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English-I (Basic English)
Dr. Shreesh Chaudhary
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Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai
Lecture 68
Writing for Public Purposes

Welcome to this next session on writing. Very often, you know, in the last session we saw, we translate visual information into verbal information, we describe what we see. This can also go into the public domain; you not only describe things for private purposes sometimes you describe things for public issue, with public documents.

So, for example, when there is a flood, or God forbid, when there are earthquakes or when there are accidents, in addition to the photographs, etc., that are taken, people also prepare reports on what they see. So, quite often for a variety of reasons, we write for public purposes, where we write for no one reader.

For example, when you describe your photograph, you know, you are writing it for your friends or for your family, maybe very occasionally, very rarely, for purposes of some document, you also do that kind of thing for state authority and a state official, or for a company, but generally, you know, that is a private kind of writing.

Whereas, when you write on public issues, you create a document that will go in the public domain, which has no fixed reader, which is, therefore, everyone anyone who can read can read it, anyone who can hear, can hear it, when you speak on a public issue, when you write on a public issue, on a public problem, on a public subject. What do you do then? Are there different kinds of constraints? Do we write like that quite often? Let me answer the second question first.

Yes, we write on public issues quite often, a lot of times actually, because you know, these things affect us limited water supply, limited electricity supply and you know limited cooking gas supply, bad law and order, pollution of different kinds, noise pollution, environmental pollution through gas or suspended particulate matter in air or pollution through too much light, too many lights in the limited place, hurting your eyes, all of these things, plus a variety of other things.

They all constitute subjects of public writing, and we often talk about them sometimes, we also write about them. In this session today, we will see, what is the minimum we should keep in mind when we write on topics of public importance. Let us see.

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WRITING FOR PUBLIC PURPOSES



- On problems, public issues etc.
- Need for precision, brevity, facts, etc.
- Importance of being formal and factual



On all topics of a public problem, on all topics where you have uncertain leadership, where anybody and everybody can read, some of these principles hold very good. Number one, be precise, say all that is to be said, but no more, no less. It is like some of our undergarments. You know, if your shirt is only XL, then you cannot take XXL, or you cannot take L.

But if your shirt is XXL, extra extra large, then extra-large would not do for you. Large would not do for you. Similarly, if your size is large, you cannot take XL, you cannot take XXL it just for your size. So, it must be precise. No more, no less. It should cover all the matter and no more and no less. That is the first demand for anything you write on the topic of public importance, it could be good, it could be bad, but that is what you do.

Then come other features of public documents such as the feature of brevity be brief, if something can be said in four words, then please do not say that in five words. If something can be said in five words, then please do not say that in six words, verbosity writing in a manner where you have lots of unnecessary words, redundancies is a weakness of writing, it takes away from the contents, you look funny, your readers' attention is distracted, the reader may not understand all that you want the reader to understand, or you want the listener to understand.

So, in writing in particular, it is extremely important that you should have all and only those words that must be there and write in a manner that you know in place of four words you can use three words rather than write a sentence where you say, God sees everything you sees everything is two words, you can say it in one word, God is omnipresent, God is omniscient.



God is there everywhere. So, you do not have to say that you can say God is omnipresent, one word will do.

You do not have to write too many and like that every language and also English has words, where one word will be enough. We have seen in earlier lessons, how you know people say this is a commuter train, which takes people daily from their home to work and brings them back home. When you have already said commuter train, it means it plies this, train plies between certain stations at certain intervals daily.

So, that using this train, you go to work at a certain period of, a certain point of time and using this train, you can come back home once again. So, you do not have to say it is a commuter train, which takes passengers every morning to their work and brings them back home every evening. These two last clauses are utterly redundant, utterly useless. Do not write in that manner; write briefly. Whatever can be said in four words must be said only in four words must not take five words. That is a drawback that is a weakness in your writing.

Next, write only facts, not attitudes, not heresies. Do not write you know, I will, it's like we saw last time, they were wearing very beautiful colourful sarees, maybe some people like the sarees in colour and to them it is beautiful, but it is quite possible that some people are like only plain sarees, it may not be beautiful to them. So, the idea is, use only those adjectives only those words that convey the facts of the matter, not the attitude of the matter.

That is the weakness of your writing; we will further explain it and then be formal, do not be casual in writing, like we saw last time, somebody said no passenger is holding the handgrip. Perhaps they do not mind falling. That is not; perhaps they do not mind falling is an informal joke, a sarcasm, an ironical statement. A sarcastic statement. That should not be there. No need for anyone to say that, be factual just write the facts and no more and be formal.

Even if your friend happens to be the corporation or the Chairman or put it the other way around if the Chairman of the corporation is very friendly to you, you cannot begin the letter by saying hi Chairman, you will have to address the Chairman, Municipal Corporation of Swatipuram, etc.

