



# IIT Madras

## BSc Degree

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# Professional Writing

## Introduction

- i) What is professional writing? (The domain and its meaning)
- ii) Differences between professional and literary writing
- iii) Elements of professional writing

# What is Professional Writing?

- A style of writing used in delivering authentic information on a subject by following systematic rules.

Eg. Catalogues of products, brochures, medical description on a tablet strip, user manuals, etc.

- The intended audience is specific and needs to possess recommended levels of knowledge on the subject in order to understand the content.
- The writing has a purpose to serve.

# Differences between professional & literary writing

## Professional writing

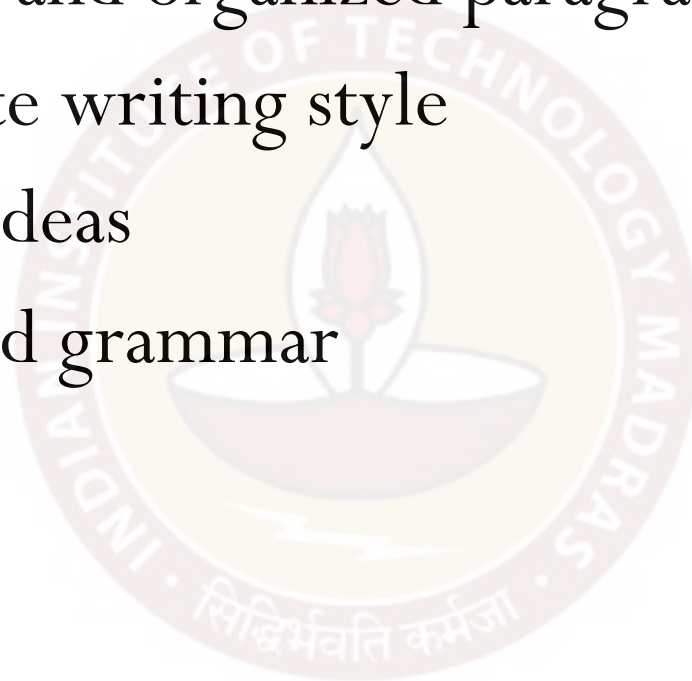
- Manages specific information so as to take suitable actions
- Written to inform and instruct
- Language used is direct, factual, specific and straight forward.
- It makes use of technical vocabulary, simple sentences, impersonal, and objective tone.
- Written for a specific audience

## Literary Writing

- Involves creative constructions such as poems or novels, and other compilations
- Written to entertain and amuse
- Language used involves techniques such as hyperbole, metaphors, etc. to bring in imagination and creativity.
- It appeals to emotions.
- It makes use of complex sentence structures and linguistic aspects such as ambiguity, dialects, etc.
- It is written for general readers.

# Elements of Professional Writing

- Developed and organized paragraphs
- Appropriate writing style
- Clarity of ideas
- Spelling and grammar

