

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

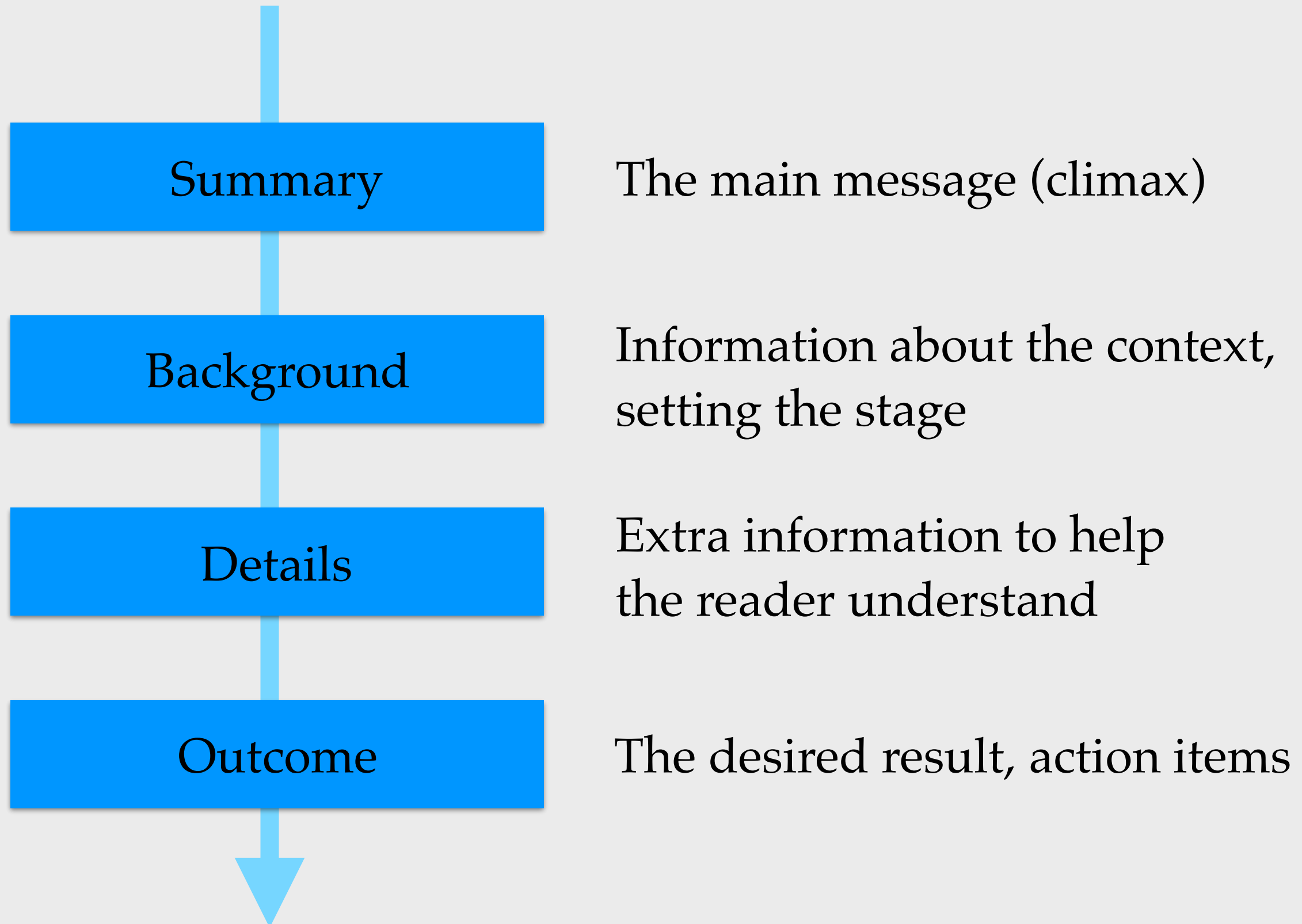


Preferable model in non-fiction

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.

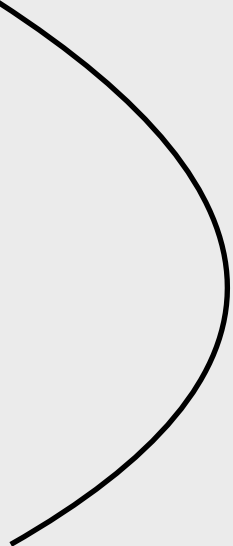
Summary

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%		<p>...roughly, of course. Not everyone writes in the same way.</p>
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?

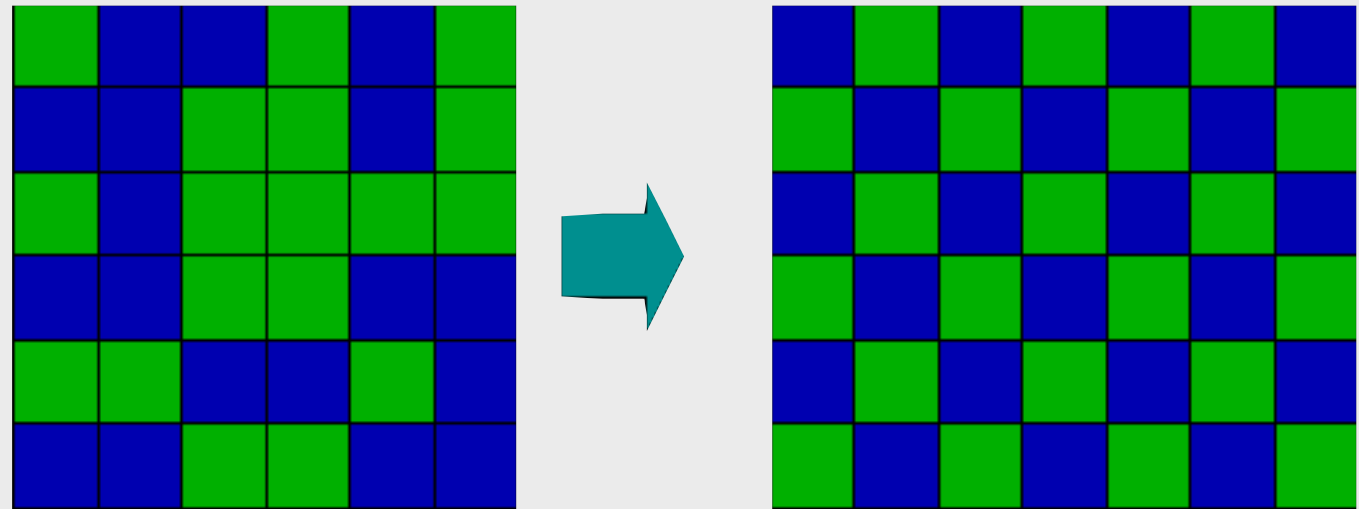
Start with a focus, known in advance (if possible).

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

Don't think about structure yet.

Think freely and creatively.