I wish to draw your attention, I beg to inform you, he is alright, you cannot say, hi guys, there are some problems in where you live, around our nest. No, that is not formal writing. So, you know, all public documents are created in a style of writing, which is formal, which is factual, which are precise and which is brief.



These four things we have to remember, formal, factual, precise and brief. Brief, anything can be said in four words, should not be said in five words, precise as much as necessary but no more nor less, formal you are not writing to a friend, you do not have to be casual, you do not have to use slangs or private idioms or jokes, factual, nothing, but facts and all facts. That is the demand for writing on public topics. Let us look at some examples.

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PUBLIC ISSUES



- What is a civic problem?
- A man-made problem- Most problems in the world are man-made problem.
- Crime, corruption, chaos, pollution, poverty, discrimination, exploitation, environmental problems, overconsumption etc.



You know, when you write on a civic problem, such as sometimes we are asked to, what is a civic problem? It is, of course, not a military problem. It is, we are not talking of war, we are not talking about natural problems like famine, earthquake, not that sort of thing. Though, there is human and even in them.

But we are talking about a civic problem. What is the civic problem? A civic problem is a man-made problem, such as jams on the traffic, such as traffic jams on the road. Most problems in the world that, most problems that mankind are facing today are man-made problems and therefore, we can call them civic problems.

Let us look at some examples. Various kinds of crimes, crimes, capital crimes, crime against, against young children, against women, crimes of different kinds on the road in vehicles, they are all man-made problems. Why do we have crimes, partly because if we are not well educated, partly because they are poor? Partly because they are unmotivated, partly because they are unemployed, all of these reasons are there.

Sometimes rich people also commit crime, sometimes educated people also commit crime, sometimes employed people also commit crimes, but they are few and as the cliche goes, far



between most of the time most crimes are unfortunate results of other kinds of thing which were within the control of mankind to eliminate.

Crimes like corruption, chaos, no rule of law and order, there are many countries today reeling under Civil War, children, women, old people, sick suffering there and all of these problems are man-made problem or population, too much gas in air, too many suspended particulate matters in air, God has not created the world that way.

It is human beings who have created these problems for themselves. Problems like poverty, some people have nothing to eat, no home where to live, no clothes with which to cover their body even in winter, even in severe winter.

Even you know the, so these problems, problems of exploitation of one man by another, of the poor by the rich, of the disabled by the evil, of the weak by the mighty, all these exploitations are man-made or environmental problem, depleting oxygen level in global warming, other kinds of problems created by use of constant use of carbon fuel, global warming etc. noise pollution, light pollution, air pollution scarcity of drinking water, water pollution.

All of these problems or overconsumption some people have a lot to eat and they are throwing away, a lot to wear, a lot of money they do not know what to do with. On the other hand, there are schools and hospitals, which have no equipment because they have no money. All of these problems are man-made problems, and when you are asked to talk about them or speak about them, it is not just a test only of language. It is also a test of your ability to gather facts and present them in a focused manner. Look at an example.

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QUESTION

In about 150 words, write a letter to the Chairman of your city corporation drawing their attention to the water logging on the road near your house.

Hint:

Problem of drainage – absence of municipal services – disturbance to traffic – hazards for pedestrians – health hazards to residents – unaesthetic look – cleaning and repair of drainage required – funds can be raised, etc. – importance of good roads.



Say, for example, this can be a typical question many examinations, they ask you, in about 150 words, write a letter to the Chairman of your city, Chairman of your city corporation drawing their attention to the water logging or any civic problem any other, of broken roads, or absence of electric supply or absence of hospital care, medical care in your part of the city.

So here, in this case, it says waterlogging on the road near your house, you know the facts they are near your house, this waterlogging what kind of problems can it create? So, think about that make your notes before you begin writing, the problem of drainage. One problem is that as rains happen, the water does not flow away, it gets choked, somewhere there is a choke, somewhere there is a blockage to the free flow, somewhere the flow is choked.

So, the problem of drainage, then why are the drainage choked? Because the municipality is not doing its regular work. It is the duty one of the important jobs of any Municipal Corporation, any city corporation to keep the drains clear and flowing, which also means that they should, there should be, on a regular basis cleaning and dredging. It only indicates that either people have encroached upon the drains so that the drains are blocked, or the drains are choked. They have not been cleaned regularly. So that sewage water or rainwater does not flow out of the city.

What problems can it cause? It causes disturbance to the traffic of course. Auto vehicles people on a bicycle, people on foot cannot travel as easily as quickly as they would if the road were free if there is no waterlogging on the road. So, waterlogging causes disturbance to traffic. It is also a hazard for pedestrian, those who are walking on foot; they cannot see what is there underwater and suppose they fall into a hole, manhole created to maintain the drainage or there may be a pebble, a sharp object, which can cut their feet.

