

Discussion

Why do we write?

Most important means of communication in analytic/policy world

Oral communication can be great in a jam, but its foundation is written

To inform ... to persuade ... to educate ... to record

Writing and thinking are integrally linked

We think by writing, and we write by thinking

We build and hone our analysis by writing it

Old debate among linguists:

We can *feel* without words, but we can't think without them

Why is writing so darned hard?!?!?!?

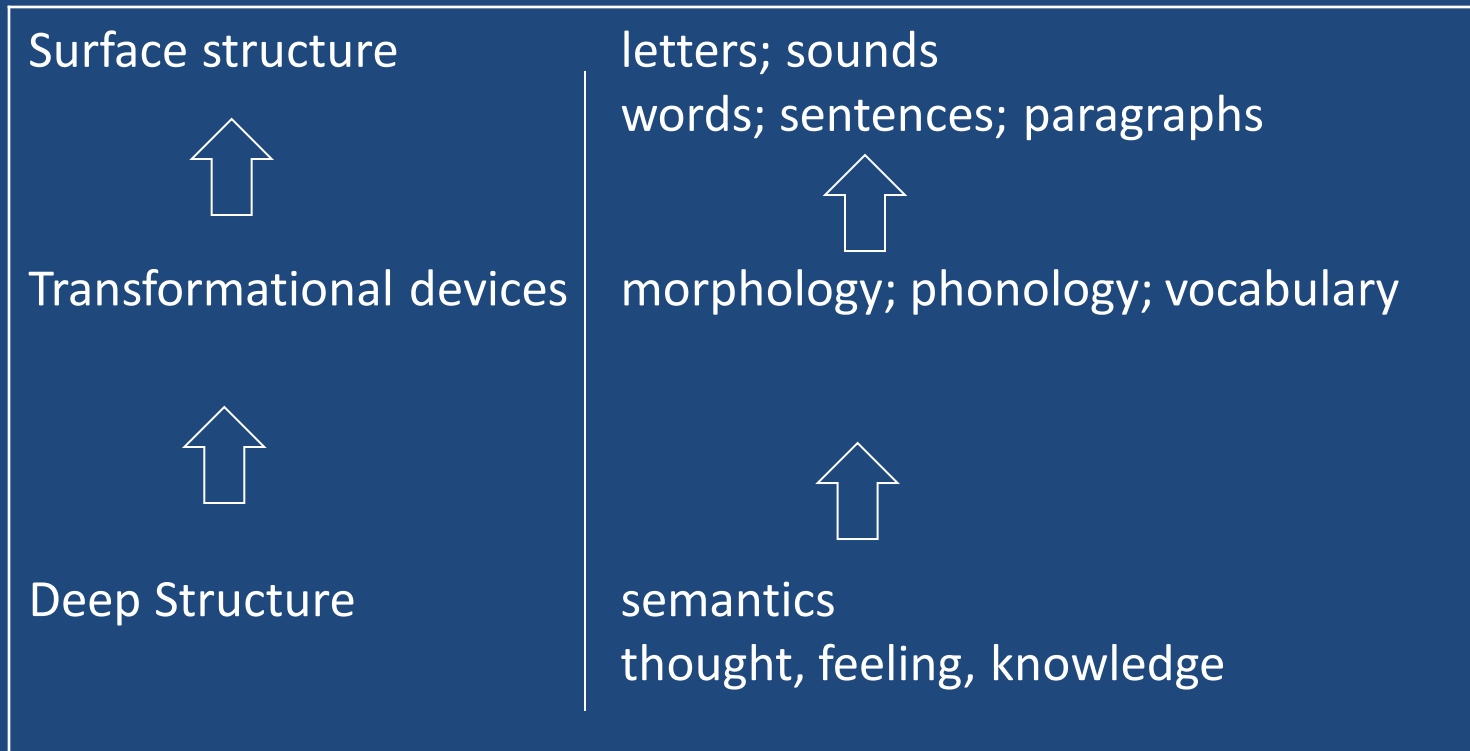
Everyone has a different answer, but general factors are ...

- we don't know what to say (or fear we don't)
- skills are complex
- “rules” and styles are confining
- makes us vulnerable
- too much work to be “fun”
- and what other reasons?

