

# Writing for a Legislative Audience

Jessica Hoffman, NCSL



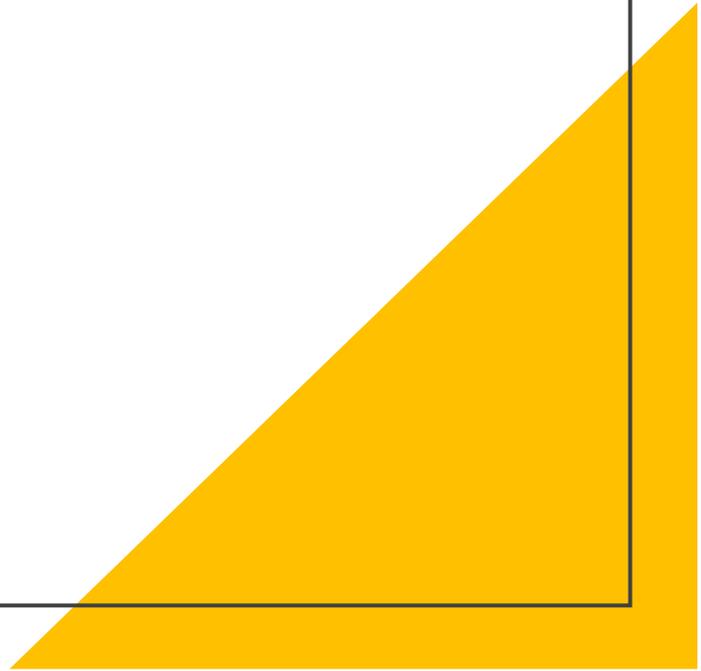
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Part I – MACRO: *Form Follows Function*

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Part II – MICRO: *Less is More*

OVERVIEW



What is your  
**biggest pet peeve?**

Share **3 reasons why**  
you find it irritating.

**Use full sentences.  
No bullet points or lists.**

**3 minutes**



PART I:  
Form  
Follows  
Function



Form  
Follows  
Function

Appearance Reflects  
the Purpose





# Form Follows Function

Writing is Designed to Fit the Specific Needs of Your Audience

Please respond...

Track Email

Helvetica 12 B I U

To: tom@gman.com

Cc:

Bcc:

Subject: Please respond...

From: Jonathan DeVore <jonathandevore1@me.com>

Signature: None

Hi Tom,

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

I need say nothing here, on the first head, because nothing can show better than my history whether that prediction was verified or falsified by the result. On the second branch of the question, I will only remark, that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while I was still a baby, I have not come into it yet. But I do not at all complain of having been kept out of this property; and if anybody else should be in the present enjoyment of it, he is heartily welcome to keep it.

I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know; all I know is, that there was but one solitary bidding, and that was from an attorney connected with the bill-broking business, who offered two pounds in cash, and the balance in sherry, but declined to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher bargain. Consequently the advertisement was withdrawn at a dead loss - for as to sherry, my poor dear mother's own sherry was in the market then - and ten years afterwards, the caul was put up in a raffle down in our part of the country, to fifty members at half-a-crown a head, the winner to spend five shillings. I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way. The caul was won, I recollect, by an old lady with a hand-basket, who, very reluctantly, produced from it the stipulated five shillings, all in halfpence, and twopence halfpenny short - as it took an immense time and a great waste of arithmetic, to endeavour without any effect to prove to her. It is a fact which will be long remembered as remarkable down there, that she was never drowned, but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two. I have understood that it was, to the last, her proudest boast, that she never had been on the water in her life, except upon a bridge; and that over her tea (to which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go 'meandering' about the world. It was in vain to represent to her that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this objectionable practice. She always returned, with greater emphasis and with an instinctive knowledge of the strength of her objection, 'Let us have no meandering.'

Not to meander myself, at present, I will go back to my birth.

I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or 'there by', as they say in Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were - almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes - bolted and locked against it.

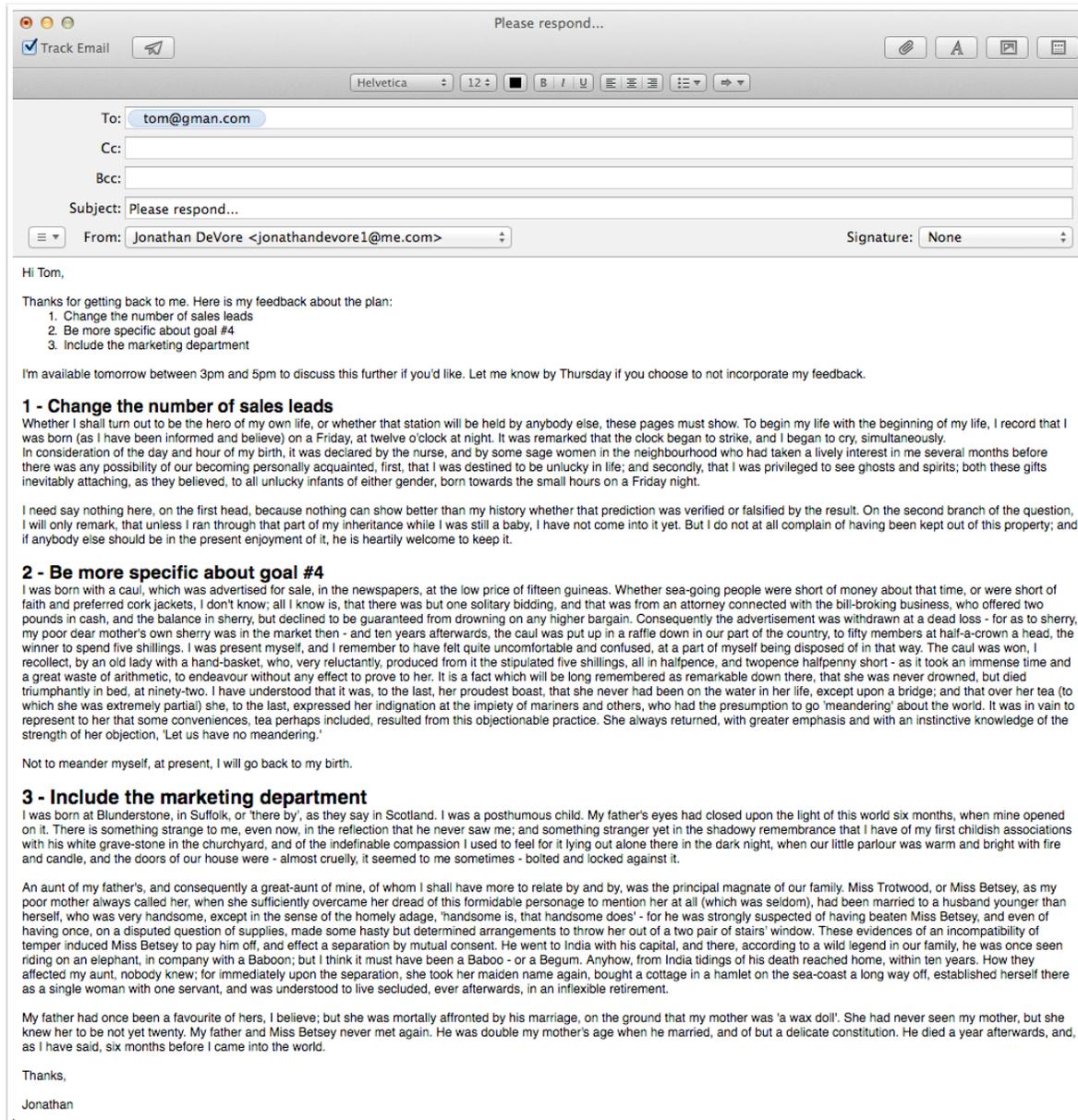
An aunt of my father's, and consequently a great-aunt of mine, of whom I shall have more to relate by and by, was the principal magnate of our family. Miss Trotwood, or Miss Betsey, as my poor mother always called her, when she sufficiently overcame her dread of this formidable personage to mention her at all (which was seldom), had been married to a husband younger than herself, who was very handsome, except in the sense of the homely adage, 'handsome is, that handsome does' - for he was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having once, on a disputed question of supplies, made some hasty but determined arrangements to throw her out of a two pair of stairs' window. These evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him off, and effect a separation by mutual consent. He went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon; but I think it must have been a Baboo - or a Begum. Anyhow, from India tidings of his death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody knew; for immediately upon the separation, she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off, established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and was understood to live secluded, ever afterwards, in an inflexible retirement.

My father had once been a favourite of hers, I believe; but she was mortally affronted by his marriage, on the ground that my mother was 'a wax doll'. She had never seen my mother, but she knew her to be not yet twenty. My father and Miss Betsey never met again. He was double my mother's age when he married, and of but a delicate constitution. He died a year afterwards, and, as I have said, six months before I came into the world.

Thanks,

Jonathan







# Barriers



**Extremely Busy**

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Often Task Switching

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# Reluctant Readers

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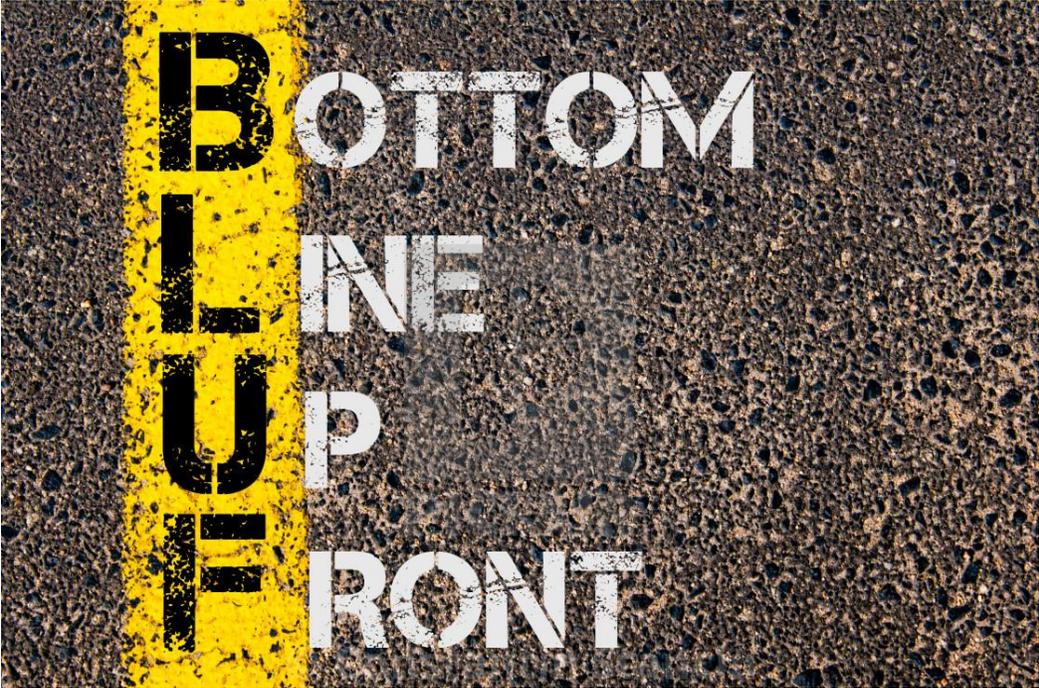




# Form Follows Function

## STRATEGIES

1. B.L.U.F.
2. Organizational Structure
3. Chunked Text
4. Clear, Specific Headings
5. Digestible Data



## Bottom Line Up Front

### **Executive Problem Statement:**

Due to recent acquisitions, new product offerings, and existing due diligence burdens from banking partners, ACME Company must hire an additional resource to help support the security and compliance program. The resource will help support new requirements from banking partner requirements (e.g., maintain current revenues). Without proper resources ACME's ability to maintain security certifications and respond to customer audit requests are at significant risk.

