



# Introduction to Report Writing

Bowker COMM 390

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Learn the rules like a pro so you can break them like an artist.

– Pablo Picasso



# Key Concepts

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- Understanding audience
- Using appropriate tone and language
- Clarifying the report's purpose
- Establishing a clear premise
- Planning your report
- Developing a logical argument
- Supporting an argument with evidence



# Goals

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1. The majority of your report is read and understood.
2. Your proposal or recommendation is highly regarded.
3. You and your company's reputation is enhanced.
4. Your report is easier to read *and* to write.



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How do you do that?!

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# Know Your Audience

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- ▶ You will write differently for different audiences.
- ▶ You must use a tone appropriate to your audience and to your company.
- ▶ Your report may still be referenced years from now where little background knowledge can be assumed.
- ▶ Key decision makers may read very little of the report.
- ▶ Understand your reader's level of expertise and technical knowledge.



# Plan Your Approach

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- ▶ Develop a strategy for how you will build your argument.
  - ▶ Step by step to a logical conclusion
- ▶ Know what you want to say before you start writing.
  - ▶ What are your key points?
  - ▶ Plan the order you will say it in.
- ▶ Identify the data required.
- ▶ Determine the level of detail necessary.
- ▶ Complete the analysis.
- ▶ Draw the conclusions.



# Form

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Beginning

Middle

End





# You Need a Plan to Pull It Off

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qybUFnY7Y8w>

OkGo needed a detailed plan to do this in one take – which they were able to do repeatedly. This final version has one edit.

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To develop a sound argument...

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# Develop A Sound Argument

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1. Ensure your position or premise is very clear.
2. State your assumptions.
3. Back it up with a logical argument & ANALYSIS.
4. Support it with sufficient proof.

➡ The result should be a position that is compelling and believable.



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First...

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# Be Clear About the Purpose

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- ▶ **Before you start:**

- ▶ Be very clear about the problem or issue you are addressing
- ▶ Why are you writing this report?
- ▶ Who is it for?



# Understand Your Purpose

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- ▶ Are you persuading, or merely presenting facts?
- ▶ Are you making a recommendation?
- ▶ Is budget a deciding factor?
  - ▶ If so, include a section on ROI
- ▶ Are there political implications?



## Develop a Premise

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What is your **premise**?  
*(What is a premise?)*



# Premise

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## **premise**

noun | Also, *premise*. Logic. a proposition supporting or helping to support a conclusion.

[pre-mis] Show IPA

- ▶ The main point you make.
- ▶ The position you take.
- ▶ The place you take your reader.
- ▶ Is the driver that provides momentum.



Kriebel

Source: Dictionary.com

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# Practice Question– answer on paper

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- ▶ Imagine you are a local designer who manufactures and sells out of a small facility. Should you also open an online store?
  1. Identify your premise or position clearly.



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Second...

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# State Your Assumptions

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## Assumptions:

- ▶ Might be an assertion we make as a starting point, like a hypothesis; or
- ▶ Might be a logical conclusion that we can't confirm.
- ▶ Allow us to develop a business case or make a plan.
- ▶ Provide a starting point so we can identify that which we agree on.
- ▶ Plan and make decisions when faced with uncertainty.



# Assumptions: Best Practices

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- ▶ Be Specific
  - ▶ Vague: “upper middle class”
  - ▶ Specific: “individuals with an annual income in excess of \$150,000”
- ▶ Distinguish between fact and opinion.
  - ▶ Opinion: “seniors are a profitable market”
  - ▶ Fact: “there are more than 1 million people over the age of 55 in BC, with an average annual income of \$x,000”
- ▶ Provide citations from the best source possible
  - ▶ E.g. as close to the original source as possible.



# Practice Question– answer on paper

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- ▶ You are a local designer. Should you open an online store?
2. Identify 2 or 3 assumptions you must make to build your argument.



