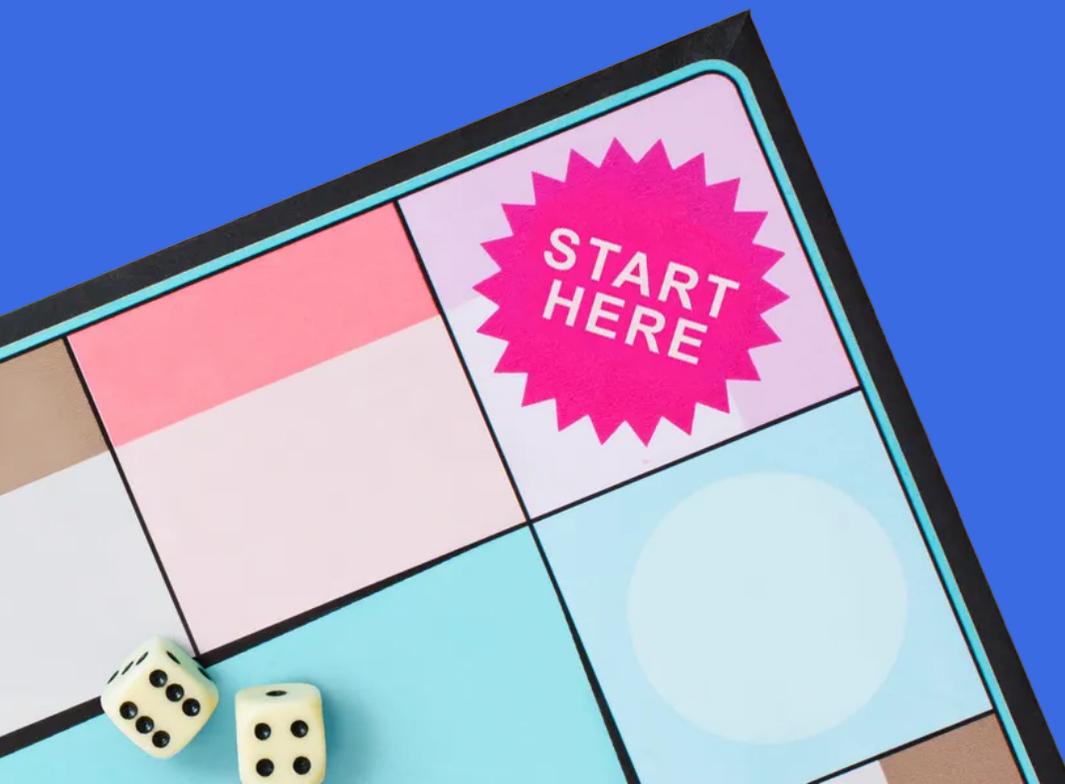


Smart Brevity® 101

How to kick off every internal communication



AXIOS HQ

“What’s new” and “Why it matters”

These two phrases are the framework for every Smart Brevity communication we share at Axios HQ — and that leaders inside hundreds of organizations, big and small, have embraced.

- The phrases help us stay focused on what our readers need, rather than indulging in what we want to say.
- Folks see, right away, why the communication is relevant to them and are much more likely to continue reading.

Below, we’ll help you see why it’s so impactful for any communication.

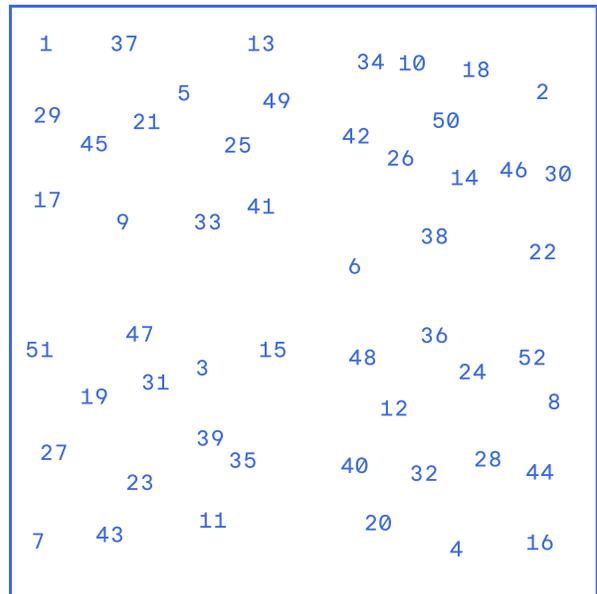
How it works

The toughest part of any communication is deciding where to start. Too often, you're under a time crunch, trying to decide what to say or synthesize a batch of updates that are already too long. The blank page gets brighter every minute you don't write.

Yes, but: There's a productive way to help our brain shift gears.