Planning — organize

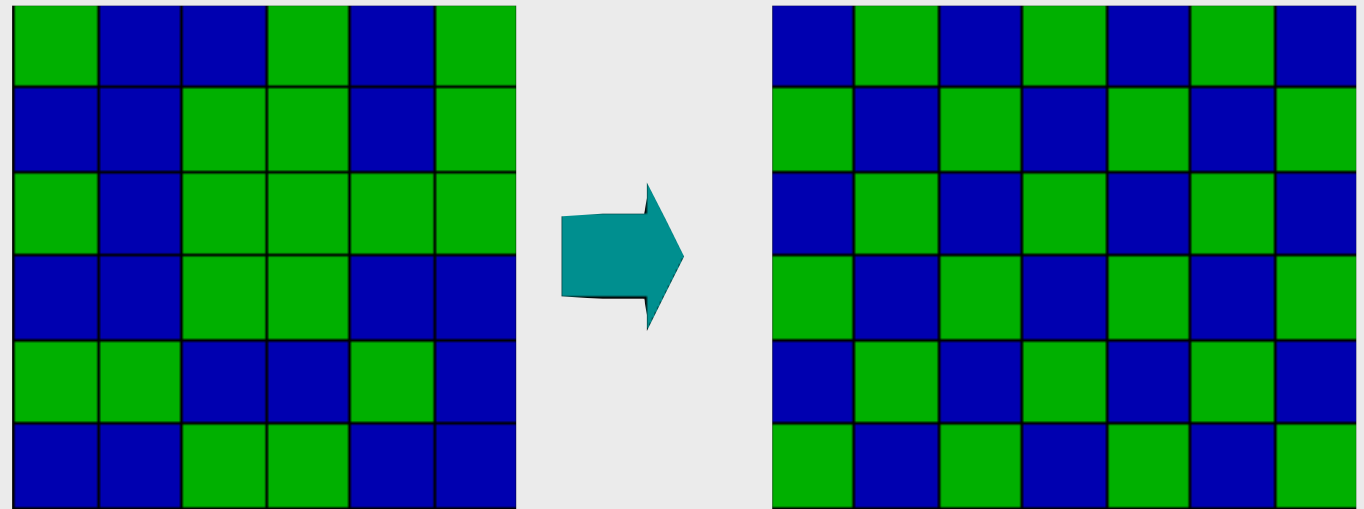


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_and_disorder

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

Keep the first set; discard the second.

