Writing Reader-Based Prose
From: Problem Solving Strategies for Writing
by
Linda Flower, Harper Collins Pub.

STEP 6 TRANSFORM writer-based prose into reader-based prose

Use your knowledge of the reader's needs to develop a strategy for communicating, not just expressing, your ideas. By identifying a goal you share with the reader and adapting your knowledge to your reader's needs, you can also achieve your own goals as a writer.

Strategy 1 SET UP A SHARED GOAL
Strategy 2 DEVELOP A READER-BASED STRUCTURE
Strategy 3 GIVE YOUR READER CUES
Strategy 4 DEVELOP A PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT

As we saw in Chapter 9, simply expressing yourself isn't always enough; it's no guarantee that you are actually communicating with someone else. This chapter will focus on specific rhetorical strategies you can use to design your writing for a reader.

Some people are rightly suspicious of the notion of rhetorical strategy when they equate it with such things as "mere rhetoric," empty eloquence, or the sophist's art of persuading by any means available. The rhetorical strategy we will discuss is instead, an attempt to fulfill your goals by meeting the needs of your reader. It is, in essence, a plan for communicating.

Why is such a strategy necessary? We have already looked at one reason: The creative reader needs the help of a context, a clear structure, and guiding expectations to effectively read your prose. Writing a message down is one thing, communicating your meaning is an art that requires planning. Shortly we will look at a second reason for conscious strategy, which grows out of the private nature of the writer's own composing process.

STEP 6

TRANSFORM Writer-Based Prose into Reader-Based prose

Good writers know how to transform writer-based prose (which works well for them) into reader-based prose (which works for their readers as well). Writing is inevitably a somewhat egocentric enterprise. We naturally tend to talk to ourselves when composing. As a result, we often need self-conscious strategies for trying to talk to our reader.

Strategy 1. SET UP A SHARED GOAL

The first strategy for adapting a paper to a reader is to create a shared goal. Try to find a reason for writing your paper and a reason for reading it that both you and your reader share. (Remember that your desire to convey information will not necessarily be met by your reader's desire to receive it.) Then organize your ideas and your arguments around this common goal. You will need to consider the knowledge, attitudes, and needs of your reader, as discussed previously.

> A shared goal can be a powerful tool for persuasion. To illustrate, try this exercise:
>
> You have just been commissioned to write a short booklet on how to preserve older homes and buildings, which the City Historical Society wants to distribute throughout a historical section of the city in an effort to encourage preservation. Most of your readers will simply be residents and local business people. How are you going to get them, first, to read this booklet and, second, to use some of its suggestions?

Take several minutes to think about this problem, then write an opening paragraph for the booklet that includes a share goal.

To test the effectiveness of your paragraph, consider the following two points about shared goals:

1. A shared goal can motivate your audience to read and remember what you have to say. Does your paragraph suggest that the booklet will solve some problem your reader faces or achieve some end he or she really cares about? An appeal to vague goals or a wishy-washy generalization such as "our heritage" is unlikely to keep the reader interested. Use your knowledge to fill some need your reader really has.

In a professional situation think of it this way: Your reader has ten letters and five reports on her desk this morning. Your opening statement with its shared goal should tell her why she would want to read your report first and read carefully.

2. A shared goal can increase comprehension. People understand and retain information best when they can fit it into a framework they already know. For example, the context of "home repair" and "do-it-yourself" would be familiar and maybe attractive to your readers. In contrast, if you defined the goal as "architectural renovation" or "techniques of historical landmark preservation" you would make sense to members of the historical society but would have missed your primary audience, the local readers. They would probably find that context not only unfamiliar but somewhat intimidating.

Offer your readers a shared goal one for which they already have a framework—that helps them turn your message into something meaningful to them.

Here are examples of three different introductory paragraphs written for this booklet. After reading each one, consider how you would evaluate its power to motivate and aid comprehension. Then read the reaction of another reader, which follows each paragraph.

1. This booklet will help you create civic pride and preserve our city's heritage. In addition you will be helping the Historical Society to grow and extend its influence over the city.

A reader's response:

I suppose civic pride is a good thing, but I'm not sure I'd want to help create it. This paragraph makes me feel a little suspicious. What does the Historical Society want from me? I'll bet this is going to be a booklet about raising money so they can put up city monuments.

2. This booklet is concerned with civic restoration and maintenance projects in designated historical areas. It discusses the methods and materials approved by the City Historical Society and City Board of Engineers.

A reader's response:

I guess this is some booklet for city planners or the people who want to set up museums. "Methods and materials" must refer to all those rules and regulations that city contractors have to follow. I wouldn't want to get mixed up with all that if I were doing improvements on my own home.

3. If you own an older home or historical building, there are a number of ways you can preserve its beauty and historical value. At the same time you can increase its market value and decrease its maintenance costs. This booklet will show you five major ways to improve your building and give you step by step procedures for how to do this. Please read the booklet over and see which of the suggestions might be useful to you.

