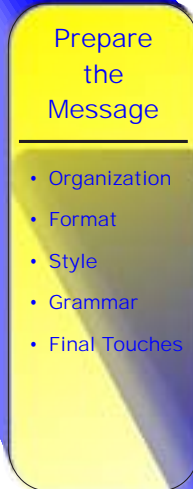
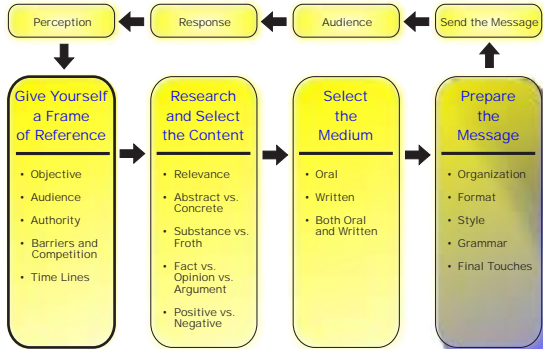


Writing for Results

A Step-by-Step Model for Executive Documents



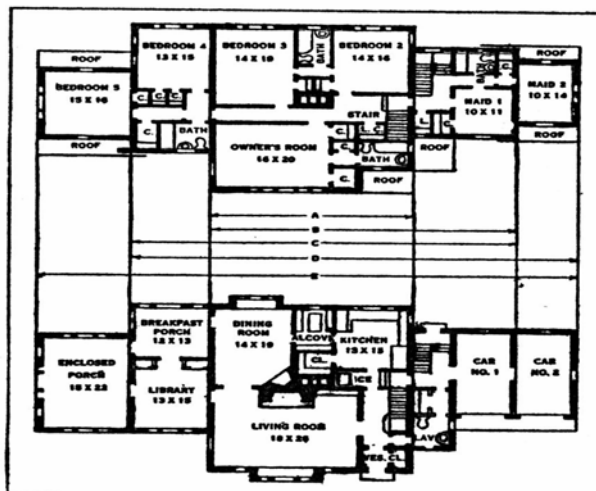
Organization

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ORGANIZATION AND FIRST DRAFT

You need a blueprint . . .



to get from here . . .

chimney back yard glass hardwood
 bedrooms lighting nails paint
 drains patio bricks studs bathtub
 drywall insulation cement kitchen
 wiring shingles hinges living room
 screws family room radiators
 copper pipes doors hearth tiles
 electrical outlets garage driveway
 staircase bathroom asphalt banister
 laundry room basement shrubs

to here.



INTRODUCTION

We all know what it is like to face the prospect of writing a first draft. This can be the most challenging stage of the writing process. It is the stage at which you must translate thoughts into words.

There are techniques you can use to help get things off the ground, reduce the time involved in the first draft and improve the usefulness of the draft you produce. Writing initial drafts is closely linked to developing an organization structure, and you may often find yourself revising your organization structure as you write. This section provides guidance that will help you approach those tasks efficiently and effectively.

APPROACHES TO THE FIRST DRAFT

THE EASY WAY

When you were in high school, your English teachers told you to sketch out a point-form outline for your essays before you started to write. It was sound advice — if you were fortunate enough to have a clear idea in mind of what you wanted to say. As you'll see below, this is not the only way to approach the task. But if you are able to at least take a stab at a point-form outline, you are likely to save yourself a good deal of time and mental energy.

Once you have an outline, you can then add content to it piece by piece, much as a builder would follow a blueprint in placing bricks, mortar and lumber to put up a well-designed house.

THE HARD WAY

Another approach is to simply start writing and rewriting until you have a clear idea of where you are going. It's hard work, but sometimes it's the only way.

If you need to take this approach, that's fine. But after you've finished writing the first draft, do go back and develop a point-form outline of what you've written. You should be able to assign a label that describes each paragraph, much as you would if you were preparing a very detailed table of contents. Then group these paragraph labels under major headings and sub-headings. This will provide valuable insights into how well your material is organized and will equip you to improve the organization significantly in the next draft.

THE THIRD WAY

Another approach to the first draft is to jot down notes randomly as thoughts come to mind. Before long, you may have several pages of such notes. Next, try grouping those notes under themes and major headings. This will give you a framework that could save you from writing one or two early drafts.

WRITER'S BLOCK

If you have no idea at all where to start, don't despair. It happens to everyone at times, and there are steps you can take to get beyond it.

First, review your frame of reference. Make sure that you are clear about what you are trying to accomplish before you try to accomplish it.

Next, try writing a single paragraph at random about some aspect of the subject — any aspect — that you are confident about. Don't worry about how it fits into the big scheme of things. That can come later. The important thing is to put something — anything — on paper. Then pick another aspect — any aspect — and write a paragraph on it. Again, don't worry for a moment about what place, if any, that paragraph will have in the final product. Then write another paragraph and another, and then another, until you start to get a feeling for where you're going. By that point, you should be able to pursue one of the three approaches described above.

If that doesn't work, then it's time to ask for help. Ask your boss, a colleague, a friend down the hall — anyone who might be able to give you some perspectives that will help you to get things off the ground.

PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION

Memos to senior executives often follow a rigid two-page format with only limited latitude for creativity in organizing your material. This rigidity is adopted deliberately to enable senior executives and their offices to effectively deal with the massive volume of paper that comes their way every day — all of it as important as what you are writing now. You'll find details in the sections on [Memos for Senior Executives](#) and [How to Fix a Four-Page Memo](#).

Briefing notes and briefing books can be significantly longer than two pages. They also give you a great deal more latitude for organizing your material creatively. Indeed, the added length often demands it. The balance of this section looks at guiding principles for organizing such documents, specifically:

- comprehension span;
- grouping scheme; and
- sequencing.

Organizing your message can be a daunting challenge at times. However, it will be an even greater challenge for your readers unless you do it for them.

Some people are a whiz at organizing documents. They may not need to even read this chapter. Others find it to be very difficult indeed. If that's you, be prepared to spend some time on this chapter. Go through it and try to grasp the concepts presented. If you find it's all gobbledygook to you, that's fine. Set it aside for a few days, and then go through it again. Then set it aside for a few more days, and go through it once again. In time, it will all become clear to you, and you will have acquired a powerful new tool for your writing.

COMPREHENSION SPAN

The organization structure of a message has two dimensions: one horizontal, and one vertical. I'll use the organization chart of a business to show what I mean. Figure 1 on the next pages shows what the first few levels look like.

In a large multi-national corporation, the vertical span might comprise a dozen or more levels and hundreds of thousands of employees. Yet the president manages to keep on top of things because only a handful of people report directly to him or her in the horizontal span. Each of those people has a well-defined role in managing the next level below.

Organization Chart of XL Electronics Consortium Ltd.