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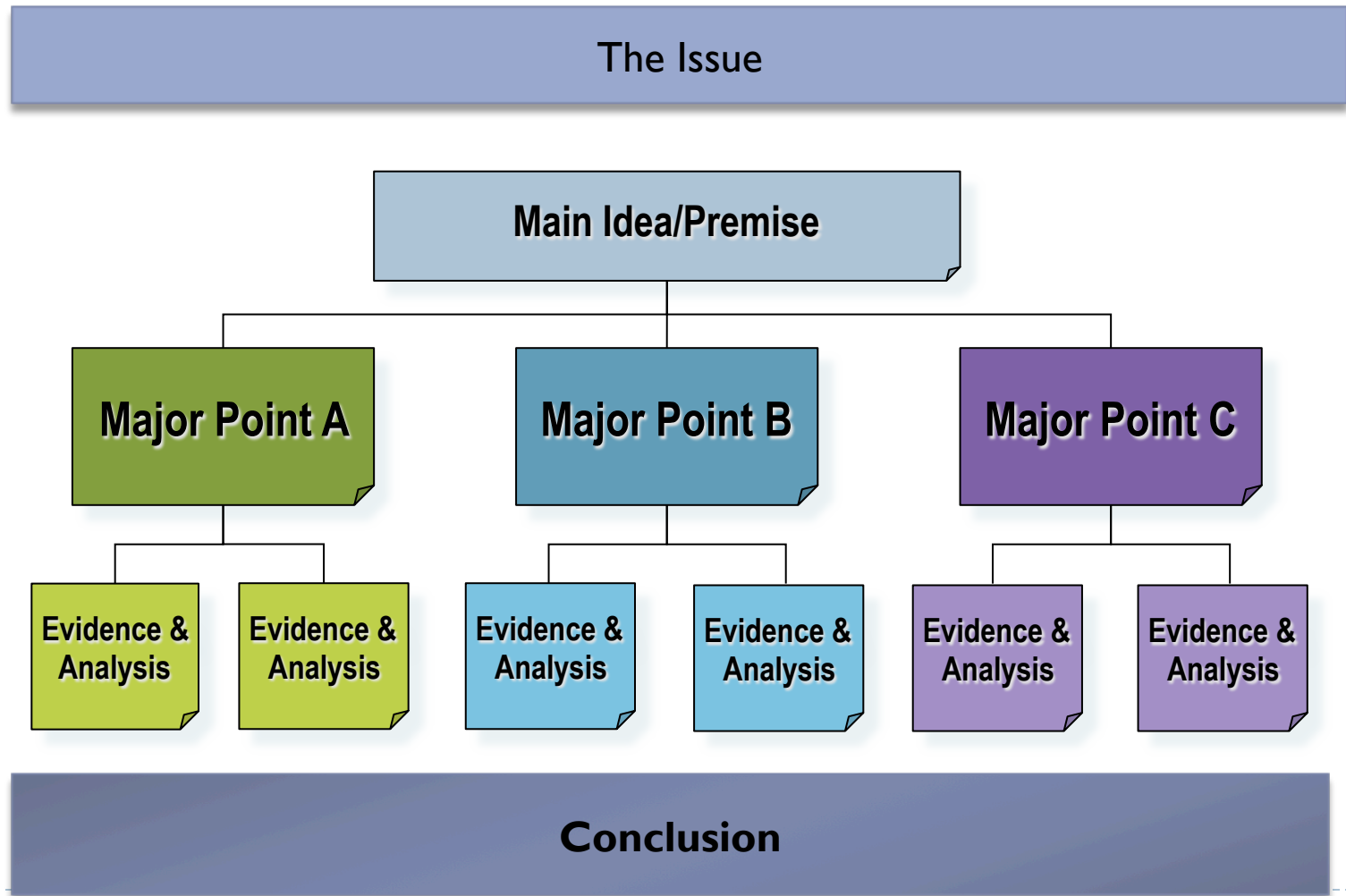
Third...

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# Identify Your Main Points

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**THE ISSUE:**

**PREMISE:**

**Main Point A**

**Main Point B**

**Main Point C**

**Supporting Evidence & Analysis**

**Supporting Evidence & Analysis**

**Supporting Evidence & Analysis**

**CONCLUSION:** *what is the conclusion you draw from the points you have made?*



# Practice Question – answer on paper

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▶ You are a local designer considering opening an online store.

3. What are the main points you want to make in support of your position?



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Fourth, and this is critical...

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# For Every Point You Make...

