

WRITING EFFICIENTLY

You can do it if you try!

Topics in this section

Climactic and immediate writing

The writing process

Revising

Climactic writing

Common model in fiction
(esp. mysteries, thrillers)

Author gradually reveals information.

The story builds to a climax,
which includes crucial information
(e.g. The butler did it!)



Immediate writing

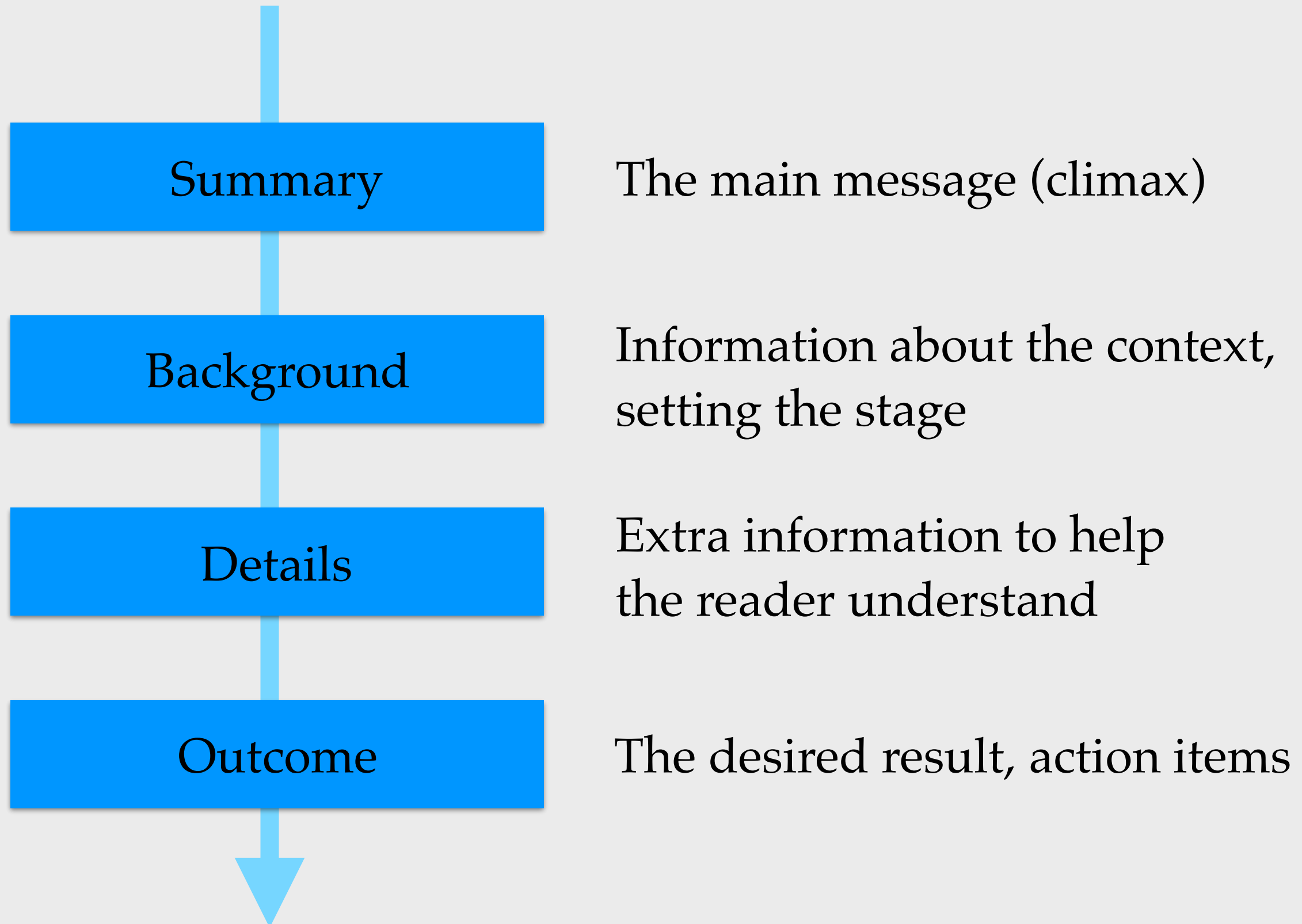


Preferable model in non-fiction

Starts with the critical information;
rest of document supports it

Not a mystery, but a police report
(e.g. The butler did it! Here's why,
how, when, etc.)

