

Report Writing

- **Characteristics and Definition**
- **Significance of Reports**
- **Types of Reports**
- **Structure of Reports**
- Technical Reports

Characteristics of Reports

- Report => “*reportare*” = carry back
- A report thus is a description of an event carried back to someone who was not present on the scene.
- Broad sense: many Memorandums, letters, news items, analysis of exam results, etc.
- Our concern: Those which scientists, engineers, business executives & administrators have to write as part of their duty.
- Definition

Characteristics: Technical Reports are result of careful investigation, sound thinking, logical organization and clear & formal writing.

What is a Report?

- **A report is a formal communication written for a specific purpose; it includes a description of procedures followed by collection and analysis of data, their significance, the conclusions drawn from them, and recommendations, if required.**
- Report: Characteristics

--Not an outburst of powerful feelings

- A report writer should examine and present objectively the data collected.
- His conclusions & recommendations are strictly based on the facts included in the report.
- A report is like a bathing suit: “It covers everything that has to be covered but nothing more...”
(Shearing, 1965)

- It does not distract attention from the content by unnecessary frills.

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Why Reports?

Irrespective of the profession, you will be asked to write/read reports.

- An engineer/a business executive spends 75 % of his time on reports.

Important decisions are made on recommendations by committee reports.

- It trains the writer in planned and orderly procedures & logical presentation of ideas and information.
- Report writing develops the power of discrimination, organization, judgement & communication.

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Types of Reports

Informational: contains only the data collected or the facts observed

- Presents the situation as it is and not as it should be.
- No conclusions/recommendations.

Interpretive: facts with evaluation, interpretation of data, the reporter's conclusions, recommendations for actions

Routine: formal, written in prescribed form (just ticks) CR on employees, periodic & progress reports, inspection reports

- Structure of Reports

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Front Matter

1. Cover: made of soft neutral-coloured card

- It protects the manuscript from damage.
- Carries 1) the title 2) number 3) date 4) the classification (secret, top secret) 5) name/s of the author/s & the authority.
- Inside of the front & back is left blank.

2. Title Page: First right hand page of the report.

Contains additional information as:

1. Sub-title 2. Name of the author/s 3. Name of the authority 4. Contract, project no.

5. Approvals 6. Distribution list

3. Copyright Notice: Given if a report is

published, as: © 2005 Rakesh Sharma

With the following note:

All rights are reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the publisher.

4. Acknowledgements: Names of persons & organizations that helped you in the production of the report.

Indicate permission taken for copyright material.

5. Table of Contents/Contents:

essential for above 10 pages.

Gives overall view to the readers,

helps him locate a particular topic easily.

6. List of Illustrations: A separate list of illustrations is given immediately after the table of contents if there are a large number (above 12) tables and figures.

7. Abstract/Summary: A synopsis

- *Abstract* tells in concentrated form what the report is about. [extent of coverage]
- *Summary* gives the substance of the report. It presents the report in a nutshell, without any illustrations and explanations. [method of analysis, the significant findings, important conclusions & major recommendations]
- Main Body

8. Introduction: Provides a better starting point & says what the report is about, what work has already been done on the subject and what new grounds are covered in the present study.

It sets the scene and prepares the reader to for what is to follow. It includes:

- ✓ Historical & technical background
- ✓ Scope of study, specifying its limitations & qualifications
- ✓ Methods of collecting data and their sources

- ✓ Authorization for the report
- ✓ Definition of special terms and symbols

- Main Body

9. Discussion or Description: Central ideas

and arguments of the report with almost
all the illustrations and tables.

Presents the data in an organized form, discusses their significance and analysis and the results that flow therefrom.

- ✓ If the data are too numerous, give them in appendix.
- ✓ Inside use footnotes or parenthetical statements.
- ✓ Generally the “backward order” is used.

- Main Body

10. Conclusions: Summary/remarks at the end of the report. It brings the discussion to a close by referring to the body of logical inferences drawn and the judgements formed on the basis of analysis of data presented.

