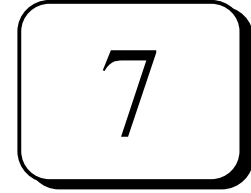# INTRODUCTION TO INFORMAL & FORMAL REPORTS

7

This unit will be especially useful for students who are very poor in communicating in the business world. The lessons are well equipped with examples and models for students to help them describe and apply the technique of writing various reports all by themselves. The emphasis throughout the Unit has been placed on developing your abilities to :

- organise materials

- write more coherently, correctly and more within the styles — best suited to the business communication world

- explain and write both informal and formal reports of various types.

Blank the page

UNIT-7

Lesson-1: Type of reports

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- distinguish between two major group of reports

- explain the nature and purpose of informal reports

- describe various types of informal reports

- state the nature of a memorandum, letter form report, prepared form of report and other miscellaneous reports

- state and write a progress report in memorandum format

- explain and write any kind of survey reports by using the model survey report presented in the lesson as your guideline.

Introduction

Reports are categorised according to their purpose and readership. The most simple division is **'informal'** and **'formal'**. The essential difference between the two types is that the formal or complex reports require some kind of investigation and research, where as the informal one does not. The types of report that you might be writing on any work day will depend upon your reporting responsibilities and specific job performance.
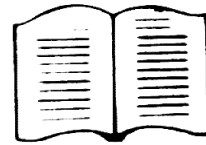
Informal reports

Informal reports vary in length and arrangements. Informal reports are usually written for readers within and among organisations. Most often these reports are quickly prepared, require no extended planning and contain little background information. Also the informal reports are written without any supplements (abstracts, title page, glossary, etc.) and can have a variety of formats. Usually they range in length from one sentence to several pages.

The purpose of informal reports is to communicate precisely and rapidly in any one of these formats: **The memorandums**, **the letter form,** and the **prepared form report,** or a variety of other formats that fit into none of the above three categories and which are called **miscellaneous reports**. The informal reports are the kind most regularly written and read in the working world to keep the companies moving.

Your worth as an effective communicator will depend on how well you can convey what you know. Your success on the job may depend on your skill in sharing useful information with colleagues. Here are some of the informal reports that you might write on any work day;

- a report of your progress on a specific job assignment

- a report of your inspection of a site, item, or a process

- a cost estimate for planning, material, labour, or a new project

- an hourly or daily account of your work activities

- a proposal outlining the reasons and suggesting a plan for a new project

- a statement of reasons for equipment malfunction or failure to meet the deadline

- a record of the minutes of a meeting

- a report of your survey to select the best prices, material, equipment, or service among those offered by several competing firms

- a voucher detailing your travel expenses

- a set of instructions for one or more subordinates

- a request for assistance on a work project

- a memo describing a change in the company's personnel policy (promotion, leave, etc.)

Format is the mechanical arrangement of words on the page and determines the physical appearance of report
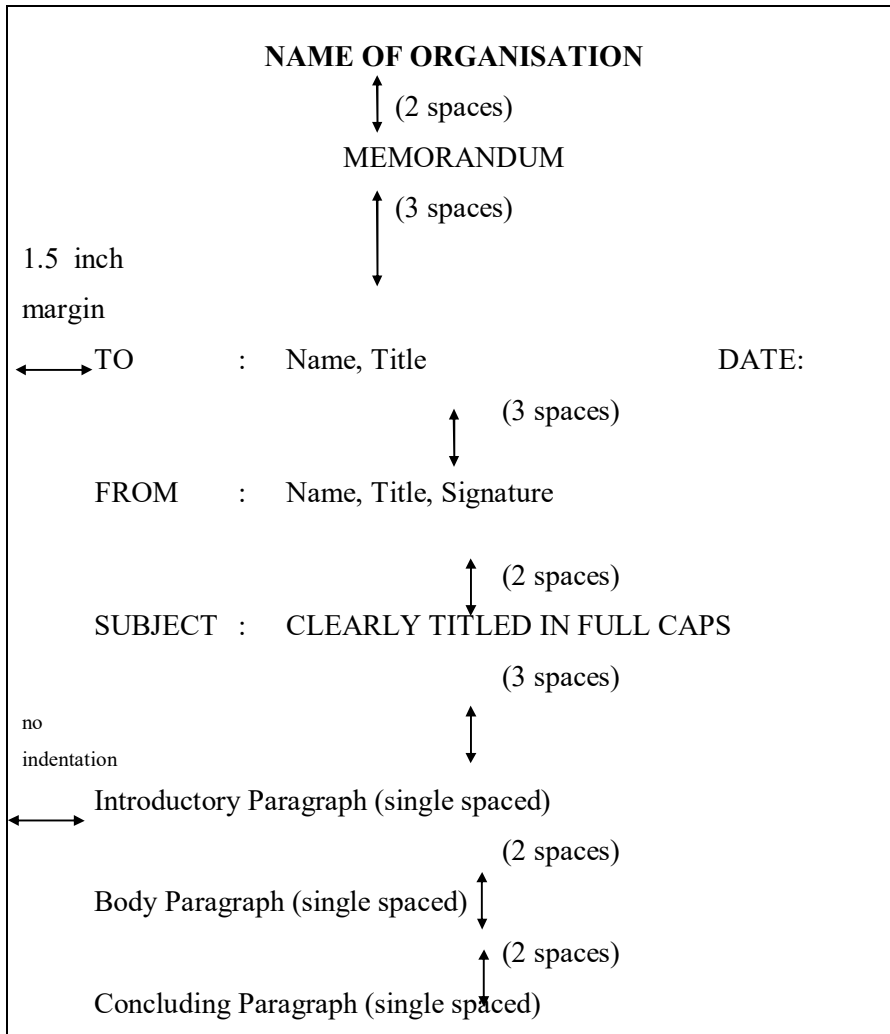
Most often these reports may be cast in a number of different forms but in any case you have to create a professional format: words on the page, indentation, margin, spacing, type space, numbering, headings and division of report section. In fact, format is the mechanical arrangement of words on the page and determines the physical appearance of your report. Also whether your informal report, data is in the letter form, prepared form, or in the memorandum format, or in some miscellaneous format, will depend on your purpose and reader's needs. In style informal report is personal and relaxed. The first person-I or we is used here.

