

# AGLP Leadership Development Curriculum

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## Communicating Effectively

Ryan Wepler, Director of the Graduate Writing Lab

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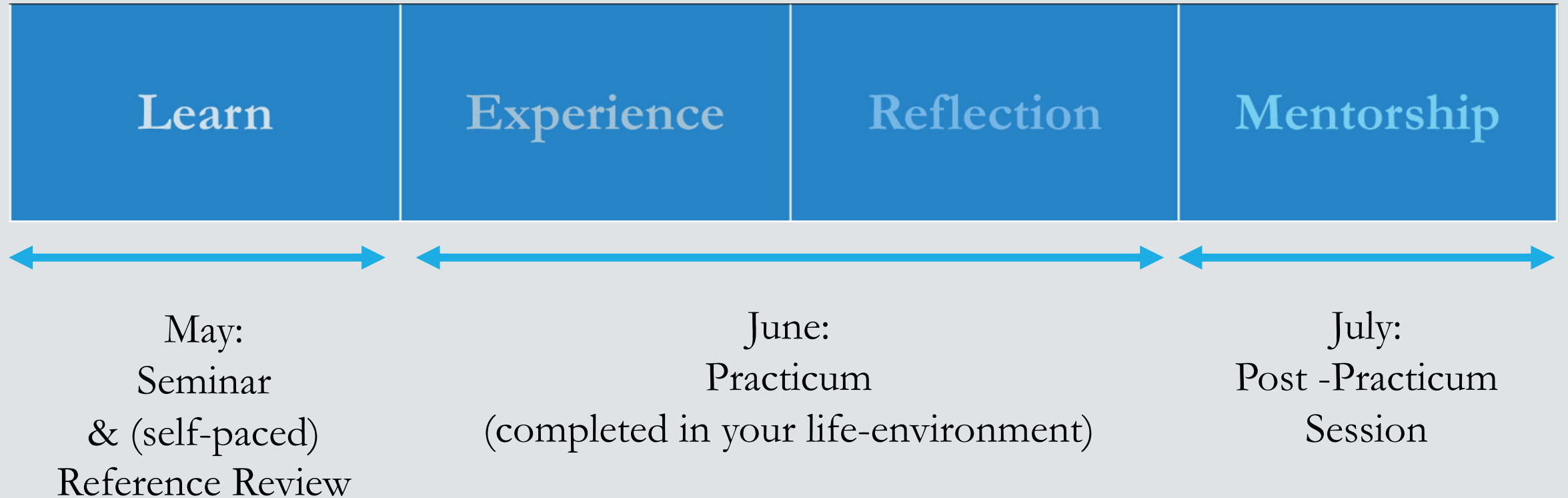
# Leadership Competencies

(USCGA Leadership Development Model)

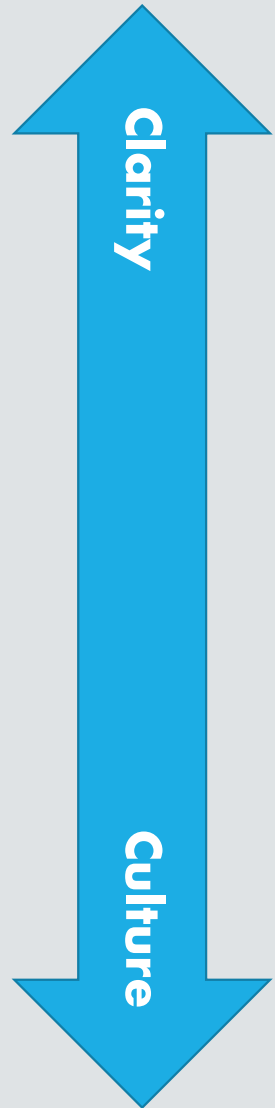
Leading-Self Competencies	Leading-Others Competencies
Accountability & Responsibility	Team Building
Aligning Values	Influencing Others
Followership	Effective Communications
Health & Well Being	Mentoring
Self-Awareness & Leading	Respect for Others & Diversity Management
Personal Conduct	Taking Care of People
Technical Proficiency	

