



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

Copyright and terms of use

IIT Madras is the sole owner of the content available in this portal - onlinedegree.iitm.ac.in and the content is copyrighted to IIT Madras.

- Learners may download copyrighted material for their use for the purpose of the online program only.
- Except as otherwise expressly permitted under copyright law, no use other than for the purpose of the online program is permitted.
- No copying, redistribution, retransmission, publication or exploitation, commercial or otherwise of material will be permitted without the express permission of IIT Madras.
- Learner acknowledges that he/she does not acquire any ownership rights by downloading copyrighted material.
- Learners may not modify, publish, transmit, participate in the transfer or sale, create derivative works, or in any way exploit, any of the content, in whole or in part.

English – II (Advanced English)
Professor Dr. Om Prakash
Guest Faculty, Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Developing Writing Skills

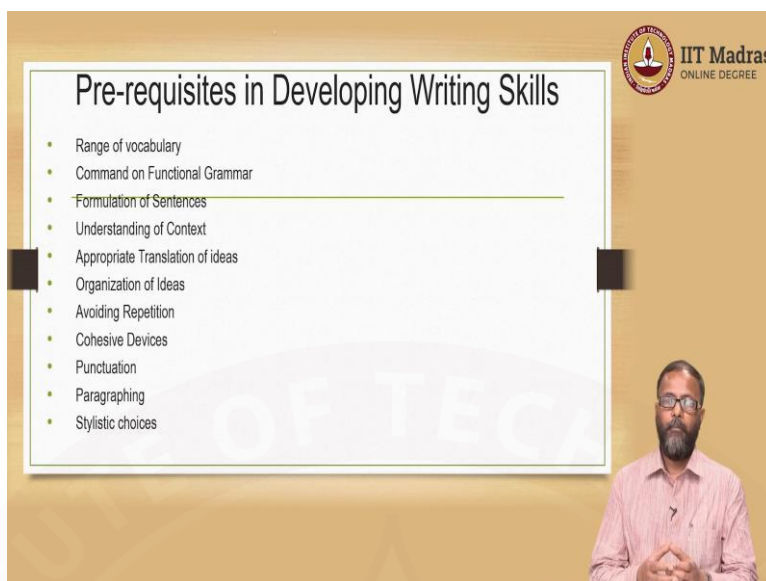
Welcome to class. Today we are going to talk about how to develop a good writing skill. As you are familiar, we have four integrated language skills. So, when I say I know Hindi, when I say I know English, when I say I know Tamil, I know Telugu, I mean to say that I have proficiency, linguistic proficiency in terms of listening or understanding, speaking, reading and writing.

So, four integrated skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, that is the natural order. Writing comes at the end of the list. That means, writing comes very late to us in our childhood as compared to listening and speaking. Listening and speaking are primary fundamental skills. Why? Because languages are primarily oral, and we acquire our mother tongue naturally, but reading and writing are crafted skills.

We acquire these skills of reading and writing in a language with a structured instruction and conscious and cautious effort. So we have to make a lot of effort to learn the script because the script is at the center of these two skills, reading and writing. So, as a user of language, we have to be familiar with the script and scripts are taught separately. You acquire listening and speaking, two skills, without any structured instruction from the environment; but you acquire even reading and writing in your own mother tongue with instructions, structured instructions. That is the difference between these two sets of skills. And that is why we need to pay extra effort in understanding, reading, and writing. Let us say in English, which is not your mother tongue, it is second or third language to you. So, you need more effort to develop this skill.

You may be a good speaker of English, you may be a good listener. You can understand the text very easily. But when it comes to writing, it is a productive skill; it requires a lot of other complex cognitive skills to accomplish a good task of writing. And that is why we are going to talk about writing as a skill and how we can develop this skill.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:20)



Pre-requisites in Developing Writing Skills

- Range of vocabulary
- Command on Functional Grammar
- Formulation of Sentences
- Understanding of Context
- Appropriate Translation of ideas
- Organization of Ideas
- Avoiding Repetition
- Cohesive Devices
- Punctuation
- Paragraphing
- Stylistic choices

So, in this talk, we are going to talk about certain widely held ideas to develop skills. I repeat, there is no golden rule and you might come across claims where people say ‘10 golden rules to write good English’. I do not know, there is no Golden Rule. You need a lot of continuous effort and practice, and how to go about it? What are the background preparations we need to make? What do we need to do while writing? Post-writing, what do we need to do? How, what is the follow up? So, all these basic fundamental general things we are going to talk about but at the same time, if you want to develop your writing skill, you need to engage with the language and the activity, and you need to have a lot of practice.

