

The logo for neosi features the word "neosi" in white lowercase letters inside a dark teal square, followed by the tagline "creating clarity" in a dark teal sans-serif font.

neosi creating clarity

Clarity checklists

Storylining theory and checklist
one-pagers

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Checklists to assess the clarity of your communication

Hello,

If you are looking at these checklists, you either already know the basic structured thinking disciplines or are curious about this powerful technique that helps organise your thoughts before you communicate.

This document offers some practical tools for assessing and improving the clarity of your work including

Simple and complex checklists

- A one-page overview of the key structured thinking rules
- A quick reminder of the key high level checks
- A simple 10-point checklist to use so that you can check how clear your documents are. Feel free to copy this page as often as you like so that you can use it often, perhaps when you audit your own work (or that of a colleague) to see if you are improving over time.
- A detailed checklist to remind you of the structured thinking checks for each part of your storyline. Likewise, feel free to copy this one for your own use.

Ideas for next steps

- Some stories from others who have used these techniques to great effect
- Places to go to learn more
- A bit about us

If you have any questions about any parts of this, feel free to email us at contact@neosi.co.

Regards,

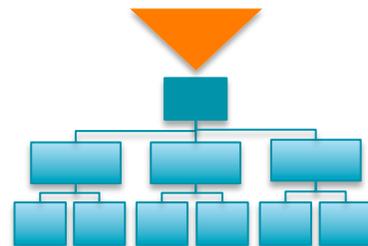
Team neosi

Use a storyline to organise your thinking before you write

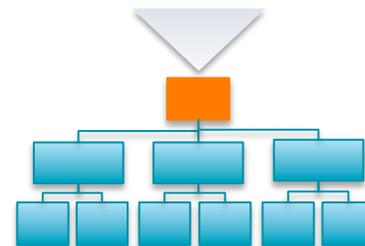
Trust structure to drive clarity



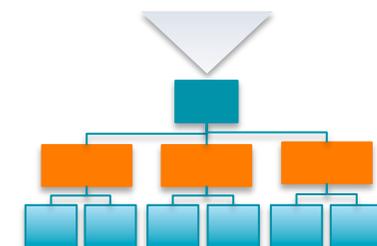
Use the introduction to set the right scene



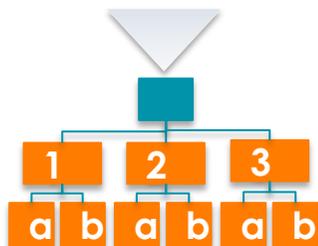
Use one overarching message to unify the story



