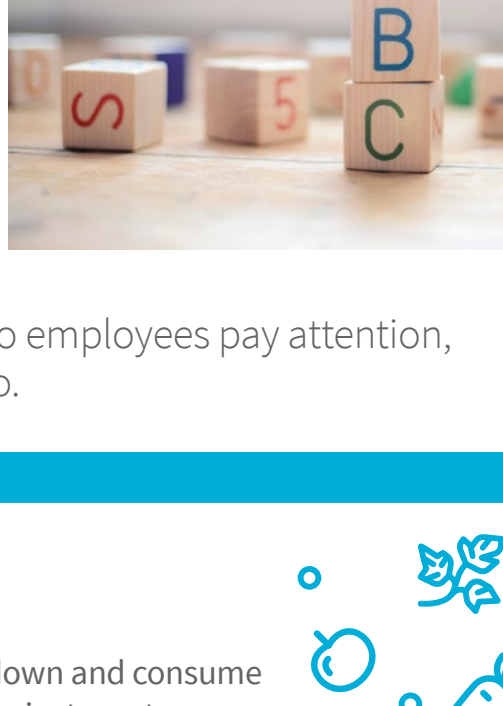


26 ways to simplify content so employees tune in

An A to Z guide to cutting the clutter and reaching distracted employees

In today's frenetic world, employees are constantly being bombarded by emails and newsletters, and the information they're reading is becoming more and more complex. So it's no wonder that instead of diving in, they're checking out.

How can you cut through the clutter? The answer is clear: Simplify, simplify, simplify. The easier your message is to read and grasp, the more likely employees will be to do just that.



Here are 26 ways to simplify your content so employees pay attention, understand what it means and know what to do.



Appetite

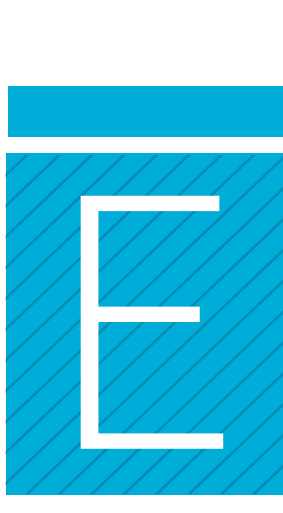
Employees don't have time to sit down and consume an entire meal of information. They just want a **bite** (quick take) or **snack** (a little more substance) to satisfy their hunger for the topic. That's why you should reduce the portion size of every communication you create.



Bullet points

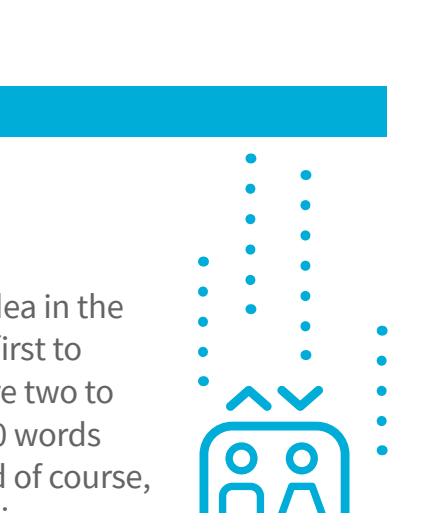
Long paragraphs seem like a lot of work to read, which is why most employees skip over them. The solution? **Cut that copy into small pieces** that are easy to digest. Here's how:

- Turn long lists into bullet points
- Use numbers to list out steps in a process
- Write your bullets using parallel construction so they're easy to read
- Keep each bullet point concise



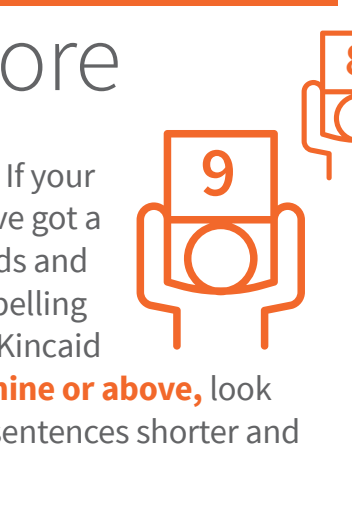
Call to action

When you need employees to **do something**, include a clear, obvious phrase in your communication to **indicate action is necessary**. Show employees at a glance exactly what they need to do.



