

# Write Like A Pro

Dr. Marcia Riley



Dr. Marcía Riley

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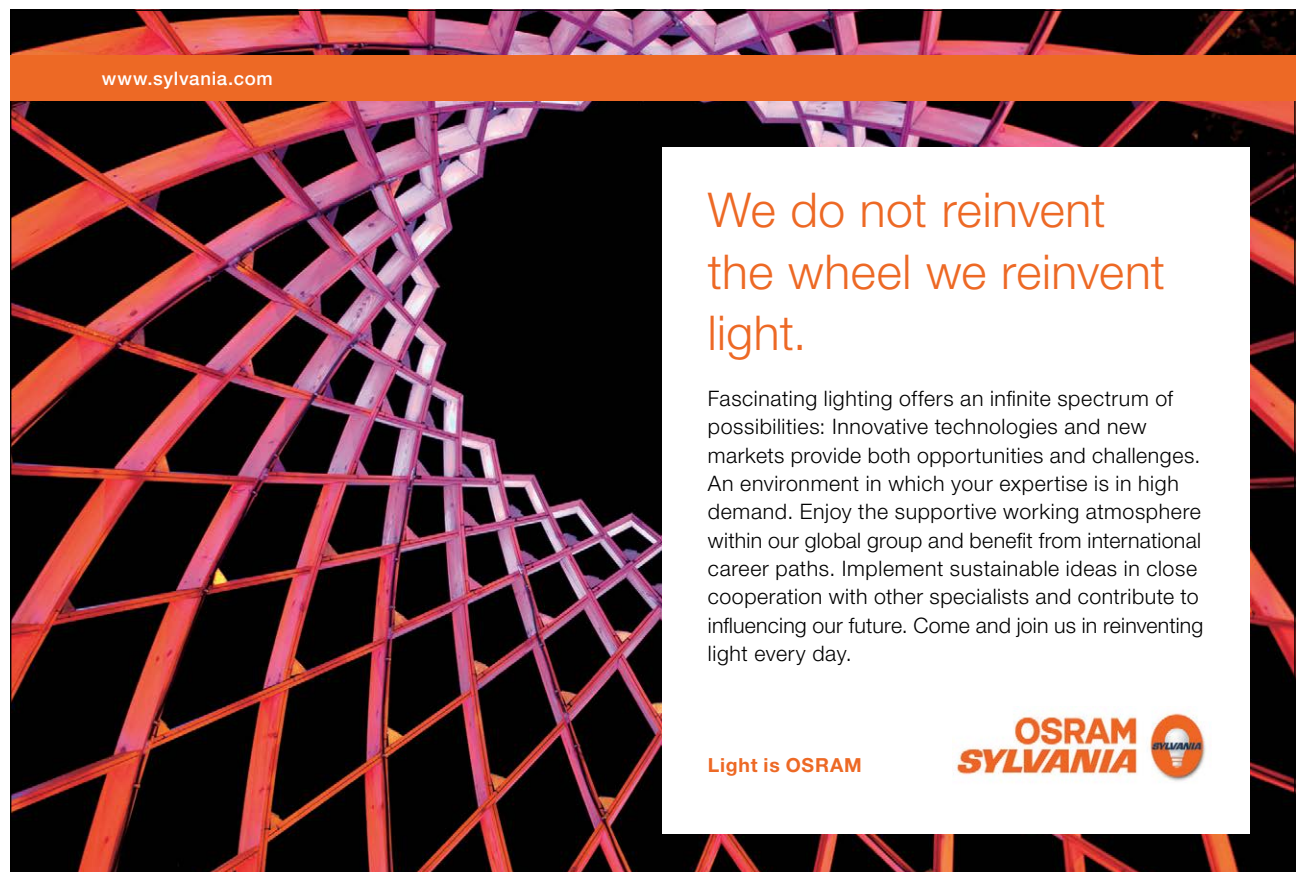
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*"Simple English is nobody's native tongue."*  
Jacques Barzun




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*"If it's not clear to the reader, then you might as well not write it."*

William Zinsser



**CHALLENGING PERSPECTIVES**

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*"Ineffective writing is a business cost you can reduce."*  
Ron Denholm



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# Preface and Bio

This book is designed to take you beyond the basics and guide you through three major writing phases from start to finish. You will learn how to think and write like a pro using specific techniques that produce results. You will learn how to plan, structure and develop your writing, as well as what to do when you hit the infamous “writer’s block.”

Nearly every employee in every business in every industry in every country has an occasional need to present information that is meaningful and understandable. Whether you are a beginner, intermediate or advance writer, you will find useful techniques to help move your writing to another level. Therefore, if you want to improve your writing skills, reduce time on writing tasks, remove writer’s block or explore new writing techniques, then this is the book for you. Regardless of your writing needs, there are useful tips, tools and techniques for even the most advanced writer.

Dr. Marcía Riley, the founder of EA Incorporated and author of this publication, has conducted hundreds of writing courses for corporate, government and academic clients across the USA. She has led writing presentations for local, state and national organizations, as well as presented writing techniques at the **PLAIN (Plain Language Association InterNational)** Conference in Sydney, Australia. Being part of the International Exchange Program, as an academic delegate to the People’s Republic of China, Dr. Riley contributed to educational programs from Beijing to Canton. She has served as a ClearMark Judge for international documents submitted through the Center for Plain Language, WriteMark New Zealand Plain English Judge and currently serves as a visiting professor with the University of Illinois/Chicago campus.



*“A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.”*

Thomas Mann

EA Incorporated specializes in providing:

- Effective technical and business writing courses
- Error-free editing and proofreading classes
- Proper grammar-use presentations
- Responsive executive coaching sessions

Dr. Riley has written three books used with EA's training programs: **WIPE™ (Write in Plain English)**, **PEP™ (Processing, Editing & Proofreading)** and **GRAMMAR Rammer™ for Professionals Who Write American English as a Second Language**. She has served as a columnist for the Tennessee Tribune Newspaper producing bi-monthly articles on editing.

For more than 30 years, Dr. Riley has developed and tailored curriculum materials based on client needs using the writing strengths and weaknesses of their staff. Each set of training materials includes creative, hands-on learning activities that produce the “write” results.

Visit EA's website at [www.executivewritingcoach.net/portfolio.htm](http://www.executivewritingcoach.net/portfolio.htm) to review an exciting portfolio of successful classes conducted for a variety of clients throughout the country. As shown in newsletters at this link, Dr. Riley's instructional strategy includes a bit of gameology. This entails using competitive writing exercises that engage students in intelligent discussions while transferring knowledge in a fun, yet effective way.

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Mail – P.O. Box 7205 – Atlanta, GA 30357 – USA

*“There are two kinds of writers in the world:  
bad writers and improving writers.”*  
William Blundell



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Universal Writing Requirements

Escrito—كتابة—صناعة—écriture—寫作—  
 Schreiben—het schrijven van—skryf—письмо—  
 bångvånban—scrittura—लेखन—skrivning -  
 書き込み

Regardless of your country, language, industry or document, the reader expects to receive a document that is clear, concise and easy to understand. A document that is void of pompous text. If not, as described by Up Write Press in an article, “The Cost of Poor Writing: A \$6.6 Million-Dollar Inefficiency” and echoed by William H. DuBay, President of Impact Information, “...valuable time and money have been wasted for both the writer and reader.”

Unfortunately, most managers have no idea how much time and money are spent due to poor writing skills. Poor writing increases the company’s risks and liability; yet, it’s an avoidable expense when employees are trained to use effective writing techniques. Of three business entities: government, corporate and academia, each is impacted by the writing skills of its staff (see Appendix Articles). And each entity has realized the need for better written communication skills.

### 1.1.1 Government

In a multi-language world, where state and federal agencies are required to communicate with a global community, eliminating bureaucratese, officialese and legalese becomes a necessity. As presented on the PLAIN website ([www.plainlanguage.org/Government](http://www.plainlanguage.org/Government)), many governments around the world have enacted policies requiring plain language.

In America, The Plain Writing Act of 2010 was passed under the Obama Administration (<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/obama-signs-law-understand/story?id=11902841>).

Australian and Canadian governments have adopted similar laws on plain language and began to realize benefits derived from making documents more comprehensive and better constructed.

*“English that is clear for its intended audience has become the standard to which most well-run countries aspire.”*

Martin Cutts

### 1.1.2 Corporate

In the private sector, writing is an essential job skill – the primary basis upon which an employee’s work and intellect are judged in the workplace. It equips employees with communication skills needed to lead and participate effectively in their work environment. As summarized in the landmark report by the National Commission on Writing, *“In today’s workplace writing is a ‘threshold skill’ for hiring and promotion among salaried (i.e., professional) employees. Survey results indicate that writing is a ticket to professional opportunity, while poorly written job applications are a figurative kiss of death.”*

In “Communication Skills Training News,” Communicaid shares that poor writing costs UK PLC (Public Limited Company) millions of pounds each year in lost revenue, investment in remedial training and damage to its corporate image. Therefore, businesses are using resources to put an end to obfuscatory and incomprehensible documents.