Now, there are certain prerequisites. As I told you, that this is a well-crafted skill inculcated or acquired with the help of structured instructions in a formal setup. So usually, as a human child, we learn to read and write when you go to school or even at home, then in this structured supervision of the adults. So, extending this understanding into a second or third language definitely will require a lot of effort on your part.

So just be ready for that and believe me, you can develop a very good skill in writing. And there are certain prerequisites, that means background preparations before you start writing. Certain basic elements you need to have, linguistic units you need to have, before you start, or get to serious writing.

First and foremost, we need of course, we need to understand that script and we need to understand the alphabet, that is the separate thing. This is a minimum, bare minimum basic thing; we will not talk about that. But given the fact that as an Indian user of English, we are

all familiar with functional grammar, we are all familiar with a wide range of vocabulary, we are familiar with spelling of the word.

So, I assumed that we have those ingredients and the background linguistic units that are required for writing. But if you are engaged in good writing, serious writing, you need to have a range of vocabulary, wide range of vocabulary, so to develop a wide range of vocabulary. Then you have to have fairly good command on grammar. And when we say fairly good command on grammar, I do not mean you to be a grammarian, who knows all the rules. That is not required, but you are required to be able to formulate sentences.

So, you are able to understand the basic functional grammar, so that you can formulate grammatical sentences in English. So, a fairly good range of vocabulary, a fairly good command on functional grammar and ability to formulate sentences, grammatical sentences, acceptable sentences. These are three primary requirements.

Beyond that, at a little higher level, you need to be understanding the context. Because always remember, any word or any text has meaning within a context, not outside. So, when you learn a word, you do not only, you not only learn spelling of it or pronunciation of it, you learn a word in terms of three aspects of learning. The three aspects of learning involved in a word, particular word, and every word that you learn, there are three aspects of learning involved.

Number one, you learn the spelling, or the pronunciation of the word, that means the structure of the word. So, you need to learn a structure of the word. That is the first thing. Then you need to learn meaning of the word. So structure, meaning, the second aspect. And what is the third aspect? Context in which it is being used or it is used. So when we learn a word, we learn three things together about a word, and then only that word learning is complete.

Most of us go by dictionary entries. Dictionary entries suggest a basic meaning of the word, basic idea about the word, but words are used in a text or in a sentence in a particular context. It can be metaphorical use, it can be idiomatic use of the words. So word literally means the same in the dictionary entry, but if you look at the sentence, it may give you a different meaning. And that is why understanding the extended use of the word is important.

And interestingly, in Indian English, for that matter, we write or speak with extended meaning of these words and most of the time, even the native speakers of English fail to derive sense out of it because you need to be familiar with the cultural context. You need to

be familiar with not only structure and meaning but also the context, cultural, social cultural context.

And you need to understand the variation in the structure and variation in the meaning. So, your understanding is complete when you understand a word in terms of its structure, its meaning, and its context. And that is why good reading, extensive reading is required to discover the contexts of use of a particular word. So, you need to understand the context, then most of the time you find it difficult to map the idea and the text, that means translate your ideas into the text.

English is not your mother tongue, we are not native speakers of English. As we are not native speakers of English, we have a lot of socio-cultural gaps in our understanding of the language. So, translation becomes little problematic for us and we need to learn that art. So, you have to practice a lot for translating your ideas into actual acceptable Standard English sentence.

And there is no golden rule for that. Let me repeat myself again and again, that you need to do practice, you need to have practice, and extensive reading in terms of input and frequent practice of writing in terms of output. Then only this skill will develop.

