

Reviewing report drafts: yours and other people's

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These notes are intended for all members of the Scrutiny Team.

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Introduction

Reviewing the draft of a report can be difficult and time-consuming. Where do we start? What do we concentrate on? How do we know that the changes we make are actually improving the report? The questions subtly alter if we're reviewing a colleague's work. How can we help them achieve what they want to say? How can we help them to improve their skills?

How we review a draft depends in part on the kind of draft we're examining. (Is it a preliminary or a final draft?) In part, it depends on the time available. (There's never going to be enough.)

The temptation is to dwell on detail and miss the bigger picture. As a result, we may not review efficiently.

This document outlines a three-stage process of reviewing that should make your life a little easier.

- 1 Key points and recommendations**
- 2 Structure**
- 3 Style**

In these notes, we're assuming that the overall structure and main thrust of a report has been agreed. But beware: draft review may lead you to question that assumption.

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A structural approach

Here's an overview of the reviewing approach outlined in this document. The top-line actions will help you focus on what matters at each stage.



1 Key points and recommendations

Start with key points and recommendations. Are they clear, and worded appropriately?

2 Structure

Does the structure of the report support the key points?

Does the report have a clear summary and introduction?

Are the headings consistently presented and interesting?

3 Style

Analyse paragraphs: structure and sequence. Do the paragraphs present the arguments and explanations needed to support the key points?

Check sentences for length and complexity.

Review language for accuracy, brevity and clarity.

This work becomes more detailed as you move from stage to stage. Go as far as you can in the time available.

If you're reviewing a colleague's draft, it's important to discuss your review of the draft with them. Explain your suggestions and discuss how they might improve the text.

I Key points and recommendations

The quality of any report depends fundamentally on the quality of its key points and recommendations.

The report's key points should be presented at the heads of chapters. Recommendations should appear prominently, either at the ends of chapters or at appropriate points within the chapters. Recommendations often appear in boxes.

The key points and recommendations will usually be of higher quality if you have created an outline or an 'emerging conclusions document' (ECD) as part of the planning process. An ECD will itself benefit from containing both emerging conclusions and recommendations. (Take a look at the examples on the following pages.)

What does a conclusion look like?

An emerging conclusion should, usually, take the form of a statement indicating how things should be in an ideal world. Rather than a statement of what's wrong –

There was poor communication between local authority services and small businesses needing help after the disturbances.

- we're looking for a statement that indicates how things should be:

Communication should improve between local authorities and small businesses needing help after civil disturbances.

But this distinction need not be pressed too rigidly.

Formatting outlines and emerging conclusions documents

The format of outlines and emerging conclusions documents is not fixed or rigidly proscribed.

On the next pages are three examples of emerging conclusions documents, produced by different members of the team. (Some details have been altered here and there.)

Managing rain and river flood risk in London

Draft report outline

Message of the report:

The Mayor should take a lead to ensure that London's elevated risk of serious flood damage in the event of heavy rain is reduced.

1. London's heavy rain flood risk and the Mayor's role in reducing it

- a) Large urban areas, especially London, are at risk of widespread and serious flood damage, and loss of life, in the event of heavy rain. (see also Appendix 1)
 - i) The large expanse of impermeable surfaces means that a high percentage of rainwater runs rapidly into drains and/or rivers. If the drains and/or rivers are full, the water floods across the surface. In the event of very heavy rain over London, this could happen within minutes.
 - ii) The high density and value of property in London means that a given flood will cause much more expensive damage than elsewhere in the country – in the case of rainfall such as caused the 2007 floods, an order of magnitude greater than the £3 billion estimated cost of that event.¹
 - iii) The rapidity of flooding, low awareness of this kind of flood risk and what to do about it, and the density of housing (especially basement flats) would generate a high likelihood of deaths.²
 - iv) The floods of 2007 show the sort of rainfall that happens from time to time in southern England. It was luck that this did not fall on London.³
 - v) An estimated 680,000 properties in London are at 0.5% per year or greater risk of surface water flooding
- b) The Mayor has an important role in ensuring that flood risk in London is tackled. (see also Appendix 2)
 - i) London Boroughs do have a statutory role in managing flood risk from surface water and smaller rivers, and the Environment Agency has a statutory role in managing tidal and main river flooding and in strategic oversight of Borough responsibilities.
 - ii) However, the Mayor has statutory responsibility for London's environmental strategy, including the Water Strategy, the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and the London Plan
 - iii) The Mayor has a key role in ensuring, on behalf of Londoners, that other agencies meet London's needs. A good example in this context is the Drain London work, where the Mayor has secured funding from Defra to fill gaps in knowledge about surface water flood risk and enable Boroughs to fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively.

