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**THE KNOWN-NEW CONTRACT**

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The known-new contract is the general expectation that new information will be preceded by known information. It is useful because it facilitates the process of comprehension by suggesting how we might fit the new information into the framework of what we already know. We present information in this way all the time without giving it much thought, and using the known-new contract consciously can be a very effective way to improve the clarity and cohesiveness of writing. Writers who are attentive to the known-new contract recognize that by providing the reader with known information that links the new information into what has already been established they can satisfy reader expectations at the sentence-level and produce more cohesive prose.

The known-new contract can be fulfilled in many ways, including by:

- Continuing previously stated themes or metaphors and referring to information a reader can safely be presumed to know.
- Using repeated or related words, phrases, and sentence structures.
- Choosing transitional words or phrases that drop hints about what the reader can expect next.

For example, Martin Luther King, Jr. does this quite a bit in the following:

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity. But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free.

One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land.

So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.