepares the listeners for the information they are about to receive
3. Helps the speaker follow the logical structure

It shouldn't happen, but if for any reason you find yourself uncertain about what comes next, the heading will immediately tell you. What could be more reassuring than that!

Use Summaries

However clear, concise and dense your presentation is, always remember that the information passes by quickly. Listeners do not have the luxury of taking hold of it and studying it. They may understand something at the moment you say it, but five minutes later it may have become fuzzy or completely disappeared from their minds.

This kind of “fadeout” can be a problem in all kinds of presentations, and particularly when you are building an argument. If understanding and agreeing with what you are saying now depends on understanding, accepting—and remembering—what you said five minutes ago, then fadeout becomes crucial.

The solution is periodic summaries. At strategic moments during your presentation, remind listeners of the key points you have covered. This can be done just orally or orally together with a summary slide. But don't fail to do it.

Some people argue that summaries are counterproductive. “We are dealing with intelligent people; they don't need to be reminded of what they have already heard.”

The key word in this statement is “people”. No matter how intelligent and experienced listeners are, they are still people. As any teacher will attest, saying something once, then rapidly passing on, seldom results in learning.

In my own experience, I have never heard anyone complain that I was talking down to them by periodically summarizing what I had already said. Quite the contrary. On one memorable occasion, I faced many complaints because I gave out information too quickly. “This is a very interesting subject and I really wanted to know about it. Why didn't you slow down once in a while to give us a chance to think about what you were saying? I really don't feel I've learned very much.”

I would have slowed down, i.e. shown summary slides, if the choice had been mine. Unfortunately, it wasn't. My client was so concerned about “insulting the listeners' intelligence” that I was forced to remove all the summary slides I had originally proposed. We probably didn't insult anyone's intelligence, but we certainly did waste their time.

Delivery

Most of what we have talked about so far concerns how the speaker relates to the listeners. Equally important is how listeners relate to the speaker.

Actually, it is incorrect to talk about “listeners” as a plural. We really should be talking about “the listener” as a singular.

Great singers are often said to be “great” because each person feels they are singing to them individually. They create a kind of personal connection. The same is true of great speakers. Although they know it isn’t true, listeners nevertheless like to feel that they are being talked to as individuals, not being addressed as an amorphous assembly. The more individual they feel, the more attentively they will listen and absorb what you are saying.

But can you really talk to many people as individuals, rather than addressing them as a group? It is not easy, but yes you can. Here are two key techniques:

1. **Cultivate the right mindset**

Think of them as individuals. If your mind says they are a group, then you will address them as a group. If your mind says they are individuals, then you will talk to them as individuals. To reinforce the point, every so often pick out one particular person and talk to him or her directly. Then move on to someone else. Don’t make it obvious to which specific person you are talking, but make it obvious that you are not addressing the “crowd”.

2. **Cultivate the right tone of voice**

Notice that in the previous paragraph, the verb kept changing. You “address” a group; you “talk” to an individual. This distinction is important.

When we address to a group, we tend to use a different vocabulary than when we talk with an individual. We become more formal and sober, and use words and expressions we would never think of using in daily life. The listeners pick up on this and rapidly decide whether you are talking to them individually or *en masse*. Individually is always better.

Conclusion

How you close your presentation is as important as how you open it. In some ways it is more important.

As the dictum reminds us: *Last said = longest remembered*. Unlike a written text, where people can stop reading at any time, oral presentations require them to stay until the end. Too many speakers squander this opportunity to drive their message home by saying something like: “Well, that’s all I have to say. Thank you for listening.”

There are much better ways of using this opportunity. How you end your presentation depends on what you are trying to accomplish. Unless your presentation is pure entertainment (hardly likely), then I would suggest that there are two basic objectives,

leading to two basic types of conclusions—and an infinite variety of ways to use them.

- **Objective:** Convey information
Technique: Summaries

If the main purpose of your presentation is to acquaint listeners with useful information, then your conclusion should summarize this information. Of course, you have probably been doing interim summaries all along. But it still makes sense to do a final one at the end to bring everything together.

Some speakers like to hand out copies of their speech on the assumption that people will re-read the whole thing later. Giving a handout may be useful, but it is unlikely that anyone will read it all the way through. More effectively, hand out only the final summary. Or the whole speech with the final summary on top, not at the end.

- **Objective:** Convey a single key idea
Technique: Use a quotation or a piece of poetry

Whatever the key idea you wish to convey, someone has probably already articulated it in a particularly striking fashion. You can benefit from this to bring your presentation to a strong, memorable conclusion. If the person or the quotation is well known, so much the better.

Examples

1. **Key idea:** The importance of democracy in the modern world
Quotation as conclusion: “Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.”
2. **Key idea:** The importance of saving money
Quotation as conclusion: “A penny saved is a penny earned.”
3. **Key idea:** The importance of investing to secure a comfortable retirement
Quotation as conclusion: “You work hard for your money. Make your money work hard for you.”
4. **Key idea:** The importance of perseverance
Quotation as conclusion: “A journey of a thousand kilometers begins with a single step.”

It is not always necessary to quote exactly. Sometimes it is more effective to “modernize” a quotation. My favorite along this line was the conclusion to a presentation about the virtue of taking a strong stand on important issues. “To update the great Chinese philosopher Confucius: ‘The man who walks down the middle of the road . . . gets hit by cars going both ways’.”

My all-time favorite conclusion occurred at a lecture I attended on the history of science. After outlining the revolutions brought about by luminaries such as Aristotle, Ptolemy, Copernicus, Newton and Einstein, the speaker finished by saying that the entire history of science could be summarized in a single sentence:

“Just when a smug, over-rated university professor, such as myself, tells an audience of admiring, awe-struck listeners, such as you, that something can’t be done, **an idiot in the back row who wasn’t listening goes out and does it anyhow.**”

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Expository writing attitude: How to really get into the mind of your reader

The expository writing attitude (no one wants to read what you write) has a broader formulation, which is also a recipe for its application:

*If you give people **what they want first**, they are likely to accept anything else you want them to have. If you give them **what you want first**, they are likely not to accept anything at all.*

Here are a few examples.

- **Stand Specific Videotape**

Throughout my career, I have done considerable work for pharmaceutical companies, which included attending medical congresses. The first couple of times I did this, I noted something strange.

Pharmaceutical companies regularly erect stands at medical congresses to inform specialist doctors about new drugs and new applications of older drugs. Many of these stands had several video monitors at their edges running videotapes. I watched the behavior of the doctors. The vast majority watched the tape for only a minute or two, then moved on.

I asked a marketing director why he was using these monitors and tapes. "To attract attention to our stand," he said. "But the doctors stay in front of the monitor only a couple of minutes, then leave." "Yes, but they were attracted to our stand. They know we are here and may come back later."

Frankly, this didn't make much sense to me, but I accepted it. A couple of years later, when I felt I knew better what I was doing, I made a suggestion.

The videotapes being used ran anywhere from 10 - 15 minutes, then automatically recycled. The problem was, doctors who began watching after the tape had started never knew how long they would have to wait for it to finish and start again. Secondly, hardly any were likely to stand in front the video monitor for 15 minutes or more, even if they had known how long it was.

The tapes were so long because they had not been conceived for medical congresses, but for a totally different purpose. They were used simply because they already existed.

My suggestion was to make a "stand-specific videotape" that would concentrate all key information about the company's product into no more than 2.5 minutes. Moreover, the fact that the tape ran only 2.5 minutes and then automatically recycled would be prominently posted, so the doctors would know exactly how much time they would need to invest.

Consider the benefits:

1. Virtually all doctors who started to watch the tape stayed for it to recycle
2. Because they got all the key points, many who wanted more information immediately came onto the stand
3. Those who were interested but were short of time probably came back later
4. Even those who were not certain they were interested nevertheless went away with a complete picture of what the company's product was all about

In short, virtually 100% effectiveness!

There was no way to gage the effectiveness of the previous system, but if it had been as much as 10% I would have been shocked.

- **Satellite Symposia**

A standard feature of medical congresses (and probably most other professional congresses) is the "satellite symposium". This is an information session held by an individual company specifically to talk about its products and applications. They usually consist of 6 - 8 presentations followed by questions and answers. Since satellite symposia are not on the official congress agenda, pharmaceutical companies expend considerably time, energy and money to attract participants.

The problem is, the companies seem to think that once they have people in the meeting room, they are a captive audience. They aren't.

Typically, about a quarter of the audience will have left the meeting room after the second presentation; another quarter or more will have left after the fourth presentation. By the end of the program, less than half the audience (perhaps as little as 30%) will still be there.

Why? Because they don't give the participants what they want, which is to see and hear the star speaker. Instead, they are forced to wade through a miasma of details before getting to the main point.

I asked a marketing director why things were done this way. He said: "Because you always save the best for the last." True, if your objective is to entertain people, because even secondary acts will be entertaining until you get to the big finish. But a satellite symposium is not entertainment, its information.

The traditional structure of a satellite symposium was a clear violation of the expository speaking attitude (no one wants to hear what you say) and the poor results were there for everyone to see. So I made a suggestion: Why not put the star speaker first? In other words, use the star speaker to give an overview of what it is to come rather than "pulling it all together" at the end.

Consider the benefits:

1. All the doctors who attended the symposium would get to see and hear the star attraction

2. All doctors who attended the symposium would get a good overview of the company's product and application, whether they stayed to the end or not
3. Because the doctors would already know the key points, the other speakers could discuss their particular aspect of the subject in greater detail
4. Those doctors who couldn't stay to the end would go away satisfied that attending the symposium had been time well spent
5. Many of those who might have left early would probably stay, because the details would now reinforce key ideas rather than confusing them about what the key ideas really are.

The result? Exactly as predicted. The doctors were highly satisfied, more of them stayed to the end, and the company got its information across to more participants in a more complete and persuasive manner.

- **Interactive Stand Animation System**

Getting people onto a trade show stand is really quite easy. All you have to do is offer them food and drink, or a small gift. Many pharmaceutical companies do this. But the real question is: *What happens once these people are on the stand?* In the vast majority of cases, after getting what they came for—which has nothing to do with the product—they leave.

At best, doctors who come onto the stand pick up the brochures and scientific papers, put them into the congress bags, then go onto the next stand and do the same thing. You never know if they actually read the documents they take away. Estimates are that 95% of them probably end up in the hotel's wastepaper basket without ever being opened.

Using the principle of giving people ***what they want first***, a colleague and I developed what we called the Interactive Stand Animation System. It would be somewhat lengthy to describe how it works, but I can instantly tell you its results.

With the Interactive Stand Animation System:

1. You are certain that your brochures are read, because people read them right in front of you on the stand.
2. Even better, they actually study the brochures, then discuss, debate and compare notes with their colleagues.
3. At the same time, they provide you with valuable market research information that would be difficult to obtain in any other way. This can be very important for determining the best ways to present your products, which features to emphasize, which aspects may require change for later versions, etc.

I once described this system to the international marketing director of a major pharmaceutical company. He was very skeptical. Basically he said: "I have been in this business for nearly 30 years and I have attended hundreds of medical congresses. What you are telling me just isn't possible."

He maintained that position until he went to a congress where we were running the system for another company. His reaction: “I’ve seen it, but I still don’t believe it. I never would have imagined anything like this could possibly be true.”

But it was.

How to Write a Corporate Image Brochure People Want to Read

As noted on page 17, almost all companies of any size feel compelled to produce a corporate image brochure. But virtually no one ever reads them. So how did I apply the expository writing attitude to produce a brochure that people not only read, but recommended to their friends and colleagues?

Starting from the assumption that no one would want to read anything about the company, I and my colleagues (it was a brainstorming) asked ourselves: *What things does the company do that people might want to read about?*

The company’s basic activity was producing vaccines. We are all naturally interested in health and virtually everyone knows the importance of vaccination, for themselves but particularly for their children. Here were already two things people might want to read about.

We were given the assignment in the mid-1980s, just when a strange new term—*genetic engineering*—was beginning to appear more and more in newspaper headlines. According to the reports, this new technique would revolutionize medicine, so people were becoming increasingly interested in learning what it was all about.

To make a long story short, we defined seven areas of the company’s activities that could be naturally attractive to potential readers. However, it didn’t stop there. If all this exciting information were mixed up together with company publicity, people probably still would not read the brochure despite their natural inclination to do so.

We therefore made a daring proposal. The brochure would be laid out in seven double-page spreads, i.e. each of the seven areas of activity would be allotted two facing pages. But the text would be rigorously segregated.

➤ **Theory**

The left side would be pure science; the company’s name would never be mentioned.

➤ **Practice**

The right side would explain how the company used the science to produce vaccines.

When we made the proposal, the reaction was one of shock. “You mean people could read the brochure left side only and never see our name?” Exactly. But having learned about the basic science, wouldn’t they naturally want to learn how the company was using the science to produce safe, effective, and (relatively) inexpensive vaccines?

It took a while for management to accept the proposal, but finally they did. When the brochure was ready, they couldn't print enough of them.

Of course, not all companies would be suitable for this particular type of corporate image brochure. The important idea here is not the brochure, but the thinking process that led to it. Our old friend, the expository writing attitude: *I know no one wants to read what I am going to write. So how can I write something they will want to read?*

Appendix B

How to Excite Reader Interest

The expository writing attitude asserts that no one wants to read what you are going to write. If you have fully accepted this idea, then you have also accepted that the writer's first task, before anything else, is to give readers reasons to read. There are several ways of doing this. Here are five of them:

1. Ask questions
2. Suggest a contrast or paradox
3. Write a newspaper-type lead
4. Make a microcosm into a universe
5. Personalize the situation

The following example shows the beginning of an extensive article on hay fever. Note that once you get beyond the lead (first few paragraphs), the remaining information in all five versions is exactly the same.

1. Ask questions

Few people can resist trying to see if they know the answer to a question. This lead asks three questions about hay fever. Readers who are not certain about an answer—or certain they don't know the answer—are likely to be motivated to read further.

Did you know that hay fever is not a fever? That it has essentially nothing to do with hay? And that it is much more common in cities than in the countryside?

In short, the term "hay fever" is very misleading. As every sufferer knows, the symptoms—sneezing, running nose, itchy and watering eyes, etc.—more closely resemble a cold than they do a fever. The French come closer to the truth by calling it "hay cold" (rhume des foins).

Also as every sufferer knows, hay fever is an allergic reaction to pollen, the fine powder (usually yellow) which plants disperse in the wind as part of their reproductive cycle. It can be triggered by the pollen of any number of plants, including weeds, grasses, and trees. In Scandinavia, the culprit is most often birch; in the United Kingdom, grass; and in southern Europe, olive and cypress trees. The leading trigger for hay fever in the United States is ragweed.

For these and other reasons, doctors refer to hay fever as “seasonal rhinitis” when it affects mainly the nose, or “seasonal rhino-conjunctivitis” when it affects both the eyes and nose.

The pollen origin of hay fever was first demonstrated in 1873 by Dr. Charles Blackley, himself a hay fever sufferer. The affliction is commonly called hay fever because the annual outbreak of symptoms for many allergic persons coincides with the hay harvest.

But if hay fever is caused by pollen, why should it be more common in cities than in the countryside?

The reasons are rather complex, but some observers believe it is a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution. Before the 18th century, very little mention was made in the medical literature of hay fever. However, as rural populations became urbanized, hay fever became increasingly prevalent. Today it is believed to affect from 10-12% of the populations in Europe and North America, largely in cities.

Knowing the source of an illness is the first step towards finding an effective treatment. However, it is also necessary to know how it produces its symptoms.

(The article continues)

2. Suggest a contrast or paradox

The terms “contrast” and “paradox” are closely related. A “contrast” is something that is commonly accepted as true but may not be so, or is at the extreme ends of a continuum (e.g. kilograms vs. milligrams, mountains vs. molecules, millennia vs. minutes, etc.).

A “paradox” is something that appears to be impossible.

Hay fever is one of the most debilitating—and one of the most misnamed—of the so-called “minor medical conditions”.

It is so debilitating because the annual attack (April-August) can greatly disrupt the victim’s ability to study or work. It also brings misery and isolation during the spring and summer, the two most “sociable” seasons of the year.

