

Principles of Professional Communication 1

Lecture 9
Report Writing

What is a report?

- Reports are documents written on a given subject to convey ideas and information and sometimes to make recommendations.
- Reports are written to provide comprehensive information, analysis and expert opinion.
- Report provide a permanent written record of research, information and ideas.

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What is the aim of an effective report?

- An effective report helps the reader decide what they should do
- A good report is:
 - Easy to understand
 - Clear
 - As long as it needs to be
 - Complete in terms of necessary information
 - Correct because decisions may be based on the information presented

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What are reports used for?

- Purposes include to:
 - Request/justify a proposal
 - Describe a work-in-progress
 - Record events
 - Record research
 - Investigate and analyse a problem
- Reports can be informative or persuasive or a mixture of both

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4

Stages in the production of a report – 1

- Investigation – the purpose of the report is established and guided by this aim, all necessary and relevant information is collected.
- Planning – information is selected, sorted into categories, and structured in a way which suits the purpose and audience of the report.
- Writing – the individual paragraphs and sections are composed from the collected information.
- Revision – a thorough and relentless check is made to ensure there are no errors of spelling etc or of information contained within.

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5

Reports

- Effective report writers spend only part of their time writing.
They spend
 - 30% investigating
 - 20% planning
 - 30% writing
 - 20% revising



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6

Stages in the production of a report – 2

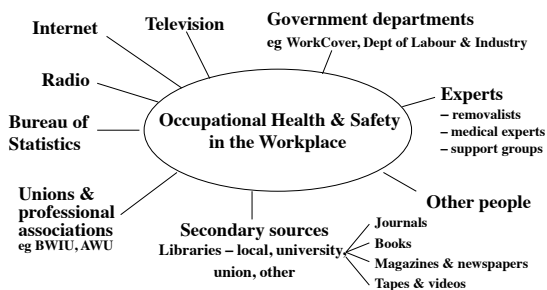
- 1. Define the purpose
- 2. Consider the reader
- 3. Determine the ideas
- 4. Collect the information
- 5. Sort and evaluate the information
- 6. Organise the information
- 7. Write the draft
- 8. Revise it
- 9. Submit a final copy

Planning a report

Ask yourself two main questions:

- 1. What is the *purpose* in writing my report?
 - ❖ To provide information or ideas
 - ❖ To clarify facts
 - ❖ To make recommendations for a course of action
- 2. Who will *read* my report? Consider
 - ❖ the existing level of knowledge of the reader
 - ❖ who has requested the report?
 - ❖ what does he/she want to know?
 - ❖ what is his/her point of view?

Gathering information – an example



Structure of a report

Front matter ■ orients the reader to the author & subject (title page) ■ allows them an overview (summary) ■ allows them to see a structure (table of contents)	→ Cover → Covering letter (optional) → Title page → Table of contents → Summary/ synopsis / abstract
Report body ■ contains the main information & analysis	→ Introduction → Discussion → Conclusions → Recommendations (optional)
End matter ■ contains additional or supplementary material assists with deeper reading of the report	→ Bibliography → Appendices (optional) → Glossary (optional)

Principles of Professional Communication 1 10

Title page

<p style="text-align: center;">PUBLIC RELATIONS: FROM CONCEPT TO COMPLETION</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prepared for:</i> Ms Jane Stevens CEO, Space Industries Inc.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prepared by:</i> Mr John Smith Assistant Manager Marketing Dept</p> <p style="text-align: center;">21 May 2010</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">IDENTIFIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Title or subject of the report ■ Name of the writer and their organisation or department ■ Name of the person and/or department for whom the report is written ■ Date of the report
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Principles of Professional Communication 1 11

Executive summary

<p style="text-align: center;">Abstract</p> <p>In the past five years, General Chemicals Pty Ltd has lost its position of employee relations leadership in the chemical industry. Today we suffer from grievances, high labour turnover and absenteeism, low employee morale and imminent industrial disputes.</p> <p>The two major causes of our employee relations problems are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. inadequate employee rewards, 2. poor supervisory methods. <p>These problems cannot be solved quickly or cheaply but they must be solved for General to remain competitive.</p> <p>It is recommended that General implement a two-year campaign to improve employee relationships involving:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. seeking consultant help to suggest job enrichment strategies and design a worker appraisal system, 2. developing a job rotation system, 3. training supervisors in interpersonal skills. <p>It is anticipated that this program will lead to a significant improvement in productivity during 1992-93 financial year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stands alone on its own page ■ Enables a reader to decide whether to read the report ■ Is written in the same style as the report ■ Is a summary of the overall report including the intro, findings, conclusions & recommendations ■ Is also known as the <i>synopsis</i> or <i>abstract</i> in scientific reports or academic writing
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Principles of Professional Communication 1 12

