MODULE 2:
STARTING OFF RIGHT WITH PLANNING

Duration: 4 - 6 hours

Before you start writing, what can you do to ensure that your report will be effective?

Introduction

As you considered in Module 1, effective writing is reader-focused. Your job as a writer is to anticipate your readers' needs and make sure that your readers' expectations and your purpose in writing are aligned. This module teaches you an approach called the Dialogue with the Reader, which is a question and answer approach to planning.

For your assignment for this module you must complete a *Dialogue with the Reader Worksheet*, based on the report that you are planning to write. As you work through this module, you will develop the components of your *Dialogue Worksheet*.

QUOTE

*"Planning is a tool for helping ensure that people
are thinking through their work."*
—Sector Manager

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you should be able to

- Describe the components of the dialogue with the reader: purpose, reader, main question, and main message.

- Identify your purpose in writing.

- Explain what is meant by aligning the writer's purpose, the reader's identity and needs, the main question, and the main message.

- Compose a main message for your report that answers your readers' main question and aligns with your purpose.

- Begin to plan your report, using your dialogue with the reader.

The Writer's Purpose

Determining your purpose is the first step to planning an effective report. You can define purpose by asking the following question: Why am I writing my report?

Many writers have only a vague idea of why they are writing. They may say "because someone told me to" or "because we've always done it this way." Or they may say "because the client expects this type of document," and then proceed to fill up the requisite number of pages without much consideration.

If the writer doesn't know why he or she is writing, will the reader bother to figure it out? Probably not. If no one reads your report, then no one is going to accept your advice or act on your recommendations. As one writer has warned: "If reports are never read, we are doomed to keep writing them."[*]

The overarching purpose of all World Bank reports is to help decision makers take appropriate action. Therefore, as report writers, you should ensure that your writing achieves this purpose.

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[*] *Maitland, Karen, 2002, Theories at the bottom of our jargon, Ed. Brian Lewis (London, UK: Pontefract Press).*

Evaluate the Writer's Purpose

Consider the clarity of the writer's purpose in two of the documents you looked at earlier. Click on the icons below to open the two sample documents. Read through them and answer the questions below.

ESAF/SAF E-mail	VP's Visit E-mail
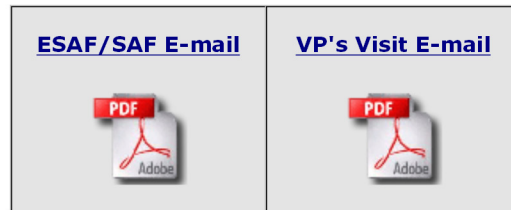
What is the stated purpose of the document?	
ESAF/SAF	**VP's Visit**
Check Answer	Check Answer
Is the document likely to be effective in meeting this purpose? Why or why not?	
ESAF/SAF	**VP's Visit**
Check Answer	Check Answer

Relevance of the Writer's Purpose

You've just looked at two short documents and evaluated their purposes. Let's pause for a moment and consider why the purpose is important. First, the purpose is important for your readers because it answers their first likely question: "Why are you writing this?"

Second, the purpose is important for you, the writer, in planning a well-organized document. The purpose should represent what you want the reader to do or know as a result of reading the report.

When planning your report, it is best to formulate your purpose statement in the following manner:

"to" + verb + object (with the verb preferably being action oriented)

Here are some typical purpose statements:

- To seek approval for the project
- To evaluate the economic situation in Country X between 2004 and 2006
- To recommend alternatives to the current efforts in the area of XYZ
- To provide step-by-step guidelines on how to implement the ABC procedure

Determining your purpose is the first step to planning an effective report.

Analyze Ineffective Purpose Statements

Here are more examples of purpose statements. However, these are not as effective as the ones provided earlier. Can you tell why? Type your reasons into the box, and then click on **Check Answer**.