- ✓ All conclusions must be supported by what has gone before.
- ✓ Nothing new should be added at this stage.
- ✓ If the number is large, they may be itemized in the descending order of their importance.

- Main Body

11. Recommendations:

Suggests future course of action.

Sometimes only this part of the report is

read for taking decisions

- ✓ List the recommendations in the descending order of their importance .
- ✓ Don't combine with “Conclusions” unless your report is too short.
- ✓ Give recommendations only if you are expected to do so and if the nature of your report demands them.

- Back Matter

12. Appendices:

The *appendix* contains material which is needed to support the main body of the report but is too detailed/voluminous to be included in the text. It should be such that the reader can safely omit reading it without any loss of understanding of the contents of the reports. It is decided on two factors:

- ✓ 1. whether the material sustains the theme and forms an essential and integral part of the report,
 - ✓ 2. whether it would interrupt the train of the reader's thought if included in the main body.
- ✓ All appendices should be referred to in the text. [questionnaires, statistical data, etc]

- Back Matter

13. List of References: To give credit to the works used or quoted. This is done by citing such works in the text and listing them in alphabetical order at the end.

If their number is small they may be mentioned in the footnotes at the bottom of the page on which they are cited.^[1*]

¹Alan Warner, *A Short Guide to English Style*,

Oxford University Press, London, ELBS Edition, 1964, pp. 40-42.

- Back Matter

14. Bibliography: Alphabetically arranged list

of published/unpublished works consulted

before or during the preparation of the report.

Keep the following in mind:

- ✓ 1. the order of writing the names and surnames of authors,
- ✓ 2. the sequences of details,
- ✓ 3. the punctuation marks, and
- ✓ 4. the layout.

Warner, Alan. *A Short Guide to English Style*.

ELBS Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

- Back Matter

15. Glossary: A list of technical words used in the report and their explanations.

- ✓ If the number is small, explained in footnotes.
- ✓ Inclusion depends on the reader.

16. Index: Intended to serve as a quick guide to the material in the report. It enables the reader to locate easily any topic, sub-topic or important aspect of the contents.

- ✓ Entries are in alphabetical order & cross-referenced.
- ✓ All page numbers on which information about an entry is available are mentioned against it.

Reports

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Report Writing 2

- Preparatory Steps to Writing Reports
- Evaluation of Material
- Organizing Material
- The First Draft
- Use of Illustrations
-

Preparatory Steps to Writing Reports

An effective report is the result of careful preparation and execution of the plan.

Important preparatory steps:

- Define your purpose and scope
- Determine your audience
- Collect the data
- Organize the material
- Make an outline
- Defining the Purpose and Scope

Reports are produced in response to specific demands (*Terms of Reference*).

It is advisable to spend some time in working out the exact scope of your report.

A false start invariably results in waste of time, energy, money and ideas.

- Determining the Audience

A Report is always written with an audience in mind.

Six kinds of audience:

1. Superior officers
2. Colleagues, and counterparts in their organisations
3. Subordinate employees
4. Other organisations 5. Share-holders
6. Customers and members of the public

- Determining the Audience

For a large and varied audience, you should find out what they know and what they do not know.

The difference in their training, experience and background should determine the presentation and style of your report.

Remember: A report is a piece of communication and can be considered successful only if it produces in the reader the desired response.

- Collecting Data

Many reports turn out to be ineffective because the writer did not use the proper method, consult the right documents, approach the right people or secure the right answers in time.

Choose relevant Methods and Sources

(A) Methods

1. Personal Observation
2. Telephone Interview
3. Personal Interview
4. Questionnaires

(B) Sources

1. Internal Records
2. Library

- Methods

1. Personal Observation

A report on a lab-experiment, a job you performed, an event to which you were an eye-witness.

Rely on your sensory perceptions and memory—

Develop the habits of careful observation & accurate recording.

