

# HOW TO WRITE ABOUT INFORMATION

One of the most important uses of writing is to convey information.

Suppose we want to inform people about dinosaurs. How do we go about it? Just grab all the books we can find on dinosaurs and start copying it all out?

***NO!! Stop.***

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There *is* a method.

- 1     *Organise your ideas***
- 2     *Research the topic***
- 3     *Present the information***

Let's look at how to write about information effectively.

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## **STEP 1     Organise your ideas**

Doesn't research come first?

No. Without doing some thinking about the subject first, you don't know ***what*** to look for.

Take 'Dinosaurs'.

Before you even open a book on the subject, think about what you want to know.

What questions do you have about dinosaurs?

- What were dinosaurs?
- What sort existed?
- How many were there?
- How long ago did they live?
- How big, and small, were they?
- How did they eat, and reproduce?
- Why did they die out?

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You might find all the answers to these questions in one place, or you might have to look in different places. What guides you is a set of

## QUESTIONS to which you find the ANSWERS

The **questions** are your guides. The **answers** are the information itself.

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### **STEP 2      Research the topic**

Armed with your questions, you are ready to do research.

Where to look?

#### (1) Libraries

- Check the reference collection – encyclopaedias, dictionaries
- Specialist books – look up the catalogue under the heading 'Dinosaurs'

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#### (2) The Internet

Be careful. Not *everything* on the internet is true. Go with 'sources' that are 'reputable' – like *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

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#### (3) People who know

If you are researching how to look after animals, why not speak to a vet? For information on how cars work, ask a mechanic. And so on. People know a lot. It's just a matter of asking.

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### **STEP 3      Present the information**

You have worked out what information you need to know. You have found the information. Now it's time to put it together.

But first:

#### (1) What do your audience already know?

If you are trying to inform children, the language has to be simple. Everything must be explained carefully.

If you are writing for, or speaking to, older people, you can assume quite a lot of knowledge.

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Think about what people are likely to know about the topic already. Do they know that

- \* A frog is an amphibian?
- \* What an amphibian is?
- \* How many types of frog there are?
- \* Do they know what a frog eats?
- \* Do they know how long a frog lives?
- \* Are frogs vanishing?

Put yourself in the place of the audience. Then you will know how much (or how little) to tell them.

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(2) How difficult is the topic?

Some topics are complex. Explaining how the universe works is an example. You will need lots of diagrams. You should explain all technical terms as simply as possible.

Other topics are easy to understand. Everyone knows the basic rules of a popular sport, like basketball. Your challenge is to not to make it easy, but to make it interesting.

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(3) How can you organize information effectively?

There are good and bad ways to present information.

Should you 'pour it all out and hope they get it'?

Bad idea!!

Public speakers and psychologists long ago found there was a 'information method' – a recipe, if you like.

How to produce a perfect information cake every time?  
Here's how.

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**A     Get 'em in!**

Start by grabbing the reader's, or listener's, attention.

In India, 46,000 people are born every day. World-wide, 16,500,000 babies appear every 24 hours!

OR

If all the cars and trucks in the world went out together, there would be a six lane traffic jam all the way to the moon!

If your topic is overpopulation, or pollution, why not start with an amazing fact? Get your audience to take notice. Once you have their interest, you can move on.

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**B Tell them what you're going to tell them**

It helps to announce your overall plan before you start in on the detail.

Start with an overview. Then announce the main sub topics. When people know what is coming they have done a lot of the mental work before you start. This is sometimes called a 'preview'.

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**C Tell them**

Now you need a series of paragraphs. Each one deals with one of the sub topics. The sub topics are probably the main questions you worked out right at the beginning of the whole planning process. Why not ask the questions, and then answer them?

Why did the dinosaurs die out?

Theories of extinction =

1. meteor strike and global cooling
2. volcanic activity
3. appearance of mammals

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**D Tell 'em what you told them**

Now it's time to sum up. This is sometimes called a 'review', or 'recapitulation'. Summarise your main points again.

Then finish with a bang. If your topic was 'Threats to our world', end with a startling fact, like

Each day, the world eats the equivalent of three skyscrapers worth of bread.

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#### (4) What works?

Presenting information well – as you can see from *this* presentation – is also about how it looks.

Theorists have discovered that certain things ‘work better’. People pay attention to some things more than others. Which things?

At the bottom of the pyramid are **words**.

Words are important, and they’re very flexible. But they can be boring!!

Next up are **diagrams**.

Diagrams are words and pictures. They are very useful to show how things work and to grab people’s attention.

Next up are **pictures**.

Pictures – whether photos or pieces of art – are even more interesting. They show you what the topic looks like in real life. “A picture is worth 1000 words”.

At the very top of the pyramid are **moving pictures and live demonstrations**.

If you can ‘show and tell’ the audience will be eating out of your hands.

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Let’s sum up. To write about information, you need to

- (1) Organise your ideas
- (2) Research the topic
- (3) Present the information effectively
  - What does your audience know?
  - How difficult is the topic?
  - How can the material be organized (the recipe)?
  - What works (the ‘pyramid of power’)

And happy informative writing!!