Example 1

To discuss Ghana's current economic situation as it relates to the XYZ project

Check Answer

Example 2

To give observations regarding the recent "clean water" initiatives in the southern African states

Check Answer

Example 3

To explore recent developments in the Thai textile industry since the WTO rulings of 2004-2005

[ ]

Check Answer

Example 4

To conduct a study on the effects of the road transportation system on the economies of the southern African states

[ ]

Check Answer

The Purpose and Reader Focus

Purpose statements that begin with verbs such as "to give observations" or "to discuss" show that the writer will express what he or she knows, but there is no regard for the reader.

Purpose statements that use phrases such as "to conduct a study" reveal a misunderstanding about the writer's intentions. Your task as a writer is not to tell your reader what you've done (e.g., conduct a study). Your task is to communicate findings and other ideas so that the reader can use them.

Part of good planning involves matching your purpose as a writer with the needs and expectations of your readers. The previous examples show what happens when writers think about reports only from their own perspective. The good examples illustrate how writers can tailor their knowledge of a topic to what their readers need to know. That's why writing a clear, action-oriented purpose statement is so critical when planning a report.

Ultimately, your purpose has to respond to the reader's question:

"What action will I take on the basis of this report?" or *"How does this report affect my work?"*

In order to keep your readers focused, you need to give them a reason to read on.

We will be returning to the perspective of the reader in greater depth later on in this section. But for now, let's look at some purpose statements in the context of the reports you may be writing.

Types of Reports and Purpose Statements

Certain reports readily suggest what the writer's purpose is going to be. For example, in a proposal you try to persuade your readers to follow a particular course of action, such as accepting recommendations or approving a plan. You can begin to articulate your purpose once you know the kind of report you are going to write. Your task then becomes one of adding important qualifying details.

Take a look at the following list of documents. In the space provided, write down what the purpose might be. You can click to

compare your answer to a suggested answer.

Please note that these examples do not account for all the types of reports written at the World Bank. However, these are some of the more common examples.

Type of document/report	Writer's Purpose
Proposal	Check Answer
Status/evaluation report	Check Answer
Terms of reference	Check Answer
Procedure document/How-to	Check Answer

Analyze the Writer's Purpose

In the following activity you will read two different texts and analyze the writer's purpose in each. As you work through this module, you will encounter these readings again, and you will gain a greater awareness of how effectively they work as documents. For now, however, you will focus only on the purpose that each one expresses.

Skim the two sample documents provided. Record the purpose for each document.

Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015	*Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area*

Document	Purpose
Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania	Check Answer

Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area	
	Check Answer

You probably noticed that the purpose of the report was easy to determine for the *Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project* since that purpose was clearly stated in the beginning of the document.

However, the purpose is less clear in *Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania*. As the reader, you are compelled to guess the purpose from the context and the content. If the purpose were clearly stated, you would recognize the value of the report and accept why you need to continue reading.

You will return to these documents throughout this planning module.

Assess Your Document's Purpose

Step 1: Determine your purpose statement and fill in the table for the writing sample you submitted when you registered for this course, or for another report you have recently written.

Type of document/report	
Purpose	
The purpose is clear.	○ Yes ○ No
The purpose is appropriate for the type of document.	○ Yes ○ No
Do you need to state the purpose explicitly in the text? (Sometimes it is clear from the type of document and other information.)	○ Yes ○ No
If the purpose is stated, it follows the "to + verb + object" style.	○ Yes ○ No
If the purpose is unstated, it is nonetheless clear and could be summarized as "to + verb + object."	○ Yes ○ No
Given what you now know about purpose statements, how would you revise your purpose statement?	
Submit	

Assess Your Document's Purpose

Step 2: Now think about the report you intend to work on throughout this course. What type of report is it? What is your purpose in writing it? As you complete the table below, remember:

1. Your purpose should be consistent with the type of report you are planning.

2. Your purpose should be action-oriented.

3. Your purpose should be made clear to the reader early in the document, even if it is not explicitly stated.

REFLECTION

Reflection 3:
Dialogue With the Reader—
Determine Your Purpose

Anticipating the Needs of Your Readers

To consider your reader when forming your purpose, you should first ask, Who is my reader? It is a deceptively simple question, but on closer inspection, you will find it provokes some complex responses. It is most likely that you will have multiple readers for your writing. Some (like your immediate supervisor or a funder) will be primary readers, and others will be secondary readers, but still need to be kept in mind. It is also useful to identify the key decision maker among your readers. For example, if action is to be taken, ask yourself, Who can authorize the action I want taken?