A reader's response:

This might be a good idea. I don't know if I'd want to buy the whole package, but I think I'll read it over. What is it—five things I could do? I might find something useful I could try out. I'm particularly concerned about the maintenance costs. Maybe I can find something here on insulation.

Note that in the final example the writer not only has identified shared goals but has given the reader a sort of mental map for reading and understanding the rest of the booklet.

Sometimes a shared goal is something as intangible as intellectual curiosity. But it is the writer's job, in whatever field, to recognize goals or needs that his reader might have and to try to fulfill them. Philosopher Bertrand Russell set forth his shared goal in this way in his introduction to A History of Western Philosophy:

> Why, then, you may ask, waste time on such insoluble problems? To this one may answer as a historian, or as an individual facing the terror of cosmic loneliness…To teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being

paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it.

To sum up, the first step in designing your paper for a reader is to set up a shared goal. Use it in your problem/purpose statement, and you might also use it as the top level of your issue tree when you generate ideas. A good shared goal will motivate your reader by providing a context for understanding your ideas and a reason for acting on them.

Strategy 2 DEVELOP A READER-BASED STRUCTURE

Most of us intend to write reader-based prose, to communicate with our reader. But for various reasons, people often end up writing writer-based prose, or talking to themselves. For example, the following excerpts are from letters written by students applying for summer jobs. They had been asked to include some personal background and experience.

Do some detective work on these paragraphs and try to describe the hidden logic that you think is organizing each one. Compare the paragraph to some other way you could write it. Why did the writers choose to include the particular facts they did, and why did they organize them in these particular ways?

Terry F.:
I was born in Wichita, Kansas, on December 4, 1962. After four years there my family moved to Topeka, Kansas, where I attended kindergarten. The next year my family moved to Rose Hill, Iowa. I went to first grade there and my family moved again. I started second grade in Butler, Pennsylvania, and finished it in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where I still live today. . . . I took the college curriculum in high school, which included English, history, science, French, and mathematics, and am currently a college sophomore.

I would like this job for two reasons. First, I could use the money for school next year. Second, the experience would be very helpful. It would help me get a job in that specific area when I graduate.

Katherine P.:
As a freshman I worked as a clerk in a student managed store, Argus. . . I became acquainted with the university personnel manager and was offered the position of Argus personnel manager for the semester beginning August, 1979. I accepted and held the job until December of 1979, when a managerial position was eliminated. With managerial staff reduced to two people, responsibilities were adjusted and I was offered the position of purchasing agent. Again I accepted.

Notice that in these examples there is a logic organizing each paragraph, but it is the logic of a story, based on the writer's own memories and, in Terry's case, personal needs. The needs of the reader have not been considered. This is writer-based prose - writing that may seem quite clear and organized to the writer but is not yet adequately designed for the reader. In each case, the potential employer probably

wanted to know how the applicant's background and experience could fit his or her needs. But neither paragraph was organized around that goal.

Why do people write to themselves when they are ostensibly writing to a reader? One reason is a natural mental habit that psychologists call "egocentrism": thinking centered around the ego or "I." Egocentrism is not selfishness but simply the failure to actively imagine the point of view of someone else as we talk or write. We see this all the time in young children who happily talk about what they are doing in a long, spirited monologue that has many gaps and mysterious expressions. They may speak in code words or private language that, like jargon in adults, is saturated with meaning for the user but not for the listener. Although a bystander may be totally in the dark, the child seems to assume everyone understands perfectly.

Part of a child's cognitive development is growing out of this self-centeredness and learning to imagine and adapt to another person's state of mind. But we never grow out of our egocentrism entirely. When adults write to themselves, it is usually because they have simply forgotten to consider the reader.

There is another very good reason adults write writer-based prose. If you are working on a difficult paper, it is often easier to discover what you know first and worry about designing it for a reader later. An interesting study called the New York Apartment Tour experiment demonstrated people's tendency to explain in a self-oriented way. The experimenters, Charlotte Linde and William Labov, posed as social workers and asked a number of people to describe their apartments. They found that nearly everyone gave them a room-by-room verbal tour and used similar procedures for conducting it. although neither the experimenters nor the speakers were actually in the apartments, the descriptions were phrased as though they had been. For example, the description typically starts at the door; if the nearest room is a big one, you go on in ("from the left of the hall you go into the living room"); if the nearest room is small, the speaker merely refers to it and makes a comment ("and there's a closet off the living room"). Then the speaker suddenly brings you back to the entrance hall ("and on the right of the hall is the dining room"), without having to retrace steps or repeat previous rooms. The intuitive, narrative procedures used in conducting this verbal tour were very efficient for remembering all the details of the apartment.

Linde and Labov found that 97 percent of the people questioned used this sort of narrative tour strategy. Only 3 percent gave an overview such as "Well, the apartment is basically a square." The reason? The narrative tour strategy is a very efficient way to retrieve information from memory--that is, to survey what you know. In this case it allows you to cover all the rooms one by one as you walk through your apartment. Yet it is almost impossible for another person to reproduce the apartment from this narrative tour, whereas the overview approach, which only 3 percent used, works quite well. As in writing, an organization that functions well for thinking about a topic often fails to communicate that thinking to the listener. A strategy that is effective for the speaker may be terribly confusing to a listener.

