

Improving writing skills

Recommended text:
The Pyramid Principle

Several copies in library

Purpose of lectures

- **Introduction** to structured writing and thinking
 - Improves clarity
 - Saves time in writing
 - Is tried and tested
- **Explanation of Pyramid Principle**
 - Just an introduction to idea
 - Understand technique before reading the book

Topics

- Components of effective writing
- Introduction to the Pyramid Principle
 - Why does it work?
 - What are the rules?
 - How do you build a Pyramid?
- Summary/Next Steps

Key components of effective writing/presenting

- The structure and content
 - Is it focused?
 - Is it logical? Is the thinking clear and concise?
 - Does it answer the question(s) in the reader's mind?
 - Is it easy for the reader to understand?
- The 'look' of the document
 - Does it look professional?
 - Has consideration been given to highlighting structure?
 - Is the document well referenced?
- The style of writing and presenting
 - Type of introduction and conclusion
 - Use of stories, anecdotes, open questions
 - Use of visuals, supporting documentation

Components of effective writing

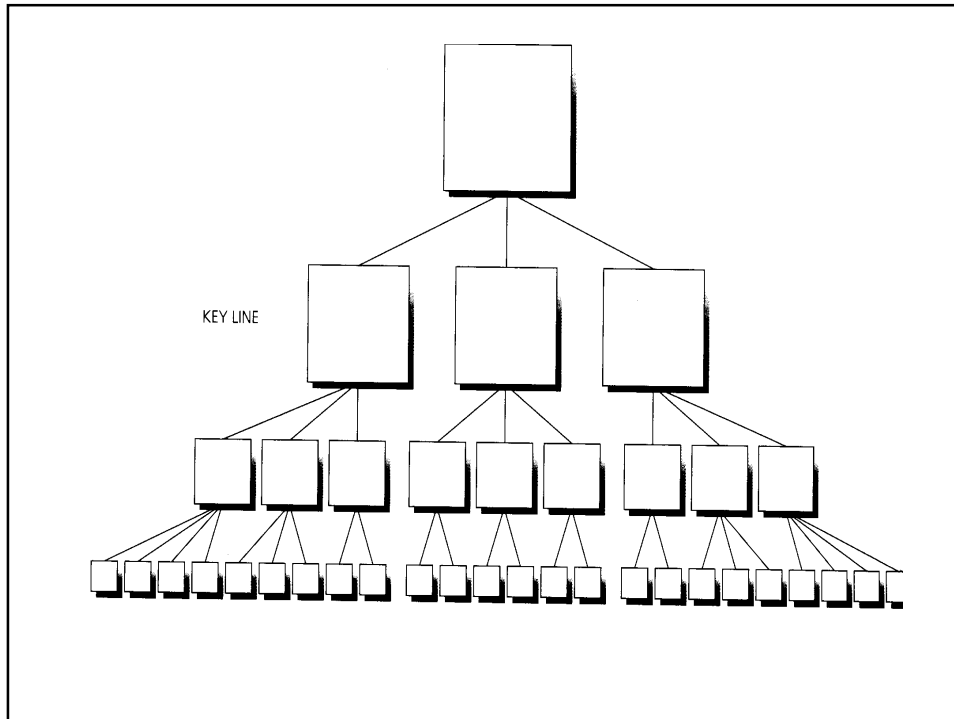
- Exercise: Take a look at the following list
 - consider your reaction and think how you would present the list to others

Young woman
11
Baby
Chair
3
Apple
Mango
Table
7
Elderly man
Teenager
Banana

Introduction to the Pyramid Principle

Overview

- The mind seeks to impose order
 - Sorts into pyramidal groupings to make sense (grouping and summarising)
 - Conducts Q&A sequence when presented with new information
 - Can hold approx. 7 ideas in short-term memory
- To clarify our thinking we need to:
 - Either verbalise our thoughts or write them down
 - Undertake iterations to test and refine our thinking



Introduction to the Pyramid Principle

For greatest clarity:

- Ideas arranged in a pyramid form
- Ideas exist under 1 main thought
- Present ideas by stating category then items
- Order from Top Down
 - from top of pyramid
- Think and present Bottom Up
 - sentences-> paragraphs -> sections
- Paragraph contains one main idea
 - Sentences should relate to one main idea
- Rules are applied which enable thinking to be tested

Example – Top Down

I was in Zurich last week — you know what a conservative city Zurich is — and we went out to lunch at an outdoor restaurant. Do you know that within 15 minutes I must have seen 15 people with either a beard or a moustache.