¹ Association of British Insurers, at the Environment Committee meeting 8 September 2010, transcript page 31

² Environment Committee meeting 8 September 2010, transcript pages 30-31

³ Draft (August 2009) water strategy, page 65

Emerging conclusions paper: format #1

Riot recovery funding emerging conclusions paper

Purpose

- To assess the effectiveness of funding to help businesses and individuals affected by the disturbances in August 2011, including government funds, insurance payments and charitable grants.
- To identify lessons learned and an agreed set of actions to ensure those who suffer damage from riot or other similar events are looked after better and receive financial help faster in the future
- The Committee will propose a number of actions to key stakeholders – the Mayor, local authorities, the insurance industry, the police authority, government departments – and try to agree improvements in the response to a similar future incident

Key messages

- There was funding available to help but confusion about the different sources, complicated processes and shortcomings in communication caused distress and meant that payments have been slow in many cases
- Improvements in coordination, communication and legislation could mean that people affected by similar incidents in the future could receive funds to get back on their feet more quickly

A. The different sources of help – coordination and communication

Emerging conclusions

- There was poor communication, resulting in general confusion about the sources of help and the different processes for claiming them
- Particularly small business and traders, for many of whom English was not a first language, found it a very difficult world to navigate
- Following an incident such as the riots, relief funding is likely to be available from several different sources; the better these sources are coordinated and presented as being part of a single process the easier it will be for those requiring help

Proposed actions – to be agreed

- In future, local authorities (with the help of London Councils and/or the GLA for London-wide incidents) will coordinate communications relating to compensation arrangements on behalf of the insurance industry, the police authority, charities, government departments and the Mayor
- A single set of agreed instructions will be produced explaining the sources of funding available, how they interact and how victims should go about seeking help

Emerging conclusions paper: format #2

Issue	Emerging Conclusions	Evidence	Draft recommendations
Food poverty in London	Food poverty and insecurity is an issue that spans London, though more acute in more deprived areas. Food initiatives should develop an increased focus on the issue of food poverty. Pressures on incomes and a decline in spending power are the principle drivers for food poverty. A proportion of low income households are at risk of, or are living in, food poverty; therefore an estimate of those affected can be calculated using household income data. There are secondary factors contributing to the risk of falling into food poverty; these include individuals' circumstances, wellbeing and location. This number will rise as the impact of the recession continues and further welfare reform is implemented in 2013/14. Addressing food poverty effectively would decrease the disease burden and costs to services, as well as improving outcomes for individuals.	95% of teachers polled reported children arriving at school hungry 64% of older people's organisations polled stated that older people found it harder to afford enough healthy food - In some boroughs, significant proportions of older people are malnourished - Benefit delays, refusals and sanctions, low income, unemployment and debt repayments are all key drivers - Food budgets are vulnerable to any pressures on income and food prices have risen significantly - Services and advocacy organisations report a rise in individuals in food poverty	- The Mayor should continue to promotion of the London Living Wage. - The Mayor should influence implementation of welfare reform, including transition and the Boroughs' responses (e.g. localisation of social fund).

From emerging conclusions to key points

The word *conclusion* can cause confusion.

The word is appropriate in the context of research. A conclusion is an idea that you formulate as a result of conducting scrutiny. But, in the report, that idea should be prominently placed at the *head* of a chapter or section, rather than concluding it at the end.

So our preferred approach is to talk about *emerging conclusions* in the research becoming *key points* in the report.

The principle is:

Say it first, then support it.

This page from a recent report illustrates the principle well.

1. The current state of technology at the Metropolitan Police Service

Key points

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does not use technology as well as it could do. It has built up its information and communication technology (ICT) over a number of years without a coherent strategy or senior leadership. Crime may be higher as a result since, as it stands, criminals with smart phones often have better technology than London's police officers. Officers do not have the technology to work as efficiently as they could.

Now the MPS faces the challenge of improving its ICT, while at the same time spending less on it. The MPS' Directorate of Information has a key role to play in helping the force meet this challenge. But the Committee is concerned that it lacks the capacity and capability to make technology work for the MPS. And the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) must ensure its oversight of the MPS' new ICT strategy is robust; currently it does not have a director in place taking responsibility.

1.1 Technology is a vital resource for police forces. From recording crimes to communicating with the public, the police's work relies heavily on its ICT systems.

1.2 But technology is not currently used in a way that supports frontline police officers.¹ In 2012, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) undertook a study of how police officers use technology in the field at six forces.² They found that of the 19 basic technology operating systems now required by a constable to carry out frontline roles away from police stations, only one – mobile telephony – was consistently available and was not always effectual. Even in forces with good technology, officers were not using it properly.³

1.3 Back-office systems are also a problem. Industry representatives told the Committee that police forces spend too much on ICT.⁴ Forces tend to go straight to a technology solution before working out the problem that they are trying to solve.⁵ And rather than exploiting the ICT capabilities they already have first, police forces tend to buy new technologies and incorporate them with their existing systems – sometimes unsuccessfully.⁶

Technology at the MPS

1.4 The MPS' technology is ageing and has not kept up with developments in ICT. The MPS has over 750 systems that have been wired together over the last 40 years; one core operating system dates back to a 1970s baggage handling system. Police officers are inhibited by the force's ICT as they carry out their

Recommendations: how they should look

Recommendations should be SMART. A specific, named individual or organisation should be instructed to take action that's specific, monitorable or measurable, achievable, realistic and timely.