Basic structure for immediate writing



An unfortunate email...

Background

information about a particular kind of software and its use

Details

detailed comparison of two software packages, long summary of the work of the committee assessing them

Outcome

We're buying option A for way more money than you had expected.

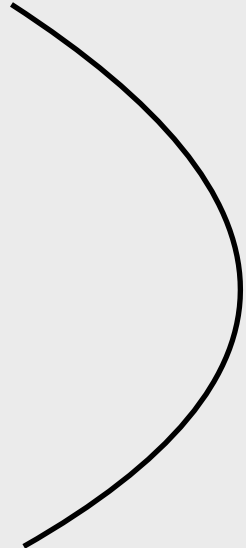
Summary

In climactic writing, the important information comes last.

In immediate writing, the important information comes first; the rest of the document supports it.

Follow the basic immediate structure:
summary, background, details, outcome.

The writing process

Planning	50%		...roughly, of course. Not everyone writes in the same way.
Drafting	25%		
Revising	25%		

Time for each phase?

Planning for your audience

What do the readers already know about the subject?

What do they want to know or expect to be told?

What do they need to know? (may not be the same as above!)

Audiences

Who will use the document?	How technical can the document be?	What do these users need?
experts	highly technical	facts & figures
informed people	semi-technical	facts & figures explained
laypeople	non-technical	facts & figures explained in the simplest terms

Planning — gather information

Assemble all information or documents that may be needed.

Get it all in advance, if possible.

Don't wait until you are part-way through the drafting process.

Planning — brainstorm



What's a brainstorm?

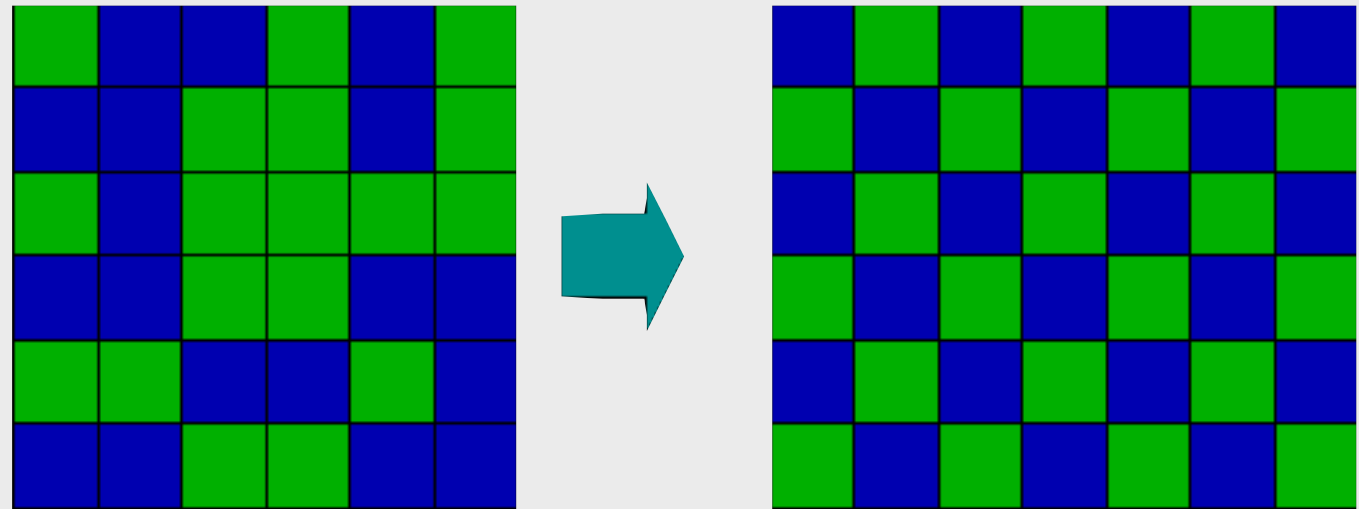
Start with a focus, known in advance (if possible).

