

1. Forms of Technical Communication

Today we talk of globalization¹ when the entire world has come closer. Various countries of the world have developed business relations with one another. But in the business world, it is not always possible for people to meet and talk with their fellow employees or customers or clients or suppliers or employers who belong to different places. Hence, they seek the help of different means of communication. Oral communication such as telephonic conversation do not always suffice² the purpose of the listener or of the speaker. Moreover, people in business and technocrats at their working places need permanent written records of what was said, to whom and on what topic. Hence technical written communication has become indispensable³ in the modern world. Technical writing facilitates the working of a technocrat. It helps in conducting business. Report, memo, proposal, resume and business letters are some important forms of technical writing.

2. Report

The word report has been derived from the Latin word *reportare* which means to carry back. A report, thus, means to carry back to someone who was not present the description of an event.

A report, generally, means 'to give an account of something seen, heard, done etc.' Lesikar and Flatley define report in the following words : "A business report is an orderly and objective communication of factual information that serves a business purpose". They give an explanation of the key words in the definition like *orderly*, *objective*, *communication*, and *factual information*. According to them as an *orderly* communication, a report is prepared carefully. The *objective* quality of a report makes the reporter to seek truth and avoid human biases. The word *communication* involves transmitting meaning whereas *factual information* is related to data, records etc. Thus, a report prepared on these guidelines serves a business purpose.

Report writing has assumed tremendous importance in the modern democratic set up and also in complex business organizations. The meetings are held, the commissions are set up and the committees are formed to attend some special business where several resolutions⁴ are passed, decisions are taken and the policies are laid down. The members of these meetings, commissions and committees have to submit their reports on all the proceedings. Today report writing has been developed into a technical art.

Different people have defined report differently. J. Stanley Jones' definition sums up all the important components of a report. He writes, "A report is a special form of narrative which aims chiefly at conveying information, based upon facts." Thus, report is a type of narration but of a special type.

1. Increasing integration of world markets for capital, goods and services; 2. Be sufficient; 3. Necessary; 4. Decisions.

3. Significance Importance of Report Writing

Professionals need effective report writing skills in order to be successful at their workplace. In report writing, the main thrust of the writer is to provide information in a scientific way. Besides, reports help in presenting data and recording the business proceedings which provide necessary feedback. Sometimes, reports persuade and motivate the readers. Reports provide necessary suggestions and recommendations. Reports are vital to the success of an organization. In brief, the relevance of report writing can be summed up in the following points :

1. Reports provide information in a scientific way.
2. Reports help in planning new ventures.
3. On the basis of reports, the officials evaluate the performance of their employees and promote them accordingly.
4. Reports help in keeping records which provide necessary feedback.
5. Sometimes, reports persuade and motivate the readers. They serve as stimuli⁵ to action.
6. A report on policies and procedures records complex information for future reference.

Thus "a report is a formal document written for a specific audience to meet a specific need".

4. Characteristics of a Report

Report writing has become a part of technical art. Since a report is the result of the efforts, made by the investigator, it should be written in an orderly way. Below are listed a few characteristics which a good report should have :

1. Based on facts
2. Objective in approach
3. Precision—no play of imagination
4. Clarity—use of unambiguous language
5. Accuracy—no scope for exaggerated or hyperbolic expressions
6. Grammatically accurate
7. Reader-oriented
8. Properly documented

5. Style of Writing Reports

Style of writing report largely depends on:

1. the reader
2. the context
3. the purpose

A number of things relating to style have already been mentioned in above point i.e., the characteristics of a Report. However, some basic elements of the style of report are listed below :

5. Something that provokes.

Objectivity

A report is a systematic discussion, analysis and interpretation of facts, it leaves no scope for the expression of sentiments and emotions. The writer pays no attention to subjective comments and personal feelings. For objectivity, the following linguistic devices can be adopted :

Use of impersonal language : avoid use of personal pronouns like 'we', 'I', 'me' etc.

Use of appropriate passive construction.

Avoid hasty Generalisations

Avoid reference to irrelevant differences based on caste or religion

Formal Language

1. Use of formal words
2. Use of specialized terminology
3. Use of formal phrases and expressions
4. Avoid use of colloquial expressions
5. Avoid conversational tone

Specific References

6. Structure of a Report

A report is said to have three parts, namely :

1. Front matter
2. Main body
3. Back matter

1. Front matter :

It includes cover page, title page, acknowledgment, table of contents and an abstract or summary. The cover page protects the report from rain or any other damages. It includes the name of the reporter and the date. The title page also has the name of the writer, its title and date.