And you know, if you walk around any New York office you can rarely find even one person who doesn't have sideburns or a moustache.

And of course facial hair has been a part of the London scene for at least 10 years.

Pyramid Rules

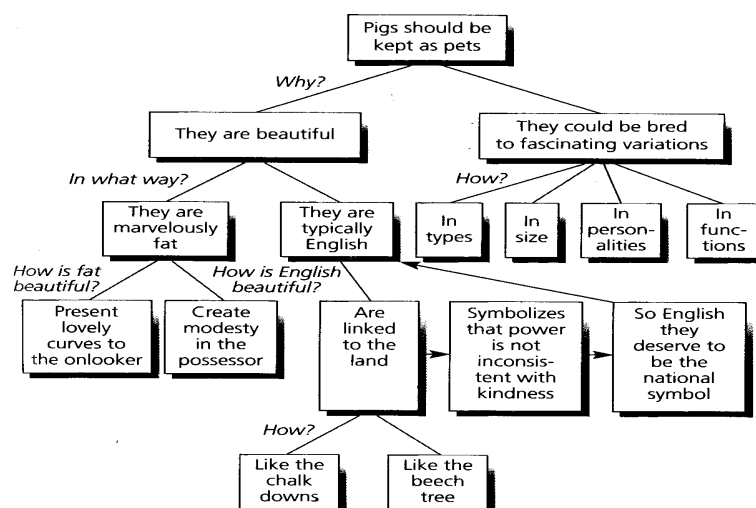
- Ideas at any level in the pyramid must be summaries of ideas grouped below them
- Ideas in each grouping must be of the same kind – usually labelled by one plural noun
- Ideas in each grouping must be logically ordered
 - Deductively, Chronologically, Structurally, Comparatively

Pyramid Structure

Ensuring you get the ideas in the right place

- Vertical relationships (Q&A dialogue)
- Horizontal relationships (logically the same, logical order)
- Determine the top point
- Work from the bottom
- Understand Introductory flow

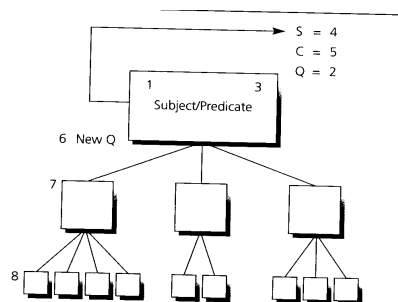
Vertical Relationship Example



Building a Pyramid

- Identifying the right question is fundamental
- Give enough thinking time on the introduction
 - S = Describe the situation
 - C = Identify the complication (trigger for the question)
 - Q = Clarify the question in the reader's mind
 - A = Develop the Answer (/solution, the over-riding point)

Top down construction



Fill in the top box

1. What Subject are you discussing?
2. What Question are you answering in the reader's mind about the Subject?
3. What is the Answer?

Match the Answer to the introduction

4. What is the Situation?
5. What is the Complication?
2. Do the Question and Answer still follow?

Find the key line

6. What New Question is raised by the Answer?
7. Will you answer it deductively or inductively?
7. If inductively, what is your plural noun?

Structure the support points

8. Repeat the question/answer process at this level.

Typical questions for building pyramid

Key questions tend to be:

- What should we do?
- Should we do it?
- How should we do it?
- Why did it happen?
- Why is it important?
-

Possible responses: reasons, steps/actions, proofs, recommendations

Example

The purpose of the exercise is to make sure you know what Question it is you are trying to answer.

Try finding Situation, Complication, Question and the key line from the memorandum on the next slide. It comes from the Accounting Department of a large beverage company in the United States.

When the company's drivers deliver the product to a customer, they send back to the Accounting Department a delivery ticket with a set of code numbers, the date, and the amount of the delivery. These delivery tickets are the basis of the billing system, which works something like this:

Takes FIVE WEEKS

Process -> delivery tickets	Send -> bill	Receive -> check	Process Payment
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Example

One of the company's customers, a hamburger emporium we'll call Big Chief, gets an awful lot of deliveries. For its own accounting purposes, it would like to keep daily track of how the bill is mounting up. It wants to know if it can't keep the delivery tickets along with each delivery, record them on a computer tape, calculate the total, and then send the tape and its check once a month to the headquarters office of the beverage com-pany. In other words, it is proposing a system that would work like this:

Propose to take ONE DAY

Receive tape ->
and check

Process
Payment

We have been requested to review the feasibility of processing Big Chief's (Parent Number 8306) N/A Delivery Tickets via tape into our National Accounts System. This processing is to be accomplished by Big Chief and us on a prepayment basis. We have completed our review of this request and our findings are as follows:

1. Our primary requirement for accepting any National Accounts data from an outside source is that we receive records in a prescribed format:
 - a. Parent Number
 - b. Outlet Number
 - c. Ticket Number
 - d. Dollar amount of each ticket
 - e. Delivery Date of each ticket

If the Parent and Outlet Numbers are not available from Big Chief, we will supply this information to them from our Customer Master File list. This information could then be incorporated into the Big Chief system for future ease in the processing of ticket data.

