



## Southern Communicator Article

March 2016

Note:

The following article was published in 2016 in Southern Communicator, the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Technical Communication. The author of this article, Elizabeth Abbott, was Chair for one of the annual conferences of the Australian Society for Technical Communication and is the Managing Director of TechWriter.

Information Mapping Australia is no longer the official distributor of the Information Mapping products and courses in Australia and New Zealand. However, the methodology still remains relevant today and underpins TechWriter's current expanded offering of courses and services.

# Is Information Mapping® still relevant?

**Elizabeth Abbott explains why adopting Information Mapping is still relevant and a great way to start as a technical writer.**

There is a view that Information Mapping is outdated, old fashioned and irrelevant. I would argue that in today's world, its methodology is more needed than ever. This is because Information Mapping is about the creation of **clear and concise written communication** that is easy for readers to use and quick for writers to produce.

It is a great approach for those starting out in technical writing as it provides a systematic approach to creating and writing the full range of business and technical documents.

## What's in it for me?

If you are an experienced technical writer, you can use Information Mapping to:

- improve your productivity – produce more in a shorter timeframe
- improve your communication – get your message across more effectively.

If you are starting as a technical writer, you can use Information Mapping to:

- apply a systematic approach to creating and writing technical documents that work
- obtain an internationally recognized certificate of proficiency and get your first job in technical writing.

## What is Information Mapping?

First I need to explain a bit about the Information Mapping methodology. Let's start with Figure 1.

### Look at the difference

Which of these would you prefer to read?

**Reorganization of the company**

To: All employees  
From: Oliver Castle, President  
Subject: REORGANIZATION OF THE COMPANY

As you well know, our company has had considerable difficulty this year with the stalled economy, inflation, with the labor difficulties we've had at several plants, and with the development of our new products, especially in the home products system. This situation has forced the management team to assess our entire company and its operations with a view to finding a better way to organize it for improved profits and long-term efficiency.

Some of our departments have been growing and shrinking without much rhyme or reason, and before this occasion we had not made the effort to take a really hard look at what we were doing. Instead, we were patching things here and there with the aim of eliminating duplication when we could and pulling together groups that belong together functionally.

Now we are announcing a major reorganization to take effect on 18 January. We will announce the details on 12 January including dates when new managers will hold meetings with various employees to whom the information is pertinent. We will also, at that time, distribute a complete schedule setting forth who will be working for whom. In the meantime, we are announcing the following changes so the managers in charge of the affected divisions and departments can prepare for the reorganization.

Charles Jones will assume duties as Director of the new Products Division, leaving his present post of Manager of Office Supplies. Janice Moreland will move from Vice President for Research to Vice President for Operations. Jack Spotter will be the new head of the Research Department, moving from his position as Assistant Vice President for Operations. Max Richardson is leaving his post as Assistant to the President to fill the position of Assistant Vice President of Operations. Marilyn Belt will become Director of the new Home Products Division, which used to have only project status. These changes in department managerial positions will take place on 5 January. Current Assistant Directors will remain in their positions at that time unless otherwise notified.

Then, on 12 January, changes at the level of Assistant Directors will go into effect. Jed Franklin and Marsha Zetzone will become Assistant Director of Office Products and Assistant Director of Home Products, respectively. From their current positions as Assistant Director of Finance and Director of Budgeting. The staffs of these departments will be notified by email notification from their managers about whether they will be moving to their new departments or staying in their current departments. In most cases there will be no change; we are trying to keep as many departments intact, with experienced staff, as possible.

**Reorganization of the company**

To: All employees  
From: Oliver Castle, President  
Subject: REORGANIZATION OF THE COMPANY

**Background**

As you well know, we have had considerable difficulty this year with:

- the stalled economy
- inflation
- labour difficulties at several plants, and
- development of our new products in the home-products systems.

**Management changes**

I am announcing the reorganization of the company and establishment of a new Home Products Division. The new positions are described in this table.