Rather than –

A single set of agreed instructions will be produced explaining the sources of funding available, how they interact and how victims should go about seeking help

- we're looking for something like:

Local authorities should submit to the Committee, by 31 December 2014, sets of instructions that they have produced to explain the sources of help available, how they interact and how victims should ask for help.

service; New York already has a similar arrangement in place.⁶⁸ The Mayor has a strategic role to ensure that London's emergency services are taking a joined-up approach to ICT.

Recommendations

The MPS, in its response to the Committee's report, should:

- explain in more detail its plans to reduce the ICT budget by £60 million, including the expected impact on operational performance;
- identify the risks associated with the savings plans, and set out how it proposes to manage these risks; and
- explain how it intends to engage with other forces, public bodies and industry – including SMEs – as it designs and implements new technology.

MOPAC, in its response to the Committee's report, should explain how it is using its role on the board of the Police ICT Company to benefit the MPS.

The Mayor, in his response to the Committee's report, should explain what he has done over the last year to ensure London's emergency services are collaborating as they develop new technologies, and what he intends to do by 2015.

2a Structure: overall report

Usually, a report will have most or all of the following sections, in this order.

Foreword

Summary (or Executive Summary)

Introduction

Chapter I

[...]

Chapter x

Conclusion(s)

List of Recommendations

Appendix I

[...]

Appendix x

Appendix or annex?

If you've ever wondered about the difference between the two:

An annex and an appendix are both forms of addendums to a report.

An **appendix** contains data relating to material in the report, which cannot be placed in the main document because it is too bulky or detailed.

An **annex** is usually a standalone document that offers additional information of interest to the reader of the report.

On the following pages, I've offered some notes about each of these sections. Regard them as guidance rather than rigid rules.

Foreword

The Foreword is a journalistic piece, written in the ‘voice’ of the Committee Chair. It is, in effect, a ‘summary of the summary’, with an added political or polemical slant.

Summary (or Executive Summary)

The Summary should be precisely that. It should accurately summarise the contents of the report, in terms of both content and structure.

Creating a summary of the report: the painless option

You should be able to produce a first draft of the Summary by simply stripping out all the [topic sentences](#) from the report, in order.

This process will be painless, of course, only if you have created adequate topic sentences for every paragraph in your report. It can be done.

[Page 17](#) shows a chapter summary generated from the topic sentences in the chapter.

Summaries generated from topic sentences are likely to be a little too long; ideally, a Summary should run for no more than two or three pages. Judiciously prune the first draft as necessary.

The Summary should include a summary of the Introduction.

The Summary can usefully include the chapter headings. It’s probably not necessary to include the chapter numbers, or section numbers of each chapter.

Introduction

Writers often seem to be confused about the difference between summaries and introductions.

In essence, your Summary summarises the report: it is the report in miniature. The Introduction tells the story of how the report came to be written. We can use two tools to create an Introduction: **SPQR** and **The Four Moves**.

There is an example of an Introduction on [page 23](#).

The Introduction can on occasions duplicate the Foreword. The Foreword nearly always takes a more personal line than the Introduction. Neither are always necessary.

SPQR

SPQR stands for ‘Situation, Problem, Question, Response’. It’s a simple narrative structure that tells the story of the background to the report.

The aim of SPQR is to lead the reader from what they know to what you want to tell them in the report.

Start with a **Situation** statement that the reader – a hypothetical, reasonably knowledgeable Londoner – might be assumed to know already. Think of the Situation statement as ‘a truth (more or less) universally acknowledged’. The Situation statement is often about something in the past.

The **Problem** statement introduces a complication into the Situation. The Problem is the reason why the Committee chose to scrutinise the issue.

The **Question** statement summarises all the issues that the Committee scrutinised. You might include a list of specific questions that the Committee addressed in its scrutiny.

The **Response** is the overall message of the report. If you can state your Response as a single sentence, so much the better.

Structuring the introduction: SPQR

SITUATION

“Once upon a time...” What is the first thing you can say about the matter that you and your reader will agree is true? The starting point is completely uncontroversial.

PROBLEM

What happened to alter the situation? Perhaps something went wrong. Maybe improvements are necessary. Maybe the Problem statement starts with an ominous *However*,...

QUESTION

What question does the problem trigger in the reader’s mind?

RESPONSE

The answer to that question should be the report’s message.

The Four Moves

The Four Moves is a technique for introductions developed by John Swales, a linguist who specialises in advanced writing.