### **Ask from Leadership:**

Approval to hire a security analyst within the next 30 days.

### **Expected Benefits:**

- 4-10x return on investment (see slide 3)
- Enable sales and banking partner relationship management
- Shorten the sales cycle during the due diligence phase
- Reduce company risk (e.g., security breach, customer relationships, ongoing compliance)

**BLUF Statement**



**The boost to the economy from broad adoption of open-data ecosystems could be as high as 1.5 percent of GDP in 2030 in the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and as much as 4 to 5 percent in India.** Emerging economies stand

to benefit more than advanced ones because they tend to have lower levels of financial inclusion and less financial depth. All market participants benefit, although to varying degrees depending on region. In India, for example, consumers would stand to gain the most from the newfound ability to access appropriate financial services with relative ease. In advanced economies, institutions would stand to gain a relatively larger share of potential economic value from being able to carry out existing processes more efficiently, in a more targeted way, and with less fraud.

**Supporting Information**





**From:** Joe Smith <[JSmith@company.com](mailto:JSmith@company.com)>

**Sent:** Thursday, October 3, 2019 1:01 PM

**To:** Mary Johnson <[BigBoss@company.com](mailto:BigBoss@company.com)>

**Subject:** Contract Changes Necessary for Project X Launch

Mary,



**BLUF: Restrictive contract with Supplier 1 may prevent us from an on-time launch of Project X, so it needs to be changed**

When we executed our supply chain contract with Supplier 1 two years ago, the contract terms were very specific to include only parts within current product lines. Project X will require the addition of completely new parts that are not covered under that contract.

Unless we change the contract, we will need to seek another supplier, which could significantly delay Project X launch due to the contractual

*Use of BLUF to highlight the key point with supporting detail following*

1

**Residents Have a Positive Perception of the City**

85% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live  
74% are satisfied with the overall quality of life in their neighborhood

2

**The City Is Moving in the Right Direction**

Satisfaction ratings have increased or stayed the same in 56 of 97 areas since 2017; significant increases in 15 areas

3

**Durham Rates 19% Above the Average for Other Large Cities in the Overall Quality of City Services**

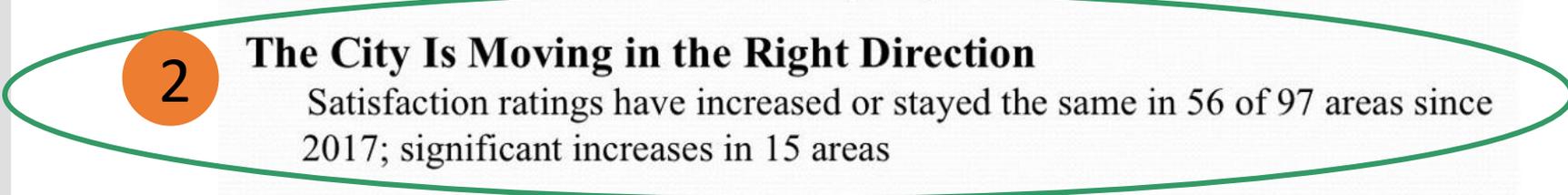
4

**Durham Rates 28% Above the Average for Other Large Cities in Customer Service from City Employees**

5

**Overall Priorities for Improvement Over the Next 2 Years:**

- Public schools
- Maintenance of City Streets
- Police Protection
- Ease of Travel in Durham





TRY IT OUT

Does your first  
sentence give the  
BLUF?



#2  
Organizational  
Structure

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Topic \_\_\_\_\_

P1: Introduction

P2: Subtopic      P3: Subtopic      P4: Subtopic

P5: Conclusion



# SEQUENCE

1

2

3

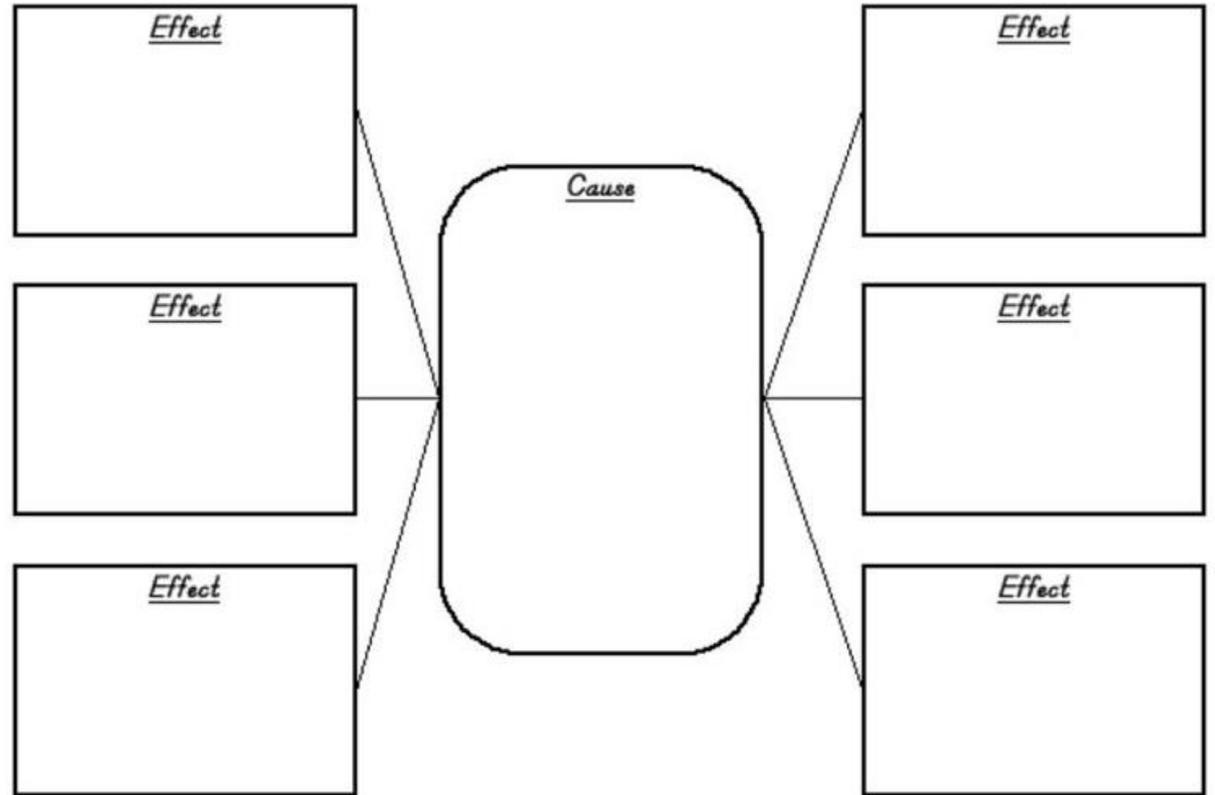
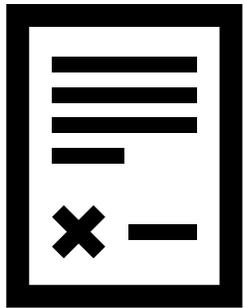
First

Next

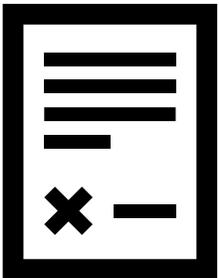
Then

Last

# CAUSE & EFFECT



# COMPARE & CONTRAST



Topic 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic 2: \_\_\_\_\_

**Similarities**  
*(How are they alike)*

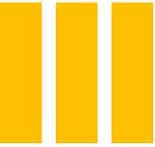
1. _____	4. _____
2. _____	5. _____
3. _____	6. _____

**Differences**  
*(How are they different)*

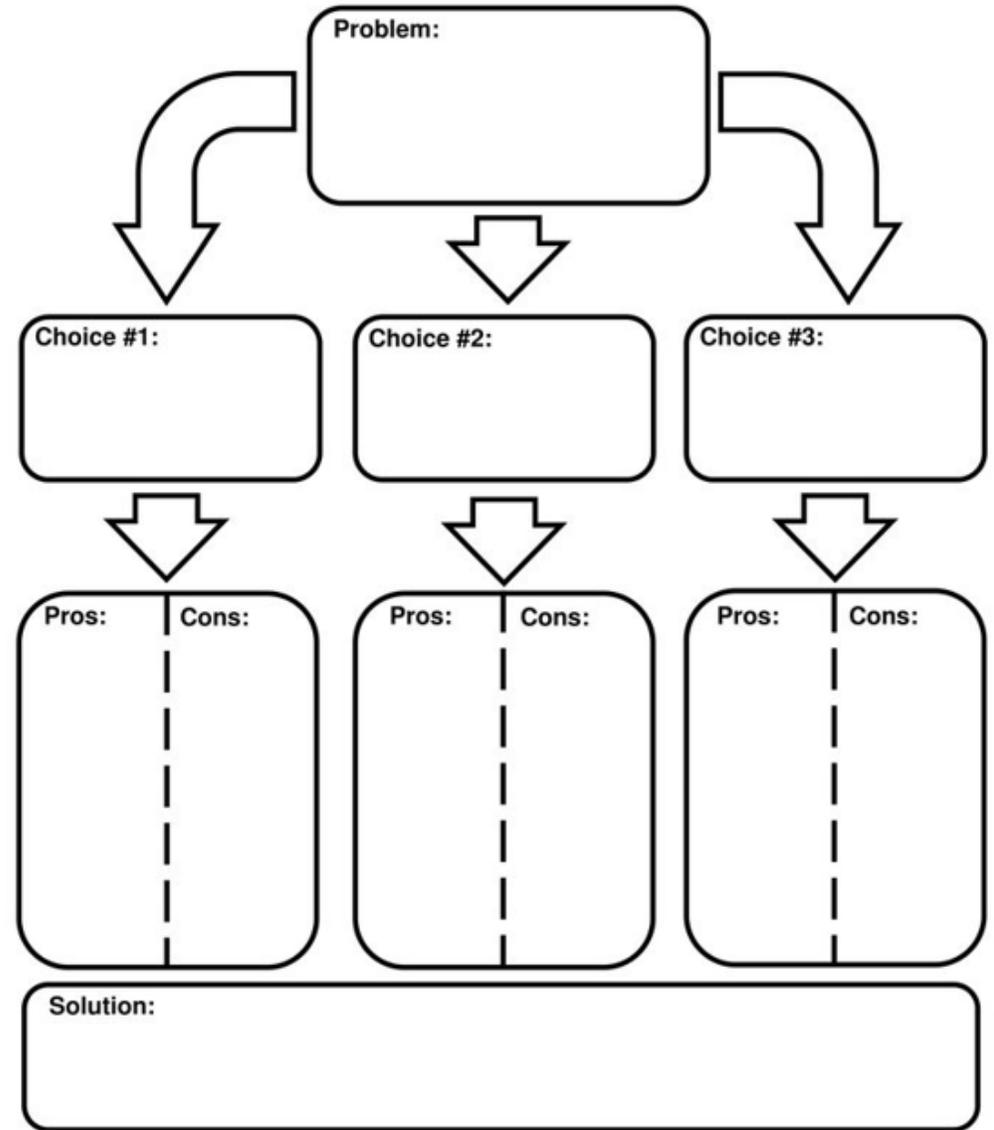
1. _____	<b>Points of Contrast</b>	1. _____
2. _____	1. _____	2. _____
3. _____	2. _____	3. _____
4. _____	3. _____	4. _____
5. _____	4. _____	5. _____

