

# **C-cubed approach to academic writing**

Carmel's 'C' principles:  
**Coherence, Clarity & Completeness**



Centre for  
Learning  
Enhancement  
And  
Research



Let's start at the very beginning ...

- “I don't believe in writer's block. I sit my butt on a chair and I start writing. You can't edit a blank page. You can't edit a blank page.”

Jodi Picoult interview, SCMP, 5 June 2005

Not like this ...

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FBI-SPOTS NO. 64



I'M WRITING  
TO TELL YOU  
I HAVE NOTHING TO SAY

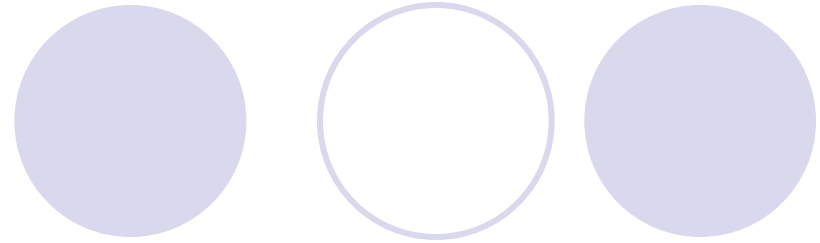
*Gallagher  
Brilliant*



## ***Activity 1. Just writing.***

- *Overcoming ‘writer’s block’ is an essential step to success. Take an idea for the next paper you have in mind and just write. No stopping. Write ‘blah, blah’ if you have to. Three minutes.*

# COHERENCE



## Structure of a good academic paper

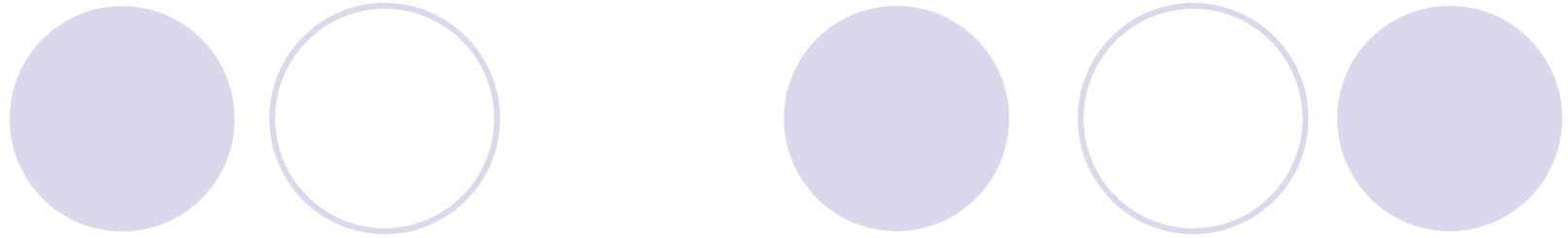
- Five 'hooks':

- title
- abstract
- first sentence(s)
- sequence of headings
- last sentence(s)



## ***Activity 2. Write a title for this abstract.***

- This paper looks at the low participation rates in computer mediated conferences (CMC) and argues that one of the causes of this may be an incompatibility between students' learning styles and the style adopted by CMC. The main learning style theories are viewed through the use of Curry's Onion Model. It is argued that Riding's Cognitive Styles Analysis is the most powerful theory with which to examine educational CMC. A framework for conducting an empirical investigation using this theory is outlined.



The author(s)' choice

# Learning Style Theory and Computer Mediated Communication

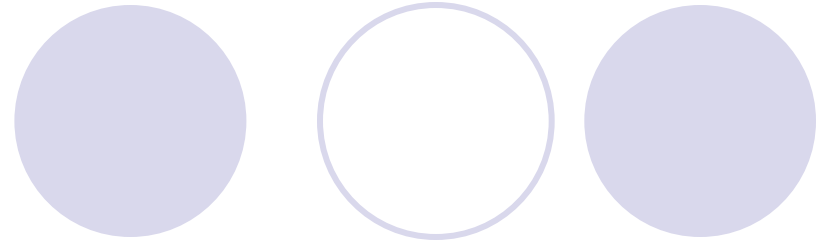
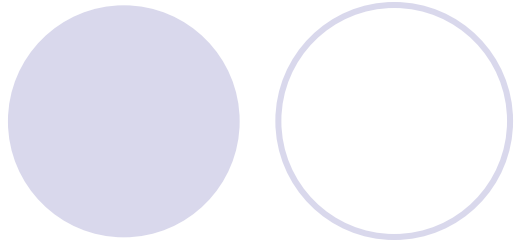
## **Activity 3** *Which would you read? Justify?*

- Remarks on the Quantum-Gravity effects of 'Bean Pole' diversification in Mononucleosis patients in Developing Countries under Economic Conditions Prevalent during the Second half of the Twentieth Century, and Related Papers: a Summary
- Quality and Rigour of Action Research in Information Systems
- What's in a Name? Conceptual Issues in Defining Electronic Commerce
- Identifying and Classifying Processes (traditional and soft factors) that support COTS Component Selection: A case study.
- Nice models but where's the business?
- The process of eliciting Information Requirement in Executive Information Systems from the perspective of the executive as an expert
- The nature of information
- Critical appraisal guidelines for single case study research.