### 1.1.3 Academia

Findings by the Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges showed that *“more than 50 percent of first-year college students are unable to produce papers relatively free of language errors.”* Another study conducted by ACT (American College Testing) indicated that one fifth of all high school English instructors are not teaching their students the basic mechanics of writing.

Articles in USA Today, New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal further emphasize the need for students to have better writing skills before entering the workforce as employers started to complain. Why? Because unclear, garbled, poorly written documents (emails included) waste time, money and productivity. In short, poor writing of new, young hires as well as older employees hinders an organization from reaching its goals.

**Write Like A Pro** offers some practical solutions to achieve desired results using effective writing tips, tools and techniques.

## 1.2 Universal Writing Challenges

There are three common problems writers experience: removing writer’s block, identifying the purpose and defining the target audience.

### 1.2.1 Writer’s Block

Defined as the inability to put words on paper or a blank computer screen, you can experience writer’s block at the beginning, middle or end of a writing project. Writer’s block symptoms can be caused by:

*“Doing business today requires writing in plain language.  
Poor writing results in costs you cannot afford to pay.”*  
Michael Egan

- A boring topic
- Anxiety about a deadline
- Brain-freeze stress
- Fear of rejection
- Little knowledge of the subject assigned
- Low-confidence level
- No plan or outline
- Short turn-a-round time

Some authors suggest creative approaches to remove writer's block such as: physical activities – take a walk around the neighborhood; hit the treadmill, tennis court or golf course; go on a think drive in the car; start in the middle or end of the document; read a magazine or eat cereal out of a box; carry a pocket-size notebook to scribble ideas. However, in Chapter Three you will discover some concrete and proven approaches for removing writer's block. But first, let's look at two factors you must know before the pre-writing process: audience and purpose.

### 1.2.2 Target Audience

Defining the intended reader or group as the recipient(s) of your document is paramount. When the audience is a known individual, it's easy to define. In contrast, when you're writing for an unknown mixed group of individuals, it's more challenging. When time and resources don't allow you to conduct an audience analysis (e.g., demographics, geographics, psychographics, behavioral patterns) or the document doesn't justify this type expense, one approach is to write to the lowest level (see Tip Sheet One). Using this approach enables everyone to understand your document. It's important to be able to define the target audience because this helps with word choice, tone, paragraph type(s) and level of detail needed.

### 1.2.3 Clear Purpose

Knowing the purpose of your document is the second most important factor to determine. Like defining your audience, knowing the purpose also helps with word choice. It shows you the goal you want to achieve, gives you an aim, direction or the focus of your document (See Tip Sheet Two).

Whether you define the audience first or the purpose first is irrelevant. It's knowing both of these factors before starting the writing process that's important.

*"Purpose sets the road map for your writing journey. If it's not clear, you'll waste a lot of time reaching your destination."*

Marcia Riley

## 2 Writing Strengths and Weaknesses

We all have writing strengths and weaknesses – even the most professional veteran writers.

While it's easy to tell when something is written poorly by another person, it's different when reading one's own text. When revising our own, we often overlook a preposition out of place, a misspelled word or a string of redundant sentences. Being aware of your writing weaknesses is the first step towards eliminating them. However, if you say, "I don't have any weaknesses"; you're only fooling yourself. With this statement, it becomes obvious that one primary weakness is your lack of awareness. Besides, even the most veteran writer admits to having a weakness or two.

Some professional writers define writing weaknesses as a lack of attention to detail or being disorganized. In contrast, this book defines writing weaknesses as it relates to words, phrases, clauses and sentence structure during the writing process.

*"Every writer I know has trouble writing."*  
Joseph Heller

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What do you think are your weaknesses? How can you identify them? Think back – have any of your writing assignments been rejected or returned for a rewrite? Were you told why? Were your limitations identified? If not, here are some suggestions to help you identify writing weaknesses:

- Review rejected reports and mandated rewrites to determine what was lacking.
- Ask a trusted friend, co-worker or teammate for input. Is the problem word usage, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, etc.?
- Read text into a recorder and play it back. Listen for clarity – write down what sounds unclear or confusing.
- Identify how to move your weaknesses into the strengths column.
- Take online interactive writing quizzes that provide answers; for example use: [http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/quiz\\_list.htm](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/quiz_list.htm) and [http://www.grammarbook.com/interactive\\_quizzes\\_exercises.asp](http://www.grammarbook.com/interactive_quizzes_exercises.asp).

Knowing your weaknesses is part of the formula for successfully removing them. And eliminating those weaknesses allows you to soar on the wings of words through the written word.

*“When something can be read without effort,  
great effort has gone into its writing.”*  
Enrique JardielPoncela

# 3 Pre-writing Phase

## 3.1 Definition

The pre-writing phase refers to activities done before putting pen to paper or fingers on the keyboard. The main difference between this phase and the writing phase is that it removes writer's block, allows you to discover subtopic options you didn't know you had and reduces wasted time during the writing phase. In short, it helps you generate words, record ideas and develop a "draft" plan using specific techniques.

In business settings, the pre-writing phase can consist of a verbal process such as responding to sales figures, internal reports, news articles or a formal presentation. In academic settings, pre-writing can include the introduction of topic materials for a writing assignment, note-taking based on a lecture or performing an Internet search. In both situations, some information, materials or text has been provided to you. However, the techniques presented in this chapter assume that you are staring at a blank sheet of paper or computer screen with nothing having been provided.

## 3.2 Manual Techniques

Mapping, Dividing and Questioning are three manual techniques that remove writer's block, generate ideas and words, which can be used to develop an outline for your document or correspondence.

Before using these techniques, you must first determine the purpose and identify the audience (see Tip Sheets One and Two). Your document can have one purpose or multi-purposes. Likewise, the audience could consist of one type reader or a mixture of readers at various levels.

### 3.2.1 Mapping Technique

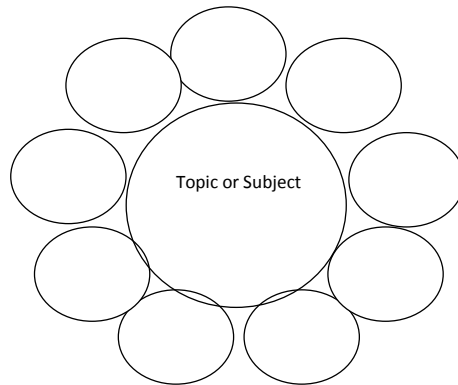
Unlike brainstorming and freewriting, mapping identifies connectors related to your purpose and audience. It's an orderly visual representation that generates words, phrases or clauses without judging if what comes up is relevant or not. You will evaluate the usefulness of these as we move towards preparing an outline or table of contents.

In the illustration below, the large middle circle shows your topic and the nine small circles represent connectors. Use the small circles to insert a word, phrase or clause related to the subject, purpose or audience. If you don't know anything about the subject, you can use one or several online techniques presented in Section Three.

*"People have writer's block not because they can't write, but because they despair of writing eloquently."*  
Anna Quindlen

For example, let's use the topic **risk management**. The purpose is **to convince** and the audience consists of **lay persons** (support staff). Based on the purpose, you could use the following connectors: plans, solutions, evaluation, rewards, projects, benefits, advice, etc. Knowing the audience, connectors such as promotions, safety, sales, training, time and cost impact can be used. To practice this technique, identify a topic and follow the steps below.

Purpose(s): _____
Audience: _____



*"When we write to people whom we have never met, they must judge us in the only way they can – by our writing."*  
Robert Barrass

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**Month 16**  
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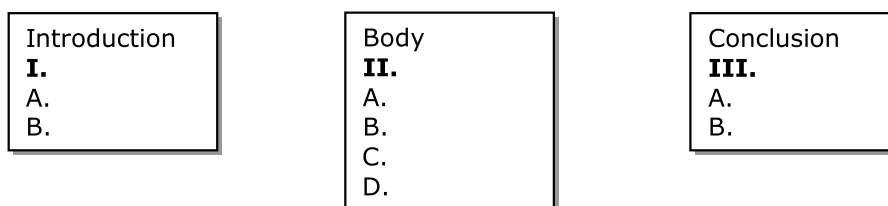
**Step One** – Write your purpose and audience in the rectangle

**Step Two** – Insert the topic of your document in the middle circle

**Step Three** – Identify words, phrases or clauses that relate to your purpose and audience

**Step Four** – Place these terms in the connector circles

You are now ready to develop an outline and determine which connectors are most appropriate. Using the three parts of every document: beginning, middle and end, ask yourself, “*What should I tell the audience first to get their attention or introduce them to the topic?*” Place those connectors under the introduction. Then ask, “*Which connectors would support the introduction or convince readers on the importance of this topic?*” Put those connectors under the body of your outline. And finally ask, “*Which connectors best summarize my topic?*”



While developing the outline, you might not use all connectors, or you might add others as you work through the process. Nonetheless, you now have a draft outline, a starting point that moves you into the writing phase with a plan.

