

Writing Tip



**Gail Tycer**

*Write less, say more and get results!*



**Tip #1: Alternate Formats:  
Because Writing is a Visual Art**

Remember that "Bite" Principle? We tend to think of "writing" as being sentences and paragraphs—the way writing looked when we were in school. Those sentences and paragraphs we learned in school are called the narrative format. And that narrative format is still

valid, forming the way most written thoughts are presented.

Because of the way the eye works, writing is actually a visual, as well as an intellectual art. To make it easy for your reader when you want him or her to "get it," and to remember it, capitalize on the "bite principle." Look for opportunities to use an alternate format anywhere from paragraph two on—or even in the first paragraph of a one-paragraph letter or memo.

You can think of the eye as being like a circuit breaker for the brain. To protect your brain from overload, it "shuts off," preventing information from reaching your brain for processing—very much like a circuit breaker shuts off to protect the wiring in your house. Your eye, and your brain, work most effectively a "bite" at a time, preventing overload, and getting the full current through. The best way to work with the way the eye works is to use an alternate format.

Now let's take a look at some of the alternate formats available. These include:

- Outline
- Narrative/Outline
- Question/Answer

**Tip #1:  
Remember the "Bite" Principle:**

Most business readers are in a perpetual state of overload. The eye processes, and the brain thinks best, a "bite" at a time.

When you want your reader to "get it" at a glance and to remember what you've said, consider an alternate format.

- Problem/Solution
- Log
- Newsletter
- Freestyle

And here's how they look:

**1. OUTLINE**

This format is just a listing; mostly good for an agenda, step-by-step instructions, or a checklist.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- 
- 
- 
- 1.
- 2.

3.

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## 2. NARRATIVE/OUTLINE

But combine the outline with the narrative, and you have a dynamite "one size fits all" format. Here is the best way to use the bite-at-a-time principle to present information in the easiest to understand, easiest to remember, way.

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

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XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXX

XX  
XXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XX  
X

XX

XX  
XX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

## 3. & 4. QUESTION/ANSWER AND PROBLEM/SOLUTION

These formats are both an organizational structure, and, because of how they look, a format. Best used for explaining (Q & A), or presenting options (P & S), in a quick way. Both the Q & A and the P & S structures can also be put into the log format, shown next. Both may be combined with other formats, such as the narrative/outline (see sample, below):

### QUESTION:

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX

XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

ANSWER:

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

OR

PROBLEM:

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

SOLUTION:

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX

XX  
XXXXXXXXXX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

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XXX

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X

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XX  
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XX

### 5. LOG

The log format can be easily adapted for a variety of uses—conference reports, meeting minutes, status reports, assignments, etc. This is an excellent format—probably the best—when you have a great quantity of information going to a number of people, but not everyone needs to read everything. By calling out the topic on the left 1/3 of the page, you will focus the reader’s attention so that the right person reads the right information.

XXXXXXXXXXXX  
XX  
XX  
XX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
XX  
XX  
XX  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

### 6. NEWSLETTER

Underlining. To be done judiciously. Because underlining is such an effective technique, anyone who writes a direct mail sales letter to sell you anything uses this technique mercilessly. Because of this, underlining—when overdone—tends to

assume a "I'm trying to sell you something" tone. So be careful. Don't overdo it, but use this powerful tool appropriately.

## **7. FREESTYLE**

Freestyle is any way you can combine the above to enhance clarity while making your message memorable.

There you have them—seven eye-pleasing formats you can use every day to help your reader "get it" at a glance, and remember what you've said.