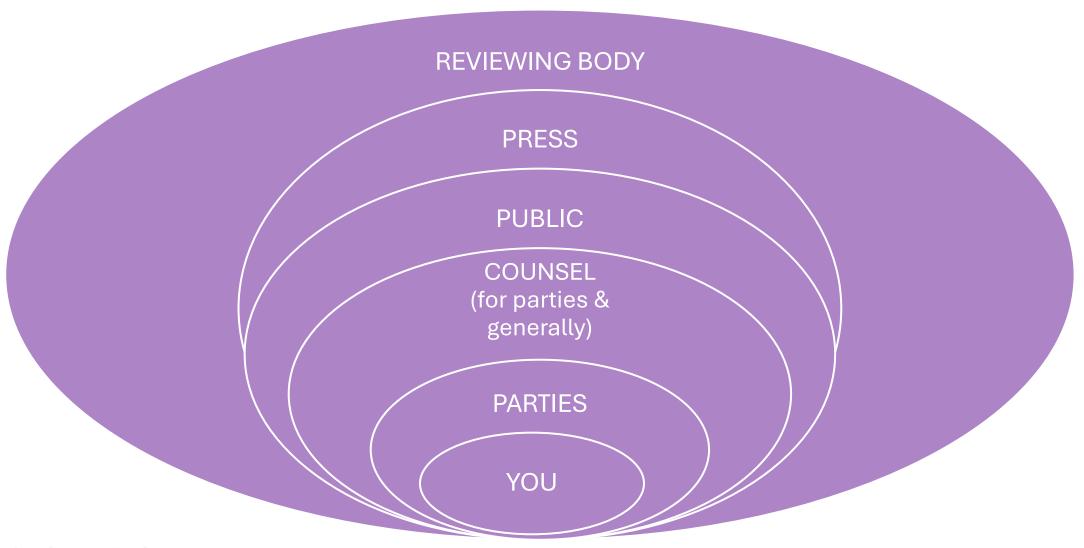


Effective Decision Writing: Key Principles & Best Practices Part 1

Workshop Presented to BCCAT November 5, 2024

Your multiple readers



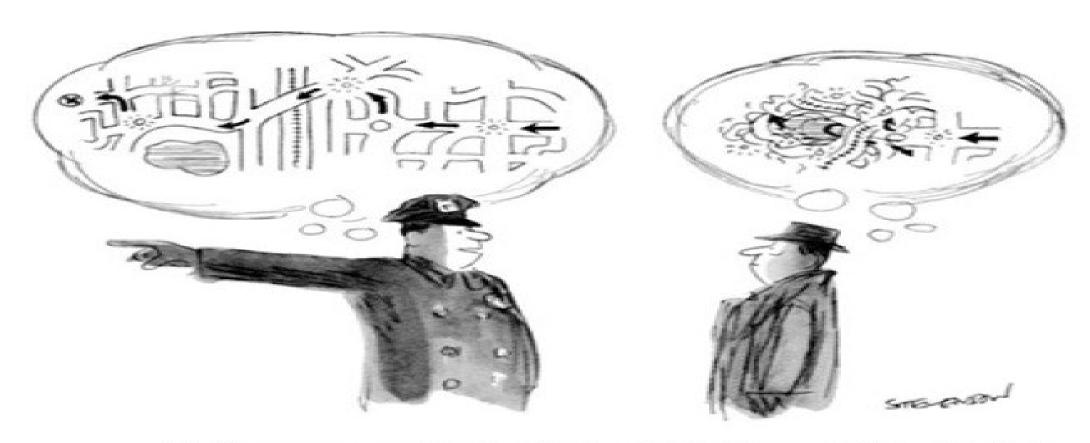




~ William Zinsser



"The curse of knowledge"

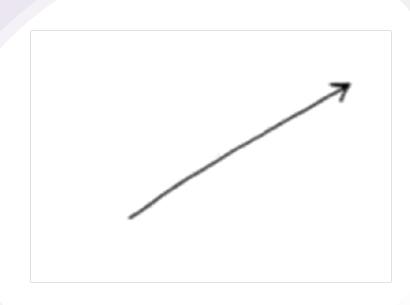


© J. Stevenson per The New Yorker da The Sense of Style di S. Pinker



"Watch me think" (writer-centred writing)

"Let me show you" (reader-centred writing)





Key principles of effective decision writing

1. ADOPT	2. PROVIDE	3. GROUP	4. CONSTRUCT	5. DEVELOP
a reader-	context	related	clear, direct,	an effective
centred	before	information	& simple	writing
approach	details	together	sentences	process