Table of contents

CONTENTS	
ABSTRACT	.....i
1. INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Background	..... 1
1.2 Aim & Scope	..... 2
1.3 Sources of information	..... 2
2. FINDINGS	
2.1 Annual Salary Increment	..... 4
2.2 Promotional Opportunities	..... 5
2.2.1 Additional research	..... 6
3. ANALYSIS	
3.1 The Present Situation	..... 7
3.2 Proposal to introduce new schemes	..... 8
3.3 Expected Results	..... 9
3.4 The Need for immediate action	..... 9
4. CONCLUSION	..... 10
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	..... 11
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	..... 12
7 APPENDIX A: Detailed proposal for introduction of award restructure trial in January 2005	

Professional
Communication 1

13

Introduction

- Defines task or problem and outlines aims or purpose of the report
- Gives appropriate background information to contextualise analysis ie what information does the reader need to understand the information or arguments the report will present?
- Outlines research methods – how information was gathered (also called ‘methodology’ in scientific reports)
- Identifies ‘terms of reference’ or ‘scope’ and ‘limitations’ – what areas of the topic are covered / not covered and why?

Principles of Professional Communication 1

14

Discussion or body

- Contains main ideas or information
- Has descriptive headings and a numbering system that provide reader with organisational structure and show internal relationships
- Should present arguments/facts for and against in an objective, balanced, unbiased manner
- Information must be factual, referenced, relevant and up-to-date
- Can come up with and explore options, alternatives or responses but these must also be referred to in recommendation section

Principles of Professional Communication 1

15

Report body can include ...

- Explanations of a problem or opportunity
- Facts, statistical evidence, and trends
- Results of studies or investigations
- Discussion and analyses of potential courses of action
- Advantages, disadvantages, costs, and benefits of a course of action
- Procedures and steps for a process
- Methods and approaches
- Criteria for evaluating alternatives and options

Conclusion

- Gives an overview or summary
- Interprets facts
- Analyses findings – the “so what?” section
- Contains no new ideas
- Should tell the reader how the report purpose has been achieved
- Should tell the reader what to do next

Recommendations

- Aim to solve problems or provide answers or potential solutions
- Always relate to research findings and are based on conclusions
- Usually presented in point or paragraph format (new recommendation for each)
- Not all reports have recommendations – only those that set out to investigate / solve / or analyse a problem

Bibliography

- Lists *all* sources of information including interviews or internal sources such as other company reports
- Usually presented alphabetically
- Uses a consistent style of layout – Harvard, APA, MLA
- Enables a reader to research further or check the original source of your information
- Must be complete

Appendix & Glossary

- Appendices are used for the inclusion of any supplementary material such as additional tables, charts, readings or other supporting data too detailed to include in the body of the report
- Glossary is a list of terms which may need to be defined for the reader

Why do I need an organisational structure?

- Provides a 'roadmap' that allows your reader to see where the report is going
- Numbering systems show the relationship between sections and sub sections
- Headings allow a reader to skim to the part that they want to read
- Sentence and paragraph transitions move the reader from one part of the report smoothly into the next and show how the parts are related
- Brief summaries at the end of sections show the reader the relationships

Organisational structures

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
WHAT WE OFFER	1. EQUIPMENT	1.1 Filing cabinets 1.2 Desks 1.3 Screens 1.4 Printers 1.5 Computers	1.5.1 IBM 1.5.2 Apple Mac	1.5.1.1 Clones
	2. STATIONERY	2.1 Printer/copier paper 2.2 Coloured paper 2.3 Diaries 2.4 Fax rolls	2.1.1 Premium 2.1.2 Recycled	
	3. FACILITIES	3.1 Ample parking 3.2 Wheelchair access 3.3 Computer games for kids	3.1.1 Freight-loading area 3.1.2 Bicycle racks	
	4. HOURS	4.1 7 am – 7 pm 4.2 7 days per week		
	5. SERVICES	5.1 Courier 5.2 Equipment installations	5.1.1 Free > 20 orders	

Principles of Professional Communication 1 22

Finally, a word about graphics & illustrative material in a report

- Illustrative material should supplement but not replace text
- Should be properly incorporated into the report with
 - Correct title eg
Fig 1 Population Trends 2000 - 2003
 - Source citation if it has been taken from a secondary source
 - Appropriate links to the text eg
“As shown in Fig 1 above, the trend is evident ...”

Principles of Professional Communication 1 23