Order supports logically for easy reading

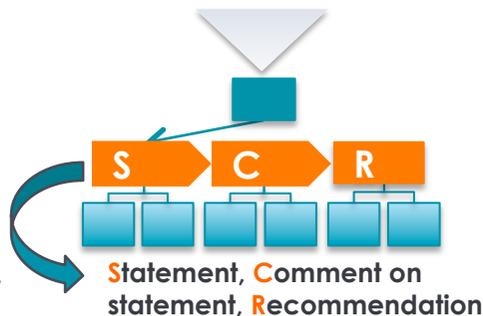


Order independent groupings logically

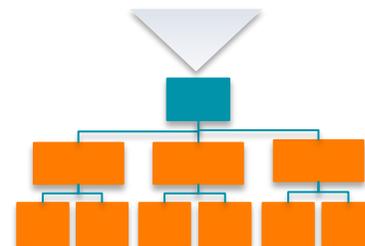


Structure, time or degree order

Order dependent arguments carefully

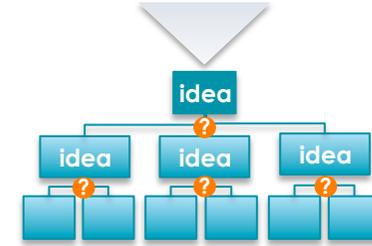


Ensure ideas are MECE or NONG



Mutually Exclusive, Collectively Exhaustive or No Overlaps, No Gaps

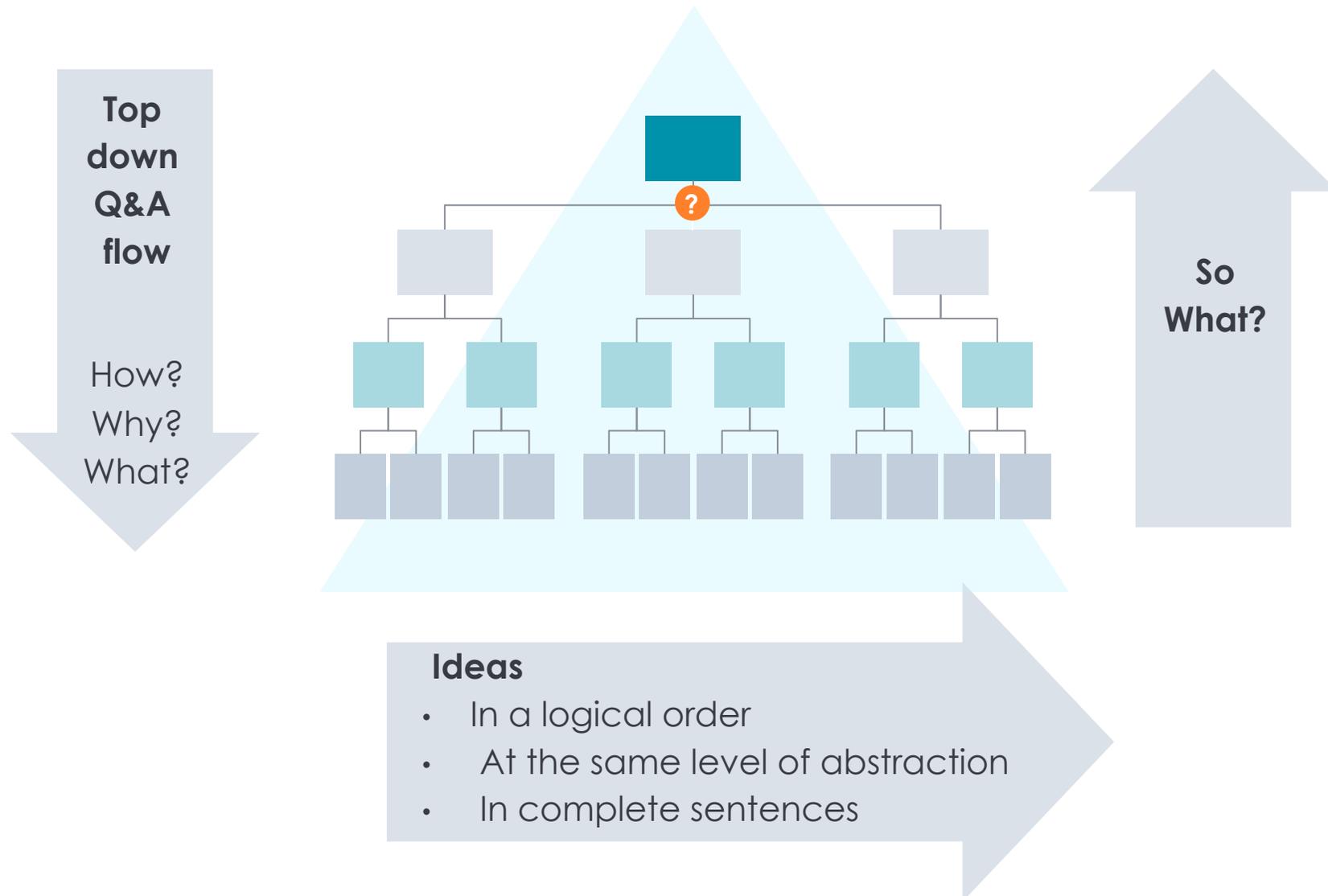
Create a logical 'conversation'



Each idea triggers a question, answered with a new idea

* For more detail see www.neosi.co, *Poetics* by Aristotle, Linda Long's *Power of Logic in Problem Solving and Communication*, Nancy Carrick and Lawrence Finsen's *The Persuasive Pen* and Barbara Minto's *Pyramid Principle*

In short: your argument needs to work in three directions



Clarity test: Does the document 'sing'?

Is the introduction right?

- Does the storyline start at the right place in time?
- Is the trigger described clearly and accurately?
- Is the question really the one we want to answer?

Is there one clear, powerful governing idea?

- Is there one clear, powerful governing idea?

Is the supporting storyline robust?

- Is the support logically sound – a grouping or deductive?
- Is the storyline MECE (categorised well with enough evidence)?

Does the document 'sing'?

- Does the structure offer a roadmap to the reader up front?
- Do the headings tell the story rather than just announce topics?
- Are the visuals right and 'clean'?
- Would your audience love the language?

Total

Context Describes the the situation that you and your audience agree is the non-controversial starting point for this piece of communication?