Gather lots of possibilities; don't edit or evaluate at all.

Don't think about structure yet.

Think freely and creatively.

Planning — organize

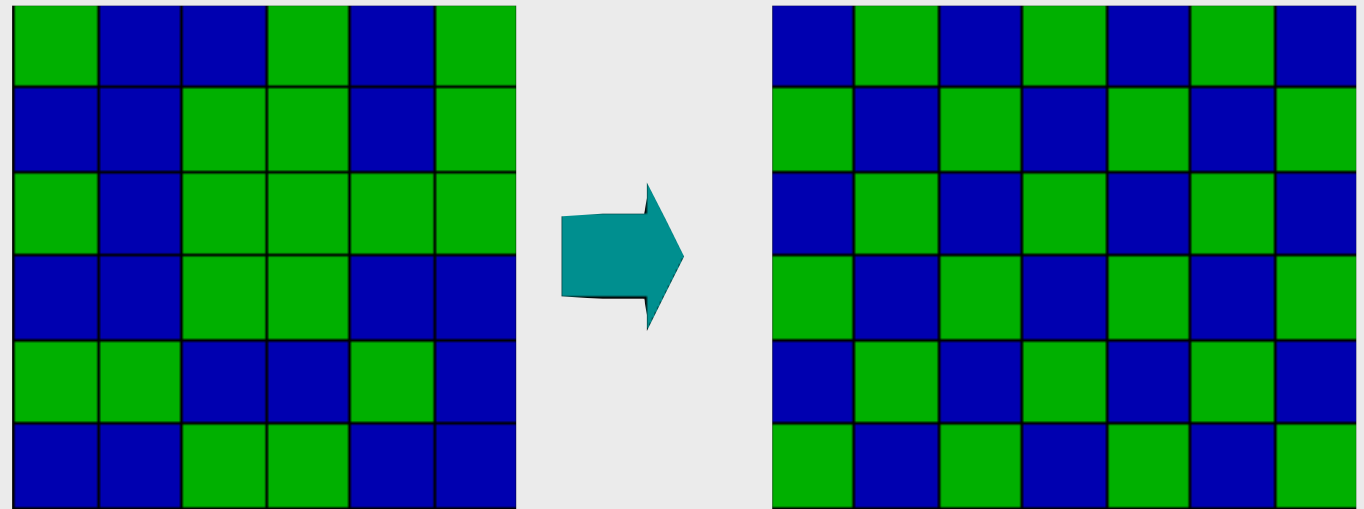


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_and_disorder

Critique each idea: is it important or pertinent, or not?

Keep the first set; discard the second.

