Progress Report Assignment

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# Scenario

*This semester, you’re writing several types of technical documents that are commonly produced in the workplace. Students who are currently working can often use topics related to their current jobs. Not all students are working or have worked in their major fields, however, so we use scenario-based assignments in which you imagine that you’re at work in your major field after graduation.*

In this assignment’s scenario, you’re somewhere in the middle of a project related to your field. The project should be complex enough to involve several stages (groups of related steps).

The person who originally asked you to do the project is now asking you for a progress report that documents the stages of the project that are complete, including obstacles encountered, and the stages that remain, including obstacles that might arise.

To develop your content fully, this assignment should be five to six pages long, double-spaced.

# Reading

* + - * All reading assigned to-date
      * This file’s Appendix A: Writing Reader-Centered Progress Reports
      * *Course Handbook*:
      * Achieving a Technical Writing Style
      * Creating Basic Visuals
      * Style and Mechanics Reviews

# Audience

For this and the other large, graded assignments this semester, your audience, or primary reader, is the person who needs the information in your report in order to perform a task or make a decision, and in that way, continue working.

Your primary reader is not me in these larger assignments. Instead, your primary reader is a person with whom you share a professional relationship, such as, for this assignment, your immediate supervisor, a person funding your project, a client who has hired you to do the project, or a similar person.

Your audience this semester cannot be a friend, family member, or close acquaintance. Writing to people you know well outside of a workplace will cause your phrasing and tone to be conversational and relaxed, which will undermine your ability to maintain a technical and professional writing style.

# Instructions

Refer to this file’s [Appendix A: Writing Reader-Centered Progress Reports](#_Appendix_A:_Writing), as you write your report. The flowchart below shows the assignment’s major stages:

Note that the flowchart gives you a helpful overview of the information in this section. You’ll include a flowchart for your reader in the Introduction section of your progress report, to help your reader in the same way.

Selecting a topic

Your project should ideally be related to your major, but if you can’t come up with a suitable project related to your major, you can choose another project you’re involved in. See [Appendix B: Examples of Past Assignment Topics](#_Appendix_B:_Examples), for a list of projects that past students have written about.

For additional guidance in how to approach this assignment, read [Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions](#_Appendix_A:_Frequently_1), and the student sample provided in the assignment’s folder on the course website.

Filling out the Communication Objectives Worksheet

The Communication Objectives Worksheet, found in [Appendix](#_Appendix_B:_Objectives) D of this file, prompts you to analyze your report’s audience in great detail, to understand your report’s purpose, and to create a document structure suitable for a progress report.

*Creating the flowchart of stages*

The worksheet’s next-to-last question asks you to create a flowchart of your project’s major stages. To describe how this is done, we’ll use the example of the project of putting in a cement patio.

1. Start by thinking of your project’s major stages, each stage being a set of related steps that must be complete before the next stage (set of steps) can begin. Think of as many stages as you can, from the very first stage to the very last stage.

For example, below are the major stages of putting in a cement patio:

1. Determining requirements
2. Measuring the area
3. Buying materials
4. Building the frame
5. Laying the cement
6. Landscaping the edges
7. Cleaning up the job site
8. Put the stages into a flowchart (see *Course Handbook* > Creating Basic Visuals > Flowcharts as needed for using PowerPoint). The flowchart below shows the cement patio stages above:

Keep stage names brief, because they will be subheadings in your progress report. You’ll be able to describe the stages in detail in their corresponding subsections.

*Writing the outline based on the flowchart*

The worksheet’s last question asks you to outline your progress report. To describe how this is done, we’ll continue with the example of the project of putting in a cement patio.

1. Refer to the outline early in Ch. 26 that shows the structure of a progress report for one project. Notice that the two major sections in that outline: “Past Work” and “Future Work.”

NOTE: Progress reports don’t have a “Current Work” section. The work that you’re currently doing is not yet complete, so it belongs in the “Future Work” section.

1. Use any pair of headings that convey the past and future nature of your progress. Note that this pair of headings must be parallel (*Course Handbook* > Style and Mechanics Reviews > 5 Parallel Structure). For example:

* Past Work  
  Future Work
* Work Completed  
  Work Remaining
* Stages Accomplished  
  Stages Remaining

1. Place the stage names from your flowchart under the appropriate “Past/Future” major section. *Use the exact stage names from your flowchart to ensure consistency in your final report’s internal cross-references.* To continue with the cement patio example:

II. Work Completed

A. Determining Requirements

B. Measuring the Area

C. Buying Materials

D. Building the Frame

III. Work Remaining

A. Laying the Cement

B. Landscaping the Edges

C. Cleaning Up the Job Site

1. Turn in your worksheet as described in the Semester Schedule. We’ll discuss your worksheet during our video conference.

Writing your progress report

* + - 1. Describe each stage in as much detail as possible. Notice the amount of detail possible in describing each stage in the cement patio example above.
      2. Include any obstacles to your progress. Describe obstacles that affected the completed stages in your past-work section; describe obstacles that might affect the future stages in your future-work section.

See the student sample for another approach to including obstacles.