Planning — organize

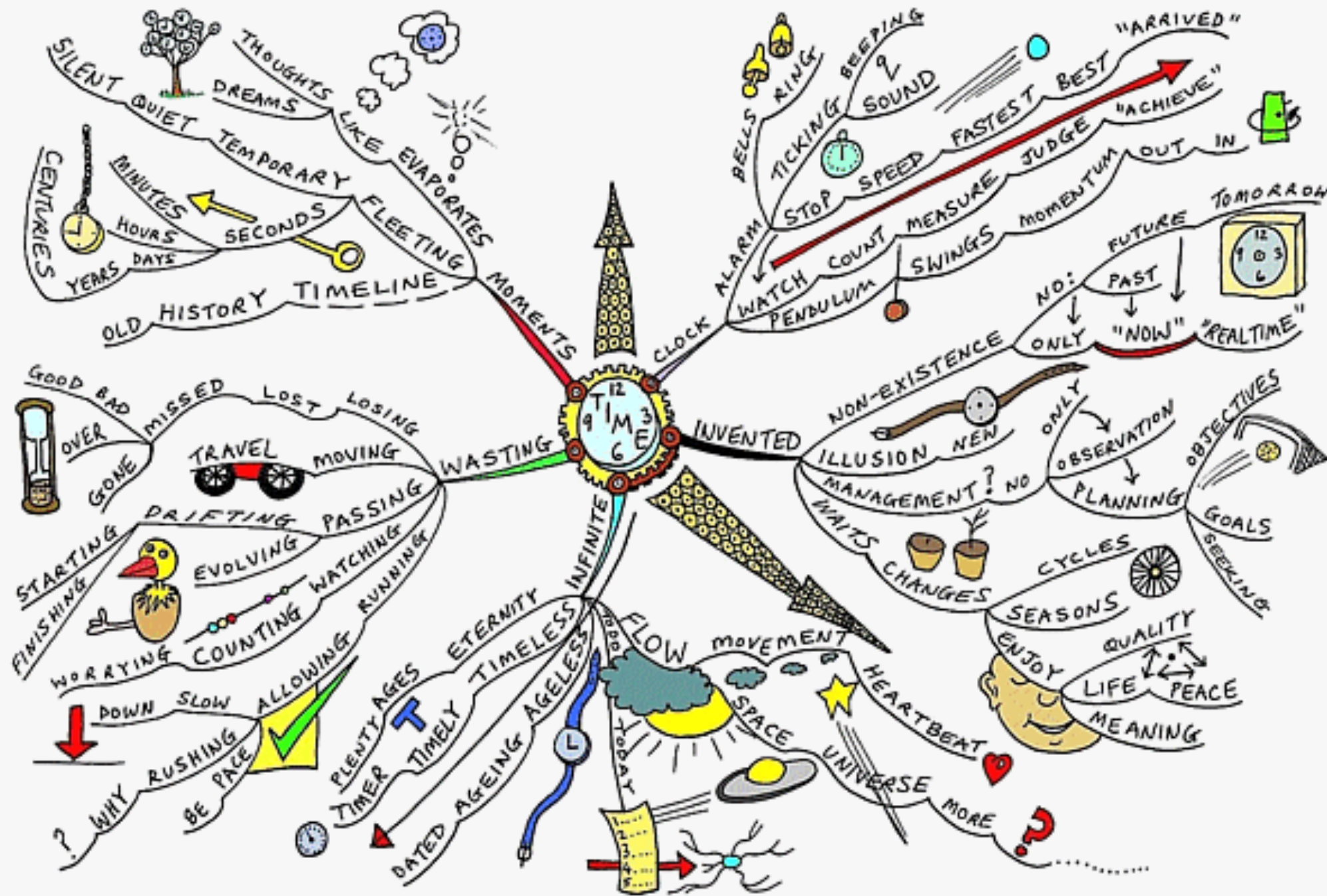


Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_and_disorder

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

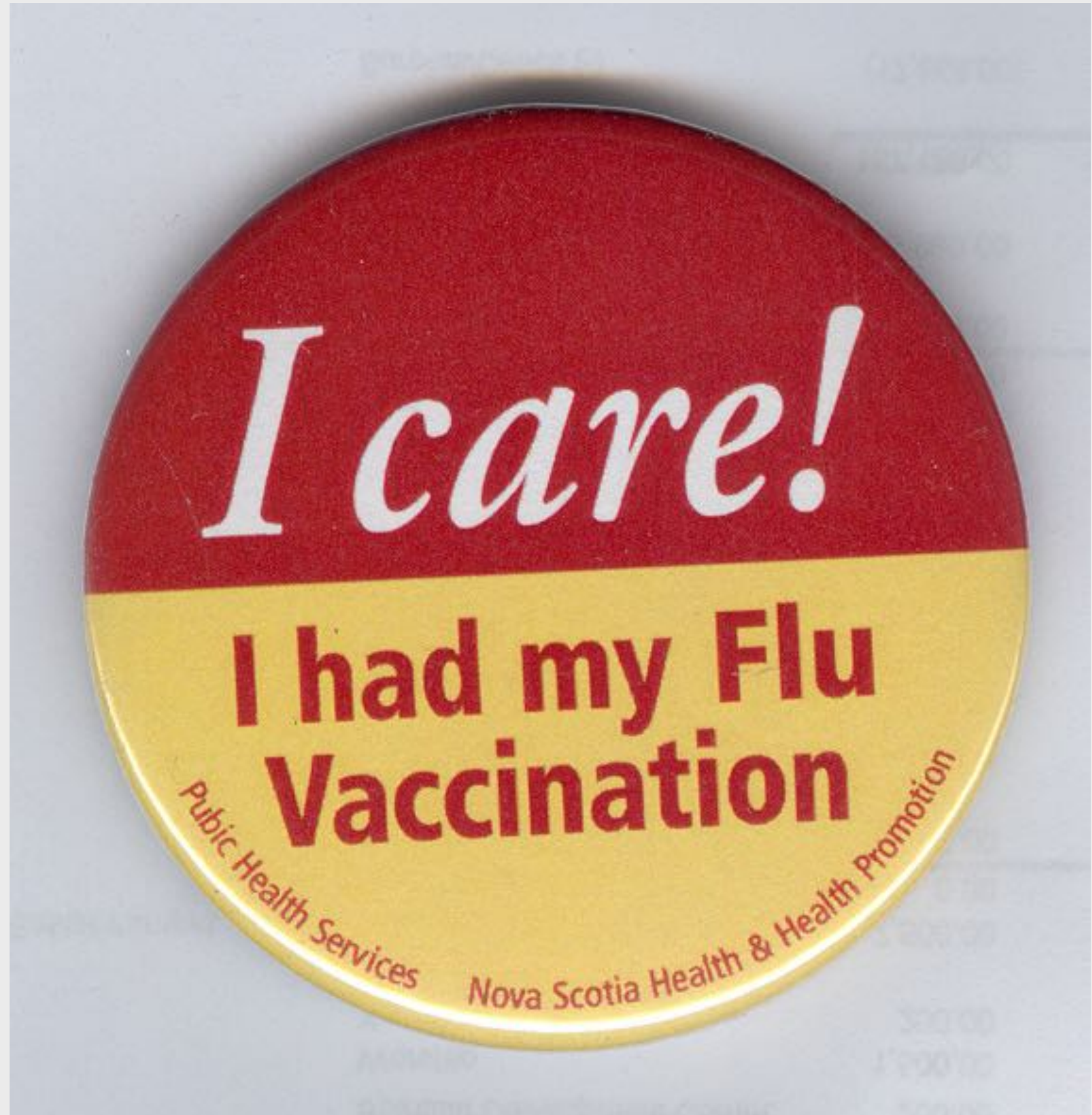


Image courtesy of James Fleming. Button originally made by the specified agency.

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**.



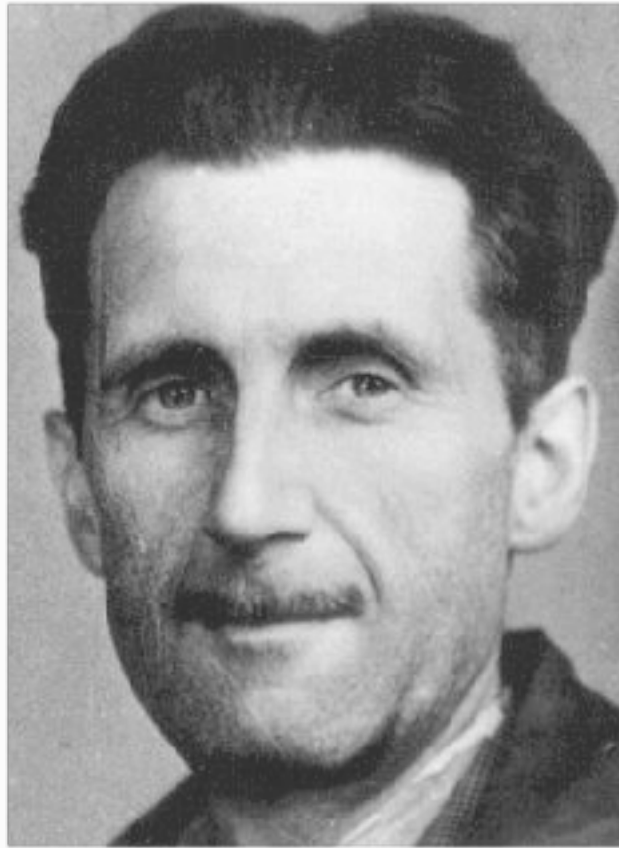
using few words



comprehensive without
using unnecessary words

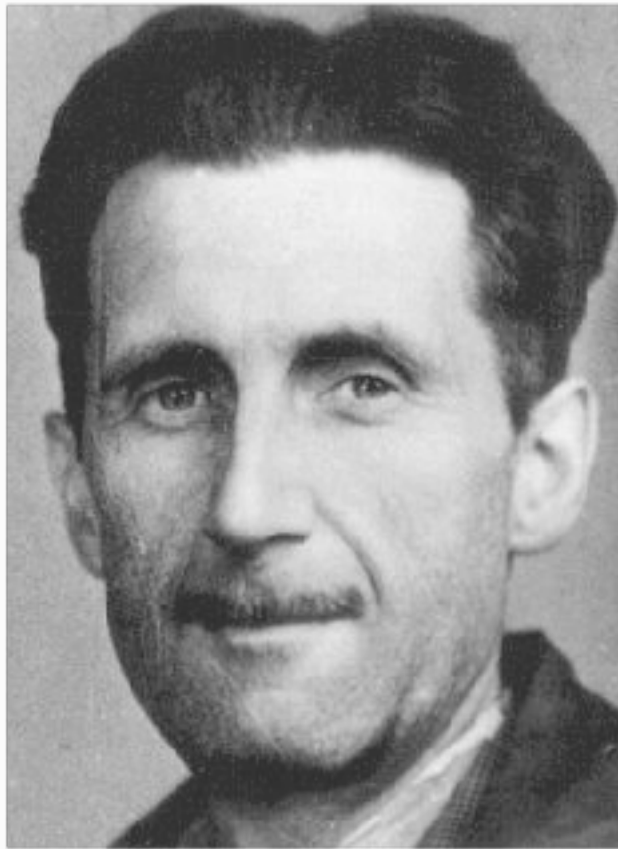
Be concise, not necessarily brief.

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...