- **For proposals,** this will be the person or persons who may be approving the idea, supplying funds, or both.

- **For sector reports,** this may be the sector manager.

- **For mission reports,** this may be the appropriate authorities, the task team, or both.

QUOTE

"We need to pay attention to communicating
effectively with policymakers."
—Sector Manager

Reader Analysis

The more you know about your readers, the better chance you have of helping them understand your message. When thinking about your reader, it's important to keep in mind the following points:

- The importance of your document for your reader

- Your reader's familiarity with the subject matter

- Reasons that may prevent your reader from accepting and acting on your document

- Time and budgetary pressures on your reader

- The reading format of your document: screen or paper

*"If there are two documents that are both technically sound and make
important points, I prefer the shorter one—the one with main conclusions up front,
the one that assumesthat the reader has time constraints."*
—Task Team Leader

Analyze Your Reader

A careful analysis of your reader and his or her likely response to your document will help you decide what you should and should not include in your report. Complete this Reader Analysis based on the report you are writing for this course.

Don't forget to save your document when you are finished.

REFLECTION

**Reflection 4:
Dialogue With the Reader—Analyze Your Reader**

Adding the Reader's Main Question

Your next step in planning is to anticipate your reader's main question. This step sets up your imagined conversation, or dialogue, with your readers. You have already prepared yourself for this dialogue by establishing your purpose and analyzing your reader (as in the previous two Reflections Files).

QUOTE

*"The writer should always ask, 'Am I telling the readers
something they don't know? Am I giving them what they need?' "*
—Country Program Coordinator

The Reader's Main Questions from Different Reports

The purpose provokes the reader's main question. Let's take a look at some examples.

1. Type of document/report: **Proposal**	
Purpose	**To get approval for this project.**
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	
Check Answers	

2. Type of document/report: **Status report/Evaluation**	
Purpose	**To update management on the project status in Country A.**
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	
Check Answers	

3. Type of document/report: **Terms of reference**	
Purpose	**To outline the key responsibilities of the consultant.**
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	
Check Answers	

4. Type of document/report: **Recommendation report**	
Purpose	**To recommend steps Region X should take to help countries reduce child malnutrition.**
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	
Check Answers	

5. Type of document/report: **Comments Paper**	
Purpose	**To describe the aspects of the Project Concept Note about which we have concerns.**
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	
Check Answers	

Analyze Purpose, Reader, Reader's Question

Step 1: Read the two sample documents you skimmed earlier: *Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015* and *Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area.*

For each document, identify the primary reader and the reader's main question.

Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015	*Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area*

1. Type of document/report: **Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015.**	
Purpose	
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	

Check Answers

2. Type of document/report: **Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area.**	
Purpose	
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	

Check Answers

Analyze Purpose, Reader, Reader's Question

Step 2: Complete the table in reference to the writing sample you submitted when you registered for this course.

Document type	
Purpose	To ...
Primary reader	
Reader's main question	
	Submit

Analyze Purpose, Reader, Reader's Question

Step 3: Now think about the report you are preparing for this course, and complete the table in the following Reflections file. This activity builds on the work you did in the previous Reflections File.

REFLECTION

**Reflection 5:
Dialogue With the Reader—
Analyze Purpose and Reader's Question**

The Main Message

In your analysis and practice of the report writing planning process, you have considered your purpose, your reader's needs, and your reader's main question. Hopefully, you have been able to see how each of these elements in the dialogue is crucial to developing a focused and coherent report. The dialogue now continues with an answer to your reader's main question. This answer is the writer's main message, and it forms the most essential part of your report for both the planning and drafting stages.

