

Yellow Level Strategies

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



Strategies for Presenting Complex Information

The Yellow Level Strategies assist professional writers with refining complex materials and presenting them in efficient and coherent ways. These strategies polish your communications, making them more look more professional.

Refine Information to Make It More Useful

Refining information is the process of taking data and applying your knowledge, experiences, insights, and expertise to it. By moving information up the ladder, you can provide readers with increasingly useful and accessible information.

The Four Levels of Information

Data

Raw data makes up the lowest level of the four levels of information. Data includes facts, figures, and statistics without any form of processing or analysis. Finding data is essential to conveying meaningful information; however, while essential to the communication process, raw data is seldom useful to your audience without some form of processing or analysis to assist your readers' understanding.

Findings

Presenting findings is the process of taking raw data and discovering relationships and correlations between the information and then sharing these findings with an audience. Findings assist the audience in discovering interesting trends within material, and can potentially generate interest and further research on the subject matter.

Conclusions

Conclusions require the refinement of findings by discovering the most useful trends within data and revealing them to an audience. Reaching conclusions typically requires direct engagement with your expertise, knowledge, and experience as they relate to data and findings. For an audience to accept your conclusions, you must establish credibility.

Recommendations

Recommendations are the most useful form of information. Giving a recommendation is the act of taking data, findings, and conclusions and offering your best opinion about what your audience should do with this information. Recommendations require expertise and knowledge about the subject discussed, and they require credibility and trust with an audience to be effective.

Example:

Data: *Ninety out of one-hundred wizards learn fire magic.*

Finding: *The majority of wizards learn fire magic.*

Conclusion: *Fire magic is a popular and common form of magic.*

Recommendation: *Aspiring wizards should consider learning fire magic.*

Suggestion: It is important to note that the Levels of Information are only guidelines. In practice, how much you refine your information is dependent upon your audience's expertise and expectations, how experienced you are with the data, and how much trust you have developed with your audience. Always refine information in a way that best conveys your message.

Design Information Using SSPD

SSPD stands for **Standard Style for Printed Documents** and is a standardized style and formatting guide that assists writers in constructing documents that are easy to understand, navigate, and use. Its primary focus is on a quality called "visual weight."

Yellow Level Strategies

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



Visual Weight

Visual weight is a term that describes how much an object draws the reader's eye. Writers can use visual weight strategically to guide readers through pages and emphasize important information. Dark colors have more visual weight than bright colors, and large items have more weight than small ones. Visual weight can be established through a number of design elements: typeface, type size, margin width and height, text alignment, and color contrast.

Principles of SSPD

Typeface

Font

SSPD uses the serif font Times New Roman for body text and the sans-serif font Arial (standard, not a variation like Arial Black or Arial Narrow) for headings and titles. These fonts are useful because they are familiar, exceptionally easy to read, and nearly all word processors and computers will have these fonts preinstalled, helping writers avoid computer errors.

Emphasis

Emphasis is created by using scripts with **boldface**, *italic*, or underlining, which all have more visual weight than basic text. These elements can be used individually or in conjunction with one another. When used singularly, **boldface** is preferred, followed by *italic*. According to SSPD, underlining is displeasing to most readers, so writers should avoid using it unless necessary. Likewise, ALL CAPS should be avoided entirely.

Suggestion: While using different typefaces for emphasis is an essential component of the SSPD, they should be used sparingly and when necessary. Too much emphasis can be distracting, confusing, or tiresome for readers.

Type Size

Body Text Font Size

The default font size for body text in SSPD is 12 points, but this is not a strict rule. If there is a good reason to do so, fonts as low as 10 points can be used and are acceptable. However, always avoid fonts that are smaller than 10 points.

Heading Font Size

The default font size for headings in SSPD is 14 points, but this is also not a strict rule. Headings can be used strategically for emphasis: For example, using 10 point Arial headings in short documents can make them look less formal, while using larger fonts adds a sense of formality.

Margins and White Space

The most effective formatting tool in a writer's arsenal is the use of white space to direct the reader. White space breaks up documents, making the writing look less overwhelming and more readable than documents with large blocks of text and little white space.

Margins

Margins should be one inch on all sides. If style or space requirements require the reduction of margins, they can be changed, but opposing margins (top & bottom or left & right) should be spaced the same.

Spacing

Professional documents are usually single-spaced. An additional space is inserted between paragraphs and after headings. Two or three lines of space can be used before headings, but if you choose another spacing style, it should be implemented consistently throughout your document.

