

Use Bullets for Surefire Reader Comprehension

Good writers pay attention to how their prose appears on a page or screen in addition to how it “sounds” as it is read. Large, dense blocks of text can discourage readers. Breaking up text using bulleted points makes prose more scannable, and therefore, less intimidating to readers.

When you write a paragraph that could be broken up by using bulleted points, follow these rules:

- Use bulleted points only to highlight items that do not require chronology; numbered lists are used to show sequence.
- Begin a bulleted list with a sentence (called a *stem* or *lead-in statement*) that explains the list’s overall theme. Alternatively, list bulleted points under a separate heading that forecasts the section’s topic.
- Write bulleted points using parallel construction—match verbs with verbs, nouns with nouns, phrases with phrases, questions with questions.
- Capitalize the first word after the bullet only when the bulleted points complete the sentence stem *or* when the bulleted points are just one or two words.
- Choose one bullet point style per document and use it throughout.
- Use a period at the end of a bulleted point that is an independent clause or a sentence; do not use a period at the end of a bulleted point that is a fragment, word, or phrase.
- Keep bulleted points on the short side, no longer than two or three lines.

Your task. Rewrite the following narrative paragraphs by changing listed items into bulleted points.

1. The media have given us some of their own occupational slang, like “sound bite,” but trendy clichés usually come from occupations and professions. So business has given us bottom lines, deep pockets, and downsizing. The military has given us bite the bullet, in the trenches, breakthrough, and flak. Engineering gave us parameters, state of the art, leading edge, and reinventing the wheel. Athletics gave us team players, ballpark figures, level playing fields, and track records. Politics is the home of charisma, spin doctors, bandwagons, and momentum. The self-help movement gave us trendy clichés like self-actualizing, holistic, meaningful, one day at a time, and wellness.¹
2. Unadvertised or “hidden” jobs may make up as much as 80-85% of unfilled openings, according to Fred Coon, a licensed employment agent. To uncover hidden jobs, Coon suggests those entering the workforce to join industry groups. Associations, chambers of commerce, or Toastmasters are great ways to make contacts before you need them. Coon also suggests talking to insiders. Insights from those already in the industry can help new workers learn how to best chart their career paths. Another way to find hidden jobs is to search company websites. Many companies only post openings on their corporate websites.

¹ Source: Kilian, C. *Writing for the Web*. 2009.