

SAMPLE NOTES

Report Writing

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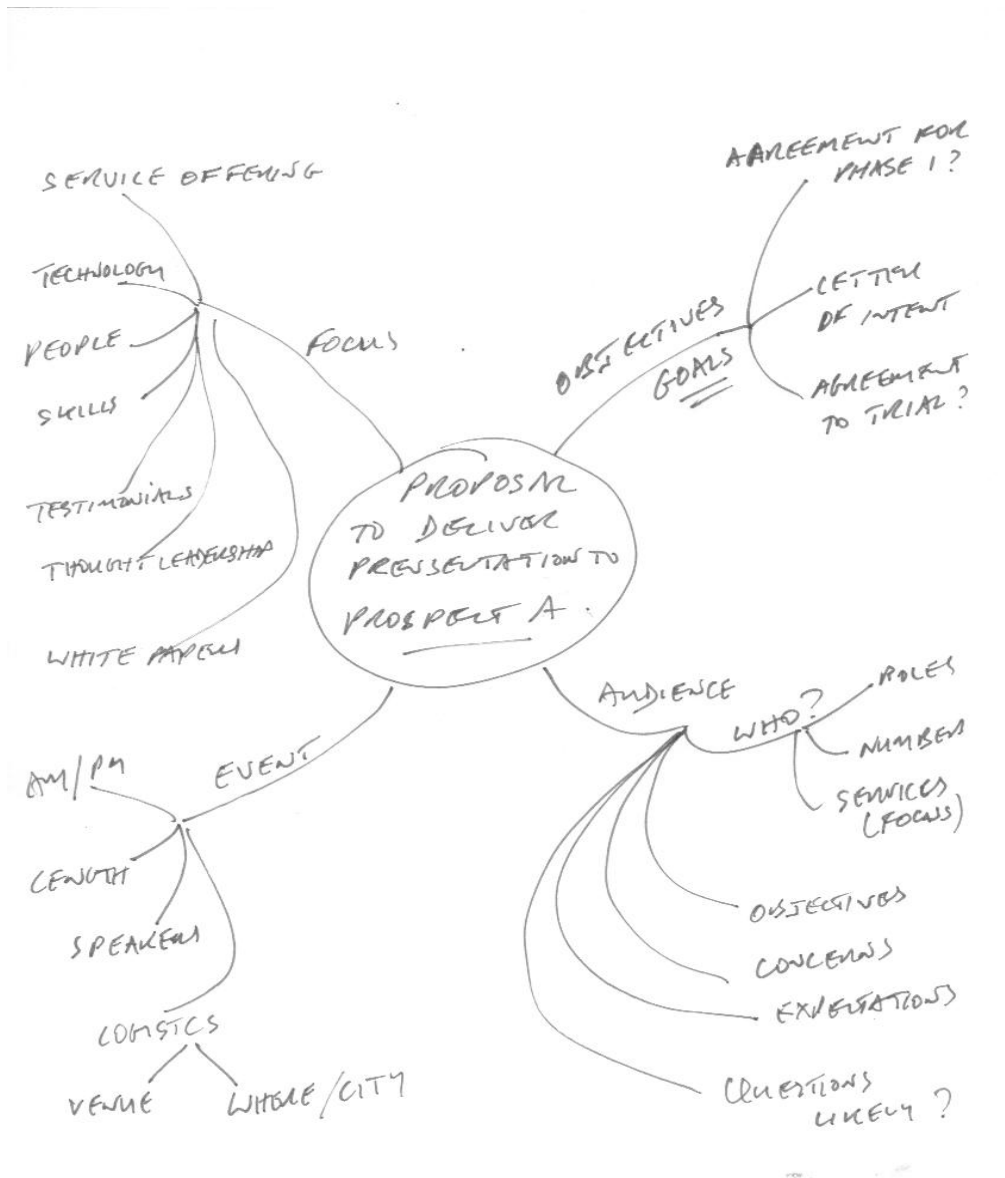
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4.3 Example mind map

Below is an example of a mind map for the activities and components required to put together a presentation to Prospect A. The theme is a "Proposal to Deliver a Presentation". In support of this theme, there are four components:

- Objectives and specific goals
- Focus
- Audience
- Event



5. Gather information

5.1 Research

This is necessary to gather all the information that you will require to write the report. You may require accurate facts and figures and need to be able to name and refer to information sources.

