Writing for your audience

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Communicating for your audience in ECTE 250/INFO 202

In ECTE 250/INFO 202 you are working in a team to design a product. One of the ways in which you will communicate about the product is through a webpage to your imaginary client (a company of venture capitalists). You will also deliver a verbal presentation to describe your product to potential customers.

This resource material looks at two communication genres that you will be using to communicate about your project/product:

- the project/product webpage
- the product's seminar presentation.

The aim of this resource material is to provide some initial guidelines for communicating for these different genres. These guidelines are not prescriptions about how you must write or speak. However, while you might want to be creative about how you communicate in these genres, you will need to keep in mind that your audience and your purpose affects:

- what information you communicate (and what you don't communicate!)
- the way in which you communicate that information to your audience (eg the language you use, the degree of technicality, the use of personal or impersonal language)

The website and the seminar presentation have very different purposes and audiences and so, they use different language, structures and layouts.

Audience

The report audience is an imaginary group of venture capitalists, and in reality, your lecturers. This audience wants clear, succinct and accurate information about:

- The project aims

- The project outcomes

- The costs

- Marketing strategies

- Specifications

- Design and application

- Testing

This audience does not need to know about the emotional ups and downs of your group project and process (put this sort of information in your diary).

Your audience will also be suspicious of exaggerated claims in your report, so avoid expressions like: "The project team is a fantastic group of people". Keep information factual and accurate.

The brochure audience is the people you want to purchase your product. Ask yourself: what does this audience want to know that might be different from the information we provide in the report? What graphics will help make this information clear to this group of people? What level of technical understanding will this group have and how will this influence the type of information and the presentation of information in the brochure?

Tips in technical writing

The following ideas are from a book titled:
Technical Writing — A reader-centered approach by Paul V. Anderson, Harcourt Brace International Edition, Third edition, 1995

Think Constantly About Your Readers

- Think about How People Read

- Readers Construct Meaning

- Readers' Responses are Shaped by the Situation

- Readers react Moment by Moment

Two Strategies for keeping your Readers in Mind

- Use a Reader-Centered Writing Process

- Talk with your Readers

Some Reader-Centered Writing Techniques you can begin using now

- Help your reader focus on key information

- Tell your readers how your information is relevant to them

- Make reading easy\

Writing for your audience - webpages

One of the major ways the team can demonstrate that it is effectively and efficiently involved in the process of completing its project is via written communication. Deliverable 2 requires individual contributions to a report for a particular audience: the group of the Venture capitalists who are funding your project.

The following information aims to demonstrate some examples from your webpages which met the audience's requirements for clear factual communication about your project's progress and also to demonstrate how you might be able to avoide some of the communication weaknesses.

- Audience 1 wanted factual information about specific content: product definition, design process, testing, budget, project plan and marketing.
- Audience 2 wanted to read a document which worked as a whole document, rather than a set of separate contributions. Some teams achieved this using a number of strategies: layout and design, navigation, editorial overview.
- Audience 3 wanted to get the impression that the team was functioning well as a team and was dealing appropriately with any problems arising from the project development
- Audience 4 wanted a document that used clear language to communicate the progress of the project and was designed to be both readable and navigable.

Factual information about specific content: product definition, design process, testing, budget, project plan and marketing

***Be as specific as possible: minimise* waffle**

Example 1

| Original text
Quality control

As a product is produced, in line testing ensures that you catch problems before additional value is built into the job. It reduces rework and scrap. The package will be tested by allowing students of various ages to try the educational package. The feedback will give us ideas to bring about improvement in our package, to meet their needs | *Comment:*
The first sentence provides general information about "why" quality control is important. This information, however, could be applicable in a number of contexts and to a number of products. Since the audience for your report is the people who have funded your project, they are interested in knowing that the project will be a quality project. They want specific information about how quality control will be achieved in relation to this particular product.

The second sentence provides some specific information; it tells the reader **who** will test the package. This information could be made even more specific by providing information about :

• **when** (ie. at what stage/s in the product development)
• **how** (ie. under what conditions, using what equipment, using what measures etc.)
• **what** (measures will/might be taken to remedy any problems found during the testing phase) |

Example 2

| Original text
Testing with interfacing circuitry

This phase is the first of two testing phases for the correct operation of the software with the actual device. Should there be any bugs, this will need to be identified at this stage and appropriate action taken to rectify the problems. Possible problems that could occur are: failing to respond to instructions received by the device, not providing the correct output for the user and possible operating system conflicts. | *Comment:*
This example provides some specific information about the number of testing phases and possible problems that might be encountered. |

Example 3

Original text So the maintainability is pretty high.	*Comment:* Words like **pretty high** leave the reader with the idea that the information is **pretty** vague. Try to ensure that your audience develops confidence in your ability to achieve your project goals by being as precise as possible in your use of language.