Name	Previous Position	Now Position
Charles Jones	Manager, Office Supplies	Director, Products Division
Janice Moreland	V.P., Research	V.P., Operations
Jack Spotter	Assistant V.P., Operations	Director, Research
Max Richardson	Assistant to the President	Assistant V.P., Operations
Marilyn Belt	Assistant to the Plant Manager	Director, Home Products Division (new division)
Jed Franklin	Assistant Director, Finance	Assistant Director, Office Products
Marsha Zetzone	Director of Budgeting	Assistant Director, Home Products

**Email notification of staff changes**

The managers of these departments will inform their staffs via email if they will be moving (with their manager) or staying in their current departments. In most cases there will be no change; we are trying to keep departments intact, if possible.

**Effective dates**

The effective dates for these changes are listed below.

Date	Change
January 5	Changes in Corporate Officers and Division Chiefs
January 12	Changes in Assistant Director of details of reorganization
January 18	Reorganization takes effect

Figure 1. Comparison of a document before and after rewriting using Information Mapping principles.

Research and experience indicate that readers, writers, and organisations face a number of common problems when communicating information, both on paper and online.

## Results of Poor Document design

When readers try to use poorly designed documents, they:

- get lost
- get discouraged
- guess what to do
- ask someone for help, or
- try short-cuts.

Poor design lowers productivity and causes mistakes and frustration with the information. Information Mapping provides the solution to reader and writer problems.

## Why use Information Mapping?

Information Mapping is based on learning theory, human factors engineering and cognitive science. The method is based on research into how people take in and process information and provides guidelines for analysing, organising, and presenting information effectively to promote reader access and comprehension. As such it is timeless and can be applied to all forms of business and technical writing.

### It's based on how people process information

Over 60 studies have shown quantifiable benefits for readers, writers and organisations. On-going research continues to support the benefits of clarity in writing. Information Mapping has stood the test of time and proved its usefulness.

### It's effective

In the years since the method was first developed, many organisations have reported significant benefits. Here are a couple of examples:

**Amex** used it to reduce the time it took for call centre staff to find information, resulting in savings of more than 1 million minutes a year (or 9 staff).

**ResMed** used Information Mapping to improve the productivity of their instructional designers resulting in a 67% reduction in the time it took to develop new modules and a 20% reduction in the length of modules.