It is so misnamed because the term “hay fever” is misleading. As every sufferer knows, the symptoms—sneezing, running nose, itchy and watering eyes, etc.—more closely resemble a cold than they do a fever. The French come closer to the truth by calling it “hay cold” (rhume des foins).

Another reason for disavowing the term: The name “hay fever” suggests that it is an illness of the countryside. The reality is, hay fever is much more common in cities. In fact, some observers believe it is a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution.

Before the 18th century, very little mention was made in the medical literature of hay fever. However, as rural populations became urbanized, hay fever became increasingly prevalent. Today it is believed to affect from 10-12% of the populations in Europe and North America, largely in cities.

Finally, hay fever is only indirectly related to hay. It can be triggered by any number of plants, including weeds, grasses, and trees. In Scandinavia, the culprit is most often birch; in the United Kingdom, grass; and in southern Europe, olive and cypress trees. The leading trigger for hay fever in the United States is ragweed.

For these and other reasons, doctors refer to hay fever as “seasonal rhinitis” when it affects mainly the nose, or “seasonal rhino-conjunctivitis” when it affects both the eyes and nose.

Seasonal rhino-conjunctivitis is in fact an allergic reaction to pollen, the fine powder (usually yellow) which plants disperse in the wind as part of their reproductive cycle. The pollen origin of hay fever was first demonstrated in 1873 by Dr. Charles Blackley, himself a hay fever sufferer. The affliction is commonly called hay fever because the annual outbreak of symptoms for many allergic persons coincides with the hay harvest.

Knowing the source of an illness is the first step towards finding an effective treatment. However, it is also necessary to know how it produces its symptoms.

(The article continues)

3. Write a newspaper-type lead

You may not know what will interest an individual reader. However, by putting a lot of clear, concise, dense information right at the beginning, you can be virtually certain that every reader will find something to attract his or her attention.

Hay fever, hardly known to our great-great-grandparents, today affects up to 12% of people in Europe and North America, and the trend is still upwards. Although considered a “mild medical condition”, the watery eyes, running nose, incessant sneezing, etc., for several months each year can be extremely debilitating for both social and economic life. Absenteeism and reduced productivity in Europe and North America cost business an estimated U.S. \$4.2 billion annually, a burden that is expected to rise to \$6.8 billion by the end of the decade.

The term “hay fever” is in fact very misleading. As every sufferer knows, the symptoms—sneezing, running nose, itchy and watering eyes, etc.—more closely resemble a cold than they do a fever. The French come closer to the truth by calling it “hay cold” (rhume des foins).

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The reasons are rather complex, but some observers believe it is a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution. Before the 18th century, very little mention was made in the medical literature of hay fever. However, as rural populations became urbanized, hay fever became increasingly prevalent. Today it is believed to affect from 10-12% of the populations in Europe and North America, largely in cities.

Knowing the source of an illness is the first step towards finding an effective treatment. However, it is also necessary to know how it produces its symptoms.

(The article continues)

4. Make a microcosm into a universe

Something that appears to be of little or no general interest can be made more vital by putting into a broader political, cultural, social, economic, or philosophical context. The power of this technique can often be reinforced by introducing the subject with an appropriate quotation.

"A splinter in the finger can hurt more than a broken leg - if all you have is a splinter in the finger" - Anonymous

It is very difficult to judge someone else's pain and discomfort, which is why to some people hay fever seems funny (non-sufferers) and to others it can be deadly serious (suffers).

Granted, the individual symptoms—sneezing, running nose, itchy and watering eyes, etc.—by themselves are not devastating. However, their constant repetition over several months every year (April-August) can make life virtually unbearable.

To many hay fever sufferers, its classification as a so-called “minor medical conditions” seems grossly inadequate. Not only does its annual attack cause personal pain and discomfort, it can greatly disrupt the victim’s ability to study or

work. It also brings misery and isolation during the spring and summer, the two most “sociable” seasons of the year.

Hay fever really shouldn’t be called hay fever at all; the symptoms more closely resemble a cold than they do a fever. The French come closer to the truth by calling it “hay cold” (rhume des foins). This is one reason doctors prefer to call it “seasonal rhinitis” when it affects mainly the nose, or “seasonal rhinoconjunctivitis” when it affects both the eyes and nose.

Another reason for disavowing the term: The name “hay fever” suggests that it is an illness of the countryside. The reality is, hay fever is much more common in cities. In fact, some observers believe it is a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution.

Hay fever is only indirectly related to hay. It can be triggered by any number of plants, including weeds, grasses, and trees. In Scandinavia, the culprit is most often birch; in the United Kingdom, grass; and in southern Europe, olive and cypress trees. The leading trigger for hay fever in the United States is ragweed.

The pollen origin of hay fever was first demonstrated in 1873 by Dr. Charles Blackley, himself a hay fever sufferer. The affliction is commonly called hay fever because the annual outbreak of symptoms for many allergic persons coincides with the hay harvest.

Knowing the source of an illness is the first step towards finding an effective treatment. However, it is also necessary to know how it produces its symptoms.

(The article continues)

5. Personalize the situation

There’s a newspaper adage that says: “One person killed in an earthquake is a tragedy; a thousand persons killed in an earthquake is a statistic.” People like to hear about other people, as individuals. Therefore, if you can personalize a situation, you will gain reader interest.

When Mary woke up that morning, the birds were singing, the sun was shining and the sky was blue. Just the sort of day that makes you want to say, “It’s good to be alive.” She then noticed a slight yellowish haze in the sky, so instead she said, “I wish I were dead!”

The haze was pollen; the hay fever season had started. Instead of the promise of a wonderful day, Mary now faced the certainty of sneezing, a running nose, itchy and watering eyes, and other symptoms associated with her annual allergic disease.

She was not alone. Each year, more and more people suffer from hay fever. Hardly known to our great-great-grandparents, today it affects up to 12% of people in Europe and North America, and the trend is still upwards.

Although considered a “mild medical condition”, hay fever can be extremely detrimental because the annual attack (April-August) can greatly disrupt the victim’s ability to study or work. It also brings misery and isolation during the spring and summer, the two most “sociable” seasons of the year.

Hay fever really shouldn’t be called hay fever. As every sufferer knows, the sneezing, running nose, itchy and watering eyes, and other discomforts the disease engenders more closely resemble a cold than they do a fever. The French come closer to the truth by calling it “hay cold” (rhume des foins). This is one reason doctors prefer to call it “seasonal rhinitis” when it affects mainly the nose, or “seasonal rhino-conjunctivitis” when it affects both the eyes and nose.

Medical practitioners also disavow the name because “hay fever” suggests that it is an illness of the countryside. The reality is, hay fever is much more common in cities. In fact, some observers believe it is a direct consequence of the Industrial Revolution.

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Knowing the source of an illness is the first step towards finding an effective treatment. However, it is also necessary to know how it produces its symptoms.

(The article continues)

Examples of contrast and paradox leads

1. Perhaps the second most influential scientist of the 20th century, after Albert Einstein, died yesterday and almost no one noticed. Of course, Jack Kilby’s name was hardly a household word. However, virtually every household—not to mention every shop, business office, factory, and other aspect of human activity—has been fundamentally transformed by his work.

Quite simply, Jack Kilby invented the integrated circuit, i.e. the ubiquitous “chip”, without which modern society would simply be inconceivable

2. Ben Hunter is a television pitchman. On his daily broadcast, he sells insurance, real estate, reducing plans, floor wax, toilet bowl cleaners, and a whole supermarket of other items.

On Thursdays, he sells children.

It sounds harsh, but Mr. Hunter himself says that is precisely his job. As a daytime announcer for KTTV, a Los Angeles outlet of Metromedia, Inc., most of his time is spent sandwiching thin slices of old Doris Day and Rock Hudson movies between commercial messages. But every Thursday afternoon, the graying, rugged-looking announcer hosts a 15-minute show whose stars are parentless children. The idea is to get them adopted by viewers

3. After waiting 17 years to get it onto the launch pad, scientists were disappointed; but hardly surprised, that their scheduled space probe to Pluto had been delayed several hours due to poor weather.
4. Being born, living, and then dying are immutable aspects of human existence. What is not immutable is the “quality of the journey” between the two endpoints, which is why such keen attention is paid to the possible teratogenic effects of different therapeutic drugs or combination of drugs. “Teratogenic” refers to how drugs taken by a pregnant woman might affect the fetus in her womb.
5. **Note:** *Keep in mind that the following lead was written in mid-2001, several months before the euro went into circulation. People were still using their national currencies (francs, deutschmarks, guilders, escudos, pesetas, etc.)*

The most anticipated event of 2002—introduction of the euro—already took place almost three years ago.

This was the principal message of Alex Furaha to the 20th EuroEnterprise Forum. He was referring to the January 1, 2002 “launch” of the euro, the new common currency for 12 of the 15 countries of the European Union.

A leading government economist, Mr. Furaha stressed that the euro became the official currency of the EU three years earlier, on January 1, 1999. Ever since that date, national currencies such as the French franc, German mark, Italian lira, Spanish peseta, etc., have existed in name only—just waiting to disappear from the world’s monetary stage.

“There has been no exchange rate between these currencies since 1999, when they all became a single currency. What we have now is a conversion rate, not an exchange rate, because the relationship amongst them is fixed. The fact that the bills and coins of the euro will be introduced on January 1, 2002 is only the obvious expression of this already established fact,” he explained.

This legal and economic reality in no way detracts from the importance of what will happen on the first day of next year, nor the complexities of making it happen

Appendix C

Exercises: 5Ws & H

Remember: The 5Ws & H are the way journalists and other good writers ensure that key information is presented to readers in a clear, concise, and dense manner.

*It is often useful to learn from negative examples. The following newspaper leads show two ways the 5Ws & H can be used **incorrectly**:*

- *Some key information that should be in the text is not there.*
- *All key information is there, but it is not well ordered to help readers rapidly understand what is happening.*

How to do these exercises

Each exercise has three texts labeled “Original”, “Analysis”, and “Revision”. The procedure is as follows:

1. Cover the page so that only the “Original” is visible, and read the text.
2. As you read, with everything else still covered, make notes about what you think needs to be done to improve the “Original”.
3. Uncover the “Analysis” and compare it with your notes.
 - If key information is missing, it will be given to you just below the “Analysis”.
 - Otherwise, you will be told that all the key information is there but that it should be re-ordered to improve density.
4. Rewrite the text.
5. Finally, compare your work to the “Revision”. Pay close attention to any explanatory notes that follow the “Revision”. These will help you better understand the changes that were made.

Exercise 1

Original

Belgian police yesterday raided the Brussels office of *Stern* and arrested its correspondent in connection with an article he had published about the European Parliament.

Analysis

Belgian police yesterday raided the Brussels office of *Stern* (**what is Stern?**) and arrested its correspondent in connection with an article he had published about the European Parliament (**what was controversial about the article?**).

1. *Stern* is a German magazine
2. The article was about fraud in the European Parliament

Revision

Belgian police yesterday raided the Brussels office of the German magazine *Stern* and arrested its correspondent in connection with an article he had published about fraud in the European Parliament.

Exercise 2

Original

Much of the supply of vaccine needed for the impending flu season in the United States may not be available. The announcement—which caught U.S. health officials by surprise—raises serious concern about whether there will be enough vaccine to protect those at greatest risk. The health officials say they are working with Aventis Pasteur to see if production can be increased.

Analysis

Much (***weasel word; how much?***) of the supply of vaccine needed for the impending flu season in the United States may not be available (***why?***). The announcement—which caught U.S. health officials by surprise (***why?***)—raises serious concern about whether there will be enough vaccine to protect those at greatest risk (***who are they?***). The health officials say they are working with Aventis Pasteur to see if production can be increased (***why Aventis Pasteur?***).

1. About 50% of the needed vaccine may not be available
2. British health authorities suspended the license of the Chiron Company to make the vaccine
3. U.S. health officials were surprised because this decision was taken by another government without prior notification
4. Greatest risk = children and persons over 65
5. Aventis Pasteur is the only other company making flu vaccine for the USA

Revision

Approximately half of the vaccine needed for the impending flu season in the United States may not be available because Britain's health authorities have suspended the Chiron Company's license to make it.

The announcement—about which U.S. health officials had no prior warning—raises serious concern as to whether there will be enough vaccine to protect those at greatest risk (children, the over-65s). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is in urgent discussions with Aventis Pasteur, the only other company making flu shots for the American market, to see if its production can be increased to compensate, at least partially, for the expected shortfall.

Notes

1. *The second sentence now clearly explains why U.S. officials were caught by surprise.*
2. *Note the change from the general term “U.S. health officials” to the “U.S. Department of Health and Human Services”, the precise name of the agency responsible for trying to solve the problem.*
3. *Because it is not sufficiently dense, the Original suggests that Adventis Pasteur is having problems producing the vaccine. The revision avoids this misconception by clearly explaining that the problem is with Chiron.*

Exercise 3

Original

Oxford University has once again petitioned the High Court to protect its buildings and staff from animal rights activists. It is asking that a temporary exclusion zone, in force since last month, be made permanent until a full civil trial on the matter can take place. The “no harassment” boundary prohibits protesters from going within 35 meters of university property.

University officials said that work on its new £18 million bio-medical research laboratory was stopped in July because contractors were being intimidated by animal rights activists. Animal testing to be carried out in the facility would be 98% on rodents with the remaining 2% on amphibians, fish, ferrets and primates.

Analysis

The problem here is not missing information, but how the information is presented, i.e. the text lacks density. Re-order the information to improve the density.

Revision

Oxford University has renewed its battle with animal rights activists by petitioning for a High Court injunction to limit protests, which university officials said have stopped construction work on its new bio-medical research laboratory since July. The £18 million facility would use animals for testing with 98% of experiments on rodents and the remaining 2% on amphibians, fish, ferrets and primates.

The university claimed that the activists are intimidating contractors working on the new facility. It wants a temporary exclusion zone, in force since last month, to be made permanent until a full civil trial on the matter can take place. The “no harassment” boundary prohibits protesters from going within 35 meters of university property.

Notes

1. *The Revision passes the **Stop Reading Test**. People could stop reading after the first paragraph and still have a clear, sharp picture of what the story is about.*
2. *Note the use of the present tense “have” (not “had”) in the first sentence of the first paragraph, and “are” (not “were”) in the first sentence of the second paragraph.*

Exercise 4

Original

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has survived a national vote of confidence in his leadership, winning 58% of the vote. His supporters immediately celebrated the victory in a pre-dawn rally by exuberantly chanting “Chavez isn’t leaving!”

Señor Chavez’s victory claim was supported by Jimmy Carter, the former U.S. president and head of a team of international observers. Information collected by the team “coincided with the partial results announced this morning by the National Electoral Council,” Mr. Carter said.

Opposition leaders quickly denounced the official result as fraudulent and called on their supporters to protest in the streets of Caracas, the capital, and throughout the country.

Analysis

The problem here is not missing information, but how the information is presented, i.e. the text lacks density. Re-order the information to improve the density.

Revision

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez has survived a national vote of confidence in his leadership, winning 58% of the vote. Opposition leaders immediately denounced the result as fraudulent and called for massive street protests in Caracas, the capital, and throughout the country.

Señor Chavez’s victory claim was supported by Jimmy Carter, the former U.S. president and head of a team of international observers. Information collected by the team “coincided with the partial results announced this morning by the National Electoral Council,” Mr. Carter said.

When the result was announced, the president’s supporters immediately celebrated in a pre-dawn rally, frequently punctuated by exuberant chants of “Chavez isn’t leaving!”

*The Revision passes the **Stop Reading Test**. People could stop reading after the first paragraph and still have a clear, sharp picture of what the story is about. In the Original, they have to read to the third paragraph.*

Exercise 5

Original

Taking a united stand, the French Government and Muslim leaders Sunday condemned terrorists in Iraq who kidnapped two French journalists in order to pressure France into revoking a law that bans Islamic headscarves in state schools.

Saturday night the "Islamic Army" in Iraq issued a 48-hour ultimatum on the lives of the two journalists. This set into motion a day of emergency meetings in Paris between President Jacques Chirac, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the Prime Minister, and Muslim leaders seeking a strategy for dealing with France's first hostage crisis in the Iraq conflict.

As his initial move, President Chirac yesterday sent Michel Barnier, the Foreign Minister, to the region for a first-hand assessment of the situation.