# AGLP Leadership Development Sequence

Leading-Self Competency: Effective Communications



# Barriers to Effective Communication



1. Ambiguity / Confusion
2. Noise / Information Overload
3. Jargon / In-Group Discourse
4. Selective Perception
5. Emotions (relationships, autonomy)
6. Error-Avoidance Mindset
7. Hierarchical or Conformity-Driven Environment

“The biggest single problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

-George Bernard Shaw

# Communicating Effectively - Outline

1. Leading with language
  - a. Asking questions
  - b. Promoting variability
  - c. Changing culture
  - d. Managing emotions
  - e. Flattening the power gradient
2. Getting heard
  - a. Concision
  - b. Directness
  - c. Frontloading Information
3. Being clear
  - a. Character & Action
  - b. “To be” verbs
  - c. Nominalizations
  - d. Adjectives and adverbs
  - e. Old to new style



# Communicating Effectively - Outline

## 1. Leading with language

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- b. Directness
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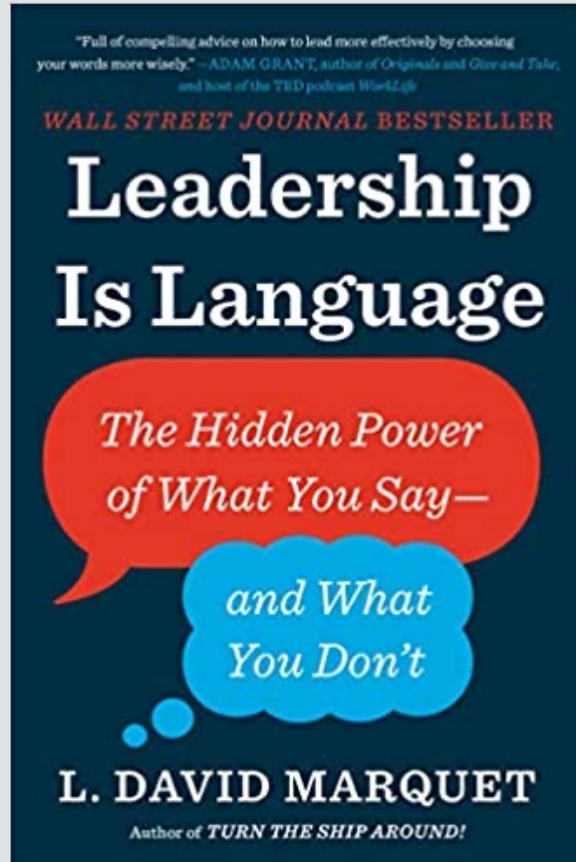
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# Sources