What is a memorandum?

A memorandum is the most common form of in-house communication. Sometimes the same information you cast in a memo to a superior will be incorporated in a letter to a client outside the organisation. Memos cover any topic important to a firm's operations. The most common types include informational, recommendations, justification, progress reports, periodic survey, credit and market reports as well.

The standard memo has a heading that names the organisation, identifies the sender, recipient, subject, and date. Its text follows an introduction-body-conclusion structure. **First,** identify your purpose for writing the memo **next**, give the information related to your purpose, finally, **conclude** with a request, recommendation, or an offer of further assistance. When you need a second page don't forget to list the recipient's name, the date, and the page, and after that you can begin your text three spaces below. (example given in Unit-2, Lesson-2)

Fig. - 1

NAME OF ORGANISATION

↕ (2 spaces)

MEMORANDUM

↕ (3 spaces)

1.5 inch

margin

←→ TO   :   Name, Title   DATE:

↕ (3 spaces)

FROM   :   Name, Title, Signature

↕ (2 spaces)

SUBJECT :   CLEARLY TITLED IN FULL CAPS

(3 spaces)

↕

no

indentation

←→ Introductory Paragraph (single spaced)

(2 spaces)

Body Paragraph (single spaced) ↕

↕ (2 spaces)

Concluding Paragraph (single spaced)

A format of a Memorandum

Here is an informal report cast in memorandum format. Like all examples use it as a guide only, don't follow it word for word. Again don't forget that the format, organisation you choose must fit your purpose, readers, and situation.

A PROGRESS REPORT ON TERM PROJECT

Date   : April 20, 1995

From   : Suraiya Zafar

To   : Dr. Enamul Haque

Subject   : <u>Evaluation of the Environment Protection Department's (EPD) Remedial Action Master Plan</u>

Work Completed

February 23	:	Began general research on the BLI contamination of the local area.
March 8	:	Decided to analyse the Remedial Action Master Plan (RAMP) in order to determine whether residents are being studied to death by the EPD.
March 9-19	:	Drew a map of that area to show places of contamination. Obtained the RAMP from Imran Ali of the EPD.
		Interviewed representative Mr. Khan briefly over the phone. Made an appointment to interview others on April 10, 1995.
		Interviewed Pervin Choudhury, Executive Director of the New Dhaka Environment Club, briefly over the phone.
March 24	:	Obtained public comments on BLI's (Bangladesh Leather Industries) reaction to RAMP.
April 13	:	Searched Mr. Azam's office files for information. He is the project officer of EPD.
Work in Progress	:	Contacting by telephone the people who commented on the RAMP.

Work to be Completed :

| April 25 | : | will finish contacting commentators on the RAMP. |
| April 26 | : | will interview an EPD representative about the complaints that the commentators raised on the RAMP. |

Date for completion : May 4, 1995

Complications : The issue of BLI (Bangladesh Leather Industries) contamination is complicated and emotional. The more I uncovered, the more difficult I found it to remain impartial in my research and analysis.

Lastly, the people I want to talk to do not always have the time to find the answers for my questions. Every one I have spoken with, however, has been interested and encouraging, if not always informative.

Functions of Memo Reports

Most "Memo Reports" written in business perform the following functions:

1. Maintain a flow of information across the levels or ranks of the organisation — from supervisor to supervisor, from vice president of sales to vice president of production.

2. Send information up and down within an organisation.

3. Serve as a reminder and maintain a permanent record of meetings changes and procedures.

SUMMARY

Reports are mainly of two types: Informal or short reports which require no extended planning and contain varieties of formats and formal or long complex reports with supplements addressed to the secondary readers.