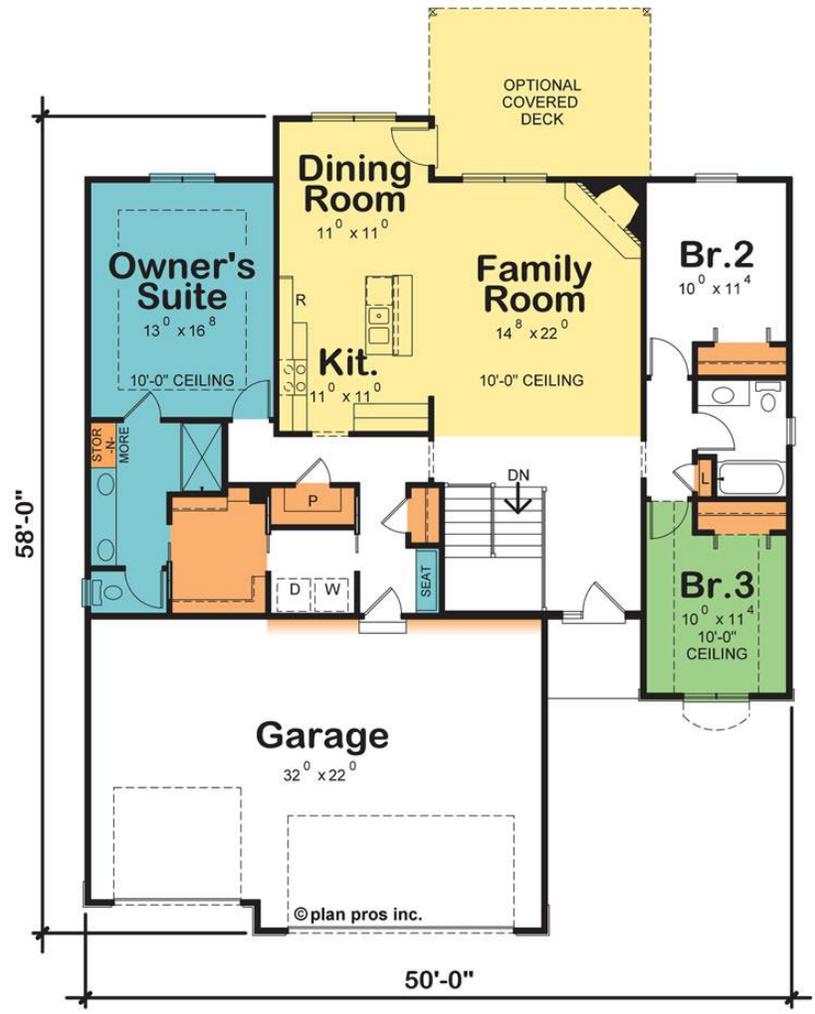
← →

**Conclusion:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

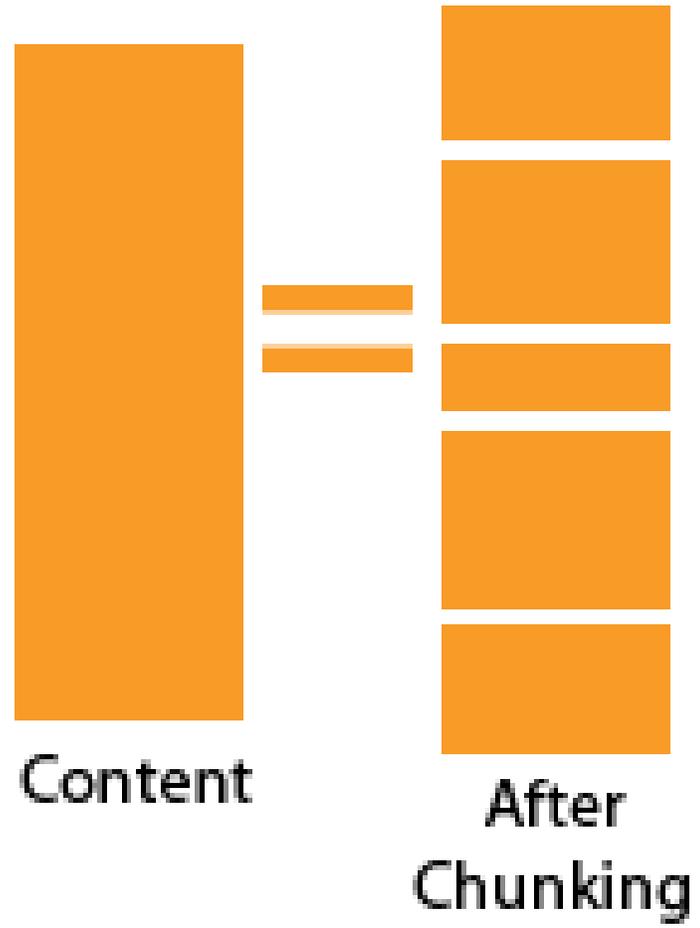


# PROBLEM & SOLUTION





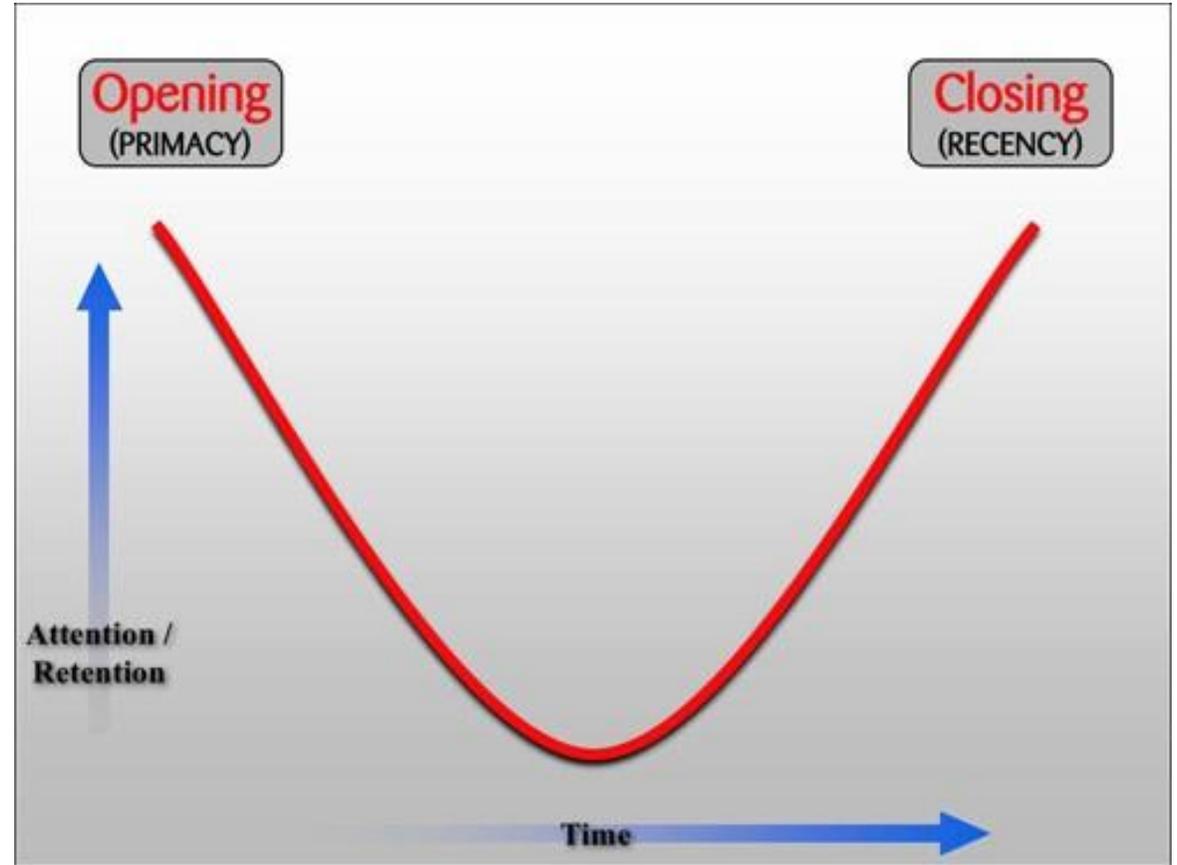
#3  
Chunking  
Text



## Community Policing

“Community policing” is an approach to law enforcement that uses community partnerships and problem-solving techniques to proactively address public safety concerns, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Community policing proponents assert that by building strong relationships, communities and police are better able to respond to and communicate during crisis situations. Rather than a specific set of policies, community-policing is a philosophy that may look different in every locality based on the needs of the police and the people in each jurisdiction. Recent evaluations of community policing practices have occurred at the state and federal level. President Barrack Obama created a Task Force on 21st Century Policing to identify and recommend best practices for “fostering strong, collaborative relationships between local law enforcement and the communities they protect.” In April 2016, Washington (HB 2908) (2016) became the most recent state to initiate a formal review of policing practices. The legislature created the joint legislative task force on the use of deadly force in community policing. The task force is charged with reviewing laws, practices, and training programs regarding deadly force and making recommendations to reduce the number of violent interactions between law enforcement officers and members of the public by December 2016. Also in 2016, the Oregon legislature (SB 5701) appropriated \$959,000 for developing and disseminating research-based community policing skills through the Oregon Center for Policing Excellence. Utah lawmakers similarly empowered (HB 355) the state’s attorney general to establish a training center and provide resources regarding law enforcement use of force. Under the law, the attorney general will provide statewide training and informational materials regarding investigating use of force, tactical disengagement, sanctity and preservation of life and stress management in life threatening situations. Last year, Ohio created a Task Force on Community-Police Relations to explore causes of, and potential solutions to, damaged relationships between police officers and communities. The Task Force released its [final report](#) in May 2015.