So, then every text has a structure. So, you have to have the central idea of the text, then all the required information must be organized in chronological order. So, the text should be, or the following sentences should be in the feeding order to complete the sentence. We have a lot of cohesive devices, lot of connectors that we use in English. Then punctuation is a very serious thing in the text, written text. And why? Because, a single comma, comma denotes a pause; colon, again denotes a pause; semicolon also denotes a pause; full stop is complete pause.

So, you have to understand however for that matter, inverted commas, where to put the inverted commas. So, you have to understand punctuation. In orals format of the language, you do not have to be familiar with the use of comma or full stop everything, your pauses work. If I have a long pause, it means sentence is complete, sentence is complete. So, we play with the pauses, we play with suprasegmental ideas or features like you know, intonation, stress, rhythm. But these are missing in written text, because written text is different from oral text. So, the sounds are missing and the suprasegmental features are missing. So, in the text, you have black and white orthographic symbols. So, all these suprasegmental features and the variations and the pitch and everything is represented in terms of punctuation. So,

you have colons, commas, semicolons, inverted commas, dash, hyphen. You need to understand the role of these in writing.

Of late you can see that people use, majority of people in majority of writings, they use two things, comma and full stop. Now you have italics and bold and underlined features because of typing. But you need to be familiar with proper punctuation.

Paragraphing? Paragraphing is about organizing your idea in the text. Each paragraph that you write contains a central idea. Every paragraph is centered around a singular idea. And in that paragraph, you have a nuclear sentence, and rest of the sentences of the paragraph are like qualifying statements. So, it has to be argumentative. And when your argument ends, or the new idea begins, it is always advisable to have a paragraph. That helps you in organizing your idea in a chronological order.

Again, stylistic choices. All of us use language, according to our own style and fancies. So, we all have our own unique style of using language. We all speak differently, with a different style. We all have our own idiosyncrasies in language and that is also reflected when you write.

So, your personal imprint is there in the text you write. So, the choices you make, choices of words, choices of sentences, choices of arrangement, it can be deductive, it can be inductive. So, these stylistic choices are purely yours, you have to develop your own style of writing, and that becomes a trademark.

So, these are the prerequisites in developing good writing skills. Quickly summing up, you need to develop wide range of vocabulary; you need to have fairly good command on grammar, functional grammar; you do not have to be grammarian, you do not have to remember rules of grammar, not at all. But a functional use of it, you should be familiar with the functional use of grammar. You should be able to formulate grammatical sentences. You need to understand the text and the context.

You need to develop skills of translating and mapping your ideas into linguistic structures; organizing your idea, avoid repetitions because in writing that is kind of immortal, permanent thing. When you speak, we do a lot of repetition and paraphrasing. When we speak, we have a lot of half-finished sentences. We seem casual at times, we drop linguistic elements but in writing, we cannot afford to do so. So, you have to have complete grammatical sentences and a complete sentence within two full stops. So, you have to have the skill to use cohesive

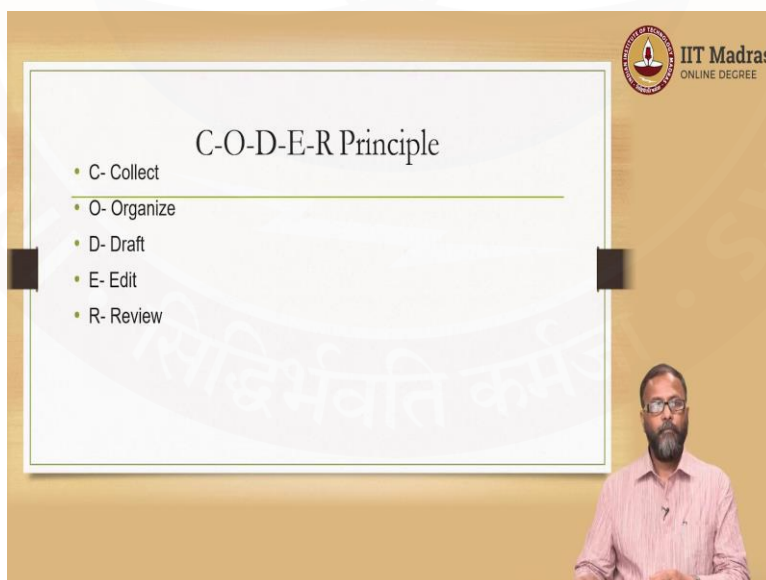
devices, how to connect sentences, how to connect long sentences, how to make complex sentences.

