
Set Your Objectives – A Planning Template from Barbara McNichol

Speed up the writing process by organizing your thoughts using these headings:

WHO: Target Audience—Who will read this? What do you know about them already? Who will be affected?

WHAT: Message or takeaway, including call to action—What do you want the reader to do, think, believe, or remember as a result of reading your piece? e.g., Attend this important meeting. Consider this point of view. Revise a letter. Refund my money.

WHY: Purpose and benefits—Why do the readers need this information? What's in it for them? Why should they care?

WHEN & WHERE: Logistics—What logistics need to be spelled out? e.g., October 4 at 3 p.m. at the Sheraton in downtown Phoenix.

HOW: Style and tone—How do you want your reader to “hear” you? e.g., polite, apologetic, excited, firm, demanding, laid back, with urgency

Outline your thoughts on these headings in point form and allow your brain to synthesize them. Then you'll find it's much easier to write the body of the letter.

Who: _____

What: _____

Why: (benefits) _____

When/Where: _____

How: (tone) _____

After you've written your whole piece, ask two people to identify the 4 Ws and How. Their feedback helps you pinpoint which aspects are unclear so you can make your next draft even better.



These phrases can be pared down and redundancies eliminated by striking out the word/words that are unnecessary.

Try your hand and see how you can quickly sharpen your writing. (Answers follow.)

- end-result
- add more
- absolute guarantee
- actual experience
- alongside of
- at the present time
- blend together
- brief moment
- complete monopoly
- current fad
- empty hole
- exactly alike
- established fact
- false pretenses
- gather together
- final outcome
- first began
- glowing ember
- grand total
- invited guests
- free gift
- link together
- local residents
- might possibly
- mutual cooperation
- my personal opinion
- natural instinct
- new breakthrough
- originally created
- pair of twins
- period of time
- pitch black
- plan ahead
- reason why
- separate and distinct
- soaked to the skin
- spell out in detail
- sum total
- sworn affidavit
- unexpected surprise
- visible to the eye

ANSWERS TO FOLLOW

ANSWERS

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About Barbara McNichol

Barbara McNichol Editorial provides expert editing of articles, books, and book proposals for authors, speakers, and entrepreneurs. Over the past 18 years, she has placed more than 280 books on her editing "trophy shelf."



Barbara helps solopreneurs improve their writing through her monthly ezine Add Power to Your Pen. She has also created Word Trippers: The Ultimate Source for Choosing the Perfect Word When It Really Matters. This handy word choice guide is available at Amazon.com (print and Kindle formats).

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Fun Figures of Speech

What's a figure of speech? Words taken out of their literal meaning to create a vivid or dramatic picture. Play with them in your writing!

Alliteration

Matching or repetition of consonants or repeating of the same letter (or sound) at the beginning of words.

- *Papa's potatoes and poultry were a big hit at the potluck.*
- *Dewdrops danced on the daylilies' tongue.*

Aphorism

Aphorisms are short, pointed sentences expressing a wise or clever observation or a general truth.

- *A good time to keep your mouth shut is when you're in deep water.*
- *If you don't have a sense of humor, you probably don't have any sense at all.*
- *There are no new sins; the old ones just get more publicity.*

Apophony or ablaut reduplication

An apophony features regular vowel variations and has a to-and-fro motion or sound – popularized by Grimm Brothers' fairy tales.

- *Chit-chat*
- *Dilly-dally*
- *Ding-dong*
- *Fiddle-faddle*
- *Flim-flam*
- *Knick-knack*

Chiasmus

A sentence that reads forward and backward like a mirror, often used in speeches in an artistic, persuasive way.

- *Ask not what your country can do for you—but ask what you can do for your country.*

Colloquialism

Colloquialisms are informal expressions (slang) that play a role in how we communicate, but shouldn't be used in formal speech or writing (unless it's dialogue).

- *Gonna and wanna*
- *There ain't nothin' to it.*
- *He done good.*

Eponym

"Proper names that have become improper and uncommonly common." That's how author Willard R. Espy described eponyms, which are words coined after people's names.

Byronic: One who is melancholic, passionate, melodramatic, and disregards societal norms. Named after poet Lord Byron (1788-1824) who displayed these characteristics as did his poetry.

Orwellian: Of or relating to a totalitarian state in which citizens' activities are tightly controlled. Named after George Orwell, pen name of Eric Blair (1903-1950), whose novel Nineteen Eighty-Four depicted a futuristic totalitarian state.