Note, however, that in draft form, writer-based prose can have a real use. Since this type of writing comes naturally to us, it can be an efficient strategy for exploring a topic and outwitting our nemesis, short-term memory. If a writer's material is complicated or confusing, he may initially have to concentrate all his attention on generating and organizing his own knowledge. He might simply be too

preoccupied to simultaneously imagine another person's point of view and adapt to it. The reader has to wait. But you don't want to make the reader wait forever.

You can usually recognize writer-based prose by one or more of these features:

1. An egocentric focus on the writer.
2. A narrative organization focused on the writer's own discover process.
3. A survey structure organized, like a textbook, around the writer's information.

There are times, of course, when a narrative structure is exactly right--if, for example, your goal is to tell a story or describe an event. And a survey of what you know can be a reasonable way to organize a background report or survey. But in most exposition and persuasive writing, the writer needs to reorganize his or her knowledge around a problem, a thesis, or the reader's need. Writer-based prose just hasn't been reorganized yet.

A READER'S TEST

Following are two drafts of a report that will be used as a test case. The writers were students in an organizational psychology course who were also working as consultants to a local organization, the Oskaloosa Brewing Company. The purposes of the report were to show progress to their professor and to present a problem analysis, complete with causes and conclusions, to their client. Both readers--academic and professional--were less concerned with what the students had done or seen then with how they had approached the problem and what they had made of their observations.

To gauge the reader-based effectiveness of this report, read quickly though Draft 1 and imagine the response of Professor Charns, who needed to answer these questions: "As analysts, what assumptions and decisions did my students make? Why did they make them? And at what stage in the project are they now?" Then reread the draft and play the role of the client, who wants to know "How did they define the problem, and what did they conclude?" As either reader, can you quickly extract the information the report should be giving you? Next try the same test on Draft 2.

As a reader, how would you describe the difference between these two versions? Each was written by the same group of writers, but the revision came after a discussion about what the readers really needed to know and expected to get from the report. Let us look at the three things that make Draft 1 a piece of writer based prose.

Group Report

(1) Work began on our project with the initial group decision to evaluate the Oskaloosa Brewing Company. Oskaloosa Brewing Company is a regionally located brewery manufacturing several different types of beer, notably River City and Brough Cream Ale. This beer is marketed under various names in Pennsylvania and other neighboring states. As a group, we decided to analyze this organization

because two of our group members had had frequent customer contact with the sales department. Also, we were aware that Oskaloosa Brewing had been losing money for the past five years, and we felt we might be able to find some obvious problems in its organizational structure.

(2) Our first meeting, held February 17th, was with the head of the sales department, Jim Tucker. Generally, he gave us an outline of the organization, from president to worker, and discussed the various departments that we might ultimately decide to analyze. The two that seemed the most promising and more applicable to the project were the sales and production departments. After a few group meetings and discussions with the personnel manager, Susan Harris, and our advisor, professor Charns, we felt it best suited our needs and Oskaloosa Brewing's needs to evaluate their bottling department.

(3) During the next week we had a discussion with the superintendent of production, Henry Holt, and made plans for interviewing the supervisors and line workers/ After we had a tour of the bottling department they gave us a first-hand look at the production process. Before beginning our interviewing, our group met several times to formulate appropriate questions to use in interviewing, for both the supervisors and the workers. We also had a meeting with Professor Charns to discuss this matter.

(4) The next step was the actual interviewing process. During the weeks of March 14-18 and March 21-25, our group met several times at Oskaloosa Brewing and interviewed ten supervisors and twelve workers. Finally, during this past week, we have had several group meetings to discuss our findings and the potential problem areas within the bottling department. Also, we have spent time organizing the writing of our progress report.

(5) The bottling and packaging division is located in a separate building, adjacent to the brewery, where the beer is actually manufactured. From the brewery the beer is piped into one of five lines (four bottling lines and one canning line) in the bottling house, where the bottles are filled, crowned, pasteurized, labeled, packaged in cases, and either shipped out or stored in the warehouse. The head of this operation, and others, is production manager Phil Smith. Next in line under him in direct control of the bottling house is the superintendent of bottling and packaging, Henry Holt. In addition, there are a total of ten supervisors who report directly to Henry Holt and who oversee the daily operations and coordinate and direct the twenty to thirty union workers who operate the lines.

(6) During production, each supervisor fills out a data sheet to explain what was actually produced during each hour. This form also includes the exact time when a breakdown occurred, what it was caused by, and when production was resumed. Some supervisors' positions are production-staff-oriented. One takes care of supplying the raw material (bottles, caps, labels, and boxes) for production. Another is responsible for the union workers' assignments each day.

These workers are not all permanently assigned to a production-line position. Men called "floaters" are used, filling in for a sick worker or helping out after a break down.

(7) The union employees are generally older than thirty-five, some in their late fifties. Most have been with the company many years and are accustomed to having more workers per a slower moving line.