Good Examples:

The impression that the team was functioning well as a team and was dealing appropriately with any problems arising from the project development.

Layout

Some web pages used the names of individuals rather than content headings on the front page others were good examples of layout which highlight that the report was a team project rather than a project being produced by a group of individuals.

Information and language

Example 1

Original text	Comment:
Project plan This section lays the foundation or time frame for the project development. It gives a general overview on how the team is going in our progress towards completion of the project. It includes a time graph which consists of bars and other icons which indicate and show what the team would be doing during the coming weeks. Team members can refer to the graphs at any time to know what needs to be done. This will help the team be co-ordinated and meet target requirements.	The purpose of the time graph is to inform the venture capitalists about the progress of the project at any particular time in its development. While it is true that the team members will refer to the graph to see what needs to be done, this isn't the sort of information that the venture capitalists need to know. They will assume that the team is keeping to it time graph. This sort of information might not inspire confidence that the team knows what it is doing.

Example 2

Original text	Comment:
Over the next week we have to meet every day to get our ideas flowing.	Again this **personal** information is not relevant to this particular audience.

Example 3

Original text	*Comment:*
Welcome to the web page, for X product. The web page is designed to help you loose those annoying pounds that you have been putting on for years and years, with the added bonus of not leaving your home. The personal trainer assigned to you will help you in any way possible, at any time that you need.	This is an excellent example of writing for the consumer or customer audience. The audience for Deliverable 2, however, is the group of venture capitalists, so a marketing spin on the writing and the use of personal pronouns like **you** or **we** is not appropriate.

A document that uses clear language to communicate the progress of the project

Language Feedback

Some of the common language errors made in the reports are shown below. We have re-written these examples so that they are grammatically accurate and provided web links for further information about this particular grammatical structure.

Sentence fragments and punctuation

It is fairly easy to write simple grammatical sentences. The difficulty comes when you are trying to express more complex ideas and need a more complex sentence structure. The following example is a complex sentence. This sentence is ungrammatical because of a punctuation error.

Sentence	Problem
Original example The operation manual must be accurate. Because it tells the customer how to use the equipment. *Rewritten example:* The operation manual must be accurate, because it tells the customer how to use the equipment. *Web links for more information on grammatical structure:* http://www.uow.edu.au/careers/resources/LD/StudentStaff.html http://unilearning.uow.edu.au http://www.edict.com.hk/vlc/	The second sentence cannot stand on its own because it is a dependent clause. It depends on the first sentence to make sense. It should be joined to it by a comma, not separated by a full stop. **Hints** • Try reading your sentences out loud. Pause when you have written a full stop. Listen to see if the sentence you have read out makes sense on its own. • If you have a sentence beginning with one of the FANBBOYS words (ie. for, and, nor, but, because, or, so) check whether it needs to be joined to the sentence before it rather than separated from it.

Run-on sentences and punctuation.

Sentence	Problem

Original example This section is devoted mainly to any outputs of the software to the recorder tutor device, this is only in the event that there are any output required in the first place and this will be determined in analysis of Software Requirements and Input and Output specification. *Rewritten example:* This section is devoted mainly to any outputs of the software to the recorder tutor device. This is only in the event that there are any output required in the first place and this will be determined in analysis of Software Requirements and Input and Output specification. *Web links for more information on grammatical structure:* http://www.uow.edu.au/careers/resources/LD/StudentStaff.html http://unilearning.uow.edu.au http://www.edict.com.hk/vlc/	The two parts of this single sentence should be separated to make two complete sentences. **Hints** - Try reading your sentences out loud. If you run out of breath before you reach the full stop you probably have too much information in the sentence. A sentence should contain one main idea only.

Lack of subject-verb agreement

To be a fully grammatical sentence, the subject and the verb in the sentence need to agree in number and person.

Sentence	*Problem*
Original example The article by Smith and Jones discuss the impact of the internet on children. *Rewritten example:* The article by Smith and Jones discusses the impact of the Internet on children. *Web links for more information on grammatical structure:* http://www.uow.edu.au/careers/resources/LD/StudentStaff.html http://unilearning.uow.edu.au http://www.edict.com.hk/vlc/	The singular subject of this sentence, **the article** requires the 3rd person singular verb **discusses** if the subject and the verb are to be in agreement.