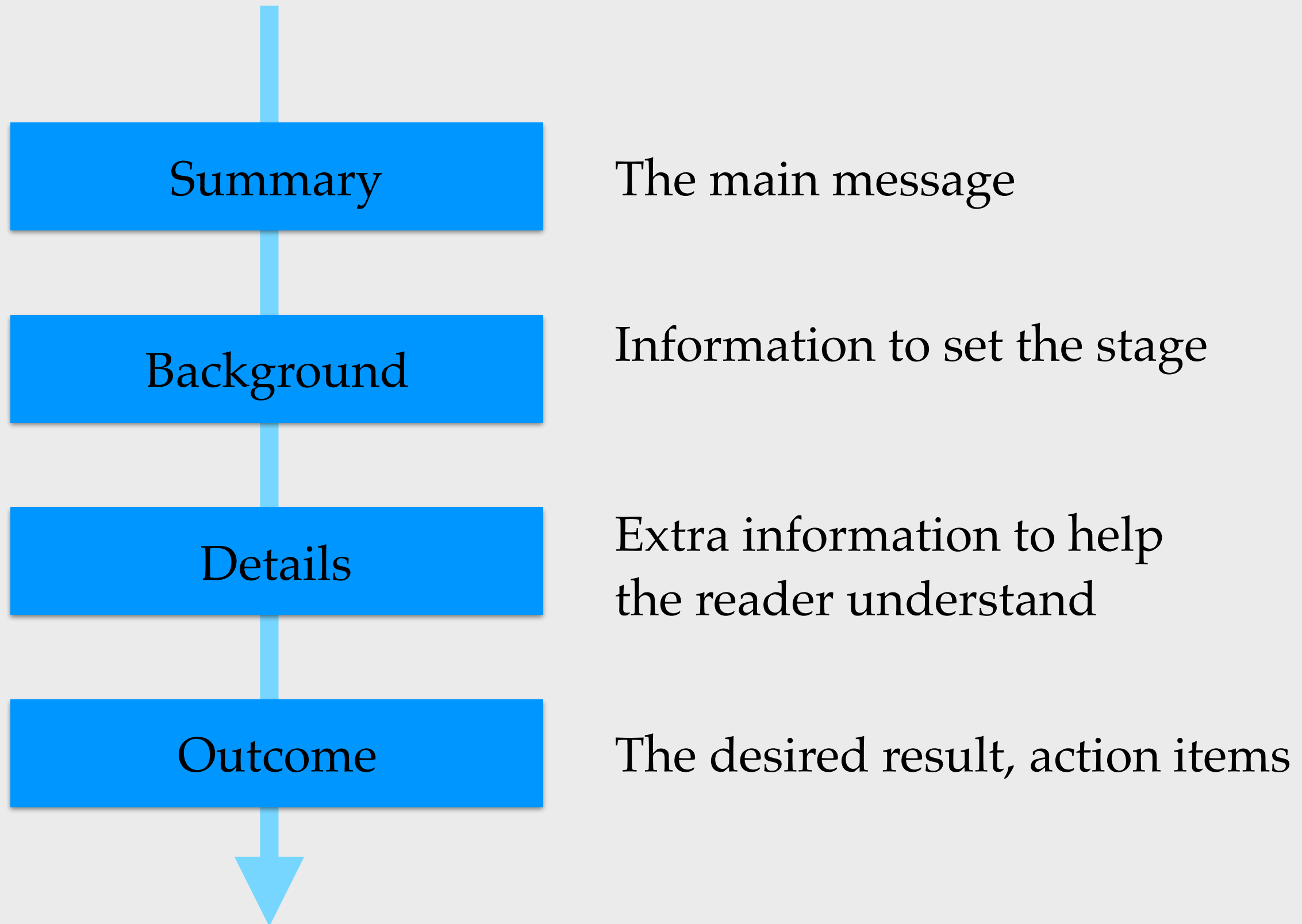
Write clearly so that your meaning is entirely plain,
and so that it cannot mean anything else.

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.

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS LETTERS

Topics in this section

The structure of a business letter

Common mistakes

Types of business letters

Structure

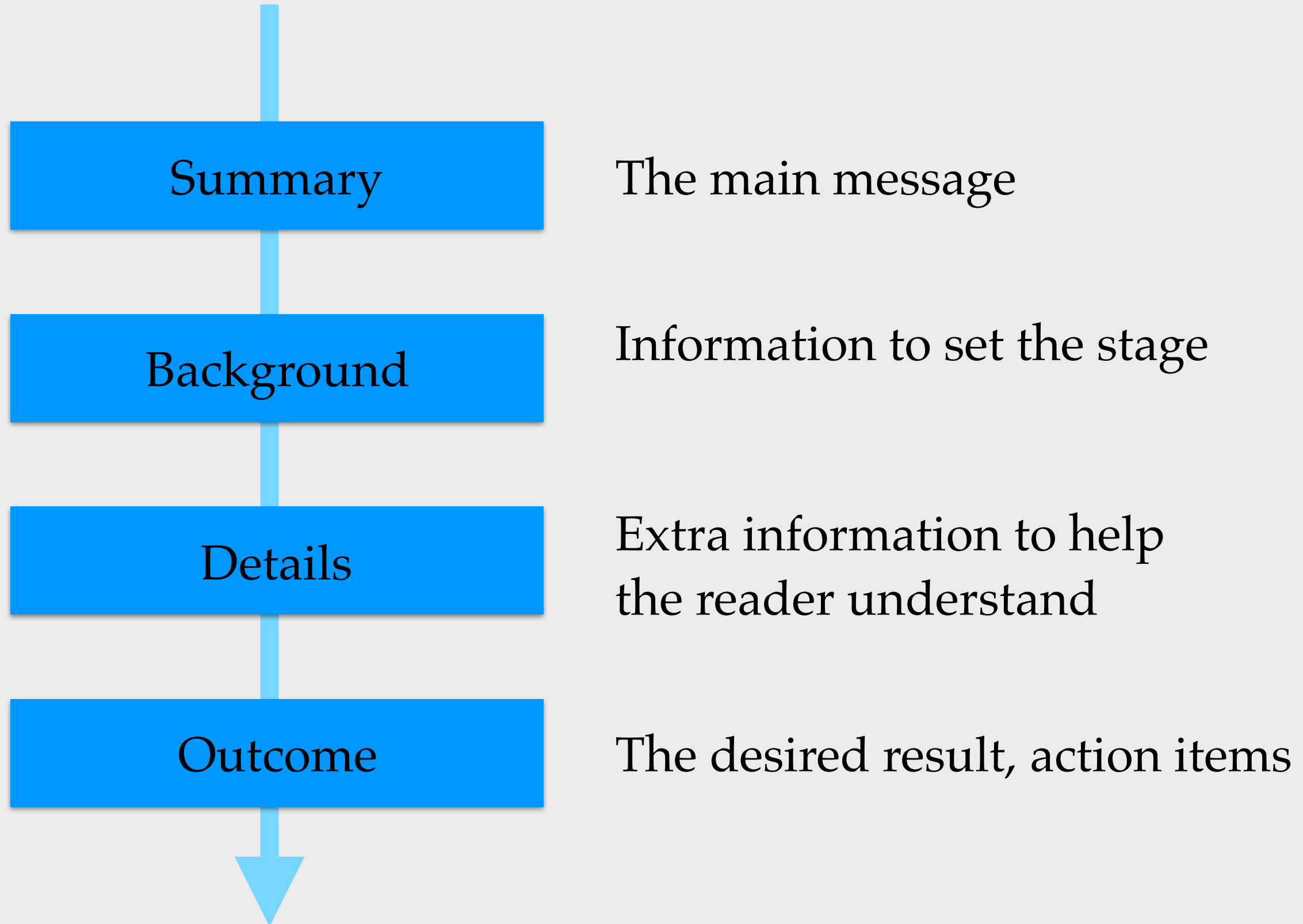
Goal You will be able to construct a letter properly.

I assume... that you know how personal letters work.

Structure

Purpose	communication outside the firm business and customers business and other businesses
Formality	formal communication, therefore use formal language
Style	short, but not always simple concise — no room for deadwood follow an accepted format

Structure



Format (full block style)

Faculty of Computer Science
Dalhousie University
6050 University Avenue
Halifax NS B3H 1W5

Return address only; no name, email, or phone.
Put postal code on same line as city & province.

October 20, 2010

Date in unambiguous format

Ms. Person Name
Title of Person, Company Name
2454 Some Street
Halifax NS B3J 2X5

Title, name, & full mailing address of recipient

Dear Ms. Name:

Formal and specific salutation, or omit

[RE: Subject Line]

Optional subject line

Summary statement gives the main message of the letter right at the beginning. Begin with a hidden "I want to tell you that..."

Background information answers who, where, when. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec purus mi, tempor sit amet tempus non, convallis vel ante. Fusce consequat, arcu pretium fermentum interdum, nunc libero vehicula erat; eu euismod tellus velit non tortor.

Details/Facts answers what, how, why. Aliquam risus lorem, fringilla at consectetur vel, mollis et purus. Aliquam erat volutpat. Donec id quam semper justo blandit fringilla viverra vitae mi

spacing
according
to CRAP

Ms. Person Name
Title of Person, Company Name
2454 Some Street
Halifax NS B3J 2X5

Dear Ms. Name:

[RE: Subject Line]

Summary Summary statement gives the main message of the letter right at the beginning. Begin with a hidden "I want to tell you that..."