Draft 2

MEMORANDUM

TO: Professor Martin Charns

FROM: Nancy Lowenberg, Todd Scott, Rosemary Nisson, Larry Vollen

DATE: March 31, 1977

RE: Progress Report" The Oskaloosa Brewing Company

Why Oskaloosa Brewing?

Oskaloosa Brewing Company is a regionally located brewery manufacturing several different types of beer, notably River City and Brough Cream Ale. As a group, we decided to analyze this organization because two of our group members have frequent contact with the sales department. Also, we were aware that Oskaloosa Brewing had been losing money for the past five years and we felt we might be able to find some obvious problems in its organizational structure.

Initial Steps: Where to Concentrate?

After several interviews with top management and a group discussion, we felt it best suited our needs, and Oskaloosa Brewing's needs, to evaluate the production department. Our first meeting, held February 17, was with the head of the sales department, Jim Tucker. He gave us an outline of the organization and described the two major departments, sales and production. He indicated that there were more obvious problems in the production department, a belief also suggested by Susan Harris, the personnel manager.

Next Step

The next step involved a familiarization with the plant and its employees. First, we toured the plant to gain an understanding of the brewing and bottling processes. Next, during the weeks of March 14-18 and March 21-25, we interviewed ten supervisor and twelve workers. Finally, during the past week we had group meetings to exchange information and discuss potential problems.

The Production Process

Knowledge of the actual production process is imperative in understanding the effects of various problems on efficient production. Therefore, we have included a brief summary of this process.

The bottling and packaging division is located in a separate building, adjacent to the brewery, where the beer is actually manufactured. From the brewery the beer is piped into one of five lines (four bottling lines and one canning line) in the bottling house, where the bottles are filled, crowned, pasteurized, labeled, packaged in cases, and either shipped out or stored in the warehouse.

Problems

Through extensive interviews with supervisors and union employees, we have recognized four apparent problems within the bottling house operations. The first is that the employees' goals do not match those of the company....This is especially apparent in the union employees, whose loyalty lies with the union instead of the company. This attitude is well-founded, as the union ensures them of job security and benefits....

The first four paragraphs of the draft are organized as a narrative, starting with the phrase "Work began..." We are given a story of the writers' discovery process. Notice how all of the facts are presented in terms of when they were discovered, not in terms of their implications or logical connections. The writers want to tell us what happened when: the reader, on the other hand, wants to ask "why?" and "so what?".

A narrative organization is tempting to write because it is a prefabricated order and easy to generate. Instead of having to create a hierarchical organization among ideas or worry about a reader, the writer can simply remember his or her own discovery process and write a story. papers that start out, "In studying the economic causes of World War I, the first thing we have to consider is...." are often a dead giveaway. They tell us we are going to watch the writer's mind at work and follow him though the process of thinking out his conclusions.

This pattern has, of course, the virtue of any form of drama, it keeps you in suspense by withholding closure. But only if the audience is willing to wait that long for the point. Unfortunately, most academic and professional readers are impatient and tend to interpret such narrative, step-by-step structures either as wandering and confused (does he have a point?) or as a form of hedging.

Egocentric Focus

The second feature of Draft I is that it is a discovery story starring the writers. Its drama, such as it is, is squarely focused on the writer: "I did/I thought/I felt." Of the fourteen sentences in the first three paragraphs, ten are grammatically focused on the writers' thoughts and actions rather than on the issues. For example "Work began...." "We decided....: " "Also we were aware....and we felt...." Generally speaking, the reader is more interested in issues and ideas than in the fact that the writer thought them.

Survey Form or Textbook Organization

In the fifth paragraph of Draft I, the writers begin to organize their material in a new way. Instead of a narrative, we are given a survey of what the writers observed. Here, the raw facts of the bottling process dictated the organization of the paragraph. Yet the client-reader already knows this, and the professor probably doesn't care. In the language of computer science we could say the writers are performing a "memory dump": simply printing out information in the exact form in which they stored it in memory. Notice how in the revised version the writers try to use their observations to understand production problems.

The problem with a survey or "textbook" form is that it ignores the reader's need for a different organization of the information. Suppose, for example, your are

writing to model airplane builders about wind resistance. The information you need comes out of a physics text, but that text is organized around the field of physics; it starts with subatomic particles and works up from there. To meet the needs of your reader, you have to adapt that knowledge, not lift it intact from the text. Sometimes writers can simply survey their knowledge, but generally the writer's main task is to use knowledge rather than reprint it.

To sum up, in Draft 2 of the Oskaloosa report, the writers made a real attempt to write for their readers. Among other things the report is now organized around major questions readers might have, it uses headings to display the overall organization of the report, and it makes better use of topic sentences that tell the reader what each paragraph contains and why to read it. Most important, it focuses more on the crucial information the reader wants to obtain.

Obviously this version could still be improved. But it shows the writers attempting to transform writer-based prose and change their narrative and survey pattern into a more issue-centered hierarchical organization.

