The Pyramid Principle
The Pyramid Principle Betters Your Communication by Helping Your Thinking

Leverages the mind’s natural inclination to process information logically

Provides a common method to analyze problems in order to generate solutions and guide analysis/discussion

Provides a common way to develop logical, fact-based messages that can be communicated in a compelling manner
Test Your Structure Against The Pyramid Rules

1. Ideas at any level of a pyramid must be summaries of the ideas grouped below them

2. Ideas in a grouping must be the same kind of idea

3. Ideas in a group must be in a logical order

© Barbara Minto, The Minto Pyramid Principle, 1996
Ideas Form A Pyramid Under One Main Message
An Idea Is A Full Sentence That Presents New Information

**Not Ideas (Lists/Labels)**
- Organization
- Our Approach
- Scope
- Seven Success Factors
- Goals and Objectives
- Strategy
- Timeframe

**Ideas (Not Lists/Labels)**
- A shared services model is cost effective
- We will follow an accelerated approach
- Limit the scope to avoid risk
- Success will depend on an integrated team
- The objective is unclear
- Microsoft’s strategy is aggressive

... generating a question in the audience’s mind
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

SUMMARY
Condensed restatement of facts

SYNTHESIS
The implication of facts and findings (“So what?”)

FACTS
Raw, unordered information
Move from Ideas to Synthesis

1. Find the commonality that links the ideas together as a group
   - All causes leading to a single effect
   - All parts of a single whole
   - All same class of ideas (reasons, problems, recommendations, etc.)

2. Tease out the insight inherent in the ideas
Don’t undermine impact by building to an intellectually blank synthesis/insight

Weak insight

The company has two organization problems

Better insight

The major organization problem is the inability to delegate authority

There are three reasons why post-merger integration will go smoothly

Post-merger integration will go smoothly because the organizations share many characteristics
BUILDING STURDY PYRAMIDS
The top of the pyramid answers the question on the audience’s mind?

- Our answer = The Governing Thought
- Major support/key line
- Minor support/details
- Ideas in a logical order
- Ideas at the same level of abstraction
- Ideas in complete sentences
- Q&A Dialogue
- How?
- Why?
- What?
- So What?
There are Two Kinds of Pyramid Structures
TWO KINDS OF PYRAMID STRUCTURES

“Grouping” (Inductive reasoning)

- Reason or Action #1
- Reason or Action #2
- Reason or Action #3

Guidelines
- Ideas are of the same logical kind (e.g., reasons, causes, steps, etc.)
- Items in each set are MECE

“Argument” (Deductive reasoning)

- Governing Thought
- Statement about Situation
- Comment on the Statement
- Implication

Guidelines
- Follows classic logical progression
  - Statement and comment combined lead to only one implication
“Grouping”  
(Inductive reasoning)
WHAT’S REQUIRED TO GROUP?

“Grouping” (Inductive Reasoning) Requires Skills In Summarizing and Ordering Ideas

KEY QUESTIONS

• What belongs?
• What does not belong?
• What is the “So What?” (i.e., the higher level of insight)?
MAKE SURE THAT GROUPINGS ARE MECE

“Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive”

- No overlapping or repeated ideas (only one home for each idea)
- No gaps or missing information (every idea has a home)
“Argument”  
(Deductive reasoning)
“Argument”
(Deductive reasoning)

Guidelines
• Follows classic logical progression
  • Statement and comment combined lead to only one implication
CHOOSE RIGHT STRUCTURE FOR YOUR AUDIENCE

Grouping

- Governing thought

Argument

- Governing thought

Reasons vs. Reasoning
Actions vs. Need for action
Receptive audience vs. Resistant audience
Creating Compelling Visual Support/Charts: Using the Pyramid Structure As A Blueprint
Successful Charts Have Several Essential Characteristics

Sales are steadily increasing

SALES 1998
US$ Millions

One clear message per chart

Content and title work together

LEGIBLE!

“Less is better”

Simplicity and consistency in format
Translating Data To The Appropriate Chart Involves A Four-Step Process

1. Analyze the data
2. Determine your message
3. Identify the comparison
4. Determine appropriate chart form

© Gene Zelazny, Say It With Charts, 1996
Chart Forms Vary Based On The Comparison Made By The Data

**COMPONENT**
Percentage of total (share, percentage of total, accounted for)

**ITEM**
Ranking of items (rank, larger than, smaller than, equal)

**TIME SERIES**
Changes over time (trend, change, grow, rise, decline, increase, decrease, fluctuate)

**FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION**
Items within numerical ranges (x to y range, concentration, frequency, distribution)

**CORRELATION**
Relationship between variables (related to, increases with, decreases with, changes with, doesn’t increase with)

© Gene Zelazny, *Say It With Charts*, 1996
Determine your message
Analyze the data

From Data To Chart

COMPARISONS

COMPONENT
Percentage of total
(share, percentage of total, accounted for)

ITEM
Ranking of items
(rank, larger than, smaller than, equal)

TIME SERIES
Changes over time
(trend, change, grow, rise, decline,
increase, decrease, fluctuate)

FREQUENCY
DISTRIBUTION
Items within numerical ranges (x to y range, concentration,
frequency, distribution)

CORRELATION
Relationship between variables
(related to, increases with, decreases with, changes with, doesn’t increase with)

CHART FORMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>TIME SERIES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>CORRELATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PIE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLUMN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Gene Zelazny, Say It With Charts, 1996
“PYRAMID” TEMPLATE