Planning — organize

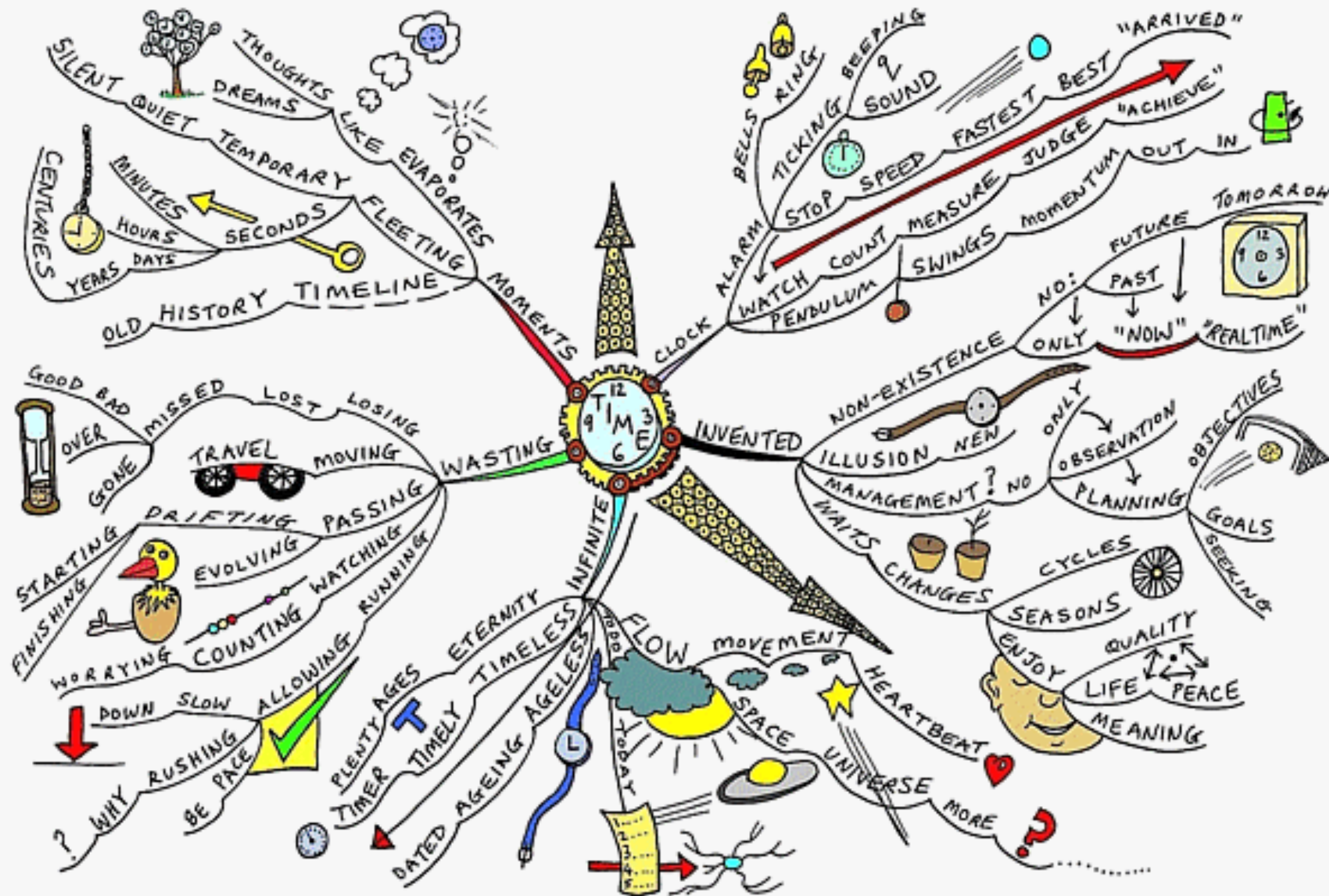


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_and_disorder

Sort the ideas into topics.

Try mind-mapping, symbols, colours, etc.

Planning — organize



Planning — organize

How will the document be organized?

What will come first, second, third...?

The answer to these questions will be an outline.

1. First idea
2. Second idea
3. Third idea...

Drafting

Start writing according to the outline.

Write one section at a time, not necessarily in order.

Finish one section before moving to another.

DON'T EDIT YET.

Writing is creative;
revising is objective.

1. First idea
2. Second idea
3. Third idea...

Revising

Take a break before you revise.

If you revise too soon, you will see what you meant to write, not what you really wrote.

A rest or change of activity helps weaken that mental link.

Revising

Consider doing at least some of your writing & revising by hand on a hard copy.

Some research suggests that revisers find 30% more errors when working on paper rather than on screen.



Revising

Read completely through the document once without editing at all.

Get a 'feel' for it.