### 3.2.2 Dividing Technique

When you know the subject, but feel stuck, this technique helps you develop an organized, coherent outline using the process of division. Using “key words” related to your topic, select two or three words that define each key word. The chart below shows how “risk management” could be divided into two sections or major headings and those sections divided even further. Because each division actually describes or reinforces the key word, your outline will be coherent – connected. Consequently, you continue this division process as long as it’s practical to do so.

The dividing technique entails three simple steps:

**Step One** – Divide the key word or main topic into comparable parts to obtain letters A and B of your outline.

**Step Two** – Divide each A and B or major heading to obtain sections 1, 2, 3, etc.

**Step Three** – Next, divide each numbered section to obtain minor headings or subheadings for sections a, b, c, etc.

*“If you can’t explain something simply, you don’t understand it well.”*  
 Albert Einstein



I. Introduction	A. Risk Management		
II. Body	A. Benefits →	1. Employees →	a. Training b. Safety c. Promotions
	B. Projects →	1. Long-term → 2. Short-term →	a. Cost b. Time
III. Body	A. B. C.		
IV. Body	A. B.		
V. Summary	A.		

### 3.2.3 Questioning Technique<sup>1</sup>

Using this method removes writer’s block since it requires a response to applicable questions based on the subject: X. It’s an effective way to start the writing process because it brings your topic into focus and forces you to put words on paper. This technique produces surprising results. In addition to the amount of text generated, you will also discover unknown subtopic options that you didn’t realize are available. Responses can help determine your document’s organization and paragraph type during the writing phase (see Tip Sheet Three).

Information Generated	Questions	Your Response
<b>Description</b>	1. What are the various features of X?	
<b>Analysis</b>	2. How is X made or done? 3. What are the component parts of X? 4. How should X be made or done? 5. What is the essential function of X?	
<b>Comparison</b>	6. How is X like or unlike Y? 7. What is the present status of X?	
<b>Summary</b>	8. What are major points or features of X?	
<b>Persuasion</b>	9. What case can be made for or against X?	
<b>Classification</b>	10. What are the types of X?	
<b>Evaluation</b>	11. What is the value or significance of X?	
<b>Definition</b>	12. What does X mean?	

## 3.3 Online Techniques

### 3.3.1 General

When you don’t know much about a topic or need additional information, there are two types of online tools that can help. These general search engines are:

*“The less familiar people are with an issue, the simpler and more direct the language should be.”*  
William DuBay

[www.onelook.com](http://www.onelook.com) and [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).

### 3.3.1.1 OneLook

This web-link connects to more than 900 dictionaries by various categories (business, computing, medicine, science, etc.) and contains a Thesaurus. It can be considered a “one-stop-shop” for obtaining information about a word. For example when the word “proofread” is entered in the search box, you not only get a quick definition, but also several definitions under the category of general, computing and slang in the left column. At the bottom of the screen, a list of similar words (synonyms) is provided. When you click one of those words, the definition is defined as initially done with the word proofread. Consequently, this web-link provides several words to use with any of the manual techniques for identifying connectors or descriptors on a topic.

*“Clear thinking is a prerequisite for clear writing.”*

Jan Venolia



“I studied English for 16 years but...  
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons”  
Jane, Chinese architect

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### 3.3.1.2 Wikipedia

This is one of the largest reference websites that's a multilingual web-based, free-content encyclopedia. It also functions as a forum for individuals across the globe to share and collaborate information that generates much richer content than what a single person could come up with. However, there's one downside. Since anyone can post, you might get some incorrect or irrelevant content in spite of the self-policing guidelines.

### 3.3.2 Technical and Specialty

When you are knowledgeable about a topic, but need more information, below are sample specialty search engines that can help.

- Academic Index – This search engine finds topics in other engines such as Infotopia, InfoMine, etc. ([www.academicindex.net](http://www.academicindex.net))
- Archives Hub – This search tool brings together diverse sources from more than 200 repositories across the UK (<http://archiveshub.ac.uk/index.html>)
- BASE – One of the world's most voluminous search engines ([www.base-search.net](http://www.base-search.net))
- CiteSeerx – A scientific literature digital library that focuses on computer and science information (<http://citeseer.ist.psu.edu/index;sessionId=576D0523AF5EE0608A27A44282F99C07>)
- Directory of Open Access Journals – This service provides full-text, quality controlled scientific and scholarly journals ([www.doaj.org](http://www.doaj.org))
- Google Scholar Beta – This engine searches across many disciplines and sources including professional societies, online repositories, etc. (<http://scholar.google.com>)
- iSeek – A target search engine that compiles hundreds of thousands of authoritative resources from government, academia, etc. (<http://education.iseek.com/iseek/home.page>)
- Library of Congress – The nation's oldest federal cultural institution and serves as the research arm of Congress ([www.loc.gov/index.html](http://www.loc.gov/index.html))
- Vadlo – Known as the site that “holds the keys to everything scientific” and more (<http://vadlo.com>)

In summary, pre-writing techniques liberate you from struggling during the writing phase. Using these techniques will save valuable time as well as help you clearly think through and plan your document before starting the writing phase.

*“The chief virtue that language can have is clearness,  
and nothing detracts from it so much as the use of unfamiliar words.”*  
Hippocrates

# 4 Writing Phase

## 4.1 Definition



Writing consists of using a sequence of letters, characters, symbols, tactile signs or words to form a thought. However, writing style is the manner in which you choose to present information to the reader.

This includes word choice, sentence structure, paragraph flow, punctuation and other factors associated with the writing phase.

As presented in Chapter Three, knowing the reader(s) and purpose determines the style and tone in which your content is written. When strategically applied, these writing techniques eliminate **5-D** readers: **D**istracted, **D**isinterested, **D**isengaged, **D**isenchanted and **D**iscouraged.

## 4.2 Manual Techniques

This chapter presents nine practical techniques for writing business and technical documents: Triangle and Inverted Triangle, Expanding, Planning-the-Piece, The P-F-S Rule, Mathematical Formulae, Venn Diagram, FencePost Scheme, Coring and Endings. However, some are best used for technical writing by a Subject Matter Expert (SME). These techniques reinforce the four characteristics of effective writing as defined by the American Management Association (see Tip Sheet Four). They ensure that relationships among ideas are clear and flow smoothly from one section to the next.

### 4.2.1 Triangle and Inverted Triangle

When writing your document, you have two options for presenting the information: triangle or inverted triangle. <sup>2</sup>Using the triangle approach requires putting the most important information at the top, in the beginning of your report or correspondence. Whereas when using the inverted triangle, you “set the stage” by presenting background information first and the main point last.

*“Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing.”*  
Benjamin Franklin



Based on the purpose and target readers of your document, when writing the justification before the request, which approach are you using?<sup>23</sup>  Triangle  Inverted Triangle

- The summary before detail?  Triangle  Inverted Triangle
- Answers before an explanation?  Triangle  Inverted Triangle
- Conclusions before the discussion?  Triangle  Inverted Triangle
- Reasons before the results?  Triangle  Inverted Triangle

*"One day the Nouns were clustered in the street. An Adjective walked by, with her dark beauty. The Nouns were struck, moved, changed. The next day a Verb drove up, and created the Sentence."*  
Kenneth Koch



## WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING...

[www.fuqua.duke.edu/whileyouweresleeping](http://www.fuqua.duke.edu/whileyouweresleeping)





### 4.2.2 Expanding

The Expanding Technique helps develop a topic sentence or key statement that expresses the main focus of your document. Normally it's placed at the beginning of your document in the introduction. Expanding adds substance to short choppy sentences and aids in removing writer's block. Once you identify a short, choppy sentence that is incomplete or unclear, expand that sentence by asking and answering six questions or less: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?

#### Example:

Send to the Human Capital and Development Branch Manager.

Who – already answered

What – the progress report

When – July 25

Where – Houston office

How – Federal Express

Based on what you want to emphasize, determines where to write your response in the sentence (see options below).

- **How** – Using Federal Express, send the progress report to the **Human Capital and Development Manager's** office in Houston.
- **When** – On July 25, send the progress report by Federal Express to the **Human Capital and Development Manager's** office in Houston.
- **What** – The progress report will be sent by Federal Express to the **Human Capital and Development Manager's** office.

### 4.2.3 Planning-the-Piece

This technique can be called “targeted writing” since it's critical that *every* part of your correspondence is clearly defined in order to achieve the desired results. Your message can only have *one* purpose and you must know the target reader(s). Responding to the questions below helps you make word, sentence and paragraph choices to produce the “write” results in your document.

What is the single purpose of your correspondence?

Who is the target reader?

*“Write the way an architect builds – first draft a plan and then design every detail.”*  
Schopenhauer

Who could be the secondary reader(s)?

What do you desire the person to do after reading your letter?

**Words:**

- What buzzwords or jargon should be used, if any?
- Which connotation, denotation or neutral words would be most appropriate?

**Negative:** There are over 2,000 **vagrants** in the city.

**Neutral:** There are over 2,000 **people with no fixed address** in the city.

**Positive:** There are more than 2,000 **homeless** in the city.

The three expressions above refer to *exactly* the same people, but invoke different associations in the reader's mind: a "vagrant" is a public nuisance while a "homeless" person is a worthy object of pity and charity.