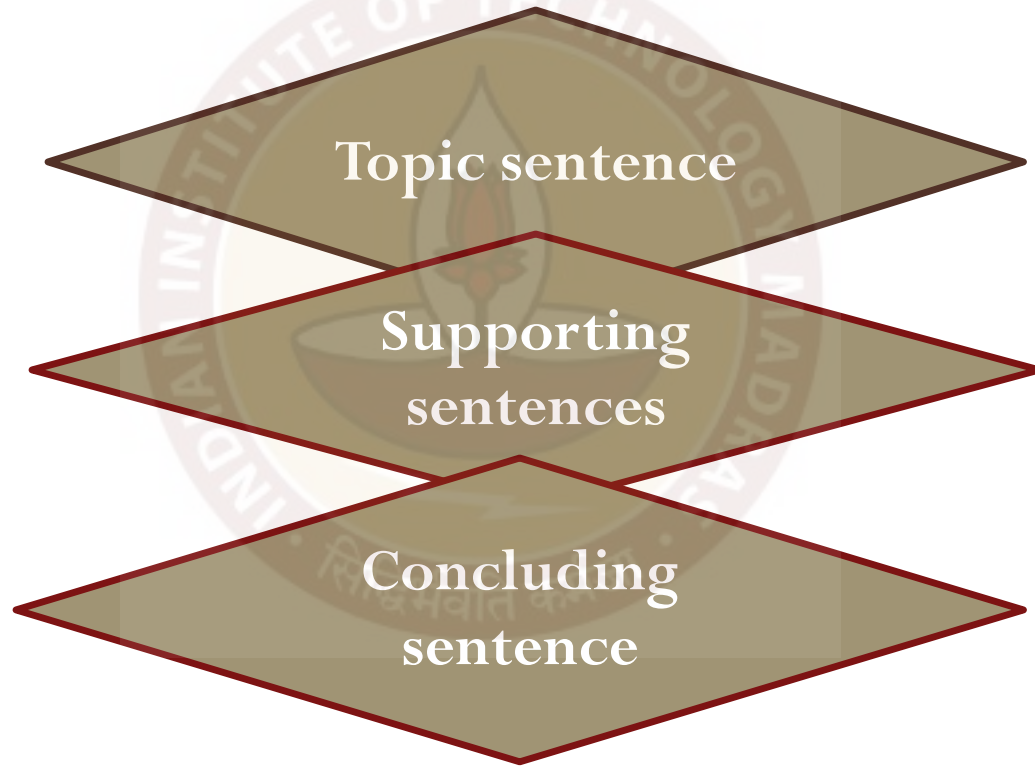


# Professional Writing

Development and organisation of paragraphs

- i) Structure of a paragraph
- ii) Strategies in writing an effective paragraph

# Structure of the paragraph



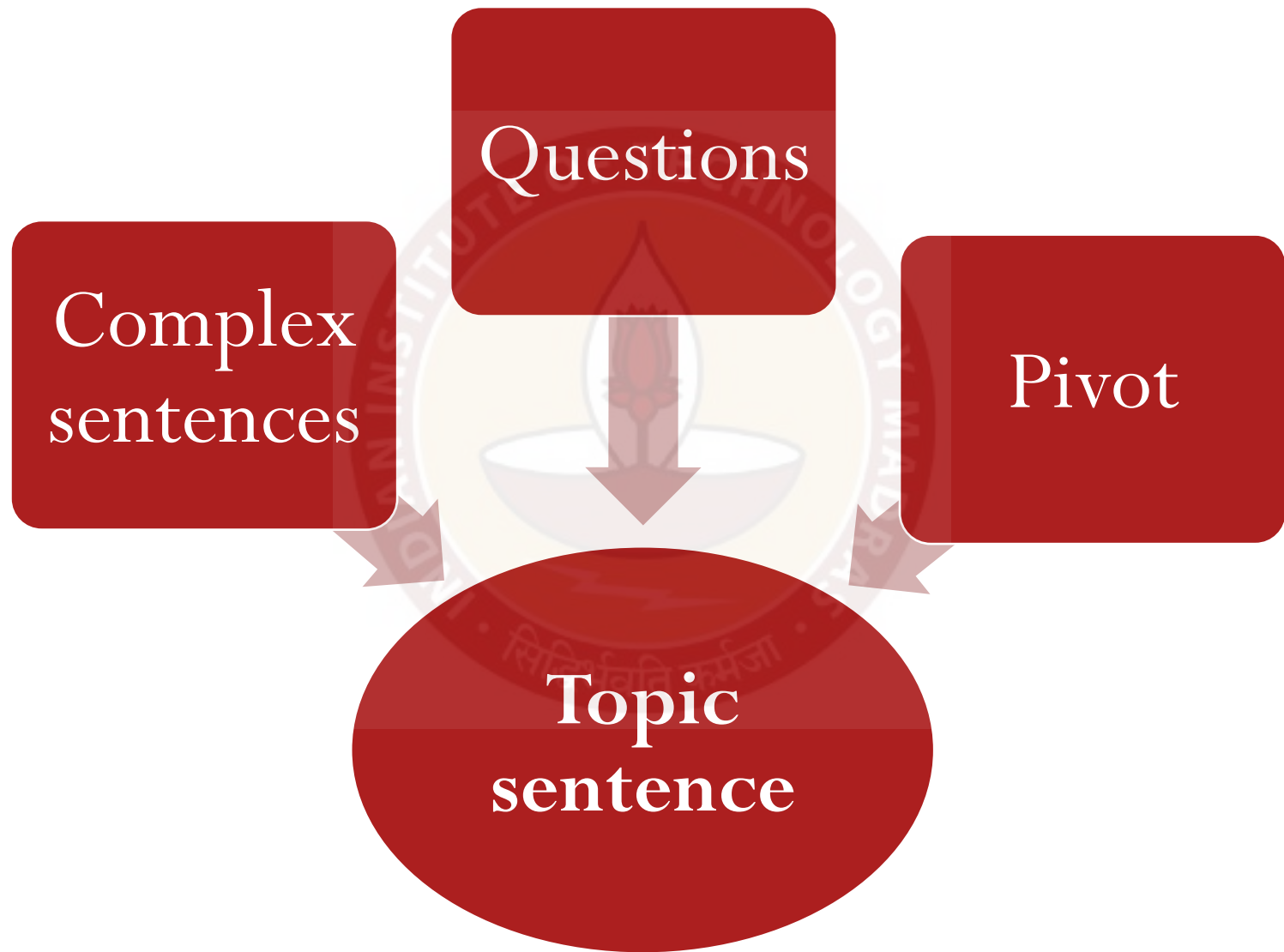
# Topic sentence : 'What' and 'How'

## WHAT?

- The topic sentence makes a claim about the topic in question.
- It should be arguable i.e. the paragraph should be such that the claim is established through it.
- It should reveal the main point / purpose of the paragraph.
- It should also connect to the overall attitude of the paragraph.