# PRIMACY and REGENCY EFFECT



## Community Policing

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*Community policing proponents assert that by building partnerships, communities and police are better able to respond to and combat crime. In a report of policies, community-policing is a philosophy that emphasizes the relationship between the police and the people in each jurisdiction.*

*President Obama's 2011 National Communities Policing Summit highlighted best practices for community policing.*

**TWILIGHT ZONE**

*Community policing is a philosophy that emphasizes the relationship between the police and the people in each jurisdiction. President Obama's 2011 National Communities Policing Summit highlighted best practices for community policing. The U.S. Department of Justice awarded \$95 million in grants for Police Community Partnership Training Centers. The training centers will provide police officers with a variety of training, including de-escalation, tactical disengagement, sanctity of life, and other techniques. Last year, Ohio created a Task Force on Community Policing to study the causes of, and potential solutions to, damaged relationships between police officers and communities. **The Task Force released its final report in May 2015.***

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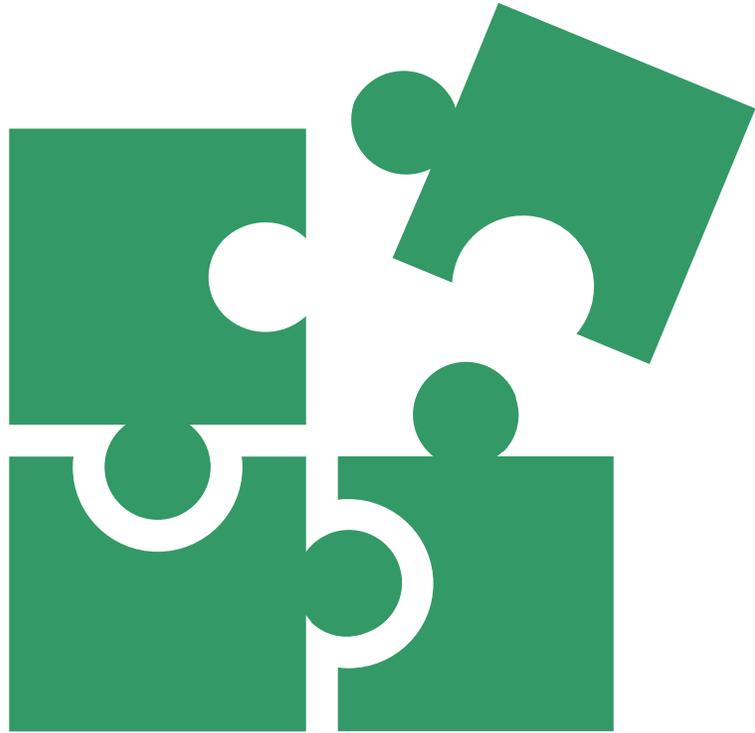
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**“... material separated into  
*meaningful related groups* ...**

**... improves comprehension”**

**National Center on Educational Outcomes**

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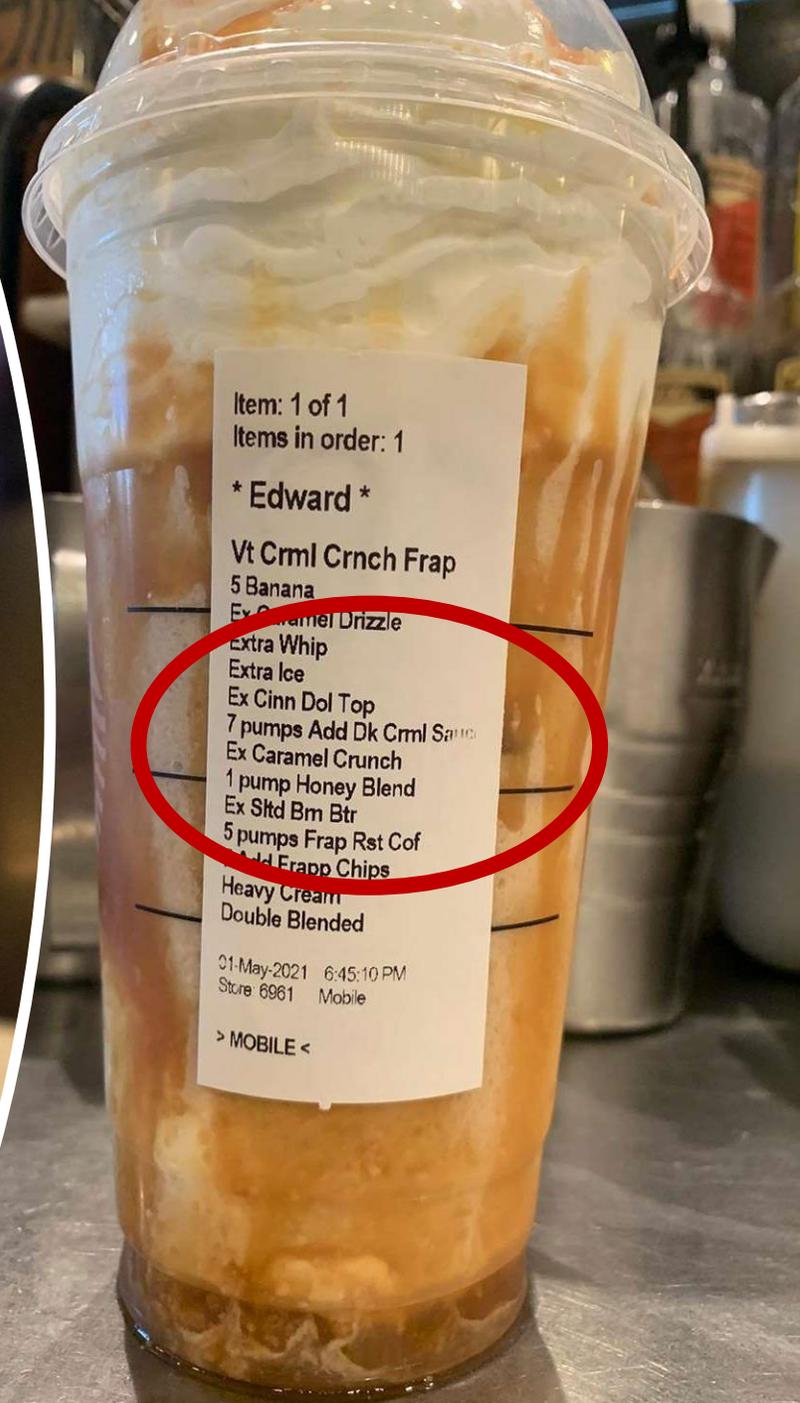
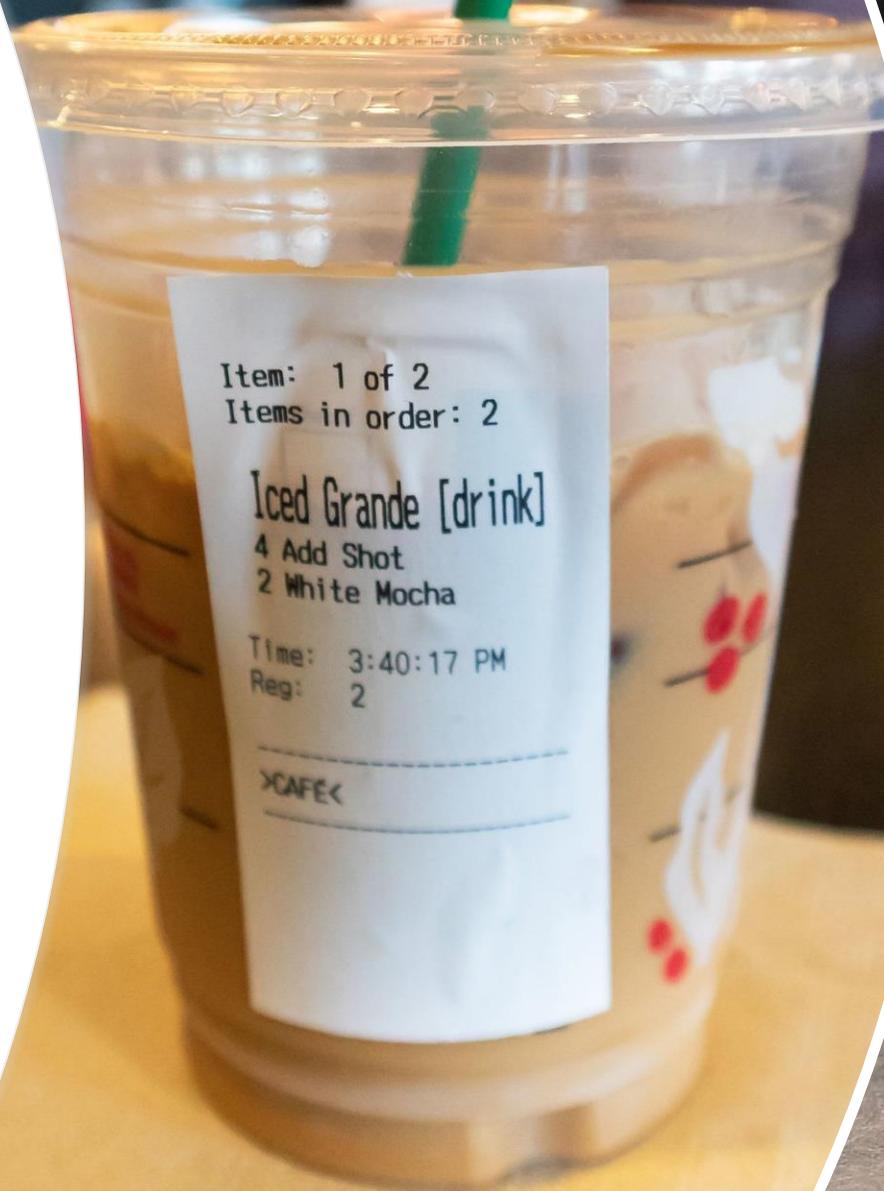
**“...comprehension improves significantly...**

**...when reading material is chunked into *smaller units*.”**

**National Center on Educational Outcomes**

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# PRIMACY and REGENCY EFFECT



# Rule of QUARTERS

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TRY IT OUT

Is your information  
chunked into  
related groups?



