

# Writing Workshop



[www.camedit.com](http://www.camedit.com)

CBN 11 November 2009





## Four topics we are going to cover

- Writing (good and bad)
- How to write for your audience
- Getting started and organising your material
- Editing and proofreading



# 1 Writing (good and bad)

## What are the features of good writing?

- Interesting and important ideas
- Logical and effective organisation of the material
- The right voice/tone for the audience
- The right words that say the right things
- Sentences that are lively and varied
- Correct and consistent grammar and spelling



# Bad writing examples

## What they wrote

It is the policy of the Whereshire County Council to seek restitution, including but not limited to, when a person wilfully cuts, defaces, causes the loss, non-return or otherwise injures any property, real or personal, belonging to the council or a council employee. The person or persons are liable for such damages, not exceeding £2,500.

## What they might have written

If you steal or damage council property we will hold you liable up to £2,500.

## What they wrote

Going forward, the Recreational Spaces Committee envision the creation of non-specified usage environments accessible to meeting the diverse needs of the community.

## What they might have written

The Recreational Spaces Committee plan to provide general recreation areas for all residents in the future.



## Golden Bull Award winner, 2008

Thank you for your Tax Returns ended 5th April 2006 & 2007 which we received on 20th December. □ I will treat your Tax Return for all purposes as though you sent it in response to a notice from us which required you to deliver it to us by the day we received it.

*HM Revenue and Customs in a letter to a customer*

Check out the Campaign for Plain English for other examples of terrible English – as well as some from companies who have tried to use the sort of language that all of us can understand.

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## Good writing example

Recycling is where an item or waste material undergoes some kind of reprocessing to make it into something new. We are currently recycling 43% of our waste. The average in England is 23%, so we're well ahead.

*Recycling in Cambridgeshire*



# William Safire's Great Rules of Writing

- A writer must not shift your point of view.
- Remember to never split an infinitive.
- Do not put statements in the negative form.
- If you reread your work, you can find on rereading a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
- And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.
- Don't overuse exclamation marks!!
- Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
- The passive voice should never be used.
- Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixed metaphors.
- A preposition is a terrible word to end a sentence with.
- Last but not least, avoid cliches like the plague; seek viable alternatives.

**William Safire** was a columnist for the New York Times and speechwriter to Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew.

Check out his other rules of writing at:  
[www.cse.yorku.ca/~gunnar/tidbits/safire.html](http://www.cse.yorku.ca/~gunnar/tidbits/safire.html)

Or you could do worse than to follow George Orwell's 6 rules of writing from his 1946 essay *Politics and the English Language*. It's on the handout.



## 2 How to write for your audience

### Unable to complete beverisation

**jar·gon** (järgn) *n.*

1. Nonsensical, incoherent, or meaningless talk.
2. A hybrid language or dialect; a pidgin.
3. The specialized or technical language of a trade, profession, or similar group. See Synonyms at [dialect](#).
4. **Speech or writing having unusual or pretentious vocabulary, convoluted phrasing, and vague meaning.**

*intr.v.* **jar·goned, jar·gon·ing, jar·gons**

To speak in or use jargon.

This phrase was heard on a plane during turbulence!  
This hotel is underelevatorised.

We all use jargon or specialised language among colleagues as a useful shorthand but it becomes a problem when it leaks out into the wider community and it confuse, irritates or alienates the reader.



# Extreme jargon – what *do* they mean?

Secluded location

In the middle of nowhere; suitable for filming, e.g. Straw Dogs

Relocated to unknown destination

Lost

Normal involuntary attrition

Being fired

Non-operative personnel

Dead soldiers



## LGA banned words 1

- blue sky thinking
- capacity building
- conditionality
- coterminosity
- going forward
- holistic governance
- improvement levers
- incentivising
- legitimacy
- predictors of beaconicity
- revenue streams

The Local Government Association has produced a list of 200 words that it wants councils to ban. Check out their website. We'd probably all agree about the ones in this first list ...

## LGA banned words 2

- best practice
- customer
- empowerment
- framework
- partnerships
- single point of contact
- sustainable
- transparency
- value-added
- initiative

... but what about these?



## Plain English

- It's writing that the intended audience can read, understand and act on the first time they read it.
- It takes into account design and layout as well as language.
- It's not about dumbing down – it's about saying what you mean in a clear and concise way so as not to baffle the reader and create a divide between the writer and the reader.

Plain English doesn't have to be dull English.



## 3 Getting started and organising your material

### Getting started - *or* excuses, excuses

“I don’t like writing.”

“I don’t have enough time to write.”

“I don’t know where to start.”

“There’s just so much to write about.”