B. **LETTER FORM OF REPORTS:** Detailed information on the letter form of reports has been given in Unit 2 of this book.

C. **PREPARED FORM OF REPORTS:** To have a smooth, clear-cut communications many companies, firms, use prepared forms for short reports. These forms are useful in two ways:

1. Prepared forms provide clear guidance for recording data. If you can fill in the form correctly, you are sure to satisfy your readers' needs.

2. In a prepared form, identical categories of data are recorded in identical order, so it allows for rapid processing and tabulating of data. Also a prepared form standardise data reported from various sources.

There are countless prepared forms for countless purposes. Below is a sample of a questionnaire used by a police officer to obtain the precise description of a suspect. As a witness provides details, a police artist converts the word picture into a sketch with the help of such descriptive questionnaire. Example No. 1

Fig. - 2

Description of Suspect

Sex _____ Nationality _____ Age _____ Height

Weight _____ Build _____ Who does this person look like?

_____ In what way? _____ Hair: Colour

_____ Long _____ Short _____ Bald _____ curly _____

Straight _____ Other _____.

Face : Round _____ Oval _____ Square _____ Other.

Complexion : Light _____ Dark _____ Unusual facial : Scars

_____ Pockmarks _____ Dimples _____ Other _____.

Eyes : Colour _____ shape _____ Brows : Colour _____ Bushy

_____ Thin _____ Average.

Nose : Large _____ Small _____ Wide _____ Flat _____

Pronounced _____ Nostril shape _____

Mouth : Lipshape _____ Large _____ Small _____ Wide

_____ Thin _____ Colour _____.

Teeth : Large _____ Pronounced _____ Crooked _____ Missing

_____ Stained _____.

Speech : Manner of speaking _____ Words spoken _____

Chin : Pronounced _____ Recessed _____ Wide _____

Narrow _____ Dimple _____

Facial Hair : Mustache _____ Beard _____ Sideburns _____

Colour _____ Shape _____

Example of a prepared form of report 1

Fig. -3

F. H. CHOUDHURY LIMITED

ACCIDENT REPORT

NAME OF INJURED PERSON ....

OCCUPATION .... DEPARTMENT ....

TIME AND DATE .... PLACE ....

DESCRIPTION OF ACCIDENT ....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

NAMES OF WITNESSES (BLOCK CAPS) ....

....

....

....

....

....

....

....

REPORT BY (BLOCK CAPS) ....

SIGNATURE ....

REF. NO. :   DATE :

A Sample of A Prepared Form of Report-2

D. MISCELLANEOUS REPORTS: Miscellaneous reports are usually written for assorted purposes that don't fit our previous classifications. If you are writing a lab report it may require you to invent a suitable format. When creating a suitable format for a

miscellaneous report, organise the information to answer the questions readers are likely to ask. Use topic headings to guide them. One common example of a miscellaneous report is, minutes of a meeting which follows fairly standard conventions but can have varieties of contents. Besides being purely informative as in the minutes of a meeting, miscellaneous reports can offer recommendations too (as in the next sample).

A.   Preliminary Marketing and Research Report

Miscellaneous reports can deal with any aspect of an organisation's operations. The following report in figure No. 4 was written to explore ways of marketing BRMDC's Strategic Planning Game (a computer assisted package for management training)

BANGLADESH RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

DATE	:	JUNE 5, 1995
MEMORANDUM TO	:	BRMDC Management System
FROM	:	S. Choudhury
RE	:	Marketing Our Strategic Planning Game

I have considered it important to outline ways we can develop a marketing strategy for our Strategic Planning Game. Although we have a lot of experience marketing our consulting services, product marketing calls for efficient approaches. Here are some broad areas of marketing research I would like you to consider before we meet on June 20, 1995.

(1) <u>Identify General Perceptions and Attitude Toward Using Games for Management Training.</u>

Example   :   Given the current successes in computer assisted training, is there an important market segment that we can fill?

(2) <u>Determine How Current Training Needs are Being Met.</u>

Example   :   Identify the percentage of current managerial training being done in-house and the percentage being done by outside suppliers, college etc. We might be able to tailor our programme to these needs. These are just the research areas that might help us. Try to expand on this list before the meeting.

A miscellaneous report Fig. No. 4

What is a survey report?

Brief survey reports are often used to examine the conditions that affect an organisation or a company or a firm (consumer preferences, available markets etc.). The following survey report cast in memorandum format

from the research director for a south eastern grain distributor, gives clear and specific information directly. Notice that an explanation (background information) of how and where these data were obtained is absent in the report as these are insignificant as to the purpose of the writer. To simplify interpretation of data, the writer arranged them in a table.

Data : June 2, 1995

To   : Mr. Atiur Rahman Miah

From : M. Khan, Research Director

Subject : Food-Grain Consumption Bangladesh 1979-82

Here are the data you requested on May 9 as part of your division's annual marketing survey.

