



A Write Quick Guide

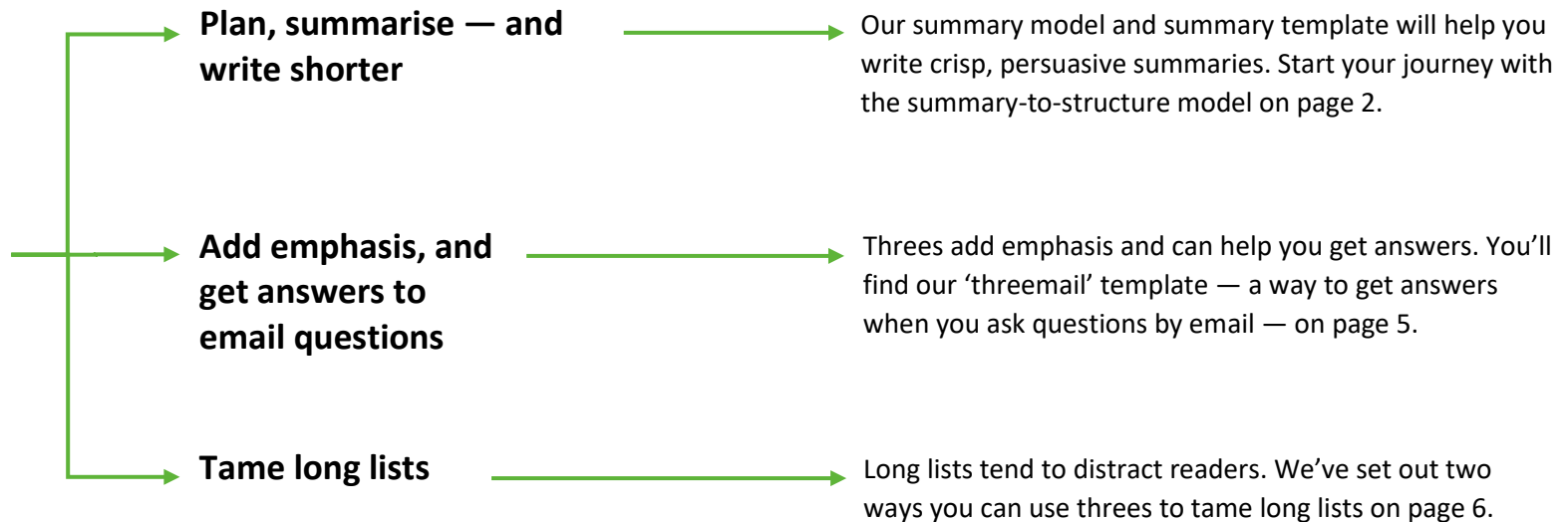
## The Magic of Threes

Politicians and speechwriters, business people and marketing folk, and songwriters and storytellers all know about the magic of threes.

We put this Quick Guide together to show you how you can use the magic of threes in your everyday writing — whether you're dashing off an email, writing a memo to a client, or finessing an important report. And you'll find a template on page 4 that will help you write short, crisp summaries.

This guide will help you sharpen up your everyday writing in three ways.

How to use the magic of threes in your everyday writing



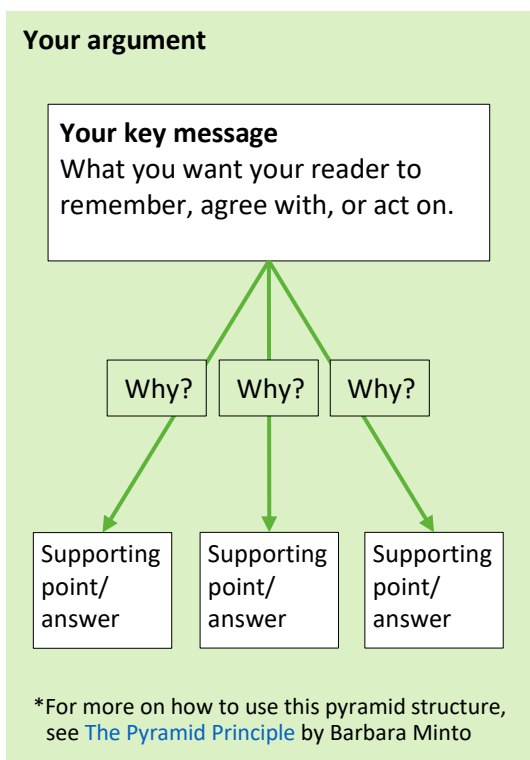
## 1. A model that will help you plan, summarise — and write shorter

Keep to one key message and three supporting points, and good things happen. You boil your argument down to your strongest points, you sound crisply confident, you keep it brief.