When planning-the-piece, consider choosing words for what they mean ([dictionary](#) or [denotations](#)) and for what they suggest (emotional associations or [connotations](#)).

**Sentences:**

- Which type sentence should dominate the letter, memo or email?

**Observation** – a statement that can be verified by you through the personal act of seeing or being directly involved

**Inference** – a statement that you have not personally verified; but, whose truth or falsity could be established, either now or in the future

**Judgment** – a statement that can never be verified. It contains terms that cannot be measured objectively; an opinion.

*"Plain language involves aspects such as vocabulary, sentence structure, text organisation, tone, readability, etc."*

Marné Pienaar

**Paragraphs:**

- Which type organizational flow is best to use? Triangle or Inverted Triangle
- Which paragraph type(s) should be used? (see Tip Sheet Three)
- What supportive materials or documentation must be included?
- How should you ask for the desired results?
- Do you need to follow-up? If so, how will this be accomplished and when?

**Nine Persuasive Approaches to Avoid:**

- **Bandwagon** – encourages the reader to do something because it's the popular thing to do; the "get on board" statement.
- **Card Stacking** – presents evidence in a partial or slanted way.
- **Emotional Appeal** – summons fear, anger or pity to secure the reader's support.
- **False Dilemma** – poses only two choices when there are a variety of possibilities.
- **Glittering Generalities** – says little specifically, but conveys emotion using abstract terms, phrases or clauses.
- **Hasty Generalizations** – bases a conclusion on insufficient evidence.
- **Name Calling** – uses negative labels to stigmatize an individual or organization.
- **Questionable Cause** – insists that one event caused the other just because it came first.
- **Slippery Slope** – claims that an event will lead to an uncontrollable chain reaction.

**4.2.4 P-F-S Rule**

According to Nirmaldasan, a multi-faceted writer and academic scholar, effective technical writing requires an understanding of three principles: brevity, clarity and scan-ability. Brevity is the avoidance of superfluous words, phrases, clauses and sentences. Clarity is the unambiguous and logical presentation of data, facts or ideas. Whereas scan-ability is the use of lists, visuals and tables based on the principles of brevity and clarity.

*"Proper words in proper places make the true definition of a style."*  
Jonathan Swift



In following the above principles, technical writers should choose words with care. Therefore, the **P-F-S** rule describes a hierarchy of **P**recise, **F**amiliar and **S**hort words to consider. The order of choice for technical writers is: **P-F-S**, **P-F**, **P-S** and **P**. Using this rule, technical *writers* must first select a word that is precise, familiar and short. If that's not available, then a precise and familiar word is the next choice. Why? Because a familiar word is better than a short, but difficult word. And if a **P-F** word is not available, select a **P-S** word. The final choice is the **P** word. The **F-S** word is ignored with this last choice because in technical writing, precision is more important than familiarity and brevity when considering word choice.

As presented in Chapter Three, there are several online, generic search engines to help you select familiar words.

#### 4.2.5 Mathematical Formulae

This technique was developed by Philip Yaffe and helps expository writing by using mathematics formulae with two criteria: clear and concise.

*"Most of us in government are not aware of how deeply our writing is affected and infected by technical jargon."*  
LousyWriter

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Like a mathematical formula, give “clear” ( $C_L$ ) text an objective definition. Highlight (e.g., underline, *italics*, circle) important words, put an “X” over unimportant words and remove irrelevant words. Consequently, using this formula to achieve clarity, you must do three things:

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

In short:  $C_L = EDE$

Like all mathematical formula, this one works only if you know the subject and how to apply it, which requires objective judgment. It is easy to say that everything is of key importance, but if everything is important, then nothing is. If you clearly emphasize what is of key importance, then whatever is left over is automatically de-emphasized. Now the only thing left to do is eliminate what is of no importance.

But how do you distinguish between secondary importance and of no importance? Secondary importance is anything that supports and elaborates one or more key ideas. If you judge that a piece of information in fact does support or elaborate one or more key ideas, then keep it. If not, eliminate it.

The next mathematical formula emphasizes density ( $D$ ). Density is a less familiar concept than clarity and conciseness, but equally important. In mathematical form, density consists of:

- Precise information (The P-F-S Rule)
- Logically linked

In other words:  $D = PL$

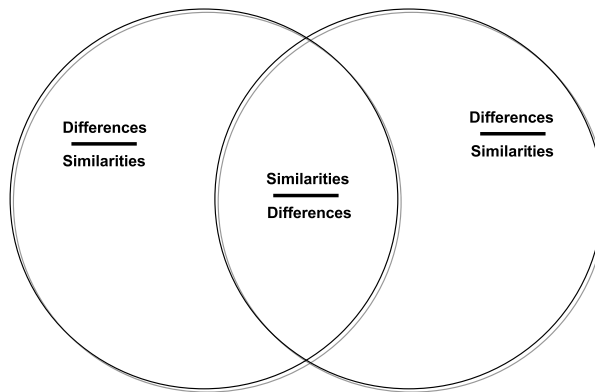
To use this formula, identify where you can show quantity (e.g., where can numbers validate your information?). Next, review text to make sure that the information is logically connected – arranged in a smooth flowing, easy-to-read manner. Using these two formulae helps ensure word-winning text that is clear, concise and effective:  $C_L + D = \text{success!}^4$

To avoid some difficulty, full disclosure of outages and corrective activities between HQs and Centers would save valuable time and resolve outages sooner. And to avoid wasted time, better communication between HQs and the Centers would benefit all concerned by eliminating redundant research and consolidating outage correction information for future questions posed by auditors. Even though grateful, this situation needs your full attention.

*“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”*

George Shaw

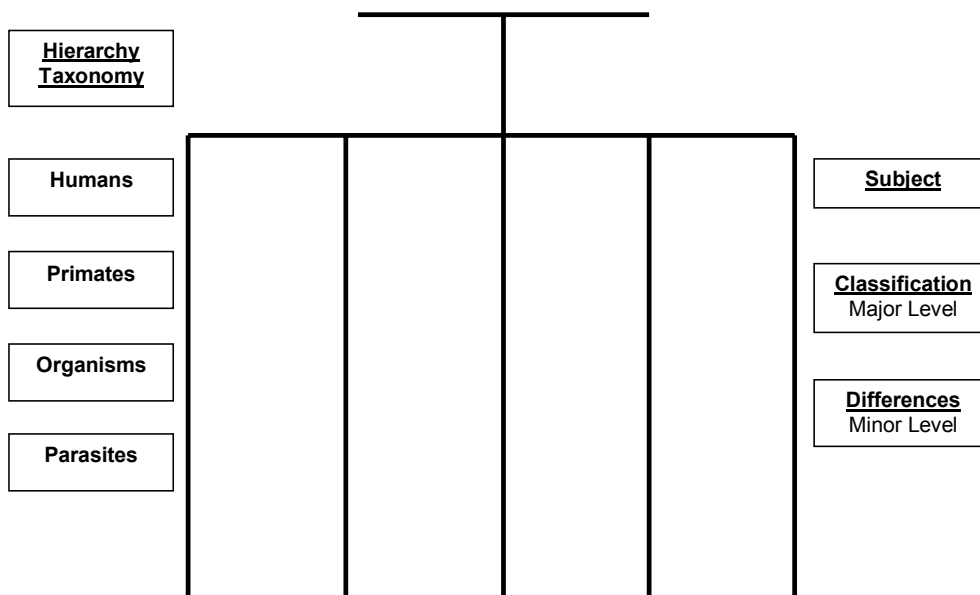
4.2.6 Venn Diagram



The Venn Diagram Technique uses a graphic structure for comparing and contrasting two subjects, products, procedures, systems or ideas. It consists of two overlapping circles with shared, similar or different characteristics placed in the overlapping area. Outside areas contain characteristics unique to each subject, product, component, etc. Text gathered in the form of two overlapping circles provide a logical sequence for documents requiring comparison or contrast analysis.

4.2.7 FencePost Scheme

This process develops an organized outline based on a specific classification or hierarchy. Using this technique, you divide the subject into parts or group several ideas by categories and consider how they are related. Therefore, the writer must be an SME to effectively use this writing technique.



*"The skill of writing is to create a context in which other people can think."*  
Edwin Schlossberg

#### 4.2.8 Coring

Coring helps you focus and center on the core message for writing concise executive summaries, written briefs or abstracts. Using synonyms and words associated with the central topic – the gist of your message- you identify essential text in a report. Similar to **EDE** in the mathematical formulae, the coring technique requires you to list key words and only expand on those words. Think of this writing approach as peeling an apple to pull out the inner most part of the fruit.

#### 4.2.9 Endings

This technique is used for writing instructions or procedures that are clear, concise, centered and organized. Using imperative verbs throughout your document enables the reader to visualize and perform each step. Therefore, it's best written by someone who has experience with the task or end-product.

- Identify whom the instructions are for.
- Precede the instructions with any necessary explanation (especially the reason(s) for changing an established procedure, system or process).
- List all materials needed.
- State any safety precautions; and if necessary, repeat these immediately before the step in which the precautions are to be taken.
- Arrange instructions in the order in which tasks are to be done – use imperative verbs.