Analysis

Taking a united stand, the French Government and Muslim leaders Sunday condemned terrorists in Iraq who kidnapped two French journalists in order to pressure France into revoking a law that bans Islamic headscarves in state schools (**is this law specific only to Islamic headscarves?**).

Saturday night the "Islamic Army" in Iraq issued a 48-hour ultimatum on the lives of the two journalists (**is the "Islamic Army" new or have they already been active?**). This set into motion a day of emergency meetings in Paris between President Jacques Chirac, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Prime Minister, and Muslim leaders seeking a strategy for dealing with France's first hostage crisis in the Iraq conflict.

As his initial move, President Chirac yesterday sent Michel Barnier, the Foreign Minister, to the region for a first-hand assessment of the situation.

1. The law bans all religious symbols such as Christian crosses, Jewish skull caps, Sikh turbans, etc.
2. A week earlier the Islamic Army said that it had killed an Italian journalist

Revision

Taking a united stand, the French Government and Muslim leaders Sunday condemned terrorists in Iraq who kidnapped two French journalists to pressure France into revoking a law that bans Islamic headscarves—as well as Christian

crosses, Jewish skull caps, Sikh turbans, and all other religious symbols—from being overtly displayed in state schools.

A 48-hour ultimatum Saturday night from the “Islamic Army”, which last week claimed responsibility for killing an Italian journalist, set into motion a day of emergency meetings between President Jacques Chirac, Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and Muslim leaders to map out a strategy for dealing with France’s first hostage crisis in the Iraq conflict.

As his initial move, President Chirac yesterday sent Foreign Minister Michel Barnier to the region for a first-hand assessment of the situation.

Note the difference in how the titles of the various government officials are shown in the Revision compared to the Original: Jean-Pierre Raffarin, the Prime Minister, or Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. Both forms are correct; you may use whichever one you prefer.

Exercise 6

Original

Attorneys for Michael Jackson claim that yesterday’s police raids on the pop star’s Neverland Ranch and a detective’s office were illegal. They plan to argue in Santa Barbara Superior Court on Thursday that prosecutors should be prohibited from using the seized items, which include computers, paperwork and tapes.

Today, the mother of the boy Jackson is accused of molesting, will take the witness stand. She will be asked if she knew that Bradley Miller, a private investigator, was working for Mark Geragos, one of Jackson’s attorneys, when his office was searched and various items taken away.

Analysis

Attorneys for Michael Jackson claim that yesterday’s police raids on the pop star’s Neverland Ranch (***where is it?***) and a detective’s office were illegal. They plan to argue in Santa Barbara Superior Court on Thursday that prosecutors should be prohibited from using the seized items (***using them for what?***), which include computers, paperwork and tapes.

Today, the mother of the boy Jackson is accused of molesting, will take the witness stand. She will be asked if she knew that Bradley Miller, a private investigator, was working for Mark Geragos, one of Jackson’s attorneys, when his office was searched and various items taken away (***not clear; whose office was searched?***).

1. Neverland Ranch is located near Santa Barbara, California
2. They could be used in Jackson’s trial on charges of child molestation
3. The office of Bradley Miller was searched

Revision

Michael Jackson's attorneys claim that authorities acted illegally when they seized items from the pop star's Neverland Ranch near Santa Barbara (California) and from a private investigator's office. They plan to argue Thursday in Santa Barbara Superior Court that because the computers, paperwork, videotapes, and other items were improperly confiscated, prosecutors should be prohibited from using them as evidence in the child-molestation case against the entertainer.

Today, the mother of the boy Jackson is accused of molesting, will take the witness stand. Specifically, she will be asked if she knew that Bradley Miller, the private investigator, was working for Mark Geragos, one of Jackson's attorneys, when the investigator's office was searched and various items taken away.

Exercise 7

Original

The scientist who created Dolly the sheep yesterday applied for a license to clone human embryos in hopes of finding a cure for motor neuron disease. Professor Ian Wilmut plans to use the controversial procedure to study the devastating condition that has afflicted Professor Steven Hawking, actor David Niven, and former England football manager Don Revie. Motor neuron disease affects about 5,000 patients in Britain, most of whom die within two to five years after diagnosis.

Analysis

The scientist who created Dolly the sheep (**who is Dolly the sheep?**) yesterday applied for a license to clone human embryos in hopes of finding a cure for motor neuron disease (**what is this disease?**). Professor Ian Wilmut (**more information about him?**) plans to use the controversial procedure to study the devastating condition that has afflicted Professor Steven Hawking (**who is he?**), actor David Niven, and former England football manager Don Revie. Motor neuron disease affects about 5,000 patients in Britain, most of whom die within two to five years after diagnosis.

1. Dolly is the first animal cloned from adult cells
2. Motor neuron disease is a condition in which nerve cells that control the muscles degenerate and die
3. Prof. Wilmut is employed at Roslin Institute near Edinburgh (Scotland)
4. Prof. Hawking is a physicist and author of the book *A Short History of Time*

Revision

The scientist who created Dolly the sheep, the first animal cloned from adult cells, yesterday applied for a license to clone human embryos in hopes of finding a cure for motor neuron disease.

Professor Ian Wilmut, of the Roslin Institute near Edinburgh (Scotland), plans to use the controversial procedure to study the devastating condition that has afflicted physics Professor Steven Hawking (author of *A Short History of Time*), actor David Niven, and former England football manager Don Revie. Motor neuron disease causes nerve cells that control the muscles to degenerate and die. It affects about 5,000 patients in Britain, most of whom die within two to five years after diagnosis.

Notes

1. *The question “what is motor neuron disease” arises in the first sentence and could have been answered right away in the second. However, the writer felt that the emotional impact of naming three prominent people afflicted with the disease was more important than an immediate technical explanation. This is a matter of judgment. It is not a matter of judgment that the question had to be answered, and soon.*
2. *The writer was probably tempted to mention that the celebrities he cited far surpassed the two to five year prognosis for afflicted persons in the very next sentence. This is interesting information, but not here. The writer wisely chose to save it for a more appropriate place later in the article*

Exercise 8

Original

Many European travelers until now exempt from visas for the United States henceforth will have to register electronically at least 48 hours before departure to the U.S. This new weapon in the security arsenal of the American administration was authorized in “anti-terror” legislation adopted August 3 by Congress to implement recommendations of the Inquiry Commission into the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon six years ago.

The Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), whose modalities and start date have not yet been announced, establishes a *de facto* visa for European travelers to the U.S. Until now, citizens of most of the 27 countries of the European Union have not been required to carry a visa.

Analysis

This exercise is really somewhat unfair. The text conforms very well to the criteria of a good inverted pyramid lead. It is included here because someone who read this article in a Belgian newspaper was extremely disturbed by it. “But I’m leaving for California in a couple of days. When am I going to find the time to get this new document?”

Of course she had read only the first paragraph when she reacted so strongly. The second paragraph clearly states that the measure had not yet been implemented, so she would not be affected.

Even good writing can be (momentarily) misinterpreted!

As an exercise, revise this text to put the delicate information about the start date into the first paragraph rather than the second one.

Revision

Version A

Many European travelers until now exempt from visas for the United States will soon have to register electronically at least 48 hours before departure to the U.S. This new weapon in the security arsenal of the American administration was authorized in “anti-terror” legislation adopted August 3 by Congress to implement recommendations of the Inquiry Commission into the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon six years ago.

The Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), whose modalities and start date have not yet been announced, establishes a *de facto* visa for European travelers to the U.S. Until now, citizens of most of the 27 countries of the European Union have not been required to carry a visa.

Version B

European travelers, until now exempt from visas for the United States, will soon have to register electronically at least 48 hours before departure to the U.S. The modalities and start date for the Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) have not yet been announced,

This new weapon in the security arsenal of the American administration was authorized in “anti-terror” legislation adopted August 3 by Congress to implement recommendations of the Inquiry Commission into the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon six years ago.

When implemented, the ETA will establish a *de facto* visa for European travelers to the U.S. Until now, citizens of most of the 27 countries of the European Union have not been required to carry a visa.

Appendix D

Question and Answer Analysis of a News Story

The purpose here is to show how the Q & A technique works in practice. There is nothing for you to do but admire and learn from the first example. Next, see how the Q & A analysis dramatically reveals the flaws in the second example.

Example 1

Original

The Pink Paper, Britain's longest running free weekly gay newspaper, has gone into bankruptcy after 17 years. *Barazoka*, one of the world's oldest gay magazines, also seems likely to cease publication after more than 30 years of being sold in Japan.

Both publications cite the same three reasons for their demise: rising gay use of the Internet, falling advertising revenues, and increasing coverage of gay news in the "respectable" press.

Readership of *Barazoka*, which began publication in 1971, rapidly rose and remained high for two decades; however, in the past five years its circulation has fallen to just 10% of what it was in the 1990s. Issue N° 382, scheduled for publication next week, will probably be its last.

The final issue of *The Pink Paper*, N° 859, was printed on October 1. The newspaper was founded in 1987 specifically to battle against plans of the Conservative Party government of Margaret Thatcher to introduce Section 28, a law that prohibited the "promotion" of homosexuality.

The fight was won when the law was repealed under the Labor Party government of Tony Blair in the late 1990s. Over the years, *The Pink Paper* reported extensively on other gay equality issues: the ban on gays in the military, same-sex marriages, adoption by gay couples, etc.

(The story continues)

Analysis of Q & A

The Pink Paper, Britain's longest running free weekly gay newspaper, has gone into bankruptcy after 17 years. *Barazoka*, one of the world's oldest gay magazines, also seems likely to cease publication after more than 30 years of being sold in Japan.

Question: *Why are these newspapers going bankrupt?*
The answer is in the next paragraph.

Both publications cite the same three reasons for their demise: rising gay use of the Internet, falling advertising revenues, and increasing coverage of gay news in the "respectable" press.

Question: *How bad did the situation get?*
The answer is in the next paragraph.

Readership of *Barazoka*, which began publication in 1971, rapidly rose and remained high for two decades; however, in the past five years its circulation has fallen to just 10% of what it was in the 1990s. Issue N° 382, scheduled for publication next week, will probably be its last.

The final issue of *The Pink Paper*, N° 859, was printed on October 1. The newspaper was founded in 1987 specifically to battle against plans of the Conservative Party government of Margaret Thatcher to introduce Section 28, a law that prohibited the “promotion” of homosexuality.

Question: *What was the result of The Pink Paper’s battle against Section 28?*
The answer is in the next paragraph.

The fight was won when the law was repealed under the Labor Party government of Tony Blair in the late 1990s. Over the years, *The Pink Paper* reported extensively on other gay equality issues: the ban on gays in the military, same-sex marriages, adoption by gay couples, etc.

(The story continues)

Detailed Analysis

This story is an excellent example of many aspects of good expository writing, so it is worth looking at in detail.

The Pink Paper, Britain’s longest running (1) free weekly gay newspaper, has gone into bankruptcy after 17 years. *Barazoka*, one of the world’s oldest (2) gay magazines, also seems likely to cease publication after more than 30 years of being sold in Japan.

- (1) *“Longest running” is a weasel word, raising the question of just how long is long. The answer “17 years” comes at the end of the same sentence.*
- (2) *“Oldest” is also a weasel word, raising the question of just how old is old. The answer “more than 30 years” comes later in the same sentence.*

Both publications cite the same three reasons for their demise: rising gay use of the Internet, falling advertising revenues, and increasing coverage of gay news in the “respectable” press.

Readership of *Barazoka*, which began publication in 1971, rapidly rose and remained high for two decades; however, in the past five years its circulation has fallen to just 10% of what it was in the 1990s. Issue N° 382, scheduled for publication next week, will probably be its last.

Note all the precise information in this paragraph, including the number of Barazoku’s final issue (N° 382). This clearly tells readers that the writer knows what he is talking about.

The final issue of *The Pink Paper*, N° 859 (1), was published on October 1. The newspaper was founded in 1987 specifically to battle against the plans of the Conservative Party government (2) of Margaret Thatcher (3) to introduce Section 28 (4), a law that banned the “promotion” of homosexuality.

- (1) *Once again, note the number of The Pink Paper’s final issue (N° 859)*
- (2) *Not just “the government” but “the Conservative Party government”. This helps readers better understand what the political/social climate was like when the paper was founded.*
- (3) *Recalling that Margaret Thatcher was in power further helps readers understand the political/social climate of the time.*
- (4) *Not just “a law that banned promotion of homosexuality”, but “Section 28”, its specific name.*

The fight was won when the law was repealed under the Labor government (1) of Tony Blair (2) in the late 1990s. Over the years, *The Pink Paper* reported extensively on other gay equality issues: the ban on gays in the military, same-sex marriages, adoption by gay couples, etc.

- (1) *Not just “the government” but “the Labor government”. This helps readers better understand what the political/social climate was like when Section 28 was repealed.*
- (2) *Recalling that Tony Blair was in power further helps readers understand the political/social climate of the time.*

Example 2

The following is a press release the IBTC Company hopes will be printed in the business sections of newspapers and magazines.

The Original certainly is unlikely to be printed. It looks too much like publicity for IBTC, not something editors would consider of interest to their readers. The company would need to pay to have it printed as an advertisement.

The Revision contains essentially the same information. Because it now looks like something that could be of real interest to their readers, many editors would probably print it as a news story free of charge.

Original

Dresden, Germany—IBTC (International Business Training Center), a major provider of business training and development, has named Randolph Hemple its official representative in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hemple will help IBTC further develop its business in the UK market by working with locally based organizations to provide a complete solution to their management development and organizational effectiveness needs—utilizing the full range of capabilities that IBTC has to address those needs. Specifically, he will develop highly

customized programs designed to improve the individual and company performance of IBTC's clients. He will also work with the Dresden based team in organizing UK events with an international scope and reach. The events will focus on key business issues, with top-class speakers who will provide both business insights and practical and measurable solutions to problems.

In addition, Mr. Hemple will work with UK organizations to increase the volume of participants from the UK who come to IBTC development seminars at its conference centre in Dresden for the international, cross-industry and cross-functional learning experience IBTC offers.

Randolph Hemple is an experienced European businessman whose career spans a wide range of industries, including advertising, automotive, electronics, telecommunications, and consumer goods. He has held board positions with UK and European organizations and has managed acquisitions/joint ventures, with business responsibilities covering 14 countries.

Analysis

Dresden, Germany—IBTC (International Business Training Center), a major provider of business training and development, has named Randolph Hemple its official representative in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hemple (**how old is he?**) will help IBTC further develop its business in the UK market by working with locally based organizations to provide a complete solution to their management development and organizational effectiveness needs—utilizing the full range of capabilities that IBTC has to address those needs. Specifically, he will develop highly customized programs designed to improve the individual and company performance of IBTC's clients. He will also work with the (**UK focused?**) Dresden based team in organizing UK events with an international scope and reach. The events will focus on key business issues, with top-class speakers who will provide both business insights and practical and measurable solutions to problems.

In addition, Mr. Hemple (**where will he be stationed? London? somewhere else?**) will work with UK organizations to increase the volume of participants from the UK who come to IBTC development seminars at its conference centre in Dresden for the international, cross-industry and cross-functional learning experience IBTC offers.

Randolph Hemple is an experienced European businessman whose career spans a wide range of industries, including advertising, automotive, electronics, telecommunications and consumer goods. He has held board positions with UK and European organizations and has (**initiated and?**) managed acquisitions/joint ventures, with business responsibilities covering 14 countries.

Q & A analysis

When someone is appointed to an important position, most people ask the following questions in the following order:

1. *Who is he?*
2. *What are his qualifications for the position?*
3. *What will be his specific responsibilities?*

The Original does not respect this order; it puts “Who is he?” at the end.

Density

1. 37 years old. Notice how giving the age completely changes perception of the person. Suppose that instead of 37 he had been 58?
2. Yes, there is a special team in Dresden devoted to the UK market
3. He will be located in Manchester
4. Yes, he both initiated and managed acquisitions/joint ventures

Revision

Dresden, Germany— IBTC (International Business Training Center), a leading provider of business training and development, has named Randolph Hemple its official representative in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hemple, 37, is an experienced European businessman whose career spans a wide range of industries including advertising, automotive, electronics, telecommunications, and consumer goods. He has held board positions in a number of UK and European companies with business responsibilities covering 14 countries, including initiating and managing acquisitions and joint ventures.