“I need somewhere quiet/a new laptop/a better chair”, etc.

“I need inspiration.”

“**Help!**”



# What's Your Displacement Activity?

Sylvia Plath's favorite form of displacement activity was baking. Ted Hughes would come in and find the entire kitchen covered in cakes and biscuits.

Douglas Adams was a master of prevarication – mid-morning naps, quick baths, Bovril sandwiches, mid-afternoon naps, more quick baths, and attempts to avoid deadlines and appointments: "I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by."



How many of you have resorted to this kind of displacement activity?  
Getting down to the job you know you have to do can be difficult. The task can seem overwhelming. How do you get started?

One way is to make a plan. **As any general will tell you – time spent on planning is never wasted.** The kind of plan you make will depend on what works best for you. Only you can decide on that. We'll give you a few ideas now.



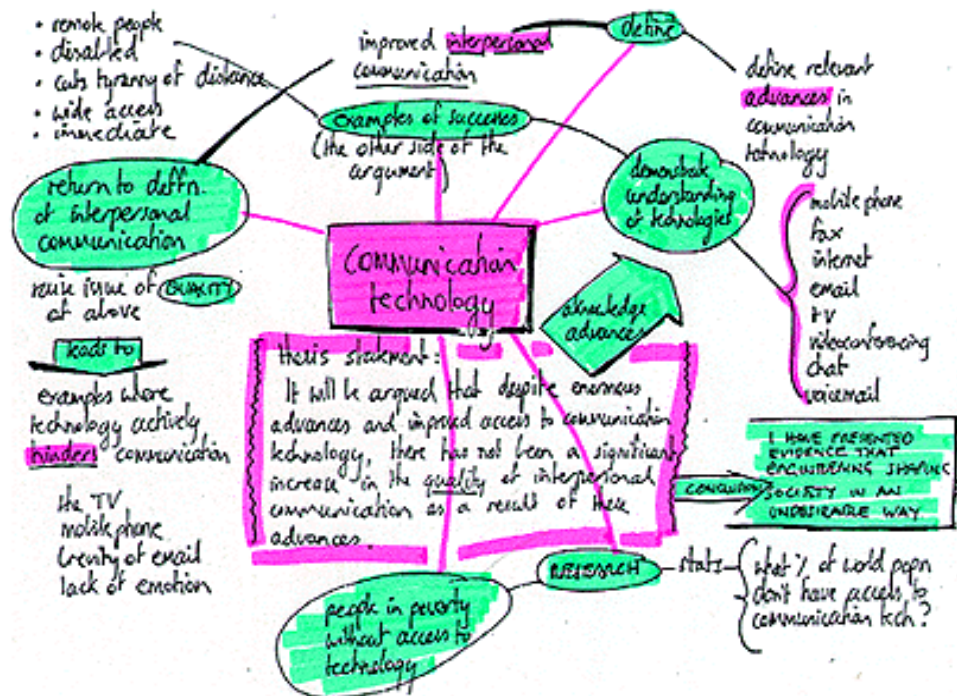
## Getting started

- Think about the story you have to tell.
- Imagine explaining what it is you have to write to a friend, partner, colleague.
- Start with the easiest part.
- Write with the screen turned off.
- Set a time limit.
- Accept the fact that you aren't going to get everything right the first time. Keep moving forward.

Are you good at getting straight down to the task – or do you find better things to do? If you write 4 pages and decided you need to throw 3 of them away, you've still got 1 page left to build on.



# Organising your material 1



If you're lucky enough to be able to discuss your ideas with other people, you can brainstorm them.

If you're working on your own, you need to find another way, and one of the classic ones is the mind map.

Some people find this a bit messy, so if you prefer a more obviously orderly approach you can try other ways.

