SCHOOL OF STUDIES IN COMMERCE

VIKRAM UNIVERSITY, UJJAIN (M.P.)

CLASS: B.B.A. (HONS.) 2ND SEM.

SUBJECT: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

TITLE OF LECTURE: BUSINESS REPORT

TEACHER'S NAME: DR. KAYNAT TAWAR

TOPICS

1. Meaning
2. Definitions
3. Purpose
4. Characteristics
5. Reports For Academic Or Business Purposes
6. Report Structure
7. Stages of Report Writing
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BUSINESS REPORT

MEANING

Reports vary widely in purpose, length, layout and style. Within organizations, there are a range of different styles and views of what constitutes a 'good' report. Academic writing can also be presented in different forms. In the Business School, the requirement is that you use a report style and format to write your assignments.

What should be common to all is that a report is a structured form of written communication, in which information or findings are presented, and a set of conclusions drawn. It will also commonly include a set of recommendations or proposals. A report should present its findings in a clear and concise way, and any conclusions should derive clearly from the findings presented.

Definition

"A business report is an orderly, objective communication of factual information that serves some business purpose."

(Lashkar & Petit)

"A business report is an impartial, objective, planned presentation of a fact to one or more persons for a specific, significant business purpose."

(Murphy & Hildebrandt)

"A formal communication written for a specific purpose that includes a description of procedures followed for collection and analysis of data, their significance, the conclusions drawn from them and the recommendations, if required."

(Sharma & Mohan)

So, a***business report*** can be defined as an organized, written statement of facts related to a specific business matter. It helps the interested persons to get insight into the problem and assists in decision-making and problem-solving.

PURPOSE

The prime objective of reports is to help a business to take accurate and pragmatic decisions. We compile reports for many reasons:

1. To carry business information to the relevant parties
2. To analyze data for interpretation
3. To help planning by providing factual information
4. To help decision-making by providing necessary information and evidence
5. To help establish effective control systems
6. To help reduce and resolve organizational disputes
7. To help to bring effective coordination between and among departments
8. To find out the reason behind a problem
9. To present the findings of an investigation or inquiry
10. To recommend specific action to solve a problem
11. To provide a basis for discussion and debate
12. To sell or persuade

As with all forms of written communication, before writing any report, it is vital to be clear about purpose.

Characteristics

As we know, business reports carry information on facts related to business activities. The very nature of business reports differentiates them from other reports. The unique characteristics of business reports are discussed below:

***Specific Issue**

Business reports are written on a specific subject. They are written to fulfill a certain need.

***Pre-Specified Audience**

An important characteristic of a business report is that it has a specified audience. Usually a report is written for a limited number of audiences and the needs of the audience are always kept in mind.

***Specific Structure or Layout**

In preparing reports, certain structures/layouts/formats are followed.

***Written on Past Events**

In most of the cases, reports are written on past events. Most business reports carry the reasons for incidents, the ways of recovery etc. Reports are also written in past forms/tense.

***Neutral in Nature**

In drafting reports, strict impartiality must be maintained. No biased or non-objective material is included. Biased reports may lead to disastrous decisions.

***Factual Information**

Business reports are always written based on factual information. The data collected on specific events is factual, not factious.

*Joint Effort

Sometimes business reports are an outcome of joint efforts of a group of people – where a committee is formed (3 to 7 people) to furnish a report on a certain incident.

REPORTS FOR ACADEMIC OR BUSINESS PURPOSES

Confusion may arise because you will be using a report format and style to produce your assignments, which are an academic form of assessment. Normally, a report would be used in organizations for non-academic purposes. The issues being reported on are likely to be the same, as your assignments will be dealing with business and management issues.

The reports written as part of your coursework are likely to:
* Cite sources of information in a reference list, which must follow the Guide to Referencing and Citing
* Describe and justify the approaches to information gathering that you used.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The recommended structure for reports is shown below.

TITLE PAGE

The title should clearly convey to the reader the nature of the report. It should also include the name of the author, date written and, if appropriate, details of confidentiality.

CONTENTS PAGE

This should show a list of the sections or chapters with page numbers in the sequence in which they appear. Generally, it will be in this order:
1) Executive summary

2) Terms of reference

3) Background/introduction

4) Information-gathering activities

5) Findings

6) Conclusions
7) Recommendations

8) References

9) Appendices.

1) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The purpose of the executive summary is to enable the reader to get an overview of the main contents of the report without having to read the whole document. The summary should be no more than a page (about 300 words) in length and briefly cover:
* The purpose of the report

*The information gathering methods

* An overview of the conclusions and recommendations.

As what you are doing is summarizing all the work you have done and the conclusions you have reached, logically, the Executive Summary cannot be written until the rest of the report has been completed. Your module tutor will indicate whether an Executive Summary is required.

2) TERMS OF REFERENCE
This should provide the purpose/aims/objectives, as well as the scope and limits of the report as specified by the assignment brief.
You may find that as your understanding increases, your original objectives change. In this case, make sure that you revisit the

first mention of your objectives and rewrite them in the light of your new knowledge.

You may be asked to incorporate the terms of reference into the introduction to the report by some tutors. This will be made clear in the assignment brief.

3) BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

Background or events leading up to the request for the report and important contextual information e.g. information on the organization and its management structure (again, this can be written as a separate section if it is necessary to include quite a lot of background detail).

4) INFORMATION-GATHERING ACTIVITIES

You need to provide a clear description of all the methods used in undertaking the investigation for the report

5) FINDINGS

You have two activities to undertake here – the first is to provide the findings, and the second is to discuss the meaning or significance of the findings, using your references as a way to compare and contrast what you have found and what the other authors have said about the issues you have discussed.

Please take care to give clear headings throughout the report, and especially here. These provide a logical structure and help the reader to understand what you are trying to convey. Please note that describing or stating what you have found (e.g. most of the employees were motivated by money) is not sufficient. You need to show that you understand the implications of this statement (e.g. this contradicts Herzberg's (1968) two factor theory).

Herzberg, F. (1968) 'one more time: How do you motivate employees?'*Harvard Business Review,* Vol.46, No 1, January-February, pp.53-62.

6) CONCLUSIONS

The final portion of your report is the place where you draw all the threads together, the points arising from the findings section, and further discussing the most interesting or unexpected findings and trying to account for these. **There should be no new data introduced in this section – conclusions are a drawing together of the information already presented**.

7) RECOMMENDATIONS

Normally, a report contains recommendations for further action. There are circumstances where you may find this inappropriate for your study. In this case, it will probably be sufficient to state that there are no concrete further actions that you recommend to be taken. It could be that you recommend further study of the issue, which you have been unable to resolve. If you do make recommendations, then these should be realistic and specific; clearly stating what should be done, by whom and in what timescales. Along with the recommendations, an implementation plan may be written which gives details of exactly what should happen and when if the recommendations are agreed. Comments about the costs/benefits of recommendations should be made, if possible.

8) APPENDICES

Appendices are separate from the report and should be used where:
* There is information that is too lengthy or detailed to be included in the main body of the text, e.g. detailed statistical tables

*There is information which is relevant and to which the reader may want to refer, but is not directly necessary in reading the text, e.g. a policy document.

All appendices should have a number and title. Any appendices included should always be referred to in the report and the numbering of the appendices should be consistent with the order in which they are referred to in the text.

Only information that is relevant and necessary should be included in the appendices and it should be remembered that the contents of the appendices are not marked. They should be included as a method of showing where information contained within the report has been sourced. The longer the report, the less inviting it will look to read. Although appendices are not included in the word count, they should never be used as a way of getting around word limits for reports - this is easily spotted!

9) REFERENCES

Whenever you are directly quoting or referring to one of your sources, you must acknowledge this in the text as you compile your report. References should be clearly set out using the Guide to Referencing and Citing. This is the method you must **always** use.

Stages of Report Writing

Breaking down a large task into smaller steps can make the task seem more manageable. If you are in the process of writing your next report, you may find it easier to view the process as a series of small steps. There are three stages to report writing:

1. Planning
   - Define the purpose and scope of the report
   - Consider the audience
   - Gather information for the report
   - Design the structure of the report

2. Writing
   - Tips and techniques to write good reports
   - Traps to avoid when writing reports
   - Write the report

3. Revising

•Proofread the content

•Do a quality check

STAGE: 1

PLANNING

Planning is a very crucial stage in report writing as it establishes the purpose, context and structure of the report. It answers the why, what, how, who and when planning questions. The more thorough you are in the planning stage, the better the report that you write!
Planning involves the following steps…

1. Define the purpose and scope of the report
2. Consider the audience
3. Gather information for the report
4. Design the structure of the report

1. Define the Purpose and Scope of the Report: The first step is to define the purpose of the report. The purpose of the report could be to share an idea, answer a question, solve a problem, or share information. Make sure that you can describe the purpose of the report in straightforward terms. This will help you to keep your information clear when you start to write. To help define the purpose and scope of the report – think of a possible report you may have to write in the near future and provide answers to the following questions. Note that this report will be referenced throughout this intervention as your Case Study:

Question	Response…
Why must you produce the report – for what purpose?	