You'll find two examples that use this model on page 3 — and a template on page 4.

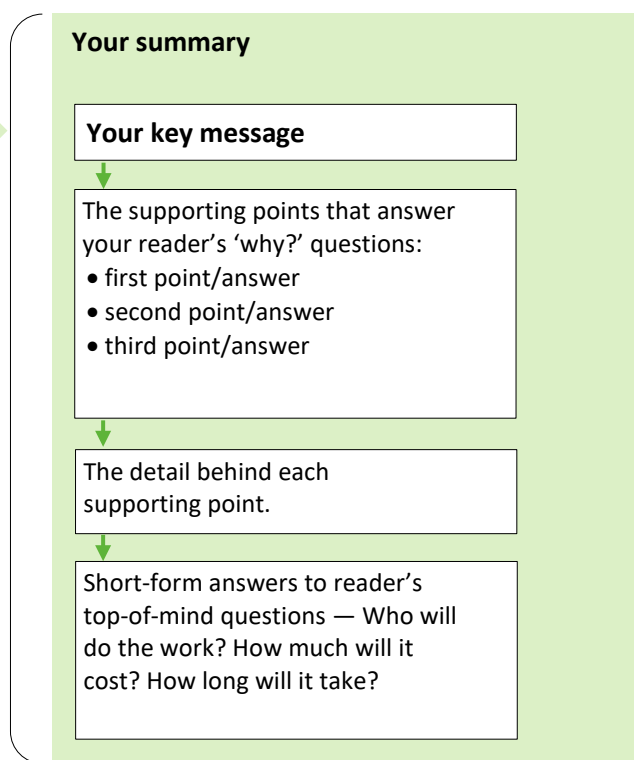
### Plan your argument, and supporting points

Think of your argument as a pyramid:\* the key message at the top, supported by three points that answer 'why?' questions.



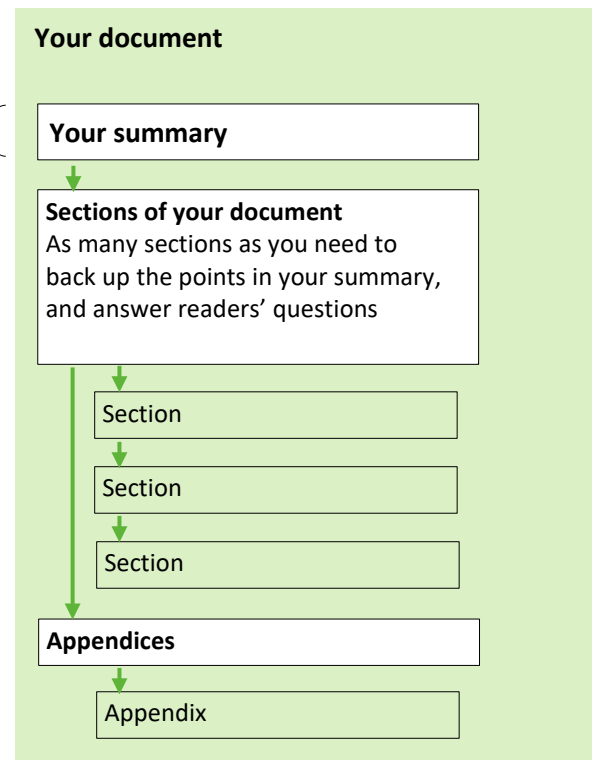
### Create a convincing summary

Your summary must set out your argument, and answer readers' top-of-mind questions. The summary will also define your structure.



