

This is a brief extract of *some* pages from our report writing workbook. There are more explanations and examples in the workbook than shown here.

The table of contents (below) is shown in full to enable you to see what the contents of the course.

Report and Letter Writing Training Course Workbook

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1 Introduction

You may have an excellent idea or proposal, but unless you can effectively communicate it in a report, you could fail to capture the interest and enthusiasm of the reader.

Reports should lead to outcomes, but they are frequently set aside. This is often because they lack the necessary impact to carry an argument through. Sometimes reports are rejected, or have to be re-written, because the purpose of the report has not been clear.

Through a combination of theory and exercises, you will develop writing skills to enable appropriate structure and present material that is easy to read and understand.

1.1 Course objective:

To produce clear, concise and effective reports by adopting a systematic approach.

2 Advantages and disadvantages of writing

What is the purpose of report or letter writing? Why must we do it?

A written document can provide more than a visit or phone call. It not only gets your message across clearly but it provides a permanent record. With well-written documents there should be no misunderstanding, unlike the possibility on the telephone or in conversation.

Reports and letters also serve as a record. They are long-lasting, tangible evidence of information you communicate to others.

Writing has its advantages and disadvantages.

2.1 Advantages

- You can choose your words carefully
- You can send the same message to several people
- The risk of misunderstanding is less than speech
- It is a permanent record, which you can copy and refer to later.

2.2 Disadvantages

- It takes time
- It does not have the advantages of body language, which can emphasise points and motivate
- You cannot be certain people have read the document
- You get no immediate feedback, hence you cannot modify the message if readers misunderstand it.

2.3 As a general rule

- If all you want to do is communicate factual information – writing is best
- If you want to persuade, motivate and involve – verbal communication is better.

Exercise 2 - Setting objectives for writing assignments

Instructions

Before writing an assignment we need to ask some important questions. Because these questions begin with the letters W and H they are known as W H questions.

Working in pairs, finish writing the list of the questions that you will need answering before starting the assignment:

Who.....

What.....

When.....

Why.....

How.....

With the answers to these questions you will be able to establish the objectives of the report.

3 What is the purpose of the report?

Managers often write reports because a senior manager has said for example “... write me a report on our recruitment policy. I need it urgently.”

You might find it a complete waste of time to start writing a report without further information. Is the report to describe the whole process from the first advertisement to the time the recruit starts work? Should it concentrate on the interview? Has someone made a complaint of unfair treatment or selection?

Before any work can begin, we need to know the precise purpose of the report. What is it for? What are its objectives? A meeting with the instigator of the report may help to clarify objectives. Clarification might result in this statement:

“The objective of this report is to examine our current recruit interview procedures for manual staff and recommend improvements for next year. The Director of Human Resources requested this report following a 35% dropout of manual staff recruited in the last two years.”

While there may be several objectives, a report will probably concentrate on a single central issue. It is important always to be clear about what this central issue is.

You need to make a clear decision about the purpose of the document before you start to write. Are you writing to:

- provide information?
- get some action?
- give instructions?
- change opinions, persuade or sell an idea?
- confirm an agreement made face-to-face or over the telephone?

What do you want the writing to achieve? How you organise your ideas will depend on this.

6 Stages of report writing

Here are the four main stages:

1. Research
2. Planning and sorting
3. Writing the report
4. Revise and fine-tune.

6.1 Research

To write a report requires some research, the generation of ideas and classifying the data. It is best to begin by making notes, gathering facts and jotting down ideas.

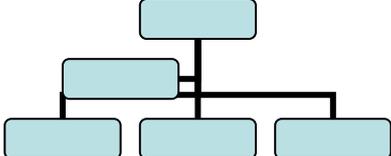
Even the simplest reports often start from masses of information. Information sources include fieldwork, personal observation, circulation of questionnaires, sampling of client and attitudes, other reports, the press, earlier correspondence, the Internet, City expertise, libraries, etc.

6.2 Planning and sorting

- Label the facts
- Group the facts
- Decide what the central and secondary issues are
- Decide the important ideas and what areas to drop

7 Time allocation

Allocate about 25% of your time to each of the following stages:

<p>1 Research</p> 	<p>2 Planning and sorting</p> 
<p>3 Writing the report</p> 	<p>4 Revise and fine-tuning</p> 

8 Organising your information

Organisation in a report is there for one reason - to help the reader. For your readers to use your report effectively, you need to organise your facts, arguments and information well. You need to structure your report with your readers in mind - not just to suit your way of writing and researching.

Most people find this the hardest part of writing a report, but it is the most important part. Once you have mastered organising your information, all your writing will become easier. Always plan what you write before you start. With reports, it helps to have an overall structure that you can fit your information into.

The key parts of any report are:

- A. Introduction
- B. Body of Report
- C. Conclusions and Recommendations
- D. Appendices.

8.2 Conclusions and recommendations

These stem from the main body of the report and must therefore follow it. These two subsections are usually distinct from each other, but for an uncomplicated report, it may be acceptable or even preferable to group them under a single heading.

