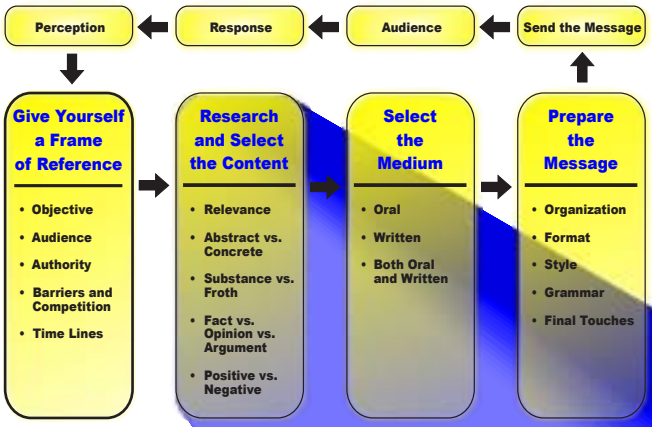
Writing for Results

A Step-by-Step Model for Executive Documents



The man is most original who can
adopt from the greatest number of sources.

Thomas Carlyle

Research and Select the Content

- **Relevance**
- **Abstract vs. Concrete**
- **Substance vs. Froth**
- **Fact vs. Opinion vs. Argument**
- **Positive vs. Negative**

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INTRODUCTION

Content comprises the substance and meaning of your message — the bricks and mortar that you will later use to build your final message. At this stage, you need not be too concerned about style or format, although it doesn't hurt to keep those matters in mind.

In developing content, you are deciding largely which concrete details and arguments to add to what abstract concepts in order to bring your audience around to your way of thinking. This can be a major challenge. If you give your audience too little content, you cannot achieve your objective. But if you give your audience too much content, you will bury the points that really matter. In making these decisions, bear in mind that what is important to you personally may differ significantly from what will be important to your audience and the success of your message.

Sometimes you will have devote a great deal of effort to researching a subject and developing a well-reasoned position. When that happens, it is tempting to deliver a message that lets the audience know just how difficult this was for you and how much you know about the subject. Avoid that temptation. Giving in to it can defeat your objective and damage your reputation in the eyes of the audience.

STRUCTURE OF THE MODEL

You will see me using "content" in a fashion that may surprise you. I use it to refer to anything that changes substance or meaning, even if it is just a single word. Some might contend that such matters should be dealt with in editing grammar later on in the process, and that's where I have placed it in the step-by-step model. Even so, it is worth your while to keep matters of grammar in mind at the content stage.

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Conversely, a case could be made for placing How to Fix a Four-Page Memo here rather than under Format in the last stage of the process. If that's how you see it, I won't debate the point too strenuously. It's not that important. What matters is the techniques that you will find inside that section. How and when you use those techniques is something that only you can decide.

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