Stationed in Manchester, Mr. Hemple will work closely with UK companies to provide complete solutions to their management development and organizational effectiveness needs. In particular, he will play a leading role in developing highly customized programs designed to significantly improve both individual and company performance.

He will also maintain close contact with the specialized UK marketing team at IBTC headquarters in Dresden to organize UK events with international scope and content. These events, focusing on key contemporary business issues, will feature top-class speakers who will provide both business insights and practical and measurable solutions to problems.

Appendix E

Examples of Past vs. Present Tense Usage (examples adapted from leading international newspapers)

- In a letter to shareholders, the company reiterated that it **is** (*not was*) prepared to enter into new talks.
- The company said that Mr. Harris resigned and that the search for his successor **is** (*not was*) underway.

- They added that it **aims** (*not aimed*) to cut costs.
- Appleton emphasized that the committee’s policy **is** (*not was*) to avoid discussing specific cases.
- The panel of leading computer scientists warned that unless the government significantly **increases** (*not increased*) support for advanced research on supercomputers, the country **will** (*not would*) be unable to retain its lead on that technological front.
- It was known that rockets propelled by chemical fuels **can** (*not could*) carry only very limited payloads and **are** (*not were*) too expensive for space journeys beyond the Moon.
- The jury announced its verdict on the espionage charge even though the judges **have** (*not had*) yet to determine if the information the scientist **is** (*not was*) accused of selling **is** (*not was*) of strategic military value.
- He asserted that national heritage sites **are** (*not were*) already under threat from the Government’s planning policies and he **fears** (*not feared*) that the wild natural beauty of their parks and reserves **will** (*not would*) be damaged.
- The company’s chief economist said that he **expects** (*not expected*) the dollar to fall at least 10 per cent against the euro over the next 12 months.

Appendix F

Conciseness Exercises

The definition of conciseness is “As long as necessary, as short as possible”. In these exercises, we assume that all the needed information is there. Your task is to make it as short as possible.

How to do these exercises

Each exercise has three texts labeled “Original”, “Analysis”, and “Revision”. The procedure is as follows:

1. Cover the page so that only the “Original” is visible, and read the text.
2. As you read, and with everything else still covered, make notes about what you think needs to be done to improve the “Original”.
3. Uncover the “Analysis” and compare it with your notes.
4. Rewrite the text.
5. Finally, compare your work to the “Revision”.

Exercise 1

Original

During employment with ABC Corporation, employees are legally entitled to take leave from the office during normal working hours. When this leave is taken, employees continue to receive their normal salary.

Analysis

During employment with ABC Corporation (unnecessary words), employees are legally entitled to take leave from work during normal working hours (unnecessary words). When this leave is taken (unnecessary words), employees continue to receive their normal salary.

Revision

ABC Corporation employees are legally entitled to take leave from work while continuing to receive their normal salary.

Exercise 2

Original

Annual leave entitlements are generated in accordance with legal requirements. Employees are credited with their annual leave entitlement during the working year and entitled to access this balance as from 1 January of the following year.

Analysis

Annual leave entitlements are generated in accordance with legal requirements (is this sentence necessary?). Employees are credited with their annual leave entitlement during the working year and entitled to access this balance as from January 1 of the following year (not clear; be more explicit).

Revision

Employees generate annual leave entitlement during the working year for use during the following year, starting from January 1. Example: Leave entitlement generated during 2009 may be used starting from January 1, 2010.

Exercise 3

Original

An employee may accumulate annual leave beyond the legal minimum only in the following circumstances.

- If there is written documentation proving that the employee's immediate manager has refused a leave request.
- If there is written proof that there were special circumstances why annual leave couldn't be taken during the current year.
- If the employee's immediate manager otherwise supports an application for additional leave.

Analysis

An employee may accumulate annual leave beyond the legal minimum (**what is this minimum?**) only in the following circumstances.

- If there is written documentation (**use active voice**) proving that the employee's immediate manager refused a leave request.
- If there is written proof (**use active voice**) that there were special circumstances why annual leave couldn't be taken during the current year.
- If the employee's immediate manager otherwise supports an application for additional leave.

Avoid repetition of "If" at the beginning of each bullet point.

Revision

An employee may accumulate annual leave beyond the legal 20-day minimum only under one or more of the following circumstances.

- Written documentation confirms that the immediate manager refused a request for leave, thus creating the need to carry some leave over to the following year.
- Written documentation confirms that special circumstances prevented the employee from taking leave during the year it should have been taken.
- The employee's immediate manager otherwise supports the application for leave carryover.

Exercise 4

Original

BBX is an agency born with the Swedish Internet, in 1996. Established in Stockholm, it has seen rapid growth and has attained the status of a completely multi-disciplinary, integrated agency.

The skills of the agency have indeed developed rapidly. This enables it to offer an extremely wide range of services today, with the same concern for quality and professionalism. These range from interface design to brand building, from Internet strategy to loyalty magazines and training in client satisfaction, not forgetting the more classic aspects of above and below the line marketing: direct mail, address list management, media planning... all this while keeping an important point in mind: increasing the quality of the relationship which our clients maintain with their prospects or their consumers.

Analysis

BBX is an agency (unnecessary words) born with the Swedish Internet, in 1996 (move date). Established in Stockholm (move Stockholm), it has seen rapid growth and has attained the status of a completely multi-disciplinary, integrated communication agency.

The skills of the agency have indeed developed rapidly (is this sentence necessary?). This enables it to offer an extremely wide range of services today, with the same (same as what?) concern for quality and professionalism. These (services) range from interface design to brand building, from internet strategy to loyalty magazines and training in client satisfaction, not forgetting the more classic aspects of above and below the line marketing: direct mail, address list management, media planning)... all this while keeping an important point in mind: increasing the quality of the relationship which our clients maintain with their prospects or their clients. (sentence too complex; services not easily distinguishable. Simplify)

Revision

BBX (Stockholm) was born in 1996 with the Swedish Internet. A pioneer of this new medium, it underwent rapid growth, quickly becoming a full multi-disciplinary, integrated communication agency.

Today, BBX's synergistic mix of skills permits the agency to offer an exceptionally wide range of services—all with a single-minded concern for professionalism and quality:

- Interface design
- Brand building
- Internet strategy
- Loyalty magazines
- Client satisfaction training
- Above- and below-the-line marketing (direct mail, address list management, media planning, etc.)

These and a host of other agency services aim at a single objective: **Increase the quality of the relationship our clients maintain with their clients and prospects.**

Appendix G

Diverse Exercises

How to do these exercises

Each exercise has three texts labeled "Original", "Analysis", and "Revision". The procedure is as follows:

1. Cover the page so that only the "Original" is visible, and read the text.
2. As you read, and with everything else still covered, make notes about what you think needs to be done to improve the "Original".

3. Uncover the “Analysis” and compare it with your notes.
4. Rewrite the text.
5. Finally, compare your work to the “Revision”.

Exercise 1

Original

A piece of electronic equipment installed in automobiles could allow insurance companies to monitor the driving behavior of their customers.

Each time a motorist uses the car, the device will record the roads being traveled and the time of the journey, and send the information via satellite to the insurance company.

With this data, the company will be able to calculate the insurance premium for each individual journey based on the relative risk of crashes on the different roads at different times of the day. The motorist will receive a monthly or quarterly “usage statement”, similar to a telephone bill, itemizing the insurance cost for each use of the car.

By agreeing to the system, motorists could save hundreds of dollars on their automobile insurance.

Because of the lower risk of crashes, trips on superhighways will cost less per kilometer than on city roads and

Analysis

This text ignores the expository writing attitude: *No one wants to read what you are going to write.* In other words, it fails to answer the all-important question: **Why would anyone want to read this?** The lead could be of interest to “techno-nerds” (people with a natural interest in science and technology), but what about everyone else?

Revision

Motorists could save hundreds of dollars on their automobile insurance by allowing their driving habits be monitored by a satellite-tracking device installed in the vehicle.

Each time a motorist uses the car, the device will record the roads being traveled and the time of the journey, and send the information to the insurance company.

The company will then calculate the insurance premium based on an assessment of the relative risk of crashes on the different roads at different times of the day. Motorists will receive a monthly or quarterly “usage statement”, similar to a telephone bill, giving the insurance cost for each journey.

Because of the lower risk of crashes, trips on superhighways will cost less per kilometer than on city roads and

Simply moving the fourth paragraph of the “Original” to the first paragraph of the “Revision” changes everything. Who wouldn’t want to know how to save hundreds of dollars on their automobile insurance?

Exercise 2

Organizing information

The following information is given piece by piece. Your task is to weave it into a clear, concise, dense paragraph. You are not required to use all the information. Remember, according to our definition of clarity, if there is something of “no importance”, you should leave it out.

Original

1. On May 29, France will vote on the European Union Constitution.
2. Five consecutive opinion polls show that the Constitution will be rejected in the French referendum.
3. Each opinion poll has been increasingly negative.
4. The situation is grave, and troubling.
5. France is one of the founders of the EU.
6. Until now, it has been considered one of the leading pillars of the EU.
7. A “no” vote in France could seriously influence referendums in other EU countries.
8. President Jacques Chirac is a strong supporter of the EU Constitution.
9. The referendum is not required under French law.
10. President Chirac took the decision to hold the referendum.
11. He apparently believes he will be able to capitalize politically through a split of the French Socialists over the EU Constitution.

Analysis

No analysis. Go directly to writing your text.

Revision

There is no right or wrong answer to this exercise. Everyone has their own style and will apply the principles of good expository writing differently. Below are three different versions as examples.

Revision 1

President Jacques Chirac is heading for a heavy political defeat May 29 when France holds its referendum on the European Union Constitution. Five consecutive opinion polls strongly indicate that the vote will almost certainly be negative despite President Chirac's strong support. Although the referendum is not required under French law, President Chirac called it in expectation that the opposition Socialists would split on the issue, thereby strengthening his government.

Revision 1 focuses on the political fortunes of Jacques Chirac, not the broader influence of the French referendum. Items 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the given information have not been used

Revision 2

Both the European Union and French President Jacques Chirac appear to be heading for a heavy political defeat May 29 when France holds its referendum on the European Union Constitution. Five consecutive opinion polls strongly indicate that the vote will almost certainly be negative despite President Chirac's strong support. Because France is a founding member of the EU—and until now considered to be one of its strongest pillars—if France votes against the Constitution, the confidence of other member states could be severely shaken.

The problem might very well have been avoided. The referendum is not required under French law; however President Chirac appears to have called it in expectation that the opposition Socialists would split on the issue, thereby strengthening his government. Ironically, exactly the opposite seems likely to occur.

Revision 2 focuses on both the political fortunes of Jacques Chirac and the broader influence of the French referendum. Items 3 and 4 of the given information have not been used.

Revision 3

The European Union appears to be heading for a severe setback due to a gross political miscalculation by French President Jacques Chirac. On May 29, France holds its referendum on the European Union Constitution. Five consecutive opinion polls strongly indicate that the vote will almost certainly be negative despite President Chirac's strong support. Because France is a founding member of the EU—and until now thought to be one of its strongest pillars—if France votes against the Constitution, the confidence of other member states could be profoundly shaken.

The problem might very well have been avoided. The referendum is not required under French law; however President Chirac appears to have called it in expectation that the opposition Socialists would split on the issue, thereby strengthening his government. Exactly the opposite now seems likely to occur.

Revision 3 focuses on the problems that will be created for the European Union by President Chirac's decision to allow a referendum. Items 3 and 4 of the given information have not been used.

Note that items 3 and 4 were not used in any of the versions.

- **Item 3** is interesting information. It could have been used, but the writer chose not to do so. For example: "Five consecutive and increasingly negative opinion polls strongly indicated that"
- **Item 4** makes a statement which is obvious from the text. Using item 4 would add nothing and therefore reduce clarity.

Exercise 3

This text is taken from a book about key ideas in science for the general public. The author was clearly a good writer, but not an exceptional one because he ignored a key element of clear exposition.

Original

A hormone is a chemical messenger. Active at low dose, it is secreted by an organ and transported through the blood to cells on which it exerts its action. In this case, the target cells are the cells of the liver, whose role is mainly to store excess glucose in the blood. Through the effect of adrenaline, the metabolism of hepatic cells is modified to release glucose.

Analysis

*No analysis. Go directly to the revision and see if you can spot the differences. They are small, **but crucially important**.*

Revision

A hormone is a chemical messenger. Active at low dose, it is secreted by an organ and transported through the blood to cells on which it exerts its action. In this case, the target cells are the cells of the liver, whose role is mainly to store excess glucose in the blood. Through the effect of the hormone adrenaline, the metabolism of hepatic (liver) cells is modified to release glucose.

Did you spot the differences? They are both in the last sentence.

1. *The word "hormone" is inserted before the word "adrenaline". Adrenaline is generally very well known, but it is a mistake to assume that everyone will immediately recognize that it is a hormone.*
2. *The word "liver" is inserted after the word "hepatic". Many people probably know that hepatic refers to the liver; however, our concern must be for those who don't know or aren't certain.*

Remember: Anything that causes the reader to stop and question what he is reading results in some loss of mind control. By inserting the words "adrenaline" and "liver" where a question might arise virtually guarantees that the reader keep on reading, so mind control is maintained.

The attentive writer must always alert to these small but crucial opportunities to ensure reader comprehension

Exercise 4

You may not understand what the following paragraph is talking about, but you should still be able to make it more clear and concise. There is no analysis, so:

- 1. First rewrite it*
- 2. Then look at the Revision to see what a professional writer did with it*

Original

Our Investment strategy has been conceived to achieve out-performance in respect to the reference index on the basis of a 2 - 5 year rolling period that is individually fixed for each specific bond mandate and for each specific bond fund. Each out-performance objective is calculated and announced in function of the investment universe for each compartment, which are namely government bonds, corporate bonds, or aggregates, taking into consideration the geographical coverage. We also have the ambition to deliver better performance than peer funds to which we can be compared and to achieve the first and second quartile in Standard & Poor's universe.

Revision

The investment process aims at three principal objectives:

- **Out-perform**, over a 3-year rolling period, the reference index defined for each bond mandate and bond fund
- **Match or exceed** the performance of peer funds
- **Consistently achieve** first or second quartile of the Standard & Poor's universe

Because their behavior is fundamentally different, the out-performance targets are specific to each investment universe (area)—government bonds, corporate bonds or aggregate, and geographic spread.

Note that the bullet points are arranged so that first word of each one is in bold. This is more effective than putting words in bold anywhere they happen to fall.

Example:

The investment process aims at three principal objectives:

- Over a 3-year rolling period, **out-perform** the reference index defined for each bond mandate and bond fund

- Deliver performance that **matches or exceeds** that of peer funds
- **Consistently achieve** first or second quartile of the Standard & Poor's universe

Appendix H

Fixing the flaws in the ten "principles" of clear writing

A widely circulated list of *Ten Principles of Clear Writing* offers much useful advice; however, these "principles" are really tips and techniques. In reality, they are built on our three true principles of clarity, conciseness, and density. By keeping these three true principles firmly in mind, you can apply the ten tips and techniques that grow from them with greater ease and impact.

You should already know each principle by heart, but they can never be repeated too often, so here they are again.

- **Clarity.** For a text to be clear, the writer must identify and emphasize what is of primary importance (key ideas); de-emphasize what is of secondary importance (information supporting key ideas); and eliminate what is of no importance (irrelevant information).
- **Conciseness.** For a text to be concise, the writer must cover all the key ideas and supporting information identified under "clarity", and do so in a minimum of words.
- **Density.** For a text to be dense, the writer must use specific information to add substance; and clearly show the logical link between related information to avoid misinterpretations.

Ten Tips and Techniques

1. Keep sentences short

This is usually interpreted to mean an average sentence length of 15-18 words. Not because readers can't handle longer sentences. However, when length rises above this average, sentences are likely to be poorly constructed, thereby damaging clarity.

But remember, 15-18 words is an average. Don't shun longer sentences. A well constructed long sentence is often clearer than two or more shorter ones. Why? Because the longer sentence better shows the logical linkage among the various elements, which would be lost by splitting it apart.