*"Never stop writing because you have run out of ideas."*

Walter Benjamin

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One generation's transformation is the next's status quo. In the near future, people may soon think it's strange that devices ever had to be "plugged in." To obtain that status, there needs to be "The Shift".



- Indicate the action required at each step by a separate statement.
- Use complete sentences written in the imperative.
- Number successive steps, so the action required at each step stands out.
- Place drawings, photographs or samples next to the words they augment.
- Work through the instructions to make sure all steps are included (beta test).
- Arrange for a “trial run” with at least two other people, one with experience of the tasks and one without.
- Revise your draft, if necessary, after the “trial run.”

### 4.3 Online Techniques

There are several FREE online tools to assist in the writing process. Voice-activated text, known as speech recognition in Microsoft Word, translates spoken words into text on your computer screen. Readability formulae evaluate the “ease” in which your document is understood by the target reader based on grade levels.

#### 4.3.1 Voice-activated Writing

Rather than type information, this writing tool displays your words using specific auditory commands. It’s three times faster than typing and allows you to quickly get ideas written – FREE hand – in draft form.

Robert Phillips, a member of PLAIN, has used speech recognition tools to prepare draft documents in computer and television industries since the 1980s. When mentoring and training other writers in Australia, Phillips offers the following tips for using this technique:

- Talk as though you have to: “Tell it to your mother.”
- Ignore homophone and punctuation errors while talking.
- Observe that based on your diction, dialect or English accent, some words might not translate accurately.

Windows 7 program contains FREE speech recognition software and an interactive tutorial demonstrating how to use its features as well as practice good dictation.

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/windows7/Set-up-Speech-Recognition>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpHB\\_jW\\_TEc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpHB_jW_TEc&feature=related)

*“In one sense, speaking is the ‘real’ language and writing is only a representation of speaking.”*  
Josef Essberger



#### 4.3.2 Readability Calculator

This FREE software tool gives a basic guide for measuring the readability of your document by indicating the number of years of education a person needs to easily understand the text during the first reading.

[http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability\\_test\\_and\\_improve.jsp](http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp)

Enter or copy/paste text

Process text

Although continuously debated for decades among writing scholars because results greatly differ in accuracy, readability formulae can help you improve a document. It's a useful tool for identifying revisions to consider during the post-writing phase. A note of caution: Relying on a grade level score can mislead you into believing that readers can understand your materials – when, in fact, they cannot. To learn more about these formulae, visit: <http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-ebooks.php> and <http://www.impact-information.com/impactinfo/readability02.pdf>.

*“There are many popular readability formulas and effective tools  
that have many useful applications in different languages.”*  
Hend S. Al-Khalifa and Amani A. Al-Ajlan

# 5 Post-writing Phase

## 5.1 Definition

This phase consists of editing and proofreading tasks that allow you to make changes after all text has been written. Manual editing and proofreading tasks should be done on hardcopy, not the computer, since our eyes don't see text as accurately on the screen.

## 5.2 Manual Techniques

Editing is the next step after the writing phase. This allows you to identify information gaps, reorganize paragraphs, remove redundancy; clear up confusing words, misplaced punctuation marks, inconsistent format, etc. Whereas proofreading is the final step that consists of comparing “live” to “dead” copy. It confirms that editing changes have been made and lets you correct typos – not revise or rework text.

### 5.2.1 Sliding

Sliding is an editing technique used to improve sentence structure and increase clarity (see Tip Sheets Six, Seven, Eight, Nine). Using this technique enables your writing to demonstrate two Cs (clear, concise) in a document because you can:

*“Editing and proofreading should help you achieve a higher level of quality in the documents you produce.”*

William A. Sabin

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- 2<sup>nd</sup> place: MSc Economics
- 2<sup>nd</sup> place: MSc Econometrics and Operations Research
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Sources: Keuzegids Master ranking 2013; Elsevier 'Beste Studies' ranking 2012; Financial Times Global Masters in Management ranking 2012

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- remove pompous, vague and abstract words or text that does not support the purpose
- eliminate foggy words (e.g., buried verbs, unnecessary articles, relative pronouns, long prepositional strings, noun stacks)
- rearrange or eliminate awkward prepositional phrases to increase sentence clarity

<p><b>Disposable Words</b>          (Depending on Sentence Structure          and Frequency Used)</p> <p>Articles/Adjectives          Prepositions          Relative Pronouns          Transitions</p>
--

- reduce sentence length; take out excessive wording, redundancies and fillers
- identify a missing word(s) or transition(s)

**Slide out buried verbs** – make the *implication* that = **imply**

arrive at a *conclusion* = **conclude**

perform an *analysis* = **analyze**

**Slide out weak verbs** – do, make, have, has, will and forms of the “to be” verb convey practically no sense of action and can be eliminated.

The Team Lead *will give* the recommendations of what is needed in the next report...(15 words)

The Team Lead recommends what is needed in the next report...(11 words)

**Slide out unnecessary articles**

Overall *the* software sales are up (18<sup>th</sup> in *the* state) showing *an* average of a \$186,000 per week increase. (19 words)

Overall software sales are up (18<sup>th</sup> in *the* state) showing *an* average increase of \$186,000 per week. (17 words)

**Slide out relative pronouns**

The report, *which* was released recently...

*“All writers-- even the best ones--benefit from good editing.”*  
 Joseph Kimble



**The report released recently...**

All applicants *who* are interested in the job must...

**All applicants interested in the job must...**

The system *that* is most efficient and accurate...

**The system most efficient and accurate...****Slide out prepositional strings**

Lanham says start *by* looking *at* the sentences *in* each paragraph from the point *of* view of the number of prepositions used *by* the writer *for* the purpose *of* expressing his or her ideas. (34 Words/10 prepositions)

*Option One:*

Lanham says look at each paragraph based on the number of prepositions used. (13 words/3 prepositions)

*Option Two:*

Lanham says count all prepositions used expressing the writer's ideas. (10 words)

**Establish parallel construction**

Sentence elements presented in pairs or series should belong to *the same* grammatical category: all nouns, active verbs (verb tense), adjectives, phrases, etc. This also applies to words and phrases used in headings, subheadings and enumerated lists.

*Poor parallel construction:*

This executive report outlines: how to deal with high employee turnover, coping with new employee training cost and what responsibility management has in correcting these situations.

*Better parallel construction:*

This executive report outlines: *dealing* with high employee turnover, *coping* with new employee training cost and *correcting* these situations through management.

*"If I waited for perfection, I would never write a word."*  
Margaret Atwood

5.2.2 SWAT<sup>2</sup>

SWAT (Search Out Words and Terminate Them) focuses on removing jargon, pompous, abstract and buzz words from your text to ensure that it's written in plain language. This editing method is similar to the sliding technique, except it targets *complex, complicated words* and *abstract modifiers*; thus is extremely useful with technical documents. Some examples of text needing SWAT<sup>2</sup> are shown below. In the second example, circle the words that are not plain language.

**Example:**

1. Climate change is becoming a driving force for refining energy expediency because saving energy can help repress the greenhouse gas emissions that interject to climate change modification. However, it is paramount to balance energy conserving measures with ventilation and with good Indoor Air Quality. (see Tip Sheet Five)

- expediency – efficiency, the ability to produce good results using available time, money, supplies, etc.
- conserving – saving, accumulating, keeping
- crucial – important, authoritative, significant, paramount
- repress – reduce, to lower something, abbreviate, concentrate, shorten, dilute

*"Using a big long word can be a beautiful thing – unless you should have used an everyday word instead."*

Charles Harrington Elster



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- modify – change, to become different, alter, convert, switch
  - refining – improving, enhancing, enriching
2. You should either take ciprofloxacin 1–2 hours before consuming or imbibing dairy products or avoidance of ingestion and drinking these products for four hours after taking ciprofloxacin.

### 5.2.3 Level Questioning

#### First-level: Content and Word Choice

1. Does your writing match what is known about the reader(s) and their level of knowledge?
2. Do examples help the reader(s) understand?
3. Does your writing have the right tone, right amount of formality or informality?
4. Is your writing bias-free (e.g., slanted words; parallel treatment of sex, race, age)?
5. Is information presented according to a logical scheme (e.g., categorization, cause-and-effect, chronological, comparison)?

#### Second-level: Punctuation

1. Do punctuation marks help readers grasp the meaning?
2. Is there any surplus punctuation (e.g., apostrophes, colons, commas, dashes, hyphens, semicolons)?
3. Are quotation marks correctly placed?

#### Third-level: Grammar

1. Do subjects and verbs agree?
2. Have you corrected misplaced modifiers?
3. Are related parts of sentences or headings parallel in form?
4. Are there any run-on sentences?

#### Fourth-level: Mechanical Style

1. Are abbreviations kept to a minimum and used correctly?
2. Is capitalization and treatment of compounds consistent (e.g., one word, two words, hyphenated words)?
3. Are there any gaps in page numbering, tables and figures?
4. Is the layout (format) attractive and enhances readability?
5. Have you used more than two typefaces?