# HOW?



# Supporting sentences

- They form the substantial segment of a paragraph.
- They are tasked to add/ explain, prove or, elaborate the main point or the central theme of the paragraph.
- These sentences could most commonly do the following.
  - i) Give reasons
  - ii) Cite facts/ data/ statistics
  - iii) Use quotations
  - iv) Give examples

# Concluding sentence

- It is a mandatory segment in a stand-alone paragraph.
- The function of this sentence is to restate or reinforce the theme substantiated through the supporting sentences and the topic sentence.
  - A good concluding sentence could do the following.
    - i) Make a prediction
    - ii) Give suggestion(s)
    - iii) Give recommendation(s)
    - iv) Summarise the key points
    - v) Offer a final observation

# Strategies for writing a good paragraph

- Unity is a significant requirement in writing a paragraph. The components of a paragraph must present and point towards a single idea and provide for a wholesome idea.

## I. Strategies for unification

- Ensure the logical continuity of the idea presented in the paragraph.
- Repeat the key words.
- Use transitional words to add, contrast , or conclude.

## II. Strategies for making an argument

- i) Use an example to further/explain the argument.
- ii) To add to a given point use quotations.
- iii) Tell a story or narrate an anecdote if writing a personal paragraph.
- iv) Use a compare and contrast method if the analysis requires the subtleties and nuances of related events/ persons/ period etc. is to be explored.
- v) A cause and effect based organisation is useful when the relationship is that of one leading to the other.
- vi) Factual and scientific details are better represented by citing data, figures, and statistics.
- vii) Definition based style suits when introducing a new concept.

# Example: Structure of a paragraph

Traditionally, Flemish comic-book culture was dominated by long-running comic series with an unchanging cast of characters. Most of those comics, initially devised as gag strips or series in newspapers and magazines, are now facing the same problems as the traditional print media in which they are published. For more than half a century, annual compilation albums of such comic strips were one of the main sources of entertainment for young people in Flanders, with print runs of more than 400,000 copies. Today, comics are part of a much wider entertainment context, competing with films, games, animation shorts, the internet, social media, and so on.

Lien Devos , Essay on graphic novels

# Example: Strategies for unification

**Traditionally**, Flemish **comic-book culture** was dominated by long-running **comic series** with an unchanging cast of characters. Most of those **comics**, initially devised as gag strips or series in newspapers and magazines, are now facing the same problems as the traditional print media in which they are published. **For more than half a century**, annual compilation albums of such **comic strips** were one of the main sources of entertainment for young people in Flanders, with print runs of more than 400,000 copies. **Today**, comics are part of a much wider entertainment context, competing with films, games, animation shorts, the internet, social media, and so on.

# Professional Writing

Language and style

- i) Aspects of formality
- ii) Tone in formal writing



# Aspects of formality



FORMAL STYLE	INFORMAL STYLE
1. Less personal	1. More casual and spontaneous
2. Used for professional or academic purposes	2. Used to write to friends and relatives
3. Uses an objective tone	3. Uses an emotional tone

# What makes language formal?

- Specialized situations
- Audience expectations
- purpose



# Factors that make language informal

- Group jargons – any in-group specialized language
- Slangs, idiomatic expressions, colloquialism

Eg. Y'all, Asap, cool, yo

- Stereotypical and biased language- gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, disability, sexual orientation

Eg. Mankind, manpower, chairman, man-made (gender based)

- First person pronouns- I, me, my, we, us....
- Contractions- I've, You're, ....

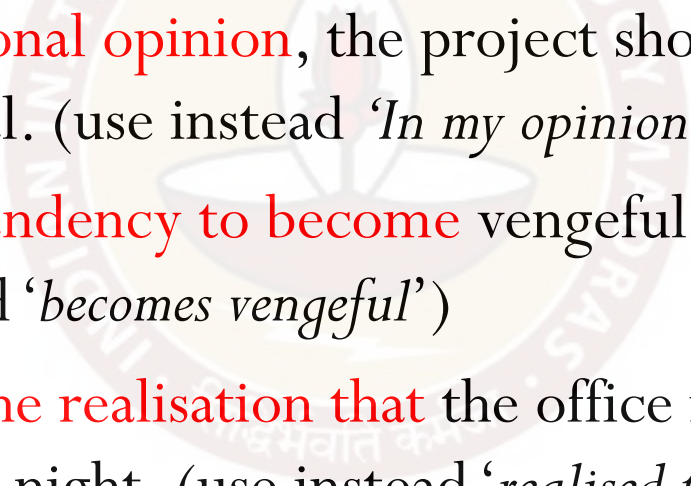
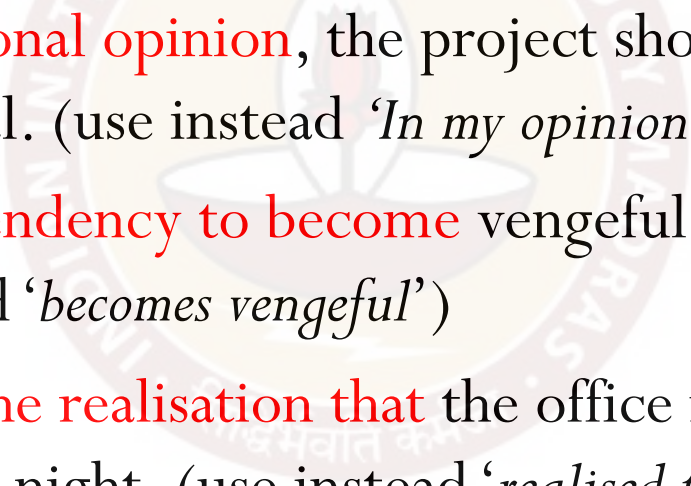
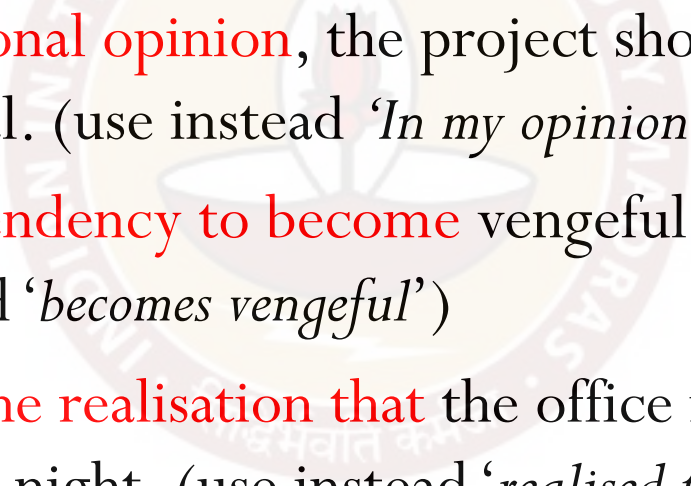
# Professional Writing: Style and clarity