Consider another example of how a writer transformed a writer-based paragraph into a reader-based one. The first draft below is full of good ideas but has a narrative organization and an egocentric focus. We can almost see the writer reading the book. Her conclusions (which her professor will want to know) are buried within a description of the story (which her professor, of course, knows already).

> Writer based draft:
> In Great Expectations, Pip is introduced as a very likable young boy. Although he steals, he does it because he is both innocent and good-hearted. Later, when he goes to London, one no longer feels this same sort of identification with Pip. He becomes too proud to associate with his old friends, cutting ties with Joe and Biddy because of his false pride. And yet one is made to feel that pip is still an innocent in some important way. When he dreams about Estella, one can see how all his unrealistic, romantic illusions blind him to the way the world really works.

We know from this paragraph how the writer reacted to a number of things in the novel. But what conclusions did she finally come to? What larger pattern does she want us to see?

> Reader-based revision:
> In Great Expectations, pip changes from a goodhearted boy into a selfish young man, yet he always remains an innocent who never really understands how the world works. Although as a child Pip actually steals something, he does it because he has a gullible, kindhearted sort of innocence. As a young man in London his crime seems worse when he cuts his old friends, Joe and Biddy, Because of false pride. And yet, as his dreams about Estella show, Pip is still an innocent, a person caught up in unrealistic romantic illusions that he can't see through.

The revised version starts out with a topic sentence that explicitly states the writer's main idea and shows us how she has chunked or organized the facts of the

novel. The rest of the paragraph is clearly focused on that idea, and words such as "although" are used to show how her observations are logically related to one another. From a professor or other reader's point of view, this organization is also more effective because it clearly shows what the writer learned from reading the novel.

Below is a good example of a writer who has focused all his attention on the object before him. He has given us a survey of what he knows about running shoes, although the ostensible purpose of the paragraph was to help a new runner decide what shoe to buy.

> Writer-based draft:
> Shoes are the most important part of your equipment, so choose them well. First, there are various kinds. Track shoes are lightweight with spikes. Road running flats, however, are sturdy, with 1/2" to 1" of cushioning. In many shoes the soles are built up with different layers of material. The uppers are made in various ways, some out of leather, some out of nylon reinforced with leather, and the cheapest are made of vinyl. The best combination is nylon with a leather heel cup. The most distinctive thing about running shoes is the raised heel and, of course, the stripes. Although some tennis shoes now have such stripes it is important not to confuse them with a real running shoe. All in all, a good running shoe should combine firm foot support with sufficient flexibility.

In this draft the writer has focused on the shoe, not the reader who needs to choose a shoe. How would we decide between leather, nylon, and vinyl? Or judge what is "sufficiently" flexible? Why does it matter that the soles are layered; was the writer trying to make a point?

> Reader-based revision:
> Your running shoe will be your most important piece of running equipment, so look for a shoe that both cushions and supports your foot. Track shoes, which are lightweight and flimsy, with spikes for traction in dirt, won't do. Neither will tennis shoes, which are made for balance and quick stops, not steady pounding down the road. A good pair of shoes starts with a thick layered sole, at least 1/2" to 1" thick. The outer layer absorbs road shock; the inner layer cushions your foot. another form of cushioning is the slightly elevated heel, which prevents strain on the vulnerable Achilles tendon.
>
> The uppers that will support your foot come in vinyl, which is cheaper but can cause blisters and hot feet; in leather, which can crack with age; and in a lightweight but more expensive nylon and leather combination. The best nylon and leather shoes will have a thick, fitted leather heel cup that keeps your foot from rolling and prevents twisted ankles. Make sure, however, that your sturdy shoes are still flexible enough that you can bend 90 degrees at the ball of your foot. Although most running shoes have stripes, not all shoes with stripes can give you the cushioning and flexible support you need when you run.

Notice how the revision uses the same facts about shoes but organizes them around the reader's probable questions. The writer tells us what his facts mean in the context of choosing shoes. For example, vinyl uppers mean low cost and possible blisters. And the topic sentence sets up the features of a good shoe--cushioning and support--which the rest of the paragraph will develop. The reader-based revision tells us what we need to know in a direct, explicit way.

CREATING READER-BASED PROSE

In the best of all possible worlds we would all write reader-based prose from the beginning. It is theoretically much more efficient to generate and organize your ideas in light of the reader in the first place. But sometimes that is hard to do. Take the assignment "Write about the physics of wind resistance for a model airplane builder." For a physics teacher this would be a trivial problem. but for someone ten years out of Physics 101, the first task would be remembering whatever they knew about wind resistance or friction at all. Adapting that knowledge to the reader would just have to wait.

In general, write for your reader whenever you can, but recognize that many times a first draft is going to be more writer-based than you may want it to be. Even though the draft may not work well for your reader, it can represent a great deal of work for you and be the groundwork for an effective paper. The more complex your problem and the more difficult your material, the more you will need to transform your writer-based prose to reader-based prose. This is not an overly difficult step in the writing process, but many writers simply neglect to take it.