BANGLADESH PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION OF FOOD GRAINS

IN TAKA, 1979-82

	1979	1980	1981	1982
Rice Production				
Various types of rice and	3315.8	2216.8	2215.8	2218.8
Other rice production	1113.5	112.5	1112.8	1113.9
Sugar and food	1114.5	1113.5	1114.6	1114.7
Lentils of various types	2201.5	1202.5	1201.2	2201.03
Wheat flour	1115.5	1115.7	1116.5	1116.5

If you require additional information, please call Ms. Khan at 55555.

xc. Mr. S. Haque Vice President Marketing.

Questions for Review

These questions are designed to help you assess how far you have understood and can apply the learning you have accomplished by answering (in written form) the following questions:

1. Define informal reports with an example.
2. What does a standard memo do? Does it follow any regular format? Answer yes or no.
3. What are the three usual formats of informal reports?
4. What are miscellaneous reports?
5. What is a survey report?
6. What are the advantages of prepared form of report?

Lesson-2: Introduction to formal reports

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the importance and nature of formal reports

- describe and prepare a title page, letter of transmittal, informative abstract or summary, and table of contents of formal reports

- apply the sample model of different elements of a formal report for writing any formal reports

- define the term supplement and explain why are supplements used in the formal reports

- write the introduction-body-conclusion-section of a formal report by following the guidelines provided.
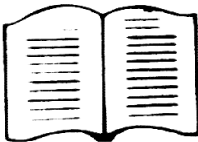
Why do you need formal reports?

Whether in science, business, industry, government, or education, formal reports, are written for decision makers : managers, executives, directors, clients trustees, board members, community leaders, and the like. Inside or outside your organisations. These are the people who decide whether your suggestions are sound, whether your project will be worthwhile, whether your service or product is useful. So formal reports cover any topic important to business operations. The most common types include, information based reports, problem solving reports, proposals, research reports, analytical reports, instructional reports, descriptive reports, etc. The formal report is used instead of the memo, when the topic requires lengthy discussion.

In writing formal reports your aim is to show how you arrived at your conclusions and recommendations. Your approach will depend on your subject, purpose and readers' need. As most often high level decision will depend on your findings you must seek and interpret all data that will help you make the best. recommendations. This is where you apply your method of carrying out a research and writing activities such as having mental preparation for analysing readers' needs and your purpose of writing; gathering information from various sources, next arranging and recording material, writing the introduction, development, conclusion, and recommendations and finally preparing it in typed form. In style formal report is relatively impersonal and restrained. Here the writer does not refer to himself as I or we, instead third person references such as "the writer", "the investigator"; "it was learned"; "investigation shows" etc. are used.

What are supplements? Why do formal reports need supplements?

Supplements are reference items generally added to a long report or to a proposal to make the document more accessible to varied readers. Supplements help readers follow technical sections. Different readers often use one report for different purposes. According to their needs readers can refer to one or more of the supplements, or skip them

altogether. Some look for an overview; others want the details, others are interested only in the conclusions and recommendation. Technical personnel might focus on the body of a highly specialised report and on the appendices for supporting data (maps, formula, calculations). Executives and managers, supervisors might only read the transmittal letter and the abstract (summary) and are likely to focus on the conclusions and recommendations. So only by adding supplements to a long report the writer can make it accessible to various readers for various purposes. All supplements, of course, are written only after the document itself has been completed.

A formal report supplements can be classified into two groups:

(1) Supplements that precede your report (front matter): cover, title page, letter of transmittal, table of contents (and figures) and abstract or summary of the report.

(2) Supplements that follow your report (end matter): glossary, footnotes, endnote pages, appendix (ces) (information on these have been provided in the last Unit of this book).

We have seen in the previous lessons that all reports (informal, formal) must conform to the basic principles of communications: accuracy, brevity and clarity and to the rules of construction: introduction, body, conclusions and recommendations. Depending on the complexity of the report each formal report might contain all of the following elements :

(A) Title Page

(B) Letter of Transmittal

(C) Table of Contents

(D) Summary or Informative abstract

(E) Introduction

(F) Body or Development (report text)

(G) Conclusions

(H) Costing

(I) Recommendation

(J) Glossary

(K) Appendix (ces)

(L) Bibliography

Title page

Your title promises what the report will deliver by stating the report's purpose and subject. The title page lists the report's title, writer's name, name of person(s) or organisation to whom the report is addressed, and date of submission. Always write the final version after completely, writing the report and make sure your title of the report is clear, accurate comprehensive, and specific. Example of a clear title :

A PRELIMINARY DESIGN PROPOSAL FOR THE NEW LODGE FACILITIES AT KUAKATA AREA

Do not number your title page, but count it as page i of your prefatory pages. Centre the title horizontally on the page, three to four inches below the upper edge, using all capital letters. A Sample title is given below.