2. Big Chief will produce an extract program that will be run against their file (A/P Liability) to extract all ticket information presently on that file. The output file created by this program will be in a format acceptable to the N/A subsystem APNND, Cash Receipt Advice (see Record Layout). This data, in the form of a tape, will then be sent to us for balancing purposes and at the same time, Big Chief's check, accompanied by a detailed listing of the information on the tape (see Report Layout #1) will be sent to the National Accounts lock box.

The tape received by our Data Processing Department will be balanced according to our prescribed procedures. The final result of this balancing is that the dollar amount of the submitted check and the detail of the tape must 'zero balance' (.00).
3. Upon completion, the balanced cash tape will be processed through the National Accounts System. This will produce a matchup by ticket number against the N/A Updated Statement History file and the production of National Syrup Account Billing Statements.

Bottom Up Construction

- List all the points to be made
- Work out relationships between them
- Draw Conclusions

Writing Introductions

- Remind rather than inform
- Include Situation, Complication, Solution
- As long as needed – history, background
- Use a narrative style

Complications - examples

SITUATION	COMPLICATION	QUESTION
Recognized stable Situation	Something went wrong	What do we do?
	Something could go wrong	How can we prevent it?
	Something changed	What should we do?
	Something could change	How should we react?
	Here's what you might expect to find in it	Do we find it?
	Here's someone with a different point of view	Who is right?
	In this situation we have three alternatives	Which one should we take?