In order to transform your paper to more reader-based prose, there are four major things you can do, all of which should be familiar by now:

1. Organize your paper around a problem, a thesis, or a purpose you share with the reader--not around your own discovery process or the topic itself.
2. With a goal or thesis as the top level of your issue tree, organize your ideas in a hierarchy. Distinguish between your major and minor ideas and make the relationship between them explicit to the reader. You can use this technique to organize not only an entire paper but sections and paragraphs.
3. If you are hoping that your reader will draw certain conclusions from your paper, or even from a portion of it, make those conclusions explicit. I you expect him or her to go away with a few main ideas, don't leave the work of drawing inferences and forming concepts up to your reader. He or she might just draw a different set of conclusions.
4. Finally, once you have created concepts and organized your ideas in a hierarchy focused on your reader and your goals, use cues--which we will discuss shortly--to make that organization vivid and clear to the reader.

Strategy 3 GIVE YOUR READER CUES

Part of your contract with a reader, if you seriously want to communicate, is to guide him or her through your prose. You need to set up cues that help the reader wee what is coming and how it will be organized. This means, first of all, creating expectations and fulfilling them so that when your point arrives, your reader will have a well-anchored hook to hang it on. This was discussed in Chapter 9(on pages 143 - 144). In addition, you want the reader to know which points are major, which are minor, and how they are related to one another. By using various kinds of cues and signposts, you can guide the reader to build an accurate mental tree of your discussion.

Readers, of course, come to your prose with built in expectations about where these cues will be. For example, they expect to find:

1. the most important points of a discussion stated at the beginning and summarized in some way at the end.
2. a topic sentence that tells them what they will learn from a paragraph.
3. the writer's key words in grammatically important places such as the subject, verb, and object positions.

It is to your advantage to fulfill these expectations whenever you can.

Writers have a number of tools and techniques they can use to preview their meaning, summarize it, and guide the reader. Figure 10-1 lists some of the most common. Check this list against the last paper you wrote. How many of these tools did you take advantage of?

The conventions of format on a page also work as familiar cues to the reader. Figure 10-2 shows a typical format for papers and reports.

Draft 2 of the Oskaloosa Brewing memo (pages 167 - 168) is a good example of how headings, topic sentences, and previews of conclusions can provide reader cues. Here is another piece of writing that was designed with the reader in mind. It comes from Thomas Miller's book This Is Photography, in a chapter called "Action." One of the first previews the reader sees on the page is a photo of a pole-vaulter effortlessly sailing over a bar and a place kicker completely off the ground with his right foot at the top of his kick. The caption reads, "These look like top speed but. . . ."

In the passage below, I have italicized and footnoted certain portions for discussion later. As you read the italicized parts, try to figure out what effect the writer was hoping to have on you by using the cues he did.

Poised Action

> In many sports, particularly in races, movement is constant enough to permit picture making in terms of calculated speeds. But there are other sports in which the action is spasmodic, defying calculation In those sports, the instants when action is poised are, pictorially just as vivid and interesting as the moments when action is wildest.
>
> Take pole vaulting, for instance. At the very top of the vault, with the vaulter's body flung out horizontally over the bar, action is relatively quiet--yet it's the best pictorial moment in this field event. This peak instant can be "stopped" with much less shutter speed than either the rise or fall.

Baseball has a number of moments which are full of poised action. The pitcher winds up and then unwinds to throw his speed-ball. In that instant, between winding and unwinding, action is suspended, yet a picture of it ells a story of speed and power. An instant later, having released the ball, the pitcher is again poised--all his energy having gone into the delivery. There's another pictorial moment. To picture either of these moments you need to work swiftly, but a high shutter speed is less important to your success than an understanding of the sport and of the personal style of the athlete before your lens.

Even in boxing, a good photographer gets his pictures as the blows land, not as they travel. There was that famous instance at the Louis-Nova fight in '41. Two photographers, on directly opposite sides of the ring, saw a heavy punch coming and shot just as it landed. Both used Photo-flashes, of course, but one of the lamps failed to work. The photographer whose light had failed discovered, on developing the film, that he had a picture--a most unusual and vivid silhouette--made by the light of his competitor's flash. The fighters hid the other man's flash bulb, so the silhouette effect was perfect--and dramatic. The only moral to this yarn is that experience teaches pressmen and other pro's that there are right instances for any shots. The photographers on opposite sides of the ring were right--and right together, within the same hundredth of a second.

Figure 10-1 Cues for the reader

Title Table of Contents Abstracts Introduction Headings Problem/purpose statement Topic sentences for paragraphs	Cues that preview your points
Sentence summaries at ends of paragraphs Conclusion or summary sections	Cues that summarize or illustrate your points
Pictures, graphs, and tables Punctuation Typographical cues: different typefaces, underlining, numbering Visual arrangement: indentation, extra white space, rows and columns	Cues that guide the reader visually
Transitional words Conjunctions Repetitions Pronouns Summary nouns	Cues that guide the reader verbally

Figure 10-2 Common format for typewritten paper

THIS IS A TITLE: THE SUBTITLE QUALIFIES IT

The first sentence in this paragraph is a topic sentence, which announces the topic and previews the argument or point of the paragraph. the remainder of the paragraph often previews the rest of the paper, introducing the main points to be covered.