Always remember, writing complex sentences, ornamental sentences are not good sign of a good writer. A good writer is one who is able to communicate the central idea of the text without interruption and ambiguity. So, you are not into essay writing competition or a creative writer where you have to show-off your writing skills. You are not writing poetry. You are not writing novels. You can afford to write this when you get to that level, and you can write poetry, you can write novels.

But always remember those novels and those poetries connect the audience, or all of us, if we do not have to make extra effort to understand that. So, if they are intelligible and easily comprehensible. So, it is the content which is important in your text, not the ornamental complex style of writing. So do not be influenced by this idea of writing complex sentences, long sentences, bringing in low-frequency words, people do not understand the meaning of it.

So, you can use simple language, high frequency words. You can have simple sentences. Still you can be profound in your meaning. So, so, that is the art of writing. You do not have to be complex, simple texts make deeper impacts; you have to remember that.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:32)



C-O-D-E-R Principle

- C- Collect
- O- Organize
- D- Draft
- E- Edit
- R- Review

IIT Madras
ONLINE DEGREE

So, this is the widely-held belief and practice; who did it, who developed this typical abbreviation, I have no reference right now. It is not mine of course, but it is practiced all over. It is called CODER principle, C O D E R, CODER principle. Each of the word, each of the letters in this, in this particular sequence, stand for a step-in writing.

So, C refers to collect. Collect what? Collect relevant information and ideas about the text you are going to write. So be familiar with the theme, collect all required information, work on the vocabulary, key words, contents that we are going to work on and start. So, first is collect.

The second, O stands for organize. Organize what? The ideas, information, the content; the organization can be deductive or inductive, it is your fully your choice. This is a stylistic choice you can make but one thing is that it has to be logical. So, ordering has to be logical, rational and logical.

So there has, they have to be ordered in a particular sequence, whether and where your reader is able to make sense of it, because always remember, when you write something you are not there to explain. So, your writing, written piece must be self-explanatory to the reader. And that is why it is important to organize the idea in a beautiful chronological order.

Then, we draft. So actual writing happens as a third step. After drafting, always remember, when we write, or when asked. These days, people are typing directly. I have no idea, I have no any any idea about it, how it works, but for me, it does not work. And why it does not work? Because I find it very clumsy to hit the keys, keyboards, while I am thinking in a logical direction, because hitting on the keyboard and the sound disturbs my thought process.

So, it is my personal thing. I am not assigning any judgement to it but when I write with a pen, my idea flows uninterrupted and smoothly. I am able to follow my idea. While you write or while you type, your idea moves faster than the actual production. And that is why the fourth stage is important, edit. E for edit, and what does it mean?

Once you draft, then step into the shoes of the reader. Look at the text and see whether what you intended to write originally, has it been covered? Is there any gap? And why I am saying gap, because your idea travels faster than your speed of writing. So, there is a possibility that you may have left certain expressions, utterances and words and certain things which may create a gap.