Formal writing avoids phrases or sentences that are wordy, clichéd, jargonised, and are indirect to ensure clarity.

- Wordiness includes lengthy sentences that owe their length to cluttered phrases that are irrelevant to the meaning of the sentence.
- Clichés are overused expressions that lead to redundancy in writing.
- Jargons are inaccessible expressions that can make the writing ambiguous to the reader.

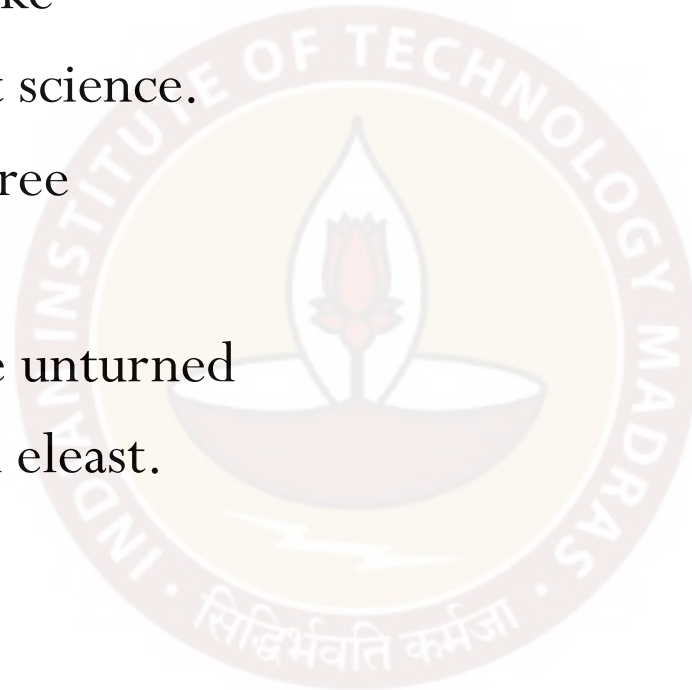
# Examples

## Wordy sentences

- i) **In my personal opinion**, the project should be considered for approval. (use instead '*In my opinion*')
- ii) She **has a tendency to become** vengeful when opposed. (use instead '*becomes vengeful*')
- iii) I **came to the realisation that** the office remains open till eight in the night. (use instead '*realised that*')

# Cliché

- Make no mistake
- It is not rocket science.
- Agree to disagree
- It is what it is.
- Leave no stone unturned
- Last but not the least.



# Jargon

- Every discipline and sub-fields have jargons that are specific to them.
- Below is a list of more common and general jargon in writing,
  - i) Tip of the iceberg
  - ii) Low hanging fruit
  - iii) Bottom line
  - iv) Big picture



# Tone in professional writing



# How to use objective tone in professional writing?

- Emphasis must be on ideas and things, not on people and feelings.

Eg. **I think that the argument is valid.**

These findings indicate that the arguments are valid.

- Evaluative words that are suggestive of non-evidence based findings or observations must be avoided.
- Avoid intense and emotional expressions.

Eg. The writing is **terrible / wonderful**. . (use instead 'less convincing' or 'well argued')

- Use modalities to allow room for disagreements.

Eg. **The policy does not negatively affect any sections of the society.**

There is a possibility that the policy works good for everyone.

- Use authentic sources for credibility.



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# Professional Writing

- i) Editing:
- ii) What is proofreading?