#4

Clear &  
Specific  
Headings



# Clear Headings

## Vegetables of the World

Gumbo beet greens corn Soko endive gumbo gourd. Parsley shallot courgette tatsoi pea sprouts fava bean collard greens dandelion okra wakame tomato. Dandelion cucumber earthnut pea peanut Soko zucchini.

### Brassicas

Turnip greens yarrow rice bean rutabaga endive cauliflower sea lettuce kohlrabi amaranth water spinach avocado daikon Napa cabbage asparagus winter purslane kale. Celery potato scallion desert raisin horseradish spinach carrot Soko. Lotus root water spinach fennel kombu maize bamboo shoot green bean Swiss chard seakale pumpkin onion chickpea gram corn pea.

### Tubers

Brussels sprout coriander water chestnut gourd Swiss chard wakame kohlrabi beetroot carrot watercress. Corn amaranth salsify bunya nuts nori adzuki bean chickweed potato bell pepper artichoke.

### Leafy greens

Nori grape silver beet broccoli kombu beet greens fava bean potato quandong celery. Bunya nuts black-eyed pea prairie turnip leek lentil turnip greens parsnip. Sea lettuce water chestnut eggplant winter purslane fennel adzuki bean earthnut pea sierra leone bologi leek Soko chicory celtuce parsley jicama salsify.

Celery quandong Swiss chard chicory earthnut pea potato. Salsify taro catsear garlic gram celery bitterleaf wattle seed collard greens nori. Grape wattle seed kombu beetroot horseradish carrot squash Brussels sprout chard.

Pea horseradish adzuki bean lettuce avocado asparagus okra. Kohlrabi radish okra adzuki bean corn fava bean mustard tigernut jicama green bean celtuce collard greens avocado quandong fennel gumbo black-eyed pea. Grape silver beet watercress potato tigernut corn groundnut. Chickweed okra pea winter purslane coriander yarrow sweet pepper radish garlic Brussels sprout groundnut summer purslane earthnut pea tomato spring onion adzuki bean gourd. Gumbo kakadu plum komatsuna black-eyed pea green bean zucchini gourd winter purslane silver beet rock melon radish asparagus spinach.

### Fungi

Beetroot water spinach okra water chestnut rice bean pea catsear courgette summer purslane. Water spinach arugula pea tatsoi aubergine spring onion bush

Heading 1

Heading 2



Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

Pell Eligibility

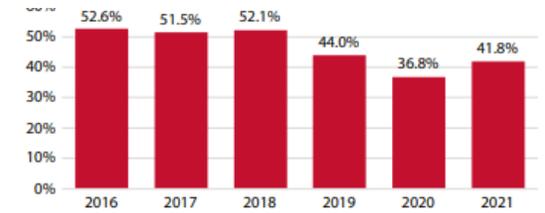
Income

Proxy Measures

**Free or Reduced-Price Lunch:** The primary measure used in this report (students' eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch) was attained through a data matching request through the Utah Data Research Center (see Appendix B for details). However, colleges do not routinely have access to this data for their students. Additionally, the measure was only available for students who attended K-12 schools in state since 2006 so out-of-state students and older students were not included in the measure. This measure will likely improve as time passes and the share of college students who attended school in 2006 or later continues to rise. In this report, free or reduced-price lunch data was available for 62.2% of all students enrolled in a USHE institution in the 2019-2020 school year. Since about 18% of USHE students are out-of-state students, this measure includes an even larger share of in-state students. It is also possible that if this measure was made available to colleges, it could be comparable across institutions and states since the National School Lunch Program is available for K-12 students nationwide. This measure is likely to be highly accurate when measuring whether students come from an economically disadvantaged background since it is based on family income level in relation to the poverty level.

**Pell Eligibility:** Pell eligibility is the most common metric for higher education institutions to measure their economically disadvantaged population. This measure is advantageous because it is made available to institutions at the student-level and is comparable nationwide since it comes from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, this measure also has challenges. Pell eligibility is only available for students who complete a FAFSA. In the 2020–2021 school year, Utah ranked second to last for FAFSA completion with 63% of high school seniors not completing the application.<sup>11</sup> FAFSA completion rates among USHE students has fallen over the last 5 years with only 41.8% of students completing the application in 2021. With more than half of students failing to complete the FAFSA, these students are ineligible for any aid that is based on Pell eligibility and go uncounted when attempting to ascertain the enrollment and success of economically disadvantaged students using this measure.

Beyond measurement, there are reasons to work towards higher FAFSA completion rates. In 2020–2021, Utah students had nearly \$44 million in unclaimed federal aid. Additionally, FAFSA completion has been shown to improve the enrollment



Source: Utah System of Higher Education<sup>15</sup>

rates of economically disadvantaged students. For students in the lowest socioeconomic quintile, FAFSA completion is associated with a 127% increase in immediate college enrollment.<sup>12</sup>

**Income:** Many research studies use income directly from tax records, self-reported measures, or aggregate census or survey-based data from entities like U.S. Census Bureau, federal and state tax commissions, Bureau of Labor Statistics, or Bureau of Economic Analysis. While this measure is useful in exploring the relationship between income and education, it is also not made available to institutions. While it is possible for institutions to ask for self-reported income from their students, students may be hesitant to provide this information and it is challenging to assess whether or not the self-reported data is accurate. It is also difficult to differentiate between a student's personal income and their family-income from childhood (when trying to ascertain whether they come from an economically disadvantaged background), particularly for older students.

**Proxy Measures:** Due to the challenges of using Pell eligibility and the lack of access to free or reduced-price lunch or income data, institutions may choose to rely on proxy measures. Instead of measuring economic disadvantage directly, they use a proxy that correlates with family-income level and that is available to them. Some potential proxy measures include zip code, race/ethnicity, and parent's education level. These measures are correlative, but not direct measures. While these measures could give schools approximations, they face the obvious drawback of not measuring economic disadvantage directly.

As higher education stakeholders work toward improving outcomes for economically disadvantaged students, having consistent reliable measurement will be key to understanding the problem, measuring the impacts of interventions, and tracking progress.

# Specific Headings: Two Methods

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**1. ASK A QUESTION THAT  
THE PASSAGE ANSWERS.**



**2. STATE THE CONCLUSION  
OF THE PASSAGE.**

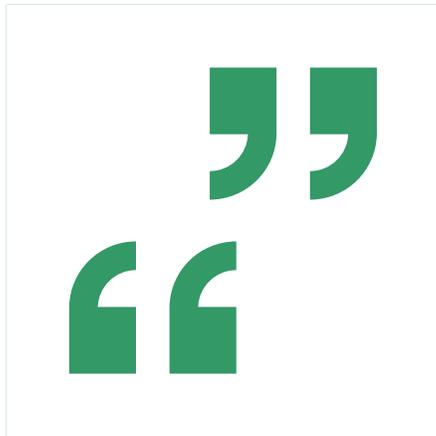
# 1. Ask a **QUESTION** that the passage answers.



*“What is the legal standard for determining cannabis DUI?”*

*“Will rainy day funds be enough to weather the storm?”*

## 2. State the **CONCLUSION** of the passage.



*“Most drivers and passengers killed in crashes are unrestrained.”*

*“States showed fiscal and economic strength before the pandemic.”*



TRY IT OUT

What headings  
would you write for  
each chunk?