What business issue is the report going to address?	
What factual information must the report contain?	
What problems will the report share insights on?	
What decisions will the report help to make?	
What is the scope of the report – what will it focus on? What will be included, excluded?	
Anything else?	

Once you have established the purpose of the report, you must consider who the audience for the report is.

2. Consider the Audience: An important aspect of report writing is to consider your audience. Unlike letters and memos - reports and proposals have a far wider distribution. Readers of your report may be involved in the problem-solving or decision-making process, so your job is to make it easy for them to understand the information and data presented. In order to make reading the report easier, think in terms of the reader.

** Who is your target audience?

To analyze the needs of the target audience, respond to the questions in the table below (following on from the previous Case Study):

QUESTION	***RESPONSE….***	
What are the needs of each audience type – relevant to the report?	primary	
	Secondary	
	Intermediate	
For the Primary Audience, answer the following:		
What do they expect to learn		

from the report?		
What do they already know?		
What don't they know that must be included in the report?		
Do they hold certain biases or preferences that will impact on the interpretation of the report – and hence decision-making or problem-solving?		
What positions do they hold in the organisation?		
What are their levels of education / work experience relevant to the report?		
What decision making powers do they have relevant to the report?		
Anything else?		

** How must you adapt the report for the audience?

Based on the above analysis of the audience, what must you consider and / or adapt in your report to cater for the various needs?
Some things you may consider for adaptation are:

- The use of jargon and technical terms
- Level of the language used in the report
- Scope of the report
- Focus of the report
- The level of detail in the report
- Strategies to handle possible contentious or sensitive issues, given the target audience, etc.

Now that you have a handle on the audience, the next step is to gather relevant information, capable of addressing the purpose, scope and issues that the report must address.

3. Gather Information for the Report

This step involves gathering information that will go into the report. Expert opinions and hard numbers often form the core of many business reports.

*****How do you gather accurate information for a report, and how do you choose what to include and exclude?***

Following these guidelines will ensure that what you gather is **accurate**:

- Collect your evidence before you write by observing, interviewing, doing research and gathering data.
- Organise your evidence.
- Keep your evidence clear of your opinions. Make sure that personal

bias isn't skewing the evidence by letting how you feel get in the way of what you gather.

In most studies, you will gather masses of information and you must **be selective** about what goes into your report. Your selection should be based on:

• The purpose of your report. What is it meant to achieve?

• The people to whom it is directed (the reader or readers). You have to decide what the readers already know and what they need to know.

Unless you are an unquestioned authority on your subject matter, **your opinions** will only carry as much weight as the evidence that you can gather. The more evidence you can collect before writing, the easier your writing will be.
Evidence consists of the facts and information you gather in three ways:

• Careful observation

• Interviews

• Research (in your company library or archives, surveys, statistical review, etc.)

"In order to make sure that your report is not biased, don't focus only on evidence that will support your argument. You need to objectively present the positive and negative results for people to see the integrity in your data and the report."

To give formal reports credibility and authority, researchers generally rely on a certain amount of secondary data, obtained in print or electronically.

Consider the following pointers when planning to gather information for business reports:

• What information do you want to gather?

• How will you gather the information, i.e. observation, documentary review, interviews, etc.?

• What sources will you gather data from? From whom or where?

• How will you analyse and interpret the information you have gathered?

4. Design the Structure of a Business Report: There are several basic formats or approaches to writing reports. The type that you use will depend on how formal the report needs to be, and how much detail your readers need. You can write internal reports (memorandum report), a letter style report, a short report, or a formal report

"Reports typically make use of headings and sub-headings to separate the information. This gives your reader a break from reading solid pages of text and also allows people to find what they want to read quickly."

The different report types are presented here from the least to the most formal.

****Memorandum Report**

This format looks like a regular memorandum (memo) at the top. It is helpful as a short report about internal matters, and is not sent to anyone outside the company. A memorandum report can be helpful for reporting on internal sales figures, letting a manager know how the team has performed during the week, or to provide an interim update on an inventory.

• Since this is an internal document, it can be objective and impersonal.

• Simple headings and text that is flush left in bold or italics are often used for quick referencing.

• The report may be initialled at the beginning, where the sender's name is noted, or signed at the bottom (four lines after the text ends and typed above a signature line) or left unsigned.

• Your standard company memo format is used on the first page, and subsequent pages are printed on plain paper.

**** Letter Report**

The letter format is practical for informal reports that run several pages. Since it is in a letter format, it can also be used for people or groups outside of the organization. These reports are typically used by outside consultants to provide updates on project analyses or recommendations. The letter format may also be used by a Board of Directors to describe changes and developments to stakeholders.

• The first page of a letter report is typed on letterhead stationery, with plain paper used for subsequent pages.

• Opening with a subject line replaces a title, and simple headings (as in the memo report) add emphasis and clarity.

****Short Report**

Short reports are distinct from memo and letter reports in both scope and format. They may include several of the same elements of a formal report, such as:

INTRODUCTION	***BODY***	***CONCLUSION***
Title page	Observations	Conclusion
Preliminary summary (including conclusion &		

recommendations.)		
Authorization details	Tables and graphics if relevant	Recommendations
Statement of the problem		

** Formal Report

Formal reports are a sophisticated presentation. They are more complex and longer than the other formats due to the content. A formal report may include all of the following elements, which are often described in company policy in order to keep reports consistent throughout an organization.

Overview :::

*Cover

Includes the title and author's name, and may be on a label attached to the cover if the cover is not a printable material. (Coloured or clear plastic is often used.)

*Flyleaf

A blank page following the cover. There can also be one at the end of the report, where people can write comments if they want to.

*Title Page
Title of the report, who the report was prepared for (name and title of recipient), author's name, position, department and / or address and date.

*Letter of Authorization
If the writer received written authorization to undertake the report, the letter or memo may be inserted here. If authorization was verbal, then a note describing who provided authorization can be part of the letter of transmittal or the introduction (described below).

*Letter of Transmittal
Explains how, why, and under what circumstances the report was prepared. This may also be a preface to the report. This document outlines the purpose of the report, its scope, any limitations to the report and the research methods used. This letter often ends with a thank you for the assignment and openness to answer any questions about the report. This letter is printed on a letterhead and signed by the author.

*Foreword or Preface
Often completed by someone other than the writer, such as a department head or other stakeholder.

Introduction ::

Synopsis or Executive Summary
An informative summary covering the purpose of the report as well as key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

***Table of Contents**
Contains main divisions with page numbers.

***List of Figures or Illustrations**
Needed only if there are many illustrations and graphs.

***Introduction**
Includes whatever the reader needs in order to understand the report, such as background, scope and limitations; details about your approach or method; and criteria used in making your evaluation.

Body :

****Body**
The “meat” of the report.

****Summary**
Tells your reader what you set out to do and what your findings are.

Conclusion :

****Conclusions**
Summarises the facts in the report and spells out the conclusions.

****Recommendations**
Offers recommendations based on the conclusions.

Annexures :

****Appendix**
May include statistics, tables and other information of interest. This is information that would only be useful to some readers and would therefore not be appropriate in the

body of the report.

****Glossary**
Helpful if your readers are not familiar with vocabulary used in the report.

****Index**
Not required, but helpful in extensive reports.

****References**
Very extensive reports may also contain footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography.

5. Summary: That concludes the first stage of report writing – **Planning**. Proper planning sets you up with a solid foundation from which to write the report.

STAGE: 2

WRITING

Now that you have planned and prepared to write the report, it is time to put it all together and write the report. When you start writing your report, you are really getting to the heart of your message. In this unit, we will explore the following:

1. Tips and techniques to write good reports
2. Traps to avoid when writing reports

3. Write the report

1. Tips and Techniques to Write Good Reports: When you write well, you are saying that you have thought about your message, have taken the time to understand the reader, and you want to send a positive image of yourself.
With the proper attitude, a respect for how words work together and knowledge of usage conventions, your writing can be clear, concise, complete, correct*and* easy to read.