Principle 1: Adopt a reader-centred approach



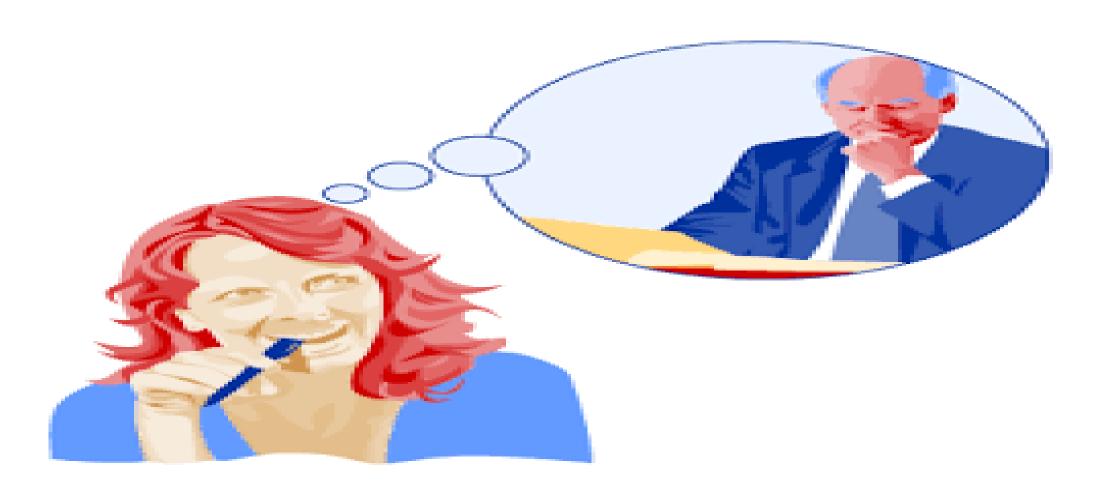


CCAT's definition of plain language

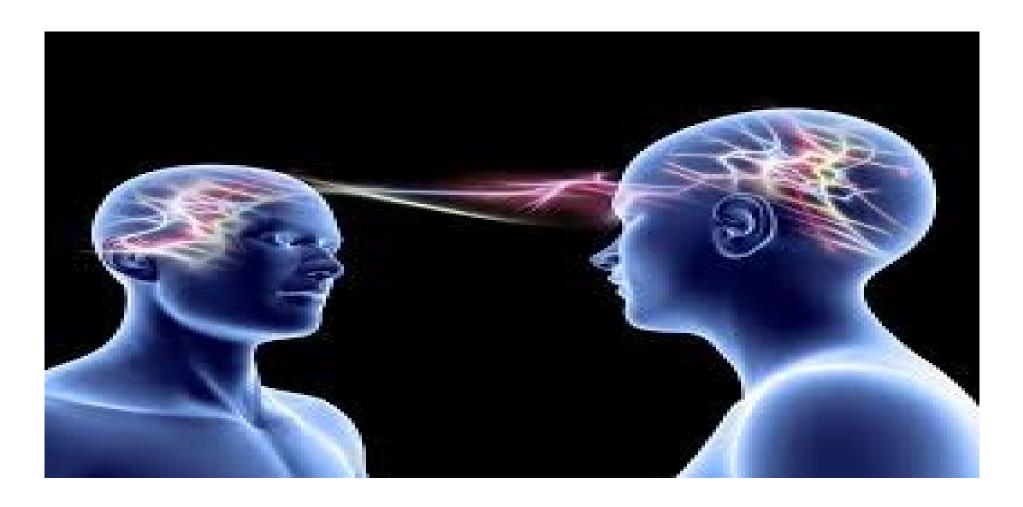
"Plain language is clear, simple writing that is easily understood by the **people it is written for**. Plain language focuses on a **reader's needs and abilities**. Its goal is to make sure that a **reader can understand everything** that the writer wants to communicate."



"What do my readers need to know next?"



"Make your readers feel smart"



Principle 2: Provide context before details

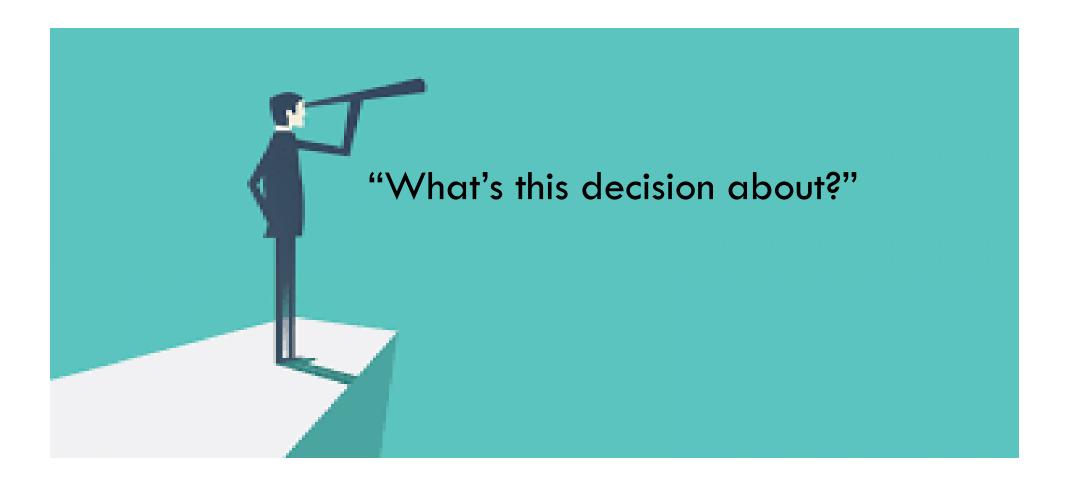


Six ways to provide context in decisions

- Start with a contextual introduction
- 2. Include internal roadmaps
- 3. Add descriptive headings
- 4. Announce a paragraph's purpose in the opening sentence
- 5. Frame block quotations
- 6. Synthesize information with bullet points



Starting with a contextual introduction



Main elements of a contextual introduction

- Provides a concise overview of the nature of the proceeding
- Includes enough facts to provide context for the issues
 - Who wants what from whom
- States the specific questions (issues) to be addressed
 - Build decisions around the issues



Does your decision start with a contextual introduction?

