



# anglo-corporate: briefing

*ideas to help trade associations and societies communicate effectively*

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## THE GUTS OF A GOOD WRITTEN PIECE: A SIMPLE FORMULA TO BEEF-UP YOUR ASSOCIATION'S OR SOCIETY'S COPY

### A SIMPLE PLANNING FORMULA

Does one structure fit all? Well, no. Communications fulfill a myriad of purposes. But most written materials that trade associations and societies write can be put together using an easily remembered formula. It's not complicated: you can keep it in mind with an acrostic, *PR-MATE*: PROPOSITION--RESEARCH--MEDIUM--AUDIENCE--THEME--EXECUTION. In the rest of this short piece, I'll set out how to use this handy memory aid.

### 1. PROPOSITION

You've seen them: the trade association submission or newsletter that's supposed to be focused, but ends up covering everything on members' minds. You don't have to do it like that. Before you write your piece, identify and agree a clear objective. This is your 'proposition'. Ask yourself: if the member, official or member of the public who reads this remembers one thing only, what should it be? Then write it down. It might never appear in the piece itself, but remember it and focus on it like a laser, throughout.

### 2. RESEARCH

Let's say you're crafting a consultation response. For all the talk of evidence-based policy, when association professionals first enter the political world, they can be shocked by how public policy can be based on scant research. The key is to start early enough to have that extra time to marshal an array of quality facts and figures. If you can, you'll be ahead of 50% of the competition. The scope to find the right sort of material online expands every year. And don't forget more traditional methods: call that member and quiz them; sit down with that colleague; ring that official.

### 3. MEDIUM

Good written communications are just that; whatever the medium. But a little thought can boost effectiveness. For example, on email: spend time getting the subject line right, keep essential content 'above the fold' (think preview pane) and, if you know the person, mention shared views and experiences. For reports: vary paragraph length and be consistent with body text and heading font. For presentations: don't use slides as handouts; start with a written document; hand that out; and consider distilling one killer fact or image per slide, or 20 words, or three bullets, tops.

## 4. AUDIENCE

You've defined the proposition, carved out time for research and thought about the medium. Just as important is to think about who you're talking to. It might be a member you know well, an official you don't know at all or a raft of members of the public. Sales professionals talk about the importance of 'rapport'. Face-to-face, that means matching their client's body and verbal language. You can do the same in written communications. Drop in a few choice words - being careful to fit them into the flow - that show the audience you understand their world. For members, it might be an allusion to tough operating conditions or illustrating your copy with real examples of their business challenges. For officials, it might be structuring your piece as a short 'briefing' with annexes, as they might do for a minister or showing you understand the importance of evidence-based policy; for MPs, you might number paragraphs from 1 to x, as a select committee might do in a report.

## 5. THEME

In an advertising agency, we'd be talking about 'concept'. Most association or society communications are more pedestrian, but the advertising world can still offer tips. Can you put an overall theme to the piece? Try to craft an overarching storyline to slot your material under. You can make a list of general approaches to see if any generates a suitable idea. It could be presenting a series of surprising facts and using each as a sub-heading to get your message across. You could challenge convention: while everybody is talking about emerging markets, you tell a story about how your sector is focusing on growth at home. Or comparison: you use a feature, on a successful automotive company, to tell the story of the historical mistakes made in the UK car industry and show how your firm avoided them.

## 5. EXECUTION

Then it comes to actually writing it. There's plenty to say there on structure, style and how to persuade and I plan to write another piece on that. I hope you enjoyed this short piece and that it sparked one or two ideas for your own writing.



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