



## Untangling the Word Knots

### It just doesn't make sense.

You can't put your finger on it, but the document you're looking at isn't working. You need a fast fix – what can you do?

- First, **identify the subject, verb, and object in each sentence.** In some cases, meaning is lost because a sentence doesn't CONTAIN these items. Always be sure that the reader always knows who did what. Example: "While taking a walk, the Dow fell." Who or what is walking?
- Second, **look at every instance of passive voice.** Example: "A close-out sale was held by the store" is passive. "The store held a closeout sale" is active. Using too much passive voice can dilute a story and raise questions about who is responsible for activities and events.
- Third, examine every sentence to **determine if an action is taking place in the past, present, or future.** A reader can quickly become confused when a chronology isn't clear. Readers are usually interested in what is happening now, so use the present tense whenever possible.
- Fourth, **test every sentence for logic.** Does the sentence make claims that aren't realistic? Does it combine ideas in ways that don't make sense?
- Fifth, **confirm that the meaning of every sentence is crystal clear.** Can it be interpreted in more than one way? Double meanings and sly inferences may pique a little interest, but can just as easily annoy and frustrate readers.
- Sixth, **identify the most important concept and put it up front.** Everything else that follows should support that Bottom Line Up Front. If it's unclear what your most important message is, re-think the piece, and re-write it until it is clear.
- Seventh, **ensure that all acronyms are spelled out, and all technical terms are defined** in a way best suited to your intended audience. How many readers could cope with a phrase such as, "SWARM defied ROM calculations."
- Eighth, **ensure that all like ideas are grouped together.** Don't make readers shift mental gears more often than is necessary.

Would you like to learn more about triaging and quickly editing documents? Give me a call, and schedule a free, no-obligation consultation. Whether you opt for some quick staff training, or just a few more pointers to get you through a critical project, I look forward to working with you!