# Data Rule #1:

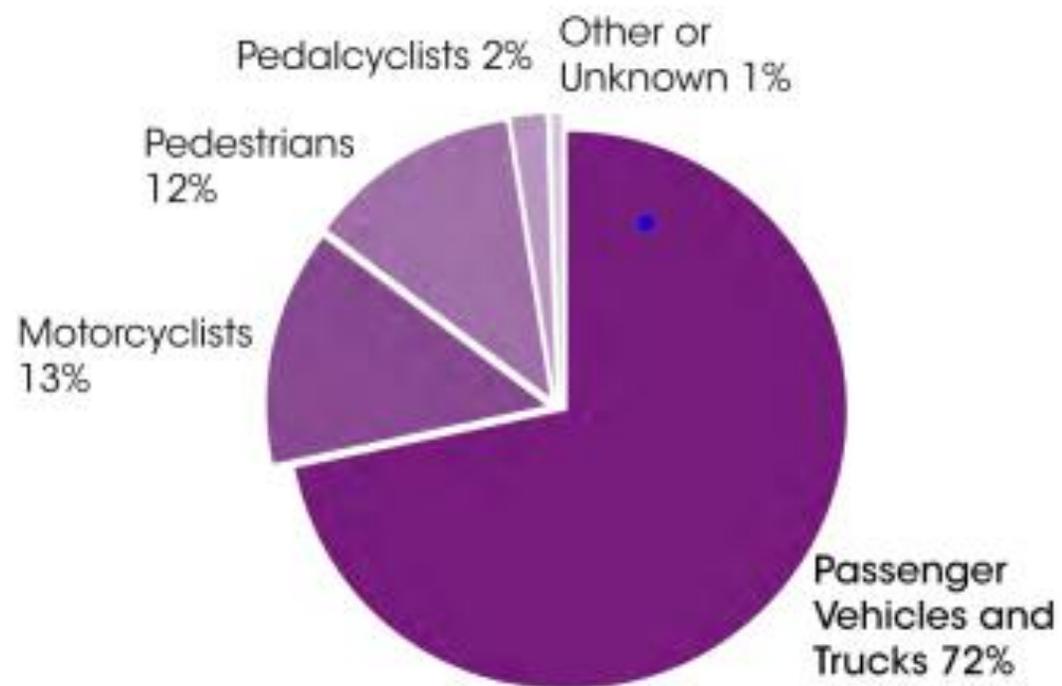
## Paint a Picture

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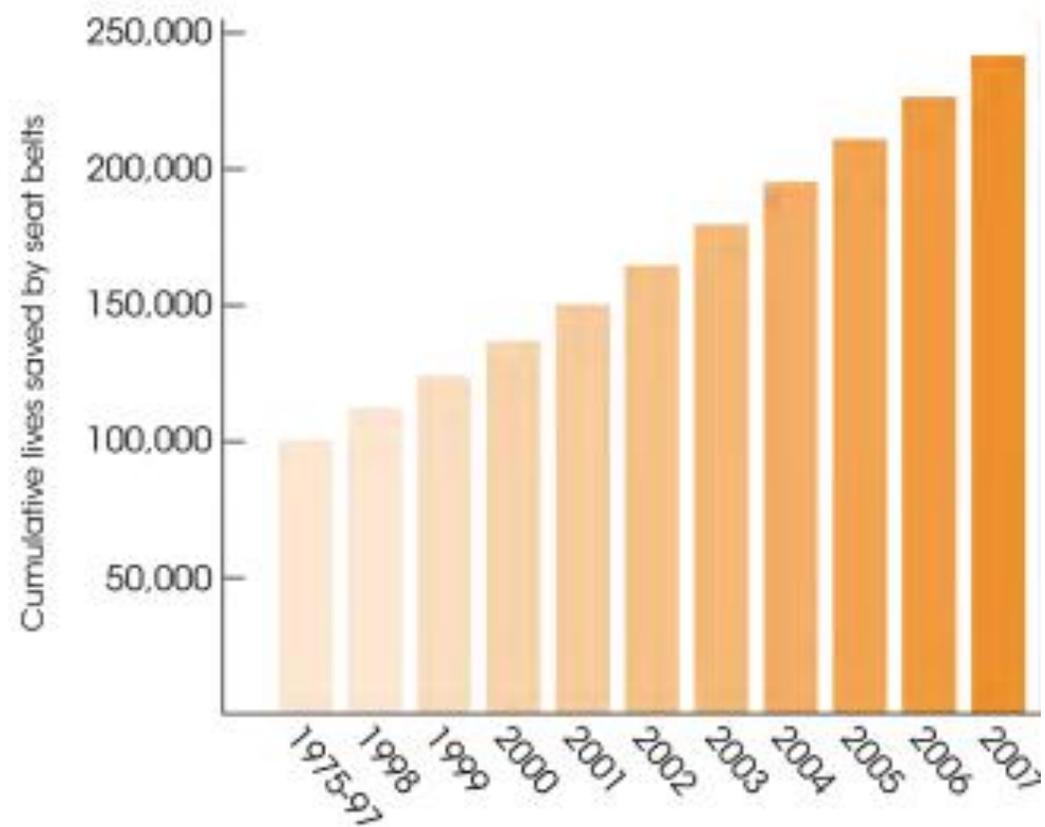
Present your statistics  
in a **visual form**  
whenever possible.

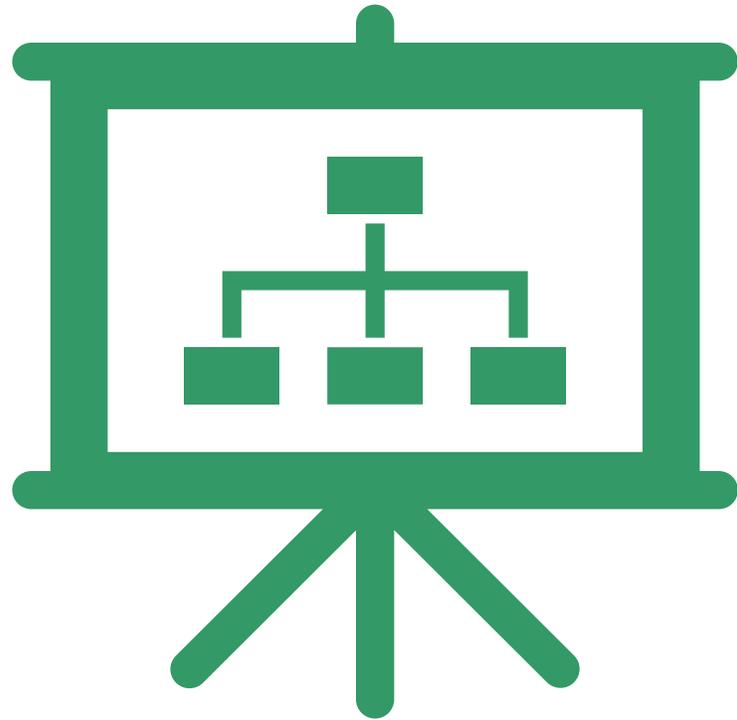


## Most people killed in crashes are drivers or passengers<sup>1</sup>



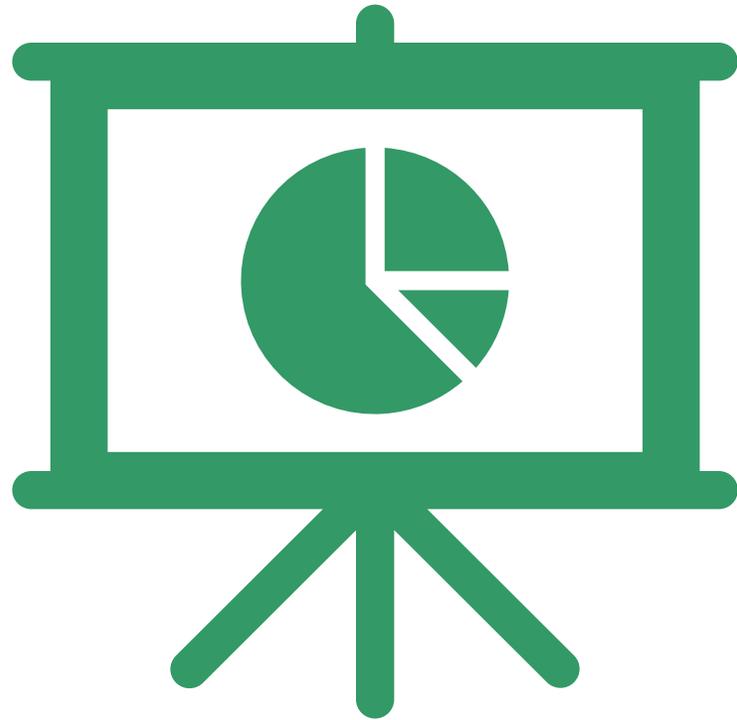
## Seat belts have saved an estimated 255,000 lives since 1975<sup>5</sup>





**“... visually impactful  
representations of data ...**

**... engaging and gets the  
message across quickly.”**



**“... complicated data starts to make sense ...**

**... when presented graphically.”**

# Which Would You Rather Read?

1

## Economic News Release

### Employment Situation Summary

Transmission of material in this news release is embargoed until 8:30 a.m. (EDT) Friday, June 1, 2018 USDL-18-0916

Technical information:  
 Household data: (202) 691-6378 \* cpsinfo@bls.gov \* www.bls.gov/cps  
 Establishment data: (202) 691-6555 \* cesinfo@bls.gov \* www.bls.gov/ces  
 Media contact: (202) 691-5902 \* PressOffice@bls.gov

#### THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION -- MAY 2018

Total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 223,000 in May, and the unemployment rate edged down to 3.8 percent, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Employment continued to trend up in several industries, including retail trade, health care, and construction.

#### Household Survey Data

The unemployment rate edged down to 3.8 percent in May, and the number of unemployed persons declined to 6.1 million. Over the year, the unemployment rate was down by 0.5 percentage point, and the number of unemployed persons declined by 772,000. (See table A-1.)

Among the major worker groups, the unemployment rates for adult men (3.5 percent), Blacks (5.9 percent), and Asians (2.1 percent) decreased in May. The jobless rates for adult women (3.3 percent), teenagers (12.8 percent), Whites (3.5 percent), and Hispanics (4.9 percent) changed little over the month. (See tables A-1, A-2, and A-3.)

The number of long-term unemployed (those jobless for 27 weeks or more) was little changed at 1.2 million in May and accounted for 19.4 percent of the unemployed. Over the past 12 months, the number of long-term unemployed has declined by 476,000. (See table A-12.)

Both the labor force participation rate, at 62.7 percent, and the employment-population ratio, at 60.4 percent, changed little in May. (See table A-1.)

The number of persons employed part time for economic reasons (sometimes referred to as involuntary part-time workers) was essentially unchanged at 4.9 million in May. These individuals, who would have preferred full-time employment, were working part time because their hours had been reduced or they were unable to find full-time jobs. (See table A-8.)

The number of persons marginally attached to the labor force, at 1.5 million in May, was little different from a year earlier. (The data are not seasonally adjusted.) These individuals were not in the labor force, wanted and were available for work, and had looked for a job sometime in the prior 12 months. They were not counted as unemployed because they had not searched for work in the 4 weeks preceding the survey. (See table A-16.)

Among the marginally attached, there were 378,000 discouraged workers in May, little changed from a year earlier. (The data are not seasonally adjusted.) Discouraged workers are persons not currently looking for work because they believe no jobs are available for them. The remaining 1.1 million persons marginally attached to the labor force in May had not searched for work for reasons such as school attendance or family responsibilities. (See table A-16.)

#### Establishment Survey Data

Total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 223,000 in May, compared with an average monthly

2

## NEWS RELEASE

BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR




Transmission of material in this news release is embargoed until 8:30 a.m. (EDT) Friday, June 1, 2018 USDL-18-0916

Technical information:  
 Household data: (202) 691-6378 • cpsinfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/cps  
 Establishment data: (202) 691-6555 • cesinfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/ces

Media contact: (202) 691-5902 • PressOffice@bls.gov

#### THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION — MAY 2018

Total **nonfarm payroll employment** increased by 223,000 in May, and the **unemployment rate** edged down to 3.8 percent, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. Employment continued to trend up in several industries, including retail trade, health care, and construction.

Chart 1. Unemployment rate, seasonally adjusted, May 2016 – May 2018

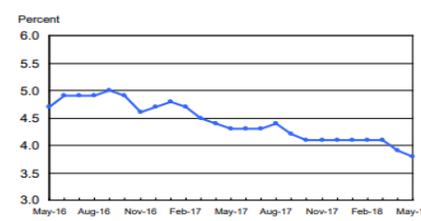
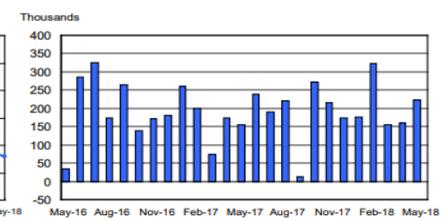


Chart 2. Nonfarm payroll employment over-the-month change, seasonally adjusted, May 2016 – May 2018



#### Household Survey Data

The **unemployment rate** edged down to 3.8 percent in May, and the number of **unemployed persons** declined to 6.1 million. Over the year, the unemployment rate was down by 0.5 percentage point, and the number of unemployed persons declined by 772,000. (See table A-1.)

