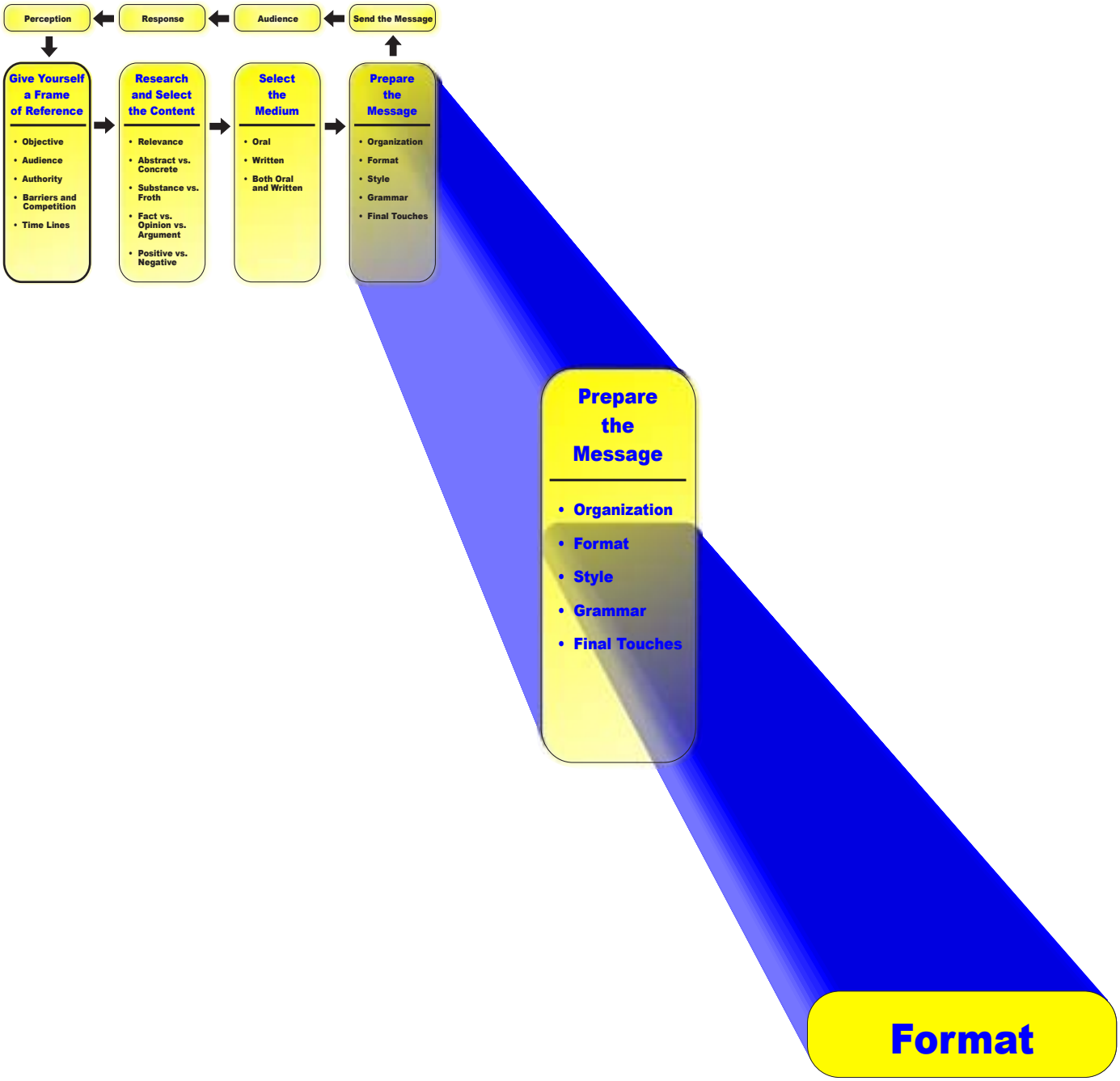
Writing for Results

A Step-by-Step Model for Executive Documents



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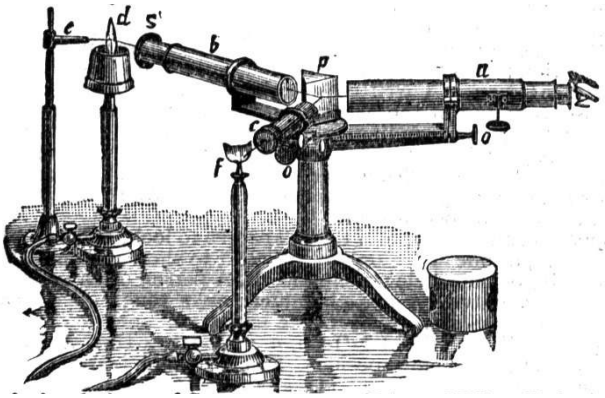
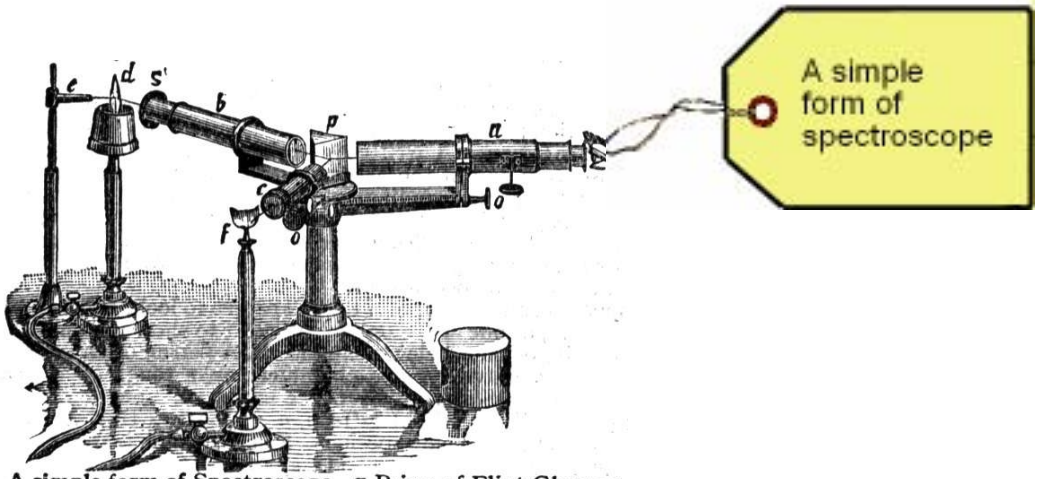
Formatting

If you don't give it a label . . .



. . . how will people know what it is?



A simple form of Spectroscope. *p* Prism of Flint Glass ; *a* Telescope with Eyepiece ; *b* Collimator through which the Light, which enters at the Slit in the End *s* from the Flame of the Bunsen Burner *d*, passes to the Prism to form Spectrum in *a* ; *c* Tube with a Micrometer ; *e* Holder for Substance whose Spectrum is to be examined ; *f* Flame illuminating Micrometer Scale ; *o o* Adjusting Screws.

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Imagine receiving a 40-page briefing note that contained nothing but paragraphs – no headings or sub-headings, not even a title or a covering memo to explain what it is. You would be hard pressed to find a reason to read it at all. And if you did decide to read it, you would surely find it to be a struggle.

Your message could be well targeted, with strong content, an excellent organization structure and an effective style. But without proper formatting, you are severely impairing your chances of success. You want your audience to focus on the significance of your message. You don't want your audience to struggle to decipher your message. In many cases, a reader who has to struggle to decipher your message won't even bother to try.

Proper formatting is vital in enhancing the ease of reading your message. It will make your organization structure visible to readers. Your format should take your readers by the hand and lead them through your message so they can understand what you are discussing, where they are in the message, where they have been, and where they are going to be next. It should also let them find things quickly if they are just giving the message a quick read.

First and foremost, the message must be physically easy to read. If the audience finds itself squinting to read great masses of text crammed into a single page, you will succeed mainly in irritating your reader.

In addition, there are many other tools that you can use to enhance the ease of reading your message. They include:

- a covering memo
- titles
- tables of contents
- summaries
- headings
- sub-headings
- sub-paragraphs
- binders and dividers

It is an important part of your job to decide which of these tools to use and how to use them. This chapter provides guidance on how to do just that.

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