### Use the summary to structure your document

Your summary sets out your argument and the top-level detail. The rest of the document backs up the summary.



## Two examples that show how the summary model — and template — work

You can use the template on page 4 to build summaries like these.

### A report that sets out findings but not a top-line recommendation

A building report will tell you about the condition of a house, but isn't likely tell you whether or not you should buy or rent the house.

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#### The main message

**The house is generally sound, but the wiring and hot water tank need to be replaced as soon as possible**

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#### Three supporting points

- The house, foundations, and most visible parts are sound.
- Older wiring is a fire risk, and the hot water tank is leaking.
- The roof is generally sound but the covering may need to be replaced within the next 5 years.

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#### Detail that fleshes out the supporting points

##### **Most visible parts are in good condition**

The house and its foundations are sound, with most visible parts in good condition. The site is stable, with minimal risk of slope failure.

##### **The wiring and hot water cylinder need to be fixed now**

The lighting circuit has fabric insulation — a fire risk. You should get an electrician to replace it, and check the rest of the house's wiring. The hot water cylinder is rusty and leaking.

##### **The roof may need to be replaced within the next 10 years**

It's sound overall, but rust at the edges suggests the galvanised steel covering may need to be replaced in the next 5 years.

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#### Short-form answers to likely questions

*The rest of the house is in good condition — see section C*

- The plumbing is mostly in good condition.
  - The upstairs floor is wonky, but won't get worse.
  - The interior and exterior walls — and foundations — are in excellent condition.
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### A report that makes a top-line recommendation\*

You'll often have to make recommendations when you write a report — it's often the main reason the report exists.

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#### The main message

**The Rebel Alliance should attack the Death Star now — before the Empire destroys another planet**

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#### Three supporting points

- The Death Star gives the Empire the ability to destroy entire planets — they've already destroyed Alderaan.
- We have fighters ready to attack the Death Star's weak point.
- If we don't strike now, the Empire will crush the Alliance.

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#### Detail that fleshes out the supporting points

##### **The Death Star gives the Empire an unbeatable advantage**

The Empire can now destroy entire planets at will. This weapon means defeat for the Rebel Alliance.

##### **We know its weak point and have the weapons we need**

If one proton torpedo reaches the Death Star's reactor, it will cause a chain reaction and destroy the Star. We have fighters, pilots, commanders, and proton torpedoes to hand. Pilots are ready to go.

##### **We must strike now before the Empire crushes the Alliance**

If we don't destroy the Death Star, we will lose many people, and the ability to resupply. Morale will nose-dive.

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#### Short-form answers to likely questions

*General Dodonna will direct an attack force of 30 fighters*

- General Jan Dodonna will direct the attack from the Yavin 4.
  - The attack force will be made up of 30 fighters.
  - Luke Skywalker will fly one of the fighters armed with proton torpedoes — the force is strong with this one.
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\* Inspired by [Eric Hulbert's YouTube video on 'The Pyramid Principle'](#)

## Your free summary template — fill in the blanks to create a crisp summary

This template uses the model on page 2. Fill in the green fields and watch your summary build.

### Three template-summary tips

- This template works best with Adobe Reader DC, [a free download from adobe.com](#)
- Take a look at this short video that [shows how this interactive template works](#)
- When you've finished your summary, use the button below to save it.

### Start with your argument

Main message

First supporting point

Second supporting point

Third supporting point

### Then add detail on supporting points, and short-form answers to reader's questions

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*Add short-form answers to reader's top-of-mind questions*

## 2. Add emphasis, and get answers to email questions

Threes can help you emphasise key points, add a dash of pizzazz — and get answers when you ask questions by email.

### Threes help you emphasise key points in your everyday writing

Search for ‘magic of threes’ online and you’ll find plenty of examples of threes in famous speeches:

- ‘...government of the people, by the people, for the people’ (from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, 1863)
- ‘I stand here today humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust you have bestowed, mindful of the sacrifices borne by our ancestors’ (from Barack Obama’s first speech as president, 2009)
- ‘Go home tonight and check in on your neighbours. Start a phone tree with your street. Plan how you’ll keep in touch with one another’ (from Jacinda Ardern’s Level 4 lockdown speech, 2020)

But threes aren’t just for orators on the global stage. The table below shows you can use threes in your everyday writing.