Trigger Describes the circumstances that have led to this communication from the audience's perspective?

Question

- Focuses on audience's primary concern?
- Makes clear the value expected to be delivered in the answer?
- Has obvious significance to the audience?

- Guides audience to core and relevant problems; does not invite reader to focus on issues of minor relevance?
- Is both general (to encompass all relevant aspects of an issue) and specific (to scope to focus on practical solutions)?
- Is SMART: Specific Measurable Actionable Timebound

Answer

- Answers the audience's central question?
- Offers or implies value to the relevant audience?
- Is 25 words or less?
- Derives from and is supported by the logic offered?

- Synthesizes ideas: adds more value by drawing out a higher-level meaning, relevance, significance, or urgency than a summary statement would?
- Provides direction for a decision or action?
- Respects positions taken on the issues; is not needlessly provocative?

Inductive body

- Gathers independent ideas of the same logical kind (e.g., reasons for/causes of same effect; steps in same process; parts of same entity) that lead you to think that the answer is probably true?
- Puts forward ideas in an obvious order – e.g., structure, time, degree or convention (may depart from conventional order to produce a deliberate effect)?

Deductive body

- Answers both why and how a particular solution is the best way forward?
- Follows time-honored structure from premises to logical implication: statement, comment on that statement, recommendation?
- Leads you to an answer that is absolutely true?
- Presents a single recurring theme?

Support

- Is relevant, credible, fact-based, true?
- Progresses the case presented?

- Is MECE (Mutually Exclusive, Collectively Exhaustive), or has no gaps, no overlaps?

Stories from others

Other people's stories can be the difference between an idea being just an idea, and an idea being something that can add real value to your career and your business.

As a result, we collect client stories and where they are comfortable, share them with others like you.

The four stories listed here provide a random snapshot of recent client experiences where people have learned and then applied structured thinking techniques to improve the clarity of their communication.

1. One page proposal a real winner
2. Susan's 5-minute finance update
3. A neat way to plan a career move
4. CEO loved Emily's one-pager

One-page proposal a real winner

Gerard has not been able to stop grinning ever since a client called to tell him how well they went in a high-stakes proposal process. His client was not even a true contender, having been brought in at the eleventh hour as a favour, and yet won the work over four other 'preferred suppliers'.

When the CEO (and now client) told them they had won the work, he was carrying the one-page proposal storyline and said: "If you can communicate with us this clearly, why would we work with anybody else?"

So, how did they do it?

They focused on the thinking first before they prepared their communication end products by

- Thinking through the context and trigger from the client's perspective first
- Making sure they articulated the client's problem up front
- Preparing a powerful one-page storyline which clearly outlined how they would help solve their client's problem
- Attaching the one-pager to the covering letter and binding it inside the proposal documentation, just before the contents page
- Ensuring that each of the sections within the tender document was completed with a big idea followed by parallel supporting points

Let us know if you have had some success with the one-page storyline idea too. We'd love to hear about your experiences.

Susan's 5-minute Finance Update

Rarely does a new employee in a finance department receive praise for the clarity of their management update.

However, Susan did when she presented her first report to her GM. Her GM said that Susan's five-minute update was the best and clearest ever! How did she do it?

Susan provided the GM with a crystal clear storyline rather than the spread sheets and tables that her predecessor had used. Here's what she did. She:

1. Analysed her audience. Susan thought through who would be in the briefing, what they wanted and what she wanted them to do as a result of the briefing. She realised the GM and leadership team were missing the "story" and couldn't see the wood for the trees - she had to make sure the real story was clear in the update.

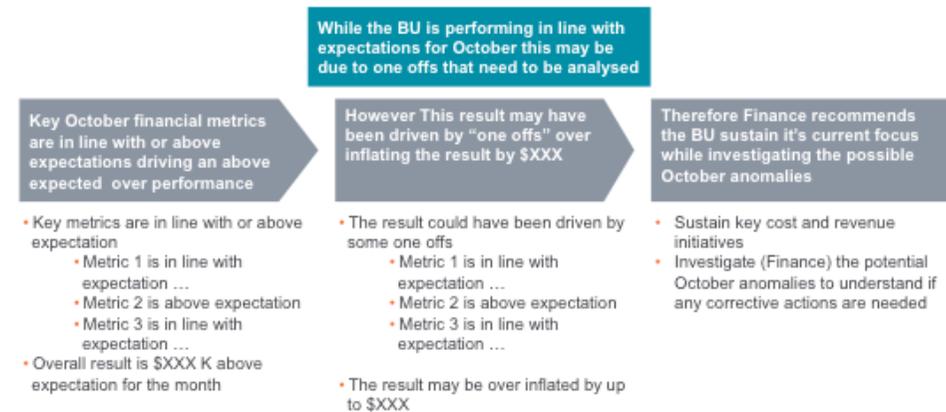
2. Built a clear storyline. She realised she needed to explain that the BU financials were on track with forecast but that could have been because of some one-offs that needed attention. We developed a simple one pager to explain the story (using Neosi of course).

