

Essential writing skills

Tutorial 1

Please check your microphone and video before the tutorial starts.

We encourage you to leave your webcam on (if you are comfortable with this).

Administration

Timings

Microphone

Camera

Slides



Learning objectives

develop content that is relevant to your readers

use plain English to improve readability

review documents for content and clarity

What are the most common problems you have seen in government writing?

Common problems

Too long

Hard to read

Confusing

Wrong tone

No context

Irrelevant content

No action

Doesn't flow

Readers expect documents to ...

Too long

Hard to read

Confusing

Wrong tone

No context

Irrelevant content

No action

Doesn't flow

be short

be easy to read

be clear

use assertive tone

have an obvious purpose

contain relevant content

have a strong call to action

have a logical structure

Reader expectations

be short

be easy to read

be clear

use assertive tone

have an obvious purpose

contain relevant content

have a strong call to action

have a logical structure



Next steps

Purpose and planning

Spotlight on structure

Hints for self-paced courses

Maintain momentum

Don't multi-task

Use a phone or tablet

Watch the videos and do the activities

Download the guides

Use the comments section in each lesson

Focus on what is relevant to you

Essential writing skills

Tutorial 2

Readers expect documents to ...

be accurate

be respectful

be clear and concise

be easy to read

have a clear purpose

contain relevant information

have a call to action

have a logical structure



Writing process



Write



Initiating guidance

Terms of reference vs authors briefs

Write the guidance yourself

Get the guidance cleared

Planning a document

‘The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.’

George Bernard Shaw

The minister's homework

- 110 press cuttings
- 25 letters to sign
- 20 briefs
- 15 submissions
- 15 letters from Cabinet colleagues
- 10 draft replies to questions on notice
- 8 reports
- 5 invitations
- 2 draft press releases
- 1 draft speech to approve
- 1 Parliamentary statement to approve
- 1 folder of papers from special advisers

Purpose

Hi Alex

I've attached a copy of the monthly report for Project Mayhem because you asked to be kept updated on it.

Hi Alex

I've attached a copy of the monthly report for Project Mayhem because it contains a critical update affecting your team.

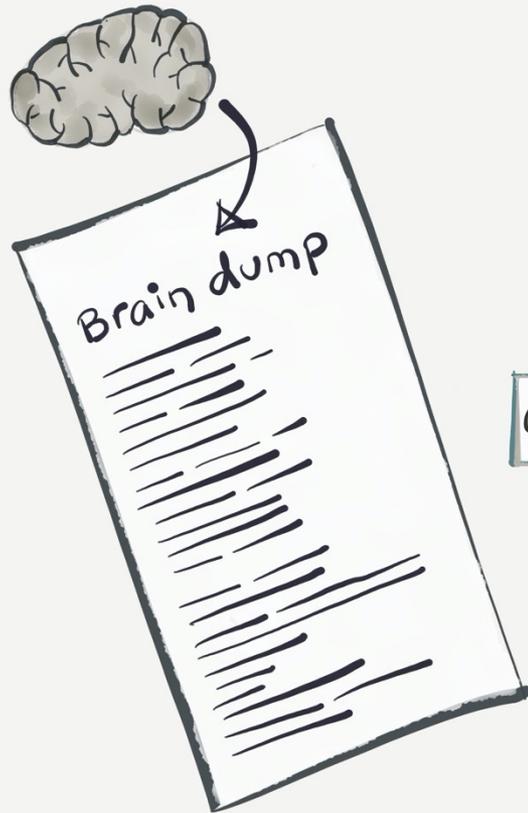
Key messages

28 sentences in the brief

Including 4 dot-point lists

Most of the sentences weren't needed
(they didn't support the purpose)

This brief is to request you approve a single source procurement of digital mapping software.



anything the reader doesn't need

anything the reader already knows

anything the reader can work out for themselves



= Key messages

Key messages

Use a list (a brain dump)

It's harder to cut content from a draft

One sentence = one thought

Call to action

Verbs are the engines of language

Reduce the reader's room for interpretation

Use assertive verbs

Briefs and minutes

noted/discuss

agreed/not agreed/discuss

approved/not approved/discuss

signed/not signed/discuss



Structure

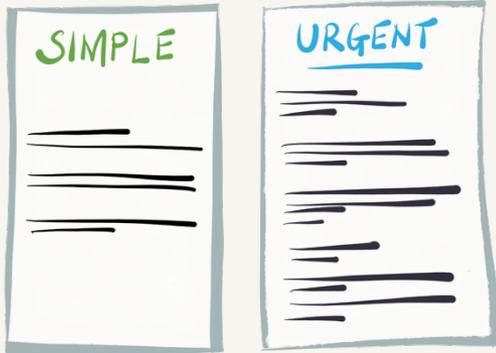
Traditional

- background
- purpose
- issues
- analysis
- conclusions
- call to action or recommendations.

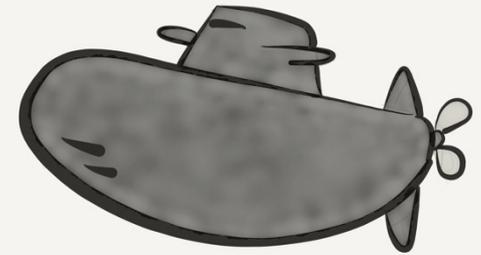
Modern

- call to action or recommendations
- purpose
- background
- issues and analysis

Modern



Traditional



Don't bury key messages!