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**Make a clear and solid assertion.**

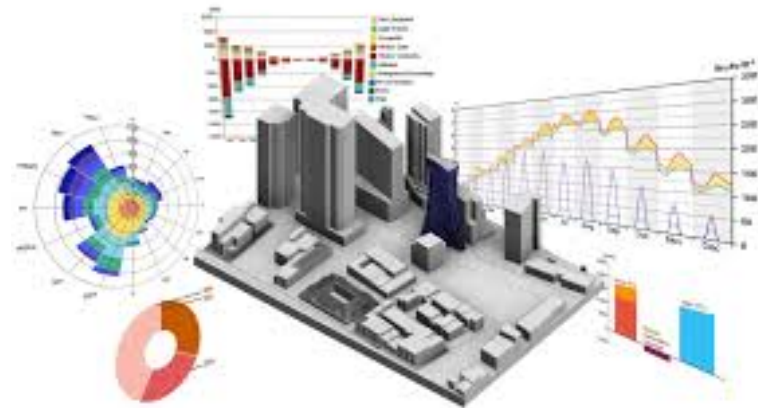
- ▶ Then prove it with evidence
- ▶ Be bold and confident. **HIT IT HARD.**
- ▶ If you hesitate or are uncertain, you will lack credibility



# Provide Analysis

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- ▶ After your premise and your main ideas provide analysis
- ▶ Break the issue in to pieces and **EXPLAIN** it
  - ▶ How does it work? Why does it work?
- ▶ Provide a careful consideration of the facts
  - ▶ Describe what they **SHOW** and what **CONCLUSIONS** you can draw from them
- ▶ Determine what matters
  - ▶ And say so **EXPLICITLY**
- ▶ Answer what happens **IF/WHEN?**



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# Evidence



# Then Use Tools to Prove Your Points

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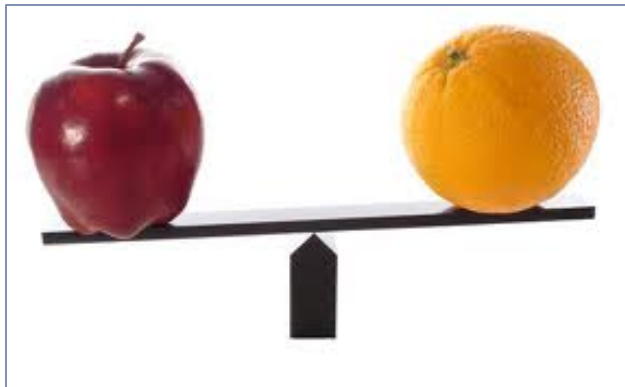
- ▶ Every point you make needs to be supported with proof or evidence.
- ▶ Provide context and illustrate your point so that it is
  - A) Easier to understand, and
  - B) More credible.



# Tools That Provide Evidence

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- ▶ Data
- ▶ Statistics
- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Illustrations
- ▶ Examples
- ▶ Comparisons
- ▶ Analogy
- ▶ Description
- ▶ Interviews
- ▶ Testimony
- ▶ Stories
- ▶ Focus Groups
- ▶ Quotes
- ▶ References & Citations
- ▶ Case Studies (strong)
- ▶ Anecdotes (weak)
- ▶ Specifics
- ▶ Tables, charts & figures
- ▶ Surveys
- ▶ Scenario Planning
- ▶ Modeling
- ▶ Best practices
- ▶ Industry standards



# Examples

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## **Statistic and Comparison:**

Canadians spent \$6.3 billion on pets in 2012, about \$800 million more than on childcare. (Globe & Mail)

Or

The amount of oil spilled into the Kalamazoo River in 2010 was 2500m<sup>3</sup>, the same as 1.5 Olympic sized swimming pools.