See whether it holds together.

Does the argument make sense?



Revising

Read completely through the document a second time for clarity.

Check for tone / style.

Check accuracy.

Find typos,
grammatical errors,
etc.



Revising

Can I revise while drafting?

Possibly, but many people seem to find it hard to draft and revise simultaneously.

The danger of setting the initial standard too high: writer's block



Revising

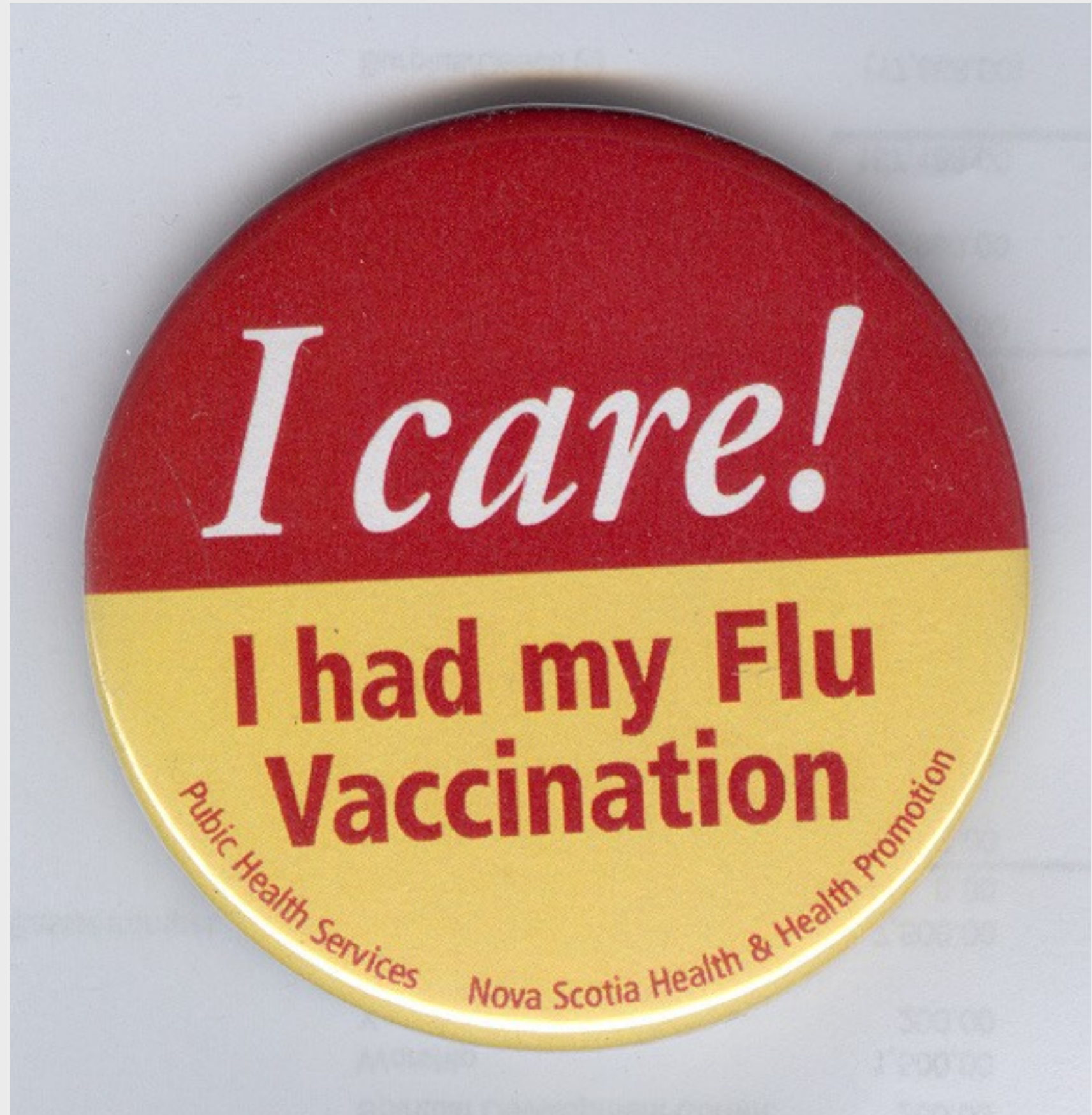


Image courtesy of James Fleming. Button originally made by the specified agency.

