

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

Inverted Triangle

July/August 2009

(Developed by Smith, L. & Zygouris-Coe, V., 2009)



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RATIONALE

The Digital Age is upon us and as we work within the parameters of new media and digital learning we must teach our students to read, write, and think in a new era of education. Although newspapers are still being flung into driveways every morning, our students are seemingly more bombarded by a plethora of informational text fashioned in an electronic approach via the Internet. The Internet offers a variety of information in many shapes and sizes. With interactive websites, informative wikis, reflective blogs, and clever tweets abound, information is moving faster than ever before.

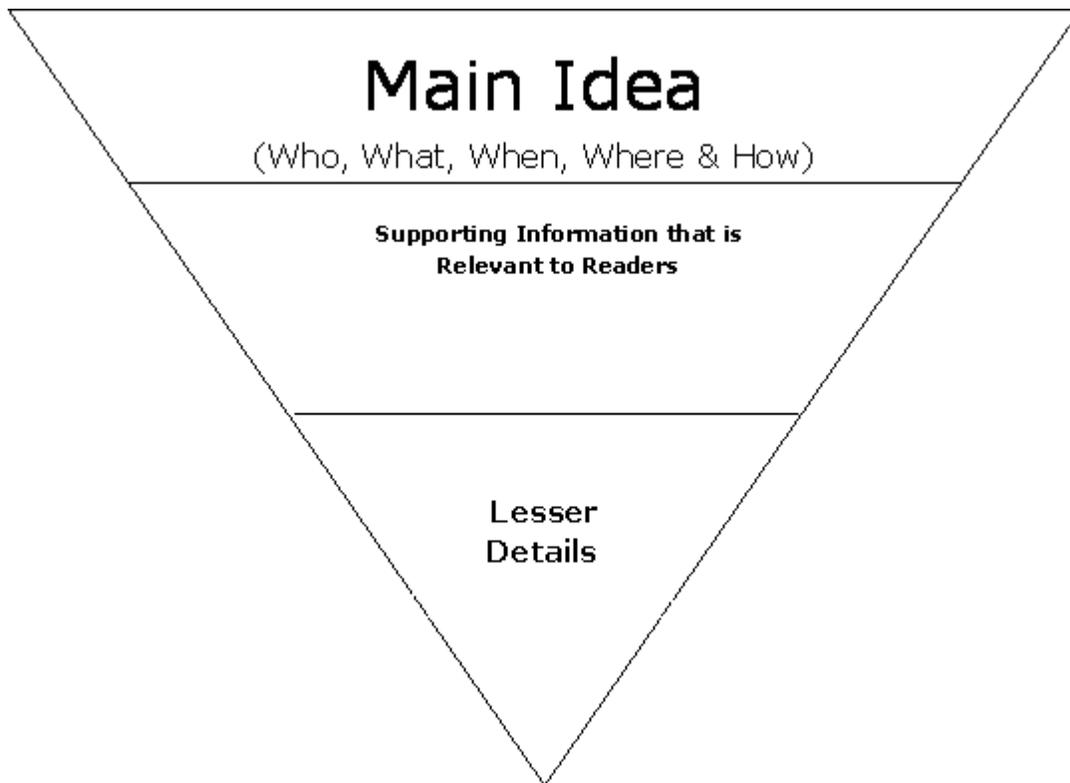
So how can we assist our students and ourselves with developing literacy skills to deal with understanding all these types of information? How can we assist them with honing writing skills that will make their writing understandable to their tech savvy peers? The Inverted Triangle, also known as the Inverted Pyramid, can be used for assisting both teachers and students with organizing, planning, and instructing in a variety of subjects and fields.

Using a mnemonic device (upside down triangle), this strategy is often best known for assisting writers in refining a broad topic of interest to a narrow, focused topic. The Inverted Triangle “draws readers into the material right at the beginning—often with a small story or with interesting and relevant facts” (Reddish, 2007). It has been found to be popular in news reporting as journalistic writers provide the most general information at the beginning of the story and save specific details for later in the story. Additionally, this strategy can be viewed as a problem solving strategy where one considers a broad problem and then drills down to the root cause, or causes, to solve it.