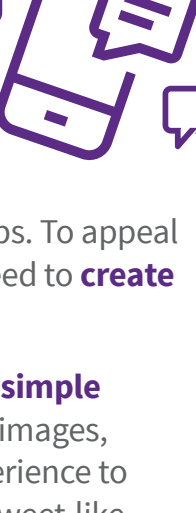
Dialogue

Using dialogue in your narrative can be a great way to add emotion and build readers' interest. Dialogue can only be present when characters are involved, and **adding humans to your story helps employees relate to the content**. If your content feels dry or boring, try adding dialogue to bring the story to life. Even one quote from a key stakeholder or person who's experienced the topic can liven up your text.



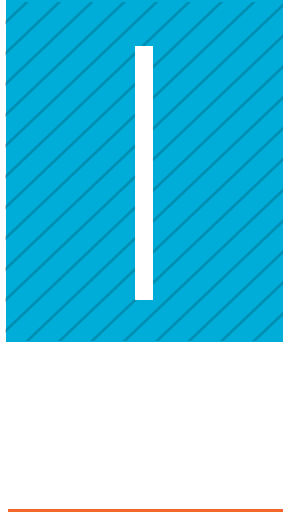
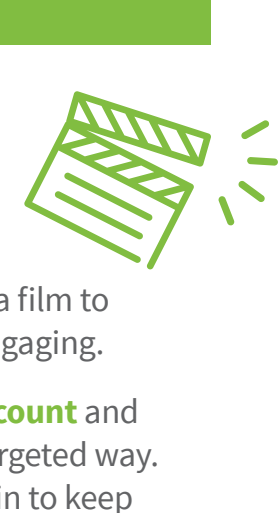
Elevator speech

An elevator speech forces you to pitch an idea in the time it takes an elevator to travel from the first to the top floor. Effective elevator speeches are two to three sentences long, contain fewer than 50 words and **take less than one minute to tell**. And of course, an elevator speech focuses on the information employees really need to know.



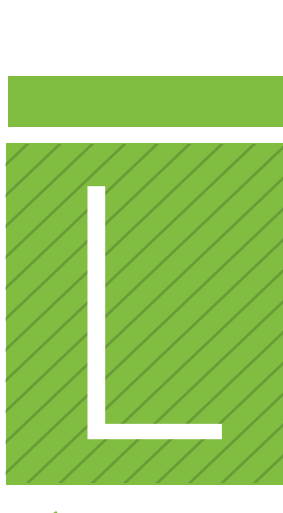
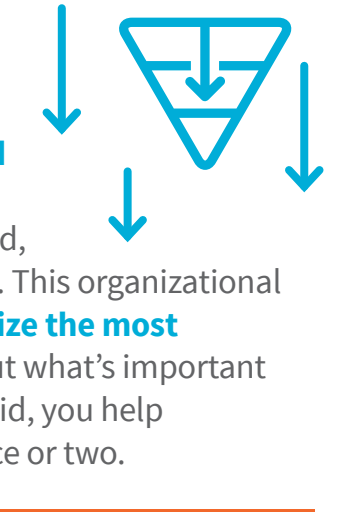
Flesch-Kincaid score

Most Americans read at the eighth-grade level. If your content is written at the 13th-grade level, you've got a problem: too much jargon, too many long words and complex sentences. Use the Microsoft Word® spelling and grammar check to determine your Flesch-Kincaid grade level score. **If your grade level score is nine or above**, look for opportunities to lower it. How? Make your sentences shorter and choose simple words instead of complex ones.