A PROPOSAL TO INVESTIGATE
THE BARRIERS TO
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
BETWEEN
MAN AND ORGANISATIONS

Prepared for
Asiatic Society of Bangladesh
5 Old Secretariat Road (Nimtoli)
Ramna, Dhaka 1000 Bangladesh

by
Suraiya Zafar
Resource Person in the
Training Programme in Communication
Skills

October 14, 1994

Letter of transmittal

Include a letter of transmittal with any formal long report addressed to a specific reader. If you are writing a report for your work place then the letter usually precedes the title page but if you are writing a report as a college student your letter of transmittal most often comes immediately after the title page and becomes a part of your report. This kind of letter adds a note of courtesy and provides you a space for personal remarks or opinions.

Now depending on the situation your letter might also refer to sections of your study along with any problems in gathering data. It might also provide a list of people and organisations to whom you are indebted for help, advice, or information. So the letter of transmittal can be tailored to a particular reader and has an introduction-body-conclusion structure. (example given below as a sample of a formal report's letter of transmittal).

A letter of transmittal

October 14, 1994

The General secretary
Asiatic Society of Bangladesh
5, Old Secretariat Road (Nimtoli)
Ramna, Dhaka 1000 Bangladesh

Dear Sir :

No one needs to be reminded about the present crisis of business communication in the world especially, in the underdeveloped countries. We are all faced to make do with poor communications.

Accordingly, I have spent long hours devising a plan to overcome this present crisis of communications in the society. I think you and your colleagues will agree that my plan is realistic and feasible.

I, therefore, submit the following proposal for your consideration.

Respectfully,

SURAIYA ZAFAR

Table of Contents

Your table of contents is a checklist and a map of the report for the readers. So simply phrase major headings in the table of contents as in the report (outline) assigning page numbers. Use horizontal dots (...............................) to connect heading to page number. (example given below)

CONTENTS

Summary or informative abstract

Summary is always written in non-technical style, it gives you the chance to measure your control over the material. This abstract is sort of your mini report and is always written after your report. Summary is the most important part of your report as some busy experts or professionals will neither have the time nor the inclination to read your entire report. They will be interested to read the summary only to know what it is about. So indicate briefly but clearly the scope of your report in not more than 350 words and write for general readers in clear simple language. A sample of an informative abstract or summary of a formal report is given below.

A SAMPLE OF AN INFORMATIVE ABSTRACT OR SUMMARY OF A PROPOSAL

ABSTRACT

A PROPOSAL TO INVESTIGATE
THE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN
MAN AND ORGANISATION

Effective communication is the life blood of any organisation. Today with its increasing volume of information the business community sees its time, energies, and its potential profits wasted by communication that don't effectively communicate. To overcome the barriers, to put a stop to the break downs of communications; a growing awareness among people to analyse the purpose of the communication and readers' need should be developed. So I have devised a plan to make people understand that communication skills can be learnt by practice and perseverance. My proposal offers a realistic plan for meeting the crisis of communication between man and his environment. I shall use both the primary and secondary sources of data to investigate the problem area. My primary sources will include interviews with various officials of different organisations. I shall roundup my primary research with letters, personal visits, and telephone calls. My secondary sources will include other publications on the problem, interpersonal relationships in the departments and all other problems related to human resources development. I shall further analyse and interpret the information gathered from various sources following a methical procedure and provide adequate knowledge and advice for improving basic communication skills.

Introduction

Your introduction section should give the reader necessary background information (the term of reference, the reason the report has been called for), indicate the area to be covered and explain how the subject is to be developed.

At the end of your introduction the reader should have a general, overall picture of where you work, what you do, how you collected data, and what the report is about, and what is to follow next.

Development or report text (Body)

This is where you spellout your plan in enough detail for readers to evaluate your report's soundness. The main goal of this section is to prove that your plan will work. It answers all these questions that are applicable:

- How will it be done?

- When will it be done?

- What materials, methods, and personnel will it take?

- What facilities are available?

- How long will it take?

- How much will it cost, and why?

- What results can we expect?

- How do we know it will work?

- Who will do it?

This section may be divided into two or more sections having subsections for convenience in preparation or ease of understanding.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion you summarise, interpret, and restate the need for the project or proposal report and persuade readers to act. So your conclusion must reflect accurately the body section of your report. Your recommendations for any further actions must be consistent with the purpose of the report, the evidence presented, the interpretations given.

Information regarding glossary, appendix(ces), footnotes and bibliography have been given in the last Unit of this book.

In writing all reports, know who your readers are, and how will they use your information. Reports should not challenge the readers to understand them, they should rather provide a challenge to the writer to write briefly using simple precise and clear language. Keep in mind that well designed visuals condense information displaying it in a meaningful way. Appropriate visuals in your report will display abstract concepts in concrete, geometric shape, so apply visuals wherever you need to do so.

Formal reports are usually long complex reports requiring sufficient research, planning, organising, drafting, and revising procedures. Formal reports are sometimes provided with supplements depending on the nature of the report.