2. Telephone Interview

For information of routine nature & brief answers

From small number of people

Saves time on travelling

Feedback may not be effective

Unrepresentative information

3. Personal Interview

Interviewing is an art that demands intelligence, patience, tact & courtesy.

All individuals cannot be dealt in the same manner.

You need to be shrewd, observant & sensitive to the reactions of the interviewee.

--Should be quick to readjust your approach & attitude to suit the case

--Secure the person's attention, excite his interest & establish a rapport.

He must open out to you and cooperate in giving you the information you want.

- Do your homework well
- Break up your problem into components
- Prepare a set of questions
- Fix an appointment, tell the duration
- Give a brief introduction about yourself, your organisation & purpose
- Don't embarrass by asking personal questions
- Don't press for confidential information
- Lead, but don't talk more
- End the meeting gracefully

4. Questionnaires

Used when a wide geographical coverage is required & a large number of people have to be contacted.

- ❖ Can send 1000s of Questionnaires at low cost
- ✓ Each question should be clearly framed & should seek to elicit related information
- ✓ Should be precise and not vague:

Do you see films regularly?

How often in a month do you see a movie?

4. Questionnaires

- ✓ Avoid leading questions--Do you read *The Hindustan Times*?
- ✓ Which daily newspaper do you read?
- ✓ Avoid embarrassing questions (about sex habits, morals, religious beliefs, personal income, age, etc)
- ✓ Arrange in logical order, leave enough space, send postage-paid envelope for reply.

- **Sources**

- 1. Internal Records**

Most activities of an organization are recorded in written documents: letters, memos, reports, contracts, agreements, etc.

- Approach the record-keeper
 - Get photocopies made

Sometimes you can collect information by issuing a circular to the concerned officers & on the basis of the replies

- **2. Library**

A library is a place where written material is collected and kept for use.

- ✓ Get used to the cataloguing system
 - ✓ Make library your second home!

- **Evaluation of Material**

- Is the author an authority in the field?
 - Is the reputation of the publishers high?
 - Is the information supported by facts?
 - What is the opinion of other experts?
 - Is it recent and relevant?

- **Organizing Material**

Thoughts do not always come in the order in which you would like to put them in writing.

- ✓ The best way to organize material is to prepare the outline of a report.
 - ✓ The outline will provide you with a framework into which you can fit in an orderly manner various bits and pieces of information.
 - ✓ Your outline is your report in skeletal form.
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- Organizing Material Sample Outline**

ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

1. Introduction

1.1. Definition

1.2. Causes of Pollution

1.2.1. Population Growth

1.2.2. Increased Productivity

2. Types

2.1. Air Pollution

2.2. Water Pollution

2.3. Thermal Pollution

2.4. Land Pollution

3. Suggestions for Reducing Pollution

3.1. Publicity about its hazards

3.2. Advisory services

3.3. Collective effort

- The First Draft

Once your outline is ready you can start writing the first draft of your report

- ✓ Do not hesitate to revise where necessary because an outline is merely a tool, a framework to help you organize the material for your final report.
- ✓ Your ultimate aim is not to prepare a good outline but to produce an effective report.
- ✓ Readiness to make changes when the situation demands is a quality that always pays.
- Use of Illustrations

Purpose

- **Illustrations form an essential part of the text of a report and are not used for mere embellishment.**

- ❖ Aim is to clarify and supplement the verbal analysis, description, or discussion.

How does it help?

- ✓ Presenting a large number of details in less space & with greater precision.
- ✓ Helps in giving an integrated picture of a number of items or to compare the results.
- ✓ Makes the report more lively and interesting
- ✓ Transmits the message effectively.
- Use of Illustrations
 - ✓ Refer to all illustrations in the text
 - ✓ Provide a context to draw inferences
 - ✓ Place them immediately after the first citation in the text
 - ✓ Number them consecutively—classify them as tables and figures
 - ✓ Put the number and the title of the table above and that of the figures at the bottom

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