Specimen of Cover Page

A Report on the Population Explosion

By : Arvind Kumar

(Researcher)

Ministry of Human Resource Development,
New Delhi

March, 15

A table of contents lists the sections of the report and the pages on which they start. The table of contents presents the organization and emphasis of a report. In the long reports, the readers look at the table of contents in order to locate the particular sections of the report. A table of contents can be described as a list of headings and sub-headings into which the content of the report has so far been organized.

Specimen of Title Page

A Report on the Population Explosion

Prepared for M. K. Mehta

(Chairman of the Committee)

By : Arvind Kumar

(Researcher)

Approved By :

G. K. Jha (Director)

Ministry of Human Resource Development.

New Delhi

March. 15

Here are some tips for writing a good table of contents :

- (i) Present the name of each section in the same wording and format as it appears in the text. If a section title is all in capitals in the text, place it in all capitals in the table of contents.
- (ii) Need not underline the name of the sections in the table of contents.
- (iii) Need not use "page" or 'p' before the page numbers.
- (iv) Write neatly and clearly the table of contents otherwise there will be a lot of confusion.
- (v) Use Roman numerals (such as i, ii, iii, iv...) for the parts or sections which appear before the main body of the table of contents.
- (vi) Don't use numbers for the main sections of the table of contents.
- (vii) Present only two levels of heads.
- (viii) Use a series of dots to connect words to page numbers.

Specimen of Table of Contents

Acknowledgments/ Preface.....(i)	Description or Discussion	3
Introduction	Conclusion	5
Background	Recommendation	8
Purpose	Appendix	9
Scope	Bibliography	12
Procedure	Glossary	16

Besides a table of contents, there is a sub section of acknowledgment where the writer expresses his thanks to those persons who have been helpful to him in the preparation of the report. He will mention the name and designation of that person who has been of great help in the preparation of the report. A report may contain a preface where the writer introduces the problem in brief and also explains the aim of the report.

At the end of the front matter, there is summary or abstract. A summary or abstract is a miniature version of the report. A summary contains the main points and basic details of the entire report. Today the ability to present concise and short versions of long documents is not only helpful but essential (Riordan). The ability to summarize is considered fundamental to technical writing. Technocrats have to summarize not only their

own long documents but also documents written by others. Hence, each technocrat has to learn the skill of summarizing long reports. A good summary should include the following points :

- (i) the purpose of report
- (ii) the problem the report addresses
- (iii) the conclusions
- (iv) the facts on which the conclusions are based
- (v) the recommendations

The following guidelines should be followed to summarize a formal report :

- (a) The information should be summed up into as few words as possible. Almost it should be of one page length.
- (b) It should summarize the entire content of the report.
- (c) Technical terminology should be avoided since most readers who depend on a summary do not have in-depth technical knowledge.
- (d) Broadly speaking ,the two terms – summary and abstract – are considered synonymous yet there is a fine difference between a summary and an abstract.

Difference between Summary and Abstract

Both summaries and abstracts are short restatements of another document (Vaughan). While defining a summary and an abstract Pauley and Riordan write – A summary restates major findings, conclusions, and support data found in a document. Summaries, which accompany many types of reports, are aimed at readers within an organization, typically executives. Many report writers put summaries first, before the body, in order to alert the reader to the main point or gist of the report. An abstract is generally a short version of a journal article. Abstracts appear in two places : with the articles in the periodical and as an independent unit provided by abstracting services for professionals in the field.

2. Main body

It includes introduction, description, discussion, conclusion and recommendation.

Introduction introduces the report to the readers. It acquaints the reader with the reporter's organization and content. An introduction includes statements of:

- (i) purpose of the report (problem it studies).
- (ii) scope of the investigation
- (iii) procedure adopted while investigating
- (iv) background of the project

Another major part of the main body of the report is description and discussion. This section of the report includes a detailed description of the work and also a discussion of the problem in detail. At the end of the report, conclusions and recommendations are given. The conclusion section emphasizes the most significant data and ideas of report. It contains a brief commentary on the inferences⁶ drawn from the discussions. The recommendation section may give some suggestions for improvement but all formal reports do not make a recommendation.