2. Prefer the simple to the complex

If the precise word is long, don't hesitate to use it, because not using it would damage clarity. On the other hand, if a shorter word would do just as well, prefer

it. Examples: “dog” rather than “canine”, “change” rather than “modification”, “entrance” rather than “ingress”, etc.

3. Prefer the familiar word

This is just a variation of point 2. If you have a choice between two words, use the one that most people are likely to recognize and use themselves. Examples: “insult” rather than “imprecate”, “daily” rather than “quotidian”.

4. Avoid unnecessary words

In other words, be concise.

5. Use active verbs

In an individual sentence, whether you use an active or a passive verb is of little consequence. However, over an entire text it becomes very important. Active verbs tend to enhance clarity; conversely, too many passive verbs tend to damage it.

6. Write the way you speak

This is a very useful technique, but don't take it literally. When we speak, we generally use simpler vocabulary and sentence structures than when we write. Writing the way you speak is a good way to produce a first draft. However, when we speak, our sentence structures are often confused and our vocabulary imprecise. These faults must be rigorously corrected in the second, third or later drafts.

7. Use terms your reader can picture

In other words, be dense. Use specifics; avoid weasel words. When making a general statement, be certain to support it with concrete data.

8. Tie in with your reader's experience

We are again talking about density, i.e. using precise information. Be certain that the terminology you chose is compatible with your readers' experience. If you need to use a word not likely to be familiar to your readers, define it the first time it appears. If it is really key, define it again later on in the text. Also be wary of words that look familiar but have a very different meaning in the context of your subject.

Example: “Insult” is medical jargon for an injury or trauma. However, talking about an “insult” to the heart without first explaining this unconventional meaning of the word is likely to leave your readers scratching their heads.

9. Make full use of variety

This suggestion is almost superfluous. If you conscientiously apply the three writing principles of clarity, conciseness, and density, you will almost automatically introduce variety of sentence length and structure into your text.

Avoid introducing too much variety of vocabulary. Constantly changing terminology for the sake of variety damages clarity. If several words mean essentially the same thing, pick one or two of them and shun the others. Introduce equivalent terms in such a way that the reader clearly understands they mean the same thing. Here's an example.

- **Confusing**

Manned space travel to Mars is once again being considered. The Red Planet has fascinated mankind for centuries. The “God of War” is the fourth planet from the sun—our own Earth is the third—and it is our closest celestial neighbor except for the moon.

- **Clear**

Manned space travel to Mars is once again being considered. Popularly known as the “Red Planet”, Mars has fascinated mankind for centuries. Being the fourth planet from the sun (Earth is the third), it is our closest celestial neighbor except for the moon.

10. Write to express, not to impress

The purpose of expository (non-fiction) writing is to inform or instruct, not to show off your literary prowess. The fact is, the better you write, the less people are likely to notice. And this is how it should be. The reader’s full attention should be on what you are saying, not how you are saying it.

Appendix I

Putting It All Together—Commented Examples of Writing & Speaking

The following is the transcript of an oral presentation made to an international business group. It was amply supported by a series of well-constructed slides, so it is interesting to see how well the text stands up without visual support.

There is an old Anglo-Saxon marketing maxim that says: “*If you build a better mousetrap, the world will beat a path to your door*”. In more common language, if you have a better product, people will seek you out to buy it (1). But only if they know you have a better product. This is the role of marketing, or more specifically marketing communication.

Everyone in business in some way practices marketing communication. The problem is, even marketing communication specialists really don’t know what they are doing (2). They have strong opinions about what they are doing (3), but if you put two such

experts together, their strong opinions (3) are likely to go in exactly opposite directions (4).

This is because many practitioners still believe that marketing communication such as advertising and press relations is more of an art than a science. You need to “feel” advertising and press relations. It is true that certain people are more sensitive than others, and therefore probably do a better job. However, they are mistaken in the belief that “feel” is the principal factor for success (5).

Marketing communication *is* a science (6). I would like to investigate some of the key principles of this science, with some examples to make them clear (7).

These are not my principles (8). I’m not going to tell you what seems to have worked for me and suggest you do the same thing. These principles are based on and confirmed by solid scientific research. And they are all contained in a very readable book that I strongly recommend anyone interested in effective marketing communication should read. Its title is “Tested Advertising Methods” by John Caples. It is called “Tested Advertising Methods” (9) because over a 50-year period, Mr. Caples actually ran scientific experiments to find out what really works and what does not. Some of his findings are very surprising and are directly opposite to what most people believe (10).

(And the presentation continues)

- (1) This maxim is probably unfamiliar to most listeners in this international audience, so the question is: “What does it mean?” The answer comes immediately in the following sentence. The presentation opens this way for two reasons:
 - Raising the question in the first sentence heightens the already high level of listener interest
 - Listeners may hear the maxim again some time in the future, so now they will know what it means.
- (2) A rather surprising statement, which again heightens interest.
- (3) Notice the use of repetition for emphasis.
 - what they are doing
 - strong opinions
- (4) The question is: “Why should this be the case?” The answer comes immediately in the following sentence.
- (5) Notice repetition of the word “feel” for emphasis.
- (6) This is an example of the “separation” technique. The speaker could have said: “However, they are mistaken in the belief that feel is the principal factor for success, because marketing communication *is* a science.” Instead, he chose to say “Marketing communication *is* a science” as a separate sentence for greater emphasis.

- (7) Tell them what you are going to tell them. The listeners now know exactly what will be in the body of the presentation and so are prepared for it.
- (8) Apparently a very banal statement, but it partially answers the question: “Who says marketing communication is a science?” The full answer comes in the rest of the paragraph.
- (9) Separation + repetition for emphasis. The speaker could have said: “Its title is Tested Advertising Methods, because over a 50-year period author John Caples actually ran scientific experiments to find out what really works and what does not.” Instead, the speaker wisely chose to use two sentences and to repeat Tested Advertising Methods—probably with vocal emphasis on the word “tested”.
- (10) A second time he “tells them what he is going to tell them”. This time he strengthens his mind control with a teaser. What thinking person would not wish to know which cherished ideas he holds that science has now challenged or proved wrong?

I think you will agree that this quite easily could have been a “naked presentation”, i.e. without slides or other visual aids. This is often the best way to develop your presentation. If it can succeed without visual aids, it will almost certainly be better with them. If it cannot succeed without visual aids, you probably should revise it.

Naked Presentation Exercise

Here is another “naked presentation”. This speech was delivered to a group of diplomats, business executives, academics, and other professionals in Brussels. Although it used no visual aids, it kept the audience spellbound. See if you can determine why.

How to do this exercise

The exercise consists of two parts.

In Part I, you will see an introduction to the speech as it might have been written by someone unfamiliar with the principles taught in this book, labeled the “Original”. This will be followed by an “Analysis” to highlight its strengths and weaknesses.

1. Cover the page so that only the “Original” is visible, and read the text.
2. As you read, with everything else still covered, make notes about what you think is good about the “Original” and what you think needs to be done to improve it.
3. Uncover the “Analysis” and compare it with your notes.

In Part 2, you will see the introduction to the speech as it was actually delivered. Once again:

1. Cover the page so that only the “Original” is visible, and read the text.
2. As you read, with everything else still covered, make notes about what you think is good about the “Original” and what you think needs to be done to improve it.
3. Uncover the “Analysis” and compare it with your notes.

You do not have to agree with everything in the “Analysis” for each part. Everyone has slightly different ways of looking at a speech. However, if you strongly disagree with anything in the “Analysis”, ask yourself “why?” In particular, ask yourself what fundamental principles you believe is being applied poorly, or not at all.

Part 1

The speech as it might have been written

I want to talk to you this evening about a man I admire very much. His name is Julius Nyerere and he was the first president of Tanzania after it gained independence from Britain in 1961.

Julius Nyerere was born in 1922 in Butiama, a small village in what was then Tanganyika. He was the son of Nyerere Burito, a Zanaki tribal chief. At that time schools were in very short supply. Julius began attending Government Primary School at the age of 12, which he completed in three years instead of the standard four. He did equally well in secondary school and won a scholarship to Makerere University in Uganda, then the only university in all of East Africa.

When he returned to Tanganyika, he worked for three years as a secondary school teacher of biology and English, before winning a scholarship to attend the University of Edinburgh where he obtained a Masters of Arts Degree in history and economics. This is where he began developing the ideas and tactics that ultimately helped him lead Tanganyika to independence from Britain and become the independent country’s first president. Unlike many other independence movements, he achieved this feat without a single drop of blood being shed.

Analysis

This speech seems to get off to a good start. It immediately tells the audience what the speaker will talk about and who he is going to talk about. Because most people in the audience will probably not have heard of Julius Nyerere, it immediately answers the question: “Who is he?” Remember, whenever you raise a question in your reader’s or listener’s mind, it is essentially to answer it; otherwise you risk losing mind control.

All of this is quite good. However, the introduction largely ignores the expository writing (expository speaking) attitude: *No one wants to read (listen to) what you are going to say.* Therefore, your first objective, before anything else, is to give them reasons for doing so. It is only when we learn that Nyerere led his country to

independence without a single drop of blood being shed—a rare occurrence in the liberation movements of the 1960s—does the man really begin to sound interesting.

Thus, while this introduction gives a lot of data, it gives little information. *In short, it fails to rapidly engage the audience.*

Part 2

As the speech was actually written

We live in a cynical world where the values of truth, honesty and integrity seem to be in short supply. We are therefore always looking for examples of such values in action, especially with regard to politicians.

I would like to offer you such an example from Africa. You have probably never heard of him, but for me he stands as a true model of integrity. Can you guess who he might be? (Speaker waits a few seconds). No, it is not Nelson Mandela. However, I am certain Mr. Mandela would be more than pleased to be compared to this person.

His name is Julius Nyerere. Julius Nyerere was the man who led then Tanganyika, today called Tanzania, to independence from Britain in 1961. Unlike many other independence movements, this one succeeded without a single drop of blood being shed.

I had the privilege of living two years in Tanzania shortly after independence. Being a city boy, for me Tanzania was quite a revelation. I virtually lived in a mud hut, suffered through a drought, saw leprosy, and contracted both malaria and dysentery. All of these things affected me. But getting to know Julius Nyerere as a political leader was truly a life-changing experience.

When Nyerere became head of state in 1961, he was so popular that he could easily have taken on the trappings of a king or potentate. But he did exactly the opposite. He chose to live very modestly, because that was his nature.

More importantly, he inspired confidence in everyone, and never betrayed that confidence, because that also was his nature. He of course had political enemies, but they were critical of certain of his ideas and policies—but never the man. The worst I ever heard anyone say about him was, “President Nyerere is doing all the wrong things for all the right reasons.”

Julius Nyerere was a realist riding a wave of idealism. (And the speech continues)

Analysis

We live in a cynical world where the values of truth, honesty and integrity seem to be in short supply. We are therefore always looking for examples of such values in action, especially with regard to politicians.

1. The first paragraph makes a broad generalization with which most of the audience will probably agree. They are therefore already somewhat on the speaker's side.
2. It also suggests that the speaker is about to offer a counter-example to this gloomy generalization, thereby titillating interest.

I would like to offer you such an example from Africa. You have probably never heard of him, but for me he stands as a true model of integrity. Can you guess who he might be? (Speaker waits a couple of seconds while the audience considers the question). No, it is not Nelson Mandela. However, I am certain Mr. Mandela would be more than pleased to be compared to this man.

1. This paragraph confirms the suggestion that the speaker will give a counter-example. But only partially. Instead, it promises an example from Africa. This raises the speculation in the audience's mind that he is going to talk about Nelson Mandela, probably the only Africa leader of world stature most of them know.
2. By asking the question "Can you guess who he might be?", the speaker confirms the audience in their speculation.
3. The speaker then reverses the situation by declaring that it isn't Nelson Mandela, but someone whom Mandela himself would have greatly admired. This heightens the audience's attention and engagement.

His name is Julius Nyerere. Julius Nyerere was the man who led then Tanganyika, today called Tanzania, to independence in 1961. Unlike many other independence movements, this one succeeded without a single drop of blood being shed.

1. Note the repetition of the name Julius Nyerere. Since most of the audience will probably not have heard of him, they are likely not to grasp the name the first time it is mentioned, so it is immediately repeated.
2. Nyerere is identified as the man who led Tanganyika, now Tanzania, to independence. This is a distinction, but hardly outstanding. However, the speaker immediately says that this happened "without a single drop of blood being shed", a very rare occurrence; the audience gets a first clue as to what makes this man so unusual.

I had the privilege of living two years in Tanzania shortly after independence. Being a city boy, for me Tanzania was quite a revelation. I virtually lived in a mud hut, suffered through a drought, saw leprosy, and contracted both malaria and dysentery. All of these things affected me. But getting to know Julius Nyerere as a political leader was truly a life-changing experience.

1. The speaker then reveals how he knows about Julius Nyerere. And why, despite all the other life-changing experiences he had in going from Los Angeles to Tanzania, he puts the opportunity to observe Julius Nyerere up close at the top of the list.
2. Talking about his personal relationship with Nyerere is not a self-serving diversion. It confirms the speaker's authority on the subject. This is yet another means of heightening audience attention and engagement.

When Nyerere became head of state in 1961, he was so popular that he could easily have taken on the trappings of a king or potentate. But he did exactly the opposite. He chose to live very modestly, because that was his nature.

More importantly, he inspired confidence in everyone, and never betrayed that confidence, because that also was his nature. He of course had political enemies, but they were critical of certain of his ideas and policies—but never the man. The worst I ever heard anyone say about him was, “President Nyerere is doing all the wrong things for all the right reasons.”

Julius Nyerere was a realist riding a wave of idealism.

1. Enough teasing. By now the audience is fully captured and ready for some concrete examples of the man and his accomplishments.
2. Note the transitional sentence: “Julius Nyerere was a realist riding a wave of idealism.” By introducing the examples with a broad generalization, the speaker knits them all together to support a thesis, rather than giving the impression that they are isolated incidents chosen at random.

(Here is the rest of the speech. Decide for yourself if it fulfils the promise of its well-crafted introduction.)

For example, shortly after taking office, he cut the salaries of all government ministers by 20-50 percent, including himself. Although by world standards they very poorly paid, by Tanzanian standards they were very rich. Nyerere argued that such a poor country simply couldn't afford to maintain its government in such a lavish style. Any minister who refused the cut was invited to leave the government, and a number of them did.

In the 1960s, the first thing a newly independent country wanted to do was set up a national airline and rush to industrialize. Nyerere was different. He concluded that Tanzania could not become truly industrialized for at least a hundred years. So instead of devoting all its energies and limited resources to trying to build an industrial base, it made more sense to strengthen its agricultural base.

In particular, it meant reforming the schools. Instead of turning out potential clerks, shop assistants and middle managers for the cities, the goal should be to turn out scientific farmers who would go back to their villages to teach their compatriots, who were mainly subsistence farmers.

Advocating this was close to heresy. Most people felt that the purpose of going to school was precisely to escape from the backward rural villages. There was considerable opposition to Nyerere's idea, but finally it was implemented. As a teacher in a boarding school at the time, I could immediately see the difference. Suddenly, we were required to start a school farm and to grow much of the food the students would be eating. The students didn't take kindly to having to do manual

labor, but eventually the protests died down and farming became part of the daily routine.

At roughly the same time, Nyerere looked at Tanzania's university students, who were the elite of the elite. You must understand that there were only about a thousand university students in the country out of a population of nearly 10 million. This was because Tanzania had virtually no schools. At the age of 6, less than half the children were in school. There was a severe examination to go from primary to secondary school, which nearly 85 percent failed because there just wasn't any place for them. And university, as I said, they were the elite of the elite.

Nyerere noted that it took the total annual income of 78 Tanzanians to keep one university student in school for one year. To help cover the costs, he therefore proposed that on graduation each student give two years to public service. Once again, rebellion. The students went on strike. Once again, Nyerere stood his ground. He said: "As much as we need university graduates, we need Tanzanians more." He closed the university for a year and sent the students back to their rural villages to rediscover their roots. Those who received good reports from their village headman were allowed to return the following year.

When he retired as head of state in 1985, he took on the role of roving diplomat and peacemaker. Because he was so trusted, he was invited to facilitate and mediate to settle disputes all across the African continent. For instance, he was instrumental in bringing an end to the slaughter in Burundi in 1996.

