

Communication Skills: Lecture No. 18

Module 6

Lecture 2

REPORT WRITING



In this lecture you will learn about the preparatory steps to writing reports, the evaluation of the material, organization of the material, writing of the first draft, drafting and editing of the report, and presenting the visuals.

Report Writing

- Preparatory Steps to Writing Reports
- Evaluation of the Material
- Organizing the Material
- Writing the First Draft
- Drafting and Editing
- Presenting the Visuals



Remember . . .

- Reports are objective, factual and written on the basis of evidence collected.
- So the primary job of a report writer is to collect the evidence, analyze it and then interpret it.

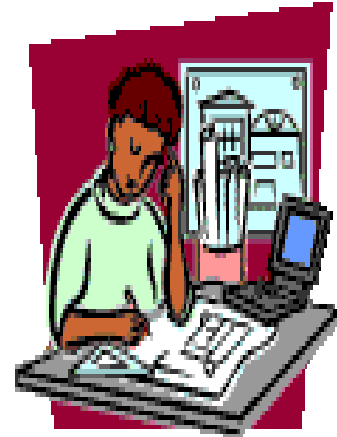


PREPARATORY STEPS TO WRITING REPORTS



You need to have lot of preparation and planning in order to write a very effective report. Successful report writers invest time in thorough preparation and meticulous execution of the plan. The following aspects of report writing need adequate plan and systematic preparation:

- **Identifying the purpose and scope**
- **Knowing the audience**
- **Gathering Information**
- **Organizing the Data**
- **Sketching out an Outline**
- **Presenting the Visuals**



IDENTIFYING THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE

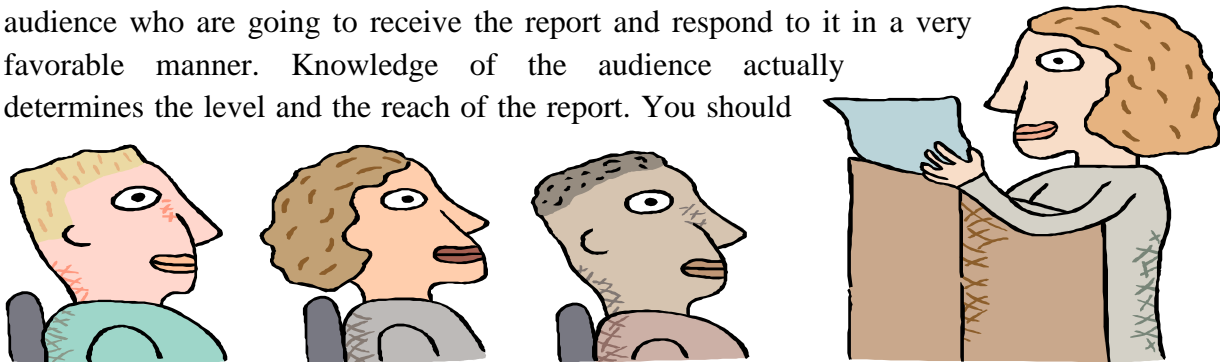


not have to lose lot of precious time later and you can achieve your target easily.

The basic purpose of any report is to inform, record and persuade. This actually germinates from clearly spelt-out requirements given in the form of *terms of reference*. Before you start, your boss, the organization, or the funding agent will give you the objectives and goals of the report in the form of *terms of reference*. These terms will clearly tell you the purpose, the aim, and the scope of your report. Initial extra time spent in identifying the scope clearly is worthy of minimizing wrong starts. Thus, if you invest enough time at the beginning, the advantage is that you do

KNOWING THE AUDIENCE

It is important that you should know your audience beforehand because ultimately it is the audience who are going to receive the report and respond to it in a very favorable manner. Knowledge of the audience actually determines the level and the reach of the report. You should



keep in mind six broad categories of audience, namely—

1. **Higher Authorities**
2. **Contemporaries and Counterparts**
3. **Subordinates/Peer Groups**
4. **Competitors**
5. **Share-holders**
6. **Clients and common people**

GATHERING INFORMATION

Gathering of information, that is, collection of data for the report is the fulcrum of entire report-writing process. The utility value of the report, in terms of its usefulness and effectiveness, will depend on your ability to gather appropriate data. You should gather information by using the proper method, consulting the right documents, approaching the right people and securing the right answers in time. In this regard, you first need to choose relevant working methods and go for suitable sources of information.





Relevant working methods involve the following:

- 1. Personal Observation**
- 2. Telephone Interview**
- 3. Personal Interview**
- 4. Mail Survey by Questionnaires**
- 5. E-mail Survey**



The information can be gathered from three basic sources:

- 1. In-house Records**
- 2. External Sources: Library**
- 3. Electronic Information**

EVALUATING THE MATERIAL

You need to assess the material that you have collected in terms of their authenticity and reliability. Ask the following questions and elicit honest answers:

Is the author an authority in the field?

