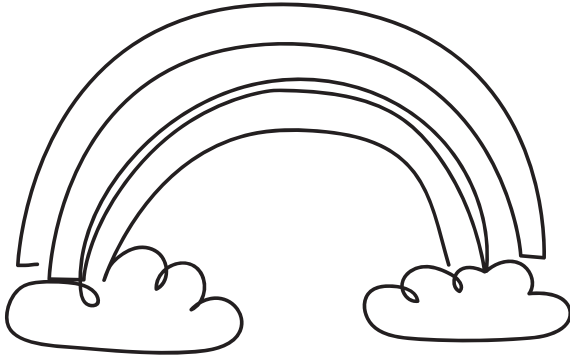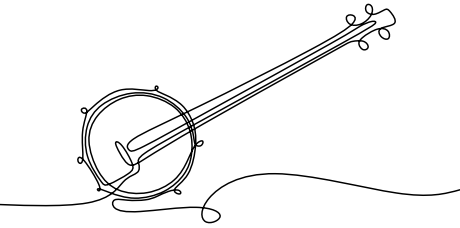# RAINBOW CONNECTIONS



## 7 ways to make our readers' dreams come true

Goldfinch

# WRITING, INSPIRED BY A FROG

The world's most famous frog once strummed his banjo and sang about the "rainbow connection".

From his swamp, Kermit bravely pondered whether the intangible could be made tangible. Whether rainbows – and the dreams they often represent – could ever be more than illusions.

Kermit thought they could, and off he hopped to make real his dreams.

Rainbows and dreams are tantalising topics, packed with joy and promise. It might seem a stretch to link them with the everyday task of business writing. But this little guide is going to see where the metaphor takes us.

It will ask what we, as writers, can learn from rainbows. Can they help us connect with our readers and, ultimately, make their dreams come true?

I think they can.

Apparently, I am not one to disagree with a singing frog.

Click here to watch Kermit singing Rainbow Connection from The Muppet Movie on YouTube.

# THE CONNECTIONS

This guide links 7 features associated with rainbows to 7 dreams that our readers are all likely to share.

Just for fun, the guide comes with its very own digital mixtape – also known as a YouTube playlist! Wherever you find a music icon, you can click through to a rainbow-related song. Or you can access the full playlist here.

We work on the unceded lands of the Darkinjung and Guringai peoples. We pay our deep respects to their Elders, and we pay the rent.

# REFRACTION
## OPEN UP ACCESS

### Refracting content for people with print disability

In the immortal words of Lewis Carroll, let's begin at the beginning – with the way rainbows are formed.

Refraction happens when sunlight meets water in the air. The white light slows, bends and splits into multiple colours inside each droplet. The colours then reflect and re-emerge as a rainbow.
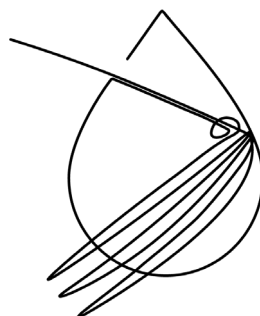
Now, let's imagine our content as sunlight. It too can be refracted if we publish in a range of formats. And there's a very good reason for doing this: refracted content will be more accessible to readers, especially those with a print disability like blindness or dyslexia.

### Planning for print accessibility

We should plan for accessibility from the concept stage. The key is to create "born accessible" files that can flow into a rainbow of formats with minimal intervention. Questions we should ask ourselves include:

• Will I print in hard copy? Will I publish on a website in HTML, Word or PDF?

• Can I create a version using large print, audio or video? What about braille or Moon for touch reading?

• What will it take for my content to work in these formats?

Click here to listen to Rachel Sandy's Refractions on YouTube.

### Taking the first step

• Check out resources from print accessibility experts, such as Books Without Barriers: A Practical Guide to Inclusive Publishing.

• Push yourself out of your PDF comfort zone, as PDFs rarely open up access.

# BRIDGE OF LIGHT
## FOCUS ON CLARITY

**Crafting sentences to maximise clarity**

When light is refracted, the rainbow makes a full circle in the sky. But we usually only see the famed arc. In popular culture, this arc is often a bridge that connects our current, troubled reality to an enchanted place of happiness and understanding. Kermit sang about it; so did Dorothy.

Click here to watch Judy Garland's Over the Rainbow from The Wizard of Oz on YouTube. You might also like Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's version.