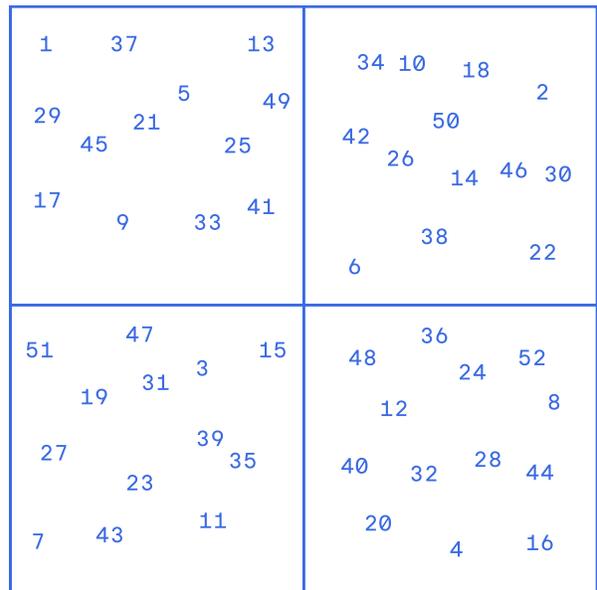
Let's start with an example. In the picture to the right, there are numbers from 1 to 52.

- Put 15 seconds on a clock.
- Find, then circle each number in order — first 1, then 2.
- Continue until time runs out.
- The highest number you circled was: _____



Now, try it again. This time, we'll divide the same picture into four quadrants.

- Put 15 seconds on a clock.
- Start in the top left quadrant — circle your first number.
- Then move to the top right — circle your second.
- Then the bottom left.
- Then bottom right.
- Continue in this order until time runs out.
- The highest number you circled was: _____



You got a lot further that time, right?

What we've learned: It's a waste of time to start from scratch every time we communicate. Just like your eyes ricocheted all over the first image, trying to make sense of its absent logic, your brain gets overwhelmed by all the ways it can organize details in your keynote, email, or update. A guiding format can help.

The big picture: All professional communications — the insights you need and use at 2pm on a Tuesday — can and should start with the same two sentences.

What's new: the newest or most significant information your audience needs.

Why it matters: the details that help them understand how it impacts them.

Studies from the University of Maryland have shown when readers see new information — like an ad or an article — they ask themselves two questions:

What is it about?

Is it relevant to me?

And if they can't answer "yes" within a few seconds, they're off to one of the dozens of other emails, messages, or notifications begging for their time and attention. Your job is to keep them focused on your communication, and your best shot is answering those specific questions upfront to help busy readers see why it's worth their time to pay attention and dig deeper.

In Smart Brevity, we start every communication with these two sentences. Whether we're sending 20 words to a colleague or 2,000 to our clients or investors, this structure puts our readers' needs first — plus, it helps squash our blank page indecisions and helps us get started writing right away.

Even better, it doesn't mean sacrificing the voice, tone, and genuine humanity that make essential communications engaging.

The simplicity of "What's new" and "Why it matters" keeps you focused on what's key, so you also have space to use the empathetic words that are natural and needed. We call that "writing like you speak."

The takeaway: This fundamental framework has helped hundreds of organizations keep readers — staff, stakeholders, clients, community members — more engaged with the important communications they're receiving. It may sound simplistic or overly structured, but it's held up for over half a decade. Simplicity wins.

Case in point

It may feel bold to say Smart Brevity works for any communication, but we've seen it hold true for articles, emails, memos, speeches, books presentations, board reports, and a whole lot more. Below are two real stories of Smart Brevity put to work.

Happy Money

The challenge: Happy Money shifted to a completely distributed workforce. They knew a regular communication from the CEO and other leaders would be critical to keep the team connected. It had to be:

Innovative: They didn't have any platform for internal comms, other than Gmail. They needed a way to polish and elevate leader messages, while keeping them clear.

Transparent: They needed a way to start measuring what employees actually read, were interested in, and would click on or engage with.

The solution: They moved a weekly email from the CEO into Axios HQ. It earns 73% open rates and 9% click rates — covering industry insights, company news, leadership perspectives and more.

 **Communication director:** "HQ is a way for me to extend my capabilities and my reach as a communicator. It makes it easy for me to invite others to contribute to the weekly newsletter and provides a user-friendly way to help other people create comms that are impactful. It also keeps us organized."

Go deeper: [Read more about their story](#), and see a real example of their [Smart Brevity communication](#).

TAUC

The challenge: The Association of Union Constructors was looking for a faster and easier way to share important news with contractors in union construction and maintenance. It had to be:

Versatile: Their old system was "too clunky," and it took a lot of time for the team to compile and distill the news their members urgently needed.

Powerful: Their updates are important, but their readers are tough to reach. They needed a guiding format that could help ensure their message is heard.

The solution: TAUC uses Axios HQ to send its newsletters. The Smart Brevity tips shortened the steps in their production process — from research to writing — by at least 50%.

 **Content manager:** "Smart Brevity is a genie in a bottle that lives in HQ. It guides your writing to make sure you're staying concise and actually delivering the what's important in your message. I'm good at writing, but it gives amazing suggestions. If I can take five words and say the same thing in two, I've saved everyone time."

Go deeper: [Read more about their story](#), and see a real example of their [Smart Brevity communication](#).

Go deeper

See how Axios HQ is helping leaders everywhere use Smart Brevity to sharpen their most important workplace communications. [Learn more.](#)

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