

**The Writer's House**

# Telling Stories

*Make use of your readers' in built love of a good story in your business writing.*



*Bad writing costs. Good writing pays.*



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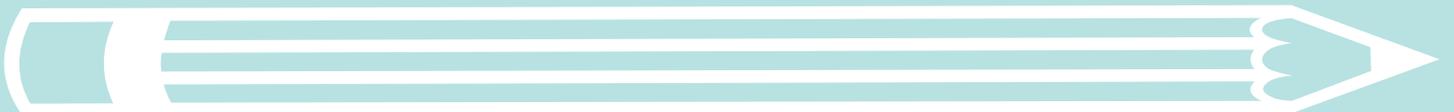
*Make use of your readers' in built love of a good story in your business writing.*

All human beings are drawn to stories. Anthropologists will tell you it's because the familiar patterns of the story have been used for centuries to pass down the knowledge of our ancestors. It's through story that we learn the social behaviours needed for our societies to function. Stories help us make sense of our world and share our experiences of the world.

In fact, we are so drawn to the story, we see story patterns even when there are none. A now famous experiment in 1944 by psychologists Marianne Simmel and Fritz Heider asked students to watch a short film of geometric shapes moving across a plane. Nearly all of the students came up with detailed narratives for what they saw. They interpreted triangles as angry or bullying and smaller circles as fearful, or cowardly.

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/thoughtful-animal/animating-anthropomorphism-giving-minds-to-geometric-shapes-video/>

So, how does this knowledge help us write better in business? At the heart of every good story are two things: **CHARACTERS** performing **ACTIONS**.



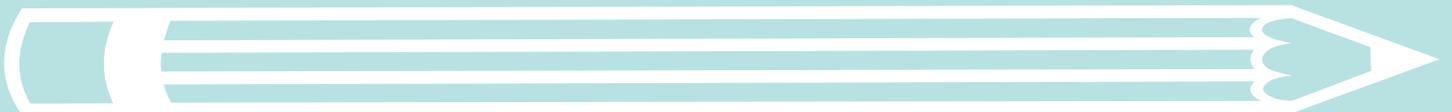


### Identify what is missing from each of the following sentences.

1. Once upon a time there were three little pigs, a wolf and a straw house.
2. Once upon a time, a straw dwelling blew away when a huff and a puff occurred.
3. Once upon a time a straw dwelling under construction by a little pig was caused to collapse by a wolf's exhalation.
4. Once upon a time a little pig built a straw house but a big bad wolf huffed and puffed and blew his house down.



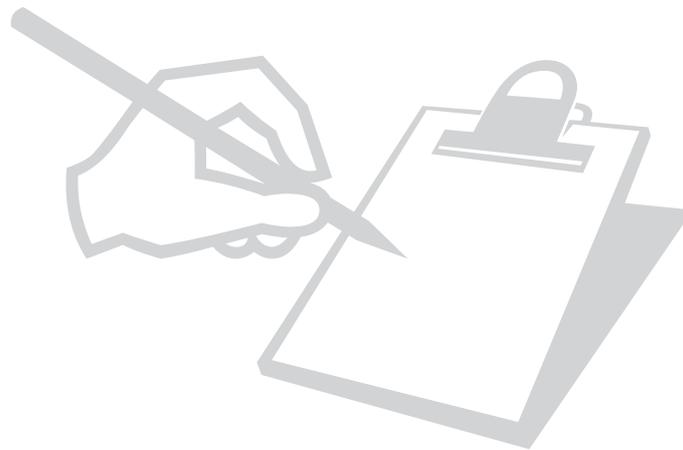
Number 4 is the clear winner in these sentences. It has clearly identifiable characters performing distinct actions. Readers can clearly identify **WHO** is **DOING WHAT**.





### Which sentences do you prefer?

- A) Assessment of the value of each option has been done.  
B) The finance team assessed the value of each option.
- .....
- A) An acceptance of the recommendation to make changes to the emergency management plan was agreed upon.  
B) The planning officer agreed to make the recommended changes to the emergency management plan.
- .....
- A) An update will be undertaken where it is possible to identify the incorrect or affected entry.  
B) We intend to update your programme when we identify incorrect entries.

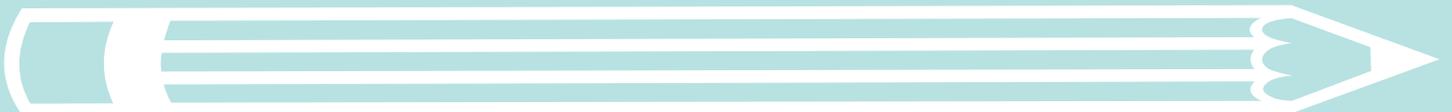


### You respond to the A and B sentences differently because of the way subjects and verbs are used.

In the B sentences the subjects are specific - "The finance team," "The planning officer," "We."

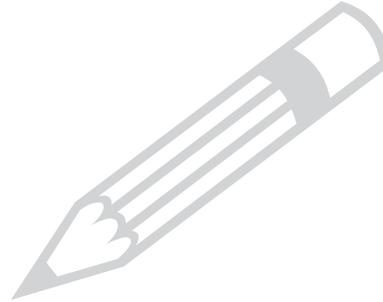
In the B sentences the verbs are explicit and concrete - "assessed," "agreed," "intend."

In the B sentences the subjects are characters and doers of the verb. "The finance team assessed..." "The planning officer agreed..." "We intend..."





Now it's your turn...



**Proofreading Tasks:** Choose a paragraph of your own writing

1. Highlight your verbs.
2. Circle your subjects.
3. Is the subject of your sentence a character that clearly acts as an agent or doer?
4. Is your verb specific and concrete? Or weak and non-specific?

*"If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten."*

Rudyard Kipling

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