# Editing and proofreading

- Editing and proofreading constitute the next significant steps after the first draft of a piece of writing.
- Both include steps towards the revision of the written work for its content, style, language, and format.
- Editing involves revision of logistic errors in writing.
- Proofreading rectifies the grammar and surface-level errors in writing.

# Editing : What is it about?

- Content
- Overall structure
- Clarity
- Style

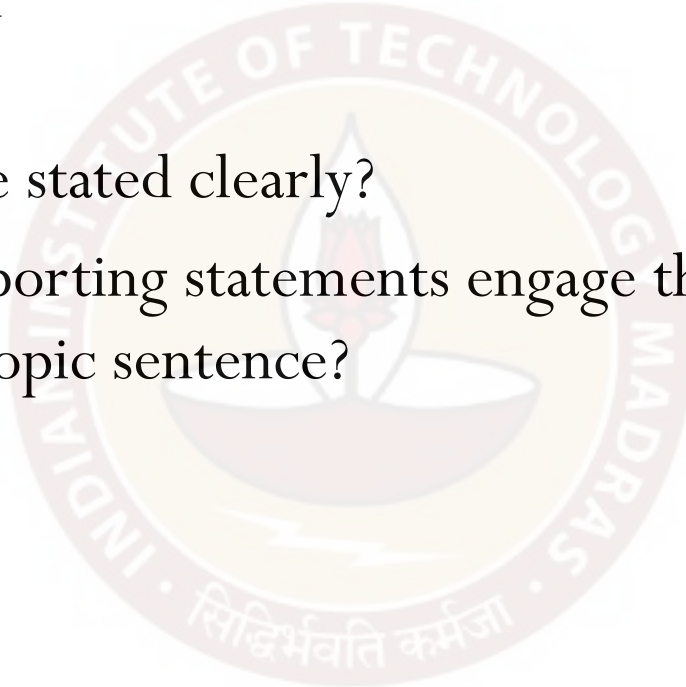


# Editing: CONTENT

- Is the major question answered?

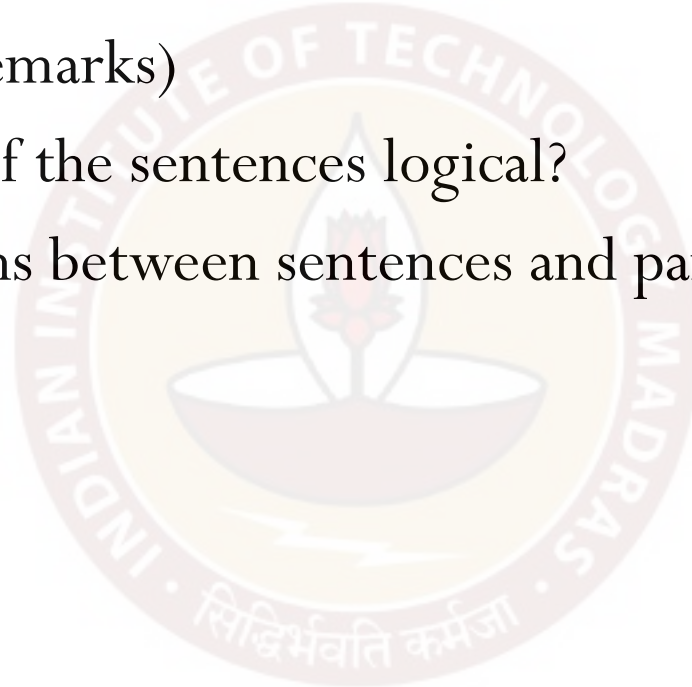
OR

- Is the purpose stated clearly?
- Does the supporting statements engage the purpose statement / topic sentence?



# Editing: OVERALL STRUCTURE

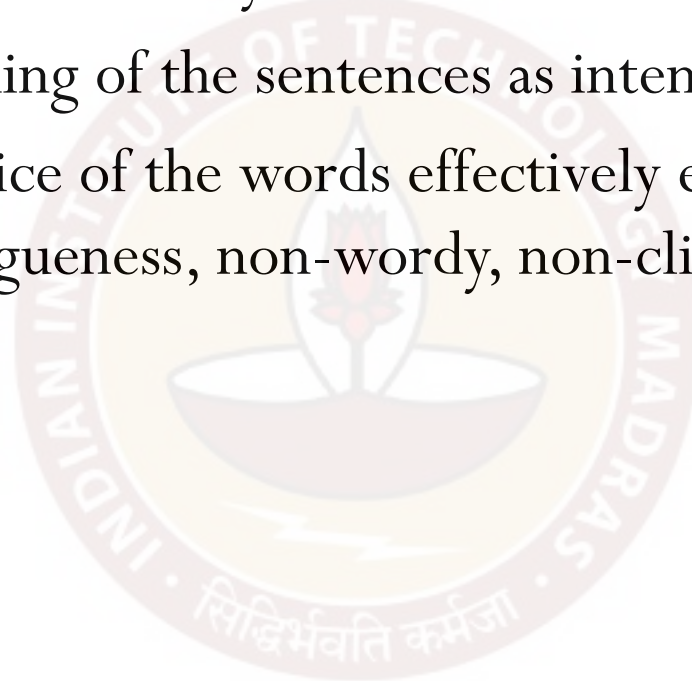
- Is there a clear introduction and conclusion? (topic sentence, concluding remarks)
- Is the order of the sentences logical?
- Are transitions between sentences and paragraphs clearly visible?