As writers, we are looking to build bridges for our readers so they can take a similar journey. But how do we ensure they reach a place of understanding?

One way is to write text that is luminous in its clarity. All we have to do is take it one step, one sentence, at a time.

**Making sure our words are familiar and useful**

The principles are simple. Every word on the page should be familiar to readers (or explained with care) and useful in conveying the main message.

This means not getting caught up in language that will be knotty and impenetrable for the people reading. It also means trimming any text that doesn't add obvious value.
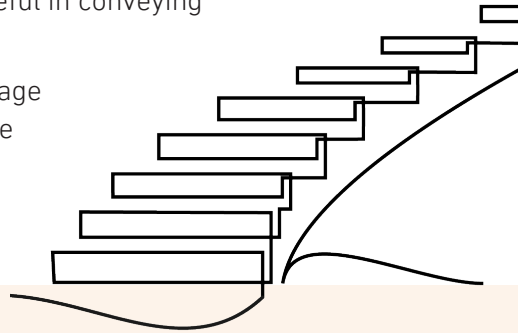
**Taking the first step**

- Look online for plain English resources, such as A–Zs of clear words.
- Ignore anyone who suggests that simplicity will threaten your credibility. It's just not true.

# POT OF GOLD
## START WITH SUBSTANCE

**Structuring text around our main message**

Another way we can bring clarity is by making the most of our pot of gold – our main message, the reason we're writing in the first place.
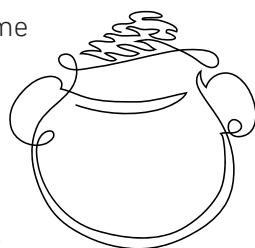
It can be tempting to be like the leprechauns and place our gold at the end of the rainbow. We might have poured everything into researching and framing the work. Surely we should step readers through that process too?

But readers aren't necessarily driven by process (outside some technical and academic arenas). They're driven by results.

**Prioritising what is most important**

So our job is twofold. First, decide what information is most important for readers. Then, position it where they can't miss it – at the front!

The most important information will vary with the type of document we're writing and each reader's own context. But they will generally be looking for:

• an outline of what we're writing about and why it matters

• the practical, actionable steps we recommend they take.

Whatever treasure we put in the pot of gold, it should appear at the start so readers aren't left wondering or searching.

Click here to watch Gabriel & Dresden's Tracking Treasure Down on YouTube.

**Taking the first step**

• Map out what readers want from your writing, as concrete actions and outcomes. Craft a summary or opening based on that map.

• Try not to be swayed by your own preferences or research processes.

# ORDER
## IMPROVE USABILITY

**Layering content in a consistent, predictable order**

The pot of gold will guide how we order the rest of our text, but we can also take inspiration from the colours of the rainbow. They always appear in those very familiar layers, moving from red through to violet. (You might sneak pink into the mix as well if you've grown up "singing a rainbow".)

Click here to listen to Peggy Lee's Sing a Rainbow on YouTube.

What's interesting is that readers appreciate a predictable order as much as rainbow spotters do. They rely on patterns and consistency to find their way.

**Creating a user-friendly package to aid readers on their journey**

To bring a sense of order, it's a good idea to present similar content in similar ways. Broadly speaking, we should create blocks of information that match each other – from the length of the text to the style of the headings.

We should:

- avoid the urge to wax lyrical on our favourite topics and skim over others
- limit the number of sections at each layer in the hierarchy – the fewer the better, so we don't overload anyone's short-term memory
- package everything up with thoughtful headings and visuals that reinforce the order.

**Taking the first step**

- Corral your thoughts by jotting them all down. See what you have to work with and what might be missing.
- Shape the points into a consistent, usable structure.

# COLOUR
## PAIR PRACTICALITY AND BEAUTY

**Balancing access, navigation and interest through design**

Staying with colours for a moment, let's move to their more literal use. Along with other design elements, colours can help make our content shine.

Design should support the content and aid reading. It's also a great opportunity to create interest for sighted readers.

But it's easy to be carried away and introduce elements that actually impair the reading experience. And we always need to be aware of what's accessible for people with print disability.
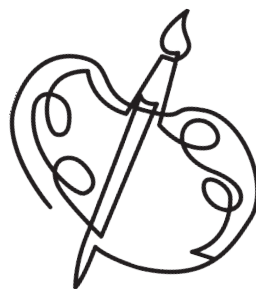
**Maximising value with a cohesive design**

Colour is a fantastic tool, but we should apply it with care to:

• create cohesion, thinking about primary and accent colours (especially across websites and other digital content)
• avoid legibility issues related to poor contrast or colourblindness
• minimise the risk of distracting or overwhelming readers.