Next steps

Words that work

Readers and readability

Sensible sentences

Effective editing

Essential writing skills

Tutorial 3

Plain English

- Use familiar, everyday words
- Use fewer words
- Control sentence length
- Prefer active voice
- Avoid jargon if there is an everyday English equivalent
- Use direct verbs (don't turn them into nouns)

Word choices

Choose ^{simple} ~~uncomplicated~~ words.

Bad habits

Fancy words

peruse, utilise

Fake verbs

take into consideration

Adverbs and adjectives

carefully analyse

Technical language

Abbreviations

Readability

Your readers should never have to read something more than once to understand it.

Improving readability

Remove unnecessary words

Replace long words

Add full stops (one sentence = one thought)

Active and passive voice

Paul ate breakfast

Breakfast was eaten by Paul

The project report was signed by the director

Active or passive

It has been determined that Geologic Australasia is able to provide the full suite of products required within a single contract arrangement to support Government objectives.

Active or passive

It has been determined **by zombies** that Geologic Australasia is able to provide the full suite of products required within a single contract arrangement to support Government objectives.

Active or passive

It has been determined **by zombies** that Geologic Australasia is able to provide the full suite of products required within a single contract arrangement to support Government objectives.

~~It has been determined that~~ Geologic Australasia is able to provide the full suite of products required within a single contract arrangement to support Government objectives.

What are we doing?

It has been determined that Geologic Australasia is able to provide the full suite of products required within a single contract arrangement to support Government objectives.

Make it readable

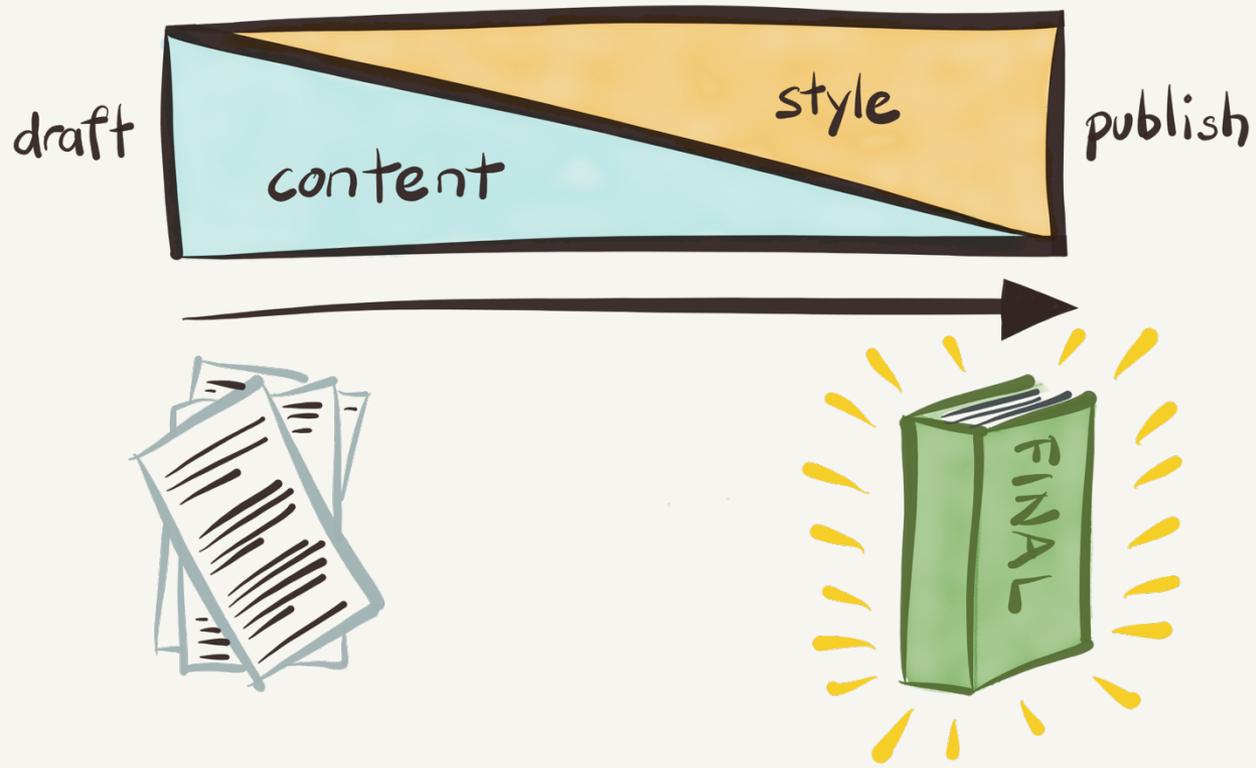
~~It has been determined that Geologic Australasia is able to provide the full suite of products required within a single contract arrangement to support Government objectives.~~

(Flesch Kincaid grade level: 16.7)

Geologic Australasia can provide everything we need in a single contract.

(Flesch Kincaid grade level: 12)

Editing and review



Editing gates

Document assessment

Content edit

Copyedit

Proofreading

Reviewing documents

Substance

- Purpose
- Key messages
- Call to action

Style

- Plain English
- Readability
- Spelling and punctuation

Feedback

What are some ways to make feedback about a document more constructive?

Next steps

12 months access to self-paced courses

Download resources

Face to face courses

Connect with us 

Practise your writing!

Summary



Write