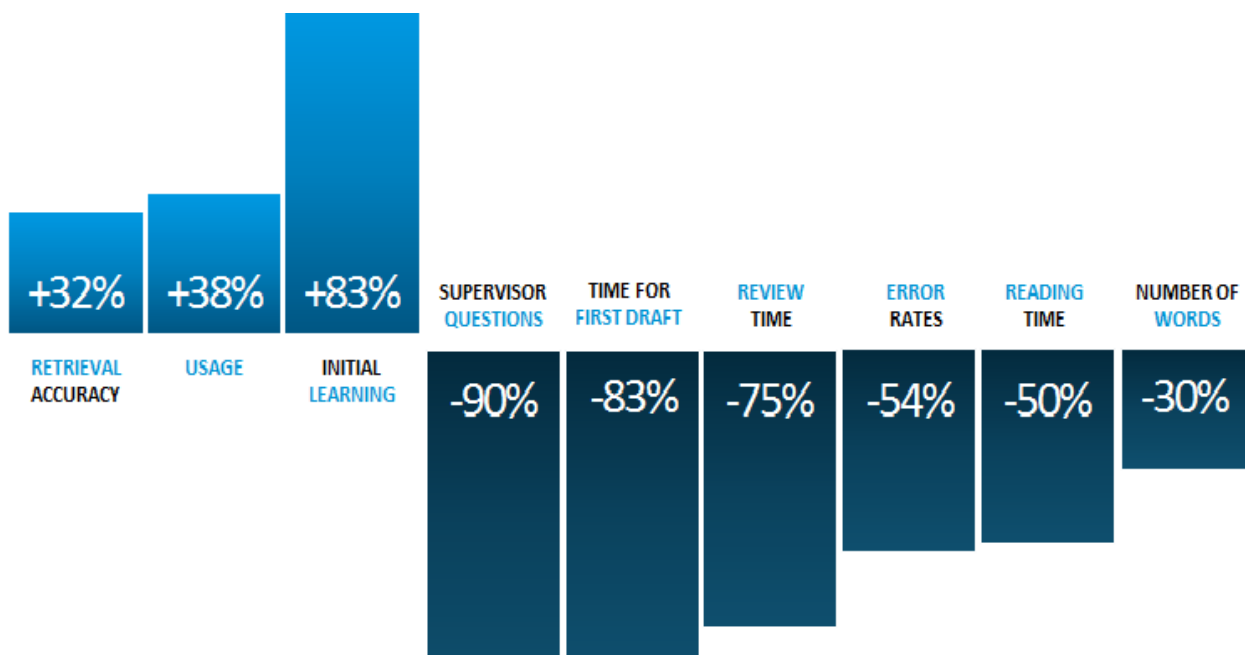


Figure 2. The verified benefits gained when IM documents were used .

### It's structured writing

Structured writing was coined by Robert Horn as the generic term for the approach described in Information Mapping. It is at the heart of most current standards and tools such as DITA, XML, AuthorIT. Like all good structured writing, Information Mapping separates the creation of content from its presentation – perfect for single sourcing, multiple output formats and content management systems.

### It facilitates a standard approach

When an organisation adopts Information Mapping as its methodology for written communication, the presentation guidelines provide an immediate standardization.

FS Pro 2013 is the Information Mapping add-on for Word that facilitates the task of creating Information Mapping documents and comes with a suite of templates for the most common business documents from a meeting agenda through job aids to project proposals.

It's in demand

At least four job ads on seek [in Australia] in February 2016 have specifically asked for people with Information Mapping skills. Many very experienced and successful technical communicators (they are now employers) learnt Information Mapping early in their careers. They say that they still use the principles in all their work. They know that it is more productive for them to employ writers who can use the method.

What do you think?

This article has been written using the Information Mapping principles so put it to the test.

- Did you find it easy to read?
• Were you able to find the information relevant to you and skip sections that you weren't interested in?
• Does it look appealing?

How do I get started?

The good news is that the Information Mapping methodology has been distilled into a 3-day course that covers everything you need to apply it to your writing immediately. The course includes a 12-month subscription to the FS Pro software and access to sit the multiple-choice proficiency exam. eLearning and modular video training are also available for those not able to attend classroom courses or who want a refresher.

Technical Writer
Document Controller / QA Support
Building Solutions Team
Information Mapping
Technical Writer
Information Mapping - Global
IT Savvy, working with tools - Document, Object...

Figure 3. seek adverts in February 2016

To learn more, visit www.informationmapping.com. This international website has free webinars, white papers and trial versions of the software and video training. To find out when a course is being held in your area or to purchase items in AUD or NZD visit our Australian and New Zealand website, www.infomapping.com.au.



Elizabeth Abbott is the Managing Director of TW Training (TechWriter) and Information Mapping Pty Ltd. Information Mapping is a joint venture between TechWriter and HCl to specifically promote Information Mapping courses and services. TW Training is dedicated to providing learning programs to help business people improve their written communication skills. To do this she is working with recognised professionals in the field such as HCl, Jill Nicholson and Information Mapping International.

Having spent more than 10 years hiring, and finding jobs for, technical communicators and learning professionals, Elizabeth is well aware of the lack of suitable short training programs in Australia and New Zealand. She was a member of the Advisory Panel for the Swinburne Graduate Diploma in Social Science (Technical Communication). Elizabeth's background is well suited to this path as she has a lifelong interest in learning and teaching and has published a number of papers. Initially studying to become a secondary teacher, she briefly taught Mathematics at TAFE and was a researcher at La Trobe University. Here she worked on a project examining how computers could be used to aid the development of thinking skills using the early PCs and the first Macintosh computer. Later she was involved in the development of the first competency based IT training program for staff at the Kent Brewery (CUB) - a forerunner to the current AQTF.

Leaving education, she became interested in business process improvement, eventually becoming the Quality Director for Citigroup Australia before moving into an audit role. Demonstrating her belief in the need for lifelong education, she has completed an MBA and Master of Professional Accounting.