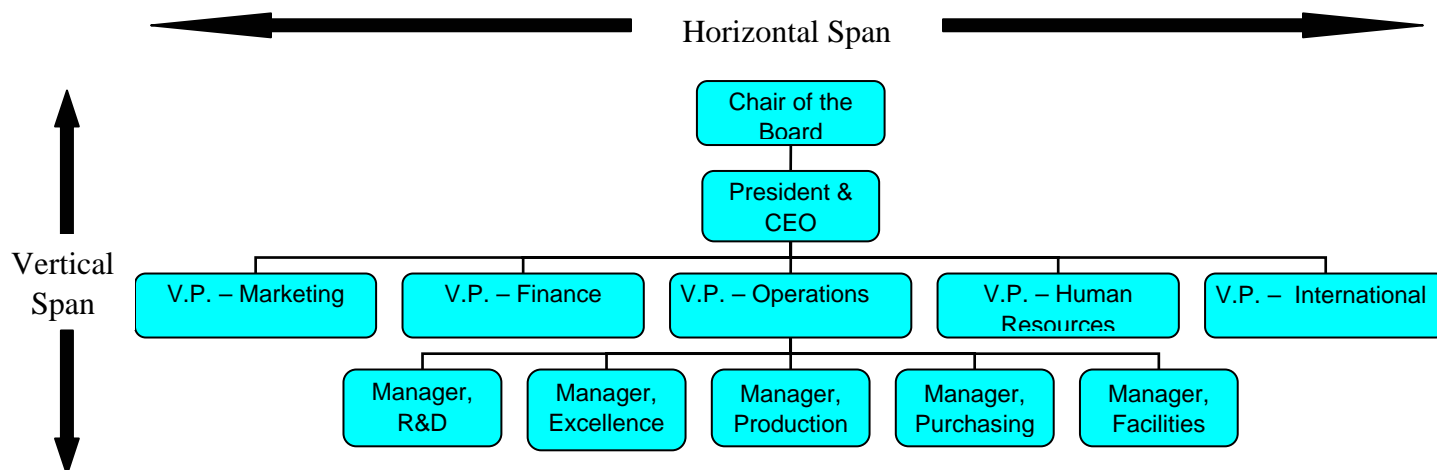


Figure 1

In written material, people’s ability to comprehend a horizontal span of concepts varies widely, depending upon the subject matter, how it is organized and how it will be used.

The white pages of the phone book use an organization structure that has only two levels vertically. The first level is the title: “White Pages”. The second level, the listings, could include millions of distinct items horizontally (but sequenced alphabetically). Dictionaries are another example of such a two-level structure. In both cases it works, because of the way people use these documents.

A narrative report, however, would be useless if it followed similar principles. It would be possible to give each paragraph a label and arrange them all alphabetically. But if you presented your readers with a continuous list of such paragraphs — even with nice neat headings — they would be baffled.

For a narrative report, you will need to design a hierarchy of details in a pyramid-like form — much like the organization chart of XL Electronics in Figure 1. I aim to limit things to a

horizontal comprehension span of seven or eight items at a given level of detail — seven or eight sections, seven or eight sub-sections in each section, seven or eight paragraphs in each sub-section, etc. Much more than that, and I will lose my readers.

In contrast, the vertical comprehension span of such a report can be infinite, provided the information is grouped in a rational scheme that is attuned to user needs. The classification systems used by librarians are examples of how millions of volumes can be organized this way.

GROUPING SCHEME

You will need a well-designed grouping scheme in order to develop viable horizontal comprehension spans for reports and briefing material.

To keep your readers' attention, you need to group your concepts in a way that helps them to see a useful pattern and that serves the objective of your message.

Any given text can be grouped, or labeled, in more than one way. Pages 10 to 19 show how this is done for two sample messages. The section on [Abstract vs. Concrete](#) provides more details on the concept of labeling.

SEQUENCING

Once you have a grouping scheme for your material, you will need to decide how to sequence it. At any given level, what comes first within the group? What comes next? What comes last? A general rule of thumb is that what is placed first is the most likely to get the audience's attention (or least likely to be overlooked). What comes last is the next most likely to get the audience's attention. What's placed in the middle is least likely to get attention.

Thus, one criterion for sequencing could be importance, e.g.:

- what are you most anxious or least anxious to convey to your audience;
- what is the most difficult issue and what is the least difficult; or
- what will have the most positive impact on an audience and what will have the least.

However, many other factors may come into play in deciding upon your sequence. Here are a few other criteria that you might use:

- logical progression from premises and observations to conclusions and recommendations (or vice versa);
- geographic sequence (e.g., progressing from eastern areas through central areas to western areas);
- chronological sequence (e.g., what happened/will happen first, what happened/will happen next, what happened/will happen last); or
- numerical sequence (e.g., most expensive first and least expensive last, or vice versa).

Those examples are just a few of the many criteria that you might use. Your imagination is the only limit to criteria that could be used for sequencing.

Pages 29 to 31 give a few examples of sequencing in practice.



GROUPING SCHEME: SAMPLE MESSAGE ON SPORTS

To illustrate a grouping scheme, I'll start with a simple example:

At three paragraphs, there isn't a lot of challenge to organizing that message. Even so, it's useful to see how many different labels, or abstractions, could be applied in such a simple message:

From January to March, I play hockey in a community league. We play at the neighborhood arena.	In April and May, I like to go cycling with my family. We go out to the Gatineau bike paths a lot.	In summer, I often play basketball with my friends on weekends. A local school has an outdoor court where we play.
--	--	--

Figure 2

My Sports Activities		
hockey • winter	cycling • spring	basketball • summer

Figure 3

Seasons for My Sports		
winter • hockey	spring • cycling	summer • basketball

Figure 4

People I Do Sports With		
community league • hockey	family • cycling	friends • basketball

Figure 5

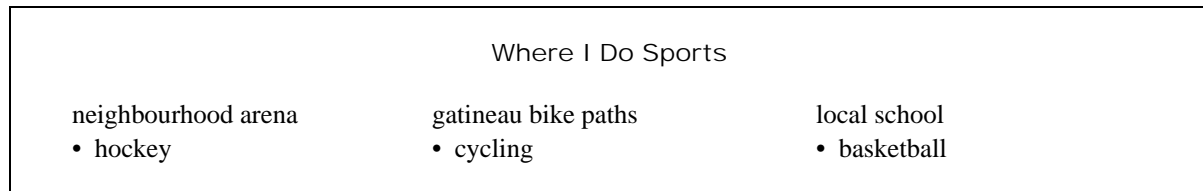


Figure 6

Your choice of labels for a grouping scheme can have a profound impact on the organization of a longer message. If you run into problems with your organization structure, ask yourself if the labels you have used should be changed.