6. Conclusions.

3. Back matter

The back matter has appendix, list of references, bibliography, glossary and index, wherever necessary.

The first major part of back matter is appendix. It contains information of a supplementary or highly technical nature which cannot be placed in the main body of the report. It generally includes such sub-sections as tables, data, model or other relevant documents. While preparing an appendix, the writer should take into account certain important points. For example, he should refer to each appendix item at the appropriate place in the body of the report. The illustrations in the appendix should be numbered in the sequence, begun in the body of the report. For long reports, separate pagination system can be used. Different appendices may be identified as Appendix A, Appendix B and so on.

In course of the preparation of a report, the writer uses certain information, collected from various sources. When the writer uses actual words or ideas of others then it becomes essential for him to show his indebtedness to the original writers. The references are produced in the order in which they appear in the text. There are two methods of writing references or footnotes – one of the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the other of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Bibliography is another major part of *Back Matter*. On a final page of report, an alphabetized list of sources should be mentioned. These sources may include a list of books, periodicals, interviews etc., and citation of these references is known as bibliography. The bibliography imparts information about the writer, the book, the publication, the edition, the no. of volume and the year of publication.

Besides appendix, reference and bibliography, glossary and index should be included in the back matter of a report, if it is necessary. A glossary is defined as a list of unfamiliar words or the uncommon technical terms which are beyond the understanding of a common reader. An index can also be given in case of long report – the report in form of a book. An index includes the word, the technical terms and also different page numbers on which that word or technical term appears.

7. Types of Reports

Reports are used to provide information and analyses so that right decisions can be taken and problems can be solved. Different sorts of reports are prepared by different types of people for conducting different sorts of business. For example, a newspaper editor may write a report for his paper, a financial expert for the market and an official for the promotion of his juniors. Reports are classified by criteria such as source, frequency, target audience, length and intent. Below are listed the major types of official reports :

1. Voluntary or authorized
2. Routine or special
3. Internal or external
4. Short or long
5. Informational or analytical

7.1 Voluntary or Authorized Reports

Reports are classified on the basis of their sources i.e. who initiates⁷ them. Reports which are prepared on one's own initiative are known as voluntary reports which often require more detail than authorized reports which are prepared at the request of some one.

7.2 Routine or Special Reports

Routine or periodic reports are submitted either weekly, monthly, quarterly or annually. Such routine or periodic reports such as sales and financial are prepared on the routine activities of the organizations.

The future policies of organization are also included. Generally such reports are used to inform the shareholders, directors or members of the organization. Special reports are the formal reports, submitted by certain individuals or committees to present the result of specific onetime studies or investigations. These special reports are not only statements of facts but they include the opinion of the writer. The writer also gives conclusion at the end. The format of the special report is as follows :

- (a) Title of the report
- (b) Terms of reference
- (c) Introduction
- (d) Procedure—meetings etc.
- (e) Findings of the reports
- (f) Conclusion—Recommendation

7.3 Internal or External Reports

Reports are often classified by criteria such as target audience i.e. where they are being sent. Reports which are designed for use within the organization are known as internal reports. Memorandum is a kind of report that circulates within and among various departments of a company or an office. In more simple terms, it may be known as inter-office communication. Reports sent to people outside the organization are known as external reports which are generally more formal than internal reports. Moreover, these external reports may be in letter format or manuscript format.

7.4 Short or Long Reports

Reports are classified as short or long on the basis of the detail they contain. A short report discusses one point of the problem while a long report takes into consideration a problem in detail. Such long reports are prepared after extensive⁸ and formal research . It takes a good lot of time in its preparation whereas short reports are concise and prepared in short span of time without any formal research.

7.5 Informational and Analytical Reports

Reports can be informational or analytical according to their function. Informational reports intend to present data without analyses or recommendations whereas analytical reports aim at solving a problem by evaluation, interpretation and analysis of data. On the basis of analysis of data the reporter arrives at a conclusion and provides certain recommendations for action. Like the informational report an analytical report also contains facts but its focus is on recommendations. It, therefore, is often called a recommendation report where information “plays a supporting role; it is a means to an end rather an end in itself.”