* + - 1. Add an Introduction, including your purpose statement and flowchart of the project’s major stages.
      2. Add a Conclusion.
      3. Identify yourself in your assignment and its filename following the guidelines in *Course Handbook* > Formatting Assignments.
      4. Turn in your progress report as described in the Semester Schedule.

# Appendix A: Writing Reader-Centered Progress Reports

Supplementary information about writing effective progress reports is embedded in this Word file as an Adobe Acrobat document. If you don’t already have Adobe Reader, download it free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/?promoid=JZEFU>

To open the file, double-click the Adobe Acrobat icon below. The file should open. If you don’t see the file, check under other files that might be open on your desktop.



# Appendix B: Examples of Past Assignment Topics

The table below is intended to reassure you that many types of projects can work well for this assignment.

NOTE: Remember that you will document your progress on the project, not the project itself.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category (related to…)** | **Project** | **Intended Audience** |
| Major | Preparing to teach ESL in a foreign country | Grant funder |
| Purchasing specialized equipment | Dept. manager |
| Adopting a specialized machine |
| Standardizing a product | Team leader |
| Analyzing the failure of a component |
| Developing a mobile app |
| Developing a physical tool | Investor |
| Creating an investment portfolio | Client |
| Increasing awareness of shooting range safety | Shooting range manager |
| Adding a sport to a high school sports program | High school sports director |
| Expanding a weight room | Gym owner |
| Delivering articulation therapy | Special Ed case manager |
| Renovating a building wing | Company vice president |
| Adding a freezer case | Frozen foods manager |
| School | Completing an independent-study course | Course professor |
| Applying for an internship | Advisor, professor, or major dept. chair |
| Meeting internship goals |
| Applying for graduate school | Scholarship foundation manager |
| Applying for a graduate assistantship |
| Current workplace | Developing a paperless procedure | Dept. manager |
| Deploying wireless communication in an operating room | Operating room coordinator |
| Expanding a clinic | Clinic vice president |
| Hobby or organization involvement | Planning a motorcycle show | Club president |
| Restoring a vintage bicycle or car | Customer |
| Remodeling a bathroom | Home owner |
| Planning a high school trip (see related Q&A in [Appendix B: Frequently Asked Questions](#_Appendix_A:_Frequently_1)) | High school principal |

# Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions

Choosing a project to document

**Q: The student sample isn’t related to my project at all—what do I do?**

A: A student sample is provided for an assignment so that you can see how one student followed the assignment instructions (i.e., used an effective organization and followed the guidelines in the *Course Handbook* > Achieving a Technical Writing Style section). The topics you’ll see in student samples will not be related to the topics that you’ll choose to develop this semester.

**Q: I’m not working on any projects at work that would fit this assignment—what should I report on?**

A: It would be nice if the subject of your progress report related to your work or your major, but it doesn't have to. Is there a personal project you’re involved in, such as learning a skill? Are you in the middle of planning an event in the near future? Are you practicing or training for an event in the near future?

Keep in mind that any process you’re involved in that has a distinct goal, or observable endpoint, is a "project."

Are you doing any renovation or restoration? Are you developing a garden or a building a business?

**Q: Can I make up a project?**

A: No, you may not “make up” a project for this assignment, but you can imagine a realistic scenario. A scenario has elements of probability and realism. Any project that you are in the middle of will do for this assignment.

If you still have difficulty coming up with a project after reading this Q&A, please e-mail me and we can talk about it. I’m always able to help students brainstorm suitable projects for this assignment.

**Q: Even though I can’t make up a project, can I make up my audience?**

A: Yes. In our scenario approach this semester, you can certainly make up your audience, or primary reader, but again, this person must be a person who would need your information to perform a task or make a decision.

Make sure that your primary reader is a person with whom you would have a professional relationship, and not a family member, friend, or anyone else who would know you outside of a work or professional relationship.

**Q: Can I write about an ongoing project at work? This project never really ends.**

A: If you can see a clear cycle in an ongoing process, you can regard one cycle as a project. To be a cycle, the process has to reach a distinct goal before returning to the start.

**Q: The only major project I’m in the middle of is planning my wedding so I was wondering if it would be appropriate to pretend to be a wedding planner for a bride and groom?**

**and**

**Q: I'm in the middle of toilet-training my 18-month-old son. Can I use this project?**

A: Do not choose highly personal projects. I replied "Yes" to both of these questions in the past, and neither student could maintain a professional distance from their projects. Both students failed at using the direct, non-conversational writing style they needed for class.

**Q: We're moving my in-laws into an assisted-living facility. Can I use this project?**

A: Even though this is a relatively personal project, it will work if in your scenario, you are an eldercare consultant helping a family move their loved one into assisted living. That scenario will provide distance from the project and enable you to write in a professional, direct style.