GROUPING SCHEME: SAMPLE MESSAGE ON TREES



Let's look at a more complex example. Say I'm writing a report on threats to forests. I've chosen "the third way" in my approach (see page 4), and I don't have an organization structure yet. I now give brief labels to the notes I've written, and I come up with the following list:

insects	insects	fire	erosion
insects	N.E. U.S.A.	fire	Alberta
weather	disease	insects	B.C.
erosion	white spruce	white pine	fire
white birch	weather	N.W. U.S.A.	weather
Quebec	over-harvesting	weather	disease
weather	red spruce	land conversion	land conversion
New Brunswick	Ontario	lodgepole pine	black spruce
disease	maple	B.C.	balsam fir
fire	Quebec	weather	Alberta
over-harvesting	maple	weather	maple
fire	white pine	white pine	land conversion
erosion			

Figure 7

At first glance, Figure 7 is a bewildering list of labels. But after taking a closer look, I start to see some patterns. Figure 8 shows what I come up with next:

THREATS		SPECIES	REGIONS
insects	over-harvesting	white birch	Quebec
insects	land conversion	white spruce	New Brunswick
weather	fire	red spruce	N.W. U.S.A.
erosion	fire	maple	Ontario
weather	insects	maple	Quebec
disease	weather	white pine	N.E. U.S.A
fire	land conversion	white pine	B.C.
over-harvesting	weather	lodgepole pine	Alberta
fire	erosion	black spruce	B.C.
erosion	fire	maple	Alberta
insects	weather	white pine	Alberta
disease	disease	balsam fir	B.C.
weather	land conversion		Alberta

Figure 7

That list still has a lot of duplication, and the pattern to it is far from transparent. However, upon reading my text again I see there are more common elements in the paragraphs than I saw when I first sketched out the paragraph labels. I notice that most of the threats are also discussed in both the paragraphs I labeled “species” and the paragraphs I labeled “regions”.

OPTION 1

Now I can start to make some real progress. I decide to make three jumps at once:

- First, I group all the paragraphs under one region or another — splitting many of them as I do so.
- Second, I group all the paragraphs by species within each region — again splitting many of the paragraphs as I go.
- Third, I group all the paragraphs by threat for each region — splitting many of the paragraphs yet again.

Figure 11 on the next page shows the result.

This organization structure has three levels in its vertical span:

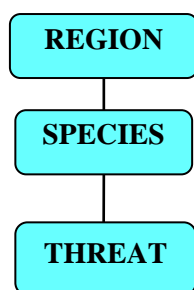


Figure 9

None of those levels has more than eight items in its horizontal span:

