

Telling your research story

Science communication at UCT

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UCT communication channels

- Research Office Global Visibility and Strategy unit
 - Focus purely on research communications, produce a range of booklets and marketing material, notably Umthombo magazine to make UCT's research visible.
 - Manage the research section of UCT News.
 - UCT's research social media channels
 - Work closely with central Communications and Marketing Department (CMD) to keep research on the communication agenda.
- Contact Lisa Boonzaier if you have some research you think will be of public interest.

Principles of good writing

Keep it short and simple (KISS)



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You don't want people to read your article, you want them to understand it.

Turns out there is a difference.

We need to understand how people read...

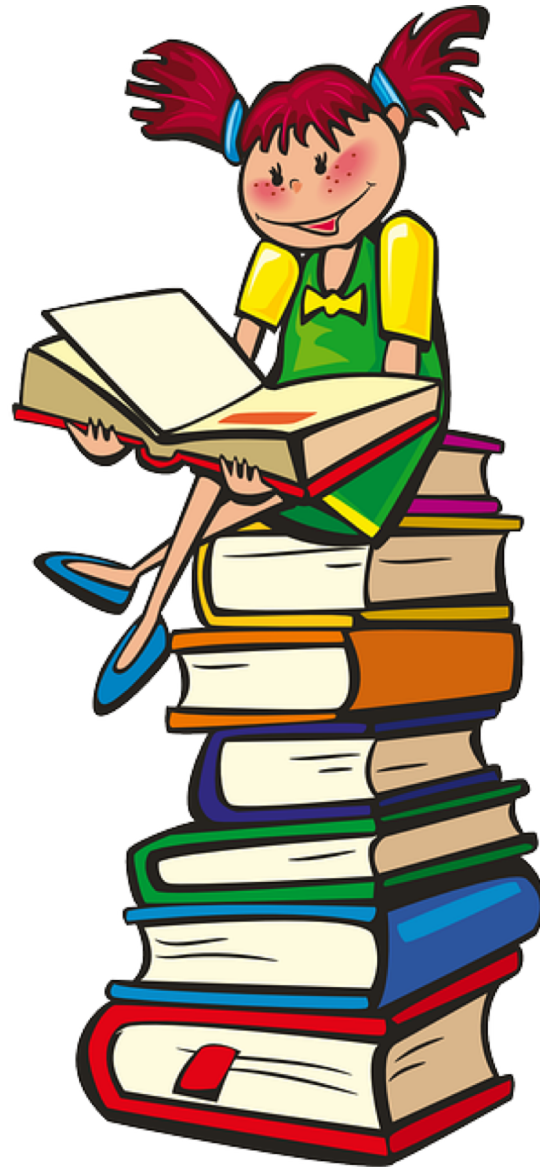
[Source: UK Government style guide](#)



**Mostly we read by
recognising shapes.**

Average reader has a
common vocabulary of
about 5 000 commons
words, which we read by
shape.

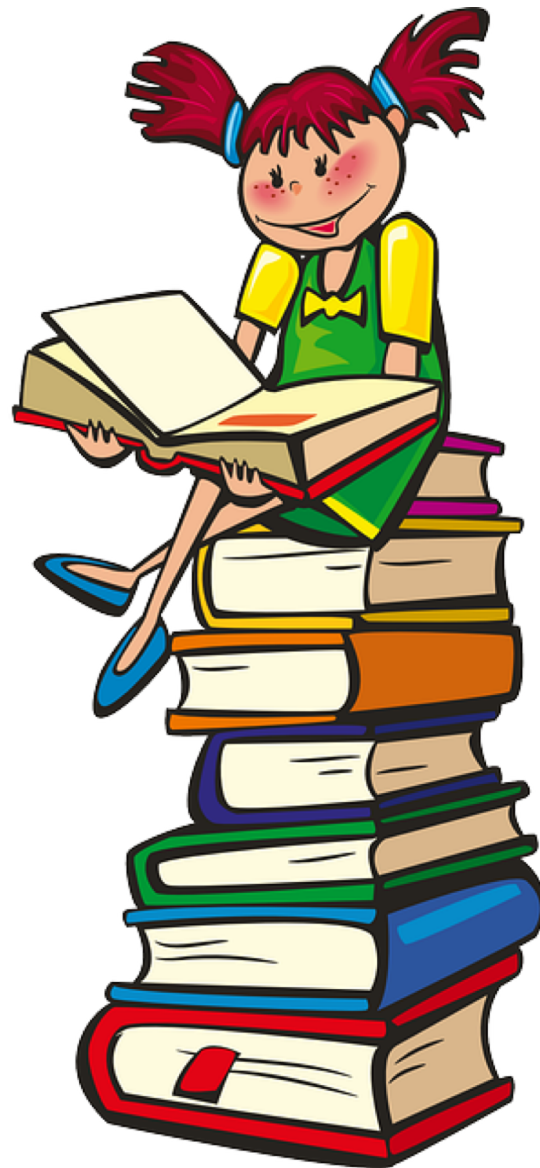
This common words
vocabulary is built by about
9 years old.



