

The Amazon Writing Culture

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Amazon's founder, [Jeff Bezos](#), has been an avid reader since childhood. He asserts that reading and writing have played pivotal roles in his personal development, particularly in the domains of entrepreneurship and business building, encompassing all that these fields entail.

"If you want to clarify your thinking, remember something important, or communicate something clearly, write it down."

– Jeff Bezos

From Image-based to Written Communication

In 2004, Bezos' passion for reading and writing inspired him to introduce a new structure at [Amazon](#) for presenting product and business development proposals. This approach mandated that all presentations be delivered in writing, conforming to several carefully developed frameworks.

As a consequence, Amazon refrains from using PowerPoint or any form of image-based presentations. Bezos' key argument for this unconventional approach is that, although written communication requires more time initially, it ultimately saves time due to the resulting clarity and the depth of thought necessary for written presentations. He contends that it's impossible to compose a six-page, narrative-structured memo without achieving clear thinking.

"The great memos are written and rewritten, shared with colleagues who are asked to improve the work, set aside for a couple of days, and then edited again with a fresh mind. They simply can't be done in a day or two. The key point here is that you can improve results through the simple act of teaching scope – that a great memo probably should take a week or more."

– Jeff Bezos

The Writing Framework

The writing framework looks as follows and has not changed significantly since it was implemented in 2004. Each memo is built around six components:

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Hypothesis
- Current state
- Lessons learned
- Strategy

Participants in the meeting are given 20 minutes to read the document. Subsequently, they devote the remainder of the meeting to thoroughly analyzing and reflecting on the presented ideas. After the meeting, the author or presenter revises the document before distributing the final version to all relevant parties. To maintain consistency and assure the quality of these presentations, Amazon adheres to seven specific rules:

Use less than 30 words per sentence

Limitations drive clear thinking and force the writer to use fewer words. If something can be explained in simple terms with few words, the understanding of what is presented is more likely high.

Replace adjectives with data

"Customers love Prime." → "Customers with Prime spend on average three times more than those without, and we retain 90% of them y/y." Specificity leads to clear results, rapid decision-making, and reduces confusion.

Pass the "so what" test

Ideally, readers should immediately know what action the presenter wants them to take. Therefore, it is important to be able to concretely describe who, what, and when. Otherwise, the presenter has wasted both their own and the reader's time.

Eliminate adverbs (words without a clear purpose)

Words such as "almost" and "significantly" should be eliminated as they create confusion. These words are imprecise and no one knows exactly what they mean.

Use subject-verb-object language

The goal of a presentation is to transfer thoughts to another person with as little confusion of the message as possible. The simpler the sentences used, the more precisely the ideas will be translated.

Avoid cluttered words

Some examples of this that Bezos himself has put forward are:

tilize → use

in order to → to

until such time as → until

due to the fact → because

Minimizing words that risk being misinterpreted makes it easier for the reader to focus on the message and the parts that matter most.

Avoid jargon and acronyms

Companies often use internal jargon, which can risk excluding new hires and external parties. Therefore, when using an acronym, it is advisable to spell it out upon its first occurrence. Prioritizing clarity over cleverness in presentations is always beneficial.

Concluding Thoughts

For me, Amazon's writing culture is about three things above all:

filter for clearer thinking

making knowledge transfer easier

eliminating unnecessary meetings

I believe that a significant number of unnecessary meetings could be eliminated if the initiator were required to write a six-page memo following these frameworks. Bezos himself is an exceptional writer, and I highly recommend reading all his [shareholder letters](#). In my view, they rank among the best sources of insights on entrepreneurship, organizational theory, and leadership.

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