**Q: I'd like to write about the project of planning a trip to [destination], but am unsure about who my audience/readers would be.**

A: This project will work if your scenario is that you’re planning a school class trip. See the following web pages for ideas about what this type of project involves:

Planning a grade-school field trip: <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/1824>

Planning a high school band trip: <http://www.grimsleyband.com/GHS%20Band%201st%20packet2013-1.pdf>

Completing the Communication Objectives Worksheet

**Q: Who is my audience?**

A: The instructions state this best: For this and all the work in this class, your audience, or reader, is NOT me! Your reader would be a person (imaginary or real) with whom you would have a formal relationship, such as a supervisor or colleague at work. Your audience cannot be someone who knows you outside of a professional setting, such as a friend or close acquaintance.

If your report is about a project at work, your audience would be a person who is in some way responsible for the project, either through funding or on behalf of an upper manager. If your report is about progress on a personal project (e.g., restoring a car, learning a skill), your audience could be a potential car buyer or personal coach, respectively.

**Q: Question #2 in the "Overall Purpose" section asks, "What prompts you to write?" How do I answer this?**

A: In our scenario approach to this and all assignments this semester, you are prompted to write by your primary reader’s need to perform a task or make a decision. "What prompts you to write" means what would be a realistic reason for writing the report you’re preparing?

**Q: The “Reader Profile” section asks who our primary reader is, and who else might read this communication. Should I state the specific names of the people who would be reading this?**

A: Provide only job titles, not a names. People’s job titles determine the type of information they need to make decisions and perform tasks. Furthermore, a person you name could move on to another position in the organization, and your reader would then be the next person to have that job title.

**Q: Should we organize the report around the five questions in “Usability” section of the Communication Objectives worksheet?**

A: No. The five questions are just to help you think about your audience's needs and expectations.

Your progress report's structure first documents what you’ve accomplished so far, then documents what you have left to accomplish, with any barriers you’ve encountered or expect to encounter placed in the appropriate past/future section. See the superstructure for progress reports presented in Ch. 26.

**Q: For the outline at the end of the Communication Objectives worksheet, can I just list the major sections?**

A: No. A list of major sections is a list, not an outline Make sure you know how to develop a formal outline, because the outline part of the CommunicationObjectives worksheet is worth a good percentage of the possible points. (See *Course Handbook* > Formal Outlining.)

The value of providing a formal outline at this stage is that I can see your emphasis and categories of information, and can either reassure you that you're on-track, or guide you in a different direction.

**Q: What if my outline changes?**

A: It's almost to be expected that your outline will change between the time you write it for your CommunicationObjectives worksheet and the time you turn in your final assignment. The outline in your CommunicationObjectives worksheet is just to help you start thinking early about the possible organization for your report.

# Appendix D: Communication Objectives Worksheet *(copy into separate Word file before submitting)*

Name:

Overall Purpose

*Please keep the questions in this worksheet and add your answers below the questions.*

1. What are you writing?

2. In this scenario, what prompts you to write?

3. What outcome do you desire from your progress report?

4. What outcome does your reader desire from your progress report?

Reader Profile

1. Who is your primary reader? Include job title and professional responsibilities.

2. What is your reader’s relationship to you?

3. Who might be secondary readers?

4. How familiar is your primary reader with your subject?

Usability Objectives

1. What are the key questions your reader will ask while reading your progress report? (List at least 5.)

2. How will your reader search for the answers? By reading sequentially, by jumping from section to section, by scanning graphics, etc?

3. How will your reader use the information you provide?

Persuasive Objectives

1. What will your reader’s initial attitude be toward your progress? Why?

2. What do you want your reader’s attitude to be?

Stakeholders

1. Who, besides your readers, are stakeholders in your communication?

2. How will they be affected by it?

Purpose Statement

Write a working purpose statement for your report. (See *Course Handbook* > Achieving a Technical Writing Style > Content Development.) Your purpose statement might change slightly by the time you turn in your assignment.

Flowchart of Project’s Stages

Your Introduction section will include a flowchart of your project’s major stages, to give your reader an overview of the complexity of your project.

Create a working flowchart of your project’s major stages below. You can start with the flowchart provided here, and add stages as necessary to describe your project. See *Course Handbook* > Creating Basic Graphics section as needed.

As with your purpose statement, your flowchart might change slightly by the time you turn in the assignment.

Outline

Refer to Ch. 26 > Superstructure for Progress Reports section > illustration showing a formal outline of a progress report for one project. Create a working formal outline below to show the structure you anticipate your progress report will have. To review formal outlining, see *Course Handbook* > Formal Outlining.

As with your purpose statement and flowchart, your structure might change slightly by the time you turn in the assignment.

* Don’t retain the numbering from your outline in your final document’s headings. See *Course Handbook* > Formatting assignments > Text and headings.

# Appendix E: Student Sample

The student sample embedded in this file is an Adobe Acrobat document. If you don’t already have Adobe Reader, download it free at <http://get.adobe.com/reader/?promoid=JZEFU>.

NOTE: Student samples are provided so that you can see an example of one student’s approach to the assignment. Copying this student’s wording is plagiarism. To avoid being overly influenced by this sample, read it through once or twice before you begin your own assignment, and then close the file. Do not keep the student sample open as you write your own assignment.

1. Double-click the Adobe Acrobat icon below. The student sample opens. If you don’t see it, check under other files that might be open on your desktop.



2. Click on the post-it icons to view my comments:



