

DEVELOPING REPORTS WRITING SKILLS²

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***Abstract:** The paper reviews existing types of report, based on different criteria, and shows the necessity to teach students write them effectively and correctly as part of their future professions. It describes the frame structures of different reports. Special attention was paid to the formal language register used in writing reports. The purpose was to describe a wide variety of exercises used for successful teaching students from different degree courses how to write different types of reports according to existing requirements. Structural classification was carried out of different functional reports.*

***Keywords:** Reports, Writing Skills, Formal Style, Teaching ESP.*

INTRODUCTION

A report is a neutral presentation, often dealing with proposals for change and whether those proposals have been approved by leading bodies and interested parties. It is a written account of something that one has observed, heard, done, or investigated. It is a systematic and well-organized presentation of facts and findings of an event that has already taken place somewhere. Reports are used as a form of written assessment to find out what you have learned from your reading, research, or experience and to give you the experience of an important skill that is widely used in the workplace. **The definition of report writing is creating an account or statement that describes in detail an event, situation or occurrence, usually as the result of observation or inquiry.** <https://www.reference.com/business-finance/definition-report-writing-ed8625022547b06e> Report writing is different from other forms of writing because it only includes facts, not the opinion or judgement of the writer. The rigid-seeming format and objective style of scientific reports lend them a universal utility so that readers from various disciplines can readily access and use the complex information.

EXPOSITION

These categories are in common use and provide a nomenclature for the study of reports:

Formal or Informal Reports: Formal reports are carefully structured; they stress objectivity and organization, contain much detail, and are written in a style that tends to eliminate such elements as personal pronouns. Informal reports are usually short messages with natural, casual use of language. The internal memorandum can generally be described as an informal report. **Short or Long Reports:** This is a confusing classification. A one-page memorandum is obviously short, and a twenty page report is clearly long. Bear in mind that as a report becomes longer, it takes on more characteristics of formal reports. **Informational or Analytical Reports:** Informational reports (annual reports, monthly financial reports, and reports on personnel absenteeism) carry objective information from

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one area of an organization to another. Analytical reports (scientific research, feasibility reports) present attempts to solve problems. **Proposal Report:** The proposal is a variation of problem-solving reports. It is a document prepared to describe how one organization can meet the needs of another. **Vertical or Lateral Reports:** This refers to the direction a report travels. Reports that move upward or downward the hierarchy are referred to as vertical reports. Such reports contribute to management control. Lateral reports, on the other hand, assist in coordination in the organization. A report traveling between units of the same organization level is lateral. **Internal or External Reports:** Internal reports travel within the organization. External reports, such as annual reports of companies, are prepared for distribution outside the organization. **Periodic Reports:** Periodic reports are issued on regularly scheduled dates. They are generally upward directed and serve management control. Preprinted forms and computer-generated data contribute to uniformity of periodic reports. **Functional Reports:** accounting reports, marketing reports, financial reports, and a variety of other reports that take their designation from the ultimate use of the report. Almost all reports could be included in most of these categories. A single report could be included in several classifications. They are also classified according to format: pre-printed form, letter, memo or manuscript.

Table 1: Types of Reports

Type of report	Intended audience and purpose	Organization (Sections, headings, layout, length)	Language (Style, vocabulary, functions)
Accident reports	When employees notify their supervisors when an accident/injury occurs	Site accident investigation about time and location; names and job titles of the involved employees; accounts of witnesses; events leading up to incident	Formal style. Job-related vocabulary, Describing causes and recommendations
Agendas for committee meetings	Managing a large number of people and tasks with the goal to keep meeting on topic	Identify meeting's goals; Participants' input; List questions to address; Identify tasks aim; Estimate topic; Identify leaders; review.	Formal style, BE vocabulary; Sharing information or decision making
Annual reports	Audited statements of income, cash flow, financial position. To shareholders, customers, investors	Letter from the CEO; management discussion and analysis; financial statements, determine key message; plan in advance	Formal style, Business English vocabulary, it must be polished and proof-read
Audit reports	Banks, creditors, and regulators require an audit of financial statements.	Preprinted form: Title of the report; Name of the addressee; Introductory paragraph; Scope; Opinion;	Formal style, BE and finance vocabulary, recommendations
Comparative testing reports	It requires testing and comparing materials, objects. Monitoring changes, differences, treatment efficacy.	It includes 3 sections: Comparison; Reflection on learning; Impact on practice	Formal style; professional vocabulary; comparing, recommendations
Duty notes reports	basic information to supervisors or colleagues	information summary, focus on the facts, Interesting aspects, conclusion	Formal style, making recommendations
Explanatory reports	News stories presented in a more accessible manner	Introduction explicating the issue; Body comparing the sources; Conclusion	Formal style, giving reasons, recommendations
Feasibility reports	Assesses solutions to a problem and	Describe the project; Outline solutions; List solutions	Formal style, evaluating and