Among the **major worker groups**, the unemployment rates for adult men (3.5 percent), Blacks (5.9 percent), and Asians (2.1 percent) decreased in May. The jobless rates for adult women (3.3 percent), teenagers (12.8 percent), Whites (3.5 percent), and Hispanics (4.9 percent) changed little over the

# Data Rule #2: Put Data into Context

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*“One out of every four...”*

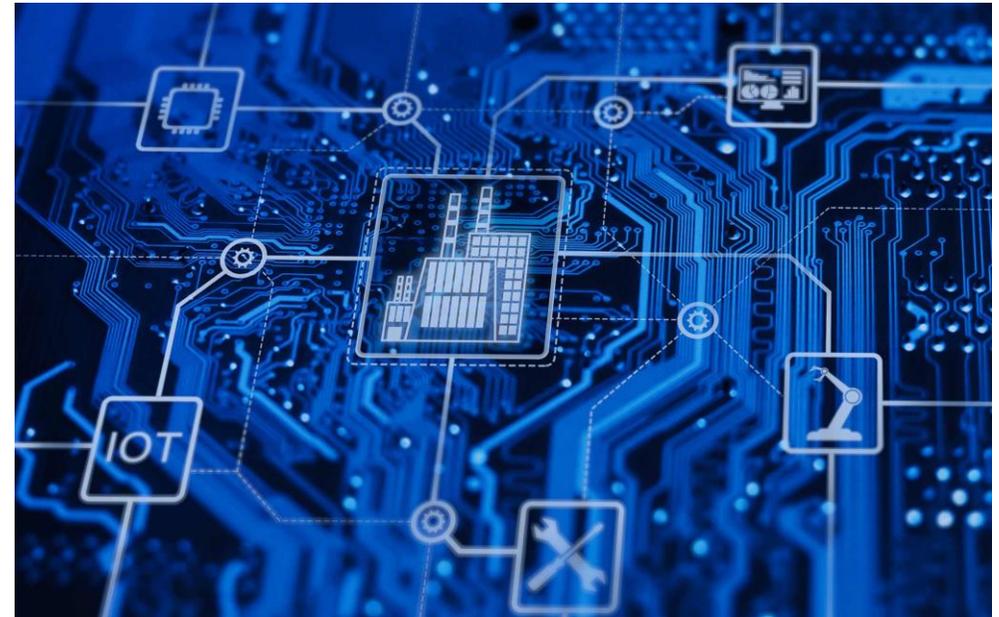
*“Every 16 seconds...”*

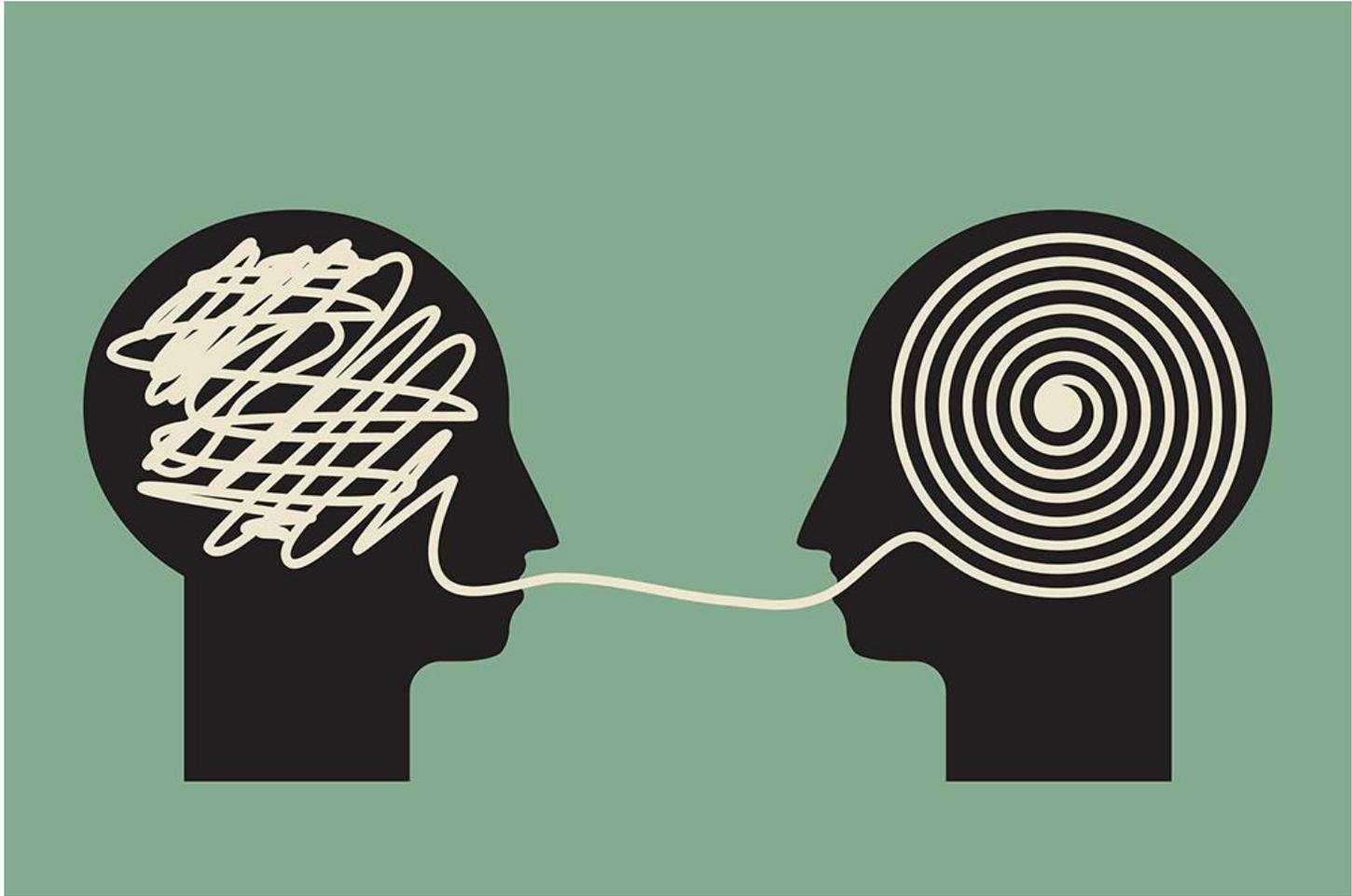
*“The equivalent of...”*



## EXAMPLE (*no context*):

One “Exabyte”  
(1,000,000,000,000,000,000  
bytes) of data is created on  
the internet daily.





## EXAMPLE (with context):

One “Exabyte”  
(1,000,000,000,000,000,000 bytes) of data is created on  
the internet daily. *This is roughly the equivalent of  
the data in 250 million  
DVDs.*







# Part I Takeaways: Form Follows Function

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The unique needs of your specific legislative audience determine the form of your writing design:

- **Bottom Line Up Front**
- **Clear Structure & Organization**
- **Chunked Text**
- **Clear, Specific Headers**
- **Digestible Data**

# Form Follows Function: Looking Ahead

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## Choose a Strategy

- 1** Bottom Line Up Front
- 2** Organizational Structure
- 3** Chunked Text
- 4** Clear, Specific Headings
- 5** Digestible Data

PART II:  
Less is More



Please respond...

Track Email

Helvetica 12

To: tom@gman.com

Cc:

Bcc:

Subject: Please respond...

From: Jonathan DeVore <jonathandevore1@me.com>

Signature: None

Hi Tom,

Thanks for getting back to me. Here is my feedback about the plan:

1. Change the number of sales leads
2. Be more specific about goal #4
3. Include the marketing department

I'm available tomorrow between 3pm and 5pm to discuss this further if you'd like. Let me know by Thursday if you choose to not incorporate my feedback.

**1 - Change the number of sales leads**

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse, and by some sage women in the neighbourhood who had taken a lively interest in me several months before there was any possibility of our becoming personally acquainted, first, that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as they believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on a Friday night.

I need say nothing here, on the first head, because nothing can show better than my history whether that prediction was verified or falsified by the result. On the second branch of the question, I will only remark, that unless I ran through that part of my inheritance while I was still a baby, I have not come into it yet. But I do not at all complain of having been kept out of this property; and if anybody else should be in the present enjoyment of it, he is heartily welcome to keep it.

**2 - Be more specific about goal #4**

I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas. Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know; all I know is, that there was but one solitary bidding, and that was from an attorney connected with the bill-broking business, who offered two pounds in cash, and the balance in sherry, but declined to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher bargain. Consequently the advertisement was withdrawn at a dead loss - for as to sherry, my poor dear mother's own sherry was in the market then - and ten years afterwards, the caul was put up in a raffle down in our part of the country, to fifty members at half-a-crown a head, the winner to spend five shillings. I was present myself, and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way. The caul was won, I recollect, by an old lady with a hand-basket, who, very reluctantly, produced from it the stipulated five shillings, all in halfpence, and twopence halfpenny short - as it took an immense time and a great waste of arithmetic, to endeavour without any effect to prove to her, it is a fact which will be long remembered as remarkable down there, that she was never drowned, but died triumphantly in bed, at ninety-two. I have understood that it was, to the last, her proudest boast, that she never had been on the water in her life, except upon a bridge; and that over her tea (to which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go 'meandering' about the world. It was in vain to represent to her that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this objectionable practice. She always returned, with greater emphasis and with an instinctive knowledge of the strength of her objection, 'Let us have no meandering.'

Not to meander myself, at present, I will go back to my birth.

**3 - Include the marketing department**

I was born at Blunderstone, in Suffolk, or 'there by', as they say in Scotland. I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months, when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me, and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were - almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes - bolted and locked against it.

An aunt of my father's, and consequently a great-aunt of mine, of whom I shall have more to relate by and by, was the principal magnate of our family. Miss Trotwood, or Miss Betsey, as my poor mother always called her, when she sufficiently overcame her dread of this formidable personage to mention her at all (which was seldom), had been married to a husband younger than herself, who was very handsome, except in the sense of the homely adage, 'handsome is, that handsome does' - for he was strongly suspected of having beaten Miss Betsey, and even of having once, on a disputed question of supplies, made some hasty but determined arrangements to throw her out of a two pair of stairs' window. These evidences of an incompatibility of temper induced Miss Betsey to pay him off, and effect a separation by mutual consent. He went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a Baboon; but I think it must have been a Baboo - or a Begum. Anyhow, from India tidings of his death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody knew; for immediately upon the separation, she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage in a hamlet on the sea-coast a long way off, established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and was understood to live secluded, ever afterwards, in an inflexible retirement.

My father had once been a favourite of hers, I believe; but she was mortally affronted by his marriage, on the ground that my mother was 'a wax doll'. She had never seen my mother, but she knew her to be not yet twenty. My father and Miss Betsey never met again. He was double my mother's age when he married, and of but a delicate constitution. He died a year afterwards, and, as I have said, six months before I came into the world.

Thanks,  
Jonathan



“Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby’s house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.”

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**F. Scott Fitzgerald**

“Oak Park: the home of  
broad lawns and  
narrow minds.”

---

Ernest Hemingway





IF IT IS POSSIBLE  
TO CUT A WORD OUT,  
ALWAYS CUT IT OUT.

