HOW TO WRITE CLEARLY

POLITECNICO DI TORINO

InnHF

Thanks to

Ufficio Relazioni con i media

This letter is longer than usual, because I hadn't enough time to do it shorter.
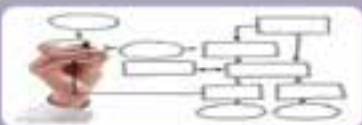
Blaise Pascal

How to write clearly

Avoid misunderstandings

Summarize

Choose simple and common words

Organize the structure

Choose the style

BE CLEAR: consider your audience as FOOLS!

1. Don't take anything for granted. If you think that something could be unclear, please explain it!

2. First of all, things shall be clear for you:
what is the KEY CONCEPT?
to whom am I writing?

Nobody ever complained about a web-site too much simple and easy to use!

Steve Krug
DON'T MAKE ME THINK
A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability
FOREWORD BY ROGER BLACK

"Less is more": something that is not adding, deprives!

Impatient reader, little spaces, etc.

Max. reader's attention: 8/10 lines for a paper, 3/5 lines on Internet

Use indexes, titles, paragraphs, keywords, etc.

Clear and short paragraphs

Only 1 Key-concept for each paragraph

Paragraph is the measurment

Choose simple and common words

Subject - verb - object

Short sentences

No asides or subordinate clauses

Use key-words, even repeated

Choose common words (not banal)

If possible, avoid technical terms, or explain them

Choose verbs instead of nouns

Do not use abbreviations, or explain them

Do not use passive sentences

Do an adequate use of bold charachters and underlining

Example: Facebook post

Group psychomotor activity can give the children a useful tool to control aggressiveness and improve their relationships with others, and help to develop problem solving strategies.

It could be:

Your child is always fighting with his/her playmates? He/she is not good in making friends? Group activities such as coral singing, team sports, painting can help him/her to create relationships in a correct way, and overcome the difficulties!
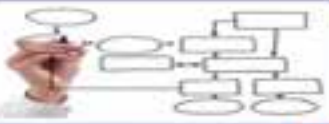
BLOT: Bottom line on the top

BLOB: Bottom line on the bottom

BLIM: Bottom line in the middle

Choose the style

Find the style most suitable for the media and the type of audience

Use a rythm able to keep the attention alive

Form follows content..

Avoid commonplaces

Reduce the difference between oral and written languages

Choose the style : visual structure

General overlook of the text

Lenght and aspect of the paragraphs

Choice of the format and fonts

Bold and coloured words

Use tricks of the web on the paper

How to be attractive

Use hooks: questions; numbers; style and rythm alterations; rethorical and publicty speech

Use meaningful and attractive titles
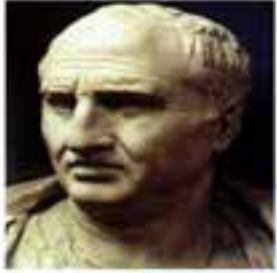
Use examples

Pay attention to the placement of the facts and graphical elements

Write less, but in a more interesting way!

Writing process

De inventione - Cicerone

- *Inventio*
- *Dispositio*
- *Elocutio*
- *Memoria*
- *Pronuntiatio*

Revision Business Writers' Handbook

- *Preparation*
- *Research*
- *Organization*
- *Writing the draft*
- *Revision*

5W RULE

Who?
What?
Where?
When?
Why?

+ How

Principles of the communication

QUANTITY: give the right quantity of information

- Give all the information required, and no more.

QUALITY: pay attention to the truth

- Don't tell something which is not proved, or fake.

RELATION: be pertinent

MODE: be clear

- Don't use obscure expressions
- Don't be ambiguous
- Be brief
- Be ordered in the exposition

Paul Grice

Writing steps

THINK
pre-writing - PLAN

WRITE
free-writing - DRAFT

REVISE
re-writing - EDIT

Clustering: quantitative phase

Write the key word in the middle of a paper

Draw a circle around the word

Meditate on, thinking through free connections

Write down the thoughts (one or more words)

Draw a circle around each word, and a line between a word and the one which generated it

Clustering: qualitative phase

Organize the thoughts

The content of each circle will become a paragraph or a chapter of what we are going to write

With clustering technique, it is possible to translate the non-sequentiality of the creative thinking into the sequentiality of writing.