Professionals have to prepare different kinds of reports at their work-place. These reports may include reports for monitoring and controlling operations, compliance reports, progress reports, project reports, market research projects, laboratory reports, inspection reports, inventory reports, monthly inquiry reports, annual confidential reports on employees and so on.

8. Format of Reports

There are four formats of reports. The decision about format should be made keeping in view the nature and function of the report. The need of audience should always be principally considered. These four options are:

8.1 Preprinted Form

This format is used for fill in the blank reports which are relatively short and deal with routine information. This format is generally used for the routine reports such as the monthly status report where there is less scope for flexibility. The person filling these preprinted forms is required to tick against the listed terms.

8.2 Letter Format

The letter format is used for reports that are short and external (directed to outsiders). Letter format can be used for informational as well as analytical reports. It includes all the normal parts of a letter including a title or a subject line that clearly states the subject of the document. Besides, the letter format reports may have headings, footnotes, tables and figures.

8.3 Memo

Memorandum format is used for short reports that circulate within a company or an office. The day-to-day operation of a company depends on memos. A memo is actually a brief report. It, therefore, is called a miniature report. Periodic reports are usually written in memo format and they are generally brief. But like longer reports, they have headings or a subject line. Brevity or conciseness is one of its essential features.

8.4 Manuscript Format

Manuscript format is used for formal reports. These formal reports are usually long. Such reports require more elements before the text i.e. the prefatory part, and after i.e. the supplementary part. They should include the elements like title page, preface, letter of transmittal, acknowledgments, table of contents, list of illustrations, abstracts, introduction, methodology analysis, conclusion, recommendation, appendices, references and bibliography.

9. Steps in Writing a Report

Whether one is going to write routine or special report, a short or a long report, one has to follow certain steps so that the report can be well organized and presented systematically. Some such steps are listed below :

1. **Analyse the problem :** Before one begins to write a report, at the outset, one has to analyse the problem or in other words think about the objectives of writing the report. Once the objectives are decided, the writer can proceed further and choose the specific devices which are in accordance with the problem he is going to deal with.
2. **Determine the scope of the report :** Next thing which should be considered is the scope of the report so that the report can be precise and relevant. The writer will have to determine the amount of information which is required. If he does not narrow down the scope of the report, such a report remains no more specific and useful.

3. **Consider the audience/reader :** Report writers should take into consideration the readers for whom the report is being prepared. The age, education, subject knowledge, attitudes, professional status of the audience/reader should be known to the writer.
4. **Gather information :** After analysing the problem, scope of the report and the audience/ reader, what writer is supposed to do is to gather information. Primary sources like interviews, observation, discussions, sight visits and so on can help the writer in gathering necessary information. Some secondary sources like reports, books, other printed material such as journals, dissertations, magazines, newspapers etc. can be of great help in the collection of genuine, relevant and accurate information.
5. **Analyse the information :** Once data have been collected, another stage is of the data analysis. It involves analysis of available data in order to obtain certain facts and figures which may help in developing further details.
6. **Preparing the report :** Once the information has been analysed, the writer begins to prepare report. He will offer solutions to the problem and also give some recommendations. The final report should always be written in simple and direct language, giving all supporting data.

Model Reports

Report No. 1

A Sample Memo Report

Pauley and Riordan present a sample memo report which has a short introduction, briefly recounts the results of a test and recommends a course of action – all in three paragraphs.

To : Bob Mitchell

From : Marcia L. Cody

Subject : Shrustik Vs. WA tapes

April 1, 2016

I've completed the laboratory testing on the Shrustik and the WA t. . . used for Bi-pack cans. This report presents the results of my tests along with my recommendation. I performed the laboratory vibration testing according to ASTMN packing regulations.

The WA tapes is far superior to the Shrustik tape in preventing can separation during shipping . The Shrustik tapes showed 27 out of the 60 cans tested completely separated from each other. Another 17 out of the 60 cans joined together with the Shrustik tapes showed severe tape scuffing. The WA tapes tested showed no cans separated, and only 5 out of the 60 cans had some scuffing.

My recommendation is to use the WA rather than the Shrustik tapes to prevent can separation during shipping.

Purpose of memo

Credibility of Writer

Basic conclusion first

Data to support conclusion

Recommendation in separate paragraph for emphasis

Report No. 2

(A News Report on infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir)

Infiltration into J & K on the rise

Srinagar : There have been reports of a steady rise in the movement of armed militants across the Line of Control (LOC), especially since Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee invited Pakistan's President Pervez Mushraaf for talks.