The purpose of reports

Adapted from materials developed by Pollock, E.; Trivett, N. and Skillen, J.(2002) for the University of Wollongong's Unilearning site.

Technical and Business disciplines with an applied focus such as Engineering, Information Technology, Commerce, Accounting and Finance, will set report writing assignments that simulate the process of report writing in industry. Assignments are often set in the form of a problem or a case study or a project.

Reports communicate information that has been compiled as a result of research and development of a product and/or analysis of data and of issues. Reports focus on transmitting information with a clear purpose, to a specific audience.

Good reports are documents that are accurate, objective and complete. They should also be well-written, clearly structured and expressed in a way that holds the reader's attention and meets their expectations. Sometimes the written report may be the "only tangible product of hundreds of hours of work. Rightly or wrongly, the quality and worth of that work are judged by the quality of the written report — its clarity, organization and content" (Blake & Bly, 1993: 119).

Often reports are structured in a way that reflects the information finding process and/or the product development and marketing process and the results and recommendations resulting from that process. Many of the reports you may be familiar with contain this type of structure: summary of the contents, introduction or background, methods, results, discussion, conclusion and/or recommendations. However the scope, structure and style of reports vary widely. These differences depend on three key factors: the report's intended audience, the report's purpose and the type of information to be communicated.

Further reading:

A. Winckel and B. Hart, Report Writing Style Guide for Engineering Students

Language and Writing style for reports

Adapted from materials developed by Pollock, E.; Trivett, N. and Skillen, J. (2002) for the University of Wollongong's Unilearning site.

Knowing about the function and structure of reports is important; however, knowing about the appropriate style and conventions to use when writing your report is equally important. Reports written in a university context tend to be *structured*, *formal*, *objective, impersonal,* and contain *technical language*.

The formal and impersonal nature of reports can be achieved by:

- avoiding certain types of language such as slang terms and contractions (*didn't, won't* etc)

- avoiding strong expressions of opinion and attitude. A more objective, impersonal tone is achieved through the use of formal and impersonal language.

Compare these two entries from two past ECTE2550/INFO 202 reports

1. Former team leaders were Mr. T and Ms. S. Mr. T. was a strong team leader who was able to bring the team together and maintain his composure until his departure mid year.
2. Communication between group members has been an important part of the project. The successful completion of tasks required that both internal communication between members be productive and any contact with external consultants or project customers be effective… The end result of this strategy was that internal group communication was maintained on a horizontal level with all team members able to access information from others.

- Entry 2 is more formal, factual and impersonal than Entry 2.

- Entry 1 contains information about individual people and their personal attributes eg." strong" "composure".

- Entry 2, on the other hand, begins with the issue: "communication" and describes factually how this was achieved eg. through pursuing a horizontal communication strategy.

Try to keep the focus of your report on the project and the issues relevant to the project rather than the personalities and individual problems/successes of the team members

Some other examples of more impersonal expressions you may use in your report include:

- This project aims to investigate… (rather than "we wanted out project to…)

- The testing indicates…(rather than " when we tested x, we found that…)

- The results suggest…

- The following recommendations are made…

The use of discipline specific terminology in your report will also add to its technicality and formality.

Writing a Cohesive report

or

How to avoid too many cooks spoiling the soup

Writing a cohesive report: A team effort approach

Adapted from: Pollock, E.;Trivett. N.; Skillen, J. (2002) Unilearning resource on Report Writing. University of Wollongong

Step 1: Determine the Ideas to Include

- As a group establish the ideas or topics you need to address in your report.
- Check your subject outline for the sections you must include in your report.
- As a group, make a list of all the potential topics or sections of the report.
- From this list, draw up a preliminary outline of headings.
- Decide which team members need to have input into which topics or sections (eg the marketing role people may need to have input into a number of sections.

Step 2: Collect the Information

- Decide what information needs to go into each section.

Step 3: Sort and Evaluate the Information

- Once you have gathered your information, review your material.
- As you review, highlight key issues and ideas that relate to the overall purpose of the report.
- Highlight this material when you write about it. Your audience wants to know the key issues, ideas, findings, not whether it was Joe or Mary who came up with a particular idea or issue.
- Do not discard any information until the report is complete: circumstances can change and you will save time if you need to make any major changes.