Question for Review

These questions are designed to help you assess how far you have understood and can apply the learning you have accomplished by answering (in written form) the following questions:

1. Why do people write formal complex reports instead of a memo?

2. What do you mean by supplement?

3. Do all the readers need all the supplements in a report?

4. What is an informative abstract?

5. What is the main purpose of writing a letter of transmittal?

6. Do you think all reports follow the same principle of communications? Yes or No.

Lesson-3: Designing effective format and outlines formal reports

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- define an outline of a report

- explain the nature of a formal report

- prepare an outline all by yourself

- design an impressive format of a formal report

Introduction
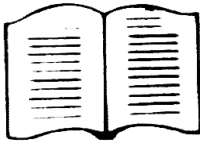
We have seen in the previous lessons that all reports must conform to the basic rules of communication — Introduction-body-conclusion and all long formal reports might contain all the elements or some of the elements discussed earlier according to the needs of the various readers. Every writer spends more time in thinking and planning than writing. Good writing calls for deliberate decisions: about what to say, how to say, how to organise it, and how to revise it to make the whole thing work. Writing begins in disorder. Messiness is a natural and often essential part of writing in its early stages. Always compose the finished outline after you complete writing the final draft of a long document. At this final stage a finished outline serves as a quality control check on your reasoning, and as a way of revealing to your readers a logical line of thinking.

What is an outline?

An outline is an information map with which you organise your information to make sense to your readers. A good beginning, middle, and ending are indispensable for all reports but alter your own outline as you see fit. The organisation of any report ultimately is determined by what your readers need. An outline usually follows either of the two systems of notation: the **roman-numeral-letter-Arabic-numeral system**, or the **decimal system**. Notation is the system of division makers. Use notation to show how each part relates to other parts and to the whole.

Numeral and decimal version of notation for the body of a report are shown here side by side:

```
II
  A                          2.0
    1                          2.1
    2                              2.1.1
    3                              2.1.2
      a                            2.1.3
      b                                2.1.3.1
    4                                  2.1.3.2


  B    and   so on                2.1.4
                            2.2      and   so on
```

The following model is adaptable to most reports directed toward reaching a decision

GENERAL OUTLINE MODEL

I. **INTRODUCTION**

    A. Definition, Description, and History

    B. Statement of Purpose

    C. Target Readers

    D. Information Sources (including research methods and materials)

    E. Limitation of the Report

    F. Scope of Coverage (sequence of major topics in the body)

II. **BODY**

    A. First Major Topic

       1. First Sub topic of A

       2. Second Sub topic of A

         a. First Sub topic of 2

         b. Second Sub topic of 2

         (and so on sub-division carried as far as necessary)

III. **CONCLUSION (Where everything is tied together)**

    A. Summary of Information in **II** (body)

    B. Recommendations Based on Information in **II**.

But no one model should be followed slavishly by any writer. Alter your outline, revise it anytime you need to adjust it to your readers' need.

Formats in Workplace Writing

A useful document looks inviting and accessible to its readers. Format is the look of a page, the layout of words and graphics. So beside having worthwhile content, sensible outline, and readable style, a report must also have good appealing format to attract readers attention.

Guidelines for Format Design

Whether you write with a type writer or a computer approach your formatting decisions from top to down: **first,** consider the overall look of your document; **next**, the shape of each paragraph; and **finally,** the size and style of individual letters and words. These guidelines follow a top down sequence, moving from large matters to small. Some general guidelines are as follows:

- **Use the right paper and ink**

  Type or print your finished document in black ink, on 8.5" by 11" or A4 size plain white paper. Use ray-bond paper with a high fibre content (25 percent minimum)

- **Use adequate white space**

  White space separates sections in a document, headings, and visuals from text, paragraphs on a page, sentences in a paragraph, words in a sentence, letters in a word. Well-designed white space imparts a shape to the whole document, provides breathing room between blocks of information.

- **Leave ample margins**

  On your 8.5" by 11" page leave margins no smaller than these:

  top margin   =   1.25 inches
  bottom margin =   1.5 inches

  right margin   =   1.25 inches
  left margin   =   2 inches

- **Keep line spacing consistent**

  For any document single space within paragraphs and double space in between; for longer documents, double space within paragraphs. Indent your double spaced paragraphs or separate them with an additional line of space so that your readers can scan a long document, and quickly locate what they need.

- **Use short paragraphs**

  Short paragraph can make complex material more digestible such as giving step-by-step instructions, or emphasising vital information.

- **Number pages consistently**

  For a long document (formal report) count your title page as page i, without numbering it, and number all front matter pages, including

your table of contents and abstract with lower case roman numerals (ii,iii,iv). Number the first page of your report and subsequent pages with Arabic numerals (1,2,3).

Apart from these (above) guidelines whatever form you select for a document, whichever highlights you choose, **be consistent** all over and never combine too many highlights.

EXAMPLE OF A FORMAL REPORT

The following example of a formal report is only one among countless possibilities.

