

## Riveting reports summary

### BEFORE YOU WRITE

#### First, answer six basic questions—concisely

- What is your topic?
- Who is going to read what you write?
- What is your purpose?
- How long should your report be?
- How much time can you spend writing?
- What is your working title?  
Make it short, memorable, and easy to repeat.

#### Second, create a paragraph-by-paragraph plan

- State your main message in less than 30 words.
- State each supporting message in less than 30 words.
- Turn your supporting messages into headings to anchor an outline.
- Assign paragraphs to headings and topics to paragraphs.

#### Third, flesh out the plan

- Make a strong point about each paragraph topic.
- Assemble details, examples, and comments under your points.
- Convert raw material into draft paragraphs.

### AS YOU WRITE

- Avoid thinking you have to use every bit of information.
- Make sure that each sentence bears on the topic.
- Use only the strongest details and examples to support your point.
- Try numbering supporting details, examples, and comments in the order that you want them to appear in the paragraph.

### AFTER YOU WRITE

#### Revise your paragraphs

- Ensure that each sentence in the paragraph is unified around the point.
- Vary the ways you make your point.
- Create smooth transitions between sentences and paragraphs.
- Establish that sentences are ordered logically.

#### Tape your draft to a wall to apply finishing touches

- Make sure the argument progresses logically and sections are ordered in the most effective way.
- Adjust the length and balance of each section.
- Remove any duplication across sections.
- Consider moving any highly detailed or technical sections to an appendix.
- Make headings parallel.
- Clarify your original messages.

#### Take a last look

- Take your report off the wall, do a line-by-line edit, use spell check, and read your report once more.