BLG 374E

Technical Communication for Computer Engineers

Week 5

Progress Reports and Reports

Your team's proposal is due next week!

Lecture Notes

I’ll be using lecture notes prepared by earlier instructors, including Esbie van Heerden, Damien Jade Duff, and probably others (though I may revise them).

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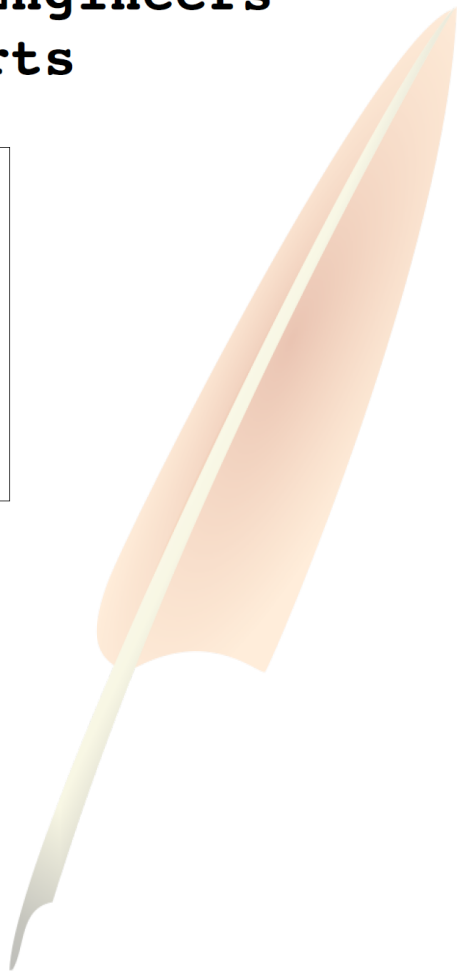
Writing progress reports

Lecture Contents:

- Why progress reports.
- Typical structure.
- Reporting expectations.



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Why progress reports? (I)

- **Two-way communication.**
  - "This is what we are doing."
  - "This is what you SHOULD be doing."
- **Keep stakeholders informed.**
  - "Where was this $10,000 per month going again?"
- **Maintain expectations, image.**
  - "You were building us a Windows replacement, right?"
- **Maintain trust.**
  - "I don't know what you're doing and I don't trust you."

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Why progress reports? (II)

- **Mitigate miscommunication.**
  - "Why is our application not on the web? I said I wanted an app."
- **Mitigate uncertainty.**
  - "If we release the marketing material Tuesday, will the system be in time?"
- **Requirements do change.**
  - "Actually, can we have a web application too?"
- **Situations do change.**
  - "With one key developer gone, how much time will it take?"

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Typical contents of a progress report

- Introduction.
  - Context.
  - Brief summary.
- Project description reminder.
- Progress.
- New developments.
- Preliminary results.

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Typical organisation of a progress report (I)

- Introduction.
  - Which project.
  - Brief summary.
  - Maybe:
    - Outline of content of report.
    - Intended audience of report.
    - Purpose of report.

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Typical organisation of a progress report (I)

- Project description.
  - Readers might be new to project.
  - Maybe:
    - Start & end dates.
    - Involved parties (e.g. suppliers).
    - Purpose of project.
    - Scope of project.

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Typical organisation of a progress report (II)

- Progress.
  - What has been done.
  - What is to come.
  - Divide by:
    - Time periods (previous, current, future).
    - Tasks.

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Progress description sample structures

By task & time (two-level)

Database instantiation.

Completed:

- Customer database.

In progress:

- Assets database.

Data import.

In progress:

- Customer records import.

Planned:

- Assets record import.

By time period

Completed.

- Customer database instantiation.

In progress.

- Assets database instantiation.
- Customer records import.

...

Planned.

- Assets record import.

...

(other structures are possible – e.g. by task 1-level, by time-then-task)

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Typical organisation of a progress report (III)

- **New developments.**
  - **Problems encountered.**

    "The proposed cloud services vendor has entered liquidation".
  - Estimate effect.

    "This should not delay the project, but may result in higher hosting costs".
  - No issues?

    "There have been no difficulties to report".
- **Changes in requirements.**
  - "Because of the advance marketing requirement the interface will now be delivered for testing by March 14".

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Typical organisation of a progress report (IV)

- **Preliminary results.**
  - E.g. Software testing results.
  - E.g. Output of investigative projects.
- **Assessment of progress.**
  - Not: a list of every complaint.
- What else the customer wants to know?

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Other considerations

- Phone call instead of report?
  - No permanent record!
    (of progress or of reporting)
- Letter instead of report?
  - Ok, but follow structure.

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Other considerations

- Set up expectations with client.
  - Frequency of reports:
    - Yearly updates on research project.
    - Hourly updates on data leak.
  - Depth of reports:
    - One-paragraph email?
    - 50 page technical summary?
  - Reporting requirements:
    - Specific information requested (e.g. financial outgoings).
    - Full report template.