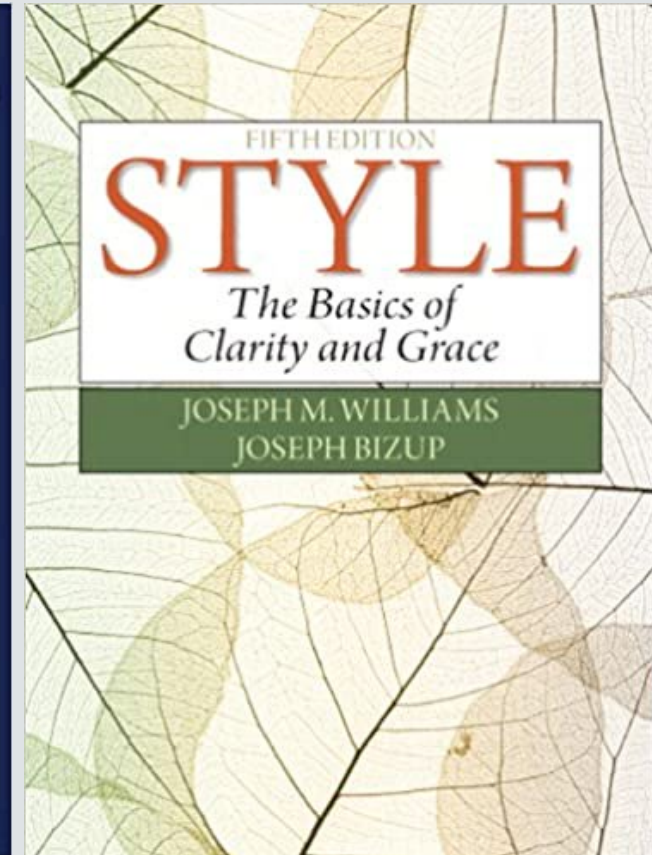
## 1. Leading with Language



## 2. Getting Heard



## 3. Being Clear



# Leading with Language: Where Our Leadership Language Comes From

## Industrial Age Management Structure

Steep hierarchy

Strict division between thinkers and doers

Thinking done by individuals or a small group

Seeks compliance from doers



# Leading with Language: Where Our Leadership Language Comes From

Industrial Age Management Structure	Modern Age Management Structure
Steep hierarchy	Flattened hierarchy
Strict division between thinkers and doers	Little division between thinkers and doers
Thinking done by individuals or a small group	Collective participation in thinking and doing
Seeks compliance from doers	Seeks commitment from doers

# Leading with Language: Where Our Leadership Language Comes From

Industrial Age Leadership Language	Examples
Coercive	coax, goad, prod, influence, motivate, inspire
Consensus-oriented	“get everyone on board”
Doing-oriented	“Make it happen.”, “Are we on track?”
Reduces variability	“Do it this way.”
Thinkers do most of the talking	Doers listen and do

# Leading with Language: Where Our Leadership Language Comes From

Industrial Age Leadership Language	Modern Age Leadership Language
Coercive	Collaborative
Consensus-oriented	Commitment-oriented
Doing-oriented	Reflection-oriented
Reduces variability	Promotes variability
Thinkers do most of the talking	Even share of voice

# Leading with Language: Where Our Leadership Language Comes From

Doing	Thinking
Avoid variability	Embrace variability
Prove	Improve
Do	Decide
Repetitious	Dissimilar
Blue Collar	White Collar
Physical	Cognitive
Individual	Team
Production	Reflection
Conformity	Diversity
Compliant	Creative
Narrow focus	Broad focus
Steep hierarchy	Narrow hierarchy

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

## The Good Question Test

Is my question:

1. Courting a variety of viewpoints
2. Curious, not compelling
3. Seeking a balanced share of voice

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

Strategy 1: Ask a single, clear question

“What does X see that we don’t?”

“How do you see it?”

Outdated industrial age strategy: Question stacking



# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

## Strategy 2: Scaffold questions

Gather observations before examining them.

“What do you see?” then “What should we do?”

Pause > rewind > fast-forward

“Where are we?” > “How did we get here?” > “What should we do?”

**Outdated industrial age strategy**: Aggressive questioning (e.g. leading with “What should we do?”)

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

Strategy 3: Ask questions that assume the other person might be right.

“Tell me more about that.”

“How does \_\_\_\_\_ affect \_\_\_\_\_?”

Outdated industrial age strategy: Leading questions (e.g. “Have you thought about \_\_\_\_\_?”)

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

Strategy 4: Ask “how” and “what” questions, which leave more space for others to answer.

“What is behind your decision?”

“How do you see the issue?”

Outdated industrial age strategy: Why questions, which tend to prompt defensiveness (e.g. “Why would you want to do that?”)

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

Strategy 5: Ask probabilistic questions.

“How likely is \_\_\_\_\_ to be true?”

“How ready are we?”

“How enthusiastic are you about this plan?”

**Outdated industrial age strategy**: Binary questions (e.g. “Is \_\_\_\_\_ true?”, “Are we ready?”, “Are you on board?”)

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

Strategy 6: Prompt for challenging information.

“What am I missing?”

“What could we do better?”

“What would you like to hear more about?”

**Outdated industrial age strategy**: Self-affirming questions (e.g. “Does that make sense?”, “Everything good with \_\_\_\_\_?”)

# Leading with Language: Asking Questions

Modern Leadership Strategies	Industrial Age Strategies
Ask a single, clear question	Question stacking
Scaffold questions	Aggressive questioning
Ask questions that assume the other person might be right	Leading questions
Ask “how” and “what” questions	“Why” questions
Ask probabilistic questions	Binary questions
Prompt for challenging information	Self-affirming questions



# Leading with Language: Promoting Variability

Why variability?