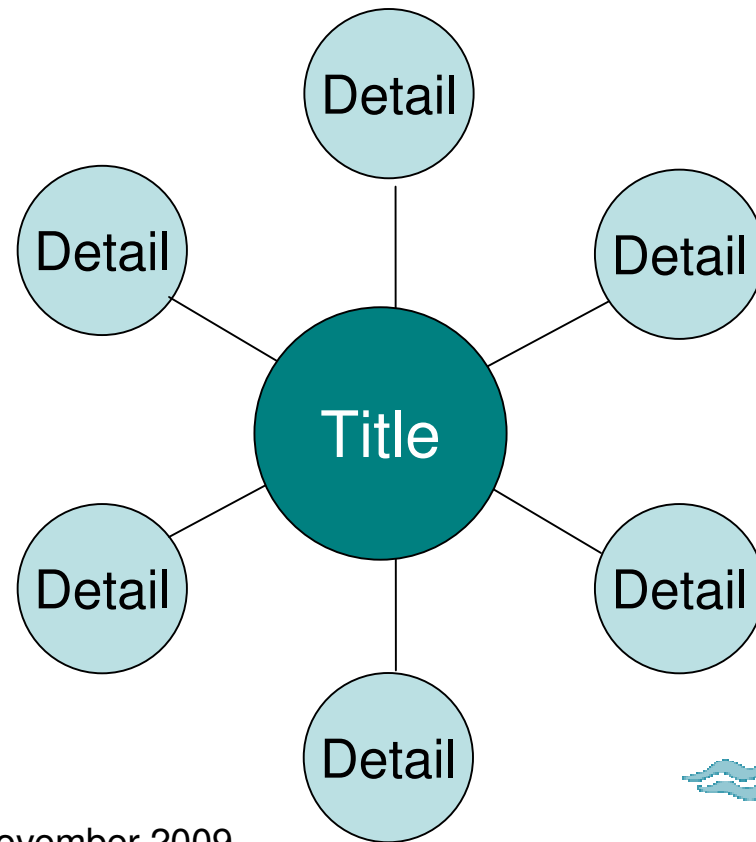




# Organising your material 2

Or start with a bubble diagram

You can try a bubble diagram on paper or the computer – it's a slightly more orderly approach for anyone who doesn't like the idea of mess and confusion

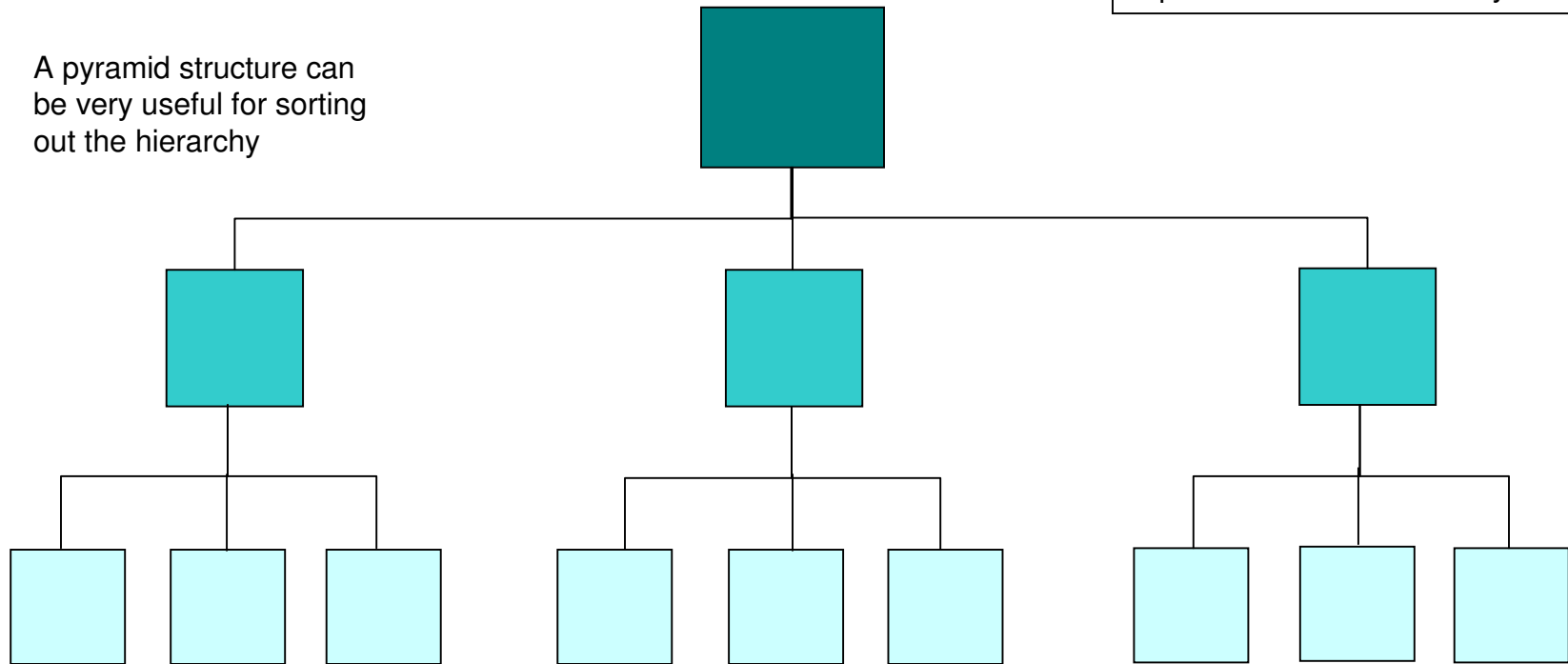




# Organising your material 3

Or the really organised, deluxe version – a pyramid diagram. This is very useful for working out the structure of things like reports and extended essays.