THIS IS A MAJOR HEADING

Major headings are placed flush left, often set in caps, and, in typewritten manuscript, usually underlined. In print they are often set in boldface type. Ideally a reader should be able to see the shape of your discussion simply by reading the title and major headings. Make the wording of major headings grammatically parallel, if you can, as the major and minor headings are in this example.

This Is a Minor Heading

Unlike a major heading it is indented and typed in capital and lower-case letters. It should be clearly and logically related to the major heading that precedes it.

> The fact that this passage is indented says it is either a long quotation or an example. The additional space around it and the single spacing signal that it is a different kind of text, and let readers adjust their reading speed and expectations.

Here are comments on the writer's cues:

1. In the original, this heading is set in boldface type.
2. These cues make the relationship between each of the sentences explicit. They lead us along; many sports are contrasted to other sports. We are told something additional about "other sports" and then given an example.
3. A topic sentence ties a new subject, "baseball," to the old topic, "poised action."
4. These words and phrases reinforce our sense of the timing and sequence of the action.
5. The writer recaps his discussion by redefining it not just as an action but in the larger context now of photographs representing "pictorial moments."
6. This sentence is a recap on an even larger scale. In it the writer draws a conclusion based on both this paragraph and the preceding one, and ties the paragraphs to the larger goal of the book and the chapter; how to take good action photographs.
7. This topic sentence and its introductory phrase are performing two functions: They introduce a new subject, boxing, and tie it neatly to the old framework with the words "even in."
8. We are told to see this as an example of the writer's point. It doesn't let us

simply be entertained by the story; he uses it.

9. This line was also in italics in the original, to emphasize how unusual the occurrence was. Note that in the phrase just before this one--"a most unusual and vivid silhouette" the writer used dashes to highlight the significance of the fact. Both italics and dashes are attention-getting cues, though they can be overdone.

10. The writer draws a particular conclusion from all of this that is tied to the point of his book, and he signposts his conclusion quite clearly so we won't miss it: "The only moral to the yarn is . . ."

Strategy 4 DEVELOP A PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT

People often write because they want to make something happen. They want the reader to do something or at least to see things their way. But sometimes expressing a point of view isn't enough, because it conflicts with the way the reader already sees things. We are faced with the same old problem of communication: Your image of something and your reader's are not the same. What kind of arguments can you use that will make him or her see things your way? In this section we will look at the nature of arguments and at one type, the Rogerian argument, that can help you persuade another person to see things differently.

WINNING AN ARGUMENT VERSUS PERSUADING A LISTENER

When people think of arguments they usually think of winning them. And the time honored method of winning an argument by force ("You agree or I'll shoot.") or, in its more familiar form by authority ("This is right because I [your mother, father, teacher, sergeant, boss] say it is."). The problem with force or authority that , short of brainwashing, it often changes people's behavior, but not their minds.

A second familiar form of argument is debate. Yet many people who learn to debate in high school discover that in the real world their debate strategies can indeed prove their point--but lose the argument. Debate is an argumentative contest: Person A is pitted against person B, and the winner is decided by an impartial judge. But in the real world, person A is trying not to impress a judge but to convince person B. The goal of such an argument is not to win points but to affect your listener, to change his or her image of your subject in some significant way. And, as you remember, that image may be a large, complex network of ideas, associations, and attitudes. The goal of communication is to find a common ground and create a shared image, but debate typically polarizes a discussion by pitting one image against the other.

Let us look for a moment at the possible outcomes of an argument of discussion in which the two parties have firmly held but differing images. Ann has decided to take a year off to work and travel before she finishes college and settles on a career. Her parents immediately oppose the idea. To them, this plan conveys and image of "dropping out" and wasting a year, with the possibility that Ann might not return to school. Furthermore, they have saved money to help put her through school and see this prospect as an indication that she doesn't value their plans, hopes, and efforts for her.

For Ann, on the other hand, taking a year off means getting time and experience that would enable her to take better advantage of college. She hopes it will help her decide what sort of work she wants to do, but more importantly she sees it as a chance to develop on her own for a while. In her mind, the goal of going to college isn't getting a degree but figuring out what things you want to learn more about.

Clearly Ann and her parents have very different images of taking a year off. Assume you are Ann in this situation. What are the possible outcomes of an argument you might have with your parents?

One outcome, and usually the least likely one, is that you will totally reconstruct your listeners' image so they see the issue just as you do. you simply replace their perspective with yours. Reconstruction can no doubt happen if your audience has an undeveloped image of the subject or sees you as a great authority, but argument strategies that set out to reconstruct someone else's ideas completely--to win the point--are usually ill founded and unrealistic. They are more likely to polarize people than to persuade them.

