

write

Let's be clear

The why and how of plain English



Be short, be simple, be human
— *Sir Ernest Gowers*



COLIC (kol'ik), *n.* acute
pain in the abdomen or bowels.

COLISEUM, see colosseum.

COLLABORATE (ko-lab'o-rat),
to work jointly, especially in liter
or scientific work.

COLLABORATION (-o-ra'shun),
united labour.

COLLABORATOR (-lab'o-ra-ter),
one who assists another, especially
in literary or scientific work.

COLLAPSE (ko-laps'), *n.* a fall
or together; sudden
failure.

COLLAPSE

Rewrite

Tools to help you reboot your writing culture

Use the Rewrite Standard for your next plain language review

Audience

'Big picture' elements

1. The purpose of the document is at the start..... ☐
2. The content supports the purpose of the document..... ☐
3. The structure of the document is clear and logical to the reader.... ☐
4. The headings signal the key content ☐

Language elements

5. The paragraphs are mostly short and focused on one topic ☐
6. The sentences are mostly short and straightforward..... ☐
7. The words are precise and familiar..... ☐
8. The tone supports the purpose of the document ☐

Presentation elements

9. The layout and presentation help the reader absorb the messages quickly and easily..... ☐
10. The document is error-free and consistent with your style guide..... ☐