*"The ability to write well is not a luxury – it's a necessity."*

Leann Anderson

## 5.2.4 Proofreading

Proofreading examines text to find and correct errors by comparing “live” copy to “dead” copy. When done properly, it eliminates all typos and other mistakes from the final document. It involves developing your **EAGLE-EYE** skills by looking for inconsistencies in text and format.

Unlike editing, effective proofreading demands that you review each word as a separate letter; evaluate every punctuation mark; ensure consistency of format; check accuracy of numbers, figures, illustrations and dates and verify acronyms. It requires that you objectively look at text and format, and ask:

- What is wrong with this...?
- What is inconsistent...?

To develop **EAGLE-EYE** skills when proofreading text and format, follow these tips:

### 5.2.4.1 Text

1. **Use a readable font:** Characters that are equally spaced prevent your eyes from skipping over thin letters. If Courier is not your preference, type the word “minimum” or “distinguish” using other fonts and select one where the letter “i” is clearest in relation to the letters around it.

Minimum - Verdana  
Minimum - Garamond  
Minimum - Georgia

Distinguish - Courier  
Distinguish - Arial  
Distinguish - Century  
Schoolbook

After proofreading, change the document back to your preferred font.

2. **Print a hardcopy:** Computer screens can distort characters on the page. Working from a hardcopy is easier, portable and allows you to be more accurate.
3. **Read systematically:** Read through your document for one item at a time.  
[ ] Spelling [ ] Punctuation [ ] Format [ ] Numbers
4. **Re-read lines with errors:** When you find an error, you often focus on it and overlook other errors nearby.
5. **Read the text backwards:** This allows your eyes to focus on each letter and brings your attention to individual words. This is an effective technique for identifying doublets, transposed words and homophone errors in short documents. It also allows you to easily spot punctuation marks that need closure (brackets, quotation marks, etc.).

*“Good writing deserves good proofreading; bad writing demands it.”*

Laura K. Anderson

6. **Use margin signals:** Insert markers such as a dot, check or arrow in the right or left margin for each correction made at each line. This will increase your accuracy when doing “live” to “dead” comparisons.
7. **Compare line-by-line:** After inserting corrections, place your new version (live) next to the old version (dead). Make sure that the margins are identical. Then carefully compare each line to ensure that all corrections are done and no new errors have been inserted.

#### 5.2.4.2 Format

1. **Look upside down:** Hold each page upside down or sideways to see the actual shape of words on the page. This technique takes your vision off individual letters and instead focuses on white space among text. This makes it easier to spot formatting inconsistencies such as tab spacing and indentions.

### 5.3 Online Techniques

#### 5.3.1 Find and Redefine

The **Find and Redefine Technique** in Microsoft Word is a time-saving editing tool that complements the Sliding Technique to:

*“The best proofreading is still done with pencil in hand.”*

Michael L. Keene



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- identify redundancy in sentences
  - highlight “overkill” of a repeated word, phrase or acronym
1. Use “Home” ribbon
  2. Click “Editing” and under that tab, click “Replace”
  3. Make sure the “Replace” tab is open – NOT “Find” or “Go To”
  4. Type the word, phrase or acronym in “Find What” putting a space BEFORE and AFTER the word or phrase

**NOTE:** If you don’t include spaces, the program will highlight every word that contains the desired word. For example: “an” appears in *arrange*, *understand*. So using the spacing is required for this editing technique to work.

5. Type the same word, phrase or acronym in the “Replace with:” box
6. Click the “>>more” box
7. Look under “Replace” and open the “Format” box in the bottom left screen, click “highlight”

**NOTE:** Under “Replace with,” the word “Highlight” should appear

8. Click “Replace All”
9. Click the “Close” button. The text identified in step 4 will remain highlighted and you’re now ready to implement the Sliding Technique.

To clear highlighted text, re-open the “Find and Replace” dialog box. On the “Replace with” tab, the word in step 4 should appear. Open the “Format” tab and click “highlight.”

**NOTE:** The words “Not Highlight” under “Replace with” should appear under the word used in step 4. Click “Replace All” and the “Close” button to return to your document.

### 5.3.2 Google News

Bill Sabin, a master editor and author of *The Gregg Reference Manual*, used Google’s news search engine (<http://news.google.com>) to see how often selected words and structures occur. He used this site rather than other general search engines because it searches more than 4,500 news sources. The count indicates terms widely used or not used by the media – especially questionable technical words.

*“It is perfectly okay to write garbage – as long as you edit brilliantly.”*  
C.J. Cherry

When editing for word choice, this technique enables you to evaluate if the public is familiar with a term. For example:

1. authoring – 3,620 hits
2. composing – 3,910 hits
3. penning – 8,000 hits
4. writing – 2,560,000 hits

### 5.3.3 LWV Lexicon

The plain English lexicon is an international editing tool that allows you to identify words most likely to be understood or misunderstood by the general public. It enables you to check a word to determine its readability level and gives a LWV (Living Word Vocabulary) that's easier for mass readership (<http://www.clearest.co.uk/pages/publications/plainenglishlexicon#>).

Word	LWV	UK	%	BNC	LWV meaning or (maybe) plainer term	Commentary
culpable	16	21	43	70	at fault, guilty, responsible for	

### 5.3.4 StyleWriter

This editing software complements your EAGLE-EYE skills while improving your writing skills. It's much more accurate and effective than Microsoft's checker. Review the "Introductory StyleWriter" demo first at <http://www.editorsoftware.com>. You can download the 14-day FREE trial version using this link. No charge card or personal information is required.

### 5.3.5 Microsoft Word Checker

Microsoft Spelling and Grammar features allow you to pre-set grammar and style based on your writing weaknesses. Though not nearly effective as StyleWriter, it "flags" grammar glitches and style issues. Use directions below to personalize Microsoft's Grammar and Style Checker.

1. Click the "File" tab on the home ribbon
2. Click "Option"
3. Click "Proofing" in the new window that opens
4. Look for the title "Writing Style" under the subheading "When correcting spelling and grammar in Word"
5. Click the box that says Grammar Only
6. Open the tab to show "Grammar & Style"
7. Click the "Settings" box which opens a new window listing Grammar and Style elements.

*"A good editor is also a good writer."*  
James Martin

**NOTE:** If you've never used this feature, all boxes will be checked. Uncheck those items that are NOT a challenge or problem in your writing

8. Reboot the computer for changes to take effect

In addition to techniques presented in this chapter, the Plain Language Action and Information Network (PLAIN) offers “Federal Plain Language Guidelines” that complement the post-writing phase. This FREE, useful document on clear communication can be downloaded at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/FederalPLGuidelines.pdf>. UK's Plain Language Commission also provides 15 specific tips to consider during the post-writing phase (<http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/plcdev/app/public/system/files/11/original/15TipsOnWritingPlainEng.pdf>). And Chillibreeze Solutions, a multi-national consulting firm, gives a FREE copy of “A Quick Guide to Plain English” at <http://www.chillibreeze.com/ebooks/Plain-English.asp>.

### 5.3.6 Air-editing

NaturalReader offers a FREE, easy-to-use text-to-speech software. This online tool can read to you any text in Microsoft Word files, webpages, PDF files and E-mails. It allows you to concentrate on the flow and sound of text by listening. Not only can you pick out mistakes, but also identify certain punctuation errors based on sound. (<http://www.naturalreaders.com/download.php>).

*“Write fast, edit slow.”*

Philip Yaffe

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# 6 Combining Techniques

There are no absolutes or silver bullets for writing your text. While techniques presented throughout this book offer a systematic approach using the three phases of writing, sometimes the audience isn't identified until after the purpose and text have been developed. Other times you have an outline and then determine the audience and purpose. Thus, depending on the situation, there are a variety of mixed approaches to writing business and technical documents.

## 6.1 Pre- and Post-writing Phases

Phase	Technique/Approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pre-writing	1. Determine Purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing	2. Develop Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-writing	3. Identify Audience	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post-writing	4. Conduct Editing	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 6.2 Writing and Post-writing Phases

Phase	Technique/Approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pre-writing	1. Dividing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-writing	2. Identify Audience	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-writing	3. Determine Purpose	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing	4. Develop Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post-writing	5. Conduct Editing	<input type="checkbox"/>

Phase	Technique/Approach	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Writing	1. Expanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pre-writing	2. Dividing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing	3. Develop Text	<input type="checkbox"/>
Post-writing	4. Conduct Editing	<input type="checkbox"/>

Regardless of which writing phase used initially, it is assumed that you will proofread the final text using tools and techniques presented in Chapter Five.

*"Don't get it right, just get it written."*  
James Thurber

# 7 Summary

Congratulations!! You have completed a succinct introduction on the three major phases of written communications. You have read plain language guidelines and standards as defined by credible, professional writing organizations, the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and various style manuals. You have become familiar with common writing challenges that plague multilingual global communities. And you have been exposed to specific writing, editing and proofreading techniques; easy-to-use tools, time-saving tip sheets and reliable resources.