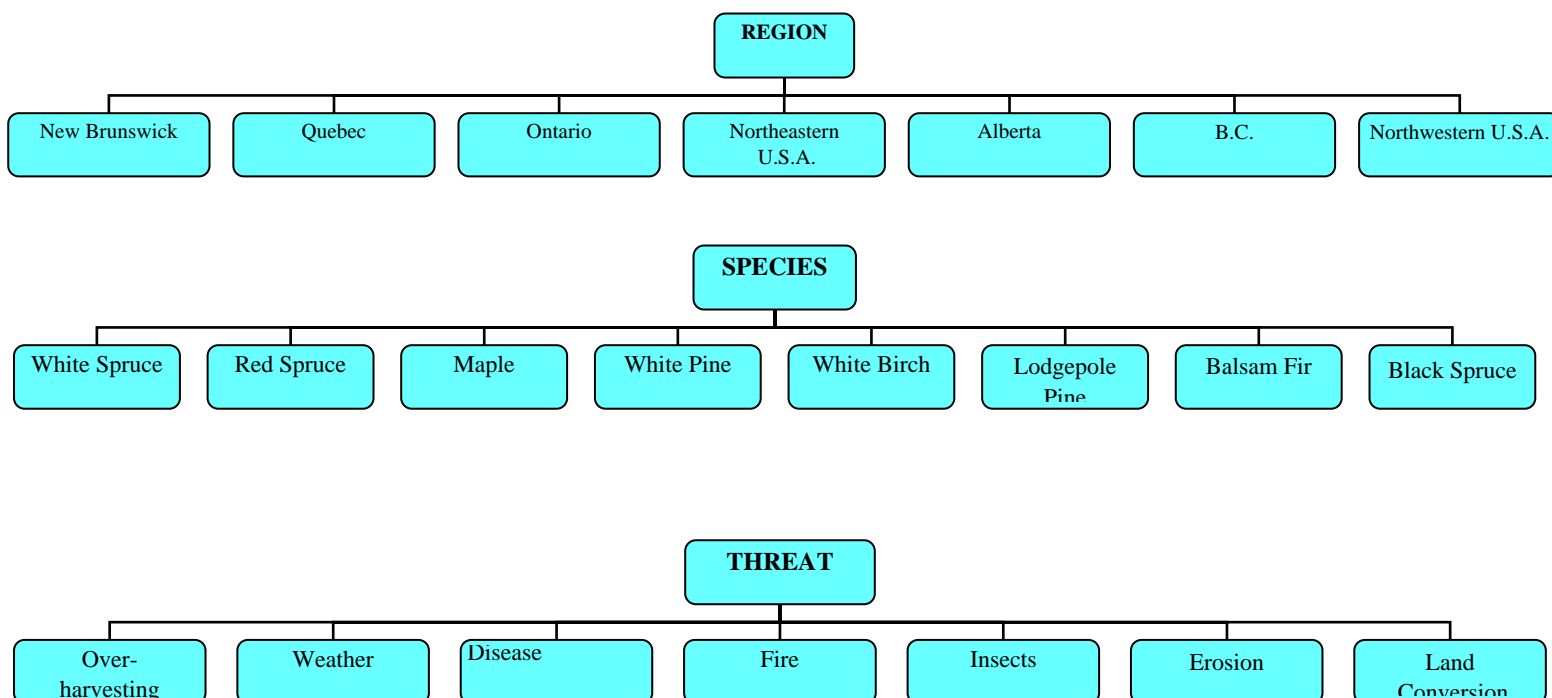


Figure 10

Option 1: Region – Species – Threat

NEW BRUNSWICK	<u>Maple</u>	ALBERTA	<u>Red Spruce</u>
<u>White Spruce</u>	weather	<u>White Birch</u>	insects
insects	erosion	insects	fire
land conversion	disease	weather	over-harvesting
<u>Maple</u>	<u>White Pine</u>	erosion	<u>Maple</u>
weather	disease	<u>White Spruce</u>	disease
erosion	fire	weather	fire
fire	land conversion	erosion	over-harvesting
land conversion	<u>Black Spruce</u>	land conversion	land conversion
<u>White Pine</u>	insects	<u>Red Spruce</u>	White Pine
insects	land conversion	insects	weather
fire	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	land conversion	erosion
<u>Black Spruce</u>	insects	<u>Maple</u>	over-harvesting
over-harvesting	fire	disease	land conversion
land conversion		fire	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>
		over-harvesting	insects
QUEBEC	N.E. U.S.A.	land conversion	<u>Black Spruce</u>
<u>White Birch</u>	<u>White Birch</u>	<u>White Pine</u>	erosion
insects	insects	insects	land conversion
weather	weather	weather	<u>Balsam Fir</u>
land conversion	erosion	erosion	erosion
<u>White Spruce</u>	<u>White Spruce</u>	disease	disease
disease	disease	fire	
fire	fire	over-harvesting	N.W. U.S.A.
land conversion	over-harvesting	land conversion	<u>White Birch</u>
<u>Red Spruce</u>	land conversion	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>	insects
insects	<u>Red Spruce</u>	insects	weather
<u>Maple</u>	over-harvesting	weather	<u>White Spruce</u>
land conversion	land conversion	erosion	insects
<u>White Pine</u>	<u>Maple</u>	disease	weather
erosion	insects	fire	erosion
over-harvesting	weather	over-harvesting	<u>Red Spruce</u>
<u>Black Spruce</u>	erosion	land conversion	fire
insects	<u>White Pine</u>	<u>Black Spruce</u>	over-harvesting
weather	insects	insects	<u>Maple</u>
erosion	weather	disease	erosion
<u>Balsam Fir</u>	erosion	fire	disease
weather	disease	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	<u>White Pine</u>
erosion	fire	weather	insects
	<u>Black Spruce</u>	erosion	fire
ONTARIO	insects	land conversion	over-harvesting
<u>White Birch</u>	weather		land conversion
land conversion	erosion	B.C.	<u>Black Spruce</u>
erosion	disease	White Spruce	fire
<u>White Spruce</u>	fire	erosion	land conversion
insects	over-harvesting	disease	<u>Balsam Fir</u>
land conversion	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	fire	insects
<u>Red Spruce</u>	erosion	land conversion	weather
disease	disease		erosion
	fire		

Figure 11

OPTION 2

However, that’s just one option. Figure 14 shows how those paragraphs could be completely regrouped for a message with a different objective or a different audience:

- First, I group all the paragraphs under type of threat or another — splitting many of them as I do so.
- Second, I group all the paragraphs by species under each threat — again splitting many of the paragraphs as I go.
- Third, I group all the paragraphs by region under each species — splitting many of the paragraphs yet again.

I still have three vertical levels, but now “threat” is on top and “region” is at the bottom. “Species”, however, is still in the middle.

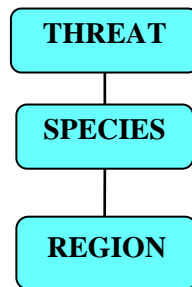


Figure 12

The items each level of in the horizontal span remain exactly the same as in Option 1:

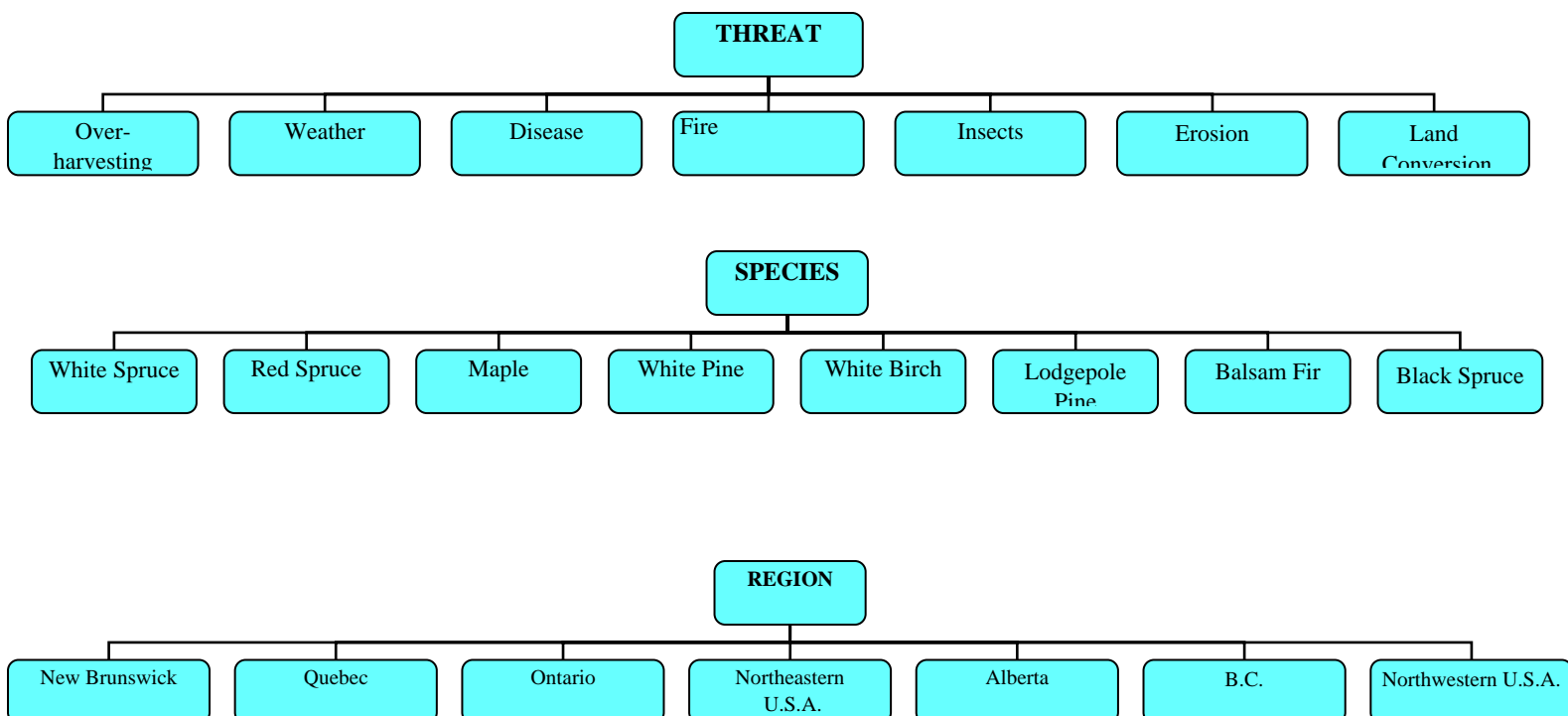


Figure 13

Option 2: Threat – Species – Region

INSECTS	<u>Black Spruce</u>	B.C.	N.W. U.S.A.
<u>White Birch</u>	Quebec	N.W. U.S.A.	<u>Maple</u>
Quebec	N.E. U.S.A.	<u>White Pine</u>	Ontario
N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	Ontario	Alberta
Alberta	Quebec	N.E. U.S.A.	B.C.
N.W. U.S.A.	N.E. U.S.A.	Alberta	<u>White Pine</u>
<u>White Spruce</u>	Alberta	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>	Quebec
New Brunswick	N.W. U.S.A.	Alberta	Alberta
Ontario		<u>Black Spruce</u>	B.C.
N.W. U.S.A.	EROSION	N.E. U.S.A.	N.W. U.S.A.
<u>Red Spruce</u>	<u>White Birch</u>	Alberta	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>
Quebec	Ontario	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	Alberta
Alberta	N.E. U.S.A.	N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Black Spruce</u>
B.C.	Alberta	B.C.	New Brunswick
<u>Maple</u>	<u>White Spruce</u>	FIRE	LAND
N.E. U.S.A.	Alberta	<u>White Spruce</u>	CONVERSION
<u>White Pine</u>	B.C.	Quebec	<u>White Birch</u>
New Brunswick	N.W. U.S.A.	N.E. U.S.A.	Quebec
N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Maple</u>	B.C.	Ontario
Alberta	New Brunswick	<u>Red Spruce</u>	<u>White Spruce</u>
N.W. U.S.A.	Ontario	B.C.	New Brunswick
<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>	N.E. U.S.A.	N.W. U.S.A.	Quebec
Alberta	N.W. U.S.A.	<u>Maple</u>	Ontario
B.C.	<u>White Pine</u>	New Brunswick	N.E. U.S.A.
<u>Black Spruce</u>	Quebec	Ontario	Alberta
Quebec	N.E. U.S.A.	B.C.	B.C.
Ontario	Alberta	<u>White Pine</u>	<u>Red Spruce</u>
N.E. U.S.A.	B.C.	New Brunswick	N.E. U.S.A.
Alberta	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>	Ontario	Alberta
<u>Balsam Fir</u>	Alberta	N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Maple</u>
Ontario	<u>Black Spruce</u>	Alberta	New Brunswick
WEATHER	Quebec	N.W. U.S.A.	Quebec
<u>White Birch</u>	N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>	Alberta
Quebec	Alberta	Alberta	B.C.
N.E. U.S.A.	N.W. U.S.A.	<u>Black Spruce</u>	<u>White Pine</u>
Alberta	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	N.E. U.S.A.	Ontario
N.W. U.S.A.	Quebec	Alberta	Alberta
<u>White Spruce</u>	N.E. U.S.A.	N.W. U.S.A.	B.C.
N.E. U.S.A.	Alberta	<u>Balsam Fir</u>	N.W. U.S.A.
Alberta	B.C.	Ontario	<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>
N.W. U.S.A.	N.W. U.S.A.	N.E. U.S.A.	Alberta
<u>Maple</u>		OVER-	<u>Black Spruce</u>
New Brunswick	DISEASE	HARVESTING	New Brunswick
Ontario	<u>White Spruce</u>	<u>White Spruce</u>	Ontario
N.E. U.S.A.	Quebec	N.E. U.S.A.	B.C.
<u>White Pine</u>	N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Red Spruce</u>	N.W. U.S.A.
N.E. U.S.A.	B.C.	N.E. U.S.A.	<u>Balsam Fir</u>
Alberta	<u>Red Spruce</u>	B.C.	Alberta
B.C.	Ontario	<u>Maple</u>	
<u>Lodgepole Pine</u>	Ontario	Alberta	
Alberta	Alberta		

Figure 14

OPTION 3

Figure 17 shows a third option, oriented yet again for a message with a different objective or a different audience:

- First, I group all the paragraphs under one type of tree or another — splitting many of them as I do so.
- Second, I group all the paragraphs by region under each type of tree — again splitting many of the paragraphs as I go.
- Third, I group all the paragraphs by threat under each region — splitting many of the paragraphs yet again.

Again, I still have three vertical levels, but now “species” is on top, “region” is in the middle, and “threat ” is back at the bottom:



Figure 15

And again, the items in each level of the horizontal span remain exactly the same as before:

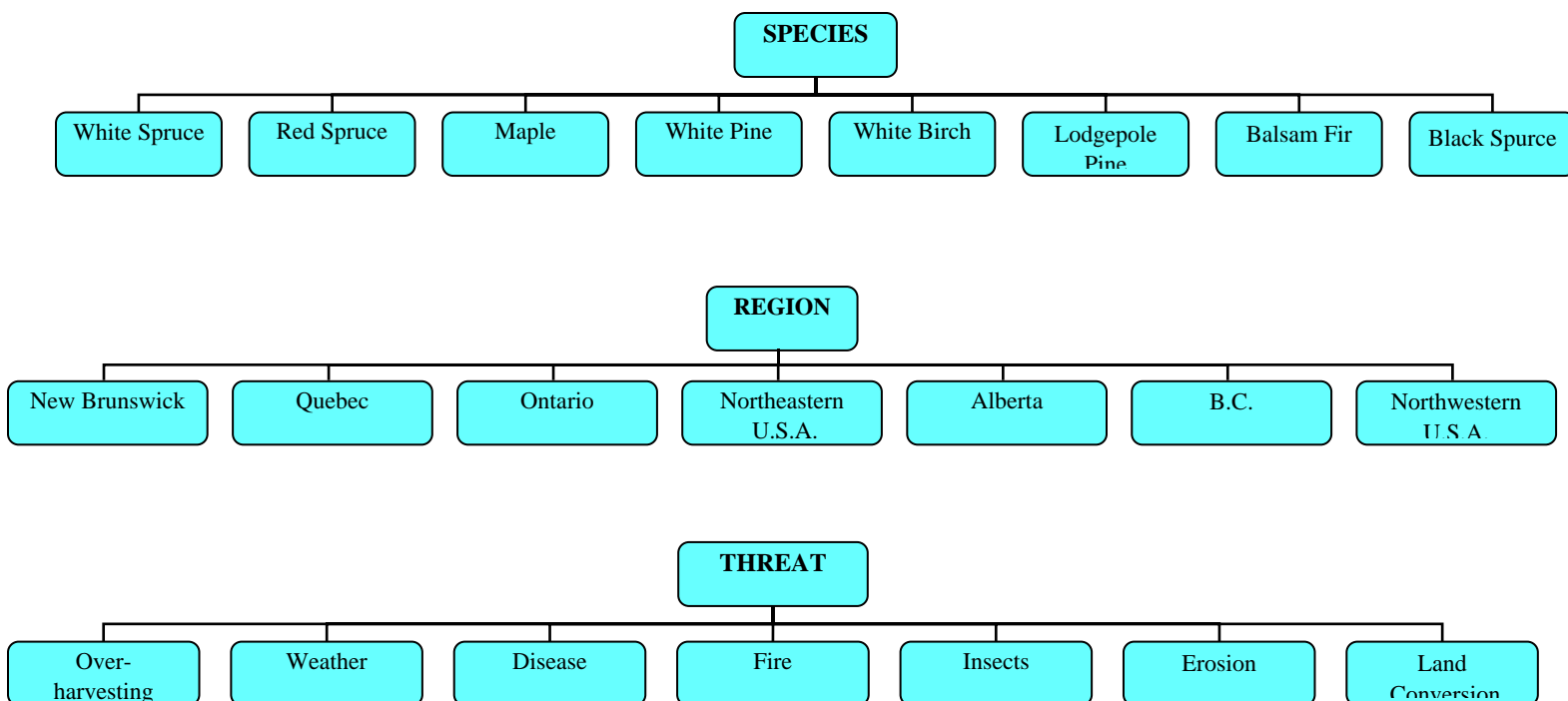


Figure 16

Option 3: Species – Region – Threat

<p>WHITE BIRCH</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>erosion</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p>	<p>RED SPRUCE</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p>	<p>WHITE PINE</p> <p><u>New Brunswick</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>erosion</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p>	<p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>fire</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p>BALSAM FIR</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p>
<p>WHITE SPRUCE</p> <p><u>New Brunswick</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p>	<p>MAPLE</p> <p><u>New Brunswick</u></p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>fire</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.W. U.S.A.</u></p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p>	<p>BLACK SPRUCE</p> <p><u>New Brunswick</u></p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>Quebec</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p><u>Ontario</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>N.E. U.S.A</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p>	<p>LODGEPOLE PINE</p> <p><u>Alberta</u></p> <p>insects</p> <p>weather</p> <p>erosion</p> <p>disease</p> <p>fire</p> <p>over-harvesting</p> <p>land conversion</p> <p><u>B.C.</u></p> <p>insects</p>

Figure 17

FINE TUNING

Any of those options could be further fine-tuned by exchanging the sub-groups with the sub-sub-groups and vice versa. Here's how this would look for a short excerpt from Figure 11:

<i>Original</i>		<i>Fine-Tuning</i>	
NEW BRUNSWICK	land conversion	NEW BRUNSWICK	white pine
<u>white spruce</u>	insects	<u>insects</u>	<u>over-harvesting</u>
insects	fire	white spruce	black spruce
land conversion	<u>black spruce</u>	white pine	<u>land conversion</u>
<u>maple</u>	over-harvesting	<u>weather</u>	white spruce
weather	land conversion	maple	maple
erosion		<u>erosion</u>	black spruce
fire	<i>[the rest of the list has been cut off here]</i>	maple	<i>[the rest of the list has been cut off here]</i>
		<u>fire</u>	
		maple	

Figure 18

IMPORTANT NOTE

Figures 9 to 18 provide excellent examples of how some organization structures can be flipped upside down. I've used them for precisely that reason. In practice, however, your imagination is the only limit to the number of ways that a given body of information can be organized. In designing possible structures, you may have to be more creative in assigning labels to various parts of the text.

GROUPING SCHEME OVERLAYS

In addition to grouping material by subject, you may well see recurring themes in the type of information you want to convey. Indeed, the type of information may take precedence over the subject of the information. That's to say that you might start with a grouping scheme based on the type of information conveyed. Then you would subdivide that information by subjects.

STRUCTURE

The structure of briefing material often follows this pattern (similar to what I've used in the section on [Memos to Senior Executives](#)):

1. opening paragraphs (often an issue statement);
2. body (background and considerations); and
3. closing paragraphs (conclusions or recommendations).

In longer briefing notes, however, the structure could include any or all of the following:

- summary;
- definition of the issues;
- objectives;
- background;
- status;
- fact-finding;
- analysis;
- options;
- arguments;
- pros and cons;
- conclusions; and
- recommendations.

A KEY CHALLENGE IN ORGANIZING THE CONTENT

A key challenge will arise in deciding at which organizational level(s) to apply the elements of your structure. This becomes a type of overlay on top of your organization of subjects in the briefing note.

To explain, I'll use the sample organization structure from Figure 11 above. You'll see that the organization structure has four levels:

1. the briefing note as a whole;

2. region (Northeastern U.S.A., New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, Northwestern U.S.A.);
3. species (white spruce, red spruce, maple, white pine, white birch, lodgepole pine, balsam fir, black spruce); and
4. type of threat (over-harvesting, weather, disease, fire, insects, erosion, land conversion).

The elements of your structure might be applied at any of those levels. In some cases, you may find that you need to apply it at more than one level or at all levels, going into progressively more detail at the lower levels. This will be a judgement call that only you can make.

On the next page, Figure 19 shows how things might work out for the example I used. Figure 20 shows another option for the overlay shown in Figure 20. In the latter case, the bottom two levels of the overlay show how information might be organized first by the type of information conveyed and then by the subject of the information.