Gadget friendly

Workforces across the globe are becoming increasingly mobile. And many employees prefer accessing email on their smartphones than their desktops. To appeal to employees using multiple devices, communicators need to **create messages that are effective across many platforms**.



High concept

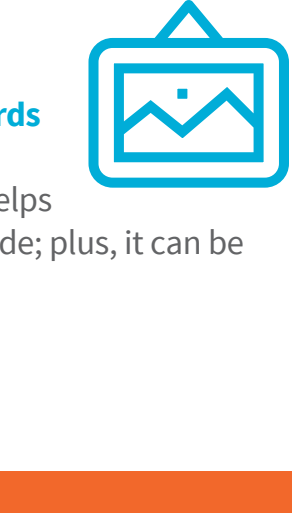
A high concept captures the essence of what you need people to know **in about 15 words**. In Hollywood, high concepts (sometimes called log lines) are used to pitch a film to a producer, meaning they have to be brief and highly engaging.

Writing a high concept forces you to **make every word count** and convey your message simply, succinctly and in a very targeted way. And once you've got it, you can use it over and over again to keep your messages consistent.



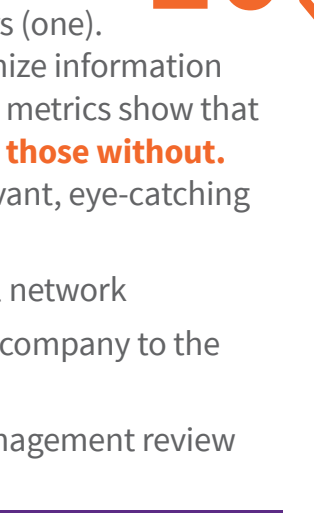
Inverted pyramid

The inverted pyramid is a journalism **tactic used to structure content** so the most important information comes first, at the top of the pyramid, and the least important goes last, at the bottom. This organizational principle helps you **draft messages that prioritize the most relevant information**, forcing you to think about what's important to employees. When you use the inverted pyramid, you help employees find the news within the first sentence or two.



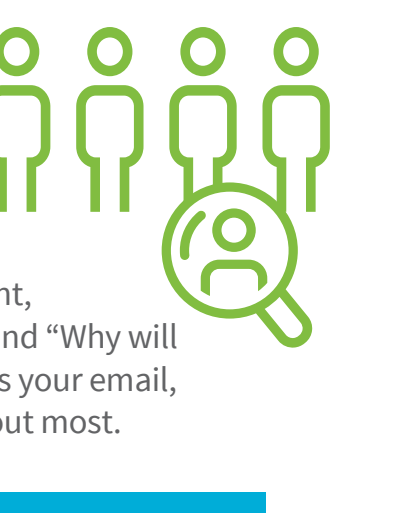
Jargon

The Cambridge Dictionary defines jargon as: "words and phrases used by particular groups of people, especially in their work, that are not generally understood." Jargon is dense, boring, abstract and absolutely useless to the employees you're trying to communicate with. That's why you should **avoid jargon at all costs**. Ban buzzwords that sound impressive but provide little meaning, such as "paradigm" or "synergy." And spell out acronyms and initialisms; don't assume everyone knows what they stand for.



Know, Believe, Do

Setting **smart objectives** is critical to developing impactful communication. A great way to frame objectives is to ask yourself: "As a result of my communication, **what do I want employees to know, believe and do?**" Once you set meaningful objectives, you can create strategies, tactics and content that build knowledge, gain buy-in and incite action.