Clustering: qualitative phase

incipit

Choose the content which is most important, that the reader shall remind. Sign it with a "B": Beginning

Choose the second important content, and sign it with an "E": it will be the end.

Many researches demonstrated that readers remind better the beginning and the end sections.

Assign a number to all the other circles, on the basis of the criteria more convenient for the subject.

Criteria to organize the circles

- ✓ **From general to specific**
- ✓ **From specific to general**

- ✓ **From causes to effects**
- ✓ **From effects to causes**

- ✓ **Chronological order**

- ✓ **Increasing importance**
- ✓ **Decreasing importance**

- ✓ **Logical order**
- ✓ **Spatial order**

Clustering: example

Free-writing
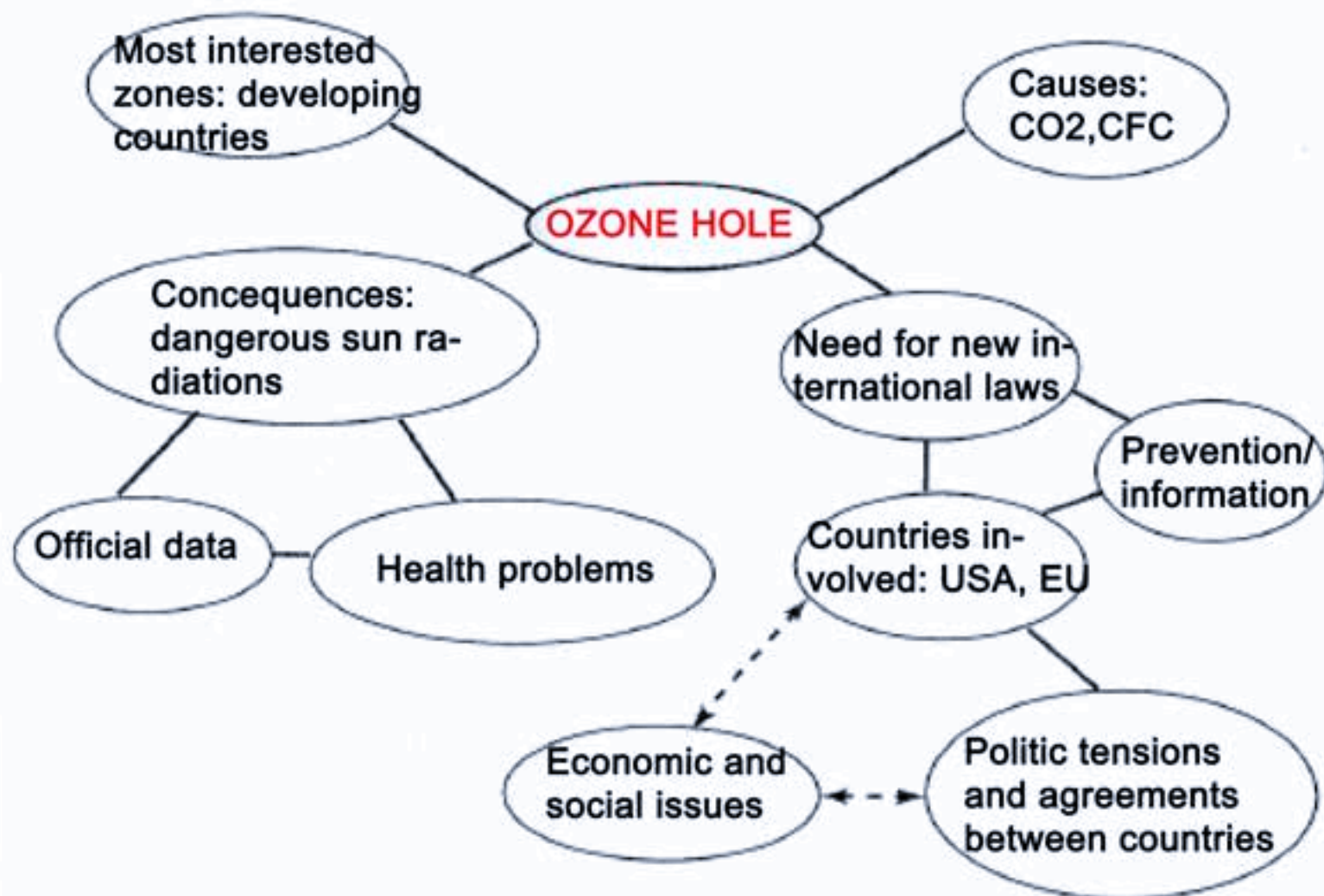
Start writing: don't stop, and don't worry about grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes

Write everything you think about each point of the cluster, with a max. time for each thought (i.e. from 5 to 15 minutes)
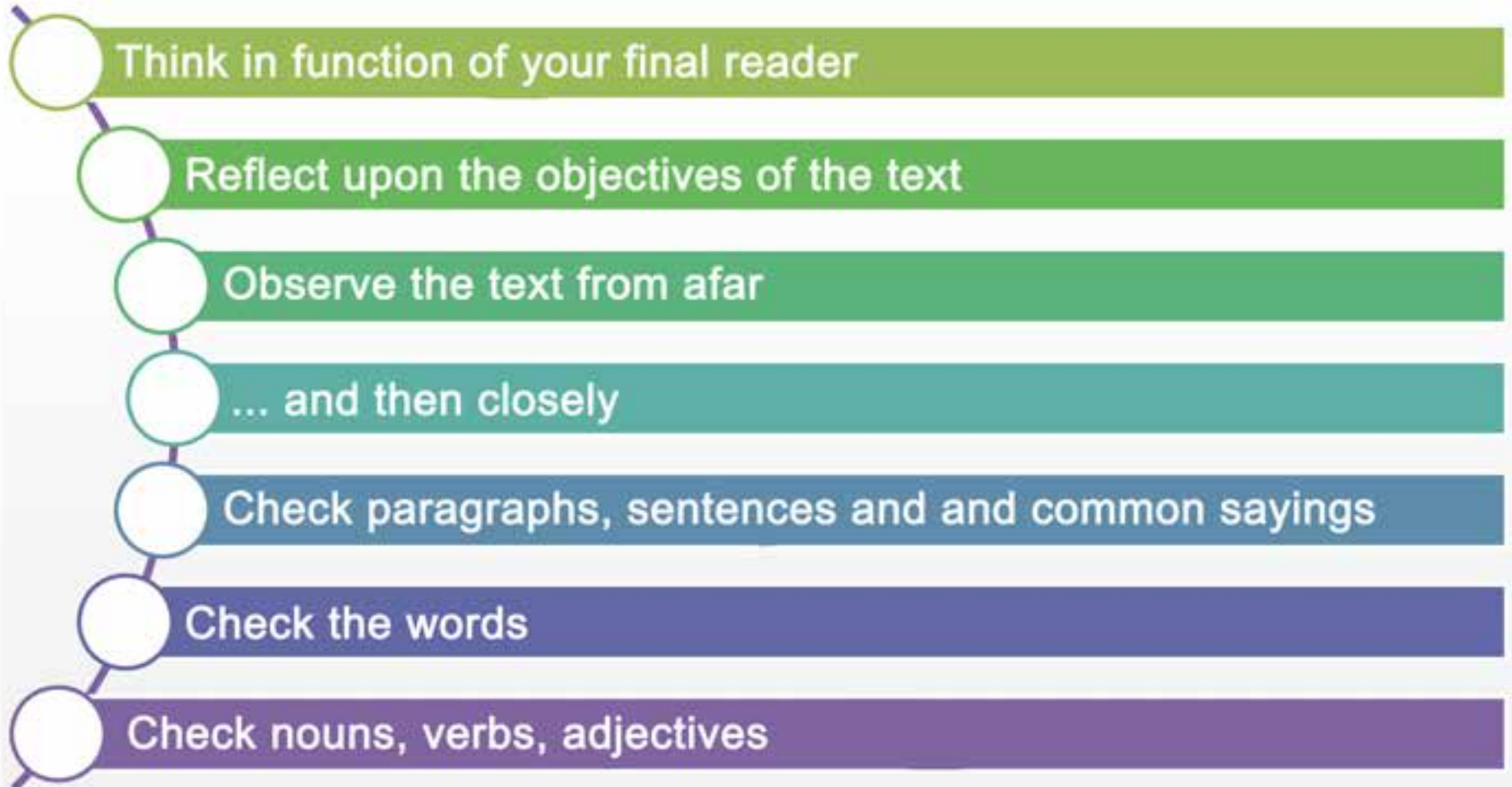
It is not necessary starting from the first point of the cluster