The main message, which should be one or two sentences, forms the main idea that you wish to convey in your report. It also creates a reference point for organizing your entire report. With a clear main message, you will be able to assess how well your report answers the readers' questions, supports your main message, and achieves your purpose.

In Module 4, you will learn about writing report introductions. In your report introduction, you will state your purpose if it's not implicitly understood, and you will clearly state the main message.

QUOTE

*"I want brevity. Tell me what you want to tell me
right up front. Put the conclusions at the beginning."*
—Sector Manager

Examples of Main Messages

Let's look at some examples that are related to the type of writing you are doing at the World Bank, building on examples provided earlier. You can now see how all these components complete your Dialogue with the Reader.

Please note that it is not possible to compose a generic main message that can apply to all reports of a particular type, such as proposals or evaluations. The main message must contain substantive information that will generate a further dialogue with your reader and help determine the logical organization of your report. Therefore, the table shows representative examples of main messages for these reports.

1. Type of document/report: **Proposal**	
Purpose	**To get approval for this project.**
Primary reader	**Funder, Manager, Decision maker**
Reader's main question	**Why should I approve this project?** Another way of saying this might be: **What are the benefits of this project?**
Main message	**The Bank should accept this proposal for funding because its objectives are in line with the Uganda CAS; specifically, the funding proposed would help build local capacity for HIV/AIDS training and strengthen health sector knowledge management by improving hospital databases.**
2. Type of document/report: **Analysis/Evaluation**	
Purpose	**To evaluate the potential of results-based financing to improve health care in Country X.**
Primary reader	**TTL, other team members, government counterparts**
Reader's main question	**What is the potential of results-based financing to improve health care in Country X?**
Main message	**Experience from other countries shows that RBF has strong potential to improve the quality and distribution of health services in Country X.** **[*The rest of the document would present country examples and offer evidence to support positive effects.*]**
3. Type of document/report: **Recommendation report**	
Purpose	**To recommend steps Region X should take to help the country reduce child malnutrition.**
Primary reader	**Food security policy makers in Region X, government partners, private agricultural partners**
Reader's main question	**Broadly speaking, how can Region X help the country reduce child malnutrition?**
Main message	**Region X can reduce child malnutrition by implementing certain steps: increasing food aid, providing technical assistance to improve training for parents, and supporting locally consumed agricultural products.** **[*The rest of the document would provide details and rationale to guide the policy shifts.*]**

4. Type of document/report: **Comments Paper**	
Purpose	**To describe the aspects of the Project Concept Note about which we have concerns.**
Primary reader	**Authors of the Project Concept Note, the team directly involved**
Reader's main question	**What are the aspects of the Project Concept Note about which you have concerns?**
Main message	**The aspects of greatest concern are that the objectives and outcomes of the project seem to be overstated, while the risks are understated.**

Writing a Main Message

As the examples indicate, your main message should not be very long or detailed. It is usually only a sentence or two. However, it should have the following qualities to be effective:

- It must reflect the writer's purpose.
- It must answer the reader's main question.
- It should provoke further questions from the reader.

The main message establishes the basis for extending your dialogue with the reader—additional questions and answers from which you can create the organizing framework (outline) for the report.

Although you are still in the planning stage, you must write a main message now in the form you imagine it will take in the actual report. You should include it near the beginning of your document. (As mentioned, in Module 4 on introductions and headings, you will learn more about the placement of the main message in the introduction.)

Umbrella and Thesis Statements

Depending on the type of report you are writing or on your reader's needs, your main message can take different forms. For the most part, however, your main message should show that you have taken a position on the subject about which you are writing. When a sentence reveals the writer's position, it is called a **thesis statement**. On the other hand, sometimes your main message will be more neutral in tone, especially in cases where you are presenting new information that has yet to be analyzed more thoroughly. These types of statements are called **umbrella statements** and they more closely resemble statements of fact.