Swales examined the introductions to forty-eight articles in the natural and social sciences, and found that most of them contained a sequence of four rhetorical moves, through which scientists create a *research space* for their work.

1. First, they demonstrate the interest or importance of the research topic.
2. Second, they selectively review and summarise the previously published research literature.
3. Third, they show that the research is not complete, creating a "gap" in the previous research.
4. And fourth, the current research is presented as a timely and appropriate "filler."

We can adapt these four moves for use in scrutiny reports. We might substitute 'previous legislation' or 'political activity' for 'previous research'; we might substitute 'a gap in provision' or 'gaps in regulation or legislation' for 'a gap in the research'. The Committee's scrutiny stands for the 'current research': all of their conclusions and recommendations are intended to help 'plug the gap'.

Chapter 1

A good example of a well structured chapter is given on [pages 18-21](#) of these notes. Note that chapters benefit from a 'top-down' approach: key points (derived from emerging conclusions) head the chapter, perhaps in one or two bold paragraphs. Recommendations can sit at the end of the chapter, or at appropriate points within a chapter, perhaps in boxes.

Conclusion(s)

Is there any need for a Conclusions section? Writers often feel that, with a Summary in place and key points at the heads of chapters, there is nothing left to say in a Conclusion.

And I would usually agree with them.

If you are going to include a section called a Conclusion, don't use it merely to repeat your key points from the body of the report. Go further. The Conclusion section offers you some interesting opportunities.

The Conclusion is your chance to have the last word on the subject. And that last word can propel the reader towards a new, wider vision of the issue.

The Conclusion can go beyond what you have said in the rest of the report. It can go beyond the confines of the report's brief or argument. In fact, the best reason for having a Conclusion is probably to do just that: to point the way forward. Your Conclusion can range beyond the scope of the scrutiny investigation, allowing you to consider the significance of the Committee's conclusions, as well as broader issues and future concerns.

Use the Conclusion to:

- summarise your key points;
- explain the implications of these key points in a wider context; and
- indicate the broader issues that further scrutiny might need to investigate.

The Conclusion can also have a less tangible, emotional impact. It's your opportunity to end on a positive note, or a warning note – whichever is appropriate.

List of Recommendations

A list of recommendations, gathered together at the end of the report, is often useful for readers who want to see only the recommendations, in one place.

Simply repeat the recommendations, in the order in which you have presented them in the report. Numbering the recommendations by chapter will allow readers to refer back to the relevant chapter if necessary.

2b Structure: chapters

Check that the structure of each chapter coherently supports the key points and leads rationally to the recommendations.

The simple, efficient way to check coherence is to read the first sentence of each paragraph in the chapter. These sentences – known as *topic sentences* – should generate an argument that supports the key point.

In the chapter reproduced on the next few pages, the topic sentences of the key point paragraphs – in bold – deliver the chapter's key points. The topic sentences of the paragraphs in the chapter deliver an argument that supports those key point sentences.

We could strip out these topic sentences and create a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 1: summary

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does not use technology as well as it could.

The Committee is concerned that the MPS lacks adequate support and oversight in improving its use of ICT.

Technology is a vital resource for police forces. But technology is not currently used in a way that supports frontline police officers. Back-office systems are also a problem. The MPS' technology is aging and has not kept up with developments in ICT. MPS employees think that technology is holding them back. These existing systems are approaching obsolescence so the situation could get even worse.

Senior leadership has been lacking in the past. It is clear that the MPS' technology department – the Directorate of Information (DoI) – is still not making technology work for police officers. This situation may be difficult to rectify because the DoI has lost skilled staff and may continue to do so. We are also concerned that oversight is currently lacking.

Crime is bound to be higher as a result of the MPS' poor technology. The MPS also faces a challenge in regaining an operational advantage over criminals. And cyber-crime presents a new threat

The MPS is attempting to address its ICT problems. However, the MPS, and the DoI in particular, faces significant challenges.

Creating the summary of the report

The assembled summaries of the report's chapters, generated in this way, can – perhaps in streamlined form – act as the report summary.

1. The current state of technology at the Metropolitan Police Service

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) does not use technology as well as it could. It has built up its current provision over a number of years without a coherent ICT strategy or senior leadership. Crime rates may be higher as a result: criminals with smart phones often have better technology than London's police officers.

The Committee is concerned that the MPS lacks adequate support and oversight in improving its use of ICT. The MPS' Directorate of Information has a key role to play in helping the force implement an effective ICT strategy; but it lacks capacity and capability. And the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC), which should be ensuring that its oversight of the MPS' new ICT strategy is robust, currently lacks a director to be responsible for this task.

1.1 Technology is a vital resource for police forces. From recording crimes to communicating with the public, the police's work relies heavily on its ICT systems.