**We don't read every word
and the more big words in
an article, the more words
your reader skips.**

When you use a longer word
(eight or nine letters) your
reader is more likely to skip
the words following that
word.

The more big words you use,
the more your reader skips
and the less they understand.



Key writing principle: never use a big word when
a short one will do

Utilise



Use



Shorter sentences are easier to understand.

- 8 word sentence = 100% comprehension of the information being conveyed.
- 14 word sentence = 90% comprehension.
- 43 word sentence = 10% comprehension.

- Public Relations Society of America, on research conducted by the American Press Institute.



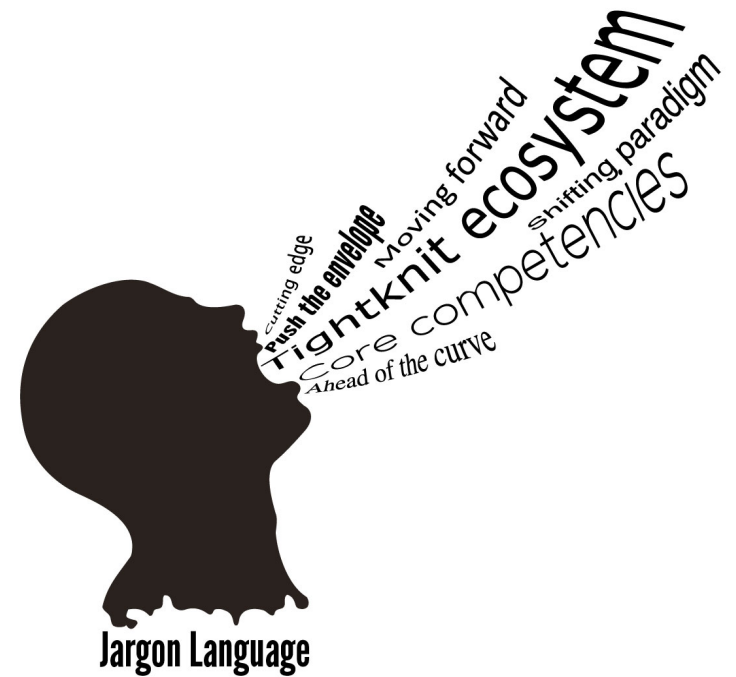
Dealing with jargon

Special words or expressions used by a profession or group that are difficult for others to understand



Dealing with jargon

- Where possible, avoid it.
- Where not possible – be sure to explain the concept/term up front in a way a layman can understand.
- Helps to compare what you are trying to explain to a commonly understood concept or narrative.
- Do not use jargon words to explain your jargon term. Eg. Biochemistry is a laboratory-based science that brings together biology and chemistry.



What is news?

Would my aunt Gertrude find this interesting?



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But is it news?

- Impact: if it bleeds, it leads.
- Controversy: a matter of contentious public debate (cloning, abortion, banting diet.
- Newness: do people already know this? New discoveries like Homo Naledi
- Surprising, unusual or bizarre: dog bites man versus man bites dog.
- Prominence: a prominent person, place or event.
- Human interest: stories of researchers overcoming the odds.
- Topicality: it is in the news anyway (aviation – boeing – crisis.
- Proximity: how does this affect me personally?