Armed with pertinent information presented in this ebook, you can reduce your employer's risks and liability that poor writing causes. You can remove gobbledygook from documents and produce clear text based on the purpose and target audience whether in an academic, business or government setting. Thus, you are now ready to move your writing to a higher level and *soar* on the wings of words!!<sup>5</sup>

**Write Like A Pro** has presented some practical solutions to achieve desired results regardless of your country, language or industry by sharing effective writing tips, tools, resources and techniques. So get started and *soar*...!!

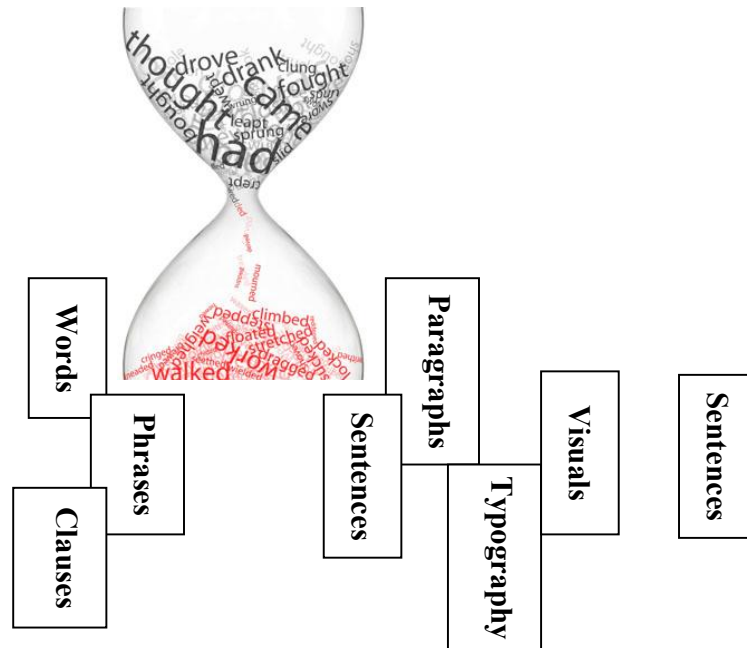
*"Almost without exception, highly successful people are clear and persuasive communicators in writing. It is the common thread of success."*

Roger Howe

# 8 Tip Sheets

These easy-to-use tip sheets will help reduce time on writing tasks and serve as a useful resource when practicing the writing, editing and proofreading techniques in this book.

*Your time-saving writing hour glass...*



## 8.1 Tip Sheet One – Target Audience

### Identifying Your Reader(s)

One of the first tasks when analyzing the reader(s) is to identify the type or types. Whether internal or external, the common division among readers into categories is as follows:

- **Executives:** These individuals make administrative, business, economic, governmental, legal, and political decisions. If it's a new product, they decide whether to produce and market it. If it's a new technology, they decide whether it should be implemented. However, just because they hold an executive position, you cannot assume that they have technical knowledge on a specific subject.

*"Don't write merely to be understood.  
Write so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood."  
Robert Louis Stevenson*

- **Experts:** These people know the theory as well as procedure, system, and product inside out. They designed it, tested it and know everything about it. They usually have advanced degrees, operate in academic settings and laboratories, or conduct complex research projects. The lay person is least likely to understand what these experts are saying, and often has the least reason to try when the writing consists of jargon, long sentences, etc. Similarly, the communication challenge faced by the expert is communicating clearly to technicians and executives.
- **Technicians:** These professionals build, operate, maintain and repair what experts design and theorize about. They have highly technical knowledge, but of a more practical nature.
- **Lay Persons:** These readers have little, if any, technical knowledge. They are considered non-specialists. Their interest in technical information is low, but they have a need to understand technical information that directly applies to them. NASA defines these readers as the general public, media, schools and universities.

When the audience is unknown or mixed, it's best to write for the lay person category. This would ensure that everyone can understand the information.

*"Some authors write every sentence with a specific person in mind..."*  
Chuck Sambuchino

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## 8.2 Tip Sheet Two – Purpose

### Determining the Purpose(s)

The purpose of writing as defined in this book is to convey information, not to amuse, entertain or arouse. Therefore, it appeals to a reader's reason, not their emotions. Knowing your purpose as a writer is the second most important task during the pre-writing phase.

1. To convince – gains the reader's confidence by presenting objective information (facts, statistics, visuals, etc.) in a clear, logical order
2. To entertain – inspires, delights, indulges or captivates the reader emotionally
3. To inform – gives the reader information without expecting any action on the part of the reader
4. To influence/motivate – sways the reader towards a desired action or way of thinking
5. To instruct – provides the reader with step-by-step directions, instructions or procedures so that the reader is able to do something (procedure, experiment, operation, task, etc.)
6. To interpret – explains or “makes sense” of a process, policy, regulation, formula, product, etc.
7. To persuade – lures the reader to take action, change their attitude or behavior without necessarily presenting all the facts; but based on valid opinions
8. To propose – suggests a plan of action for a specific problem or responds to a request for proposal
9. To recommend – suggests an action or series of actions based on alternative possibilities that have been evaluate
10. To request – asks the reader to provide something or respond to questions, a survey, etc
11. To build goodwill – leaves the reader feeling positive regardless of the purpose

## 8.3 Tip Sheet Three – Paragraph Types (Based on Information Generated)

When determining organizational issues for your document during the pre-writing phase, you must decide on a logical sequence for presenting the information. You should choose the type paragraph(s) that best suits the purpose, readers and subject of your document.

- **Categorization**  
Divides supporting material into facts, groups, concepts, class, etc.
- **Cause-and-effect**

*“The first rule of style is to have something to say.”*  
George Polya

Begins with either the cause or the effect of an event. This approach can also be used to develop a report that offers a solution to a problem, beginning with the problem and moving on to the solution.

- **Chronological**

Emphasizes the time element of a sequence. This method uses the natural order of events, dates, years, phases, etc. For example, a trouble report that traces events as they occurred in time.

- **Comparison**

Presents a new topic that is similar in many ways to another topic that is more familiar to the readers. Or it is used to assemble information on all the alternatives in order to make a comparison such as cost, progress, packages, quantities, testing procedures, etc.

- **Definition**

Extends definitions with additional details, examples, comparisons or other explanatory devices.

- **Division-and-classification**

Describes physical objects or structures with component parts. Division could be used to describe a physical object, such as parts of a FAX machine; classification could be used to organize individual components.

- **General-and-specific**

Proceeds either from general information to specific details or from specific information to a general conclusion.

- **Order-of-importance**

Presents a sequence that reflects the relative importance of each detail. The information can be presented in either decreasing order of importance or increasing order of importance.

- **Process Analysis**

Answers such questions as: How does it work? How do you do it?

- **Sequential**

Emphasizes the order of elements and is particularly useful when writing step-by-step instructions.

*"Purpose sets the road map for your writing journey.  
If it's not clear, you'll waste a lot of time getting to your destination."*

María Riley

- **Spatial**

Describes the physical appearance of an object or area, such as a room, from top to bottom, inside to outside, front to back and so on.

Some documents require the use of several paragraph types. For example, in describing the organization of your branch, you could use three methods of paragraph development. You could divide the larger topic, the branch, into departments (**division-and-classification**), arrange the departments by their order of importance within the branch (**order-of-importance**) and present their operations in sequence succession (**sequential**).

#### 8.4 Tip Sheet Four – Characteristics of Effective Writing

According to the American Management Association (AMA), effective business writing has six characteristics: (1) clear, (2) concise, (3) conversational, (4) centered, (5) compensating and (6) coherent. However, the four Cs emphasized throughout this ebook are **clear, concise, centered** and **coherent**. By using specific writing and editing techniques that incorporate these Cs, you can produce documents that get the “RIGHT” results and comply with plain language standards.

- **Clear Writing**

*“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”*  
Mark Twain

“I studied English for 16 years but...  
...I finally learned to speak it in just six lessons”  
Jane, Chinese architect

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Writing is clear when the intended readers understand it, accurately and completely, in one reading. That means the intended reader, the person you've aimed your message to, must read it through one time only, set it aside, and say "I get it." If that doesn't happen, if the intended reader has to reread what you've written, puzzle over it, ask someone else to interpret it or call you on the phone to find out exactly what you meant, the writing isn't clear.

- **Concise Writing**

Writing is concise when it contains no unnecessary words. In everyday parlance, concise is frequently used as a synonym for short or brief. Strictly speaking, however, concise means direct or to-the-point. The American Heritage Dictionary defines concise as "expressing much in a few words." That's a good definition. Writers write concisely when they say as much as they need to in the fewest words. A 50-page report would be concise if it contained only the necessary words; a five-line report would not be concise if it contained unnecessary words. Brevity is not what matters: necessity is.

- **Centered Writing**

Whatever you write must have a point, a central idea. If it doesn't, why bother writing? After all, the whole purpose of writing anything is to convey a central idea, to share a core message. If you have no core message, you'll be better off doing something else with your time; don't waste it on writing. Good writing is writing in which everything – every scrap of information, every idea or opinion, every argument – clarifies or strengthens the core message. Anything that doesn't help get that message across, doesn't belong.

