

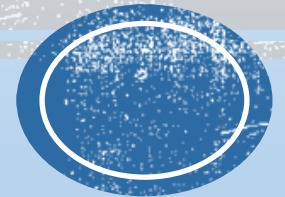
# **CAES 9541**

# **TECHNICAL ENGLISH FOR**

# **ELECTRICAL AND**

# **ELECTRONIC**

# **ENGINEERING**



Unit Eight

Writing Front and Back matter; Practising question and answer session



# OVERVIEW

## *Learning Outcomes*

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

- identify front matter and back matter of a technical report
- anticipate and handle various situations in a Q&A session

**WHAT IS FRONT AND BACK MATTER?**

**CAN YOU LIST THEM ALL IN A SEQUENCE WITHOUT REFERRING  
TO ANY SOURCE/HELP?**

# WHAT IS FRONT AND BACK MATTER

## 8.1 Writing Front and Back matter of a report

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

### **TASK 8.1 Identify the front and back matter in a report**

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Work as a group. Brainstorm a list of elements in a report such as ‘Table of Contents’, ‘Introduction’, etc. List them in order and identify the front and back matter.

- (a) Title page
- (b) Summary/Abstract
- (c) Table of contents
- (d) List of Figures
- (e) List of Tables
- (f) Introduction
- (g) Methodology
- (h) Results and Discussion
- (i) Conclusion and Recommendations (these two can be separated)
- (j) References
- (k) Appendices

#### **Suggested answer**

Front matter: a-e

Back matter: j and k

## **Features of Front and Back Matter**

### **Title Page**

This varies based on the requirement of the project but generally includes the project/study title, author (including the organization), the purpose (e.g., the fulfillment of course requirement), and the expected audience, (see a sample of the title page in *Text 1* of a student report in the latter part of this section).

### **Summary (or Abstract)**

This is a short (generally less than one page) but self-sufficient writing showing the significance of the study/project in terms of its motivation, knowledge/research gap, major findings, and implications (see Unit 9 on the details of writing a summary)

### **Acknowledgement**

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

## Table of Contents

This is a list of headings helping the reader to locate the corresponding sections quickly and easily. They are generally written as noun phrases and are descriptive in nature (see a sample of TOC in *Text 2*).

## List of Figures

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

## List of Tables

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

## Abbreviations

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



## References

This is a reference list based on the in-text citations made in the report, not limited to the citations made in the literature review section. This does not only serve to purpose of avoiding plagiarism but also practically offers justification of the arguments made and allows the reader to research further if needed. The citation format should be consistent and based on the standard of the field or requirement of the project.

## Appendices

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



# Engineering Design Report

## **Reconfigurable Obstetrics Delivery Bed**

ME 440 Mechanical Engineering Design  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
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Team 12

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20 April 2012

## TASK 8.2 Critique of a Table of Content of a report

Work as a group. Read the table of contents of a report below on the design strategies for energy and water conversation at a construction site. Note the readability of this outline and consider whether there are components you would like to add or edit. Compare this with the TOC of your own report and you will notice the differences.

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

<b><u>Table of Contents:</u></b>	Student A
1 List of symbols and common practice used	<i>Comments</i>
2 Summary	
3 Introduction	
4 Analysis of problem	
5 Theoretical principles	
6 Method of investigation	
7 Experimental results	
8 Discussion and Analysis of the results	
9 Conclusion	
10 Reference and Acknowledgement	

### **Possible observations:**

- An organized outline with front matters separated from the main body with Roman and Arabic page nos.
- Clear section numbering with page nos.
- Generally illustrative headings and subheading instead of the customary ‘methods’, ‘findings’, etc. But they can be even more specific with the writer stance embedded in the subheadings, e.g. “Enhanced Insulation by xxx”
- The formatting is clear and aesthetically pleasing in general
- Perhaps there are no tables in the report but it would be interesting to see why there are none especially when comparisons of different strategies may be involved

# ORAL PRESENTATION – HANDLING Q&A SESSION

## 8.3 Anticipating and handling situations in a Q&A session

Usually at the end of the presentation, some time will be allotted to the Q&A session so that the audience can raise questions, concerns or feedback regarding your presentation. In fact, the Q&A session is not an additional section of a presentation. It IS an important and integral part as it can make or break your presentation. In the professional world, it may mean funding or cutting your project! Therefore, you are strongly advised to prepare for situations which you have not thought of before.