Information can be acquired by questionnaire, interview, library and from the Internet. It is good practice to collate all information you may use with its sources and URL reference (if appropriate) and record this electronically for future access. Whenever third party information is used, ensure that you have permission to publish it in your report.

5.2 Select information

You won't require all the information which you have gathered and so this is the point where you need to sift, discard and retain information as appropriate. You need to ensure that the information is important to your case.

5.3 Organise information

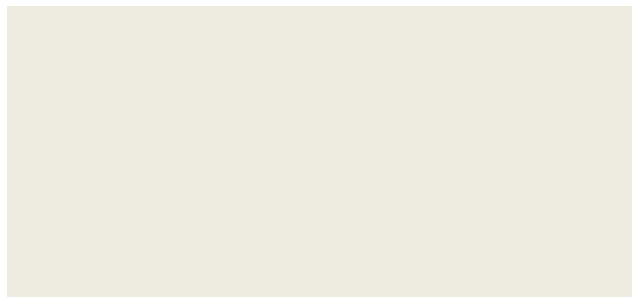
Information needs to be in a logical order so that each information piece plays a coherent role in the report.

5.4 Interpret information

This is where you take the information and interpret it in favour of the view which you wish to take in your report.

Question

From where do you acquire information for your reports?



6. Structure

Having tested your thoughts and linked one thought to another, the most important aspect of writing a report is to formalise your thoughts in a hierarchical and logical sequence. This means that your key thoughts should be followed by supporting but more detailed thoughts.

6.1 Hierarchy of thoughts

To start with, you need to summarise your objectives (or thoughts). This is scene setting and is an important part of effective report writing. Set the scene effectively at the beginning and it makes it easier for the reader to go on the journey (through your report) with you.

This hierarchical principle should be applied at all stages. Thoughts presented at a higher level should be a summary of the thoughts at a lower level. The grouping of thoughts must be of a similar type and logical.

For instance, Apples and Pears could be under a group heading of Fruit. Cars and Motorcycles might be under the group Motor Products. If you needed to put both groups together, because you wished to group them under "Inventory" say, then this should be done at a higher group level.

Logic and hierarchy is crucial for good report writing. What should be first should appear first, and what should be second, should appear second. So you need to take care that your logic is correct and tested.

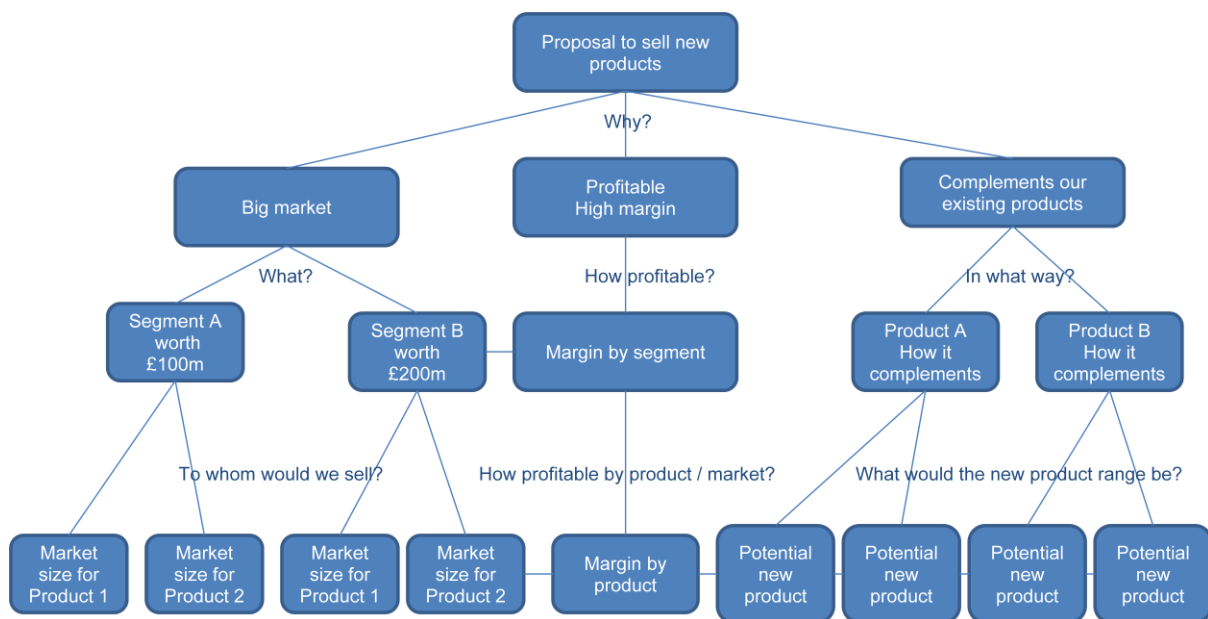
According to Barbara Minto in her book *The Pyramid Principle* the correct sequence of your thoughts depends on the analytical process that you consider appropriate. Minto says that there are four logical ways in which to order a set of ideas (or *thoughts* as we describe them here). These are:

- Deductively (major premise, minor premise, conclusion)
- Chronologically (first, second, third)
- Structurally (London, Paris, New York)
- Comparatively (first most important, second most important, etc.)

If deductive, your thoughts are reasoned in argument order. If chronological, you are working out the cause and effect of relationships in time order. If structurally, you are commenting on an existing structure and its implications. If comparatively, you are commenting on the order of importance.

6.2 Hierarchy and logic

Here is an example of the results of a logical sequence of thought. There is a vertical relationship between points and sub-points but there is also a relation within sets of sub-points. As you go down into sub-points, each sub-point begs questions which need to be answered by the subsequent layer and so on. Structuring your thoughts in this way enables you to think clearly.



If you were producing a real report along these lines, you might also include Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT).

6.3 Way of thinking

The best means of building your structure to order your ideas (or thought process) is in terms of Situation, Question and Explanation/Elaboration.

Situation

For example, your current business may have declining product revenues but you may have good market access or market reach. Your report may be about the strategic decisions which need to be made. You need to describe the situation.

Question

This is where you need to explain the rationale to your proposal. What is the scope of your proposed strategy? Does it include some or all products and services? You need to think of what is needed to substantiate your case at each stage.

Explanation/Elaboration

Each box (apart from the one at the top) should answer the questions which your thoughts in the previous box suggest.

Report structure

The top of the sequence should represent the topic. The boxes below should answer questions that previous boxes have begged.

When drafting the structure of your report for real, then put the answers in (if you know them).

So what?

At each stage in structuring the report, ensure that you answer the question “so what?”

Clarifying your thoughts

If you find difficulty to get your thoughts in logical order, revert back to the mind map at 4.2. Use the mind map to list all the points you wish to make, the relationship between the points and your conclusion. Think of your readers / your audience. What’s in it for them?

7. Test your logic

Two methods for establishing logical relationships between ideas are:

- Inductive reasoning
- Deductive reasoning

7.1 Deductive reasoning

Deductive reasoning reveals a conclusion which necessarily follows from a set of premises. For instance:

1. Jessica meets the three criteria necessary for being a great athlete
2. Jessica is an athlete
3. Therefore, Jessica is a great athlete

A deductive argument is sound if it is valid and its premises are true.

The first premise states that Jessica meets the three criteria necessary for being a great athlete. The second premise states that Jessica is classified an athlete. The conclusion states that Jessica must be a great athlete because she meets the necessary criteria from her classification as an athlete.

Here's an example of an argument which is valid but not sound:

1. All greyhounds can run very fast.
2. Some horses can run very fast.
3. Therefore, some horses are greyhounds.

7.2 Inductive reasoning

Inductive reasoning requires some degree of support and probability for the conclusion. Inducing means: bringing about. Inductive reasoning means: bringing about facts to guide you towards the conclusion. For instance:

1. When chimpanzees become angry, they may become violent.
2. Humans are similar to chimpanzees
3. Therefore humans may become violent when angry."

Here's another example:

1. Many heart patients live in New Town and travel to Old Town Hospital for their specialist medication.
2. The number of heart patients in New Town would justify a local specialist heart unit.
3. New Town Hospital has available finance to upgrade its heart specialist facilities.
4. New Town Hospital can attract and recruit the required medical specialists.
5. New Town Hospital should build its own specialist heart unit.

