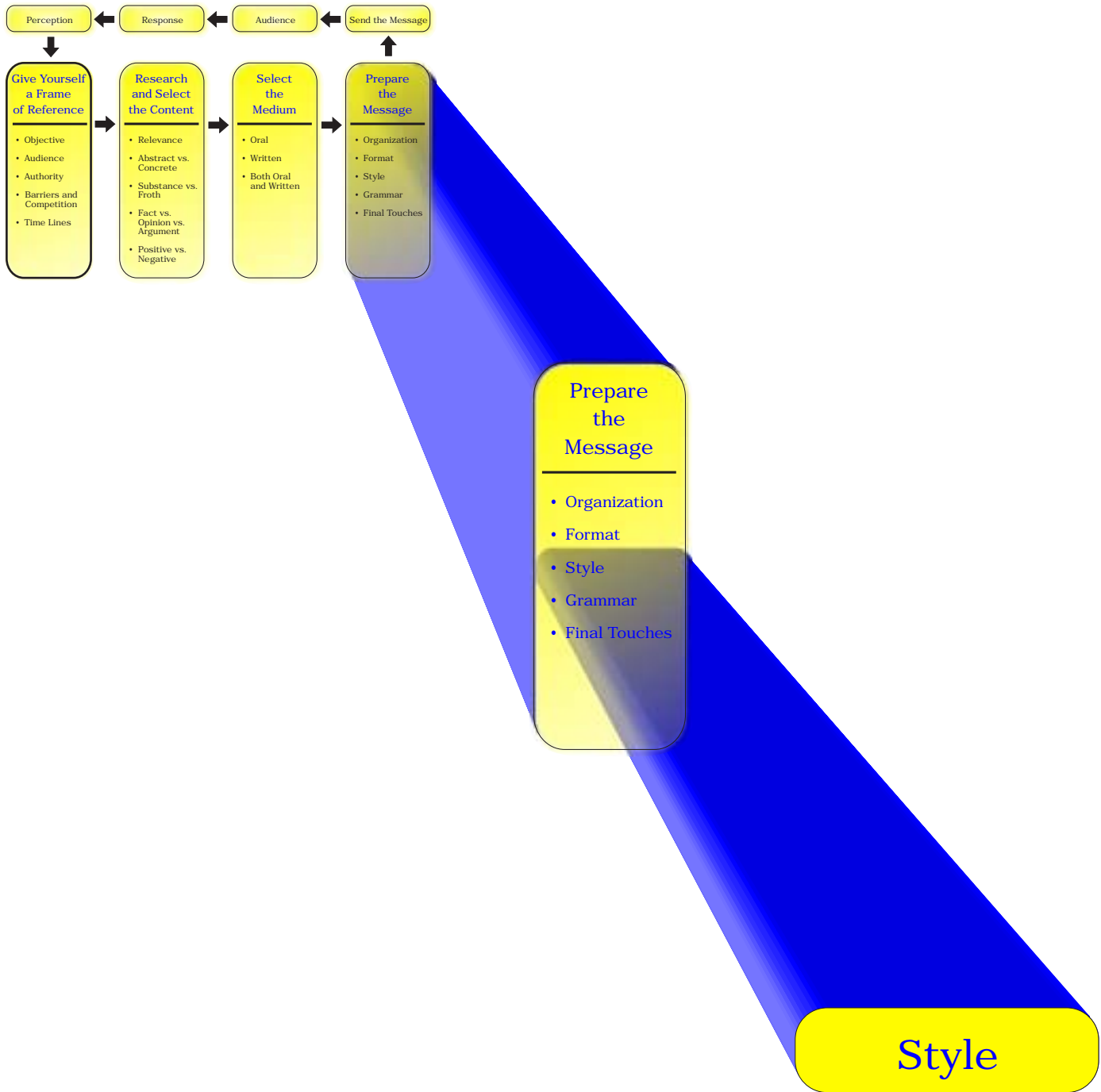


# Writing for Results

A Step-by-Step Model for Executive Documents



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*Showing Off?*

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## INTRODUCTION

Briefing notes and memos to a minister are the formal written record of the advice of the bureaucracy to Canada's elected government. Letters from the minister and the deputy minister play a vital role in influencing their stakeholders and the general public. Be prepared to devote thought and effort to achieving the appropriate style for those documents.

In drafting, aim for a style that emotionally neutral and fitting to the stature of executive documents. You should also work hard to avoid bureaucratic baffle-gab, which is easier said than done.

The style of executive documents differs from the style I've used in this handbook. Here, I've used an informal, personal style — often using personal pronouns such as “you” and “I” as well as contractions such as “won't”. And I've started lots of sentences with “And” and “But”.

Such a style is fine for a handbook such as this. But it is too casual for formal documents such as briefing notes and memos to a minister. Even so, in editing such documents I

apply many of the same principles that I have used here. I aim for:

- short words;
- short sentences; and
- active verbs.

You might be worried that your minister might read such material and exclaim, “This looks like it was written for a child!” That’s an unlikely outcome. It is far more likely that the minister will simply read it with ease, not even being conscious of making an effort to follow what you have to say. And that takes hard work on your part.

It has been said that Hemmingway re-wrote the opening page of *The Old Man and the Sea* over 100 times. That novel won him a Pulitzer Prize. But in reading it, you would not be conscious of plowing through a sophisticated piece of literature that took so much hard work to write. Rather, you would simply find yourself being drawn into the book without even being aware of reading.

In your own writing, don’t be discouraged if you find yourself editing, revising and editing again to achieve a high standard of reading ease. It’s par for the course to have to go over things again and again.