A second alternative is to modify someone else's image, to add to or clarify it. you do this when you clarify an issue (for example, taking a year off is not the same as "dropping out") or when you add new information (Ann's college even has a special program for this and might give her some course credit for work experience). As a writer this is clearly the most reasonable effect you can aim for. In doing so you respect the other person's point of view while striving to modify those features you can reasonably affect.

The third possible outcome of an argument may be the most common: no change. Think for a minute of how many speeches, lectures, classes, sermons, and discussions you have sat through in your life and how many of those had no discernible effect on your thinking. If we think of an argument as debate in which a "good" argument inevitably wins, we forget that it is possible for even a "correct" argument to have absolutely no effect on our listener.

To sum up, the goal of an argument is to modify the image of your listener--and that this is not the same as simply presenting your own image. A successful argument is a reader based act. It considers attitudes and images the reader already holds.

However, a great roadblock stands in the way of modifying a listener's image. Many people perceive any change in their image of things as a threat to their own security and stability. People's images are part of themselves, and a part of how they have made sense of the world. To ask them to change their image in any significant way can make people anxious and resistant to change. When this happens, communication simply stops.

Arguments that polarize issues often create just this situation. The more the speaker argues, the more firmly the listener clings to h is own position. And instead of listening, the listener spends his time thinking up counter-arguments to protect his own position and image. So the critical question for the writer is this: How can I persuade my reader to listen to my position and maybe even modify his or her image without creating this sense of threat that stops communication?

ROGERIAN ARGUMENT

Rogerian argument, developed in part from the work of Carl Rogers, is an argument strategy designed not to win but to increase communication in both directions. It is based on the fact that if people feel they are understood--that their position is honestly recognized and respected--they may cease to feel a sense of threat. Once the threat is removed, listening is no longer an act of self defense, and people feel they can afford to truly listen to and consider other ways of seeing things.

The goal of an argument, then, is to induce your reader at least to consider your position and the possibility of modifying his or her own. One way to make this happen is to demonstrate an understanding of your listener's position first. That means trying to see the issue from his or her point of view. For face-to -face discussions, Carl Rogers suggested this rule of thumb: Before you present your position and argue for your way of seeing things, you must be able to describe your listener's position back to your listener in such a way that he or she agrees with your version of it. In other words, you are demonstrating that you not only care about your listener's perspective but care enough to actively try (and keep trying) to understand it. So Ann in our example would have begun the discussion with her parents by exploring with them their response to her leaving college and the reasons behind their feelings.

What does this mean for writers who don't have the luxury of a face-to-face discussion? First, you can use the introduction to your paper, including your shared goal, to demonstrate to your reader a thorough understanding of his or her problems and goals. This is your chance to look at the question from your reader's point of view and show how your message is relevant to them.

Secondly, try to avoid categorizing people and issues. This puts people into camps, polarizes the argument, and stops communication. For example, Ann may well have felt that her parents were being old-fashioned and conventional to resist her idea, but establishing that point would have done little to change their minds. A Rogerian argument, by contrast, would begin by acknowledging the parents' plans and hopes for her and recognizing the element of truth in their fear of her "dropping out." They know that, despite good intentions, many people don't come back to college. In taking a Rogerian approach, Ann might also begin to understand the issues more clearly herself. One of the hidden strengths of a Rogerian argument is that, besides increasing one's power to persuade, it also opens up communication and may even end up persuading the persuader. It increases the possibility of genuine communication and change for both the speaker and listener.

The first draft of Ann's letter started like this:

Dear Mom and Dad,

I wish you would try to see my point of view and not be so conventional. Things are different from when you went to school. And you must realize I am old enough to make my own decisions, even if you disagree. There are a number of good reasons why this is the best decision I could make. First,

Although this letter created a "strong" argument, it was also likely to stop communication and unlikely to persuade. Here is the letter Ann eventually wrote to her parents, which tries to take an open Rogerian approach to the problem.

Dear Mom and Dad,

As I told you the other night on the phone, I want to consider taking a year off from college to work and be on my own for a while. I've been thinking over what you said because this is an important decision and, like you, I want to do what will be best in the long run, not just what seems attractive now. I think some of your objections make a lot of sense. After all the effort you've put into helping me get through college, it would be terrible to just "drop out" or never find a real career that I could be committed to.

I know you're also wondering if I recognize what an opportunity I have and are probably worrying if I'm just going to let it slip through my fingers. Well, in a way I'm worried about that too. Here I am working hard, but I don't really know where I want to go or why. It's time for me to specialize and I can't decide what to do. And it's that opportunity I'm afraid of losing. I feel I need some time off and some experience so I can make a better decision and really take advantage of my last year here.

But there's still the question of whether I would be dropping out. The college actually has a program for people who want to take a year off, and they even encourage you to enter it if you have some idea of what you'd be doing. So, as far as the school is concerned, I'd be in a well-established leave of absence program. But the fact is, people do drop out. They don't always come back. What would a whole year away from school do to me? You're right, I can't really be sure. But I think my reasons are good ones, and I'm working on a plan that would let me earn credit while I work and come back to school with a clearer sense of where I want to go. Can you offer me any more suggestions on ways I could plan ahead?

Love,

ANN