

# *Business Writing*

## *– the US Way*

**Doug Gorman and his team conducted a careful study to see how people learn, and especially how they deal with large amounts of data. The results revealed some methods to better organise those ever growing masses of information nobody can live without nowadays.**

There's no way out of it, dear friends: the more information there is, the better you'll have to structure it, otherwise who'll understand it, analyse it, present it to others for future use?

Most writing fails, Gorman believes, because one writes what one knows, for oneself. And that is wrong: one should write with others in mind. The paragraph is a group of sentences addressing one thought, but even then, it represents a thought by the writer. Gorman recommends another structure – that of blocks. A block is one unit of information, designed from the reader's perspective. And it should be remembered that the human brain will absorb a maximum of seven items of information.

### *USA TODAY, A MODEL?*

An odd piece of advice for a journalist of ID-side who keeps trying to please his readers by surprising them, offering them new ways of constructing texts into phrases and paragraphs, or sometimes isolated works, by varying his style and by mingling topics of interest.

All this without daring to assume that his readers will be unable to follow him. Gorman admits that journalism perhaps requires more artistic writing than producing a memo, but he finds USA Today an excellent example of what should be done. The reader is never surprised, the first paragraph contains every-thing there is to know, the further you read on, the less important the information is. (Great, Doug, but we'll stick to our old ways if you don't mind.)

### *NOT A SPELLCHECKER*

Now of course, business writing is a piece of cake. No press fantasy, no journalistic freedom here, no colours, none of the flowery language of novels, but structured information that will quickly serve its purpose and its purpose only. There is so much knowledge that should be organised: you may have explicit knowledge like policies, procedures or financial results, and then there is tacit

within the company, meaning it's controllable. "Now add to that the traffic from the web; it's not organised, it's not reader-oriented, it doesn't know what you're after, it's real garbage – or it is a wonderful too, but probably for our kids."

Doug (an honest man, admitting that "I got a D in English at college, and today I'm running a writing company!") means there is work to do – and his company is offering some



*Luc Bouquet, zaakvoerder van Atek (als inzet en vooraan, derde van rechts in de groepsfoto), mocht tevreden zijn: zijn eerste "Belgian Information Mapping Conference" was een succes. Doug Gorman staat helemaal rechts vooraan.*

knowledge like experience, know-how, feelings or culture. "The intellectual capital is the asset value of the sum total of the knowledge in your organisation." Somehow it's

solutions. Information Mapping is giving seminars to teach its method – a method derived from the continuous research it is leading, and therefore being constantly refined. The company is also selling software that supports the writer of

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any business communication with a conceptual approach: “It’s not at all comparable to a spellchecker: we offer an intelligent format people just have to follow. Other companies offer a writing course, but nobody goes as far as we do. Our sole competitor is inside the company.” Naturally, Information Mapping offers the consulting that is needed to help those writers stick to the standard.

## MAXIMUM LEVEL; 4TH GRADE

Which writers? “The applications are very wide: financial service industries, going through mergers, need organised communication to blend their cultures, their systems. Then you have the regulatory world, hi-tech documentation, technical writing, and web publishing issued by hardware vendors, manufacturers, petrochemical and other process industries – all of them businesses that are cost-driven. Mistakes are expensive, while better writing saves money! And translation work becomes much easier if the text has been expertly mapped. We also work for government agencies: in the US they sometimes ask us to help them communicate in a fourth grade education level – no higher.”  
A few words about Information Mapping? Yes, this should maybe have been the first paragraph – but anyway.....



A Colombia university professor in psychology, Bob Horn, created it in 1967, starting on a Department of Defense grant relative to fighter pilots (which makes us think of that SAP-acquired Cockpit decision-orienting system designed by the Belgian professor Patrick George, who found his inspiration in the behaviour of fighter pilots as well). For about twenty years, Information Mapping was essentially an academic research project. This company based in Waltham, Massachusetts ([www.infomap.com](http://www.infomap.com)) is now present in forty countries.

Doug Gorman’s conclusion? “Companies must move beyond technology and a knowledge repository to a continuous process that facilitates intellectual capital creation and knowledge management.” Gee! Well said – well written?

**BTE**



*Nu luisteren ze allemaal met aandacht. Straks zullen ze – beter - schrijven*

## Et les mots pour le dire...

Nous avons pu rencontrer Doug Gorman durant la première Belgian Information Mapping Conference (payante) organisée par la société gantoise Atek Technical Communication ([www.atek.be](http://www.atek.be)), qui représente Information Mapping dans notre pays. Pour un coup d’essai, ce fut une réussite: quelque deux cents participants pour un sujet apparemment aussi aride, c’est une prouesse. Une quinzaine d’exposés ont été donnés par des orateurs de la DG X, le banques Bacob et Générale, de stad Gent, universiteit Tilburg, des sociétés telles que L&H Mendez, Language & Computing, Atek, Infoware, Wang Global et Information Mapping, Inc. Il existe de plus en plus d’outils de gestion et de diffusion électronique des documents, certains se contenant d’être des publishing tools, d’autres invoquant la gestion des connaissances, mais la possession d’un outil ne signifie pas la création d’une meilleure communication. Ce sont les gens qui rédigent le contenu, et il leur faut une méthode scientifiquement mise au point (comme Imap) pour leur donner les moyens d’analyser, structurer et présenter des documents d’une manière efficiente. Ce n’est pas seulement une question d’esthétique, mais avant tout d’économie. Un information mapping bien conçu entraîne des diminutions de coûts impressionnantes: la production d’un premier jet prend 83% moins de temps, la révision du document 75%, sa lecture de 10 à 50%, et le nombre d’erreurs se réduit de 54%.