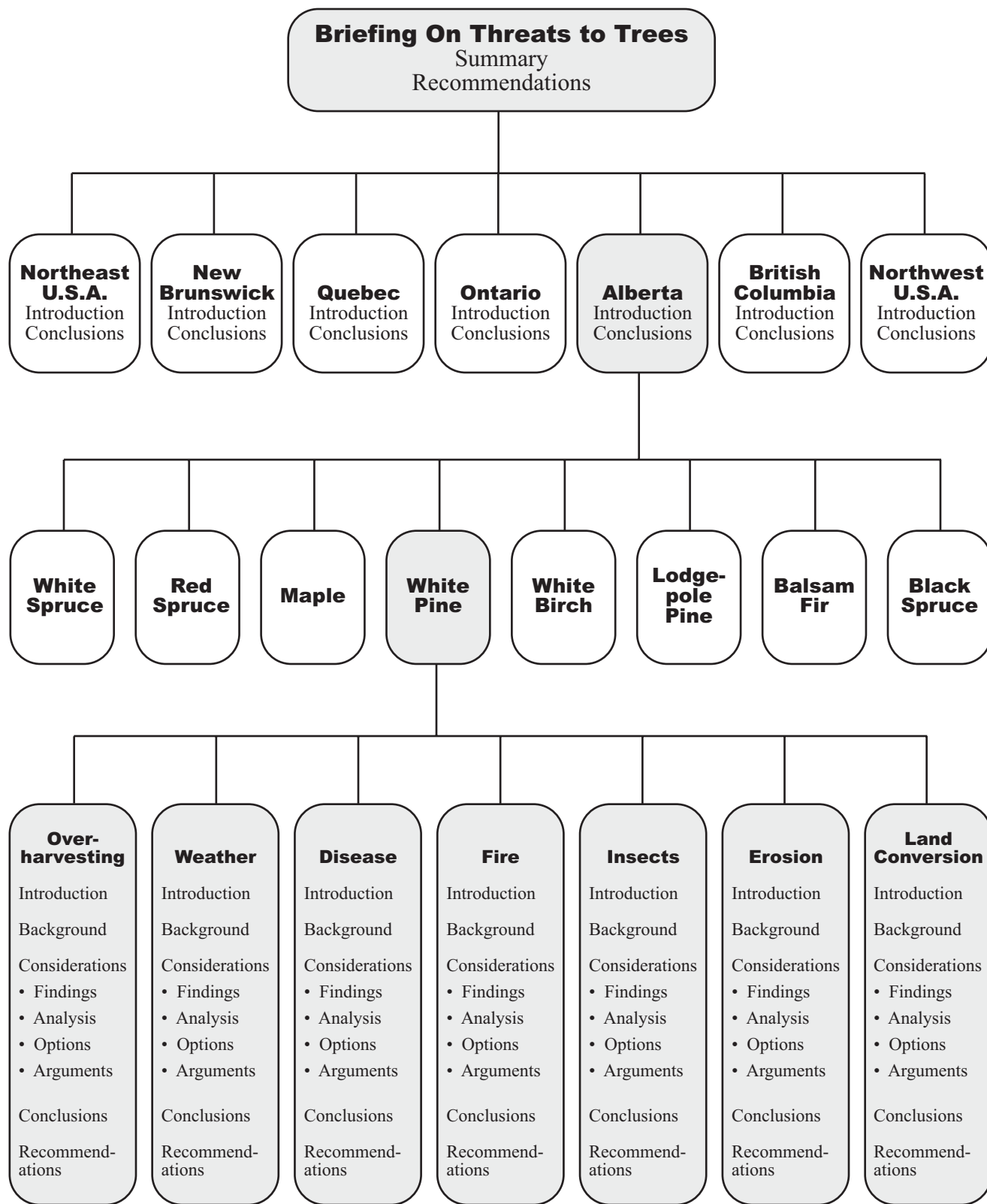


Figure 14.19 Grouping Scheme Overlay

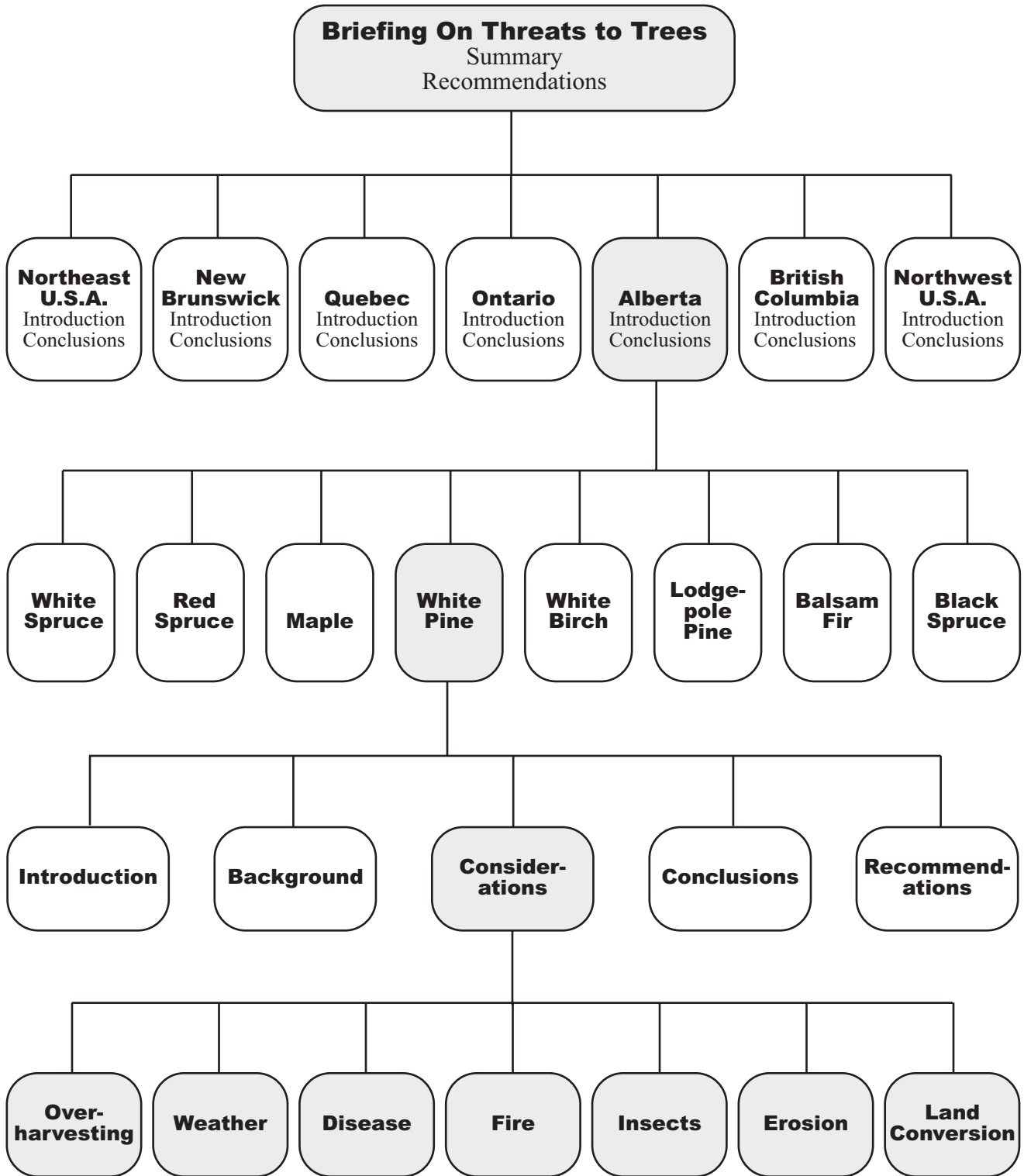


Figure 14.20 Another Option for a Grouping Scheme Overlay (Bottom Two Layers)

SEQUENCING: SAMPLE MESSAGE ON TREES

Once you have settled on your grouping scheme, you will need to decide how to sequence material within it. Within any given division of your grouping scheme, what comes first? What comes next? What comes last?

A general rule of thumb is that what comes first and what comes last are most likely to be noticed. However, that is just one of many considerations that might guide you in deciding how to sequence your material (see page 8).

RANDOM SEQUENCING

Have a look back to the grouping scheme shown on in Figure 17. Under “White Pine”, you’ll see a section on Alberta. Within that section, I’ve sequenced the threats as follows: That sequence is random. There is no reason that one threat has been placed before another.