1. Anchoring bias – We tend to over-rely on an initial piece of information when making decisions
2. Overconfidence bias – The brain tends to believe we'll succeed at whatever we do
3. Stress – Time pressure or the desire to prove ourselves drive us to find an answer quickly

source: Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*

# Leading with Language: Promoting Variability

## Why variability?

The wisdom of crowds - In 1907, Sir Francis Galton asked 787 English villagers to guess the weight of an ox. None of them got the right answer, but when Galton averaged their guesses, he arrived at a near perfect estimate. He repeated this experiment several times. Each time, only a handful of people were able to guess more accurately than the collective average of the group.



source: James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*

# Leading with Language: Promoting Variability

*“Since all innovation starts as an outlier thought, driving consensus is bound to suppress innovation.”*

Leadership is Language, 126

## Leadership principle 1: Promote variability to

- (A) Mitigate biases from overconfidence, stress, and overreliance on specific pieces of information.
- (B) Harness the collective wisdom of a group
- (C) Expand opportunities for innovation

# Leading with Language: Promoting Variability

Underlying principle: Your language should open space for a range of ideas.

1. Vote first, then discuss
2. Use a scale (probabilistic questions)

“On a scale from 1 to 99, how enthusiastic are you about the idea we’re proposing?”

“What do you think we should do next? Write your answer down on the index card in front of you.”

# Leading with Language: Promoting Variability

Underlying principle: Your language should open space for a range of ideas.

## 3. Prompt for dissent

We seem to be coalescing on view X. I'd like to flip it and assume view X is a bad thing, what would be the case for that?

Now that Sam has presented their case, I'd like to invite someone to challenge that position.

## 4. Give information, not instructions

Instead of “do X” say “I see A,” “I’m going to B,” or “the situation is Z.”

# Leading with Language: Promoting Variability

Exercise 1: Think of a real-life decision on which sought input from others. Write a question you might ask in that situation to make space for a variety of viewpoints. Please type your answer in the chat.



# Leading with Language: Changing Culture

The structure of behavior

A = Antecedent. What happened before the behavior.

B = The behavior itself.

C = Consequence. What happens after the behavior.

Only consequences affect long-term behavior change.

Immediate, positive, and certain rewards are most powerful for establishing and maintaining a behavior.

source: Aubrey Daniels, *Bringing Out the Best in People*

# Leading with Language: Changing Culture

Leadership principle 2: How we respond after the fact has the biggest impact on establishing and maintaining behavior.

## 1. Observe. Don't judge.

“I see . . .”, “I noticed . . .”, “It looks like . . .”

“I see you’ve organized your presentation into three sections. I’ve got your ideas much clearer in my head now.”

# Leading with Language: Changing Culture

Leadership principle 2: How we respond after the fact has the biggest impact on establishing and maintaining behavior.

## 2. Reflect on the behavior, not the outcome.

“Tell me the key decisions you needed to make.”

“How did you come up with that idea?”

“What were some of the challenges you had to overcome?”

“What were some of the inspirations you drew on when working on this project?”

# Leading with Language: Changing Culture

Exercise 2: Think of a time you offered praise to another person. Revise your response by (a) making an observation about what the person did, and (b) asking a follow-up question that prompts them to reflect on what they did.

# Leading with Language: Managing Emotions

Emotional needs of human beings:

1. Competence – The feeling on mastery
2. Relatedness – The sense of connecting with other human beings
3. Autonomy – The sense of being in control of the things that matter in one's life.

Deci and Ryan argue that these elements are fundamental to intrinsic motivation

source: Edward Deci & Richard Ryan, “Self determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being”

# Leading with Language: Managing Emotions

ETH Zurich Study:

1751 airline cockpit & crew members.

Asked to reflect on a situation where they did not speak up about a safety-relevant issue

Findings:

77% of cases where a captain didn't speak up to a subordinate cited relatedness (i.e. preserving a friendly relationship)

33% of first officers and 51% of flight attendants said they didn't speak up because of autonomy (i.e. the belief that they wouldn't be listened to.)

source: Bienefeld & Grote, "Silence that may kill"



# Leading with Language: Managing Emotions

Leadership principle 3: Manage emotions with language that is forward-, outward-, process-, and excellence-focused.

## 1. Forward-focused (rather than backward-looking)

“What should we continue doing next time?”

“If you could go back in time, what would you tell yourself?”

## 2. Outward-focused (rather than inward-focused)

“If someone were to take over the project, what would you say to them to help make it more successful?”

“What changes would [outside stakeholder] want us to make here?”