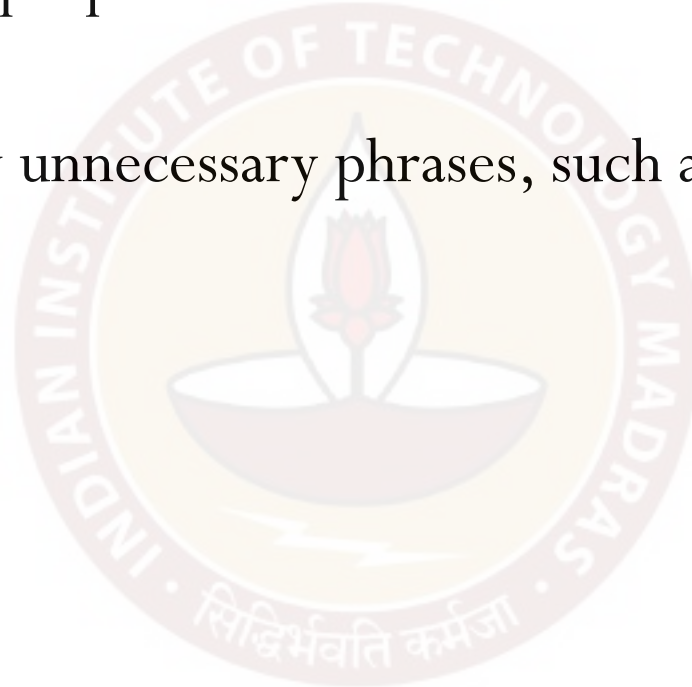
# Editing: CLARITY

- Are all the terms clearly defined ?
- Are the meaning of the sentences as intended by the author?
- Does the choice of the words effectively express the ideas?  
(free from vagueness, non-wordy, non-cliched, non-ornate  
etc.)



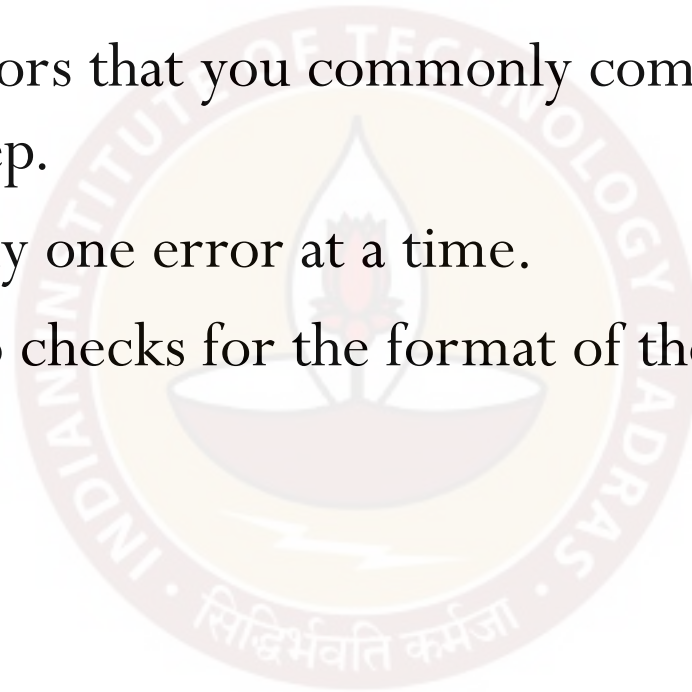
# Editing: STYLE

- Is the tone appropriate for the audience? ( objective and impersonal)
- Are there any unnecessary phrases, such as ‘due to the fact that....’?



# Proofreading techniques

- Read your work aloud.
- Make a list of errors that you commonly commit and look for them as a first step.
- Proofread for only one error at a time.
- Proofreading also checks for the format of the writing.



- - It rectifies the errors in -

Punctuation

Citations

Page numbers

Headers/ footers

Proper names

Fonts (type and size)