Nyerere didn't look like the consummate leader he was. He was rather small and had a bushy little moustache that made him look like a chocolate Charlie Chaplain. But when he spoke and when he wrote, you knew that you were in the presence of someone special. He was affectionately known as "Mwalimu", which is Swahili for teacher, which is what he was before going into politics. This was a sign of respect, not reverence.

I am not a very emotional person. But when Julius Nyerere died on October 14, 1999, I felt a sudden emptiness in me. It was as if something good had left the world. And it had.

Nyerere was a devout Catholic and in 2005 he was proposed for beatification. He is currently under consideration for canonization, which is one step away from sainthood. I don't think I would put him on such a high pedestal. I didn't necessarily agree with everything he did. But I never doubted that it was always for the best of reasons.

Every time I here his name, I still feel the same emptiness I felt on the day he died. So if you are ever tempted to say that politics and integrity don't mix, please remember Julius Nyerere. You will never find a better model of integrity, either in politics or in daily life.

Appendix J

Creative Writing & Expository Writing at the Crossroads

What do Abraham Lincoln and William Shakespeare have in common?

Throughout this book, I have tried to stress the idea that a professionally written text is carefully planned and carefully executed. This is not always the case. In rare instances, the text literally flows without any apparent conscious thought.

I know this from personal experience, because it has happened to me once. It was an award-winning article I wrote in reaction to a major international disaster. In all honesty, I cannot take credit for the piece. As I recall it, when I sat down at the keyboard my fingers began moving almost by themselves. I wrote continuously, without hesitation. When I finished, I made virtually no changes. My first draft was my final draft.

I assume that my subconscious mind had been working on the article before I actually wrote it. Nevertheless, it was quite a spooky experience.

One of the greatest speeches in American history—indeed in world history—gives the self-same feeling of “premeditated spontaneity”. It is known simply as *The Gettysburg Address* because it was delivered by President Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863 at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to mark a pivotal victory in the American Civil War.

Mr. Lincoln was not reputed to be a good speaker. Among other things, he had a somewhat weak and irritating voice. So the power of the speech was mainly in the words, not the delivery.

Some reports suggest that he scribbled it on the back of an envelope just before arriving in Gettysburg. This is probably a myth, but the feeling it engenders makes the story seem plausible.

The Gettysburg Address contains only 272 words. I would like to analyze this miniature masterpiece sentence by sentence (there are just nine) because they exemplify virtually everything we have been discussing. First read it straight through; then read the analysis.

Sentence 1

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Sentence 2

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation—or any nation so conceived and so dedicated—can long endure.

Sentence 3

We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

Sentence 4

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.

Sentence 5

It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Sentence 6

But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground.

Sentence 7

The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

Sentence 8

The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

Sentence 9

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. And that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Analysis**Sentence 1**

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

The language of the mid-19th century was somewhat more florid than what we use today. But it appears that Mr. Lincoln purposely employed such phraseology to give his first words almost biblical importance. He could have said, "Eighty-seven

years ago, our country was founded based on the idea that all men are created equal.” Hardly the same thing, is it?

Sentence 2

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation—or any nation so conceived and so dedicated—can long endure.

The sentence begins, “Now we are engaged in a great civil war” This is very plain language, almost banal, suggesting that war is a mean and dirty business. The rest of the sentence then reverts to more sophisticated language to ennoble the purposes of the war. Note repetition of the words “conceived” and “dedicated” from sentence 1. This heightens the impact of the statement, which would have been seriously diminished if Mr. Lincoln had believed it mandatory to avoid such repetition.

Sentence 3

We are met on a great battlefield of that war.

This is another banal statement. It could easily have been combined with sentence 4 by saying “battlefield of that war in order to dedicate” But notice how much stronger it is standing by itself. This is an excellent example of the “separation” technique.

Sentence 4

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live.

This sentence once again contains a repetition, or at least a near repetition: “. . . who here gave their **lives** that that nation might **live**.” These two words complement each other and reinforce Mr. Lincoln’s thought. He could have chosen “survive”, “overcome”, “prosper”, or a dozen other alternatives to avoid this near repetition. I hope you will agree that none of them would have been anywhere near as effective.

Sentence 5

It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Yet another banal statement, providing dramatic contrast between the sophisticated statement that preceded it and the sophisticated statement that follows it.

Sentence 6

But in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground.

Note the near repetition created by the words "dedicate", "consecrate", "hallow". This is almost tautological, as it was meant to be in order to emphasize the thought.

Sentence 7

The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

Note the repetition of the word "consecrated": the tautology continues, further emphasizing the thought of the previous sentence.

Sentence 8

The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

Oh, what an understatement! Mr. Lincoln probably truly believed this, but he was wrong. Virtually every American schoolchild learns these words by heart, and the speech is known and recognized as a masterpiece well beyond the borders of the United States.

Sentence 9

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us. That from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain. That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom. And that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

This sentence, although divided by periods in the written form, is in fact a single, unified thought. However, it is quite easy to understand thanks to repetition of the word "devotion" and use of "internal bullet points", indicated by repeated use of the word "that".

The sentence powerfully expresses Mr. Lincoln's conviction about the purposes of the war that he passionately hated yet found himself constrained to pursue. The last "bullet point" has almost become America's national motto: "That government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Shakespeare's famous Marc Anthony soliloquy on the assassination of Julius Caesar, another beautiful piece of writing, also gives a feeling of "premeditated spontaneity". It is remarkable that *The Gettysburg Address*, considered pure exposition, and the Marc Anthony soliloquy, definitely pure creation, technically have so much in common.

Let's analyze the soliloquy the same way we did *The Gettysburg Address*. And let's start by noting that it is extremely plain language. Even centuries removed, we have little difficulty understanding it, which is not always the case with Shakespeare.

Sentence 1

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

Sentence 2

The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.

Sentence 3

So let it be with Caesar.

Sentence 4

The noble Brutus hath told you Caesar was ambitious. If it were so, it was a grievous fault, and grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.

Sentence 5

Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—for Brutus is an honorable man; so are they all, all honorable men—come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

Sentence 6

He was my friend, faithful and just to me. But Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man.

Sentence 7

He hath brought many captives home to Rome, whose ransoms did the general coffers fill. Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

Sentence 8

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept. Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.

Sentence 9

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man.

Analysis

Sentence 1

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears. I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

This is the perfect introduction to a speech, i.e. “tell them what you are going to tell them.” It is also very simple language, suggesting that the speech will be neither polemical nor great oratory. It will be a heart-felt statement of bereavement.

Sentence 2

The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones.

Once again very simple language, but something has begun to change. Note the excellent use of contrast to stimulate and maintain interest. “I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him” in the first sentence, and “evil” and “good” and “lives” and “interred” in the second.

Sentence 3

So let it be with Caesar.

Brutus has already denounced Caesar as a tyrant, who had to be killed for the general good. Anthony suggests otherwise, raising expectations in the crowd, only apparently to definitively dash them, thus heightening their interest. This is an excellent example of the “separation” technique.

Compare

➤ **As it might have been written**

The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones, and so let it be with Caesar.

➤ **As it was written**

The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones. So let it be with Caesar.

The difference is remarkable.

Sentence 4

The noble Brutus hath told you Caesar was ambitious. If it were so, it was a grievous fault, and grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.

Once again, Anthony reverses field. “If it were so . . .” clearly indicates that he disagrees with Brutus. We are back to the polemic.

Note the power in the near repetition of “grievous” and “grievously”. The statement would have been significantly weaker had Shakespeare felt compelled to avoid such repetition. He really did know how to use the language.

Sentence 5

Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest—for Brutus is an honorable man; so are they all, all honorable men—come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

Here comes the master stroke: “for Brutus is an honorable man; so are they all, all honorable men”. By now there can be little doubt that Anthony is using the word “honorable” ironically; he is in fact suggesting that Brutus and his co-conspirators are hypocrites. He drives the point home by repeating it: “so are they all, all honorable men.”

Sentence 6

He was my friend, faithful and just to me. But Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man.

Here again Shakespeare works his magic by repeating both “ambitious” and “honorable.” This heightens the impact of the statement, which would have been seriously diminished by substitutes. For example: “But Brutus says he was tyrannical and Brutus is worthy of our trust.” The same thought, but nowhere near as powerful with the repetition.

Sentence 7

He hath brought many captives home to Rome, whose ransoms did the general coffers fill. Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

Repetition of “ambitious”. Also, Anthony asks a question rather than making a statement. The listeners are enjoined to answer the question for themselves, and of course the answer is “no”, just as Anthony wants.

Sentence 8

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept. Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.

Note the use of “cried” and “wept”. Not only did Caesar empathize with the poor; he felt their pain even more than they did themselves. Also note the near repetition, “ambition” rather than “ambitious”.

Sentence 9

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious, and Brutus is an honorable man.

“Ambitious” and “honorable”. These two words now resound like a drumbeat. Anthony has effectively transformed their meanings. “Ambitious” now means “philanthropic” and “honorable” now means “ignoble”. This drumbeat continues throughout the text.

Now read the soliloquy as Shakespeare wrote it, without interruption, keeping in mind the above analysis.

(Anthony addresses the crowd)

Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones;
So let it be with Caesar. The noble Brutus
Hath told you Caesar was ambitious:
If it were so, it was a grievous fault,
And grievously hath Caesar answer'd it.
Here, under leave of Brutus and the rest -
For Brutus is an honorable man;
So are they all, all honorable men -
Come I to speak in Caesar's funeral.

He was my friend, faithful and just to me:
But Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.
He hath brought many captives home to Rome
Whose ransoms did the general coffers fill:
Did this in Caesar seem ambitious?

When that the poor have cried, Caesar hath wept:
Ambition should be made of sterner stuff:
Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And Brutus is an honorable man.

You all did see that on the Lupercal
I thrice presented him a kingly crown,
Which he did thrice refuse: was this ambition?

Yet Brutus says he was ambitious;
And, sure, he is an honorable man.

I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke,
But here I am to speak what I do know.
You all did love him once, not without cause:
What cause withholds you then, to mourn for him?
O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason. Bear with me;
My heart is in the coffin there with Caesar,
And I must pause till it come back to me.

But yesterday the word of Caesar might
Have stood against the world; now lies he there.
And none so poor to do him reverence.
O masters, if I were disposed to stir
Your hearts and minds to mutiny and rage,
I should do Brutus wrong, and Cassius wrong,
Who, you all know, are honorable men:
I will not do them wrong; I rather choose
To wrong the dead, to wrong myself and you,
Than I will wrong such honorable men.

But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar;
I found it in his closet, 'tis his will:
Let but the commons hear this testament--
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read--
And they would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood,
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory,
And, dying, mention it within their wills,
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy
Unto their issue.

The crowd demands to hear the will.

Have patience, gentle friends, I must not read it;
It is not meet you know how Caesar loved you.
You are not wood, you are not stones, but men;
And, being men, bearing the will of Caesar,
It will inflame you, it will make you mad:
'Tis good you know not that you are his heirs;
For, if you should, O, what would come of it!

Anthony continues to display mock deference to the “honorable men”. This only stirs emotions further. When he finally does read the will, the crowd mutinies against the honorable men and sets off to kill them.

If there was any doubt that this was the objective of Anthony's soliloquy, they are swept by two comments as the crowd begins to riot.

- "Now let it work. Mischief, you are loose. Take whatever path you want."
- "Fortune is favorable, and in this mood will give us anything."

The complete scene is too long to reproduce here. If you have never fully appreciated the soliloquy, here is your opportunity to break out your Shakespeare and review it in its magical entirety.

Appendix K

How to Get the Most from Your Word Processor

At every opportunity, this book has emphasized that good writing and good speaking derive from good thinking. Mathematician-philosopher Bertrand Russell once observed: *Most people would rather die than think; in fact, they do so.* This is perhaps an overstatement. However, it is clear: *What you achieve in writing and speaking with good thinking will be far superior to what you achieve without it.*

Emphasizing how you should think about writing and speaking in no way precludes benefiting from modern technology. The computer and its word processing programs are amazing inventions. The benefits you can get from your computer fall into two categories: 1) aid to thinking, 2) aid to editing

Aid to Thinking

I recall when word processors first became popular. It was not all that long ago (1990s), but it already seems forever. I also remember that I wasn't impressed, because for me the marketing efforts were off-target.

Every thing I heard seemed to be saying: *Use a word processor; you can produce more pages in less time.* I was working on an electric typewriter (already a major advance over manual typewriters). I was concerned about quality, not quantity. After all, good writing requires thinking, and thinking takes time. The last thing I needed was to produce more pages in less time.

It was only when my employer introduced computers and liquidated all typewriters that I discovered something the publicity was not saying. ***Word processors help you think!***

How?

I had always strongly believed in what I call "copy experiments". Whenever I finished writing a text, I would look at it to see if it might have been developed differently. Although I often saw other possibilities, I was seldom able to retype everything to compare the two (or sometimes three) alternative versions.

With a word processor, this is no longer a problem. You simply copy the first document into a separate file, then cut, paste, revise, reformat, etc. When you finish, you print out all the versions and choose the best one. Copy experiments take only a few minutes, but they can significantly boost the quality of your writing.

There is no question that the word processor has made me a better writer because, by making copy experiments so easy, it has made me a better thinker. It can do the same for you.

Aid to Editing

Word processors are designed to ruthlessly find and point out errors even the most conscientious proofreader might miss.

- **Spelling**

Given the word processor's speed and accuracy, today there is virtually no excuse for misspelled words. They will almost instantly find and display every word that does not conform to their internal dictionary. They can also be programmed to automatically correct commonly misspelled words without even telling you about it.

However, you cannot rely on them blindly. In English (and many other languages), words with the same sound can have several different spellings, e.g. here, hear; there, their; see, sea; cite, site, sight, etc. Because the word processor cannot always distinguish between them, when it finds such a word, it will highlight it with the alternatives and ask you which one you mean; you must make the right choice.

But watch out. The word processor may not highlight all such cases (there are just too many of them), so careful manual proofreading is still required.

- **Grammar**

Word processors can also be used to check grammar. Although they will catch most grammar errors, they will not necessarily catch all of them. So you still need to do some serious proofreading. Also, as noted on page 39, a good writer will sometimes purposely violate a grammar rule for purposes of clarity and impact. Therefore, if the word processor signals a grammatical error, don't blindly accept its judgment. Use your judgment.

- **Conciseness**

Remember, concise writing means leaving out words that are not really necessary. Not because they make the text long, but because they make it less clear.

But writers are human. We tend to fall into bad habits and may unwittingly use words that serve no real purpose. Use the “search” function of the word processor to find and delete the most common of these.

Many writers, for example, overuse “very”. This is a weasel word, i.e. it seldom adds anything to the text—and therefore subtracts from it. Search your text for “very”. If it is truly needed, keep it; otherwise, delete it. Often you can replace it with a much more descriptive word.

Compare

- The car’s engine started with a loud roar
- The car’s engine started with a very loud roar
- The car’s engine started with a thunderous roar

“In order to” is a weasel phrase. In some cases it may add emphasis to what you are saying. But in most cases it doesn’t, so replace it by a simple “to”.

Compare

- He went to the supermarket to buy bread
- He went to the supermarket in order to buy bread.

• **Force**

Verbs are generally more illustrative than nouns. Look for nouns that can be turned into verbs. In particular, search for words ending in “-ance,” “-age,” “-ment”, etc.

Compare

- **Poor:** The burglar gained entrance to the house
Better: The burglar entered the house
- **Poor:** Our success is dependent on good weather
Better: Our success depends on good weather
- **Poor:** The committee putting the matter under diligent investigation
Better: The committee is diligently investigating the matter

• **Negatives**

Negatives statements are not taboo; however, they are generally stronger and clearer as positives. Search for “no” and “not” to decide if sentences containing them could be better formulated.

Compare

- **Poor:** The menu had no variety and the food had no taste

Better: The menu was bland and the food was tasteless

➤ **Poor:** The play was not interesting and the actors were not very good

Better: The play was insipid and the actors were uninspired

- **Diction**

Diction basically means choosing the right word to express what you mean. Renowned author Mark Twain once observed: *The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.*

Non-professional writers often fail to choose the right word because they use two or three words where one would do much better. This is frequently seen in adverb-adjective combinations.