- **Coherent Writing**

When writing is connected, unified – all of its parts form a whole – then you have mastered coherent writing. There are no loose ends or dead ends. Every sentence belongs, every sentence is in the right place and every sentence strengthens or reinforces the central point. A document is coherent when it has a logical beginning, middle, ending and all of these are linked by transitions for a smooth flow.

## 8.5 Tip Sheet Five – Answer Options

### 4.2.1 Triangle and Inverted Triangle

The justification before the request                       Triangle             Inverted Triangle

The summary before detail                                       Triangle             Inverted Triangle

*"This report, by its very length, defends itself against the risk of being read."*

Winston Churchill



Answers before an explanation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Triangle	<input type="checkbox"/> Inverted Triangle
Conclusions before the discussion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Triangle	<input type="checkbox"/> Inverted Triangle
Reasons before the results	<input type="checkbox"/> Triangle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inverted Triangle

*"Like prepositional phrases, certain structural arrangements in English are much more important than the small bones of grammar in its most technical sense."*

Richard Mitchell

## 4.2.5 Mathematical Formulae

Avoiding full disclosure of outages and corrective activities between HQs and Centers would save valuable time and resolve outages sooner. Better communication between HQs and the Centers would eliminate redundant research and consolidate outage correction information for future questions posed by auditors. Even though grateful, this situation needs your full attention.

5.2.2 SWAT<sup>2</sup>**One SWAT<sup>2</sup> Option**

Climate change is becoming an efficient force for refining energy because saving energy can help lower greenhouse gas emissions that interrupt climate change. However, it is important to balance energy saving measures with good Indoor Air Quality.

Climate change is becoming a driving force for refining energy ~~expediency~~ because saving energy can help ~~repress~~ the greenhouse gas emissions that ~~interject~~ to climate change ~~modification~~. However, it is ~~paramount~~ to balance energy ~~conserving~~ measures with ventilation and with good Indoor Air Quality.

## 5.3.2 Google News

writing – 2,560,000 hits (the most appropriate verb for mass readership based on the number of “hits”)

## 8.6 Tip Sheet Six – Common Prepositions (Time, Space, Position, Direction)

about	by	past
above	down	regarding
according to	during	since
across	for	through
after	from	throughout
against	in	till
ahead	inside	to
along	into	toward
among	like	under
around	near	underneath
at	next	until
before	of	up
behind	off	upon
below	on	with
beneath	out	within
beside	outside	without
between	over	
beyond		

*“You start out writing crap and thinking it’s good stuff, and then gradually you get better at it...”*

Octavia Butler

**Space:** at, beside, between, from, in, into, near, off, on, over, to, under The report is **in** the desk, **on** the desk, **near** the desk or **under** the desk.

**Time:** after, at, before, during, past, since, throughout, until The professor gave writing tips **during** the class, **before** the class, **throughout** the class and **after** the class.

**General:** by, for, to

*"Using transitional words and phrases helps papers read more smoothly and allows the reader to flow more smoothly from one point to the next."*

Joe Landsberger



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## 8.7 Tip Sheet Seven – Wordy Phrases (One Word Replacement)

Circumlocution	Plain English	Circumlocution	Plain English
a greater length of time	longer	if it is assumed that	if
a great deal of	much	in all cases	always
a large number of	many	in all other cases	otherwise
a number of	several	inasmuch as	since
a proportion of	some	in between	between
a small number of	few	in connection with	about
a sufficient number of	enough	in conjunction with	with
afford an opportunity to	allow	in most cases	usually
after this has been done	then	in order that	to
aimed at	for	in regard to	about
are found to be in agreement with	agree	in spite of the fact that	although
arrive at a decision	decide	in the nature of	like
at a later date	later	in the vicinity of	near
at an early date	soon	in this day and age	now
at the present time	now	it is apparent therefore that	hence
at this precise moment in time	now	it may well be that	perhaps
carry out experiments	experiment	later on	later
check on	check	make an adjustment to	adjust
conduct an investigation into	investigate	make an examination of	examine
count up	count	not infrequently	often
give positive encouragement to	encourage	of a reversible nature	reversible
has an ability to	can	on a regular basis	regularly
have been shown to be	are	on account of the fact that	as
on two separate occasions	twice	undertake a study of	study

*"If you can't explain what you're doing and why you're doing it to any intelligent layman,  
that really means that you don't understand it yourself!"*

Allan Bromley

## 8.8 Tip Sheet Eight – Transitional Indicators

To ensure coherence within your paragraph and make the relationship clear among sentences, these transitional words and phrases could be used. Careful selection of transitions is essential, because without them your writing cannot achieve a smooth flow from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph that is required for coherence.

- **To indicate addition/evidence**

Again, also, and then, besides, equally important, as well, finally, further, furthermore, in addition, last, lastly, likewise, moreover, secondly, too, again, and

- **To indicate comparison**

Likewise, in a like manner, similarly, in contrast, on the other hand

- **To indicate concession**

At the same time, of course, after all, naturally, I admit, although this may be true

- **To indicate contrast/exception**

And yet, after all, at the same time, although true, but, for all that, however, in contrast, nevertheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, still, yet, in spite of, nonetheless, on the one hand

- **To indicate emphasis/special features**

Namely, for example, for instance, indeed, incidentally, in fact, in other words, specifically, in particular, to illustrate, of course, even

- **To indicate a repeat**

As stated, as I have noted, as has been noted, in brief

- **To indicate results/cause-and-effect**

Accordingly, consequently, hence, therefore, thus, truly, as a result, then in short, so

- **To indicate sequence/order**

First, second, third..., next, then, finally

- **To indicate similarity**

*"The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The word is a force;  
it is the power you have to express and communicate – to think."*

Don Miquel Ruiz

In the same way, also, just as...so too, likewise, similarly

- **To indicate space/position**

Up, down, beside, just above, behind, closer, farther, to the left, to the right, next to, in the distance, higher, lower, adjacent, below, beyond, here, in front, in back, nearby, there

- **To indicate summary**

In brief, in short, on the whole, to sum up, to summarize, in conclusion, to conclude, finally, in a word, in the end, in the final analysis, thus, in summary

- **To indicate time**

Afterwards, at length, immediately, in the meantime, meanwhile, soon, at last, after a short time, while, thereupon, thereafter, temporarily, until, presently, shortly, lately, of late, since, a bit later, as soon as, following that step, before, currently, during, earlier, later, now, recently, simultaneously, subsequently, then

*"Useful redundancy promotes a better understanding of the writer's message."*

James Martin



## 8.9 Tip Sheet Nine – Imperative Verbs

Verbs are action words; however, imperative verbs are known as “bossy words” – they tell readers what to do (e.g., **close** the door; **empty** the bin; **click** on the “Format” tab). Imperative verbs are effective for writing instructions, procedures and directions.

add	edit	open	tear
apply	enter	operate	turn
arrange	find	organize	use
attach	flip	place	widen
backup	fold	pour	wipe
browse	follow	push	write
calculate	get	put	zip
call	hang	record	
change	hold	remove	
choose	identify	revise	
close	increase	rewrite	
code	insert	select	
combine	install	separate	
compare	label	shut	
cut	layout	slice	
define	lift	start	
detach	list	store	
display	measure	take	
divide	mix	tap	

Other words that help make instructions clear are transitions and articles. Sequential transitions place each step or task in a specific order. This helps the reader identify what needs to be done first, second, etc.

## 8.10 Tip Sheet Ten – Redundancy Sheet

### Redundant Modifiers

Some adjectives and adverbs give the same information as the words they describe and add no value to the sentence. These redundancies should be removed using the Sliding Technique.

finally concluded	new innovation
first introduced	general consensus
serious crisis	end result
important essentials	future plans
past history	unexpected surprise
advance warning	sum total
basic essentials	connected together
true facts	exactly identical
advance planning	added bonus
close proximity	

### Other Redundant Word Groups

meet at 9am in the morning	first time ever
the rich and the wealthy	ask the question
extra added feature	in joint collaboration
each and every	few in number
autobiography of his own life	frequency of occurrence
during the course of	appropriate parameter required
conclusions reached	substantiate all validations



## 9 References

These relevant news articles reinforce the need for employers, government agencies, universities and colleges, business owners as well as parents and students to seriously assess writing skills for improving communication in a global community. It shows why “**Write Like A Pro**” is a must read for all.

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# Endnotes

1. Adapted from Jacqueline Berke's *Twenty Questions for the Writer*.
2. This technique complements the newspaper format for organizing writing. However, the illustrations intentionally avoid the academic approach since this book is for employees in the “real-world” of work.
3. See Tip Sheet Five.
4. This mathematical approach was developed by Philip Yaffe, a former feature writer with *The Wall Street Journal* and international marketing communication consultant. In addition to teaching effective writing in Brussels, Belgium, he is the author of numerous e-books on effective writing, language learning (French) and a variety of other topics.
5. This writing style is an example of James Martin's quote: “Useful redundancy promotes a better understanding of the writer's message.”