News writing

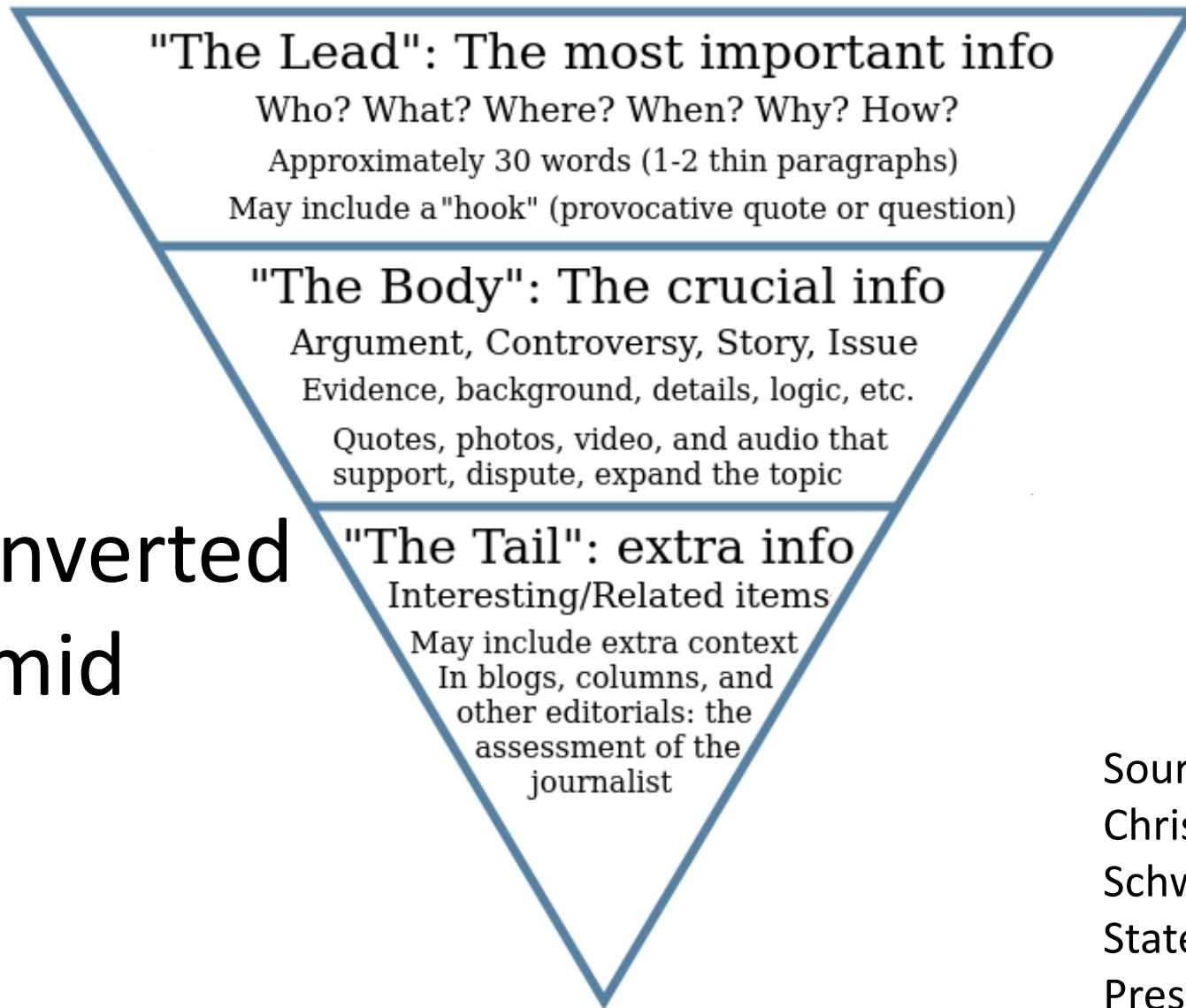
The inverted pyramid



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The inverted pyramid



Source:
Christopher
Schwartz. Ohio
State
Pressbooks

Using UCT communications channels
to make your research visible.



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Other communication channels

- The Conversation Africa.
- Blogging platform: medium.
- Social media.
- Podcasts: Figshare's School of Batman.
- Building your own relationships with science journalists.

Thank You



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