In order to increase creativity, it is necessary to reduce rules, not to add them

✓ **Revising words and sentences is simpler when they are already on the paper, than when they are only in our mind!**

✓ **An hard revision of the text (contents, structure) doesn't mean we are not good at writing!**

Systematic re-writing

- Think in function of your final reader
- Reflect upon the objectives of the text
- Observe the text from afar
- ... and then closely
- Check paragraphs, sentences and and common sayings
- Check the words
- Check nouns, verbs, adjectives

Structure of the text - organization
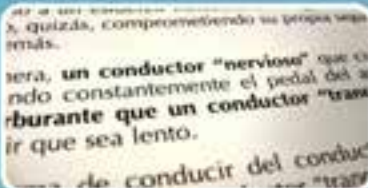
Titolo

Strategic title

Incipit = overturned pyramid

- The five W should stay in the first paragraph
- The structure is the contrary of that used in a scientific paper

Paragraphs

Visual anchors

- Bold characters, paragraphs, etc.

Structure of the text - contents

Problem / issue

Solution

Conclusion with perpectives

How to captivate the reader

Tell a story: our mind is always searching for a sense, a common thread

Recurring elements:
✓ Characters
✓ Reason for action
✓ Location
✓ Time period
✓ Conclusion

Don't be self-referential

Listen to your audience

Reader focused-writing

How to give the reader a leading role

Satisfy his/her needs:

- ✓ Need of consent
- ✓ Mind stimulation
- ✓ Knowledge increase

Writing for the web

- Write pertinent contents: reader want information
- Conclusions in the beginning
- 1 idea for each paragraph
- Use action words. Explain what to do, don't use passive tenses
- Mind the visual appearance: lists instead of paragraphs!
- Lists: max. 5-7 words
- Write short sentences
- Include internal sub-paragraphs: the text becomes more readable
- Insert links
- Use images!

Being complete, coherent and fast is the objective of a web writer. Ability to perform synthesis is the most important thing!

How to write a press release

Press release: general summarizing text
+ in-depth analysis sheets

Attractive title and subtitle

Precise indication of the data

Lenght: 1 page

Press office contacts well highlighted

Writing for social networks

Use few words: express one concept at a time

Speak directly to the reader

Try to involve the reader

Use question mark

Use a simple language

Use multimedia contents

Write out of working hours

POLITECNICO
DI TORINO

European commission: suggestions

1. Think before writing
2. Mind the reader: try to be direct and interesting
3. Pay attention to the structure of your document
4. Simplicity + conciseness = clarity
5. Be coherent: check the logic of each sentence
6. Avoid redundant nouns and adjectives
7. Be pragmatic
8. Choose the active form of the verbs
9. Pay attention to abbreviations
10. Check and revise