HOW TO USE THE STRATEGY

Summaries, articles, or stories that are written in an Inverted Triangle style allow readers to concentrate on the most important information as they read from the top down. As the writer considers the vital pieces to the text, the reader in-turn gets the primary facts early in the writing and decides if she wants to continue reading the article. In fact, it has been shown that many web readers focus only on the title and first few paragraphs of a piece of text before deciding if they should read on for more information or move on to another resource (Reddish, 2007).

One of the keys to successful writing is organizing information. For the Inverted Triangle the following dimensions are used (Walling, 2006):



Writing

When beginning to teach the Inverted Triangle strategy take time to help students determine the main idea. Using the journalistic questions based on the “5Ws and 1 H” model (Who, What, When, Where and How), have students determine the basic parts of what they writing about or summarizing.

Next have students determine what supporting information they should use in their writing. Have them consider what would truly be relevant to their readers. Do their readers have to know the name of Napoleon’s dog or George Washington’s favorite song? These facts are probably not relevant to the writing at hand. Students still should take time to consider if any of these are possibly a lesser detail that belongs toward the end of the article. Deciding the level of importance will determine the placement of the information within the text.

Planning and Organizing

Along with assisting students with writing skills the Inverted Triangle can provide help in planning, thinking, and organizing. While starting with a broad topic, as we did with the writing, students can use the graphic organizer to stay focused as they decide on topics they may be interested in for a research article and need help with making the subject manageable.

See the following examples for how to use the strategy for planning and organizing.

Inverted Triangle Organizer

Name: _____
Topic: _____

Inverted Triangle Strategy

FOR-PD

To use this strategy, write a broad topic you wish to explore at the top of the triangle. Begin to narrow that topic by choosing an area of interest. Write that on the next level of the triangle. Continue this way until you have a narrow, focused topic. A similar approach will also work for problem-solving.

http://portal.usf.edu

Blank Template

Name: Elementary Example
Topic: The Watsons Go to Birmingham - 1963

Inverted Triangle Strategy 

To use this strategy, write a broad topic you wish to explore at the top of the triangle. Begin to narrow that topic by choosing an area of interest. Write that on the next level of the triangle. Continue this way until you have a narrative. Narrowed topics, a similar approach will also work for problem-solving.

<http://forpd.ucd.edu>

What are your thoughts about the theme of this book?

State a question you have about this book that will help you choose the theme.

Why does Byron have to move to Alabama?

State a question you have about this book that will help you choose the theme.

What happened in the church that made them take Byron back to Michigan?

State a question you have about this book that will help you choose the theme.

Why are the Watsons considered "new"?

How did the Watson family change?

What is the theme of the book?

Elementary Example

Name: Secondary Example
Topic: Choosing a topic for my paper - The Ocean

Inverted Triangle Strategy 

To use this strategy, write a broad topic you wish to explore at the top of the triangle. Begin to narrow that topic by choosing an area of interest. Write that on the next level of the triangle. Continue this way until you have a narrative. Narrowed topics, a similar approach will also work for problem-solving.

<http://forpd.ucd.edu>

I want to study the ocean.

I want to study the biology of the ocean.

I would like to study the animals of the ocean.

I want to study animals that swim in pods.

I would like to study dolphins.

Bottle nose dolphins

Secondary Example

ASSESSMENT

Teachers can assess both the process of how students use the Inverted Triangle strategy and the final product that they produce. As a simple way to evaluate their work is to provide students with a wordy story that is in more of a narrative form. Have them work on the elements of the Inverted Triangle to organize the story into a more systematic, news level, entry.

RESOURCES

How a News Story is Organized

http://www.newspapersineducation.ca/eng/level_7to9/lesson5/lesson5_eng.html

This lesson plan offers specific ways to assist learners in organizing a news story.

Inverted Pyramid

<http://taje.org/fortaje/PDF/pyramid.pdf>

This information sheet provides a great handout for your students on the topic of the Inverted Pyramid (triangle).

Inverted Pyramid Structure

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/journalism20/print_journalism/pyramid_structure.htm

This module offers detailed lessons and strategies to use with the Inverted Pyramid strategy.

The Inverted Pyramid Structure

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/04/>

This site offers specifics on how to use the strategy along with considerations on when not to use it.

REFERENCES

Redish, J. (2007). *Letting go of the words. Writing web content that works*. San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann.

Walling, D. R. (2006). *Teaching writing to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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