HRS

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Written Communication -- Clear expression of ideas in writing; includes grammar, organization, and structure.

Varying levels of writing skills are required for different jobs. The ability to convey ideas is important. The extent to which proper grammar and form are important depends on both the job and the method of communication.

Key Behaviors:

- Uses correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

- Expresses ideas so that the reader can understand.

- Organizes communication logically.

- Adjusts the style, format, and content of communication to the level of the reader.

- Presents data accurately to support conclusions and recommendations.

- Knows when written communication should be used rather than oral communication.

- Sends communication to the appropriate parties.

- Asks for help from others in reviewing important documents.

Key Words -- reports, letter writing, composition, grammar

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Report Writing

Formal reports communicate information to others without the need for meetings. If you are required to explain your work to others in this way, effective reports are vital. Effective reports will give you a professional image and get others to take your work seriously.

Report Writing at Work

Reports are a way on informing and persuading people as well as initiating change. You might prepare or contribute to annual, project, or progress reports. A well-structured report that has clear objectives will get more attention and is more likely to produce the intended results.

Reports have their own structure that is distinct from the form of an essay. Essays are mainly used to allow you to demonstrate your ideas and arguments to others. Written reports provide specific research-based information that results in a course of action being decide and acted on. Reports are designed to give information concisely and accurately. A formal report has an impersonal and objective "tone of voice". The main argument is clear and uses a minimum of words. Accurately presented facts are in the main body of the report- your evaluation of these is in the "conclusions" and "recommendations" sections.

Reports tend to follow a standard structure but much depends on the circumstances in which they are being written. It helps to ask your employers, mentors, and colleagues what they expect – there may be an accepted way of writing a report appropriate to your organization.

What Makes a Good Report?

The following comments have been made by senior managers about what they look for in a good report:

- " The report must meet the needs of the readers and answer the questions in their minds."
- "The report must be at the right level for the readers. Some readers have an in-depth knowledge of the subject: others may be decision-makers without specialized technical knowledge."
- " The report must have a clear, logical structure – with clear signposting to show where the ideas are leading."
- "The report must not make assumptions about the readers' understanding. All writers need to apply the 'so what' test and need to explain why something is a good idea."
- "The report must give a good first impression. Presentation is very important."
- "All reports must be written in good English – using short sentences and with correct grammar and spelling."

Presenting a Report Professionally

A report should be written in the third person - this means not using "I" or "we". Often more formal, lengthy reports are written in sections, which have sub-headings and are numbered.

Reports are broken into the following elements, but it should be noted that not all these elements are needed in all reports. For example, an index is only needed for long reports where readers need to locate items; a glossary of terms may help if the readers are unfamiliar with terms used, but not otherwise.

The way in which you present your report will vary according to what you are writing and for whom. The following is a general guide to the structure of reports.

1. **Title Page**

   This will include the title of the report, who has written it and the date it was written/submitted.

2. **Acknowledgements**

   Thanks to the people or organizations who have helped.

3. **Contents Page**

   As in a book, this lists the headings in the report, together with the page numbers showing where the particular section, illustration etc. can be located.

4. **Executive Summary**

   This is a most important part of many reports and may well be the only section that some readers read in detail. It should be carefully written and should contain a complete overview of the message in the report, with a clear summary of your recommendations.

5. **Purpose and Scope**

   This section sets the scene for your report. It should define the scope and limitations of the investigation and the purpose of the report. It should say who the report is for, any constraints (for example your deadline, permitted length) - in other words, your aims and objectives - the overall purpose of your report and more specifically what you want to achieve.

6. Methodology

This section outlines how you investigated the area. How you gathered information, where from and how much (e.g. if you used a survey, how the survey was carried out, how did you decide on the target group, how many were surveyed, how were they surveyed - by interviews or questionnaire?)

7. Introduction/Background

This will help to tune your readers in to the background of your report. It is not another name for a summary and should not be confused with this. They can be two separate sections or combined: background detail could include details of the topic you are writing about. You could take the opportunity to expand on your Purpose and Scope within the introduction, give more detail as to the background of the report - but remember to keep it relevant, factual and brief.

8. Findings/Analysis

This is the main body of the report, where you develop your ideas. Make sure that it is well structured, with clear headings, and that your readers can find information easily. Use paragraphs within each section to cover one aspect of the subject at a time. Include any graphs or other visual material in this section if this will help your readers. The nature of this section will depend on the purpose and scope of the report. The sections should deal with the main topics being discussed - there should be a logical sequence, moving from the descriptive to the analytical. It should contain sufficient information to justify the conclusions and recommendations that follow. Selection of appropriate information is crucial here: if information is important to help understanding, then it should be included; irrelevant information should be omitted.

9. Conclusions

These are drawn from the analysis in the previous section and should be clear and concise. They should also link back to the Purpose and Scope. At this stage in the report, no new information can be included. The conclusions should cover what you have deduced about the situation - bullet points will be satisfactory.

10. Recommendations

Make sure that you highlight any actions that need to follow on from your work. Your readers will want to know what they should do as a result of reading your report and will not want to dig for the information. Make them specific - recommendations such as "It is recommended that some changes should be made" are not helpful, merely irritating. As with the Conclusion, recommendations should be clearly derived from the main body of the report and

again, no new information should be included.

11. References/Bibliography

References are items referred to in the report. The Bibliography contains additional material not specifically referred to, but which readers may want to follow up.

12. Appendices

Use these to provide any more detailed information which your readers may need for reference - but do not include key data which your readers really need in the main body of the report. Appendices must be relevant and should be numbered so they can be referred to in the main body.

13. Glossary of Terms

Provide a glossary if you think it will help your readers but do not use one as an excuse to include jargon in the report that your readers may not understand.

Report Editing Checklist

The purpose		3
Have your clarified your purpose?		
Have you identified your readers' needs/characteristics?		
Have you remembered these when considering the items below?		
Information		
Have you included the main points?		
Are points supported by evidence?		
Is the information relevant to the purpose?		
Accuracy		
Are there spelling mistakes?		
Do the figures add up?		
Are the references correct, in the text and at the end?		
Are all sources of information listed in the *References* section?		
Are abbreviations consistent?		
Images		
Are images clear?		
Format		
What is the balance between sections?		
Do the most important items have the most space?		
Is the report easy to follow?		
Is it easy to find information in the report?		
Are headings and numbering clear?		
Are the arguments followed through?		
Is it logical/easy to follow?		
Language		
Is it clear, direct, easy to read?		
Will the readers understand it?		
Will its tone help you achieve the purpose?		
Can unnecessary words/phrases be deleted?		
Is the grammar/punctuation correct?		
Is there any repetition?		
Presentation		
Is the layout appealing?		
Does it highlight important points?		

Source: *The Student Skills Guide, Sue Drew & Rosie Bingham*
Gower, 1997

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