Take a look at the following three statements on the subject of crop outputs. Each statement represents a different level of the writer's position. Read through each one and see how they differ.

Umbrella statement
Crop outputs in the Kano area have increased by slightly less than 5 percent overall in the past three years, as compared with targeted increases of 10 percent per year.
Explanation

Thesis statement
The Kano project has achieved only a small fraction of the increase in crop output anticipated at the outset, and there is some doubt as to whether even that small increase is being produced economically. [Explanation]
Stronger thesis statement
Although crop outputs on the Kano project have increased slightly, flaws in both design and implementation have kept the project from meeting its objectives. [Explanation]

Identify Umbrella and Thesis Statements

Read the sentences below. Determine whether each one represents a thesis statement or an umbrella statement.

Statement 1
Considering the overcentralization of the government, it is not surprising that land reform has made little or no progress in most of the oblasts. ○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**
Statement 2
Private capital flows from Germany to developing countries have increased fourfold in the past five years, while foreign aid has decreased by nearly 20 percent. ○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**
Statement 3
Three agreed-upon measures and two reform efforts have been undertaken in Russian land reform. ○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**
Statement 4
Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) include a wide variety of groups. Definitions vary, but NGOs typically are entities that are entirely or largely independent of government and have humanitarian or cooperative rather than commercial objectives. ○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**
Statement 5
The model of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) will not work until the agency can solve three major administrative problems. ○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**

Statement 6

OED assessed in-depth 37 projects or major project components in five countries: Bolivia, Brazil, India, Kenya, and Mali. These countries were chosen in late 1996 following a review of the 24 countries with 10 or more projects with provisions for NGO involvement identified in the Bank's NGO database.

○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**

Statement 7

For NGO involvement in Bank-supported projects to succeed, several elements have to be handled well by all the partners; however, only a few have to be done poorly for a partnership to perform poorly. While the investment needed to achieve the necessary elements may seem high, the results can be worthwhile when investment is undertaken selectively.

○ **Thesis**   ○ **Umbrella**

Determine the Main Message

Step 1: Let's return to the two sample reports that you have been analyzing in this module. What is the main message of each document?

Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015	*Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area*

1. Type of document/report: **Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015**	
Purpose	**To propose areas for strategic focus in Ruritania over next 3-5 years (as requested by sector manager)**
Primary reader	**Sector manager, new to region but experienced at the Bank and knowledgeable about Urban Development**
Reader's main question	**What should our strategic focus be?**
Main message	

Check Answers

2. Type of document/report:	
Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area	
Purpose	**To analyze road paving samples prepared by the contracting firm for implementing a project component** **... and** **To recommend improvements based on this analysis.**
Primary reader	**Project leaders for the Kurchani project, road paving contractors**
Reader's main question	**Do the road paving samples meet the project component's requirements?** **What do you recommend for improving them?**
Main message	
	Check Answers

Determine the Main Message

Step 2: Now consider the report you are completing as you work through this course. What is your main message?
(Remember, the main message should be just a sentence or two, and it must answer the reader's main question.)
This activity builds on the work you did in the previous Reflections Files.

REFLECTION

**Reflection 6:
Dialogue With the Reader—
Determine the Main Message**

By completing these steps, you now have the first draft of your assignment for this module: your Dialogue With the Reader Worksheet.

Analyzing Reader Dialogues

Determining the report's purpose, the reader's main question, and your main message is just the beginning of the dialogue process with your reader. However, it is a very important beginning because this initial planning lays the foundation for the rest of the dialogue and for the report.

Up to this point in the module, you have been analyzing and developing the required elements of the Dialogue with the Reader:

- the writer's purpose
- the reader's main question
- the writer's main message

The dialogue provides the organizing framework needed to continue with the planning of your report. You have already begun to put these elements together for your report.

