

COAT 2018

Canberra

Thrills, Spills and Skills: Communicating Clearly

Writing Comes Alive

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Planning · helps speakers to listen

Summarising · helps listeners to listen



Listen and See

People don't see things as they *are*.
They see things as *they* are.

Richard Rohr, Franciscan



Be an effective observer



Switch perspective: anticipate



Focus on your listener for positive news

A refund will be sent.

We will send a refund.

You will receive a refund.



Focus away from your listener for negative news

You sent the form after the due date.

We received the form after the due date.

The form was received after the due date.

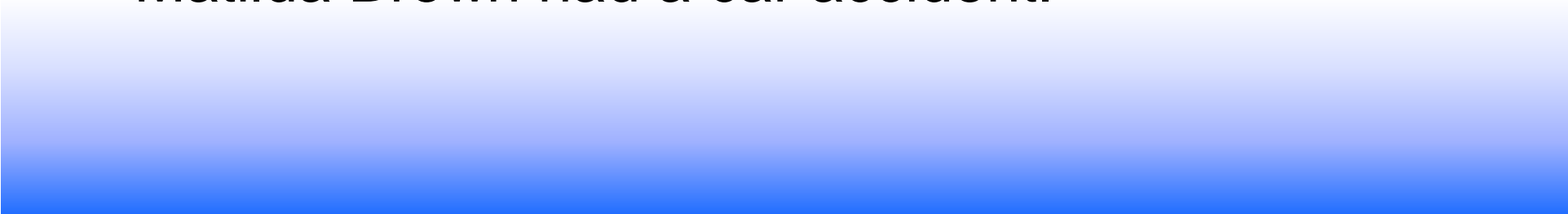


Sentence emphasis

1. Matilda Brown had a car accident in Adelaide two months ago.

2. Matilda Brown had a car accident two months ago in Adelaide.

3. Two months ago, while visiting Adelaide, Matilda Brown had a car accident.



Avoid babushka-doll sentences

Before

If you go to the registry · it's on level 3 ·
they will tell you · see if you can speak to
Joan · what to do if you've lost your
documents · the originals · when you only
have copies.

After

Go to the registry on level 3. Ask for Joan and
she will explain what you do when you've lost
your original documents.

Active voice + clear verbs

Before


We need **to be provided with** copies of the documentation.

After

We need **you to provide us** with copies of the documents.

Better still

John, you need to **send** us copies of the documents.

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Prefer verbs over nouns

Before

We would appreciate **receipt** of the requested information as soon as possible.

After

Simon, please **send** me the information I've asked you for by Friday morning.

Remove unnecessary words

Avoid throat clearers that go nowhere

“The parties have had previous discussions.

“It is important to note that . . .

“At this point in time . . .

“Having regard to . . .

Get straight into your message

“You asked the Tribunal to review your allowance.

“This is the report you asked us to consider.

“You asked us three questions about your obligations. This is what you have to do.

Use everyday language



Speak plain English

Before

Hearing papers need to be filed by 30 June. OR

Plaintiff to file and serve papers by 30 June.

After

Richard, if there's anything you want me to read, you need to give it to me by 30 June.

Speak plain English

Before

The matter is to be adjourned to a date to be determined by the registrar.

After

We're going to have to delay this until another day. The registrar will let you know when that is.


Prefer a conversational tone

Before

Is it your submission that this witness not be called to give evidence?

After

Do you say that I shouldn't let this witness tell her story?



Be mindful

Watch out for words that are culturally or contextually dependent:

"possibly	" probably
"usually	" often
"Important	" serious
"should	" could
"have to	" matter

Compare

I have to check my diary.

and

You have to report the loss to the police.



Compare

It doesn't matter.

What is the matter?

The matter is to be adjourned.



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