

SCQA

SITUATION · COMPLICATION · QUESTION · ANSWER

Stop burying your conclusion.

The communication framework used by
top consultants and product leaders.

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Based on Barbara Minto's Pyramid Principle

SCQA

Most business communication buries the answer.

Typical memo structure:

Evidence → More evidence → Even more...

Audience checked out by slide 5.

Conclusion finally appears on slide 22.

(Nobody made it that far.)

SCQA flips this. Lead with the answer.

Start with the answer. Then support it.

Every memo, email, and product brief
should follow this structure.



"Based on Barbara Minto's Pyramid Principle"

Situation

Shared context — what everyone already knows

Establish the stable backdrop. Common ground your audience accepts. Set it once, briefly — then move on.

DO 1–3 sentences. Factual, not opinionated.

DON'T Repeat what the audience already knows.

EXAMPLE

"Our watches category is 15% of total revenue and the primary gateway to jewellery and footwear."

Complication

The tension — what changed or went wrong

This is the pivot. Something has changed, a gap has appeared, or a risk has surfaced. The complication makes the situation unstable.

DO Be sharp and specific. Quantify where possible.

DON'T Say "there are challenges." Name the challenge.

EXAMPLE

"Repeat purchase rates are down 10% vs last month — the steepest decline in two years."

Question

The implicit question the complication creates

Surface the question your complication implicitly raises. Stating it aligns the audience on what you're solving before you give the answer.

DO One sentence. Makes the Answer feel inevitable.

DON'T Ask multiple questions — pick the most important one.

EXAMPLE

"What should we do to recover repeat purchase rates in the watches category?"

Answer

Recommendation first, evidence second

Lead with the recommendation, then support it. Most people present evidence first and conclusion last — do the opposite.

DO "We recommend X" + 2–4 supporting points.

DON'T Hedge. "We could consider exploring..." leads nowhere.

EXAMPLE

"Add cross-category promos to post-purchase emails, launch two new sub-categories, and run a re-engagement test on lapsed buyers."

SCQA in Action

The Watches Category — a complete walkthrough

S Situation

Our watches category is 15% of total revenue and the primary gateway to jewellery and footwear.

C Complication

Repeat purchase rates are down 10% vs last month — the steepest single-month decline in two years.

Q Question

What should we do to recover repeat purchase rates in the watches category?

A Answer

Add cross-category promos to post-purchase emails, launch two sub-categories, and run a re-engagement test on lapsed buyers.

When to change the order

Standard *

S > C > Q > A

Default. Most memos, strategy docs, and product briefs.

Direct

A > S > C

Audience knows the problem. Lead with the recommendation.

Concerned

S > C > A > Q

Propose before surfacing objections. Useful with resistant audiences.

Drama

S > Q > A > C

Narrative storytelling and pitches. Suspense before resolution.

** Standard is the default for most business communication*

Wrong vs. Right

WRONG

Answer buried at the end of the doc

Complication is vague — no specifics

Situation is three paragraphs long

Multiple questions raised in Q section

Answer hedges: "we could explore..."

RIGHT

Move recommendation to the first sentence

Add a metric, date, or named risk. Numbers land.

Cut to 1–3 sentences. They know the context.

One question that makes the Answer inevitable.

"We recommend X." Be decisive. No hedging.

Remember This

Lead with the answer, not build to it.

S: Shared context — brief and factual (1–3 sentences).

C: The tension — specific, quantified, and named.

Q: One question that makes the Answer inevitable.

A: Decisive recommendation + 2–4 supporting points.

Full framework, variants + examples at
antonov.com.au/scqa