All those risks are there not just to vehicular traffic, not just to the drivers, but also to people walking through that stretch of road, then it is a health hazard to residents all around, we know that variety of disease-causing mosquitoes, and other pests live and grow on accumulated rotting water bodies.

So, they are a health hazard to all the houses nearby, and above all, they do not give a good look, no matter how beautiful the city, but if the roads are waterlogged. The city will not have a great name as a beautiful city. It will still be considered a slum, a city where hardly anyone who would like to go for pleasure for problem for when you have no choice we go anywhere, that is another matter.

So, it is possible you know, there may be health hazards, they may not look good, what can be done in a public document. The writer must also suggest what can be done. This can be done; there should be regular periodical meant work on the maintenance and cleaning of the drains. So, that rain waters and other kinds of waters flow freely; then funds can be raised. The government may also help but more than the government, the people may help themselves. The simple question is, what do we do with all the cash? If I live in a problem.

So, funds can be raised, and cleaning and repair of drainage can be undertaken, more than anything else, good roads are important in themselves and one first, one of the first features of a good road is it must be free. It must not have potholes or water because otherwise, a speeding car might skid. There might be a problem for the drivers, look at some samples.

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One important feature of, one important feature of public writing is it should have no redundancies do not use words that are unnecessary. Here, of course, it is a joke. It is a notice outside a shop, one of my friends took a photograph of this notice somewhere in India outside a shop, the shop says this store is not open today, because it is closed by order of the manager leave other things apart.

But there are errors in spelling there is an error in sentence construction, there is an error in the convention of writing, what is capital letter B doing in writing because in the middle of a sentence and then because it misspelt, the store is misspelt. There are other kinds of violations of spelling convention writing convention; we will talk about them later, perhaps.

But here it is important to see that, half of this text is redundant, this store is not open today, because it is closed, what do you, what are you saying? You are saying the same thing. You are saying this store is not open today and again, you are saying this store is not open today.

Could you do that? Nobody in their sanity will do that. This writer does so because the writer does not know the language. Otherwise, there is no need for him. For the writer to say this store is not open today, because it is closed, he could either have said, they could either have said this store is not open today or they could have said this store is closed today, by order of the manager.

Once again, there is an error of spelling. But the point here is redundancy is a great enemy of all writing; it does not become obvious immediately. But if you write and regularly revise, regularly, carefully, it becomes a part of your habit. You will see that you notice it immediately without a problem, and then your writing improves; you become a better writer.

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FIRST DRAFT



To: The Chairman,
City Corporation of Swamitipuram
Chennai 600 002

26 Jan, 2019

Sub : Water logging on road – reg.

Sir,

I wish to draw your attention to the unhygienic condition and traffic hazard prevailing in this area due to water logging on the main road here.



Next, you will become a much better writer actually. Look at the first draft, here is a letter to the Chairman of the City Corporation of Swamitipuram, somewhere. Please read the letter carefully.

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Information gathering:

statistical – anecdotal – local – global – general – particular – types of problem – quantities of each of them. – number or unit wise, etc.



Now, in order to write on this, public on topics of a public problem, you see earlier issues were my private issues, my curriculum vitae. Then, writing about my candidature, writing about other kinds of things. They were my private view, or you look at a photograph, and you describe not much of a challenge, because your all the information that you need is there.

But in this case, when you to describe your problem. You first you have to gather information. You know, what civic problem are you talking about? Let us talk about bad roads. So, what kinds of information can you get statistical? How many roads in this city have no potholes? You can begin with that.

You do not have to look at all the roads; you can say I surveyed one road and a found that it had no problems and then we can extrapolate it. We can say well. Perhaps the city has wonderful roads. So, you know, it could also be anecdotal, it could be local, you do not know the problem of waterlogging worldwide, but if you can say if one road can cause so much traffic delay because of water problem, because of the problem of waterlogging, imagine how many litres or gallons or how many millions of gallons of petrol is burned because the vehicles have to use bad roads.

So, your data could be local, your data could be global, or you could say, there are 7 billion barrels are wasted every week on keeping the motors of waiting cars running. You can also say that if you have that kind of data. So, you can then you can then particularise it you can see so many gallons, so many litres, so many different kinds of problems.

If engines are switched off at traffic junction, so much petrol may be saved, so much pollution may be saved there was an experiment at a particular place, they found this they found that you can bring all those problems, all those sorts of statistics or data in as evidence in support of your claim.

You can also describe types of problems how many, if you are talking about roads, which where you cannot drive freely, what are the kinds of problems these roads have? Number 1 traffic jam, number 2 stray animals on the roads, number 3 bad roads, broken roads potholes, no traffic signs on the road, you can imagine, and you can find lots to say about you have types of problem.