Draconian: Unusually harsh. Named after Draco (late 7th century BCE), Athenian legislator, noted for the harshness of his code of laws.
Heteronyms

Homonyms and Homophones

Homonyms are spelled the same but differ in meaning while homophones are pronounced the same but differ in meaning, origin, and sometimes spelling.

Examples of homonyms:

- *Bank (a place to deposit money) and bank (a river's edge)*
- *Fair (county fair), fair (reasonable), fair (in appearance fair-skinned)*

Examples of homophones:

- *Cite (to quote as an authority or example), sight (to see), site (location or place)*
- *Sea (body of water) and see (vision)*

Hyperbole

This figure of speech adds exaggeration to your writing. Hyperbole (hy-PER-buh-lee) statements are not literally true but are used for emphasis.

- *Her feet were as big as skis.*
- *I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.*
- *I've heard that joke a thousand times.*

Malapropism

Named after Richard Sheridan's character Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*, malapropisms are a comic misuse of language.

- *He had to use a fire distinguisher.*
- *Dad says the monster is just a pigment of my imagination*
- *My sister has extra-century perception.*

Metaphor

A metaphor lets us use one image to conjure up another. Overused metaphors are considered clichés.

- *You are my sunshine.*
- *All the world's a stage.*
- *The thick blanket of snow covered the frozen field.*
- *"Life is the art of drawing without an eraser." – John W. Gardner*
- *"Life is a moderately good play with a badly written third act." – Truman Capote*
- *"Life is a great big canvas, and you should throw all the paint on it you can." – Danny Kaye*

Oxymoron

An oxymoron takes two incongruous or contradictory terms and puts them together to express two contrasting qualities in one concept. (Plural form is oxymora.)

- *Old news*
- *Dull roar*
- *Open secret*
- *Random order*

Palindrome

A word, phrase, verse, or sentence that reads the same backward or forward.

- *Straw – warts*
- *Do geese see God?*
- *Never odd or even*

Pangram

A pangram uses all 26 letters of the alphabet.

- *The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.*
- *Watch Jeopardy! Alex Trebek's fun TV quiz game.*

Paraprosdokian

A figure of speech in which the latter part of a sentence or phrase is surprising or unexpected; it causes the reader to reframe or reinterpret the first part. It's how you add "funny" to your writing!

- *"Where there's a will, I want to be in it."*
- *"If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong."*
- *"War does not determine who is right – only who is left."*
- *"A friend in need is a friend I don't need." – Deepak Jhangiani*
- *"You can lead a horse to water...but if you can teach him to roll over on his back and backstroke, you got something." – Rudy Cluke*

Personification

A figure of speech that gives "human" characteristics (emotion, honesty, volition, etc.) to an animal, object, or idea.

- *The haughty peacock strutted around his mate.*
- *Fate frowned on her success.*
- *My car was happy to be washed.*

Pleonasm

Pleonasm consists of two concepts (usually two words) that are redundant.

- *boiling hot*
- *cash money*
- *dark night*
- *empty hole*
- *little baby*
- *pair of twins*

Portmanteau

A portmanteau results from combining two words into a single (and often deprecating and/or ironically humorous) term that denotes a new concept. Its origin is French: as a noun, portmanteau is a case or trunk in which clothing is carried; as an adjective, it means embodying several uses or qualities.

- *Slidewalk – slide + sidewalk (a sidewalk covered with ice) – Steve Fine*
- *Administrivia – administration + trivia – Bernie Steinberg*
- *Scrave – scary + brave – from Room by Emma Donoghue*

Reduplications

Reduplications feature repeated words. These are rhyming reduplications:

- *Fuddy-duddy*
- *Fuzzy-wuzzy*
- *Arty-farty*
- *Boogie-woogie*
- *Chick-flick*
- *Hanky-panky*

Exact reduplications are used in teaching babies to talk.

- *Blah-blah*
- *Bling-bling*
- *Bye-bye*
- *Choo-choo*
- *Chop-chop*
- *Knock-knock*

Simile

Makes a comparison using “as” or “like” to show how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in another way.

- *Busy as a beaver.*
- *Mad as a wet hen.*
- *The snow was as thick as a down blanket.*

Spoonerism

Words or phrases in which letters or syllables get swapped. Examples of spoonerisms:

- *I’m driving in the right lane, for I’m driving in a light rain.*
- *Tease my ears, for Ease my tears.*
- *Wave the sails, for Save the whales.*

See more at www.nonfictionbookeditor.com under Word Play