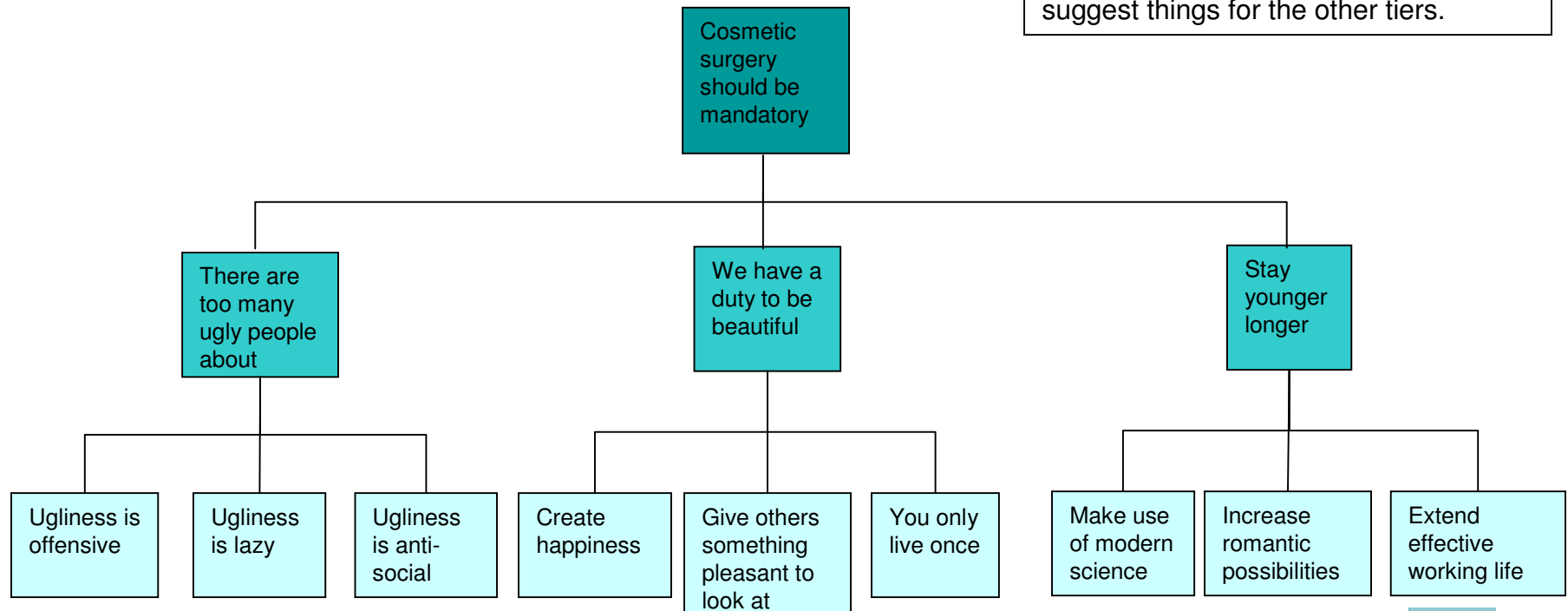
A pyramid structure can be very useful for sorting out the hierarchy





# Structuring an argument

Here's an example that came out of a session we did with some students at an international business school. We just asked them for a topic and let them suggest things for the other tiers.





## 4 Editing and proofreading

**What do you see? – We all see what we want to see, or what we know ought to be there.**

Don't Loose Your Valuables —*City of Westminster Car Safe.*



Proofreading: look carefully

A survey of 200 16-year olds revealed that over 90% were disinterested in the new Youth Centre proposal.

The residents sued the Council's waste disposal unit.

Brian Smith, chairman of New Town Rangers, insisted that the team needed more room to practice. The lads haven't anywhere to keep there kit, said Mr Smith. Sir Bobby was very complementary but its different to his day. We've definately been badly effected.

How many mistakes can you spot?



Proofreading: examples corrected.

A survey of 200 16-year olds revealed that over 90% were **un**interested in the new Youth Centre proposal.

The residents **used** the Council's waste disposal unit.

Brian Smith, chairman of New Town Rangers, insisted that the team needed more room to practi**se**. The lads haven't anywhere to keep **their** kit, said Mr Smith. Sir Bobby was very compli**mentary** but **it's** different **from** his day. We've defini**tely** been badly **a**ffected.

nine mistakes



# Check, check and check again

Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.

Another of William Safire's rules of writing.