**Report Writing**

**What is a report?**

The word ‘Report’ has originated from the French word „reporter‟ and Latin „Re‟ (back) plus „portare‟ (to carry). Both the words mean ‘to give an account.’ ‘Report,’ thus, means ‘to give people information about something that you have heard, seen, done, etc.’ It is a very formal document that is written for a variety of purposes, generally in sciences, social sciences, engineering and business disciplines. However, reports are also written for various types of academic pursuits such as a research report, a book report and a project report and include many other kinds of report writing as well.

**Objectives of Reports:**

A report is an extremely official document that is written to serve a range of purposes. Reports play a crucial role in communication in all types of businesses, organizations and professions. They assist people not only in recording the important happenings but also in decision making at all the levels. People are asked to write and present reports in every type of profession for different objectives. Some important objectives are:

* To keep check and control over a business.
* To execute new strategies and measures.
* To keep a record of research work, events, schedules, timetables, milestones and happenings.
* To record and clarify complex information for future generation.
* To meet the requirements of legal and governmental regulations.
* To study a particular situation in order to find an effective solution.
* To discuss, analyze and evaluate data.
* To present information to a large number of people.
* To present organized information on a particular topic.
* To make current and future planning and implement it.
* To evaluate infrastructure, resources and manpower.
* To compare growth, profit, achievements of an organization with those of its competitors.
* To give feedback, suggestions or recommendations on a particular problem.
* To help in taking vital decisions and actions.

**Characteristics of a Report:**

An effective reporting calls for professionalism, profound knowledge of the subject, attentiveness and outstanding writing proficiency. A good report is essentially:

**Precise:** Precision gives unity and consistency to the report and makes it a valuable document. Effective reports must clearly reflect their purpose. The objective should be defined clearly, considering the expected response from the audience/ readers.

**Factual:** A report should be very detailed and accurate. The scientific accuracy is essential to a good report as it leads to decision making.

**Relevant and appropriate:** The facts presented in a report should concentrate on the particular problem and should include no irrelevant details or misleading ideas. Irrelevant facts make a report confusing and at the same time exclusion of relevant facts leaves it incomplete.

**Reader-centric:** A good report is always reader centered. While drafting a report, it is necessary to consider keep in mind the person who is/ are going to read it and to whom. A report meant for the layman should be different from one meant for the technical people.

**Highly objective:** Recommendations and conclusions should come logically through investigations and analysis. There is no place for prejudices, bend of facts, self- interest or personal opinions on the part of the writer.

**Simple and unambiguous:** A good report should be written in simple and clear-cut language. It should be clear, brief and grammatically correct.

* Brief: A good report should be brief, complete and accurate. Brevity of a good report means that it should include all required facts and figures in an accurate manner and yet be brief.
* Well organized: A good report should present facts in systematic and definite manner.
* Comprehensible – A good report should cover all vital details e.g., What is the main problem? Who is/are involved in it? When did it arise? Moreover, it should convey understandable information.
* Grammatically Accurate: A good report uses short sentences, correct grammatical structures and spellings (In report you don’t get marks for writing correct language but you lose for writing wrong English.)
* Suitable Style and Layout: A good report should use appropriate layout and professional style.

**Significance of Reports:**

A report is a basic management tool used in decision making. Hence, it is extremely important for all the organizations, especially for large scale organizations that are engaged in different activities handled by different departments. Their top executives cannot keep a personal watch over all these activities so they have to take their decisions on the basis of reports from the heads of various departments. Reports are important for both the organizations the one in which they are prepared and the other where they are submitted. Some of the advantages of reports and report writing to the organizations and the individuals are listed below:

* **A report is the only concrete product of a professional** : All the efforts of the engineers, academicians and researchers culminate in reports that convey to others the efficiency with which they carried out their assignments.
* **Reports enable decision making and problem solving in the organizations**. Administrators can solve serious problems or can take important decisions on the basis of the information presented, analysis discussed or suggestions rendered in a report.
* **Reports help authorities in planning new ventures and in evaluating men and material**. If an organization wants to open a new branch in a nearby locality, it can plan for the same more effectively after going through the feasibility report prepared for the purpose. Similarly, if the organization wants to assess the qualities and capabilities of a person, it can do so by going through the annual assessment form submitted by the supervisor of that person. No organization can evaluate a newly introduced machine or a product without going through the report prepared for the purpose.
* **Reports are an important means of spreading information within and outside the organization**. Many reports like inspection report, inventory report, news report, annual report etc. transmit information across and outside the organization.
* **Reports serve as an important factor in determining the growth, progress or success of an organization**. The success of any organization depends on the quality and quantity of information flown through its personnel in the form of oral or written reports. For instance, an organization focusing on research can bring out reports from time to time to provide information on the progress being made and it will serve to provide its worth to the prospective clients. Moreover, a manager can measure the progress of his/ her department by going through the monthly reports on the status of all the projects.
* **Reports serve as a valuable storehouse of information**. Organizations of various kinds preserve reports of importance for a long time so that they can refer to these reports whenever required. For example, an academic institution can refer to the previous assessment reports it had received from some committee in order to improve its performance.
* **Reports reveal gap in thinking.** A report can give the recipient an idea about whether the writer has thought and proceeded logically or whether he/ she had conducted an in- depth study of the topic or not.
* **Reports develop certain skills in the writer**. Reports not only develop organizations but also help the writer develop certain skills, such as the ability to organize, evaluate, and communicate with greater accuracy.

**Types of Reports:**

Reports can be classified in the following way: Reports Oral Written Informal Formal Informational Analytical Routine Special

**1. Oral Reports:** An oral report is a face-to-face communication about something seen, observed, experienced or investigated. It generally consists of impressions, observations and experiences. It is simple and easy to describe, quick and immediate to present and gives first hand information but it may not be as objective and as detailed as a report has to be. It saves time for the reporter but may be strenuous for the listener as he/ she has to listen and memorize each and every word at the moment. Moreover, it lacks authenticity and is difficult to preserve. An oral report may not be used for taking vital decisions but it is beneficial in judging speculations and impressions and can be used to take an immediate action.

**2. Written Reports:** A written report provides a permanent record so it is always preferred to an oral report. Moreover, a written report is accurate and precise while an oral report may be vague at times. There are no chances of distortion of facts while transferring information from one source to another. A written report is more formal than an oral report and is generally used to communicate complex facts.

**3. Informal Reports:** Certain business reports can be short and informal. In current business dealings, informal reports are more frequent than the formal ones. Basically, informal reports perform the same function as the formal reports – transmitting information, facts or data to someone for taking decision. However, informal reports are quite brief about one to five pages that too when you have supplementary material like bibliography, appendices etc. The style of writing is personal and conversational.

**4. Formal Reports:** A formal report is the result of thorough investigation of a problem or situation. Formal reports are generally detailed and elaborate. These reports follow a fixed format. The length of the report may vary according to the requirement. Formal reports include informational, analytical, routine, special reports etc.

**5. Informational Reports:** An informational report presents facts, situations or problems required to take vital decisions. The writer collects relevant information, compiles and organizes it in an orderly manner and presents it as objectively as possible. Informational reports record happenings like conferences, seminars, tours, and so on and supply details for future planning.

**6. Analytical Reports:** Analytical reports present data along with its proper analysis. The writer studies facts, situations or problems objectively; evaluates the information; draws suitable inferences and puts forward his/ her recommendations and conclusions. Project reports, feasibility reports, market search report fall in this category.

* Project Reports: Project reports usually provide pre-investment information required for investments before setting up a project. These are based on small investigations. Cost, goods, machinery requirements etc. given in the report are rough calculations. They also keep the organizations regularly updated about the progress of the long term projects or bring an important issue in the limelight.
* Feasibility Report: A feasibility report evaluates a proposal designed to determine the difficulty in carrying out a plan. Market Feasibility takes into account the importance of the business in the selected area. Authorities often require developers to complete feasibility studies before they will approve a permit application for retail, commercial, industrial, manufacturing, housing, office or mixed-use project.
* Market Search Reports: Market search reports collect data on market trends, users and prices of different commodities. These reports contain guidelines for the promoters of the new products, policies, organizations etc. It is done for discovering what people want, need, or believe or how they act. Once research is done, it can be used to determine how to market the product.

**7. Routine Reports:** Routine reports, also known as form reports, are usually written on a prescribed pro forma. The main purpose of these reports is to record the progress of a task, evaluate the performance of its employees and to record the success or failure of a policy. They generally include lab reports, progress reports, inspection reports, production reports, monthly sales reports, annual confidential reports etc.

* **Lab Reports:** A lab report records the experimental work done in a laboratory to analyze a theory, conclusion or validity of a particular research. One has to record the process, reactions and results accurately in order to arrive at a convincing conclusion. These reports include title, experiment number, date, purpose, apparatus used, procedure adopted, observations, conclusions and signature.
* **Progress Reports:** A progress report informs the readers about the progress and the status of a long term project. The project may be about installation of a factory, construction of a bridge or a residential colony or some research work carried out in an organization. These reports are written at the various stages of a project. The essential details included in these reports are title of the project, date, total work to be done, time allotted, work already done, work to be done, time required, future plans, remarks, name, signature and designation of the reporter.
* **Inspection Reports:** Inspection reports are written to ascertain whether or not the work is going on satisfactorily, infrastructure facilities are sufficient or the quality fulfils the required specifications. These reports are written in factories as well as in educational organizations to check and ensure the quality.
* **Annual Confidential Reports:** Annual confidential reports are written to evaluate the performance and the general conduct of the employees in an organization. Such reports may be subjective as the human qualities such as alertness, zeal, confidence etc. may not be measured. However, these reports are used to determine their efficiency, critically appraise their achievements and assess their usefulness before granting them increments or promotions.

**8. Special Reports:** Special reports are written to convey special information related to a single condition, situation, occasion or a problem. These reports do not contain repeated information as they are written about the specific situations. Like the other reports, these reports also help in decision making as some most important decisions are taken on the basis of special reports. Special reports include inquiry reports, research reports, thesis, dissertations etc.

* **Inquiry Reports:** Inquiry reports are prepared by the special committees appointed by the government or some private organizations to investigate the cases of mishaps, carelessness on the part of the officials, charges of corruption or some anti-social activity. Such reports are prepared in groups because they demand thorough investigations of an issue, objective interpretations and recommendations and systematic presentation of information. These reports are very common in administration as no action can be taken against any one without proper justification.
* **Research Reports:** Research reports are prepared by the researchers and scholars of various universities, colleges and research organizations to present a concrete proof of the research conducted. While writing a research report, one must aim at clarity, organization and content. Research reports are all the more same like technical reports, lab reports and scientific papers which follow a consistent format to display information clearly.

**Structure of a Formal Report**

Keeping the above guidelines in mind, draft your report, revise it, check it thoroughly and take some time to refine it then compile it under the following heads:

1. Opening Section:

* Cover
* Frontispiece
* Title Page
* Copyright Notice
* Forwarding Letter
* Preface

1. Acknowledgements Table of Contents Table of Charts/ Diagrams and Illustrations Abstract or Executive Summary

2. Body of the Report: Introduction Methodology Discussion and Description Conclusions and Recommendations

3. Closing of the Report: Endnotes Appendices References and Bibliography Glossary Index

1. Opening Section: The opening section of a formal report includes the preliminary details to familiarize the readers with the content of the report:

2. Cover: The cover of a formal report is important as it is the first thing the readers notice about the report and it protects the report as well. The cover should be preferably white or some neutral colour and should contain report's title, author's name, the name of the department or the organization for which it is prepared, date of publication and report number. For example: ROLE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN JOB SELECTIONS A Report By Seema Chahal Report No. 6 G. L. A. University, Mathura (UP) 25 March 2012 Logo

1. Frontispiece: Frontispiece is generally given in long reports. It includes a map, a logo, an organization chart, a photograph etc. It arouses curiosity of the reader as well as creates interest in him/ her for the report.
2. Title Page. The title page of a formal report often contains the same information as is given on the cover page. It provides the details like heading, sub-heading, writer’s name and designation, name and address of the authority to whom the report is submitted, serial number if any, date, contact number and approval: Report no. 10 Project no. 2 A Report on ROLE OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN JOB SELECTIONS A Study Based on Job Selections of M. C. A. Students Prepared for The Department of Training and Placements G. L. A University, Mathura Approved by: Admission Committee By V. MENON Academic Coordinator G. L. A University, Mathura 27 June 2012
3. Copyright Notice: Copyright notice is given on the back side of the title page, if a report is to be published: © 2010 By Pearson Education Ltd. Or sometimes it is given in the form of a note: „All rights reserved. No part of the report may be reproduced in any form without the permission of the publisher.’
4. Forwarding Letter: ‘Forwarding letter’ or the ‘Letter of Transmittal,’ or ‘Covering Letter’ is a brief letter by the writer explaining the objectives, scope and other highlights of the report. It contains information like time and areas covered in the research process, difficulties encountered in preparing the report, need for further study or a prompt action, significance of the study etc.
5. Preface: The preface introduces the report describing its salient features and offers it to the readers. It provides an opportunity to the writer to justify his/ her approach. A preface is normally written in long reports for the common readers when it is not clear who will Logo