Quantities of each of them, how many kilometres of road in this city is broken? How many otherwise are good, there is a number which place to which place they connect; you can see all that, within the time provided you write precisely, briefly and factually on any topic. It just requires a little bit of brainstorming and no more.

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FINAL DRAFT



To: The Chairman,
City Corporation of Chennai
Chennai 600 002

Sub : Water logging on road – reg.

Sir,

Some action is urgently requested to remove water logging on the road here. It causes traffic hazard, insanitation, breeding of mosquitoes, and stench all around. Last week three vehicles got stuck, and had to be pulled out by crane.



Next, this is the final draft, take a look. Next.



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Two passengers have already been hurt. Some have complained of skins allergies. And many have complained and shouted at the drivers. Drivers splash water wetting the clothes of walkers. Cases of water borne disease are rising. A photograph is attached. Please, have the drains inspected and blockages removed, so that the accumulated water can flow away freely.



Next,

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The entire area must be sanitized. Damaged roads must be repaired and traffic marks redrawn. Residents may, please, be compensated for damages. Until some measures are taken, traffic may be diverted to another road. Water supply lines must also be checked for leakages. Laying new lines may be a welcome step.

With best regards,
Santosh Gupta



Next.

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Attached photograph:



This is the photograph. This is the situation that those two drafts are describing water logging in the road look at the differences. Next.

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What has changed in different drafts :

FIRST DRAFT	FINAL DRAFT
291 Words, little info	148 Words, lots of info
Usual redundancies	
and traffic hazard	X
Even a drizzle ...rainfall	Even a shower...



This is the difference between final, first draft; the first draft again is verbose has lots of words it has 291 words, the final draft has about 148 only and all the more information. So, it is like the first draft had lots of redundancies like we saw just a while ago, this store will remain closed today because it is not open or this store is not open today because it is closed, you are saying the same thing in two different ways that is redundancy. So, this piece of



writing also has usual redundancies, and then you know unclear writing, what do you mean by traffic hazard?

Do you mean to say head-on collisions? Do you mean to say people coming under these vehicles? What do you imply? Even it resilient then, like it goes on in rainfall fall leaves the waterlogged you do not have to say all that you just have to say slightest rainfall creates waterlogging on the route, slightest rainfall.

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Sentence Construction	
Motor vehicles passing through this road have no idea of the depth or the condition of the road under water, and as they drive at their usual fast speed, they not only splash water all around, they also cause hazard to other vehicles and pedestrians nearby.	Drivers have no idea of the road under water. They drive fast, are a threat to other drivers and vehicles.



Next, just look at it. Motor Vehicles passing through this road have no idea of the depth of the condition of the road underwater. Motor Vehicles do not have an idea; drivers have an idea. So, be accurate. Ask yourself what you are writing about. Are you writing about motorcars or are you writing about waterlogging on the city roads like this, you can understand when you compare the two sets of writings. Next.

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ACTIVITY

Write a letter on any of the following topics to the editor of a local newspaper requesting them to highlight the issue raised by you.

- a. Light pollution in your residential locality,
- b. Noise pollution in your area,
- c. Supply of unclean water in your area,
- d. Need furniture for students,
- e. Difficulties in managing mid-day meals.



Once again, as I have been saying excellence requires personal initiative. You must take charge, you must work for yourself, write about each of them the first draft maybe no matter how many words, but in the second, in the third, in the final draft, try and bring your stuff your script, you make your script in fewer words here are some topics.

You can say light pollution in your residential locality, noise pollution in your area; suddenly you find when you bought a house here, it was a quiet area in the city. Now, you find that it has become a very noisy area or your homes are being supplied with unclean water, how would you quantify it, you can say that one cup of water cannot be seen, we cannot see the bottom of the cup if we fill with water from this lake or this pool or this river, that is you know, any reader will conclude the pollution is so bad that even the floor of a cup cannot be seen. Imagine what it might be like when we look at a big body of water in this place.

So, for each of these topics, there may be some common ways of data gathering. But there may be also some different ways of data gathering, and one should not be too proud when learning. So, do not hesitate to ask your friends or family or teacher or us for help.

Finally, as we have always said, excellence in any skill comes only through constant pursuit. Here are some topics. Come back to the earlier screen. I would not say take any of them. I will take all of them one by one, not the same day, not the same week, maybe one this week, the next topic next week or do right on them, gathering all the possible information.

Writing precisely, clearly, briefly, using accurate words and making as many drafts as necessary, until you feel that you have done your best. Then you can show it to friends to family or to your teacher. Seek their review, seek their comments, and you will find that



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writing in this manner makes your script better and better as you progress. So, good luck, and thank you.