Examples of Completed Dialogues

Below you can see the completed dialogues that you have been analyzing throughout this module. Before you finalize your own Dialogue Worksheet for your report, look at completed examples to ensure you know the questions to keep in mind as you write.

1. Type of document/report: **Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015**	
Purpose	**To propose areas for strategic focus in Ruritania over next 3-5 years (as requested by sector manager)**
Primary reader	**Sector manager, new to region but experienced at the Bank and knowledgeable about Urban Development**
Reader's main question	**What should our strategic focus be?**
Main message	**To support decentralization and help build local governments, strategically we should focus on grants and activities at the local and regional levels. We will need to build on existing activities and initiate new ones.** **Note:** *This is what the main message should have been. In this poorly organized document, the main message is not stated clearly and occurs too late (paragraph 9). However, the main message (when the reader finally gets to it) does mention the key factor of decentralization.*

2. Type of document/report: **Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area**	
Purpose	**To analyze road paving samples prepared by the contracting firm for implementing a project component** … and **To recommend improvements based on this analysis.**
Primary reader	**Project leaders for the Kurchani project, road paving contractors**
Reader's main question	**Do the road paving samples meet the project component's requirements?** **What do you recommend for improving them?**
Main message	**With modifications, the samples will be acceptable. These modifications include the following: only brown aggregate should be used, the grains of the aggregate should be more heterogeneous, and all parts of the road must have three layers.** **Note:** *The main message is very diplomatic in tone. The writer is saying that the samples are not acceptable and is specifying the changes that need to be made.*

Assignment 2:
Dialogue With the Reader Worksheet

Review your worksheet (Reflection 6: Dialogue with the Reader), which you created and saved earlier in the module. If you don't have your saved file, click on the icon below to access a blank worksheet.

Dialogue With the Reader Worksheet
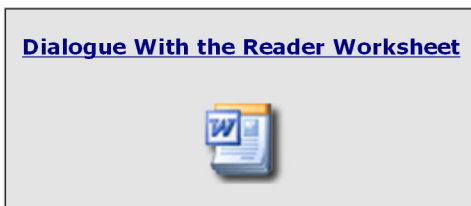
Before submitting your worksheet, check it against the criteria below.

Criteria for the dialogue

Purpose. Is the purpose clear?

Reader. Is a specific reader (or group of readers) given?

Main Question. Does the main question seem to flow logically from the purpose?

Main Message. Does the main message answer the main question? Is it limited to one or two sentences?

When you are satisfied with your worksheet, upload it into the Assignment section in Moodle.

Resources and Documents

Reflections Files
- Determine Your Purpose
- Conduct a Reader Analysis
- Analyze Purpose, Reader, Reader's Question
- Determine the Main Message

Sample texts
- ESAF/SAF E-mail
- VP's Visit E-mail
- Suggested Discussion Points for Strategic Engagement of [Region X] [Urban Unit] in Ruritania, 2011–2015
- Kurchani Sustainable Urban Transport Project (Asiana): Road Paving Samples for the Ancient Temple Palace Area

Other resources
- Background Readings: Report Writing
- Module 2 Printable (PDF format)

Summary

Having a clear purpose and taking into account your reader's needs will help you plan your report. A good way of planning is to imagine a dialogue with your readers, starting with your purpose and then anticipating the main question your readers will have. The answer to that question will form your main message.

Most main messages take the form of either a thesis statement or an umbrella statement. (Some may combine elements of both.) The type of statement you choose must align with your purpose in writing the report.

Your main message is critical, since it is the first piece of writing that contributes to your report. For this reason, your main message must

- Be clearly stated, often taking a position (as in a thesis statement).

- Reflect your purpose.

- Answer your reader's main question.

- Establish the basis for extending your dialogue with the reader—additional questions and answers from which you can build an outline.

- Have substantive information but consist of only one or two sentences.