Step 4: Organise the Information

- Going back to the preliminary headings you drew up, begin to sort your information under these headings if they are still appropriate. This step is very important because you must ensure that you have a suitable structure or outline of the report. Keep the big picture in mind:

- How do the ideas link together?
- Are there any gaps in the information?
- What headings/issues are the most important, and what sub-headings might come under them?
- What information should be presented graphically (tables, charts etc)

You may need to revise your headings and outline during this process and add new topics or remove redundant or irrelevant ones. Categorise your information under the headings and then plan sub-headings. Having done this, ensure that your sequence of heading and sub-heading is logical and appropriate.

Step 5: Write a draft of the entire report

- Table of contents
- Executive summary
- Introduction
- Other major sections and chapters
- Tables and graphs
- Conclusion

Step 6: Editorial input

- Use the Editing Checklist to check entire report for consistency, grammar etc before handing in.

Editing checklist

Use this editing checklist on your final report to ensure that it has been written in a appropriate style and is as complete as possible. The web addresses provide extra information and resources relevant to a particular item on the checklist.

Have we:

- checked the report follows an appropriate structure?   o

- ensured the headings and subheadings accurately reflect the content of each section?   o

- ensured each paragraph contains a topic sentence?   o

http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/effective/4b.html

- used paragraphs that aid the flow and analysis of the report's findings?   o

http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/effective/3.html

- structured the sections of the report logically   o

http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/effective/2.html

- used language/expression in the report that is:

    appropriate to the report's purpose?   o

    clear and easily understood?   o

    concise?   o

    non-sexist, non-racist and inclusive?   o

    suited to the needs of the reader?   o

http://unilearning.uow.edu.au/academic/1a.html

- made the report's purpose clear?   o
- fulfilled the terms of reference/the criteria specified in the subject outline?   o
- written an introduction that:

    explains the aims of the report?   o

    identifies and briefly describes the product/project, the target group for the product/project and the aims of the product/project?   o

    Outlines the sections included in the report   o

- written body sections/chapters that:

    have headings and perhaps sub-headings?   o

    present factual and objective information?   o

    use graphics appropriately   o

- written a conclusion that:

    draws the ideas/issues together?   o

    summarises the content and findings?   o

- prepared recommendations that:

    offer solutions to any problems encountered in the project or its development?   o

    relate to original aims of the project/product development?   o

    are concrete, specific and action oriented?   o

    are acceptable to the reader and possible to implement?   o

- included appendices that are:

    relevant to the report?   o

    clearly labelled?   o

    necessary?   o

- referenced appropriately in the text of the report?   o
- included a complete reference list?   o

(This checklist has been adapted from Dwyer, J. (1991) *The Business Communication Handbook (2nd Ed.).* Sydney: Managing Business Communication:)

Using graphics in your report

Adapted from: Pollock, E.;Trivett. N.; Skillen, J. (2002). Unilearning resource on Report Writing. University of Wollongong

When to use figures in your report

- A good rule of thumb is to produce text and figures that can both stand alone: the text should be readable without figures, and vice versa.

- Make sure the figure is worthwhile. If the text is crystal clear without the insertion of a figure, there is no point including it, despite how good it may look. If the text does not make sense without the insertion of the figure, you are expecting the figure to do your job for you. In fact, the figure is not meant to make your point but to illustrate, emphasise and supplement it.

Using figures in your report

Figures essential to the report should be smoothly and correctly integrated and should be explained and referred to in the main body of the report:

- lead into the figure by telling the reader what to focus on in the figure and then,

- lead out of the figure perhaps by linking the important point that was illustrated to the next salient point.

An example of a smoothly integrated figure:

'Lead-in' sentence showing what is to be noticed.

As can be seen from Figure 5.4.1 below, when the tap handle is placed in an upward position the tap is closed. In contrast, when the tap handle, or lever, is moved to a downward position, the tap valve is opened by a pushrod that raises the normal washer and water flows (see Figure 5.4.2).

The figure or figures being discussed are inserted as closely as possible to the end of the paragraph in which it was introduced (i.e. below the paragraph or on the next page). The figure/s should be **numbered and titled**.
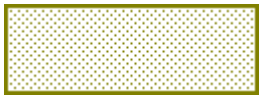

Figure 5.4.1: The tap handle in the upward (closed) position

Figure 5.4.2: The tap handle in the downward (open) position

'Lead out' sentences that conclude the point being made or link the discussion to the next point.

By incorporating a ratchet locking system, similar to that used in an automobile handbrake, the lever can be locked in a number of positions, provided by graduations in the ratchet, allowing the user to set the flow rate, similar to a conventional tap.