Background Background information answers who, where, when. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec purus mi, tempor sit amet tempus non, convallis vel ante. Fusce consequat, arcu pretium fermentum interdum, nunc libero vehicula erat; eu euismod tellus velit non tortor.

Detail Details/Facts answers what, how, why. Aliquam risus lorem, fringilla at consectetur vel, mollis et purus. Aliquam erat volutpat. Donec id quam semper justo blandit fringilla viverra vitae mi. Suspendisse viverra lacus nulla. Sed tincidunt pellentesque lectus ut suscipit. Quisque aliquet vehicula euismod. Nullam a felis justo. Praesent varius euismod augue, at vehicula orci accumsan eget. Cum sociis natoque penatibus et magnis dis parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus. Suspendisse ac enim justo. Integer diam purus, pretium et congue nec, egestas ac massa. Morbi consequat; mauris vitae consequat vulputate; justo metus dignissim sem, pulvinar tempor massa arcu tincidunt justo.

Outcome Outcome answers what, how, who, when. Ut scelerisque convallis magna in aliquet. Nunc in orci erat. Nunc vitae odio magna.

Yours truly,

Summary statement gives the main message of the letter right at the beginning. Begin with a hidden “I want to tell you that...”.



Background information answers who, where, when. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Donec purus mi, tempor sit amet tempus non, convallis vel ante. Fusce consequat, arcu pretium fermentum interdum, nunc libero vehicula erat; eu euismod tellus velit non tortor.

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Outcome answers what, how, who, when. Ut scelerisque convallis magna in aliquet. Nunc in orci erat. Nunc vitae odio magna.

Yours truly,

James B. Fleming
Instructor, Informatics Degree

Enc.

cc: John Smith


Closing salutation

Space for signature (real or digital)

Name & title of sender

Phone or email may be included

List enclosures (if any)

Copy line (if any)

Format (modified block style)

Return address,
date, closing
salutation, and
signature block
moved right

Faculty of Computer Science
Dalhousie University
6050 University Avenue
Halifax NS B3H 1W5

October 20, 2010

Ms. Person Name
Title of Person, Company Name
2454 Some Street
Halifax NS B3J 2X5

Dear Ms. Name:

[RE: Subject Line]

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Enc.
cc: John Smith

Format (modified block style)

Less frequently
used than
full block style

Faculty of Computer Science
Dalhousie University
6050 University Avenue
Halifax NS B3H 1W5

October 20, 2010

Ms. Person Name
Title of Person, Company Name
2454 Some Street
Halifax NS B3J 2X5

Dear Ms. Name:

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Format (modified block style)

Hopefully
your business
will have its own
letterhead...



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**
Inspiring Minds
Faculty of Computer Science

October 20, 2010

Ms. Person Name
Title of Person, Company Name
2454 Some Street
Halifax NS B3J 2X5

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Instructor, Informatics Degree

Enc.
cc: John Smith

Faculty of Computer Science • Goldberg Computer Science Building • 6050 University Avenue
• Halifax NS B3H 1W5 Canada • Tel: 902.494.2093 • Fax: 902.493.1517 • www.csdl.ca

Format (modified block style)

Hopefully
your business
will have its own
letterhead...



**DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY**
Inspiring Minds
Faculty of Computer Science

October 20, 2010

Ms. Person Name
Title of Person, Company Name
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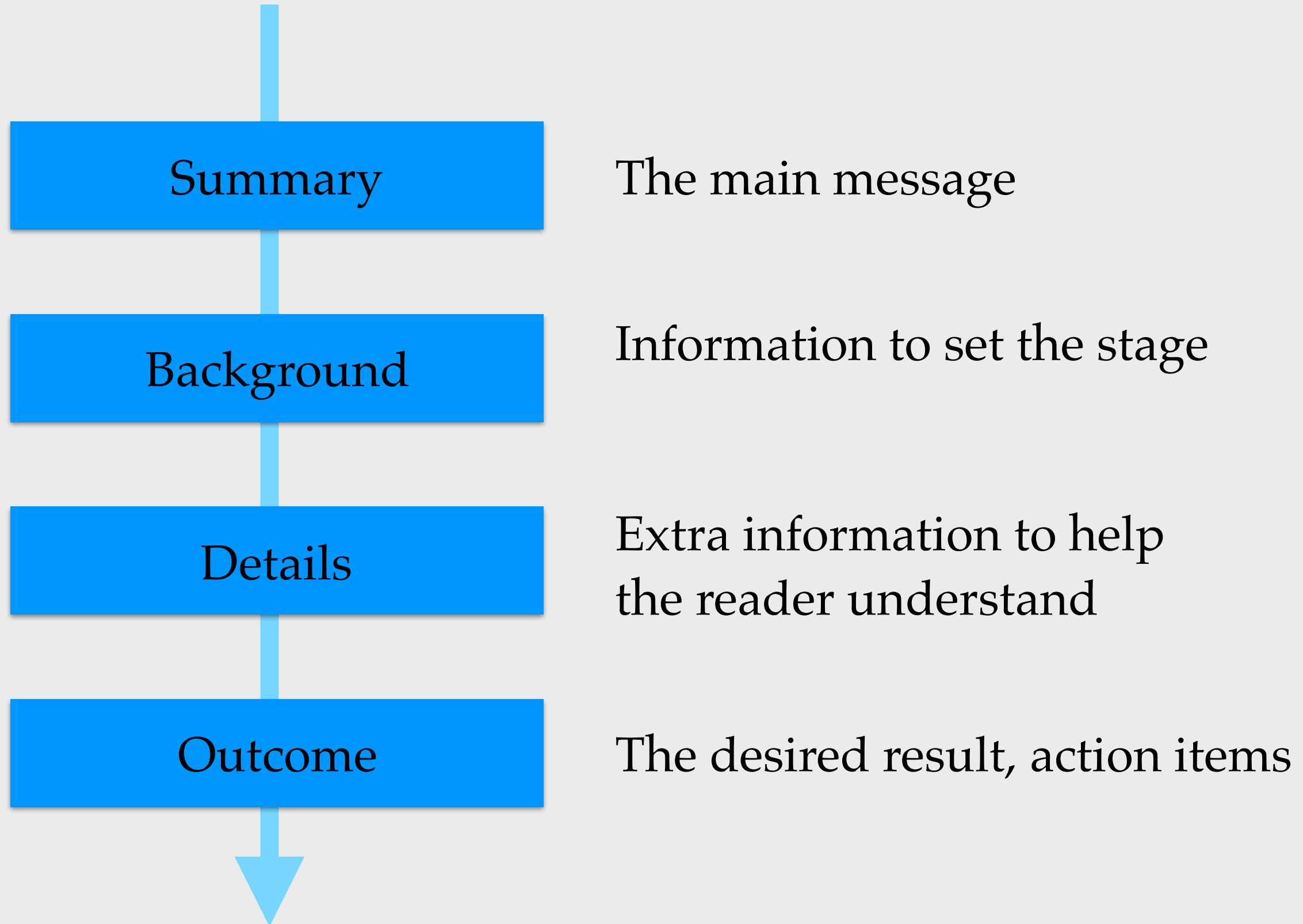
Yours truly,

James B. Fleming
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Enc.
cc: John Smith

Faculty of Computer Science • Goldberg Computer Science Building • 6050 University Avenue
• Halifax NS B3H 1W5 Canada • Tel: 902.494.2093 • Fax: 902.493.1517 • www.csdl.ca

Structure



Structure



Summary

Tell the reader why you're writing.