Is he the subject expert?

Is he a specialist?

Is he a knowledgeable person?

Has he published so many books, articles?

Is the reputation of the publishers high?

Has he given various talks on this topic?

Is he corroborating his own story or backing his information with facts?

What is the opinion of other experts?

How does the peer group assess this author?

Is the information provided latest and relevant?

ORGANIZING THE DATA

Once you collect sufficient data, you may feel choked with the overload of information. Besides, the thoughts and ideas you have flow in random order. You do not know where and how to start and you wait for some inspiration. However, as explained before, report writing is not an emotional poetry writing; so, do not wait for inspiration. This is a factual report; you have collected the facts, present it by following objectivity and scientific precision.

In a technical report, control and organization of data is everything. The best way to organize the data is by starting to draw an outline of the report. The outline offers the lay out, the blueprint, the framework into which data can be inserted in an orderly manner. Your outline is your report in skeletal form and you are adding flesh and blood in terms of the factual evidence that you have collected.

Now let's look at a very simple sample outline on a report on *Global Warming*:

GLOBAL WARMING

- 1. Introduction**
 - 1.1. Definition**
 - 1.2. Causes of Global Warming**
 - 1.2.1. Ozone layer depletion**
 - 1.2.2. Increased use of Chlorofluorocarbons**
- 2. Effects**
 - 2.1. Cause of diseases like skin cancer**
 - 2.2. Premature Death**
 - 2.3. Acid Rain**
 - 2.4. Submergence of low lands**
- 3. Suggestions for Controlling Global Warming**
 - 3.1. Publicity about its hazards**
 - 3.2. Afforestation**
 - 3.3. Use of natural gas**



WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT

Once you prepare your outline, you need not wait for any inspiration and start writing the first draft. Now a days, word processor in computer has made the editing business very smooth. Since rearranging is easy in a computerized draft, you can even start writing the concluding part first, and then, go to the introduction later. While you start writing the first draft, keep in mind that you should be flexible enough to allow changes, and revise where necessary. Besides, it is not always possible to follow the original outline precisely. Outline generally provides a framework for organizing your material—but, it is not the be all and end all. So, there is no hard and fast rule that you should follow it accurately. New ideas flow as you write; what was important earlier seems insignificant at a later stage. The final aim is to produce an effective report and not to prepare a perfect outline.

DRAFTING AND EDITING

Drafting and editing have nuanced differences. Drafting indicates the initial writing process activated by a single author, that is, you. Whereas, editing often shifts from a single author to a team. Sometimes the editing is done by the author along with a group. Often there are expert editors associated with publishing groups who do the entire job in a professional manner. Editing refers to the post-writing process involving refinement of the report that has reached its final stage. During drafting, the author modifies the text considerably. But during editing, modifications are made only to achieve greater accuracy, consistency and clarity. Professional editors have sharp eye for spelling, language and formatting errors, hence, it is advantageous to make use of their support.

PRESENTING THE VISUALS



You know that a picture is worth thousand words. Therefore, if your descriptions are supplemented by pictures and illustrations, they will make your report more appealing and impactful. In case of describing a machine, for instance, presenting cross sectional or aerial view will help the reader to clearly perceive the function of the machine.

Illustrations and graphics are integral to a report and should not be used as showy displays. They amplify, clarify, and enhance the verbal description. Figures, column chart, line chart, flow chart, pie chart, etc., are all used in a report and they come under the category of illustrations.

Overall, illustrations and visuals help in presenting a large number of details in less space and with greater precision. Apart from making a report more lively, interesting, and effective, it helps in giving an integrated picture of a number of items. Especially pie chart and tabular column facilitate quick and easy comparison and contrasting of the results.

PRACTICAL HINTS


Take note of the given practical hints while you make use of visuals in your report.



Visual Presentation

Practical Hints

- ✓ Refer to all illustrations in the text
- ✓ Provide a context to draw inferences
- ✓ Place them immediately after the first citation in the text
- ✓ Number them consecutively—classify them as **tables and figures**
- ✓ Put the number and the title of the table **above** and that of the **figures at the bottom**



Put the number and title of the table above.

Table 1 Number of Units Produced

Year	Plant A	Plant B
2012	249	268

For figures, give the numbers below.



Fig. 1 Percentage graph showing preferences of News Papers

TIPS FOR MAKING A GOOD REPORT

Let me conclude this lecture as well as this module on *Report Writing* with some quick tips:

Tips for making a good report

- Submit the report by the deadline
- Make a good impression from the cover
- Make it free from typographical and formatting errors
- Clearly define the purpose and scope
- Give substantial description of the body



Tips for making a good report

- Reveal the results obtained by adequate summary & set of conclusions
- Structure it to facilitate selective reading (only abstract or only recommendations)
- Construct a logical argument and follow it up consistently and coherently.
- Create an overall impression of authenticity, thoroughness, reliability and accountability



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