Search the text for words ending in “-ly” (often the mark of an adverb). If you find an adverb being used to “strengthen” an adjective, chances are you could replace them with a single word that would do the job much better. The same thing applies when one adjective is used to “strengthen” another.

Compare

➤ **Poor:** really big
Better: large, huge, gigantic

➤ **Poor;** loudly shouting
Better: thundering, screaming, roaring

- **Exclamation Mark**

It is also worth hunting down and destroying exclamation marks (!). These can be very useful in creative (fiction) writing. However, they are almost always useless in expository (non-fiction) writing.

Simply putting an exclamation mark at the end of a sentence does not automatically increase its importance. Too many exclamation marks in a text will almost certainly decrease importance. If you feel the need to use an exclamation mark, chances are that you really need rewrite the sentence.

- **Good English**

If English is not your native language (and even if it is), you should pay particular attention to the word “of”. This frequently signals a phrasal adjective, e.g. “a decision of the last minute” rather than “a last-minute decision”. Phrasal adjectives can sometimes be useful for emphasis and clarity, but usually they aren’t. Use the “search” function to find the word “of” and make your decision.

Appendix L

Yaffe's Law

Everything you need to know about persuasive writing & speaking in just two sentences

I don't believe in panacea formulas that solve every ill. Nevertheless, they do sometimes act as valid reminders of things we know and how to apply them.

In 2007 I wrote an article that introduced the concept of *Yaffe's Law*. This "law" says nothing new on the subject of persuasive writing and persuasive speaking; however, the way it is formulated could help you more easily recall and apply the principles you have learned in this book. Here is the article.

Techniques of Persuasive Communication: Old Wisdom in a New Package

What you are about to read will probably sound familiar. Indeed, it has been said many times before. However, I believe this formulation is original and may help you better apply it in your marketing communication. I immodestly call it Yaffe's Law.

Yaffe's Law

If you give people **what they want first**, they are likely to accept anything else you want them to have. If you give them **what you want first**, chances are they won't accept anything at all.

This is simply the classic principle that you should write from the reader's point of view. And of course we all do this. Or do we?

How often do we interpret writing from the reader's point of view as telling people: "What I have to say will be of benefit to you, so you should pay close attention"? When we do this, we are in fact writing from our point of view, not theirs. We may sincerely believe that our message is important and will be beneficial to our potential readers. But unless they agree—and agree almost immediately—the argument is lost.

We have all been guilty of such self-serving logic, and some of us do it more often than we would like to imagine. This is why this new formulation of the classic principle is potentially so useful. It forcefully reminds us that the readers are king. *And like royalty they must be served first*. Only after readers have sampled what we have on offer and find it palatable will they be truly ready to listen to what we want to say. Assimilate it. And hopefully act on it.

The power of Yaffe's Law lies in the fact that it is more than just a reminder. It is in fact a formula for ensuring that you will always write from the reader's point of view.

The trick is first to apply the formula, then check how well you have applied it—and, if necessary, reapply it.

The formula consists of three steps:

1. Determine what your readers really want to know, rather than what you want to say.
2. Give this to them--***first***.
3. Link what you want to say to what they really want to know.

Here are a few examples of how Yaffe's Law works in practice.

Corporate Image Brochure

I was once commissioned to write a corporate image brochure. Two things are certain about these expensive, glossy booklets:

- Almost all companies of any size feel compelled to produce them.
- Virtually no one ever reads them.

By applying the formula, I created a brochure that people not only read. They called the company to request additional copies to give to friends, clients and professional colleagues!

How? I started from the assumption that no one would want to read anything about the company itself. So I asked myself: *What things does the company do that people might really want to read about?*

The company's basic activity was producing vaccines. We are all naturally interested in health and virtually everyone knows the importance of vaccination. Here were already two things people might want to read about.

I was able to define seven areas of the company's activities that could be naturally attractive to potential readers. However, it didn't stop there. If all this interesting information were mixed up with company publicity, people would still probably not read it despite their natural inclination to do so.

The brochure was therefore laid out in seven double-page spreads, i.e. each of the seven areas of activity would be allotted two facing pages. However, the text would be rigorously segregated.

- **Theory**

The left side would be pure science; the company's name would never be mentioned.

- **Practice**

The right side would explain how the company used the science to produce vaccines.

In short, I gave the readers what they wanted first (scientific information), then what the company wanted them to have second (company information).

When I proposed this to the company, the reaction was one of shock. “You mean people could read the brochure left side only and never ever see our name?” Exactly. But having learned about the basic science, wouldn’t they naturally want to learn how the company was using the science?

It took a while for management to accept the idea, but finally they did. When the brochure was ready, they couldn’t print enough of them.

Of course, not all companies would be suitable for this particular type of corporate image brochure. The important thing here is not the specific structure of this specific brochure, but the thinking process that led to it.

Stand Specific Video

I have done considerable work for pharmaceutical companies. This often included attending medical congresses. The first couple of times I did this, I noted something strange.

Pharmaceutical companies regularly erect exhibition stands to inform specialist doctors about new drugs and new applications of older drugs. I noted that many of the stands had several video monitors at their edges running videotapes. I observed the behavior of the doctors. The vast majority of them watched the tape for only a minute or two, then went away.

I asked an international marketing director why he was using these monitors and tapes. “To attract attention to our stand,” he said. “But the doctors stay in front of the monitor only a couple of minutes, then leave.” “Yes, but they were attracted to our stand. They know we are here and may come back.”

Frankly, this didn’t make much sense to me, but being young and inexperienced I accepted it. A couple of years later, when I felt I knew better what I was doing, I made a suggestion.

The videotapes ran anywhere from 10 - 15 minutes, then automatically recycled. The problem was, doctors who began watching after the tape had started never knew how long they would have to wait for it to finish and restart. Moreover, hardly any were likely to stand in front the video monitor for 15 minutes or more, even if they had known how long the presentation was.

The tapes were so long because they had not been conceived for medical congresses, but for a totally different purpose. They were used simply because they already existed.

I suggested making a “stand-specific videotape”, which would concentrate all key information about the company’s product into no more than 90 seconds. The fact that the tape ran only 90 seconds and then automatically recycled would be prominently posted, so that the doctors would know exactly how much time they were being asked to invest in it.

Consider the benefits:

1. Virtually all doctors who started to watch the tape stayed for it to recycle.
2. Because they got all the key points, many who wanted more detailed information immediately came onto the stand.
3. Those who were interested but were short of time probably came back later.
4. Even those who were not certain they were interested nonetheless went away with a complete picture of what the company's product was all about.

In short, virtually 100% effectiveness!

There was no way to gauge the effectiveness of the previous system. But if it had been as much as 10%, I would have been shocked.

Interactive Stand Animation System

Another thing I noticed at medical congresses. Doctors would come onto the stand, pick up the brochures and scientific papers, put them in the congress bags, then move on to the next stand and do the same thing. The problem was, pharmaceutical companies could never really tell if doctors actually read the materials they take away. Estimates are that up 95% of it ends up in the hotel's wastepaper basket without ever being opened.

Using the method of Yaffe's Law, a few years ago a colleague and I created what we call the Interactive Stand Animation System. It is applicable not only to medical congresses, but virtually every other kind of professional trade show.

There is not room here to describe how it works, but I can tell you its results.

With this system, you are certain that your brochures, data sheets, etc., are being read, because people read them right in front of you on the stand. Even better, they actually study the documents, then discuss, debate and compare notes with their colleagues. At the same time, they provide you with valuable market research information that would be difficult to obtain in any other way. This can be very important for determining the best ways of presenting your products, which features to emphasize, which aspects may require change for later versions, etc.

I once described this system to the international marketing director of a major pharmaceutical company. He was very skeptical. Basically he said: "I have been in this business for nearly 30 years and I have attended dozens and dozens of medical congresses. What you are telling me just isn't possible." He maintained this position until he went to a congress where we were running the system for another company. His reaction: "I've seen it, but I still don't believe it. I never would have imagined anything like this could possibly be true."

But it was.

Appendix M

Final examples, exercises and tips

The following mix of examples, exercises, and tips is designed as a general review. But it is not a final test. There are many ways of writing and speaking effectively, so there may be no single correct answer. Nevertheless, whatever answers you come up with should be based on the six fundamental principles that govern effective writing and speaking:

- **Expository writing attitude**
No one wants to read what you are going to write
- **Clarity:** $C_L = EDE$
- **Conciseness:** $C_O = LS$
- **Density:** $D = PL$
- **5 Ws & H:** Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- **Inverted pyramid**
 - **Lead:** key information
 - **Body:** details, in descending order of importance

Fundamental Review

- A. What is the meaning of the formula $C_L = EDE$?
Use the **exact words** under ***What do we mean by “good writing”?*** on page 19
- B. What is the meaning of the formula $C_O = LS$?
Use the **exact words** under ***What do we mean by “good writing”?*** on page 20
- C. What is the meaning of the formula $D = PL$?
Use the **exact words** under ***What do we mean by “good writing”?*** on page 21

Exercise 1

Revise the following sentences. First read the Original, determine its fundamental meaning, then rewrite it as clearly and concisely as you can. Finally, look at the Revision. And remember, if your revised sentence is not the same as the Revision, this is quite normal. However, examine the revision to see if you might have done better.

Sentence A

Original

Based on currently available information, we are able to announce that the work will begin within a month's time.

Rewrite the sentence, then look at the Revision.

Revision

The work should begin within a month.

Sentence B

Original

Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) is a European program, launched by the European Commission in 2001, with the aim of gathering information on air quality in Europe and based on this information, put into place mechanisms to evaluate and generally improve air quality where and when necessary.

Rewrite the sentence, then look at the Revision.

Revision

Clean Air for Europe (CAFE), an initiative of the European Commission, was launched in 2001 to achieve two fundamental objectives:

1. Collect reliable information on air quality throughout Europe
2. Use this data to establish mechanisms for evaluating and improving air quality

Exercise 2

The following text is taken from an official document describing the educational systems in various European countries. First, rewrite it as best you can. Then look at the four alternative revisions.

It would be difficult to say which of the revisions is "best", because that depends on what precedes it and what follows it. However, I think we can agree that all of the revisions are superior to the Original.

Sentence A

Original

At both levels of education under consideration, in the case of Germany, and at primary level only, and in the case of France, Luxembourg and Portugal, at both primary and secondary levels, schools have no autonomy as regards the use of the financial resources allocated to them. Use is dictated by the Ministry of Education and cannot be modified.

Rewrite the text.

Complete your work before looking at the proposed revisions below.

Revisions

1. At both levels of education, Germany (primary level only), and France, Luxembourg and Portugal (primary and secondary levels), schools have no autonomy in the use of financial resources allocated to them. Use is dictated by the Ministry of Education.

Elimination of unnecessary word: "in the case of"

2. In Germany (primary level only), and France, Luxembourg and Portugal (primary and secondary levels), schools have no autonomy in the use of the money they receive. Use is dictated by the Ministry of Education.

Elimination of unnecessary word: "in the case of" and "at both levels of education"

3. Schools in four countries have no autonomy to use the monies they receive: Germany (primary level only); France, Luxembourg and Portugal (both primary and secondary level). Use is dictated by the Ministry of Education.

Revised to put key idea first: "Schools in four countries have no autonomy to use the monies they receive"

4. Schools in four countries have no autonomy to use the monies they receive:
 - Germany (primary level only)
 - France, Luxembourg and Portugal (both primary and secondary level)Use is dictated by the Ministry of Education.

Revised to put key idea first: "Schools in four countries have no autonomy to use the monies they receive" + bullet points

The word "autonomy" sounds rather like jargon. It might be advisable to change it to "authority", "freedom", etc.

Exercise 3

The following text is taken from a report describing the deterioration of some of Europe's most famous buildings and monuments. First, rewrite it as best you can. Then look at the three alternative revisions.

It would be difficult to say which of the revisions is "best", because that depends on what precedes it and what follows. However, I think we can agree that all of the revisions are superior to the Original.

Original

Recent years have seen many countries wake up to the heartbreaking deterioration of priceless buildings and monuments, with a renewed commitment to historic preservation using the best modern materials and processes that deliver results while respecting the environment.

Rewrite the text.

Complete your work before looking at the proposed revisions below.

Revisions

1. Many countries in recent years have woken up to the heartbreaking deterioration of priceless buildings and monuments, and have set about preserving them by using the best modern materials and processes that deliver results while respecting the environment.

Revised to give a more active tone: "many countries in recent years have woken up to" in place of "recent years have seen many countries wake up to" and "have set about preserving them" in place of "with a renewed commitment to historic preservation".

2. Many countries in recent years have woken up to the heartbreaking deterioration of priceless buildings and monuments, and have set about preserving them by using today's most modern, environmentally friendly materials and processes.

Active tone + elimination of unnecessary words: "modern, environmentally friendly materials and processes" in place of "modern materials and processes that deliver results while respecting the environment".

3. Many countries have woken up to the heartbreaking deterioration of priceless buildings and monuments, and are now preserving them by using today's most modern, environmentally friendly materials and processes.

Active tone + further elimination of unnecessary words: “in recent years” deleted, and “are now preserving them” in place of “have set about preserving them”.

Exercise 4

Text A

Medical representatives from pharmaceutical companies regularly visit doctors to tell them about new therapies or new uses for existing therapies. Surprisingly, medical reps do not necessarily have medical backgrounds. Basically, they are intelligent people who learn fast and know how to communicate. Nevertheless, it is useful to reassure them when teaching them about a new product in a new field.

This is especially true concerning asthma. Most types of asthma are caused by a failure of the immune system. The functioning of the immune system is generally considered to be one of the most complicated and difficult areas of medicine.

The following is the introduction to a training course for a new asthma medication. It is somewhat different from previous products because it is based on important new insights into how the immune system works. As you read it, ask yourself:

- 1. What is the argument of this text?*
- 2. Do you feel that it states the argument in a clear, concise, dense manner?*

Immunology is one of the most fascinating and complex branches of medicine.

- It is so fascinating because the immune system is the body’s major defense against countless microscopic enemies all around us, always ready to do harm, and even bring death.
- It is so complex for precisely the same reason. Because the immune system must cope with an almost infinite variety of enemies, it exerts an almost infinite variety of actions.

Most of the time, it works extraordinarily well; however, sometimes it dysfunctions. Allergies are caused by one such dysfunction. To understand how allergies arise and their appropriate treatments, it is necessary to clearly understand how the immune system works—and how it may go wrong.

Like virtually every other branch of science, the complexities of the immune system are in its details. The basic principles that underlie its basic functions are few and easy to grasp. This training course is therefore divided into three essential parts:

1. An overview of the fundamental principles of the immune system
2. A detailed look at each principle and how it applies
3. A more detailed look at our company’s anti-allergic product in comparison to its main competitors

What is the argument?

You might want to consider this text to have two arguments:

- 1. It is necessary to understand the immune system in order to understand asthma and the benefits of the new medication.*
- 2. The principles of the immune system are few and easy to understand; everything else is detail.*

Text B

This text is the introduction of a brochure to recruit specialist doctors to participate in a major clinical trial.

- 1. What is the argument of the text?*
- 2. Do you think it is stated in a clear, concise, dense manner?*

Allergic diseases in children in industrialized countries are showing constant increases. Since it is unlikely there has been a major change in the genetic make-up of populations in industrialized countries (allergies have a strong genetic component), it is reasonable to attribute these increases to environmental factors, e.g. eating habits, air pollution, cigarette smoke, etc.

With respect to asthma, both morbidity (severity) and mortality (death) are increasing. This is happening despite better diagnosis and symptomatic treatment, notably with safer, more effective bronchodilators

The question arises: Can this alarming situation be improved? Theoretical considerations and preliminary clinical studies suggest the answer could be: YES.

Recent advances in basic research today give us significantly better understanding of the underlying mechanisms of allergies than we had only a few years ago. This better understanding in turn suggests that allergies in general—and especially asthma—could be treated at the very earliest stage to stop, or at least delay and mitigate, subsequent development of clinical symptoms.

What is the argument?

The argument is:

The rising trend of allergic diseases, notably asthma, can be stopped by controlling the environmental factors (rather than genetic factors) that contribute to them.