Start with six words:

Background

"I want to tell you that..."

Complete the sentence,
then remove the six words.

Details

Outcome

Structure

Summary

~~I want to tell you that~~

Your new furnace cannot possibly be repaired
and you should therefore consider contacting
the manufacturer for a replacement under warranty.

Structure

Summary

~~I want to tell you that~~

The data in the last lab test will have to be verified before the final report can be sent to the client.

Structure

Summary

~~I want to tell you that~~

The revised code now works exactly as we had hoped, and the client is delighted.

Structure



Summary

Background

Details

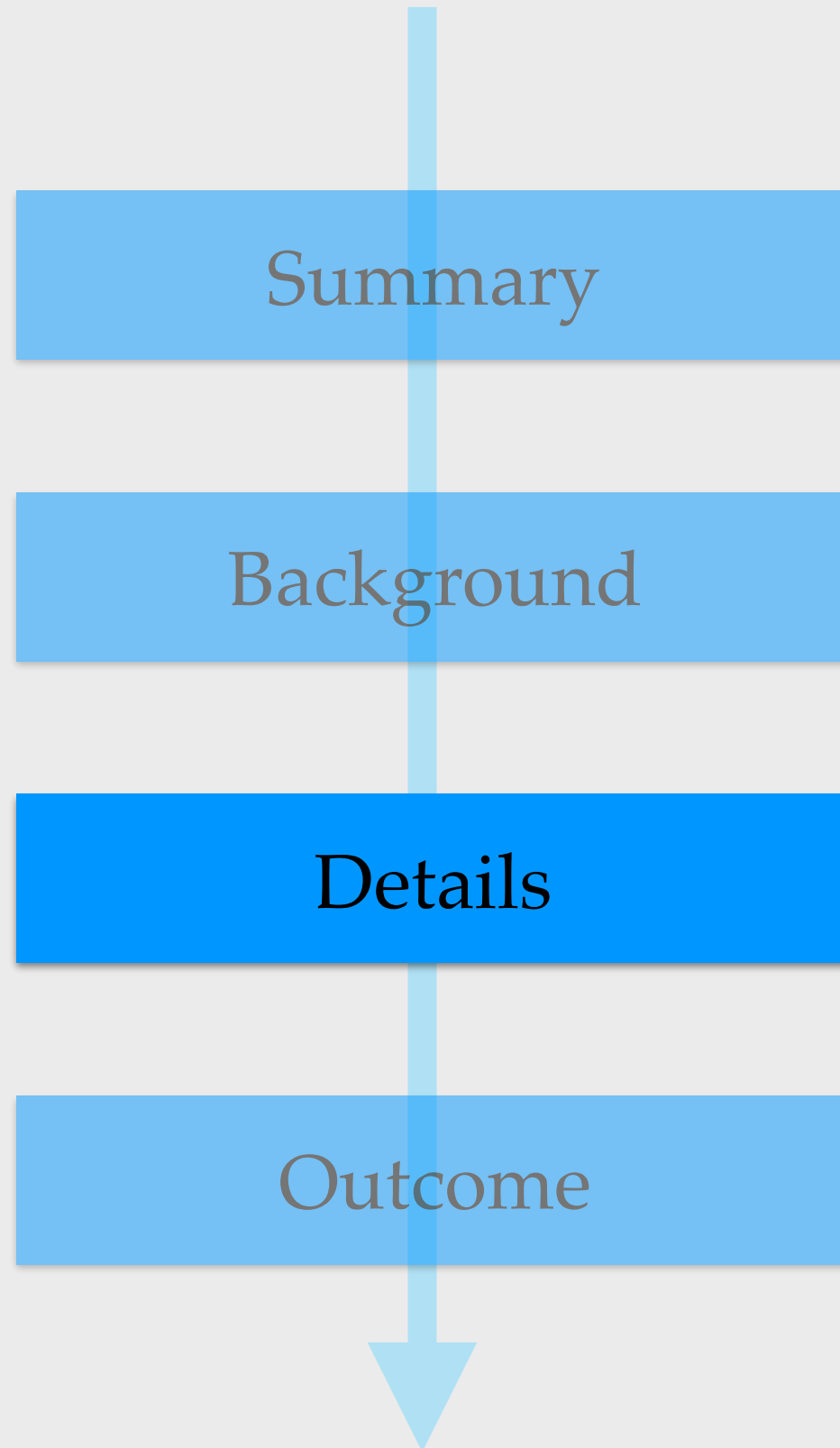
Outcome

Provide any information that the reader will need.

Often focuses on questions such as who? where? when?

Can be combined with the summary in a short letter.

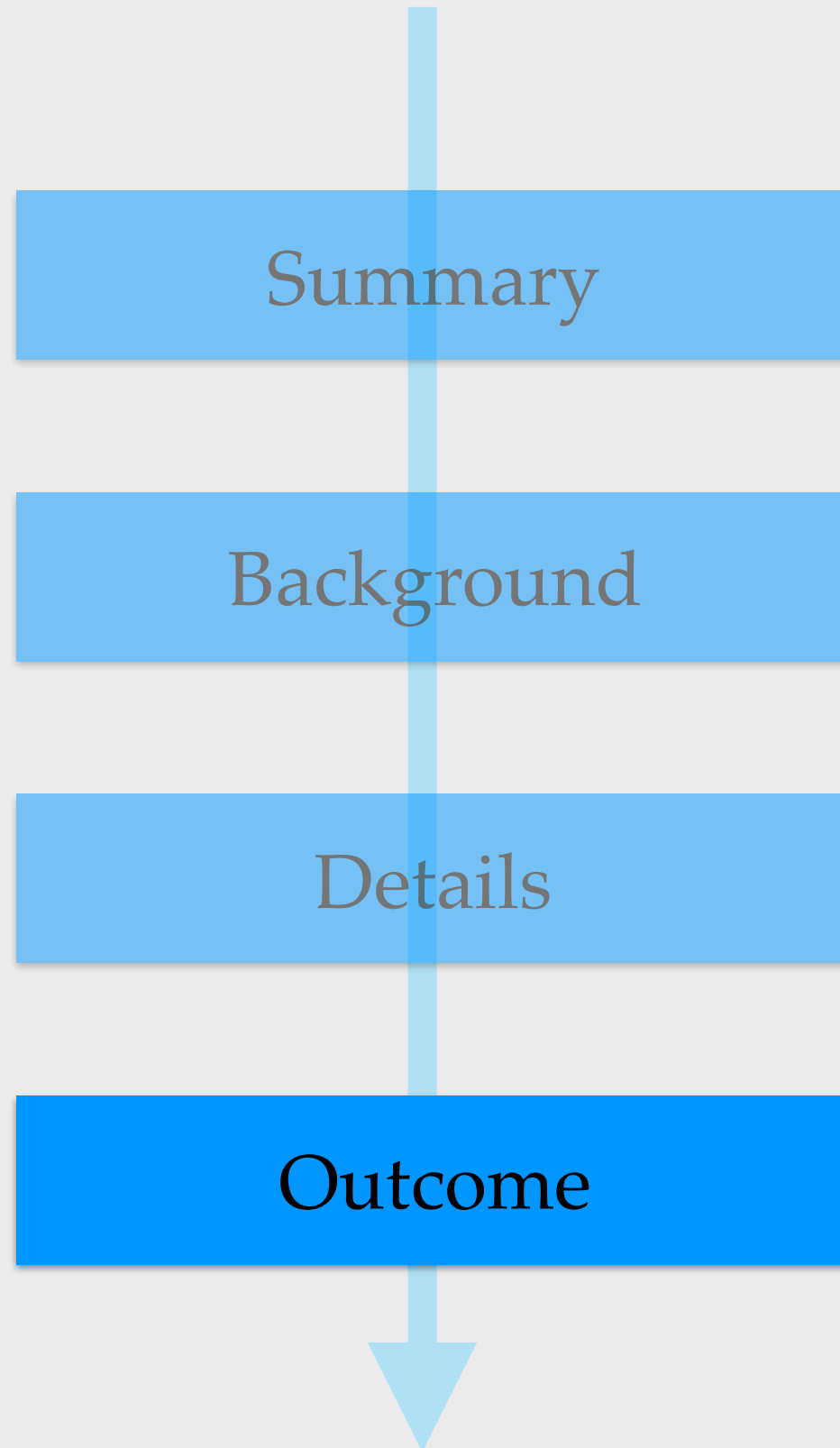
Structure



Usually gives the main message along with further details

Often answers question such as how? what? why?