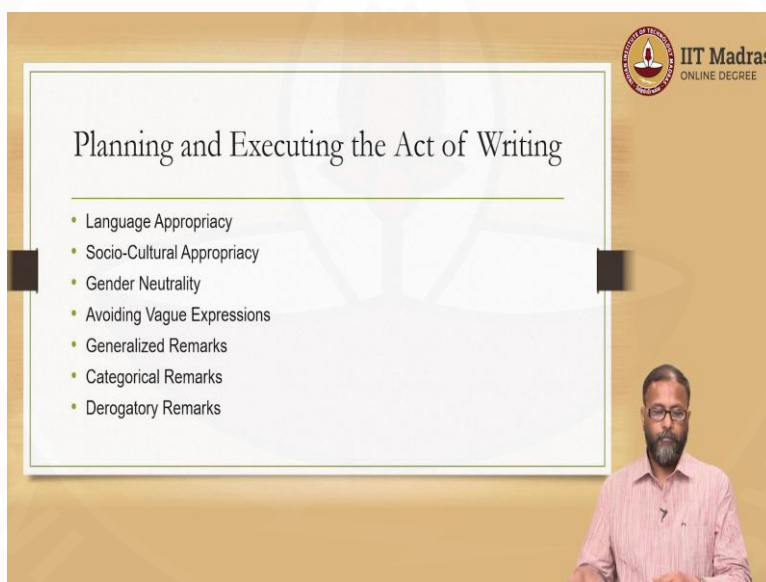
So, you have to edit it in terms of filling in the gaps of the ideas, coherence in the idea and the thought process and also the orthographic typo errors. For example, full stops, commas, punctuation marks, all punctuation rules. So, you have to edit. You have to see whether a particular word you have chosen to represent a particular idea or a concept, is it appropriate?

You have to understand, if it requires, change it. Draw from other available alternatives. Change the word. Change the utterance. You may find a paragraph not very well arranged, change the sequence of sentences. So, that is why editing is required after drafting.

And then finally, your role as a writer gets over and you get into the shoes of the reader. So, the final stage, which is called review, is exchanging the role. So as a writer, you followed four steps, C O D E. So, CODE, you coded it, encoded it as a writer, but R for review. So, you step into the shoes of the reader and look at the text and then read it closely.

So do intensive reading and see whether the text represents the original idea. As a reader, are you able to decode the same idea or the same theme that with which you started originally or is there any mismatch? So, these are the five steps to follow for good writing: collect, organize, draft, edit, and review. So, I hope I am clear.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:24)

The slide is titled "Planning and Executing the Act of Writing" and is part of an IIT Madras Online Degree presentation. It features a list of seven guidelines for writing, each preceded by a green bullet point. The guidelines are: Language Appropriacy, Socio-Cultural Appropriacy, Gender Neutrality, Avoiding Vague Expressions, Generalized Remarks, Categorical Remarks, and Derogatory Remarks. A presenter, a man with a beard and glasses wearing a pink shirt, is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide frame. The IIT Madras logo and "ONLINE DEGREE" text are in the top right corner of the slide.

Moving on, planning and executing the act of writing. It may be repetition, but let us quickly go through it. We have already talked about many things. And this all summarize, summarizes those things. So, language appropriacy. Of course, you need to understand that language is central in writing. So, you have to have appropriate language, selection of appropriate word, selection of appropriate sentences, selection of appropriate utterances. It is always advisable to avoid ambiguity and low-frequency words.

Low-frequency words means specialized words, which may not be understood by your reader. If you are writing, let us say in a particular field or discipline, of course, you have to write, you have to use a lot of jargon and technical words from the discipline. But again, if it

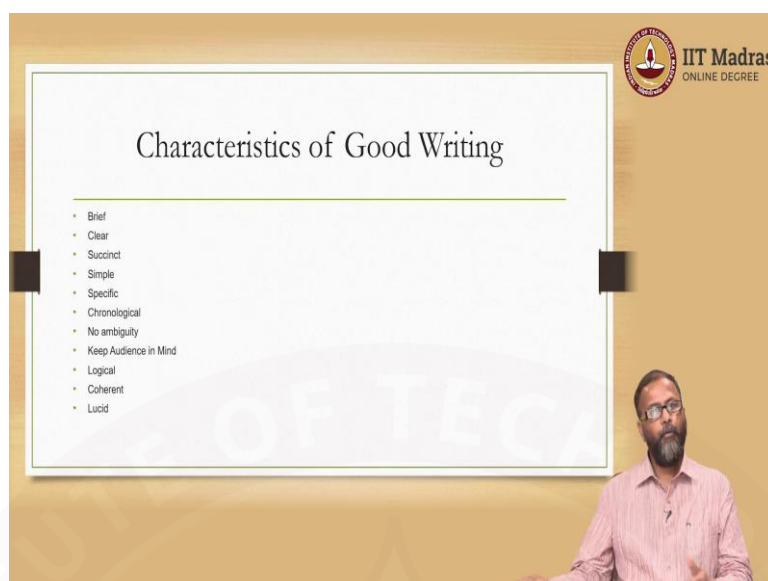
is meant for people who are in your discipline, absolutely no problem, but if you are writing for general public, it is always advisable to avoid technical words and jargon. Make the register as simple as possible. Then you have wide readership.

