

# Writing for Decision

A course for CAE schools

# Academic vs Decision Writing

- **Academic** writing seeks to...
  - Explore all avenues
  - Explain the issue thoroughly
  - Exhaust all sources
- Audience (“customer”) is...
  - Author
  - Peers
  - General public

# Academic vs Decision Writing

- Writing for **decision** seeks to...
  - Convey essential information and implications.
  - Provide a compelling, convincing argument.
  - Above all be concise and precise.
- Audience (“customer”) is...
  - President and administration.
  - Warfighter.
  - Operator.

# Academic AND Decision Writing

- Must identify clear, important question worth answering.
- Must exhaust all available sources of information and explore all avenues.
  - Demonstrated in academic writing, assumed in decision writing.
- Must have a clear line of march and logical, supported conclusion.

# Decision Writing Is Purposeful

Our customers need information that is:

- New or timely.
- Unique.
- Important.
  - Not the same as interesting.
- Relevant.

# Purposeful cont.

They need information that is:

- Put into context.
  - Insight based on expertise.
- Actionable.
- Timely.

# Decision Writing Is Persuasive

- Start with the main point (BLUF).
- A compelling argument.
  - Has solid logic and reasoning.
  - Uses evidence effectively.
  - Identifies gaps and unknowns.
- Clear differentiation of fact vs opinion.
  - “According to” vs “We assess”.
  - Confidence levels.

# Decision Writing Is Precise

- Every word counts.
  - A different definition of “long”.
  - “Lifeless” prose.
  - The value of simplicity.
- Avoid “squishy” words.
  - Does “significant” have a common meaning?
  - Do labels—“right wing,” “liberal,” “extremist” have the same meaning everywhere?
- Unambiguous on the first read.
- Everyone takes away the same message.



# And Decision Writing Is....

- Provided only when it meets the customer's threshold.
  - New.
  - Insightful (third order analysis).
  - Timely.

# ...and Often Painful

- Research.
- Consistency.
- Coordination.
- Editing and reviewing.
- Prebriefing.
- Follow-on tasking.

# Decision Writing Chronology

- What is new?
- Why is it happening?
- Why do we care?
  - Impact.
- What can we do about it?
  - Implications.
  - Opportunities.

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# Structure: Starting Strong

- The title: a contract.
- The topic sentence.
  - In harmony with title.
  - Conveys your bottom line.
  - Address the questions, what's new and why does it matter?
- Successive topic sentences.
- The power of graphics.

# Learn to BLUF

- Bottom Line Up Front.
  - Logic flow is inverted from academic style.
  - Lead sentence must state what is new and what impact it has for US interests.
- Typically 4-6 sentences per concept.
  - 2-3 sentences in paragraph, 2-3 bullets with supporting evidence.
  - One point per paragraph
  - Each paragraph builds on the one before it.
  - Keep like with like.
  - Keep the primary actor consistent in each paragraph.

# Premium on Concise

- Busy people don't have time to read.
- Use active voice--subject, verb, direct object for clarity.
- Use precise verbs rather than adverbs and adjectives.
- No clauses.

# Warbania's New Security Policy Likely To Be Ineffective

Warbania's poorly trained and equipped military will probably undermine implementation of the government's new security policy against resurgent terrorist groups, whose activities could spill beyond Warbania's borders.

- Most Warbanian troops are illiterate and receive only two weeks of basic training, according to military reporting.
- The majority of Warbania's Soviet-origin helicopters and personnel carriers are inoperable, according to imagery, forcing a reliance on vulnerable commercial trucks to move troops to battle.
- We assess, based on a study of recent clashes, that the military lacks the ability to consistently detect, track, and target terrorist forces.



# Our Products

- Current.
- Papers: typically 3-5 pages.
- Memos.
- Leadership profiles.
- Briefings.

# So How Can You Apply This Now?

- Use research to build expertise.
- Choose topics that matter.
- Make an argument.
- Be persuasive and precise.
- Learn to self-edit.
  - Get a style guide.
  - Read out loud.
  - Use spell-check and grammar-check.

# So How Can You Apply This Now?

- Be discerning about sources.
- Think about graphics.
- Create your future writing sample.