Structure



Expected action or result

Often answers question such as
who? what? when? how?

May be combined with details
in a short letter

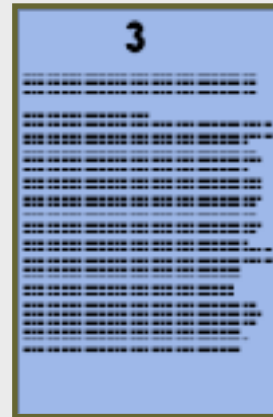
Condense with attachments

Letter



summary
statement

Attachment



background, details, etc.

Summary

Business letters are formal documents that follow a set format.

Always use the immediate writing structure
(summary, background, details, outcome)

Use attachments to reduce the length of the letter
if it becomes too long.

Common mistakes

Goal You will be able to identify and avoid common mistakes in writing letters.

I assume... that you know that a business letter formally represents to the reader not only you but your company.

Mistakes — false starts

Avoid starting with an -ing word or a phrase ending in “to”.

Referring to...

Regarding...

Replying to...

Responding to...

In reference to...

In response to...

Due to...

Mistakes — false starts

Avoid starting with a redundant expression.

I am writing to...

For your information...

This is to inform you...

Enclosed please find...

We have received your letter...

I want to tell you that...

Mistakes — antagonizing the reader

Avoid words that cause guilt.

You have failed to...

You neglected to...

You should have known that...

You overlooked...

Avoid words that may provoke anger.

You must return the laptop...

Your demand for warranty service...

You will doubtless agree that...

Mistakes — vague final comments

Avoid vague, feeble closings.

I look forward to hearing from you...

Thanking you in advance...

Please don't hesitate to contact me...

etc.

Summary — writing mistakes

Avoid false starts that waste time and space.

Avoid causing anger or guilt to your reader.

Avoid weak closings.

Types of Business Letters

Goal You will be able to construct
various kinds of business letters properly.

I assume... that you understand the immediate writing style.

Types — informative letters

Informative letters tell the reader something new:

- what has happened

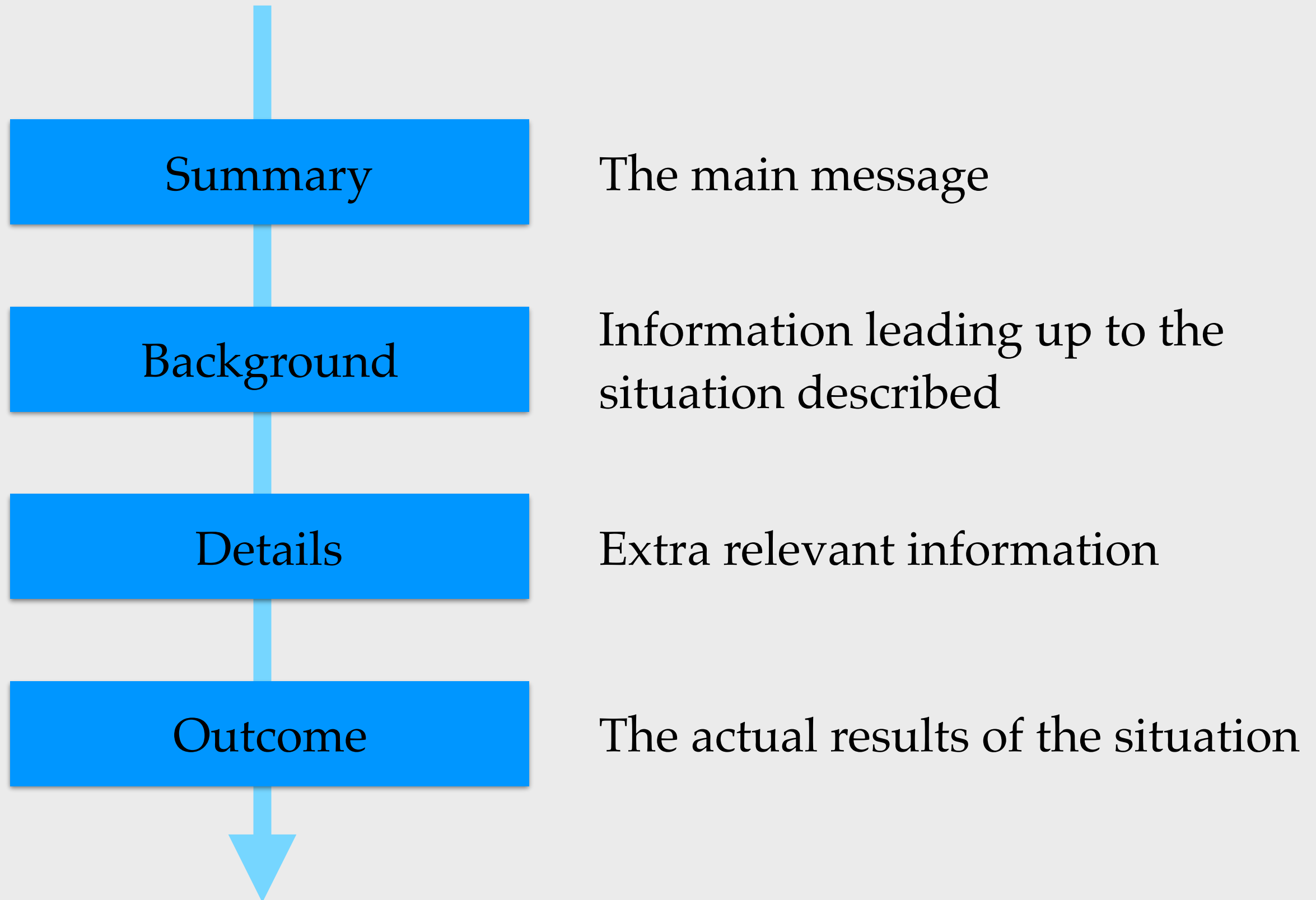
- what has been done

- what must be done

Informative letters do not expect a reply from the reader.

Informative letters follow the basic letter structure outlined above.