****Writing clearly**

Writing is like other forms of communication. You want people who receive your reports to understand what you are saying.
People are inundated with things to read. If you tend to pad your writing with extra words and "fluff", they will probably feel that their time is wasted. Poorly written documents will go to the bottom of the pile and may not be read at all.

****What do you think this manager meant in the following message?**

"Personnel assigned vehicular space in the adjacent areas are hereby advised that utilization will be suspended temporarily on Friday morning."

You would probably have read that sentence several times before you understood that*you are being advised not to park in the lot next door on. Friday morning* .

Clear messages contain words that are familiar and meaningful to the reader. Whenever possible, use short, common, simple words to say what you mean.

Let's find out how to write more clearly.

*****Familiar words***

Look at the following list. Can you decide which words your audience would be more familiar with?

Ascertain	Find out
Conceptualize	See / visualize
Encompass	Include
Hypothesise	Guess
Monitor	Check
Operational	Working
Option	Choice
Perpetuate	Continue
Perplexing	Troubling
Reciprocate	Return
Stipulate	Require
Terminate	End
Utilise	Use

****Precise words***

When you consider what you need to say and how to say it, don't give up a precise word if it says exactly what you mean. Let's look at some examples:

- "The report was on time," is not as precise as, "The detailed, twelve-page report was submitted on time."
- "There is a change in our budget," is less clear than, "There is a 10%

reduction in our budget."

• "The president of the company said we should contribute..." is not as direct as, "The president of the company demanded that we contribute."

****Concrete nouns***

Concrete nouns help readers visualise the meaning of words. Concrete nouns name objects that are more easily imagined, such as desk, car or an earring. On the other hand, **abstract nouns** name concepts that are difficult to visualise, such as automation, justice, integrity and environment.

In business writing, you should help your reader see what you mean by using concrete language whenever possible.

****Jargon***

Every workplace has some words and some terms that are particular to that industry or that business.

Avoid jargon so that people outside your industry or organisation will not be confused. It would only be appropriate to include jargon when you are writing to someone who you know will not only understand, but expect you to use, that jargon.

****Writing concisely**

Readers have different needs, motivations, backgrounds and interests. Make sure that your business writing focuses on the reader, not you as the writer. Your purpose should never be to impress the reader with your vocabulary or writing style.

Writing concisely means saying exactly what you mean in the fewest words possible and including all the details that are needed. How do we do this?

****Watch out for adverbs***

Adverbs can add unnecessary bulk to your sentences. In his treatise*On Writing,* Stephen King says, "The road to hell is paved with adverbs."

Example:

- The dog moved much more quickly than the cat.
- The dog moved quicker than the cat.

Don't be redundant

Have you ever seen a sentence like, "I watched the colourful sun set in the west," or, "I took off the purple coloured shirt"? Now, if the sun were setting in the east, that would be something to comment on, but we all know that the sun sets in the west. Likewise, you can safely assume that your readers know that purple is a colour.

Similarly, watch out for words that mean the same: "We drained and emptied the tank," could be replaced by, "We emptied the tank."

Replace clichés and metaphors

When we speak with friends, our language can become full of words that don't belong in business writing. Try to avoid relying on clichés and metaphors to get your meaning across. Replace those phrases with words you really mean, and that other people will understand more easily.

Clichés are words and phrases that have been so overused that they lose their impact, even though they may be true. They include phrases like, "dumb as a sack of hammers," "work like a dog," or "right as rain."

Metaphors are figures of speech that try and help us understand one thing through the story of another. For example, in As You Like It, Shakespeare compared the world to a stage and all the people as merely players. Metaphors can get quite complex as they use analogy, rhetoric and parable.

While the application of a well-phrased metaphor can be quite powerful in writing, they usually do not belong in business writing. If you feel the temptation coming over you to write with strongly metaphoric speech, keep in mind that when you edit you'll need to be cutting all that work out as you aim for writing that is clear and concise.

Charts, graphs and graphics

Graphs and charts are helpful tools, provided they add something to the report or explain something that words do not. Don't use illustrations, graphs or charts unless they are necessary.

Since the report's purpose is to communicate information in the most precise and meaningful way, tables and graphs may be important supplements to the narrative. To be effective, they must be well-designed and clearly executed. They should also be carefully integrated with the text of the report.