- 1. Read the opening section of your decision.
- 2. Write out three reasons why you think the section is, or is not, a contextual introduction.
- Be prepared to discuss your reasons with the large group



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Roadmaps set the stage for what follows



- Use a roadmap to
 - Tell readers where to focus their attention
 - Preview the order in which content will be presented

Steps of an upcoming analysis?

 Help readers navigate through a section



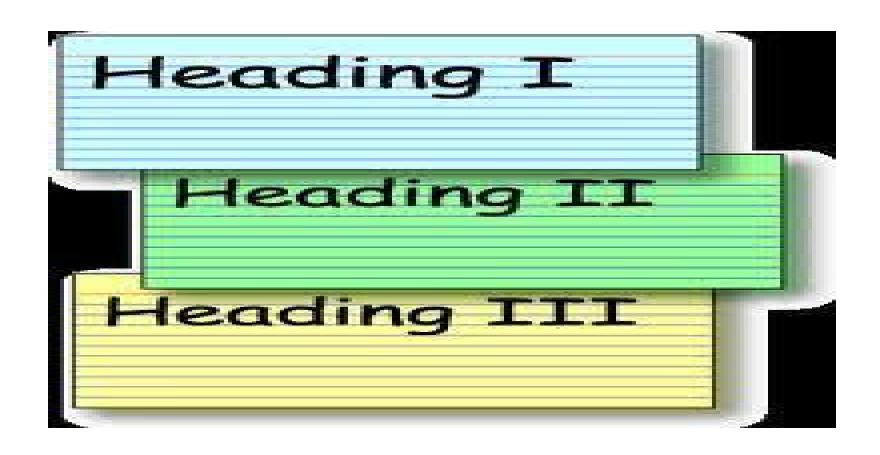
Sample roadmap

BCUC decision

The Panel identifies three overarching objectives that guide its decision: (1) maximize the recovery of program costs from RNG customers; (2) manage biomethane inventory; and (3) establish a BERC rate setting mechanism that is robust, effective and provides regulatory efficiency.



Adding descriptive headings





Headings are "readers' little helpers" because they...

- Signal overall organization
- Offer a quick overview
- Help readers find what they need
- Give readers a break from blocks of text



Drafting tips - descriptive headings

- Each heading should
 - Stand out
 - Say something about the section that follows by Describing content, or Asking a question the section answers
- Aim for no more than one line of text
- Never write just one subheading
- Don't overdo it



Do your headings outline the structure?

- 1. Choose one substantive section of your decision.
- 2. Highlight each heading.
- 3. Does a clear structure emerge from the headings?
- 4. If not, think about how you might structure the section more effectively.
- Be prepared to discuss your observations with the large group



Announcing a paragraph's purpose in the opening sentence





Opening sentences provide two types of context

- For the specific paragraph
 - Tells readers exactly why they're reading that paragraph
- For the whole document
 - Readers should be able to understand the gist of a document by reading only the opening sentences of each paragraph



Drafting tips – opening sentences

- Answer the three questions most readers ask when starting to read a paragraph:
 - Why am I reading this?
 - How does this information connect to the previous paragraph?
 - How does this sentence move the discussion forward?



Do your opening sentences tell the story?

- 1. Working with the same section of your decision as the previous exercise, highlight the first sentence of each paragraph.
- 2. Do the opening sentences, taken sequentially, provide a coherent outline of the section?
- 3. Does the sequence and logic of the headings & opening sentences make sense?
- Be prepared to discuss your observations with the large group



Framing block quotations

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- Introduce each block quotation with a framing sentence that paraphrases its key point
 - Enhances clarity
 - Imposes discipline on writers
 - Leads to shorter decisions that are easier to read



Sample framing sentence

With thanks to John Laskin

The relevant provisions of the *Municipal Act* are in subsections 213(2) and (3), which authorize municipalities to pass by-laws regulating and prohibiting smoking in public places and workplaces:

[the statutory provisions]



Synthesizing information with bullet points

bullet point lists



Drafting tips – bullet points

- Always introduce list items with a framing sentence followed by a colon
- Ensure the text before the colon & the bulleted part fit together grammatically
- Keep bullets simple, clean, & short



How do you start your sentences?

- 1. Choose two or three pages inside the body of your decision.
- 2. Highlight all sentences that start with "it", "this", and "there".
- 3. Can you identify what "it", "this", and "there" refer to in all cases?
- 4. If not, replace each word with a concrete subject.
- Be prepared to discuss your observations with the large group tomorrow