**Best Practices:** Smart phone apps should minimize end user typing. (Motorola)

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# Practice Question: Example

- ▶ **Assumption:** Many people are moved by the speech Rev. Martin Luther King made at the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963.
- ▶ **Evidence** of its importance: almost 7 million people have watched the top listed video of it on YouTube since it was uploaded 3 years ago
- ▶ **Analysis:** *Explain why this evidence supports this assertion.*



**I Have a Dream**

[http://www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=smEqnklfYs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smEqnklfYs)

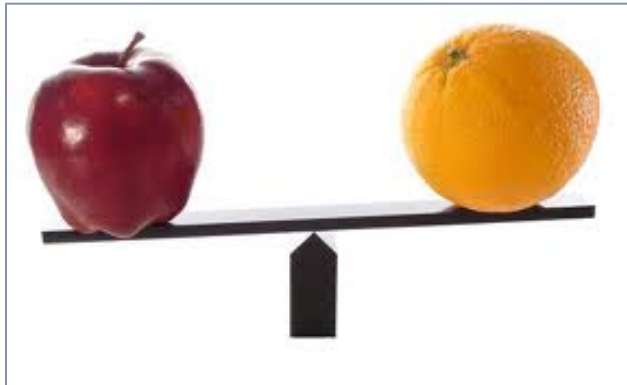


# Practice Question– answer on Connect

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Pick **3** tools from the list on the previous slide and for each one, give specific examples that provide evidence necessary to support an argument.

3. Make one of them support your newsstand argument.



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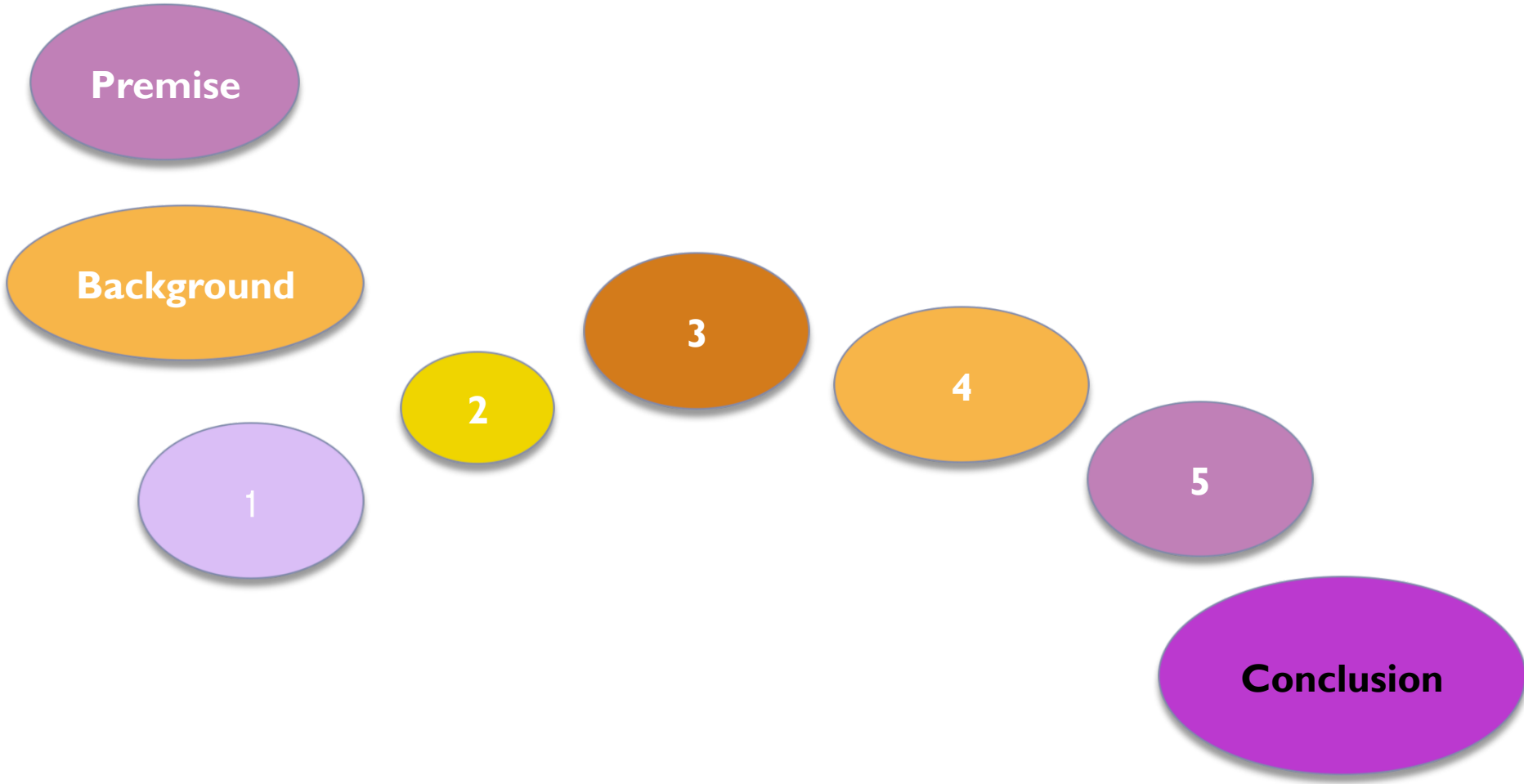
*And finally...*