Graphics like charts, tables and lists command attention, unless, of course, you have overused them. Correctly used, they give the report a different way of seeing information. Here are some other tips:

- Put long, complicated graphics in the Appendix. Use bite-sized tables and charts in the text.
- Keep tables and charts as brief as possible.
- Signal the reader when a table or chart is coming up.
- Label graphics clearly and specifically.
- Number tables and charts consecutively throughout the report. Do not, however, mix the two.
- Only use graphics if they will help the reader understand your point.
- Don't interrupt the text with a graphic; lead the reader into it and out of it.
- Point out the significance of the table or chart to the reader.
- Keep the graphic as simple as possible.
- Use white space and labeling to make your graphics attractive; make the reader want to look at them.
- Consider using tables and charts in the Appendix as a way to compile and present all your significant data in a convenient form.

**Making your writing complete

Complete writing means that you have included all of the important elements in your writing. The easiest way to think about this is to make sure that your writing includes the 5 W's, namely: who, what, why, when and where and also how.

Your message is **complete** when all the information needed, for a receiver to understand, is included. While the writing situation and knowing your audience will help you decide what information to include, you can also refer to the following list:

• **Use the 5 W's and an H.** Answer the questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

• **Make a checklist** of all the important points you want to cover, and then check them off when the report is done.

• **Empathise** with the reader. Ask yourself if you have told them everything they need to know.

• **Restate** for effectiveness. You will state the problem or objective clearly at the beginning of your writing, so that your reader understands what is important. Since readers are most likely to remember what is at the beginning and at the end, you will need to restate it using slightly different wording to add emphasis.

• Give something **extra** when appropriate, such as an example, a visual or a supporting reference.

****Writing Correctly**

There are three aspects of correct writing that we will discuss here: voice, style and facts.

****Voice***

There are two voices: active and passive.

Active:

*Is direct (The manager pressed the button on the photocopier.)
*Reduces length
*Clarifies the sentence
*Produces a crisper, more vital style

Passive:

*Is indirect (The button on the photocopier was pressed by the manager.)
*Reverses the normal subject-verb-object pattern
*Includes some form of the verb, followed by a past participle (was pressed)
*Usually considered weak, obscure, wordy and lacking vigour

Note:

Bear in mind that in most of the cases, reports are written on past events and are therefore written in past forms/tense.

***Style**

Style refers to the method behind the writing. If you are writing a document that must conform to particular style specifications, such as a style guide created by your organisation, you must make sure that it meets those guidelines. You will also ensure that your document is free of spelling and grammar errors.

***Facts & Sources**

An important component of correctness is factual precision. Did the budget actually come in at R555,600 or was it the actual total on the financial statements, which shows R555,671? Was the temperature actually 67 degrees? Were the test results really positive?

There are a few ways to ensure that your document is factually correct. When writing, make sure you **list the source** whenever you include a fact. These sources can be for your own reference and not part of the final document, but they will help you when editing. These references will also help you answer any questions that readers may have later on.

If at all possible, make sure you go to the **original source.** If you find a newspaper article that quotes a particular study, for example, go back and find that study. In some cases, you may want to find multiple sources to confirm a particular fact. It depends on your audience and what kind of document you are writing.

It can also be a good idea to include **excerpts** from your source. For example, rather than try to explain a graph, it might be easier to include the graph itself. Make sure that you have the appropriate permissions and that the source is quoted if you choose to do this.

**Write the Report

It is time to write the report. This is where the rubber meets the road!

- You know the purpose and the scope of your report
- You have identified the audience and their specific needs
- You have the structure of your report set up
- You have gathered relevant and factually correct information
- You understand how to ensure that your writing is clear, concise, complete and correct