# A coherent structure

- ***First sentence(s)***  
Get to the point. What is the paper's contribution?
- ***Sequence of headings***
- ***Last sentence(s)***  
So, where to from here?



- ***Introduction***

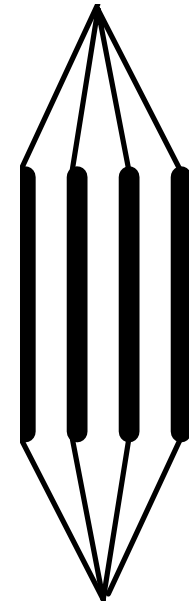
Tell them what you are going to say

- ***Main body***

Say it

- ***Conclusion***

Tell them what you said, & where you are going



# CLARITY

Two aspects here:

1. Need to have one key idea in a paper

2. Editing



*I'm busily editing...*



## *Activity 4 of nutshelling in pairs*

- *“In a nutshell, the idea for my paper is ...”.*  
*Each person describes the central idea of her/his paper in one or two sentences to her/his partner.*
- The ‘nutshell’ needs to be in your first paragraph.

# Editing



- In phases – it takes time
- Peer review **does** work
- Find your own style
  - active & passive voice
  - present & past tense
  - avoid generalizations; be succinct – see ‘On the lighter side’
  - avoid over quoting

# COMPLETENESS



- Four aspects here:
  1. Role of the literature
  2. Going beyond description
  3. Describing your data
  4. Attention to detail

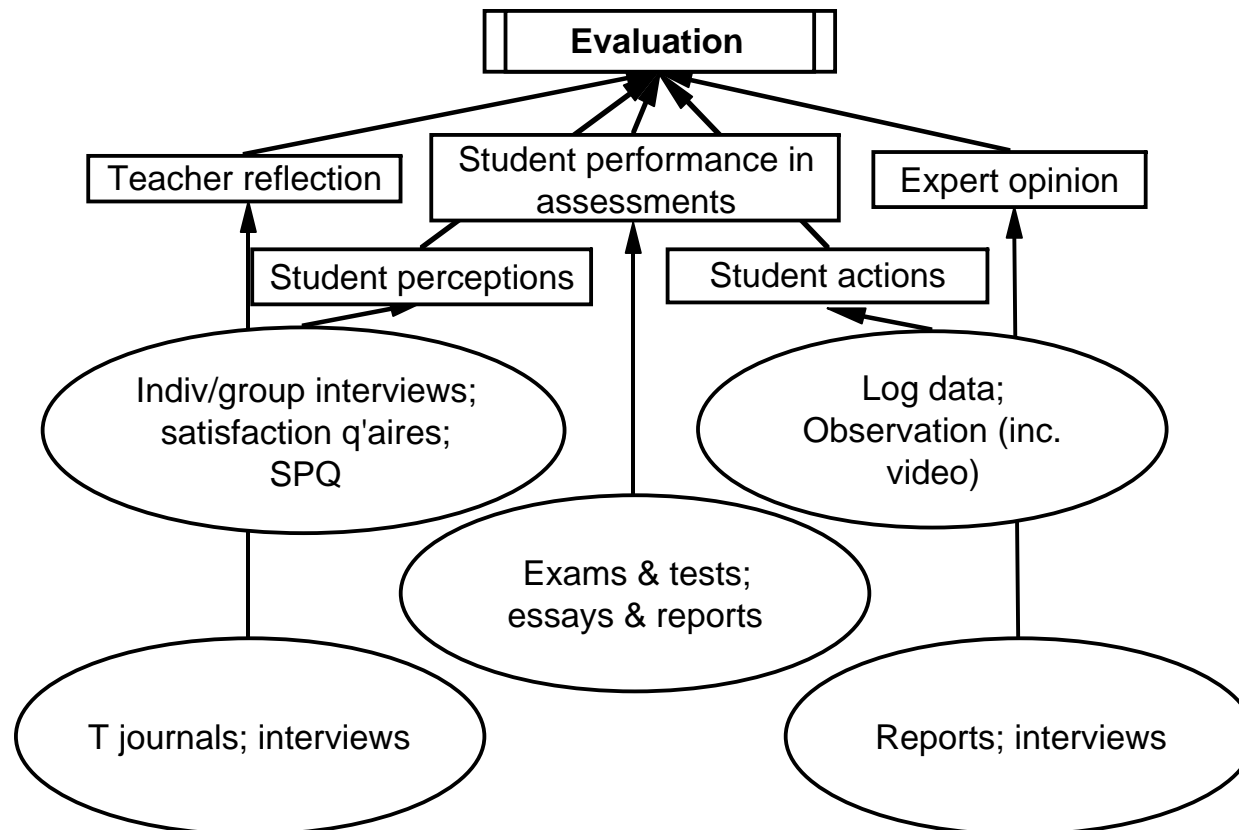


# Role of the literature

- Enough and not too much
- Avoid long strings of references in brackets.
- The reader wants to know how you have used the literature and integrated the ideas into your own framework – your own words.