read it. If all these features are included in the ‘Forwarding Letter,’ there is no point in giving ‘Preface’ separately. Acknowledgements: Acknowledgements is the customary necessary part of the report. It gives the writers an opportunity to acknowledge all the major contributors who have provided financial, moral or emotional support in preparing the report. ‘I am really thankful…. / I take this opportunity to…/I convey my sincere thanks….I express my heartfelt gratitude…/ I am indebted….I acknowledge my thankfulness…./ I will be failing in my duty if I don‟t …../‟ – are some phrases which may be used for this purpose.

1. Table of Contents: The ‘Table of Contents’ gives complete information regarding the headings, sub-headings along with page number on which a particular topic or a point is given. In a long report, it not only enables the readers to locate a point or a sub-point but also gives them an overview of the report indicating relationship between the main points and the sub-elements. However, be uniform and consistent while numbering the points and sub-points as well as in organizing them.

For example:

Table of Contents

S. No. CONTENTS Page No.

1. Introduction

1.1. ---------------------

1.2. ---------------------

1.3. ----------------------

1.4. ----------------------

2. Discussion

2.1. ----------------------

2.2. ---------------------

2.3. ---------------------

**Table of Charts/ Diagrams or Illustrations:**

The ‘Table of Contents’ is usually followed by the ‘Table of Charts/ Diagrams or Illustrations.’ It includes all charts, figures, diagrams and illustrations used in the report. If the number of these items is small, they may be combined into one table also.

**Abstract or Executive Summary:**

An Abstract or an Executive Summary is the gist of the report in a single tightly packed paragraph stating aim, results and recommendations of the report. One has to oversimplify facts while condensing a 100 page report to one paragraph stating the salient features as well as the tone and emphasis of the report without distorting facts.

**Body of the Report:**

The main body of the formal report contains introduction, discussion, and conclusion of the report: Introduction. The introduction of a report prepares readers for understanding the discussion of the report. Like the title and the summary, introduction is written for the largest possible readers. It supplies details regarding the general outline of the report – purpose and the scope of the study, historical and technical perspectives of the problem undertaken as well as the limitations of the report.

**Methodology**:

Methodology comprises a number of sources through which information has been gathered like internet, libraries, interviews, surveys, discussions etc. used for collecting information. This section summarizes the method, sources and procedure of data collection as well the criterion of adopting a particular approach.

**Discussion/ Description and Analysis:**

This part of the report presents facts, analysis and interpretation of data. The details are presented in the same order as they are collected. Discussion part of the report may be divided into sections, sub-sections, headings and sub-headings in order to provide clarity to the structure.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:**

The conclusion section analyzes important results from the discussion and evaluates them in context of the entire work. In this part you should mention several techniques employed to solve a problem, propose a course of action to improve a situation and indicate need of further work in the concerned area.

**Closing of the Report:**

The report is concluded with endnotes, appendices, glossary, and references. Endnotes: All the scientific terms, difficult words and technical phrases used in the report should be explained along with their sources in detail, immediately after citation in brackets or as a footnote at the end of the page or after the chapter or at the end of the main body of the report.

**Appendices:**

Appendices contain material or data that is relevant to the main text but does not easily fit into the main body e.g., graphs, letters, articles, questionnaires, statistical and technical details etc. At the end of the report, they do not divert the readers and may be referred to whenever required. If the items included in an appendix are numerous, appendices may also be numbered as ‘Appendix A’, ‘Appendix B’ and so on. Some material like slides, models or samples may be recorded in a different way of binding or framing to complement with the main report. References and

**Bibliography:**

‘References’ refer to the works or material – books, research papers, reports, dissertations, thesis, news papers, websites – cited in the report, in the order of their occurrence including author’s name, work, publishing details and page number. For example: Grewal, B.S.(2005), Numerical Methods for Engineering and Science, Khanna Publishers.

**Glossary:**

A glossary is the list of technical and specialized terms defined in an alphabetical order in a report. It helps the readers understand difficult terms and words and enables the writers to explain key definitions to the non-technical readers. Cross- references of all the words should be explained in glossary. Index: Index is the final section of the report. It lists all important concepts, topics and sub-topics along with page numbers, discussed in the report.