### TASK 8.3 Brainstorm difficult situations in Q&A (5 mins)

Work as a group. Brainstorm as many situations that can go wrong in a Q&A session as possible (Give at least ten). There is no need to offer solutions at this moment.



- You think the question is not in the scope of the discussion.
- You think you are not the best person to answer the question.
- You do not know how to answer the question.
- You overrun in answering.
- You are not professional and courteous enough.
- No questions from the audience – dead silence
- The question is too long
- The question is hostile
- The questioner disagrees/or keep on disagreeing with you

## TASK 8.4 Deal with difficult situations in Q&A (10 mins)

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Select three situations that you think will make you panic or feel embarrassed the most, and share them with your classmates in the same group. Brainstorm as a group how you can deal with those situations.

- You do not understand the question.
- You think the question is not in the scope of the discussion.
- You think you are not the best person to answer the question.
- You do not know how to answer the question.
- You overrun in answering.
- You are not professional and courteous enough.
- No questions from the audience – dead silence
- The question is too long
- The question is hostile
- The questioner disagrees/or keep on disagreeing with you

# SOME SUGGESTIONS

- **You do not understand the question.**

Try to clarify using paraphrase and high-level synonyms and hopefully the questioner will mention something that you are familiar with. If this fails after two trials, at least identify the scope of the question or locate the particular VA (powerpoint slide) with the help of the questioner. Maybe he/she can point it out from the VA.

- **You think the question is not in the scope of the discussion.**

This happens more frequently than you think, especially when your presentation has generated interests and hence expanded the scope beyond your original intention. Politely point out the scope and explain why the question cannot be dealt with (if it really is not) in detail in the session; for example, “This appears to concern the area of cost which is very important, but since this presentation only focus on ..., I may provide you with more info after the Q&A session.”



- **You JUST do not know how to answer the question.**

If you really do not know the answer, DO NOT pretend you do and just try to randomly answer. This is unprofessional and will waste everybody's time. Frankly admit this and give a reason – either beyond the scope of the discussion or beyond your knowledge. Politely offer to do more research and contact the audience at a later time.

- **You think you are not the best person to answer the question.**

This usually happens in the two scenarios above. Frankly admit this and provide a reason why the question cannot be addressed immediately. The main objective is to convey a sense of sincerity and willingness to help even though the immediate answer is not available.

- **No questions from the audience – dead silence**

This depends whether you actually need a question from the audience. If not, you seriously look at the audience in the eye and pause for a second or two before thanking the audience for their time and signalling the end of the presentation. This shows that you do not intend to hastily end the presentation. If you NEED a question for whatever reason, ask your audience what they think, especially their positions. Their answers or positions may help generate questions from either you or the audience.

- **The question is too long**

Summarize the question for yourself and the rest of the audience. The purpose is to first confirm your understanding of the question and second helps everybody focus and anticipate the answers. Occasionally, you need to break down the long question into a number of shorter ones, and then you can decide whether it is appropriate to answer all or only a subset of the questions. Repeat the keywords in your mind before you start answering.

- **You overrun in giving an answer.**

This happens when you do not summarize your answer well. Only use key-terms, make reference to one or two items on particular VAs, and simple drawings. Make sure you say yes or no to a yes/no question or if you say ‘it depends’, make sure you articulate that keyword, ‘depends on what’. If you are up to the one-minute mark and have not appeared close to giving an appropriate answer, summarize your explanation and politely offer to take the discussion offline where appropriate.

- **You are not professional and courteous enough.**

This is usually noticeable to the audience rather than to yourself, but assuming that you seem to sense that from your audience, you hedge your answers and provide evidence to support them. Change your mentality too as you usually sound rude when you think the audience or the question is not worth your time. There is no such thing as a stupid question. If you think you need to repeat what you have just talked about, repeat it with pleasure.