REPORT ON THE

DHAKA UNIVERSITY CAFETERIA

I.   TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 15 May, 1995 the Vice Chancellor asked the officers of the Student's union to investigate the services provided by the university's Cafeteria in the campus, report its finding and make necessary recommendations.

II.   PROCEDURE

The members, the chosen officers of the union visited the cafeteria during the morning and afternoon breaks and at lunch time for a period of 4 weeks and observed the way in which the cafeteria operated making notes on the services provided. They have also examined the quantity and quality of the food.

III.   FINDINGS

A.   Provision of Food

1.   The quality of the food:- The officers of the union took lunch for about a month and all of them agreed that the quality of the food was quite satisfactory.

2.   The quantity of the food:- All the officers agreed that the lunch was a bit small and the portion of meat and fish were particularly inadequate. They also noted that the size of the meals was quite adequate on many occasions and the breakfast and afternoon tea were of good quantity.

3.   The distribution of food:- Students wanting any kind of refreshment and meals had to join the queue and it took them over ten minutes before they collected the food. This was because there was only one person serving for the whole cafeteria

B.   Seating Accommodation

1.   The size of the Cafeteria:- The seating area in the cafeteria is only 20 metres by 8 metres. This seemed quite inadequate for the whole university students.

2. The seating arrangement:- The tables are placed fairly close together so it is sometimes difficult to get into a chair.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

1. Provision of Food

Although the quality of the food was satisfactory they were inadequate and because of the poor serving arrangements students wasted a substantial part of the lunch hour waiting and for this reason they were late in attending afternoon classes.

2. Seating Accommodation

The floor space of the cafeteria was sufficient, but the seating arrangements were not adequate to cope with the mid day rush.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

In organising information writers use outlining as a simple device or tool for orienting information to the readers.

1. Size of portions

The portion of food should be increased

2. Serving Arrangements

A good number of staff should be employed in serving the food, and arrangements should be made so that there are separate queues for light refreshments and lunches and hot snakes on the other.

3. Tables

The tables should be better spaced. Three more small tables could be placed in the alcove at the further end of the cafeteria. If these are provided with chairs, the seating arrangements for lunch should be adequate.

10, JUNE 1995   Rina Wahab
                     Mahbub Jamil
                     Shihab Zafar
                     Tanveer Tareq
                     Officers of the Students Union
                     Dhaka University

Question for Review

1. What is an outline? What does an outlines follow?

2. Prepare a model outline for a formal report containing introduction - body - conclusion structure only and no supplements.

3. There are some guidelines in topic form below. Are these guidelines meant for preparing an outline or designing the format of a formal report?

   1. Use the right paper and ink

   2. Use adequate white space

   3. Leave ample margins

   4. Keep line spacing consistent

   5. Use short paragraphs

   6. Number pages consistently

Lesson-4:   Introduction to technical writing

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- define technical writing
- distinguish between technical and non technical writing
- explain what is a press release
- write a press release following the sample provided.

What is technical writing?
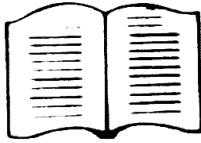
In technical writing you communicate and interpret specialized information for your readers practical use. Readers may need your information to answer a question, solve a problem, perform a task or make a decision.

Suppose that you are writing an instruction manual for some people on "How to prepare a ground for a tent." In the introduction you are informing readers that these instructions are for partially informed readers who know how to use spade, shovel, and rake for clearing the ground but who are approaching this task for the first time. Afterwards you provided the steps to be followed in carrying out the job. Now while giving this kind of information you have taken extra care in choosing precise words and correct steps so as not to mislead your readers through the steps. Because your instructions will help the readers do the job efficiently you have to aim for utmost clarity in your information. Your instruction should have only one interpretation so that the readers get specific, direct information instead of becoming confused with your information.   So information based on facts and having only one interpretation is called **technical information**. **In technical writing you communicate and interpret specialised information for your readers' practical use.   Readers may need your information to answer a question, solve a problem, perform a task, or make a decision**. All technical documents are prepared in response to some definite situation, to fill some specific needs. In technical writing vague, descriptive words (such as **'a room', 'at a high speed'**) are replaced by more precise words (eight by twelve foot room, eighty miles per hour) that give readers a clear picture. So as an expression of facts technical writing always give only one interpretation of its information. Examples of technical reports are, weather reports, accident reports, police reports, instruction manuals, lab report, technical description of items, processes, etc.

Technical writing is that writing, where writers provide factual information for readers' practical use. The responsibility of a technical writer is to observe, interpret, and report from a technical point of view: based on facts and verifiable evidence.

Features of Technical Writing

All useful technical documents share the following features :

- Each is produced by a writer who fully understand the subject.

- Each is focused purely on the subject not on the writer. The readers are not interested to know what the writer feels and thinks about the subject, they want to get the straight forward information about the subject only.

- Each conveys one meaning, allowing one interpretation only.