Keep the conclusion short and provide cross references to the appropriate sections in the main report for more details, for example, why to implement the conclusions. Hence, if a reader jumps straight to the conclusion, it is obvious where to go for more information on points of interest.

To insert cross references in Microsoft Word, select 'Insert' / 'Reference' / 'Cross-reference' and select a predefined reference type, e.g. 'Numbered Item', 'Heading'. Then select the item to cross reference to. Select how you want this reference to appear in 'Insert reference to', e.g. Paragraph text, Paragraph number. Then click 'Insert'.

8.3 Executive summary

Lengthy reports may also have an overview or executive summary, which precedes even the introduction and is a brief piece summarising the whole report. Busy Executives often only read the Executive Summary, so ensure it contains a summary of all the information they need.

13 Lists and bullet points

Lists are also good for breaking up or emphasising information. There are many different ways of setting out bullet points. Here are some rules and examples for you to consider. Select which you or your company prefers and be consistent when using it.

Bullets should:

- contain comparable material
- consist of one or two lines only per bullet
- contain correct punctuation.

Notice how each bullet point (in the example above) is a continuation of the sentence, so each point should start with a lower-case letter. The final bullet point ends with a full stop.

- Another acceptable method is to end each bullet with a semicolon, but still end the bullet list with a full stop
- If each bullet is a stand-alone sentence (like these), start each bullet with a capital letter. You can either end each bullet point with a full stop or leave blank. For consistency with my previous bullet list, I have left them blank but finished with a full stop.

17.4 Sentences that confuse

There are several ways of avoiding long sequence of prepositional phrases:

- Delete words that do not effect the meaning
- Rewrite the sentence as two or more sentences.

Exercise 6 – Sentences that confuse

Instructions

Rewrite this sentence so that it does not confuse.

'The book under the table in the corner of the office near the stairway is the one you need.'

18 Grammar

We have choices about grammar. The order of our ideas in a sentence is an aspect of grammar called syntax.

Exercise 7 - Grammar

Instructions

Correct the grammar in these sentences.

- 'Wheres them letters what I wrote?'
- 'Would it be possible for you and I to go to the meeting?'

Exercise 8 - Passive sentences

Instructions

Working in your pairs make these passive sentences into active sentences.

1. Your complaint has been investigated
2. Job application advice can be obtained
3. Enquiries have been made by us
4. It will be signed by the manager.

Exercise 9 - Tautology

Instructions

The following phrases all say the same thing twice or add unnecessary information. Underline the repeated or unnecessary information.

5. Safety is absolutely essential on the production line.
6. Advanced planning always reduces errors.
7. A definite decision is needed on which supplier to choose.
8. Staff may possibly be required to work overtime.
9. Let us revert back to an earlier page.

Exercise 10 – Unnecessary words

Instructions

Here are a few examples that might contain unnecessary words. Underline those you believe are unnecessary.

1. ... during the course of investigations.
2. Also, it should be mentioned that many people
3. Allow a few days to elapse before speaking with ...
4. You should contact...
5. ...which is done for each and every incident...

Exercise 12 – Clearer sentences

Instructions

Here are some more examples of sentences containing long-winded phrases you can replace with clearer ones. Jot down what you think would be a better word to use in each of these sentences instead of the group of words highlighted.

1. **Despite the fact that** deliveries of raw materials were late, the order was met on time.
2. This **in many cases** proved to be so.
3. I should like to **draw your attention to the fact** that I haven't been paid.

Exercise 15 – Tautology

Instructions

Read the passages below and:

- remove (any) tautology
- use active not passive verbs
- reduce sentence length
- use more familiar words.

“Many people are fearful of travelling by air as opposed to travelling by sea or land even though statistical research has been carried out and the research reveals air travel to be the safest one out of the three.”

Your improved version:

“We trust the foregoing report is satisfactory, but should you require to discuss this further you may wish to contact the writer direct or our Administration Officer, who will be available at the telephone number shown below.

Your contribution to the Children In Need appeal is appreciated.”

Your improved version:

19.4 Apostrophe

Apostrophes are the most misused punctuation mark in the language. Let us look at the basic rules and the exceptions.

1. To show possession of something. Usually you add 's to the person possessing. For example:
 - the electrician's tools
 - the board's decision
 - the army officer's uniform

Exercise 17 – Apostrophe

Instructions

Add an apostrophe where appropriate:

1. I am going round to Micks house. My videos broken and hes taped Match of the Day for me.
2. I need two Drs to sign this form.
3. Sarah thinks Trevors mates house looks terrific.
4. Rolling a dice ten times, I got three twos and two fours.
5. Lettuces only 50p!

I hope this has given you an idea of the format of the course and how delegates will benefit by attending our enjoyable course.

“An enjoyable day with good instruction and constructive criticism. Now I know what a report should consist of and how to get the point across without waffling.”

S. Robinson - Ipswich Town Football Club