

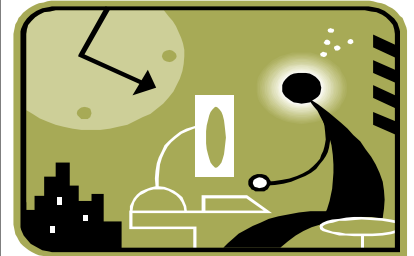
### Writing: The all-important executive summary

A company called me in to help some of its people to write shorter sentences. “Managers don’t have time to read these long reports,” I was told. The reports ran 10-12 pages, but half the pages were executive summary. The problem was not so much lengthy sentences as it was a lack of understanding of what a summary is and how to write one.

Next time you write a report, proposal, business plan, or other document of some length, use this checklist as a guide in developing and evaluating your summary.

<b>Definition</b>	
Highly condensed version of the most important information	
<b>Objectives</b>	
To give main points without bogging readers down in details	
To make readers want to go further; “grab” the readers	
To give a framework for understanding the document	
<b>Readers</b>	
Executives who want the big picture but won’t check details	
Middle managers who present your case to decision-makers (a good summary makes it easy for them to champion your cause)	
<b>Content</b>	
Enough background to show understanding of the issues	
Main ideas, key facts to show your position on the issues	
<b>Process</b>	
Review document, make notes on points relevant to readers	
Write draft; review for correspondence to document	
Polish draft for smoothness and brevity	
<b>Format</b>	
Length—one-to-two pages	
Most critical information in first two paragraphs	
Graphics and bullets to simplify reading (without overdoing)	
<b>Characteristics</b>	
Most important part of the document; most polished	
Short, clear, focused; key words but not jargon	

### E-Mail: How to manage it



Here are some tips for managing email:

**Highlight your intention:** Readers will appreciate your telling them up front the kind of reaction you are looking for. Put in your subject line advisories such as “Response Requested,” “Action Requested,” “FYI,” or “Time Sensitive.”

**Scan your inbox.** If your email messages are sorted chronologically, with oldest messages shown first, you may find yourself jumping the gun on some requests. That is, you may act on a request only to find a later message telling you to ignore that previous message. Before answering a request, check to see if there are any follow-ups to the message. A second message may tell you the writer has found what he was looking for or no longer needs it.

#### When you need...

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## Presenting: The ice-breaker must be relevant

Speakers often begin a presentation with a story or joke, to get the audience's attention. But that kind of opening should do more than break the ice. It should introduce your theme to your audience right from the get-go.

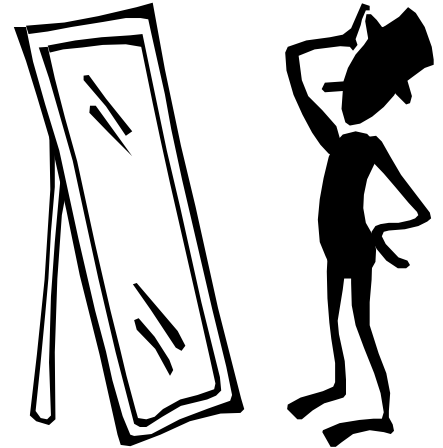
Here's an example. The subject of the presentation was benchmarking—how companies can measure performance by comparing themselves to other companies, rather than to just their own past performance. We started the talk this way:

*You may recall a mythological character named Narcissus. He was a very handsome young man. One day, Narcissus was walking through a forest and stopped at a pool for a drink of water. As he*

*leaned over the pool, Narcissus saw his reflection, though he didn't realize it was his own. Narcissus fell so in love with that image in the water, he could never love anyone else. He pined away in a love that could not be satisfied. At last, the gods took mercy on him and changed Narcissus into a flower.*

*Narcissus may have been handsome. But he was not very bright. Unfortunately, some companies have a narcissistic mentality. They look at their own operations only and are pleased with what they see. They don't use industry benchmarks to get a true reflection of their performance.*

When you are speaking to a large group or small and want to use a joke or story as an ice breaker, be sure it has a point that dovetails with and introduces your theme.



## Mechanics: Learning from the politically incorrect

The State of New Jersey recently put out a call for suggestions for a new state slogan. Of the more than 7000 entries, a committee selected five finalists. One of these contains a grammatical error. Can you spot it?

- a) New Jersey: Expect the Unexpected
- b) New Jersey: Love at First Sight
- c) New Jersey: Come See for Yourself
- d) New Jersey: The Real Deal
- e) New Jersey: The Best Kept Secret

If you picked (e), congratulations for noting the lack of a hyphen between “best” and “kept.” The rule requires a hyphen to join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun, as in: “well-prepared speaker,” “computer-based program,” “one-page summary.” Don’t use the hyphen if the two-word combination follows a verb of being (e.g., *is*, *was*). For example:

**Use the hyphen:** She shows a mean-spirited attitude.

**Omit the hyphen:** Her attitude *is* mean spirited.

The omission of the hyphen is less egregious an error than the one made by Acting Governor Codey when he said of the entries: “Any one of these five are better than 90 percent of the ones out there.” Given time, the governor would probably realize that the singular subject of his sentence (*any one*) requires a singular verb, in this case *is*.

Though I did not send in an entry, my personal choice is: New Jersey: You got a problem with that?

### You Try It

Insert hyphens as necessary.

- 1. She works 12 hour days.
- 2. Let's focus on long term improvements.
- 3. The commitment is high level.

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