3. Practiced. Susan practiced delivering the story and had the key numbers attached as back up.

The result - a five-minute update to the BU with the GM saying it was the best and clearest ever!

The Finance update (sanitised version)

Context Each month we update the business on key financial metrics.
Trigger We have now received the October numbers.
Question Is there any corrective action required based on our October financial performance?



A neat way to clarify a career move

From time to time our friends and clients tell us a story about how they have used neosi that makes us smile. A recent conversation with my friend Andrea was one of these.

Andrea wears many hats as a CEO and female business leader in general. One of her recent tasks has been to mentor senior people, and having recently attended one of my Clarity Workshops, she decided to apply the techniques in a new way.

Her mentee had some decisions to make about her career and Andrea used neosi to help her client clarify her career decisions. Here's what she did:

First, she helped her client map out the options she was being presented with as a way to fully understand each proposition and then choose the preferred path. She mapped out a story describing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach to help do this.

Once her client had identified which way she wanted to go, they then worked together to build a story describing her 'plan of attack' for the new role. The structure and the discipline provided a framework for mapping out the options and the path forward for her as an individual, as it might for a company as a whole.

Let us know if you have found any left of centre ways to use structured thinking. We'd love to hear about them.

CEO loved Emily's one-pager

One of my consulting clients recently needed to present to her CEO for the first time and was concerned that her 'energetic and organic' style was going to get in the way of her message.

She realised she had two main challenges to overcome: nerves (given it was the first time she had presented one-on-one to her CEO) and her tendency to wander "all over the place" in her presentations.

We worked together to prepare her story while also introducing structured thinking techniques, and she was thrilled with the one-pager that we prepared that encapsulated her story as well as his response. Here's what she said after the meeting:

"The presentation went really well. I synthesised my slide even further and really told a story which worked really well. I communicated my main points and even though his questions threw me from the flow of the presentation, I brought it back each time. The objective was to gain support for the program and we achieved this.

He mentioned my presentation in the following week's trading meeting which was great."I also had a presentation to Jenny the next day and I had to pull the one page slide together in an hour which I managed using neosi. This presentation was on a completely different topic and in quite a complex space.

I am finding that I am faster and more effective at working through what I am trying to achieve and how to best synthesise this in a presentation.

Thanks again for your help,

Emily"

Where to go if you would like to learn more

- www.neosi.co (sign up for a free trial and you will be able to create storylines with great ease and then automatically export each storyline to any one of a number of Word and PowerPoint document types)
- www.claritysecret.com (signup to our free eNewsletter to receive occasional emails with ideas and examples for improving the clarity of your communication)
- Rhetoric and Poetics by Aristotle (available on www.amazon.com)
- The Power of Logic in Problem Solving and Communication by Linda Long (available at www.scc-llong.com in both textbook and workbook form)
- Say it with Presentations by Gene Zelazny (available from www.zelazny.com)
- The Minto Pyramid Principle by Barbara Minto (available as a book from www.barbaraminto.com and as an app at the Apple App store)

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A bit about the authors

This set of checklists was prepared by Davina Stanley and Gerard Castles, the founders of www.claritycollege.co.

Davina and Gerard are also the creators of neosi, software that helps you intuitively map your thinking into a cohesive argument and then automatically creates Word and PowerPoint documents for you.

They both began their consulting careers at McKinsey & Company: Davina in Hong Kong and Gerard in Sydney Australia. Together they now serve a range of clients to improve the clarity of their problem solving and communication.

Recent engagements include

- Helping more than 1500 lawyers learn how to clarify their thinking so they can communicate their key ideas within 30 seconds
- Designing a change management program for a regional consulting firm that wanted to radically improve the way it served its clients
- Building a comprehensive program to embed structured thinking skills in a large Australian corporate

Feel free to make contact at hello@claritycollege.co if you have any questions that we could help you answer.