

## Unit 8

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# ***Language practice, avoiding common mistakes, Reporting Front and Back Matter***

### **Overview**

This unit aims to sharpen your sensitivity to language use in highlighting common mistakes in student writing such as the use of modals, connectives, reference markers, etc. This will help you not only identify pitfalls in the cohesion and coherence of your writing but also put a finishing touch on your project report. You will also be reminded of the essential elements in the front and back of a report to enhance the formality and readability of your report.

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this unit, you will be able to

- improve your writing by identifying and correcting common language mistakes
- identify the importance of the essential elements at the front and back of a report

### **8.1 Additional language points in technical writing**

Subtle use of language features is highlighted in the following which will help you to avoid common mistakes. Rather than learning from a set of prescribed rules, raise your own language awareness with the following examples.

#### **TASK 8.1 Identify problems in language use**

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Read the following extracts and identify the possible strength or issues regarding specific areas of language use. Hints are provided. Discuss them with your partners.

##### **A. Use of modals**

Modals such as ‘could’, ‘can’, ‘should’, ‘would’, etc. can be strategically used to show your attitude and the strength of your arguments/claims. What do you think about the following sentences? How can you improve them?

Sample: This operating system can be multifunctional. It could operate on normal desktop computers or mobile devices.

##### **B. Use of connectives – additive and contrastive**

Adding and contrasting ideas are common in any form of writing, but make sure you are NOT overusing some common connectives that may make your sentences illogical.

Identify any problems with the following sentences and suggest how these can be improved.

Sample 1:

The Search API does allow people to get only the most recent tweets (public tweets) and not all data from their database.

Sample 2:

Many countries are extremely interested in forging business links with China. Some of these countries have serious concerns regarding the language barrier and foreign currency restrictions. They ultimately rejected the idea of doing business with China.

Sample 3:

Costs will be reduced. Besides, the time required for programming can be shortened.

Sample 4:

In spite of the QA team executed many test cases, many programming mistakes have not been discovered until user testing.

Sample 5:

As there is redundant JavaScript in the client code that severely slows down certain types of programs. Therefore, it needs to be removed for faster program execution.

### C. Reference Markers – It / This

Pronouns are common but they can refer to different antecedents. It is easy to confuse the two. Look at the following samples and decide whether you should use ‘it’ or ‘this’.

Sample 1:

Heavy rains and stormy conditions throughout the summer have led to severe shortages in strawberries and other soft fruits. \_\_\_\_\_ has led to price rises in many supermarkets and shops.

Sample 2:

This paper makes two contributions. First, \_\_\_\_\_ introduces a user interface that integrates searching for example code into a development environment

### **D. Concision**

Make your writing direct and efficient unless you wish to emphasize certain themes. Rewrite the following samples to make them direct and efficient.

Sample 1: For the real-time capture of user data, it is difficult because ...

Sample 2: As for the deployment schedule, it will be delayed if ...

### **E. Formality**

Rewrite the following sample to be more formal and also more coherence (makes more logical sense).

Sample:

The money spent on the start of the project is a lot. And also, it's difficult to follow up on support.

## 8.2 Writing front and back matter of a report

While we, as readers, generally refer to the section of introduction to understand the background of a project and the conclusion for a summary of the work delivered (see Unit 3 and 7), they are usually not the first and the last items we read in a report. The preliminary information before the introduction (front matter) and supplementary information after the conclusion (back matter) is like a ‘map’ or ‘index’ of your report guiding the reader.

### **TASK 8.2 Identify the front and back matter in a report**

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Work as a group. Brainstorm a list of elements in a report such as ‘Table of Contents’, ‘Introduction’, etc. List them in order and identify which are the front matter (go at the beginning of the paper), which are the main body, and which are back matter (go at the end of the paper).

**Front Matter:**

**Main Body:**

**Back Matter:**

## Features of Front and Back Matter

### Title Page

This varies based on the requirement of the project but generally includes the project/study title, author (including the organization), the purpose (e.g., the fulfillment of course requirement), and the expected audience, (see an example page in *Text 1* of a student report) **Note: this is not intended to be the best and please follow the advice from your supervisor).**

### Summary (or Abstract)

This is a short (generally less than one page) but self-sufficient writing showing the significance of the study/project in terms of its motivation, knowledge/research gap, major findings, and implications.

### Acknowledgement

This is a short text allowing you to express your gratitude towards those who have helped or inspired you in the project. There is no standard format or language to use but your writing should NOT be a formality but a heartfelt thanks or appreciation.

### Table of Contents

This is a list of headings helping the reader to locate the corresponding sections quickly and easily. They are generally written as noun phrases and are descriptive in nature.

### List of Figures

Figures are frequent in a technical report and they are numbered based on the order appeared in the corresponding section of a report; for example, *Figure 2.x* in Section 2. The corresponding page no. should be listed.

### List of Tables

Tables shown should be listed accordingly, similar to the description of “List of Figure” above.

### Abbreviations

While it may not be necessary to explain terminology standard in the field, specific terms or acronyms specific to the project can improve the readability of the report.

### References

This is a reference list based on the in-text citations made in the report, not limited to the citations made in the literature review section. This does not only serve to purpose of avoiding plagiarism but also practically offers justification of the arguments made and

allows the reader to research further if needed. The citation format should be consistent and based on the standard of the field or requirement of the project.

### Appendices

This is additional but not irrelevant information for understanding the project. Each appendix should have a clear title, number (or letter in alphabetical order) and corresponding page number.

*Text 1* <sup>[1]</sup> A title page of a student report (**Note: this is not intended to be the best and please follow the advice from your supervisor**).

## Engineering Design Report

### **Reconfigurable Obstetrics Delivery Bed**

ME 440 Mechanical Engineering Design  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
University of Michigan

Team 12	UID
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Ken Lauper	12973401723
Diane Deepak	12965938792
Lily Rubis	12968749378
Francisco Smith	12974562562

Supervisor

Prof. Katrina Prausnitz  
Professor of Mechanical Engineering

20 April 2012

## TASK 8.3 Critique a Table of Contents of a report

Work as a group. Read the table of contents of a report below by a previous student on a website development of an online salon search application by a previous student. Note the readability of this outline and consider whether there are components you would like to add or edit. Comment on what has been done well and what could be improved.

Text 2 <sup>[2]</sup>

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**TASK 8.4 Reflect on this unit****Key points to remember**

- Select your modal according to how assertive you want to be. Use different modals to get a ‘feel’ instead of relying on the definition of the modal.
- Define the relationship between two ideas before deciding on which connective to use.
- Try NOT to use the connective “besides”
- Use “this” instead of “it” more often to refer to the whole idea presented earlier.
- Be clear and direct with the focus in the subject position and use illustrative verbs.
- Start with vocabulary when you want to enhance the formality of your writing.

**Homework and Preparation for the next session**

- Prepare Progress Report 2
- Prepare your oral presentation rehearsal

**References**

1. Kaur N, Miller L, Nijindam D, Rubis N, Sennett F. Reconfigurable obstetrics delivery bed. US: University of Michigan; 2009. Available: <http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.42/62449>
2. Adapted from student texts