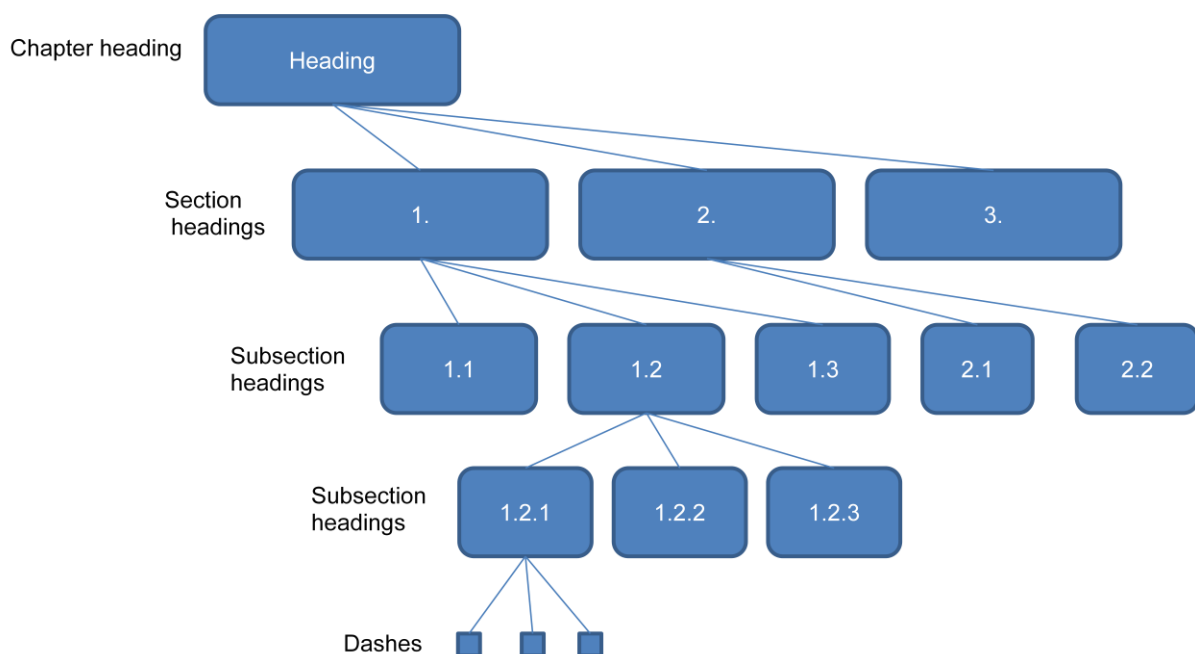
Inductive reasoning is the method you are most likely to use to create your arguments.

8. Headings and subheadings

Having created the hierarchical structure of your report in rough format, the next stage is to begin writing.

To reflect hierarchy, you may have a house format. It doesn't matter what the format is, provided it is clear. The format used within these course notes has major headings to the left, with subordinate headings indented to the right.

Instead of numbers, you could as easily use letters. Your chosen format doesn't matter provided that it is clear and consistent throughout your report.



8.1 Consistency of description

Whichever you apply, a verb or noun, ensure consistency in your headings. If you have a heading with “Systems’ Management” or “Managing the System” ensure that subsequent headings and subheadings follow your original style.

8.2 Concise headings

The heading is for attention and not for thought. Ensure your headings are descriptive but concise.

8.3 Group of headings

List the group of headings at the beginning of each chapter to give a signpost to the readers.

9. Format

The introduction is a critical part of your report. It sets the scene and needs to motivate the reader to read on. The introduction needs to be as long as is needed to ensure that both you and the reader are starting from the same place.

It should be non-controversial and state the situation in a way the reader should accept. This should be covered in two or three paragraphs although it could be covered in one depending on the content.

The structure you should choose should be the same as the one you have used for your whole report:

9.1 Situation, Question, Explanation (or Elaboration)

Situation should state the reason why the report has been produced, its scope and what the report is covering.

Questions should be aimed at testing your thoughts at each stage of your report structure.

Explanation/Elaboration is answering those questions. As you progress down through the report structure, the detail in your explanations should increase.