Exercise 6

Many companies produce employee newspapers and/or provide employee news on in-company websites to keep their workforces informed and interested in their jobs. The theory is, motivated workers are more conscientious and productive. However, to read some of these publications, you might be forgiven for wondering if the company really understands the people it's talking to.

Here's a typical example.

Original

Russian soap executives visit us

In the presence of Gentry & Mulford, our marketing partner in Russia, and Ms. Nadia, Pavloski of Radkoff, a leading Russian laundry detergent manufacturer, a high delegation of the most important Russian applied surfactants association, TRIA, visited the Samuelson Silicones facilities in Ireland from July 7-13.

Earlier in the year, firm contacts with Mr. Igor Bronkovitch (General Director) and Mrs. Olga Zukoff (Deputy Director Science) had been established when Samuelson Silicones and Gentry & Mulford participated in the Russian National Detergents Conference in Moscow, where our new triple-layered anti-foam product (TLAF) was presented to the Russian detergent industry.

At a time when the Russian economy is recovering from its recent financial crisis, its population is rapidly reverting to the purchase of fully automatic washing machines, which require the incorporation in detergent formulas of full cycle foam control, for which purpose Samuelson Silicones developed its patented TLAF powdered foam control product.

This product introduction attracted a lot of attention and interest among Russian detergent experts. Since production volumes of "low-foaming" detergents are increasing sharply, we are expecting significant new sales of TLAF in Russia already starting in 2008.

Analysis

There is no detailed analysis of this text. Technically, it has many things wrong with it; however, there is one fundamental thing wrong with it. Carefully re-read the text and see if you can find the fundamental flaw. Then rewrite it accordingly.

Revision

Bubbling Russian economy looks to Samuelson to keep its foam under control

As the Russian economy recovers from its recent financial crisis, its population is once again buying fully automatic washing machines, which require detergent formulas with full-cycle foam control. Samuelson Silicone's patented triple-layered

anti-foam product (TLAF) is a leading contender to keep all this new Russian foam under control.

“Because production of low-foaming detergents is sharply increasing, significant new sales of TLAF in Russia can be expected starting as early as 2008,” says Raymond Sanchez, Samuelson’s Global Marketing Manager for Domestic Cleaning Products.

How did this important new opportunity come about?

Earlier this year, firm contacts were made with Igor Bronkovitch (General Director) and Olga Zukoff (Deputy Director Science) of TRIA, the Russian surfactants association, when Samuelson and Gentry & Mulford, our local marketing partner, participated in the Russian National Detergents Conference in Moscow. This is where TLAF was presented to the Russian detergent industry for the first time, attracting a lot of attention and strong interest from detergent experts.

As an indication of Samuelson’s strengthening position in the Russian market, from July 7 - 13, a delegation of Russian detergent industry leaders visited the company’s facilities in Ireland. They included both Mr. Bronkovitch and Mrs. Zukoff of TRIA, as well as Nadia Pavlova of Radkoff, a major Russian laundry detergent manufacturer.

Notes

The fundamental problem with this text is that it fails to answer the fundamental question: Why would anyone want to read it (expository writing attitude)? Certainly not because some prestigious visitors came to the company’s facilities in Ireland. But because of what this visit signified for the company’s prospects—and the security of each reader’s job. In the Original, this vital information was not mentioned until the third paragraph; in the Revision, it is in the first paragraph, where it belongs.

- 1. Note the difference in the two headlines. The Original states a fact of doubtful interest. The Revision suggests an important milestone in the company’s development.*
- 2. The Revision uses a direct quotation from one of the company’s senior executives. The information could have been conveyed without a quotation. But note how much more compelling it is when it comes from someone directly involved in the situation.*
- 3. The Original immediately identifies people according to their civil status: **Ms.** Nadia, Pavloski, **Mrs.** Olga Zukoff, **Mr.** Igor Bronkovitch. The Revision uses civil status starting only from the second mention of the person. This is a question of style. Most professional publications do it as in the Revision because defining civil status on first mention is considered unnecessarily heavy and wordy.*

An exception is made when the name does not clearly indicate whether the person is male or female, in which case civil status is usually shown in parentheses.

Example: (Mr.) Marian Morrison.

4. *The Original uses many passive prepositional phrases; the Revision changes most of these to more active constructions.*
Compare: “reverting to the purchase of fully automatic washing machines” vs. “once again buying fully automatic washing machines”.
5. *The Original contains 190 words compared to 161 for the Revision. This is not a huge difference. But doesn't the Original seem much, much longer?*

Exercise 7

This text is just for show; there is no Revision. It is part of the Executive Summary of a much longer document. With a bit of effort, you can probably understand it. But imagine if you had to read a whole document written like this!

At the turn of the millennium the use of environmental taxes has accelerated, at least at the level of the individual member states of the European Union (EU). However, at the EU level hardly any progress, particular in the area of energy taxes, is visible, although a vast majority supports broadening and increasing minimum excise levels for all energy products. In particular, large EU countries such as France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom have started applying this instrument. Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, some Asian and South American countries are also increasingly starting to experiment with environmental taxes, while in North America application is visible only at the individual state level and apart from comprehensive tax expenditures.

When entering the debate and implementation of ecological tax reform, several issues are the core of the debate. Potential negative impacts on competitiveness are the major concern, which is closely related to impacts on employment. However, practically no negative experience is available, as the design has been chosen appropriately. Other concerns debated are related to equity, inflation, and the potential trade-off between raising revenues and showing environmental effects.

Most barriers to implementation, especially to energy taxes, such as potential negative impacts on competitiveness, on employment (particularly on specific sectors and regions), on inflation, and on low-income groups, can be overcome by the removal of environmentally damaging subsidies and regulations, careful design, the use of environmental taxes and respective revenues within broader tax reforms, looking at distributional impacts by taking into account the proportionally higher physical impacts of reduced environmental damages for low-income groups, and abolishing the requirement for unanimity voting at the EU level. Countries applying ecological tax reforms have demonstrated through the specific design of their taxes that these measures help to overcome these barriers.

If environmental taxes are well designed and implemented, they could deliver improvements in five key areas of public policy: the environment, innovation and

competitiveness, employment, the fiscal system, and the functioning of other instruments such as environmental agreements and regulations.

Notes

1. Note the use of the terms “environmental tax”, “energy taxes”, “ecological taxes”. You might deduce that an “energy tax” is a specific tax on energy products (petroleum, coal, gas, etc.) to conserve energy and combat global warming. But what is the difference between an “environmental tax” and an “ecological tax”? Or are they alternative terms for the same thing? This is not at all clear.
2. This text is full of lists. Listed information should occasionally be broken out as bullet points for clarity and added emphasis. The last paragraph literally cries out for bullet points.

Example

Original

If environmental taxes are well designed and implemented, they could deliver improvements in five key areas of public policy: the environment, innovation and competitiveness, employment, the fiscal system, and the functioning of other instruments such as environmental agreements and regulations.

Revision

If environmental taxes are well designed and implemented, they could deliver improvements in five key areas of public policy:

1. Environment
2. Innovation and competitiveness
3. Employment
4. Fiscal system
5. Proper functioning of other instruments such as environmental agreements and regulations.

Writing Tips

I am not particularly fond of lists of writing tips, especially those that offer 10 of them. Ten always seems to be an artificial number, as if the writer set out to write a list and decided beforehand that it should contain 10 items. There is no reason why such a list shouldn't contain 8 or 12 tips, or any other number. Citing 10 suggests an artificial effort to reach this magic number, which means that the list itself was not the writer's principal concern.

That having been said, the reason I don't like such lists is that whatever they contain, they almost invariably leave something out. That something is the true sense of what each tip means. It is not enough to read the words; you must fully understand why the tip is valid.

If you have fully grasped the basic principles—the expository writing attitude, the functional (mathematical) definitions of clarity, conciseness, density, the inverted pyramid, etc.—such a list might serve as a handy reminder.

Here is a list of my own, compiled from the innumerable tip lists you can find in other books and on the Internet.

1. Keep sentences short

This is almost invariably the first item on everyone's list. I have seen some author's insist that no sentence should exceed 20 words. Why 20 and not 21? Or 19? Mainly because 20 is a round number and therefore seemingly has inherent force. But of course this is nonsense.

There is no natural limit to the length of a sentence. The basic principle of conciseness applies to sentences as well as the overall text: *As long as necessary; as short as possible*. Thus, if there is any way of shortening a sentence without damaging its clarity, they you probably should do so.

Never count the words in individual sentences, but only within the overall text. As a rule of thumb, if the **average** number of words per sentence is 20 or higher, your text could probably be improved.

2. Write only one idea per sentence

Each sentence should have a specific purpose. You should clearly know why you are writing it, i.e. what essential idea you want to convey. Knowing the purpose of the sentence before you write it will help you determine what to put in, and equally important, what to leave out. This improves both clarity and conciseness.

3. Aim for the lowest common denominator

Always assume that your audience knows **less** than they probably do. However educated people may be, they are likely to have gaps in their knowledge or areas of uncertainty. Help them better understand by explaining key aspects of your message, even at the risk of "talking down to them".

If you tell people something they already know, they generally take it as a reminder. However, if you fail to tell them something they don't know, they can become lost. In my experience, I have never been criticized for over-explaining, but I have been criticized for under-explaining. Hopefully, I no longer make this mistake.

4. Be wary of technical terminology and jargon

Technical terminology and jargon are very useful shorthand; they allow you to say in a word or two what might otherwise take several words or even a full sentence. On the other hand, they can be totally confusing to people who are unfamiliar with them.

Avoid technical terminology and jargon unless you are absolutely certain your readers or listeners will understand. Assuming they know less than they do will almost never cause a problem. Assuming they know more than they do certainly will.

5. Avoid too many prepositions in a single sentence

Overuse of prepositions usually indicates non-concise writing, which in turn damages clarity. When proofreading, if you notice a sentence with three or more prepositions, consider if it could be written more clearly and concisely.

Compare

➤ Poor

Together with its concern for diversity, XYZ Corporation attaches the highest importance to the quality of the working environment and of the development of the talents of its employees. **Prepositions: 7**

➤ Better

Version A

Together with its concern for diversity, XYZ Corporation attaches the highest importance to providing a quality working environment and developing the talents of its employees. **Prepositions: 4**

Version B

Complementing its concern for diversity, XYZ Corporation attaches the highest importance to providing a quality working environment and developing the talents of its employees. **Prepositions: 3**

6. Use active voice as much as possible

Verbs in the passive voice of course have their uses; otherwise the passive voice would not exist. However for most purposes the active voice should be preferred, because it is generally clearer and more concise.

- **Active voice:** Our group greatly appreciated the exhibition
- **Passive voice:** The exhibition was greatly appreciated by our group

7. Avoid long introductory clauses

A brief introduction to a sentence before getting into its main message is often useful. However, if the introduction piles up too much information, the main message is likely to be diminished or lost.

Compare

➤ **Poor**

With exports of polished diamonds up significantly from all cutting centers and reports from Asia, Europe and the United States that retail sales are ranging from “same-to-higher” compared to the same period a year ago, diamond and jewelry companies seem to be on the road to prosperity.

➤ **Better**

Diamond and jewelry companies seem to be on the road to prosperity as evidenced by exports of polished diamond being up significantly from all cutting centers, and reports from Asia, Europe and the United States that retail sales are ranging from “same-to-higher” compared to the same period a year ago.

➤ **Best**

Diamond and jewelry companies seem to be on the road to prosperity. Exports of polished diamond are up significantly from all cutting centers. Moreover, reports from Asia, Europe and the United States show retail sales are ranging from “same-to-higher” compared to the same period a year ago.

8. Use concrete terms rather than abstract ones

This is just another way of saying: *Avoid weasel words*. Remember, readers can interpret weasel words (abstract nouns and phrases) in unexpected ways. You as the writer never know how they are doing it, so you lose mind control. Concrete terms help ensure that you and your readers are walking the same path—and that you are leading them exactly where you want them to go.

9. Avoid unnecessary transition

This probably sounds like heresy. You no doubt learned in school that transition is vitally important. And it is. However, the suggestion here is to avoid **unnecessary transition**.

When one idea logically follows from another, it is often unnecessary—and *in fact preferable*—not to use transitional words such as “thus”, “therefore”, “moreover”, “in addition”, “it follows that”, “on the other hand”, etc.

Why?

Because when used automatically, such words tend to dominate the text, ultimately clouding meaning rather than clarifying it. So:

1. Look for places that really need transitional words and put them in.
2. Look for places where ideas follow so logically that transition words are not needed—which should be most of the time—and delete them.

Compare

➤ Poor

When we arrived, we saw the house at the top of the hill. First we walked up the hill and then rang the doorbell several times. Moreover, we even knocked on the door. However, there was still no answer. Thus, we decided to walk back down the hill, get into our car and then leave.

➤ Better

When we arrived, we saw the house at the top of the hill. We walked up the hill, rang the doorbell several times, and even knocked on the door. There was no answer, so we decided to walk back down the hill, get into our car and leave.

10. Paragraph lay-outing

I am particularly fond of “paragraph lay-outing”. Paragraph lay-outing simply means dividing text into paragraphs to increase clarity rather than to conform to the rules of grammar.

A grammatical paragraph is one that unites all the elements related to a single idea. A clarity paragraph is one that emphasizes a single idea.

I know this sounds vague, so to paraphrase the famous dictum: *An example is worth a thousand words*. You have just read one such example. A grammarian would probably argue that the preceding two paragraphs should have been written as only one.

I am particularly fond of “paragraph lay-outing”. Paragraph lay-outing simply means dividing text into paragraphs to increase clarity rather than to conform to the rules of grammar. A grammatical paragraph is one that unites all the elements related to a single idea. A clarity paragraph is one that emphasizes a single idea.

I would argue that the concept of “paragraph lay-outing” is more strongly and clearly conveyed (emphasized) by dividing the paragraph into two.

I have been using paragraph lay-outing throughout this book. True, it sometimes leads to paragraphs of only a single sentence. Some grammarians would consider this to be sinful. The only real sin in expository writing and speaking is

lack of clarity. If a single-sentence paragraph aids clarity, it is virtuous. It is sinful only if it doesn't.

Take a few minutes to go back through the book looking for examples of paragraph lay-outing. Judge for yourself whether the meaning of the passage would have been better conveyed by a single "grammatical" paragraph rather than two "clarity" paragraphs.

11. Consistently apply the "what question does this raise in mind of the readers?" technique

After each sentence you write, examine it to see what question it could raise in the mind of your readers. *Then answer it!*

12. Write fast, edit slow

Input what you want to say as if you were speaking it rather than writing it. This is the best way to determine if your ideas are well organized, if they have sufficient supporting information, if further research may be needed, etc. Once you have produced a first draft that meets these fundamental criteria, take time and care editing it to ensure that you are really saying what you want to say in the clearest, most concise, densest possible manner.

13. Use appropriate quotations

Whatever you want to say, someone else has probably already said something on the subject in a particularly striking way.

You will have noticed that this book has used quotations, but sparingly. Quotations draw attention and therefore can strongly reinforce a point you want to make. Take full advantage of this. But remember: You still want it to be your point. Using too many striking quotations tends to make readers look for the next one rather than paying attention to what you want them to understand.

Use quotations to advance your thesis; never use them solely for amusement or entertainment.

That having been said, I would to share with you some of my favorite quotations about writing and communication. Each one contains a nugget of wisdom that can greatly add to your effectiveness.

- Don't write merely to be understood. Write so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)
Essayist, novelist, poet

- The first rule of style is to have something to say. The second rule of style is to control yourself when, by chance, you have two things to say. Say first one, then the other, not both at the same time.

George Polya
Mathematician and author

- The idea for a new venture is likely to be strategically unsound if it can't be put into one coherent sentence.

Kenichi Ohmae
The Mind of the Strategist

- What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.

Samuel Johnson
Essayist and lexicographer

- A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions: 1) What am I trying to say? 2) What words will express it? 3) What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4) Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?

George Orwell
Novelist, political essayist

- Good writing says what needs to be said in a minimum of words with a maximum of meaning

Anonymous

- The secret of good writing is to say an old thing in a new way or to say a new thing in an old way.

Anonymous

- The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think.

Anonymous

- Learn as much by writing as by reading.

Anonymous