1.2 But technology is not currently used in a way that supports frontline police officers. In 2012, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) undertook a study of how police officers in six forces use technology in the field. They found that, of the 19 basic technology operating systems now required by a constable to carry out frontline roles away from police stations, only one was consistently available and was not always effectual. Even in forces with good technology, officers were not using it properly.

1.3 Back-office systems are also a problem. Industry representatives told the Committee that police forces spend too much on ICT. Forces tend to go straight to a technology solution before working out the problem that they are trying to solve. And, rather than exploiting the ICT capabilities they already have, police forces tend to buy new technologies and incorporate them with their existing systems – sometimes unsuccessfully.

Technology at the MPS

1.4 The MPS' technology is aging and has not kept up with developments in ICT. The force has over 750 systems that have been wired together over the last 40 years; one core operating system dates back to a 1970s baggage-handling system. Police officers are inhibited by the force's ICT as they carry out their day-to-day duties. Until recently, it often took officers 30 minutes to log on to a computer.

1.5 MPS employees think that technology is holding them back. In 2012, the MPS commissioned Deloitte to undertake a review of MPS technology. Deloitte surveyed over 200 police officers and 100 civilian staff at the MPS; they consistently found that staff experience technology-related performance issues. And, due to the fragmented ICT systems at the MPS, officers are not as effective and productive as they could be.

The MPS told the Committee that ‘if an officer is dealing with a crime from start to finish in terms of arrest and putting a file together, they will input the names of both the suspect and the victim 10 or 12 times’.

1.6 These existing systems are approaching obsolescence so the situation could get even worse. Currently, 70 per cent of the services’ ICT systems are redundant. This is expected to increase to 90 per cent by 2015. Maintaining these elderly systems is expensive: the MPS spends 85 per cent of its ICT budget – approximately £250 million a year – ‘keeping the lights on’, rather than supporting the frontline with modern technology and improving public access.

Organisational issues

1.7 Senior leadership has been lacking in the past. The MPS told the Committee that historically the force and the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) have not successfully implemented their long-term technology strategies. The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) added that the senior management team at the MPS has not taken ownership of its technology function.

1.8 It is clear that the MPS’ technology department – the Directorate of Information (DoI) – is still not making technology work for police officers. In 2012, the MPS commissioned Deloitte to undertake a review of MPS technology. Deloitte found that there were significant gaps in the DoI’s capability and capacity to provide a ‘partner’ role to the rest of the MPS. As a ‘partner’, the DoI would constructively engage with the rest of the MPS in designing and implementing its strategy. Instead, the DoI increasingly provides a ‘supplier’ role, simply doing what the rest of the MPS tells it to do. The MPS recognises that the DoI is not organised in the right way, with the right skills; it also acknowledges that it needs to train and develop current staff, and possibly bring in new people.

1.9 This situation may be difficult to rectify because the DoI has lost skilled staff and may continue to do so. The MPS’ Voluntary Exit programme has led to top staff leaving to take jobs in industry. And the Mayor’s priority for cutting civilian staff to protect officer numbers may mean that other skilled DoI staff leave the MPS; the force as a whole may be less effective as a result. The Committee has previously recommended that skilled civilian staff can often undertake roles more effectively or cheaply than warranted officers could. A lack of expertise in the DoI may have costly implications in the future.

1.10 We are also concerned that oversight is currently lacking. MOPAC told the Committee that it is currently recruiting for the director role that will oversee the MPS’ ICT; the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime is taking the lead role in the meantime. Given that MOPAC has the MPS’ ICT rated as ‘red’ on its risk register, it urgently needs to implement an effective management structure for oversight in this area.

The impact of poor technology

1.11 Crime is bound to be higher as a result of the MPS' poor technology. Police officer time spent logging on to computers or re-entering data into different systems is time that could be spent on the beat tackling crime. HMIC told the Committee: 'if you have good technology and you are more preventive, crime goes down'. Currently, officers are deployed without having access the information that the MPS has on the activity of criminals. And they are unable to communicate as effectively as they could with the public and business.

1.12 The MPS also faces a challenge in regaining an operational advantage over criminals. Criminals using commonly available smart phones may have better technology than officers, as demonstrated by the 2011 civil disturbances. Currently, a parallel ICT infrastructure is in place at the MPS: officers use their personal smartphones to do their job since they can be more effective than the kit provided.

1.13 And cyber-crime presents a new threat. Experts believe police and law enforcement agencies are having to rethink the basic skills they need to do their jobs due to the rise in cyber threats. The MPS' technology needs to be suited for the challenges it will face in the future.

A new ICT strategy for the MPS

1.14 The MPS is attempting to address its ICT problems. It has conducted a root-and-branch review of what technology it needs to meet its policing objectives, and it is developing a new ICT strategy. The force has highlighted two key themes in its new approach to technology: enabling officers to work more remotely; and better exploiting the data the MPS has. It seeks to have inter-linked systems to remove duplication of work and to provide officers with real-time information in the field. The Met Info Tech group – chaired by Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley – is producing the new strategy and reports directly to the MPS Management Board. This is encouraging: a lack of senior management buy-in to technology strategies has contributed to their failures in the past.