- **The question is hostile**

This may be the most difficult! This usually originates from a strong disagreement from the audience. Admit that the audience may be valid in challenging your position or argument. Focus on the issue rather than the questioner by politely asking for the specific areas of concern, ask him/her to refer to a particular VA shown or statement made. Try to identify the areas that you and questioner may actually agree with (there may be some) under the high-level disagreement; for example, you and the questioner may disagree whether the weather condition is the main cause of the plane accident, but you two may agree that whether the airborne speed is actually maintained before the accident should receive your attention before jumping to conclusion. Trust that your audience has the good intention to follow valid arguments instead of causing trouble. If you sense the latter on a rare occasion, there is a good possibility that the rest of the audience can sense that too. Then you have the right to discontinue the exchange and politely invite the questioner for further discussion after the presentation.

# BE POLITE AND PROFESSIONAL

## Don't say 'what?', 'what do you mean?'

### Expressions that you can use in a Q&A session

Listed below are expressions you can use to begin asking a question during a seminar or another kind of presentation that encourages responses from the audience. How you begin depends upon the type of question you want to ask. Try to learn several of these expressions for active use when asking a question yourself and learn the others so that you will be able to recognize what sort of answer is required when you, as a presenter, are asked a question.

### How to ask questions

- I was wondering if you could tell me...?
- I wonder if you could tell me...?
- Would you mind explaining about...?
- Would you mind if I asked you about...?
- May I ask about...?

### How to ask for clarification

- I'm sorry but I'm not sure what you mean by... could you explain it a little more?
- I'm afraid I didn't follow you. Could you be more specific?
- I didn't quite understand what you said about..., Could you give us an example?
- I'm not quite sure of what you said about... Could you tell us again?
- I'm afraid I'm not quite clear about..., Could you clarify that point?
- I'm sorry but I didn't quite get your point about..., Could you go over it again?

### How to ask for confirmation

- So, when you say... do you mean...?
- Would I be correct in saying/to say that...?
- Am I right in assuming/to assume that...?
- If I've understood you correctly, you're saying that...?
- Are you saying that...?
- So basically, what you're saying is...?

## Answering Questions

Listed below are expressions you can use as a presenter in a seminar or other kinds of oral presentation, to begin to answer questions from your audience. Try to learn several of the expressions that you could use in dealing with different types of questions.

### How to respond to questions

1. That's a very interesting question.
2. I'm glad you asked that question.
3. You've raised an important point there.

### How to clarify your point

1. Well, I mean...
2. What I mean is
3. The point I'm trying to make is...
4. Well, what I'm trying to say is...
5. Sorry, perhaps I haven't made myself clear. What I'm getting at is...
6. Perhaps I could make that clearer by saying..
7. Well, perhaps I'm not making myself too clear. Allow me to rephrase that...



### How to correct misunderstanding

1. Well, no, that isn't quite what I mean.
2. Actually, I think you've misunderstood the point here.
3. I think perhaps there's been a slight misunderstanding.
4. We seem to be talking at cross purposes.
5. With (all due) respect, that is not what I said

### How to avoid answering a question

1. I'm afraid it's difficult to answer that just now.
2. I'm afraid I don't have an answer to that yet.
3. I'm afraid I don't have enough information to answer that.
4. I'm afraid I can't answer that question right now, but I'll check...and get back to you.

### How to question the questioner

1. It depends what you mean by...
2. I'm not quite sure what you mean by that.
3. I'm afraid I don't quite follow your question.

## Key points to remember

<b>Title</b>	The abstract page begins with the title "Abstract"
<b>Function</b>	Brief summary of a report or research paper. Only essential points included.
<b>Audience</b>	Specialists, researchers, or others in related fields
<b>Purpose</b>	Establish the purpose of the whole document and give an overview of its content
<b>Content</b>	<p>Key components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem/motivation/context/gap</li> <li>• Methodology/procedure/approach</li> <li>• Results/findings/products/outcomes</li> <li>• Conclusions/recommendations/applications/implications</li> </ul>
<b>Language</b>	<p>Use technical language-</p> <p><b>Review notes above on tense!</b></p>
<b>Style</b>	Technical and academic
<b>DO NOT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• include illustrations, tables or references</li> <li>• add new information that is not contained in the report</li> <li>• write in point form</li> </ul>
<b>Over to you</b>	Most guides suggest you write the abstract <i>after</i>

# REMINDER FOR NEXT WEEK

- Improve the front and back matter of your report