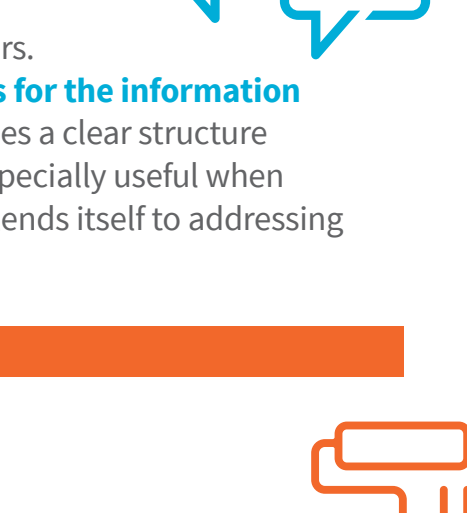


LATCH

Use LATCH to organize your content according to employees' needs. Devised by Richard Saul Wurman, the founder of TED Talks, the LATCH principle provides an easy-to-use **framework for structuring information**. The premise is that nearly all organizational schemes can be reduced to five basic dimensions:

- Location
- Alphabet (like this guide!)
- Time
- Category
- Hierarchy

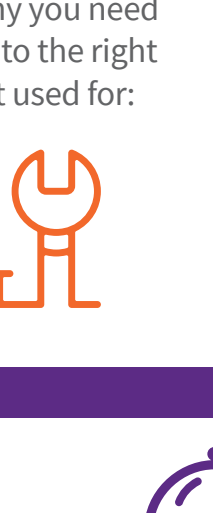
Neatly **organized information is inherently easy to follow** and understand. Writing about a process with deadlines? Organize your information by timeline. Explaining an organizational structure? Try a hierarchical approach.



Message frame

A message frame is a core statement of **15–20 words that captures the essence of what you need employees to know**. Creating a message frame helps you decide what information is important to include; plus, it can be used in many formats:

- Email subject lines
- Elevator or escalator speech
- A "tweet" or microblog



Number

Scientists have proven that human brains are more attracted to numerals (1) than written-out numbers (one). This is likely because numbers automatically organize information into a logical order, and our brains crave logic. And metrics show that **headlines with numerals yield more traffic than those without**. So try boiling down your next headline to one relevant, eye-catching number. Here are some examples:

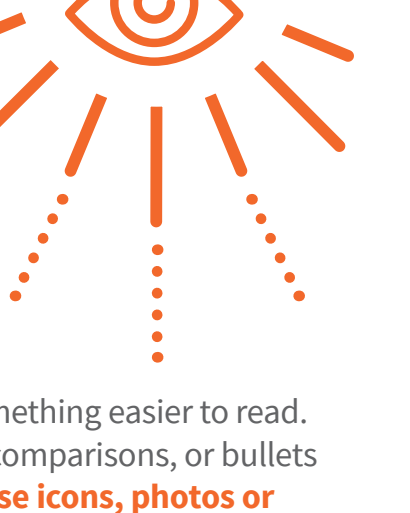
- 5 ways to get the most out of our employee social network
- 3 reasons why our business strategy will take our company to the next level
- Top 10 tips for nailing your next performance management review



Onion

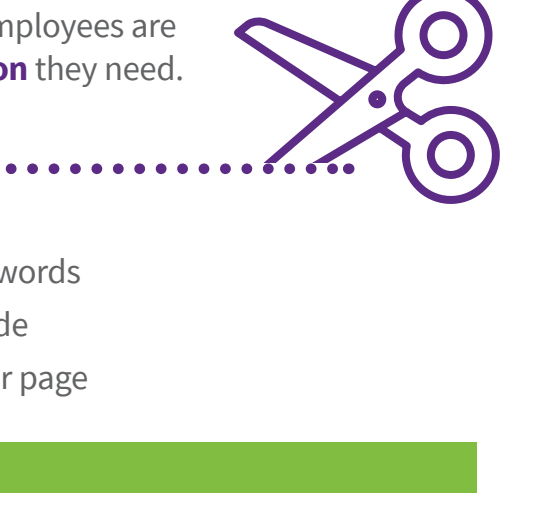
To get to the heart of an onion, you have to peel many layers. The same task applies to simplifying content: you've got to **keep peeling layers until you deeply understand** the essence of the message you need to relay. Here's how:

- Ask the basic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
- Look at the big picture
- Get the details
- "Don't stop 'til you get enough"



Preferences

If you want employees to quickly grasp the meaning of a message, make sure it's written to **focus on their needs and preferences**. Before writing content, ask yourself, "What do employees want to know?" and "Why will employees care about this information?" Then focus your email, article, poster or video on what employees care about most.