1.15 However, the MPS, and the DoI in particular, faces significant challenges. While other public sector bodies are grappling with similar ICT issues, the force acknowledges that nobody else has solved them yet: 'we do not see anybody who has really made the massive jump and got to where we need to get to in terms of the way we use and exploit our information'. The MPS must make this step; the changes to technology it proposes will be a significant enabling factor in realising the overall MPS savings target. It cannot afford to get its new ICT strategy wrong.

Recommendations

By October 2013, MOPAC should provide the Budget and Performance Committee with a capability review of the DoI. In light of the concerns that Deloitte raised about the capacity and capability of the DoI, MOPAC should demonstrate in its review its confidence that the DoI has the skills and resources to successfully implement the MPS' ICT strategy. If necessary, it should set out the steps needed to make the DoI fit for purpose.

So simple – yet so challenging to achieve

This structural review – stripping out and analysing topic sentences – is strikingly simple. It's quick and efficient, and yields immediately useful results.

Achieving this level of structural coherence when writing the report, however, can be hard work.

Reviewing a draft at this level can help a writer to formulate better arguments and explanations.

Reviewing the introduction

Refer back to the notes on the Introduction on [page 13](#).

Not every scrutiny report needs an introduction. The primary function of an introduction is to present the background to the report: the story of how the report came to be written.

The introduction will also usually contain information about the contents of the report, chapter by chapter, including the contents of appendices.

(In the example on the next page, the Response is missing. This is a good example of 'scaffolding': the writer is referring to the fact that they are writing something, rather than writing what they want to say. In an introduction, 'scaffolding' may be admissible.

Generally, we should be removing the scaffolding and leaving the ideas to speak to the reader clearly.

For more on 'scaffolding', look at [point 5](#) on page 27.)

[SITUATION] An effective transport system will be crucial to the delivery of a successful 2012 Games. Athletes, spectators, officials, and the media will need to be able to travel between the competition venues, training sites and their accommodation. At the same time, regular users of the transport system will need to make trips. The Olympic Transport Plan is the statutory document setting out how all travel requirements will be met. The final edition of the Plan will be published in spring 2011.

[PROBLEM] London's transport system has been a cause of concern for the 2012 Games. Before the capital won the right to host the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) identified transport as a major weakness. In August 2010, the IOC said that traffic remained its biggest issue. Three months later, the Minister for Olympics reported that transport was one of his three biggest concerns and Lord Coe, Chair of the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG), described it as a major risk. He told the Assembly that London's reputation depended on its ability to transport people effectively in 2012.

[QUESTION] The Transport Committee has, therefore, undertaken an investigation to explore progress with the delivery of the Olympic Transport Plan. It has considered the main issues arising at this stage. This investigation has involved a number of stages including two public meetings. Further details of this investigation are set out in appendix 2.

[RESPONSE(?); CONTENTS OF REPORT] The remainder of this report sets out the Committee's findings. The first section covers the scale of demand for transport in summer 2012. It shows the implications for regular users of the transport system and the significant challenge faced by the transport authorities. The second section focuses on issues raised about meeting this challenge. The Committee is seeking responses to all these matters including further information in the final Olympic Transport Plan.

This report represents a snapshot in time. The delivery of transport arrangements for the 2012 Games is ongoing. Detailed travel plans for the venues are now being developed. New transport infrastructure is still being installed. The Committee will continue to keep 2012 transport under review in the year ahead.

3 Style

What are you looking for in the style of the report?

Accuracy Does the language convey your meaning with as little ambiguity as possible?

Brevity Can you use fewer words?

Clarity Would a moderately well informed Londoner understand what you are saying?

First impressions can be helpful. Read the text from beginning to end, fairly quickly. Note any paragraphs or sentences that:

- isn't understandable at first reading;
- introduces unexpected material without warning;
- adds nothing new;
- fails to follow coherently from the previous paragraph or sentence; or
- contains jargon.

Many stylistic issues have probably resolved themselves as you reviews key points, recommendations and structure. If you want to go further, you can review style most efficiently by working on three levels.

Paragraph

Sentence

Word

Work through each of these levels in this order. Reviewing individual words and phrases can be hugely time-consuming and relatively unproductive. Reviewing paragraphs, on the other hand, can yield useful improvements with relatively little effort.

Turn the page for the really simple guide to style review.

On subsequent pages, I offer more detailed ideas. Go as far as you and the writer wish to go, or as far as you have time for.