# Leading with Language: Managing Emotions

Leadership principle 3: Manage emotions with language that is forward-, outward-, process-, and excellence-focused.

## 3. Process-focused (not person-focused)

“Thinking about the work itself, what do we think could be improved?”

“What improvements could we make to the process?”

## 4. Excellence-focused (not error-focused)

“What do we want the outcome to be?”

“What impact do we want to make?”

# Leading with Language: Managing Emotions

Exercise 3: Think of a time when you wanted a colleague to take more initiative on a project. What might you say to them about the project to affirm their feeling of competence, relatedness, and/or autonomy?

# Leading with Language: Flattening the Power Gradient

“The rule of power gradients is that the steeper the gradient, the more difficult it is for information—think, truth—to flow upward. Amy Edmonson of the Harvard Business School did research based on surgical teams adopting new technology and showed that teams with flatter gradients among surgeons, nurses, and other attendants had more back-and-forth communication, better error correction, and more learning. This led to a more successful implementation of the new technology than teams that retained a traditional hierarchy had.” (Marquet 244)

Amy Edmonson, “Managing the risk of learning”

# Leading with Language: Flattening the Power Gradient

Leadership principle 4: The steeper the power gradient, the more difficult it is for information to flow upward.

1. Use “we” (rather than “I” or “you”)

“I need you to make a decision” vs “We need to decide about this.”

2. Admit you don’t know

“I don’t have much experience with this.”

“I’m only 60% sure about this.”

“Given how little we know, this seems like the best bet. But let’s reassess in a few days.”

# Leading with Language: Flattening the Power Gradient

Leadership principle 4: The steeper the power gradient, the more difficult it is for information to flow upward.

3. Focus on what others can contribute (rather than your own experience)

“Your fresh eyes will be valuable on this.”

“Just because we’ve been doing this a long time doesn't mean we can’t improve it”

4. Observe, don’t Judge

“You wrote that report poorly” (judging the person)

“The report needs to be written better” (judging the work)

“I noticed three typos on the first page of the report” (observation)

# Leading with Language: Flattening the Power Gradient

Exercise 4: Think of a time when your authority may have influenced how willing a colleague was to share their point of view. What might you say to communicate that their perspective is valued.

# Leading with Language: Summary

Strive to use language that

1. Promotes variability, to reduce bias and harness the wisdom of crowds
2. Observes behavior instead of judging it
3. Manages emotions by being forward-, outward-, process-, and excellence-focused
4. Flattens the power gradient, to make it easier for information to flow upward



# Being Heard: Cutting through the Noise

1. Concision
2. Directness
3. Frontloading information

# Being Heard: Concision

Why be concise?

Information feels more forceful when presented in fewer words. Put differently, the forcefulness of information dissipates as more words are used to express it. The additional words can also obscure your point.

A general strategy for writing concisely

Read each paragraph and sentence, asking yourself: “If I deleted this, what would be lost?” or “What work is this doing for my argument?”

# Being Heard: Concision

Eight revision techniques:

1. Delete words that mean little or nothing. (*kind of, really, actually, in order to . . .*)
2. Delete words that repeat the meaning of other words. (*true and accurate, each and every, first and foremost . . .*)
3. Delete words implied by other words. (*terrible tragedy, final outcome, period of time, accurate manner . . .*)
4. Replace a phrase with a word. (*in the event that/ if, are in a position to/ can, an increase in the number of/ more . . .*)
5. Change negatives to affirmatives. (*not different/ similar, not often/ rarely, not allow/ prevent . . .*)
6. Delete useless adjectives and adverbs. (*very, absolutely, interesting . . .*)
7. Replace words with punctuation. (*“for example,” “that is,” “therefore” &c. can be replaced with a colon; a semicolon can replace “and” between two independent clauses*)
8. Negate with verbs instead of with *not* (“people do not see . . .”/“people miss . . .”; “scholars have failed to look into . . .”/“scholars have overlooked . . .”)