- The writers of technical documents always adjust their message to the specific needs of their readers.

- Each document is written at a level of technicality that will be understood by the specific readers (i.e. general information for non technical general persons and specialised information for the highly technical persons such as Computer Programmer, Engineers, Scientists).

- All technical documents are categorised as efficient documents, where every detail serve a useful purpose.

> Instead of merely happening, a technical document is carefully designed to share all the above features.

Non Technical Writing

Basically poetry, fiction, essays would not form technical writing because they are written on the basis of the writer's imagination, intuition, and feelings. Also a story, poem or essay can suggest any number of meanings and this kind of writing are subjective and termed as non technical writing. So **non-technical** writing conveys impression of the writer about any subject and contain little facts about it. For example the discussion of a village could be the theme of both poetry, essay writing or technical writing as in the following passages:

Non technical writing conveys impression of the writer about any subject and contains little facts in it.

A. **Technical description of a village** — The village called 'Shimla' lies in the northern corner of Dhaka district. It stretches 650 kilometres from north to south and 350 kilometres from east to west, there is a pine forest in the north east side and a bazar of 100/50 meters on the west. There is a school, a mosque, and a health complex too for the benefit of the villagers. The population density of the village varies from 38 people per square kilometre through medium density to higher density of about 300 people or more per square kilometre. There are about 800 houses in the village.

B. **Non Technical description of a village** — The village Shimla is situated in the northern part of Dhaka city. It's a village full of life and happiness. People are mostly farmers. They grow different kinds of rice, vegetables, pulses and sell those in the nearby market. The children can go to a nearby school in the village. The elders enjoy the quietness of the surroundings and most often they go to the mosque to attend their prayers. This is a village where

there is no political parties to be seen as the elders of the village are too old to waste their energies. There are about 800 houses in the village. The members of these houses may not have the comforts of modern living but they do have mental peace, happiness and serenity of village life.

Non technical sentence	:	These collar ties are too heavy.
Technical Sentence	:	These collar ties weigh 150 kilograms a piece, thereby exceeding the load tolerance by 20 percent.

Press Release

Press release is a type of technical information which gives factual information to public.

Any private organisation or group may issue a press release which means written information given to the press for public consumption. Press release, handouts, press notes are important source of information. These type of information come from various organisations, clubs and association, business houses, political parties, etc., to a newspaper office. Many of these information contain news value of varying degrees and the newspaper office pick up only those carrying genuine and important news value. Here the editor will decide which points to accept and which to ignore. He will definitely ignore the points which seem important to those who have issued the press release but have nothing to interest the readers. The editor will also edit the press release sent by any outsiders to make it clear, accurate and jargon free. The editor will make sure before organising the press release that it will satisfy readers' needs and interest. So a press release is a type of technical information too, giving factual information to the public. But the writer may combine both technical and non technical points of view in one single information occasionally. Now let us look at the passage below which have been sent by a lady to the newspaper office as a press release information.

Dhaka: Moulvi Saleh Ahmed a very old retired government officer died at 8:30 p.m. at the Holy Family Hospital on April 10, 1995 in the city. He was 75. He was suffering from an internal haemorrhage. His wife was near his bed along with three daughters, 2 sons and a host of relatives.

If you notice carefully, then, you can see that there is no need to call the man old when the age is already mentioned and also the exact death time is not important in this case. So just April 10, 1995 would have been enough. Now look at the revised version below:

Dhaka: Moulvi Saleh Ahmed a retired government officer died on April 10, 1995 following an internal haemorrhage at the Holy Family Hospital. He was 75. He is survived by his wife, three daughters, two sons and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

So this is how the editors of the newspaper office transforms a written information (sent by anybody) into an accurate precise one to be released by the press.

Press releases are written information sent to the news office by voluntary organisation, club or social persons for the consumption of the public. The editors of the newspaper will sort, organise and transform that written information into an informative factual report before placing it as press release.

Question for Review

These questions are designed to help you assess how far you have understood and can apply the learning you have accomplished by answering (in written form) the following questions:

Convert the following passage into a press release for the daily news paper of your city.

"A person of about 50 died on the road of Mohakhali in the city yesterday June 11, 1995. He was hit by a local train at Mohakhali rail crossing. The body was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital Morgue for autopsy by some social workers.

A case was filed with Gulshan Thana in this connection by the local police.

Which of the following sentences are representing technical information and which are non technical? Put T beside the technical sentence and N for non technical one.

    a.   Our room is quite large.

    b.   The weather is beautiful today

    c.   My office is having a brick wall, a rug with a four inch hole in the centre five chairs with broken handles and a ceiling with plaster missing in three or four spaces.

    d.   My salary is Tk. 100,000.00 per year.

    e.   His teaching complex has an awful view, terrible furniture and a depressing atmosphere.

    f.   I have a car which runs forty miles per gallon city; fifty high way.

    g.   Mr. Arefin bought a car with an impressive gas mileage.