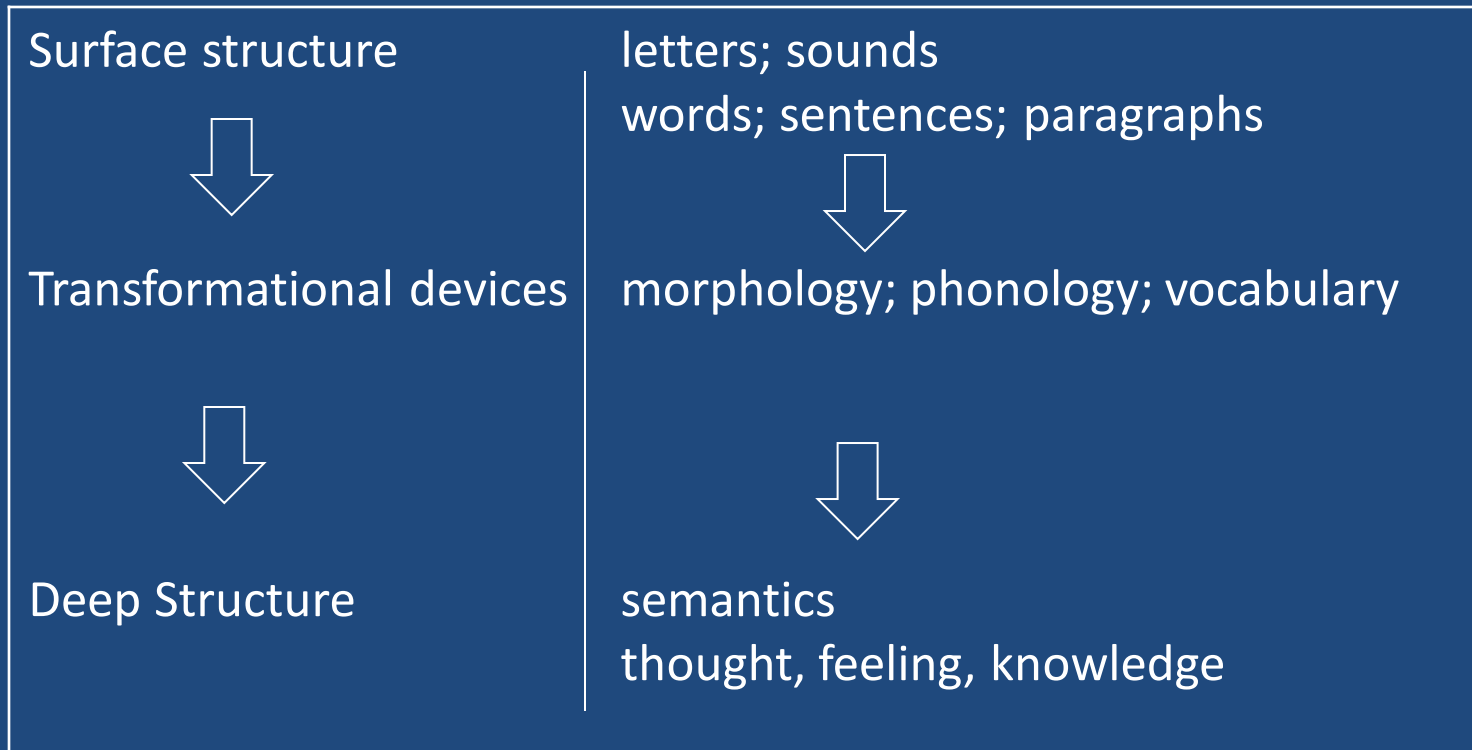
Like any other skill or art ... effort brings results.

What happens when we write?

Multi-level process similar to any language production



And it goes both ways.



One problem often is that we try to write linearly.

Sometimes we write ourselves into dead ends.

Sometimes we don't have the up-and-down flow.

Sometimes we let our own written word slow our thought processes.

Sometimes we don't have time ... or energy ... or drive to have the full dynamic, but ...

While each writer's brain operates differently, and while there's no magic solution, there are always ways to improve.

What is “analytic writing”?

Main PURPOSE	
Satisfy your audience’s need for:	
Information	What, where, when
Validation/substantiation	How we know. Quality of info.
Feel for the dynamics - Causes - Trends	Why What next, how much momentum
Implications/Scenarios	Why it matters, what will happen

What is “analytic writing”?

Main STYLE	
Satisfy your audience’s need for:	
Brevity	Efficient; only detail with purpose
Conciseness	No ambiguity
Objectivity	Free of bias and opinion
Transparency	Honest (including on gaps)

BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)

What is “analytic writing”?