Labelling figures in your report

Figures must be clearly labelled so they can be accurately referred to in your written discussion. Each figure should have a title and a number, for example:

**Figure 1:** Retention rates of Year 10 students in NSW public schools in 1998-2001.

Table 5: Means scores and standard deviations from Experiment 2.

You may choose to label diagrams, tables and figures as **Figures** or you may choose to label diagrams and graphs as **Figures** and tables as **Tables**.

The title of your figure should include enough information to enable the figure to be **self-explanatory**.

Exercise 1: Labeling figures in your report

Select the most appropriate label for the following figures.
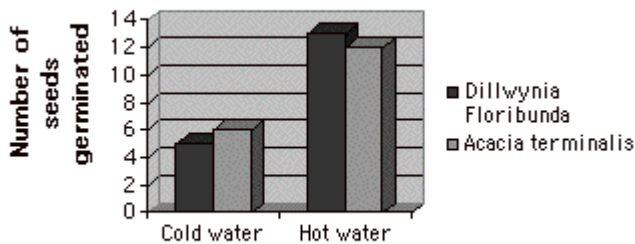
A: Figure 5: The number seeds germinated in hot and cold water.

B: Figure 5: A comparison of the number *Acacia terminalis* and *Dillwynia floribunda* seeds germinated after cold and hot water treatment.

C: Figure 5: The number *Acacia terminalis* and *Dillwynia floribunda* seeds germinated in hot and cold water.

D: Figure 5: The number of *Acacia terminalis* and *Dillwynia floribunda* seeds germinated.

Answer: B

Feedback: The most appropriate title for the figure is option B because this title provides the most comprehensive description for the data illustrated in the figure such as the thing being measured (the number of seeds germinated), the specific types of seeds involved and the relationship illustrated in the figure (a comparison between the seed types).

Exercise 2: Labeling figures in your report

Part	Metal Hooks	Nylon	Buckles	Clips	Other Materials	TOTAL
Amount required	4	3.6 metres	10	4		
Cost (wholesale)	$2.60	$10.88	$4.50	$13.80	$6.00	$37.38

A: Table 3: Estimated cost of the design RAX based on wholesale prices.

B: Table 3: The parts and costs of RAX.

C: Table 3: Estimated amount of parts and costs required for the design RAX.

D: Table 3: An estimate of the parts required and resultant wholesale costs of the design RAX.

Answer: D

Feedback: The most appropriate title for the figure is option D because this title provides the most comprehensive description for the data illustrated in the figure such as the things being measured (parts required and costs), specific details (wholesale costs, the fact that it is an estimate) and the relationship illustrated in the figure (the fact that the costs are a result of the amount of parts required).

Using tables in your report

Use tables to show *quantitative* features of data and close analysis**.**

Tables should be presented so that patterns and exceptions in the data are highlighted; for example, if you intend to discuss two means, place them close enough together to compare visually.

To show the relationship between two or more series of numbers, arrange them in columns rather than rows because reading down columns is quicker than reading across rows and patterns emerge more quickly.

A poor example of a table in a report

The title of table does not follow standard format, it should not be bold.

What each attribute consists of is unclear.

The acronym 'PSI' could be mistaken for the scientific term 'pounds per square inch', so should not have been used.

What the items, A, B and C refer to is unclear.

3.6 Performance Success Index Table

Attribute	P.S.I.	A	B	C
Fund Corr.	10	-2	-2	-1
Perf. Guar.	8	-0.8	-0.8	-4
Prod. Cost	10	-2	-1	-10
O & M Costs	8	0	0	-10
Ergonomic	10	-3	-3	-1
Physiological	8	0	0	-0.8
Psychological	5	0	0	-1
Legal	5	-1	-1	0
Total	64	-8.8	-7.8	-27.8

A better example of a table in a report

Title follows 'standard format'.

Labelling within the table is now more is meaningful.

The addition of a border around the table makes it more visually pleasing.

Important information such as the totals are highlighted through colour and bolding.

Table 3.6: Performance Success Index

Performance Attribute	Success Index	Proposal A	Proposal B	Proposal C
Correctness	10	-2	-2	-1
Predicted Performance	8	-0.8	-0.8	-4
Production Cost	10	-2	-1	-10
Overall & Maint. Costs	8	0	0	-10
Ergonomic Design	10	-3	-3	-1
Physiological	8	0	0	-0.8
Psychological	5	0	0	-1
Legal issues	5	-1	-1	0
Total	**64**	**-8.8**	**-7.8**	**-27.8**