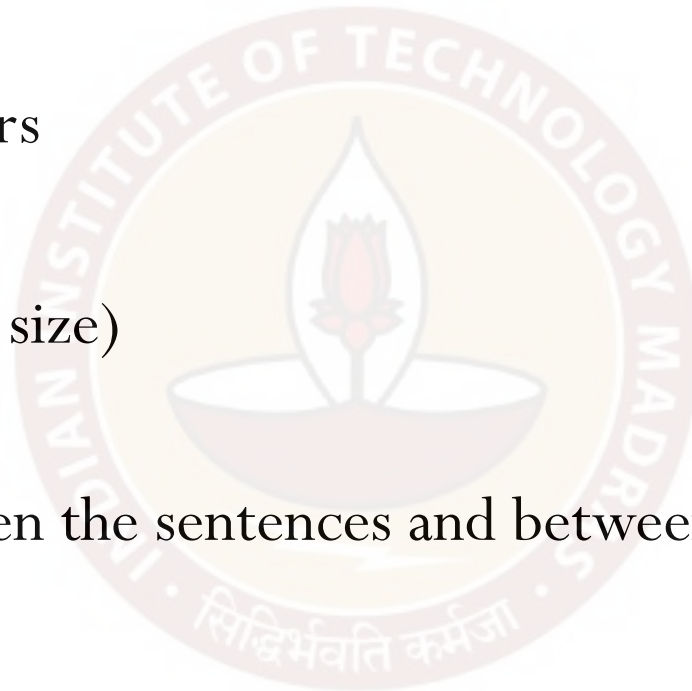
Indentation

Spacing (between the sentences and between sections)

Alignment

Spelling

Grammar



# Most common surface errors

## 1. Missing comma after introductory phrases

*Eg. According to the secretary, the files should be submitted in a sealed envelope.*

## 2. Vague pronoun references

*Eg. She gets a bus first and then the bike to go to her school. It is blue in colour.*

*She gets a bus first and then the bike to go to her school. The bus is blue in colour.*

## 3. Missing comma in a compound sentence

*Eg. I will write the email, and I will send the report to the manager.*

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#### 4. Wrong words

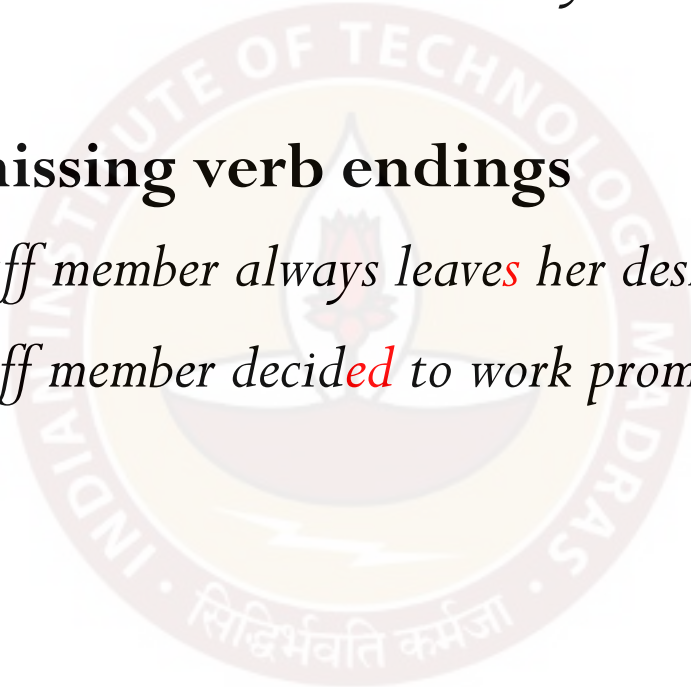
*Eg. You should all take the advise seriously.*

*You should all take the **advice** seriously.*

#### 5. wrong or missing verb endings

*Eg. The new staff member always leaves her desk unattended.*

*The new staff member decided to work promptly on the files.*



## 6. Comma splices or fused sentences

*Eg. I am skilled at typing, I can type at a high speed.*

*I am skilled at typing; I can type at a high speed.*

*I am skilled at typing, and I can type at a high speed.*

*I am skilled at typing. I can type at a high speed.*

## 7. missing or misplaced possessive apostrophes

*Eg. Ashas office desk looks really neat. (missing apostrophe)*

*Asha's office desk looks really neat.*

*Officer's should report to the centre on time. (misplaced apostrophe)*

*Officers should report to the centre on time.*

## 8. unnecessary shifts in tense

*Eg. The reports are presented to the clients, they have been verified.*

*The reports are presented to the clients; they are verified.*

## 9. wrong shifts in pronouns

*Eg. He was on their way back from work.*

*He was on **his** way back from work.*

## 10. sentence fragments

*Eg. Want to attend the meeting.*

***I want to** attend the meeting.*

*Since yesterday, the work has been postponed, waiting for it to resume.*

*The work has been postponed since yesterday. **I am waiting** for it to resume.*

## 11. lack of agreement between subject and verb

*Eg. I likes the ambience of my office.*

*I like ( **$\Phi$** ) the ambience of my office.*



▪

## 12. missing commas in a series

*Eg. The reports of the previous meeting, files and writing pads must be laid on the table before the members of the board arrive here.*

*The reports of the previous meeting, files, and writing pads must be laid on the table before the members of the board arrive here.*