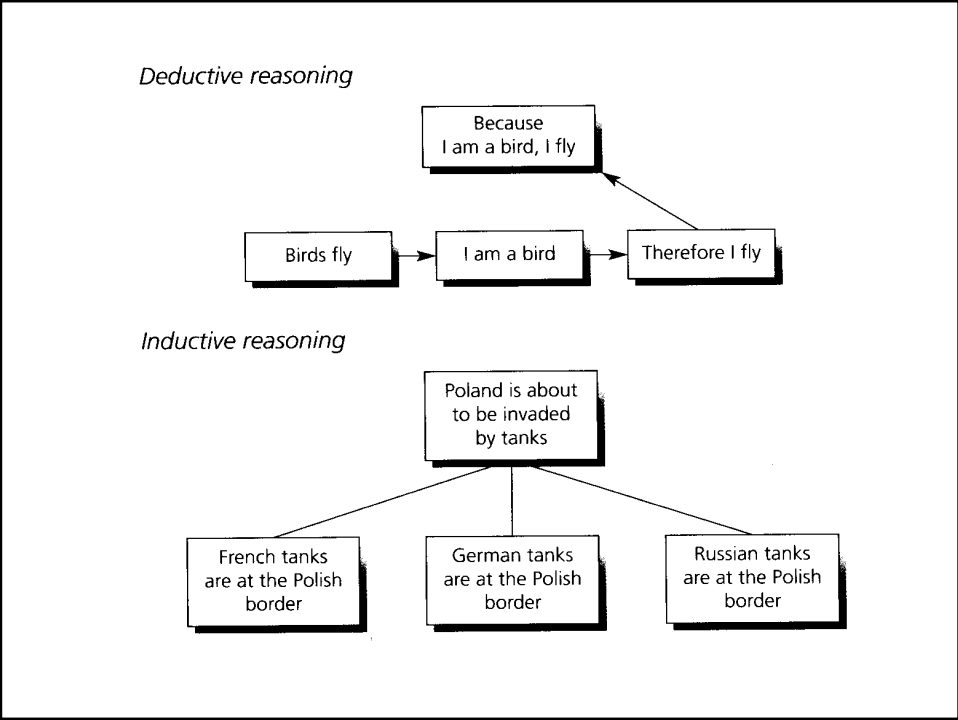
Two types of logic

- Deductive

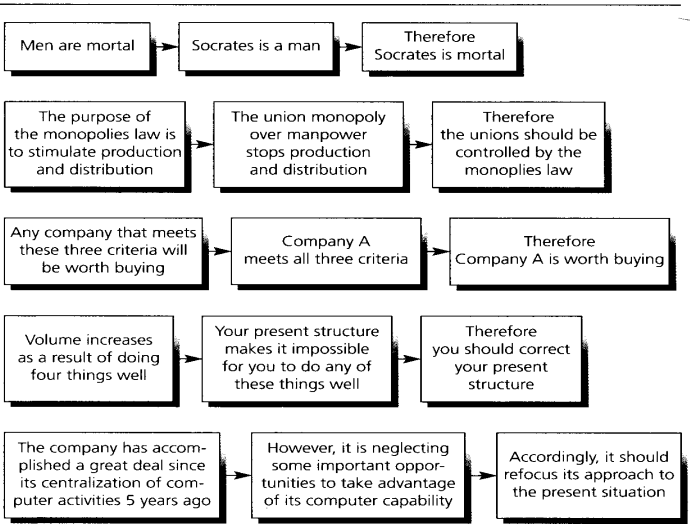
Statement followed by a comment on the statement
leads to a 'therefore' conclusion

- Inductive

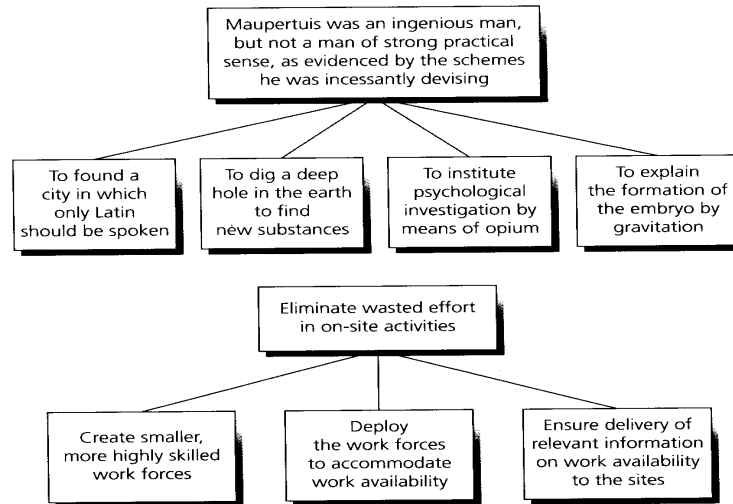
Grouping of similar examples that explain a higher concept



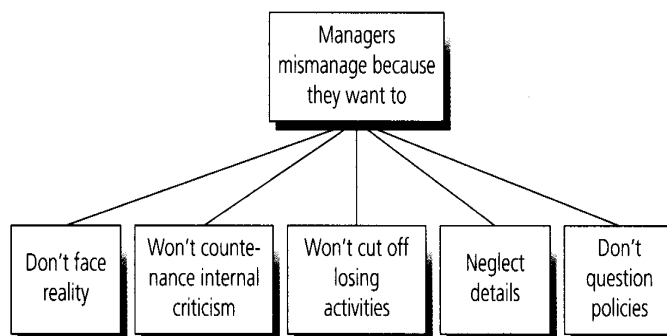
Examples – deductive arguments



Examples – inductive arguments



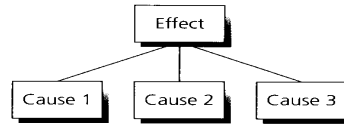
Example – poor inductive argument



Ordering a grouping

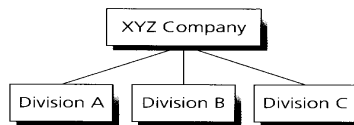
1. It can determine the causes of an effect

Time order



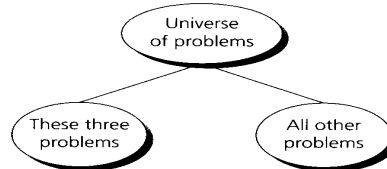
2. It can divide a whole into its parts

Structural order



3. It can classify like things

Ranking order



Further Reading

- Highlighting structure – ch. 6
- Checking order of grouping – ch 7
- Checking problem-solving – ch 8
- Checking summary statements – ch. 9
- Logic in scientific reasoning - Appendix

Summary/Next Steps

Developing the structure

- Begin to develop pyramid
- Identify the Situation, Complication, Question and Answer
- Complete and test pyramid ideas/logic

Writing the document

- Draft introduction
- Write paragraphs using Pyramid structure
- Highlight structure to assist the reader in following the logic

Practice is crucial