

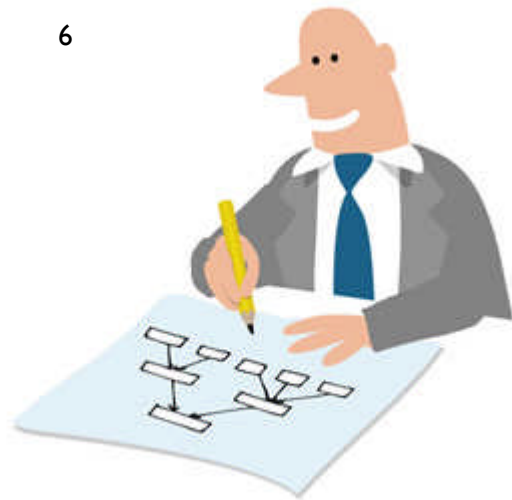
Logical reporting using the pyramid principle

## Three good reasons to learn this now

Introduction

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. You will keep your readers happy  | 2 |
| 1.1 Relevant content                 | 2 |
| 1.2 Accessible form                  | 2 |
| 2. Writing is easier                 | 4 |
| 3. Cooperative processes get a boost | 5 |

Preparing for the course 6



# Introduction

Advisory reports have a rather poor reputation – they are seen as overly long, woolly, poorly written, and lacking in clarity concerning their purpose. According to the cliché, they are usually left to gather dust.

In addition to undermining people’s enjoyment of work, it is a major obstacle to efficiency.

Many consultants, managers and other professionals have never learned how to write reports that are concise and to the point. Instead, they tend to reflect their own train of thought, the *process* that they themselves have followed.

During the training we will show you how to put the *result* (the outcome of your train of thought) at centre stage. This will help you to write a well-supported story that is of real use to your readers.

We use a method that was originally developed by McKinsey & Company and is now in worldwide use: the pyramid principle. Christine Oberman worked at McKinsey in the seventies, where she learned the method from Barbara Minto, who wrote a book on the subject in 1987: *The Pyramid Principle*. Over the years, Christine Oberman has given courses on this method, refined it and made it more accessible, a process that we are still working on today.

It is the best possible way to improve your business communications. While that may sound a little pretentious, we feel that it is no exaggeration. Before you start the course, we would like to tell you why. Three reasons are set out below.

# I. You will keep your readers happy

The main reason for learning the pyramid principle is to keep your readers happy. This is because the method puts the readers first (or the listeners, in the case of presentations). This may seem obvious, but it really isn't. Many writers simply commit their *own* train of thought to paper - which is something else entirely.

In specific terms, how do readers benefit?

## I.1 Relevant content

Readers do not want to waste their time on irrelevant texts. They want information that is tailored to their own needs. The pyramid principle provides that by omitting all unnecessary information, such as flights of fancy, digressions, details regarding the progress of an investigation, etcetera. The information that remains is one hundred percent relevant.

During the course we will explain how to identify items of information that can be omitted.

## I.2 Accessible form

The pyramid principle makes it very easy for readers to absorb information.

- The content really stands out. Even those who just scan the headings are guaranteed to grasp the essence.
- There is a coherent story. The components each have a clear relationship to one another. This allows you to illustrate, with total clarity, how a given position or opinion is underpinned.

- In addition, the method makes it easy for readers to retain information. This is due to the classification method used, which is in keeping with the way our brains process information. Furthermore, by presenting information in a structured way, you will create an impression of neatness. This shows that you have mastered the material in question.
- Finally, the method helps readers to read in a focused way. If they so wish, they can read only what is important to them. The risk that they will accidentally skip the wrong material is reduced to a minimum, thanks to the clear layout.

Have you watched the video clip on our website? It might be a good idea to watch that first (it is only a minute and a half).

The consultant on the left, wearing the blue tie, describes the process and the approach he takes. As a result, he has no time left to discuss his research results.

The consultant on the right, however, is able to describe his research results. Moreover, he does so in a way that is very accessible. Starting with the essence, he then gives a well structured account of the supporting evidence.

## 2. Writing is easier

As a writer (or as someone who creates presentations), the method has many advantages for you too. This is because the whole process goes much more smoothly. Many writers either suffer from writer's block or take a long time to complete their work.

Hardly surprising, as writing is a complicated business. You have to be aware of the structure of a text, the wording, style... to say nothing of the actual content. Many different matters require your attention, all at the same time.

The trick is to divide the writing process into stages, slicing it into separate pieces.

In many other disciplines, it is very common for processes to be divided into stages. An architect first creates a design, that has to be approved before the contractor can start work. This ensures that any design faults are addressed at an appropriate stage.

In writing this is less common, as all of the tasks involved are usually carried out by a single individual. However, it is just as helpful to divide that process into stages too, and to start with a design.

During the training course, we will show you what a design for a text looks like.

When you work this way, the benefits include:

- Fewer problems getting started.
- Less likeliness that you will have to restructure the text at a later stage.
- Easier cooperation with others when working on documents.

### 3. Cooperative processes get a boost

For many organizations, the main argument for adopting the pyramid principle is improved cooperation.

Why is this? Simply put, the reader is able to process information more effectively, speeding up decisions about subsequent steps. These next steps will also be better underpinned, raising the entire decision-making process to a higher level.

Compare that to poorly structured advisory reports, which lack an effective focus. In this way, organizations become difficult to manage.

Clear, logical communication enhances the quality of decision-making. This in turn boosts an organization's clout – whether this is your own organization or that of a client.

An additional consideration for many consultants is that well-structured advisory reports tend to become a “showpiece”. Customers come to value them, and soon they won't be prepared to settle for anything less!

# Preparing for the course

Logical reporting is an intensive skill-based training course. Accordingly, we would like you to prepare two things in advance.

1) Consider this question: what type of text should not be structured like a pyramid?

2) Learn this list by heart. Later on, this will be the subject of an exercise.

- Drill
- Easel
- Ruler
- Cutter
- Paper
- Passe-partout
- Paintbrush
- Plug
- Screw
- Screwdriver
- Watercolour paint
- Picture frame

You will be given an extensive set of study materials during the course itself.