Progress Report Example

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RESEARCH PROJECT
PROGRESS REPORT
(*Scientific Report*)

PROGRAM CODE:
PROJECT NO:
PROJECT DURATION : .... months
REPORT NO:
REPORTING PERIOD: .../.. /.... - .../.. /....
PROJECT COORDINATOR:

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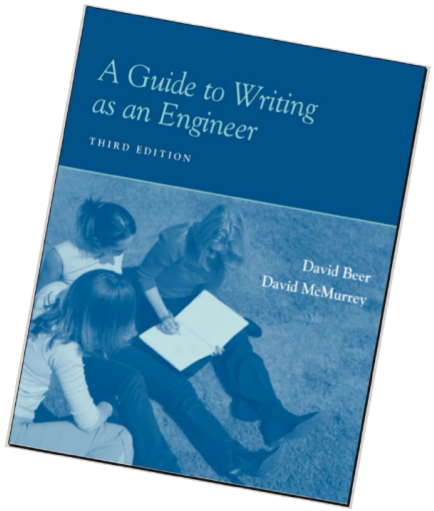
Reading



Beer & McMurrey
Chapter 5 – Section
"Progress reports"
(p.113).

Also, try the
internet:

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Reports

Lecture Contents:

Report requirements vs. structure
Parts of reports
Common problems with reports

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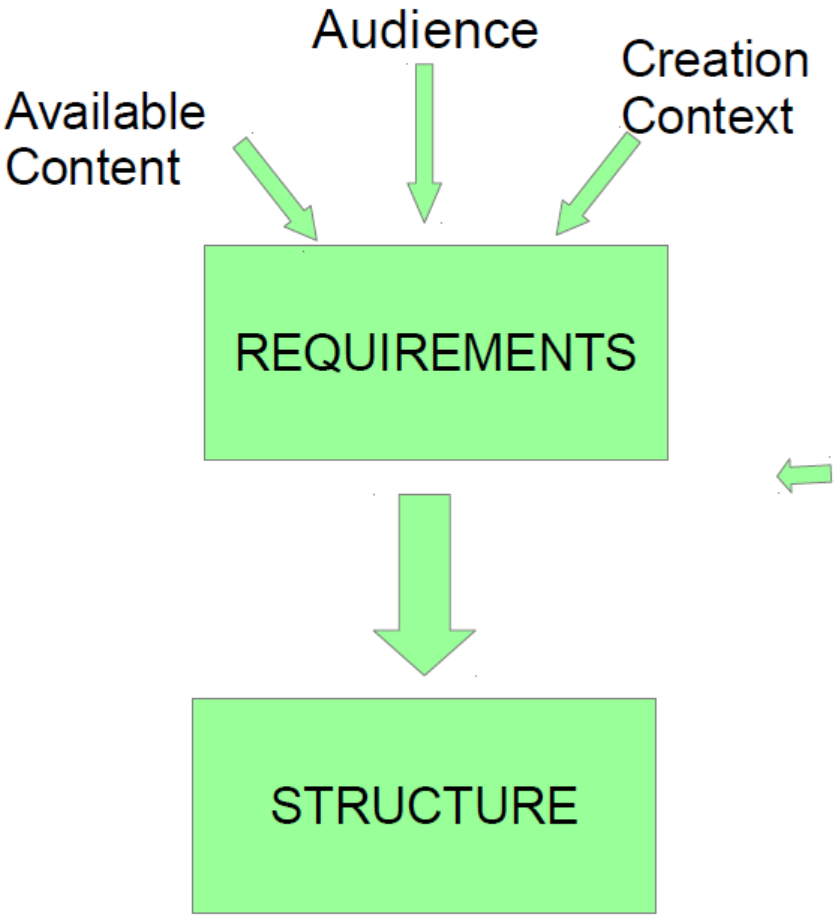
Why standard structure & format?

- Rapid/random access.
- Reduce cognitive load.
- Ensure minimum standard.

Report requirements vs. structure

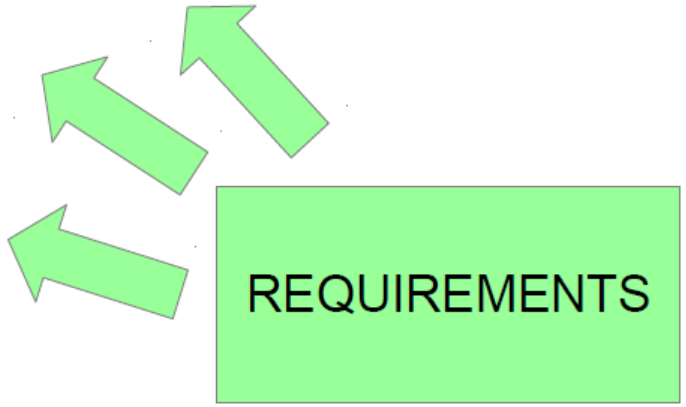


Report types

- Recommendation.
- Progress.
- Incident.
- Inspection.
- Field.
- Laboratory/research.
- Specifications.
- Proposals.
- Results.