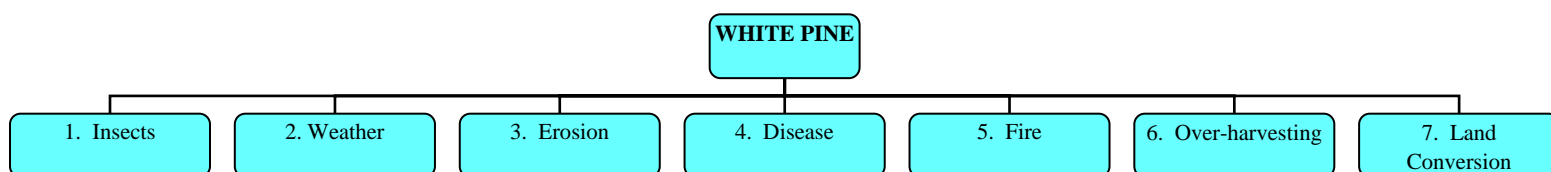


Figure 21

ALPHABETICAL SEQUENCING

I could give the sequence it a measure of reason by rearranging the threats in alphabetical order:

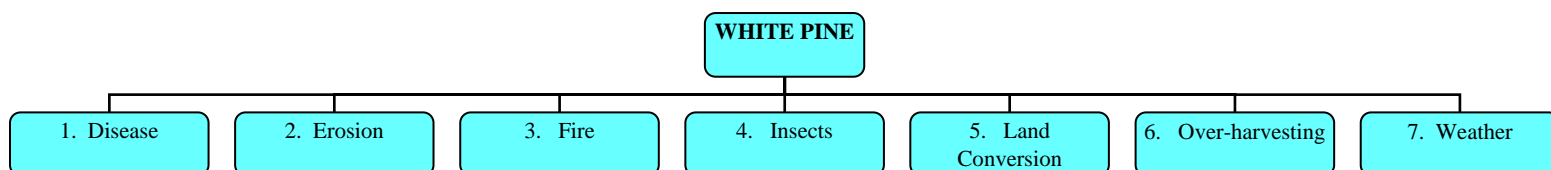


Figure 22

NUMERIC SEQUENCING

For such a short list, however, alphabetical ordering doesn’t accomplish much. Another approach might be to attach a dollar figure to each threat in terms of loss to the forest sector as a

whole. Using obviously fictitious figures, here's what I might come up with for the dollar values:

- \$168 — disease;
- \$131 — erosion;
- \$238 — fire;
- \$105 — insects;
- \$101 — land conversion;
- \$108 — over-harvesting; and
- \$127 — weather.

With this information, I can now sequence the sections in order of the economic impact of each threat, starting with the highest impact. Here's the resulting sequence:

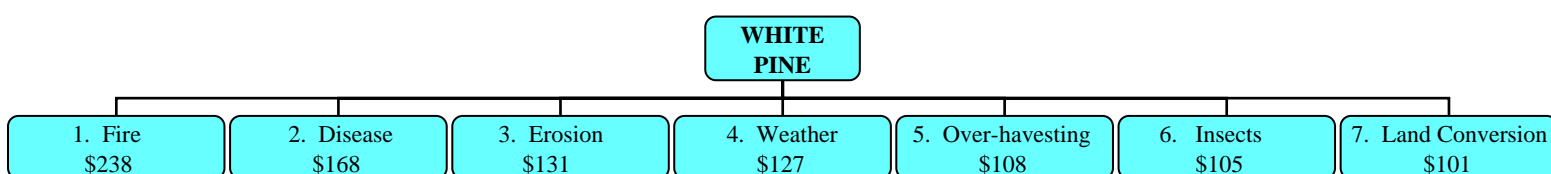


Figure 23

Those are two options. Here are two other numerical sequences that I could have used instead:

- number of hectares affected by each threat; and
- estimated cost of addressing each threat effectively.

Yet another sequencing criterion might be the priority assigned to the threat by stakeholders.

SEQUENCING THE NEXT LEVEL UP

Geographical Sequence

Jumping one level up in the grouping scheme in Figure 17, you'll see that I've sequenced material under in rough geographical order. I start in the east and move west, pausing to jump down to the northeastern U.S. before leaving the eastern provinces. Here's the sequence:

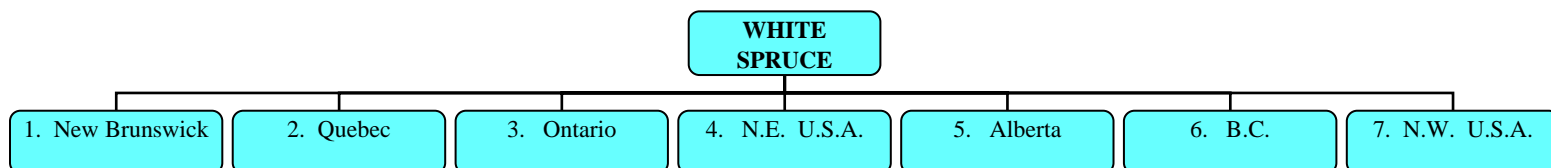


Figure 24

As with the threats themselves, I could have sequenced the material in alphabetical order of the regions. Again, however, that is probably not a useful criterion for such a short list.

Numeric Sequence

Alternatively, I could assign a total dollar value to the threats in each region, just as I did with the individual threats (again, using obviously fictitious dollar figures):

- \$116 — New Brunswick;
- \$241 — Quebec;
- \$292 — Ontario;
- \$348 — N.E. U.S.A.;
- \$978 — Alberta;
- \$997 — B.C.; and
- \$876 — N.W. U.S.A.

Using that criterion, I come up with the following sequence, starting with the highest economic impact:

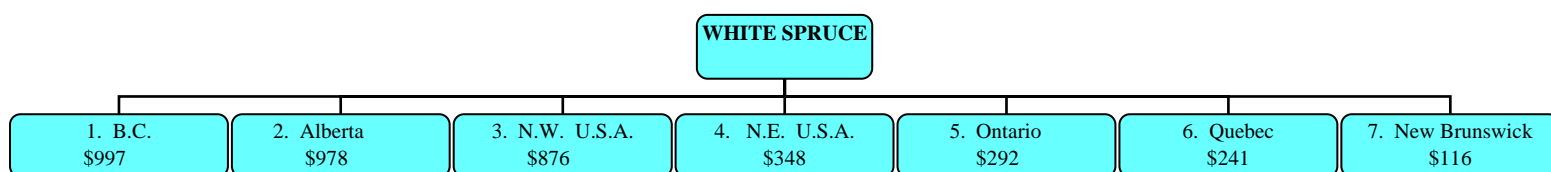


Figure 25

Those are just a few examples of sequencing. For your own messages — each with its own objective, its own audience and its own content — you will have to decide for yourself which of an infinite variety of criteria will be best-suited to your needs.