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# Step by Step to a Logical Conclusion

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# Form

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Beginning

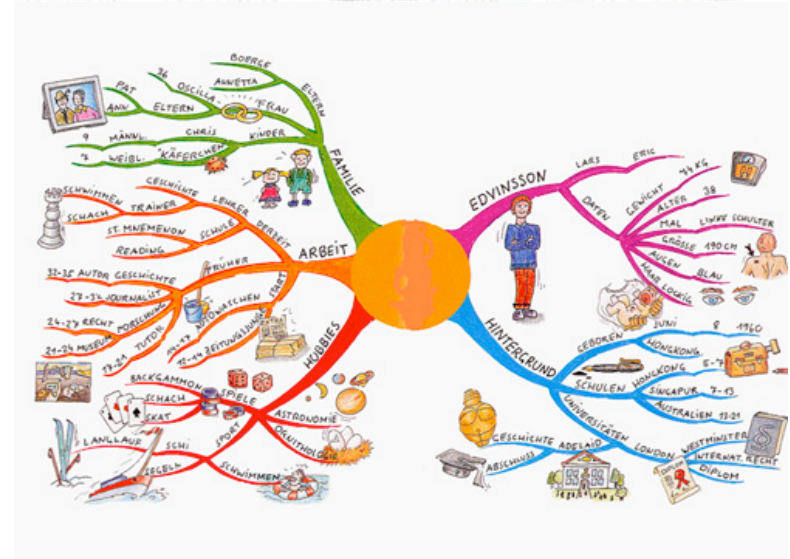
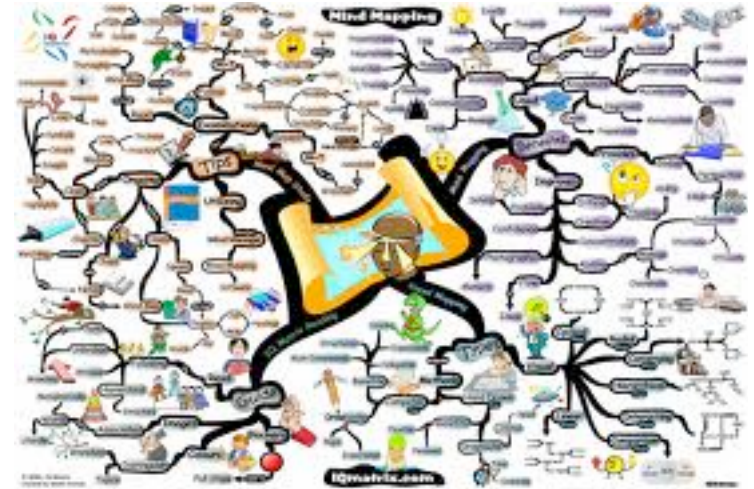
Middle

End



# Organize Your Ideas

- ▶ What do readers need to know first?
- ▶ What information provides context?
- ▶ What information supports your conclusions?
- ▶ Categorize so the right data and analysis follow the conclusion they support.
- ▶ Is there anything extra?
  - ▶ Take it out.



# A Sound Argument

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1. Clear position or premise
2. Stated assumptions
3. Backed up with a logical argument
4. Supported with sufficient proof

➡ The result should be a position that is compelling and believable.



## Practice Question– answer on Connect

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In point form, and in a logical order, identify your premise, main points, assumptions and evidence in response to the question: **Should we open an online store?**





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End

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