# Being Heard: Directness

Replace impersonal description with pronouns (“we” and “you”)

No Pronouns (third-person)	Pronouns (first & second person)
Avaya is a recognized innovator and leading global provider of solutions for customer and team engagement . . . Avaya Engagement solutions bring people together with the right information at the right time in the right context, helping to enable a higher level of engagement between customers, teams, employees, and partners to improve efficiency and quickly address critical business challenges. Designed to be highly scalable, reliable, secure and flexible, these solutions help reduce costs and simplify management while providing a platform for next-generation engagement and collaboration.	At Avaya, <b>we</b> provide communication and networking technologies to businesses and government groups of all sizes. <b>We</b> make teams and partnerships more efficient. <b>Our</b> solutions help <b>you</b> cut costs and simplify management.

source: Bernioff, *Writing Without Bullshit*, 88–89

# Being Heard: Frontloading Information

Put the main point at the beginning of a communication (first sentence, subject line of an email, title, &c.).

The most important point may be a piece of information, but it could also be a challenge, a question, something important at stake, &c.

Frontloading information also aids comprehension. Studies show that when the main idea is presented at the beginning of a piece of writing readers retain more of the subsequent information than they do when that idea is presented at the end.

# Being Clear: Character & Action

**Action** – The thing that happens in a sentence

**Character** – The thing that carries out the action in a sentence

Clarity Principle 1: Sentences feel clearest when (a) the character is the subject of the sentence and (b) the action is expressed by the verb

# Being Clear: Character & Action

Sentences are clearest when (a) the character is the subject of the sentence and (b) the action is expressed by the verb.

*Governmental intervention in fast-changing technologies has led to the distortion of market evolution and interference in new product development.*

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*Governmental intervention in fast-changing technologies has led to the distortion of market evolution and interference in new product development.*

*When a government intervenes in fast-changing technologies, it distorts how markets evolve or interferes with their ability to develop new products*

# Being Clear: “To Be” Verbs

**“to be” verbs:** am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being

Clarity Principle 2: Replace “to be” verbs with active verbs wherever possible

# Being Clear: “To Be” Verbs

Replace “to be” verbs with active verbs wherever possible.

My sister **is** loud when she **is** telling her children to do their homework.

My sister **bellows** when telling her children to do their homework.

The restaurant’s food **is** excellent.

The restaurant **serves** excellent food.

# Being Clear: Nominalizations

**Nominalization:** a verb that has been turned into a noun using a suffix (-ment, -tion, -ence, -ing).

Clarity principle 3: Replace nominalizations with active verbs wherever possible

# Being Clear: Nominalizations

Replace nominalizations with active verbs wherever possible.

*Governmental **intervention** in fast-changing technologies has led to the **distortion** of market **evolution** and **interference** in new product **development**.*

# Being Clear: Nominalizations

Replace nominalizations with active verbs wherever possible.

*Governmental **intervention** in fast-changing technologies has led to the **distortion** of market **evolution** and **interference** in new product **development**.*

*When a government **intervenes** in fast-changing technologies, it **distorts** how markets **evolve** or **interferes** with their ability to **develop** new products*

# Being Clear: Adjectives and Adverbs

Clarity principle 4: Limit your use of adjectives and adverbs.

- *Actions and details—verbs and nouns—contain the most information and tend to feel most vivid*
- *Be especially suspicious of vague qualifiers (generally, potentially, very) and modifiers whose primary purpose is to intensify (devastating loss, ran quickly)*

# Being Clear: Old to New Style

**Old information:** information that is familiar to readers

**New information:** information readers cannot predict

Clarity principle 5: Readers are best able to follow your ideas when you begin your sentences with old information before moving to new information



# Being Clear: Old to New Style

Readers are best able to follow your ideas when you begin your sentences with old information before moving to new information

Some astonishing questions about the nature of the universe have been raised by scientists studying black holes in space. The collapse of a dead star into a point perhaps no larger than a marble creates a black hole. The fabric of space is changed in puzzling ways when so much matter is compressed into so little volume.

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Source: *Style*, 36-39

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# Being Clear: Five Principles

1. Sentences feel clearest when (a) the character is the subject of the sentence and (b) the action is expressed by the verb

As you edit: Underline the action in each sentence, then check to see if (a) the action is expressed in the verb and (b) the character performing the action is the subject of the sentence.

2. Replace “to be” verbs with active verbs wherever possible
3. Replace nominalizations with active verbs wherever possible
4. Limit your use of adjectives and adverbs
5. Structure sentences to move from old information to new information

## Sources

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