A similar view of the process



Image drawn from <http://owl.education.excelsior.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/03/writing-process-2.jpg>

Summary

Expect to spend most of your time planning,
then less (hopefully!) when drafting and revising.

Effective advance planning will give you an outline.

Write during the drafting phase; edit during the revising phase.

Strategies when revising

Be able to discuss these!

Assumed knowledge: basic editing & proofreading skills

Revising for the audience

Keep them in mind.

Are you using vocabulary at their level?

Are there technical terms that need to be defined?

Make it as easy as possible for them to understand you.

Definitions

What is a definition?

Exercise

Define these words for a completely non-technical audience:

cat

central processing unit

the internet



Revising for topical focus

What is essential in your message?

Information that they need to know? Keep it.

Information that is nice to know, but not necessary?

Delete it,

move it to the footnotes,

move it to an appendix—

but probably better just to delete it.

Revising for clarity

Choose words that are as clear and simple as possible.

Not the place for your richest vocabulary!

“Eschew obfuscation; espouse elucidation.”

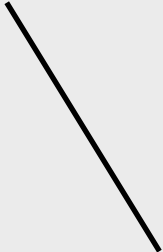
“Avoid being unclear; support being clear.”

Revising for conciseness

Difference between **brevity** and **conciseness**.



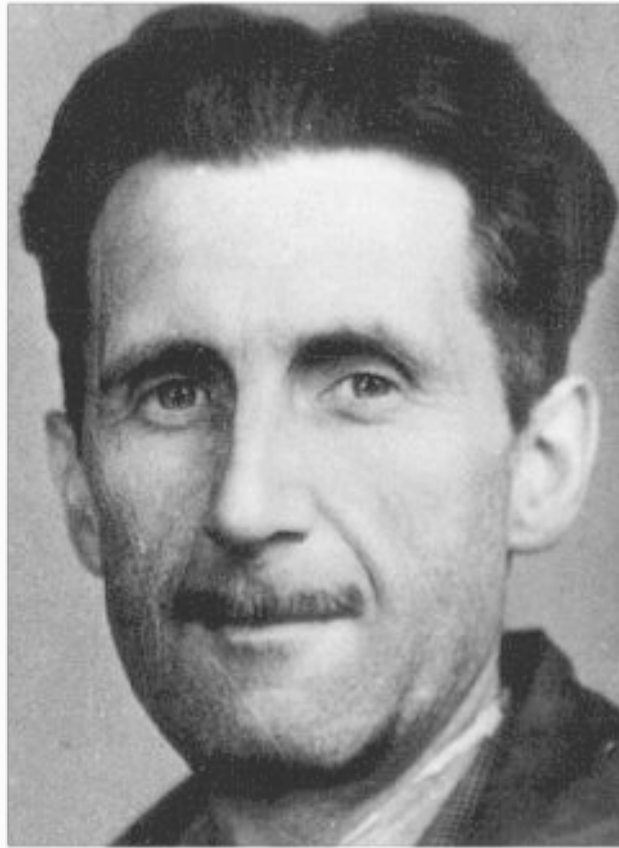
using few words



comprehensive without
using unnecessary words

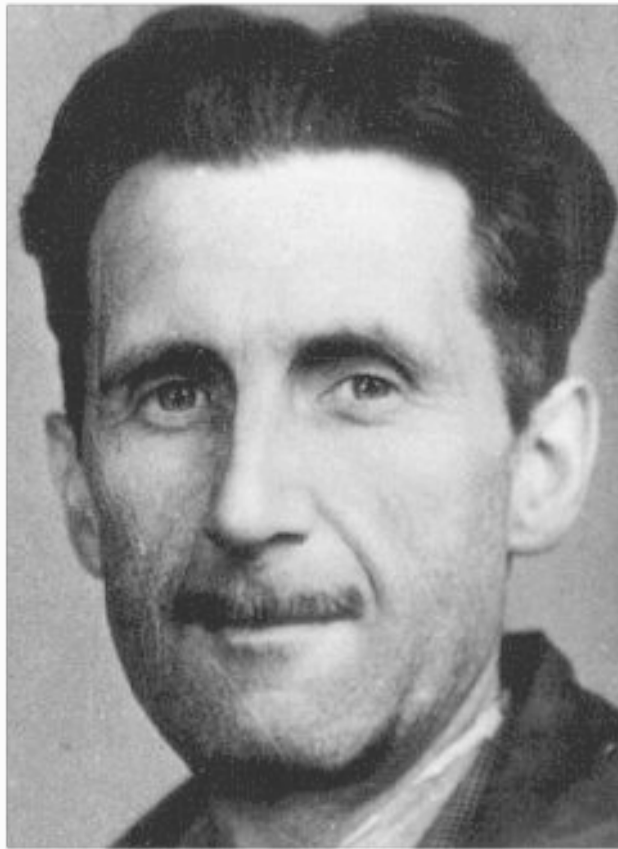
Be concise, not necessarily brief.

Get rid of unnecessary words and inflated phrases.



George Orwell on Good Writing

- i. Never use a metaphor, simile, or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
- ii. Never use a long word where a short one will do.
- iii. If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
- iv. Never use the passive where you can use the active.
- v. Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word, or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
- vi. Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.



Orwell “Orwellized”

- i. Never use worn-out expressions.
- ii. Prefer short words to long ones.
- iii. Cut unneeded words.
- iv. Avoid the passive whenever you can.
- v. Use everyday English wherever possible.
- vi. Apply these rules within reason.

Revising paragraphs

Paragraphs need **unity**

Is there one main idea?

coherence

Does each sentence lead naturally into the next one?

If unity and coherence are lacking, there isn't a paragraph, only disjointed, free-standing sentences.

Revising for understanding

Dilbert has written his document with all of this in mind...