— GEORGE ORWELL

# Lean Writing **STRATEGIES**

1. Reduce Expletives
2. Eliminate Passive Voice
3. Condense Wordy Phrases

#1

## Reduce Expletives

It was a simple rule my parents made that got me interested in the trumpet: no television or computer time until I had practiced for half an hour. There were many days when this rule angered me, but when I look back it seems my parents knew best. Today I'll always pick up my trumpet before the television remote.

# Expletives: What Are They?

Words that **DO NOT** add meaning to a sentence.

**EXAMPLES** *there, here, it, it is, there is, there will be, indeed, it is a fact*



Expletives hide the substance of a sentence behind filler words.

# Expletives: How to Catch Them

## SENTENCES BEGINNING WITH “IT” OR “THERE”

- *It was a simple rule my parents made.*
- *There were many days when this rule angered me...*



*“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness. . .” - Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities*

# Practice 1: Reduce Expletives

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1

It is inevitable that oil prices  
will rise.  
(8 words)

2

**Oil prices will inevitably rise.**  
(5 words)

# Practice 2: Reduce Expletives

---

1

There are likely to be many  
constituents seeking relief  
from this proposal.

(12 words)

2

**Many constituents will likely  
seek relief from this proposal.**

**(9 words)**

# Practice 3: Reduce Expletives

---

1

**There has been a strong positive reaction to this newly proposed legislation.**

**(12 words)**

2

**The newly proposed legislation was positively received.**

**(6 words)**

# Pennies Add Up

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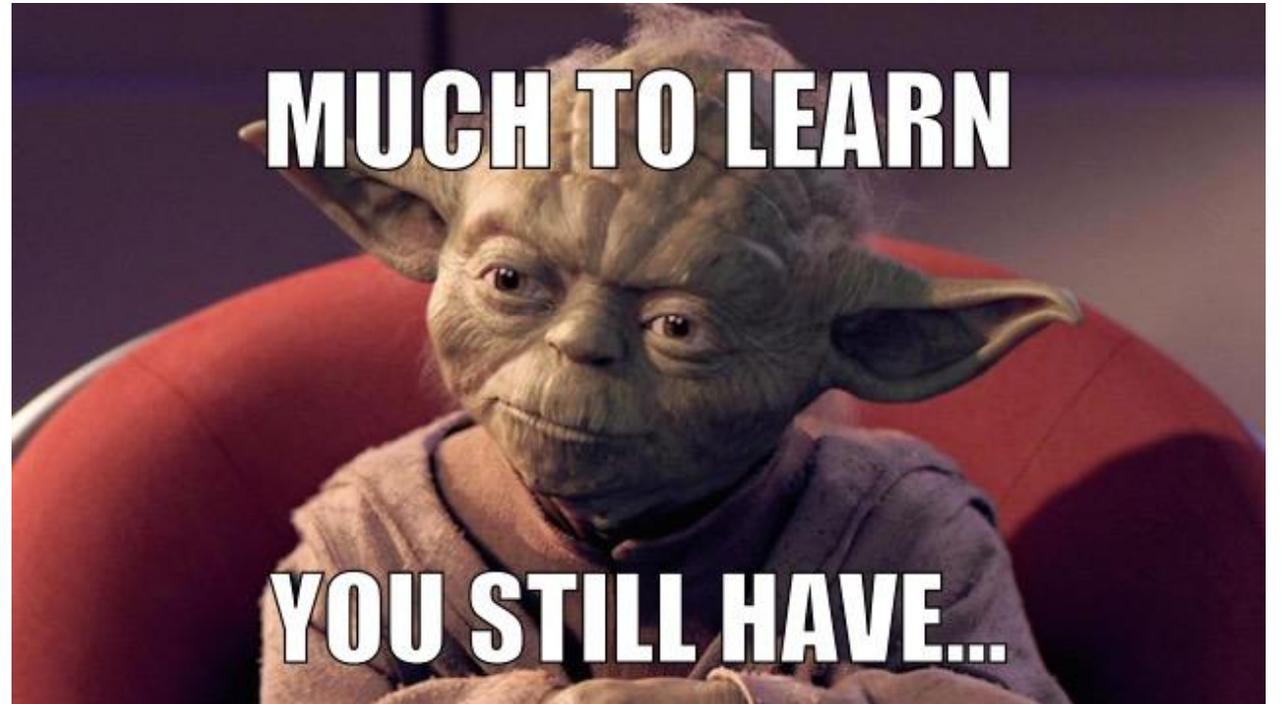
TRY IT OUT

Does your writing  
include expletives?



#2

Eliminate  
Passive Voice



# Passive Voice: What Is It?

**When the OBJECT of an action is made into the SUBJECT of a sentence.**

The ball (*object*)  
was thrown (*verb*)  
by Jess (*subject*).



Passive voice is less concise, less direct and buries the main idea.

# Passive Voice: How to Catch It

## 1. PAST-TENSE VERBS

- ...*was eliminated* from the budget.
- ...*were discriminated* against.
- ...*is portrayed* in a negative light.

## 2. WORDS BEFORE “BY”

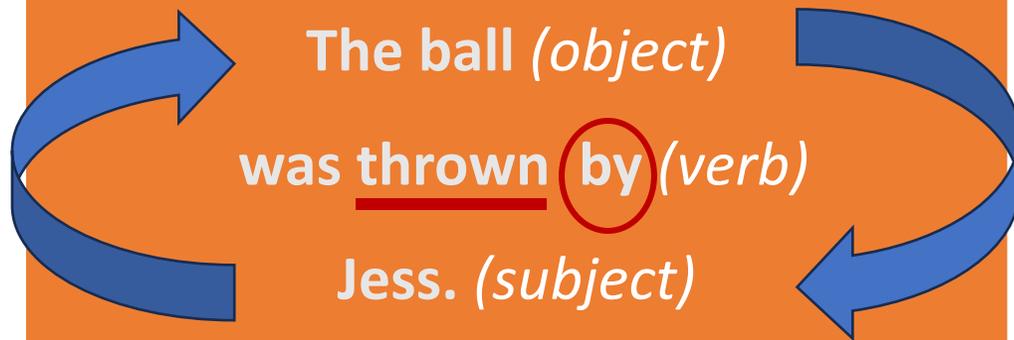
- *It is believed by...*
- *Questions were answered by...*



# Practice 1: Eliminate Passive Voice



## PASSIVE



Object → *Past Verb* → Subject

## ACTIVE

Jess (*subject*)  
throws (*verb*)  
the ball. (*object*)

Subject → *Present Verb* → Object

# Practice 2: Eliminate Passive Voice



## PASSIVE

One type of air pollution (*object*)

is caused **by** (*verb*)

hydrocarbons. (*subject*)

Object → *Past Verb* → Subject

## ACTIVE

Hydrocarbons (*subject*)

cause (*verb*)

one type of air pollution. (*object*)

Subject → *Present Verb* → Object

# Practice 3: Eliminate Passive Voice



## PASSIVE

Passive voice writing  
was eliminated by  
the writing training.

## ACTIVE

The writing training  
eliminates  
passive voice writing.

# Pennies Add Up

---



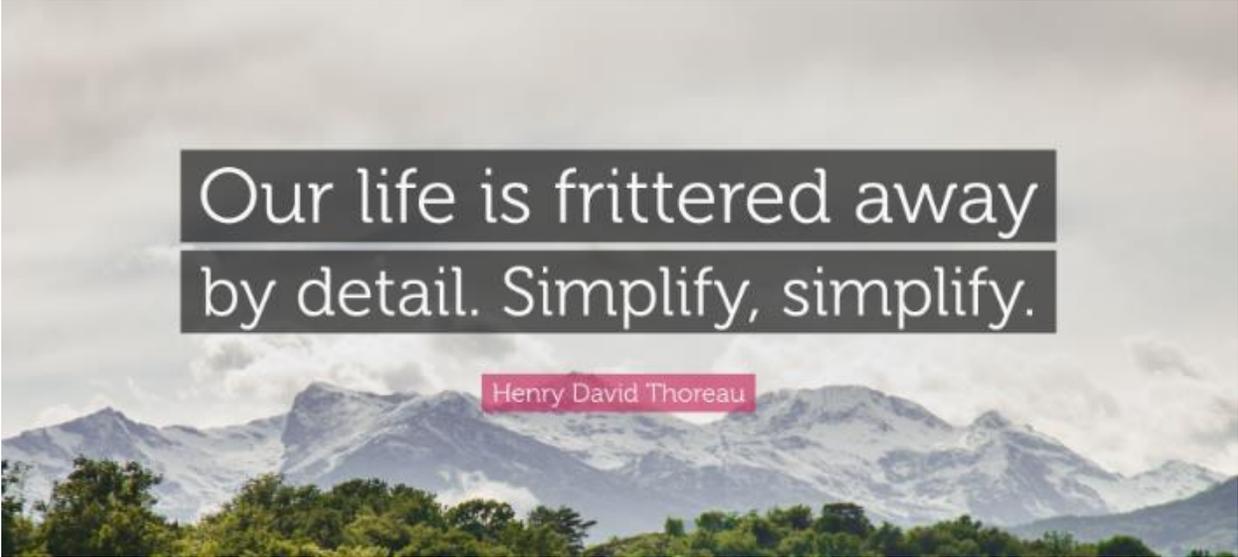
TRY IT OUT

Does your writing  
use passive voice?



#3

Condense  
Wordy  
Phrases



Our life is frittered away  
by detail. Simplify, simplify.

Henry David Thoreau

SORRY



# Practice: Condense Wordy Phrases

---

**THESE WORDY PHRASES CAN BE REPLACED BY ONE WORD:**

“The reason for” → ***Because***

“Due to the fact that” → ***Since***

“In the event that” → ***If***

“In a situation where” → ***When***



# Practice: Condense Wordy Phrases

---

1. “A large number of...” → MANY ?
2. “Despite the fact that...” → ALTHOUGH ?
3. “Each and every...” → EACH / ALL ?
4. “Has the opportunity to...” → CAN / COULD ?
5. “At this point in time...” → NOW ?
6. “In a case in which...” → WHEN ?

# Pennies Add Up

---



TRY IT OUT

Does your writing  
use wordy phrases?



# Part II Takeaways: Less is More

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## “Writing Lean”

Minimize your word count to maximize your message’s power.

1. Reduce Expletives
2. Eliminate Passive Voice
3. Condense Wordy Phrases

***Pennies add up to dollars!***



# Less is More: Looking Ahead

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## Choose a Strategy

1

Reduce Expletives

2

Eliminate Passive Voice

3

Condense Wordy Phrases

# Workshop Takeaways

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## 1. Form Follows Function

Address the Needs of Your Audience

## 2. Less is More

Write Lean



# Thank You!

Jessica Hoffman, NCSL

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(720) 856 – 1393