## 13. lack of agreement between pronouns and antecedents

*Eg. Each of the emails have been sent to their recipients.*

*Each of the emails have been sent to **its** recipients.*

## 14. dangling or misplaced modifiers

*Eg. I have submitted the paper clips to the department that were left over.*

*. I have submitted the paper clips **that were left over** to the department.*



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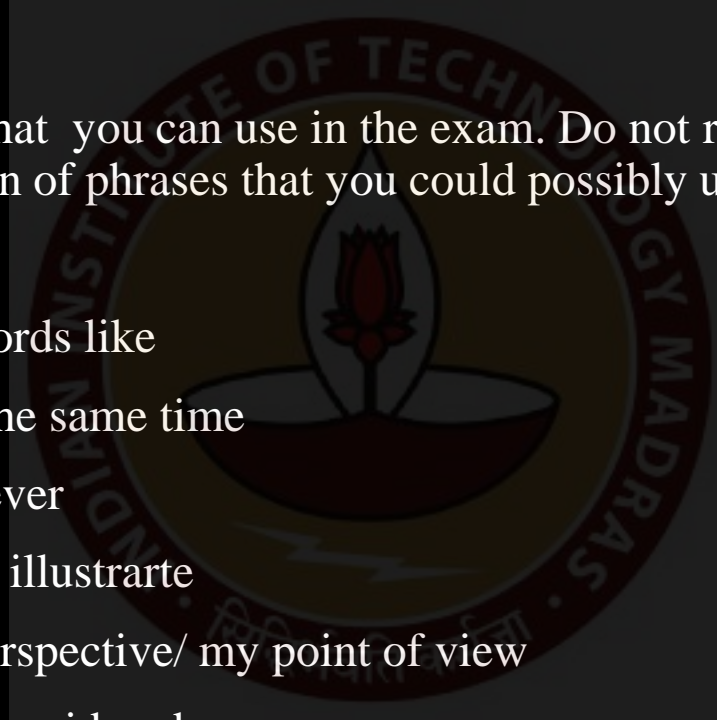
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# IMPROVE YOUR WRITING SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC WRITING EXAMS

KARTHIKA SATHYANATHAN



- Keep it simple : Simple done accurately is better than complicated done inaccurately. It is better to keep things simple and do it well rather than overcomplicate everything and do it badly. Show off your accurate English. Not the English that you are not sure of.
- Prepare set phrases and keywords that you can use in the exam. Do not rehearse what you are going to write. But you do want to have a collection of phrases that you could possibly use if the time arises.
- Have linking words prepared for words like
  - a) Compare – in the same way, at the same time
  - b) Contrast – on the contrary, however
  - c) Give examples – for instance, to illustrate
  - d) Give your opinion – from my perspective/ my point of view
  - e) Generalise – overall, all things considered
  - f) Express certainty – undoubtedly, of course

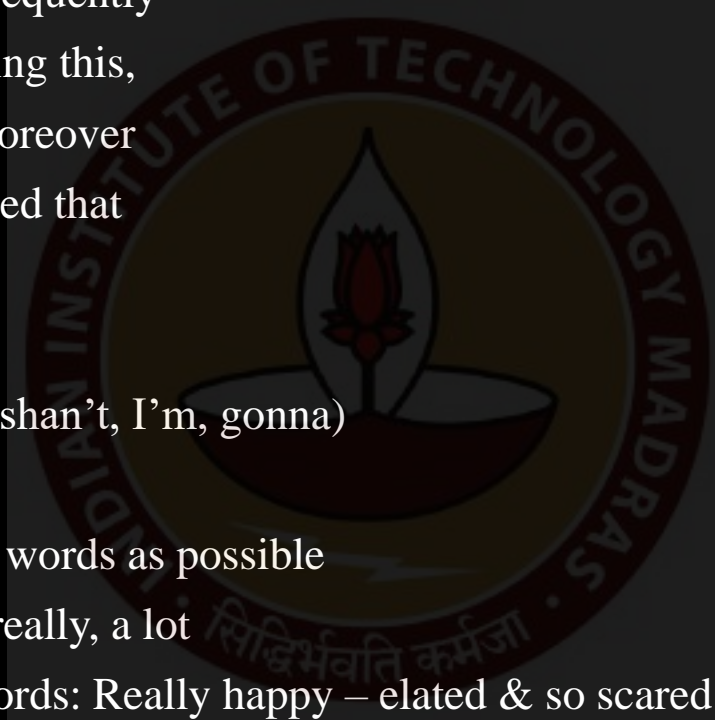


- a) Express partial agreement – in a way, to some extent
- b) Show cause – owing to, due to
- c) Show effect – for this reason, consequently
- d) Mark time – to begin with, following this,
- e) Add information – furthermore, moreover
- f) Express condition – unless, provided that
- g) Conclude – in summary, in short

- Do not use contractions (can't, don't, shan't, I'm, gonna)

- Reduce your word count : Use as few words as possible

- a) Avoid deadweight words : very, so, really, a lot
- b) Replace empty words with strong words: Really happy – elated & so scared – terrified
- c) Avoid the words “there is/there are” - There are many problems that we may encounter / We may encounter many problems.



- Read the right documents – For scoring well in an academic writing exam, it is important to read the right kind of materials. Are they asking you to write articles, reports, essays? Read accordingly. Do whatever you can to familiarise with all kinds of writing (they expect you to do in the exam)
- Check your work - If you don't check them, you don't see them. Write less and check more; fewer words, higher accuracy. In writing exams, you need perfection.
- Write and get it checked – Find somebody to correct your work after self checking.