Structure — informative letters

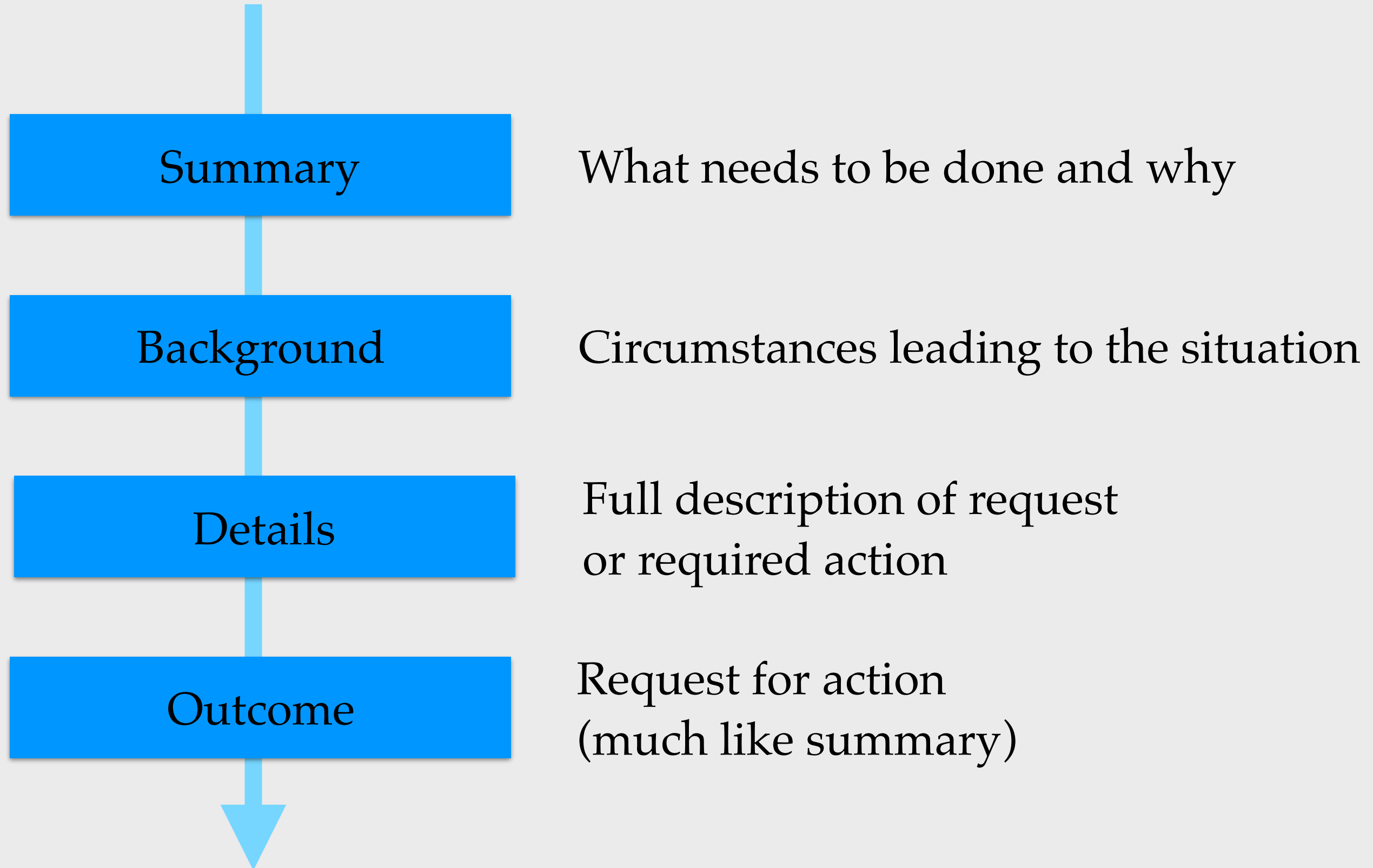


Types — persuasive letters

Persuasive letters try to convince the reader to do something.

Persuasive letters expect a response or action from the reader.

Structure — persuasive letters



Specimen persuasive letter

Sunset Trailers
3344 Curly Boulevard
Mensa SK S4S 3Y2

February 21, 20XX

Global Fabrics
1020 Park Ave.
Saskatoon SK S3P 4X2

Dear Sirs:

Our firm is interested in acquiring a quality canvas fabric for the production of canvas awnings on several different models of trailers. We produce sixty to one hundred units per year and require ten square meters of canvas per unit. We would greatly appreciate meeting with a representative of your business in order to evaluate the quality of the canvas that you sell. Our company president, Mrs. Olsen, will be in Saskatoon on March 5 and would like to meet with you then. Please contact us in order to confirm a time that you might be able to meet with her that day. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "B. Olsen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brian Olsen
Secretary,
Sunset Trailers

Types — persuasive letters (complaint)



Summary

What needs to be done and why

Background

Circumstances leading to the situation

Details

Full description of complaint

Outcome

Confident, strong identification
of the action for the reader

Specimen complaint letter

Dear Sir or Madam,

I recently purchased a computer from your store in Laurel, MD. When I got it home, the computer was unable to connect to any network. I narrowed it down to a problem with the computer and not the network. In an effort to make the computer work I installed Windows XP on it however this still did not fix the problem.

Determining that this computer was defective, I attempted to return it to your store. It was less than one week after I purchased it. However your staff refused to accept the return because it had Windows XP installed on it.

This may be a fair position however nowhere in our return terms and conditions printed on my receipt does it mention that installing any software or operating systems on a computer makes it non-returnable.

Please immediately issue me a refund for this item or I will be forced to dispute the charge on my credit card. A copy of the receipt is attached (including your stated terms and conditions for a return).

Additionally your staff at this store was very rude when refusing the return and refused to let me speak to the store manager.

Types — persuasive letters (response to complaint)



Summary

Briefly agree or disagree.

Background

Refer to the original complaint.

Details

Explain why the answer is affirmative or negative.

Outcome

State what action will be taken.

Specimen response letter

Dear Ms. Quinlan:

The purpose of this is to convey to you my sincere apologies for any inconvenience you may have experienced last month with respect to the installation of your Internet high speed service.

I just returned from vacation this week and found your file in my in-basket. As soon as I reviewed your case it was clear that somehow your May 20th request for a change in service had somehow slipped through the cracks. The only possible explanation I can give is that we recently had a number of key staff changes which might have resulted in your letter being overlooked.

Consequently, I have directed our Installation Group to contact you by the end of this week to set up a time convenient to you when they could go to your house and install your new router and make the necessary adjustments to your software.

Because of the serious oversight , and as a testament to our appreciation of you as our customer, we are going to provide you with your first three months free of charge. Therefore, your account will not be billed until October of this year.

Ms. Quinlan, let me assure you that what happened in your case is not typical of CableNet's level of customer service. We continue to be committed to providing you and all our customers with the highest standards of service in the industry.

Types — persuasive letters (confirmation)



Summary

State that you are confirming a previous tentative agreement.

Background

Refer to prior correspondence or other background.

Details

Clearly define all facts or figures.

Outcome

Brief remark: “Contact me if you have any questions...”

Specimen confirmation letter

Dear Mr Smith

Ref: your order KIT003

Thank you for the order that you placed for the full team kit. We wish to confirm that the order will consist of 12 red and white striped jerseys (size large), 12 white shorts (size large) and 12 pairs of red socks with white trim (size 6-12). We envisage that the delivery time on this order will be approximately 3 weeks from the date of this letter, however please be aware that we have experienced a slight delay on recent similar orders and there is a possibility that the order may take an additional 2 weeks beyond the expected date.

We can confirm that you will be invoiced for the full amount of £195 plus VAT after the order has been received.

Once again, we thank you for your custom and should there be any problems with your order then please do not hesitate to contact us during office hours on 01303 123456.

Yours sincerely,

Summary

Most business letters are informative or persuasive.

Informative letters explain circumstances and do not need a reply.

Persuasive letters may make requests
make complaints,
respond to a complaint,
or confirm an existing plan.