Click here to watch Cyndi Lauper's True Colors on YouTube.

The same goes for other design features, from charts to icons to photos. We should ask ourselves whether they are adding value. How do they benefit readers? And are they accessible to assistive technologies?

**Taking the first step**

• Define a small colour palette and library of images or elements.
• Run pale colours, or unconventional foreground and background pairings, through an online contrast checker.

# CLOUDS
## BUILD TRUST

### Acknowledging good *and* bad news

As most rainbows are born of both sunlight and rain, it's hard to have a rainbow without a few clouds.

Sometimes, in business, we have to acknowledge the clouds as well as the sunshine – mistakes we've made or issues that could affect our clients.

Our instinct might be to shy away from bad news, especially if it could send people straight to a competitor. But by being open and honest in our writing, we can actually strengthen trust.
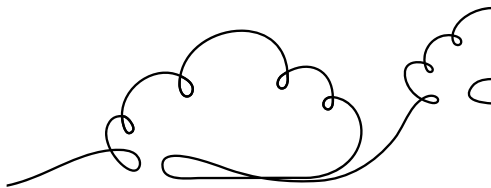
### Prioritising transparency over obfuscation

Like the pot of gold, it's best not to hide bad news away. That's particularly true if it's our core reason for writing. Camouflaging the worst parts in small print or a whirlwind of positive spin is only ever going to seem suspicious.

We're more likely to win readers over by:

- explaining what's at risk or what has happened as transparently as we can
- stating the steps we've taken to control the risk or ease the impact
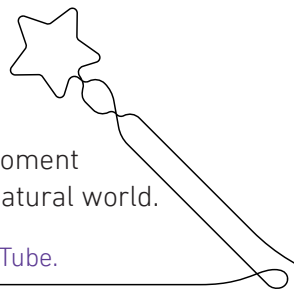- expressing genuine empathy for those who have been affected.

Click here to listen to Joni Mitchell's <u>Both Sides Now</u> on YouTube.

### Taking the first step

- Put yourself in your readers' shoes. Identify the information they would most want to know in the circumstances.
- Pass on that information in a clear and authentic way.

# WONDER
## FIND THE MAGIC

### Giving readers some unexpected magic

When clouds give way to a rainbow, we are offered a brief moment of magic. We might pause and marvel at the wonder of the natural world.

Click here to listen to Sol Rising's Magic and Wonder on YouTube.

As writers, it's worth considering whether we can give readers a bit of magic too. They will already be pretty impressed if our writing is complete, accurate and focused – if it answers their questions and gives them clear next steps. That's a feat in itself.

But they might still dream of more, to be lifted from the humdrum to the special. The big question is how to provide that spark of wonder without creating complexity or moving too far away from our main message.

### Grabbing and holding attention

Given the volume of content readers are faced with every day, we should always look for ways to grab and hold their attention. We might use:

- a power-packed opening paragraph with a "hook"
- a thought-provoking example, story or (dare I say) metaphor
- a simple, rhythmic style using other rhetorical devices like alliteration (starting consecutive or nearby words with the same letter)
- an interactive element or activity (that's accessible, of course).

### Taking the first step

- Be creative, but keep it simple and user-friendly.
- Rethink any text you've written a hundred times before, as it's probably become dulled by repetition.

# THE RAINBOW REVISITED

## REFRACTION

Make accessibility part of your process. Think about how format can either prevent or open up access.

## BRIDGE OF LIGHT

Help readers reach a place of understanding with simple, focused language. Lighten dense text to bring clarity.

## POT OF GOLD

Share your treasure early on – the what, the why and the how that readers need to be able to act. Don't hide it away.

## ORDER

Order your content logically and consistently so the structure becomes reassuringly familiar.

## COLOUR

Use a restrained colour palette and create accessible design elements that will help readers get to grips with your writing.
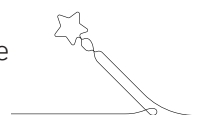
## CLOUDS

Be transparent and authentic when it comes to bad news. Leave out the spin and the excuses.

## WONDER

Look for that little touch of unexpected magic that will leave your work lingering in readers' minds.

## Goldfinch

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Come and chase some rainbows with us.