Yellow Level Strategies

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



Indents

Indents should not be used at the beginning of new paragraphs. The space between paragraphs is used in place of indents in SSPD. Instead, indents should be used to emphasize lists and other document elements to maximize white space.

Alignment

Left Align Everything

Left align all the material within a document. Remember to not use indents; the spaces between paragraphs indicate the beginning of new paragraphs and sections of material.

Avoid the Justified Alignment

The “justified” alignment expands and contracts the spaces between words and letters to fill the full width of columns. While it is a useful tool in newspapers and journals, the “justified” alignment can be confusing to readers and slows down reading and comprehension in standard documents. SSPD does not use this alignment.

Centering

Centering holds significant visual weight and should only be used for top level information – the names of reports and major headings in longer documents. Avoid the tendency to center material unless it is absolutely essential.

Use Lists

Lists help your audience quickly find and understand important information, making your communication more effective and efficient. Any time a sentence or paragraph contains a series of items, using a list should be considered.

When to Use Lists

Lists hold significant visual weight and draw a reader’s eyes and attention. If the list is not important to your overall message, it should remain in sentence form. Alternately, important information should nearly always be placed into lists. Lists are excellent tools for showing relationships, hierarchies, instructions, data, order of events, and for separating components.

List Components

- Use bulleted lists as a default.
- Use numbered lists when the numbers are necessary: chronological instructions and rankings lists are two examples.
- Use parallel structure when writing list items
- Avoid using too many items in a list, or filling list items with too much information.
- Consider using an odd number of items in your list; research shows odd numbers are more pleasing to the brain.

How to Set Up a List

When using lists, use these guidelines:

- Each list should be introduced after an independent clause.
- The preceding sentence should introduce the information in the list directly.
- A colon rather than a period or comma typically follows sentences that introduce lists.

Example: *There are several benefits inherent to learning fire magic:*

- *You will never be cold in the winter.*
 - *Friends will ask you to show off.*
 - *If you ever get lost in the woods, you won’t need a lighter.*
-

Yellow Level Strategies

Note: These reference guides do not take the place of assignment guidelines



Write with Parallel Structure

Parallel structure refers to the repetition of grammatical forms within your writing. Often, this refers to the initial words that introduce headings, lists, and ideas. In SSPD (and in most writing styles), parallel structure is a necessary tool to improve readability and clarity within a document.

Not Parallel: <i>Fire wizards should take several things into consideration before casting a spell:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Being careful during the casting process.</i>• <i>To eat a balanced meal before doing magic.</i>• <i>Craft a protection circle for added safety.</i>	Parallel: <i>Fire wizards should take several things into consideration before casting a spell:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Being careful during the casting process.</i>• <i>Eating a balanced meal before doing magic.</i>• <i>Crafting a protection circle for added safety.</i>
---	--

Craft Informative Headings

Headings are similar to subject lines in that they help readers navigate pages and understand their content quickly and easily. Well-crafted headings shape your message while also giving your document a professional look. Like subject lines, headings should be specific to the information that appears beneath them.

Characteristics of Good Headings

Well-crafted headings have several characteristics in common:

Headings Should Be Specific and Concrete

Good headings should be concise while also being specific and concrete. They tell the story about what is contained in their section by informing the reader about what is being said below.

Not Specific or Concrete: <i>Fire Magic</i>	Specific and Concrete: <i>The Benefits of Fire Magic in the Modern Age</i>
---	--

Headings Should Be Parallel

Parallelism allows readers to grasp information quickly, and this principle applies to headings as well. Each heading should be parallel with other same-level headings.

Non-Parallel Headings: <i>The Benefits of Fire Magic in the Modern Age</i> <i>Efficiency of Fire Magic</i> <i>How Fire Magic Is Adaptable</i> <i>Using Fire Magic in the Workplace</i>	Parallel: <i>The Benefits of Fire Magic in the Modern Age</i> <i>The Efficiency of Fire Magic</i> <i>The Adaptability of Fire Magic</i> <i>The Use of Fire Magic in the Workplace</i>
---	--

Headings Should Be Visually Significant

Good headings use visual weight to make them stand out on the page or screen. This is done through contrast: font type, boldface, italics, and font size can all be used to make headings stand out and create contrast.

No Contrast: <i>Why We Should All Use Fire Magic</i> <i>It's the most efficient and powerful magic in the world.</i>	Contrast: <i>Why We Should All Use Fire Magic</i> <i>It's the most efficient and powerful magic in the world.</i>
---	--