Style review: the simple guide

Paragraph

- Every paragraph should have a topic sentence. The topic sentence summarises the paragraph as a simple sentence of no more than 15 words.
- All other sentences in the paragraph should support the topic sentence.
- Single-sentence paragraphs are allowable in prominent positions. For example, a ‘topic paragraph’ of one sentence can usefully introduce a section or sub-section.

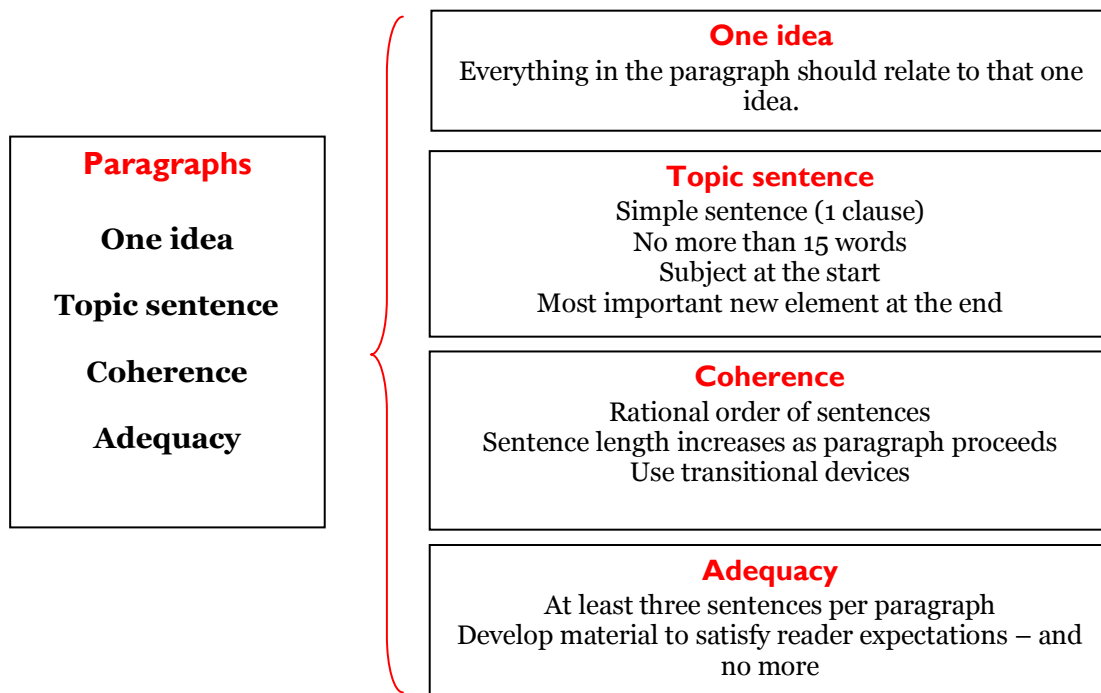
Sentence

- No sentence in any part of the document should be longer than 25 words. (This is a guideline that you can ignore on rare occasions.)
- Simplify sentences as much as possible.
- If in doubt, ask: “Who is doing what?” Find the actor, agent or chief character in the sentence; put them at the start; and use a specific, active verb to express what the character is doing.

Word

- Ration long, abstract, or technical words.
- Prefer active verbs to passive verbs.
- Gently encourage a style of language that ‘speaks’ to the reader.

Style review: overview



Sentences

- Aim for maximum sentence length of **25** words.
- Cut long sentences into separate sentences.
- Separate multiple sentences.
- Remove unnecessary words from long sentences.
- Simplify complicated sentences.
- Find strong subjects and verbs.
- Check the grammar.

Words

- Prefer active verbs to passive verbs.
- Prefer familiar words to rare words.
- Use strong, specific and well placed verbs.
- Balance abstract nouns with concrete nouns.
- Punctuate clearly and simply.

Beyond editing

This is editing at a more advanced level. Go to this stage if you want to!

From effective paragraphs to engaging paragraphs

1. Identify the function of each paragraph.
Explanation or argument?
Explanation: which pattern?
Examples
Categories
Process
Comparison and contrast
Definition
Cause and effect
2. Begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.
3. Topic sentences should make sense in order.
4. Structure topic sentences:
 - a. Subject (at start of sentence): element from the previous paragraph;
 - b. at end of sentence: new element: theme of new paragraph
5. Remove all 'scaffolding': references to the fact that you are writing.
(In this section...; As we mentioned in the previous section...; This section contains...)
6. Use [transitional devices](#) to connect sentences together within the paragraph.
7. Check that the paragraph contains all the information necessary to support the topic sentence – and no more.

From sensible sentences to stunning sentences

1. Place at the beginning of a sentence an element from the previous sentence.
2. Place at the end of a sentence the new information that you want to introduce. [A-B. B-C. C-D.]
3. Place the most important new element at the very end of the sentence. (Place new technical terms, for example, at the end of a sentence.)
4. Shift more important information to the right; shift less important information to the left.
5. Use empty subjects to introduce new ideas and to shift important elements to the right. (Use sparingly.)
6. Use [transitional devices](#) to connect sentences.
7. Use classifiers to bind elements from one sentence into the next. (Classifiers are like categories and are normally [nominalisations](#); this is an occasion when nominalisations can be useful.)