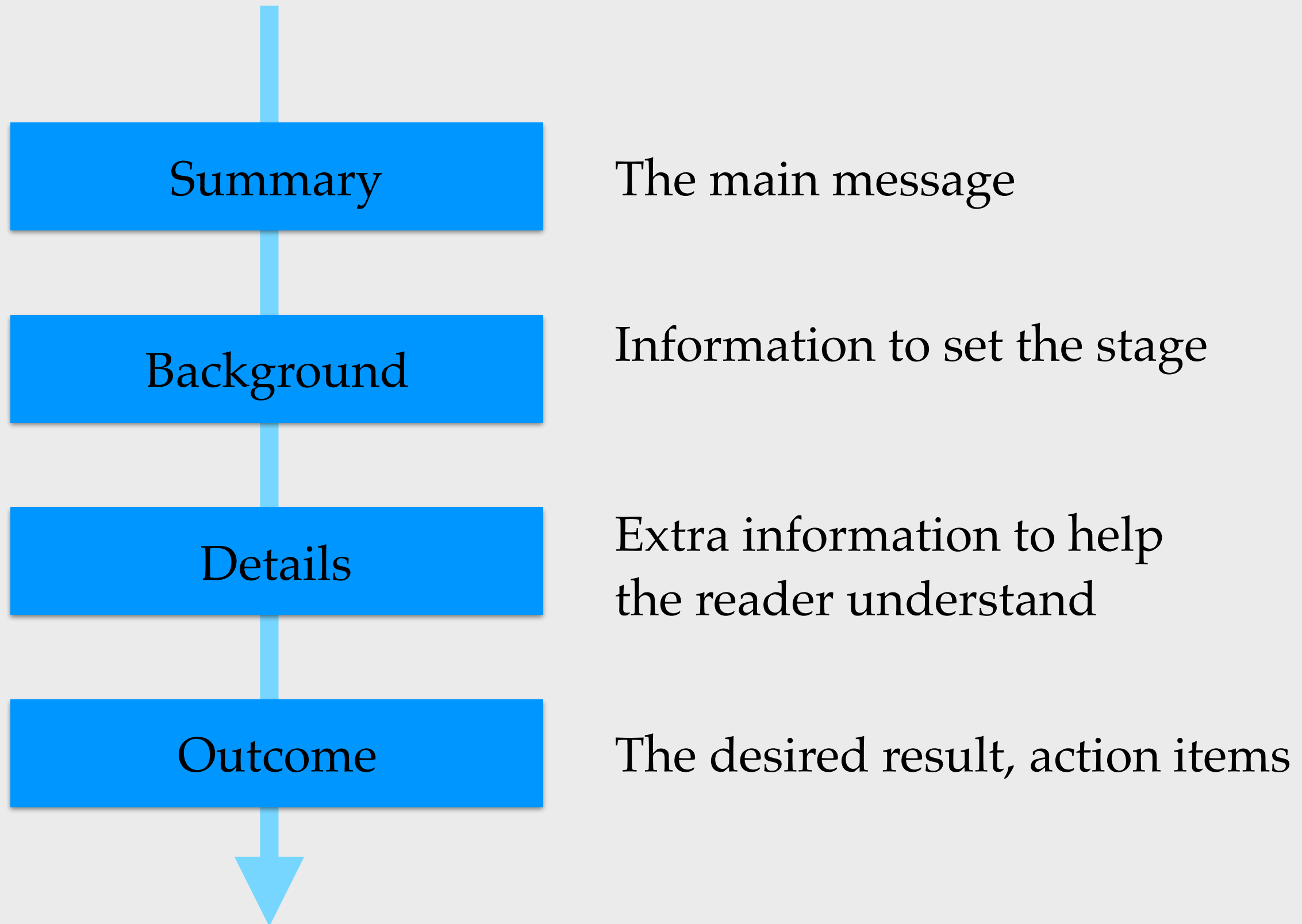
Write clearly so that your meaning is entirely plain,
and so that it cannot mean anything else.

Revising for understanding



Original source unknown, but now found all over the planet
in blogs on punctuation and grammar

Revising for structure



Revising paragraphs

Fred,

The EHV conference described in the attached brochure is just the thing we have been looking for. Only last week you and I discussed the shortage of good technical information in this area, and now here is a conference featuring papers on many of the topics we are interested in. The cost is only \$495 for registration, which includes a visit to the Freeling Rapids Generating Station. Travel and accommodations will be about \$1150 extra. I'm informing you of this early so you can make a decision in time for me to arrange flight bookings and accommodations.

Cam

A revised version

Fred,

May I have your approval to attend an EHV DC power conference next month? The conference described in the attached brochure is just the thing we have been looking for. The cost is only \$495 for registration, which includes a visit to the Freeling Rapids Generating Station. Travel and accommodations will be about \$1150 extra.

Cam

Revise this letter...

Hello Applicant,

Thank you for applying for the Bursary.

We were pleased to have received so many excellent applications, yours included. Upon reviewing all of the applications received, the Bursary selection committee, including alumni who previously lived in the building, has selected recipients for the two available bursary awards. We regret to inform you that you have not been selected, but we thank you for your interest and for your contribution to the [*name of residence deleted*] community.

Please refer to the following link for information regarding various funding sources available to students of [*name deleted*] University: ...

Sincerely, Residence Life Manager, [*name deleted*] University

Summary

Write to your audience with the information that they require.

Use simple, direct, concise language in unified paragraphs.

Follow the structure for immediate writing:
summary, background, details, outcome.