Go ahead and write the report taking into account all of the above…

Summary

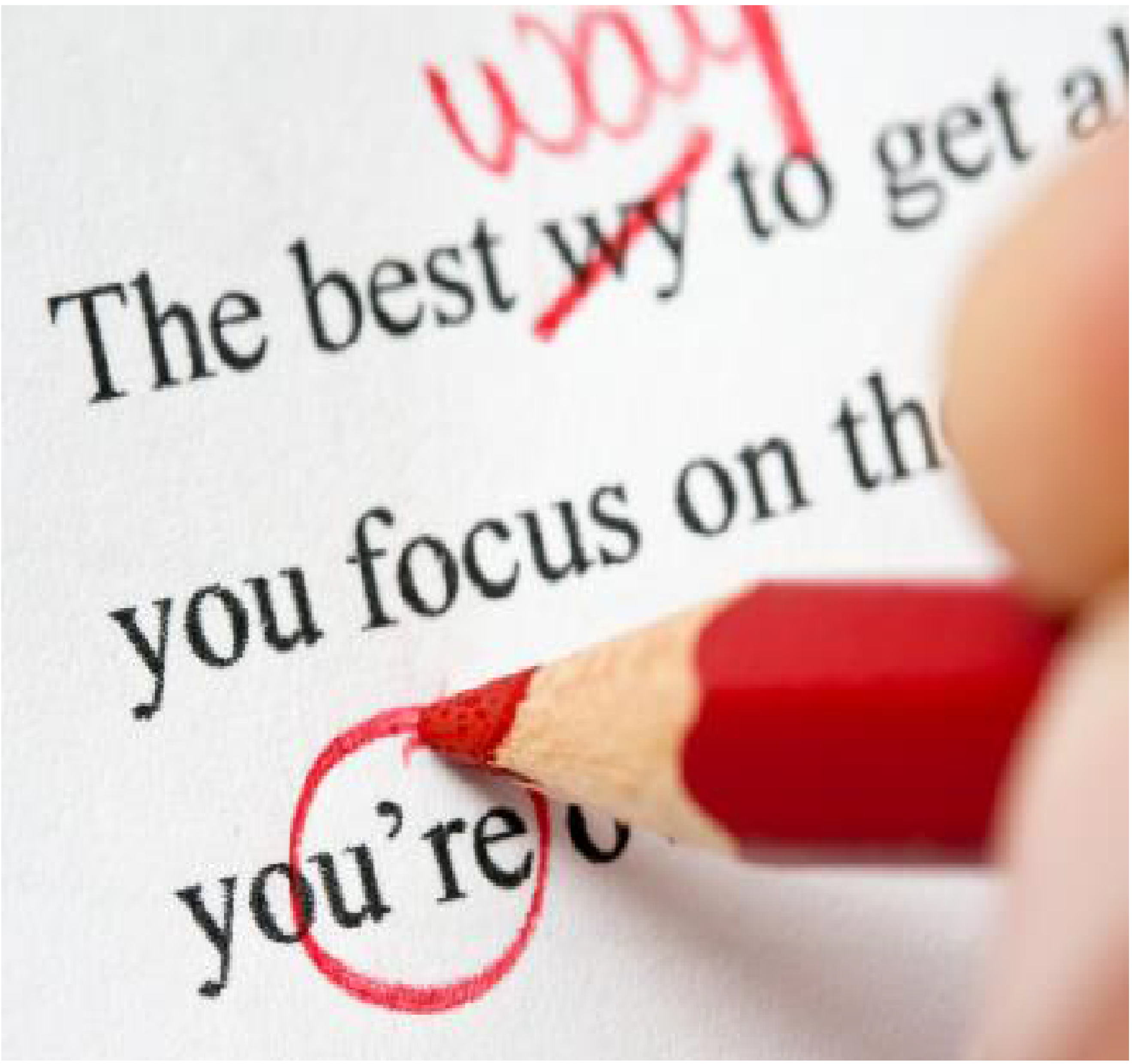
That concludes the second stage of report writing – **Writing**. Following the guidelines for writing the report will go a long way to helping you write a report that is fit for purpose.

STAGES: 3

REVISING

Now that you have written the report, it is worthwhile taking the time to check the report to ensure that there are no unforeseen errors and to ensure a quality report. In this unit, we will explore the following

- **Proofread the content**
- **Do a quality check**



**Proofreading :

Proofreading carelessly can spoil a writer's best efforts. Proofreading is classic evidence that writing looks different to the writer and to the reader. Our brains really think that everything we do is correct, so we have a hard time recognising our own errors.

To the writer, typographical or spelling errors may not mean all that much. So your finger slipped, or you always put two t's in "commitment." For the reader, an unfixed typo can transform the writer from a smart person into a careless writer in the twinkling of an eye.

It is impossible to read about "fist class work" or "shot meetings" without interrupting the flow of what you are reading. It may be unfair that proofreading matters so much, but it does.