A senior police officer said 200 armed foreign militants had sneaked⁹ into the country from across the LOC near the Kupwara sector in north-west Kashmir in the past three weeks.

According to intelligence inputs, given the disagreement among Pakistan hard-liners over the General's visit to this country, Pakistan-based militant groups were likely to set-up their subversive¹⁰ activities during the forthcoming summit.

9. To go or move in a quiet way ; 10. overthrow or undermine an established government or political system by attacking it secretly.

There have been over half a dozen encounters between militants and the security forces near the LOC at the Handawara-Kupwara sector in the past three weeks, killing 10 soldiers and an equal number of militants. However, many more militants, largely foreign mercenaries¹¹, have managed to sneak off into the valley.

Ashok Bhandari, special secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, has already asked the security forces to be extra vigilant during the summit.

The security in and around government installation and localities with concentration of minority communities has been tightened. The security cover provided to Hurriyat leaders has also been up- graded.

(The Times of India, News Service Monday,
June 25, 2001)

Report No. 3

(A News Report on a Railway Accident)
Accident stresses need for rail safety measures

New Delhi : Two months into his second tenure as railway minister, Nitish Kumar faces the nightmare¹² again – another train accident, more deaths. Last time, it was Gaisal, this time it is Kadalundi, near Kozhikode. Two years ago, systemic flaws led to nearly 300 deaths in a train collision at Gaisal : this time, it is too early to say what went wrong.

Thirteen years ago, there was a similar tragedy in Kerala – bogies fell off a bridge into Ashthamudi lake, victims apparently of a typhoon. It will take time to get a clear picture of what happened this time, but lingering safety issues have just snapped¹³ back into sharp focus again.

9. To go or move in a quiet way ; 10. overthrow or undermine an established government or political system by attacking it secretly; 11. Men hired for service in a foreign army; 12. A bad dream; 13. Executed or carried through in haste.

For, in the journey of two years since Gaisal, a virtually bankrupt Railways has been unable to do much more than pay lip-service to correcting systemic safety flaws. Safety is an issue. Nitish Kumar, who resigned after the Gaisal accident on August 1999, has been harping on—there can be no compromise on this front, he told general managers during a meeting in May. It was again on the agenda for a special meeting of GMs scheduled for Saturday; the meeting stands cancelled now. Accident after accident has pointed to flaws, meeting after meeting has pointed to the need to finalise inquiry reports on time and take corrective measures. But most times, the long wait for reports erases¹⁴ the accident from public memory, the Railways tasked with little more than the job of making reassuring noises. With traffic going up, equipment being flogged and the list of average assets (tracks, coaches, wagons, signals etc.) growing, safety margins are getting squeezed¹⁵ further.

The jury, obviously, is still out on what happened this Friday. But a look at the big picture shows derailments¹⁶ are clearly the main problem for the Railways. Of course 400 'consequential' train accidents a year, 76 per cent are derailments, 60 per cent are due to track problems. About eight percent are collisions¹⁷, which could be triggered by a derailment. Officials have been saying it is the cause-derailment-rather than the consequence which should be tackled. That does not always happen. Human error is blamed for two-thirds or more of all accidents but there are failures every day—more than 2,000 rail fractures a year, more than 3,000 weld failures a year.

*(The Times of India, News Service Monday,
June 25, 2010)*

Report No. 4

(A report on UCO Bank's cash scheme for the benefit of the customers)

UCO Bank's Mega Cash Scheme

Under UCO Bank's Mega Cash Scheme, customers will be offered loan between ₹ 2 and 10 lakh to meet obligations like marriage expenses, children's higher education, foreign travel expenses, medical expenses, renovation¹⁸ of house and repayment of loans from other banks etc.

A uniform rate of 16 per cent will be charged on the loan. The borrower may be a salaried man, a professional or a businessman. The scheme has two classifications.

Under scheme A, loan will be sanctioned against urban property and in scheme B, the loan will be self-liquidating in nature.

In either case, the borrower won't have to provide guarantor. If repayments on the loan are regular, 5 per cent of the total interest amount will be waived.

14. To wipe out; 15. Press together closely; 16. Trains leaving the track; 17. Accidents; 18. Repairing remodelling.