Socio-Cultural Appropriacy: English, because you are writing in English, you need to understand certain standard acceptable forms of expressions. And you need to understand that you need to be gender neutral. Gender neutrality is demand of the time. Languages are sexist. We will talk about language and gender some other time, but languages have sexist expressions.

So, there is essentially some sexism in language you need to avoid when you write. Avoid vague expressions. What do you mean by vague expressions? Expressions, which refer to things in general, make it specific and informative. Do not make generalized remarks. It looks like cliché in a writing. So, be specific, what do you want to say?

Any categorical remark, any derogatory remark, unnecessarily brings in a lot of controversy and diverts the attention of a reader and makes the reader judgmental about you. So as a writer, you need to avoid vagueness in expressions. Be specific. You need to avoid any sexist expression in your writing. You need to avoid any categorized, generalized, and derogatory remarks. These are the cautions you have to follow; you have to keep in mind these things when you write.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:30)



Moving on, so finally, what are the good characteristics of writing? What are the attributes of good writing? Unless and until you are writing a novel or a poetry or you are into creative writing, if you are writing in a professional domain, these are the commandments. Treat them like commandments. And we have to follow these steps.

So brief, you need to be brief. Because always remember, you need to be speaking minimum, to communicate maximum; writing minimum to communicate maximum. That is an art, being brief, being straightforward, being objective and to the point. So, you do not have to stretch the same idea just to cover a lot of space.

Be clear, because if you stretch, you lose the focus. So, it is important to be brief, to the point. It has to be succinct, straightforward and succinct. Simple, being simple is the most challenging thing in writing and speaking both because we are born complex, we have complex ideas about things. You need to simplify your idea for uninterrupted, unambiguous interpretation by the reader. So, it is important that you become simple.

Be specific. So, avoid vagueness. Again, same thing. The ordering of the information and idea must be chronological in order. So, they must be in feeding order. So, what precedes must be connected with what follows and vice versa. What follows must be in connection with what proceeds. You cannot have disjoint sentences in a paragraph where you have no contextual coherence. They have to be very succinct, coherent, and they stick together.

There must not be any ambiguity. What is ambiguity? Any expression, any word, which may give multiple meanings. 'Flying planes can be dangerous.' It is ambiguous. Flying planes, for

people on the ground, can be dangerous or flying planes as a pilot can be dangerous to him or to people who are travelling in it. 'That old man and woman.' So old man, but not necessarily old woman. Or 'old', it qualifies both man and woman, both are old. So, ambiguity; any expression with which creates ambiguity, you have to be very specific there.

And the most important thing, when you write, your written text must be customized according to the reader. You need to understand, who is your audience? For whom are you writing? Who is going to read it? If you are writing in your professional domain, of course, experts in your, in your discipline will read it. So, your tone and tenor of the text must be according to that.

If you are writing for common people, who may not be familiar with the register and technical jargon, technical words in your field, simplify it. So, point is, that you need to customize your text. Then, it has to be logical, coherent, and lucid.

So, these are the things that we have to keep in mind when we write. But at the end of everything it is all about practice, and practice and practice. No other option. Repetition, repetition, repetition, practice, and practice and practice. And as I told you, reading helps us a lot; extensive reading helps us a lot in feeding into our good writing skills. Because there, while doing extensive reading, you are familiar with a variety of texts. You are familiar with a variety of unique ways of expressing your ideas. You are familiar with new expressions and new words. You are familiar with new patterns of sentences, style.

So, you get a lot of input when you have extensive reading and with conscious effort, you can translate and transfer all your learning of reading into your writing. And with careful, conscious effort, you can make your written piece or your writing skill, very impressive and productive.

So, I hope this helps you and there is no shortcut. Again, I say it is all about practice, and practice and practice. Thank you very much.