If you can put yourself in the reader's position, you'll proofread obsessively, gripped by the fear that a mistake will turn you into a laughing stock! Learning some specific techniques, however, will help alleviate that problem as you become better at proofreading and creating better documents.

Proofreading errors are different from punctuation or spelling or usage problems, and you fix them differently. Punctuation, spelling, and usage are*knowledge problems* , and you fix them by learning.*Proofreading problems* are usually a matter of seeing, and you fix them by learning to look.

Here is an example demonstrating this:

The Pweor of the Hmuan Mnid :

Aoccdrnig to rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttaer what oredr the ltteers in a word are. The only iprmoetnt thing is that the first and lsat ltteer be in the rghit pclae. The rset can be a total mses and you can still raed it wouthit a porbelm. This is bcuseae the human mind deos not raed ervey lteter by

istlef, but the word as a wlohe.

Amzanig huh?

The better you read, the worse you'll proofread, unless you are consciously aware of what you are doing. Good readers and fast readers guess what the words are as they read the text, and they just check in now and again to see if they are right. The more they can guess, the less they have to look and the faster and more efficiently they read.

To be a good proof reader, you have to go back to being a child again, or pretend that you are just learning to read. Look at every word as it comes along. Here are some principles to guide you.

• Read through once and ignore content. As soon as you start paying attention to what the text is saying, you'll start assuming what the words are and stop looking for errors.

• Assume there's at least one error, so that you have something to find.

• Forget what you meant to say. Read the report as though you have never seen it before.

• Read backwards. This destroys comprehension, and your eyes can't trick you as easily.

• Don't try to do something else when you proofread. Stop tinkering with it and rewriting sentences; look for errors.

• Take your time. When you hurry, you guess and skim, and that usually doesn't work.

• Proofread a second time, paying attention to content. This is where you find those things spell check and reading backwards did not catch, such as, “The little cap pulls off*it* you put enough effort into it.”

• Leave it alone overnight, so that you come to it again having fresh eyes to look at it.

• Read it aloud. It is more difficult for your eyes to skip over errors when you read aloud, because you will hear something out of whack.

• Try to have someone else proofread your work, particularly if the document is important or going to be released to the public

**Do a Quality Check

Do a quality check of your report to make sure that it meets the four C's. Your report is **clear** if it is fully understood at first reading. By **concise**, we mean that all information is down to an intelligent and intelligible minimum. Your report is **complete** when every piece of essential information has been included. Finally, your report is **correct** when all information is both accurate and verifiable.

*Clear

• Did you say what you wanted to say?

• Did you eliminate ambiguous terms (many, less, etc.)?

• Are your paragraphs linked?

• Are your recommendations or conclusions easy to locate?

*Concise

• Did you cut out all the "fluff"?

• Did you use an active voice as much as you could?

• Did you make effective use of graphs, charts and graphics?

*Complete

• Is all the necessary information there?

• Can you look at it and identify the five W's and How?

• Will your readers know what is going to happen next / what they are responsible for?

• Are references included (if needed)?

*Correct

• Did you check grammar, punctuation and spelling?

• Are your facts and figures all correct?

• Are the readers' names, titles, company name/s and addresses all correct?

**Checklist for review

Use the checklist below to review your work. This is an excellent way to ensure that no steps are missed.

TASK	ITEM	✓
Check the facts	Are the facts correct?	
	Are there any assumptions	
Check the length	Does it tell readers more than they want to know?	
	Does it miss important evidence?	

Check the structure	Does it have a beginning that makes it clear what the report is about?	
	Does the middle develop and support the main idea?	
	Does the ending summarise, reinforce the point and make recommendations?	
	Is each paragraph unified and coherent?	
	Does each paragraph relate to the main thesis?	
	Does each paragraph relate to the paragraph before and after it?	
Check the style	Be on the lookout for lengthy, obscure sentences; wordiness; pretentiousness; overuse of the passive voice; and imprecise language.	
	Read the report out aloud and circle parts where you stumble or you find yourself bored.	

	Cut, rearrange and rewrite.	
Check for errors	Check spelling and grammar.	
	Check punctuation.	
Check the requirements	All mandatory requirements are included	

Summary

That concludes the third stage of report writing – **Revising**. Taking the time to revise your report will ensure that you iron out any errors you may have missed in the writing of the report and is essential to ensure a quality report.