www.rewriteforchange.com
Rethink, reboot, reinvent

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Take your time

Thinking and structuring 50%

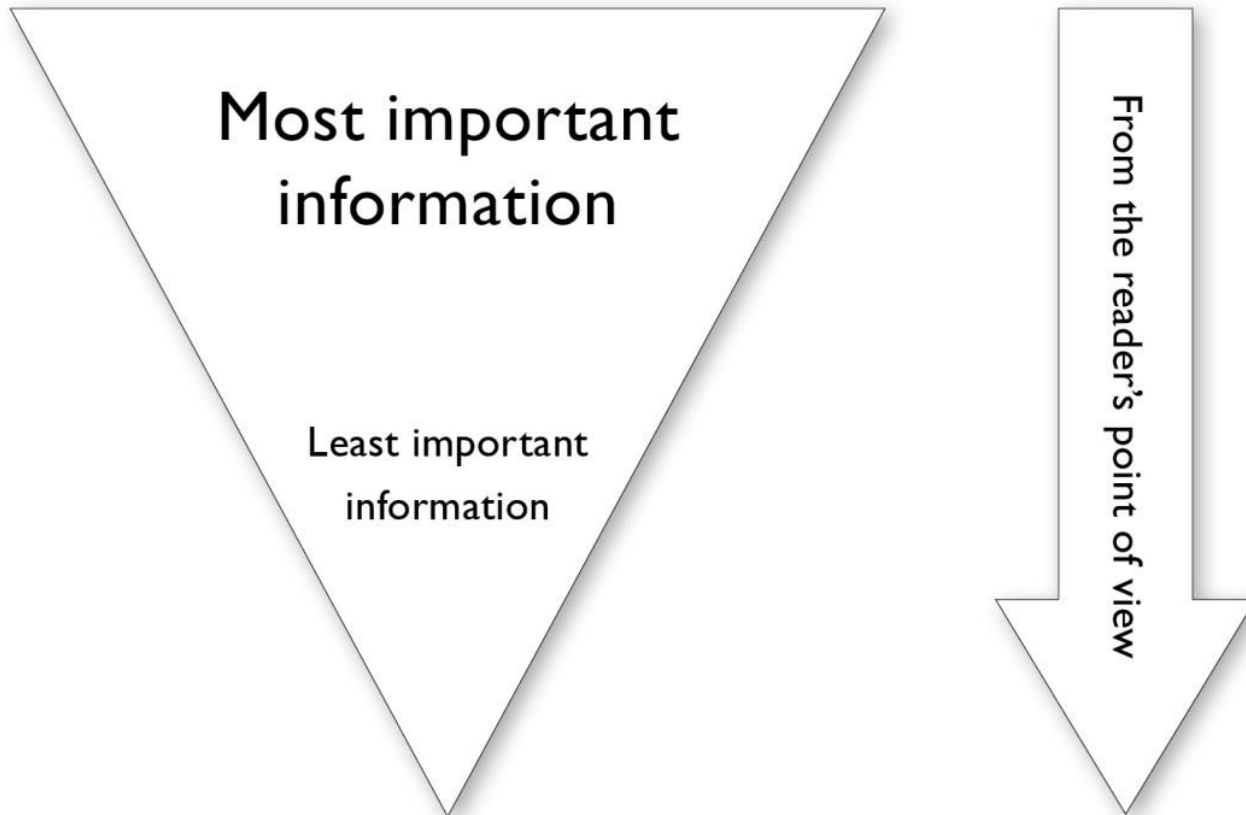
Writing 25%

Editing and proofreading 25%

Big picture

- Purpose of the document
- Content that supports the purpose

The inverted pyramid



The MADE structure

M Main message

A Action

D Details

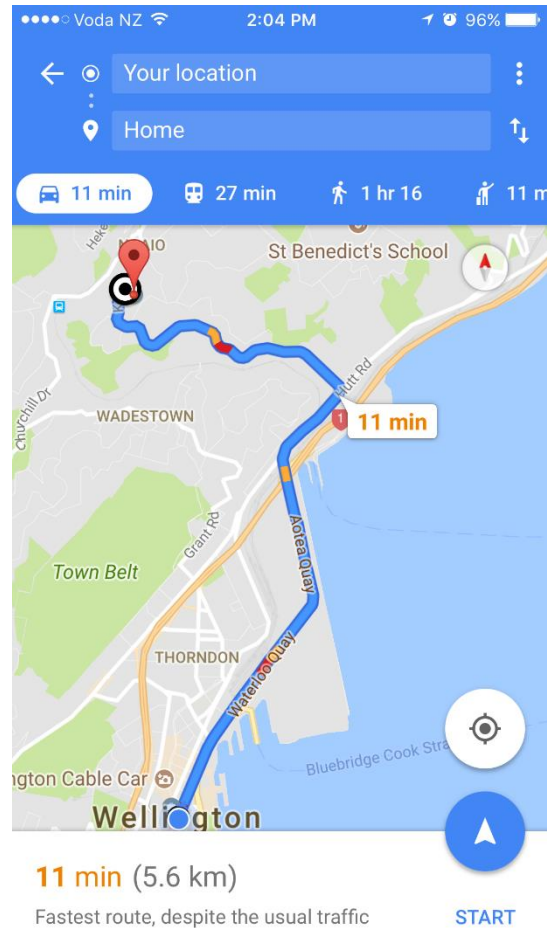
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Headings guide the way



Report writing tips

These tips come from the specialists who run our Report Writing workshop.

[Come on our Report Writing workshop to learn more tips](#)

Order information based on the reader's questions

Forget about how you learned to order information in academic reports. Imagine the question the reader will most want the report to answer, and put that information first. Then think about the next likely question the reader will have. Put that second. You will probably find you put your recommendations right near the front of your report.

Include information the reader wants to know

Include only the information you think the reader will find interesting. All the history that led up to the report may be fascinating to you, but old news to the reader. So you might decide to put the Background section in the appendix, or delete it altogether.

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Use statement headings

The best headings for reports are informative, descriptive headings. We recommend you use statement headings (like a newspaper headline, or a sentence without a full stop). Statement headings are more helpful to the reader than label headings, such as 'Introduction' or 'Background'.

Write executive summaries from scratch

Never make an executive summary by cutting and pasting from your report. Repeated sentences make an author look careless. Reword your main points, creating an executive summary that does not contain phrases from the body of the report.

Use 'I' or 'we' in your report

Many of us learned not to use 'I' or 'we' when writing reports. However, not using 'I' or 'we' creates a distancing tone and seems old fashioned. Filling your reports with 'I' or 'we' creates a more dynamic, open tone.

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Choose your heading

- Introduction

Label

- Plain English saves you money

Statement

- Include information the reader needs to know

Instruction

- How long do I have to appeal?

Question

Be descriptive in 4–10 words

Attendance survey results

Results released of June attendance survey

School attendance is falling, says June survey

A big part of our everyday chit chat in the office is about language and how we communicate. To us, these conversations are fascinating. This blog shares our conversations with you, and gives you the chance to tell us what you think.

08 June 2010

Writing clearly shows that you respect your clients

We're renovating a house at the moment. I am amazed at how I'm making decisions — I just realised I'm choosing to use companies' services based on how clear their writing is.

I emailed about eight property valuers asking for quotes. One valuer rang me and answered my questions over the phone. She was just lovely, and she mentioned she'd follow up the phone call with an email. As soon as I got the email, I was put off. The email was full of phrases she didn't use on the phone to me, like 'should you wish to proceed' and 'we can sometimes expedite this if required'. She suddenly seemed pompous, stiff, and distancing. I guess I was also put off by assuming that it would be difficult to read her report after the valuation.

By contrast, transferring the mortgage to Kiwibank has been a pleasant experience. All the paperwork I've received from Kiwibank has spoken to me like a normal person talking to another normal person. It has a direct, clear tone, with few complex words. Very little in the writing has confused me. The Kiwibank lawyers' documents are written clearly too. I'm most impressed, and I've discovered I look forward to receiving their documents in the mail.

I can't be the only person who judges service companies by their writing. To me, it makes such sense to write clearly — to write how you would speak if you were face to face with a client. Writing clearly means you don't distance your clients or make them feel stupid because they don't understand the terms you use. Writing clearly means your clients feel like your equals. They feel you respect them. So they warm to you, and you get their

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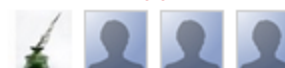
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Make language easy to read

Paragraphs:

- 65 words, one topic
- topic sentences

Sentences:

- 10–25 words
- One idea

Cut the clutter

- In a number of... With regards to
- There is, there are
- Develop-MENT, install-ATION
- Past history, close proximity

Use clear words

Precise, familiar

- Purchase?
- Obtain?
- Influenza?
- Irreducibly pluvial?

It all adds up to tone

A sense of ...

- clarity
- courtesy
- connection
- confidence
- comfort

Presentation

White space

- C - consistency
- A - alignment
- R - repetition
- P - proximity

Proofread perfectly for professionalism



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