<i>Ways to use threes</i>	<i>Examples of how threes can work</i>
<b>Threes within a sentence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Company X meets all our project requirements — budget, experience, and technology.</li><li>• This approach will help us hit key targets for revenue, client mix, and market awareness.</li></ul>
<b>Threes in separate sentences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The project you describe in the request for proposals is a perfect fit for XCorp. We have solid project experience. We understand your industry. And we know how to work with senior stakeholders.</li><li>• The car is a lemon and I want a refund. It overheats. It often won’t start. And it’s already going rusty.</li></ul>

### The ‘threemail’ — a neat way to ask the same question three times

People tend to skim emails, so repeating your question, or ‘ask’, can help you get answers. This example shows how you can ask the same question three times, in slightly different ways.

Can you send me the status report on project X by Monday, 3 April? ← **The first ask is in the subject line, with a question mark.**

Hi Keith,

Please send me a status report on project X by Monday, 3 April — I’ve attached the template we have to use. ← **Get the second ask in early.**

I have to give a short presentation on the project at the next project committee meeting on Wednesday, 5 April. **Give your reader a bit of detail, the reason you need what you need.**

I need your update on the Monday so I have time to check any details with you, and add your update into my presentation.

Let me know soonest if for any reason you can’t get me the status report on Monday, 3 April. ← **Put the third ask at the end — it’s rephrased in this example.**

Best regards

Susan

### 3. Tame long lists

Long lists — seven or more items — can distract readers and break their flow. Here are two ways you can use the magic of threes to tame long lists.

A topic sentence is a sentence at the start of a paragraph that sets out the paragraph's main idea.

#### The original seven-point list in rather formal language (see rewritten version at far right)

- Several issues tend to reduce competition in the private health market.
- Lack of information that would help consumers compare different providers.
  - High concentration of providers, particularly in local geographic markets, means little real choice for consumers.
  - Medical insurers' buying power is limited as insurers have limited choice of providers in many geographic markets.
  - Difficulties for new providers in getting recognised by main insurers.
  - Incentives payments paid by providers to consultants and GPs.
  - Insufficient warnings for insurance patients of the possibility of facing shortfall prices, where services exceed the level of their policy cover.
  - Consultants — particularly anaesthetists — forming local groups that charge set fees.



#### Group items on the same topic together, and add bold headings for each group (We've also rewritten bullets into plain language.)

- Three issues tend to reduce competition in the private health market.
- New providers face significant barriers**
- New providers have to go through a long, expensive process to get onto insurers' lists.
- Ways of working may inflate prices**
- Providers pay consultants and GPs incentives.
  - Consultants — particularly anaesthetists — form local groups that charge set fees.
  - Medical insurers have little or no choice of providers in many geographic markets.
- Patients have poor information and little choice**
- Patients have a limited choice of providers. And often no real choice — for example, within 30 minutes' drive — in local markets and rural areas.
  - Patients can't compare providers because of a lack of standard information on providers.
  - Patients don't get clear warnings that their policy may not cover all or part of a procedure — and that they have to pay the difference.



#### Rewrite grouped points into paragraphs, and use topic sentence that sets out each para's main idea (This example shows how you can use paragraphs.)

- Three issues tend to reduce competition in the private health market.
- New providers face significant barriers to entry.** Providers have to go through a long, expensive process to get onto insurers' lists.
- Ways of working may inflate prices.** Providers pay GPs and consultants incentives, and consultants — particularly anaesthetists — form local groups that charge set fees. And medical insurers have little or no choice of providers in many geographic markets.
- Patients have poor information and little choice.** A lack of standard information on providers makes it hard for patients to compare services and prices. In many areas, particularly rural ones, patients have only a limited choice of providers, or no real choice at all.
- To make matters worse, insurers and providers often do little to warn patients that a policy may not cover a procedure — and patients have to pay the difference.