From workable words to wonderful words

1. Identify all [nominalisations](#). Replace where possible with verbs or adjectives.
2. Identify all adjectives and adverbs. Remove any that are unnecessary.
3. Remove redundant words.
4. Use as few numbers as possible.
5. Consider [figures of speech](#) that will bring your style to life.

Transitional Devices (connecting words and phrases)

To add:

and, again, and then, besides, equally important, finally, further, furthermore, nor, too, next, lastly, what's more, moreover, in addition, first (second, etc.)

To compare:

whereas, but, yet, on the other hand, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary, by comparison, where, compared to, up against, balanced against, vis à vis, but, although, conversely, meanwhile, after all, in contrast, although this may be true

To prove:

because, for, since, for the same reason, obviously, evidently, furthermore, moreover, besides, indeed, in fact, in addition, in any case, that is

To show exception:

yet, still, however, nevertheless, in spite of, despite, of course, once in a while, sometimes

To show time:

immediately, thereafter, soon, after a few hours, finally, then, later, previously, formerly, first (second, etc.), next, and then

To repeat:

in brief, as I have said, as I have noted, as has been noted

To emphasise:

definitely, extremely, obviously, in fact, indeed, in any case, absolutely, positively, naturally, surprisingly, always, forever, perennially, eternally, never, emphatically, unquestionably, without a doubt, certainly, undeniably, without reservation

To show sequence:

first, second, third, and so forth, A, B, C, next, then, following this, at this time, now, at this point, after, afterward, subsequently, finally, consequently, previously, before this, simultaneously, concurrently, thus, therefore, hence, next, and then, soon

To give an example:

for example, for instance, in this case, in another case, on this occasion, in this situation, to take the case of..., to demonstrate, to illustrate, as an illustration

To summarise or conclude:

in brief, on the whole, summing up, to conclude, in conclusion, as I have shown, as I have said, hence, therefore, accordingly, thus, as a result, consequently

Nominalisation

Nominalisation is the process of creating a noun from another part of speech: typically, a verb or an adjective.

Nouns name things, people, times, places or qualities.

Concrete nouns name things physically present in the world (*table, woman, pen, car, tree*); **abstract nouns** name ideas, concepts or qualities that cannot be sensed physically (*growth, awareness, training, marketing, possibility*).

Abstract nouns often relate to verbs.

<i>Growth</i>	<	<i>to grow</i>
<i>Measurement</i>	<	<i>to measure</i>
<i>Responsibility</i>	<	<i>responsible</i>

Try to cut down the number of abstract nouns in the draft. Replace them, if you can, with verbs or adjectives. If you can replace an abstract noun only with a *group* of shorter, more concrete words, consider keeping the abstract noun.

*There were some **differences** in **configuration** between the two machines which added a **degree of complexity** to the **exercise**.*

The two machines were configured differently, making the exercise more complex.

Figures of speech

Figures of speech are ways of using language unusually for effect.

The three most commonly used figures are probably:

Contrast

Question and answer

Tricolon (set of three)

Here are some examples.

Contrasts [antithesis; chiasmus]

It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)

That's one small step for a man;
one giant leap for mankind. (Neil Armstrong)

Contradictions (not this, but that)

You turn if you want to;
the lady's not for turning. (Margaret Thatcher)

The ultimate measure of a man is
not where he stands in moments of comfort,
but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. (Martin Luther King)

September 11th was not an isolated event,
but a tragic prologue. (Tony Blair)

Comparisons (more this than that; less this than that)

For better, for worse;
For richer, for poorer... (Marriage vows: Book of Common Prayer)

I've taken more out of alcohol
Than alcohol has taken out of me. (Winston Churchill)

Opposites (this or that)

The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones. (Shakespeare)

There is nothing wrong with America
That cannot be solved by what's right with America. (Bill Clinton)

Phrase reversals

Management is doing things right;
Leadership is doing the right things. (Peter Drucker)

You should eat to live;
Not live to eat. (Socrates)

Ask not what your country can do for you;
Ask what you can do for your country. (J F Kennedy)

Questions and answers

You ask, 'What is our aim?'
I can answer in one word.
Victory. (Winston Churchill)

Shall we put an end to the human race?
Or shall mankind renounce war? (Bertrand Russell)

Rules of three [tricolon]

No, no, no. (Margaret Thatcher)

I stand before you today the representative of a family in grief
in a country in mourning
before a world in shock. (Earl Spencer)

The time for the healing of wounds has come.
The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come.
The time to build is upon us. (Nelson Mandela)

For more:

<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>