	determines which are viable for analysis	criteria; State which solution is most feasible; Conclusion	recommending, persuading
Informative reports	Provide data, facts, feedback without recommendations or analysis.	Introduction; Body; Conclusion to restate topic, summarize main points, state the results and conclude.	Formal style, describing events, objects, processes
Instructional manuals	Detailed information about how something should be operated. To familiarize the user with the product and/or to guide to the task completion.	Cover page; Title and copyright page; Preface, details of related documents; Contents; Purpose; Audience; Scope, Guide how to use the function; Troubleshooting; FAQ; Contacts; Glossary	Formal style; describing, objects, systems, processes; giving instructions
Interview reports	A record of a professional, guided conversation. May be intended for the public as published articles interviewing a public figure or for private use	Combine interview with writing preparation; Gather information about the interviewee and the occasion for the interview; Consider audience and tone; report template; details about interviewee and views	Formal style, expressing personal and objective opinion, describing facts, pre-printed form
Investigation into financial affairs of company reports	Evaluate if an entity has prepared financial statements or disclosures to mislead the users	They include: the balance sheet (or statement of financial position); income statement; cash flow statement; and statement of changes in owners' equity	Formal style, Business English and finance vocabulary
Minutes	Notes, recorded during a meeting that highlight key issues, motions voted on, activities to undertake	Date and time; Names of Attendees, Acceptance of previous meeting's minutes; Decisions regarding each item; Date of next meeting	Formal style, Business English and professional vocabulary
Process description reports	Precise portrayals of events leading to outcome, describing steps in the operation of a mechanism or in a conceptual process	Introduction, which provides an overview; body, which treats each step in detail, usually one step to a paragraph	Formal style, BE and technical vocabulary; Describing processes, charts, diagram
Progress reports	Explain how much progress is being made. For a supervisor or client	Introduction that reviews the purpose and scope of the project; an overall appraisal of the project to date	Formal style, clear language, technical jargon, avoid passive
Research reports	Recorded data by researchers, typically in form of surveys or qualitative methods. Details for marketers	Summary; Introduction; Implemented Methods; Results; Deliberation; Conclusion	Formal style, terms, graphs present tense to make results sound immediate

Student project reports	Written document submitted by the students on the project work carried by them. The purpose is to present an answer to the project problem(s) and to communicate the ideas and methods used to obtain it. A concisely worded and well-organized paper that is understandable to any other student	Title and Cover Page; Declaration; Certification; Acknowledgements; Abstract; Table of Contents; List of Figures; List of Tables; List of Symbols and Abbreviations; Notation and Classification; Numbering of Page; Introduction; Body of the Project and the Chapters; Experiments and Results; Details of Softcopy of the Project; Conclusion and Recommendations; Scope; References; Appendices	Formal style, clear and logical language, explaining technical jargon, spelling out acronyms if needed, using clear graphs
Systems evaluation reports	Examines if a product, service, or process is working, according to a set of standards. It displays different types of dynamic information	It includes the following sections: an introduction, background information, criteria, evaluation, conclusions, and recommendation.	Formal style, clear and concise language, technical jargon, spelling out acronyms recommendations
Technical reports	A document written by a researcher detailing the results of a project and submitted to the sponsor of that project. To present a solution to a problem to prompt action.	It includes: a title page, cover letter, a table of contents, a table of illustrations and an abstract or executive summary. The text of the report is its core and contains an introduction, discussion recommendations, and conclusion.	Formal style, clear and concise language, technical jargon, spelling out acronyms, using diagrams and charts, making recommendations
Trouble shooting reports	A form of problem solving, often applied to repair failed products/processes on a machine/system.	It includes the following parts: describing the problem, the probable cause and solution of the problem.	Formal style, clear language, technical jargon, acronyms, charts, diagrams, tables

So genre analysis is the ability to identify a genre's defining organization, language, intended audience and purpose.

<https://elc-language-resources.group.shef.ac.uk/lessons/what-is-genre-analysis/>

The list of the reports, enumerated in the above table, is more or less exhaustive in terms of content, intended audience and purpose. It is obvious that they differ in relation to structure and language means. The students from the different degree courses need acquiring the report writing skills for their future professions. However, we include in our classes different types of reports for the different specialties. The students from the Engineering degree courses need to know how to write Technical and Technological reports, Instructional manuals, Trouble - shooting reports. The students from the Business and Social Studies degree courses need to know how to write Agendas for committee meetings, Annual reports, etc. Some of the above-mentioned content-oriented reports are suitable for all kinds of specialties as they are vital for all kinds of professions like the Comparative testing reports, Process description reports, Research reports, Feasibility reports, Progress reports, and Interview reports. They may slightly differ in relation to teaching different vocabulary or terms

but otherwise there is complete overlapping in regard to the purpose and intended audience, organization requirements, style and linguistic functions.