Possible report sections

- Letter of transmittal (cover-letter).
- Executive summary.
- Title page.
- Abstract.
- Table of contents.
- List of figures.
- Document control/revision history.
- Abbreviations/glossary.
- Introduction.
- Body.
- Conclusion/recommendations.
- Bibliography.
- Appendices.



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Experimental reports: Typical additional contents

- Background:
  - Research question.
  - Theoretical considerations.
- Literature review.
- Method/procedure/equipment.
- Results/data.
- Implications/analysis.
- Conclusions.

Beer & McMurrey "Laboratory and Field Reports" (in chapter 5).

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Reports

Lecture Contents:

Report requirements vs. structure
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Common problems with reports

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Engineering report-writing: **Titles**

- To understand topic:
  - Informative.
- For indexing:
  - Appropriate words.
  - Multiple lines: Okay.
  - Multiple paragraphs: Not okay.

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Engineering report-writing: **Introduction**

- Who should be reading this?
  - Context of report creation (audience, intent).
- Why am I reading this?
  - Brief background.
  - Statement of topic & motivation for it.
- What should I expect?
  - Summary of content.

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Engineering report-writing: **Background**

- Any information necessary to understand the purpose of the report or its contents.
- E.g.:
  - Technical background.
  - History of topic.
  - Literature reviews (scientific).

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Experimental report-writing: **Approach/methods & results**

- Interleaved:
  - Experiment 1: XXX.
    - Motivation.
    - Methods.
    - Results.
  - Experiment 2: YYY.
    - Motivation.
    - Methods.
    - Results.

- Or separated:
  - Experiments Intro.
  - Methods:
    - Experiment 1: XXX.
    - Experiment 2: YYY.
  - Results:
    - Experiment 1: XXX.
    - Experiment 2: YYY.

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Experimental report-writing: **Approach/methods & results**

- Approach/methods:
  - How info was acquired.
- Results/details:
  - Careful presentation of information.
- Don't be afraid to repeat information.

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Repeating information

- Methods section:

  The two algorithms are run on the primary dataset and compared in terms of relative prediction error, calculated as...

- Results section:

  The results of comparing the two algorithms on the primary dataset with respect to prediction error can be seen in Figure 3...

- Is this OK?

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Engineering Report-writing: **Conclusions**

- Summarise information.
- Reiterate interpretations.
- Reiterate conclusions.
- Reiterate important take-aways.
- **No new info.**

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Engineering Report-writing: **Appendices**

- Extra info that would break flow inside report.
- Unnecessary for main understanding.
- E.g.
  - Mathematical derivations.
  - Reference information
    - Raw data.
    - Survey questions.
    - Technical set-up info.
    - Etc.

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Parts of reports
→ Common problems with reports

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Common problems with reports

- Unnecessary information.
  - What is the purpose?
- Wall-of-text.
- Sloppiness:
  - Spelling, white-space, basic sentence structure.

Final Report Example

AUTOMATICALLY GENERATED FROM TURKISH USING MS WORD TRANSLATOR

RESEARCH PROJECT
FINAL REPORT
(*Scientific Report*)

PROGRAM CODE:
PROJECT NO:
PROJECT DURATION : .... months
REPORTING PERIOD: .../.. /.... - .../.. /....
PROJECT COORDINATOR:

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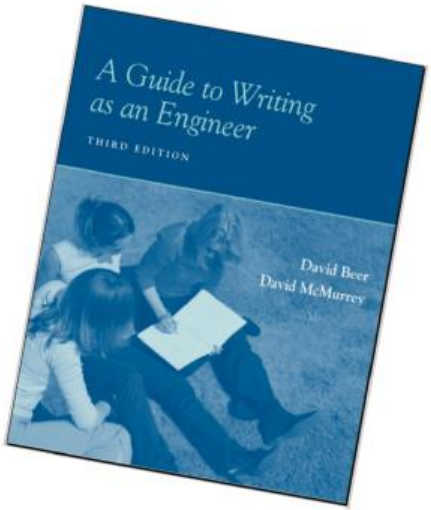
Reading



Beer & McMurrey
Chapter 5.

"Writing Common Engineering Documents"

Getting Started With Report Writing
http://mycourse.solent.ac.uk/mod/book/tool/print/index.php?id=232731&chapterid=36552
Short Reports
http://www.engineering.utoronto.ca/Directory/students/ecp/handbook/documents/short.htm