Q&A

A great way to organize information is to structure topics into questions and answers. This allows readers to **skim the questions for the structure they're most interested in**. Plus it provides a clear structure that's easy to follow. The Q&A format is especially useful when communicating about change because it lends itself to addressing employees' most pressing concerns.



Right tool

Always make sure you **use the right tool for the job**. Too many organizations rely on email for absolutely every communication, when a different channel might do a better job of relaying a message, building emotion or inciting action. That's why you need to diversify how you communicate by tailoring content to the right channel. Here are a few channels and what they're best used for:

- Email:** Providing quick, actionable information
- Video:** Dramatizing and illustrating messages
- Meetings:** Explaining complex content and answering questions



Service journalism

When you tell employees how to solve a problem or take action, you're doing them a service. That's the idea behind service journalism: **to provide helpful advice**. Here are some examples of service journalism in action:

- 5 ways to increase your productivity without leaving your desk
- How to set performance goals that support the strategy
- 3 simple steps to take when selecting a dental plan



Time

Did you know that **employees spend 30 hours per workweek checking and reading email?** What a waste of time! If you take your time to craft messages that are attention grabbing, easy to understand and quick to read, you'll save your employees time getting the information they need. Who doesn't love that idea?

Understandable

Ensure employees can easily understand your writing by making it clear and concise. Here's how:

- Focus on clarity:** Organize information in a logical manner to help employees follow along, and write with straightforward language that quickly gets to the point
- Cut out jargon** and unnecessary language
- Write short messages:** fewer than 100 words for email and fewer than 300 for news articles

Visuals

Of the total sense receptors in the human body, **70% reside in our eyes**. Visuals are effective because they:

- Help employees navigate dense information
- Convey complicated ideas
- Emphasize key messages
- Efficiently consolidate content

So ditch the long, narrative copy and go for something easier to read. You can create charts or tables to explain cost comparisons, or bullets to highlight key changes. Whenever possible, **use icons, photos or sketches to illustrate your points**. To simplify the most complex content, try infographics or videos.



Word count

Always **limit your word count** so employees are able to **quickly read the information** they need. Here are some guidelines:

- Email: 100–200 words
- Articles: 300–400 words
- Posters and digital screens: 10–20 words
- Presentations: 25–50 words per slide
- Print brochures: 300–400 words per page



X-tra small

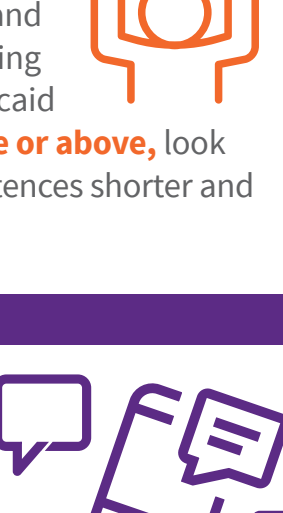
We've said it before, and we'll say it again. **Keep your content brief**, concise, succinct, short, bite-sized, digestible...in short, x-tra small!



You

What's the most important word in the English language? You! When people hear that magic word, their ears perk up and they automatically pay attention. **Writing with "you" as the main pronoun forces you to focus on the employees**—what they want to know and/or need to do. Here's an example:

- Before: Open enrollment starts tomorrow
- After: Choose the best benefits plan for you—starting tomorrow



Zen

When you've honed your content down to its core essence, chopped your word count and simplified your language, that's when you'll find it: **Peace. Nirvana. Zen.**