Main STRUCTURE	
Satisfy your audience’s need for:	
Clear, meaningful summary	Thesis – BLUF
Factual laydown, validation	What is really needed
Discuss causes and trends	Why and how it’s happening
Scenarios and Implications	Why it’s important, and what else could happen

One sentence or one paragraph

Perhaps one-quarter of your paper

Perhaps one half

Perhaps one quarter

BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)

Main STRUCTURE

Clear, meaningful summary

Factual laydown, validation

Discuss causes and trends

Scenarios and Implications



December 19, 2016

Cuba: Preparing for President Trump

Cubans are already calibrating their expectations for relations with the United States under President Trump – hoping the normalization process does not unravel but preparing for a return to a sanctions-based policy from Washington. Conversations in Havana reveal deep concern that the President-elect's tweets and statements about Cuba, Mexico, and Latinos in the United States will translate into efforts to slow, stop, or reverse normalization. The past two years of dialogue have focused on mutual interests, without ignoring remaining differences between capitals but not allowing them to blot out hopes of mutually beneficial cooperation. Cuba will interpret a return to bombastic rhetoric, exaggerated conditions to reach a “deal,” and the pressure tactics of the pre-Obama era as a sign of U.S. willingness to put bullying a small neighbor eager for improved ties ahead of its own national interests.

Cubans present the stiff upper lip in conversations and, not surprisingly, defiantly note that they've already survived decades of U.S. pressure, but their disappointment is palpable.

- Most concerned are entrepreneurs in Cuba's small but growing private sector, who depend on investment from U.S.-based relatives and friends. More than 100 Cuban private businessmen wrote a letter to Trump last week urging restraint.
- Nationalism has precluded Cubans from saying that normalization would be a major driver of their long-promised economic reforms, but few deny that improving ties with the United States would eventually present Havana important opportunities. U.S. retrenchment will remove important incentives for the government to move ahead with its reform strategy.
- Rumors about tensions between Cuban proponents of normalization and conservative opponents may have some merit, but Cubans across the spectrum will close ranks if Trump gets aggressive.

Cuba's reactions to Trump's election, including President Raúl Castro's congratulatory message to him, so far suggest that it will hold its tongue and resist being provoked. A U.S. return to full-bore Cold War tactics would not pose an existential threat to Cuba, even considering the country's difficulties dealing with unrelated problems such as the crisis in Venezuela. Popular reactions to the passing of Fidel Castro last month are being construed as evidence of residual political legitimacy for the government and support for it to deliver on promised improvements. Moreover, Cuba's progress in normalization; its effective contribution to the Colombia peace accord; its new political dialogue and cooperation agreement with the European Union; and the recent Havana visit of Japanese Prime Minister Abe have boosted the country's international image – and blame for collapse of normalization will surely fall solely upon the United States. However difficult it will be for the proud people of Cuba to resist rising to whatever bait the Trump Administration throws its way, showing forbearance in the bilateral relationship and moving “without hurry but without pause,” as Raúl Castro said, with its national reform plan would protect the investment that Cuba has already made in normalization.

Our obsessive concern should be ...

What does my reader need most to understand the situation I'm writing about?

Especially if my reader is a decisionmaker, what does he/she need to know to adopt the best possible decision?



promotes interests
achieves strategic benefit
minimizes errors and costs

Did you see these characteristics in the examples of excellent writing that you posted in Blackboard?

What impressed you the most?

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HOW TO WRITE ANALYSIS

Writing analysis, like any writing, is a personal process. With experience, each writer discovers the best way that he/she prepares, drafts, and hones analysis. Nonetheless, there are seven basic steps to all analytic writing.

1. **ASSESS** what your reader needs.
Put yourself in your reader's shoes.
Think of the scope of the topic and key questions to answer.
Determine what the reader *really* needs – not just what is requested. Don't pander.
2. **GATHER** your information, **ABSORB** it, and **CHALLENGE** it.
Take only the level of notes that you need to establish landmarks in your data.
Don't build your information linearly; build it more like a Christmas tree.
Critique your sources as you read; ask how they're influencing you.
Mark questionable information.
Make note of information gaps.
3. **LOOK FOR PATTERNS** in your information.
Find common points and parallels in your data.
Ask again if your sources lean one way or other.
Identify gaps again.
4. Formulate your **HYPOTHESIS** and build your **ARGUMENTS**.
Draft your thesis sentence.
Write sentences capturing your main points.
Marshal facts to support your arguments.
Start building your paragraphs. (Tick formats work well.) Keep them soft, non-linear.
5. **TEST** and **BUILD** the bond between your hypothesis, arguments, and facts.
Ask yourself honestly if your thesis holds up.
Reorder data and make adjustments for maximum strength.
Go gather more information to test and strengthen your case.
Adjust, adjust, adjust.
6. Focus on **LANGUAGE** and **STRUCTURE**
Hone the thesis sentence and check it for consistency with arguments and facts.
Check the structure of sentences and paragraphs.
Edit, edit, edit.
7. Take a **BREATH** and **REPEAT** steps 4 and 5 until you're happy.

Basic, Simple Structure

- Grab attention and give BLUF
- Identify drivers – explaining what's happening and why
- Say where things are headed
- Name "wildcards" if meaningful
- Hit the reader between the eyes with the implications

Questions? Comments? Concerns?