Now, that we have surveyed the different types of reports, let us move on to the actual process of writing the report. We highlight the following features to our students in order to write a successful report: Re-phrase a report more formally; Analyze language and structure of a report; Read and discuss reports with complex information; Sequence information for impact on reader; Structure report for readability; Accentuate positive or negative interpretation; Target report at specific readership. Students have to know and apply: Appropriate register for social/business/technical reports; Paraphrasing / synonyms with different emphasis; Accepted layout and structure of reports; Guidelines for effective report-writing; General grammatical accuracy. The organization of a report requires prior thought. In general, all reports require a more positive approach. It is always worth taking time to prepare a framework before starting to write. Frameworks can vary from a sequence of self-imposed questions to the more formal “objectives, facts, opinions, conclusions and recommendations”. The framework sets out the logic of the material to be written. A good structure for a report would be as follows: **Title Page:** The title is a brief factual statement of the subject-matter. As part of the information-control of the firm or organization, the report will be filed, its title and reference number will be used for this purpose. **Summary/Synopsis/Executive Summary:** (approx. 10% of word count) - it identifies its purpose, its scope - issues covered/not covered, the important results and findings, the conclusions and recommendations, acknowledgement of any assistance in researching and compiling the report. Those readers, who do not want to read the whole document, can thus know which part or parts might interest them. **Table of contents:** not including the title and contents page. **Body of report:** it includes: Introduction - what is the report about, Discussion - divided into sections and sub sections, presented clearly and confined to fact rather than analysis/opinion. **Conclusion:** this should relate back to the findings, include a clear summary of the main points and outline the findings of the research. There should be nothing in the conclusion that has not already been mentioned in the body of the report. **Recommendations** - these should: *emerge from the conclusions; suggest what is to be done, who is to do it and how/when it is to be done; be justified based on findings, not just the opinion of the writer.* **References:** List cited sources on a References page using the Author–Year or Number system. **Appendix/Appendices:** containing supplementary material too detailed for the main body of the report, such as tables, charts, statistics, questionnaires, etc.

We use a variety of tasks with the aim of mastering the different strategies for writing a good report: *Combining information; Reporting real events; Using connectors of addition; Using cohesive devices* (combining ideas using a range of cohesive devices and sentence patterns); *Organizing general and supporting statements* (we use a formal scientific text as found in a textbook and focus on understanding how paragraphs can organize information); *Transferring information to a diagram* (it helps to see how a text is organized and provides them with an understanding of discourse structure which will enable them to write their own classifications appropriately). *Unscrambling a text; Explaining reasons in cause and effect arguments; Using logical connectors for describing effects;* Using the *chunking strategy* - organizing multi-chunk groups hierarchically into higher level groupings. Developing the kinds of meaningfully connected knowledge organizations that experts possess takes time and experience. Most of our students are far from attaining that level of expertise. However, even novice students learn and remember more when they connect information in meaningful ways. By engaging in such processes, students tend to build better knowledge organizations and perform more effectively.

Developing report writing skills is examined in a number of studies (Stefanova 2021 (a, b) among others). Many approaches to language teaching implicitly take the view that teaching different ranges of style concern advanced students only. What is needed to begin with, it is suggested, is a kind of bland neutral style with accurate grammar and vocabulary. Only when this has been achieved, should stylistic variation be considered. A discourse approach takes the opposite view: that stylistic choice and range need developing from the earliest stages. Stylistic choice is not an optional extra in communication, but one of its most important features. When the language function is to convey information, an inappropriate style can impede it. When style is inappropriate,

communication breaks down. Students need to communicate with people in different situations. They need to make appropriate choices about the arrangement of information and devices for its combination, and to be sensitive to the implications of choices made by others. We need always to remember that the final goal of the language student is to operate the interlocking systems of discourse, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation in their entirety. It is to activities which involve everything at once that we turn our attention.

CONCLUSION

When choosing activities from existing materials, we assess the practice which they offer in the various elements structuring discourse, ensuring that students, in the course of their studies, experience a variety of senders and receivers, social relationships, discourse types, topics, and functions. Only by exposure to a wide selection of these elements, interacting in a multitude of ways, can students become fully competent users of the language. Another broad area is that of understanding the increasing role of electronic texts in professional contexts. Reports are now far more heavily *influenced by graphic design* than ever before and the growing challenge to the page by the screen as the dominant medium of communication means that images are ever more important in meaning, and teachers have the task to explain how visuals have been organized for maximum effect, while considerably more work needs to be done to understand the role of multimedia and hypertext in corporate and academic communication and the genres that students will need to control as part of their writing skills. ESP writing instruction is essentially a practically oriented activity committed to demystifying prestigious forms of discourse, unlocking students' creative and expressive abilities, and facilitating their access to greater life chances. The fact that it is grounded in the descriptions of texts and practices, however, means that it also seeks to provide teachers and students with a way of understanding how writing is shaped by individuals making language choices in social contexts, and so contributes to both theory and practice. In particular, it shows how ESP has nothing to do with topping up generic writing skills that learners have failed to master at school, but involves developing new kinds of literacy: equipping learners with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and professional cultures.

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