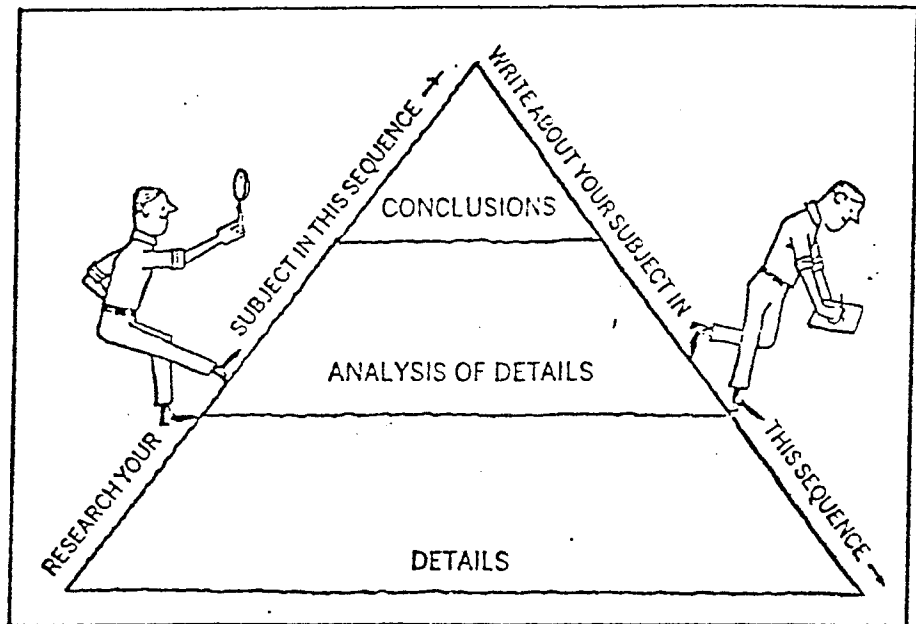


Fast, Functional Writing

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INVERTED-PYRAMID approach assures that the main ideas in the report—what the reader most wants to know—are at the beginning, not at the end.

The Inverted Pyramid

This structure, which has been called the inverted-pyramid approach to report organization, is far and away the most logical for any technical report, because:

- At once, the reader learns what he wants to know. For instance, if several copies of a research report are distributed, some of the most important recipients may have neither the time nor the desire to examine every page; all they may want is a clear picture of the conclusions that emerged from the research—and the inverted-pyramid form can give this to them without their having to hunt for the right pages.

- Conclusions are usually concrete, rather than general. Thus the writer avoids a notorious trap when he begins with his conclusions. He is not forced to begin with a lengthy, general introduction before coming to grips with his subject matter. This is a major fault of the academic approach to organization, where a vague summary, followed by a vague introduction, creates all kinds of confusion. One has to get down to brass tacks at some point, so why not do it right at the beginning?

- For the writer, there is a great psychological advantage when conclusions come first. Once the reader grasps the writer's main points, and learns why the writer is promoting them, he is forced to consider the writer's point of view as he reads through the report. He may not entirely agree with the writer at the outset, but he can't ignore his main points, no matter how much he tries. In contrast, when conclusions come at the end of the report, the reader isn't influenced by them at all; in fact, he may have arrived at entirely different conclusions before he gets to the final pages.

- The report is much easier to write when conclusions appear at the beginning. This is perhaps the biggest benefit of all for the report writer. When conclusions are spelled out clearly at the outset, most of the traditional problems of organization tend to disappear. The remainder of the report simply becomes an expansion of the conclusions and recommendations. And quite frankly, the organization after this can be atrocious, yet the reader is not likely to object so vociferously. Why? Because the first part of the report gives him clues or guidelines that make it much easier to interpret the mass of detail that follows.