# Beyond description to evidence

- You must have some evidence about the effectiveness of you what you have done.



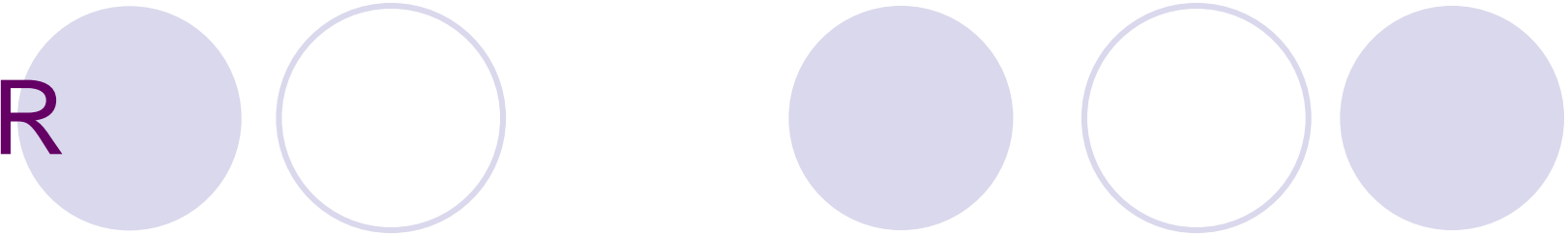
# Describing data



Make sure that **all** your data is described. It is **not** acceptable to say:

- ‘We interviewed a number of participants. Illustrative quotes are included in the discussion.’
  - How was the interview data collected?
  - Was it transcribed?
  - How was it analysed?
  - What themes emerged from the whole data set?
  - etc., etc.

OR



- ‘The online survey yielded 242 responses’ without describing
  - how you developed the questionnaire,
  - what claims there are to reliability and validity of the questionnaire,
  - the nature of the population,
  - whether you selected groups,
  - what the actual response rate was,
  - how open-ended comments were considered,
  - etc., etc.

# Attention to detail



- On submission AND on resubmission
- Format the paper properly
- This includes referencing, inc. URLs
- For a journal, always show how you have addressed referees' comments (mostly they are worth considering ... BUT ...)

## Carmel's worst review

Thank you for asking me to review this paper. The subject and assessment of 2 teaching papers (before & after) are valuable and worthy of an airing in our literature from time to time. However, for more 'qualitative' subjects such as this, the use of English + 'readability' is (to my mind) of great importance. The initial few pages were, quite simply, full of jargon and poor overall English style. Whilst I appreciate that this may be beyond authors

whose first language is not English and whose training is in science rather than the humanities, I do not believe that this is acceptable for the BSPS.

I have annotated the text (probably 'illegibly', as this is on a train!) extensively, but I would recommend a thorough re-write, preferably by another co-author who might not even need to be a plastic surgeon (or even medically trained).

The discussion, however, isn't too bad at all - it might even have been re-written when compared to the abstract/introduction/methods etc.

I am sorry if some of my annotations at the style come out (poorly!!) as the paper moves on - this only reflects what I expect any 'average' reader would detect if it were published 'as is'.

## Activity 5. Evaluating your own work

- Consider the most recent paper you wrote. What was its best aspect? What was its worst aspect? How could you improve it?



A sense of satisfaction and growth ...

# Where to publish?



- Carr-Chellman, A. A. (2006). Where do educational technologists really publish? An examination of successful emerging scholars' publication outlets. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 37(1), 5–15.
- <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467-8535.2005.00522.x>
- emerging scholars – EMs

### *Most frequent pub outlets among EMs*

<i>Journal</i>	<i>Total pubs EMs</i>	<i>No. EMs</i>
Computers in Human Behavior	9	3
Computers in the Schools*	4	3
Educational Technology*	8	5
Educational Technology Research and Development*	24	9
International Journal of Educational Telecommunication	5	3
Journal of Computing in Higher Education*	4	2
Journal of Educational Computing Research*	10	5
Journal of Educational Technology Systems	5	3
Journal of Interactive Learning Research*	4	4
Journal of the Learning Sciences	8	3
Journal of Research on Computing in Education*	9	4
Performance & Instruction	4	2
Performance Improvement Quarterly	4	2
School Community Journal	4	1
Tech Trends* (*From the Holcomb <i>et al</i> (2003) lists)	18	8

**COHERENCE**



A best paper!

**COMPLETENESS**

**CLARITY**